

An Alternative Model for Women Cooperatives in the MENA Region: The Case of Arbaa Mesti, Morocco

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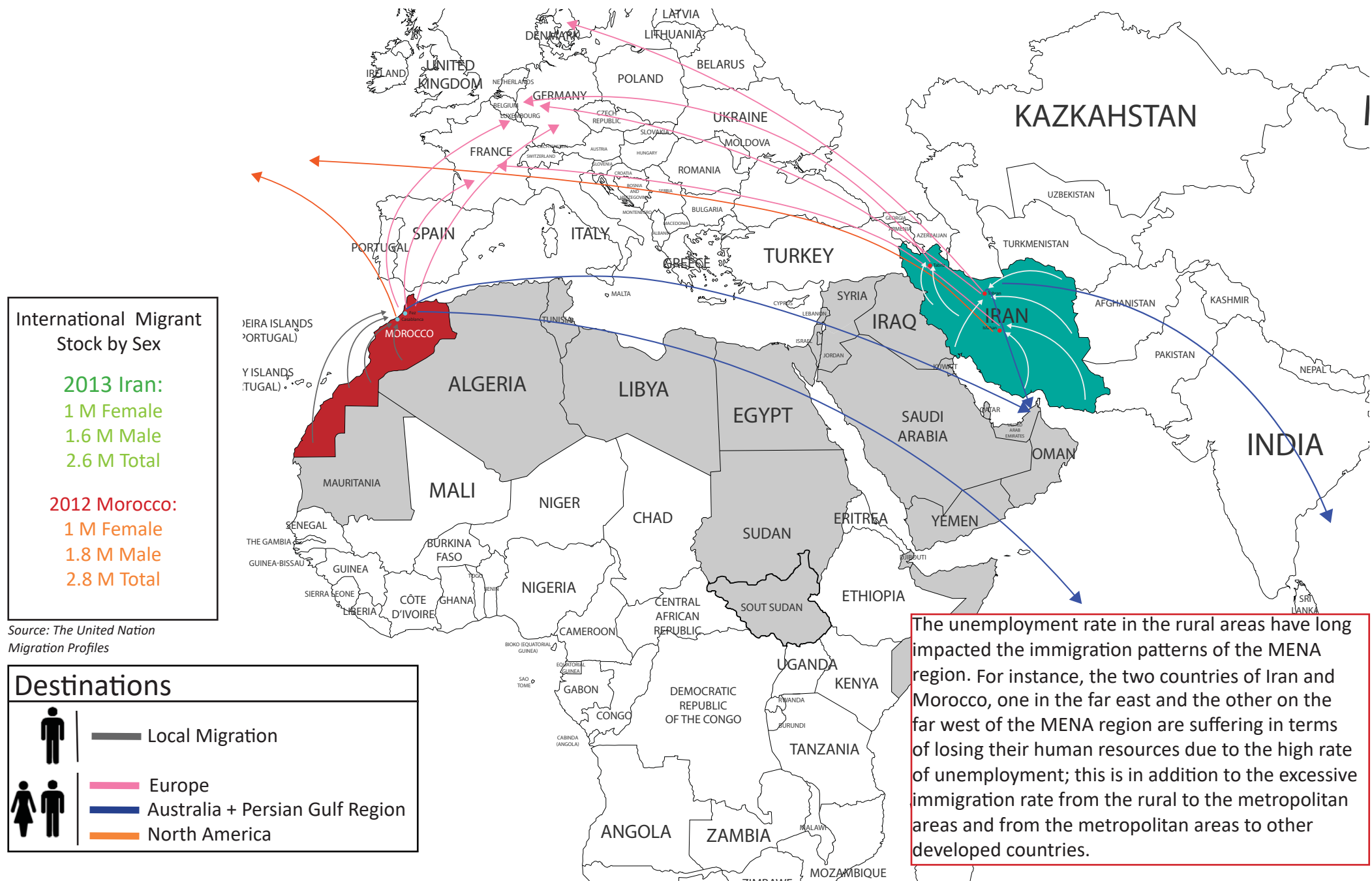
Meeting with a Local Farmer, Morocco

Introduction

My thesis project tackles issues of politics, experience economy and women empowerment within the spatial arrangement of handicraft cooperatives in rural areas, in the face of the fast-growing tourist industry in the Guelmim region (located in southern Morocco). In particular, I offer a prototype, set in the remote village of Arbaa Mesti, Morocco. The village has already accommodated women's cooperative workspaces with modest, inefficient, and un-functional structures. My design solutions confront existing obstacles by providing new functions such as integrating public, semi-public, and private spaces by interweaving different types of experiences. The complex as a whole will create opportunities for flexible indoors and outdoors functions. While self-sufficient in and of itself, the complex will also uphold a sustained life and economy within the larger Arbaa Mesti community.



The MENA Region Migration Patterns and Unemployment Rates

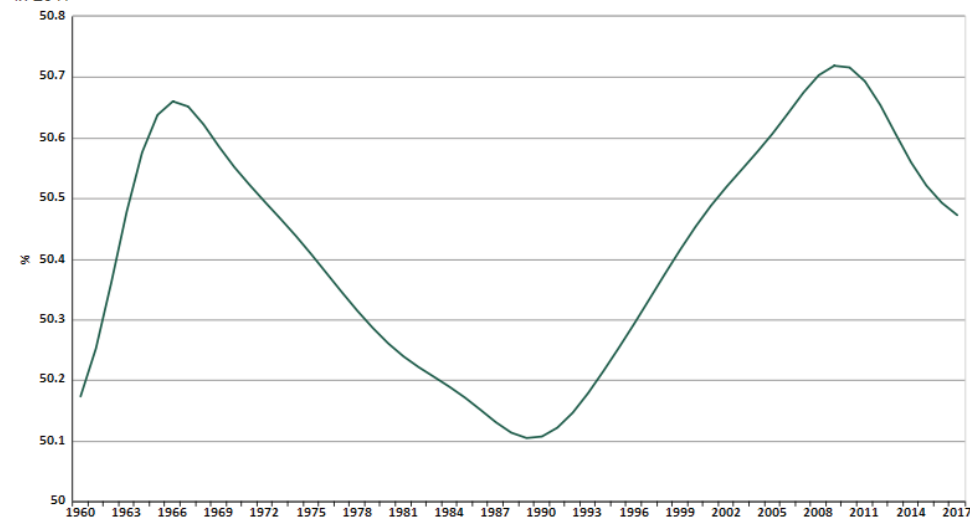


The Growth of the Female Population and the Job Market

Morocco - Female population as a share of total population

50.5

(%)
in 2017



Source: [Population Estimates and Projections](#)

Population, total of Morocco increased from 15 million persons in 1967 to 35.3 million persons in 2016 growing at an average annual rate of 1.77 %.
Source: (<https://knoema.com>)

Morocco's female population was at the level of 50.5 % in 2017. The growth in female population influenced the female job market; this imbalanced situation between the growth of male and female population increased the demand for the female job market. Therefore, there is a crucial need for foreign and local investment within the less developed regions in Morocco where the female population is higher than the male population.

Women Unemployment Rate

Unemployed Women = Marginalization in Metropolitan Areas = Social Issues

As we can see in this picture of a shanty town in the suburbs of Casablanca, the unemployment rate in the rural areas has led the excessive migration to the metropolitan areas such as Casablanca. Many men and women are moving to large cities to find a proper job; however, they become marginalized in large urban societies. Subsequently we see more crime and poverty, specifically for children and women.



In September 2017, the majority of Moroccan feminist women in Fez demonstrated against the social discrimination against female workers. They demanded a reform in the Moroccan employment policy.

Why is there a Need for Investment in Rural Morocco?

- 1- Women's Empowerment
- 2- Sustainable Development
- 3- Prevention of Poverty and Crime
- 4- Reducing Immigration to Metropolitan Areas



Investment in rural areas of the MENA region decreases poverty and crime and prevents excessive immigration of both men and women into the large cities. It also provides opportunities for sustainable development within the country's less developed regions.

