

Putting the Associative Actor to the test in Tourism: Comparative Study of two Rural Communes, Asrir in the Province of Guelmim and Tighdouine within the Western High Atlas of Marrakech- Kingdom of Morocco

Dr. Wahiba Mobchir¹, Dr. Fadwa Chbani Idrissi², PhD Student Sana Ait Ihya³ and Dr. Malika Ait Nasser⁴

Abstract

We seek to justify the importance of the association's internal and external organization and the territory dynamics in the new development challenges for tourism promotion. The study field is made up of two sites: the Southern Oasis Tourist Association in the rural commune of Asrir-Guelmim and six associations in the rural commune of Tighdouine-Province of Tabnaoute-Al Haouz, Marrakech. The qualitative analysis of the comments collected from interviewed actors involving the members of the associations and local institutional actors aims to understand more the aspects of the internal and external management of the targeted associations. Apart from their divergent experiences and territories, this article emphasizes the importance of management carried out by the association.

Keywords: *Associations, Actor, Associative, Management, Internal, External, Tourism, Cooperation, Development, Organization, Rural*

INTRODUCTION

The realization of an association project requires the mobilization of several resources and the pooling of skills acquired by different local collectives. On the one hand, this collective has experience in coordination between the different local actors and sufficient knowledge of the local social field and its challenges. On the other hand, the State directs public subsidies towards projects and activities in order to involve associations in the management of local matters, as the development of the association governance system depends on public financing mechanisms. Cooperation gives rise to a new form of financing called “joint financing” for the implementation of associative projects with a tourism vocation (*De La Rochefoucauld, 2003; Moussa cited in Sedjari, 2005; Laghrissi, 2010; Rifkin, 2011; Janin et al, 2011; Bekkari, 2016; El Machbour, 2021; Teng-Chuen-Yu, 2018; Ait Nasser, 2021*).

Our reflection about the local associations and tourism development is a part of the national context for the governance's reorganization modes and territories restructuring. So, how do associations work in tourism cause? Our objective is therefore to question the action mechanisms of these non-profit organizations. We focused on the discrepancies noted in terms of internal and external management of their activity. We also evaluate the relevance of their intervention as a territorial actor in the era of participatory democracy. In the final title, we created a table with all the subjects we discussed throughout the interview, and we categorized the quotes verbatim based on our interpretations.

METHODOLOGY

Our empirical investigation is based on the exploration of two areas: the only existing tourist association in the rural commune of Asrir-Province of Guelmim (Oued-Noun region) the Southern Oasis Tourism Association (SOTA) in its management of Oasis Tourism Information and Orientation Office (OTIO) and six associations directly involved in local tourism development located within the rural commune of Tighdouine-Province of Tahnaoute-Al Haouz (Marrakech El Haouz region). The chosen land belongs to two strategic provinces in terms of territorial development and promotion. The choice of these two study cases allowed us to question

¹ Laboratory of Resource Studies, Mobility and Attractiveness, (LRSMA), faculty of Letters and Human Sciences- Marrakesh

² Laboratory of Resource Studies, Mobility and Attractiveness, (LRSMA), faculty of Letters and Human Sciences- Marrakesh

³ Laboratory of Resource Studies, Mobility and Attractiveness, (LRSMA), faculty of Letters and Human Sciences- Marrakesh

⁴ Laboratory of Researches in Society, Language, Arts and Medias (LARSLAM), faculty of Letters and Human Sciences- Agadir E-mail: Malikanacer@hotmail.com

the mechanisms of action and management of tourist activity. Those associative actors are based on two territories with a tourist vocation. But, they re apparently dissimilar by their experiences in terms of tourism, their territorial positioning and their geographical. The objective of this paper is to compare their internal mode of operation and the action mechanisms for managing their resources. The aim of this comparison is to detect similarities as well as divergences. Our work should lead to a synthesis allowing the identification of opportunities and the limits encountered by associations. We therefore conducted directive interviews with the presidents of the targeted associations. The qualitative analysis of the results was carried out by thematic analysis followed by a discourse analysis (*Sales-Wuillemin, 2006*) in order to have visibility on the profile of the associations, the activities and the organization related to both territories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Associative Actor and Local Development

