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Charifa Mamouni Alaoui

Oumhani Eddelani

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QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF INNOVATION AND INSTITUTIONAL PROXIMITY MANAGEMENT, TOWARDS THE REVITALISATION OF URBAN ECOSYSTEMS

ABSTRACT

In the context of a knowledge economy, innovation and coordination between actors are seen as determinants of economic development and the prosperity of territories. This paper explores the crucial role of innovation and institutional proximity management in the revitalization of urban ecosystems, with a particular focus on a case study of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole. The main aim of this contribution is to examine the urban challenges facing these two cities as complex and interdependent urban territories. Our approach is qualitative, employing a thematic analysis to explore the specific advantages offered by an integrated approach to innovation in the design of actors and the organization of the urban ecosystem. Through an exploratory literature review, we identified and categorized key themes that highlight both opportunities and challenges. The first part of the article contextualizes the issues related to innovation in urban territories, while the second part presents a detailed analysis of the opportunities and challenges specific to Fez-Meknes. The results of our investigation will contribute to identifying opportunities for innovation in urban management by examining examples of good practices likely to contribute to the revitalization of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole as an urban ecosystem. We also propose to raise awareness of innovative initiatives based on an institutional proximity management approach with an understanding of sustainable territorial dynamics and issues. This research offers valuable insights for urban actors and policy-makers seeking to foster sustainable urban development and strengthen competitiveness in other similar urban contexts, with particular emphasis on adapting local specificities to institutional dynamics.

Keywords
Innovation; Institutional proximity; Urban ecosystem; Regional regeneration; Local dynamics.

1. Introduction

Urban ecosystems are at the heart of contemporary challenges, facing crucial issues in a constantly changing world. They are being transformed around new projects that require innovative approaches to urban planning and citizen participation Rebelo et al. (2023). The forces that drive such approaches can result from an endogenous institutional genesis. Proximity and interaction between institutions will drive innovation insofar as they will determine the opportunities in an urban ecosystem in order to benefit from the opportunities thus created (North, 1994).

Innovation is considered here essentially as a collective, non-linear process, in which interactions between institutional actors are important. We propose to deal directly with this theme, focusing in particular on Callon and Latour's theory of translation, which offers an innovative perspective on innovation Callon et al. (1999) within urban ecosystems. According to this theory, the success or failure of an innovative project does not depend exclusively on the intrinsic characteristics of the innovation, but rather on the dynamics of interactions between human and non-human actors within a heterogeneous network.

The need to rethink cities to make them more sustainable, resilient and inclusive has become imperative. Hence the integration of innovative practices and effective community management within local institutions represents a unique opportunity to transform our urban environments into engines of social harmony. This synergy between innovation and local management opens the way to a new urban paradigm, revolutionizing the way in which urban ecosystems respond to the needs of their residents, where creativity, collaboration and citizen involvement are at the heart of the revitalization process.

The Fez-Meknes bi-pole embodies a constantly evolving urban environment with intrinsic characteristics that contribute to its visibility. However, it is faced with the need to deal with all the requirements of this new economy. With this in mind, this article focuses on the link between innovation and institutional proximity management as fundamental levers for meeting the complex challenges facing these two cities. The central question is: how can these approaches converge synergistically to stimulate the revitalization of urban ecosystems?

2. Methodology

Insofar as the aim of this study is to explore in depth the crucial role played by institutional proximity in the innovation assets of urban ecosystems, highlighting the interactions, best practices and coordination of urban actors, our methodology relies primarily on a qualitative approach to achieve an in-depth understanding of the institutional dynamics and specific needs of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole.

The qualitative approach is particularly suited to understand the specific issues of our context (Bowen, 2009) when it comes to capturing multiple perspectives that cannot be reduced to a single measurable variable (Creswell, 2014). By adopting this methodology (table 1), we aim to capture the complexity of local issues and provide informed recommendations for innovative institutional proximity management adapted to the case study context.