Solution “Investment in sustainable
sectors such as craft and
agriculture via NGOs and rural
[women] cooperative”
(Ministry of Coop Labour and Social Welfare, Iran, 2017)

In what sectors should the Moroccan government invest?

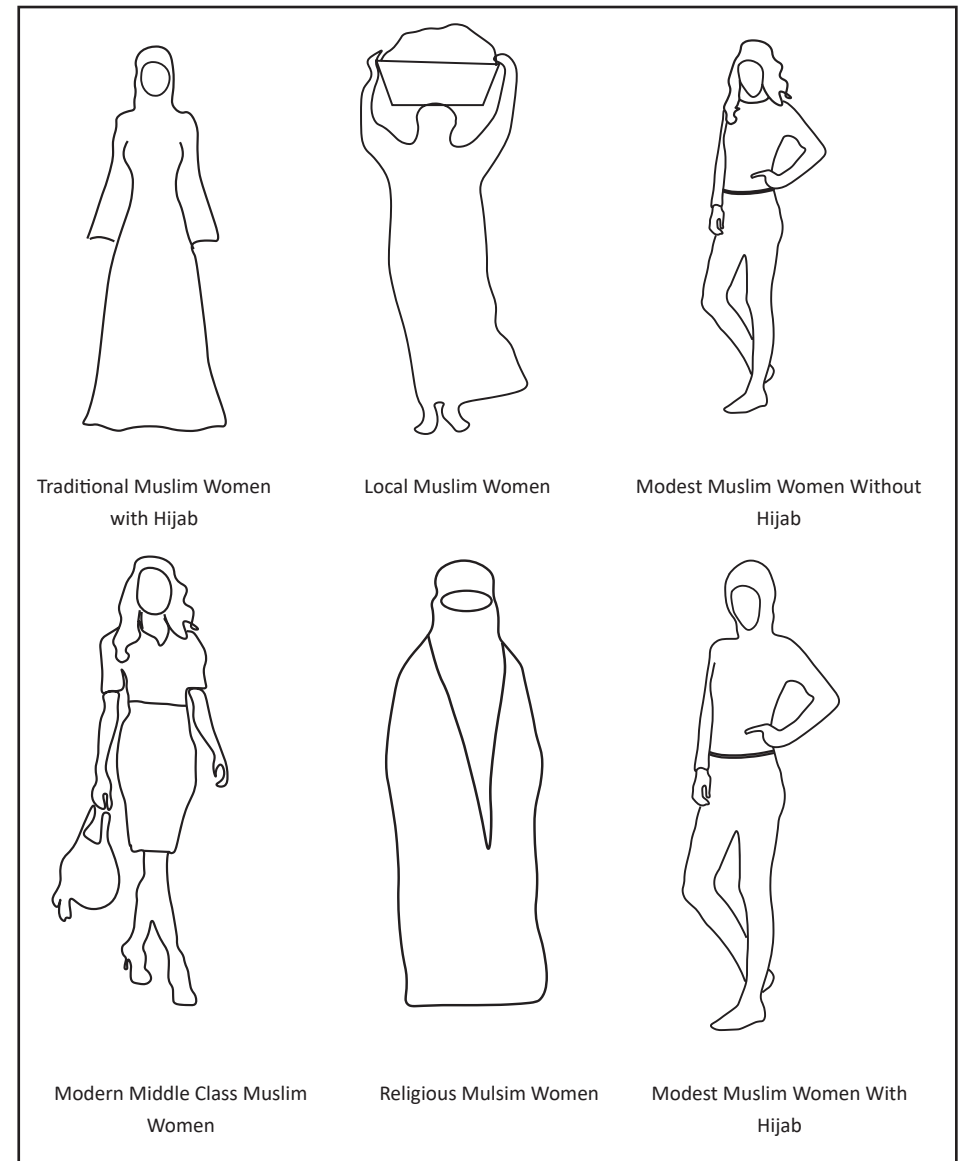
The best way to approach the problem is using local assets.

Local traditional industries such as craft and agriculture can be placed within newly designed NGOs and rural cooperatives.

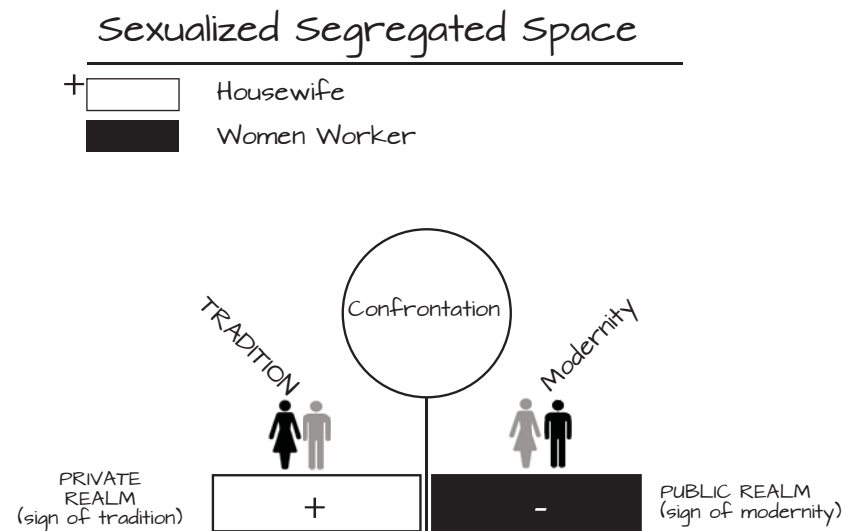
According to Homi Bhabha, “ the body is always simultaneously (if conflictually) inscribed in both *the economy of pleasure and desire* and *the economy of discourse, domination and power.*”

Investment in rural women cooperatives requires infrastructures that are well adapted for female use. In this regard, understanding the different types of women in the Islamic society of Morocco is crucial. The way women perform their corporeal identities can inscribe different discourses in the society. Consequently, the way women represent themselves can also influence the form and function of the buildings they occupy.

Women Type in Morocco



Post Independence Urbanism



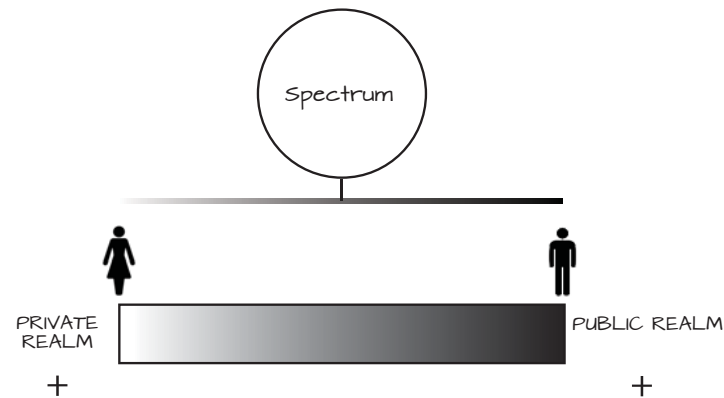
In the Newtonian view social conflicts is a reaction to the “static” notion of space.

In the post-independence period in Morocco due to rapid modernization, spatial dichotomy became a major dilemma. In public space women were perceived as objects of desire. In general women were divided into two groups indescend or housewives. This specific interpretation towards women through their participation in public realm influenced the economy in a negative way. In Morocco Space is closely connected to the definition of gender identity.

Islamic Urbanism

Un-sexualized Space

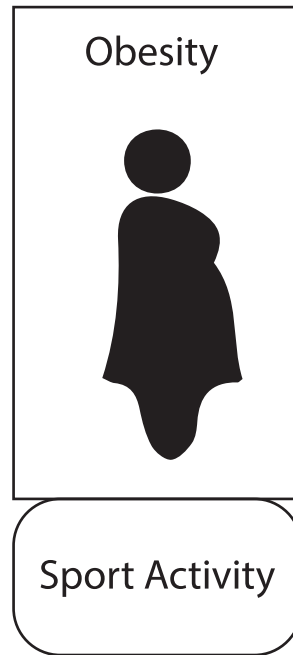
The public realm is an extension of the home and public activities.



