

Territorial Metropolitan Dynamics in Northeastern Tunisia: The Zaghouan Region

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Abstract

The process of metropolisation in Tunisia is still limited and it essentially concerns a portion of the eastern shore, in particular the vast triangle formed by the main cities of the country, namely: Tunis, Sousse and Sfax. The metropolisation in these spaces is essentially marked by the spreading of the cities, the multiplication of large planning projects, the mobility and the distribution of the population, the restructuring of the activities and urban functions, the emergence of new poles of exchange and jobs and of new administrative commercial and recreational centralities. The small urban centres located in these metropolitan areas are affected by this process and must adapt to it, as it is the case of the small town of Zaghouan, located about 60 kms from Tunis. This study analyses, in the first place, the constraining factors to the structuring and the recomposition of the space around Zaghouan. Subsequently, it endeavours to suggest some ideas about the promotion of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the region and its integration in the regional, national and international space.

Keywords

*Zaghouan region,
Metropolisation,
Regional attractiveness
and competitiveness*

1. Introduction

Metropolitan dynamics was defined by the planner F. Ascher as being ‘a process to restore large agglomerations, cities, and more remote locations in the area of daily operations’. It is also explained by the ability of these cities to attract businesses (especially by the creation of technology parks and districts), to develop quality equipment, to provide a skilled work force. Metropolitan dynamics is also marked by the spatial extension of urbanization and by the mutations that affect the distribution of the population, the birth of large projects and new poles of exchange and jobs, in addition to the emergence of new administrative, commercial and recreational centralities.

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In Tunisia the metropolisation process has constituted since the 1970s a major aspect of regional dynamics and it started with the economic liberalisation and the development of export activities. Two major regions have emerged in this process: the region of Tunis and the Sahel in Sousse. The metropolitan area of greater Tunis, located in the Northeast of the country characterized by the diversity of natural landscapes, is marked by high population densities, an urbanisation rate of more than 80% in 2014 and the concentration and the diversity of economic activities (40% of the country's activities) which engender conflicts at the level of the land appropriation. The present urban frame of the region is articulated around Tunis, a capital and a metropolis with an international vocation (Haydar, 2006).

The metropolisation process in the northeast of Tunisia includes different subspaces, which form the metropolitan area, including two important poles: the first one is portuary (Bizerte and Menzel Bourguiba) and the second is touristic (Nabeul and Hammamet). Between these two poles, there is a set of small and medium-sized urban centres with development potentialities, and which form two crowns around the capital. Among these, we shall study the case of the town of Zaghuan, located 60 kms from the centre of Tunis in the southern part of the Northeast region. This city is the chief town of Zaghuan governorate, which covers a total area of 2820 Km², that is 1.7% of the whole country. This region enjoys a privileged and central position between North, North West and central governorates. The proximity of greater Tunis allows it to benefit from the externalities linked to basic infrastructure (Dlala, 2007).

On the social level, the governorate is characterized by its rural character that affects more than half of the total population, with a rate of population growth, which has steadily decreased from 1.87% in 1984 to 0.95% in 2014. The migration balance continues to be negative (-900 between 2009 and 2014), the illiteracy rate is 26.4 % and the rate of unemployment 16.9% - both rates superior to the national average. The farming, which is still traditional, contributes in a significant way to the regional economic income, as it occupies approximately 27% of the jobs, and the industrial sector experienced a remarkable development during the last two decades, due to the proximity of the capital town and the classification of the governorate among those benefiting from incentives for regional development. Tourism is under-developed, despite the wealth of potentialities, including many hot springs and several archaeological sites. Zaghuan, the main town, is a weak pole in relation to urban centres that surround it, and does not succeed in playing the role of a locomotive capable of leading regional dynamics in the region.

This study suggests, firstly, the main features of this region and the obstacles and constraints that hinder the structuring and the recomposition of the metropolitan area of Zaghoun. It will subsequently seek to analyse the development potentialities of the region and consider the guidelines that should be adopted in order to diversify the economy, to better integrate the new generations on the economic and social level, and ensure a better positioning of the region in its national and international environment.

2. The fragility of the economic fabric of the region and the environment degradation

2.1 A traditional extensive grain farming and sheep breeding

Agricultural activity in Zaghuan governorate was once founded on an agro-pastoral system characterized by the importance of the traditional extensive grain farming associated with extensive sheep farming. Zaghuan region is also characterized by the

presence of irrigated orchards introduced by the Andalusians. During the 1980s, farming experienced the development of arboriculture in barren lands, with the diffusion of olive trees and almond trees and irrigated areas, which led to a reduction in the acreage devoted to cereals.

