

The Determinants of Territorial Attractiveness: Proposal of a Conceptual Model

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Abstract. This article explores the different theoretical approaches to territorial attractiveness, focusing on the region as the scale of analysis. The aim is to understand how public policies, economic dynamics and social expectations interact to build sustainable attractiveness. The study examines the coordinated processes of regional planning, territorial branding and citizen participation as key levers of this dynamic. Through a review of contemporary theories, it emerges that attractiveness is not the result of a unilateral act, but is built over time, thanks to a complex articulation between different actors and processes. The results underline the importance of collaborative governance in achieving shared, sustainable attractiveness objectives. This research thus offers a nuanced reading of the factors influencing attractiveness, while suggesting ways to better integrate social and economic dimensions into territorial strategies.

Keywords: *Territorial attractiveness, Collaborative governance, Place branding, Spatial planning, Citizen participation.*

1. Introduction

In a context characterized by the intensification of inter-territorial competition, territorial attractiveness has become a major strategic concern for local authorities, regions, and states alike (Camagni, 2002; Vanolo, 2008). Stimulating tourism, attracting investments, or strengthening social participation are among the challenges that largely depend on a territory's ability to position itself as attractive to both economic actors and citizens.

The concept of territorial attractiveness is widely employed in political and media discourses. It encompasses economic dimensions (infrastructure, competitiveness...), social aspects (quality of life, security...), environmental considerations (sustainability, living environment...), cultural factors (intangible capital, identity...), as well as institutional elements (governance quality, trust, policy...). Moreover, it is subject to diverse interpretations depending on the disciplinary lens applied, including geography, regional economics, sociology, and political science (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2010; ESPON, 2013).

Several theoretical approaches coexist to analyze this notion: geographical economics (Krugman, 1991), territorial systems theory (Camagni, 2002), and works on territorial marketing and local governance (Lefèvre, 1998; Moine, 2006 ; Medway & Warnaby, 2008). These perspectives highlight the variety of factors to consider in understanding why and how a territory becomes attractive. In this regard, the objective of our study is to address the following research question : In the face of increasingly intense territorial competition, what are the key factors that determine territorial attractiveness ?

This work is distinguished by its integrative and multidimensional approach to territorial attractiveness. The originality of this contribution lies in the proposal of a synthetic conceptual model that allows for a systemic analysis of the drivers of attractiveness. By focusing on the

Moroccan context, this research provides both theoretical and practical added value by offering an analytical framework tailored to the realities of emerging territories.

To contribute to answering this question, the first part of this work is devoted to a review of the main theoretical approaches that help delineate the concept of territorial attractiveness as well as related notions. The second part proposes a conceptual model highlighting the principal determinants likely to influence a territory's attractiveness, based on a methodology grounded in documentary analysis.

2. The concept of Territory

The concept of territory is fundamental in the disciplines of geography, spatial planning, and the social sciences. It refers to a delimited geographical space that is appropriated and organized by human actors. Beyond its physical dimension, the territory is understood as a social and cultural construct that reflects economic, political, and identity-based dynamics.

Territory is a complex entity that transcends its mere geographical dimension to encompass social, cultural, political, and economic aspects. According to Raffestin (1980), territory is the result of a process of territorialization, through which human actors project their values, practices, and symbols onto space, transforming it into a specific place. This definition was further developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who described territory as an assemblage of power relations and interactional flows, where social and political dynamics play a crucial role. In a more recent perspective, Lussault (2007) emphasizes the central role of spatial practices in the construction of territory, highlighting its relational and evolving nature. He argues that territory results from continuous interactions between human actors and their environment. Since 2010, several scholars have expanded on this approach. For instance, Lévy (2012) contends that territory should be viewed as a "spatial institution" that structures the relationships between individuals and their living environments, underscoring its role in shaping social and economic organization.

Harvey and Braun (2012), in their research on metropolitan territories, argue that these spaces are increasingly shaped by globalization and urbanization, which transform their internal dynamics. They contend that major metropolitan areas have become complex territories where economic, ecological, and social challenges intertwine. Paasi (2013) offers a critical perspective, emphasizing that territory also serves as an instrument of power, employed to control and organize populations through symbolic and administrative boundaries.

Complementing this view, Retaillé and Dory (2015) introduce the concept of "territorial mobility," highlighting the fluidity of contemporary territories within a globalized world. They demonstrate how the movement of individuals, capital, and ideas continuously redefines territorial boundaries and meanings. Lastly, Häkli and Kallio (2018) adopt a relational perspective, conceiving territory as a construct emerging from interactions among individuals, institutions, and natural environments, encompassing both local and global dynamics.