*Ritters, Ratzel and Hettner,
believe, “space is a form of perception, an approach to reality.”*

In the pre-independence period, space was defined according to traditional gender roles.

Towards an Ideal Public Work Space for Rural Women



Female participation in public space requires appropriate design. This design must afford comfort and flexibility. Women in Morocco's rural areas tend to work more comfortably in homosexual environments. Design must respond to such needs. Workspaces must accommodate homosexual environments and allow women to choose the ways in which they want to interact with the general public.

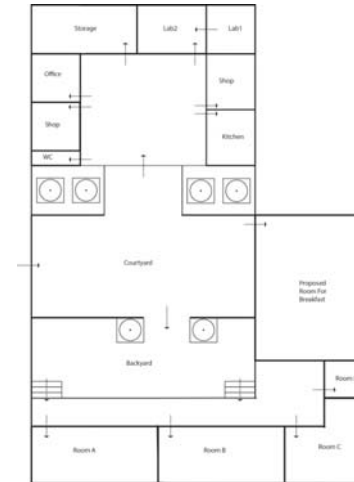
Existing Women's Workspaces in Arbaa Mesti, Morocco



Arbaa Mesti
Cooperative



Women cooperative of Mesti,
Arbaa Mesti, Morocco, 2017



A/F=2100 m2
V= 1m2/person



(Top) The plan of the women coop centre
of Mesti, Morocco (Bottom) The location
within the rural context, Mesti, Morocco,
2017. (Drawing: Parham Karimi)

Coordination 29°15'56.52"N
10° 6'45.19"W

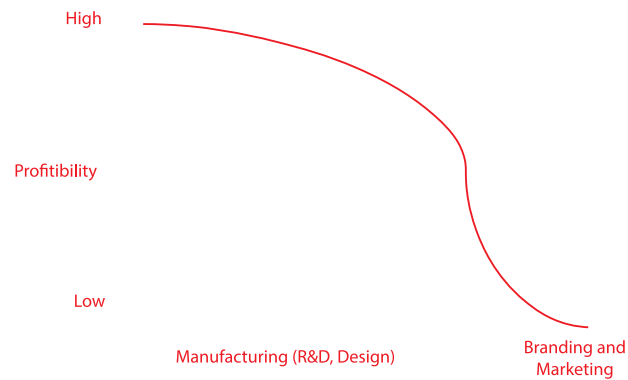
The existing workspaces such as the Arbaa Mesti cooperative building are not ideal. In fact, most professional infrastructures do not facilitate women's needs. The Arbaa Mesti women cooperative is considered as a nonfunctional structure used by those who occupy it.

Workspace: Paradigm shift from Manufacturing to Marketing & Communication

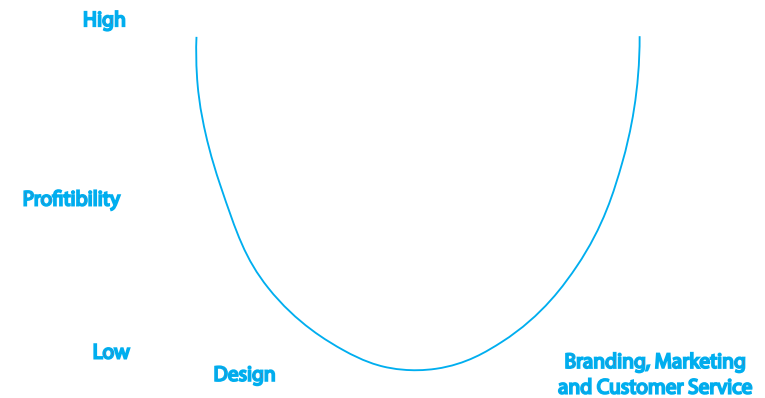


In the rural areas in Morocco the design of workspaces is geared towards production. However, in the new proposed model, pre-production and post-production must be central to the design.

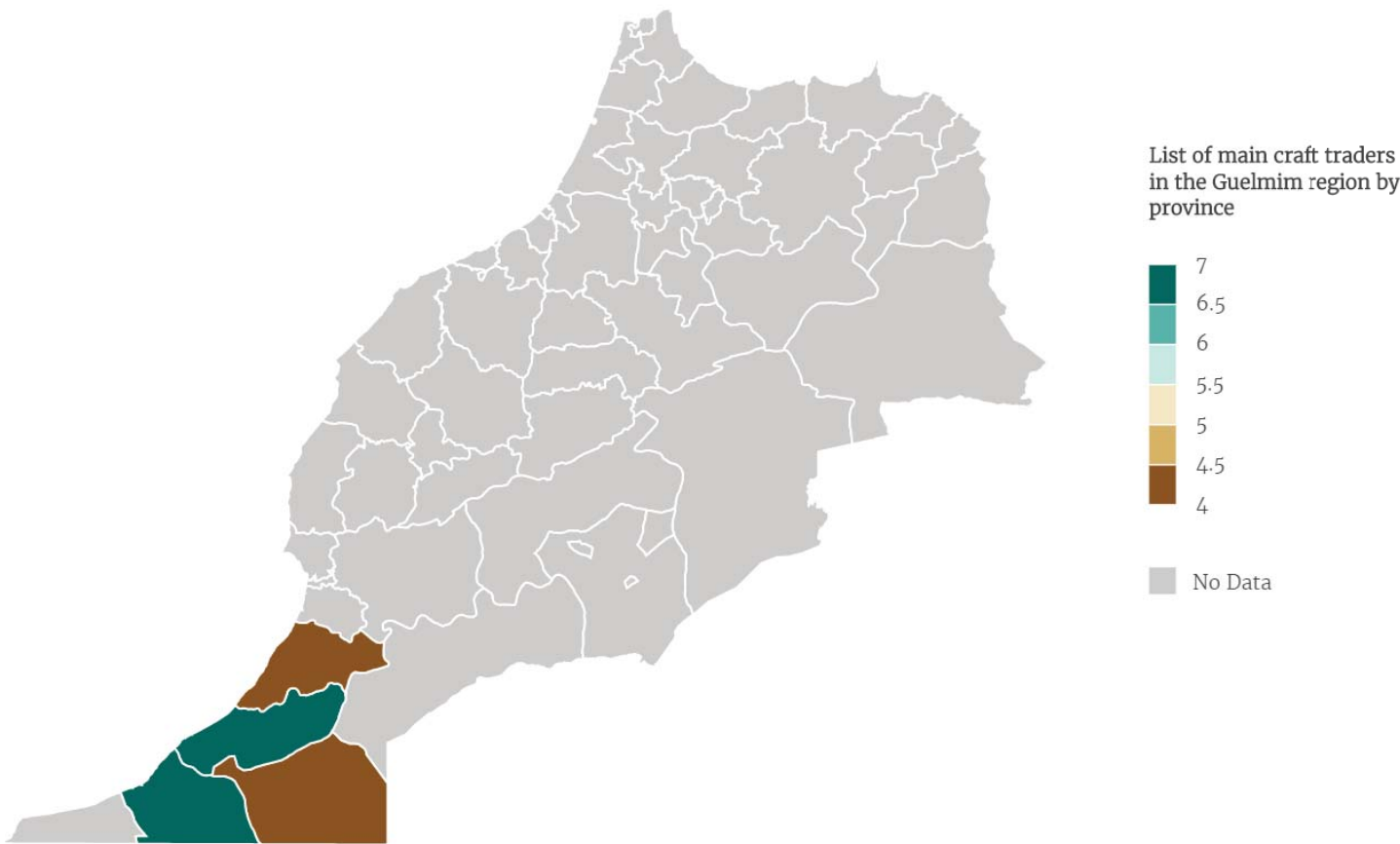
✗ Production Space Model



✓ Pre-Production, Production & Post Production





Women Handicraft Cooperatives in Guelmim Region



In Guelmim region a total of 92 professional craftwomen and 100 aperantices are currently active in the craft cooperatives.