Tab. 1. Evolution of different farming between the beginning of the 1970s and the 2000s.

| Types of farming | 1970/71 | 1980/81 | 1990/91 | 2003/04 | 2013/2014 |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Arboriculture (ha) | 27,000 | 32,000 | 37,000 | 48,000 | 58,911 |
| Ground (ha) | 55,000 | 58,000 | 78,000 | 87,000 | 87,000 |
| Cereals (ha) | 112,000 | 110,000 | 89,000 | 80,000 | 67,750 |
| Sheep-goats(heads) | 100,000 | 160,000 | 260,000 | 421,000 | 195,730 |
| Irrigated areas (ha) | 1,700 | 2,000 | 4,200 | 10,174 | 13,282 |

Source: CRDA Zaghuan

The table above allows us to establish the following findings:

- areas devoted to fruit trees, particularly olive and almond trees, doubled, from 27,000 to 58,911 ha, between 1997 and 2014;
- grainfarming declined from 112,000 to 67,750 hectares;
- the acreage devoted to grounds increased in the 2000s due to difficulties at the level of the fodder production in direct relationship to the weather conditions, particularly the rain fluctuation;
- the irrigated areas experienced a major extension, since between 1970 and 2014 the acreage increased from 1,700 to 13,282 hectares.

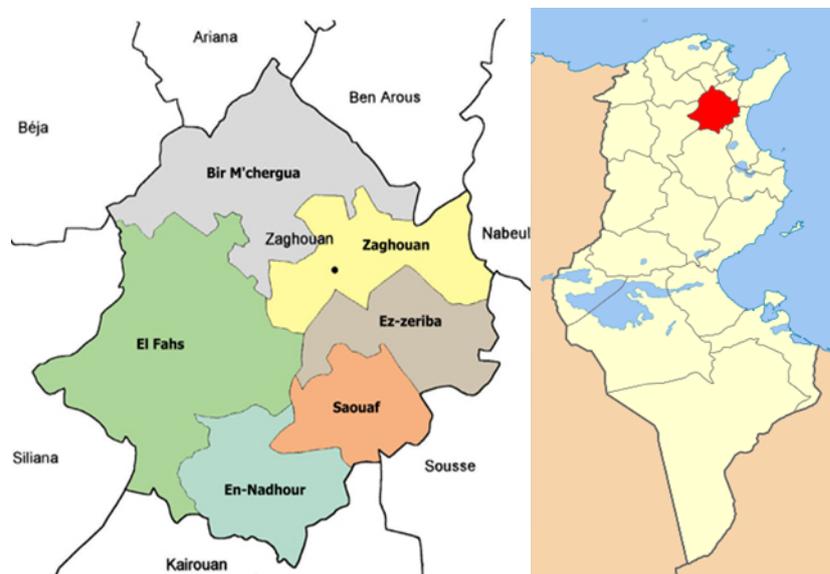


Fig. 1. Location of the governorate of Zaghuan in Tunisia.

As in the rest of the country, the agrarian landscape of the governorate is still marked by atomized structures, and characterized by the predominance of small farms. 38.4% of the 8436 farms in the region have a surface of less than 5 ha, and 64% of less than 10 ha.

Thus, agriculture in Zaghouan is still marked in its vast majority by a family dimension, except a few modern farms set up by private promoters who are generally strangers in the region (CRDA, 2014).

The change of the agricultural sector has been possible thanks to the support of the public authorities (infrastructure, subsidies and technical support). As a result, the region became one of the main centres of agricultural production of the country, especially for vegetables and arboriculture (olive and almond trees and milk production). Despite these achievements and positive results, the agricultural sector had not a significant influence on the development of the region in terms of diversification of the economic fabric. Moreover, agricultural activity is still facing several constraints; namely:

- the frequency of drought years, accentuated by the increasing phenomenon of weather change, which will imply a reduction in rain fall in the future;
- an overexploitation of groundwater in the Southern area of the region, which constitutes a real threat to the sustainability of the irrigated sector;
- an agricultural exploitations marked by fragmentation;
- a reduction in grounds, that, especially in years of drought, threatens the production of meat and milk;
- an increase in the cost of production due to the reduction or even the cancellation of subsidies for farms, and the stagnation or even the drop of the prices of agricultural products;
- the limited diffusion of new practices in terms of organization, productivity, competence and effectiveness, despite the emergence of some positive experiences;
- the lack of efficient exploitation of the soil in the State domains by the operators of the private sector, in particular by agricultural companies;
- the weakness of the diversification of production and of the diffusion of high value crops, and, therefore, the inability to create new jobs.

2.2 The limited impact of the industrial sector, despite the introduction of 10 zones in the region

The contribution of the Zaghouan governorate to the national industrial activity is still modest. Zaghouan was long regarded as an agricultural region. However, from the 1980s, the region has experienced the beginning of industrialization, which can be explained by the existence of several assets capable of encouraging promoters and investors. The region enjoys skills, resources and benefits, the most important of which are:

- the proximity of centres (the district of Tunis, Cap Bon, Sahel Sousse) which represent major consumer markets for industrial products;
- the availability of a regular labour offer from rural areas and a qualified workforce issued from training centres;
- the classification of the governorate among the regions qualified for the incentives for investment of the regional development policy undertaken by the public authorities ('encouragement areas for regional development');
- the availability of building materials.

