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Steffen Wippel

# The Multilevel Branding of Tangier at Spatial and Temporal Interfaces

## 1 Introduction

Endeavours to establish cities as brands have become a worldwide phenomenon. In the Middle East and Africa, too, cities have started to actively position themselves as attractive tourism destinations and investment sites and are trying to enhance their distinctiveness and recognisability. Gulf cities have become the most prominent – and often emulated – examples. Less attention has been given, for instance, to North African places.

Accordingly, this chapter starts from the assumption that systematic approaches to branding cities are still limited, notably for cities of the “Global South.” Before I present my case study, I will begin with a few conceptual ideas. In particular, I will point to the multi-scalar aspects of place making and to the positioning of places at spatial, cultural, and temporal interfaces. In the empirical part, I will analyse the branding of Tangier, Morocco, from a comparative historical perspective. Already in the first half of the 20th century, the city attracted travellers and residents, but also economic and financial institutions. After a post-independence period of stagnation that I will skip here, in recent years, Tangier has experienced another rapid urban transformation. The main goals are to become an international hub for trade, a major place for foreign investment, and a recognised tourism destination. In terms of the conceptual reflections the article has a major interest in the multiple contributions from several actors on different national, local, and project scales to building brands for Tangier and particular places in it. It will critically investigate the tools and channels, forms, and contents of their attention strategies and their endeavours to create positively perceived images. Special attention will be directed to how strategic communication positions the city in space and time and at specific interfaces, e.g., between different world regions and between a great past and a prosperous future. A short summary concludes this chapter.

The following study is a side result from my research in recent years that analyses the urban transformations of Tangier and its emerging transnational and transregional ties.<sup>1</sup> Methodologically, it is based on repeated fieldwork in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper for the panel “Branding the Middle East” at the 33rd *Deutsche*

city from 2013 on, including expert interviews and photo-geographic excursions, the thorough assessment of written documents in printed media and available in the Internet (like leaflets, brochures, reports, advertisements, webpages), and the analysis of illustrations and other images used in branding.

## 2 The Rapid Spread of Contemporary Urban Branding

While in recent decades the importance of place branding has tremendously increased, the phenomenon is not totally new. In particular, there is long international experience with cultivating images and “selling” tourism destinations.<sup>2</sup> Yet, with the perception of increased globalisation pressure and interurban competition, the branding and marketing of places has become an increasingly important component in the geo-economically oriented neoliberal strategies and the postmodern restructuring of cities and, in parallel, has attracted increasing academic interest from empirical as well as theoretical perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Often, then, “branding” is understood as a comprehensive approach: as a form of strategic communication, it intends to generate beneficial perceptions and advantageous images of its object in a broad and heterogeneous public by extensively using historical, geographic, and sociocultural motifs. Besides its external function, namely to create a politically and economically exploitable image and to attain good standing, branding is also directed towards an internal audience to foster identification with given constituencies and social cohesiveness. It goes beyond the narrower “marketing” of nations, regions, cities, and project sites, which presents a geographically defined entity as a desirable product to a specific, directly targeted clientele. However, in concrete cases, practices and publications do not clearly differentiate between the two processes, which both serve image formation, identity creation, and the

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*Orientalistentag* and 24th Congress of the German Middle East Studies Association in Jena on 19 September 2017. Hence, most of the empirical work was done in 2017: since then, several links referring to quotes have expired; other sources have been updated or verified using the Internet archive Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org>. I thank Birgit Krawietz, Freie Universität Berlin, and Christian Steiner, Katholische Universität Eichstätt, for critical comments on a previous version of this chapter. However, responsibility for the result is exclusively mine.

2 Compare, e.g., Ward, 1998.

3 Cf., for example, from Anholt, 2007, to Vanolo, 2017; for a review of literature on place and city branding, Gertner, 2011; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Vuignier, 2017. More detailed references are given in the introduction to this edited volume.

stimulation of attention.<sup>4</sup> As it is difficult to define a clear dividing line, in the following I will not consistently distinguish between the two terms, either.

Most of what has been written on place branding is rather descriptive and application-oriented research, transferring principles of brand development from products and firms to space-related entities. Usually, authors then develop comprehensive communication strategies with a broad spectrum of instruments and methods to promote places successfully. In general, they advocate a consistent package of communication measures with which all relevant actors have to abide in order to create as uniform an image as possible. Mostly, they stipulate a single responsible institution for branding, normally on the respective system level, e.g. in the case of city branding, on the level of the municipality.

In parallel, there is an increasing number of critical studies of branding processes in the social sciences and humanities. Accordingly, contemporary branding exemplarily reflects the eclectic, media- and experience-oriented character of postmodernity.<sup>5</sup> Urban research, in particular, considers the current staging and marketing of cities under postmodern conditions and tries to understand the production of cities as appealing places with a promising future.<sup>6</sup> Authors like Edward Soja point to the need to position cities in emerging inter-city networks and, in particular, emphasise the importance of simulation in and of contemporary cities. As cities and large urban development projects are increasingly shaped by mottos and themes, urbanism and urban marketing are increasingly engaged in creating “hyperreal” worlds.<sup>7</sup>

Critical approaches to the neoliberalisation of cities, too, underline the need felt by responsible actors to favourably position cities in tightened interurban competition by means of marketing and branding.<sup>8</sup> In the “entrepreneurial city,”<sup>9</sup> urban politics mutates, first, into location policy to strengthen competitiveness and integrate the city into global flows of commodities and capital; soft locational factors thereby achieve a particular significance in increasing attractiveness for demanding investors, a highly qualified workforce, affluent citizens, and free-spending tourists. Besides easily recognisable logos and slogans, “festivalisation”

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4 In particular, in French, branding activities have often been labelled “marketing territorial.” For the terminological shift and conceptual differentiation, cf. also Kavaratzis, 2004.

5 Cf. Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995.

6 Cf. Soja, 2000, esp. ch. 7 and 11; Dear and Flusty, 1998.

7 For the Middle East, cf. also Steiner, 2010.

8 For the neoliberal transformation of cities, see, e.g., Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Heeg and Rosol, 2007; for the Arab world, Al-Hamarneh, Margraff, and Scharfenort, 2019.