Craft Trader in Guelmim Region by Province.
Source: Ministry of Craft

 92 craft women
 100 craft students

Why should Handicraft Industry lead to women empowerment and Sustainable Development in Rural Areas?



“It is a linkage between [Experience Economy], culture, education, gender decentralization and the environment ...”.

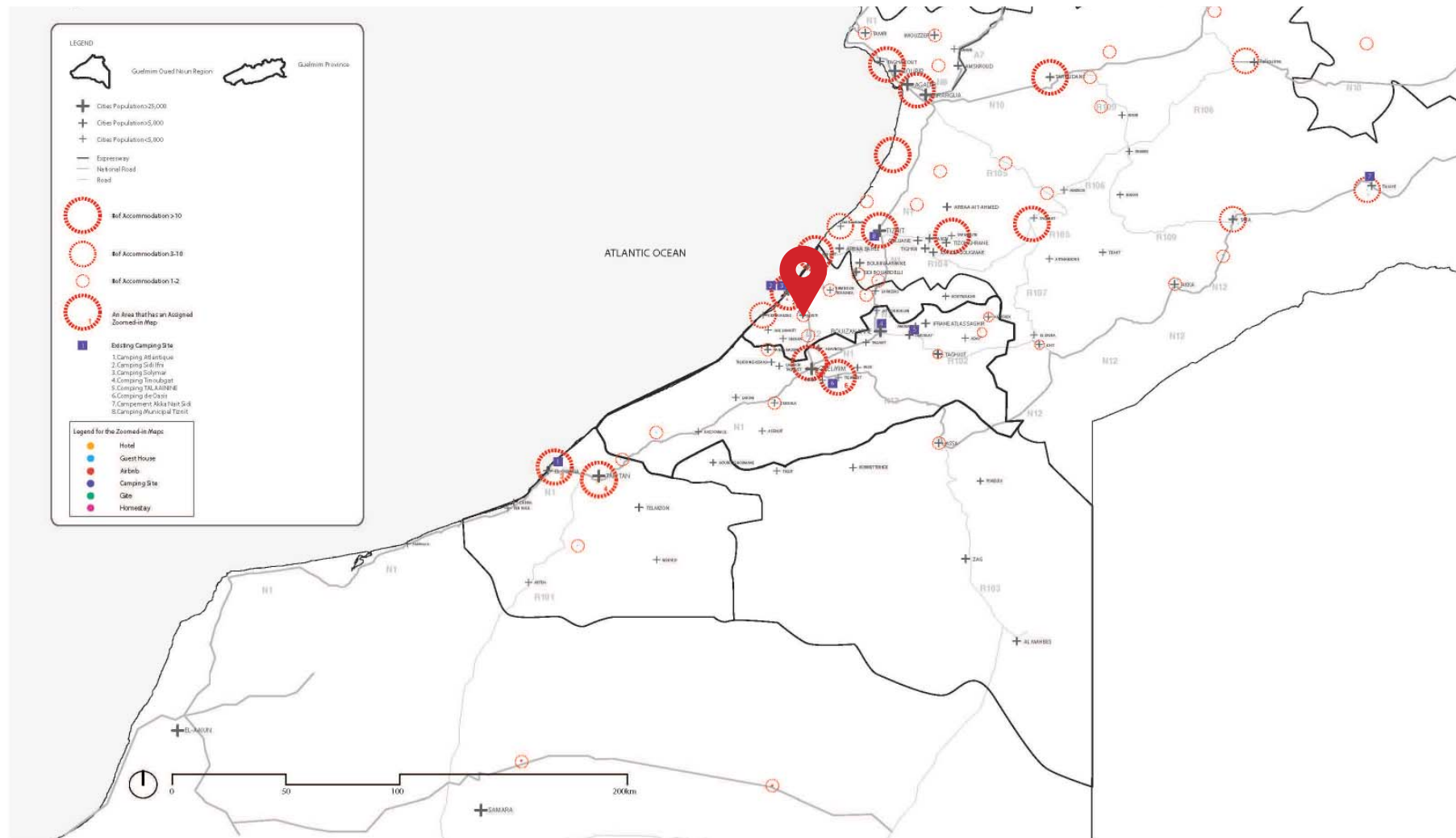
(Richard Anker, 2007)

Cultural Capital

“Cultural capital can add value to an object.”

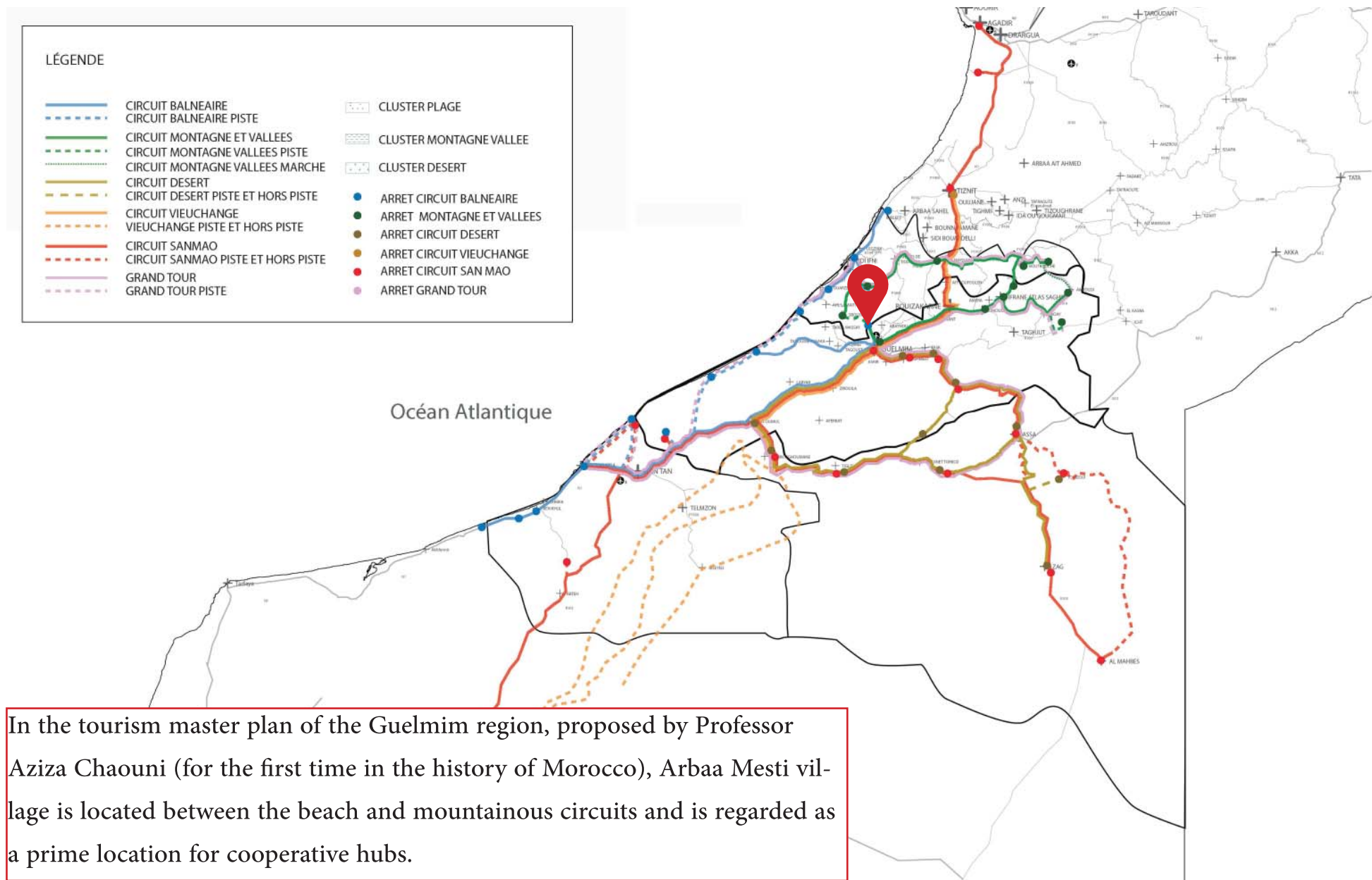
Pierre Bourdieu believed that cultural capital can add value to the properties of an object. By designing better work spaces we can provide cultural capital and as a result add to the value of the craft or other objects produced in the cooperatives.

