

International migration and its impact on the spatial dynamics of Guercif city (Morocco)

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Abstract

This study is based on the field survey, one methodological tool among others used mainly in the social sciences. The aim is to determine the impact of international migration on the spatial dynamics of the city of Guercif. A phase of reconnaissance of the field, followed by a qualitative stage marked by interviews with the respondents, allowed us to verify the results and exploit them quantitatively via questionnaire. The analysis of the responses from 230 valid questionnaires indicate a strong involvement of migrants from the city of Guercif in speculation and the animation of the land market, thanks to the funds transferred.

Keywords: *survey, international migration, spatial dynamics, questionnaires, land market*

Rezumat. Migrația internațională și impactul acesteia asupra dinamicii spațiale a orașului Guercif (Maroc)

Lucrarea de față se bazează pe un studiu de teren, o metodă deseori folosită în cadrul științelor sociale, cu scopul de a determina impactul migrației internaționale asupra dinamicii spațiale a orașului Guercif. După o etapă de familiarizare cu situația din teren, a urmat o etapă calitativă în care am desfășurat interviuri cu diverși respondenți care ne-au permis să verificăm rezultatele preliminare și să le valorificăm apoi din punct de vedere cantitativ prin intermediul unui chestionar. Analiza răspunsurilor obținute în cadrul a 230 de chestionare valide indică o implicare puternică a migranților din orașul Guercif în speculațiile și dinamizarea pieței imobiliare datorită infuziei de capital.

Cuvinte-cheie: *sondaj de opinie, migrație internațională, dinamici spațiale, chestionare, piața imobiliară*

Introduction

The phenomenon of migration is a global trend. Its multidisciplinary aspect puts it at the center of the concerns of various disciplinary fields such as economics, sociology, and above all geography, which has invested the most in this field because of its mobility and spatial aspect (Berriane.M and Aderghal.M, 2008). The report of the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019) on the state of migration in the world in 2020, estimates the share of migrants to be 3.5% of the world population. Morocco is considered an important basin of international migration, perceived among the capital dynamics of the population. Since the second half of the twentieth century, Morocco has been the point of departure for migrants to various destinations, particularly Western European countries. With the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement in 1990, it was illegal or clandestine emigration that fed the human flow from Morocco. In this regard, the city of Guercif, among others, was a rear base for illegal emigration networks and a transmitting center during the 1990s the latter in a perspective where «migrants exchange misery without hope for... misery with hope». (Adepoju, 1988: 123). Unemployment and

poverty have largely induced mass migration, which reveals the economic and social imbalance, and which turns after some time into mass migration since the migrant does not take long to bring his family as part of family reunion. The benefits and costs associated with migration are expressed in terms of economic gains that affect different aspects of the urban landscape of the city of Guercif, mainly the real estate sector which is a privileged investment area for local migrants.

Generally, the expansion of our cities is partly a consequence of the intervention of migrants in the revitalization of the construction sector; this is a finding confirmed by several studies that have focused on the phenomenon of urban expansion (Elaklaâ El Aklaâ et al, 2013). In this sense, international migration is captured as a driver for urban dynamics that have experienced in the case of the city of Guercif a revealed boom. The model of the migration cycle (OECD, 2007) allows us to attest to the consolidation phase in which our study area is, marked by the increase in remittances and the decrease in poverty. This article aims to show the impact of international migration on the spatial dynamics of Guercif on the one hand, and the role of local migrants in the animation of the land market and the production of housing on the other.

Study area

The city of Guercif, the capital of the province is located on a plain of the same name at 378 m above sea level. It is located in the North-East of Morocco at a crossroads between the corridor of Taourirt in the East and that of Taza in the West along with the national road No. 6 on the one hand, and between the North and the South-East along with the national road No. 15 on the other hand (Fig. 1); hence the status of relay city qualifying Guercif. This has given it a strategic geographical location at the center of a triangle whose vertices are Oujda, Nador, and Fez, cities of great importance in the national urban framework (Oujda, Nador, and Fez). It was created by the dismemberment of the province of Taza following the administrative division of 2009. Since 2015, Guercif is part of the Oriental region. The uniqueness of this city lies in the place it holds as a single city in a vast province (over 7300 km²), consisting of nine other municipalities that are all rural. It is enclosed in the neighboring commune of Houara Oulad Rahu.

