

Original Research

Public Spaces and Urban Integration of Migrants in Morocco: Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Cities

Nawal Benabdallah^{1,2, c}, Jean-Claude Baraka Munyaka³, Jérôme Chenal^{3,4}¹ Laboratory of Urban Innovation and Heritage (UIH Lab/ESAR), College of Engineering & Architecture (C&A), International University of Rabat (UIR), Technopolis Rabat-Shore Rocade Rabat-Salé, Morocco² Center for Global Studies (CGS), International University of Rabat (UIR), Technopolis Rabat-Shore Rocade Rabat-Salé, Morocco³ CEAT, EPFL, Bâtiment BP—Station 16, 1015 Lausanne, Suisse⁴ Center for urban systems (CUS), Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), Ben Guerir 43150, Morocco

Abstract

This study analyzes the central role of public spaces in the urban integration of migrants in Morocco, amid a profound transformation of the national migratory landscape. Based on research conducted in several neighborhoods of Casablanca and Rabat, using a mixed methodology combining field observations and semi-structured interviews, the study reveals that parks, markets, cafés, and local sports grounds are the most frequented spaces by migrant populations, serving as venues for socialization, economic activities, and community gatherings. However, significant challenges persist, notably language barriers and administrative constraints, which limit access to certain spaces and create a paradox between a relatively high sense of security and restrictions linked to migrants' administrative status. The analysis also highlights a convergence of socio-economic vulnerabilities between migrants and local populations. In response, the study proposes strategic recommendations focused on language development, cultural animation of public spaces, participatory urban planning, and the adaptation of the intercultural cities model. The latter, inspired by international experiences, could provide a relevant methodological framework to value diversity and strengthen social cohesion in Moroccan cities. This research thus offers new insights into urban integration dynamics and proposes concrete pathways for building more inclusive and resilient Moroccan cities.

CONTACTS

Corresponding author:

Nawal Benabdallahnawal.benabdallah@uir.ac.ma

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 19 / 02 / 2025

Accepted: 01 / 04 / 2025

Published: 15 / 04 / 2025

KEYWORDS

- Urban integration
- Public spaces
- Migration
- Social inclusion

Résumé

Cette étude analyse le rôle central des espaces publics dans l'intégration urbaine des migrants au Maroc, dans un contexte de mutation profonde du paysage migratoire national. À partir d'une enquête menée dans plusieurs quartiers de Casablanca et Rabat, mobilisant observations de terrain et entretiens semi-directifs, la recherche met en évidence que parcs, marchés, cafés et terrains de proximité sont les espaces les plus fréquentés par les migrants, favorisant socialisation, activités économiques et rassemblements communautaires. Cependant, des défis majeurs persistent, notamment les barrières linguistiques et les contraintes administratives, qui limitent l'accès à certains espaces et génèrent un paradoxe entre un sentiment de sécurité relativement élevé et les restrictions liées au statut administratif. L'étude souligne également une convergence des vulnérabilités socio-économiques entre migrants et populations locales. Face à ces constats, des recommandations stratégiques sont formulées : développement de programmes linguistiques, animation culturelle des espaces publics, planification urbaine participative, et adaptation du modèle des cités interculturelles. Ce dernier, inspiré d'expériences internationales, pourrait offrir

un cadre méthodologique pertinent pour valoriser la diversité et renforcer la cohésion sociale dans les villes marocaines. Cette recherche apporte ainsi un éclairage nouveau sur les dynamiques d'intégration urbaine et propose des pistes concrètes pour bâtir des villes marocaines plus inclusives et résilientes.

1. Introduction

This study is set in a context where Morocco is experiencing a profound transformation of its migratory landscape, transitioning from a transit country to a genuine host country. Morocco's institutional response, particularly through the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) and regularization campaigns, demonstrates the importance given to this issue.

However, the integration of migrants into the Moroccan urban fabric remains a major challenge, as illustrated by the presence of approximately 103,000 international migrants in 2020 (IOM, 2024). Innovative experiences at the local level, such as the regional migration strategy in the Souss-Massa region and the use of the Urban Diagnostic Tool (UDT) in Agadir¹, demonstrate a willingness to develop more targeted and effective approaches for migrant integration (Souss Massa Region, 2023; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). These initiatives underscore the importance of a deep understanding of the dynamics between migration and urban planning to develop adapted urban policies.

In this context, our study aims to fill an important gap in research by specifically examining the role of urban public space as a vector for social integration of migrants in Morocco. This approach aligns with the objectives of sustainable and inclusive urban development, while addressing the lack of data linking urban planning and migration issues, as highlighted by [Migration Data Portal](#).

By focusing on the socio-cultural inclusion of migrants in urban public space, this study seeks to make a significant contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities related to the integration of migrants in Moroccan cities. The central hypothesis of this study is that the inclusive design and use of urban public spaces can play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of migrants and strengthening social cohesion in rapidly changing Moroccan cities.