Guelmim Region Population



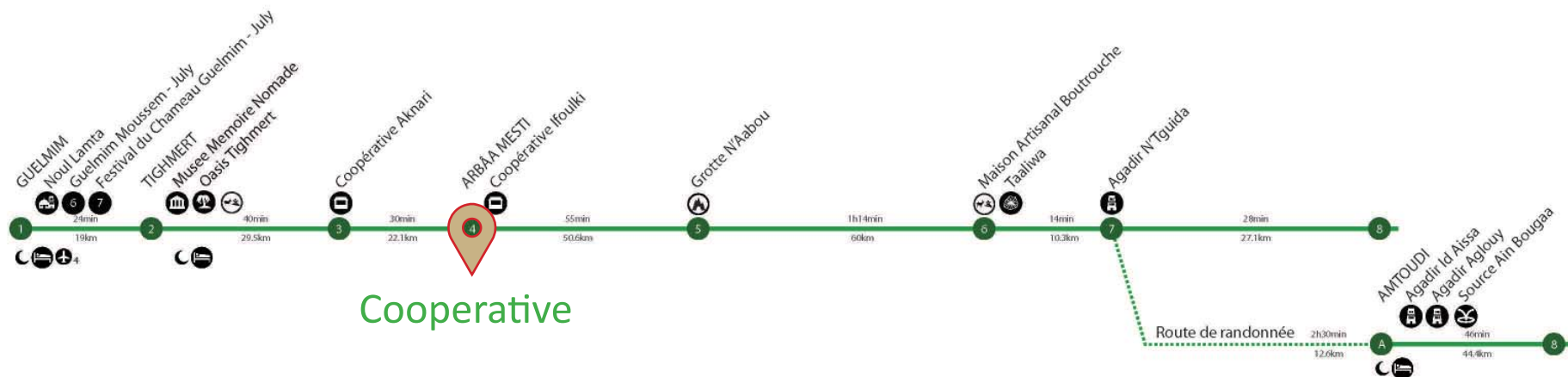
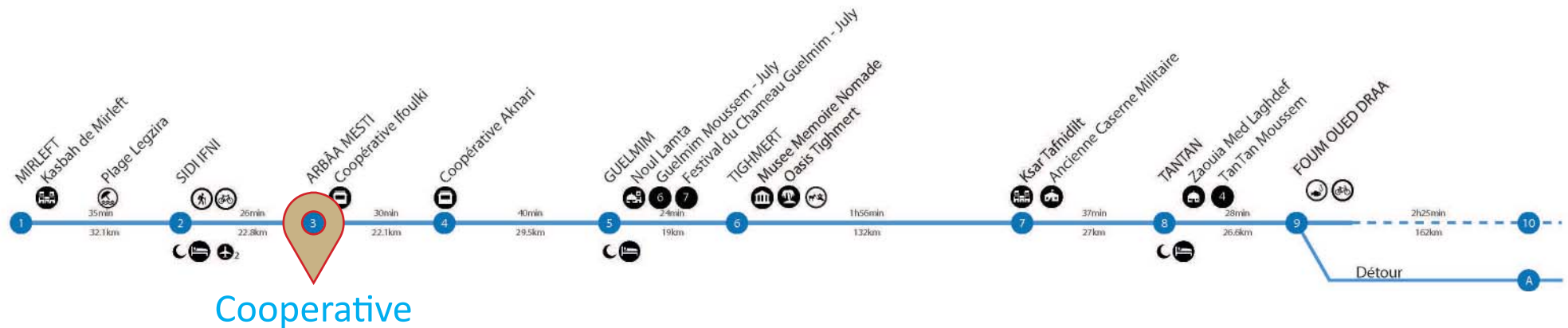
The city of Arbaa Mesti is located close to the large cities within the Sidi Ifni province. Arbaa Mesti's population is 2500 people. Compared to the most populated cities in the province, Arbaa Mesti is considered a village.

Guelmim Region Master Plan



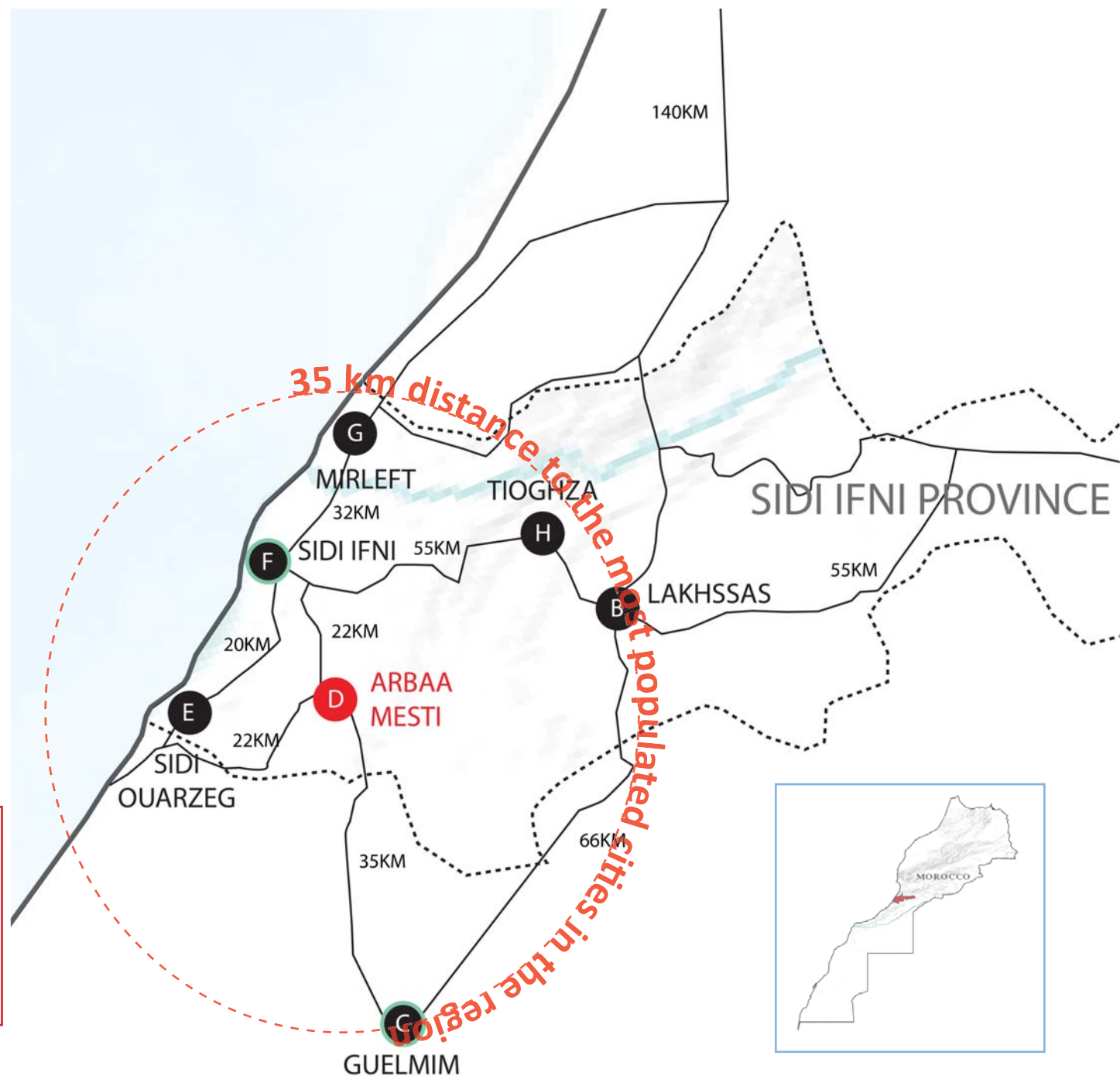
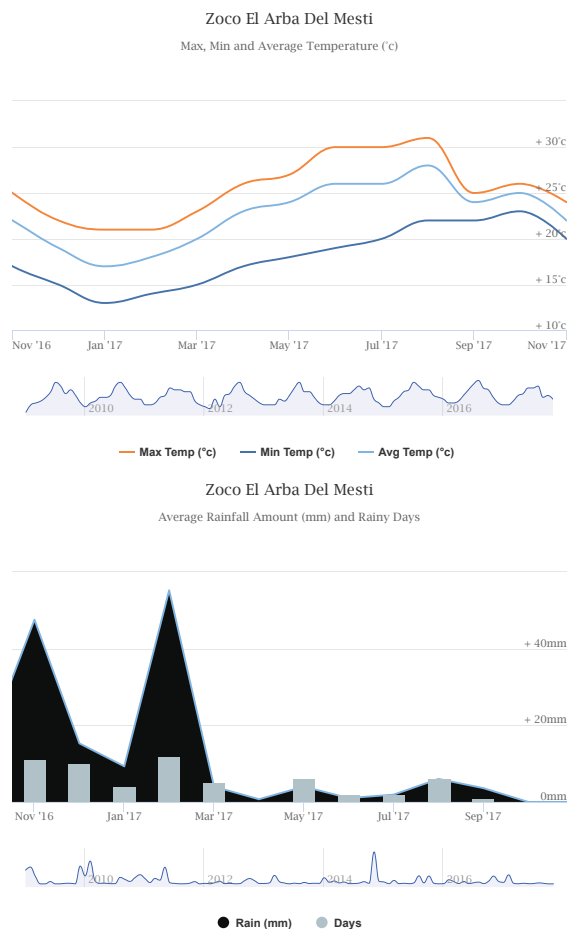
In the tourism master plan of the Guelmim region, proposed by Professor Aziza Chaouni (for the first time in the history of Morocco), Arbaa Mesti village is located between the beach and mountainous circuits and is regarded as a prime location for cooperative hubs.

