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## **“Sustainable” Entrepreneurial Urbanism in Morocco: What Change(s) for Mining Cities?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, phosphate cities in Morocco have been the site of major urban development projects launched by a Phosphate mining company known as the OCP Group (formerly *Office chérifien des phosphates*). These projects (new cities, major international universities, large farms, etc.) have been aimed at conveying a new image of the company's mining territories, where a growing portion of the population experiences marginalisation and social precariousness. The present contribution analyses the implementation of these projects often labelled as sustainable, as well as the social and spatial effects that they exert at the local level. It also traces how the OCP Group is transforming its mining territories by assessing the place that local populations occupy in its “global” initiatives. Drawing on a series of field investigations conducted in three phosphate cities of Morocco (El Youssoufia, Benguerir, Khouribga), the contribution shows that instead of driving dynamics of change at the local level, these projects contribute to reinforcing and consolidating already existing dynamics of social precariousness and marginalisation.

**Keywords:** mining, marginalisation, sustainable project, phosphate city, Morocco.

## RÉSUMÉ

Depuis quelques années, les villes phosphatières du Maroc sont le support de grands projets d'aménagement urbain lancés par une société d'exploitation des phosphates, le groupe OCP (anciennement Office chérifien des phosphates). Ces projets (villes nouvelles durables, grandes universités internationales, grandes exploitations agricoles, etc.) visent à véhiculer une nouvelle image des territoires miniers du groupe, où une part grandissante de la population est en situation de marginalité et de précarité sociale. La présente contribution analyse le processus de réalisation de ces grands projets d'aménagement souvent étiquetés de durables, ainsi que les effets sociaux et spatiaux qu'ils induisent localement. En outre, elle retrace les changements qu'opère le groupe OCP sur ses sites miniers en évaluant la place qu'occupent les populations locales dans ses projets « internationaux ». À partir d'une série d'enquêtes effectuées dans trois villes phosphatières du Maroc (El Youssoufia, Benguérir, Khouribga), la contribution montre que, plutôt que d'impulser des dynamiques de changement au niveau local, ces projets contribuent à renforcer et consolider des dynamiques déjà existantes de précarité et de marginalisation sociale.

**Mots-clefs :** exploitation minière, marginalisation, projet durable, ville phosphatière, Maroc.

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## **A Commitment to Sustainability: Morocco as a “Model” Country for Sustainable Development?**

It is impressive to observe the increasingly predominant, if not disproportionate, place now occupied by notions of sustainability and sustainable development in the political and media scene and the elaboration of various public policies in Morocco (Philifert, 2015). Admittedly, interest in these notions dates back to the early 1990s, when Morocco displayed its commitment to sustainable development objectives at the Rio summit. Yet, with the arrival of the new monarch in the early 2000s, this interest took an important turn as part of an internationally oriented neo-liberal policy (Catusse, 2011). A range of initiatives, including the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the National Initiative for Human Development, the National Charter for the Environment and Sustainable Development, the Green Morocco Plan, etc., have since been undertaken to convey a new image of the kingdom as a “model” country in the area of sustainable development (Barthel and Zaki, 2011). This ambition was very recently illustrated by the recent hosting of the World Conference on Climate Change (COP 22) in Marrakech, in which Morocco committed itself to instituting a set of legal and constitutional measures for the environment.<sup>1</sup> Beyond adopting such measures, the country has also initiated a series of large so-called “sustainable” industrial, tourist, energy and urban projects that participate in the growing international circulation of sustainable urban planning models (Ward and McCann, 2011).