9 Cf. Hall and Hubbard, 1998.

through widely discernible cultural, sports, and other big events<sup>10</sup> and the use of landmark architecture and prestige megaprojects are central components to make these places widely known and to produce symbolic capital.<sup>11</sup> Especially in many cities at water edges, extensive revitalisation programmes have transformed deteriorated former docklands into luxurious waterfronts for consumption and leisure purposes, after port activities have been more and more relocated out of inner cities.<sup>12</sup>

And finally, authors dealing with global and globalising cities also emphasise processes of integration into global urban networks,<sup>13</sup> which also seems to require urban authorities to position their strongholds prominently and clearly demarcate them from potential competitors. As this is not an exclusive prerogative of Northern cities, the term “worlding” has been coined for places in the Global South, which likewise want to position themselves highly in the flow of global attention, including with demonstrative branding strategies.<sup>14</sup> Authoritarian regimes, in particular, such as prevail in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), are successful in implementing a quick, often admired urban restructuring at the expense of civic participation and objection rights.<sup>15</sup> Branding thereby also reflects existing power structures and proceeds selectively by excluding annoying aspects from spatial, temporal, social, and cultural attributions to places.

As endeavours to establish cities as brands have become a worldwide phenomenon, not only “global cities,” but also “secondary cities” strive for far-reaching appeal.<sup>16</sup> In the MENA region, the most outstanding example of a strong city brand is doubtless Dubai. In the last decade, it has become a general role model for urban and economic development, but also for widely radiating attention strategies that many places in the Gulf region and beyond have endeavoured to copy.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Govers and Go still stated in 2009 that the emirate had only lately started to develop a passably coherent branding strategy.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, in the mid-2010s, Moroccan publications, for instance, still mostly focused rather abstractly on components

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10 Cf. Häußermann and Siebel, 1993.

11 Cf. also Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez, 2002; Klingmann, 2007.

12 Cf., for instance, Hoyle, 2000; Prelorenzo, 2010.

13 Cf. Sassen, 2001; Taylor, 2004; for the construction and performance of world-cityness, cf. Doel and Hubbard, 2002.

14 Cf. Roy and Ong, 2011; for MENA cities, Beier, 2019.

15 Cf. Bromber et al., 2014.

16 Cf. Wippel, 2021b.

17 On Dubai in the global attention economy, cf. already Schmid, 2009; as an urban role model, Wippel et al., 2014.

18 Cf. Govers and Go, 2009: esp. 73–108.

of branding strategies and to-do lists to be adopted, with little empirical analysis, including for Tangier.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Branding as a Multi-scalar Endeavour

A first assumption of my article is that a multitude of actors are undertaking urban branding and marketing on differing spatial scales and, hence, conveying a multi-faceted, often heterogeneous, and sometimes inconsistent image of the city to the addressed public. For this, wider conceptual references can be made, first, to the “geographies of scale.” Numerous authors explicitly point to the different scalar levels on which social processes and space formation take place.<sup>20</sup> Especially in the context of current globalisation, a continuous rescaling occurs, i.e. repeated shifts between existing levels of agency and organisation.<sup>21</sup> Correspondingly, the responsibilities of certain institutions and the effects of political interventions and individual or collective identities, for instance, regularly jump across different spatial scales. In the 1990s, the multi-scalar dimensions of globalisation and the close entanglement of different spatial scales, notably the intertwining of the global and the local, have been conceptualised as “glocalisation.”<sup>22</sup>

But in fact, beyond the continuous jumping within a nested hierarchy of clearly delineated scales, we can observe a progressive mutual blurring and interpenetrating of scales, which are ever more difficult to analytically distinguish from each other. Hence, relating to the subnational and especially the local, Saskia Sassen points to their constitution on multiple scales, while contemporary urban reconfigurations deploy at various levels.<sup>23</sup> In particular, global cities establish direct links to international urban networks by leaping across established national state hierarchies. Scale jumping and blurring also occur, e.g., when global and regional events have immediately repercussions on local development and vice versa. This conforms with Neil Brenner’s understanding of cities as places in continuous re-territorialisation and as interfaces between multiple, overlapping, and shifting spatial scales.<sup>24</sup> Agency has become more and more multi-scalar, too, encompassing interventions by local, national, and transnational stakeholders on the urban level.

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<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Laghzaoui and Abakouy, 2014; Marso, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Swyngedouw, 1997; Berndt, 1999; van Schendel, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Brenner, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Robertson, 1995; see also Scholz, 2004: 221–258.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sassen, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., e.g., Brenner, 1997.

Neoliberal development in particular has induced significant changes in urban governance. While the neoliberal agenda has been implemented on the national scale, concomitantly the importance of the local level has grown, as responsibilities and competencies have been increasingly downscaled. In the course of the opening, deregulation, and privatisation of economic life, but also the commodification of other political, social, and cultural domains, the number of relevant actors who actively participate in urban politics and in planning and implementing large urban projects has multiplied. State authorities continue to be important players enforcing neoliberal policies and attracting global investors. Notably in the context of authoritarian regimes, large urban projects are being presented as auspicious “visions” of a caring ruler.<sup>25</sup> But urban development and the provision of public services have regularly been assigned to special agencies acting according to private sector principles, public-private partnerships, and a growing number of private investors, increasingly from abroad. Accordingly, it suggests itself that these manifold actors from different, difficult to define scales also intervene in city branding to promote their interests and positions, using manifold tools and media.

## 4 Branding Practices as Place Making at the Interface

Primarily, the study centres on the critical analysis of strategically communicated texts and images. The central question relates to the characteristics that are being emphasised to make Tangier and projects established there appear attractive and successful. Taking up Brenner’s statement on cities as interfaces, another conceptual point I want to make is the idea of the integrating “interface,” at which cities, in their branding, are being placed in spatial, temporal, and cultural terms. Application-oriented works often prefer a clearly referenced and easily recognisable positioning of places. In contrast, my central, second thesis is that, in order to (re)present the manifold facets of a city, to convey a positive image to the largest possible audience, and to accommodate the multitude of stakeholders in the process, branding often not only contrasts a city and its urban projects with competing places, but also situates them between different spaces, times, cultures, and life worlds and at connecting transitions and interstices. At the same time, this may also reflect diverse geostrategic orientations, especially of national political actors.