Historically, the countries of North Africa, and particularly Morocco have constituted an important basin of international migration. Indeed, towards the beginning of the 20th century, Morocco was the destination of European migrants within the framework of the colonial occupation; but with the beginning of the second half of the last century, it became the starting point for the flow of Moroccan migrants to western Europe, especially France, Belgium, Holland, Germany. Later, around the 90s of the last centuries, and with the entry into force of the Schengen agreements, the number of legal migrants fell considerably and it was illegal emigration that would arouse the interest of young candidates for emigration. In this regard, the contribution of the city of Guercif to international migration is relatively recent compared to other cities in the country, because it only began to gain momentum around the second half of the 90s of the last century. The enthusiasm for the phenomenon of migration at the local level set Guercif up as a rear base for illegal emigration networks until 2008 when the pace of emigration was slowed down due to global economic crisis and its impact on the labor market in Europe in general, and particularly in Spain, a preferred destination for young people of the city of Guercif. Despite this, the dream of reaching the "European El Dorado" has not ceased to seriously occupy the minds of the young people of the city and its margin. The security situation induced by the Arab spring revolutions in neighboring countries Tunisia and Libya has benefited networks active in the field of illegal emigration from Tunisian and Libyan coasts. During our field survey, several interviewees assured us that many young people from the city of Guercif took this mode of emigration, especially in 2016 and 2017.

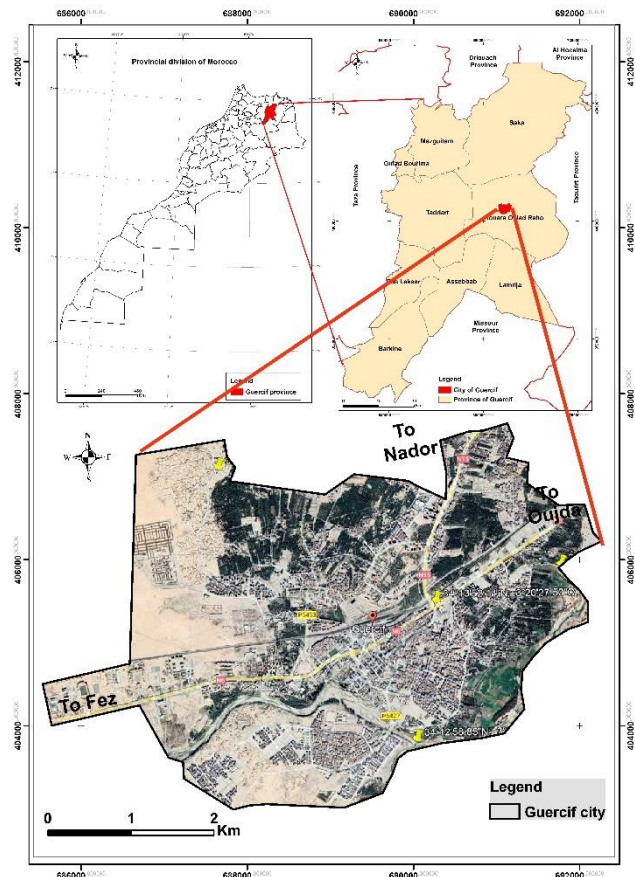


Fig. 1 Study area

Sources: Provincial division (2009), Urban plan of Guercif (2015), and Landsat 2019 satellite image of Guercif.

Moreover, the most significant urban development was recorded in Guercif at the beginning of the 1980s when the city became a center for commercial and service activities. The current urban perimeter is the result of a succession of administrative divisions, and the area of the city has grown from 500 ha to the current 1900 ha. From a demographic point of view, data from the general census of population and housing in Morocco show that the population of the city of Guercif has increased from 11340 inhabitants in 1982 to 90880 inhabitants in 2014. Current projections from the center for demographic studies and research (CDSR) and the high commission for planning (HCP) estimate the population of Guercif at 118674 inhabitants in 2021. This demographic boom has resulted in disproportionate urbanization in which migrants have massively participated in the production of housing in a regulatory framework and sometimes in a framework of self-urbanization thanks to the funds transferred.

