

Tangier, Morocco in Transnational Flows and Networks: Regionalising Infrastructure from an Urban Perspective

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News:

In 2013, Tangier jumped to place 55 in the top 100 list of container ports worldwide from rank 72 in the previous year and achieved the highest annual growth in the world with a 40% rise in container throughput (Figures from Containerisation International/Lloyd's List 2014, taken up by numerous national and international media.). In 2014, it realised a further increase of 20%. In the same two years, the world's then-biggest container ships, the *Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller* and *Magleby Mærsk*, which can only call a few ports worldwide, visited Tangier.

Key Words:

Tangier, Morocco, urban development, regional trade, transport infrastructure, container port

Summary:

In recent years, Tangier has experienced important urban and economic progress. Based on its new container port, this includes its transformation into a major transport and logistics hub that links to several parts of the world. The paper focuses on corresponding infrastructure. After a brief survey of the new interest in advancing Morocco's North, it studies different types of infrastructure development and their wider regional dimensions. The conclusion situates these developments in the broader context of the country's current regional economic (re)orientations.

Analysis:

Developing Tangier

Already in the past, Tangier was reputed as a meeting place of regions and cultures, especially during the time of the International Zone (1923-56) (Tafersiti Zarouila 2012). But despite the political and symbolic importance of re-integrating Tangier into the postcolonial nation-state, former King Hassan II neglected the Northern parts of the country, mostly because of his political distrust of it. In the 1990s, some new projects were already envisaged, but essentially after Muhammad VI's accession to the throne in 1999, central authorities turned their attention towards the economic and urban development of the city. Today, it is being purposefully developed as an important hub for exchange and traffic, and it has once again become a symbol of the country's openness. A multimodal system of transport is going to connect Tangier to interregional infrastructure networks and commodity flows.

Efforts were directed first towards building a huge new port intended mainly for container transshipment, but also included the establishment of supplementary transportation and communication infrastructure. Also, a lot of major constructions are in the making, inside and around the city, such as free trade and logistics zones, new towns, residential, office and tourism complexes and shopping malls (Kanai/Kutz 2013, Barthel/Planel 2010). A special agency was created in 1996 to enhance the social and economic development of the northern provinces. Since 2004, the Agence Spéciale Tanger Méditerranée has been responsible for the planning and management of the new port and industrial complex. In 2013, the king announced the "Tanger Métropole" vision, which will spend additional funds to develop comprehensive transport, social and cultural infrastructure.

Port infrastructure

The port is Tangier's most ambitious project within the current development program. From the end of the 19th century on, the city port was important for trade with European powers; in 1914, the first regular shipping service was established to Dakar, which existed until the 1960s. After Tangier's integration into the independent kingdom, the first Moroccan free zone was established in

the port area. In 1997, Hassan II announced a deep-water transshipment port, which was initially proposed to be constructed west of Tangier, on the Atlantic coast. Five years later, his son declared he would start construction east of the city, along the passage between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, where 20% of global maritime container transport transits. The first stage of the container port opened in 2007 (Ducruet et al. 2011). It has an annual capacity of about three million standard containers (TEU). TangerMed II, currently under construction, will raise overall capacity to 8.2 million TEU. The first stage is now expected to open in 2017. The port also has oil, general freight, rail and roll-on/roll-off terminals, as well as a ferry terminal.

Traded volumes increased rapidly. In 2014, the port handled 42 million tons of goods. This made it the top national port, well ahead of Casablanca. Nearly 75% of its operations are container handling. Throughput in 2014 was 3.1 million TEU (of which 97% was pure transshipment). Thus, in its seventh year of full operation, TangerMed already ranked eighth among container ports in the Mediterranean, sixth in the Arab world and third in all of Africa. More than 50 regular sea routes connect the port to nearly 150 other container ports in the world. Its multiregional links concentrate on Sub-Saharan, Northern European and Mediterranean ports; but there are also important connections with East Asia and the Western hemisphere, mainly Latin America, and the Middle East and Gulf region is increasing in importance. The biggest container shipping companies worldwide (with Mærsk Line in the first place) are responsible for most of the container traffic and are involved in the management of the container terminals¹. They form networks with other ports around the world that are managed by the same big players. Together with Algeciras, TangerMed constitutes a port cluster of 7.7 million TEU annually, clearly putting it in first place in the Mediterranean. Important “motorways of the sea” funded by the EU to connect the Baltic to the Black Sea through the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean pass in front of Tangier.

