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# The Contribution of Crafts in Improving the Tourist Image of Essaouira: The Case of Marquetry

Mustapha Bouragba<sup>1</sup>, Fatima Elkandoussi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit, ENCG Agadir, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

<sup>2</sup>Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit, ENCG Agadir, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

Correspondence: Mustapha Bouragba, Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit, ENCG Agadir, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. Tel: -. E-mail: mustapha.bouragba@gmail.com

## Abstract

In order to enhance tourism in Morocco, the 2020 vision is concentrating on an integrated and a proactive approach to national land-use planning. Eight territories have been set up, and each one has a positioning that the ministry of tourism plans to promote. Essaouira, which is a part of Marrakech Atlantic territory, is hence, presented as a destination that embodies the art of living. Namely, the marquetry, which is reflecting cultural and artistic identity has played a key role in fostering the touristic image of Essaouira. However, this role is not well highlighted and Essaouira's marquetry is encountering several obstacles that need to be fixed so as to improve this craft, which is the symbol of an entire province. The aim of this article is to evaluate the managerial practices of Essaouira's inlayers, in order to recommend suitable actions for the improvement of the city's marquetry sector and therefore contribute into the enhancement of its touristic image.

**Keywords:** Branding, Crafts, Destination's Image, Essaouira, Marquetry, Tourism

## 1. Introduction

Essaouira is an outstanding touristic city. What makes it distinct from other Moroccan cities is clearly its history and culture inherited from different civilizations and ethnicities. Tourism sector plays a major role in the provincial economy. This sector is expected to play an important role in increasing foreign exchange resources, driving commercial and craft activities up to creating jobs. Natural, geographical and cultural assets make Essaouira, the capital of the Province, land of peace and one of the richest and most diverse host cities in the kingdom. Tourism in the city benefit from an important reception and accommodation facilities. The total accommodation capacity of Essaouira is 2608 rooms, composed of 5513 beds divided between hotels, guesthouses, tourist residences and hostels (Essaouira's Province, 2019).

With a view to consolidate the positioning that the Ministry of Tourism (vision 2020) wants to attribute to the Marrakech Atlantic territory, and more specifically the site of Essaouira as a destination that embodies the art of living (Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts "Department of Tourism", 2011), the actors of Essaouira's province have become part of a dynamic aimed at valuing local products, especially those of the marquetry, which constitutes the cultural and artistic identity of Essaouira. Since crafts are not only a collection of activities and products, but also constitutes a civilizational vector that carries the cultural and artistic ability of the people and the nation (Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts and Social Economy "Department of Handicrafts and Social Economy", 2004). Furthermore, the marquetry, established in Essaouira in the 19th century by European renegades converted to Islam and known as laâllouj, constitutes a refined and prestigious specialty of Essaouira, of which it is in Morocco the undisputed capital (Sibony, 2004).

Actually, the marquetry is one of the key trades of Essaouira, its products represent 90% of the handicrafts exportation. It is an essential element in the social and solidarity Economy of the province of Essaouira given of the labor signed up, about more than 3500 craftsmen (Provincial Direction of Handicrafts in Essaouira, 2019).

Tourist are craving for local products from the marquetry, as they are looking for products with a high cultural content, that is representative of the Essaouira's tradition. However, the role these products play in the development of Essaouira as a touristic image is not well highlighted.

The question which comes then to light;

Are the managerial practices of Essaouira's inlayers relevant to improve the branding of the city's destination?

Five hypotheses emerged:

- H1: the supplying method of inlayers has a positive effect on the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H2: the inlayers' production system plays a role in promoting the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H3: human resources in marquetry positively influence the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H4: financial resources in marquetry promote the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H5: marketing mix practices of inlayers promote the branding of Essaouira's destination.

In fact, the aim of this article is to highlight the role of marquetry, as a craft product with a strong cultural content of which territorial anchorage is very strong, in the positioning and enhancement of Essaouira's touristic image.

To reach this goal, we have structured our work into four main parts:

In the first axis, we will address the conceptual framework of our research.

The second axis will be devoted for the presentation and analysis of the inventory of the Essaouira's marquetry.

The third axis will approach the discussion of the results in order to validate or reject our research hypotheses.

The last axis will treat the actions to be taken for upgrade Essaouira's marquetry. Therefore, the enhancement of the touristic image of the city.

## **2. Conceptual Approach of Destination Image**

### *2.1 Destination Image: A Strategic Device for Tourism Valuation of the Territory*

According to Lawson and Baud-Bovey (1977), a destination image is the expression of any objective and/or subjective knowledge that an individual or group may have of a particular place. For Hunt (1982), "all places have images - good, bad and indifferent - that must be identified, then either changed or exploited". In other words, the destination image brings together all the emotional perceptions and mental representations that people have in a specific place.