2. Literature Review

Our research on the urban integration of migrants in Morocco is based on a conceptual framework structured around four major theoretical foundations that notably guided the development of a detailed questionnaire, administered in the various districts under study (See Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the "Moroccan Cities and Migration" research).

Transnationalism (Schiller & *a/l.*, 1992) examines the creation and maintenance of cross-border ties by migrants while integrating into the Moroccan urban context, which is reflected in questions about their country of origin, migration journey, and transnational practices.

¹ L'atelier régional du 7 novembre 2024 à Agadir, organisé par l'OIM Maroc en partenariat avec la municipalité d'Agadir et divers acteurs institutionnels, constitue une première nationale pour la mise en œuvre de l'Outil de Diagnostic Urbain (UDT) appliqué à l'intégration des migrants dans le contexte urbain marocain. Cet événement s'inscrit dans le cadre des projets « Appui à l'intégration des migrants par la municipalité d'Agadir et les communes avoisinantes », financés par l'Agence espagnole pour la coopération internationale au développement et les Fonds de l'OIM pour le développement.

Primarily promoted by the UN-Habitat program in the early 2000s (UN-Habitat, 2001), the inclusive city represents an urban ideal aiming for the integration and active participation of all inhabitants. It can be explored through questions about the accessibility of public spaces and participation in community activities.

The right to the city, theorized by (Lefebvre, 1968) and further developed by (Harvey, 2012), constitutes the third pillar by asserting the collective right of inhabitants to shape their urban environment, an aspect evaluated through questions on the appropriation and use of public spaces (Lefebvre, 1968 and 1972; Donzelot & *al.*, 2003; Harvey, 2012). While Donzelot & *al.* (2003) focus primarily on urban policy and community participation in the United States and France, their comparative analysis offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of inclusive urban governance. Applying these lessons to the Moroccan context is a reasoned extrapolation, aiming to inform local strategies for migrant integration rather than to provide direct empirical evidence.

The social determinants of health (SDH), as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), encompass “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness.” These non-medical factors are widely recognized as primary drivers of health inequalities between social groups, profoundly shaping access to resources, vulnerability to disease, and overall well-being (WHO, 2008; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2004). In the context of inclusive urbanism, the SDH framework highlights how social and economic structures (such as housing, employment, education, and social integration) directly impact population health outcomes. Building on this foundation, a study conducted by Economia and the HEM Research Center in Morocco underscores the particular importance of the migratory experience and living conditions of migrants as key determinants of their health. Migrant status emerges as a major source of health inequalities, influencing access to healthcare and overall well-being. To address these disparities, the study recommends creating public spaces that foster intercultural interactions between Moroccan residents and migrant communities, such as community markets offering healthy products at affordable prices. Such initiatives, developed collaboratively by municipalities, local associations, and international organizations, not only aim to improve migrant well-being but also to promote social integration and mutual understanding between communities (Haince et al., 2021)

The study by Haince et al. (2021) provides an in-depth analysis of the sociocultural and structural barriers that sub-Saharan migrants face in accessing health services in Morocco. Their findings highlight the role of administrative status, housing conditions, employment precarity, language barriers, and discrimination in shaping migrants’ experiences of exclusion. Our research complements these results by extending the analysis beyond the health sector to encompass broader dimensions of urban integration, including access to public spaces, participation in local governance, and the potential of inclusive urban planning. Both studies converge in identifying persistent obstacles to migrants’ full inclusion, but our work further explores how urban planning, and participatory approaches can become new levers for integration at the national scale - a field that remains largely unexplored in the Moroccan context.

The migratory experience refers to the set of events, challenges, and adaptations that a person encounters when leaving their country of origin to settle in another country. This includes reasons for departure, the migration process, reception in the new country, cultural integration, obstacles encountered, relationships with family and community, as well as the psychological and emotional impact of this transition. Migratory experience is unique for everyone, but it often

shares common themes such as adapting to a new environment, constructing a new identity, and seeking stability in a foreign context (Scholten & al., 2022).

3. Methodology

In the context of this research, an integrated methodology was developed with a multi-level strategic approach. The study was deployed at the district level to ensure territorial coherence, targeting five representative areas: four neighborhoods in Casablanca (Hay Al Hassani, Aïn Sebaa, Aïn Chock, and Sidi Belyout) and the Yacoub Al Mansour neighborhood in Rabat. These sites were chosen for their high concentration of migrants, their socio-economic diversity, and their importance in urban integration dynamics.

This theoretical basis guided the development of analytical axes, structured into three main sections in the questionnaire: migrants' experience in public spaces of their host country, their comparative experience with the country of origin, and their specific experiences in their neighborhood (See Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the "Moroccan Cities and Migration" research).

The analytical approach revolves around four dimensions explored through detailed questions on spatial practices, social interactions (particularly with locals), needs assessment (including safety and accessibility), and mapping of uses (frequency, moments, and types of use). This methodology reveals the essential role of public spaces as vectors of social and cultural integration, documented by questions on interactions, satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement.

