

Decentralisation and City Diplomacy as an Alternative in the Development of Border Regions: Case Study- Debdab-Algeria

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Received: January 09, 2023

Accepted: January 23, 2023

Published: January 28, 2023

Abstract

Border territories are often defined as spaces with various challenges. It is an image that they embody and that they struggle to overcome despite their various potentialities. Their appeal as spaces of transit and exchange needs specialised attention. Side-lined, or ignored by the public authorities, these territories reflect modes of development that are largely controlled by a centralist, vertical governance which ignores the special characteristics and challenges of these regions. It is clear that these regions are willing to help bring about a new socio-economic dynamic, capable of reducing the illegal migration that so tarnishes their image. In a forward-looking vision, the redynamisation of these territories hinges on a review of the role of local authorities in the development process. They must be given more powers to allow them to operate from below, in collaboration with the local community, about development strategies. The Debdab region, situated in the wilaya of Illizi, close to the Tassili Najjer region and the Tunisian and Libyan borders, highlights well the reality of these territories; unfairly treated and left to face all sorts of issues and conflicts. It is clear that the future of the local population will be in jeopardy without integrate strategies of regional development, capable of revitalizing an already fragile territory. This paper aims to confront the development strategies of these border regions, by applying the principles of decentralisation, to measure the impact of this method in preparation for a process of city diplomacy in regional development. Finally, we will verify, with the help of legal and administrative texts, the viability of city diplomacy as an alternate mode of development to revitalize the Debdab region.

Key words: Decentralisation, border, city diplomacy, Debdab, Algeria.

INTRODUCTION

The *Debdab* region, situated close to the Libyan and Tunisian borders, is today in a precarious economic and social position. The life of the people who live there is in jeopardy and, in the long term, that of the neighbouring regions will be affected. Although the Debdab region has been subject to a planning and redevelopment program, it is still under-developed which could forcibly transform it into a problem area, especially since it is already notorious for illegal migration and contraband. To rectify this situation, we believe that a revision of regional planning methods should be immediately carried out, with local management programs dedicated to decentralization, giving local communities more political and financial power. The aim of these reforms is to create favorable conditions that will allow the local economy, built on a solid and united foundation, to thrive, by highlighting both the tangible and intangible potential of the Debdab region. In addition, decentralization as part of a local management program, must, in this specific case, be accompanied by political power so as to allow the « wilaya déléguée » of the Debdab to cooperate with neighbouring municipalities and those of bordering countries (Libya, Tunisia, Niger) as part of a broader vision of economic, social and more specifically communal development. It will renew the territorial co-existence which had formerly existed before the ludicrous demarcation system of the French colonial power destroyed it forever. Consequently, by means of an effective decentralisation, the community of Debdab will fulfill a diplomatic mission.

City Diplomacy

The neologism, « city diplomacy », is the direct outcome of globalisation. It is an expression that supports a vocabulary already rich and diversified in terms related to cooperation and regional partnerships, such as decentralised cooperation,

town/commune networks, united cities, whose usage has sometimes led to confusion. Although very different in their function and their modus operandi, all these structures are supported by local communities and towns that seek to promote partnerships and solidarity between different regions and societies. Furthermore, all these organisations arose out of a need to affirm, on an international level, local powers, helped and sustained by an active society, concerned about regional issues. In short, we are witnessing the projection of the local in the global, a vision in keeping with the slogan of René Dubois (1972): think global, act local. Henceforth, all these structures signify the birth of a substate with strong international cooperation. They represent the advent of a new era in both international relations and systems of regional government. In fact, the composition of local communities into networks with international support has allowed them to share beneficial experiences, especially with regard to their legal position in front of international organisations (UNO-IMFI).

The origin of city diplomacy, as a mode of cooperation between local governments, dates back to 1913, and the foundation of the Internationale Union of cities (IUC) in Belgium¹.

