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**The place marketing strategy in Moroccan
regions: Conditions of applicability**

By **Hicham ECHATTABI**^a & **Ahmed KHATTAB**^{b†}

Abstract. Place marketing, a modern place management tool that straddles communication, marketing and territorial strategies, is not only used to promote the territory but also helps territorial governments to manage it better and to think in terms of market. To do this, the environment and the conditions to establish a place marketing strategy must be thought out beforehand. This article aims first of all, to come back to the marketing of territories as, today, an approach before moving on to the conditions and the environment of its implementation in the Moroccan context.

Keywords. Place marketing strategy, Territories, Moroccan context.

JEL. R12, R13, Q15, Z33.

1. Introduction

The use of marketing-based techniques and approaches has been justified by the globalized international context. This is marked by the opening of borders, the increasing mobility of production factors and the growth of free trade agreements, as well as by the ambition of cities and regions to attract value-creating activities. In this context, regional actors have adopted place marketing and branding policies in their administrative practices and their philosophy of government (Kavaratzis, 2004) in order to face not only the challenges of factory closures and rising unemployment rates, but also the scarcity of location projects. In this competitive era of all against all, the regions find themselves in the imperative position of being proactive in the implementation of any territorial strategy and not only reacting urgently to disinvestment and deindustrialization (Proulx & Tremblay, 2006). Thus, territorial decision-makers must no longer rely solely on its natural and generic resources (Noisette & Vallérugo, 2010) and its financial and fiscal aids and subsidies to attract wealth-creating activities. They must think of co-constructing value by and for these companies by presenting them with an adapted territorial offer based on the logic of territorial anchoring. To assist them, place marketing, materialized by a global, coherent and adapted approach, allows to elaborate on the basis of the knowledge of the environment a territorial offer able to answer the

^a Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Morocco.

✉. (351) 217 21 42 48 ✉. echattabi.hicham@usms.ma

^{b†} Abdelmalek Essaadi University Tangier, Morocco.

✉. (351) 217 21 42 48 ✉. akhattab@uae.ac.ma

seducing sirens of territorial development, and in fine, to distinguish the regions in this hyper-competitive context.

Managing the image of the territory, improving its attractiveness, mobilizing actors, moving away from the logic of supply towards the understanding of demand, etc. are all objectives attributed to place marketing. In this context and in the era of the great project of advanced regionalization, this article aims to question the realm of place marketing practice and the conditions of its implementation as a territorial strategy. In fact, the purpose of this work is to answer the following question: is the Moroccan context favorable to the implementation of a place marketing strategy?

This work is structured around two points. The first will be devoted to place marketing and particularly to the place marketing approach (PMA). The second point highlights the conditions and the favorable environment to the implementation of this PMA in the Moroccan context.

2. From place marketing to the place marketing approach

A young discipline in restructuring, derived from marketing and fed by several disciplines such as regional and urban economics, industrial economics, tourism, works on competitiveness, planning, urbanism, spatial economics, territorial planning, political science, governance (Echattabi & Moussalim, 2020), place marketing is still seeking legitimacy.

2.1. Can we talk about a place marketing approach?

Place marketing, a modern form of management, is a development tool for the territory, straddling the line between communication, marketing and territorial strategy (El-Khazzar & Echattabi, 2016), aimed more specifically at investors foreign and local companies. Thus, it is a set of actions of the actors involved directly or indirectly, individually or collectively in the service of territorial attractiveness, starting from the identity of the territory concerned while presenting a different and competitive offer compared to other competitors (El-Khazzar & Echattabi, 2016). Today, the literature on marketing has evolved and shifted towards the strategic dimension (Noisette & Vallérugo, 2010), branding (Vuignier, 2016), the place marketing approach (Houllier-Guibert, 2017), the performance variables of place marketing and branding activity (Halme, 2021). Many actors have noted this evolution (Houllier-Guibert, 2017):

"Today, we talk about the place marketing approach and not simply place marketing. The term approach legitimizes an expression that has long aroused the mistrust of territorial actors. With the idea of approach, a collective process is expressed, even becoming a strategic objective" (Houllier-Guibert, 2017, p.6).

Indeed, in reality, it is a global approach and a way of thinking. It aims to build a robust argument for their territories before moving on to territorial

communication and today to the territorial brand (El-Khazzar & Echattabi, 2016).

