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Governance aspects of sustainable tourism in the Global South
– evidence from Morocco

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Zusammenfassung

Seit einem Vierteljahrhundert ist die Menschheit auf der Suche nach Wegen zur Förderung von Handlungsweisen, die den Anspruch auf eine verstärkte Orientierung am Nachhaltigkeitsparadigma erfüllen. In den Ländern des Globalen Südens schafft es die Öffentliche Hand – die in den OECD-Staaten oftmals die Rolle eines zentralen Key-Players einnimmt – oftmals nur sehr eingeschränkt diese zu erfüllen.

Das Anliegen dieses Beitrags ist es – unter dem Blickwinkel des Nachhaltigkeitsparadigmas – den Diskurs und die Rollen der unterschiedlichen im Tourismus von sog. Entwicklungsländern involvierten Akteuren zu analysieren. Dabei wird die Souss-Region in Südmarokko als Fallbeispiel herangezogen, um die Positionen und Handlungsansätze von öffentlichen und privaten Akteuren – einschließlich zivilgesellschaftlicher Organisationen – zu beleuchten.

Die zentrale Frage ist dabei, ob Bottom-Up-Ansätze in Tourismusregionen als indirekter Ansatz wirken, bei den lokalen und regionalen Akteuren die Nachhaltigkeitsorientierung zu stimulieren und damit Schwächen der öffentlichen Nachhaltigkeitsförderung der politischen Seite in Destinationen der sog. Entwicklungsländer kompensieren können.

Schlagworte: nachhaltiger Tourismus, Destination Governance, Tourismus im ländlichen Raum, Marokko

Summary

For the past quarter of a century, mankind has been searching for ways to stimulate approaches to tourism which are more oriented to the principles of the sustainability paradigm. In the Global South, the public sector – which often plays a key role in OECD countries – often only fulfils this stimulation role to a certain degree.

The aim of this contribution is to focus – with the perspective of the sustainability paradigm – on the discourse and the role of the different stakeholders involved in tourism in developing countries. Using the Souss region in Southern Morocco as a model, the contribution will analyse the activities and positions

of public and private stakeholders, including civil society organisations. The question is whether bottom-up processes in tourism regions might function as a possible indirect method to increase awareness of sustainability among local and regional stakeholders, which could compensate for weaknesses regarding sustainability in public policy for destinations in so-called developing countries.

Key words: sustainable tourism, destination governance, rural tourism, Morocco

1   Governance aspects in achieving a more sustainability-oriented form of tourism

Tourism is often seen as a means of facilitating economic development in peripheral regions – both in OECD countries as well as in the countries of the Global South. For many decades, one goal has been to reconcile the intended (positive) economic effects of tourism development with the unintended (often negative) side effects affecting social and environmental aspects.

Tourists, as well as the relevant stakeholders from the tourism industry along the entire service chain, tend to at least feign interest in sustainability aspects. However, tourists themselves show only limited commitment when it comes to specific actions – whether this means the willingness to pay a surcharge (*Brohlburg & Gronau* 2011) or by changing their travel preferences or patterns (*Eijgelaar* 2011, p. 287). Tourism professionals are also often only interested in sustainability concerns outside their direct influence to a limited extent (*Burns* 2004). In so-called "developed countries", public authorities play a major role in facilitating reductions in the use of resources and emissions as well as facilitating social justice. Their instruments are both push-oriented and pull-oriented, ranging from legal arrangements (including monitoring and enforcement of implementation) to tax incentives and direct subsidies, but they also include soft awareness-creating elements as well.

In the developing countries of the Global South, the public sector often only plays a minor role in the implementation of sustainability-oriented strategies. Public governing structures tend to be less elaborate and effective (*Mundt* 2011, p. 51 et seq.). As a result, governance approaches that put a greater emphasis on sustainability must compensate by promoting more non-governmental initiatives at the local, regional and national level, integrating private enterprises as well as other stakeholders of civil society. In other words, the role of national and international NGOs becomes more important in the implementation of procedures that focus on creating a higher degree of sustainability. The questions regarding the "right" governing modes and the type of interaction – including the questions of leadership – are hotly debated (*Beritelli & Bieger* 2014).