These recent contributions enhance the understanding of territory by incorporating new dimensions such as globalization, mobility, and the interplay between local and global scales. They show that territory remains an evolving concept, reflecting the economic, social, and political transformations of the contemporary world.

Territory is a multidimensional entity situated at the intersection of geographical, social, cultural, and economic dynamics. Its comprehension requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates both classical and contemporary insights. As a space appropriated and organized by human actors, territory functions simultaneously as a site of identity, an instrument of power, and a framework for interaction. Recent research underscores its significance in a globalized and mobile world, where territories must continuously adapt to emerging realities.

3. The Commune

The commune represents the fundamental tier of administrative and territorial organization. As a local entity, it plays a central role in managing public affairs and implementing policies focused on proximity. It also constitutes a space for citizen participation and the practical application of decentralization and local democracy principles. Although the concept of the commune is historical, it continues to evolve under the influence of contemporary political, economic, and social transformations.

Historically, the commune has been defined as an administrative subdivision responsible for local affairs management. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835), in his seminal work *Democracy in America*, highlights the commune's role as the starting point of local democracy, providing citizens with a direct arena for expression and active engagement in public governance. He regards the commune as a cornerstone of modern democracies. By the mid-20th century, Léopold (1949) emphasized the commune's function in territorial structuring, underscoring its autonomy and its role in optimizing local public services.

More recently, Chevallier (2003) analyzed the commune through the lens of local governance, stressing concepts such as subsidiarity and citizen participation. According to him, the commune is an essential actor in decentralization, capable of effectively addressing citizens' specific needs thanks to its proximity and autonomy. Loughlin (2009) extends this view by linking the commune to challenges related to the modernization of local administrations. He insists on the necessity for communes to adapt to contemporary political and economic transformations by integrating mechanisms of transparency and accountability.

Since 2010, numerous scholars have brought fresh perspectives on the role and functions of communes. Blondiaux and Sintomer (2012) examine the commune from the perspective of citizen participation, highlighting the rise of participatory devices such as participatory budgeting and citizen forums, which enhance residents' engagement in local decision-making. Lefèvre (2013) views the commune as a central player in the ecological transition, playing a key role in implementing local policies related to the environment and sustainable development. Horlitz and Bernt (2015) adopt a critical standpoint, underlining the challenges communes face in the context of globalization and metropolitan expansion. They note that communes must now reconcile their traditional roles with growing expectations regarding economic attractiveness and social innovation.

Clergue and Pommier (2021) explore the relationship between communes and territories from an integrated governance perspective. They argue that communes must collaborate with other governance levels, particularly regions, to address collective challenges such as mobility, housing, and infrastructure. These approaches reinforce the idea that communes, while autonomous, operate within an interconnected system requiring coordination and cooperation. These contributions demonstrate that the commune remains a key player in local governance but must continuously adapt to meet contemporary challenges, notably ecological transition, social innovation, and the integration of digital technologies.

4. The Region

The region, as a territorial entity, plays a pivotal role in the intermediate governance between the state and communes. It lies at the heart of economic, social, and environmental development dynamics. Regionalization refers to a political and administrative process aimed at enhancing the autonomy of regions to enable better territorial management. These concepts have been extensively analyzed in academic literature, highlighting their significance in decentralization and strategic planning.

The region is defined as a delimited territorial space equipped with administrative and political structures that allow for the coordination of public policies at an intermediate scale. According

to Keating (2013), the region has become a key actor in the context of globalization due to its ability to attract foreign investments and promote economic innovation. He emphasizes that regionalization strengthens this capacity by granting regions broader powers and increased resources.

For Lefèvre (2014), the region serves as an essential lever to reduce territorial inequalities and foster balanced development. He argues that regionalization facilitates a more efficient allocation of resources and governance tailored to local specificities. Loughlin and Hendriks (2016) examine the impact of regionalization on local democracy, highlighting how it encourages citizen participation and transparency in public decision-making.

Harvey and Braun (2018) adopt a critical stance, pointing out that regionalization can also exacerbate disparities between wealthy and poorer regions due to differences in their financial and economic capacities. These authors stress the need for national regulation to mitigate such inequalities. Finally, Clergue and Pommier (2021) underscore the role of regions in the ecological transition, explaining how they can integrate environmental concerns into their development policies.

Table 1 offers a comparative summary of the main concepts and characteristics associated with the notions of territory, commune, and region, aiming to better grasp their specificities and respective roles.

