TERRITORIAL BRANDING AS A VECTOR OF IDENTITY AND A LEVER FOR TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: THE CASE OF LARACHE

LA MARQUE TERRITOIRE VECTEUR D'IDENTITÉ ET LEVIER D'ATTRACTIVITÉ TOURISTIQUE : CAS DE LARACHE

A MARCA TERRITORIAL COMO VETOR DE IDENTIDADE E ALAVANCA DE ATRATIVIDADE TURÍSTICA: O CASO DE LARACHE

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Abstract. Faced with increased competition between tourist destinations, territories are feeling more than ever the need to revolutionize their practices. Nowadays, we are witnessing a growing use of territorial brands, a relatively recent concept whose first initiatives date back to the 1970s. In Morocco, territorial branding is still in its early stages, with the first brand being created in 2011 as part of a strategy launched by the Moroccan National Tourist Office to reposition Morocco on the international tourist scene. This study focuses on the city of Larache to explore the relationship between territorial branding, identity, and tourist attractiveness. This relationship is notably highlighted in the literature through the works of V. Golain and B. Mayronin. We consider our field of study highly appropriate to closely observe the validity of this link. Indeed, the decline in tourism that Larache has experienced has piqued our curiosity, leading us to reflect on the role of brand communication in promoting territories and strengthening their identity. We hypothesize that Larache suffers from an identity blur impacting its image as a tourist destination, primarily due to the absence of a branding strategy capable of consolidating its identity. In this context, a mixed-method approach was adopted. We administered a questionnaire with the objective of studying Larache's image and notoriety to assess its perception among potential tourists. This survey was supported by an analysis of social representations, with the main goal of exploring the representations associated with Larache's identity among two target groups: residents and potential tourists. Our results support our initial hypothesis and reveal a significant gap between the two representations, reflecting the identity blur from which Larache suffers. Based on these results, we define the identity profile of the territory in question to address the diagnosed identity deficit. Our study holds great importance for practitioners as it encourages them to rethink their tourism promotion practices and become aware of the crucial role that territorial branding can play in the tourism development of regions.

Keywords: territorial brand; place branding; territorial identity; destination attractiveness; social representations.

Résumé . Face à une concurrence accrue entre les destinations touristiques, les territoires ressentent plus que jamais, le besoin de révolutionner leurs pratiques. Désormais, on assiste à un recours de plus en plus croissant aux marques territoires; notion relativement récente dont les premières initiatives remontent aux années 1970. Au Maroc, la marque territoriale en est encore à ses débuts, la première étant créée en 2011 dans le cadre de la stratégie lancée par l'Office National Marocain du tourisme pour

repositionner le Maroc sur la scène touristique internationale. Cette étude prend appui sur la ville de Larache pour explorer le lien entre marque territoire, identité et attractivité touristique. Un lien dont la littérature fait état notamment à travers les travaux de V.Golain et B.Mayronin. Nous considérons que notre terrain d'étude est très approprié pour observer de près la validité de ce lien. En effet, le fléchissement touristique que connait Larache a attiré notre curiosité, et nous a amené à réfléchir sur le rôle de la communication de marque dans la promotion des territoires et la consolidation de leur identité. Nous avançons l'hypothèse que Larache souffre d'un flou identitaire impactant son image de destination touristique, et qui est principalement dû à l'absence d'une stratégie de marque à même de consolider son identité. Dans cette optique, une méthode mixte a été adoptée. Nous avons procédé à l'administration d'un questionnaire dans l'objectif d'étudier l'image et la notoriété de Larache, afin d'en évaluer la perception chez le touriste potentiel. Cette enquête a été soutenue d'une analyse des représentations sociales, ayant pour principal objectif d'explorer les représentations associées à l'identité de Larache chez deux groupes cibles, à savoir résidents et touristes potentiels. Nos résultats confortent notre hypothèse de base et font apparaitre un écart assez significatif entre les deux représentations, reflétant le flou identitaire dont souffre Larache. Fort de ces résultats, nous définissons le profil identitaire du territoire objet de notre étude afin de pallier le déficit identitaire diagnostiqué. Notre étude, revêt en cela un intérêt majeur pour les praticiens dans la mesure où elle les invite à repenser leurs pratiques de promotion touristique et à prendre conscience du rôle crucial que peut jouer la marque territoire dans le développement touristique des territoires.

Mots clés : marque territoriale ; marketing territorial ; identité territoriale ; attractivité touristique ; représentations sociales.

Resumo: Diante da crescente concorrência entre os destinos turísticos, os territórios sentem mais do que nunca a necessidade de revolucionar suas práticas. Atualmente, observa-se um uso cada vez maior das marcas territoriais, um conceito relativamente recente cujas primeiras iniciativas remontam aos anos 1970. No Marrocos, a marca territorial ainda está em seus estágios iniciais, sendo a primeira criada em 2011 no âmbito da estratégia lançada pelo Escritório Nacional de Turismo do Marrocos para reposicionar o país no cenário turístico internacional. Este estudo foca-se na cidade de Larache para explorar a relação entre a marca territorial, a identidade e a atratividade turística. Essa relação é destacada na literatura, principalmente através dos trabalhos de V. Golain e B. Mayronin. Consideramos nosso campo de estudo altamente adequado para observar de perto a validade dessa relação. De fato, o declínio do turismo em Larache despertou nossa curiosidade e nos levou a refletir sobre o papel da comunicação de marca na promoção dos territórios e no fortalecimento de sua identidade. Avançamos a hipótese de que Larache sofre de uma falta de clareza identitária que impacta sua imagem como destino turístico, e que isso se deve principalmente à ausência de uma estratégia de marca capaz de consolidar sua identidade. Nesse contexto, adotou-se uma abordagem metodológica mista. Aplicamos um questionário com o objetivo de estudar a imagem e notoriedade de Larache, a fim de avaliar sua percepção entre turistas potenciais. Essa pesquisa foi complementada por uma análise das representações sociais, cujo objetivo principal foi explorar as representações associadas à identidade de Larache em dois grupos-alvo: residentes e turistas potenciais. Nossos resultados corroboram nossa hipótese inicial e revelam uma diferença significativa entre as duas representações, refletindo a falta de clareza identitária de Larache. Com base nesses resultados, definimos o perfil identitário do território em questão para mitigar o déficit identitário diagnosticado. Nosso estudo é de grande relevância para os profissionais, pois os convida a repensar suas práticas de promoção turística e a tomar consciência do papel crucial que a marca territorial pode desempenhar no desenvolvimento turístico dos territórios.

Palavras-chave: marca territorial; marca local; identidade territorial; atratividade turística; representações sociais.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faced with increasing competition between tourist destinations, territories are more than ever feeling the need to revolutionize their practices. Territorial brands are a relatively recent concept, with the first initiatives dating back to the 1970s.

In Morocco, territorial branding is still in its infancy, the first being created in 2011 as part of the strategy launched by the Moroccan National Tourist Office to reposition Morocco on the international tourism scene.

Our study focuses on the issue of tourism in Larache, and given the downturn in this sector, we propose to approach the subject of our study from the angle of territorial marketing. More specifically, the aim is to ascertain whether the absence of a marketing and communication strategy capable of consolidating the area's identity and developing its attractiveness could explain the downturn in tourism in Larache.

This study therefore uses the city of Larache as a case study to explore the link between territorial branding and identity. Identity is at the heart of brand strategy. It enables us to highlight the personality of a territory and position it for attractiveness purposes.

This leads us to question the link between attractiveness and identity. This question was at the origin of our research. Indeed, the downturn in tourism in Larache aroused our curiosity and led us to reflect on the role of brand communication in promoting territories and consolidating their identity. We hypothesize that a link between brand communication, identity and attractiveness can be established, and that if Larache suffers from a blurred identity impacting its image as a tourist destination, this is mainly due to the absence of a brand strategy capable of consolidating its identity. The latter is studied in the light of the theory of social representations. The choice of this reference theory is by no means arbitrary, and corresponds perfectly to the issues we have chosen for our study. Indeed, it is in the light of social representations that we are going to question the facts relating to identity through the perceptions of two actors, namely residents and potential tourists.

Our aim is to understand to what extent the territory brand can be considered a vector of territorial identity, and to what extent it can contribute to improving the territory's image and developing its attractiveness to tourists.

In the light of the literature review, we will first define the key concepts of our research: territory brand and territorial identity. This will enable us to grasp the link between the different elements making up our theoretical framework, before proceeding to study the representations of the main users of the territory (residents and potential tourists). This will enable us to identify the territory's identity as represented by the two groups of individuals mentioned above, and to draw up the city's identity profile at a later stage, so as to reduce the gaps between perceived identity and lived identity, and thus give the territory a positioning anchored in its reality.

2. TERRITORY BRANDING AS A TOOL FOR BUILDING IDENTITY

2.1. Territorial Identity

Based on the hypothesis that Larache suffers from an identity deficit that has a negative impact on its image among potential tourists, this section will focus on the notion of territorial identity, which we will attempt to define in the light of the work of several authors, a difficult undertaking given the complexity of the concept and the multiple meanings it covers.

Our interest in the question of identity stems from the fact that it is seen as both a resource and a means for territories to distinguish and promote themselves. As such, it constitutes a real lever of attractiveness, and even an indispensable tool available to decision-makers to make their territories attractive. This is where branding comes in, as a tool for conceptualizing and enhancing identity. In this section, we will attempt to approach the concept of the brand as a strategic tool for enhancing territorial identity, likely to reinforce the attractiveness and visibility of territories.

In today's competitive environment, cities and regions are called upon more than ever to differentiate themselves, to adopt a positioning that gives them uniqueness and singularity. The

territory is therefore at the heart of communication strategies. But to raise the question of attractiveness is essentially to ask how territories can promote themselves.