2.2. *Towards the formulation of a place marketing approach*

Place marketing is primarily marketing (Sperling, 1991). In other words, it used the same techniques to market places in the same way as other products or services (Eugenio-Vela *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the development of a PMA implies the use of mass-marketing to transpose it to the territorial level with an adequate adaptation. If we go back to the main proposals of the authors in classical marketing, the marketing approach ranges from two phases, strategic marketing and operational marketing, to three, study marketing, strategic marketing and operational marketing. Some authors add another phase, control: analysis, decision, action and control.

In the territorial context, it generally includes two or three stages: analysis and diagnosis, upstream marketing and downstream marketing. The diagnosis of the current situation raises many questions: what positioning? What resources? Strategic place marketing or the upstream phase; a crucial phase in the development of the marketing strategy. However, it is not always preferred by the actors, who are in a hurry to move on to communication. Finally, the last phase concerns the implementation of these strategic choices; it is the operational translation of the approach into tangible actions. According to our literature review, we found that there is a diversity of proposals. We adopt and adapt Chamard's proposal (2014). The global approach of place marketing includes two main phases:

- The first phase, known as upstream, includes all the steps that precede the implementation of place marketing, including the territorial diagnosis. It includes three stages in which the main decisions are taken in an irreversible way;
- The second stage, called downstream, concerns all the collective actions of the implementation of place marketing. It is the operational translation of the approach into concrete actions.

Beyond these two phases, upstream and downstream, another preparatory stage is added for the success of the PMA, the preliminary (El-Khazzar, & Echattabi, 2017). The respect of these three phases ensures the success of DMT and leads it to play its role in strengthening the attractiveness of investments.

Indeed, with the number of failures of territorial branding strategies [link], preparing and thinking about the preconditions for the implementation of any PMA are now necessary to be able to launch it on good bases. In this sense, we propose several variables that territories must take into account before each place marketing strategy. These variables are the keys for success in order to lay the solid foundations of a successful place marketing approach. Note that according to the Anglo-Saxon literature, the concepts "place marketing" (Gertner, 2011a; 2011b) and "place branding" (Skinner, 2008) are used to refer to PMA.

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2.2.1. *The prerequisite for the implementation of a place marketing approach*

In general, any PMA requires time and must be based on a comprehensive, reliable and robust methodology. These elements are grouped together in a preparatory phase for any place marketing strategy, called the prerequisite for implementing a PMA. Therefore, it is essential to spend more time on the preparation of this strategy. We quote the mobilisation of the actors:

"Before starting any place marketing approach, I recommend engaging in preparatory work aimed at mobilizing the driving forces of the territory's attractiveness. This is not always easy, but it is essential that the main players in the field of attractiveness act together. Investing time at the beginning to build an alliance of local actors is essential and will avoid wasting a lot of time later" (Gollain, 2016).

Indeed, in this work, we propose six variables -need and willingness, use of promotional tools, total mobilization of actors, involvement of actors, coordination and influence of the overall upstream strategy- drawn from the literature and analysis of the main successful experiences [[link](#); [link](#); [link](#)] in place marketing. These variables help set the stage for an effective and successful PMA.

2.2.2. *The need and willingness to attract businesses*

This motivates the search for the implementation of such a strategy. In most cases, the regional actors in charge of promoting the territory express their need to attract investors and companies and are aware of the importance of bringing in activities that create income and employment. In this sense, the willingness of local actors is one of the important variables in attracting businesses.

2.2.3. *The use of promotional tools*

Despite the definitions distinguishing place marketing from territorial promotion, place marketing is often used as a synonym for territorial promotion (Boisen *et al.*, 2017). In this vein, the investment promotion tools used by territorial development agencies, public investment promotion institutions facilitate the use of more structured tools such as those of place marketing. A qualitative-quantitative study has been conducted on the Marrakech-Safi region (Echattabi, 2018) showed that when regional actors are used to promotional tools, they do not find it difficult to resort to a comprehensive and complete approach encompassing not only these tools but also strategic choices.