Territorial development and the associative activities cannot be considered in isolation. Their strong interdependence is due to the essential role that associations have in the territorial development process. In fact, associations are considered as *strategic actor*⁵ in the territory, through their specific links with the population and public actors (*Fiedberg, 1997*). However, the functions assumed can vary from a simple intermediation function with the outside world to a real actor serving the local population; they are interacting with a dynamic context and facing new development challenges. So, the associations show a very important role in territorial co-construction. The multiplicity of actors, issues and the impossibility of individual transformation of society require co-constructing adequate solutions for targeted territory (*El Machhour, 2021; Teng-Chuen-Yu, 2018; Bekkari, 201*).

The Values of The Associative Actor Within Moroccan Rural

The values of the associative act are anchored in tradition among the local population called “Jmaâa”. They constitute a basic pillar of modern associative action. Indeed, the associative movement does not constitute a new element. It is the extension of traditional heritage of solidarity for managing and organizing the territory and common interests. This human capital, which must be profitable, constitutes support for the modern associative form, as is the case for water sharing.

Alongside its potential, there are weaknesses that complicate the realization of targeted activities. However, the presence of several forms of traditional management on the one hand (Jmaâa, tribe, etc.) and the State, on the other hand, places Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in situations of disagreement between the interests of a social heritage history and political or personal priorities. Resolving deadlock situations depends on collaboration at all scales and between all associative and/or public actors. Likewise, the return to the complexity of administrative procedures, which slow down development initiatives taken by NGOs, questions the traditional mentality of the protective State which still takes root and resists the principles of modernity of management, based on the principle of proximity, governance and co-development (*Rifkin, 2011; Janin et al, 2011; Dissart, 2012; Ait Nasser, 2022*).

Legal Framework of the Associative Actor

The interventions of associations in tourism constitute a backbone of territorial dynamics; their presence is conceived as a striking expression of local solidarity. Indeed, the participation of associations in the activities of the tourism sector is managed by Dahir n°1-58-378 of November 15, 1958, as it was modified by Dahir n°1-02-206 of July 23 2002 promulgating law 75-00 (*De la Rochefoucauld, 2003; Chkaoulou, 2006*). On local scale, we cite among them:

Non-Profit Tourism Promotion Associations: they are developed around activities such as reception and promotion at the local scale and the development of the socio-professional activities of tourism employers.

Putting the Associative Actor to the test in Tourism: Comparative Study of two Rural Communes, Asrir in the Province of Guelmim and Tighdouine within the Western High Atlas of Marrakech- Kingdom of Morocco

Information and Reception Associations: they provide tourist information in the form of presentations of tourist activities, hotels and sites, etc. Nevertheless, their abundance has revealed different ways of conceiving tourism development. Their reason justifies their presence, but other anomalies making their presence very weak alongside other actors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Internal Organization of the Associations

The analysis of the internal organization of the association is based, firstly, on the leader of the association in order to subsequently justify internal dysfunctions. Table n°1 summarizes the internal organizational aspects that we have further developed based on two subheadings.

