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Territorial Marketing, Attractiveness, and Socio-Economic Development: Perspectives of Territorial Stakeholders

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Abstract:

This article aims to understand how territorial stakeholders perceive the role of territorial marketing in enhancing the attractiveness of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, retaining businesses and skilled professionals, and promoting economic and social development. To this end, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted, based on six semi-structured interviews conducted with various territorial stakeholders in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region. The findings show that the region has several important assets, particularly its geographical location, infrastructure, industrial activities, and tourism potential. However, the interviewees emphasize that these advantages do not benefit all areas and stakeholder groups equally. Disparities are particularly evident in access to employment, services, and economic opportunities. The study also highlights that attracting investors, businesses, and skilled professionals is not sufficient to ensure sustainable development. It is equally important to create favorable conditions for their long-term retention and the continued development of their activities within the region. Finally, concerns regarding the rising cost of living, water availability, and territorial inequalities suggest that territorial attractiveness should not be assessed solely in terms of investment and tourism, but also through its impact on residents' living conditions.

Keywords: Territorial Marketing; Territorial Attractiveness; Territorial Embeddedness; Socio-Economic Development; Territorial Governance; Thematic Analysis; Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima.

1. Introduction

In a context characterized by increasing competition among territories and the search for new development opportunities, territorial marketing has emerged as a strategic approach to enhancing territorial resources and strengthening attractiveness. However, scientific research shows that the availability of geographical, economic, or cultural resources alone is not sufficient to transform them into competitive advantages. This transformation also depends on the coherence of the territorial offering, its alignment with the expectations of target audiences, and the ability of stakeholders to coordinate their actions (Colletis et al., 1999; Thiard, 2005; Chamard & Schlenker, 2017).

Recent studies also emphasize that territorial attractiveness cannot be reduced to the image promoted by a territory or to its ability to attract new investments and visitors. Lived experiences, stakeholder participation, and the quality of governance play an important role in shaping relationships between stakeholders and their territory (Berrada, 2019; Ripoll González et al., 2025; Stoica et al., 2026). Furthermore, attracting new economic activities does not necessarily ensure their long-term retention or

their contribution to socio-economic development. Issues related to stakeholder retention, territorial embeddedness, quality of life, and the distribution of benefits therefore highlight the need to move beyond a predominantly promotional understanding of territorial marketing (Soldo, 2018).

Against this background, this article aims to understand how territorial stakeholders perceive the relationships between territorial marketing, attractiveness, territorial embeddedness, and socio-economic development in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region. It adopts an exploratory qualitative approach based on six semi-structured interviews conducted with economic and institutional stakeholders. The thematic analysis of the interviews seeks to identify areas of convergence and divergence, as well as the conditions that may explain how territorial attractiveness can be translated into sustainable benefits for the region.

2. Results of the Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

2.1. Profile of the Respondents

The study is based on a dataset of six semi-structured interviews conducted with participants who have professional or personal ties to the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region. The selection of participants aimed to capture diverse perspectives on territorial marketing practices, the factors influencing territorial attractiveness, stakeholder embeddedness, and socio-economic outcomes. To ensure participants' confidentiality, the interviews were anonymized using the identifiers E1 to E6.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Code	Respondent Profile
E1	Bank branch manager in Tangier
E2	Human Resources Director at a River Basin Agency
E3	PhD student and resident of Tangier
E4	Municipal council president and member of a regional committee
E5	Financial officer at the Tax Administration in Al Hoceima
E6	Director of an event management company

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the interviews conducted.

2.2. Territorial Attractiveness Based on Recognized Resources

The interviews reveal a widely shared recognition of the geographical, infrastructural, economic, and cultural resources of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region. Proximity to Europe, port and industrial infrastructure, the coastline, and cultural heritage are frequently mentioned as key factors contributing to the region's attractiveness. However, the importance attributed to these resources varies according to the respondents' professional backgrounds and the activities they associate with them.