To build their reputation, regions often rely on traditional marketing techniques, which aim above all to meet the needs of potential tourists by adapting supply to demand. However, such an approach relies above all on the creation of a brand image capable of highlighting the region's assets and differentiating it from the competition. Although this approach helps to raise the profile of the region beyond its borders and enhance its image, it also poses the problem of homogenizing practices. Indeed, many so-called branding strategies tend to embellish a region's image by overlooking its negative aspects. As a result, all territories become similar. They are all cultural, cosmopolitan, lively and attractive, which ultimately runs counter to the very aim of branding, which is to emphasize one's difference from the competition. In other words, a brand image that doesn't reflect reality could blur local identity, which is the only element capable of differentiating a territory. Territorial identity must therefore be at the heart of branding strategy. Only then can it be considered as a lever for attracting tourists. But what is territorial identity? And how can it help promote a territory?

Before answering these questions, we'll start by clarifying the difference between image and identity. This is all the more necessary given that some territorial marketing strategies are limited to the dissemination, via communication campaigns, of images that in no way reflect the reality of the territory. To be credible, an image

> Doit reposer sur des données factuelles vraisemblables, et l'on ne peut construire artificiellement l'image d'un territoire, au risque de la crédibilité et, à terme, d'une certaine contre productivité (…) l'image constitue un actif immatériel et important pour un pays, aussi sa gestion s'avère-t-elle cruciale. L'image ne se maitrise pas toujours et ne se dégage que rarement d'un travail que l'on conduit soi-même. (Amirou et al, 2011, p.91)

It can't be decreed, it's subjective and the result of experience in the territory. What's more, the image is not fixed. The image we have of a city can evolve over time as a result of new information or experiences, so it's pointless trying to convince our target audience of the image we want to convey, especially when it doesn't rhyme with reality. "L'identité, en revanche, semble plus profonde que l'image ; elle intègre des éléments de l'imagerie et des éléments de l'imaginaire " (Amirou et al, 2011, p.91), and is specific to each territory.

In fact, a branding strategy would gain in effectiveness and relevance by placing identity at the heart of its strategy as a means of promotion capable of contributing to a region's tourist appeal.

We agree with Benoit Mayronin: "aucune stratégie marketing ne peut réussir en ce coupant de la réalité, et donc ici de ce qui fonde l'identité d'un territoire. C'est dans ses gènes qu'une ville puise les atouts sur lesquels bâtir du neuf, qu'il s'agisse d'un projet urbain et/ou de son image ". (Mayronin, 2015, p.73)

The concept of territorial identity is by no means easy to define. Identity has been the subject of several definitions, but very few researchers have focused on its territorial dimension. To define it, we have drawn on the work of four main authors.

Christophe Alaux approaches the concept of territorial identity from the angle of relationship marketing. In his view, the relationship marketing approach is best suited to the territorial marketing issues of small and medium-sized territories, as he demonstrates the impact that territorial relationships between a city's players can have on the individual territorial identities that are at the root of territorial identity, and distinguishes two levels of territorial identity: an individual level and a territorial level.

At the individual level, identity comprises three dimensions: a cognitive dimension, an affective dimension and a conative dimension.

At the territorial level, identity expresses, according to Christophe Alaux: “l’unité d’un territoire et sa distinction par rapport aux autres. Il s’agit de ce que le territoire est à travers toutes ses composantes telles que son histoire, sa raison d’être, l’offre qu’il propose, sa stratégie…En ce sens, l’identité d’un territoire permet à ce dernier de définir son positionnement stratégique “ (Alaux et al, 2015, p.66). Territorial identity is therefore a question of relationships and results from the links between individual and social identity (Alaux, 2015) or, as Christophe Alaux puts it so clearly: “ce sont les identités territoriales individuelles qui permettent l’émergence d’une identité territoriale “ (Alaux et al, 2015, p.65). Whether at the individual or social level, relationships are a prerequisite for the construction of territorial identity. This is where Alaux's relationship marketing paradigm comes into its own. Indeed, relationship marketing as Alaux defines it constitutes a device for managing the relationship between the territory and its users, “le marketing relationnel est en effet un processus continu qui se concentre sur une création de valeur par le biais des relations avec les groupes de parties prenantes “. (Alaux et al, 2015, p.67)

Benoit Mayronin, approaches the question of territorial identity from a different angle; it seems to be inscribed in the geography and history of the territory and is thus distinguished from image, which according to the same author “est la somme des croyances, des idées et des impressions que l’on se forge à son propos “. (Mayronin, 2015, p.74)

Identity is therefore _always according to Benoit Mayronin_ based on two components, one spatial (morphology, climate, situation) and the other temporal. This definition echoes that of Michel Thiollière, Senator and Mayor of Saint Etienne: “quand vous êtes à Saint Etienne, vous n’êtes pas dans une autre ville, chaque ville à son identité, il y a quelque chose d’un peu magique qui produit cette identité, qui se retrouve sans doute au croisement du temps et de l’espace, donc de l’histoire du lieu “. (Quoted by Mayronin, 2015, p.74).

This definition partially overlaps with that of Rachid Amirou. Indeed, in Amirou's understanding, identity is defined as “la conjugaison d’image, d’imageries, et d’un imaginaire “ (Amirou et al, 2011, p.87), three concepts that he links to two visions of travel, namely the “traditional vision”, which he describes as modern, and the “postmodern vision”, where the city is defined in terms of its idea of itself (chosen positioning) and not in terms of what it has to offer (monuments, natural resources, climate...). (Amirou, 2011)

So, according to Amirou, a territory's identity is not limited to its characteristic features, but goes far beyond them: it is both real and virtual. He thus opposes the commonly accepted idea that identity is a fixed fact inscribed in the genes of the territory, which is also made up of symbolic imagination referring “à la mémoire d’un lieu, à son pouvoir d’évocation et aux associations d’idées qu’il suscite “ (Amirou et al, 2011, p.87). That said, a territory's identity can be shaped to meet market needs, and sometimes even created from scratch. In short, it's up to towns and territories to choose their strategic positioning, either by opting for a “modern discourse”, highlighting the territory's assets (monuments, climate...), or by focusing their communication strategy on a “post-modern” discourse (understood, here, in the sense that Rachid Amirou gives to it, namely the imaginary or image that a territory conveys of itself and which meets a certain consumption need of the potential tourist). In this case, travel would be an object of consumption. “Se rapprocher des attentes des clients et faire évoluer l’identité que les touristes ont des villes “ (Amirou, 2011, p.87) thus becomes a necessity.

A third option is to reconcile “modern and postmodern” discourse, which would give rise to multiple identities. Paris is particularly illustrative of this scenario: to reconcile modernity and postmodernity, Paris implements two strategies, combining “classical imagery” (capital of gastronomy and museums) and “symbolic imaginary”, by presenting itself as a party city and thus attempting to modify its image as a sleepy capital of art and gastronomy, thus mixing desired and subdued tradition (Amirou, 2011). So, according to Amirou, in addition to being

an immutable fact inscribed in the genes of the territory, identity is also a construct, the result of communication policies designed to manufacture the identity of territories from scratch.

Amirou's definition seems to offer an alternative to small territories suffering from an identity deficit, as is the case with the city of Larache. Having undergone several mutations due to migratory flows, the latter has ended up losing its identity, going from a city strongly marked by a Moorish heritage, to a refuge city to which thousands of migrant's flock, and where shantytowns and illegal camps multiply. Given the false nature of identity and the multiplicity of strategies designed to promote the area, the question arises as to what image should be conveyed to potential tourists.

In an attempt to grasp the link between identity and territorial development, Hervé Thouément and Erwan Charles highlight the complex nature of territorial identity, which can only be grasped through the interweaving of four major structuring elements:

- The sense of belonging, which is primarily subjective and individual. Culture (in Malinowski's sense: geography, history, customs, knowledge, know-how, heritage, etc.), reflecting an objective, collective approach.
- Yesterday's collective mobilization, its various forms and its relevance to today's territory.
- The view from outside the territory, made up of prejudice, apprehension, distance and real knowledge of the territory under consideration. (Thouément et al, 2011, p.22)

At first glance, we can see a certain overlap with the previous definitions. Highlighting the complexity of the notion, Thouément and Erwan emphasize the objective, unchanging nature of identity (drawing its sources from culture, a fact inscribed in the territory's DNA), as well as its subjective nature resulting from representations constructed by actors inside and outside the territory.

Territorial identity is therefore a difficult concept to define, as it depends on the meaning given to it by those who have already had a particular link with the area. This external view of the area helps to shape its identity, leading to changes that can sometimes affect its image and attractiveness to tourists. Territorial identity has the characteristic of being both fixed and dynamic, organized around a central core that constitutes its essence (unchanging features resistant to change), to which is grafted a peripheral system that, for its part, is evolving and largely dependent on context, and it is in this way that we define it: it is both objective and subjective, fixed and evolving, a given inscribed in the history of the area and the result of a construction emanating from representations of the territory.

We therefore intend to think of territorial identity in terms of the social representations associated with it. It should be noted that, from a marketing perspective, the territorial brand is seen as a tool for formalizing identity and facilitating its dissemination. This brings us to the concept of the territory brand.

2.2. Territorial branding

Many authors have defined the concept of the brand, but Géraldine Michel's definition is particularly interesting insofar as it emphasizes the concept's evolution over time:

> Historiquement, pour l'entreprise, la marque servait à garantir l'origine et à défendre la propriété ; elle désignait ‘'ma porterie dans le four commun, ma vache dans le troupeau. Avec la révolution industrielle et la fin des produits vendu en vrac, on est passé du ‘'c'est à moi'' au ‘'c'est pour vous'' : c'est la naissance de la marque commerciale. Dans les années 1920, la marque devient progressivement un repère mental sur un marché. Puis dans les années 1970, les entreprises commencent à prendre conscience de sa valeur entant qu'actif incorporel générant du revenu. Aujourd'hui, la marque est un enjeu stratégique

> majeur pour l'entreprise, elle devient réciproque : à travers sa marque, l'organisation s'engage, mais elle engage aussi toutes les parties prenantes envers sa marque en interne et en externe. (Géraldine, 2013, p.63)

It can serve to differentiate, identify or create meaning and value; it's a kind of landmark for consumers, guiding them by differentiating products and services. It is a guarantee of a certain level of quality and performance.