Today, competition between tourist destinations is fierce due to the increasing of international tourism. Thus, the enhancement of territories is necessary for public decision-makers and local authorities. In fact, each destination has an image, and some may have a stronger image than others. To develop a competitive position, it is important to create and convey a favorable image to potential tourists in targeted markets. Indeed, it represents the way for

destinations to position themselves and achieve a sufficient degree of recognition (Di Marino, 2008). One of the most important marketing challenges arising from this situation is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy. To be successfully promoted in targeted markets, a destination must be positively differentiated from its competitors, or positively positioned, in the minds of consumers. A key element of this positioning process is the creation and management of a unique and attractive perception, or image, of the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

The image of a destination is at the source of its attractiveness since the specificity of the territories and their identity constitute a major source of competitiveness (François, 2008). Therefore, it plays a crucial role in the choice of a destination by tourists. Hence the need to make destinations attractive by improving their image by using an effective promotion of their distinctive local qualities. As a result, local products are one of those qualities that must be enhanced, aiming to develop a favorable competitive position for a destination. The authenticity, tradition and originality of these local products are used as arguments to create and convey a favorable image for potential visitors.

## *2.2 The Dimensions of a Destination's Branding*

The concept of destination brand is the result of tourists' perceptions of a destination, which affect their behavior towards it (Mantei, 2015). As a result, and given the fierce competition in the tourism sector, the branding of a destination is a crucial asset which stimulates the emotions of tourists (Marcotte, Bourdeau, & Leroux, 2011). Therefore to distinguish itself, the branding of a destination can be based on its most prestigious dimensions in order to enhance the unique and exceptional character of the territory so that it is appreciated by tourists.

Given the diversity of tourism derivatives that a destination encompasses, it would be appropriate to equate the name of a destination with that of a sign. Thus, the image of a destination is only an overlay of the different images conveyed by the various points of sale of hotels and tourist services hosted in this territory.

At this stage and according to Mankai (2005), it is necessary to apply the effect of the "identity prism" on the image of a destination so as to better identify a coherent branding. The latter concept proposed by Variot and Kapferer (1985), cited by Dourai (2001), is composed of six pillars that symbolize the territory potentiality of a sign, it is a judicious tool to identify the dimensions of the branding of a destination, namely:

- The physical.
- The personality.
- The relationship.
- The culture.
- The reflection.
- The mentalization.

The attractiveness of a territory is thus built on one or more dimensions. It is also strongly linked to the perception of local actors, the reputation of established companies, the workforce, the cultural environment, etc. Moreover, according to Nifle (2004), it is the cultural vocation of a territory that makes it a personalized, unique and attractive space. Given its own values, its identity, its character, its heritage and the know-how of its inhabitants, etc. In addition, tourists shape a close relationship with destinations and associate their images with the products they consume. Thus, they seek destinations characterized by specific products or services rich and captivating environmental sources (Moalla & Mollard, 2011).

Subsequently, it appears that the highlighting of the cultural dimension of the tourist destination of Essaouira, notably through the upgrade of the marquetry, will contribute to the enhancement of its image as a tourist brand. In fact, the handcrafts with strong cultural content and in particular the marquetry of Essaouira, given its strong territorial anchorage stem from an ancestral traditional know-how and represent a local cultural heritage, plays a crucial role in improving the attractiveness of Essaouira's tourist image. Hence, the need to analyze the state of the

premises of the Essaouira's marquetry and thus propose the actions to be implemented to remedy the obstacles that hinder its development and, therefore, enhance the tourist image of Essaouira.

### 3. Empirical Study of the Managerial Practices of Essaouira's Inlayers

#### 3.1 Study Methodology

In order to bring in answers to our problematic and propose actions to be implemented for the improvement of the Essaouira's marquetry and to contribute, therefore, to the enhancement of the city's tourist image, we carried out a qualitative survey among 54 Essaouira's inlayers. In our questionnaire we were based on the following axes:

- Supplying ;
- Production system ;
- Human resources ;
- Financial resources ;
- Marketing mix.

The processing of the questionnaire that we conducted led us to two analyzes:

- External Analysis.
- Internal Analysis.

#### 3.2 Results of External and Internal Analysis

##### 3.2.1 External Analysis

In order to conduct an external analysis of the craftsmen's environment, we studied the opportunities and threats of the components of this environment, namely: Legal and regulatory environment, demographic environment, natural environment, technological environment, the market and competition.