In the context of this strongly expressed royal desire to promote sustainable development, a Phosphate mining company, the OCP Group (formerly *Office chérifien des phosphates*), has launched a series of so-called “citizen” initiatives, which include the building of green new cities, the rehabilitation of abandoned mining sites, the creation of “globalised” research and training facilities for sustainable development, etc. As the leading employer in Morocco and the leading global exporter of

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1. The most spectacular of these measures was the ban on the use of plastic bags, commonly referred to as “Zero Plastic” or, in local dialect, “Zero Mika.”

phosphates, this now-privatised former national company has been working since 2006 to counter the negative image with which it is often associated in its mining territories due to the environmental nuisances it has generated (Adidi, 2006). The “citizen” initiatives it has set up as part of its new social and environmental responsibility policy are thus aimed at minimising the social and environmental impact of its mining and processing plants and, more generally, at enabling its positioning as a civic-minded company committed to sustainability (Boyer and Scotto, 2013; Felli, 2015).

Building on a body of scientific work that examines the social and political challenges of entrepreneurial urbanism<sup>2</sup> and its integration at the local level (Ward and McCann, 2011), this contribution explores the “entrepreneurial” approaches adopted in the global South to deal with persisting social, economic and environmental problems (Philifert, 2015; Barthel *et al.*, 2013; Bogaert, 2015; Boiral, 2008). It analyses, through the lens of “the Greening the Neoliberal City” framework (Béal, 2017), the articulation/disarticulation between entrepreneurial urbanism, which promotes a managerial and performative vision of development (Harvey, 1996, Mayer and Kunkel, 2012; Peck *et al.*, 2013), and “sustainable” urbanism, which privileges its environmental and ecological dimensions (Cambell, 1996; Pinson *et al.*, 2011; Jonas and While, 2007). Lastly, it traces how this articulation/disarticulation unfolds in “the local,” considered here in its social, political and cultural dimensions (Raco, 2005), while participating in the growing international circulation of sustainable urban planning models (Barthel, 2015; Ward and McCann, 2011).

In addition, the contribution draws on a series of field investigations on the social and spatial integration of the OCP Group’s “sustainable” projects. These investigations, which were conducted as part of a research study on mining cities in Morocco (Khouribga, El Youssoufia and Benguerir), combined documentary research,

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2. The notion of entrepreneurial urbanism is linked to the concept of the entrepreneurial city put forward by David Harvey. This concept refers to the different economic and managerial approaches implemented in urban spaces to facilitate and attract private investment and to promote the logic of economic profitability (Harvey, 1989; Béal, 2017).

observation sessions and interviews<sup>3</sup> with various institutional and ordinary actors concerned by these initiatives. They provided the basis for the present analysis of the motivations behind the OCP Group's adoption of a social and environmental responsibility policy and of the place that "the local" truly occupies in these novel ecological urbanism projects (Harvey, 1989; Fol *et al.*, 2013). How can one explain that the mining company mobilises sustainability as a central value of its action and multiplies ecological urbanism projects in territories dedicated to mining? How is this "top-down" mobilisation of sustainability perceived and appropriated locally? Do the company's "sustainable" projects induce real change in these spaces marked by social and economic precariousness and by often deplorable environmental conditions (Adidi, 2006)? Might it be that, in the face of pressures from environmental associations and local populations, the OCP Group is in fact using these projects as new instruments to "sustainabilise" mining (i.e. to ensure that mining is sustained and extended over time) and to legitimise its own action (Deshaies, 2011; Godard, 2003)?

Based on these investigations, the contribution highlights the discrepancies between "globalised" and local perceptions of the OCP Group's sustainability, as well as between the actions undertaken by the mining company and the expectations and real needs expressed by local populations. It also traces how these "sustainable" labelled projects fit into the framework of entrepreneurial urbanism (Ward and McCann, 2011), which merely prolongs and perpetuates the paternalistic and exogenous approach that has long characterised town planning in mining cities. Most importantly, it shows that the OCP Group is implementing such projects mainly to ensure the longevity and legitimacy of its action in mining territories (Godard, 2003).

*A Changing Mining Company? From an Organisation Closed to Its Environment to a "Civic-Minded" Company Committed to Sustainability*

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3. The interviews were carried out in Benguerir and El Youssofia with two OCP Group technical managers, five municipal technical and political representatives and, finally, a dozen local residents and associative actors.

