



Geografares

ISSN: 2175-3709

ISSN-L: 1518-2002

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Brasil

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Geografares, vol. 5, no. 41, e-50153, 2025, July-December

Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo

Vitória- Espírito Santo, Brasil

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47456/geo.v5i41.50153>

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Territorial governance in the Marrakech-Safi region: issues and challenges of decentralization and deconcentration policies

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the implementation of decentralization and deconcentration reforms in the Marrakech-Safi region. Through an analysis of territorial governance, carried out in the field with local players, as well as spatial and statistical analyses, the study highlights the difficulties associated with coordination between the various players, the slow political maturation of elected representatives, and the absence of effective accountability mechanisms. Regionalization, decentralization and deconcentration policies aim to transfer powers to local authorities. This article analyzes the implementation of these reforms, highlighting the gaps between the theoretical principles of the laws and their application in the field, particularly in the management of territorial projects. The study insists on the need for genuine political will and an overhaul of political practices to establish effective territorial governance, adapted to the specific characteristics of the regions, particularly Marrakech-Safi. Despite ambitious reforms, the study underlines that Morocco still faces many challenges in establishing territorial governance that reduces inequalities and promotes balanced development, particularly in high-potential regions such as Marrakech-Safi.

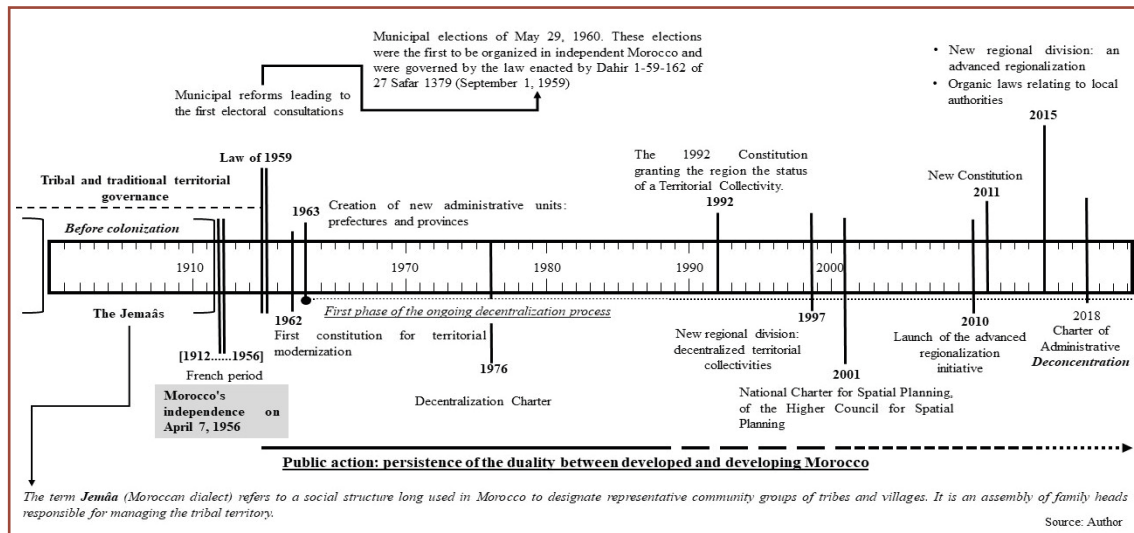
KEYWORDS: local autonomy; decentralization; deconcentration; territorial governance; coordination.

INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan administration has undergone several transformations, both at the central and local levels (Badri, 2019). It has continued to develop, adapt, and restructure itself in order to break with the imbalance inherited from colonization and to better meet the needs of its citizens. To this end, since its independence in 1956, Morocco has been committed to establishing and perfecting the instruments necessary for its development policies, through the municipal reforms of 1959-1960, constitutional amendments since 1962 (the last constitution was in 2011), the 1976 decentralization charter, the new regional division of decentralized local authorities in 1997, and the 2001 national charter for regional planning. The latter highlighted the inadequacy of the regional division established in 1997 in terms of demographic specificities and the requirements of development and land use planning. Indeed, although Morocco has been pursuing decentralization and regionalization policies since 1960, these have not borne fruit in terms of economic and social development. Thus, the duality of a “useful/developed” Morocco and a “useless/underdeveloped” Morocco from the colonial era remains relevant today (Salhi 2025). This is what made the implementation of advanced regionalization, which was launched in 2010 and reinforced a year later by the new reform, so urgent. In this context, and to strengthen this advanced regionalization, organic laws relating to local authorities were promulgated in 2015. Their main objectives were to regulate the powers of local authorities, constitutionalize the decentralized nature of the Kingdom, and enshrine advanced regionalization as the basis for territorial organization and free administration. Three years later, in order to support advanced regionalization and accompany the decentralization policy, the decentralization charter was created in 2018. Its objective was to establish, at the local level, decentralized services of the central administration and decentralized services of the State that coordinate the actions of decentralized services and support decentralized territorial organization. Territorial development now depends on how the two decentralized and deconcentrated Stakeholders govern their territories (Stead 2013; Maurel et al, 2014; Leloup and Maillefert, 2022). The political and constitutional changes adopted in Morocco to date (Figure 1) are far from being remedies for the structural causes of spatial disparities, poverty, and socio-economic crises (Salhi 2023). This is because there has never been any question of pursuing a genuine spatial planning policy, but rather a sectoral policy. Hence the urgent need to review the governance system,

which remains a work in progress in terms of content and implementation modalities. In fact, the governance deficit was mentioned in the 2006 report “50 Years of Human Development, Outlook 2025” as one of the key issues that will need to be addressed.

Figure 1 – General trajectory of Moroccan territorial public policy



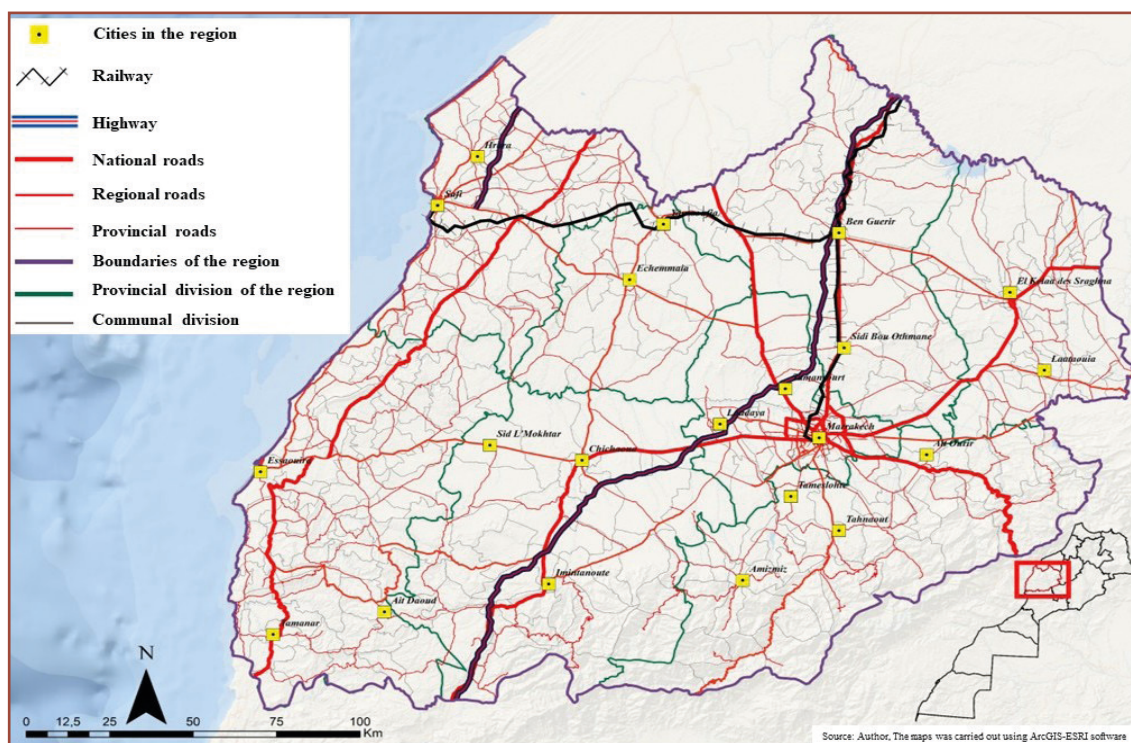
While the solution to Morocco’s problems of territorial inconsistency, spatial concentration of activities in only part of the territory, and development disparities lies at the local and national levels, no one can say for sure how effective and capable the strategies currently being implemented are in resolving inherited and new imbalances. The fundamental reason for this is the difficulty of integrating these strategies into specific territories (Kato et al., 2022; Bouirbitten et al., 2023), as well as the difficulty of adapting Stakeholders to changes and new responsibilities (Bronen & Chapin, 2013). Indeed, regionalization, decentralization, deconcentration, and regional planning are two sides of the same policy coin and together constitute the necessary conditions for regional development (Regourd et al., 2013; Desjardins, 2021). These policies are part of a long and ongoing process with a single, ultimate goal: successful territorial development (Dumont, 2020). However, these policies encourage the emergence of a plurality of Stakeholders at different levels with multiple and even divergent interests (Nejjar, 2016). This diversity of Stakeholders and levels of intervention has necessitated the transformation of the concept of government into territorial governance (Bevir, 2004; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006; Kazancigil, 2009; Turnhout and van der Zouwen, 2010). This transformation can be explained by the fact that government Stakeholders no longer have a monopoly on public action, which now involves a multiplicity of Stakeholders

