

For a Model of Territorial Intelligence: What Integration of Atlantic Free Zone within the Region of Kénitra, Morocco ?

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Abstract— This article is bringing out the challenging integration of Free Zones in Morocco from a territorial intelligence perspective. The main objective of our ongoing study is to address the problematic of a disconnection between the Free Zone as a closed system and the territory hosting it as an open ecosystem. The study and strategic modeling are taking place in Kénitra which is a transitioning territory towards specialization in automotive industry. This is an excellent opportunity for us to extend academic research towards an ongoing regional development issue. The problematic is centered around the weak correlation between business development opportunities at the Atlantic Free Zone and the region within which it operates. This research action has been triggered by two events that were organized in May 2018: A seminar that took place in the Province of Kenitra to discuss Atlantic Free Zone and the second was the industry meeting day that took place in Casablanca to assess the impact of industrial investment over regional development while Morocco is undergoing the industrial acceleration plan. In this article, we address the issue of assessing territorial human capital with a focus on improving youth employability in the offshore business which is a main growth concern in the area. The objective is to unlock the Free Zone and open up communication channels and professional flow conduits to promote an internal cohesion within the same territory instead of maintaining the current status of two isolated entities. We address the concept of internal cohesion as a means to benefit the companies operating massively in the Free zone on one hand as well as to boost employment quality and integration on the other hand. It will also address innovative ways of how to appreciate and improve local profiles, improve professional training, attract new talents and spread initiatives of entrepreneurship and networking within an inclusive and sustainable development framework. This work is adopting Geographic Information Systems as a strategic tool to build a territorial portal integrating key stake holders within the subject territory through the application of co-development and co-design approaches with one common objective of solving a human capital inconsistency. The process will generate a more cohesive economic and social development aligning both the Free Zone and its host territory as permanent local partners, enhanced by a digital Human Capital observatory portal that will be a digital relay and a virtual meeting point of territorial actors. The portal will also be used as a monitoring tool measuring the integration degree of the free zone within the host territorial ecosystem. We believe that this portal is a prerequisite to any type of durable joint development that might be replicated and tested in similar regions.

Keywords— Territorial intelligence, co-development, human capital, free zone, automotive industry.

INTRODUCTION

This research project is streamlining from our real life observation as a team of local researchers and scholars living in Kénitra and witnessing its overall transition over more than twenty years. It is actually a reflexion over a combination of problems that we know and understand, triggered by an academic framework. Thus, we initiated this attempt to address the crucial problematic over a precious asset: the human capital.

The main idea of this study is to build a territorial model integrating Atlantic Free Zone (AFZ) into the territorial ecosystem in order to solve a human capital problematic within the scope of a systemic approach focused on Soft Systems Methodology SSM and Actor-network theory ANT . This rises several questions such as: How to unlock the AFZ and open up standardized professional communication channels to solve inconsistencies of youth employment in the offshore business in Kénitra? What development of the human capital in conjunction with existing and future industries in

AFZ? How can consistent networks be built to reach common goals in the region?

Main socio economic priorities in Morocco are placed over enhancing investment, attracting free zone industries, and promoting youth employment and entrepreneurship at the regional level. Ideally, local institutions are supposed to be fulfilling a strategic role at the regional level. With the admitted failure of the Regional Investment Centers, and a lack of territorial vision of the professional and high education systems, the government of Morocco is currently reviewing the existence and mission of such institutions.

The main hypothesis is that socio economic inconsistencies throughout the regions can be avoided if regional development is addressed with the territorial intelligence approach that we are adopting. However, as researchers, we can advocate this perspective as being change agents not decision makers.

The idea is not only to prove that this model works with Atlantic Free Zone but to allow a better knowledge of the region and also aggregate more elements and indicators that evaluate our actions. If we consider the human capital, which is the focus of this study, we can identify talents in a special canvas within the space studied. GIS¹ (Geographic Information Systems) is an excellent tool that shows the availability, trends, flow, and mix of the human capital and can give insights about their multidimensional iterations². It can also be used as a base to adjust competencies to meet industry shifting requirements in the long run, especially in the upcoming volatile technology surrounding the automotive industry. The regionalization process and free zones trend in Morocco is in its beginning. In 2010, AFZ was created and the first companies started their operations in 2012, mainly operating in the automotive industry. AFZ is the product of a national strategy adopted by the Kingdom of Morocco called the industrial acceleration plan. There are currently 12 Free Zones that have been spread all over the country. Seven of them are operational, the other five are in progress. This trend of offshoring is being developed steadily and is drawing our attention regarding its integration in the economic development at a regional level.

APPROACH

This research is referring to the work of Checkland as a systemic approach around the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)³. It is also referring to the Actor-network theory (ANT). The study will generate endogenous territorial indicators to suggest practical solutions applicable in the region for a

better knowledge management and a more inclusive human capital leverage in coherence with the ongoing development dynamics. The model will also suggest simulations towards employment generating projects through a Territorial Portal to link up AFZ with the eco system and to enhance entrepreneurship in the short run with the goal of integrating women and youth in the territorial intelligence perspective. A research action over two years has been designed for the region of Kénitra to include key operators in AFZ featuring a sample of about 100 young women and men employed in offshore companies or seeking employment around automotive industry factories. The same samples will be followed over the research period and throughout the implementation of suggested Territorial Portal around professional training and entrepreneurship to assess the impact of this digital territorial link. Relevant information and data have been collected throughout observations, surveys, interviews and field investigations at production lines, meetings and social networks as well as a targeted bibliography. The model is built on real life data collected within the subject territory for a customized portal. Our strategic modeling is mainly engaging concepts of co-design and territorial intelligence. It is actually a socio-economic integration model submerged in the territorial ecosystem and engaging several stakeholders or the so-called "territorial actors" who are directly or indirectly involved in the current development wave throughout the region. In fact, this is an interactive local study combining two facets: the first is a strategic facet through a visionary territorial intelligence approach focused on human capital upgrades and the second is a practical digital application facet through the mapping of human capital data featured by the Territorial Portal. Both the managerial and digital approaches are meant to support joint territorial decisions between AFZ and the territory in which it is operating and can facilitate strategic simulations to accompany a flawless evolution towards industries and future employment opportunities in the region. This is the dual challenge that we aim to tackle in this thinking process.

CONCLUSION

In this era of shared economy, we are working on building an interface between two isolated blocks. In other words, AFZ and The Region of Kenitra will have to communicate through a common platform that integrates a regional outreach program absorbing AFZ in the regional development dynamics at all levels and increasing the bandwidth of potential interactions that are still to be imagined and built with a systemic approach. Our vision is that an inclusive territorial strategy can build solid partnership bridges between AFZ and the regional ecosystem including OFPPT, ANAPEC, CGEM, Academia,.. Enhanced by a proactive economic watch which can insure the continuity of employment opportunities in the long run.

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Furthermore, customized professional training in conjunction with updated technical processes and appropriate soft skills can greatly motivate unemployed youth and support those already employed within the offshore business. We believe that this win-win approach around offshore dynamics will be greatly facilitated by the relatively well developed public private partnerships. It will also insure a continuous upgrade of the workforce and promote further social integration of women and youth into the job market in a more coherent way, neutralizing any forms of massive vulnerabilities or social exclusion.

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