Following the example of developed countries, developing countries often officially adopt sustainability-oriented legislation and development schemes. However, adopting such schemes – and loudly and frequently using the expression "sustainability" in the public discourse – does not necessarily mean that the corresponding systems of administration and governance applied in industrialised countries are adopted as well.

The relationships and interactions between governmental authorities and local and regional stakeholders in the Global South have often continued to be marked by post-colonial top-down hierarchies. The often-iterated interaction procedures that are undertaken in industrialised countries as a matter of course (*Revermann & Petermann* 2003, p. 98 et seq.) are usually lacking in countries of the Global South (*Mowforth & Munt* 2003, p. 255 et seq.). Approaches to tackling the diverging trade-offs between economic, social and ecological aspects – which are usually rather well established in industrialised countries (*Biedenkamp & Garbe* 2002, p. 2) – are lacking in many countries of the Global South.

In the following on the case study of Morocco, this text will address the question of what role different governance approaches play in achieving the goal of a more focused orientation towards the sustainability paradigm.
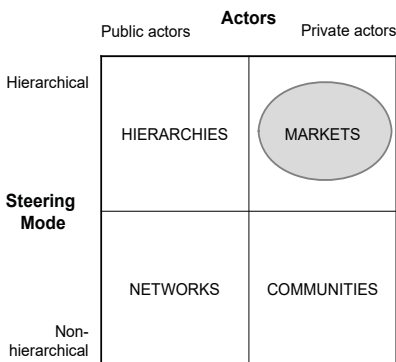
2   Governance patterns in Moroccan tourism

The traditional Moroccan tourism product in the second half of the 20th century has been based on three pillars:
1) The "Sun and Beach" segment, with a specific focus on the Bay of Agadir;
2) The "Imperial Cities" (especially Fes, Meknès and Marrakesh) with their architectural and construction cultural heritage;
3) The "Route of the Kasbahs" with their pre-Saharan earthen construction techniques of clay architecture along the river oases south of the High Atlas Mountains.

From a governance perspective, these "products" are characterised by a predominance of large private actors. National and international hotel chains provide the accommodation facilities in the coastal resorts as well as the imperial cities. To stimulate tourism activities, the state engaged itself in the initial phase – especially in the pre-Saharan destination south of the High Atlas – with a parastatal hotel chain, but withdrew in the 1970s by selling its hotels to national and international hotel chains. In addition to the accommodation sector, the market has been characterised by the dominance of international tour operators, national destination management companies and the national and international flagship transport carriers. According to the typology of governance structures posited by *Michael Hall* (2011, Fig. 1) regarding steering mode and actors, Moroccan tourism demonstrates characteristics of the "Market" mode.

Figure 1: Typology of governance structures according to steering mode and actors

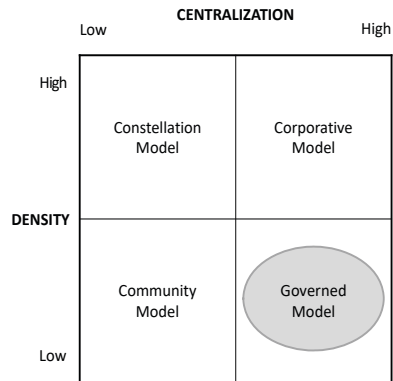Source: Own design following Hall 2011, p. 443

Bodega, Cioccarelli & Denicolai (2004) used two dimensions as well to characterise organisational structures in destinations. Their dimension of "centralisation" corresponds closely to Hall's hierarchical/non hierarchical axis (steering mode). They noted the relevance of the density of the interaction between the stakeholders, and made it their second dimension (Fig. 2). The Moroccan approach can be characterised by the "Governed Model", with a high degree of centralisation at only a few large private stakeholders and a low degree of interaction between the different stakeholders. The role of the public sector during this phase has been mainly limited to guaranteeing the quality of the general conditions concerning infrastructure and promoting the whole country in a rather general way by conducting a number of image campaigns.