The bank branch manager mainly emphasizes geographical advantages and their connection to economic infrastructure: "Tangier's geographical location is its main strength. Its proximity to Europe and the availability of all the necessary facilities and infrastructure." (E1)

This perspective is also shared by the resident respondent, who identifies proximity to Europe, the port, and industrial zones as Tangier's main assets. However, the event management company director offers a broader perspective, highlighting the region's strategic position between Europe and Africa, as well as its potential for cultural and professional development.

The analysis also shows that the resources contributing to territorial attractiveness are not always considered sufficient on their own. In particular, the representative of the River Basin Agency establishes a clear link between resource development and environmental preservation: “These assets can support tourism, agriculture, and investment, provided that ecosystems are protected and sustainable water management is ensured.” (E2)

Furthermore, respondents do not describe the region as a homogeneous territory. While the bank branch manager mainly highlights Tangier's industrial and tourism dynamics, the financial officer working in Al Hoceima places greater emphasis on the potential of natural heritage, tourism, and local products. Nevertheless, he stresses the need to diversify economic activities and strengthen the local business sector. These different perspectives suggest that the advantages recognized at the regional level do not necessarily translate into the same economic opportunities across the territories that make up the region.

2.3. Tensions Between the Promoted Territorial Image and Actual Conditions for Attracting and Welcoming Stakeholders

Although participants generally acknowledge improvements in infrastructure and the growing number of economic projects, several emphasize that these developments do not necessarily ensure a complete alignment between the territory's promoted image and the actual experiences of its target audiences. This gap is particularly evident in the account of the PhD student living in Tangier: “However, there is sometimes a gap between the image presented and the daily lives of residents. Further improvements are needed in transportation, traffic management, certain public services, and disparities between neighborhoods.” (E3)

The respondent representing a local authority expresses a similar view, emphasizing the importance of supporting territorial communication with tangible achievements: “The credibility of territorial marketing therefore depends on the quality of concrete achievements.” (E4)

This concern is also reflected in the perspective of the event management company director, who argues that infrastructure and reception facilities must be supported by effective logistical organization, appropriate professional services, and efficient mobility. In the event management sector, discrepancies between promotional promises and the services actually delivered may influence participants' experiences.

The representative of the River Basin Agency highlights another essential condition for ensuring consistency between the promoted image and territorial realities: “Attractiveness does not depend solely on visible infrastructure or territorial communication. It also relies on water availability, the quality of public services, and the territory's capacity to sustainably meet the needs of residents and investors.” (E2)

Digital communication is recognized by respondents as an important tool for increasing territorial visibility, particularly in tourism and event-related activities. However, several participants stress the importance of the quality, regular updating, and usefulness of the information provided. According to E3, digital platforms should also facilitate citizens' access to reliable information and enable interaction. Similarly, E6 argues that the effectiveness of promotional campaigns should be assessed through event participation, contacts generated, and the resulting benefits.

2.4. Unequal Perceptions of Territorial Attractiveness Across Target Groups and Areas

The interviews reveal significant differences between stakeholder groups that benefit from the region's growing attractiveness and those for whom the conditions for settling or remaining in the region are less favorable. Investors, businesses, and tourists are frequently identified as the groups most attracted to the

region. In contrast, young graduates and residents of less developed areas are more often associated with difficulties in accessing opportunities.

This distinction is particularly evident in the account of the resident respondent: “Tangier is attractive to investors, businesses, and tourists. However, it is less attractive to young graduates, who do not always find stable employment or adequate salaries.” (E3)

The representative of the local authority highlights a similar spatial disparity: “In contrast, some rural municipalities face greater difficulties in attracting businesses and retaining young graduates, particularly when infrastructure and local services remain insufficient.” (E4)

These statements suggest that the conditions shaping territorial attractiveness may vary within the same region, particularly according to the availability of infrastructure and local economic opportunities.

This diversity is also reflected in the comparison between Tangier and Al Hoceima. While E1 describes a dynamic industrial environment, E5 considers that Al Hoceima still needs to strengthen its ability to attract large companies, diversify its economic activities, and provide more opportunities for young graduates.