It should be recalled that State intervention in the area of social housing has essentially benefited a small segment of the solvent population, while a large part of the population has been forced to opt for non-regulatory and low cost housing. Thus, towards the

end of 2004, more than 59% of the city's population lived in substandard housing (AUT, 2008). The expansion of the city of Guercif is a consequence of the socio-economic and spatial evolution induced by several factors including international migration. The counting of building permits issued between 2000 and 2019 shows that 29% of beneficiaries are migrants. Hence, the role of income from international migration in the animation of the construction sector in the city of Guercif.

Methodology

To carry out this work, we first made an observation and a reconnaissance of the areas where the projects of the migrants who are the target of our survey are located, then we collected data using interviews with officials having a direct or indirect relationship with the issue of migration, such as the council for Moroccan nationals abroad, the ministry in charge of Moroccans residing abroad, the prefecture of Guercif (division of passports and immigration, economic and social division) the services of the municipality. Then, we draw up a questionnaire aiming to extract quantitative information on the investments of the migrants relating to the field of urbanizable land. The questions covered the subjects

raised in the study in order to get the most representative idea possible of the phenomenon. The questionnaire targeted the heads of household and it covered various aspects of the migrant's situation before the first migration (age, place of birth, place of residence, activity carried out, monthly income, level of learning, reasons for immigration, year, type -legal or illegal- destination, date of regularization of the migrant's situation, activity, marital status, number of children, monthly income, frequency and volume of transfers, number of visits to the country of origin, type of habitat, status, mode of production, investments, etc. A corpus of work consisting of 230 questionnaires distributed proportionally to respondents during the summer of 2021, a period which coincides with a mass return of migrants, aims to collect information on the respondent's situation before and after migration: activity carried out, average monthly income, reason for immigration, age, year of migration, type of migration (legal/illegal), destination, activity, average monthly income abroad, the volume of transfers, type of investments. The investigations carried out in six areas of the urban perimeter (Fig. 2), enabled us to assess the involvement of local migrants in the urban sprawl experienced by the city of Guercif.