The brand creates meaning and value, "elle donne du sens à l'action et facilite l'identification. Dès lors que l'on considère la marque comme porteuse de sens, elle revêt une dimension stratégique" (Géraldine, 2017, p.03), and it's this dimension that interests us in the territorial context. Indeed, because of growing competition and the opening up of economies and territories, the latter are engaged in marketing strategies aimed at increasing competitiveness and attractiveness. In this context, the territorial brand is seen as both a value-creating resource and a lever for territorial development. But to create value, it must be adapted to the specific characteristics of the territory. Indeed, "le territoire est une construction complexe et multidimensionnelle, qui nécessite d'adapter les stratégies marketing selon ses caractéristiques". (Alaux et al, 2015, p.61)

Our review of the literature has enabled us to identify a number of characteristics specific to the territory brand.

According to Chanoux and Serval "le concept de marque doit être adapté au contexte des territoires car les produits et les services d'une ville ne peuvent pas être comparés à ceux des marques commerciale". (Quoted in Alaux et al, 2015, p.63)

Alaux agrees, considering that the complexity of the territory makes it difficult for target audiences to evaluate it, which in turn has an impact on the decision-making process, which consequently becomes longer and more complex compared to the simple purchase of a product or service (C.Alaux, 2015), due to the singularity of the territorial product whose "les caractéristiques historiques et géographiques influent fortement sur la stratégie de marque"(Alaux et al, 2015, p.63).

A second difference lies in the objectives pursued by each organization. While companies pursue mercantile objectives, territories cannot limit themselves to this logic, these are turned towards "objectifs d'intérêt général et de bien être des parties prenantes territoriales". (Alaux et al, 2015, p.63)

A third difference, again according to Alaux, between commercial brands and territorial brands lies in their respective market positioning. A territory is circumscribed within a physical space bounded by borders, so it becomes more difficult :

> d'opérer un positionnement comme une entreprise créerait un nouveau produit ou une nouvelle marque et ce, d'autant plus que le nom du territoire n'est pas possédé par une entité unique, mais par une pluralité d'acteurs territoriaux hétérogènes qui construisent son identité et influent sur l'image qu'il véhicule. (Alaux et al, 2015, p.63).

Developing a territorial brand therefore requires a collective logic involving several stakeholders.

In the same vein Rochette asserts that: "la marque territoire en tant que marque collective et partagée est un construit social, elle implique de nombreux acteurs à ce titre elle peut être appréhendée comme action collective, une action organisée". (Rochette et al, 2016, p.92). The involvement of several actors in the process of developing the territorial brand, far from converging efforts in a single direction, tends to generate tensions between the various stakeholders. Indeed, "en tant qu'objet co-construit, la marque implique de nombreux acteurs partageant une préoccupation commune" (Rochette et al, 2016, p.92), and therefore poses the

problem of cooperation; the motivations of the actors in charge of the brand therefore tend to clash or even oppose each other. The company tends to converge efforts towards a common goal, while the territory is subject to confrontation between multiple actors.

A fifth difference stemming directly from the previous one concerns the degree of autonomy enjoyed by local authorities. Companies enjoy a certain degree of latitude in the decisions they take, whereas local authorities are dependent on central administrative authorities, who may be led to oppose the territorial branding project if it is deemed inappropriate or does not meet their expectations. Thus, after examining the specific features of the territorial brand, we can safely say that it is indeed a complex project implemented in an equally complex situation, and whose implementation requires collective mobilization and coordination of efforts.

At this stage of the discussion, a question arises: to what extent does a territorial brand contribute to positioning and promoting a territory, and how useful is it?

An examination of the concept of brand identity through the literature review will enable us to provide some answers to this question.

The literature review points to three conceptions of brand identity:

- Brand identity limited to visible signs.
- Brand identity confused with the nature of the product.
- Brand identity as a transmitter function in brand communication.

2.2.1. Brand identity limited to visible signs

In this vision of brand identity, the emphasis is on signs and their meanings, an understanding echoed in the legal definition of the term:

> une marque est la dénomination où le signe de représentation graphique ou sonore qui caractérise l'activité économique d'une personne ou d'une entreprise […] elle a pour fonction de garantir au consommateur l'identité d'origine du produit désigné par la marque… (legal dictionary).

In this view, trademark work is limited to the search for a name or the development of a logo. A rather simplistic definition that fails to highlight the strategic dimension of the brand.

2.2.2. Brand identity confused with the nature of the product

In this case, brand identity is closely linked to a given product or service, which sometimes leads to confusion between the brand and the product. This definition is very restrictive and cannot be applied to territories. Indeed, associating the territory with just one of its attributes could lead to the neglect of others, as the territory is made up of a fairly rich and diversified offering.

A territory brand must be all-encompassing, and not overlook any tangible or intangible feature of the territory. This is all the more true when the territory-product pre-exists the brand, without forgetting that in the case of a territory brand, the identity is inscribed in the genes of the territory - it's just a matter of enhancing it; unlike a product brand whose identity is created from scratch. Thus, to consider a territory brand's identity from the angle of one of its characteristics, to the detriment of the others, is to reduce its appeal and damage its brand image.

2.2.3. Brand identity as a transmitter in brand communication with consumers

"L'identité de la marque peut être comprise comme l'ensemble des messages émis par une organisation à travers sa marque" (Géraldine,2013, p.15). A definition inspired by the classic communication schema. In our case, if we consider the above, and try to apply this definition to our study, we can easily obtain the following diagram:

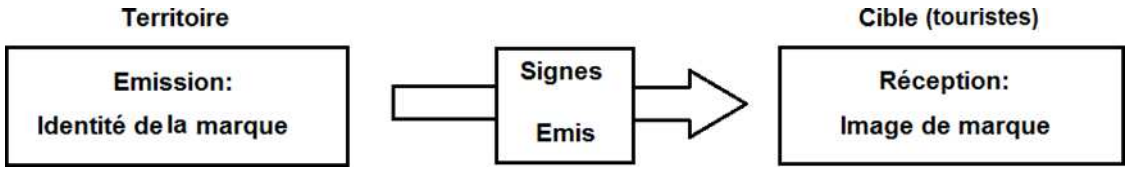

Figure 1. Inspired by Jakobson's diagram of communication

This raises the question of the role that the territory can play as an entity that emits signs conveying a certain identity to shape the target's representations and thus generate a positive brand image.

According to Aaker, brand identity is *un groupe d'associations sélectionnées par l'entreprise émettrice en vue d'être développées. Et opérer une sélection d'associations favorables aux buts poursuivis par l'organisation est l'activité essentielle, constitutive de la stratégie de marque*". (quoted by Géraldine,2013, p.16)

The above definition places a great deal of importance on the issuing entity and the communications issued by it. In a territorial context, this offers the advantage of selecting only those elements that correspond to the desired positioning. However, to function properly, a brand must be built on realities; in other words, the territorial brand should be based on a lived identity, otherwise images that contrast too sharply with reality will contribute to the failure of the communication campaign. This brings us to the question of the integration and appropriation of the brand's identity by the population, as the bearers of the lived identity, because it must be recognized that the inhabitants are the brand's first ambassadors. The more people are involved in the creation process, the stronger the integration of the brand's identity.

An imposed brand identity can lead people to minimize their identification with and attachment to the region, which can influence the image projected to the outside world. The more the population is involved in the brand development process, the more the image relayed to the outside world is enhanced.

In this way, the brand not only helps to promote the area by differentiating it from the competition, but also contributes to the identification of local residents with their living space, by arousing pride and attachment. As Mervi Ilmounem points out:

> Il n'existe pas de définition universelle du terme branding ou brand (marque) en gestion urbaine. En général, l'objectif du branding est de pouvoir distinguer un bien d'un autre. Le branding peut être un outil générateur du sentiment d'appartenance ou d'identité locale comme le souligne Hans Monmaas : Brands enable us more easily to read each other and our environment of palces and products… Seen in this way brands are not a source of pure differenciation, but also of identification, recognition, continuity and collectivity "(B. Monmaas, Le branding ne permet pas seulement de distinguer un lieu de l'autre, de le spécifier de par ses caractéristiques, mais l'aide aussi à définir le type de ville ou région auquel nous désirerons nous identifier (Ministère de l'écologie, de l'énergie, du développement et de l'aménagement du territoire, 2007)

So, after examining a few definitions of the brand, we can now affirm that identity is a prerequisite for the construction of the territory brand, or even the foundation on which it rests. Moreover, to raise the question of brand identity is to raise the problem of how to formalize it. To ensure its longevity, a brand must be based on a certain number of specific traits.

So what are the foundations of brand identity, and how does it translate? The literature is not silent on this point: the prisms of Aaker and Kapferer propose models of brand representation that can serve as a reference in formalizing the essential traits that need to be

associated with the brand. But to what extent are these models applicable to the territory brand? An examination of the above-mentioned models will provide some answers.

Aaker's identity system:

The brand personality model was developed in 1995 by David Aaker. This identity system is made up of 12 dimensions that fall into four categories: the brand as product, the brand as organization, the brand as person and the brand as symbol. These different dimensions constitute the very essence of the brand.

The advantage of Aaker's model is that it formalizes brand identity in a very precise way, making it easier to appropriate. The disadvantage, however, is that it is essentially based on the "brand/product" pairing, which makes it difficult to transpose to the territory.