After 1919, international cooperation, on a global scale, was put on stand-by. It was undermined by the wars of 1914 and 1939 to be replaced by coalitions and military conspiracies. Nevertheless, in 1928, the Internationale Association of cities changed its name to the Internationale Union of Local Authorities (IULA). It is clear that the dramatic events of these wars were, if only partially, responsible for restoring both international and regional cooperation in an attempt to calm relations, promote peace and overcome all the hostilities generated by the wars. Several years later, the first twinnings and international cooperatives were established by several local governments in order to promote peace and solidarity between peoples.

The twinning of the town of Luchon with that of Harrogate in 1953, as well as the creation of the World Federation of Twin Towns (FMVJ), formerly the World Federation of United Cities, (FMCU), in 1957 (B. Gallet, 2005) set a precedent for this kind of cooperation. Since then, twinnings and cooperatives have taken on increasingly new forms and cover more and more extensive geographical areas. Thus, the support² of both global and regional structures

(UNO/EU) for the internationalisation of local powers (local government) in their diplomatic mission, has given them credence as a sub-state in regional management. This, in our opinion, is the main reason behind the central government's opposition to international support for local authorities, accusing it, rightly, or wrongly, of carrying out a parallel diplomacy. It is important for central government that local authorities show their support. At Hague, in 2008, local officials held their first world conference, under the direction of the CGLU³, founded in 2004 (B. Gallet, 2005). During this reunion, the term « city diplomacy » was unanimously accepted as a popular expression of this new form of cooperative, since an explanatory resolution (agenda), regarding the missions and objectives of this mode of cooperation, was approved by everyone present. This resolution attempted, in the best possible way, to clarify the prerogatives and objectives to which this structure aims to aspire. Moreover, in his analysis of the agenda of the Hague, Yves Viltard (2010) highlighted a number of important points. The author immediately identified several problems which could stop city diplomacy from being put into practice. The most important ones include the differences that exist between the systems of local government in different countries, their power and their expertise.

1 The IUC was created during the Universal Exhibition in Ghent, from July 27 to August 1, 1913, which saw the holding of the International Congress on the art of building cities and the organization of communal life (R. Payre, P Saunier, 2004)

2 The 26 session of the UN (1970) stipulates and insists on the strengthening of relations between cities. E. Taib (2014). The European Union, through its parliamentary resolution (2017/2037(INI)), of 3 July 2018, on the role of cities within the framework of the European Union, has encouraged the role of cities in the establishment of sustainable urban development programs of the European Union. The same resolution, following the Maastricht Treaty, reinforces the consultative role of cities in the EU decision-making process, which strengthens the prerogatives of local authorities and communities. In addition, the European Parliamentary Committee that the EU's external policies will be more effective if they are carried out by the cities, following various twinnings and cooperation, confirms that the cities, by tackling the problems, poorly thought out the powers central. The ACP and CEEC program of the EU aims to encourage the emergence of local actors in African countries, from Eastern Europe to Latin America E. Taib (2014). In 2016, during the United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III), UCLG's contribution was recognized and welcomed by UN bodies, particularly in the development of the new urban agenda. . <https://www.uclg.org/fr/themes/le-nouvel-agenda-urbain> consulted on 18/08/2020.

3 United Cities and Local Government is an organization that brings together cities, local authorities and municipal associations. It has 140 UN member countries, divided into 7 regional sections, in addition to a forum and coordination.

The author seems unenthusiastic about the outcome of this new form of cooperation, especially since the agenda of Hague, itself, is unsure of the exact definition of city diplomacy⁴. In its definition, communities and local authorities are united in one principal mission: to promote peace and security, and to fight against conflicts. In short, it is a close institutional analogy to the mandate upheld by the central government. The CGLU confirms, in its agenda, its predisposition to work with partnerships: « *on several levels with central governments, with international governmental institutions and with the organisations of civil society...* »⁵. Consequently, it is clear that the diplomatic action of local authorities, and of towns, remains inferior to that of central governments, at least in the beginning. This seems to imply that the principal objective of the CGLU, which consists of the internationalisation of the actions of local powers, will take time. This objective will be achieved in one of two ways: either by reinforcing the powers of local authorities, or by introducing decentralisation with a transfer of expertise, especially in matters of diplomacy, to be made in favour of local government and upheld as a fundamental prerequisite.