Table 1: Methodological details of the study

Targets		- Explore the role of innovation in revitalizing urban ecosystems. - Analyze the importance of institutional proximity management in this process. - Identify examples of good practice in innovation and institutional proximity management for urban revitalization. - Provide recommendations for the revitalization of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole, based on the results of the case study.
Data gathering	**Documental sources**	- A corpus of scientific articles and academic publications (Scopus, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Persée, Google Scholar databases) - Publications by local and national public institutions (Regional Investment Center (RIC), High Planning Commission (HPC), Fez-Meknes Regional Council…) from 2013 to 2024.
	Selection criteria	Documents were selected on the basis of their relevance to the themes of urban innovation, institutional proximity management and the revitalization of urban ecosystems, and their potential contribution to understanding the issues studied. Criteria included currency, reliability and coverage of topics of interest.
Data analysis		- Thematic content analysis of the documents collected in order to identify the main issues, levers and obstacles related to innovation and the management of institutional proximity in the development of the bi-pole. - Comparison of the results of the document analysis with theoretical concepts from the literature on innovation and institutional proximity.

The study will focus on successful initiatives, deepening the analysis to highlight success factors and lessons learned. In the course of this exploration, we will first examine the ins and outs of this convergence between innovation and institutional proximity management. We will then analyze how these dynamics can be harnessed to bring about a genuine revitalization of urban ecosystems, thereby helping to build urban ecosystems that are more intelligent, connected and adapted to the evolving needs of their citizens.

3. Context and conceptual framework

Today, development is more often characterized locally, such as in neighborhoods, conurbations, urban ecosystems, and regions. It is linked to the ability of local actors to carry out projects that enhance resources and create benefits for the whole community (Stöhr & Taylor, 1981). This perspective paved the way for the concept of 'local development', as discussed by Vachon (1993) and Tremblay and Fontan (2003).

Local development now depends not only on innovation, science-industry collaboration and the co-creation of resources, but also on organizational and institutional determinants.

These determinants are mobilized by the vision of the future of the society and condition the relationships between the actors and the dynamics of governance, stimulating the creativity and inventiveness of its population. In various configurations, these components contribute to the establishment of national innovation systems (clusters, techno poles, etc.), which can be adjusted and deployed at smaller territorial levels.

We consider that innovation is a process shaped by society and territory, and that its genesis and repercussions are influenced by conflicting socio-economic environments, both locally and globally. According to Cloutier (2003), space mediates and creates alliances between different actors, organizations and decision-makers, fostering the emergence of specific innovation cultures, but which remain interconnected and not autonomous in relation to more global contexts. It is very useful, at this level, to return to the definition of innovation given by Callon and Latour (Collin et al., 2016), who see innovation as the result of complex processes of translation within networks of heterogeneous actors.

Callon and Latour developed the actor-network theory (ANT), which offers a socio-technical perspective that highlights the importance of interactions between human and non-human actors (objects, technologies, institutions, etc.) in understanding the genesis and deployment of innovations. Innovation, from this perspective, emerges when different actors manage to translate their respective interests in such a way as to create something new within the network. This can include the introduction of new technologies, new ideas, or the reconfiguration of relationships between existing actors. Our research is part of this line of work, and this definition is consistent with the needs of our study.

The organization of institutional arrangements seeks to bring together different institutions in order to create benefits from externalities on the processes in which these actors are involved. According to Talbot (2009), this bringing together is not limited to a simple opposition of actors, but to a relational opening. This can be achieved through effective physical movement, but also through telecommunications, which frees up the physical network. As Rallet and Torre point out, "both present and active here and elsewhere thanks to communication technologies" (Rallet & Torre, 2004, p. 25). Institutional proximity (Talbot, 2009; Talbot, 2008) bears witness to this duality.

According to Zimmermann, institutional proximity refers to sharing the same institutional framework, which includes a set of rules, codes and standards (Zimmermann, 2008). According to Talbot (2008), this form of proximity incorporates a political dimension that governs interactions. Proximity is fostered by connectivity rather than contiguity, and to ensure proximity it is necessary to be located in an accessible network node. The aim is to establish links while preserving the physical distance between actors. The design and management of a space then leads to attempts to control distance through mobility.

For Boschma (2005), institutional proximity is associated with the presence of a common institutional framework that encourages exchanges between actors, enabling them to meet and make the interactive learning necessary for innovation effective. Certainly, the introduction of rules and standards makes it possible to predict the behavior of actors.

Knoben and Oerlemans (2006) highlight two different and complementary levels of analysis of institutional proximity (1) macro level (at national and regional level); (2) meso level (at organizational level).