whose capacity for collective action determines its quality. Thus, establishing a process of territorial governance (Davoudi et al. 2008) in order to carry out collective action and reconcile multiple interests is no easy task. In this context, our research aims to answer the following question: What form of governance is used to implement territorial projects in the Marrakech-Safi region within the framework of the new decentralization and devolution policies?

STUDY AREA

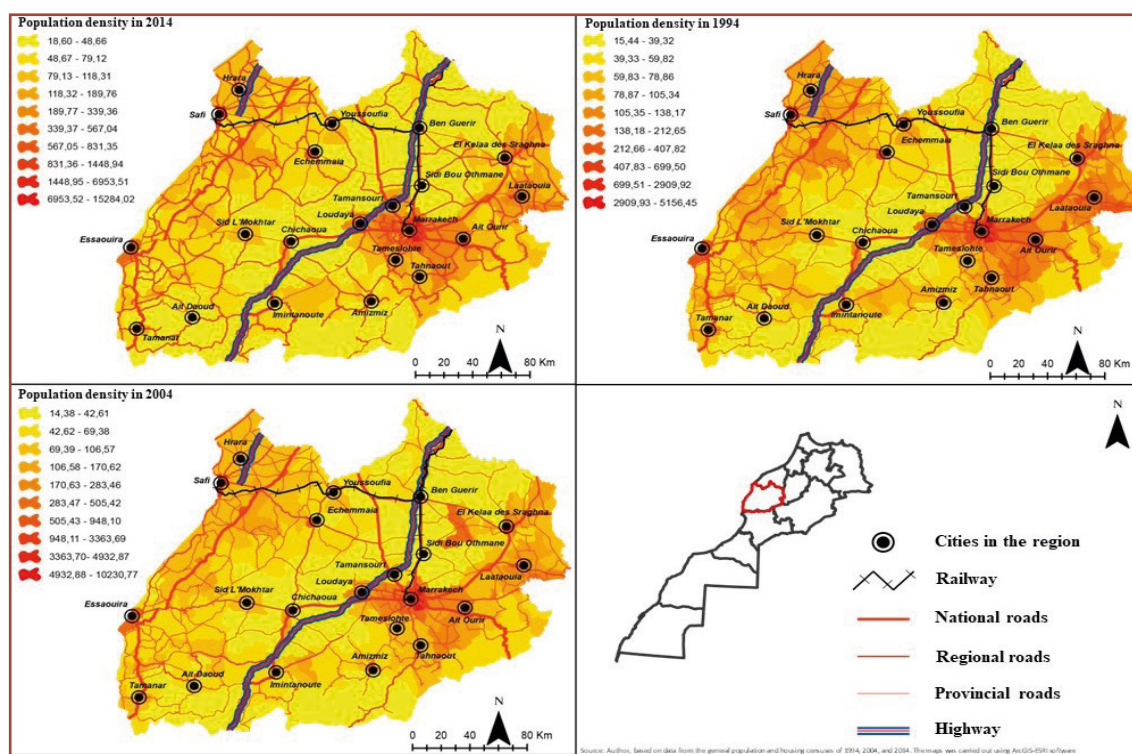
Our study area is the Marrakech-Safi region. It is one of Morocco's twelve regions, created by Law 114-14. It is bordered to the north by the Settat-Casablanca region, to the south by the High Atlas mountain range (Souss-Massa and Drâa-Tafilalet regions), to the east by the Beni Mellal-Khenifra region, and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean. This new territorial entity includes the prefecture of Marrakech, the capital of the Marrakech-Safi region. To the east, it is bordered by the Beni Mellal-Khenifra region and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean. This new territorial entity includes the prefecture of Marrakech, the regional capital, and the seven provinces of Al Haouz, Chichaoua, El Kelâa des Sraghnas, Essaouira, Rhamna, Safi, and Youssoufia (Figure 2). It encompasses the previous region of Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz, to which the provinces of Youssoufia and Safi have now been added.

Figure 2 - Localization of Marrakech-Safi region



The accession of these two provinces enabled the former regional territory to gain an additional area of 13,141 km² (increasing from 31,160 to 44,301 km²), and also enabled its population to increase from 3,102,652 (2004 census) to 4,520,569 inhabitants according to the 2014 census, representing an absolute increase of 1,417,917 inhabitants (Figure 3). It thus ranks third in terms of population size, after the Greater Casablanca-Settat region (20.27%) and Rabat-Salé-Kénitra (13.53%). Between 2004 and 2014, the regional population grew at an average annual rate of 1.27%, which is faster than the previous intercensal period (1.17% between 1994 and 2004) and lower than the national average of 1.32%. Furthermore, this average annual growth rate (AAGR) is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. While urban areas recorded an AAGR of 1.68%, rural areas recorded a rate of only 0.92%. (Monograph and SDAU of Marrakech, 2017).

Figure 3 - Population density in the Marrakech-Safi region between 1994, 2004, and 2014



METHODOLOGY

Our methodology is based on field surveys. We adopted a project-based approach, selecting specific projects and identifying the Stakeholders involved. This method was chosen because we believe it offers the best way to measure and analyze territorial governance, by examining the interactions

and decision-making processes of the Stakeholders involved in the projects. Our investigations focused on 14 projects (Figure 4; Table 1), selected according to criteria related to geographical accessibility and available data. We opted for projects that are covered by a partnership agreement and involve at least one devolved Stakeholders and one decentralized Stakeholders.

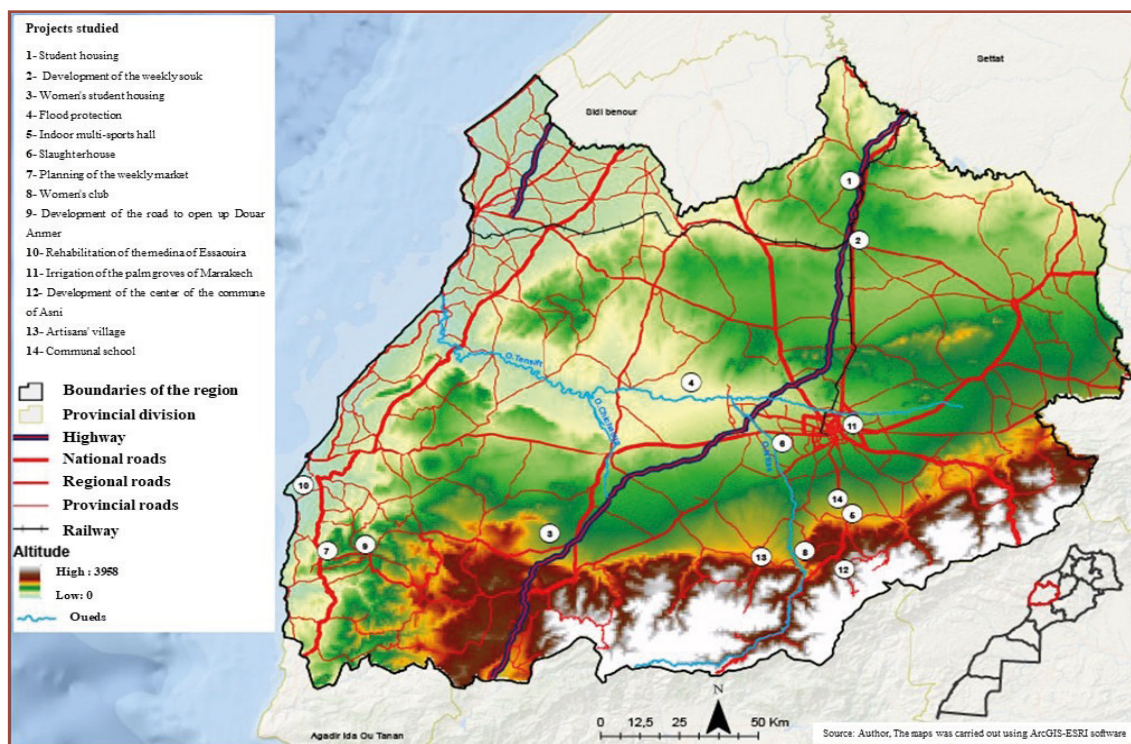
Table 1 – Description of the projects studied