In the next table we have tried to summarize the results obtained:

Table 1. External analysis

	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Legal and regulatory environment	- Law 112-12 to reform the status of cooperatives. - Law 133-12 relating to the distinctive signs of handicrafts. - Law Project 72-11 relating to Fair Trade.	Lack of a law prohibiting the export of raw thuja wood.
Demographic environment	- Morocco's population growth. - In 2014, the province of Essaouira had a population of 449 133. (High Commission for the Plan of Morocco, 2014)	
Natural environment	Morocco has 700 000 hectares, or 80% of the thuja forests in North Africa. In Essaouira's province, the area occupied by the thuja is about 96 000 ha. (Sibony, 2004)	- Overexploitation of the forests of Essaouira, drought. - Thuja grows very slowly. Indeed, it is only by more than 100 years that the tree reaches 10 to 15 meters and becomes usable. It should also be noted that the life expectancy of thuja is 400 years (El Jouali, 2003).
Technological environment	At first, the work was 100% manual, now the inlayers are increasingly using	Lack of an effective technological solution for drying wood.

	machines that represent a saving of time, effort and money.	
The market	- Strong potential of the internal market. - Customer increasingly sensitive to the Social and Solidarity Economy.	- Flooding the market with low-quality, low-priced items. - The anarchy of sales spaces. - Persistence of the informal.
Competition	Establishment of the THUYA D'ESSAOUIRA label.	- Competition is fierce in the domestic and international market. - Competition from other countries (China, Indonesia ...).

Source: Authors

Based on the results obtained, we notice that the components of the external environment related to inlayers in the city of Essaouira are generally favorable and promote the development of the latter.

### 3.2.2 Internal Analysis

In order to analyze the internal analysis of the inlayers' environment, we studied the strengths and weaknesses of their management practices.

The following table summarizes the results obtained:

Table 2. Internal analysis

	<b>Forces</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Supplying	Know how to choose and process the raw materials.	The price of thuja wood is variable and relatively high.
Production system	- Skill and ancestral know-how of the inlayers. - The ability of craftsmen to adapt to customer demands.	- Often rudimentary equipment. - Sometimes inappropriate working conditions (narrow workshop space, pollution problems...).
Human resources	- An experienced and talented manpower (master craftsmen). - The training programs launched by the Department of Crafts. - Several craftsmen have benefited from the national literacy program.	- The disinterest of young people. - Illiteracy. - Lack of management competence and marketing techniques.
Financial resources	- Financial support from the department of crafts (technical equipment). - Financial support from the National Initiative for Human Development. - Financial support from the MAISON DE L'ARTISAN (exhibitions organized abroad).	- Difficulties in accessing bank loans for craftsmen - Lack of information on funding opportunities. - Shortage of financial resources.
Marketing mix	Product - Diverse offer. - The reputation of the Essaouira's marquetry (reflects the cultural and artistic heritage of Essaouira).	- Lack of innovation and creativity. - Lack of information on the evolution of the sector, especially in new collections.
	Price The products have good value for money.	- No price display.

	- No match in the prices of identical items.
Distribution	
Short distribution channels.	Weak structuring of the inlayers.
Communication	
The scorers benefit from the actions put in place by the MAISON DE L'ARTISAN.	- Very limited communication actions. - Low use of social networks and new technologies.

Source: Authors

In addition, we can conclude that the internal environment of inlayers represents more shortcomings than strengths especially in terms of supplying, production system and marketing mix.

#### 4. Discussion:

The qualitative study of the relationship between managerial practices of inlayers and the tourist branding of the city of Essaouira is carried out through a questionnaire. This analysis yielded results which interpretation will allow us to validate or reject our research hypotheses.

According to the results of our questionnaire, we note that the external environment of inlayers presents significant opportunities for them, in particular:

- The significant potential of natural resources available in the province of Essaouira, especially with regard to thuja forests.
- Technological progress in favor of craftsman. In fact, inlayers are using more and more machines, especially for difficult tasks, which save time, effort and money.
- The great potential of the internal and external market.
- The Establishment of the THUYA D'ESSAOUIRA label which promotes local marquetry products and protects them against unfair competition.

In addition, inlayers suffer from several weaknesses which concerns their internal environment, especially in terms of supplying, the production system and the marketing mix. Thus, the inlayers are facing supplying difficulties because of the very high prices of raw materials, also, the use of rudimentary equipment and the often inappropriate working climate weakened the efficiency of their production system. As for the marketing mix practices, we notice on the one hand that the policy followed by inlayers lacks innovation and creativity. On the other hand, it doesn't have a price display and harmonization system, also, we note the weak structuring of the inlayers and the low use of social networks and new technologies. This shows that the supplying method, the Production system and the marketing mix practices adopted by the inlayers are too weak to improve the branding of Essaouira's destination.

Thus, we can reject the subsequent hypotheses:

- H1: the supplying method of inlayers has a positive effect on the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H2: the inlayers' production system plays a role in promoting the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H5: Marketing mix practices of inlayers promote the branding of Essaouira's destination.