Table 1: Comparative Summary of the Conceptual Dimensions of Territory, Commune, and Region

	Territory	Commune	Region
Definition	Appropriated and organized geographic space.	Basic local administrative unit	Intermediate level between the State and communes.
Caractéristiques	Dynamic, multidimensional (social, cultural).	Proximity, autonomy, citizen participation.	Large scale, coordination of regional policies.
Rôle	Reflects identity and economic dynamics.	Manages local needs and public services.	Strategic planning and economic attractiveness.
Enjeux	Governance, attractiveness, mobility.	Decentralization, local efficiency.	Economic development and reduction of territorial inequalities.
Exemple	Rural areas, cross-border territories.	Villages, small cities (e.g., Mohammedia, Casablanca...)	Administrative regions such as Île-de-France, Casablanca-Settat, or Fès-Meknès

Source : Inspired by the works of Blondiaux and Sintomer (2012), Lefèvre (2013), and Clergue and Pommier (2021)

These contributions demonstrate that the municipality remains a key actor in local governance, but must continually adapt to contemporary challenges, notably ecological transition, social innovation, and the integration of digital technologies.

The region, as a territorial entity, and regionalization, as a political and administrative process, play a central role in modern governance. They provide a relevant response to the imperatives of decentralization, participatory democracy, and sustainable development. However, issues related to interregional inequalities and the coordination between different levels of governance remain critical challenges for maximizing their effectiveness.

5. Territorial Attractiveness : A Multidimensional Perspective

Territorial attractiveness has become a strategic issue in a context marked by globalization, the mobility of production factors, and increased inter-territorial competition. It refers to the

capacity of a territory to attract and retain mobile resources, such as businesses, investments, talent, or residents, by mobilizing a range of multidimensional levers.

Since the early 2000s, scholars like Camagni (2002) have proposed a systemic understanding of attractiveness based on economic, social, cognitive, and institutional factors, moving beyond mere economic performance. This approach was further reinforced by Tremblay and Tremblay (2010), who emphasize the need for a long-term vision rooted in the valorization of local resources and inclusive governance.

More recently, the OECD (2022) updated this perspective by highlighting that residents' well-being is now a central determinant of territorial attractiveness. The report *Measuring the Attractiveness of Regions* points out that quality of life, which includes access to public services, a healthy environment, rich cultural life, and cohesive social fabric, has become a major criterion for individuals, especially young professionals and families with high human capital. Thus, attractiveness is no longer aimed solely at investors but also at citizens, placing social cohesion and proximity policies at the heart of territorial strategies.

The economic dimension remains, however, indispensable. According to Echattabi (2024), the territorial offering constitutes a key lever to capture investments. This offering must be co-constructed between public and private actors to address contemporary challenges related to sustainability, innovation, and inclusion. Earlier works by the ESPON program (2006, 2010) already emphasized the multidimensionality of attractiveness, linking it to criteria such as connectivity, human capital, and innovation. In this light, economic attractiveness relies on the ability to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurial development, investment, and employment.

Institutional quality also emerges as a structuring determinant. Sorcaru et al. (2023) demonstrate that governance, regulatory stability, and transparency significantly influence the localization of foreign direct investments. A territory perceived as stable and predictable attracts more economic actors. This aligns with the OECD's (2009) definition of attractiveness as the capacity to mobilize resources and enhance international visibility while offering a conducive living environment.

Simultaneously, integrating environmental concerns has become crucial in attractiveness strategies. Pérez and González (2023) show that territories adopting ecologically responsible policies benefit from increased attractiveness, both among businesses and residents. These practices not only strengthen the territory's image but also contribute to sustainable competitiveness. This vision aligns with Tremblay and Tremblay's (2010) argument that territories must engage in sustainable development to maintain their attractiveness over time.

Accordingly, communicational and cognitive dimensions have gained growing importance. Kavartzis (2004) introduced the concept of place branding, emphasizing that constructing a clear and shared territorial identity is a strategic factor in attracting talent, investors, and visitors. Berrada (2019) confirms this in her study on the WeCasablanca brand, showing that institutional communication and citizen engagement in promoting the territory's image are decisive in shaping external perceptions. Thus, the attractiveness dynamic becomes a matter of territorial narrative, collective appropriation, and the valorization of local specificities.

