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SOCIAL TOURISM IN MOROCCO

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Introduction

Social tourism, as defined by scholars, aims to guarantee the right to holidays and the access to tourism for all social classes, especially those with lower resources, through realisations, programmes and strategies implemented by the public and private sectors, trade unions and associations.

The concept of social tourism has been completely ignored in Morocco's tourism strategy. Even though they did adopt several social-related programmes, successive governments did not show any interest in this form of tourism, that remains totally unknown by the general public.

The purpose of this article is to give an account of the history of social tourism in Morocco, the programmes and future prospects for this form of tourism in the Kingdom, while addressing the challenges Morocco is facing regarding access to holidays.

Historical overview of tourism in Morocco and the emergence of social tourism

The term "social tourism" remains excluded from the jargon of the ministry of tourism, of the ministry of youth and sports, and of professionals of the tourism sector. Some associate social tourism with domestic tourism, others with mass tourism, but it remains unknown as a form of tourism that aims at allowing access to tourism for all social classes, especially those with lower income, and at ensuring the right to holidays for all.

Morocco, under the protectorate, and since the creation of the central committee of tourism (*Comité Central du Tourisme - CCT*) in 1918, focused on developing luxury tourism for the upper class. Following the creation of the ministry of tourism in 1965, the kingdom implemented a strategy to establish priority development areas (*Zones à Aménagement Prioritaire - ZAP*), including mostly small seaside resorts and imperial cities, in order to develop seaside and cultural tourism.

In order to respond to a growing international demand, Morocco invested in building new tourism infrastructures (accommodation establishments, amusement parks...), in developing current infrastructures and fostering quality elite tourism, that can draw significant resources for the country's GDP.

The national tourism policy was long based on a growth model aiming at attracting elite and wealthy visitors, a category known to be the biggest spender. Luxury tourism, and all its components (hotel, restaurant, transport, amusement...), was given a significant boost.

The year 2000 was a milestone in the national tourism policy. The Moroccan government adopted a new strategy named "*Plan Azur 2010*" with the objective of creating six seaside resorts and boosting mass tourism (domestic and external) in order to reach 10 million tourists. That is how the first forms of a Moroccan social tourism emerged, although limited to some population groups with sufficient financial means to travel.

In November 2010, Morocco adopted another tourism policy named "*Vision 2020*", designed as a continuation of the "*Plan Azur 2010*". The new goals were to promote each region of the kingdom and initiate environment-friendly tourism.

Programmes adopted by national stakeholders

Efforts made by the ministry of youth and sports only target a specific and limited population group.

-State programmes:

The State, through the ministries of tourism and of youth and sport, adopted programmes to stimulate domestic tourism.

- *Vacances pour tous* (Holidays for all): programme launched in 2002 by the Moroccan ministry of Youth and sports in cooperation with several networks of associations. It allows children from families with lower income to go on holiday camps. In 2010, 300,000 children benefited from this programme and the investment of the ministry amounted to 27,250,000 MAD.¹

- *Safar Attaalim* (travels for the education sector): travel services for the education sector, initiated by the *Fondation Mohammed VI de promotion des œuvres sociales* (Mohammed VI Foundation for the promotion of social welfare), in association with the travel agency "Atlas voyages" and Atlas Hospitality Hotel & Resorts, a branch of Royal Air Maroc. This programme allows teachers and their family to go on holidays in Morocco or abroad. A website is at the disposal of Moroccan teachers to make their bookings (www.safartaalim.ma).

- Language study holiday: organised by host institutions that come under the delegations of the ministry of youth and sports, for young Moroccans aged 15-17, during spring and summer holidays, against financial contribution.

- Youth travel programme: this programme, initiated by the ministry of youth and sports, targets mainly the youths aged 13-30 that would like to go on cultural and discovery trips for a duration of 6-11 days, in Morocco or several countries, including France, Greece, Germany, Turkey, Cyprus, South Korea, Senegal, Egypt... The financial contribution ranges from 1,000-3,000 MAD for a trip in Morocco to 4,500-15,000 MAD for a trip abroad.

Network of holiday camps:

¹ 11 MAD (Moroccan Dirham) equal approximately €1

It includes 8-day holiday camps for teenagers aged 15-17, permanent holiday centres for teenagers for a period of 12 days in the summer season and 8 days during the spring and autumn holidays, and urban centres that welcome children aged 8-14 for 6 days.

- Clubs: holiday centres for members of a ministry or a socio professional sector (teachers' club, justice club, Bank Al Maghreb club...). In addition to accommodation, those clubs can provide their clients with catering and leisure activities.

- *Plan Biladi* ("My country" Plan): schedules the creation of eight new integrated areas for domestic tourism, with a capacity of 30,000 beds (11,000 beds in the form of tourism residences and holiday villages, and 19,000 beds in camp-sites). It includes Grand Casablanca (Sidi Rahal), Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz, Tangier-Tetouan (Assilah, Kaa Srass), Sous-Massa-Draâ (Agadir/Immiwadar, near Taghazout), Rabat-Salé-Gharb (Moulay Bouselham), Doukkala-Abda (Azemmour/Lalla Aïcha El Bahria), Fès-Meknès-Ifrane (Ifrane), and Oriental (Lazzanane).