The Kapferer prism:

Introduced by Jean Noel Kapferer in 1992, the identity prism is considered to be the first analytical tool designed to approach the field of brand identity. It is a descriptive model in 06 dimensions positioned around a prism.

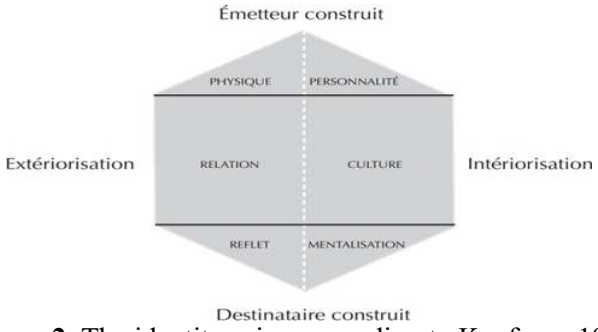

Figure 2. The identity prism according to Kapferer, 1992

Each element of the prism represents a dimension of the brand. Let's take a look at the different elements that make up the prism:

a) The physical: corresponds to the brand's physical characteristics (e.g. logo), and also evokes what immediately comes to mind when the consumer thinks of the brand.
b) Personality: refers to the character of the brand.
c) Relationship: defines the type of bond the brand has with the consumer.
d) Culture: refers to the brand's system of values, knowledge and beliefs, the culture of the country where the brand has developed.
e) Reflection: refers to the image that brand users project to non-customers.
f) Brand mentalization: corresponds to the consumer's idea of himself when using the product.

Unlike the model proposed by Aaker, Kapferer's identity prism does not focus solely on product characteristics but enables a systematic study that takes into account the complexity inherent in brand identity. With this tool, Kapferer aims to clearly position a brand by characterizing it in a singular way.

It should be noted that, when applied to territories, this model cannot be transposed in its entirety, and some adaptations are necessary due to the specific nature of the "product-territory". We will therefore retain only those elements of this model that can be adapted to the territory: personality, brand culture and physical elements of recognition.

Personality refers to the character of the territory. All the features that distinguish a locality.

Brand culture refers to heritage and roots; Larache, for example, has a strong Moorish heritage.

The physical elements of recognition refer to natural resources (mountains, sea, river...) and cultural heritage (archaeological sites, monuments, gastronomy...).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical frame of reference

Our work falls within the scope of research aimed at understanding the mechanisms involved in the perception of territorial brand image. This has led us to reflect on the question of territorial identity, which is, in our view, an antecedent to image and a lever of tourist attractiveness.

Identity, as we have defined it above, is a given inscribed in the genes of the territory and is also the result of the important contribution of the other, as an actor participating in the process of constructing territorial identity. The theory of social representations is therefore a possible theoretical approach to the question of identity. Recourse to a reference theory is all the more essential as it enables us to understand the relationships between phenomena.

Alex Mucchielli rightly points out that

> La recherche constructiviste doit faire appel à un cadre de référence théorique large et souple qui est vu comme une carte provisoire du territoire, composée de connaissances générales à propos du phénomène qu'il s'apprête à étudier, ainsi que des repères interprétatifs. (quoted by Paquette, 2007, p.4)

This frame of reference serves as a guide for reading and interpreting the results of the phenomena studied.

Using the structural approach (core theory) of the theory of social representations, we aim to identify the territory's identity as perceived by two groups of individuals: residents and potential tourists, as actors who contribute to the city's symbolic imaginary. More specifically, the aim is to identify the representations constructed by these two types of actors, who, through their perceptions and the meaning they attribute to the area, shape its identity. We therefore intend to consider territorial identity, the foundation of brand strategy, through the intermediary of the social representations associated with it.

A theoretical frame of reference built around the notion of social representations plays several roles in the realization of this research work. It will be used to identify lived identity and perceived identity, and will also serve as the basis for an identity analysis of the area under study, enabling us to assess the quality of marketing communications about Larache, and to establish the city's identity profile at a later stage.

It should be noted that we will approach the question of social representations of the area under study (Larache) through the theory of the central core. Abric was the first to inaugurate this line of research, also known as the Aix-en-Provence school of social representations.

According to Abric, the central core of a representation is the element or set of elements that give it meaning and continuity. By definition, it is stable and resistant to change.

The first empirical study to demonstrate the existence of the central core is the social representation of the craftsman. Abric states that:

> Cette mise en évidence des représentations sociales apparait comme essentielle dans la perspective d'élaboration d'actions visant à promouvoir l'artisan et le produit artisanal en France. En effet, c'est en fonctions de ces représentations que la population instaure une relation positive ou négative avec l'artisan, développe un comportement d'achat ou de rejet du produit artisanal, s'intéresse

> ou non aux problèmes de la situation sociale et économique de l'artisan, soutient ou non ses revendications, etc. (Gaymard, 2021, p.80)

In the same way as for the artisan's trade, the links that residents and potential tourists establish with the area help to shape the nature of their relationship with it, and it is according to this relationship that favorable or unfavorable behaviors will be developed towards it. Thus, knowing the social representations of the various social actors is a necessary prerequisite for developing a brand strategy, and without it, communication actions would be perceived as completely detached from reality and without a precise objective.

To speak of social representations is to determine the type of method that can be used to identify them. There are, of course, several methods, not all of which will be developed here.

The Context Independence Test (CIT) is the method we have opted for to gain access to the structure of the representation (central core \ peripheral system). Although it enables us to formulate hypotheses of centrality, it does not give us access to the content of the representation under study, hence the need to use the free evocation method, directly inspired by the work of P. Vergès.

More schematically, this involves asking a group of residents to produce a list of all the words or expressions they associate with the identity of Larache.

The main aim of free evocation is to make

> Apparaître les dimensions latentes qui structurent l'univers sémantique spécifique des représentations étudiées, les associations libres permettent d'accéder aux noyaux figuratifs de la représentation Elles sont plus aptes à sonder les noyaux structurels latents des représentations sociales, tandis que des techniques plus structurées, comme le questionnaire, permettraient de relever des dimensions plus périphériques des représentations sociales. (Abric, 2005, p. 63)

Several characteristic elements of Larache's identity emerged from this experiment: the Loukous River, the Atlantic Ocean, the Lixus archaeological site, gastronomy, saltworks, red fruits, fish, the forest, art festivals, the old medina and Hispano-Moorish fabric.

Simply identifying the content of the representation is not enough: we need to analyze its structure and formulate hypotheses as to the centrality of certain elements, and this is where the context-independence test comes in.

The aim of this technique is to find out whether or not the individuals surveyed consider an element to be systematically linked to the object of the representation under study. More precisely, the aim is to highlight the elements inherent in the central core.

For example, to test the structural status of the "Loukous River" element in the representation of Larache's identity, we'll ask the individuals making up our survey sample (residents, potential tourists) to situate the element in question on a value scale of 1 to 7. To determine the structural status of the above-mentioned elements, we will use the following formula: In your opinion, the city of Larache, as a tourist destination, is always and in all cases associated with X [characteristic]. In this way, validation of the item as a characteristic element of the central core of the representation is based on the degree of association of this characteristic with the object. The most central elements of the representation are those assigned the values 1, 2 and 3, below which the element is considered peripheral. Highlighting these two zones of the representation is necessary to define the identity of the region (Larache) as perceived by residents and tourists alike, the aim being to judge the centrality of the elements of the communication, the more the central elements are targeted by the marketing communication, the more the territory's identity is emphasized and the less they are targeted, the more the identity is blurred, which will lead us to confirm or refute our main research

hypothesis that Larache suffers from an identity problem due to the ineffectiveness of the communication actions carried out, or the lack of them.

3.2. Data Collection Method

Gathering information is an essential dimension of empirical work; gathering information means determining the instrument or instruments for data collection. To implement this study, we conducted a field survey. Several questionnaires and interviews with communication managers, potential tourists and residents were carried out.

It should be noted that during the course of our investigation we carried out two questionnaires; the first aimed to study the image and reputation of Larache in order to assess how it was perceived by potential tourists and to measure the attractiveness of the land constituting the object of our study, while the second aimed to identify the structure of representations. We also conducted a number of interviews to ensure that the assumptions underlying our research were well-founded.

3.2.1. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is one of the techniques used to gain access to the information essential to the research. In the present study, the choice of the questionnaire as a data collection tool is by no means arbitrary; it aims, through questions designed to assess the city's image and reputation, to verify the validity of the hypotheses on which our research is based.

The questionnaire we have devised is based on 17 questions submitted to potential tourists, the aim of which is to study their perception of the city and its degree of notoriety.

We began the questionnaire with simple, closed-ended questions, first asking respondents to fill in questions relating to gender and age group.

It should be noted that the answers the respondent is asked to provide are voluntarily anonymous, since anonymity enables us to gain the respondent's trust and obtain reliable answers.

The remainder of the questions are divided into four categories: the first aims to study the city's reputation, the second to determine consumers' image and perception of the area, the third to evaluate the communication initiatives deployed by the municipality and the regional tourist board, and the fourth to gauge respondents' opinions on communication about Larache.

3.2.2. The Interview

In view of our epistemological positioning and our research object, we conducted interviews with managers working for the municipality of Larache and the regional tourism board. Interviews offer the advantage of “d’obtenir des informations, qui ne se trouvent nulle part ailleurs, auprès de personnes ayant été le plus souvent témoins ou acteurs d’événements sur lesquels porte la recherche” (Marce and Pétry, 2000, p.91).

We opted for the semi-structured interview, which offers several advantages: it enables us to gather a large amount of information, to explore a specific question in greater depth, to react to the interviewee's answers and to fine-tune the research objectives.