The Mountain + The Beach Circuit



As mentioned, the Arbaa Mesti cooperative is located between the beach and the mountainous circuits. This geography has created a tourist attraction. Most tourist have the opportunity to purchase local products when they visit interesting places within these two important, attractive circuits.

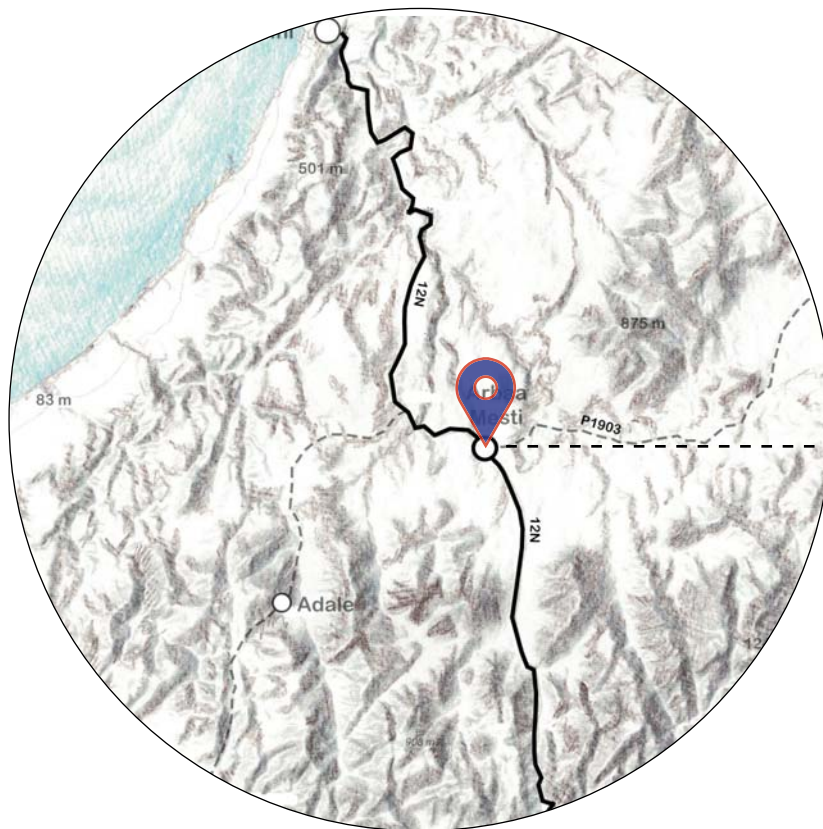
The Geographical Location of the Site



Arbaa Mesti town is located in the radius of 35 km distance from the other major cities in the region. The average temperature is 22 degree celsius and the average rainfall in January is almost 50 mm.

Geography and Landscape of Arbaa Mesti

In terms of Topographical and Geographical location, the village of Arbaa Mesti is located at the intersection of the main roads in the region. The vegetation surface in this village is covered with Argon trees and Cactus shrubs.



Topography + Major cities + Arbaa Mesti is located in the 12N road between Sidi Ifni and Guelmim city
(Drawings: Parham Karimi)



GEOGRAPHICAL LANDFORM: The topography level + vegetation of Arbaa Mesti town - micro scale approach
(Drawings: Parham Karimi)

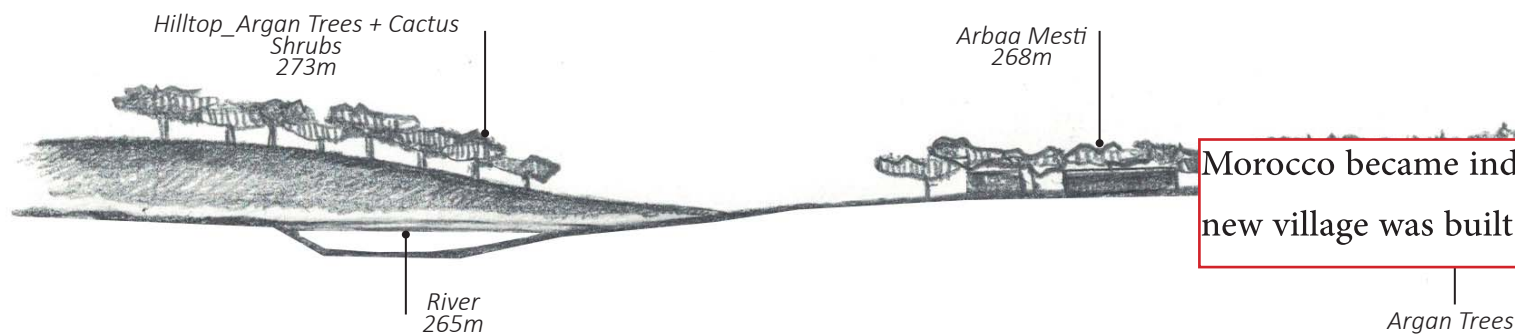
Site History



Site History



Site History



Morocco became independent in April 7th 1956. The new village was built between 1950 and 1970.

Site Cross section
(Drawing: Parham Karimi)

Site History



Since the 1970 and the present time the village has grown slowly.

Moroccan Farmer's Markets: The Spaces of Emptiness



Panoramic view of the site - the farmer market of Mesti

4000 m²



Arbaa Mesti Market, Arbaa Mesti, Morocco

The farmer's markets in Moroccan towns are losing their traditional functions. They have been replaced by modern super markets. The spaces left behind provide an opportunity for design. The site of my project is one of these left over spaces in Arbaa Mesti.