N° and project title	Municipality	Stakeholders involved	Status	Failure factors
1. Student housing	Skhour Rehamna	Municipality, Rehmana Provincial Council, Association	Functional	
2. Development of the weekly souk	Benguerir	Municipality, Province (Rehamna)	Functional	
3. Women's student housing	Sidi Abdelmomen	Municipality, Local Association	Functional	
4. Flood protection	Sidi Chikr	Safi Provincial Council, Regional Council, Municipality, ABH	Functional	
5. Indoor multi-sports hall	Tahnaout	Municipality, Al Haouz Provincial Council, Regional Council, Ministry of Youth, Province (Al Haouz)	Blocked	Blockages linked to a lack of communication between stakeholders and the absence of a prior territorial assessment
6. Slaughterhouse	Souihla	ONSA, Municipality, Province (Marrakech)	Completed but not functional	Personal and political conflicts between project stakeholders
7. Planning of the weekly market	Smimou	Province (Essaouira), Municipality, Provincial Council	Functional	
8. Women's club	Ouazguita	Municipality, INDH	Completed but not functional	Dysfunction of the structure due to a lack of competent staff, resulting from the exodus of young people to large cities
9. Development of the road to open up Douar Anmer	Imi n Tlit	ANDZOA, Municipality	Functional	
10. Rehabilitation of the medina of Essaouira	Essaouira	Province (Essaouira), Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, Ministry of Culture, MHPV, Regional Council, ONEP, Municipality	Functional	
11. Irrigation of the palm groves of Marrakech	Marrakech	M6 Foundation, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Environment, CT Directorate (MI), Secretary of State for the Environment, National Promotion Directorate (MI), State Property Directorate, Wilaya of the region, Municipality of Marrakech, Marrakech Palm Grove Observatory, RADEEMA	Blocked	Land issues due to the absence of a preliminary assessment during the project design phase

Continued on next page...

12. Development of the center of the commune of Asni	Asni	Regional Council, Provincial Council of Al Haouz, Municipality, Province (Al Haouz)	Functional	
13. Artisans' village	Amizmiz	Ministry of Handicrafts, Chamber of Craftsmen, Provincial Council, Municipality, Province (Al Haouz)	Completed but not functional	Significant delays since the launch in 2015, mainly caused by political conflicts between the various councils
14. Communal school	Aguouatim	Province (Al Haouz), Ministry of Education, Municipality, National Promotion Provincial Delegation	Blocked	Failure linked to the dysfunction of the decentralization policy: decisions imposed in a top-down manner by the Ministry of Education and insufficient budget allocation

Figure 4 - Localization of the projects studied

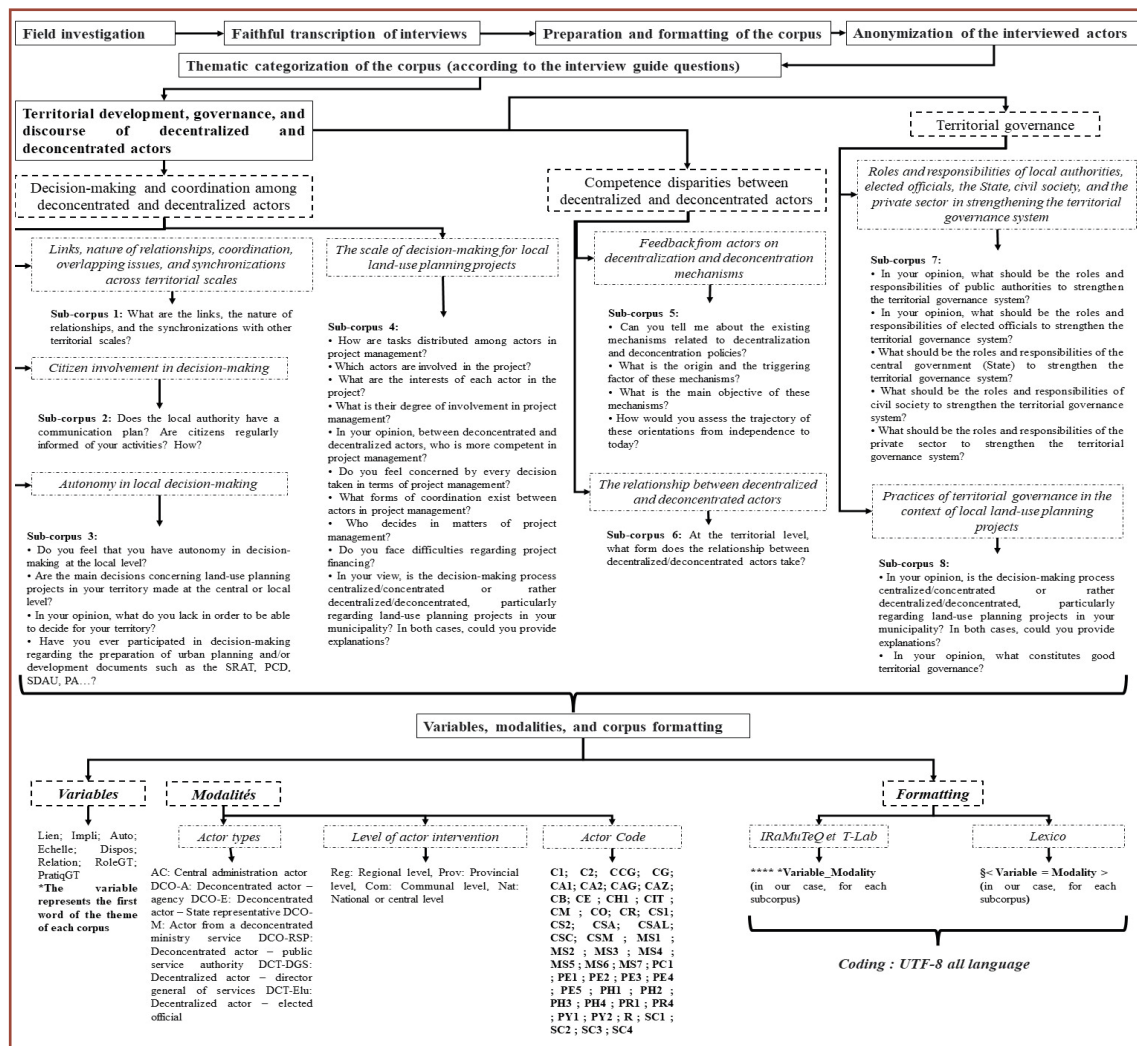


Quantitative data collection

For the survey, we used a diversified methodological approach, based on a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative). For the qualitative approach, we interviewed 55 stakeholders (representing all those involved in each project) using an interview guide. Among the stakeholders interviewed, we had a representativeness of 40% at the municipal level, 35% at the provincial level, 16% at the regional level, and 9% at the national level. A promise of confidentiality was made explicitly to the interviewees before the interview began

in order to protect their privacy and their own interests. At the same time, pseudonyms were used when analyzing the results to avoid the disadvantages of complete anonymity. To analyze the results, we used IRaMuTeQ software (Version 0.7 alpha 2), T-LAB plus 2022, and Lexico 5. Beta. This multiple choice of software is justified by the need for precise analyses that a single software program could not provide. The corpora used as the basis for our analysis correspond to the interviews with the Stakeholders, transcribed faithfully. Before proceeding with the analysis, we began by manually preparing and formatting the corpus in several stages (Figure 5). The first stage was to anonymize the Stakeholders. The second stage involved categorizing the subcorpora thematically according to the themes. The third step is to format (according to the formatting or tagging rules of each software program) the categorized subcorpora and create variables (in our case, these are Stakeholders codes, Stakeholders types, and Stakeholder intervention scales).