This type of proximity brings a crucial dimension to innovation by encouraging more effective local governance insofar as it: (A) involves decentralized decision-making, encouraging the direct participation of citizens and local communities. (B) it can develop solutions tailored to the specific needs of each territory, encouraging a more personalized and inclusive approach; (C) it is often more flexible and agile, able to react quickly to local changes and challenges.

Innovation in this sense does not automatically imply social or technical progress. Progress, defined as a subjective change in the structure of social relations, emerges from decisions taken by institutional actors when they appropriate and adapt an invention to their local context, as change processes unfold over time and in context (Wright et al., 2023).

The capacity for innovation lies above all in the major regions or urban areas. The unit of analysis used in our study is the urban ecosystem. This article focuses on how innovation and institutional proximity management can contribute to solving urban problems and creating dynamic and prosperous urban ecosystems.

4. The Fez-Meknes bi-pole: an opportunity for urban renewal

Cities, as places of social transformation (Harvey, 2003), culture and economic activity, have always been crucibles of innovation. At the heart of every city lies a constantly evolving socio-economic fabric, fed by many actors: businesses, local institutions, universities, start-ups and committed citizens. Together they form a dynamic urban ecosystem where new ideas emerge, develop and unfold to meet the changing needs of the urban population[1] .

Traditional urban models are being challenged by changes in society, technology and the environment. Moroccan cities are being transformed around new architectural projects that require innovative approaches to urban planning and citizen participation (Rebelo et al., 2023). Large cities are playing an increasingly important role in fostering a diversity of places capable of promoting growth and guaranteeing the conditions for social development. Within the framework of the new Fez-Meknes region[2] as an organized territory, the Fez-Meknes bi-pole is destined to play a driving role, underscoring its influence and impact on the urban and economic environment with a strong historical and geographical connotation, and whose identity gives it a geo-strategic centrality noted by its particular situation in the heart of the Kingdom of Morocco and by the corridors of economic exchanges.

[1] Harvey (1973) emphasizes the need for collective action to shape fairer, more inclusive and democratic cities.

[2] The new Fez-Meknes region is the result of Morocco's new regional division of 2015, which involved an institutional and administrative reorganization of the areas covered by the three former regions of Fez-Boulemane, Meknes-Tafilalet and Taza-Al Hoceima-Taounate.

4.1 The Fez-Meknes urban ecosystem: Exploring the potential and challenges of local development

This bi-pole has significant natural and heritage potential, but is under-exploited. It is made up of a dense network of small urban centers, with a fast-growing population and a high rate of urbanization (Table 2), around major cities, poles of growth and attractiveness.

Table 2: Main socio-economic indicators for the Fez-Meknes region

	Urbanization rate	Density (inhabitants/Km2)	Unemployment rate (urban)	Activity rate (urban)
Fez	98.42%	3 859.77	7.5	39.9
Meknes	84.06%	517,43	17.1	40.6
Region F-M	64.68%	110.35	18,7	39,1

Source: Directorate-General for Local Authorities 2015, High Planning Commission (HPC) 2013-2023

These indicators point to the expected growth of the new region and the situation has changed. The influence of Fez on Meknes and vice versa is subtly widespread, difficult to pinpoint, but concrete and complex. The presence of relations between the two contemporary cities is undeniable and, in reality, the analysis and measurement of the levels of reciprocity would come up against numerous obstacles and challenges.

The bi-cluster is firmly committed to revitalizing all productive sectors, targeting high-growth, value-added industries. A number of challenges and issues need to be addressed, the most important of which are: the rapid growth of urban areas is having a direct impact on the ecosystem, threatening biodiversity and increasing environmental pressures; the brakes of paralyzing territorial competition between urban centers, particularly in terms of foreign investment and tourist business flows; and digitization is evolving as the foundation of the future in all areas and sectors, resulting in ever-changing citizen aspirations.

The efforts being made to recover and strengthen the influence of the Fez-Meknes Bi-pole underline its dynamic urban character, with projects aimed at revitalizing the region. Dealing with the Fez-Meknes Bi-pole as an urban ecosystem requires an understanding of its growth sectors, development challenges and opportunities. To this end, the data collected is analyzed through a thematic analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012), enabling us to identify and understand the economic aspects, as well as the urban framework, that will be established including the bi-pole's industrial vocation, its institutional environment, and financing solutions.