In addition, in 2014, almost 2.2 million people transited through TangerMed, mostly Moroccans abroad returning for their summer holidays. The inner city port kept only its fast ferry services and a fishing harbour that is being rebuilt. Cruise shipping and pleasure navigation facilities are being extended and the old port area is being converted into a zone for commercial, cultural and residential purposes. The TangerMed complex also includes an integrated industrial platform: the existing Tanger Free Zone south of the city has been

¹ The two terminals have been assigned to *APM Terminals*, one of the world’s largest port operators, which is owned by the Danish Møller-Mærsk group, and a consortium led by the German *Eurogate*.

considerably expanded, other industrial and logistic zones – including the export-oriented “Automotive City” dominated by Renault – have been established in recent years and further projects on the Tangier peninsula are currently under construction.

Road infrastructure

Long-distance road links from Tangier have also been considerably reinforced in recent years. In the mid-1990s, construction began on a motorway from Rabat. Since 2005, it has linked Tangier to the growing national network. In recent years, this was supplemented by new expressways in the rectangle between Tangier, TangerMed, Tétouan and the border with the Spanish territory of Ceuta. These sections are also part of the new Rocade Méditerranéenne that follows the coast to Morocco’s East. A new two-lane road through the Rif towards Fès is under discussion.

This upgraded road infrastructure is primarily part of national planning, but at the same time, it is integrated into several overlapping transnational transport development programs² and contributes to forming a multiregional network. The motorway constitutes the northern tip of a transcontinental “Tangier-Dakar” road (Marfaing/Wippel 2005). Since the early 1970s, plans for a network of Pan-African roads included this axis. But the Western Sahara conflict in particular precluded its realisation for a long time, and Morocco’s border with Mauritania remained closed until 2002. When the final section of the road from the new border crossing to Nouakchott was completed in 2006, traffic immediately increased considerably, and logistics providers at TangerMed now offer transshipment by road to Mauritania. In the South, numerous connecting road projects are being revived, too. For example, a coastal road is to continue from Dakar to Lagos and a Trans-Sahelian road will lead to Chad. Yet, the current political situation does not seem to be favourable for the completion of additional such links; and at least for coastal states, shipping connections will strongly compete with road transport.

Towards the East of Morocco, the motorway and the rocade both connect to another Pan-African road along the Mediterranean to Cairo. The Tangier-Dakar road at the same time forms a part of the Trans-Maghreb highway conceived since the late 1980s. Final sections in Algeria and Tunisia will open soon, but the route risks being ineffective without the opening of the Moroccan-

² This includes important financial support in the framework of EuroMed and African cooperation.

Algerian border. A “Euro-Maghrebian Freight Transport Corridor” is also in the declared interest of the Western Mediterranean Ministers of Transport and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). To the North, Trans-European Networks (TEN) will further improve existing overland connections. Thus, the motorways starting on the Tangier peninsula are explicitly said to serve the development of commercial and human exchanges between Europe and Morocco.

Rail infrastructure

An interzonal railway line has linked Tangier to the old capital of Fès since 1927. In 2009, TangerMed has also been connected to the main line, and in 2010 a shortcut improved Tangier’s connection to the Rabat-Casablanca conurbation. Recent development schemes proposed more new lines across the Tangier peninsula. A major project is to provide Morocco with a high-speed rail. It was decided to realise the section from Tangier to Casablanca first. Work started in 2011, and it is now envisaged to open the line in 2017. Important European and Arab funds contribute to financing the new infrastructure. By 2035, the high-speed network will extend perhaps as far as Agadir and Oujda.