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Created in 1920 as a public establishment in charge of phosphate extraction in different sites of the national territory, the *Office chérifien des phosphates* diversified and expanded its missions over time to include new activities linked to phosphate reuse and, most importantly, social, environmental and educational activities aimed at conveying a new image of its operations. This diversification was part of a major restructuring strategy initiated in 2006, which involved the transformation of the *Office* into a limited company (OCP SA) and, above all, the implementation of a social and environmental responsibility policy. In adopting this policy, the mining company sought to effect a radical change in its relationship to the mining territories. Responsible, engaged, civic-minded and fair – such were the expressions used and disseminated by the OCP Group to display its new status as a company “committed” to sustainability.

The OCP Group also instituted a set of institutional, social and managerial measures and schemes in order to give concrete expression to its newly adopted social and environmental responsibility policy. At the institutional level, it introduced in its organisational chart and its different mining subsidiaries new sustainable development structures responsible for organising and leading a range of social, environmental and educational activities. These structures were complemented with the creation in 2007 of a major sustainable development foundation, the OCP Foundation, whose role is to promote and consolidate the OCP Group’s new status as a civic-minded company.



Figure 1: Values advocated by the OCP Group sustainable development policy  
(source: OCP Group sustainable development activity report, 2014)

At the operational level, the OCP Group has significantly transformed its mode of operation in mining territories by implementing a series of socio-economic projects in them: socio-cultural centres, sports fields and complexes, vocational training and support centres for youth, etc. In this perspective, it launched in 2017 an initiative called “Act for community” to help its employees get involved in charitable activities for the communities living in the mining territories.

These various “citizen” initiatives raise questions about the OCP Group’s reasons and motivations for transforming its mode of operation. While this restructuring was officially presented as a strategic and deliberate choice spurred on by the arrival in 2006 of a new manager commonly described as its main architect, this should not obscure the other motivations that cast doubt on this voluntarist account. First, there is the managerial motivation, whereby the OCP Group used the social and environmental responsibility policy as an instrument and opportunity for global

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repositioning to attract new customers in an increasingly competitive market (Bellini, 2003). The second motivation is more social and “securitarian”: It has to do with the strong social protests led by the impoverished inhabitants of the territories in which the OCP Group operates. These protests, which were widely publicised in 2011 in the context of the so-called “Arab Spring” (Bogaert, 2015), forced the mining company to redirect part of its actions towards disadvantaged areas through instituting a set of measures targeting youth and underprivileged populations. The next section will examine the modalities of social and spatial integration of the actions and projects carried out by the OCP Group in its mining territories. It will also assess whether these have been able to improve the social and economic situation of the local populations (Deshaies, 2011).

### *Major Development Projects with a “Sustainable” Label: The New Positioning of the OCP Group*

Beyond its many “citizen” initiatives, the OCP Group has developed several large-scale ecological urbanism projects (rehabilitation of former mining sites into green mines, green new cities, sustainable technopoles, etc.) on its properties. These projects, which have been the focus of much media attention, privilege a highly entrepreneurial approach that draws on the tools and methods of the private sector (Harvey 1989). By their nature, their consistency and their international scope, they mark a major turning point in the mode of operation of the OCP Group and of its subsidiaries in the mining territories.