These aspects represent the main reasons why ideal development plans contrast with the real needs of this diverse and expanding economic area.
Based on a territorial diagnosis, supplemented by an in-depth examination of various reports and studies published by various local institutions:

4.2 Theme 1: Urban structure

A complex and diversified urban framework made up of two major centers, it is home to a rich history and an impressive cultural heritage. Fez, the spiritual heart of the Kingdom, is famous for its traditional arts and rich authentic architectural heritage. It is a major center for crafts, tourism and industry. Meknes, another imperial city, offers an attractive civilizational crossroads thanks to its heritage and the Volubilis site. Meknes is an important agricultural and commercial center, with strong activity in the agricultural, agri-food and logistics sectors.

Both cities have been classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO (1981). In addition, the two cities have a different but linked history: governance of the empire, the spread of culture and religion among the urban elites, family networks, exchanges of capital, the management of agricultural land, etc. This framework is supported by rail links between Fez and Meknes, which also strengthen the interconnection between the two cities, and a network of modern infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, shopping centers, universities and industrial parks and zones.

It is essential to remember that the urban area of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole is facing territorial changes and spatial dynamics that require increased monitoring and control to guarantee urban management based on greater decentralization, implemented by effective and dynamic institutions.

4.3 Theme 2: Economic and industrial aspects

The Fez-Meknes region is benefiting from a new revival strategy which is one of the main thrusts and guidelines defined by the Regional Spatial Planning Scheme and the Regional Development Plan, aimed at breathing new life into its industrial front, thereby enhancing its economic attractiveness and growth potential.

Establishing a clear vision of the green economy is one of the strategic projects for the region, promoting a circular economy approach that takes account of local specificities and opportunities. Support for green industries such as solar energy, wind power, wastewater treatment and waste management is a particular focus (CRI, 2021), as the Creative and Digital Industries ecosystem is one of the Region's five growth ecosystems, identified as part of the Region's positioning and economic development strategy for 2035.

The Fez-Meknes bi-pole has a number of important economic aspects that contribute to its regional dynamism and its influence on Morocco's national economy. Industry plays an essential role in the economy of both cities. With this in mind, it is necessary to adopt policies and modes of governance to encourage the implementation of modern logistics that will have a positive impact on the productive apparatus of the two centers.

By adopting a proactive approach to improve the attractiveness of the city of Fez by welcoming a rail manufacturer, the aim is to develop a strategic partnership with the ONCF to facilitate the realization of the Fez Fast-track project. The initiative has been set up to provide local support to ensure that administrative procedures are speeded up for rail manufacturers and to support the development of appropriate training to help manufacturers in the mobility sector to experiment with and develop innovative technologies.

By 2035, the city of Meknes aims to become a major agro-industrial hub, taking advantage of the availability of the agro pole, the proximity of agricultural production areas in the Fez-Meknes and Gharb regions, and the presence of major national actors in the agro-industry.

Local actors have an interest in making the most of agglomeration externalities to improve urban performance (Tongjing et al., 2024), which is why the Fez-Meknes region currently has around fifteen operational industrial estates. Fez has six zones devoted entirely to service activities. The Fez-Shore Park is specially designed for offshoring and high-tech outsourcing, the ex-COTEF industrial zone, the Ain-Chkef industrial zone, the Sidi-Brahim industrial district, the Doukkarate industrial district and the Bensouda industrial district. The prefecture of Meknes has four industrial zones and districts, including the Agro-polis industrial and business zone for the Agri-food industry, the Mejjat industrial zone, the Sidi-Bouzekri industrial zone and the Sidi-Slimane Moulkifane industrial zone.

The region's industry accounts for 5.8% of national GDP and generates export sales of 4.2 billion dirhams (45% of which is generated by the leather and textiles sector). Today, Fez-Meknes is one of Morocco's leading industrial regions, with 1,619 mining and manufacturing companies providing 43,000 jobs. Agri-food and textiles/leather account for 68.7% of the added value of the region's industry (CRI, 2024).

4.4 Theme 3: Institutional aspects

The region has taken steps to make the most of its resources, and the various institutions, each in its own field of competence, have taken care to stimulate the potential of the bi-pole.