This condition will weaken the coherence of city diplomacy as a viable notion, thus associating it with the concept of decentralised cooperation, a term which has already been in use for a long time. This connection reflects a conceptual analogy between the two ideas. However, although decentralised cooperation alludes to city diplomacy, it aims at the perfection and excellence that only decentralisation can bring. Decentralised cooperation first appeared in French legislation in 1985⁶, regarding the external actions of local authorities. The law passed on February 6th, 1992 gave new powers to local governments and strengthened their role on an international level. Decentralised cooperation « *...opens up new horizons regarding international relations in ways that traditional twinning could never do.....seeks to develop viable and long term relationships...intends to fulfill economic, social, cultural, technical and environmental actions...founded on the values of peace, friendship, solidarity and partnership....a means of counteracting the effects of globalisation which is built on the values of self-interest.....subvert central bureaucracy...* »⁷, ultimately means rethinking the role local authorities play both in their international relationships, and in regional development projects, especially since such cooperation establishes new, more democratic, methods of regional government (Comélieu et al 2002), geared towards sustainability. According to E. Taib (2014), « *The notion of cooperation refers to external actions carried out by regional governments that of decentralisation relates to the method and the level of institutional intervention of this cooperation* ». Through these cooperatives, officials will gain access to new methods of management and regional development without having to submit to the exigencies of central government.

City Diplomacy and Regional Development: A More Viable Option

City diplomacy⁸ is a concept that has broken a lot of ground in recent years. It is now a framework which oversees all the actions carried out by local authorities within international cooperatives. As such, it gains strength to act as a player representing local government, not only within organisations but also at both regional and world forums. Since its implementation in 2008, it has given local authorities and towns the basis for a new approach in management and development. This⁹ consists, among other things, of strengthening the powers of local officials, of consolidating their financial and institutional autonomy and democratisation of public affairs. In other words, with such an approach, local authorities are able to engage in a transnational dynamic where competitiveness is a systematic corollary of exchanges and of partnership.

In fact, donors see in these platforms numerous opportunities for investment and financial release, away from the constraints of central administration. For them, the conquest of new territories is, henceforth, allowed which reaffirms the attractiveness of local government and, thus, strengthens regional resilience. City diplomacy is, ultimately, the best

4 "City diplomacy as a tool of local governments and their associations for the promotion of social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, with the aim of creating a stable environment in which citizens can live together in peace, democracy and prosperity". The Hague Agenda on City Diplomacy. 2008. p 3

5 Idem p 4

6 The French laws of January 7 and July 22, 1983 "on the transfer of powers from the state to local authorities

7 Essaid Taieb. Op cite p 13

8 For all the actions and programs or the notion of city diplomacy, the role of these are advanced, please consult the following link: <https://www.uclg.org/fr>, UCLG in action file.

9 This approach is based on a set of recommendations issued by UCLG during the Forum on Development Policies under the supervision of the European Commission. These recommendations are contained in the UCLG policy guidance document on development cooperation and local governments, published in 2013. Available at the link: https://issuu.com/uclgcglu/docs/9243688576_fr_fr_uclg_position_paper_final/34

way of obtaining sustainable regional growth. It allows local government to flourish and encourages the innovative capacities of the inhabitants. It favours the internationalisation of local skills, thus, promoting them. In our opinion, city diplomacy, as a measure for sustainable growth, is closely linked to that of regional development. First of all, both processes focus on small regions like those governed by local authorities (A. Torre, 2015). Secondly, in their respective approaches, both city diplomacy and regional development regard the idea of territory in a similar way. They focus on the unique character of the region, and both its tangible and intangible potential. In other words, they look upon territory as a social unit and as the result of the actions of its local players (Pecqueur et al, 2013). Regional development is dependent on good local government and it focuses on the systems of cooperation and social construction that best enhance its territorial innovation (A. Torre, 2015).