Table n°1: Summary of the association's personal resources

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Local tourism development associations-Marrakech</i>	<i>Association SOTA-Guelmim</i>
<i>President's profile</i>	<i>University Level/ middle school level</i>	<i>University Level</i>
<i>Members profile</i>	<i>Academics/ employees/ liberal professions/ public sector employees</i>	<i>Academics/ employees/ liberal professions/ public sector employees</i>
<i>Management power</i>	<i>Reserved for the president with very partial delegation to other members.</i>	<i>Participatory.</i>
<i>Application of statutory requirements</i>	<i>Mandate assigned to office members is less than 2 years/ Board meetings and general meetings are less frequent.</i>	<i>Closure of the office before the achievement of the president's mandate and the establishment of the internal regulations.</i>
<i>Human resources</i>	<i>Members native to the region.</i>	<i>Native members of the commune.</i>
<i>Knowledge/ know-how</i>	<i>Personal resources and skills acquired during training organized by the 'Adrar Nderm' confederation at the municipal level or as part of projects financed by international NGOs.</i>	<i>Resources from members and local, national and foreign stakeholders.</i>
<i>Activities</i>	<i>Setting up tourist circuits, training in hospitality professions for locals; marketing of lodges; internal management of tourist sites.</i>	<i>Management of the Oasis Tourism Information and Orientation Office (OTIO).</i>
<i>Territorial influences</i>	<i>Non-presence in events relating to their sector of activity.</i>	<i>Association has not started to assess its impact.</i>
<i>Mode of governance</i>	<i>Occasional participatory management due to insufficient resources, both material and human.</i>	<i>Participatory management in the creation of the OTIO associative project.</i>
<i>Management of the activity</i>	<i>Participatory management involvement of the local population in tourist activities.</i>	<i>Participatory management involvement of the local population in tourist activities.</i>
<i>Internal financing</i>	<i>Member contributions.</i>	<i>Member contributions.</i>
<i>Other financing resources</i>	<i>Merchandising/sale of local products.</i>	<i>Partners and members during the period of the creation of OTIO.</i>
<i>Training</i>	<i>Very irregular training of members at the local and provincial level.</i>	<i>No training done for members.</i>
<i>Technical assistance</i>	<i>Members/ local contributions.</i>	<i>Members/ partners.</i>
<i>Information & communication</i>	<i>Partnership with travel agencies / Digital platforms, catalog and brochures / referencing in tourist guides.</i>	<i>Partnership with the private sector for communication tools (brochure, site, portal, etc.).</i>

The Association President's Profile.

The profile of the president of the SOTA association falls within the framework of the logic of positions and not of skills in the field of tourism. With academic and without experience or knowledge of the field, the choice of his profile is based on two criteria: being a native of the region and belonging to the same tribe of the commune of Asrir (the Hassani Azwafite tribe); security concerns dominate more in his choice in order to avoid any conflict of tribal order or geographical or political affiliation. The absence of knowledge and foresight of the integration of the association in the management of local tourist activity justifies the lack of thoughtful strategies in the basic activity of the association: the management of tourism activities.

From the same perspective, the analysis of the profile of the presidents of the associations surveyed in the commune of Tighdouine reveals varied levels of education: except for a university executive, all the other members have a level which varies between primary and high school. They are all natives of the region but their membership of different political parties causes tensions detrimental to the articulation of their action within the territory (Jamani, 2008). Their professional skills are unsuitable for the position and do not promote efficient management or administration. It is worth noting that the powers of management and representation are statutorily reserved to the President and cannot be delegated to other persons. Furthermore, the rotation of the members of the association is very slow or sometimes non-existent and suggests a management style that is not

very participatory. The analysis of the profile of the presidents of the associations within the two territories reveals the following:

the lack of professionalism and tourism skills among the majority of local tourism stakeholders and promoters;

the lack of collaboration between private and public sectors due to the absence of professional tourism associations;

the lack of initiative and creativity among tourism professionals who are invited to create seasonal tourist activities based on territorial resources in collaboration with other local actors.

Aspects of the Associations' Internal Organization

For the promotion of rural tourism, SOTA has set up OTIO to coordinate between available tourism activities. It is made up of associations, Economic Interest Groups (EIGs) and cooperatives. It aims at information, entertainment and coordination between the different products and services in the rural commune of Asrir. The association encourages tourism professionals to register with the association, since it oversees the training of tourism project leaders and tourism profession, according to the type of their activities (accommodation, catering, transport, bivouac, etc.). Training for members of the association will be provided by a tourism professional chosen following a call for tender. The financing of the training will be taken through the agreement between the association and the Rural Development Fund. Faced with the ambitions expressed, the SOTA association is experiencing a period of trial and error and suspension of activities; while awaiting the realization of a common strategy for the management and operation, the OTIO office depends also on a certain organization professionalism of its members. It's facing an internal dysfunction manifested as follows:

- *lack of experience in tourism activities for rural areas;*
- *lack of training in the associative field despite the intellectual level of the participants;*
- *financial dependence on public sector associations for the stability of their financial resources;*
- *conflicts between project ideas, its perceptions and implementation;*
- *problem of internal cooperation between members and local actors.*

The associations in Tighdouine revealed their involvement in promotion and development actions. Apart from their dedication to their goal, their participation remains very complicated during a decade of experiences in tourism. The internal functioning limits their action and suggests various deviations listed as follows:

- *at the level of internal organization:* due to the lack of skills, the discretionary power of some presidents reduces any contribution to the decision with an almost absence of the office members. The application of statutory requirements remains very summary: half do not keep accounts or a board of directors even if 3% have a tax ID;
- *in terms of financial means:* the funding obtained within the framework of state programs benefited a minority, i.e. 30% of local associations. 50% of associations consider modest member's contributions as the main source for the internal functioning of their structure. 33% use donations from individuals and only 8. 3% call on donors to finance their project. The sale of local products, i.e. 16.7%, and the rental of stopover lodges for an association constitute self-financing resources;
- *in terms of material resources:* only one association has premises and a service car. 20% declare that they have computer equipment and a telephone line dedicated to the association. The premises chosen by the majority of associations are devoid of any equipment allowing them to work in a suitable setting;
- *communication and promotion almost non-existent:* no association publishes a newsletter, except for a single association which worked on the design of a website. We also note a weak presence in provincial or regional events linked to tourism (Noyer & Raoul, 2013).

Management Of the Association’s External Environment

In the field study, it is a question of a varied type of associative organization between community organizations, local solidarity groups on socio-economic management (cooperatives) and private non-profit organizations. The varieties of its organization, its partners and its objectives have also an impact on the associations’ resources. The table below outlines the main features of the resources that the two areas of our study mobilize for external exchange.

Table n° 2: summary table of external resources for associations

	<i>Associations-Marrakech</i>	<i>Association SOTA-Guelmim</i>
Funding	NIHD ⁶ / MOAZARA Program of the Ministry of Tourism/ Local authorities and NGOs.	Partners (South Agency, rural commune, NGOs).
Logistical support	Partnership between municipality and NGOs.	Commune/Southern Agency.
Land	Association/ commune/ individuals.	State/commune.
Construction	NGOs / NIHD/ Southern Agency / commune	Southern Agency/ commune
Equipment	NGOs/ NIHD	NGOs/ Southern Agency
Training & know-how	Confederation of associations / Provincial associative space / NGOs.	In partnership with stakeholders in subsidized projects.
Partnership	NGOs /Province/Local Communities/Travel Agency/Network of Local/ University Associations/Provincial Space of Associations.	Southern Agency/ commune
Information & communication	Partnership with travel agencies / Digital platforms/catalogue and brochures/telephone canvassing.	Partnership with the private sector for communication tools (brochure, site, portal, etc.)/partners.
Others to be specified	More than 60% of national customers/Very advantageous geographical positioning.	Relational based on exchanges between locals and nationals.

The Partnership Between the Associations and Other Local Actors

In the rural commune of Asrir, the associations are the actors who benefit most from the organization of collective actions. Funding, equipment and training provided converge towards the promotion of associations and cooperatives. The associations introduce the role of NGOs that use the empowerment as a mode of practicing power and promote the direct development by motivating local population to participate in decision-making. Still, we sometimes witness conflicting situations between the technical side of NGOs and local social values due to their attachment to the policies of their agency more than to the local needs. In order to validate their objectives, they opt for cooperation with local actors. In our field study, they are partners of the South Agency for the development of several activities including tourism and local products.

At the level of the municipality of Tighdounine, interaction with local actors is a leitmotif. The joints recorded are at different levels: administrative, financial and also training. We can describe relations with local authorities as vertical one, because they exclude the avenues of consultation and deliberation. Also, national or international NGOs develop one-way relationships as long as their interventions are limited to very specific projects and benefit a minority.