The field survey focused on a sample of 140 migrants selected according to two main criteria: residence in Morocco exceeding two years and a minimum age of 18 years, using a convenience sampling method in frequented public spaces.

To better understand the dynamics of migrant integration in urban public spaces, it is essential to clearly define the key variables examined in this study. The main variables include: the frequency of use of public spaces by migrants, the nature of social interactions between migrants and local populations, as well as migrants' perceptions of their integration in these spaces. In addition, the study explores how contextual factors such as migrants' legal status, public immigration policies, and socio-economic characteristics of neighborhoods influence these interactions. This approach establishes an analytical framework that not only highlights the challenges faced by migrants but also the opportunities offered by public spaces to promote successful integration.

Data collection adopted a mixed approach combining three complementary methods: meticulous field observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a detailed analysis of public spaces frequented by migrants. The analysis was structured around three essential disciplinary dimensions - urban, sociological, and migratory - allowing a holistic understanding of the dynamics of spatial integration of migrants in the Moroccan urban context. The urban dimension focused on the use and accessibility of public spaces as well as the impact of urban renewal projects on migrant integration. The sociological aspect examined social interactions, community dynamics, and processes of cultural adaptation, while the migration component contextualized migrants' experiences within the broader framework of migration trends and integration policies in Morocco. This analysis was built around three fundamental theoretical concepts - transnationalism (Schiller et al., 1992), the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey,

2012), and the inclusive city framework (UN-Habitat, 2001) - that deeply structured the reflection on the spatial integration of migrants in Moroccan cities.

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval from the **EPFL Human Research Ethics Committee** (HREC No: 083-2023 / 15.10.2023). This research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

The Institutional Ethics Committee (IRB) of the International University of Rabat (UIR) also reviewed and approved the research protocol (IRB / 15.03.2024).

4. Results

Our study has demonstrated the fundamental role of public spaces in the process of migrant integration, while revealing the complexities related to their administrative status and security issues. Public spaces constitute essential vectors of social and cultural integration, facilitating territorial appropriation and intercultural exchanges for a more inclusive and accessible city.

4.1. Spatial Dynamics and Appropriation of Public Spaces

The analysis of spatial practices has identified that parks, markets, cafes, and local grounds represent the spaces most frequented by migrant populations, with regular weekly use. These places fulfill three main functions: socialization, economic activities, and community gatherings.

In Yacoub Al Mansour, Rabat, certain public spaces hold particular importance for sub-Saharan migrants:

- Yacoub Al Mansour Park and Al Kifah Park have become essential socialization places. A Senegalese migrant testifies: "The park is our second home. We come here to re-lax, chat with friends, and sometimes even to look for work."
- The seafront promenade and Souk Al Amal (G5) market are spaces for economic and social integration. A Malian trader explains: "At the G5 market, we can sell our products and interact with Moroccans. It's a place where we feel accepted."

In Casablanca, the African Souk emerges as a remarkable example of an inclusive space. A migrant from Sidi Belyout notes: "Here everyone interacts. It's one of the rare places in Casablanca where there's no distinction of nationality."

"These spaces play a crucial role in creating social bonds and developing social capital. An Ivorian migrant in Casablanca shares: "In the parks, we meet other migrants, but also Moroccans. It's where we learn the most about the local culture."

"The multifunctionality of these spaces is particularly significant in the context of urban integration. Public spaces serve as essential anchoring points for migrant communities, facilitating their gradual adaptation to their new urban environment. As illustrated by the testimony of a migrant in Ain Sebaa: "In our community, we often chat outside in front of houses... These are often our meeting places." These spaces thus become informal but crucial reception infrastructures.

These spaces also play a crucial role in creating social bonds and developing social capital, essential for long-term integration. They serve as platforms for informal economic activities, offer community protection, and facilitate intercultural exchanges, thus contributing to the creation of a truly welcoming city. In Yacoub Al Mansour, a migrant emphasizes: "These are spaces where we can relax, chat with friends, and sometimes even look for work."

The superior quality of urban developments in Moroccan cities is also a determining factor in the appropriation of these spaces by migrants. This quality is manifested through:

- Well-maintained spaces, notably Yacoub Al Mansour and Al Kifah parks
- Better accessibility, particularly in areas like Sidi Belyout where the African Souk has become a true cultural crossroads
- Facilities adapted to different uses, as evidenced by the diversity of activities in parks and markets
- Increased security, with 80-100% of migrants expressing a feeling of safety in these spaces

4.2. Security Paradox and Administrative Constraints

Our study reveals a significant paradox in migrants' experiences in public spaces. On the one hand, migrants express a remarkably high sense of security, but on the other hand, their administrative status generates significant constraints that limit their ability to fully enjoy these same spaces.

Migrants express a remarkably high sense of security, attributable to three main factors: police presence, established community networks, and their gradual familiarization with the urban environment. This positive perception sharply contrasts with the experiences of insecurity lived during their migratory journey (UNHCR, 2024). As expressed by a migrant in Yacoub Al Mansour: "I feel safe in the neighborhood, but the problem of papers creates a lot of anxiety. We can't move around freely, we're always afraid of checks."