The implantation of industries in the governorate of Zaghouan is recent. It is from the beginning of the 1980s that the first industrial units began to settle with the support of some operators of the public sector (industrial land agency, regional Council,

municipality) and private investors. Accordingly, the region has undergone since then a localization, de-localization and re-localization process, influenced by the aid granted by the state for the industrial de-concentration. The six delegations of Zaghoun governorate were granted the status of 'encouragement zones with priority regional development'.

In the governorate there are, currently, 10 zones covering more than 360 hectares which constitute an important source of employment. The industrial areas are managed by four groups of maintenance and management (GMG) in Zaghouan, Jbel Oust, El fahs and Ezzriba. The public industrial political measures offer new promoters and an accompanying service for innovative projects and start-ups. However, the industrial sector is still suffering from the lack of qualified technicians capable of responding to the needs of the production management and of the conduct and maintenance of machines. Furthermore, the low level of technology reduces the potential added value and, in general terms, the industrial development of the region (MEHAT, 2014).

In the Zaghouan governorate are located 289 industrial plants that cover more than 10 different sectors, and employed in 2014 23,656 units. Spatially, the industrial factories are concentrated in the areas of Bir Mecherga, Jbel Oust and Ezzriba, and are not disconnected from the national and international economy. In fact, in 2014, we find 95 enterprises whose products are entirely exported, employing 14,879 workers, corresponding to 62.8% of the total number of jobs in the region (APII, 2015).

The process of industrialization of Zaghouan is not dynamic, despite the existence of the several assets we mentioned. This situation is not likely to promote the accumulation of capital, technical and managerial knowledge and a greater integration between industrial activity and the rest of the economy, the development of local potentialities and of the diversification of the economic fabric.

Despite the geological, lithological and mineralogical wealth of the region of Zaghouan and its potentialities due to the abundance of building materials (whereas the extraction of fluorite and barite in the Ezzriba mine has stopped since the end of the 1980s), the building, ceramics and glass industry is yet to develop in the region (ONM, 2010).

2.3 The weakness of the tourism sector, despite the abundance of its environmental and archaeological potentialities

The tourist offer of the region of Zaghouan is organized around its heritage, its beautiful archaeological sites, its picturesque surroundings and the reputation of its thermal springs. Three main resources can summarize the tourism potentialities of Zaghouan:

- the cultural and historical resources, consisting mainly of the archaeological heritage;
- the ecological resources, made up of sites and natural reserves, landscapes with an exceptional attractiveness (national park of Zaghouan);
- the thermal resources: Zaghouan is known as one of the main thermal regions of world reputation, and its waters are known for their multiple therapeutic effects.

The capacity of hotel and tourist accommodation in the governorate of Zaghouan is quite low. The modesty of the tourist accommodation is due to the location of Zaghouan, that is very close to Tunis and Hammamet, frequented by many visitors who prefer to lodge in these renowned areas. The capacity of tourist accommodation is of only 181 beds. The number of tourist arrivals registered in 2012 was 994 for 1732 nights.

The Jbel Wet care centre provides 180 beds (bungalows, villas, and hotel rooms). This centre houses people in need of for therapeutic thermal baths. The visitors, coming mainly from neighbouring regions, rent furnished houses during the winter and spring holidays. Because of the lack of lodging, they are forced to settle in hotels in Nabeul and Hammamet. Often they spend in the site a single day because of the lack of suitable accommodation structures. Zaghouan governorate, which should be an area of ecological tourism per excellence, provides no camping sites, although its favourable conditions.

There are presently 11 in-pending tourism projects. These projects concern the creation of eco-rural tourist cottages, sports activities centres, a residential hotel, a camping centre, a riding club. The main problems encountered by the promoters of these projects concern especially the unavailability of lands, the delays incurred for obtaining the authorisations by the regional authorities, the refusal of financing (MI, SAMEF, 2014).

2.4 The low evaluation of the craft

The craft sector can be regarded as a productive sector with great potentialities because of its relationship with the accessible raw material and the specialized labour available.

The Tunisian utility or decorative, traditional or modern, handicraft products continue to be present in everyday life. Being a region with strong rural characteristics, Zaghouan once produced a lot of wool, leather, wood objects for various uses. These rough products were worked by craftsmen of the city. Zaghouan is known for the Tunisian slippers called 'balgha', the good quality wool manufacture of the 'Fez', the wool blankets ('haiks'), the carpets ('margoums') and also the treatment of leather.

As everywhere in the other governorates, handicrafts of Zaghouan suffer from an insufficient commercial sector adapted to tourists' demand. The absence of institutional support making the craft a cultural value and an economic resource has affected the sector, and relegated it for decades to the lowest rank of the local economy.