The interviews were conducted with three different players who were able to provide us with information that would shed light on our problem:

- The person in charge of monitoring the Larache municipality's action plan, to find out what role communication plays in the municipality's tourism policy.
- The head of communications at the regional tourism board, to find out how Larache fits into the board's marketing and communications strategy, how it is positioned and what means are used to promote it.
- The curator of the archaeological site lixus to get an idea of what's being done in terms of heritage promotion.

In order to establish a climate of trust, we were careful to adopt a benevolent attitude, taking care to explain to our interviewers the context in which this research is being carried out, as well as the underlying objectives.

The interview consists mainly of open-ended questions, to encourage the interviewee's expression and gather as much information as possible.

We kept the interview to a maximum of 30 minutes, to avoid tiring or boring the interviewer. Through these data collection methods, we aim to verify the validity of our research hypotheses. The aim is to measure the attractiveness of the area covered by our study, and to analyze consumer perceptions and representations of Larache as a tourist destination.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Tourist Appeal

4.1.1. Awareness

The first part of our questionnaire focuses on the question of Larache's attractiveness as a tourist destination. The main questions aim to elicit responses on the city's reputation and that of its cultural and natural heritage.

We hypothesize that Larache suffers from a lack of notoriety, which impacts on its attractiveness to tourists; we have therefore asked several questions aimed at measuring its degree of notoriety. Through these questions, we seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication actions undertaken by the municipality and the regional tourism board.

We began by asking our respondents to name four towns in the north of France. Our aim with this question was to measure spontaneous awareness of the town, the frequency of appearance of the desired item being an index of awareness. The item appears in 62% of responses, indicating a high level of awareness, although this result is tempered by the rank of appearance of the item “Larache”. 23% of the population put it in 3rd position, while 36% put it in 4th position, for a total percentage of 59%. We deduce that, compared with other cities in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al-Hoceima region, Larache's reputation remains fairly limited. Our research hypothesis is thus confirmed: Larache suffers from a lack of awareness.

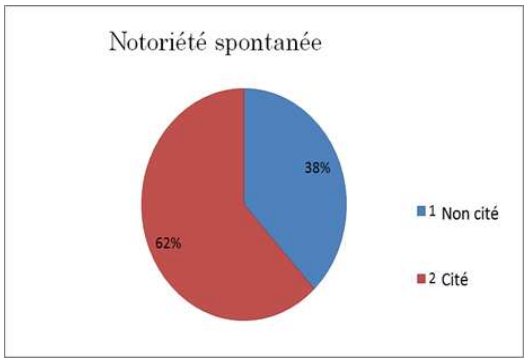

Figure 3. Spontaneous awareness of Larache

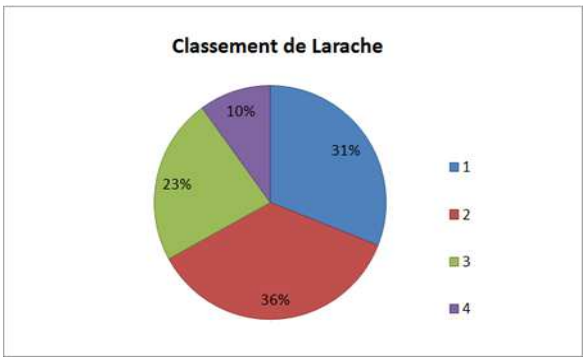

Figure 4. Ranking of “Larache” item appearances

4.2. Cultural and Natural Heritage

4.2.1. The Lixus Archaeological Site

The popularity of a tourist destination can also be measured by the popularity of its cultural and natural heritage. We asked our respondents, in a closed question, to tell us if they were aware of the existence of the Lixus archaeological site dating from the 8th century BC. The following graph summarizes the different responses in terms of percentages.

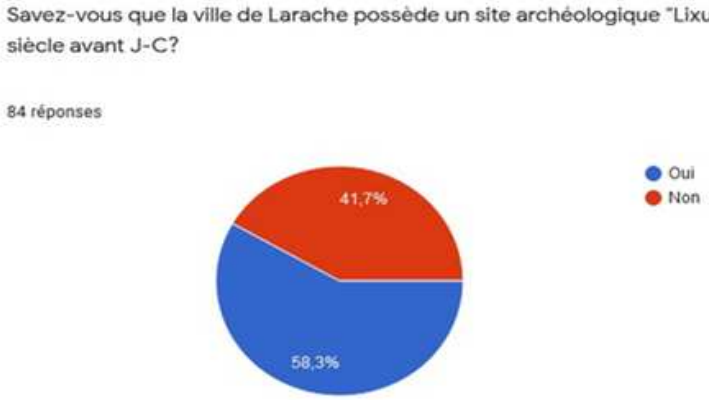

Figure 5. Awareness of the Lixus archaeological site

58.3% said they were aware of the site, while 41.7% said they were not. It's worth noting that the percentages are almost equally divided between those who know about the site and those who don't. This result can be explained by the absence of a communication strategy to promote the city's heritage potential.

During our interview with the curator of the Lixus archaeological site, he made no secret of the absence of a communication strategy, and when we asked him about the efforts made in this direction by the tourist office, he replied that no communication action had been undertaken to date, going so far as to deplore the absence of a communication department within the central management.

"La communication n'est pas de mon ressort, c'est l'office du tourisme qui doit se charger de cela, mais malheureusement au Maroc on n'est pas encore conscient du rôle important que peut jouer la communication dans la promotion du patrimoine. La gestion des sites archéologiques reste très classique ; l'état devrait penser à les déléguer au secteur privé ".

This result is corroborated by the opinions of our respondents. In fact, when asked whether they thought the Larache municipality and the regional tourist board communicated sufficiently about the site, 94% of respondents said they did not.

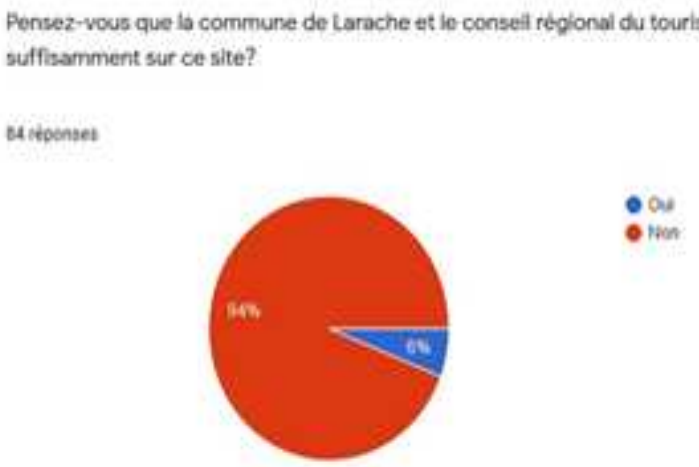

Figure 6. Low level of marketing for the Lixus archaeological site

4.2.2. Historical Monuments

The diversity and richness of Larache's cultural heritage is an established fact. It is an important element that should be taken into consideration when developing a brand strategy;

in other words, it is the foundation on which the brand is built. A region would gain in notoriety by communicating on this essential component of culture.

We therefore wanted to find out from our respondents the level of awareness of historic monuments.

The question we asked was a closed one, with two possible answers (yes/no). The question is: Do you know, even if only by name, some of the historic monuments in the city of Larache?

Responses were equally divided. 42 of our respondents, or a percentage of 50%, claim to know something about the city's historic monuments, while the other half (42) claim not to.

Once again, we believe this is due to the absence of an effective communication strategy. This opinion is also shared by our respondents: out of 84 people surveyed, 70 (83.3%) think that Larache does not communicate enough about its cultural and natural heritage via print media. The graph below summarizes the different observations of the respondents in percentage terms.

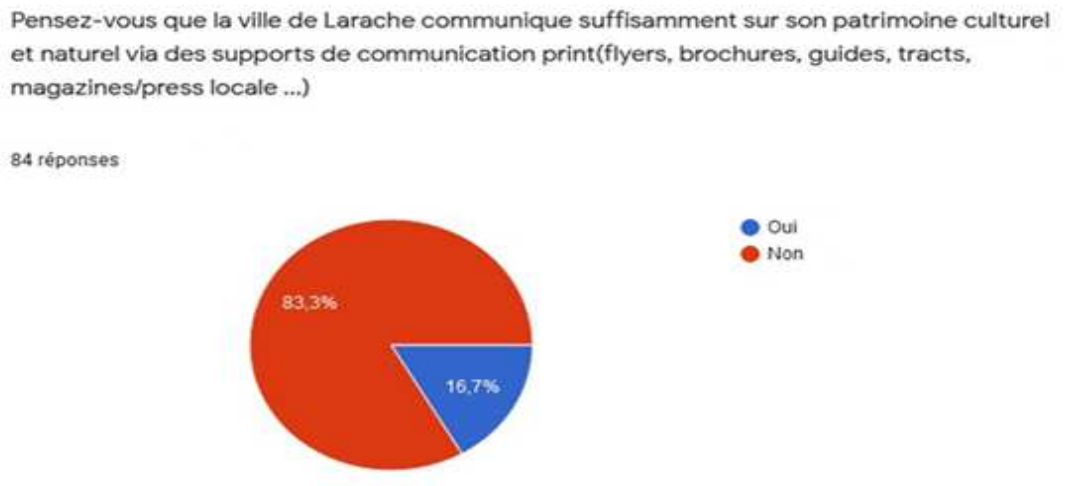

Figure 7. Diagram illustrating Larache's low level of tourism promotion

4.2.3. Loukous River

Natural resources are an important dimension of a region's tourist appeal, at least according to Benoit Mayronin, who believes that "a region's morphology and location are natural elements that already strongly influence its identity and positioning possibilities" (Mayronin,2015 p.40).

Because of its historical past, the Loukous River remains one of the city's flagship natural features.