In Casablanca, a Cameroonian migrant adds: "The police know us in the neighborhood, which gives us a sense of security. But as soon as we leave our area, anxiety returns because of our status."

The relatively high sense of security expressed by migrants in their current urban environment strongly contrasts with the often-perilous experiences lived in their countries of origin and during their migratory journey. This perception of security is mainly explained by three factors: police presence, established community networks, and gradual familiarization with their new environment.

The migratory experience, which encompasses an individual's entire journey from departure to settlement in the host country, plays a crucial role in the integration process. It includes various aspects such as reasons for departure, challenges encountered during the journey, reception in the new country, cultural adaptation, and psychological and emotional impacts of this transition. Although each experience is unique, it often involves common themes such as adapting to a new environment, constructing a new identity, and seeking stability in a foreign context.

Similarly, in Casablanca, a Cameroonian migrant expresses this duality: "The police know us in the neighborhood, which gives us a sense of security. But as soon as we leave our area, anxiety returns because of our status."

This paradoxical situation, where migrants feel safe in limited areas but anxious outside, can lead to involuntary community withdrawal. This phenomenon risks compromising the objectives of social and cultural integration, thus creating an additional challenge for inclusive urban planning policies and integration of migrant populations.

4.3. Social Interactions and Integration Dynamics

The analysis of social interaction dynamics reveals complex integration patterns characterized by a diversity of interactions that vary according to socialization contexts. Intercommunity exchanges develop particularly in commercial and sports contexts, as illustrated by this testimony from Ain Chock: "As president of associations and also as an athlete, I often have a lot of contact with Moroccans."

Associations play an essential role in creating intercommunity links, serving as structured platforms to facilitate encounters and exchanges.

The African Souk in Casablanca emerges as a remarkable example of an inclusive space, with a migrant from Sidi Belyout noting: "Here everyone interacts. It's one of the rare places in Casablanca where there's no distinction of nationality."

4.4. Major Challenges for Migrant Integration in Moroccan Cities

Our research highlights a complex reality of migrant integration in Moroccan cities, characterized by three major interconnected and mutually reinforcing challenges.

The first fundamental obstacle identified is the language barrier of Darija, the Moroccan dialect. As a migrant in Yacoub Al Mansour testifies: "Darija is very difficult to understand - moreover, Moroccans speak fast." This linguistic difficulty is particularly problematic as it is exacerbated by the absence of appropriate support programs, creating a vicious cycle of social and cultural exclusion.

The second major challenge concerns administrative constraints that profoundly affect migrants' daily lives. The precarious status of migrants leads to:

- A significant restriction of their mobility
- Constant anxiety
- A direct impact on their integration capacity
- Negative effects on their psychosocial well-being

As a resident of Yacoub Al Mansour expresses: "The problem of papers creates a lot of anxiety. We can't move around freely." This administrative precarity creates a form of invisible confinement that considerably limits integration possibilities.

The third axis of complexity manifests through sociocultural tensions that create a contrasted urban geography. This reality is characterized by:

- Persistent discrimination, even in situations of accompaniment by locals, as illustrated by this poignant testimony from a migrant in Yacoub Al Mansour: "Even when you're accompanied by a Moroccan, they ask him why he's with an 'Azzi' (pejorative term)"
- A paradoxical coexistence between spaces of inclusion (such as African souks) and zones of exclusion marked by stigmatization
- Paradoxical situations where cultural differences become markers of discrimination

This complex configuration draws an urban geography where migrant integration oscillates between inclusion and exclusion, creating differentiated spaces within the city itself. African

souks emerge as islands of inclusion, while other neighborhoods remain marked by stigmatization, thus revealing the inherent contradictions in the process of urban integration of migrants.

4.5. Convergence of Vulnerabilities and Shared Challenges

Our research highlights a convergence of socio-economic vulnerabilities between migrants and local populations. This convergence generates dynamics of spatial exclusion that weaken the urban social fabric and community cohesion. The convergence of socio-economic vulnerabilities between migrants and local populations has been widely documented in cities across the Global South, particularly in Africa. Both groups face common challenges in accessing urban resources, security, and affordable housing. Recent studies and institutional reports highlight that these shared vulnerabilities stem from structural barriers such as limited access to basic services, precarious employment, housing insecurity, and exclusion from decision-making processes. For example, research in South African and Moroccan cities shows that migrants and low-income locals often rely on informal markets and live in neighborhoods affected by gentrification and rising rents, which push both groups to the urban periphery. Furthermore, insecurity (especially at night) and administrative barriers exacerbate the difficulties experienced by women and other marginalized groups, regardless of origin. These findings underscore the need for urban policies that address vulnerabilities holistically, rather than targeting migrants and locals separately, to foster more inclusive and resilient cities (SACN, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2015; HCP, 2022; Sajjad & Jain, 2014)

Economic and temporal barriers emerge as fundamental obstacles to social integration. A resident of Ain Sebaa testifies: "I rarely participate in activities outside the neighborhood because sometimes it's far and sometimes expensive." This reality reflects a broader issue of accessibility to urban resources that affects all vulnerable populations. Professional constraints, particularly atypical work schedules, considerably restrict socialization opportunities, thus creating invisible barriers to social interaction. Accessibility to urban resources and social activities is limited by financial constraints and atypical work schedules, affecting both migrants and vulnerable local populations.