Figure 2: Matrix of organisational positioning according to degree of centralisation and density of interaction

Source: Own design following Bodega, Cioccarelli & Denicolai 2004, p. 17)

This traditional product portfolio remained quite stable until almost the end of the 20th century. Since the turn of the century, more and more rural regions in Morocco have opened themselves for tourism with such intensity that two Moroccan experts even spoke of a certain "fever" (*Berriane & Moizo* 2014, p. 21) in rural regions. But 15 years after the start of the rural tourism initiatives, the balance has been quite disillusioning. The central weaknesses of the attempt to stimulate rural tourism in peripheral regions can be found on the side of the public sector as well as the private stakeholders involved. On the side of the public stakeholders, it is possible to observe:

1) A traditional hierarchical understanding of an authoritarian state;
2) An orientation towards major investors from outside the region; and
3) Missing awareness on the need for governance structures among the public stakeholders.

The small private stakeholders trying to engage themselves in rural tourism:

4) Often lack the necessary capabilities to successfully run a tourism business; and
5) Have not established nationwide cooperative structures to tackle the individual weaknesses generated by leader-oriented approaches.

Even if NGOs try to intervene in some cases to compensate for the deficits of the public steering function, their effect has been quite limited (for more details, see *Berriane & Aderghal* 2012, *Berriane & Moizo* 2014 and *Kagermeier* 2014b). One of the few examples where a grassroots NGO has been established which has a certain impact is the "Réseau de Développement du Tourisme Rural", operating in the Souss-Massa region of the country (see Section 4).
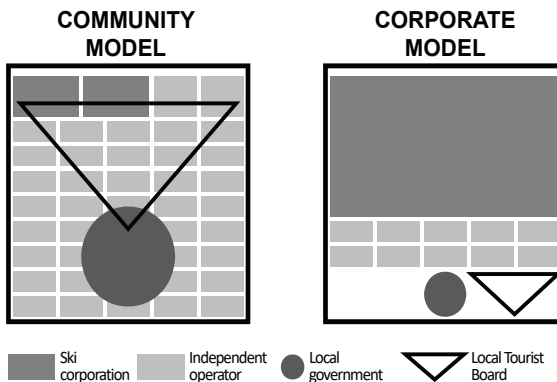
The new current trend in tourism, with "Explorer Tourists" looking for perceived authenticity "off the beaten track", getting in contact with the locals and sleeping in unique accommodation has not only influenced metropolitan tourism (S*tors & Kagermeier* 2017). As a peer-to-peer marketing platform for accommodation, Airbnb has enabled individuals in even the most remote and isolated corners of pre-Saharan Morocco to present themselves as proprietors of accommodation in rural areas. As this tendency continues into the future, more and more stakeholders with less and less professional experience will present themselves on the tourism market – especially in rural regions. For this reason, the necessity to establish governance structures that are adequate for this variety of small and micro-entrepreneurs and that support them to establish themselves in a more and more competitive environment with ever-more demanding clients is becoming increasingly urgent.

Figure 3: Ideal types of organisational structures in Destination Management: Community Model and Corporate Mode


COMMUNITY MODEL   CORPORATE MODEL

Ski corporation   Independent operator   Local government   Local Tourist Board

Source: Own design following Flagestad & Hope 2001, p. 452

From a governance point of view, the destination management model of *Flagestad & Hope* (2001; see Fig. 3) is useful. They sketch a "Corporate Model", dominated by major international and national private stakeholders (hotel chains and tour operators) with only a minor role for local and regional tourist boards (as destination marketing and management organisations) as well as the public sector (in its governing capacity). This is in contrast to the "Community Model", where a multitude of small local and regional private stakeholders need comprehensive destination marketing and management organisation as well as public stakeholders who can take over the leadership role in a destination (see *Beritelli & Bieger* 2014 or *Kagermeier* 2014a).

By synthesising the governance models of *Hall* (2011, Fig. 1) and *Bodega, Cioccarelli & Denicolai* (2004, Fig. 2), the challenge for Moroccan tourism governance structures could be described as orienting the former model – characterised by privately dominated hierarchies and a low level of interaction between the few large international and national stakeholders – and moving towards a less hierarchical steering mode with a high density of interaction between the multitude of small local and regional private stakeholders and greater responsibility on the part of public actors (Fig. 4).