In other words, city diplomacy, which is the final step in decentralised cooperation, contributes to territorialisation through a public action working with development strategies, the most integrated and best adapted to the local context. This process focuses on the value of local potential (tangible/intangible). It is a corrective measure for sectoral public development policies. According to Alain Faure (2011) territorialisation of public action, which has replaced the idea of local development, consists of: « ...a movement of professionalization of public interventions directly driven by local authorities.... It suggests that these measures and programs have an extra soul when individuals are closer to public decision-making. It thus appears that the qualifier « territorial » conveys a representation of public action both performative and virtuous.....It represents not only the best capacity of expertise, on the part of the citizens, to make public decisions, but also an increased awareness in the face of bureaucratic and ideological abuse... ».

In addition, an array of ideas, such as « territory project », « territorial government », were introduced by P.S. Weisbein (2007) which came to signify the end of the era of centralist policies, giving way to a more democratic and decentralised management.

City diplomacy and the Algerian legal corpus; a lukewarm response

At the beginning of independence, which was declared on July 5th, 1962, Algeria inherited an impoverished and vulnerable nation. It was necessary to mitigate this insecurity and try to heal the deep wound that had existed in the country during the 132 years of its colonisation.

This situation, combined with other social and historical considerations, was the reason for the choice of socialism as the political regime and system of government of the country. This political system was thought to be avant-garde, guaranteeing national sovereignty, and ensuring social cohesion.

This system of government essentially means that all political power is in the control of central institutions which consequently reduces the power and competencies of regional administration as well as that of local communities. This political system lasted from 1962 until the beginning of the 1990. Throughout this period, with regard to regional and urban planning, central government made the decisions, made the rules and carried out the work. In fact, all local redevelopment projects were monopolised by the state-owned engineering and design offices. This system excluded all forms of competition (Maouia, 2003), and rejected private investment.

Furthermore, the centralisation of development programs (housing, services) and the nationalisation of all financial mechanisms shows just how dependent local government was on central administration. In fact, the centralisation of political power followed a vertical logic where local authorities, in the absence of effective decentralisation, could fulfill an administrative purpose and be used by the elected body to oversee and manage development projects.

This period was marked by the ideology of the welfare state which owed its existence to the sovereigntist mentality of the State, chosen by the policy makers after Independence. This is why international relations and diplomatic missions were the exclusive responsibility of the central administration. In fact, the twinnings that were established in Algeria, during this period, were made within the framework of cooperation between governments which meant that decentralised cooperation either came under the guardianship of the central administration E. Taib (2014), or was blocked completely. The politico-economic reforms carried out by the state after 1990 were part of a structural readjustment plan ordered by the IMF and the World Bank. They redefined not only the political and economic life of the country but also the role of local governments. These became, more or less, decentralised and relatively democratic, although they were often forced to submit to the arbitration of supra-local authorities: a lukewarm decentralisation. It was, in reality, projects and interventions that would never reach fruition. For the sake of argument, approvals for the strategies of local development were dependent on the endorsement of both regional and central authorities.

The municipal and communal code of 1990 (law 90-08) hardly mentions either the aspects of decentralisation or those of international cooperation. Nevertheless, despite all the politico-economic restrictions, the Algerian community was able, during this period, to establish a few twinnings and agreements between the municipalities of other countries, especially those in France A. Akerker (2015). According to the same author, decentralised cooperation in Algeria gained new momentum after 2000. New laws concerning regional development were established in 2001, focusing on the principle of sustainable development. These were, in part, responsible for the recourse to decentralised cooperation which was put into place in response to the civil unrest of a population who had become more informed about the changes that were happening all over the world.