Partnership and Projects’ Financing

According to the people interviewed, “the ideas and proposals come from the partners”. That diversity of partners introduces the diversity of funding and the variety of subsidized projects. In reading the logic of the local actors, the president of the commune of Asrir and the support of the Southern Agency together constitute the actors of the steering group. The agency crystallizes the creation of partnerships and the attraction of foreign donors to guarantee the total financing of the local association SOTA. Indeed, it emphasizes the importance of the association’s president. First of all, in the search for partners, the president is invited to produce financial report and plans according to the objectives of the association. Then, the members of the association must be

able to mobilize income via their networks. Finally, the interference between the associative interests for the collective good and the political interests of the members of the office is blocking the ambitions of the association.

In Tighdouine, 83% of associations belong to a subnational association network. At the rural level, there is the confederation of associations operating in different fractions allowing the dissemination and sharing of information. At the provincial level, there is the Provincial Space of Al Haouz Associations. The search for project subsidies is complicated because it requires mastery of associative work and advanced relationships with local and regional authorities. In short, from the study of the two case studies, it seems that partnerships between associations and other actors in the territory are limited to one-off issues; it suggests that efficient scales of social co-construction have not yet been established in order to optimize the impact of the associative actor at the regional level.

CROSS-ANALYSIS OF THE GENERAL PROFILES OF THE TWO STUDIED ASSOCIATIONS

The associative actor surveyed, newly established in the rural commune of Asir, is going through start-up challenges and obstacles. At the same time, the accumulation of more than 10 years of experiences for the associations in Tighduoine could not spare the presence of several dysfunctions that limit the scope of their actions within the territory. The data collected during our research work allowed us to establish an internal and external diagnosis of local associations for tourism development to understand the conditions in which they attempt to evolve.

Table n° 3: Cross-analysis of internal diagnosis and external diagnosis of the associations

	Internal strengths and opportunities	Internal weaknesses and threats
Internal Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a will to make tourism a factor in local development; - knowledge of the territory; - local credibility; - distinctive skills to be mobilized; - training offered by the confederations and the provincial space; - associative platforms dedicated to interaction and sharing of experiences; - set up partnerships; - collaboration between associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a lack of internal management skills; - the problem of the availability of association's members; - the absence of logistical resources; - a lack of financial autonomy; - weak participatory management; - the absence of tourism know-how; - no digital visibility; - Difficulty setting up subsidized projects.
External Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the presence of political will to consolidate the associative actor; -implementation of active support and awareness programs; -the presence of support structures at the local and provincial level. -a desire to make tourism a factor in local development; -knowledge of the territory; -the importance of the associative actor in establishing sustainable tourism; -A logic of belonging and sharing the same interests and projections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - few interactions with external actors; -a blatant gap between the means and skills of associations and the expectations of the rural territory; -difficulties finding subsidies; -convergences of interests between NGOs and associations; -Complexity of administrative procedures for subsidies; Actions are limited to specific projects; - the discontinuity of tourist activities; - the influence of political tensions on the future of associations due to controversial relationships with local authorities;

The above analysis highlights the potential of the associative actors and its contribution to the tourism development of the territory. The internal diagnosis of the associative actors revealed a strong desire to make tourism a factor in territorial development. Several opportunities and strengths are to be seized (knowledge of the territory, presence of political determination to strengthen the associative actor and an increased desire for learning). Threats and weak points have been recorded (a lack of participatory interaction with local stakeholders, poor management methods of the association; a lack of knowledge of the activities linked to the promotion of tourist products and a lack of autonomy in seeking financing). The assimilation of this internal and external diagnosis resulted in three strategic axes which are articulated as follows: the consolidation of human resources skills, the establishment of collaboration mechanisms at the territorial level, the strengthening of support and financing programs for associations and the redefinition of public policies to establish good associative governance. In short, this analysis conceptualizes how associations can effectively integrate into

their environment to promote rural tourism, taking into account the various internal and external factors that influence their success.

CONCLUSION

As the final platform of the tourism project, the commune scale remains timidly exploited with the exception of the rural commune of Asrir. According to the analyzes of data from surveys carried out in this commune, the functioning of the Oasis Tourism Information and Orientation Office (OTIO) depends on the SOTA association's members motivation. The establishment of OTIO encourages the integration of the commune as a crucial actor in initiation and reception of tourism projects. In the same point and despite the initiatives aimed at strengthening the associative actor, the examination of the inventory within the rural commune of Tighdouine revealed organizational dysfunctions in the internal as well as in the external functioning of the associations.