Figure 4: Typology of governance structures and direction of the necessary changes in Moroccan tourism
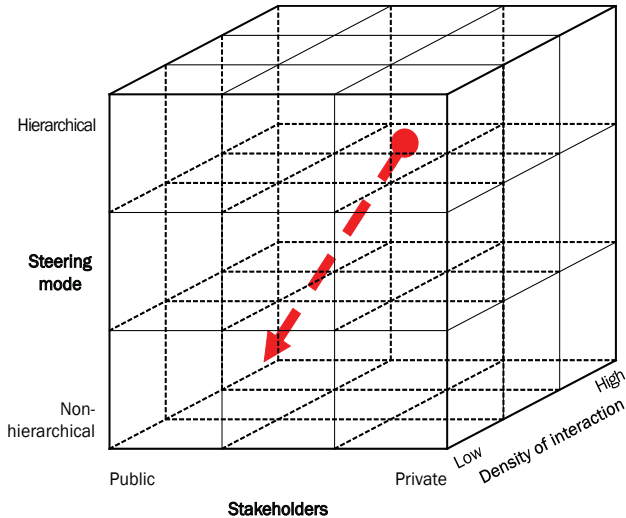
Source: Own design

3 An overview of the sustainability policy in Moroccan tourism

Using the perspective of the governance structure analysis outlined in the above paragraph, this part of the article will analyse the sustainability policies of Moroccan tourism over the last two decades.

3.1 Vision 2010

The first strategic document which was developed in Morocco after the Rio conference in 1992 was known as "Vision 2010", which was signed in 2001 (*Royaume du Maroc* 2001). This memorandum, between representatives from the private sector in tourism and the public sector, served as a kind of roadmap or master plan for the overall tenor of Moroccan tourism policy in the first decade of the 21th century. Its main points were influenced by the macroeconomic role of tourism for the national economy. Tourism was noted for its role as:

- The most important contributor to the balance of trade;
- The second-most important contributor to gross national product (GNP);
- The second-biggest industry for the national labour market (*Royaume du Maroc* 2017b).

The main aspects of Vision 2010 were:

- A system of enforced and professionalised promotion ("un dispositif de promotion renforcé et professionnalisé")
- An Open-Skies treaty with the European Union ("un ciel libéralisé")
- A dynamic education system ("un système de formation dynamisé")

- Strong investment dynamics ("forte dynamique d'investissement")
- Initial steps towards new governance ("premiers jalons d'une nouvelle gouvernance") (*Royaume du Maroc* 2017b).

"New Governance" was specified as revamping the national tourism marketing organisation (ONMT), creating a tourism-oriented statistical analysis office (Observatoire du Tourisme) and establishing annual meetings at the national level, as well as creating Regional Tourism Councils at the regional level (Conseils Régionaux du Tourisme). The main goal of Vision 2010 was to double the size of the tourism sector to enlarge its role in the national economy (for more details, see *Kagermeier* 2016, p. 149 et seq.).

Sustainability did not play a major role in Vision 2010; the word "sustainable" (in French: "durable") only appears five times in the whole document – and this always in the meaning of stable economic development in the original meaning of the word "sustainable" (*Royaume du Maroc* 2001).

3.2   Vision 2020

Following the approach in the first decade of the 21th century, a new "Vision 2020" was elaborated in 2010 (*Royaume du Maroc* 2011). Its central commitment was to continue making the tourism sector a motor of the economic, social and cultural development of Morocco. Again the main objective was to double the size of the sector (including the construction of 200,000 new beds, the intended doubling of international tourists, the creation of almost 500,000 new jobs in the sector, and more than doubling of revenues; *Royaume du Maroc* 2017c).