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25 For the Gulf region, cf. Bromber et al., 2014: 7–8; Hvidt, 2019.

Approximately in the 1980s, the term “interface” was introduced in geography from the natural sciences. In the framework of economic geography and urban research, cities were conceptualised, on the one hand, as passages between the local and the global and especially as indispensable transnational brokers and nodal points between economic networks.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the city has been conceived as a platform, filter, and modulator of and between a multitude of cultural spheres and symbolic worlds, especially in the age of digital communication media.<sup>27</sup> In a wider understanding, notably French geographers have conceptualised interfaces as spheres of contact and exchange between regions, networks, and systems, which often articulate in hubs such as cities or specific infrastructures.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to rather territorially defined concepts of clear, distinct borders and spatial discontinuities, relational aspects of connection, mixture, blending, and transition have been particularly emphasised. That underlines also the positively connoted compatibility of diversity, concomitant qualities such as innovation and complexity, and the processual character of space and place production at such interfaces. While these sources still strongly conceive interfaces in physical terms (e.g., human–environment, culture–nature, urban–rural, land–sea<sup>29</sup>), here they are understood in the sense of a discursive positioning, as happens in the context of branding.

Hence, this chapter first goes into the question of which belongings, connections, and intersections those actors responsible for marketing and branding underline, contrast, and combine to achieve the most positive associations. The chapter’s first interest is in the multiple geographical positioning of places in diverse larger regional settings or at the intersection of several world regions. This includes allusions to historical and (re)emerging inter- and transregional contacts and intermediary positions, as well as specific types of landscapes or climatic zones that are presumed to be attractive. With regard to the temporal positioning of cities, this article investigates references to their past, present, and future and as contact points between these temporal layers. Among them are allusions to con-

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26 Cf. Hsu, 2005. Cf. also Baumann, Dietze, and Maruschke, 2017 on places like trade and port cities as intermediary “Portals of Globalization”; for Gulf cities as interfaces, Katodrytis and Syed, 2013. Interestingly, a quick look at explanations in Wikipedia suggests that in English “interface” is still much more closely linked to computer science, while the German “Schnittstelle” also refers to organisational aspects, and especially in French, geographical dimensions, as discussed in the following, have deserved a separate entry; cf. Wikipédia, 2021.

27 Cf. Georgiou, 2008; De Waal, 2013.

28 Cf. Groupe de recherches “Interfaces,” 2008; Lampin-Maillet et al., 2010.

29 Particularly on the local level, this may also refer to the port-city interface, with regard to urban port and waterfront development; cf. Hoyle, 2000.



tinuing lines of tradition and historically formative experiences, which point to an envisaged desirable and successful future. Likewise, invented traditions and architectural styles with multiple spatiotemporal references have to be included. Finally, this article inspects Tangier's sociocultural positionings and especially its association with specific lifestyles and civilisational worlds. Such cultural assignments are often being spatialised and defined in terms of exclusive civilisational areas, but can also be multiple and overlapping. The contrasting or interlocking of rational economic and emotional life world dimensions is an important aspect in urban marketing.<sup>30</sup>

## 5 Branding Tangier in the “International Period” (1920s–’50s)

Tangier had long been a trade centre connecting trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean networks, and so it looks back on a long cosmopolitan past.<sup>31</sup> Between the 15th and 17th centuries, it experienced European – Portuguese, Spanish, and British – rule. In the 19th century, it had become the diplomatic capital of the Cherifian Empire, where foreign legations were established, which brought many sectors of the communal administration under their control. Around 1900, a new city began to develop outside the old walls and along the waterfront, where a modern harbour was set up and hotels and other leisure facilities were built. While in 1912 the French and Spanish protectorates were established over the rest of Morocco, Tangier in 1923 formally came under multinational administration that lasted until its reintegration into the Moroccan nation-state in 1956. At that time, it was an important port city, an attractive tourist destination, a haven for capital and refugees, and a favoured place for artists and outcasts.

During the “international period” from the 1920s to the ’50s, Tangier’s marketing concentrated on transport and tourism. In this liberal age, the urban and economic development of the city was mostly left to local and international private actors. Hence, it was notably the local tourism association that promoted Tangier with booklets, brochures, and posters, often with Orientalist motives, displaying the medina and casbah with arches, minarets, and traditional boats, or men and women in traditional costumes (Fig. 1a). Yet, for some years in the late 1930s, it regularly published an illustrated magazine called *Tanger-Riviera* that brought news

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Mattissek, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> For Tangier’s past urban development, cf. Stuart, 1955; Ceballos López, 2009; Tafersiti Zarouila, 2012; for its port and waterfront, cf. also Wippel, 2022.



**Fig. 1:** Marketing Tangier in the International Era

a) Poster from Syndicat d'Initiative et de Tourisme de Tanger, by Jacques Majorelle, 1924; b) Cover of *Tanger-Riviera* magazine No. 1, 30 September 1937; c) Luggage sticker, Hotel El Minzah, Tangier [mostly dated 1950s].

Sources: Qatar National Library, 2022 (no known copyright); photo Steffen Wippel, 2017 (at Biblioteca Juan Goytisolo, Instituto Cervantes de Tanger); CER.ES, 2022.

of beach life, sports, and tourism in the city and displayed more modern illustrations including bathing costumes and cocktails (Fig. 1b). This was paralleled by the marketing of Tangier done by hotels and shipping, airline, and railway companies, whose poster motives, luggage tags, and small travel guides also showed a predilection for exotic palm- and mosque-decorated environments (Fig. 1c). Hence, “othering” in an exoticised, historicised African realm dominated, while a few media already placed Tangier at the cultural, temporal, and geographical interface with “modern” leisure habits that had developed along the European coasts of the Mediterranean.