2.2.4. *The total mobilization of actors*

Individual promotion and prospection approaches of the territories are becoming more and more difficult to make profitable. And because the territory is a common place, it is necessary to develop collective actions at the expense of individual actions. Place marketing relies on collective dynamics because, in order to be fully efficient, it is necessary to gather all the key actors of the territory during all the stages of the process: from the upstream phase to the downstream phase. This mobilization must aim to cultivate the assets and qualities of all stakeholders. In this context, without

mobilization, the territory does not exist (Chamard, 2014) and ultimately place marketing. Therefore, the mobilization of economic actors, public and private, while reasoning collectively behind a single objective in favor of the region, is a key element for the success of the PMA.

Thus, the involvement of stakeholders is essential. This is a key word in territorial governance and a strong sign of successful mobilization. The success of a territorial strategy is not the responsibility of a single actor, but it is a process of mobilization, involvement and coordination of different actors. The challenge for the territory is therefore to gather and involve the actors of the territorial offer in order to produce together an analysis and a collective marketing strategy. It is not only a question of asking for their opinions on the approach, but of ensuring their participation and involvement in the development of the territorial strategy.

After having mobilized and involved the different actors, it is time to work on coordination. If the territory, a complex concept, is characterized by the diversity of its actors, coordination between actors is a sine qua non condition for regional development.

2.2.5. The influence of the global strategy upstream

Place marketing is a tool -among others- to manage attractiveness but it is not enough on its own: it must be interwoven with the territorial strategy (Chanoux, 2015). Therefore, a global territorial project upstream is a key factor for the success of place marketing strategy. For it allows to create the right climate for the implementation of a place marketing strategy:

The global strategy of the territory, an essential element, will allow to define precise objectives to the PMA. The more the place marketing strategy is supported by a territorial development strategy, the more its success is assured.

After having presented the necessary conditions for the implementation of a PMA, two major phases that the developer or territorial marketer must respect: the upstream phase and the downstream phase of place marketing. Each phase includes several key variables that contribute directly or indirectly to increasing the attractiveness of investments.

2.2.6. The upstream phase of place marketing

The strategic place marketing, the most energy consuming phase of the marketing approach, contributes to structure the foundations of any PMA, as well as a propitious moment to make emerge a shared territorial project. Indeed, strategic thinking has become indispensable for local management when it is confronted with the need to simultaneously define and achieve territorial development objectives (Noisette & Vallérugo, 2010). In this framework, one cannot talk about operational marketing without the previous steps being well conducted. For PMA in order to be effective and consequently achieve the objective of strengthening the attractiveness of investments, it is necessary to give the elements of strategic place marketing their full place.

The strategic territorial diagnosis allows to find the comparative and differentiating advantages of the territory which allow the territories to

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know its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These elements are important for each strategy of attractiveness reinforcement.

Territorial segmentation allows to divide the targets in order to better target them through a well adapted territorial offer. Territorial segmentation makes it possible to find market segments that express homogeneous needs, because territories cannot address the whole of a vast target with heterogeneous needs. According to the dynamic and promising sectors, the territory can choose the segments (or the segment) of companies or investors to be followed in order to propose them to come and invest in the territory.

Once the territorial segmentation has been carried out, it is necessary to target the segment of investments or companies that the territory wants to attract. Targeting consists of evaluating the attractiveness and interest of each segment to decide whether or not to target these investors or companies. The targeting objective makes it possible to avoid unnecessary investor and business segments by focusing on the most important ones and on those for whom the territory has a well adopted territorial offer to their needs and expectations. Thus, positioning an offer consists of designing and promoting it in such a way that it acquires a distinctive value in the face of the competition in the target market. This is why positioning plays a decisive role in the final choice of location.

This phase is of major interest because it should serve to lay the foundations for the entire PMA (Chamard, 2014). The strategic and structuring decisions will be taken during this phase; whereas the operational phase of place marketing will only be able to give satisfactory results if all the previous stages are well conducted.

2.2.7. The downstream phase of place marketing

In general, place marketing is considered as a "functional" approach to regional attractiveness which aims to create, position and "sell" the territorial product (Pasquinelli & Vuignier, 2020). As a result, this third phase of the PMA aims to take the territory out of the logic of supply and focus on demand. It is the adaptation of the offer to the demand, to the investors. In this sense, a differentiated and adapted territorial offer, a professionalized and targeted communication and a territorial brand federating the efforts of all the stakeholders directly and positively influence the decision of implantation.