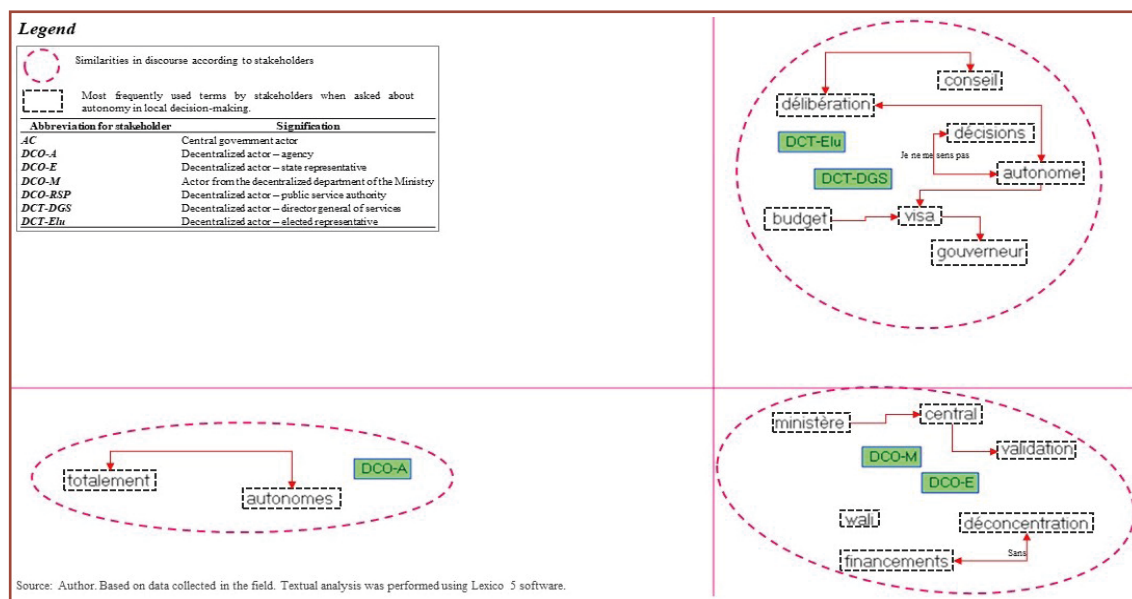
Figure 5 – Steps in preparing the corpus of interview transcripts



For the quantitative approach, we sent a questionnaire with closed questions to all of the stakeholders interviewed (55 stakeholders). The results were analyzed using XLSTAT software (XLSTAT BASIC+ license). In our analyses, we used cross-tabulation on the one hand, and principal component analysis on the other, to visualize the observations (corresponding in our case to the participants' responses) in a two- or three-dimensional space, in order to identify homogeneous groups of observations, or, conversely, atypical observations; visualization of correlations between variable modalities (corresponding in our case to the codes, types, and scale of intervention of the stakeholders surveyed).

DECENTRALISATION, DECONCENTRATION AND LOCAL POWER: A FRAGILE BALANCE BETWEEN THE STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Figure 6 – Stakeholders' Perception of Their Autonomy in Local-Level Decision-Making



The adoption of the organic laws relating to local authorities in 2015, followed by the Charter of Deconcentration in 2018, marked a major step in redefining the relationship between the State and local authorities (Sedjari 1997; Zine 2017). These texts established a new form of territorial governance by replacing a priori supervision with a principle of a posteriori control, exercised through the Governor's visa or that of his representative on certain local deliberations—particularly those with financial implications, those related to administrative organisation, external partnerships, asset management, or the creation of public services. At the same time, deconcentrated services were

called upon to play a more active role in the local implementation of public policies, with a relative degree of managerial autonomy. However, the effective implementation of these reforms faces numerous obstacles (Quillien 2015), notably the mismatch between the powers transferred and the resources provided, persistent bureaucratic burdens, and the weak institutional capacity at the local level (Sévérino 2001; Dick-Sagoe 2020). The results of our survey (Figure 6) show that the degree of autonomy in decision-making varies significantly depending on whether the Stakeholders are deconcentrated or decentralised (Keuffer 2016). For the former, this autonomy depends on the type of ministry concerned (sovereign ministries or sectoral ministries) and on the nature of the local entity (agency, regional directorate, external service).

For the latter, particularly local authorities, the council president does not enjoy full decision-making freedom, being constrained by the council's deliberations *"[...] It is the council that deliberates on decisions, and I, as president, simply execute them, that's all. I do not decide on my own; it is the communal council that decides [...] interview with CSA, 04/05/2021"* and subject to administrative authority through the visa mechanism *"[...] today we have merely replaced guardianship with the visa and administrative control, and we experienced this during the health crisis, because according to a circular from the Ministry of the Interior, the wali refused our request to validate a project even though we had the budget and, as a commune, we have legal personality and financial autonomy and should not be subjected to a ministerial circular. Thus, the role of local authorities should be limited to control [...] interview with CS2, 09/06/2021."*

This situation is perceived as a simple continuation of guardianship (Kada and Pontier 2022) in another form, as confirmed by several testimonies we collected during the health crisis in which projects—despite being budgeted and legally carried by legally autonomous local authorities—were blocked by the local authority on the basis of ministerial circulars *"[...] During the lockdown, we felt a strong presence of the local authority, because they blocked all our decisions, and we could not do anything without the authorization and visa of the wali. This shows that they do not trust us to manage our affairs, especially during states of emergency like Covid-19 [...] interview with CM, 01/07/2021."*

These blockages reflect a lack of trust by the State toward local elected officials (Grémion and Worms 1970), particularly visible during crises (Bensain and Salhi 2022). Some stakeholders point out that not all communes have the same capacities, especially in rural areas, and that the organic laws should be adapted to the realities of each territory. However, they regret

that this differentiation is not taken into account in the action of the Ministry of the Interior, which continues to apply a uniform approach “[...] *There are communes that still lack capacities, especially human resources, as well as the tools to manage their local affairs, but we should not generalize, because there are also communes that have the human and financial capacities and the tools to fully manage their territory. But unfortunately, the Directorate of Local Authorities does not make this distinction, and, personally, I think the Ministry of the Interior has grown accustomed to managing everything and cannot grasp that more freedom should be granted to communes [...]* interview with CM, 01/07/2021.”

Moreover, the budgetary issue arises repeatedly: for many elected officials, whoever controls financial resources holds the real decision-making power, rendering any autonomy fictitious if not accompanied by adequate means. Even local budgetary decisions remain subject to the Governor’s control, which hinders the genuine exercise of free administration “[...] *We are free in managing our territories, but still under the authority of the governor [...]* interview with CR, 06/04/2021,” “[...] *Even if the legislator has given me the right to manage my local authority autonomously, I do not feel autonomous, because I cannot make a decision without the governor’s approval. In the laws there is managerial autonomy, but in reality this principle is absent, especially when it comes to money [...]* interview with PE3, 23/05/2021.”

With regard to deconcentrated stakeholders, except for sovereign ministries and agencies with extended autonomy, local-level decision-making capacity remains largely subordinated to the central administration. Some services continue to operate according to the former regional division, in contradiction with the new territorial organization, revealing the absence of genuine territorialisation of deconcentration. By contrast, agencies, offices and public utilities, although under supervision, enjoy real administrative and financial autonomy. Local authority representatives themselves have considerable room for manoeuvre and believe that elected officials are not always capable of managing local affairs effectively, notably due to what is perceived as an insufficient level of education. According to them, eligibility based on stricter criteria, such as a minimum level of education, would ensure better governance “[...] *Elected officials do not have the level required to properly manage their territory, given that to run for elections it is enough to have completed primary school, and I think that such a level is not sufficient to ensure territorial management. The day we require at least a high-school degree to run for office, more power can be delegated to elected officials [...]* interview with PE1, 21/05/2021.”