Illustrated but at the same time text-loaded information-rich brochures, adverts in newspapers and magazines, and diligently designed posters habitually exhibited inside offices or hotel halls were the preferred modes of presentation and communication. Text was often multilingual, written in French, English, and sometimes Spanish, less in Arabic and other languages. Already during the international era, maps were used to promote Tangier as a place at a maritime crossroads where many shipping lines called and on the main rail route from Europe, notably France, to North Africa (Fig. 2). Accordingly, the small travel guide that the Rotterdam shipping company published in the 1950s stated: “Tanger, l’ancienne ‘Tingis’ des Romains, occupe une position geographique privilegiee. Grace a sa situation favorable, face a l’Europe, et grace aussi a la circonstance qu’elle est sur la



Fig. 2: Tangier's cartographic positioning at the intersection of sea-lanes and railroads  
Source: Propaganda and Tourism Section of the Tangier Zone, 1929: 32 (picture retrieved from Robertson, 2006).

route des grandes lignes de navigation, elle est d'une importance qui va grandissant chaque jour.”<sup>32</sup>

## 6 Multi-actor and Multi-scalar Branding of Tangier's Contemporary Transformations

After independence, Tangier was neglected, stagnated, and lost much of its economic prosperity, like the Kingdom's entire North. Only since the late 1990s has new attention been directed to its comeback. In particular, several megaprojects have been implemented, which are effectively transforming the urban landscape and the surrounding agglomeration.<sup>33</sup>

The first and most outstanding megaproject is the *Tanger Méditerranée* complex. New port facilities have been established outside the city, at the Strait of Gibraltar. Its core consists of the huge container port that opened in 2008 and mainly serves transshipment. The complex also includes the Great Industrial Plat-

<sup>32</sup> Rotterdam Lloyd, n.d.

<sup>33</sup> For Tangier's contemporary urban development, cf. in the following Tafersiti Zarouila, 2012; Haller, 2016; Haller, Wippel, and Reifeld, 2016; Wippel, 2019.

form encompassing several logistic and free zones, the Renault plant with an Automotive City, and additional industrial estates scattered across the Tangier Peninsula. *Tanger Ville* is the second large urban project; it is about to reconvert the old inner-city port area into a luxurious consumption- and leisure-oriented waterfront and to connect it to the revamped Corniche along the adjacent Tangier Bay.<sup>34</sup> *Tanger City Centre*, a huge international business complex and “Western-style” shopping mall, is developing a hitherto unused central terrain into a new urban pole.

To supplement these high-end structures, the *Tanger Métropole* programme envisions a large set of measures to develop infrastructural, social, and cultural amenities, including in the more peripheral and neglected quarters. And finally, in 2017, the agreement was signed to develop the *Cité Mohammed VI TangerTech*, a technopole and residential “New Town.” Moreover, important transport infrastructure has been established, like motor- and expressways, a high-speed railway line to Casablanca, an expanded airport, and in the distant future, perhaps an underwater tunnel to Spain. Also, alongside other new towns for the working population, numerous gated communities, integrated tourism resorts, and first-class hotels have been designed for a well-off national and international clientele, mainly along the coast.

In the race for a good position among cities in the wider region, Tangier already registers some important advancement, which has been extensively recapitulated in national and local media and has created a good basis for successful branding. Notably, its container port rapidly advanced to rank 25 worldwide in terms of annual throughput in 2020 and is now the first port in Africa and the Mediterranean. TangerMed is one of the few key transshipment hubs of Mærsk, the biggest container shipping company worldwide, and the major hub for the Euro-African services of CMA CGM, offering the third-largest global transport capacity. As per the maritime “connectivity index,” it has pushed the entire country from place 78 in 2004 to around 16–20 in recent years.<sup>35</sup> In 2012/13, the Financial Times group nominated the Tanger Free Zone as the best port free zone worldwide and in the following years repeatedly the most competitive free zone of Africa.<sup>36</sup> Within Morocco, Tangier has become the third-most populated city and the second industrial pole. In 2015, the World Bank presented Tangier as one of six “model cities” in the Global South for its outstanding economic development and competitiveness.<sup>37</sup>

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34 For port and waterfront development, cf. also Ducruet, Mohamed-Chérif, and Cherfaoui, 2011; Benabad, 2012; Wippel, 2022.

35 UNCTAD, 2021.

36 Cf. fDi Intelligence, 2020 (and earlier issues).

37 Cf. The World Bank, 2015.

According to the waterfront development agency, “Tanger a toujours été une ‘petite ville monde,’”<sup>38</sup> but it is surrounded by several ascending “world cities” in the North and the South, but itself has not yet been included even in the most comprehensive global city rankings.<sup>39</sup> In Morocco, only Casablanca has advanced to the category of an important world city that is considered instrumental in linking the country to the world economy. While the Kingdom’s economic capital with the affirmative slogan “WeCasablanca” claims to have set up the first comprehensive city branding strategy in Africa in 2016,<sup>40</sup> it was not yet included in the 2018 City Brand Index of 56 evaluated cities worldwide.<sup>41</sup> The Country Brand Index, at least, gives all of Morocco a mediocre 64th place worldwide.<sup>42</sup> But, with its economic boom and infrastructural and urban developments, Tangier has also experienced multifarious endeavours for branding in the last two decades again.

Today, public entities endeavour to make Tangier a “showcase city”<sup>43</sup> and are increasingly marketing the territory by presenting its advantages in TV spots and at international exhibitions and fairs. However, there is not a single entity responsible for Tangier’s urban branding; many actors and institutions from different sectors and with specific interests participate in constructing the image of the city. Compared with the colonial age, the number of actors intervening has even multiplied, and, in particular, the city’s promotion is being done on manifold scales.<sup>44</sup> First, several externally oriented public authorities on the national level market Tangier, e.g., as a tourist destination and investment site. Besides the national real estate developers, this is notably the case with the Ministry of Tourism and its affiliates, such as the National Tourism Office: in the mid-2010s, they promoted Tangier as a part of *Cap Nord*, one of the eight focus regions for tourism development in the national Vision 2020, and emphasised cultural, city, business, and conference tourism complemented by beach tourism on the nearby shores and ecological and hiking tourism in the hinterland.

Within the city, no central agency or PR city manager has unfolded discernible branding activities up to now. Tourism marketing, in principle, should be expected to be the task of the delegation of the Tourism Ministry, but the poorly equipped

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38 SAPT, 2017.