The security issue constitutes a second axis of shared concern. Nighttime insecurity, particularly felt by women as illustrated by this testimony: "I don't feel safe at night", reveals a gendered vulnerability that transcends origins. Discrimination based on sexual orientation adds an additional layer of complexity to the dynamics of exclusion. Gentrification processes in Yacoub Al Mansour threaten access to affordable housing, creating a vicious cycle of spatial exclusion that disproportionately affects economically fragile populations, whether migrant or local.

The urban renewals experienced by these neighborhoods occupied by migrants, like the Yacoub Al Mansour district, particularly gentrification, exacerbate these vulnerabilities by threatening access to affordable housing. This phenomenon creates a vicious cycle of spatial exclusion that disproportionately affects economically fragile populations, whether migrant or local, thus compromising efforts for social cohesion. A long-time migrant in Yacoub Al Mansour observes: "The neighborhood is changing rapidly. Rents are increasing and many of our friends, migrants and Moroccans, are forced to move further away."

These testimonies underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to urban integration, considering both structural (language, administration) and sociocultural aspects. The Moroccan city thus appears as a space of tensions and opportunities, where dynamics of inclusion and exclusion overlap and intertwine, calling for targeted and inclusive interventions to promote genuine social cohesion.

4.6. Emerging Needs and Integration Perspectives

The study highlights several crucial needs:

- A growing demand for outdoor cultural activities
- Untapped potential of public spaces as venues for intercultural encounters and exchanges
- A need to increase the visibility of integration initiatives through outdoor cultural events

Targeted financial support to remove barriers to mobility and access to sports infrastructure for vulnerable populations, whether local or immigrant. This essential aid combats social exclusion by ensuring equitable access to public spaces far from housing or work, and to sports activities and facilities, thus promoting real and sustainable integration into the urban fabric.

This reality is illustrated by the testimony of a migrant in Sidi Marouf: "We need to plan more cultural activities between Moroccans and sub-Saharanans, but outdoors because most of the activities we organize are indoors and not visible to everyone."

A Senegalese migrant in Sidi Belyout reinforces this idea by suggesting: "We need to create spaces for outdoor cultural events where Moroccans and sub-Saharanans can meet, like at the market, but just for culture... This will allow us to get to know each other better."

These testimonies highlight the importance of creating more outdoor meeting opportunities to promote integration and intercultural dialogue in Moroccan cities. This approach could help reduce the tension between the sense of security and administrative constraints while promoting better social and cultural integration.

5. Discussion

Our study on the urban integration of migrants in Morocco highlights the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach that benefits the entire community. The results emphasize the need for a multidimensional approach integrating the physical planning of spaces with the sociocultural and economic dimensions of integration.

It is essential to acknowledge certain inherent limitations of this study. Firstly, the methodology employed, although rigorous, is based on an exploratory survey that may not fully represent the diversity of migrant experiences in other Moroccan urban contexts. Additionally, potential biases related to semi-structured interviews, such as social desirability, may influence participants' responses and thus affect the validity of the results. Furthermore, it would be relevant to explore the long-term implications of the proposed recommendations, particularly regarding their implementation and impact on the integration of migrants into the social and economic fabric of Moroccan cities. A thorough reflection on these aspects could enrich the discussion and open new avenues for future research.

The strategic recommendations from our study are structured around three main axes, forming a coherent framework to promote the urban integration of migrants in Morocco.

Firstly, linguistic development and communication are essential. The implementation of targeted language programs aims to facilitate intercommunity communication, thus creating bridges between different populations. This approach is crucial for promoting better integration and mutual understanding within urban space.

Secondly, the cultural animation of public spaces plays a fundamental role. Public spaces become showcases of cultural diversity through the organization of intercultural events such as festivals, artistic performances, and shows in parks and public squares. These activities celebrate the cultural richness of migrant communities and generate an environment conducive to cohabitation and mutual cultural enrichment, thus strengthening tolerance and social harmony. As Manaï (2009) demonstrates, public spaces play a central role in the integration process by serving as sites of reciprocal familiarization, identity construction, and intercultural sociability. Their centrality, visibility, and accessibility are key factors in building welcoming communities, making them crucial levers for inclusion and social cohesion. This perspective directly informs our analysis of how parks, markets, and communal spaces in Moroccan cities foster social bonds and support migrants' appropriation of urban space.