The river is considered by the locals to be closely linked to Larache's identity.

"The Loukous River is to the Larachoix what the Nile is to the Egyptians," asserts the president of the Al-kazabah association for the promotion of cultural heritage. Despite its importance to the locals, the Loukous remains unknown to potential tourists. To the question "Do you know that Larache has one of the largest rivers in the kingdom?", 37 of our respondents (44%) replied in the negative, and if they chose "no", we asked them to specify the reasons for their ignorance, choosing between two response options: (disinterest/lack of communication). 80.3% of respondents said they were unaware of the river's existence due to a lack of communication. The following pie charts illustrate the results.



Figure 8. Diagram illustrating the low level of tourist promotion of Larache's natural assets

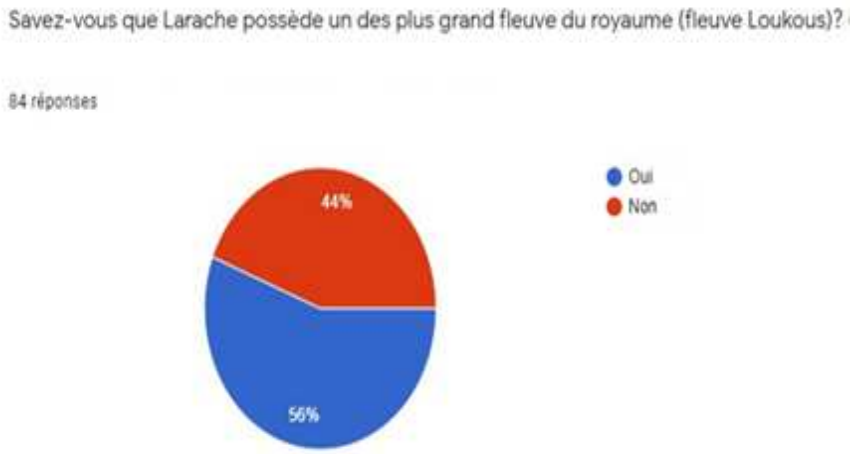

Figure 9. Awareness of Larache's natural assets

4.3. Cultural Events

Another factor conditioning the attractiveness of a region and having an impact on its image is cultural events. Through this variable, we wish to evaluate the notoriety of these events. The graph below shows the various events held in Larache and the percentages associated with them.

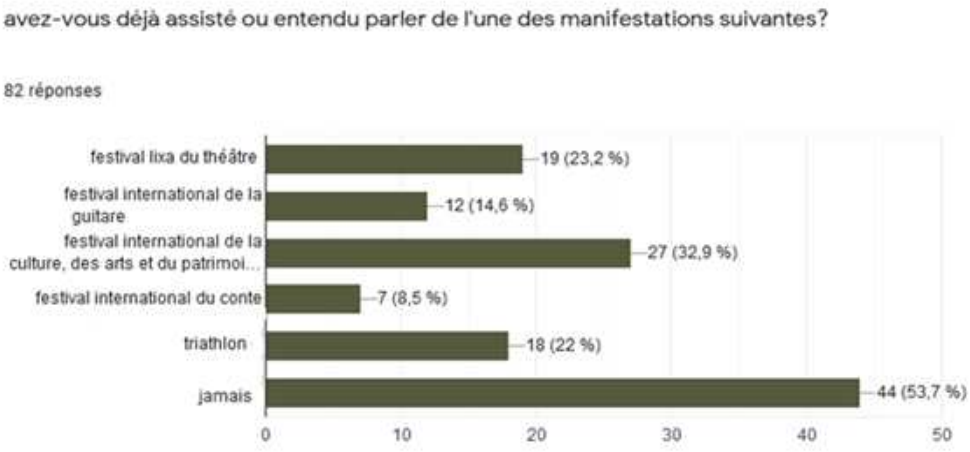

Figure 10. Larache's main cultural and artistic events and public participation rates

As the graph shows, 53.7% of respondents said they had never attended or heard of any of these cultural events; this is in line with the results associated with the previous variables. During our interview with the person in charge of monitoring the Larache municipality's action plan, he stated that: “C’est les associations qui se chargent de l’organisation de ces manifestations, malheureusement elles manquent terriblement de compétences en matière de communication. La communication ou le marketing en général n’ont jamais été notre priorité. Aujourd’hui et face au fléchissement touristique que connait Larache nous sommes plus que jamais conscient de son utilité. Larache a un grand potentiel il suffit juste de la promouvoir ”.

The variables analyzed above aim to assess the attractiveness of the city of Larache. The choice of variables corresponds to the determinants of attractiveness identified by literature dedicated to this field. This analysis shows that Larache suffers from a lack of notoriety due to the absence of a communication strategy capable of promoting it. This finding was confirmed by all those involved in the interviews, confirming our research hypothesis that the absence of a communication strategy capable of consolidating and promoting the city's identity could be one of the reasons for the deterioration of Larache's tourism sector.

4.4. Image

4.4.1. Visiting Larache

The image conveyed by a given territory is an essential determinant of its attractiveness to tourists, which is why we wanted to sound out our respondents' opinions on their image of Larache as a tourist destination.

First of all, we asked our respondents to tell us whether they had ever visited Larache. 76% of the population said they had, while 23% said they had not. At first glance, this suggests that the city of Larache enjoys a good image with potential tourists, especially as 64 out of a total of 84 respondents said they had already visited it. The graph below summarizes the results relating to this question.

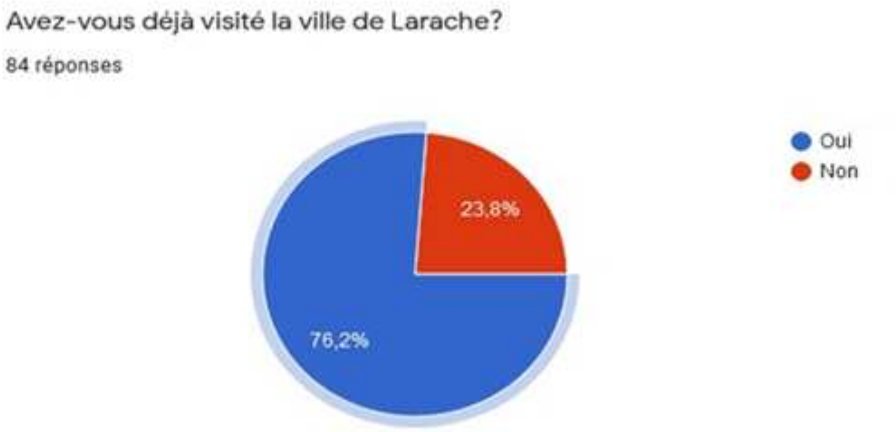

Figure 11. Diagram illustrating the rate of visits to the city of Larache

However, the number of visits is just as important when it comes to assessing a city's image. It can be considered an index of satisfaction.

We therefore asked our respondents to tell us how many times they had visited Larache, and the percentages break down as follows:



Figure 12. Diagram illustrating frequency of visits

We note that the percentage of the population having visited Larache less than 5 times is quite significant, amounting to 64%, broken down as follows 32.8% of respondents visited only once, 21.9% chose the response modality 2 times, while only 9.4% declared having visited Larache three to four times.

Thus, despite a high visit rate (76% of the population surveyed), the number of visits per tourist remains fairly limited, which is indicative of the image that the city conveys to its visitors. A causal link can therefore be established between the image conveyed and the number of visits.

4.4.2. Reason for Visit

The purpose of this variable is to identify the image that potential tourists associate with Larache:

"main destination" or 'stopover destination'. The following graph shows the results in percentage terms.

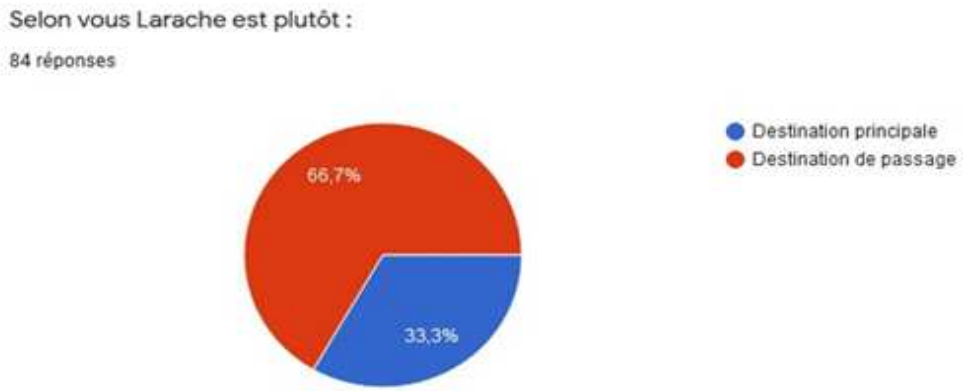

Figure 13. Diagram illustrating how potential tourists view the city of Larache

We can see that 66.7% of the population surveyed consider Larache to be a passing destination, meaning that it is not a major attraction for potential tourists, which may be due to the image it is associated with in their minds. In fact, 55.5% of respondents said they had visited Larache for reasons other than tourism. The graph below summarizes the results.



Figure 14. Diagram illustrating the different reasons for visiting the city of Larache

After examining a number of variables, we can conclude that Larache is far from being the destination of choice for potential tourists. This leads us to question its image and the role of communication in promoting and enhancing the image of the region. We put this question to our respondents, and 94% of them believe that tourism communication can help shape or positively change the image of Larache.



Figure 15. Respondents' opinions on the impact of marketing communication on Larache's image

In the absence of a marketing communication strategy, potential tourists may associate the city with a set of preconceived ideas that do not necessarily reflect reality.

The image of a region is by no means the result of chance, but is built up through a variety of communication initiatives. In other words, territories assert themselves by communicating, and the more a city communicates, the stronger its image. Our hypothesis that Larache's lack of identity has an impact on its image with potential tourists thus seems to be confirmed.