The event management company director also points out that the ability to host professional events depends on the facilities and capacities available in each city. Consequently, the organization of events and their potential benefits may be concentrated in areas with better infrastructure and facilities.

Overall, these findings indicate that regional attractiveness cannot be understood as a uniform phenomenon. Rather, it varies across stakeholder groups, economic sectors, and geographical areas.

2.5. From Attraction to Territorial Embeddedness: The Role of Retention Conditions and Long-Term Relationships

The interviews place particular emphasis on the stability of the economic environment, the availability of skills and services, the quality of experiences, and opportunities for business development. The financial officer working in Al Hoceima explicitly highlights this relationship: “The challenge is to transform initial interest in the region into sustainable activities capable of generating employment and local added value.” (E5)

The event management company director identifies a similar mechanism in the context of professional relationships: “The challenge is to transform a one-time visit into a lasting relationship with the territory.” (E6)

These two perspectives converge on the idea that territorial embeddedness requires sustained engagement beyond the initial decision to invest, establish a business, or visit the region. However, the conditions needed to ensure such continuity vary according to the nature of the activities involved.

According to the representative of the River Basin Agency, securing water supplies and strengthening local skills are important conditions for the long-term sustainability of investments. From the resident respondent's perspective, job stability, salaries, housing opportunities, and quality of life play a central role in the decision to remain in the region. She explains: “However, for residents and young graduates, the decision to stay depends largely on employment opportunities, salaries, housing, and quality of life.” (E3)

The return of Moroccans living abroad is also mentioned by E1 as a recent development, while E4 and E5 emphasize the importance of supporting their investments in their regions of origin.

2.6. Recognized Socio-Economic Benefits, but Challenges Related to Their Quality and Distribution

Respondents generally associate investment and infrastructure development with the expansion of economic activities and the creation of employment opportunities.

The bank branch manager emphasizes the role of financial support and advisory services in implementing economic projects. The event management company director highlights business opportunities for service providers in the hospitality, catering, transportation, and technical services sectors. Similarly, the representative of the local authority points out that infrastructure and development projects can encourage investment and employment, while stressing that their outcomes should be assessed using concrete indicators.

This concern for the quality of socio-economic benefits is reflected in E3's statement: "In my opinion, infrastructure and economic activity can create jobs and encourage young people to start their own businesses. However, these jobs must be sustainable and aligned with their skills." (E3)

Concerns about quality of life are also expressed by the bank branch manager, who identifies the potential increase in the cost of living as a risk associated with urban development: "It is important to ensure that the city's development does not lead to a significant increase in the cost of living, which could threaten residents' stability, particularly those with low incomes." (E1)

The analysis also highlights environmental and territorial concerns. E2 emphasizes the importance of equitable access to water and essential services for quality of life, particularly among rural populations and in vulnerable areas. E4 stresses the need to distribute investments according to the needs of individual municipalities, while E5 calls for greater opportunities for small businesses and less developed areas. The event management company director identifies a similar challenge in his sector: "The economic benefits of events are often concentrated in cities with better infrastructure and facilities." (E6)

Overall, these perspectives reveal a tension between the pursuit of economic growth and the need for more inclusive development.

2.7. Territorial Governance: Institutional Communication, Stakeholder Participation, and Coordination Capacity

The interviews reveal a general recognition of the role of institutions and cooperation mechanisms in promoting territorial development. However, respondents distinguish between different levels of involvement, ranging from institutional communication to participation in decision-making and project implementation.

The bank branch manager mainly refers to the dissemination of information by the Regional Council and its interactions with citizens. This perspective emphasizes the communication dimension of governance without clearly explaining how stakeholders are involved in defining strategic priorities.