Apart from a focus on the authenticity, diversity and quality of products and services, this time an explicit orientation towards sustainability was expressed. Nevertheless, sustainable tourism has still mainly been connoted with nature-oriented tourism, aiming at eco-resorts and eco-lodges (*Royaume du Maroc* 2013, p. 16). The reduction of sustainable tourism to eco-tourism and responsible tourism (*Royaume du Maroc* 2017a) is visible even in the presentation of the different product lines of Moroccan tourism on the website of the ministry (Fig. 5)

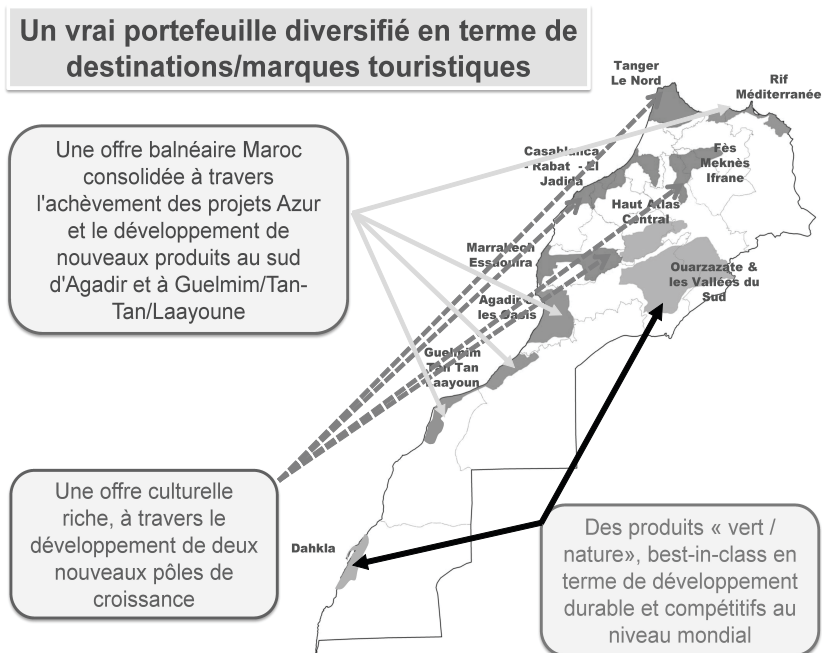*Figure 5: Depiction of tourism products on the official website of the Moroccan tourism ministry*

Source: www.tourisme.gov.ma/fr)

Apart from the traditional product lines of beach tourism (Azur 2020) as well as tourism based on the cultural heritage of the imperial cities or the pre-Saharan clay architecture (Patrimoine & Héritage), eco-tourism is positioned among other niche markets such as business travel, health and wellness tourism, or internal, event and sports tourism.

The governance focus of Vision 2020 is rather vague in its descriptions of new organisational structures, mainly at the national level, with regard to the air transport connections and the marketing requirements to fill the accommodation capacities ("à assurer … la juste adéquation entre les capacités litières, la desserte aérienne … et la mobilisation des budgets de promotion nécessaire au remplissage des capacités"; *Royaume du Maroc* 2017d).

With Vision 2020 – in accordance with the clear decentralisation policy which Morocco has seen in the last decade – different destinations have been delimited (Fig. 6). Eight of the ten regional destinations refer to the traditional urban and coastal product. Apart from a small stretch in the former Spanish Sahara (Dahkla), the rural pre-Saharan region between the river Oasis of the Tafilalet and the Oued Drâa are the only ones labelled as destinations for "green" and "nature" tourism.

Figure 6: Designation of different product lines for the main Moroccan tourism destinations

Un vrai portefeuille diversifié en terme de destinations/marques touristiques

Une offre balnéaire Maroc consolidée à travers l'achèvement des projets Azur et le développement de nouveaux produits au sud d'Agadir et à Guelmim/Tan-Tan/Laayoune

Une offre culturelle riche, à travers le développement de deux nouveaux pôles de croissance

Des produits « vert / nature», best-in-class en terme de développement durable et compétitifs au niveau mondial

Tanger Le Nord
Rif Méditerranée
Casablanca - Rabat - El Jadida
Fès Meknès Ifrane
Haut Atlas Central
Marrakech Essaouira
Ouarzazate & les Vallées du Sud
Agadir les Oasis
Guelmim Tan Tan Laayoun
Dahkla

Source: Royaume du Maroc 2013, p. 17

Figure 7: Wastewater treatment plants in Marrakesh

Source: Royaume du Maroc 2017a

Figure 8: The use of recycled waste water for the irrigation of golf courses in the Palmeraie of Marrakesh

Source: Royaume du Maroc 2017a

Even if the core of the so-called sustainability orientation in the Moroccan tourism policy tends to represent a quite restrained connotation of sustainability, there are also measures that have been applied to reduce the environmental impact of tourism activities specifically. In Marrakesh, for example, an important effort has been made to build wastewater treatment plants which are efficient enough that the output can be used as recycled water for the irrigation of golf courses in the Palmeraie of Marrakesh (Fig. 7 and 8).