Figure 7 – Decision-making conditions according to stakeholders

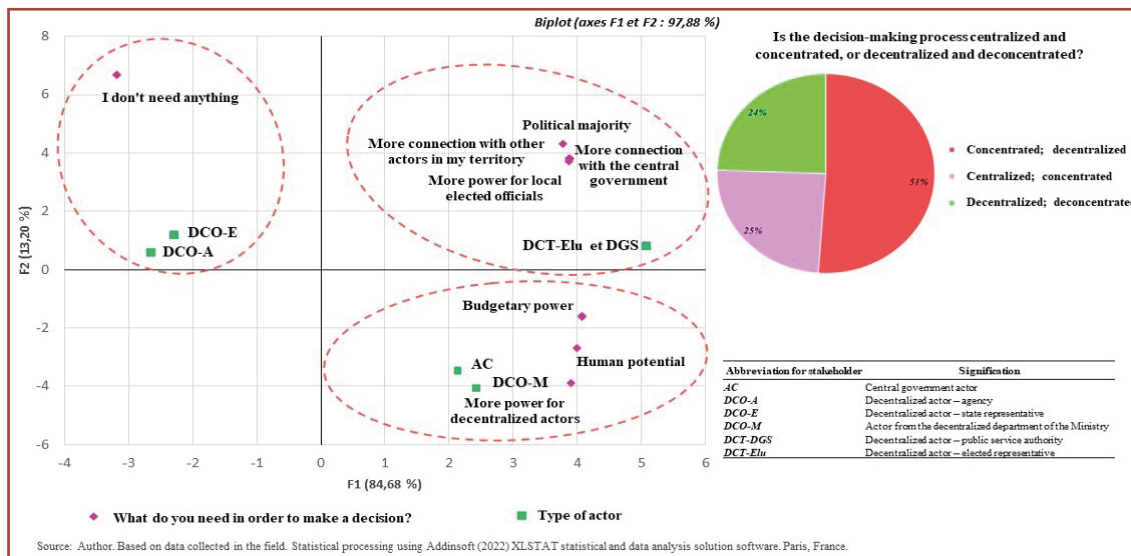
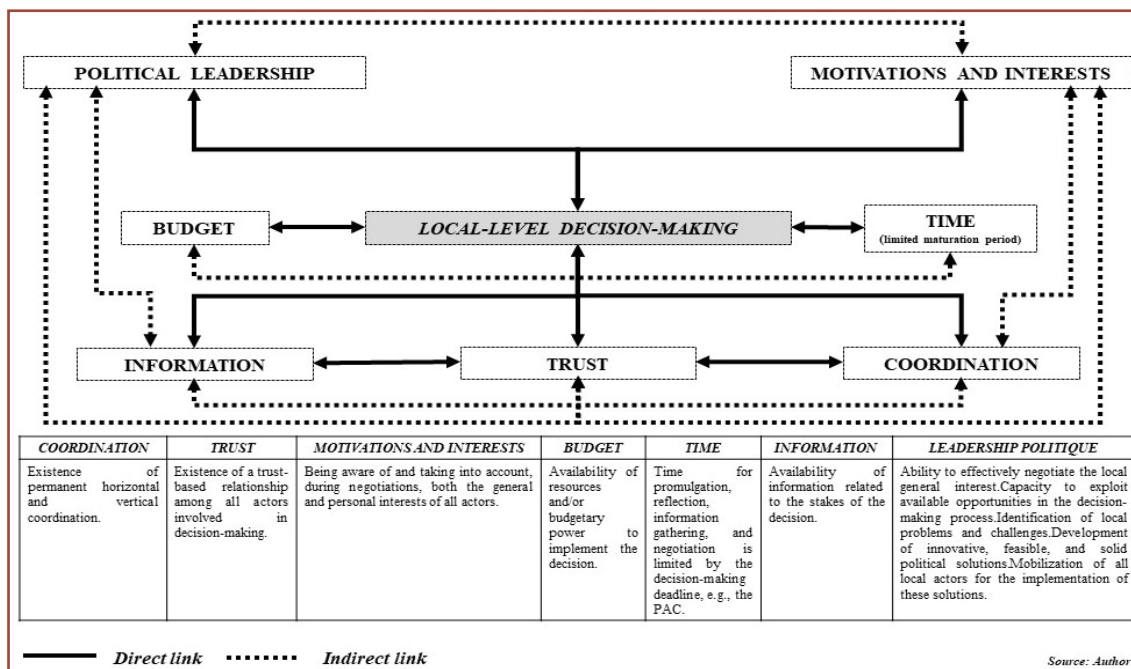


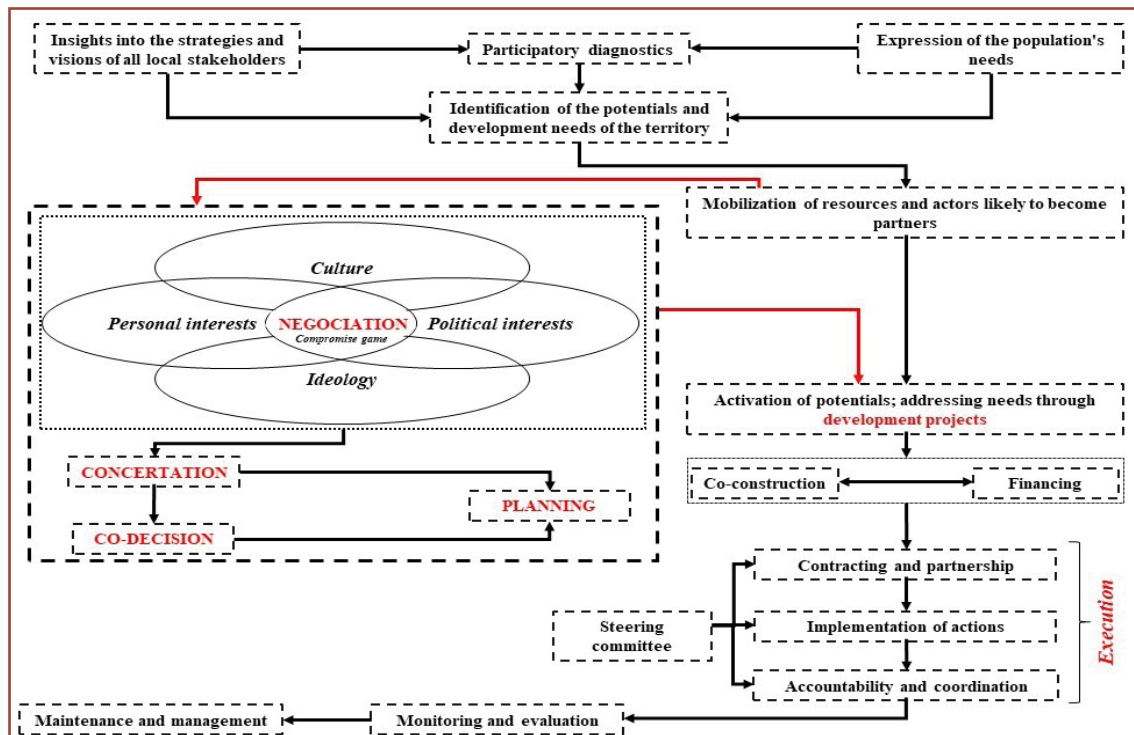
Figure 8 – Factors influencing autonomy in decision-making



The statistical analysis of questionnaire data (Figure 7) shows that for de-centralized State services and agencies, autonomy is not a major problem. In contrast, for regional directorates of ministries, the obstacles lie in the weakness of the deconcentration process, the absence of interinstitutional coordination, the lack of human resources and insufficient budgetary means. Among decentralised stakeholders, the limitations are more political and structural: they relate to the composition of councils, the weak vertical and horizontal coordination between institutions, and the insufficient power

granted to presidents, whose vote only becomes decisive in the event of a tie. This creates a paradoxical situation in which decisions are taken collectively, while legal responsibility falls solely on the president.

Figure 9 – The local-level decision-making process



Thus, the actual autonomy of local stakeholders—whether decentralised or deconcentrated (excluding agencies and sovereign ministries)—remains very limited. Yet this autonomy is essential for adapting public policies to the specific contexts of each territory. This recentring of the State is occurring precisely at a time when it seems to have lost part of its capacity for local steering. Not only are deconcentrated services weakened, but territorial policies decided at the centre struggle to take local needs into account. These observations lead us to question the relevance of a decentralisation process deprived of genuine decision-making autonomy. Indeed, decentralisation is not merely a redistribution of competences or resources; it fundamentally aims to improve the effectiveness of local administration (Kumar et al., 2022). It is based on normative principles such as effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Decision-making autonomy requires competent elected officials capable of mobilising local resources, stimulating the economy, forming partnerships and developing a strategic vision for their territory. An autonomous decision is one taken independently, with real initiative-taking power. Democratic accountability necessarily presupposes a certain degree

of autonomy (Verrier and Bourgeois, 2020). This level of autonomy depends on several factors: the alignment between transferred responsibilities and available means—particularly budgetary ones (Sutherland et al., 2005; Passavant-Guion, 2016) (Figure 8). As each territory has its own specificities, decentralisation constitutes the best lever for expressing these local particularities (Ghiotti 2006). By fostering the empowerment of local stakeholders in decision-making processes, initiatives are unlocked and territorial governance dynamics are strengthened (Figure 9).