Thirdly, participatory urban planning is an essential axis. The involvement of migrants in urban planning and community projects is crucial. Well-designed public spaces promote inclusion and allow migrants to integrate into urban life without discrimination. The implementation of participatory mechanisms, such as public consultations and neighborhood councils, offers migrants concrete opportunities to contribute to the construction of their city.

These recommendations must be implemented within the framework of inclusive governance involving all urban actors. Participatory platforms allow residents to express their ideas and actively contribute to the construction of their city, thus strengthening the inclusion of all residents, including migrants.

International experiences demonstrate a wide range of effective strategies for the urban integration of migrants. In Canada, several cities have implemented free or subsidized public transit passes for refugees and displaced persons, facilitating access to essential services and supporting socio-professional integration². In Germany, national programs reward municipalities for innovative integration projects that combine language training, employment support, and community-building activities³. In Costa Rica, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) led the collaborative revitalization of abandoned parks, transforming them into inclusive spaces that benefit hundreds of families and foster intercultural exchanges⁴.

The Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) provides a robust methodological framework for inclusive urban governance, with member cities such as Rotterdam and Wrocław developing intercultural strategies that have improved social cohesion and the active

² Canada – Public Transit Passes for Refugees: Several Canadian cities, including Ottawa and Halifax, have established programs offering free or subsidized public transportation passes to newly arrived refugees and displaced persons. These initiatives aim to facilitate access to employment, education, and essential services, thereby supporting the socio-professional integration of migrants (Blower, 2020; OC Transpo, 2025).

³ Germany's national competition "Living Together Hand in Hand – Creating Communities" has rewarded municipalities for innovative integration projects, including language training, employment support, and community-building activities. Cities like Minden and Osterholz-Scharmbeck have developed local partnerships with civil society and businesses to create integration pathways for refugees, combining language acquisition, social support, and employment opportunities (OpenStories, 2023).

⁴ Costa Rica – Park Revitalization by IOM: In San José, Costa Rica, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) coordinated the rehabilitation of two abandoned parks, transforming them into inclusive spaces with community facilities, murals, and recreational areas. This project benefited over 700 families and promoted intercultural exchanges between migrants and local residents (IOM, 2019).

participation of migrants in public life⁵. Cultural festivals, supported by organizations like UNESCO, have also proven effective in promoting social cohesion and celebrating diversity, both in major cities and within refugee camps⁶.

These documented initiatives highlight key levers for successful integration: accessible public infrastructure, participatory governance, intercultural events, targeted support for employment and language acquisition, and the transformation of public spaces into hubs for social interaction. Adapting these approaches to the Moroccan context (through tools such as the Intercultural Cities Index and by fostering collaboration between municipalities, civil society, and international organizations) would significantly enrich existing mechanisms and promote sustainable, inclusive urban development.

This "cultural cities" program represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen the urban integration of migrants in Morocco. With a network of over 154 member cities worldwide, this initiative provides a proven methodological framework for valuing diversity as a lever for urban development. The results and impact of the ICC program demonstrate its effectiveness in promoting an intercultural approach to governance, thus fostering harmonious coexistence and active participation of all communities within urban spaces.

Adapting the ICC to the Moroccan context would significantly enrich existing mechanisms. The program offers concrete tools such as the Intercultural Cities Index, allowing cities to objectively assess their progress in integration. Studies show a strong statistical link between local intercultural policies and improved collective well-being, with greater trust in public services and better social cohesion (Joki & Wolffhardt, 2017). International comparative research also highlights that inclusive urban policies foster social cohesion and enhance quality of life in diverse cities worldwide (Price & Chacko, 2012).

The ICC program facilitates participatory governance involving municipalities, employers, and civil society. This systemic approach integrates social, economic, and cultural dimensions into a comprehensive vision of integration. Member cities benefit from a database of the best international practices and a network for exchanging experiences, allowing them to adapt innovative solutions to the local context.

The successful implementation of the program requires a cultural change within municipal services and political leadership. The emphasis is on valuing diversity, real equality, and meaningful intercultural interaction. This transformation is based on clear indicators and monitoring mechanisms to measure its impact over time.

This initiative fits perfectly into Morocco's sustainable development dynamic, which has already committed national adaptation and integration strategies. The ICC approach would create

⁵ Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC): The Council of Europe's ICC Programme supports more than 160 cities worldwide in developing intercultural policies and participatory governance. Cities like Rotterdam and Wrocław have implemented the ICC Index and intercultural strategies, resulting in improved social cohesion and greater involvement of migrants in urban life (Council of Europe, 2024; Wrocław ICC, 2023).

⁶ Cultural Festivals and Social Cohesion: UNESCO has documented the important role of cultural festivals and artistic events in fostering social cohesion, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue in diverse contexts worldwide (UNESCO, 2023). In Kenya, for example, the Kakuma Festival—supported by UNESCO—has demonstrated how public cultural events can create spaces for exchange, celebrate diversity, and strengthen mutual understanding among refugees and host communities (UNESCO, 2023b).

more inclusive urban environments where diversity becomes a real driver of community development. However, it should be noted that the empirical evidence presented by Joki and Wolffhardt (2017) is based primarily on European cities; therefore, applying these findings to the Moroccan context constitutes a reasoned extrapolation rather than a direct demonstration by the source.