In sum, it is clear that the sustainability orientation in the Moroccan tourism policy is – in spite of many verbal declarations – still in its infancy as far as substantial effects are concerned.

More specifically, apart from the quite extensive utilisation of the word "sustainability" in all kinds of different official contexts as well as those from private stakeholders or civil society, some measures have been implemented;

however, they are usually limited to those aspects of sustainability that demonstrate an immediate and direct effect for tourism professionals (such as saving energy or water resources).

Limiting the understanding of sustainability to the direct use of scarce and limited resources, such as water and energy for waste disposal, has been prioritised for a long time, and thus has overshadowed approaches that represent a more comprehensive sense of the sustainability paradigm.

Nevertheless, at the end of 2016, when Morocco hosted the UN climate change conference "COP22" (Conference of the Parties; United Nations 2017), a few additional activities were launched. One of them was the creation of the Moroccan Charter on Sustainable Tourism (Charte Marocain du Tourisme Durable; *Royaume du Maroc* 2016). While its statements are quite comprehensive, there are no definite regulations or limits to be respected. As such, the charter (which any stakeholder of the tourism industry can sign) is more of a statement of will than a concrete mechanism of implementation. The following section therefore raises and addresses the question of whether – given the incomplete engagement of the public sector – private activities might be able to compensate for the lack of a public sector and facilitate a sustainability orientation in tourism that goes beyond "Sunday sermons" and achieves substantial results.

4   Sustainable tourism attitudes in the Souss-Massa Region

The pre-Saharan Souss-Massa-Drâa Region[1)] south of the High Atlas Mountains covers two types of regional destinations, coastal tourism along the Atlantic Ocean (especially around Agadir) and rural destinations of mountains and valleys south of the High Atlas. Almost every regional destination in Morocco has seen smaller private tourism initiatives which tend to focus on sustainability (at least in a broader sense). However, the RDTR (Réseau de Développement du Tourisme Rural) in the Souss-Massa-Drâa Region appears to be the most substantial private initiative in Morocco taking a sustainable tourism perspective.

A comprehensive study on sustainable tourism activities in the Souss-Massa-Drâa Region undertaken between 2012 and 2014 revealed that, among the traditional hotel sector (mostly run by national and international hotel chains) in the region, only Club Robinson (owned by the tour operator TUI) had a significant orientation towards the goals of sustainable development (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 69 et seq. & p. 90 et seq.). Apart from this beach resort, all the other hotels and holiday resorts in the study fulfilled only the (few) legal requirements concerning the impact of their business on the environment, avoiding any further commitment to the idea of sustainability.

A second example of good practices in the Souss-Massa-Drâa Region was an owner-operated lodge, the Ecolodge Atlas Kasbah. This location focuses on rural tourism and practises a comprehensive sustainability-oriented approach

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1) The Souss-Massa-Drâa Region was created in 1997 as part of a regionalisation policy in Morocco. In 2015, the region was split up into the Souss-Massa Region, with the eastern section becoming part of the newly created Drâa-Tafilalet Region

Figure 9: *Phyto-purification as part of wastewater management at the Ecolodge Atlas Kasbah*

Source: A. Kagermeier 2014

with a broad environmental management plan concerning water, energy and waste management (including its own phyto-purification as part of its wastewater management, Fig. 9). Apart from that, social aspects concerning the integration of the local population and awareness-raising among visitors are included as well, following a broader Corporate Social Responsibility approach (for more details, see *El Boudribili, Bel Kabbachi & Kagermeier* 2012).

The sustainability orientation is combined with a high level of quality of the product, including different activities ranging from conventional excursions to workshops on traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, soap making).