“COMPETENCY” DISPARITIES AND INSUFFICIENT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DECENTRALISED AND DECONCENTRATED STAKEHOLDERS

For deconcentrated stakeholders, their interactions with decentralised stakeholders are hindered by the limited skills and cooperative capacities of local elected officials. According to them, the majority of these officials lack competence, boldness, and commitment, largely due to the absence of an accountability framework (Casteigts, 2003; Lafarge, 2016). Although some elected officials—a minority—manage to drive development in their communes despite scarce financial and human resources, thanks to their initiative and political leadership, these qualities are largely absent in the majority of local authority leaders. As one stakeholder noted: *“[...] Development is a matter of the elected official's competence, not the budget. Some officials invest with a small budget in several minor projects and seek partners at the national and international levels, as well as financing aid organizations. Indeed, Morocco needs this type of official, because one cannot simply sit back and wait for solutions to come from elsewhere; creativity can sometimes generate extraordinary solutions [...] interview with MS6, 29/06/2021.”*

In contrast to decentralised elected officials, deconcentrated stakeholders generally have a higher level of education and more pronounced expertise in management and planning. This difference creates a skills imbalance between the two categories of stakeholders, which, combined with the structural limitations of the deconcentration policy, constitutes a major obstacle to the effective implementation of territorial development. The inadequacy of some local elected officials primarily stems from their difficulty in mastering new territorial governance tools, such as participatory territorial diagnostics, strategic planning, negotiation, consultation, coordination, partnership development, or territorial marketing. This gap is made even more critical by

the lack of qualified personnel within local authorities, particularly staff capable of supporting elected officials in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Holding a local mandate is not improvised; it now requires increasingly sophisticated technical, strategic, and managerial skills (Desage, 2003; Camus, 2022). Yet, as Navarre (2014) points out, elected officials do not all receive adequate training to meet these growing demands. In Morocco, access to local elected positions does not depend on any specific skill or qualification requirements. The only legal conditions for candidacy are being at least 20 years old, enjoying full civil rights, and not being disqualified or legally incompatible. There is neither a job description specifying expected skills, nor a requirement for a diploma, prior experience, or training. As a result, neither voters nor candidates can ensure that future elected officials possess the abilities necessary for their functions. As one administrative officer noted: *“Competencies are concentrated within State administration, both at central and local levels. Communes over the past ten years have faced recruitment difficulties, aggravated by the lack of attractiveness of salaries and working conditions.”* Interview with PY2, 03/05/2021.

This issue extends beyond Morocco. In France, for example, no formal qualification is required to run for local office, but a filtering process occurs upstream via political parties, which select candidates according to internal criteria, either by internal appointment or party member vote. A similar pre-selection mechanism exists in the United States. Other countries go further by imposing additional eligibility requirements. In Croatia, Spain, Denmark, Latvia, Serbia, Lithuania, and Slovenia, candidacies must be supported either by a political party or by a minimum number of citizen signatures. Additionally, countries such as Malta, Turkey, and Latvia require the payment of a financial deposit to validate a candidacy, introducing an economic barrier to entry into local politics.

On the administrative relations between decentralised and deconcentrated stakeholders, legal difficulties are also apparent. Each stakeholder is governed by its own legislative corpus (law, Dahir, or charter). These texts are sometimes contradictory, creating conflicts or blockages when they must be applied simultaneously by multiple administrations. As one stakeholder explained: *“[...] In the context of a project, each administration must apply the law governing its domain while remaining in agreement and harmony with other Stakeholders. This is not feasible, or nearly impossible, because major contradictions between these laws leave no room for alternatives [...]”* Interview with PE2, 22/05/2021.

Another problematic factor lies in interpersonal relations. As one interviewee stated: “[...] *Administrative relations are based on written documents, under hierarchical authority, which takes a lot of time and energy. However, sometimes, a ‘good’ interpersonal relationship allows one to save a lot of time, because you can request information or opinions simply by phone, without going through the usual official channels. In our Moroccan context, the relational aspect, whether positive or negative, is the most important in administration management. If it is positive, it saves a lot of time and allows us to move forward. But if it is negative, even if we apply the law, we will always face blockages and never reach the end, whether in projects or in making simple decisions [...]*” Interview with PE1, 21/05/2021.

The role of today’s elected official is no longer what it used to be (Le Bart, 2003). Traditionally, an elected official’s role focused on meeting the daily needs of constituents, serving as an intermediary between the central administration and the local population, and sometimes arbitrating local conflicts. This mission, often assigned to local notables, did not require particular skills. The relationship between elected officials and constituents was based on a quasi-hereditary trust, passed down from father to son.

With the advent of regionalisation and decentralisation, the role of elected officials has been profoundly transformed: from mere mediators, they have become full-fledged decentralised stakeholders, responsible leaders of territorial development. Decentralisation has conferred new responsibilities and State-transferred competences on elected officials, who are now expected to possess not only political acumen but also the skills of a leader, strategist, entrepreneur, and diplomat—competencies essential to managing a territory.

The development of local authorities is now closely linked to the quality of the stakeholders tasked with designing, implementing, and managing development projects. Despite the existence of relevant mechanisms, the bodies responsible for their territorialisation mostly suffer from a lack of competence. Indeed, illiteracy—or even functional illiteracy—among a large proportion of elected officials constitutes a major barrier to the effective exercise of their duties. This results in a clear gap between the requirements of organic laws governing local authorities and the on-the-ground reality, where illiterate elected officials hold deliberative power. This gap, combined with disparities in competence, political conflicts, lack of transparency, corruption, individualism, illiteracy (preventing elected officials from understanding legislative texts), and weak citizenship, occurs within a broader context marked by the absence of a coherent political doctrine,

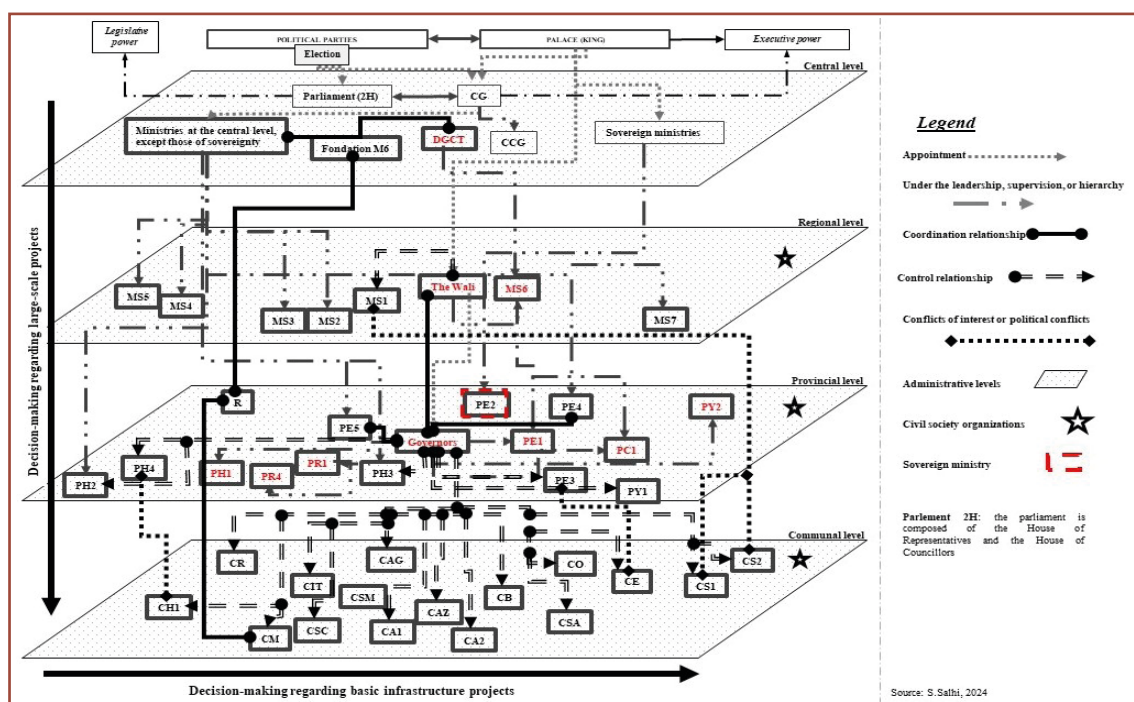
clear programs, and well-defined strategies, both within political parties and among elected officials themselves.