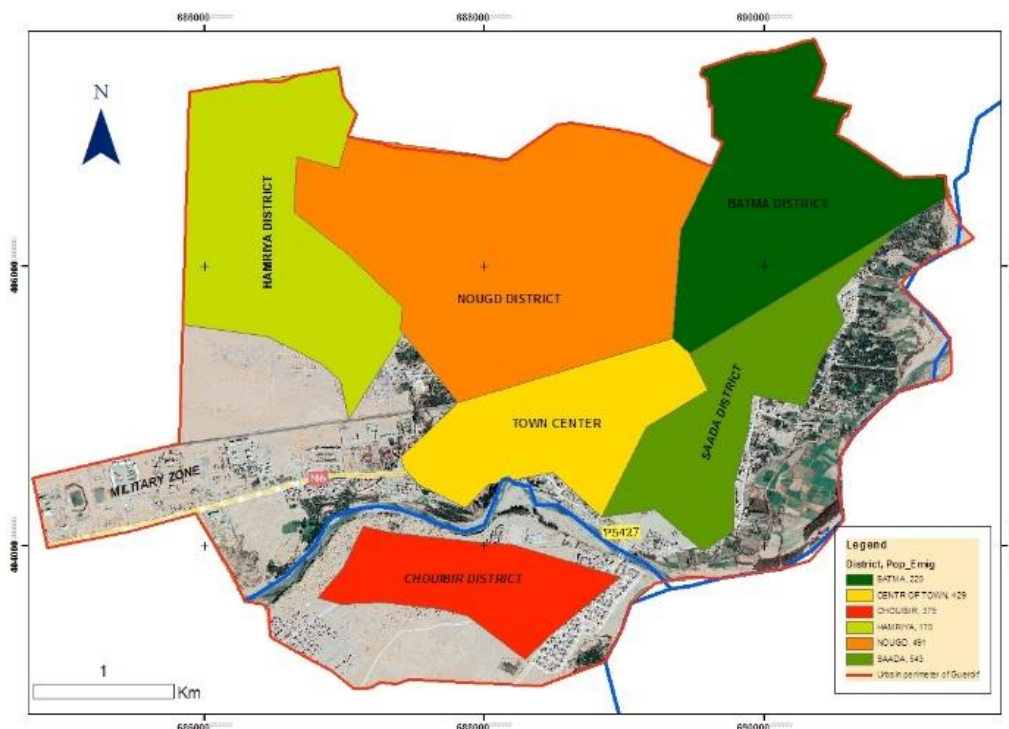


Fig. 2: Distribution of surveyed areas within the urban perimeter

Faced with the impossibility of making a complete search of the migrant in the city and given the irregularity of the period of their return, we resorted to a representative sampling where the respondents were selected according to the information collected from the "Moquaddam", representative of the

authority at the district level. The total population of each neighborhood surveyed is given by the general census of population and housing 2014 in Morocco, and the number of households per neighborhood was provided to us by the "Moquaddam".

Thus, a 10% sample of the emigrant population was the main source of data for this study (Table 1). The statistical unit being the household and the interviewee is the father whose age at the time of the first migration was between 20 and 40 years for 79.2% of the sample surveyed.

Table 1: Distribution of samples to be surveyed

Surveyed area/ district	Total population	Emigrant population	Sample to be surveyed
Town center	13627	509	51
Nougd	13258	491	49
Saâda	18473	543	54
Batma	5492	220	22
Chouibir	19356	379	37
Hamriya	18293	170	17

Source: General census of population and housing (2014) and representative of authority (2021)

In addition, to complete this work, we conducted a documentary analysis of the building permits issued by the competent services in the municipality of Guercif. Sorting of the database related to the authorized constructions allowed us to attest to the role of migrants in the dynamization of the building sector in Guercif.

To get an idea of the weight of migrant investments, an analysis grid was developed from the questionnaire to retain the essential information relating to the contribution of migrants to the spatial dynamics of our study area. The information retained concerns:

- 1- The investments of the migrants (urbanizable land, area, location, use).
- 2- The method of financing (self-financing, self-financing + bank credit, self-financing + family credit)
- 3- Increase in the flow of migrants to Europe and its consequences on the land market

To facilitate the analysis and synthesis process, the information collected was captured and processed to present the main aspects of the study based on the survey data.

Results and discussions

Land investment: a priority for migrants

The impact of migration on the sprawl of the city of Guercif is the priority aspect of this study. The result of our survey showed the prevalence of the land sector which represents a share of 78,90% of all investments by migrants in Guercif. The field survey carried out on the occasion of the completion of thesis

work in 2019 on the urban growth of the city of Guercif testifies to the real estate self-promotion of migrants and reveals that most of the investments are directed towards real estate which occupies an 80% share among the overall investments migrants. These investments are mostly located in the city of Guercif, which monopolizes 95% of the real estate project carried out, hence a significant contribution to urbanization and consequently the sprawl of the city. The remaining share is spread over other cities such as Taza, Fez and Oujda. These results are supported by the work of Hamdouch (Hamdouch B et al, 2000) which showed that the share of real estate in the investment of migrants is around 83,7%; as well as those of the high commission for planning survey in 2005 which showed that the real estate sector represented 86.9% of all investments by Moroccan migrants. In addition, the total remittances from emigrants represent 7 to 8% of the Moroccan gross domestic product (GDP), of which 10% are intended for investment in general and real estate monopolize 70% of the volume dedicated to investment (Migraion & Developpement, 2014).

These investments cover the entire chain of housing from the purchase of land to construction. The study revealed that 14.8% of the migrants surveyed owned built assets (house, building); 31.6% owned lots in regulatory housing estate, and 1.2% of migrants were developers. The plots, whose total number was 117, were distributed over the area surveyed (Table 2) and their surface varies according to the sector.