The revitalization of this sector and the promotion of its production is essential, on the one hand, in order to make of Zaghouan a tourist destination and, on the other hand, to preserve and safeguard some authentic and representative regional handicraft products (MT, SAMEF, 2014).

2.5 The worsening of unemployment in the years that followed the revolution

The active population of the governorate of Zaghouan increased from 46,167 to 55,767 units between 2004 and 2014, that is an average increase of 1.9% in ten years. The growth of actives is bigger than the population growth. The employment rate rose from 28.6% in 2004 to 31.5% in 2014, but remains lower than the national average.

The contribution of the various branches of the economy shows the importance of the employment in the sectors of administration, health, education, and services, that represent together 37% of actives in 2004. The percentage of actives in the manufacturing is 21.7. Building and public works sector occupies a good portion of the workforce. In any way, the agricultural sector remains a dominant activity in the region. The rate of unemployment increased from 24.4% in 2004 to 20.3 in 2014. The number of the unemployed in 2014 in the governorate represents 5.3% of the total of the unemployed of the Northeast region. It is particularly in the delegations with rural dominance that we record the highest unemployment rates. The evolution of the unemployed between 2004 and 2014 shows an increase in numbers at all levels of schooling, and is particularly high among the higher education graduates.

In the last decade unemployment is an important phenomenon even among executives and managers. In this group, job applications have experienced a significant increase between 2012 and 2014, from 1,428 to 9,755 demands. There is a huge gap between demand and offer of executive jobs due to the socio-economic crisis affecting the country and the reluctance of the private sector to invest since the revolution of January 14th, 2011 (INS, 2014).

The migration balance of Zaghouan governorate was always negative since the end of the 1980s. Between 2009 and 2014, the balance was -900 and this situation can be explained by the fall of jobs creation due to the economic crisis (global crisis since 2008) and the revolution of January 2011. The increase of departures from the region is explained by the scarcity of employment opportunities for the increasing numbers of graduates of higher education, and, above all, by the crisis in the agricultural sector, due to the excessive fragmentation of exploitations, the over-exploitation of water resources and rising prices of agricultural inputs.

2.6 The deterioration of the environmental situation

This degradation of the environment in the region is especially shown by the stopping of the treatment and management of industrial and special waste in the town of Jradou. Just after January 14th, 2011, the inhabitants of Jradou demanded the closure of local specialized equipment, evoking the environmental risks on the physical, biological and human environment. However, after the closure, the pollution has increased, due to the delay in implementing new controlled dumping grounds and the rejection of industrial waste in anarchic dumping grounds in the heart of towns, in forests, rivers and sewers.

The intervention of the national Office of sanitation (ONAS) in the governorate of Zaghouan dates back to 1991, and only three municipalities (Zaghoun, Zriba and Fahs) among the six ones in the region are covered by a sewerage system. Three existing wastewater treatment plants are not able to treat wastewater produced by the population, which is, therefore, spilled in the nature.

Despite its important contribution to the depollution effort, the urban sanitation sector causes environmental impacts that must be mastered. These impacts can be linked to wastewater that is not collected, or collected and untreated, or treated and not reused. Urban drainage water may also have significant environmental impacts, because it can be also polluted. The small towns of the governorate of Zaghouan are still waiting to be covered by the public operator responsible for sanitation (ONAS). It is therefore important and urgent to imagine new technical, institutional and financial efforts enabling to improve the situation of the sanitation of the cities not covered. Technically, it is important to develop solutions adapted to the context of these communities, in order to identify appropriate depuration systems (ANPE, 2011).

Zaghouan is characterized by the presence of an important sector of traditional limekilns, that use tire rubber as a source of energy, which further increases air pollution. There are more than 50 quarries of limestone, sand, clay and gypsum. Most of these quarries do not respect the regulations concerning the exploitation, transport and the rehabilitation of the places after the discontinuance of the activity. In Northwestern Zaghouan are located thirty olive-oil mills that engender several types of waste, in particular a significant amount of vegetable water stored in 3 public sites, and 5 others managed by the private sector. The storage sites of vegetable water of Zaghouan and Nadhour are located close to the household waste dumps. Moreover, several olive-oil mills reject their waste in the environment and in the ONAS network.

3. The problem and the development orientations of Zaghuan governorate

The Zaghuan governorate is characterized by its bridge position between the Northwest and the Centre-east of the country, the diversity of its natural environment and the variety of its ecosystems, the decisive role played by the rural sector in its economy, and the proximity to the capital. It is on this background that should be chosen the good governance rules capable of strengthening the function of polarization of Zaghuan town in the region and stimulating the competitiveness and the attractiveness of the governorate on the regional, national and international levels. The most important question is the promotion of a tourism based on the historical and natural potentialities of the region, in accordance with the standards of sustainability.