*Table 1: Main "ecological" projects launched by the OCP Group  
(source: OCP reports and project presentation brochures)*

<b>Project</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Surface area</b>	<b>Projected population</b>	<b>Specificities/program Mission</b>	<b>OCP Group subsidiary in charge of the project</b>
<b>Mazagan Urban pole</b>	Outskirts of El Jadida	1,300 ha	134,000 by 2034	Recreation and logistics	Société d'aménagement et de développement de Mazagan S.A (SAEDM)
<b>Mohammed VI Green City</b>	Benguerir	1,000 ha	100,000 by 2025	University and tertiary services	Société d'aménagement et de développement vert (SADV)
<b>Green mine</b>	Khouribga	300 ha	20,000 by 2020	Rehabilitation of former mining sites into tourist and recreational sites	Société d'aménagement et de développement vert (SADV)
<b>Foum El Oued Technopole</b>	Laayoune	126 ha	6,000 by 2030	Building a pole of technological and cultural attraction	Fondation Phosboucrâa



*Map 1: Geographical location of the OCP Group's sustainable projects (source: personal data)*

Spread over large land areas and offering a range of diversified and dense programs, these projects have been designed according to established principles and standards of sustainability and environmental protection, with very detailed specifications for improving environmental efficiency. Contrary to other real estate developers in Morocco who have adopted the French environmental certification (HQE), the OCP Group has chosen to privilege a ground-breaking U.S. certification (LEED) as part of a strategy of marketing positioning vis-à-vis competitors. To this is added a clear preference for world-renowned design offices and architectural firms,<sup>4</sup>

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4. Thus, the Green City project in Benguerir was designed by a Paris-based architectural firm (Kardham Cardet Huet) in collaboration with a Moroccan firm (Saad Benkirane). The Green City's Polytechnic University was designed by the renowned architect Ricardo Bofill.

which confer a globalised image to the company's megaprojects (Barthel and Zaki, 2011).

Among these various "ecological" operations, the Mohammed VI Green City project in Benguerir stands out for its consistency and technological innovations. The promoters of this project presented as the pilot operation of ecological urbanism in Morocco have paid considerable attention to sustainability standards. Its design is based on detailed specifications that uses the most common technical and environmental standards of ecological urbanism. The choice of the name "Green City" is not accidental: It highlights the challenge that the project designers have to face as they seek to create a veritable "oasis" in a territory marked by a dry climate and scarce water resources.

One of the main components of this project being carried out on the outskirts of Benguerir is the building of a large, world-renowned university that is meant to serve as the primary driving force of the Green City (the first phase of the project has already been completed, including the university in 2013). This university, which offers advanced training in the fields of agricultural development, mining and sustainable development, was conceived as a genuine structure for innovation supporting ecological industries and facilitating greater valorisation of the OCP Group's phosphate products. Its creation was officially justified by the ambition to ensure world food security through promoting research linked to the development of phosphate-based fertilisers.

While these ambitions reflect an attempt at global repositioning, they also show that the OCP Group promotes scientific research, as embodied by the university, mainly as a way to push its projects forward and to improve its growth prospects.

*The Social and Territorial Effects of the OCP Group's "Sustainable" Projects*

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Clearly, given the size and originality of their programs, the ecological urbanism projects initiated by the OCP Group serve as vectors for conveying a more positive image of its mining territories to national and international promoters.

As an elected municipal official explained: “Thanks to these large-scale projects, our city [Benguerir] has gradually managed to transform its image as a small rural town. It is now viewed as an attractive territory undergoing major changes in the Rhamna region” (A. M., elected municipal official in Benguerir, 15 June 2018).

Because large construction sites are required for their development, these projects also contribute to boosting the local economy by creating job opportunities for local youth—though these jobs are mainly temporary. Finally, these projects introduce technological and environmental innovations that break with the harmful and detrimental mining extraction practices of the past (see *Swissaid Report*, “Dangerous fertilisers,” 2015). But despite the expressed intentions and actions in favour of mining territories, “the local,” as understood in its social, cultural, economic and even political dimensions, is hardly taken into account in the design and implementation of the projects. Indeed, the latter remain more connected to the global than to the local. A telling example of this is the Mohammed VI Polytechnic International University in Benguerir, which was conceived as an “American-style” full fee-paying educational facility with a strong international orientation. This university operates in complete isolation from the surrounding area, and the majority of its training courses and research structures are more in line with the OCP Group’s fields of intervention than the needs of the local market.