To operate the ICC approach and foster inclusive urban environments, local authorities and civil society organizations can adopt several targeted strategies:

- **Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Local governments could establish training programs for municipal staff and community leaders on intercultural communication and inclusive urban planning. These programs would equip stakeholders with tools to manage diversity effectively and promote equitable access to public spaces.
- **Cultural Exchange Platforms:** Civil society organizations can organize regular cultural exchange events, such as outdoor festivals, art exhibitions, or culinary fairs, in public spaces. These events would provide opportunities for migrants and locals to interact, share experiences, and build mutual understanding.
- **Inclusive Infrastructure Development:** Municipalities should prioritize the development of accessible public spaces with multilingual signage, gender-sensitive facilities, and areas designed for diverse cultural practices. Partnerships with international organizations could provide technical expertise and funding for such projects.
- **Community-led urban projects:** Encouraging participatory urban planning through neighborhood councils or focus groups involving all vulnerable people, including migrants, would ensure that their needs are considered in urban development projects. This approach would enhance their sense of belonging and their ability to shape their environment

By implementing these measures, Moroccan cities can transform public spaces into hubs of intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable urban development.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the fundamental role of public spaces as levers for the social and cultural integration of migrants in Morocco, amid a profound transformation of the national migratory landscape. The analysis shows that these spaces transcend their utilitarian function to become essential vectors of territorial appropriation, identity construction, and social cohesion, in line with the “right to the city” theories of Lefebvre and Harvey. The results reveal that urban integration for migrants is a complex process, hindered by language barriers, administrative constraints, and a convergence of socio-economic vulnerabilities between migrants and local populations.

The multidimensional approach adopted (combining urban planning, socio-cultural animation, and participatory governance) aligns with the principles of the inclusive city promoted by UN-Habitat and the UNESCO/UN-Habitat guide, which emphasize that urban inclusion goes beyond meeting basic needs and involves creating an environment where civic, social, and economic inclusion are essential for sustainable development (Price & Chacko, 2012). This holistic

perspective recognizes that migrant integration requires a nuanced understanding of the inter-connections between different aspects of urban life, and that public policies should aim for cities where human diversity is celebrated as a driver of prosperity (Price & Chacko, 2012).

Documented international experiences, such as the Diversity Festival in Toronto and the intercultural parks in Odessa, concretely illustrate how the principles of transnationalism and intercultural governance can be applied to make cities laboratories of social innovation, where diversity is seen as an asset. In this context, adapting the Intercultural Cities model, promoted by the Council of Europe, appears as an innovative and structuring pathway for the Moroccan context: this methodological framework would help to value diversity, foster intercultural interaction, and actively involve migrants in city-making, while drawing on assessment tools such as the Intercultural Cities Index (Joki & Wolffhardt, 2017 ; Conseil de l'Europe, 2024).

The study also stresses the importance of participatory governance, involving migrants in urban decision-making processes, in line with theories of urban democracy and the recommendations of Haince et al. (2021). This implies creating intercultural councils or local participatory platforms, as well as investing in accessible public infrastructure and organizing intercultural events to transform public spaces into venues for dialogue and cohesion.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to strengthen the long-term evaluation of integration policies, develop inclusion indicators inspired by international tools, and encourage cooperation among local authorities, civil society, international actors, and migrant communities (Price & Chacko, 2012; Joki & Wolffhardt, 2017). Successful migrant integration not only improves their quality of life but also enriches the social and cultural fabric of Moroccan cities, thus contributing to more sustainable, equitable, and resilient urban development for all residents.

By embracing diversity as a driver of development and promoting inclusive governance, Moroccan cities could become regional references for social innovation and urban inclusion.

Funding details

This project, titled "*Moroccan Cities and Migrations*," is part of the Morocco-Switzerland cooperation framework, supported by the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation (MESRSI) and Haute École spécialisée de Suisse occidentale (HES-SO), and coordinated by Nawal Benabdallah (Center for Global Studies, International University of Rabat - CGS/UIR) and Jérôme Chenal (Communauté d'Études pour l'Aménagement du Territoire, Ecole Fédérale Polytechnique de Lausanne - CEAT/EPFL).

Conflict of Interest

"The authors report there are no competing interests to declare."