Therefore, in the absence of concrete measures to establish an orderly framework, raise awareness of citizenship, promote ethical public conduct, and implement a system of control and accountability, reforms and mechanisms—no matter how relevant—will remain ineffective and continue to erode.

TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE: A SYSTEM REQUIRING BETTER INTEGRATION BETWEEN DECENTRALISATION AND DECONCENTRATION

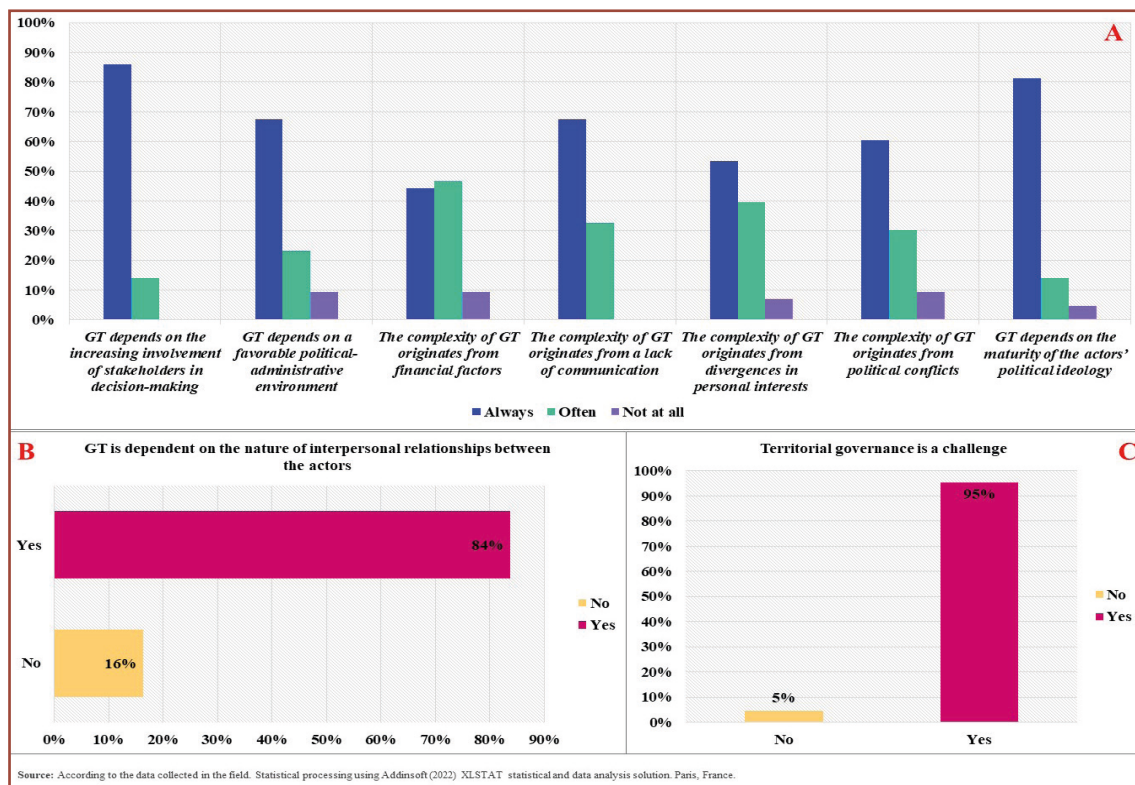
Good or poor governance (Lesage, 2022), as well as the success or failure of projects, results from a complex process that requires a supportive ecosystem. It is not the responsibility of a single stakeholder nor merely a legal framework, but rather a complex territorial system in which a weak link can sometimes directly or indirectly cause dysfunctions. Furthermore, the mere application of laws can generate conflicts and project blockages, because in Morocco there is a significant gap between legislative texts and local realities, not to mention the frequent contradictions between sectoral laws. Analysis of various projects in the Marrakech-Safi region shows that the nature of relationships between stakeholders falls into three categories: coordination, control, and conflicts of interest or politics (Figure 10).

Figure 10 - The nature of relationships between stakeholders



Effective communication between local stakeholders is essential, as it allows the timely transmission of relevant information to all parties, thereby ensuring efficient and effective action (Butt et al., 2016). Territorial governance is a highly complex process, based on the cooperation and coordination of stakeholders both horizontally and vertically, within a framework of subsidiarity. Its objective is territorial development, defined jointly at different spatial scales to ensure the coherence of actions undertaken. The main challenges therefore lie in reconciling horizontal and vertical coordination across territorial levels, as well as coordinating different sectoral policies. The majority of stakeholders interviewed view territorial governance as a complex challenge, mainly linked to financial constraints, lack of communication, divergent personal interests, and political conflicts (Figure 11C). This process also depends on interpersonal relationships between stakeholders, their involvement in decision-making, a supportive politico-administrative environment, and the maturity and political ideology of the stakeholders concerned (Figures 11A and 11B).

Figure 11 - Causes of the complexity of territorial governance



In practice, territorial governance primarily relies on listening, coordination, and the reconciliation of interests. Interpersonal and political relationships are omnipresent and form an integral part of the logic of good territorial governance, whose impact cannot be denied. On the contrary, these relation-

ships should be leveraged to strengthen the governance process. According to our results, genuine territorial governance requires holding all stakeholders involved in decision-making accountable. Achieving this remains complex, as local authorities face multiple challenges and constraints. Elected officials, confronted with a decision-making chain that is often opaque and sometimes corrupt (particularly within councils), may sometimes prefer to evade responsibility. Our interviews indicate that each stakeholder must be held accountable according to their competencies. Governance is a puzzle composed of all local stakeholders. Currently, deconcentrated Stakeholders remain subject to the supervision of their central ministries, creating a gap in this puzzle and hindering the local public action process. Some interviewees also argue that good territorial governance is closely linked to the enforcement and respect of laws. Its success also depends on local realities and constraints, whether they are related to land, human resources, culture, or politics. However, the application of laws is limited by territorial specificities. As one stakeholder pointed out: “[...] For me, governance is the management and adaptation of laws to territorial specificities. For example, construction laws cannot be applied uniformly, especially in rural areas. Likewise, why is there an urban agency but no rural agency? The urban agency cannot meet the needs of the rural world [...]” Interview with CO, 29/03/2021. The theoretical dimension of regulatory texts in Morocco does not always match the realities on the ground. Laws alone are insufficient to change mindsets. When political and ideological conflicts arise, territorial governance loses its effectiveness. Our survey shows that political interests even influence territorial project planning, with some regional and provincial officials artificially creating needs in communes controlled by their political allies. To achieve effective territorial governance, it is crucial to hold stakeholders accountable and prioritize the interests of the territory over personal or political interests. Success depends largely on two key institutions: the Wali at the regional level and the Governor at the provincial level. Current organic laws grant these two Stakeholders an essential coordination role among the various stakeholders. They act as local facilitators of development and ensure the proper application of existing laws. Their role is therefore decisive but also depends on the cultural and intellectual level of elected officials. In this regard, political parties must ensure the training and support of political elites. To reduce the gap between the administration and elected officials, often linked to cultural differences and educational levels, respondents recommend implementing strict eligibility conditions for elections. As one stakeholder emphasized: “[...] *Western democ-*

racy is not directly applicable, because reading culture is ingrained there and the quality of their primary education is higher than ours. Therefore, things must be adapted to our context [...]” Interview with PY1, 03/06/2021. Twenty-six percent of respondents believe that the complexity of territorial governance stems primarily from divergent political and personal interests. Next are the political immaturity of elected officials and the lack of political leadership (Figure 12). Nevertheless, these stakeholders acknowledge that governance success depends largely on coordination, communication, and law enforcement (Figure 13).