*Figure 2: The “fortress” architecture of the University of Benguerir (source: Ricardo Bofill firm, [www.ricardobofill.com/ca/projects/universite-mohammed-vi-polytechnique](http://www.ricardobofill.com/ca/projects/universite-mohammed-vi-polytechnique))*

Located on the outskirts of Benguerir in the heart of the Green City, the university was designed as a closed and highly surveilled configuration<sup>5</sup> containing a wide range of cultural, sports and scientific facilities along with several banking and catering services, all of which render it completely autonomous from its surroundings. In fact, the university was not created to respond to the lack of educational facilities in Ben Guerir, but to meet the needs of the OCP Group for specialists trained in its new fields of intervention. This was confirmed by the administrative manager of the university in an interview he gave in 2012 to the weekly magazine *TelQuel*:

“Don’t go thinking that we’re building this new city out of pure philanthropy. Research and development will be of great use to [the OCP Group], which will find on campus the engineers of tomorrow, specialists in chemistry, mining, sustainable

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5. Access to the university is strictly forbidden to the public. The request for an exploratory visit we made as part of our field investigation was categorically refused.

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development or renewable energies.... Everything we do here creates value for the company and for the country" (*TelQuel*, 22 December 2012).

While the university has reserved a number of places for scholarship students from the mining cities in which the OCP Group operates, the fact remains that the majority of enrolled students come from other Moroccan cities or from foreign countries, particularly African ones. This state of affairs was strongly criticised by an activist member of a local association in Benguerir. This activist contested the selective and fee-paying logic of the training courses offered by the university, which he claimed was more oriented towards the global than the local.

Indeed, in view of the university's strong international connections, highly specialised training course offer and private status, local populations tend to cast doubt on the OCP Group's professed aim to turn it into a genuine lever of local development. The adoption of the most recent standards of sustainable urbanism reinforces this perception. These imported ecological standards, which are imposed via international certificates, rarely refer to traditional and local techniques for using and recycling natural resources.

In short, the different "sustainable" projects initiated by the OCP Group often operate in configurations that are completely closed to surrounding areas. Thus, a significant contrast can be observed between "hyper-sophisticated" projects that use the most advanced technical and technological conveniences and often disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterised by a banal and modest urban landscape.

The most salient example of this is the city of Benguerir, which was a small rural town until recently, before it experienced, in a fairly short period of time, a considerable turn with the launch of the Green City project. This turn was partly due to the intense lobbying conducted by the former municipal and parliamentary president and current

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royal councillor<sup>6</sup> via a local association, the Rhamna Foundation for Sustainable Development, which has established itself since its creation in 2008 as a central player in the conduct and steering of the city's development actions.

Despite the actions to beautify and improve the urban landscape initiated in recent years by the OCP Group in partnership with the Rhamna Foundation, there remains a striking contrast between the "Green" New City, with its prestigious university, and the rest of the city. This contrast recalls and perpetuates, in another form, the segregated configuration adopted by the OCP Group in its mining territories, where processing plants are surrounded by often informal and poorly equipped neighbourhoods.

"Why create a whole new city on the outskirts of the existing city when there is great potential for urbanisation in the existing city? The university could be well integrated in the city centre to serve as a real vector of local development and urban animation. In fact, we are now faced with two totally distinct cities managed by heterogeneous actors who unfortunately interact little with each other", explained a young association activist with regard to the project. This distinct, two-headed management of the city is very reminiscent of the mode of organisation that generally characterises mining cities. In El Youssoufia, for instance, the mining territory is managed by the OCP Group while the rest of the city falls under the responsibility of local authorities.