7. References

Blower, J. (2020). *Exploring innovative migrant integration practices in small and mid-sized cities across Canada* (TMCIS Working Paper No. 2020/7). Toronto Metropolitan University, Centre for Immigration and Settlement. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement/tmcis/publications/workingpapers/2020_7_Blower_Jenna_Exploring_Innovative_Migrant_Integration_Practices_in_Small_and_Mid-Sized_Cities_across_Canada.pdf

Council of Europe. (2024) *Intercultural Cities, Annual Survey 2024*. <https://rm.coe.int/etude-annuelle-icc-2024-resultats/1680b0d5f0>

Donzelot, J., Mevel, C., & Wyvekens, A. (2003). *Faire société. La politique de la ville aux États-Unis et en France. Faire société. La politique de la ville aux États-Unis et en France [Making Society: Urban Policy in the United States and France]*. Les Annales de la recherche urbaine, N°95, 2004. Apprivoiser les catastrophes. pp. 135-136. www.persee.fr/doc/ar_0180-930x_2004_num_95_1_2546_t1_0135_0000_2

Haince, M. C., Ben Mouro, Y., & Aït Mansour, H. (2021). *The Sociocultural Determinants of Access to Health for Migrants in Morocco*. *Economia and HEM Research Center*. <https://www.economia.ma/sites/default/files/recherchePJ/Rapport%20final%20web%20mi-grant.pdf>

Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. *Community Development Journal*. 48. 339-341. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bst010>

Haut-Commissariat au Plan (HCP). (2022). *Populations vulnérables: emploi et migration*. <https://www.hcp.ma/file/230829/>

Sajjad, H., & Jain, P. (2014). Assessment of Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities among Urban Migrants in South-East Delhi, India. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, 7(1), 65–81. <https://www.infinitypress.info/index.php/jsss/article/download/652/301>

South African Cities Network (SACN). (2014). *Migration, Mobility and Urban Vulnerabilities*. <https://www.sacities.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Migration-Urban-Vulnerabilities-FI-NAL2014-1.pdf>

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2015). *Migration et les réfugiés en zone urbaine. Habitat III Issue Paper 2. Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas – Habitat III Issue Paper 2*. <https://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/2-Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-2-Migration-et-Refugies-en-zones-urbaines.pdf>

Lefebvre, H. (1968). *The Right to the City*. 1968 (*Le Droit à la ville*), 1996 (*English translation as The Right to the City*). Anthropos Editions.

Manai, B. (2009). *Importance of Public Spaces in the Integration Process and in Building Welcoming Communities. Importance of Public Spaces in the Integration Process and in Building Welcoming Communities*. [Master's thesis, National Institute of Scientific Research]. https://espace.inrs.ca/id/eprint/9854/1/Germain_2009.pdf

Joki, A.-L., & Wolffhardt, A., with the support of Huddleston, T. (2017). *How the Intercultural integration approach leads to a better quality of life in diverse cities*. Migration Policy Group. <https://www.migpolgroup.com/old/portfolio/how-the-intercultural-integration-approach-leads-to-a-better-quality-of-life-in-diverse-cities/>

OC Transpo. (2025). *Transit Pass Program for Displaced Persons and Refugees*. [site web] <https://www.octranspo.com/fr/nouvelles/article/programme-des-laissez-passer-de-transport-en-commun-pour-les-personnes-deplacees-et-refugiees/>

International Organization for Migration. (2024, November 7). *Regional workshop for the presentation of preliminary results of the urban diagnostic tool and the identification of migrant groups and areas of intervention* [Concept note]. Agadir, Morocco.

International Organization for Migration [IOM] (2019). *Through the Rehabilitation of Two Parks, IOM Promotes the Integration of Migrant Families in Costa Rica*. In : <https://www.iom.int/fr/news/grace-la-rehabilitation-de-deux-parcs-loim-favorise-lintegration-des-familles-migrantes-au-costa-rica>

International Organization for Migration [IOM]. (2024). *IOM Morocco annual report 2023: Diversity at the heart of our actions*. In : https://morocco.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1936/files/en_bilan_oim_web_20240902.pdf

- Price, M., & Chacko, E. (2012). *Migrants Inclusion in Cities: Innovative Urban Policies and Practices*. Conference Paper prepared for UN-Habitat and UNESCO. In: <https://unhabitat.org/migrants-inclusion-in-cities-innovative-urban-policies-and-practices>
- Schiller, N. G., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645 (1-24). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1992.tb33484.x>
- Scholten, P., Pisarevskaya, A., & Levy, N. (2022). *Introduction to Migration Studies: The Rise and Coming of Age of a Research Field*. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8>
- UNESCO, (2023). *Cultural Organizations and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. https://www.unesco.org/creativity/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/06/3-Policy_Perspectives_Spectacles_FR-web.pdf
- UNESCO. (2023b). *UNESCO-supported cultural festival catalyzes social cohesion in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-supported-cultural-festival-catalyzes-social-cohesion-kakuma-refugee-camp-kenya>
- UN-Habitat, 2001. *Inclusive Cities Initiative: The Way Forward, Nairobi*, UN Habitat.
- UNHCR, (2024). *Global Trends report 2023*. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023>.
- Wilkinson, R., & Marmot, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Social determinants of health: The solid facts (2nd ed.)*. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/326568>
- Wroclaw ICC. (2023). *Wrocław – Intercultural Cities Index*. Council of Europe, Intercultural Cities Programme. <https://wielokultury.wroclaw.pl/en/strategy/icc-intercultural-cities/>