Figure 12 – Causes of the complexity of territorial governance by type of stakeholder

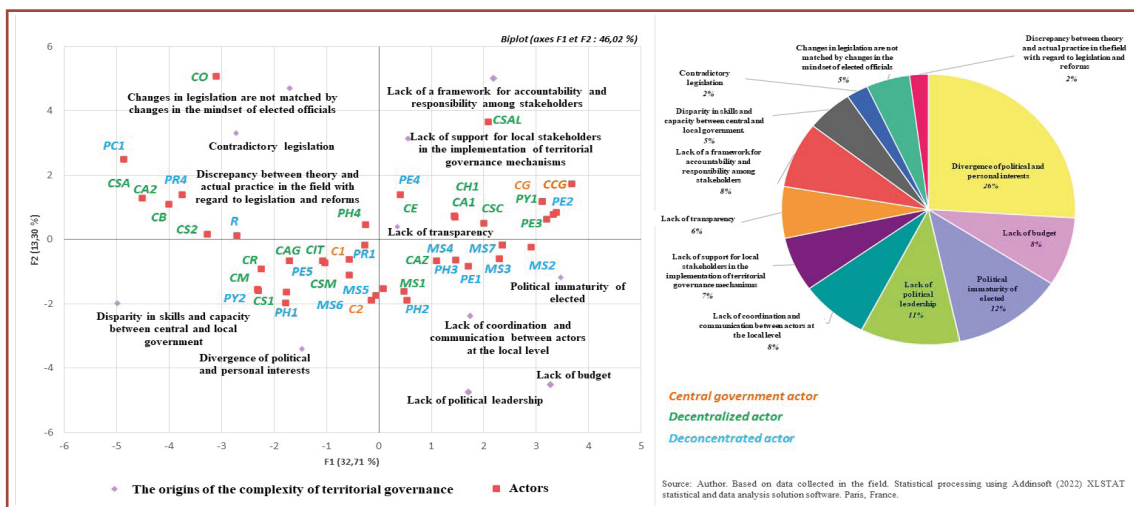
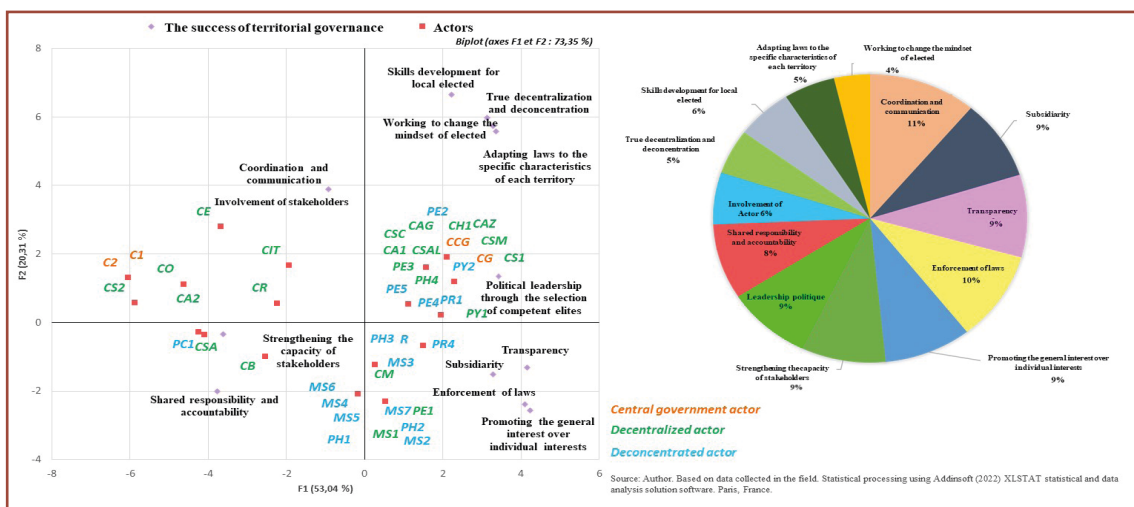


Figure 13 – Conditions for the success of territorial governance by type of stakeholder



Cross-referencing the definitions of territorial governance by various authors (UNDP, 2003; Lardon et al., 2008; Ramírez, 2022; Yilmaz, 2023; Torre,

2023) with the realities observed in the field reveals a significant gap between the two. Classical definitions do not incorporate the ideological and cultural dimensions of stakeholders, even though these systematically influence decision-making. Moreover, these definitions often associate governance success with the application of standardized “best practices,” whereas such practices vary across societies and sometimes even across territories. This comparison highlights the need to rethink Moroccan territorial governance to better reflect its realities. We therefore propose the following definition:

Territorial governance is a mode of political-territorial management based on tools and mechanisms adapted to territorial specificities. It constitutes a dynamic, flexible, adaptable, configurable, responsive, and transparent process, sometimes ambiguous. It involves integrating and reconciling the interests, ideologies, cultures (with cultural and ideological factors exerting major influence on decision-making), and multiple, sometimes divergent logics of territorial stakeholders. It relies on coordination, cooperation, and negotiation to reach agreements while pursuing shared objectives through the definition of decision-making rules, the prioritization of actions, and the consideration of territorial interest. It also entails the sharing of responsibilities under the aegis of the State and the Constitution, which guarantee its legitimacy.

It is easy to judge whether a project reflects good or poor territorial governance, but this does not necessarily reflect reality. A successful project does not always imply good governance, and conversely, a failed project does not automatically indicate poor governance. Indeed, territorial governance is a highly complex process in which consensus is difficult to achieve and must be pursued throughout the project’s lifecycle. One may observe good governance before a project phase, but encounter failures during or after its execution. Therefore, to qualify governance as good or poor, it is first necessary to identify the phase of the process in which management ethics were not respected, explaining the reasons and the modalities involved.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified several findings that may contribute to the development of a Moroccan model of territorial governance. The complexity of this process stems from multiple factors: the lack of coordination and communication among stakeholders at the local level, the limited political maturity of elected officials, divergences of personal and political interests, the absence of a collective construction of development logics, the gap between local, re-

gional, and national priorities, the lack of a clear accountability framework, and the disparity of skills and capacities among central and local authorities as well as decentralised and deconcentrated stakeholders. Finally, a notable gap exists between theory and practice on the ground, particularly in the implementation of laws and reforms. According to the main results of this study, the disparities in competencies between decentralised and deconcentrated Stakeholders, political conflicts, lack of transparency, corruption, individualism, coupled with illiteracy and weak civic awareness, are closely linked to the absence of a coherent political doctrine, as well as clearly defined programs and strategies within political parties upstream and among elected officials downstream. Therefore, without concrete measures to restore order, raise civic awareness, instill ethical conduct among elected officials, and establish a system of control, reforms and mechanisms—no matter how relevant—will remain ineffective and continue to deteriorate. Local autonomy is only fully realized when territorial authorities have sufficient budgetary resources and the freedom to act within their territory, enabling them to develop genuine action philosophies. The results of this study show that autonomy in local decision-making is closely linked to the budgetary means and the competencies transferred by the State to local authorities. For decentralised stakeholders, decision-making is more closely related to the dominant political affiliation within the council, the quality of horizontal and vertical coordination among stakeholders, and the insufficient powers of elected officials, who notably call for greater budgetary leeway and a stronger influence of the council president's vote (which only becomes decisive in the event of a tie).

However, the effective implementation of decentralisation and deconcentration mechanisms requires genuine political will for change, both at the highest levels of the State (central level) and locally. Change can only occur through reforms affecting the mindset of the Stakeholders responsible for the territorialisation of these mechanisms. In most decision-making processes, individual and political interests dictate and control the balance within elected councils, at both local and central levels. To achieve the desired change, political parties play a crucial role, particularly in recruiting political elites and leaders, as well as in candidate selection, since they serve as the interface between the people and the government, playing a central role in producing, training, and mentoring political elites. One major conclusion of this study is that laws alone cannot change mindsets. When political and ideological conflicts prevail, territorial governance loses its value, and gover-

nance itself becomes impossible. Regarding coordination among stakeholders, this study has shown that the geographical proximity of intervention levels significantly influences the quality of relationships across territorial scales. The farther one moves from the central sphere, the weaker the quality of relationships and the coordination process, although the Governor or Wali, as representatives of the State, are tasked with ensuring coordination among all territorial Stakeholders. Our results indicate that without shared engagement and political will among all stakeholders, Walis and Governors cannot fully perform their role as coordinators, and no policy or strategy, however well-designed, can be effectively anchored on the ground. ●

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Received: 10/09/2025

Accepted: 11/14/2025

Available online: 11/18/2025