- *Kounouz Biladi* (wealth of my country): a new accommodation formula, established jointly with the national federation of the hotel industry (*Fédération Nationale de l'Industrie Hôtelière* – FNIH). This operation includes 200 hotel establishments with a capacity of 8,000 beds. Prices range from 260 MAD per room for a 2-star hotel to 60% discount for 5-star hotels.

- *Moussems*: religious festivals and commercial fairs, *moussems* attract people from all regions of the kingdom to celebrate a saint. For those spiritual events, low-cost accommodation is made available to visitors. There are more than 600 *moussems* in Morocco throughout the national territory.

- *The private sector:*

In the framework of its contribution to the development of domestic tourism and promotion of holidays, the private Moroccan sector (banks and companies) provides its staff with holiday vouchers, during holiday periods, that can be used in Moroccan accommodation establishments to cover part of the expenses.

-Trade unions:

The representation of employees in companies and civil servants in public departments is ensured by trade unions, which role is mainly to defend their interests and labour law in general. Even though trade unions have played an important role in the development of social tourism in Europe, Moroccan trade unions have remained uninvolved in an actual social policy for holidays in Morocco.

-Associations:

Non-profit associations are influential stakeholders in the field of social tourism at the international level. At the national level, only 159 associations are active in the tourism and eco-tourism industries. However, few associations work for social tourism in Morocco. For reference, we can mention the association "*Maroc chez l'habitant*" (Home-stay in Morocco), based in Lyon, France, and founded in 2000, the association "*Maroc istiqbal*" (Welcome Morocco) established in 2009, the "*association marocaine du tourisme familial*" (Moroccan association for family tourism) created in 2011... The goal of those associations is to foster relationships between travellers and host families through short stays of 3 days. Prices range from 350 to 459 MAD per day with half-board. The host family receives a stay allowance amounting to between 50 and 60% of the price paid by travellers.

Challenges and future prospects for social tourism in Morocco

The most disadvantaged population groups have great hopes in social tourism as an indirect means to fight against poverty, precarious conditions, marginalisation, debauchery and social exclusion.

Social tourism should play an active role in land-use planning, and in the local and regional development of the country.

As a stakeholder of the social economy, social tourism should create employment for those who don't have high education levels, develop the regions, foster exchanges and interactions among the population, promote travel and encourage both municipalities and local citizens to safeguard local heritage and preserve it for future generations.

Nevertheless, the lack of a national strategy focusing on social tourism crushes the hopes of the local population.

There are still hundreds of thousands of unemployed citizens that are deprived of the right to travel, and hundreds of thousands of families that do not or no longer have the financial means to go on holidays. Even though we note a decrease in poverty levels (9% in 2007) and vulnerability (17.5% in 2007), the part of the population that goes on holidays hardly exceeds 30%.

In 2011, Morocco had 2,041 graded accommodation establishments, including 78 inns, 41 tourism holiday villages (VVT) and 28 guest houses, that is to say 7.2% of accommodation establishments dedicated to social tourism. The part of social accommodation in the total accommodation does not exceed 8%.

Public and private stakeholders, associations and trade unions should get more involved in popular tourism, for the benefits of all Moroccan citizens. The encouraging suggestions listed below can provide guidelines to revive social tourism and allow the access to travel for all.

- Develop tourism accommodation for social tourism by increasing the bed capacity dedicated to this form of tourism;
- Regulate non-market accommodation and help families to declare and formalise their guest house, for greater transparency;
- Include the local population in the wealth creation process;
- Support equipments and accommodations for people with reduced mobility;
- Widen current programmes proposed by both the public and private sectors, and increase the number of citizens that can benefit from social tourism in the different regions of the kingdom;

- Invite non-profit associations and trade unions to play an effective role in promoting social tourism;
- Add more flexibility to current programmes through the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements between all sectors;
- Develop the conditions for the creation of a social tourism platform with scope in the Maghreb and Arab region, that will allow all Arab citizens to participate in tourism exchanges on a permanent basis;
- Develop a travel culture;
- Help families in need to go on holidays;
- Strengthen the middle class;
- Promote the role of tourism cooperatives that enhance the development of local populations and improve their living conditions;
- Invite accommodation establishments, especially those located in rural areas, to adopt new information and communications technologies (NICT).

Conclusion

Social tourism in Morocco is still at an early stage, with economic, political and sociocultural impediments that slow down the democratization of travel and the development of this form of tourism. The low level of involvement of associations and trade unions in the field of social tourism undermines the – meagre – effort made by the public and private sectors.

The development of social tourism in Morocco depends, on the one hand, on the effective involvement of all tourism stakeholders in designing clear and targeted strategies towards the most disadvantaged populations, and on the other hand, on a strong political will to include social tourism among the strategic priorities of the country, in order to guarantee the access to travel for all citizens and allow for mobility.