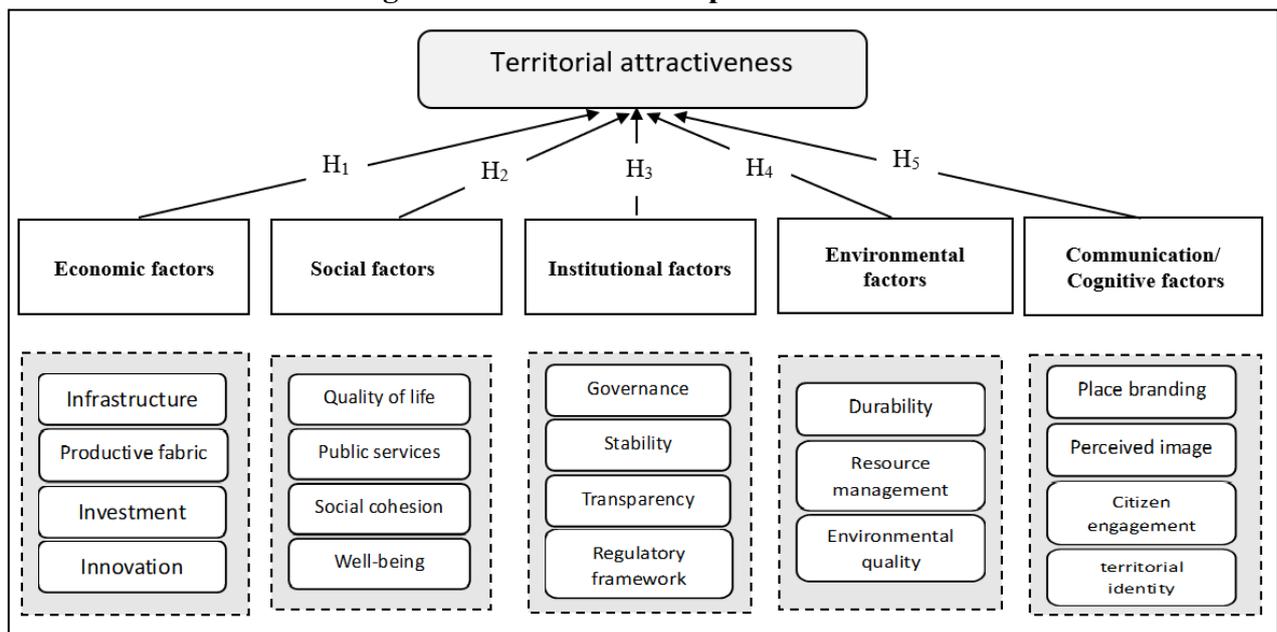
In summary, the challenges of territorial attractiveness are multifaceted and interdependent. Economically, it serves as a key lever to attract investments, stimulate employment, and enhance a territory's competitiveness within a globalized context. From a social perspective, attractiveness contributes to population retention, the improvement of quality of life, and social cohesion by ensuring equitable access to public services and opportunities. Environmental concerns are also central, as an attractive territory must now meet the demands of sustainability, responsible resource management, and resilience to climate change. Politically, attractiveness raises issues of territorial governance: it requires effective coordination among stakeholders, a shared development vision, and citizen involvement in projects. Finally, symbolic and

communicational aspects have become indispensable: the construction of a positive and authentic territorial image through place branding plays a crucial role in the territory's ability to attract investors, residents, and visitors.

6. Research Conceptual Framework

After analyzing the various determining factors that influence territorial attractiveness, we propose an integrative conceptual model (Figure 1), based on a systemic theoretical framework. This conceptual model aims to represent the articulation between five major dimensions: economic, social, institutional, environmental, and communication/cognitive, identified through the literature review.

Figure 1: Research Conceptual Model



Source: authors

This conceptual foundation draws notably on :

- The theory of territorial systems (Camagni, 2002), which conceives the territory as an open, dynamic, and interactive system shaped by spatial interdependencies;
- Territorial marketing and local governance approaches (Moine, 2006 ; Medway & Warnaby, 2008), which highlight the strategic importance of image, identity, and multi-actor coordination in enhancing attractiveness;
- Recent contributions from the OECD (2022) and Tremblay & Tremblay (2010), which underscore the centrality of well-being, quality of life, and sustainability in contemporary territorial development strategies.

The model is based on the assumption that territorial attractiveness results from complex and multidirectional interactions among these dimensions. Each factor contributes in a distinct yet complementary manner to the construction of an attractive territory (Table 2), according to the following logics:

- Economic factors (infrastructure, investment, innovation, etc.) constitute the foundation of territorial competitiveness, attracting businesses and capital (Krugman, 1991; ESPON, 2010).