39 Cf. GaWC, 2020.

40 WeCasablanca, 2021. Cf. also Dounia Sedra’s article in this edited volume.

41 Valet, 2018.

42 FutureBrand, 2020.

43 Chattou, 2011.

44 For the multiplicity of actors and the multi-scalarity of interventions in Tangier’s economic and urban development, cf. Wippel, 2019 and 2021a.

local tourism office does not display much information – a small brochure and, if you are lucky, a small city map. In contrast, in the mid-2010s, the regional tourism council, representing local tourism operators, started to develop a website covering the whole north-western region and accessible to the public and to publish documents addressing professionals in the sector.<sup>45</sup> Only very recently has a hop-on hop-off sightseeing bus been installed whose operator also gives tourist-oriented information on its Internet page.

Besides, parastatal special agencies, installed by the central state and public institutions in the course of the “agencification” of Moroccan urban policies,<sup>46</sup> promote their local projects internationally and are looking for clients and investors abroad. They have been assigned substantial power and great, private sector-like freedom of action in planning, implementing, and operating megaprojects. This is the case of the state-owned TangerMed Special Agency (TMSA), the holding responsible for the entire TangerMed platform, and its affiliates managing the numerous sub-projects. To attract terminal operators, shipping lines, and industrial companies, they vaunt the advantages of (being present in) Tangier, the favourable conditions for implementation, and the extraordinary geographic location accommodating the firms’ interests to serve plenty of markets. At the same time, the transnational firms established there, like the two container terminal operators, Mærsk’s APM Terminals and the Eurogate consortium, praise the port’s equipment, too, which favours their businesses. The public *Société d’Aménagement pour la Reconversion de la Zone Portuaire de Tanger* (SAPT), which surveys the transformation of the inner-city waterfront, is perhaps the most active agency in co-constructing the city’s new image. Together with the national port agency, it has founded the joint venture Tanja Marina Bay International to manage and develop the diverse port and marina activities, while Eagle Hills, a branch of Emaar from Dubai, has been commissioned to construct and market the new commercial, residential, and tourism real estate in the former harbour area.

Such international investment, real estate, and construction companies engaged in the upcoming tourism resorts and residential communities also contribute to conveying an attractive image of the city. However, following the economic, financial, and in part political crises in their home countries, such as Spain and the Gulf sheikhdoms, numerous widely announced projects had to be put on hold since the late 2000s or changed ownership and design, tarnishing to some extent the discourse on the city’s bright future and imminent boom.

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<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Regional Council of Tourism Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Amarouche and Bogaert, 2019.



## 7 Multi-Media Branding of Tangier

Today, the branding of Tangier makes intense use of a broad range of media including virtual communication tools. Brochures are still on display in agency and firm offices and in showrooms, but are also available in web-compatible format. The degree to which detailed information on websites is provided, however, varies considerably from one project and one institution to the other.<sup>47</sup> Depending on the addressees, texts are sometimes offered in even more languages today, sporadically including Chinese and Japanese.

In addition, outdoor advertising, 3D models, and virtual simulations play a pre-eminent role. Along the main traffic arteries, huge billboards present new real estate projects and waterfront developments for sale and often still under construction; on fences, posters advertising new buildings mask construction sites (Fig. 3a). Material models demonstrating the future designs of residential, office, and tourism complexes are exhibited in showrooms, like for the new Tanja Marina Bay and the Tanger City Centre (Fig. 3c). Images and films presented in the Internet show animated landscapes, multiple perspectives, and two- and three-dimensional indoor tracking shots; maps situate Tangier and project sites in narrower and wider geographical contexts. While the city is still “under construction,” these media already present its future appearance to a broad public (Fig. 3b). All in all, substantial written information seems to play a lesser role than pictorial impressions and qualitatively enhanced graphic material. Even more, instead of formal, detailed, and technical development plans, urban “visions” presented by the king and communicated by public media, including illustrations of the monarch gazing at large site models and inaugurating new developments (Fig. 3d), confer projects a quasi-transcendental aura and makes them difficult to contest.<sup>48</sup>

A great variety of logos – from abstract arches and palms in tourism to maritime motifs alluding to sails in the marina project and geometrical patterns representing globality, connectivity, and diversity for port bodies, shopping malls, and the Expo 2012 (cf. below) – give visual expression to projects, sites, firms, and institutions in the city; slogans also help to merchandise them. Nevertheless, a central single logo or slogan advertising the city is missing – neither the regional nor the national tourism and investment agencies present such a wordmark. In contrast, “big names” among corporate investors, real estate developers, and planning offices symbolise international expertise and underline Tangier’s global ambitions.

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<sup>47</sup> The use of social media has also increased, but often seems to use the same text modules and is left to a separate investigation.

<sup>48</sup> Similarly for Gulf cities, compare Bromber et al., 2014.



**Fig. 3:** Billboards, models, and simulations

a) Billboard advertising the Tanja Marina project; b) Pictorial simulation of the new marina; c) 3D showroom model of Tanger City Centre; d) Mohammed VI visiting the TangerTech model.

Sources: Photo Steffen Wippel, 2015; Tanja Marina Bay, 2017; Photo Steffen Wippel, 2013; Tanger Experience, 2017.

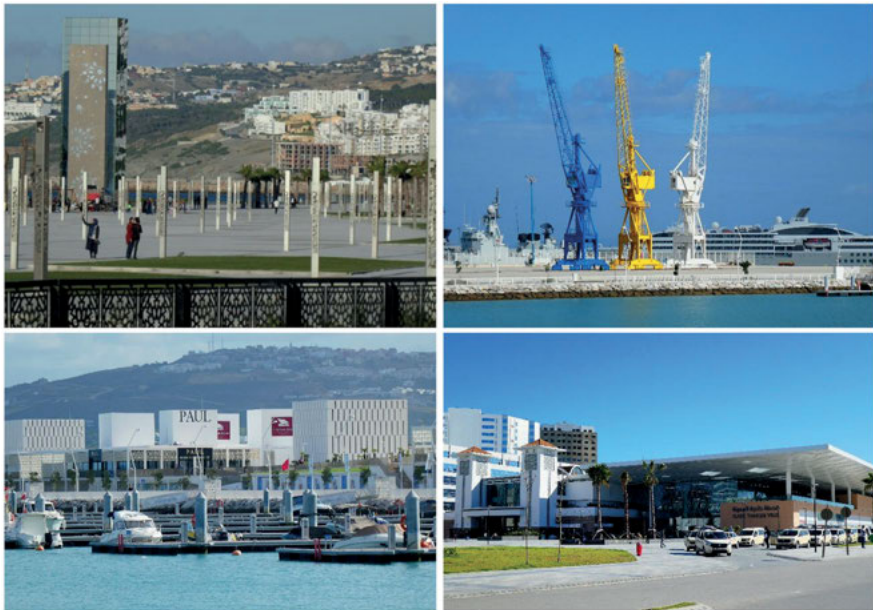
This namely concerns Gulf investors in the tourism and residential sectors like *Qatari Diar*, the Bahraini Gulf Finance House, and Dubai's Emaar, as well as world-wide leading specialists in the field of transport and logistics, such as Mærsk, CMA CGM, Eurogate, and DHL, and global leaders in industrial production, from Renault-Nissan to Siemens, Decathlon, and Danone.<sup>49</sup>