Because they are endowed with very limited technical and financial resources, local actors (especially the urban municipality) often see their role as limited to facilitating the implementation of the OCP Group's projects. Indeed, they view the

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6. Born in a family from Benguerir, this royal councillor served as elected municipal president of the city between 1992 and 1998. He was appointed Secretary of State at the Ministry of the Interior in 1999, before being promoted to Minister of the Interior in 2002 and 2007. In 2007, he founded the Authenticity and Modernity Party, which became a new political force in Morocco, and won the legislative elections in the province of Benguerir. He was re-elected municipal president of Benguerir in 2009. In 2011, following the poor showing of his political party in the legislative elections and the strong social protests that rocked Morocco, he resigned from his party and became councillor in the royal cabinet while remaining president of the association he had created in 2007: the Rhamna Foundation for Sustainable Development.

latter as “royal” operations that go beyond their areas of intervention, which they believe justifies their marginal involvement in them.

An elected member of the Benguerir municipal council justified himself in these terms: “[The Green City] is a royal project driven by the *Makhzen*. It is quite normal that the municipality is only marginally involved in it.”

Although the Green City project was initiated by the OCP Group, it is often viewed locally as a project of the central government (*Makhzen*) which requires the mobilisation of all local financial and technical resources. This imprecise perception of the Green City’s status is explained by the strong involvement of the royal councillor, who plays a double role as a representative of the *Makhzen* (as councillor and former Minister of the Interior) and as an elected municipal and parliamentary official. The locals often refer to the Green City by his name to signify the crucial role he has played in the development and completion of the project.

The Rhamna Foundation, which is chaired by the royal councillor and brings together major personalities from the political, academic and cultural spheres on its board of directors, was granted a major role in the governance of the Green City project. It has thus set itself the objective of promoting the development of the city through various initiatives and actions. Its strong connection with the *Makhzen* due to the special status of its president and members, as well as the flexibility it enjoys in managing mobilised funds, has greatly facilitated its action at the local level and enabled the acceleration of the project’s implementation.

Local associations, which are little involved in the implementation of the Green City project, have nevertheless contested the predominance of the Rhamna Foundation as well as its monopoly on urban development projects in the city.<sup>7</sup> They have also

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7. In this regard, a local confederation for the fight against corruption and authoritarianism (which brought together the local branches of the Democratic Labour Confederation, the Moroccan Labour Union, the Moroccan Centre for Human Rights and the Moroccan Association of Unemployed Graduates) filed a complaint to the Regional Court of Auditors in 2013, in which it requested a mission to audit the accounts of the Foundation.



criticised the “extraterritorial” character of the project and highlighted its weak contribution to the development of the local economy.

As an active member of a local association explained: “It is true that the Foundation has helped to mobilise significant resources for the development of the city, but it has also contributed to the exclusion and marginalisation of the local associations that are closest to the city’s inhabitants. I don’t really see any real difference between the Foundation’s unilateral approach and the local authorities’ top-down management style that has long characterised city development” (K. H., association activist in Benguerir, 22 June 2017).

Aziz, a young unemployed resident of Benguerir, put things as follows: “Even though we’ve heard reassuring and appealing talks by decision-makers and OCP Group officials concerning the positive effects that the Green City project will have on the city’s economic development and the creation of job opportunities, there are few companies creating jobs so far. The few job positions that have been offered or created are mostly open to highly qualified candidates, who are often sought outside the city” (Aziz, young resident of Benguerir, 30 years old, 23 June 2017).

According to Aziz and other young people interviewed in Benguerir, the city does not need “hyper-sophisticated” projects in the form of sports complexes following international standards or state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plants. Above all, it needs genuine development actions that can create jobs and improve the social and economic situation of the local population, and especially that of youth. In the words of Aziz, the OCP Group’s “sophisticated” projects are “mere window dressing to conceal an alarming social situation” (Aziz, young resident of Benguerir, 23 June 2017).