Table 2: Distribution of batches of migrants by sector

Surveyed area	Number of batches
Town center	9
Nougd district	37
Saâda district	22
Batma district	30
Chouibir district	9
Hamriya district	10

The Nougd and Batma districts monopolize more than 57% of the lots. These initially agricultural lands are more coveted by migrants for their incentive prices. The number of lots per district (mainly Nougd and Saâda) goes in hand with the number of migrants which are spread over European countries with variable frequencies between districts depending on the host country (Fig. 3). It should be noted that Spain is home to the majority of migrants in the town of Guercif.

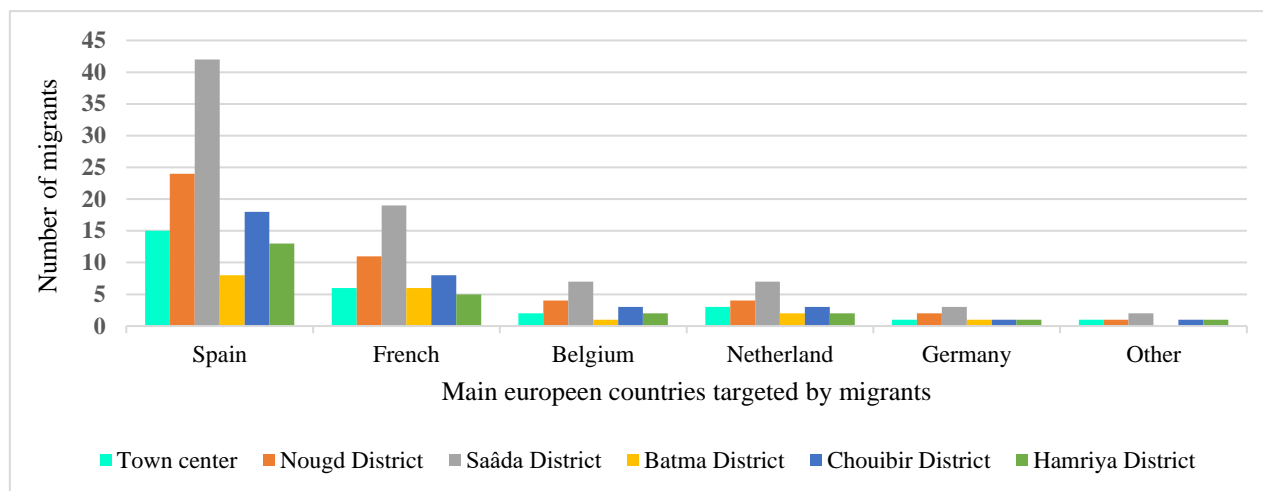


Fig. 3: Distribution of the number of migrants by district and by host country

Migrants in the city of Guercif mainly come from Nougd and Saâda districts. The lots in these districts have an area that varies from 84 to 120 m² for 71.79% of the lots; this is the ideal area for a modern Moroccan house reserved for housing and the practice of commercial activity on the premises on the ground floor. The remaining lots have an area ranging from 121 and 600 m² are generally dedicated to the construction of building with some exceptions concerning the construction of villas for the personal use of the migrant, or the fragmentation to build or sell (Fig. 4).

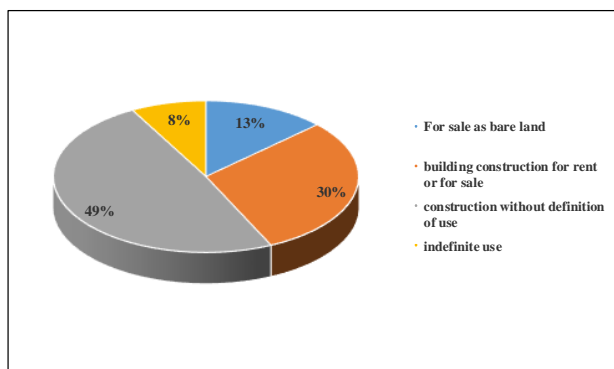


Fig. 4 Subsequent use of the land acquired by the migrants of Guercif

Due to the guaranteed benefits it provides, access to land ownership has become a means for migrants in the city of Guercif to diversify their sources of income. Thus, 43% of respondents intend to sell or rent their real estate. This observation is supported by Mansour Tall (Tall, 2009) who specifies that generally, in the countries of the south, "Emigrations are driven by a strong desire to access property ownership. The stakes of this craze lie in the fact that the realization of a construction can be profitable by leasing or speculation".