Material objects also have an important role in making Tangier known and attractive to the outside world. This includes iconic urban megaprojects, new architectural landmarks, and renowned names involved in their construction, which are widely promoted, communicated, and, it is hoped, perceived (Fig. 4). The TangerMed Business Centre was designed by Jean Nouvel, winner of the 2008 Pritzker Prize, while “starchitects” like Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, and Ricardo Bofill participated in the urbanistic competition for the complex and the reconstruction of the inner-city waterfront. Tourism resorts and gated communities have been constructed in modern “Mediterranean,” popular “Hispano-colonial,” and allegedly

<sup>49</sup> For this, see, e.g., the companies’ “wall of fame” on websites and in brochures and reports, such as TMSA, 2021: 98–99, 112–113.



traditional “Andalusian” décor.<sup>50</sup> Close to the Tanger City Centre, the new TGV station inaugurated in 2018 is another remarkable building in steel and glass that adds to the adjacent main station in Neo-Moresque style opened in 2003. This also includes visions of future museums and the 540-metre Al Noor Tower temporarily announced by the Saudi Bin Laden group. The also unrealised Bab al Maghreb Tower was reminiscent of the Atlantis Hotel in Dubai, while people on the street even regard the new purified, concrete-covered corniche with its geometrically decorated towers and lampposts as representing some sort of “Dubai style.” Giant gantry cranes at the TangerMed container port have become repeatedly pictured iconic symbols for Tangier’s role as a transport hub; while repainted dockside cranes in the old port area are reminiscent of its historical trade legacy.



**Fig. 4:** Urbanistic landmarks

The new corniche at the eastern bay; painted dockside cranes at the old inner-city port; Tanja Marina Bay; the new railway stations from 2003 and 2018.

Photos: Steffen Wippel, 2017, 2018, 2018, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> This contrasts with Daus’ observation that the “postmodern” holiday villages at nearby Tamouda Bay built in the 1980s copied Bauhaus-like occidental styles; cf. Daus, 2000: 311.

Finally, big events are also extensively used to brand Tangier especially as a place for culture. The city intensely participates in the festival fever that has broken out across Morocco, in particular in the fields of literature, film, and music. Among the most prominent, often annual events, we find the *Festival de Jazz* (TANJazz), the Tangier International Film Festival, the *Festival de Cine Africano* (together with Tarifa, Spain), and the *Salon International de Tanger des Livres et des Arts*. In contrast, Tangier's internationally promoted application for the world exhibition Expo 2012 under the motto "Routes du monde, Rencontre des cultures. Pour un monde plus uni,"<sup>51</sup> which aimed at highlighting the city's global entanglements and for which extensive new construction was planned for the eastern side of the bay, failed in the last round against its South Korean competitor.

## 8 Locating Tangier at Spatial and Temporal Interfaces

Concerning the contents of statements disseminated in the context of urban marketing and branding, it is not too surprising that branding activities first endeavour to create a pleasant atmosphere, an ambiance of ease and beauty, and an impression of modernity and progressivity. Contemporary buzzwords often relate to global neoliberal and ecological canons. Catchwords such as "clusters," "ecosystems," "smart" and "green" cities, or "technopoles" and "science parks," as well as hints at construction and management according to "global standards" and to internationally established high quality are abundant. Projects are repeatedly "greenwashed": this is true, for example, of the New Town of Chrafate, which is advertised as a "green city,"<sup>52</sup> of the "zero emission" Renault factory,<sup>53</sup> and of the envisaged TangerTech City, which has been declared "environment-friendly";<sup>54</sup> environmental auditing has become a standard for establishing projects in the local free zones.

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<sup>51</sup> Association Tanger 2012, n.d.: 3.

<sup>52</sup> Chabâa, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Renault Group, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> TelQuel, 2017.

**Box 1: Locating Tangier at interfaces between continents or seas**


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Tangier proudly overlooks the sea, In that particular point of the meeting of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. It is located at the crossroads between the north and the south.<sup>55</sup>

*Une position géostratégique*

Porte ouverte sur l'Afrique, tournée vers l'Europe, la ville du Détroit possède une position géographique unique, trait d'union entre l'Europe et le reste du Maroc, entre l'Atlantique et la Méditerranée. De par cette position exceptionnelle, Tanger a toujours été favorable aux échanges et aux investissements.<sup>56</sup>

*Extrait du discours de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI (Février 2003)*

Nous procédons au lancement d'un des plus grands projets économiques dans l'histoire de notre pays. (...) Le Maroc consolide ainsi son ancrage dans l'espace euro-méditerranéen et dans son environnement maghrébin et arabe. Il valorise sa vocation de pôle d'échanges entre l'Europe et l'Afrique, la Méditerranée et l'Atlantique, (...).<sup>57</sup>

Thanks to its full integration with Tanger Med Port, the gateway to Europe, Mediterranean and Africa, TMZ [Tanger Med Zones] offers a compelling value proposition meeting the genuine needs of international investors and centered around. (...) TMZ is a fast growing hub on the Mediterranean at the doorstep of Europe for industrial, services and commercial activities.<sup>58</sup>

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Remarkably, urban branding takes place between times and regions, repeatedly emphasising the unique economically and culturally important location of Tangier and of institutions and places in the urban agglomeration. Many texts, but also maps and illustrations, place the city geostrategically at accentuated regional interfaces. Space and location are not considered as constructed by human effort, but become naturalised. Geographically, Tangier is assigned an exposed location at the northernmost point of Morocco and Africa. Situated at the North-South interface, i.e. the continental transition where Europe and Africa meet, and, at the same time, at the maritime East-West passage from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, it is considered a bridge and gateway (cf. exemplary quotes in Box 1).<sup>59</sup> This is particularly true of the new port, which is located at one of the busiest maritime lanes in the world and, hence, allows for establishing and linking multiple regional and transregional connections. Accordingly, the TangerMed Platform is presented as a node “at the heart of global trade” (Fig. 5). At the same time, the peninsula is regarded as a transit point for passenger traffic, freight carriage, and energy trans-

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55 Regional Council of Tourism Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, 2016: 14.