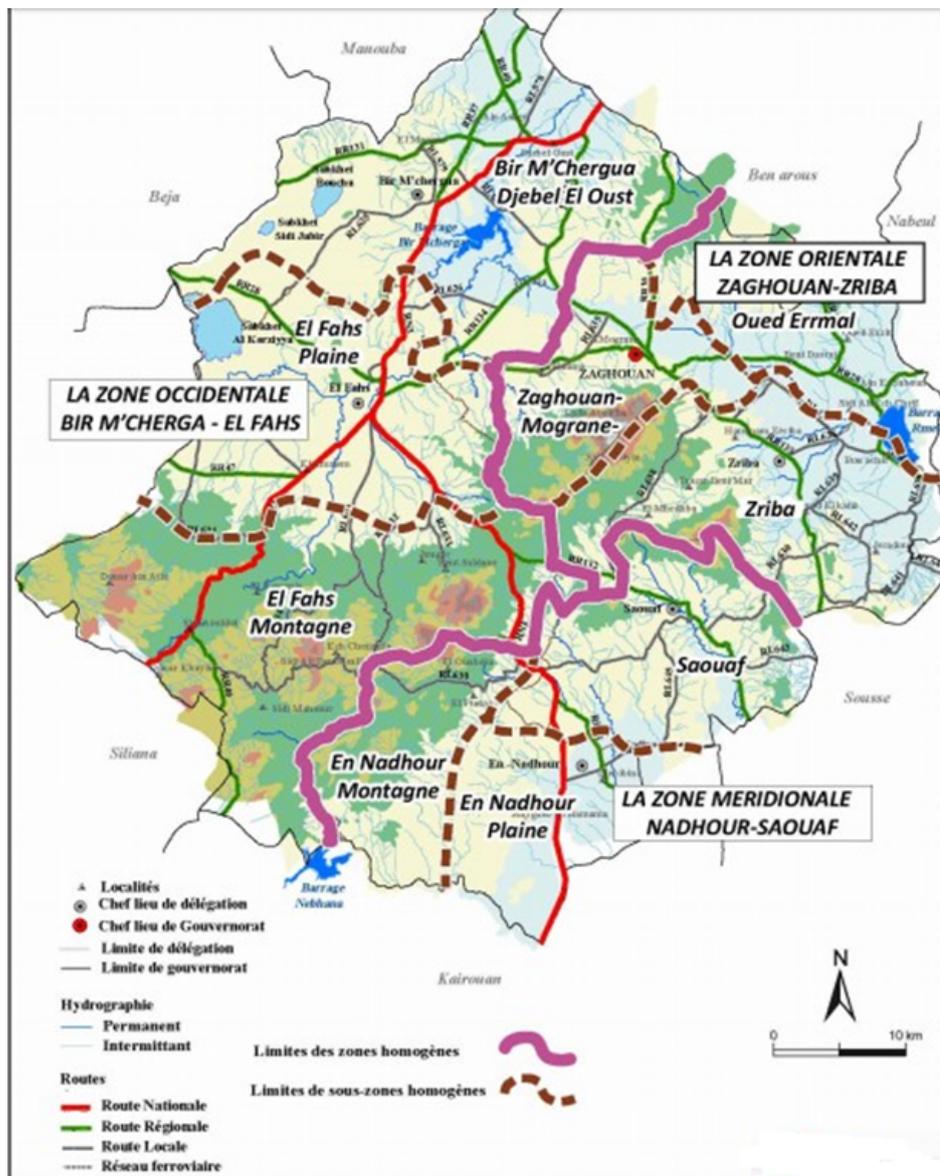


Fig. 2. Homogeneous spaces of the Governorate of Zaghuan - *Source*: MEHAT 2004.

3.1 *Contrasting the marginalization in rural areas*

Zaghouan governorate still remains a rural area although it is part of the most urbanized region of the country. More than half of the population lives in the countryside and the system of agricultural production in most farms is still traditional, based on cereal crops depending on the rainfalls and on cattle ranching. Cereals occupy a significant portion of the cropland in the governorate. The irrigated and the arboreal sector surface has increased over the past decade.

As for the rest of the countryside, the agrarian landscape remains marked by fragmented structures, characterized by the predominance of small exploitations and the absenteeism of the proprietors of large exploitations, increasing production costs and the stagnation or even the fall of prices of agricultural products. The farmers owning less than 10 ha. are 5,408, that is 64% of all farmers in the region. This category uses 23,347 ha., that is 13.4% of the total land in the governorate (CRDA, 2014). The intensive exploitation barely exceeds 30% of the land, and in general uses inadequate technical packages. The agricultural sector suffers from the intertwined problems of economic weakness and unsustainable modes of production, an overexploitation of groundwater, in particular in the Southern area, which constitutes a real threat to the irrigated areas; the increase of drought years that causes a fodder deficit. This situation contributes not only to low yields and productions, but also to the reduction of employability: underemployment and unemployment increases and favours the rural exodus towards the Cape Bon and the greater Tunis region.