The policy of territorial offer remains an essential lever to ensure the development of the attractiveness of investments, insofar as it responds to a set of expectations and needs of investors seeking to set up. The territorial offer is made up of a set of socio-economic characteristics of a territory that have a more or less direct impact on the reception and maintenance of economic activities. It seems to us important for regions and cities to develop a differentiated and adapted territorial offer policy to attract more investors. So, in order to make the territorial offer known, reported and promoted to the target, the territory should return to the media and communication. The territorial communication allows to develop the notoriety and to attract new investors and companies. Finally, the territorial brand allows to gather the

public and private actors around a project of attractiveness. It allows changing or affirming the image perceptions of a destination to reinforce its attractiveness. This phase constitutes the practical implementation of the upstream phase. In other words, if the decision-makers have put in place an attractiveness strategy, this phase will make it known to all of the publics concerned, from near and far.

3. Place marketing in the Morocco context: From the environment to its applicability

Beyond the globalization of economies and inter-territorial hyper-competition, several factors in Morocco constitute a ground for the implementation of the place marketing strategy such as decentralization, advanced regionalization and new regional development plans.

Indeed, since independence, and until today, decentralization has been a strategic choice for Moroccan public authorities, giving communities as much autonomy and competence as means. With the new regionalization project, more decision-making and executive prerogatives have been granted to the regions so that they are able to carry out their role to the best of their ability, to act and to take their future into their own hands. This has increased a "latent competition" between the regions of the kingdom while accelerating the development of regional communication with the aim of branding themselves and, ultimately, differentiating themselves and standing out. To speak of regional or place marketing in Morocco, in the narrow sense of the term, is to implicitly evoke a few scattered communication and promotion campaigns accompanying the regionalization and decentralization projects. This one began more than 61 years before.

Territorial brands, the territorial offer, the approach pursued by local actors, academic research on this theme, the institutional framework, etc. are all elements to be raised when talking about place marketing practices in the Moroccan context. If we look back at the main periods of decentralization in Morocco, where local actors play a central role in local economic development, we could summarize them in the following axes:

The period 1959-1976 was characterized by the establishment of the main foundations of decentralization. It was from 1959 onwards that the beginnings of decentralization began, notably with the promulgation of the dahir of 2 December 1959 on the administrative division of the Kingdom; and the creation of 801 urban and rural communes for the first time on a generalized territorial basis.

However, the kick-off was given in 1960. It was truly the year of decentralization in Morocco. Indeed, it was precisely on June 23, 1960 that the first communal charter was adopted, announcing an initial regime of the decentralization process with a naturally restricted sphere of competence, a two-headed executive and extensive tutelage [\[link\]](#). Even in that year, decentralization was not solid and satisfactory. In December 14, 1962, the

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first constitution had strengthened this decentralization process by creating the territorial collectivity: the prefectures, the provinces and the communes. It was not until 1992 that the region was reinstated as a territorial authority.

With the adoption of the 1976 communal charter, a new stage of decentralization was initiated. It was the real starting point for decentralization in Morocco insofar as it gave the president of the communal council the status of executive body. Another important advance was recorded in the period 1992-2002. Indeed, in 1992, two important events took place. Firstly, the revision of the communal charter allowing the creation of 668 new communes and secondly, the establishment of the region as a local authority by the revised constitution in that same year [[link](#)]. The revision of the communal charter in 2002 marked a qualitative leap in the decentralization process and heralded a new stage characterized, among other things, by: the improvement of the status of territorial elected officials, the reorganization of internal bodies and the redefinition of their role.

The year 2009 was also characterized by the improvement of local governance and the modernization of the financial management of local authorities: the main reforms concerned the strengthening of cooperation and partnership arrangements, the modernization of the financial management of local authorities and the adaptation of management tools for communal assets. In 2011, and more precisely in July 29, a new constitution with a new stage of development of decentralization and regionalization in Morocco. The advanced regionalization project in Morocco provides for a regional division of 12 regions instead of 16, a reduction of 25%. This new regional configuration has been made according to certain criteria based, among others, on the principles of efficiency, homogeneity, proportionality and balance, but also accessibility and proximity.