While the sustainability orientation of Club Robinson limits itself to rather isolated internal activities, the owner of the Atlas Kasbah can be seen as one of the rare examples where individual activities make a broader impact.

The owner of the Atlas Kasbah has been one of the key persons since 2011, when a few tourism professionals and academics founded the RDTR with the encouragement of the regional council. Its target has been to bring together small tourism stakeholders in the rural milieu of the region in order to "structure and organise the rural tourism sector, organise and manage all common interests and promote the practices of rural tourism (promotion, communication, marketing assistance), promote the exchange of good practices, ensure the quality of rural tourism products, participate in the development of sustainable and responsible rural tourism, and build partnerships with regional, national and international tourism stakeholders" (*RDTR & Afkar* 2013, p. 6, translation A. Kagermeier).

The primary purpose of the network is to strengthen the performance of small tourism activities by building a network focusing on capacity building and providing the service orientation necessary to successfully participate in the tourism

market – which is marked by a high degree of competition. Apart from the development and promotion of the rural tourism product itself, the sustainability orientation has been an integral part of the RDTR's mission from the very beginning.

The RDTR has five strategic pillars:

1) Consolidation of the institutional capacity of the RDTR;
2) The creation of comprehensive experiences for tourists;
3) Supervision and training;
4) Eco-certification;
5) Promotion and marketing.

This therefore meant establishing a proper eco-label (*RDTR* 2012, p. 5 et seq.), which also includes quality aspects. The definition of ecological and quality standards was part of the PhD project by *Youssef El Boudribili* (2014).

Just after its foundation, the RDTR had already comprised about 70 members (*RDTR* 2012, p. 4), including more than 40 tourism professionals that owned their own accommodation business (gîte, guesthouse, campsite, etc.). During the first few years, a wide range of activities was launched. The RDTR (co-)organised several workshops and conferences (*RDTR* 2012, p. 12), focusing mainly on three different aspects: first, the creation of support among the different private and especially public stakeholders in the region; second, the awareness and development of professional know-how among their members; and, third, the establishment of a network with other national and especially international actors from NGOs, public bodies and academia. The authors of this article have been involved in these kinds of activities in recent years as national and international members of the academic tourism community.

At the same time, a number of marketing activities were started – especially using internet and social media tools (*RDTR & Afkar* 2013; Fig. 10), which are easily accessible, and thus have low barriers to entry and do not result in high monetary costs. In spite of these various activities, the number of members stagnated, so the optimistic hope that membership would rise from 70 to an estimated number of 200 by 2013 (*RDTR* 2012, p. 4) was never fulfilled.

It is difficult to evaluate the reasons for the stagnation of the members. Perhaps the focus of the key players exercising leadership in the network has been a little bit too much oriented towards the representative function of conferences. It also must be noted that the spatial focal point of the network lies in the immediate surroundings of Agadir, so perhaps the intensity of interaction decreases significantly with the distance from the spatial (and functional) core node of the network, even if formally each of the provinces in the Souss-Massa-Drâa Region were to send an equal number of delegates.

In order to strengthen the competitiveness of tourism in the region as well as the sustainability orientation in 2012, the RDTR began working in cooperation with the University Ibn-Zohr in Agadir to establish a Charter of Quality and the Environment in Tourism (QET). The general meeting agreed on this charter in 2013 (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 121, Fig. 11). The charter opened the way for a classification scheme focusing on two core aspects: product quality and sustainability. The comprehensive criteria for classification were developed in the context of *El Boudribili's* PhD thesis (2014, p. 188 et seq.), including classical environmen-