Agricultural development policies must in the first place focus on the marginalized sectors in the governorate, in particular on the area around Ennadhour, Saouaf and Ezzriba, marked by isolation, socio-economic unfavourable conditions, high poverty. Moreover, this area is ecologically highly vulnerable: the deterioration of its natural resources is caused by land erosion due to an aggressive climate, a rugged ground, erodible soils, and the over-cultivation of fragile soils. The property of the lands is mainly private, with a reduced presence of State domains; but it is often not formalized due to the absence of property titles, which does not facilitate farmers access to formal credit. Land cadastre should therefore be the object of special care.

A particular attention should be granted to the situation of rural women in the region. The improvement of their living conditions by relieving them of their daily tasks through the improvement of collective facilities as tanks for rainwater collection that could supply drinking and home cleaning water. The promotion of vegetable gardens and craft projects would improve the family economy, generate income, and preserve the local heritage, which marks this region (distillation of water from dog rose, weaving and traditional clothing). We should also target the precarious condition of rural youth by income-generating activities, particularly in the fields of agricultural production, livestock, beekeeping and the maintenance of agricultural equipment (AFBD, 2009).

3.2 *The consolidation of the role of Zaghouan as a regional metropolis*

The town of Zaghouan has not played its role as a regional metropolis despite its status of chief town of the governorate. Zaghouan is a regional capital with no polarizing effect neither on most towns of the region, nor on its rural hinterland. Apart from some administrative services, the city offers only a few private services despite the recent dynamics over the last decade.

The city has not its own territory and remains directly connected to the Tunis, Kairouan and the Sahel regions. Several factors explain the weakness of the attractiveness of the

town of Zaghouan: the rural character of the governorate and the weakness of the demographic weight of the city, in addition to the modesty of the infrastructure of the region.

The administrative division does not favour a reduction of the disparities between the different sectors of the governorate, especially in terms of basic infrastructure. The presently carried out projects (roads and communication services) so far have failed to stimulate private initiative. The administrative promotion of some rural areas which were once marginalized was not accompanied by a policy favouring the re-settlement of the population, that still inhabits villages far away (MEHAT, 2002, 2004, 2009).

The towns have been in recent years places of exasperation of social tensions, under the effect of the unemployment of young people, the socio-spatial segregation, urban poverty, and the failure of the process of regional development and decentralization. The weakness of resources of the local communities, the rise of corruption, the lack of participation to local politics have further exacerbate urban populations.

To strengthen the regional urban frame and its position in the national urban context, planning initiatives should be taken in order to consolidate the regional centre function and, at the same time, enhance the other urban and rural centres. These policies could take advantage from the resources of which Zaghoun and most towns of the region dispose: in particular, the proximity of the most dynamic economic centre of the country, that is the national capital, the largest consumer market in the country; the availability of land reserves enabling at the same time a planned urban sprawl; the development of the urban economy; the settlement of large structural equipment and the stimulation of industrialization; the presence of manpower whose upgrading by professional training could stimulate the production systems; and, finally, a very rich cultural, historic and natural heritage. At the same time, the other side of the coin should be well considered. The proximity to the capital is at the origin of the weakness of the administrative institutions of the region, that do not provide efficiently and rapidly the services required by the citizens and force them to move to Tunis or to neighbouring urban centres (Nabeul, Beja and Ben Arous). Moreover, the government planning infrastructure (industrial areas) is still weak in the light of the industrial jobs created so far (MEHAT, 2004) in Northwestern Zaghouan through the de-location of many industrial units that were settled in greater Tunis.

The Directing planning Scheme (SDA) proposes, for the future development of the town of Zaghouan, 'its full integration in the metropolitan area of the capital', confirming and enhancing the vocation of Zaghouan, both regional and national, based on its geographic location as a crossroads of exchange and encounter between different regions of the North (Tunis, Cap Bon, Medjez el Bab) and the centre (the city of Kairouan, the Sahel). The Zaghouan SDA confirms thereby the orientations of the SDATN, which consider this site as being the most suitable for the establishment of a logistics platform.

Various actions and measures have been recommended in the context of the SDA in order to concretise this option of regional integration, aimed at:

- the consolidation of the regional function of crossroads of Zaghouan, and of its tertiary function of command of Bir me cherga-Jebel El Oust;
- the promotion of its industrial fabric;
- the development of crafts and cultural tourism in Zriba and services to agriculture in Sminja, and the consolidation of some second level rural centres such as Jradou,

Bou Selim-Bni Derrajrural, but also of the small rural centres such as Bouaachir, Bir Hlim.

The advent of globalization has marked the economic, political, societal and institutional developments of Tunisia. At the territorial planning level, the country has opted for a metropolitan development that empowers the capital to become a point of support and an interface of insertion in globalization, but all this threatens to marginalize most of the national territory. This ultraliberal policy has caused regional disparities that have been the mover of the revolution of 2011 (Bennasr, 2012). The task of the planning policies should be that of reversing this marginalization process.