All of these phases have created a ground for place marketing practices. Thus, on the ground, Morocco markets itself well, especially to attract tourists and investors. The Morocco brand is better positioned at the international level. And as geographers working in the field of development of resources and territorial offers used to say, it is necessary to create specific resources before using marketing tools. These resources are now called by economists and geographers the "differentiating advantages".

In this context, Morocco has inaugurated major projects, such as the port of Tangier, the TGV, the first solar energy station in the world², free zones, territorial clusters... All these projects will need to be promoted and marketed. In this case, we are talking about place marketing of projects: large urban projects, redevelopment of districts, etc.

As a result, since the 1990s, and with the aim of strengthening its competitiveness and attractiveness, Morocco has embarked on a series of reforms aimed at stabilizing and improving the business environment, strengthening the competitiveness of the country's production system and

² According to Le Figaro (08/02/2016), this is the first tranche of a solar power plant which, according to its promoters, will be the largest in the world

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launching ambitious programs to develop infrastructure and stimulate growth sectors. These reforms have been a source of economic and tourist attractiveness³. In this context, and at the institutional level, Morocco has created institutions for the promotion of investments that use in one way or another the tools of place marketing.

Agencies for the promotion and economic and social development ; are three in number : the North [link], the Oriental [link] and the South [link]. These agencies aim to improve the living conditions of the populations and their territories through the implementation of integrated economic and social development programs. They work to strengthen competitiveness and attractiveness by supporting investment and productive sectors in their regions.

Regional investment centers (CRI): following the Royal Letter of January 9, 2002 relating to the decentralized management of investment, regional investment centers were created with the main missions of simplifying procedures, proximity and uniqueness of the interlocutor, as well as the development and promotion of investment in the main Moroccan regions;

Moroccan Agency for Investment and Export Development (AMDIE) or Invest In Morocco [link].

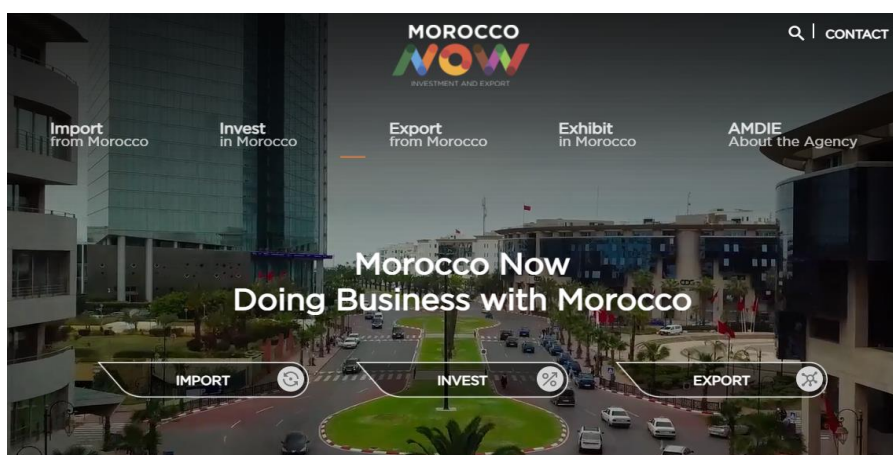


Figure 1. AMDIE's website

Source: <https://www.morocconow.com/>

A public organization created in 2009, its main mission is to promote and market the Moroccan investment offer. To do this, it undertakes promotion and communication actions to publicize investment opportunities in Morocco and attract potential prospects. AMDIE organizes seminars, conferences, workshops, etc., to promote both domestic and foreign investment. In terms of investment attractiveness via digital marketing, Morocco is well ranked globally. According to FDI Intelligence, Morocco ranks 5th worldwide in digital marketing behind Ireland, Costa Rica, Great Britain and Colombia. Indeed, the communication campaign of AMDIE was selected among the five best worldwide and this, during the last edition

³ Guide to investing in Morocco (2010).

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(2011-2012) of the "Digital Marketing Awards" launched by FDI Intelligence, a subsidiary of the Financial Times specialized in investments. The jury rewarded the work undertaken by AMDIE for the promotion of investments in Morocco through its digital strategy which includes a quality website, information sharing, innovation and search engine optimization [link].