However, the last codes for regional government, as set down in 2011 and 2012, remain unclear about the notion of decentralised cooperation, and even more about diplomacy. In this sense, the articles 57 and 171 of the law 11-10 (municipal and communal code), state, once more, that communes and officials must get approval from the Wali, or the Interior

Ministry, not only for donations and legacies, but also for the ratification of conventions and twinnings. According to articles 8, 55 and 134 of the law 12-07, the wilaya can engage in cooperation with local authorities in other countries after approval from the central government. Effectively, since article 8 stipulates that: cooperation and related conventions must be approved jointly by both the Foreign Ministry and the Interior Ministry.

These elements, among others, have forced us to conclude that decentralised cooperation, which is a prerequisite to city diplomacy, continues to be marginalised by Algerian legislation, which sees it as a threat to national sovereignty. In the Interior Ministry's flow chart of 2014, a branch for the « cooperation and decentralised exchange » was established, whilst, in a similar one for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there was no mention of this decentralised cooperative E. Taib (2014).

The city orientation law (06-06) summarized the concept of decentralisation (art 2), the international reputation of the town (art5), cooperation (art 6, section 10) and the integration of large cities into both regional and international networks (art 6, section 11), However, in none of the above has this organic law stated how these objectives should be reached. All these projects become unachievable in the absence of a legal basis that allows local authorities to engage in international cooperation, as has already been discussed.

The Algerian public authorities invest very little in both city diplomacy and decentralised cooperation, even though these modes of local governance and cooperation are profitable for both local authorities and the State as a whole. This highlights the centralised logic behind territorial planning and programming. The rise of city diplomacy and local authorities has been hindered by the inefficiency of decentralisation and deconcentration mechanisms, E.B. Azzag (2012).

Local authorities are as much deconcentrated as they are decentralised; that is to say, they are agents that execute public strategy since they intervene as initiators in development projects. The financial mechanisms of local development are suggestive of this fact.

The internationalisation of towns and local authorities in Algeria has become politically imperative, all the more so because this global dynamic has received recognition of its CGLU, ALGA, GLU-Afrique from the United Nations, an organisation of which Algeria has been a member for a very long time.

It is high time that the Algerian public authorities seized this opportunity to benefit from the know-how of its local communities and towns as well as from the municipalities of other countries. Algeria has a twofold interest in taking this step. Firstly, it will allow it to reinforce its presence on an international scale through its local authorities; secondly, it will allow it to promote its geographical position on an international scale, as a relay country, between both south (Africa) and north (Europe) of the

Mediterranean Sea, on the one hand, and between the other African countries¹⁰ with which it shares its borders. In this way, the role of local authorities, in bordering regions, is crucial especially since it is a well-known fact that these areas are prone to illegal migration, community conflict and smuggling of every type. The CGLU, in its agenda, laid down at the Hague, made the promotion of peace and the resolution of conflicts the principle aim of local authorities. To allow local authorities to fulfill this mission, public officials must introduce both institutional and legal reforms that will strengthen the political role of local communities.

¹⁰ Algeria shares its borders with six countries in North Africa as well as sharing maritime borders with France, Italy and Spain.

The National Policy for the Development of Border Zones

The new national policy for territorial development, established since the adoption of the law n° 01-2011 relative to sustainable development of a region, defines several levels of territorial development and their instruments.

The national scheme for territorial development (SNAT 2030) is one of these tools. This schema, a veritable territory project, adopted by the law n° 10-02, is the principal reference to which all other tools adhere, defined in law n° 01-20. It (SNAT) can be broken down into several levels of intervention, including the Schema for the Development of Space Territorial Programming EPT (regional level), and schemas for the development of the wilaya.