Thus, a significant part of the migrants' land holdings, 79%, is destined for housing production,

which shows the weight of the migrants' contributions and their consequences on the sprawl of the city of Guercif. The rental market is of most interest to the migrant who ensures a permanent monthly income and prefers not to sell the property (Fig. 5). Indeed, 50% of the sample surveyed indicated that their real estate investment is intended exclusively for the rental market, while a significant proportion of the respondents still hesitates about the use reserved for the buildings that have been built and are still empty.

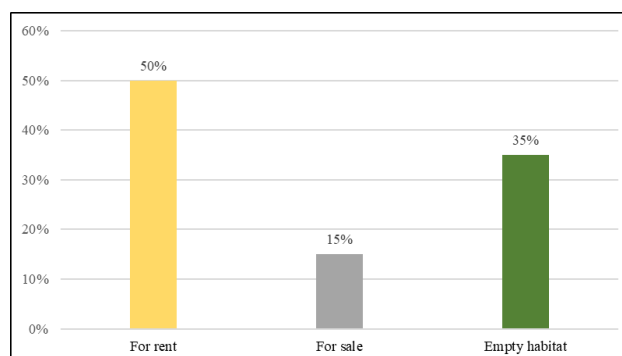


Fig. 5: Uses of the housing stock by the migrants of Guercif

Since the promotion of the city of Guercif into a provincial capital and the massive installation of various government services, demand in the rental market has increased due to the needs of newcomers represented by government officials. This partly explains the tendency of migrants to rent rather than sell.

Self-financing as a mode of housing production

Concerning the method of financing the real estate investments of the migrants in our study area, we noted a clear pre-eminence of self-financing, the recourse to credits from banking institutions being very limited.

The tiny share of credits granted by banks to real estate investments by migrants in the city of Guercif is explained by the complexity of administrative procedures. Indeed, the absence of a mortgage to secure the loans is a deterrent for the bank to engage with the migrant in such projects. In addition to this, the very high-interest rate set by the banking institutions; hence the recourse to the migrant's means as the ultimate means of financing his real estate projects.

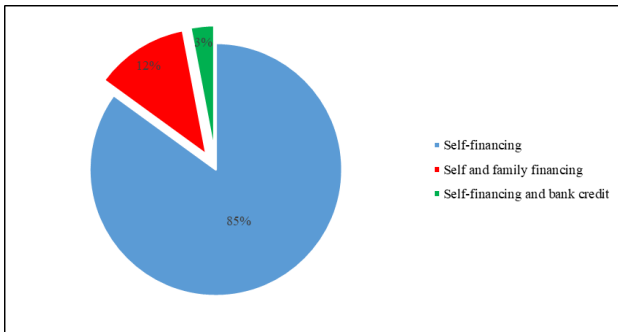


Fig. 6: Method of financing real estate investments of migrants in Guercif

In addition, the contribution of migrants to the dynamics of the construction sector in Guercif is