Unlike Benguerir, which has been the focus of special political attention, the city of El Youssoufia (100 km from Marrakech) is perceived locally as having been abandoned by the OCP Group in favour of other mining cities. For several years, El Youssoufia has been the scene of violent social demonstrations protesting the

deplorable social, environmental and economic situation which persists despite the fact that the city has important phosphate resources. Compared to the rest of the country, the city has alarming levels of unemployment, poverty and social precariousness (the poverty rate in El Youssoufia province is 18.8 % compared to a national average of 8.2 %), which are reflected in the proliferation of substandard housing. Major social, economic and environmental initiatives have been launched in the city by the OCP Group and its sustainable development foundation (landscaping of public gardens, building of infrastructure networks, creation of a vocational training centre for youth, etc.), but they have not contributed to alleviating social tensions at the local level. According to the young people interviewed in this study, these “citizen” actions are temporary and do not fall within the scope of sustainability, which calls into question the company’s stated goal of promoting sustainable development.

As regards the issue of youth employment in the city, the OCP Group’s late 1980s decision to give preference to mechanical instead of manual methods of phosphate extraction has significantly reduced the recruitment of local labour. Moreover, there has been an increase in the demand for candidates with greater technical qualifications who do not necessarily originate from the mining territories. This has prompted strong protests on the part of local youth. In view of the limited employment opportunities available in mining territories, young people, the majority of whom come from mining families, generally consider that they should be given highest priority for the jobs opened by the OCP Group. Most justify this by the fact that the mining resources still being exploited by the company are “local” resources, the benefits of which should primarily accrue to the local population.

According to Abderrahmane, a young activist member of a local association of unemployed graduates in El Youssoufia, “The decision to limit the hiring of local labour was not followed by a parallel diversification of economic activities at the local level. As a result, local youth found themselves restrained by the lack of job opportunities in the city. It is difficult to envision a future for the city without the mine” (Abderrahmane, young association activist in El Youssoufia, 32 years old, 15 May 2017).

Abderrahmane noted that this feeling of being restrained “forced” a considerable number of young people to emigrate from the city to other parts of the country or, often clandestinely, to foreign countries. According to him, this led to a situation where the city was “drained” of its human resources.

The problem of youth unemployment prompted the mining company to set up in 2011 the OCP Group Skills Centres, with the twin objectives of improving the employability of young people and contributing to the socio-economic revitalisation of local territories. In addition, the OCP Group delegated part of its activities (mainly those related to logistics, maintenance, transport, etc.) to subcontractors to facilitate employment opportunities in the city. Yet, while these initiatives have resulted in the creation of many jobs for young people, they are far from satisfying the growing demand for work, especially from young people with no degree.<sup>8</sup>

“It is true that a vocational training and support centre for youth<sup>9</sup> was set up at the local level and that a number of young people have been hired. But this was only to calm things down after the social protests of youth. We know full well that these initiatives are limited in time and that they do not in any way address the structural problems of the city, which require a real dynamic of development to create wealth for present and future generations. Proof of this is that most of the jobs offered are located in mining sites outside the city. This is not always conducive to the development of the local economy,” explains Ahmed, a young university graduate and son of a retired miner who regularly takes part in sit-ins in front of the local headquarters of the OCP Group or the provincial government with other young people.

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8. Subcontracting has been contested on the grounds that it is a means for the OCP Group to escape its obligations and that it contributes to the economic precariousness of youth due to the poor working conditions it provides.

9. The “OCP Skills” program was set up following the 2011 protests of youth from mining cities. In 2012, it assisted more than 20,800 young people via three intervention components: immediate recruitment (5,800 people), vocational training to enable the hiring of young people in different sectors of the Moroccan economy (15,000 candidates), entrepreneurship (support for young project leaders). In El Youssoufia, around 30 projects received support for business start-ups in 2017.