4.5. Marketing Communication

The aim of this section is to sound out respondents' opinions on communication about Larache. We propose to evaluate the communication of two entities: the municipality and the regional tourist board.

It should be noted that the commune of Larache has not yet undertaken any communication action. This information was confirmed to us by the person in charge of monitoring the

communal action plan: “La communication n’a jamais été une priorité pour la commune et je pense que c’est une question de choix politiques avant tout.”

This is why we contacted the head of marketing at the regional tourist board. The aim of our interview was to provide answers to a number of questions:

- Strategic vision;
- Objectives of the communication strategy adopted;
- Larache's place in the region's communication strategy;
- Larache's positioning in relation to other cities in the region;
- Preferred means of communicating Larache's tourism potential;
- Criteria for choosing publications on social networks;
- External partners.

At the end of this interview, which lasted around 45 minutes, our main research hypothesis that the city of Larache suffers from an identity deficit impacting its tourist appeal was confirmed. Indeed, during this exchange, the CRT marketing manager revealed that Larache has no positioning. “Pour être franche avec vous ce sont les membres du conseil qui définissent le plan d’actions annuel, et en tant qu’association nous ne disposons pas de compétences en matière de marketing, moi je ne suis là que pour exécuter le plan d’action. Nous manquons de vision stratégique à long terme. La question du positionnement n’a jamais été discutée lors des réunions”.

In the light of these interviews, we can now assert that the absence of an effective branding strategy could be at the root of the identity deficit from which Larache suffers, and this is also confirmed by the literature review. In fact, a review of this literature highlights the importance of the role that marketing communications can play in enhancing territorial identity, considered by some authors as a prerequisite to image, in a word as the foundation on which a communication strategy is based, or even the differentiating element that enables a territory to position itself by differentiating it from the competition.

We have to admit that, despite the substantial nature of identity, it cannot ensure a region's influence beyond its borders unless it is communicated. Communication is, so to speak, what brings identity to life. Our fieldwork enabled us to empirically verify this hypothesis. During our interview with a local official, he clearly stated that “Larache n’arrive toujours pas à se positionner sur le marché du tourisme, à valoriser son identité, cela est dû à l’absence d’une stratégie de communication. Il faut penser à marketer notre ville si nous voulons que les choses changent”.

The results of the different variables relating to this section corroborate the statements of the various interviewees and support the idea of a blurred identity due to the absence of a branding strategy. Indeed, to the question “Do you think that the municipality and the regional tourist board communicate sufficiently about Larache's cultural and natural heritage?”, 37 of our respondents (44%) chose the response modality “little agree”, while 26.2% opted for the response modality “not at all agree”. The following graph summarizes the results of the processing of the question.

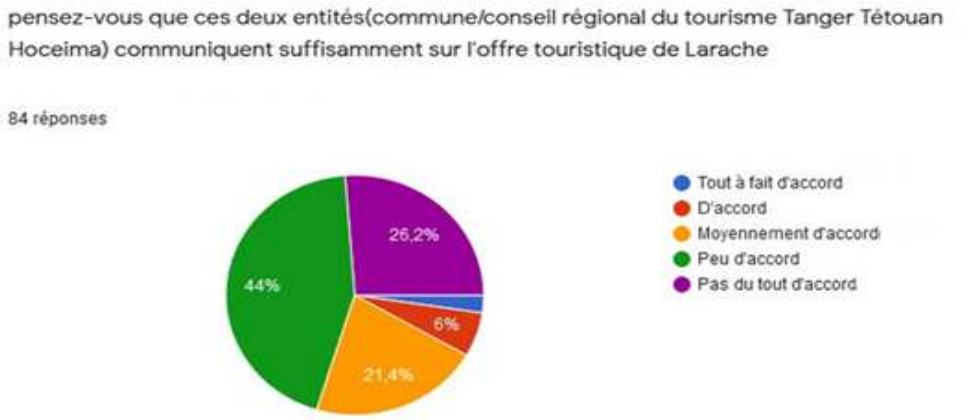

Figure 16. Respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of the communication issued by the commune and the regional tourist board

We then asked them to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the quality of the regional tourist board's publications on social networks. This graph shows the results of the analysis.



Figure 17. Respondents' opinions on the quality of tourism promotion by the regional tourism board

The first observation that stands out is the dominance of the "moderately relevant" response modality, with a percentage of 38.1%, followed by the "not very relevant" response modality, which accounted for 36.9% of responses.

An examination of the regional tourism board's Instagram page helps to explain the reasons for such an assessment. Indeed, publications are limited to a few snapshots taken in different cities in the Tangier-Tetouan-Al-Hoceima region, with no other information to orient tourists, which runs counter to the page's objective. There is also an increasing lack of information aimed at publicizing and promoting heritage resources. The interactive aspect with the public is also neglected, and subscribers' questions often go unanswered, which partly explains the low level of interaction and the low profile of the page.

This observation is confirmed by the results of our questionnaire. Indeed, out of a total of 84 respondents, 78 (92.9%) claimed not to be subscribers to the regional tourism board's Instagram and Facebook pages.

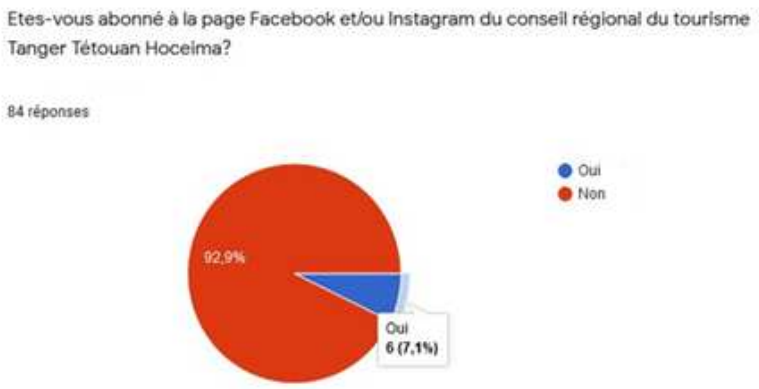

Figure 18. Diagram illustrating the low participation rate on the regional tourism board's facebook and instagram pages

This is all the more surprising given that 64.3% of respondents said they used social networks to search for tourism information.

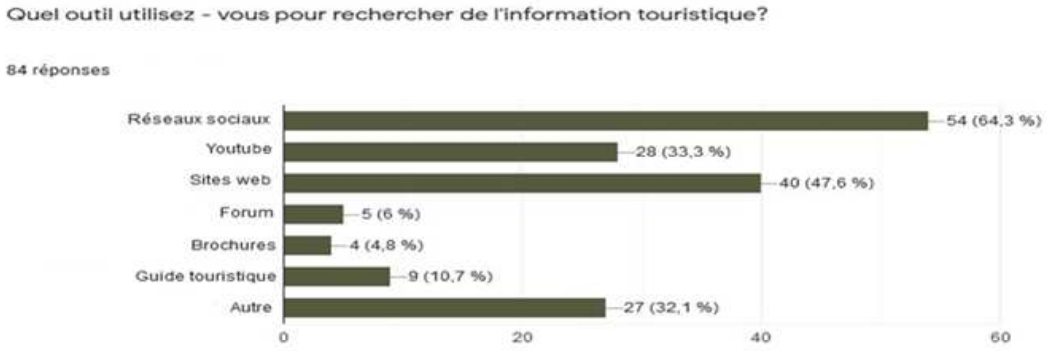

Figure 19. Diagram illustrating the rate of use of marketing communication media

5. STUDY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Data was collected from a sample of 30 residents. The method used (free evocations) consisted in asking them to produce, from an inductive word, a list of all the words or expressions they associate with the identity of Larache. Tourists and residents were then asked, via an online questionnaire, to assess the structural status of the words collected in the first experiment, ranking them on a Likert scale from 1 to 7. In this way, the most central elements of the representation are those assigned values 1, 2 and 3, while those below these values are considered peripheral. The characteristics of the samples selected for this study are as follows:

Table 1. Characteristics of survey samples

	Résidents (n=52)	Touristes (n=52)
Sexe	67,3% hommes 32,7% femmes	55,8% hommes 44,2% femmes
Age	18 à 29: 19,2% 30 à 45: 46,2% + de 50 Ans: 34,6%	18 à 29: 42,3% 30 à 45: 38,5% + de 50 Ans: 19,2%
Niveau d'étude	94,3% niveau universitaire 5,7% niveau secondaire	94,2% niveau universitaire 5,8% niveau secondaire

The analysis shows that social representations differ from one group to another. The core group of residents is made up of the following four items: ocean, fish, lixus, Loukous, while the core group of tourists includes fish, climate, Moorish fabric and ocean.

The table below shows the content of the representation and the rank of appearance of each item. Items in red constitute the core of the representation.

Table 2. Representation content and rank of appearance of each item.

Eléments	Résidents	Touristes
	Rang	Rang
Océan Atlantique	**1**	**3**
Fleuve Loukous	**4**	7
Site Archéologique	**3**	5
Poisson	**2**	**1**
Médina	5	8
Festivals	12	6
Tissu Mauresque	7	**2**
Salines	11	11
Fuits Rouges	10	12
Forêt	8	9
Gastronomie	6	10
Climat	9	**4**

Comparison of the two representations reveals common elements in the central kernels of both representations: "Ocean, fish". The terms "archaeological site lixus" and "Loukous river" are central for residents and peripheral for tourists. It should also be noted that the frequency of occurrences linked to each characteristic is higher for residents - this can be explained by a superior knowledge of the object of the representation, whereas that of tourists is based essentially on stereotypes.