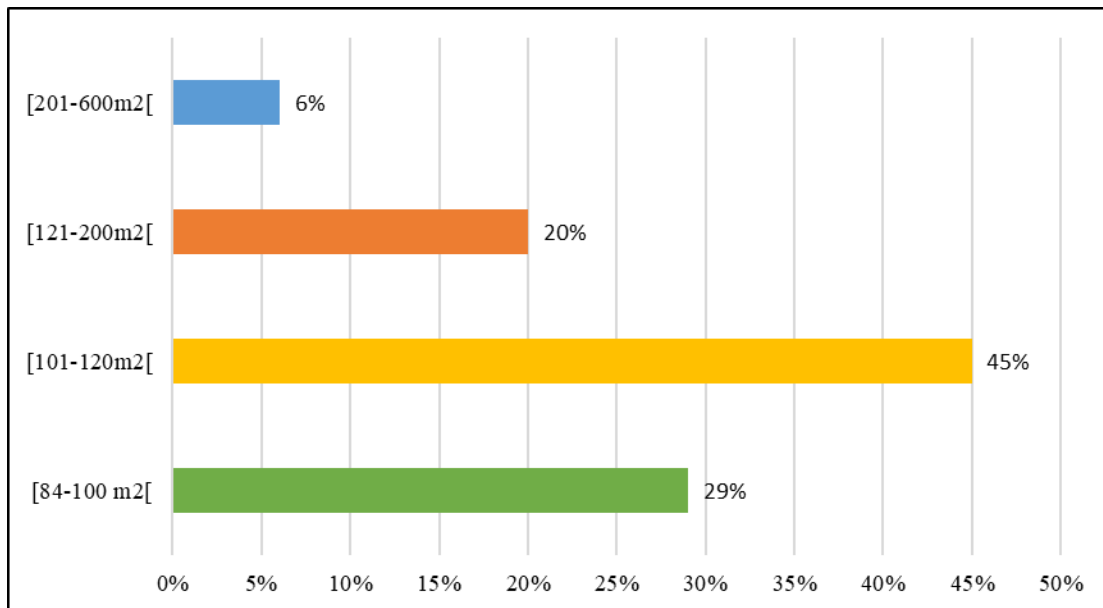


Fig. 7: Surface area of Guercif migrant plots

In addition, and parallel to the increase in the flow of migrants from the city of Guercif to Europe, a surge in prices was recorded in the land market as a result of the growing demand and the monopoly of migrants, especially after 1995. It should be noted that real estate speculation only appeared with the introduction of the capitalist mode of production that succeeded the traditional legal, economic and ideological modes of relations of pre-capitalist property, and even the economic and social content

illustrated through the evolution of the number of building permits that have experienced a sustained increase, especially since the promotion of the city to the provincial capital in 2009.

Table 3: Evolution of the number of building permits

Period	1992-2002	2003-2009	2010-2019
No. of building permits	3000	2213	5819

Source: Municipality of Guercif - urban planning department (2019)

In this regard, a review of all permits granted during the period 2010-2019, we concluded that 25% of permits are in the names of migrants in the city, hence the important role of this social fringe as a promoter of the development dynamics of urbanization and growth of the city. The area of land subject to building permits varies from 84 square meters in regulatory housing estates to 600 square meters (Fig. 7) in non-regulatory housing estates where speculation is driven by incentive prices.

Mazzucato, 2009]. Indeed, the investment of migrant from the city of Guercif in a house is not only an economic act, but also a cultural and social issue. Before starting the investments, the migrant is first required to provide for the housing needs of his family who remind in the country. The construction of a house is an investment with a symbolic value which attests to the success of the migrant and his social advancement. The house expresses belonging to the city and is the place for family ceremonies. The more the migrants invests in this sector, the more he acquires social notoriety. Land investment is a guaranteed gain in a context marked by speculation and increase demand on housing.

Conclusion

The results of this study attest to the impact of migration on the dynamics of the construction sector and consequently the expansion of the city of Guercif by migrants. Most of their investments are directed towards real estate (80% of total investments), and the production of housing intended for the rental market is the reason for these investments. The migrant's land, the use of which is not specified, is a factor that fuels speculation and the increase in the price of urbanizable land. The migrant resorts to his financial means ensured by the income from his work in the host country to finance his real estate projects.

However, despite the investments of migrants from the city of Guercif,, the rush of banking establishments, the number of which increased from 8 to 17 between 2000 and 2021, towards the collection of funds from migrants and their reuse in region renowned for their dynamic economy, limits the prospects for economic growth in the city of Guercif.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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