In addition to these tools, the redevelopment law highlights several specific spaces for intervention such as the coast, mountainous regions and border zones. The national scheme for territorial development has highlighted nine border zones:

- The border zone of the east coast
- The border zone of the eastern Tell region
- The border zone of the eastern High Plateau
- The south east border zone
- The Great South border zone

The Great South-East Border Zone : *Debdab*

This vast border zone consists of Debdab, In Amenas, Illizi and Djanet. It offers a potential to form relations with both south Tunisia and Libya (Ghadamès, Ghat). (Fig.1)

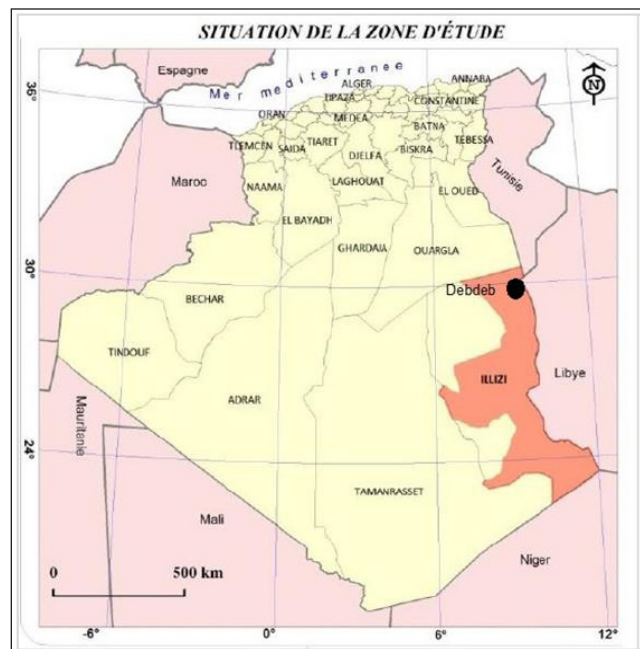


Figure 1. Territorial situation of the case study. Source: development plan for the GRAND SOUTH EAST border area

Behind the Creation of the Town: From Thiriet Fort to the Wilaya Déléguée

The town of Debdab is situated in the extreme south-east of Algeria, almost 1300 km from the capital, Algiers. It is situated in the north of the Wilaya of Illizi on the edge of the great eastern Erg, a vast desert region. The town of Debdab was created after the independence of Algeria, close to the ancient Thiriet Fort, which was part of a series of fortifications erected by the French army to mark the Algero-Libyan border. In actual fact, Debdab was built to serve as the centre of an administrative district, a so-called wilaya déléguée, in keeping with the presidential decree of December 2018. This new administrative status was an intermediary step in the process of transforming Debdab into a wilaya with a view to giving it more power to intervene in the new policies of trans-border development.

The System of Settlement within the Study Zone

The study zone is considered to be a sparsely populated area with its inhabitants spread unequally across the region of the Great South-east border zone (Tab 1 and 2). Such a situation is linked to several factors:

- Situated in the eastern part of the Algerian Sahara, considered as a deserted and hostile region where the proliferation of human establishments is closely linked to water supply. Settlements are often set up close to rivers or roads.
- The region in question is huge and sparsely populated. The numerous groups that compose it are spread over a wide area with a low population density.
- The distance between the different settlements and groups of population, still sparse, can sometimes reach several kilometres which makes carrying out any redevelopment project extremely difficult.