In general, the sustainability of an association depends on its relations with public authorities; its ability to maintain relationships with its external environment; its knowledge of the field and its capacity to innovate in its field of action. The State should play its role as catalyst to promote the integration of associations into territorial dynamics within the framework of collaborative work inclined to implement territorial engineering for the development of sustainable tourism (*Chattou, 2005; Capone, 2006; Cayla & Duval, 2013; Campaign & Pecqueur, 2014*).

REFERENCES

- Ait Nasser M. (2022), "Capability, Actors, Tourism: a new reading of the territory of the province of Guelmim", Edition LERMA, Marrakech, 144 p.
- Ait Nasser M. (2021), "Local actors and mobilization of tourism resources for the development of the province of Guelmim", pp. 63-81, Scientific Review "South Moroccan Heritage and Arts Series", Faculty of Languages, Arts and Human Sciences - Ait Melloul, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Number 1, Autumn 2021.
- Ait Nasser M. (2021), "Territorial capacities as a platform for tourism development in the province of Guelmim-Morocco, Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences, ISSN: 2414-3111, pp.156-163.
- Bekkari L. (2016), Office National du Conseil Agricole, The role of associative actors between actors of local development and auxiliary to public policies: case study in the Middle Atlas, pp 1-7.
- Campaign P. & Pecqueur B. (2014). "Territorial development", Nouvelle Imprimerie Laballery, 267 p.
- Capone F., 2006, "Tourist Clusters, Destinations and Competitiveness", New York, Routledge.
- Cayla N. & Duval M., 2013, "Geotourism: Moroccan heritage, practices, actors and perspectives", Collection Edytem, n° 4, pp. 101-116.
- Chattou Z. (coord), 2005, "Sustainable tourism and rural development", Rabat, self-employed, 166 p.
- Chkaoulou M. (2006), "Tourism law", Imprimerie Tissir, Casablanca, 441 p.
- De La Rochefoucauld. B (2003), "Tourism Economy", Edition BRÉAL, Paris, 288 p.
- Dissart J.C. "Co-construction of capacities and territorial resources in mountain tourist areas", Revue de Géographie Alpine, dossier 100-2 |2012, 10 p.
- El Machhour H. (July 2021), "Participation of associations in local democracy: What role of public financing in Morocco?" AME Review Vol 3, No 3, pp 285-289.
- Friedberg E. (1997), "Power and rule", Points, Paris, 422 p.
- Jamani, A. (2008). "The oasis of asrir, elements of social history of the Oued Noun", Publisher la Croisée des Chemins, Rabat, Morocco, 431p.
- Janin C., Grasset E., Lapostolle E., Turquin E. (2011), "Engineering, a sign of territorial intelligence? », Edition Economica Anthropos, Paris, 142 p.
- Laghrissi A. (2010), "Governance in Morocco, Public action approach", El Watanya, 193 p.
- Moussa M.F. (2005), "Public-private partnership and good governance for the development of Arab countries: an Arab regional initiative in partnership with the OECD and UNDP", pp 71-92. In. Ali SEDJARI (Dir), "Public-private partnership and future governance", Edition L'Harmattan, 2005, 525 p.
- Noyer, J-I-P. & Raoul, B. (2013). "Media and territories: Public space between communication and territorial imagination". California, CA: Presses University Press.
- Rifkin J. (2011) "The Third Industrial Revolution: How Lateral Power is Transforming Energy, the Economy and the World", Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 304 p.
- Salès-Wuillemin, E. (2006) "Survey methodology", in: M., Bromberg and A., Trognon (Eds.) Social Psychology 1, Presses Universitaires de France, pp 45-77.

- Teng-Chuen-Yu M. (2018), "The potential of associations for the development of the territory example of Saint-Benoit, master's thesis Management of organizations, professional specialty, management of associations, Sorbonne business School, Paris, 138p .