- Social factors (quality of life, public services, well-being, etc.) shape a territory's ability to retain its population and attract new residents, particularly highly skilled talent with strong human capital (OECD, 2022).
- Institutional factors (governance, stability, transparency, etc.) ensure a predictable and secure environment for both investors and citizens, by promoting equity and inclusiveness (Sorcaru et al., 2023; OECD, 2009).
- Environmental factors (sustainability, resource management, ecological quality, etc.) are increasingly central, given growing public expectations regarding ecology and climate resilience (Pérez & González, 2023).
- Communicational/cognitive factors (perceived image, place branding, territorial identity, etc.) act as powerful symbolic levers, enhancing visibility, reputation, and the sense of belonging (Kavaratzis, 2004; Berrada, 2019).

Table 2 : Theoretical Foundations of the Dimensions in the Conceptual Model of Territorial Attractiveness

Dimension	Constituent Elements	Theoretical Justifications
Economic Factors	Infrastructure, productive fabric, investment, innovation	New Economic Geography Theory (Krugman, 1991); ESPON (2006, 2010); Camagni (2002)
Social Factors	Quality of life, public services, social cohesion, well-being	Territorial Well-being Approach (OECD, 2022); Sustainable Human Development (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2010)
Institutional Factors	Governance, stability, transparency, regulatory framework	Theory of Territorial Systems (Camagni, 2002); Territorial Governance (Sorcaru et al., 2023; OECD, 2009)
Environmental Factors	Sustainability, resource management, environmental quality	Territorial Sustainable Development (Pérez & González, 2023); Ecological Approach to Attractiveness (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2010)
Communicational / Cognitive Factors	Place branding, perceived image, citizen engagement, territorial identity	Territorial Branding Theory (Kavaratzis, 2004); Public Territorial Communication (Berrada, 2019); ESPON (2010)

Source: authors

Thus, we formulate our research hypotheses as follows:

H1 : Economic factors have a positive and significant impact on territorial attractiveness.

H2 : Social factors have a positive and significant impact on territorial attractiveness.

H3 : Institutional factors have a positive and significant impact on territorial attractiveness.

H4 : Environmental factors have a positive and significant impact on territorial attractiveness.

H5 : Communication and cognitive factors have a positive and significant impact on territorial attractiveness.

The conceptual model we propose not only accounts for the diversity of levers that can be mobilized but also enhances the understanding of the synergies among the components of territorial attractiveness. It thus provides public decision-makers with an analytical foundation for the strategic management of territories, enabling the implementation of effective and

sustainable strategies to enhance territorial appeal, while fostering a harmonious and inclusive territorial dynamic. However, the proposed conceptual research model is intended to undergo empirical validation, with the aim of offering an operational framework to assess the relevance of the identified dimensions within the Moroccan context.

In this perspective, the model also presents significant analytical value, as it allows for the anticipation of expected outcomes for each of the hypothesized dimensions. Specifically, it aims to test the significant and positive impact of economic, social, institutional, environmental, and communicational/cognitive factors on territorial attractiveness. Empirical validation should therefore help identify, according to local specificities, the most determinant variables and prioritize the intervention levers. In this sense, the model offers both a predictive and strategic framework for evaluating the expected outcomes of territorial public policies, whether they pertain to economic development, governance, sustainability, or territorial marketing.

7. Conclusion

Territorial attractiveness has become an essential subject of study for understanding local and regional development dynamics within an evolving landscape of inter-territorial competition. Through this contribution, we have highlighted the conceptual richness and the diversity of approaches employed to apprehend this phenomenon.

The first section allowed us to define the concept of territory in its full historical and theoretical depth, emphasizing its evolution from a merely geographic space to a social, political, and relational construction. This reinterpretation of territory provides a crucial foundation for understanding the differentiating factors and sources of valorization that contribute to attractiveness.

In this regard, the region emerges as a significant analytical scale for comprehending attractiveness strategies. It serves as a space for articulating public policies, economic dynamics, and societal aspirations. The theoretical approaches analyzed demonstrate that attractiveness is not decreed but constructed over time through coordinated processes of planning, territorial branding, and citizen participation.

From this perspective, adopting an integrated approach to territorial attractiveness that mobilizes diverse resources and stakeholders becomes paramount. It is within this framework that the use of a multidimensional conceptual model takes on full meaning: it enables a better understanding of the complex mechanisms underlying territorial attractiveness and guides public actions accordingly. This analytical lens thus provides a relevant theoretical basis for developing sustainable, inclusive strategies tailored to the specificities of each territorial context.

However, this model remains, at this stage, a theoretical proposition. It will require empirical validation to assess the relevance of the identified dimensions and their ability to reflect territorial realities, particularly within the Moroccan context. This step will constitute a natural extension of this review, with the ambition to construct an operational analytical framework capable of guiding public policies related to territorial attractiveness.

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