Figure 10: Website of the RDTR campaigning for the idea of sustainable tourism as well as promoting the rural tourism products and services of its members
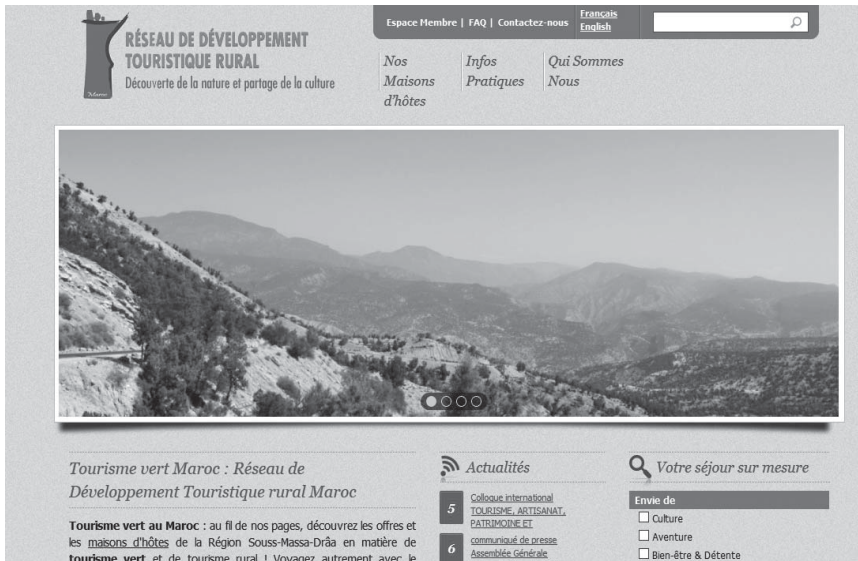
Source: www.maroc-tourisme-rural.com

Figure 11: The establishment of the Charter of Quality and the Environment in Tourism

Source: RDTR 2013

tally oriented aspects, as well as attention to human resources, the local population, raising visitor awareness and other aspects related to a integrated understanding of sustainability. Four different grades are possible, ranging from a "basic" level to an "excellent" level. Two-thirds of the classification points deal with quality aspects and one-third with sustainability aspects (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 124). The classification scheme has so far been open to RDTR members only (thus functioning as a point of added value for members and with the intention of stimulating interest in joining the network). Of the 48 RDTR

members owning an accommodation establishment or a restaurant, 44 have been evaluated for classification. Only two establishments were excluded from the classification outright (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 127), which might be interpreted as a selective interest in the network by those owners already showing a minimum level of interest in quality and sustainability. However, it can also be seen as ambivalent if the classification institution and the classified establishments are in a specific relationship. At the same time, only 14% of the theoretically possible points have to be fulfilled to be classified at the basic level (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 124). This seems to be a relatively low barrier to entry, attracting even establishments with rather moderate quality and sustainability ambitions hoping to further orient their business on issues of sustainability in the future as a result of an initial basic classification. The process-oriented intention becomes visible by the fact that only four establishments (among them, of course, the Ecolodge Atlas Kasbah as the best-ranked accommodation) were classified as "excellent", thus signalling to others that future improvements might lead to a higher classification (*El Boudribili* 2014, p. 127).

Even if the classification approach of the RDTR started out as quite compelling, a follow-up visit in 2016 revealed the fact that continuous quality improvement and a focus on a sustainability approach could not be achieved by the NGO. After the first classification assessment, no additional repeated surveys have been conducted. At the same time, the idea of continuous quality and sustainability-oriented training has also not been realised. A lack of human capacity as well as other interests on the part of the leading members might be a preliminary explanation for the lack of continuity in the approach of the RDTR.

5   Conclusion

This contribution has tried to evaluate the situation of sustainability-oriented tourism in so-called "developing countries". The example of Morocco shows that – as somewhat of a contrast to industrialised countries, where the public sector usually takes the lead on sustainability matters – the public sector in developing countries often has – apart from verbal statements and "Sunday sermons" – only limited scope when it comes to specific implementation.

The core question of this article has been if and to what extent civil society actors might be able to fill the gap of a suboptimal public leadership in small-scale rural tourism. The example of a tourism network in the Moroccan South, which seemed to be promising at the beginning of its activity a couple of years ago, shows that NGO structures find it hard to guarantee continuity for sustainability efforts, even if at the beginning the enthusiasm might be quite high.

When viewing the case through the lens of governance structures, it has to be stated that no empirical evidence indicated that the necessary change in rural tourism towards a more non-hierarchical steering mode with a high density of interaction between the multitude of small local and regional private stakeholders might develop without intensive intervention of the public sector. At the same time, the question of the optimal relationship between public and the private stakeholders in rural tourism still remains open.

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