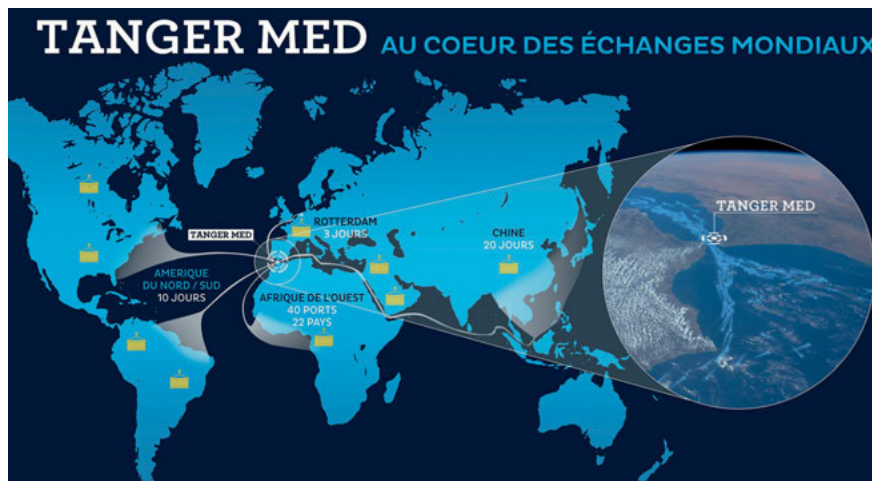
56 Ibn Batouta Mall, 2017.

57 TMSA, 2021: 4.

58 Tanger Med Zones, 2017.

59 In the following boxes, headlines appear in italics and, in the original, are not always immediately followed by the rest of the quote. Separations of paragraphs are ignored; linguistic imperfections in English and French are retained without being specially marked.

port. For firms, the city's attractive location and manifold links are said to accommodate their interest in simultaneously serving national, regional North African, European, sub-Saharan, and world markets.



**Fig. 5:** Tangier's cartographic positioning in international trade

Source: Tanger Med, 2021.

In particular, the port helps to restore the city's and the kingdom's African connections, thereby supporting national regional and economic policies.<sup>60</sup> This reconnection is also true of land transport, since the last section of the so-called Tangier-Dakar Highway was completed more than a decade ago and terrestrial shipping has started from the logistical hub at TangerMed to West Africa. From the colonial “gate to Morocco” – first for diplomats and later for foreign residents and tourists – the city developed into Morocco's “gate to Europe” with increasing labour migration, and nowadays has become the “gate to Africa,” according to manifold statements (Box 2). This African dimension has been repeatedly underlined, from the urban development plan of the late 1990s to statements of national ministries and state-owned agencies and releases by terminal operators and freight companies – including the possible wordplay between “port” and “porte” (gate) in French.

<sup>60</sup> Compare Marei and Wippel, 2020.

## Box 2: Considering Tangier a “Gate to Africa”

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### *La position géostratégique*

Etant en constante relation avec, d'une part l'Europe, et les grandes routes maritimes d'autre part, [la région Tanger-Tétouan] est considérée comme 'la porte de l'Afrique[']'.<sup>61</sup>

### *Africa's gateway to the world*

(...) the EUROGATE Tanger container terminal is Africa's gateway to the world and a bridge between continents.<sup>62</sup>

### *La plateforme TIMAR Tanger Med*

La situation géostratégique du port Tanger Med ouvre les portes de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Afrique subsaharienne, (...).<sup>63</sup>

### *Positionnement du territoire*

Porte de l'Afrique, la destination Cap Nord capitalisera sur ses histoires multiples, sa situation géographique de carrefour et son dynamisme économique.<sup>64</sup>

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The sea-land interface is another transition zone appearing in the branding of Tangier (Box 3): it is not only served by various infrastructural installations, but is also a central element of on-going waterfront transformation. In its history, Tangier had long turned its back on the sea; despite its maritime legacy, no port existed; ships had to anchor off the coast and goods had to be transloaded on barges. A “real” port with moles and basins did not develop until the 20th century; but as access was limited to workers and passengers, it still sealed the sea off from the city. Today, most major projects, including tourism developments, are located along the entire peninsula's shores, where “sand and sea” or “ocean and mountains” meet. In particular, the reconversion of the old inner-city port promises “Uniting the port with the city” and “Bringing the sea to the city.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> CRI, 2010: 10.

<sup>62</sup> Eurogate Tanger, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Timar Afrique, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Secrétariat d'Etat chargé du Tourisme, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Tanja Marina Bay, 2021.

**Box 3:** Communicating the city's sea-land interface

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Le bien-être entre terre et mer<sup>66</sup>

Entre mer et montagne, les villes de Tanger et de Tétouan déploient un immense terrain de jeu riche en possibilités, des lieux inédits pour les baroudeurs!<sup>67</sup>

*Al Houara*

At the Gates of Europe and Africa, where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic, lies an elegant destination where sand and sea meet the verdant forest.<sup>68</sup>

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Tangier's geographic location is equated with its location in a cultural transition zone (Box 4). Interpenetrating Islamic, European, overarching "Andalusian," and African influences and the passage and settling of many peoples are being highlighted and are said to have given the city its particular cosmopolitan and culturally rich character. This is closely linked with temporal interfaces: accordingly, Tangier has experienced a series of foreign presences and benefited from all of them. Its geostrategic position is presented as a historical constant. Mainly the multinational image of the city from colonial times is cultivated, including the presence of important – in general, mostly Western – artists from the late 19th century to the "Beat Generation" of the 1960s. This includes often referenced painters like Eugène Delacroix, Henri Matisse, and Francis Bacon, writers such as Paul and Jane Bowles, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Tennessee Williams, and musicians from the Beatles to the Rolling Stones and Jimmy Hendrix, as well as other jet setters like Barbara Hutton and Yves Saint-Laurent. The king's candidature address for the Expo 2012 exemplarily sums up both, the linking of different world regions and of experiences from the past and progress in a near future: for him, Tangier represents a platform of convergence between continents and civilisations, a junction point par excellence between Africa, Europe, and the Arab world, including the American continents; its centuries-old strategic position and international diplomatic experience, together with its considerable current transformation, will propel it to a place among the primary economic poles of the Mediterranean South by 2015.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tanja Marina Bay International, 2016: 8.