In the light of these results, we can now assess the effectiveness of communication about Larache. This may be due to the ineffectiveness of the communication actions carried out, as confirmed by our results. Communication is considered effective only if it targets the central core of the representation. So, the more the core elements are targeted by the communication, the more the identity is enhanced, and the less they are targeted by the communication, the more the identity is blurred. This partly explains the blurred identity from which Larache suffers, and leads us once again to confirm our research hypothesis that Larache suffers from an identity deficit impacting its tourist appeal.

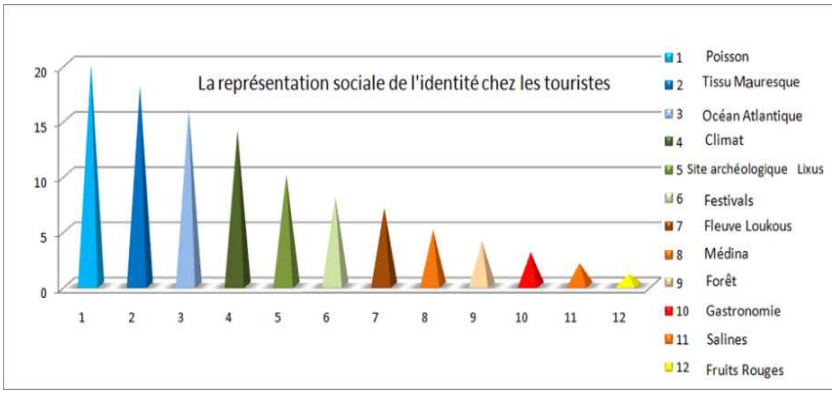

Figure 20. Tourists' social representation of identity

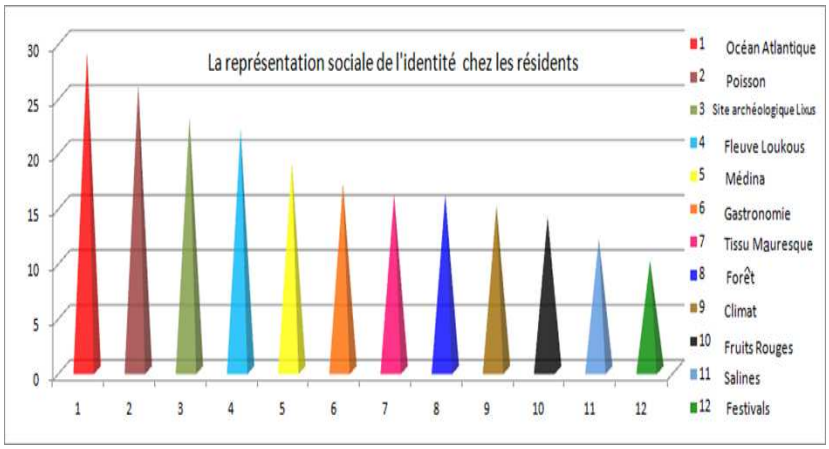

Figure 21. Residents' social representation of identity

It should be noted that the identity perceived by potential tourists differs considerably from that experienced by locals, and is based on preconceptions that in no way reflect the reality of the area. Our findings suggest that this is due to the absence of a marketing strategy capable of driving the town's tourism development and bringing its identity to life. In this context, our primary aim is to change the way the region is perceived.

Indeed, Larache is facing a problem of attractiveness, reflected in a drop in tourist flows; it is now competing with cities which may not have the same potential, but which have succeeded thanks to their communication policies in promoting themselves as tourist destinations. This demonstrates the importance of the role played by communication in the promotion of regional tourism, and leads us to consider regional attractiveness from the angle of marketing communication. This requires a thorough knowledge of the territory under study, hence the importance of the identity analysis we carried out, the results of which are presented above.

The choice of the tool used to carry out the identity analysis (central core theory) enables us to apprehend identity through the perceptions of two key players, namely residents and potential tourists.

Such a choice is all the more pertinent as it enables us to draw up a real profile of the area, based mainly on its intrinsic qualities (natural, historical or cultural heritage). On the one hand, this will highlight the identity of the area under study, providing it with some elements of differentiation, and, on the other hand, compensate for the lack of image and notoriety from which it suffers.

The identity portrait was identified through interviews designed to bring out the constituent elements of territorial identity. Respondents were asked to provide a series of words they associated with Larache's identity, based on a key word.

Several characteristic elements of this identity emerged from these free evocations, namely: the Loukous River, the Atlantic Ocean, the Lixus archaeological site, gastronomy, saltworks, red fruits, fish, the forest, art festivals, the old medina and Hispano-Moorish fabric. Then, using the Context Independence Test (CIT), residents and potential tourists were asked to give their opinion, on a scale of 1 to 7, on the degree of association of each item with the town's tourist identity.

The test results reveal two different representations with two different central cores. Thus, in the representation of locals we find the following central elements: ocean, fish, Lixus archaeological site and Loukous river.

Potential tourists, on the other hand, are represented by four elements: fish, Moorish fabric, ocean and climate. The two diagrams below show the structure of the two representations.

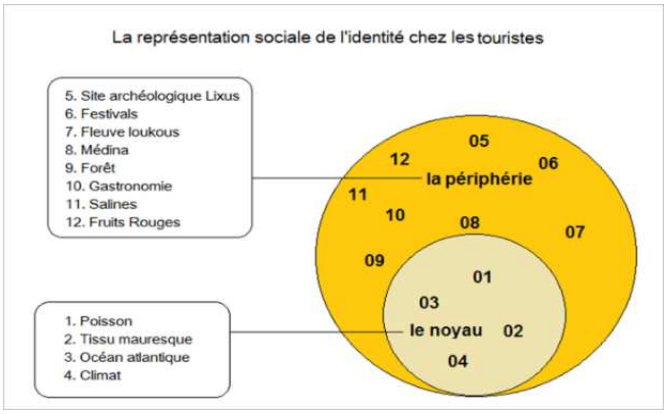

Figure 22. Structure of tourists' social representation of identity

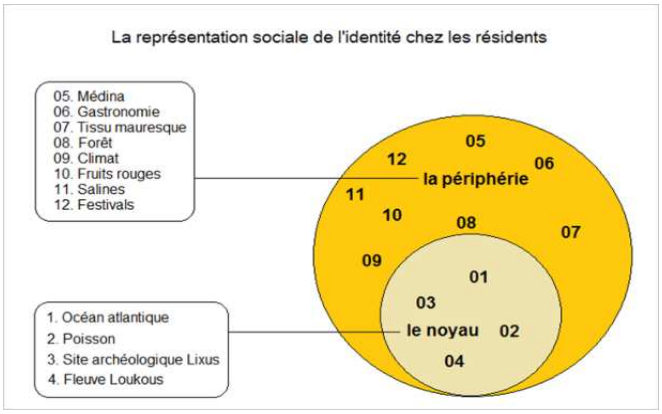

Figure 23. Structure of residents' social representation of identity

Marketing communication should therefore emphasize the city's identity, the only differentiating element capable of conferring a strategic positioning on Larache. However, care must be taken to ensure that the communication reflects the reality of the area, otherwise it will be considered misleading, hence the interest of the identity analysis we have carried out. Indeed, the representations of tourists and residents should serve as the basis for the development of a branding strategy. This will make it possible, on the one hand, to reduce the gap between lived and perceived identity, and on the other hand, to propose a positioning anchored in the territory's reality. Communication actions will therefore need to target the core of both representations in order to overcome the problem of awareness raised during the data analysis.

6. CONCLUSION

Through this study, we set out to explore the impact of territorial branding on the consolidation of territorial identity. In a context marked by increased competition, territorial actors and stakeholders are engaging in territorial development dynamics.

In this context, territorial marketing is proving to be a real development lever and a good alternative for territories lacking in attractiveness. Building a positive image and developing brand awareness remain the fundamental challenges of territorial marketing.

The aim of our research was to understand the role played by the territory brand in developing a locality's tourist appeal. At the end of this study, we can affirm that territorial marketing, or what is commonly referred to as “territorial branding”, contributes significantly to a territory's appeal beyond its borders.

The interviews we conducted, as well as the results of the quantitative study, confirm the existence of a causal link between brand communication and tourist appeal.

Furthermore, Larache's identity deficit and low profile, which are partly due to the absence of a branding strategy capable of promoting the city's tourism potential, leads us to recognize the importance of the role of the territory brand, not only in tourism promotion but also in enhancing local identities.

To promote a tourist destination is above all to build and enhance an identity. But thinking about territorial identity means considering its ambivalent nature. It is both dynamic and immutable, inscribed in the genes of the territory and the result of the image constructed by others. To limit it to its “spatial” and “temporal” components is to overlook the importance of the role played by the other in the identity-building process. Indeed, the other, through his or her perceptions and outlook on the territory, helps to shape its identity.

The latter was studied in the light of the theory of social representations. Through this, we were able to establish the identity profile of the city of Larache as represented by two groups of individuals: residents and potential tourists.

A comparison of these two representations revealed a gap between perceived and lived identity. Locals, because of their superior knowledge of the object of representation, manage to provide a representation rooted in the reality of the territory, whereas that of the potential tourist is essentially based on stereotypes. This has led us to confirm our main hypothesis that Larache suffers from an identity deficit due to the absence of an effective branding strategy.

We can therefore confirm that brand communication does indeed have a positive impact on a region's tourist appeal. It should be noted, however, that unlike commercial brands, territorial branding as a public and shared good requires collective action involving different stakeholders whose projects and motivations may well vary or even clash.

This leads us to look at things from a completely different angle, namely, what is ultimately at stake behind the creation of a brand? Isn't the branding of the territory conditioned by the interplay of the players involved in the process of creating the territory brand? for its implementation to be effective, shouldn't it be accompanied by upstream reflection capable of identifying the underlying motivations and interests likely to alter its operation?

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