Manifold regional schemes intersect again with the national railway program. In 1990, plans were developed with the support of the Arab Maghreb Union to construct a Trans-Maghreb high-speed line. In the last decade, the project resurfaced. As with the road network, national projects are underway, but will need the opening of Morocco’s border. To the South, a regional railway seems rather unlikely. Even the standard line extension to Laâyoune, proposed since the 1980s, has not yet been realised. On the European side, Spanish and EU programs contribute to developing rail connections farther to the North. The extended TEN for neighbouring countries includes the connection to Rabat as well as the Moroccan-Egyptian axis, which will complete a circum-Mediterranean network.

In this context, another project is the “fixed link” across the Straits of Gibraltar (Wippel 2000). From 1979 on, the Spanish and Moroccan governments started to prepare feasibility studies, and in 1996, they decided in favour of a rail tunnel. In the last decade, geophysical explorations started. The project has been integrated as a potential project into the programme of the European Neighbourhood Policy; African and UN commissions, too, support it. Optimistic estimations have set potential traffic at 9 million passengers and 8 million tons of freight in 2025. To the South, the zone of influence for passengers should extend to 23 African countries for trade. Yet, there is wide scepticism whether the project will ever be viable.

Airport infrastructure

Despite its historic importance as a stop on the famous postal route from France to Dakar and Latin America, today, the airport of Tangier is of minor importance in the national system and has problems attracting airlines permanently. A new terminal with a capacity up to 1.5 million passengers was inaugurated in 2008. But whereas the effective number of passengers had increased considerably to 850,000 in 2012, it dropped back to 766,000 by 2014. The less than a dozen international destinations are all in Western Europe. Yet, a transfer of the airport to a more central position between the city, the port and Tétouan is being discussed.

Energy infrastructure

Transnational energy infrastructure with regional effects also cuts across the Tangier peninsula and contributes to Morocco's ambition to become an important energy hub. To this end, the Maghreb Europe Gas Pipeline has connected Algerian gas fields to Spain and Portugal since 1996. To the South, the construction of a connecting Trans-Saharan pipeline from Algeria has been delayed due to unrest in the areas it crosses. Also, an electrical interconnection was built in the 1990s to transmit electricity from Spain to Morocco; a second line was added in 2006. Transmission capacity with Algeria has also been tripled in the last decade.

Both gas and electricity links have received help from European (and Arab) funds and link to wider European systems. The integration of the Gibraltar power line into Maghreb, Pan-Arab and Pan-Mediterranean high-voltage grids has been tackled. In particular, it constitutes an essential component in a future "European Super Grid" that builds on the UfM's "Mediterranean Solar Plan" and the Medgrid project. Again, obstacles, mainly security concerns, will be huge. To the South, a working group with Mauritania and Senegal has been installed to interlink the national electricity grids and finally to connect to the "West African Power Pool".

Conclusion:

The port city of Tangier is being developed into one of the biggest container hubs in Africa, the Mediterranean and the MENA region and has considerably reinforced its maritime links at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. The relocation of the port to the new site opened the opportunity

to redevelop large parts of the city and its surroundings. In particular, a network of terrestrial transport infrastructure is about to substantially improve connections between Morocco's northern tip and Europe, the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, Tangier is being developed into an interface between the country's interior and exterior and as a nodal point in the worldwide network of flows.

At the same time, this is part of the kingdom's wider regionalisation processes. The Euro-Mediterranean context in particular has helped the government rediscover Morocco's "Mediterranean façade" since the 1990s. But Tangier has also taken on a special role in the framework of the country's geostrategic ambition to open up supplementary markets, from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb and the Arab world to Asia and the Western hemisphere. Yet, Tangier is still a city very much "in the making"; far-reaching overland routes are still only in the planning stage or under construction. Hinterland connections into Morocco and further to the South and East, in particular, remain underused and underdeveloped. Financial risks, political conflicts and security concerns endanger the realisation of many plans.

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