Table 1. Evolution of the population and growth rates (from 1977 to 2018)

Municipality	Pop 1977	Pop 1987	Pop 1998	Pop 2008	Pop 2018	Evolution of Growth Rates		
						1987-1977	1998-1987	2008-1998
DEBDEB	700	1325	3212	4341	4722	6,60%	9,30%	3,10%
Total Border Zone	10214	16274	28376	43633	52660	4,8%	5,7%	4,4%

Source: development plan for the GRAND SOUTH EAST border area

Table 2. Spatial distribution of population (density) (2008 and 2018)

Municipality	Superficie (Km2)	Densité (Hab/Km ²) 2008	Densité (Hab/Km ²) 2018
DEBDAB	33 116	0,131	0,143
Total Border Zone	180 022	0,290	0,353

Source: development plan for the GRAND SOUTH EAST border area

A strategic Position: Debdab's Principal Asset

Our research has shown that neither the physical environment nor the settlement system are positive attributes of the Debdab region. However, it has one outstanding asset; its strategic position along the Algerian border with both Tunisia and Libya. Debdab is about 605 km from the city of Tripoli, and 800 km from Sfax.

Debdab, A Territory in the Early Stages of Trans - Border Relations

The plan for the development and of the great south eastern trans-border region adopted by the Algerian authorities has transformed it into a tampon zone of exchanges with the large towns in eastern Libya. In fact, the town of Debdab constitutes the principal relay town for transit and exchanges between Ouargla and the Tripolitaine region, as well as southern Tunisia (Fig.2).

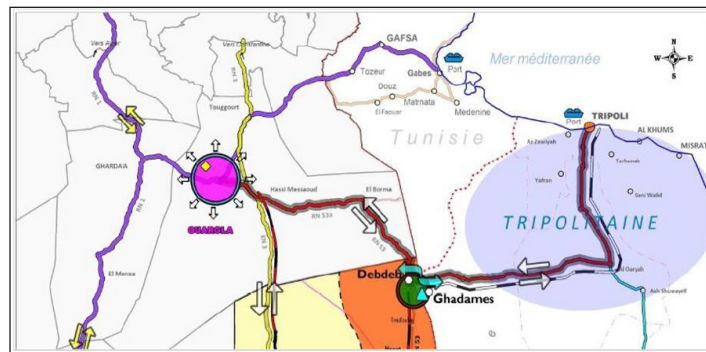


Figure 2. Situation of Debdab as a relay city and the beginnings of its cross-border. Source: development plan for the GRAND SOUTH EAST border area

The aim is territorial reconstruction, triggered by economic exchanges and trans-border trade, effectively allowing a border area to become a cross-border area. This is indispensable if new dynamics of development are to be created. This

territory project must be based on a collection of prerequisites which have been identified in the development study for the Great South region. These include:

- Trans-border integration and the reinforcement of road and railway links by :
 - o The creation of international road networks notably the Ouargla-Debdab Nalout-Tripoli road
 - o The extension of Hassi Messaoud-Debdab railway line with the possibility of extension into Libya.
- Interregional integration and the reinforcement of the productive system in Ouargla and Tamanrasset. Ouargla could become a logistics platform for national products coming from the north (Alger, Oran, Sétif, BBA...) to be exported to Libya and Tunisia via Debdab.

This upgrade of the infrastructure must be carried out according to the directives of the study, adopted by the national authorities, in order to create a free zone in the Debdab region. This willingness to create trans-border development in the Debdab region, such a sensitive area for the country, can only be carried out in a spirit of decentralised cooperation on the part of the Algerian, Tunisian and Libyan governments, which will allow their respective local authorities to take responsibility together, for the grievances of the population.

CONCLUSION

Through our research, it has become clear that the Debdab region has many characteristics that favour trans-border relations. However, such a condition remains dependent on political reforms that will favour local authorities, by reinforcing their political power. By means of these reforms, the Debdab region will open up and re-establish the communication links that were destroyed by the ludicrous boundary lines drawn by the french colonial power. Entry into this global mind-set, regulated by such organisations as the CGLU, will be a useful step towards these reforms and put into place city diplomacy and a strong local government.

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Citation: Dr. Djafar Djefal, Mr. Aziz Laleg. Decentralisation and City Diplomacy as an Alternative in the Development of Border, Regions: Case Study-Debdab-Algeria. Int J Innov Stud Sociol Humanities. 2023;8(1): 371-378. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2456-4931.080139>.

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