3.3 Strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of the governorate to integrate it into the regional and national system

Strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of a territory constitutes one of the main conditions of its economic development. Competitiveness depends, in fact, on various factors, such as the quality of human resources, the availability and quality of transport and telecommunications' infrastructures, the quality of the services. Tunisia belongs to the countries that provided considerable efforts to strengthen its attractiveness, and the government has also undertaken a policy of promotion of the territory. However, the projects actuated are far from the expectations of decision makers, and the risks of de-location towards emerging countries are very high. The events of January 2014 have not arranged the situation.

The Arab Institute of Business (IACE), in partnership with Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), has conducted a study about regional attractiveness in the 24 governorates of Tunisia that could shed light on these questions. The study analyses five issues: non-municipal services, participatory approach and governance, transparency and access to information, and, finally, infrastructure and living environment. What emerges from this report is that only 6 governorates enjoy a 'moderately satisfactory' climate conducive to business: Tunis, Sousse, Ariana, Sfax, Ben Arous and Bizerte. In 18 governorates, the business climate is considered 'not at all satisfactory'. Zaghouan governorate ranked 12th on a total of 24, with a 3.27 general index, while the highest index is recorded in the governorate of Tunis with 5.56. These data highlight the major obstacles to the economic activity. Among this hindrances, the most important are the complex administrative procedures, the non-municipal services (electricity and gas, sanitation and telecommunications), the living environment, infrastructure and local dynamics (IACE, 2015).

Particularly investors and industrial developers encounter several difficulties and obstacles in the governorate of Zaghouan, due to the weakness of the industrial land reserves all over the region and the absence of a medium and long-term strategy for programming and developing industrial zones. We have recently noted the anarchic implantation of industrial units in Ezzriba, caused by the delay in the extension of the industrial zone. On the other hand, the development of industrial zones and spaces reserved to the industrial activities by the public operator (AFI) do not sometimes take into account modern standards; and the old industrial areas hosting exporting units present deficiencies at all levels. The industrial zones managed by private operators (Bir Mcherga and Jbel Oust) present gaps and deficiencies, as well. The policy of industrial decentralization advocated since the end of the 1970s must be articulated around the

choice of spaces equipped with infrastructure and destined to play the role of anchorage points for investments (Belhedi, 1992).

At the national level, the improvement and the facilitation of the business at the local level remain dependent on the quality of local governance and participation in its daily life, the improvement of infrastructure and the way of life at the local level and the improvement of access to information and the transparency in the management of the business. Local governance aims to promote the territorial attractiveness, particularly the economic one, the final objective being to attract enterprises, a crucial factor for the survival of the regions. The territorial agents must be able, each one according to his role and functions, to supply differentiated services of good quality that meet the specificities of their territory. In the spirit of the new constitution, the issue of decentralization is highly linked to the concept of development, in the medium and long-term, of the most backward regions. It points to diversification and technological modernization and tries to attract high added value sectors, in particular the services related to ICTs, the engineering and mechanical and electronic industries; that is the sectors capable of generating numerous and decent jobs, and the development of entrepreneurship (IACE, 2015).

The Zaghouan government should also strengthen the development of industrial clusters as vectors of development of SMEs and the establishment of the business links with international investors. We presently find in the governorate thirty-three Italian exporting industrial enterprises settled in the industrial area of Birr Mcherg, Ennadhour, El Fahs, Ezzriba and Zaghouan, which employ more than 2500 units, mainly in the sectors of textiles and clothing (10 enterprises units), electricity, machines and metallurgy (10 enterprises), shoes and leather (6 units), plastic (5 enterprises) (APII, 2015). This industrial base could be enlarged through the development of clusters that would benefit from the creation of free export zones and industrial park, technopoles and poles of competitiveness, where common infrastructures are provided to investors. The creation of economics parks has been part of the economic development strategy of Tunisia since the 1990s. This approach, which initially provided mainly additional incentives to businesses, was afterwards redirected towards the development of poles of competitiveness and technology parks. These include, for example, a production area, a nursery of businesses, a scientific research centre and a university space. The settlement of these parks aims to promote creative and innovative companies, to stimulate the generation of skilled jobs and to improve the competitiveness of the domestic industry (OECD, 2014).

The impact of the manufacturing sector is still limited, despite the existence of several industrial units and a considerable number of employees. The rate of unemployment remains high, and these units appear isolated from their socio-economic contexts.