3000 m²



Amoura Souk Market, Khafira, Morocco

4200 m²



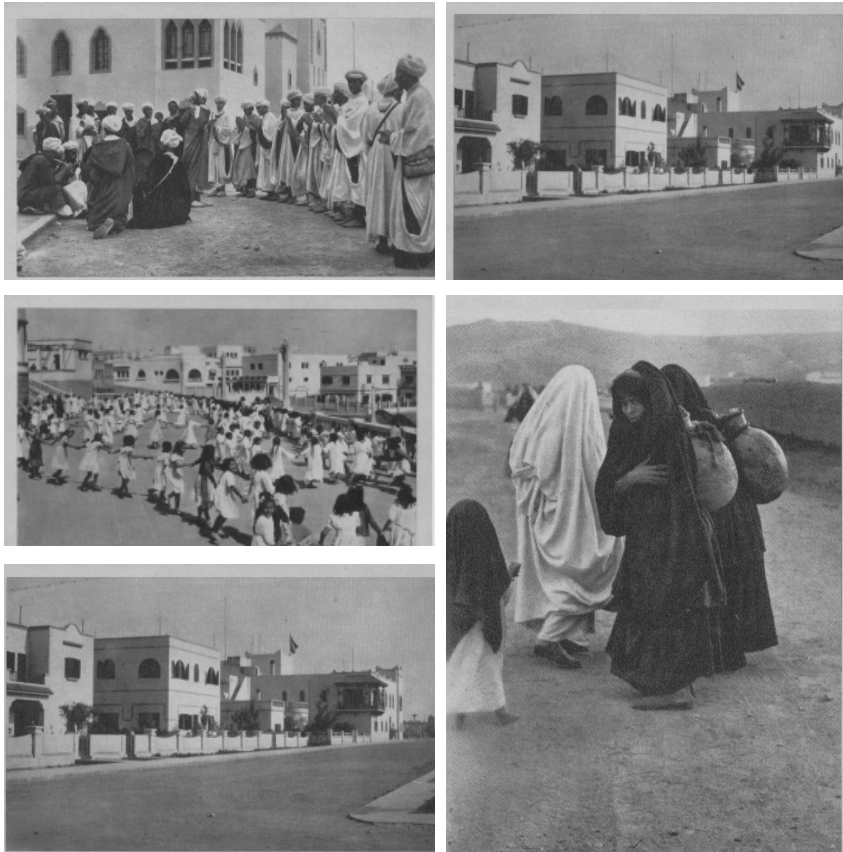
Tiflet Souk, Tiflet, Morocco

5100 m²



Aitta Maloull market, Aita Maloull
Morocco

Arbaa Mesti, 1958



The pictures on the left show Arbaa Mesti just 2 years after the independence of Morocco.

Arbaa Mesti, 2017



The pictures on the right show Arbaa Mesti today.

The village is built near a river. The size of the village is roughly 300 meters wide and 850 meters long.

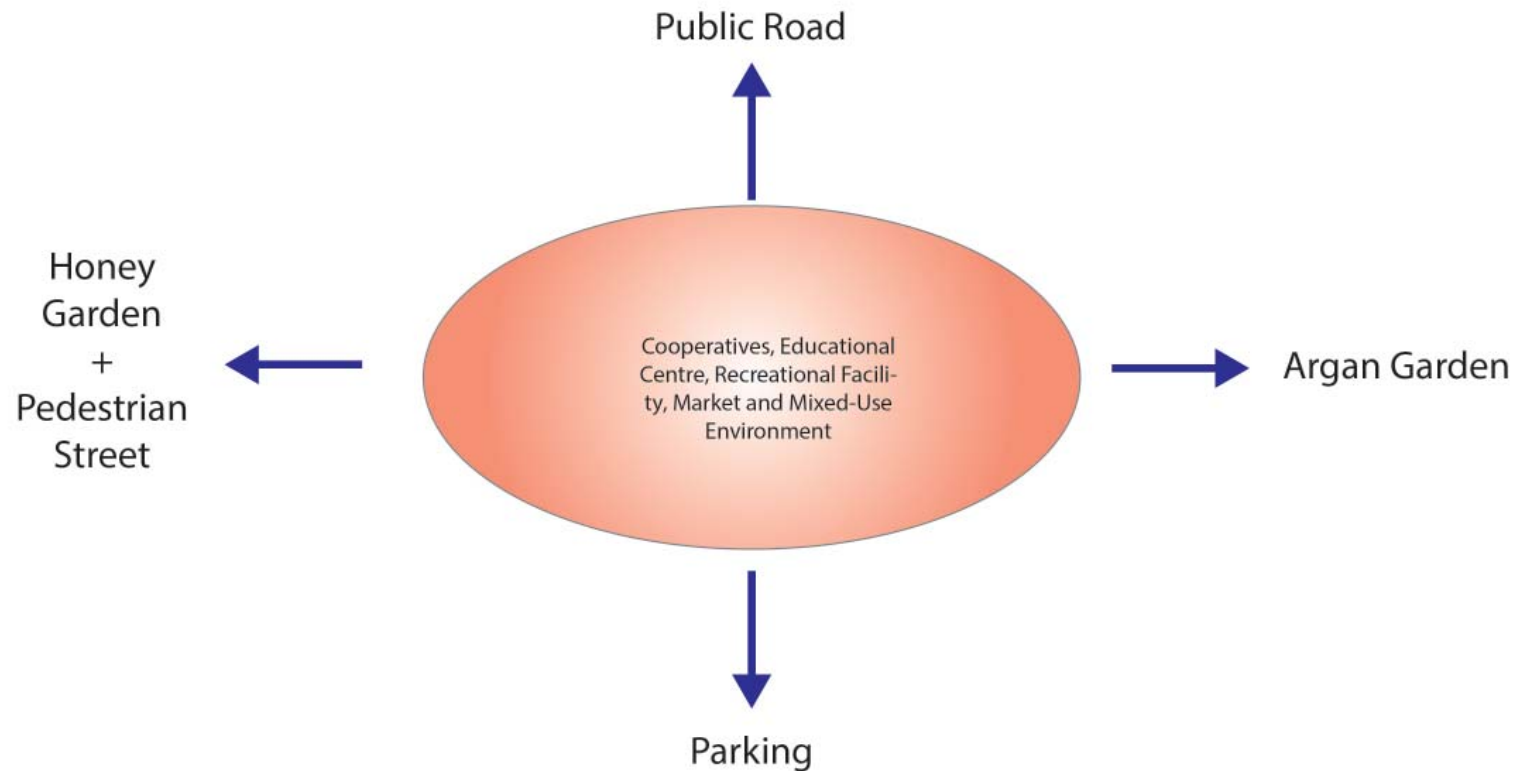
Project Site: Arbaa Mesti Farmer Market



The Site is divided into 4 major zones for the proposed project. All these zones with specific functions are meant to help the economy of the proposed cooperative models.

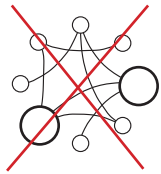


Proposed Concept at a Glance

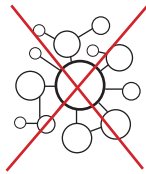


According to the site condition and socio-economic atmosphere of the village a new alternative model was introduced for the women coop of Arbaa Mesti.