Furthermore, the presence of talented and experienced master craftsmen benefiting from continuous training organized by the department of handicrafts results in manufacturing of innovative masterpieces reflecting, at the same time, the culture and tradition of Essaouira, which is, therefore, a factor for improving the branding of Essaouira's destination. Also, craftsman benefit from financial and technical support from the ministerial department of handicrafts, the MAISON DE L'ARTISAN and the National Initiative for Human Development in order to showcase their finished products intended for national and international tourists, and consequently improve the image of Essaouira's city. Based on these results, we can confirm the following hypotheses:

- H3: Human resources in marquetry positively influence the branding of Essaouira's destination.
- H4: Financial resources in marquetry promote the branding of Essaouira's destination.

## 5. Recommendations

In order to improve the role that marquetry plays in enhancing Essaouira's tourism image, some measures must be put in place for the upgrading of this profession, which constitutes Essaouira's cultural and artistic identity:

- Organization of tours / introductory marquetry workshops for tourists to discover the different stages of manufacture of marquetry products. This approach will allow tourists to acquire knowledge about the distinct products, while encouraging them to buy them.
- Creation of a festival to promote local products from Essaouira, especially those of the marquetry.
- Integration of marquetry workshops and points of sale within tourist circuits.
- Support, for the benefit of the scorers, in technical equipment to reduce waste during the various stages of wood processing and improve productivity.
- construction of infrastructure projects (craft complexes, craft villages, craft activity area including a center dedicated to the trades of thuja wood, etc.) will improve the productivity of craftsmen, upgrade their working conditions and promote the attractiveness of the province by the development of handcrafts and the creation of a tourism and commercial dynamic.
- Stimulation of innovation to improve and renew existing product lines while preserving authenticity related to Essaouira's culture, civilization and lifestyle.
- Establishment of partnerships with designers to create new product collections and make them available free of charge to inlayers.
- Rationalization of the use of thuja wood by developing new techniques and combining it with other types of wood/materials.
- creation and promotion of marketing spaces for marquetry products, especially in rural areas, to increase the traffic of buyers (locals and tourists) while ensuring the improvement of the attractiveness of existing spaces.
- Setting up services that facilitate the act of purchase in all sales spaces.
- Support for inlayers to take advantage of the National Initiative for Human Development.
- Organization of open days to enhance marquetry, as the cultural and artistic identity of Essaouira, with young people and motivate them to learn the trade, and thus ensure the transmission of knowledge to future generations.
- Facilitate financing for inlayers (banks, micro credit, etc.).
- Creation of sales spaces for marquetry products in existing and future tourism infrastructure.
- Realization of promotion and communication campaigns on Essaouira's marquetry, the different types of masterpieces made by inlayers, their ancestral and authentic know-how and the nobility of the wood used (thuja).
- Creation of a website presenting the heritage and historical dimension of the Essaouira's marquetry and the specificity of its products. So that to more easily inform potential customers (including domestic and foreign tourists).
- Organization of competitions with awards dedicated exclusively to Essaouira's inlayers in order to enhance the profession and encourage innovation.
- Organization of awareness days on standards and good practices in terms of hygiene and safety in the workplace and on pollution problems (waste, dust, etc.).
- Organization of a functional literacy program and continuing training sessions for inlayers to promote their technical and managerial skills.
- Promotion of Essaouira's marquetry through the annual organization of national and international fairs, shows and exhibitions dedicated exclusively to marquetry products.
- Organization of communication days on funding opportunities and programs from which inlayers can benefit.
- Encourage inlayers to use social networks to promote their products.
- Launching of communication campaigns to sensitize the tourists about the impact of buying marquetry products on sustainable local development, given their strong territorial roots, and on improving the quality of life of inlayers.



## 6. Conclusions

Huge efforts have been made by the Ministry of Handicrafts, Social and Solidarity Economy to promote the Essaouira's marquetry. Nevertheless, the potential of this profession is not yet well exploited, given the crucial role it plays in enhancing Essaouira's tourism image as it reflects its cultural and artistic identity. Thus, the establishment of the THUYA D'ESSAOUIRA label will help to promote the marquetry products, to sustainably penetrate the target markets and to preserve this national heritage by protecting it from counterfeiting and unfair competition, and thus to make the appellation of Essaouira's thuja a geographical reference.

At the same time, it is necessary to make tourists aware of the different types of masterpieces made by the inlayers, highlighting their ancestral and authentic know-how, the nobility of the wood used (thuja), not to mention the role that these products play in sustainable local development given their strong territorial roots. In addition, the workshops and sales points of the marquetry must be integrated within the tourist circuits in order to strengthen the complementarity between the tourism and crafts sectors and to boost the marketing of its products.

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