*Figure 3: Sit-in and protest of young people against marginalisation in El Youssoufia (source: personal snapshot, 2017)*

Finally, the much-publicised environmental measures introduced by the OCP Group are far from mitigating or reducing the harmful effects generated by its different phosphate processing plants (see *Swissaid Report*, "Dangerous fertilisers...", 2019). Thus, in El Youssoufia, both the local municipal authorities and the residents of the neighbourhoods located near phosphate washing and drying plants encounter difficulties in maintaining gardens and public spaces, which are covered daily by large quantities of sand and dust that come from open-pit mining.

As an elected municipal official explained: "The city is effectively plagued by air pollution by dust, which poses a great problem for the municipality's technical services responsible for the upkeep of roads and green spaces" (A. T., elected municipal official in El Youssoufia, 14 May 2017).



*Figure 4: Inhabitants of El Youssoufia's surrounding villages protesting the depletion of water tables in the region (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f321UaKEzeg>)*

In addition, groundwater is still being overexploited for mining washing in El Youssoufia, which contributes to the gradual depletion of a resource that is vital for small farmers and for the residents of villages on the outskirts of the city.<sup>10</sup> This situation has prompted some rural dwellers to emigrate to other agricultural regions. Finally, according to testimonies collected on site, toxic liquid and atmospheric discharges from mining extraction continue unabated, with harmful effects on the health of local residents as well as on the air quality and water resources of the city (White, 2015). The OCP Group technical staff interviewed on the subject denied and refuted most of the reports of nuisances coming from local residents and associations. It is therefore difficult to confirm these testimonies, especially in the absence of neutral and up-to-date studies by the administrations concerned and by specialist researchers (Adidi, 2006).

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10. The city of El Youssoufia has been the scene of social protests (locally referred to as protests against thirst) led by the inhabitants of outlying rural areas to denounce the depletion of water tables.

In short, the OPC Group's mode of operation in its mining territories is paradoxical in that it combines ground-breaking pilot actions for the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development with activities that perpetuate the pollution of the environment and the exploitation of natural resources. This paradox invites us to ask whether these "citizen" and environmental actions might ultimately be part of a marketing logic aimed at legitimising mining exploitation (Deshaies, 2011).

## Conclusion

### *"Sustainable" Entrepreneurial Urbanism: Rupture or Perpetuation of the Segregated Configuration of Mining Cities?*

This exploratory research has uncovered a significant contradiction between the OPC Group's promotion of sustainable entrepreneurial urbanism and the deplorable social and economic situation that persists in its mining territories. Despite the company's adoption of a "citizen" approach, the articulation between the implemented ecological urbanism projects and "the local," understood here in its social, economic and political dimensions, remains weak. The present contribution shows that by privileging an entrepreneurial and managerial approach, these projects effectively perpetuate, in other forms, the OCP Group's former capitalist and externalised approach. Indeed, the company's "citizen" initiatives are marked by a "paternalistic" and "top-down" logic of sustainable development, which is primarily tailored to the standards of international requirements and certifications. If anything, sustainable entrepreneurial urbanism is a novel scheme that facilitates the OCP Group's global repositioning while legitimising the expansion of its action in mining territories. Moreover, the entrepreneurial and managerial logics that underpin these ecological urbanism projects translate into important differences—and weak relations—between the new "globalised" territories

that have been created ex-nihilo by the OCP Group and the disadvantaged territories that surround them.

It appears, then, that these new projects constitute not a rupture, but a perpetuation of the segregated and fragmented configuration that has long characterised mining cities. Insofar as they mainly benefit the OCP Group's image and prospects for global growth, the new measures being implemented as part of the sustainable entrepreneurial urbanism framework effectively conceal and perpetuate the dynamics of social and territorial marginalisation. The persistently awful social and economic situation of most mining cities and the still marginal involvement of local political, associative and ordinary actors in these projects are testament to this.

In the end, following Myriam Donsimoni and Olivier Chavanon, one may ask whether "by applying the logics of international organisations and largely exogenous ways of thinking, these major development projects [might not draw new] borders between those who govern and those who are governed as opposed to helping reduce them" (Donsimoni and Chavanon, 2016, p. 22).

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