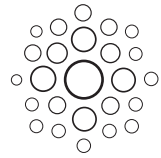
Existing Economic Model, Cooperatives in Morocco



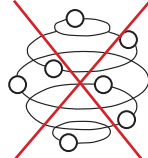
Consortium Blockchain



Semi-private Blockchain



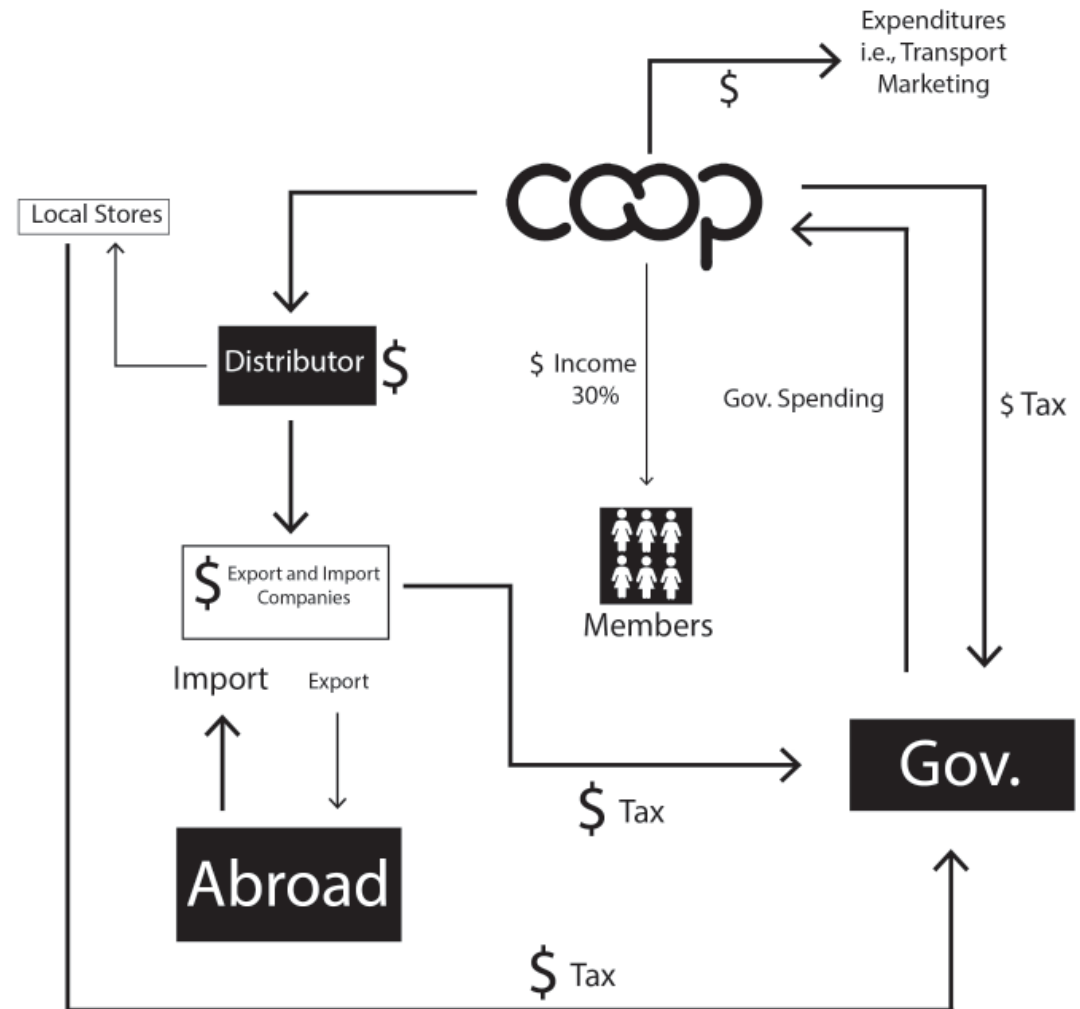
Private Blockchain



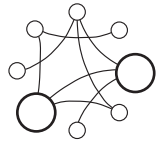
Public Blockchain

Coop Blockchain Network Arrangement

In the existing cooperatives only 30% of profits are given to members. The rest goes to the pockets of big corporations and the government. This is partially owing to the distance between cooperative members and their customers.



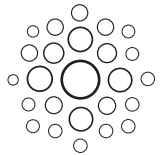
Proposed Economic Model, Cooperatives in Morocco



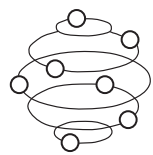
Consortium Blockchain



Semi-private Blockchain

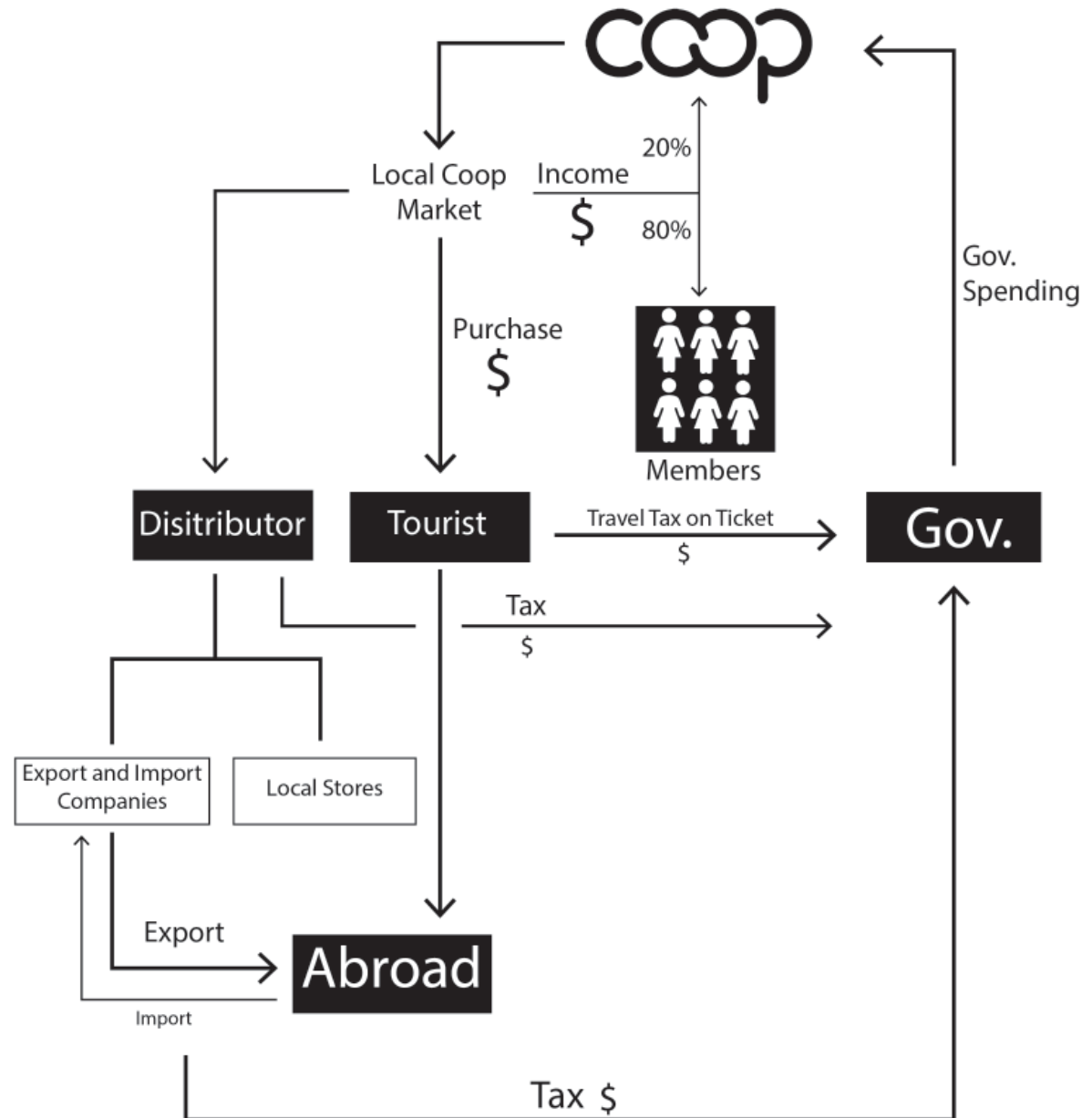


Private Blockchain



Public Blockchain

Coop Blockchain Network Arrangement



In the proposed model the distance between the producer and consumer is reduced. Most of the profit goes directly to the pockets of local coop members. To put it in simple Marxian terms, the proposed model prevents “alianation” and reduces the “surplus value”.