On the other hand, the World Bank highlights in the 2012 edition of its report [link] "Global Investment Promotion Practices 2012", the advances made by Morocco in investment promotion and ranks the Kingdom among the countries with the best investment promotion practices worldwide. This makes it easier for regions to use place marketing tools to promote their potential.

For investment attractiveness, Morocco, on the one hand, was ranked as the 1st country in the North Africa in terms of FDI attraction by FDI Intelligence, for the year 2012, enjoying political stability and a favorable business environment. And on the other hand, Morocco ranks 9th in the world, at the same level as France, in terms of attracting investments in the field of solar energy. The country has a great potential for the production of renewable energies, especially solar energy, which will eventually allow it to provide energy to Europe.

In terms of academic research, several Moroccan researchers are beginning to show interest in and work on this place marketing theme, although the number of research projects in this area is still very limited.

As mentioned above, the concepts "place marketing" (Gertner, 2011a; 2011b) and "place branding" (Skinner, 2008) are used to refer to PMA in the Anglo-Saxon literature. In this framework, if we agree to talk about place marketing practices in the Moroccan context, we can cite the case of Casablanca and some cities that have dared to return, directly or indirectly, to place marketing.

The city of Casablanca remains the first and only Moroccan city to have created, in 2016, a territorial brand called WECASABLANCA. This brand, considered as an umbrella brand, has set itself the objective of serving the competitiveness and influence of the city by conveying a powerful and coherent image to investors, tourists and residents.



Figure 2. Logo of the umbrella territorial brand Wecasablanca

Source: <https://wecasablanca.com/>

So in terms of investment attractiveness, decision-makers choose a brand WECASABLANCA INVEST carried by the Regional Investment Center of Casablanca-Settat since 2016. This merger represents one of the virtues of the territorial brand, namely the federating of synergies between the region's players around the issue of investment attractiveness.



Figure 3. Logo of the Wecasablanca invest territorial brand

Source: <https://www.casainvest.ma/fr/cri/we-casablanca-invest>

Its objectives are in line with those of place marketing such as developing the attractiveness of the region, reinforcing pride of belonging, further accelerating the economic development of the metropolis, etc.

Place marketing, branding and communication are more and more requested at the international level. In Morocco, it is still necessary to create a more favorable ground for the practice of place marketing. Thus, with the progress made in the field of decentralization and recently the project of advanced regionalization, it is also necessary to take other measures likely to make PMA succeed. These include the training of actors in the field of territorial management, with considerable investment; the creation of territorial intelligence and place marketing departments; knowledge of the territory; the collaboration and involvement of all local actors concerned; coordination between local actors working for local development; and the monitoring and ongoing evaluation of place marketing actions.

Finally, it is imperative that Moroccan regions react to territorial issues by raising their level of professionalism and building a cross-cutting attractiveness and effective place marketing strategy.

4. Conclusion

Territorial attractiveness, a collective construct, is a vital issue for local authorities and requires the implementation of a territorial strategy that brings together the strengths of the territory. Moreover, the city or region exists through its ability to create a favorable environment not only for investors, businesses and tourists but also for the local population. In this context, to say that place marketing can meet all these challenges does not remove a doubt to settle in some actors. This concerns both territories that are advanced in place marketing practices and those that are in the process of discovering it, such as the Moroccan regions.

In Morocco, tackling the issue of territorial attractiveness from a place marketing perspective poses many challenges. First of all, the attractiveness strategy, being cross-cutting, is a matter for all regional actors and, as a result, specific modes of governance and forms of collaboration and coordination between various public policies are required (Vuignier, 2018). Thus, other challenges to be raised include the financial means or financial autonomy of the regions, the attributions and competencies of regional councils, the willingness of actors, the involvement of all stakeholders, the presence of the state and public institutions, the lack of qualified and specialized human resources in territorial development, a lack of sufficient funding for certain axes of the development plans of the regions, a mismatch

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of the territorial offer with the expectations of investors, a lack of incentives specific to the region, a non-support or after-care of investments.

The practices of place marketing in the moroccan context are conditioned by a real will of the national and local decision makers. This will must be translated into concrete actions leading to the development of an environment favourable to the implementation of a place marketing strategy before moving on to its applicability.

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