In contrast, the resident respondent reports a lack of consultation based on her personal experience: "Personally, I have never been consulted by a public administration or an association about my needs. Therefore, I do not know how these needs are identified." (E3)

The representative of the local authority advocates a more active approach to participation: "Participation must go beyond simple consultation. Businesses, associations, young people, and residents should be able to contribute to defining priorities and monitoring projects." (E4)

This distinction highlights that having the opportunity to express needs does not necessarily guarantee influence over decision-making. It also reflects E3's concerns regarding the involvement of residents and young people in territorial projects.

Other respondents place greater emphasis on the organizational capacities required for collective action. E2 stresses the importance of data sharing and coordination between institutions to anticipate water-related and economic needs. E5 highlights administrative simplification, transparency, and cooperation between public services and investment support organizations. Finally, E6 emphasizes the value of joint planning and impact assessment to avoid fragmented initiatives.

Table 2. Main Themes Identified from the Six Semi-Structured Interviews Conducted in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima Region

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Territorial Resources and Advantages	Geographical and natural resources	Proximity to Europe; coastline; water resources
	Economic and physical resources	Ports; industrial zones; infrastructure
	Cultural and human resources	Cultural heritage; territorial identity; local skills
Territorial Development Strategies and Territorial Offerings	Territorial positioning	Industry; tourism; agriculture; business tourism
	Territorial planning and quality of offerings	Facilities; transportation; services; hosting capacity
	Digital communication and promotion	Social media; territorial visibility; information reliability
	Alignment between image and experience	Territorial promises; lived experiences; unmet needs
Differentiated Territorial Attractiveness	Economic attractiveness	Investors; business establishment; companies
	Tourism and event-related attractiveness	Visitors; conferences; events
	Residential attractiveness and talent attraction	Young graduates; employment; housing; quality of life
	Spatial disparities	Tangier; Al Hoceima; rural municipalities; small towns
Stakeholder Retention and Territorial Embeddedness	Business and investment retention	Stability; profitability; reinvestment
	Retention of residents and skilled professionals	Stable employment; remuneration; services
	Loyalty and long-term relationships	Return visits; partnerships; diaspora
	Conditions for long-term sustainability	Water availability; skills development; administrative environment
	Local economic development	Employment; entrepreneurship; financing; local service providers

Socio-Economic Outcomes and Sustainability	Quality of life and social inclusion	Transportation; housing; essential services
	Costs and constraints of development	Cost of living; pressure on water resources; local impacts
	Spatial and social equity	Rural municipalities; young people; low-income households; distribution of benefits
Territorial Governance and Collective Capacities	Identification of stakeholder needs	Consultations; surveys; stakeholder engagement
	Stakeholder participation	Residents; businesses; associations; young people
	Coordination and strategic information	Institutions; data sharing; planning
	Transparency and evaluation	Institutional communication; project monitoring; impact assessment

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the thematic analysis of the interviews.

Conclusion

This article examined the relationships between territorial marketing, attractiveness, stakeholder embeddedness, and socio-economic development through a thematic analysis of six semi-structured interviews conducted with various stakeholders in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region. The comparison of respondents' perspectives reveals a shared recognition of the region's potential, particularly its geographical location, infrastructure, industrial and tourism activities, and diversity of natural and cultural resources. However, the findings show that the availability and promotion of these assets do not necessarily ensure uniform attractiveness or equal benefits across territories and population groups.

One of the main findings of the study is the distinction between the territory's attractive image and the actual conditions for attracting and retaining stakeholders. While investment and the expansion of economic activities are generally perceived as indicators of economic dynamism, respondents also emphasize the importance of service quality, employment opportunities, housing, resource availability, and institutional coordination. Territorial attractiveness therefore emerges as a phenomenon that varies across stakeholder groups and geographical areas.

The analysis also highlights that attracting new economic activities does not automatically lead to their long-term embeddedness or to improvements in socio-economic conditions. Continued investment, stakeholder retention, skills development, and local economic relationships are important mechanisms that may strengthen territorial benefits. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the cost of living, youth employment, water-related constraints, and disparities between urban and rural areas demonstrate that economic dynamism should also be assessed in terms of the quality and distribution of its benefits.

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