<sup>67</sup> ONMT, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Qatari Diar, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Association Tanger 2012, n.d.: 5.

#### Box 4: Branding Tangier's cultural and temporal interfaces

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##### *Une diversité culturelle*

(...), la région Tanger-Tétouan jouit d'une culture millénaire. La population est caractérisée par son ouverture, et son multilinguisme, fruit d'un brassage de populations et d'origines diversifiées. Avec la succession des Phéniciens, Romains, Carthaginois, byzantins, Vandales et Arabes, la population de la Région a acquis l'art de la tolérance.<sup>70</sup>

Tanger, ville mythique du bassin méditerranéen, traversée de vies millénaires, alimente l'imaginaire mondial avec son histoire antique, médiévale et moderne. Porte naturelle et stratégique, à la croisée de l'Europe, de l'Afrique et du Maroc, Tanger cosmopolite et éternellement mystérieuse se nourrit de ses échanges avec le monde. (...) Ville internationale avant l'heure, elle a tous les atouts pour retrouver, à l'ère de la globalisation, le statut qu'elle a acquis il y a un siècle.<sup>71</sup>

##### *Une ville entre deux mondes*

Tanger est une ville bouillonnante : le passé et le présent s'y mêlent avec harmonie. (...) Tanger est une croisée où convergent les influences. (...) Aux frontières de l'Europe et de l'Afrique, Tanger est une ville cosmopolite, où passé et présent coexistent.<sup>72</sup>

##### *Tangier... the crossroad*

As waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic intertwined at the foot of Tangier, it also combines the European, Arab and African cultures. A blend that surprises its visitors.<sup>73</sup>

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The city's glorious past serves to overcome the negative reputation it had since its reintegration into the Kingdom and notably in the 1980s, when it was better known for drug trafficking, prostitution, and crime than for its historical and cultural richness.<sup>74</sup> It is becoming directly linked with its present transformation and expansion and its bright future as a major port city, tourist destination, and investment site and possesses a beneficial legacy in the current age of globalisation. Yet, the reference to older commercial activities and local personalities is much less explicit than to its cosmopolitan cultural heritage. In particular, one of Tangier's most famous sons has long been widely ignored in urban branding: the scholar, traveller, and explorer Ibn Battuta, who perambulated through Africa and Asia in the 14th century, could represent past and current worldwide connections and address several regional publics. Only the airport, a new peripheral settlement, and a small shopping mall are named after him; his pretended tomb in the medina is difficult to find. This contrasts with the highly commercialised, hy-

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<sup>70</sup> CRI, 2010: 11.

<sup>71</sup> Tanja Marina Bay International, 2016: 4–5.

<sup>72</sup> ONMT, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Regional Council of Tourism Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, 2016: 16.

<sup>74</sup> Especially until 2010, guidebooks also contributed to the image of Tangier as a hetero- and homosexual heterotopia and a subversive, dangerous, and declining place; cf. Sanoussi, 2017.

perreal Ibn Battuta Mall in Dubai, representing the booming city's multifarious geographical ties.<sup>75</sup> Only recently, a young NGO started to organise a series of international events to commemorate Ibn Battuta's heritage, foster mutual cultural understanding, and put him on Tangier's map again. Finally, in 2022, the Ibn Battouta Memorial Exhibition, in one of the casbah's fortified towers restored by the SAPT, opened its doors to pay tribute to this legendary character.

## 9 By Way of Conclusion

This case study helps to fill a gap related to the branding of cities in the Global South and of secondary cities in particular; it largely fits and confirms the conceptual framework developed above. Corresponding to my first theory-based assumption, this overview of the branding of Tangier demonstrates that there is no comprehensive, consistent overall strategy for communicating a positive image of the city to the wider national and international public. Instead, many individual and collective, public and private, local, national, and transnational actors contribute to the (more or less strategic) construction of the booming city's image, mostly pursuing individual interests and addressing specific clienteles. Endeavours "from above" that brand Tangier among other places in Morocco, as well as branding "from below," which situates individual large and small projects in the local context and also co-brand the city, supplement still timid citywide efforts; nevertheless, they show many common features and direct the city's communicated image in similar directions. Moreover, branding is a multimodal endeavour: manifold material and virtual means are used to create such an urban brand.

In line with my second thesis, a central feature of branding Tangier is its positioning at manifold crossroads and interfaces of overlapping and interlinked geographical belonging and connectedness, especially between different (naturalised and essentialised) world regions such as "Europe" and "Africa." This emphasises Tangier's – and incidentally Morocco's – aspirations to be acknowledged as a global and transregional hub in transport, trade, and tourism, while several time horizons serve to link a glorified cosmopolitan past, a successful present, and an even brighter future. Problems, such as the progressing socio-spatial fragmentation of the city, transregional flows of drugs and migrants through the city, and underlying dependencies and imbalances that also appear at different levels are obviously eliminated from this strategic communication. To conclude, the city's branding perfectly aligns with the neoliberalisation, globalisation, and postmodernisation

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75 Cf. Steiner, 2014.



of a secondary city that struggles for a favourable positioning in competitive inter-city and inter-port networks; but like urban development itself, branding happens in a rather fragmented way. Yet, even if Tangier might present an outstanding exemplary case, I suppose that we may find such multi-scale involvement and multi-regional positioning not only there, but also in many places, particularly in cities in the Global South.

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