3.4 Enhancing the natural and heritage potentialities through the promotion of ecotourism

Zaghouan governorates dispose of rich natural potentialities: high mountains, large forest areas, wildlife and a miscellaneous fauna and flora, abundance of water and thermal springs. Moreover, it is favoured by its geographical location: the proximity of the capital and the greater Tunis as well as the traditional touristic poles of Cape Bon and Sousse Monastir regions. The region also disposes of rich archaeological and historical potentialities. The archaeological sites, rich in monuments, can be at the origin of a touristic and cultural dynamics, and the mountains also constitute an ecological and sports

tourism development asset. Several factors hinder the development of these activities; particularly the rigidity of the forest code and the lack of basic infrastructure (water, electricity, road and developed tracks). The isolation of some sites compared with the neighbouring tourist centres does not encourage the development of these potentialities. To these structural problems, should be added the lack of a scientifically elaborated communication strategy aimed at the promotion of the existing resources (MT, SAMEF, 2014).

The tourism offer remains modest, for not only the insufficiency of Zaghouan hosting capacity, but also the quality of service offered, target of criticism on the part of the regular curists of the thermal springs. Private investors and young promoters, who want to launch tourism projects in the governorate, face serious difficulties of an essentially administrative nature. Moreover, the incentive and encouragement measures to investment in the region are unsuitable to the regional context.

On the side of the private investors, the travel agencies' program of visit circuits barely exceed a day, and all move from Tunis and Hammamet. They tend to ignore the potential of local circuits, that could provide plenty of interesting sites. A circuits' list could include the following six itineraries: the water circuit from Zaghouan to Carthage with three calls at Mhamdia Séjoui and the Bardo; the circuit of the discovery and observation of the fauna and flora; the caving circuit; the cultural circuit, including the sites of Thuburbo Majus, Jebel El Oust, the Temple of waters, the medina of Zaghouan, the archaeological site of Oued Ermel, Zriba, Jradou; the Andalusian survivals circuit; and finally the thermal circuit of Jebel El Oust, Zaghouan, Zriba. These circuits are not yet signalled or listed in any tourism promotion plan. Nevertheless, three local NGOs, a travel agency and an office specialized in ecology are marketing some of these tours at the request of their clients (MT, SAMEF, 2015).

In connection with this, we should think about modernising and diversifying the ecotouristic industry in Tunisia. This modernisation aims mainly to promote accommodation, the caravanning camping, and sports in wilderness. The accommodation is the keystone of ecotourism. To be able to appreciate the beauty of the landscape in a protected area, the eco-tourist prefers a stay in this environment, rather than a simple and superficial visit. In order to diversify the tourist offer, we should opt for the new emerging activities. Wilderness sports are emerging eco-touristic activities, despite the absence of an accurate and clear legal definition of this activity. Camping and caravanning are eco-tourist activities allowing visitors a direct contact with nature, and they are usually practised on equipped grounds.

Ecotourism finally obeys the logic of supply and demand. This requires the implementation of mechanisms destined to promote its image in order to conquer new eco-tourism markets. In this respect, we should use the means of communication and dissemination of modern information to attract foreign customers interested in this activity. It is necessary also to accelerate the development of a code of the environment that must necessarily devote provisions to ecotourism.

Together with these measures, we must consider the essential objective concerning the local populations, that should enjoy the economic benefits of ecotourism. This requires leading targeted actions, such as the creation of a special fund to finance projects in this niche, the building of rural cottages by granting micro-credits to people wishing to invest in the field of ecotourism, a free professional training in eco-tourism under the auspices of the Ministry of tourism, and services linked to this activity, namely the sale of the craft

products to tourists and the obligation, to be included in the financial incentives granted to these investors, to recruit their personnel among the inhabitants of the region.

On the other hand, the local inhabitants, especially young people, are to be properly trained on catering, accommodation, guiding groups of visitors, on the knowledge of the traditional know-how and local products; and, finally, on the awareness of the ecological and historical values of their own country.

4. Conclusions

Globalization and the opening of the economies of developing countries has resulted in a new space order that favours in the first place the spaces best situated, the activities and the sectors most turned to the outside, the increase of the regional imbalances inside these countries. In Tunisia, the metropolitan dynamics at the level of the major cities of the eastern seaboard (Tunis, Sousse and Sfax) took the form of a simple extension of the urbanization of the economic activities towards the outskirts of these cities, as is the case of the metropolitan area of Northwestern Zaghuan. The strengthening of integration and insertion of Zaghuan within the regional, national and international system must be done by reducing the disparities and inequalities between urban and rural areas, often lacking the basic modern equipment. The liberist-oriented options which the country has undertaken since the end of the 1980s has led to social tensions and has accentuated the imbalance between the economically dynamic eastern seaboard and the underdeveloped hinterland, suffering in particular of a high unemployment rate concerning particularly the younger generations.

On the other hand, the metropolitan area of North-western Zaghuan disposes of several advantages that makes possible a new territorial dynamics supported by local actors the public central authorities. This new dynamic should diversify its economy, implement a new territorial governance, better integrate the new generations by orienting them towards new professional horizons, and ensure a better positioning of the region in its national and international environment.

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