Their regular interventions have aimed to create synergies and forge a common regional identity. If innovations are to bring about lasting change, they need to be sustainable over the long term, despite institutional challenges (Petitclerc, 2003).

A number of agreements, conventions and initiatives have been drawn up with this in mind, with the aim of improving the integration of the institutional dimension and promoting the development of strategic sectors such as renewable energies, inclusive agriculture, low-carbon industry and digital technology (CRI, 2021).

Following the signing of the State-Region-Program Contract (2020), the Fez-Meknes Regional Council drew up a progress report on the projects included in the Regional Development Program (PDR). As part of the implementation of the priority projects of the Fez-Meknes Regional Development Plan, 80 cooperation agreements have been approved. These agreements break down as follows 31 agreements aimed at supporting employment and scientific research; 17 agreements aimed at improving the economic attractiveness of the region's territorial areas; 11 agreements devoted to the enhancement of cultural heritage, tourist sites and the preservation of natural resources; 9 agreements relating to the reduction of social and territorial inequalities.

The Fez-Meknes Regional Investment Centre (CRI), in turn, has undertaken, since 2020, to provide support and supervision to the Student Council of the *Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah* University (USMBA). This agreement is part of the partnership established with the USMBA for the benefit of students who have signed up to the SNEE (National status for student entrepreneurs) program. The aim is to provide better support for students' entrepreneurial projects, in partnership with economic actors. This training is geared towards building an innovative entrepreneurial project in the form of workshops, seminars, mentorships, MOOCs, etc.

The Department of Agriculture has developed another innovative modern distribution initiative, e-commerce for local produce, to improve market accessibility for these products. In addition, in collaboration with Barid-Al-Maghrib, the Agricultural Development Agency (ADA) has provided e-shops to local produce groups, enabling consumers to purchase these products by placing their orders online (CRI, 2021).

The fruit of a public-private partnership, Fez Smart Factory (FSF) aims to be a place for incubating and accelerating start-ups, by offering engineering services to companies and research and development laboratories. The FSF is perfectly in line with a vision for the future of the spiritual capital, responding to the need to improve industrial productivity and environmental and social efficiency by taking advantage of Industry 4.0 concepts. The partners in the integrated ‘AFWAJ’ program have travelled the length and breadth of the bi-cluster to meet the project leaders during the first two promotions, with a view to ensuring proximity based on an institutional approach.

And when it comes to innovation, the AGRINOVA competitiveness cluster for innovation in agriculture and agri-food is supported by the Regional Department of Agriculture (DRA) to develop collaborative research and development projects. It is also responsible for managing the Meknes Agri-Food Innovation Centre, an innovative multiservice platform that transfers knowledge and technologies to start-ups and companies in the field.

This is achieved in particular through (CRI, 2021): (A) Real-time remote monitoring of the various operating parameters of anti-hail generators. (B) Using drones to treat crops with pesticides, thereby saving time and optimizing the use of products.

4.5 Incentive offers and financing solutions

Initiated to ensure better support for the Region's economic operators, financing and support solutions are being put in place. The aim is to bring together the institutions involved in financial education and unites them around common objectives and guidelines, while optimizing resources and promoting synergies between the public and private sectors. This target has also been the subject of a wide-ranging partnership program, including a partnership agreement between CRI Fez-Meknes with "Crédit du Maroc" (CDM) and the Association Space Starting Point (ESPOD) for the promotion of female entrepreneurship at regional level.

Various measures have been taken to make the Fez-Meknes cluster a new-generation industrial magnet, including new funds to support industrial investment, employment incentive schemes, collaborative partnerships to facilitate access to finance for industrial companies and personalized support in decarbonizing industries. These include new generation industrial parks, major incubators and training establishments, etc.

Intelaka, Innov-start, capital-risque équité, Innov DEV, AFWAJ, Sayidati Al Mokawila are just some of the projects carried out to boost innovation based on the proximity of different institutions (CRI; Bank Al-Maghrib; Tamwilcom; the Moroccan Foundation for Financial Education; credit institutions; CGEM; etc). The two cities of Fez and Meknes have benefited from the Intelaka programme with a volume of 11% of guaranteed loans, ranking third after Casablanca-Settat and Rabat-Kénitra with consecutive volumes of 29% and 17% (TAMWILCOM[3], 2022).

4.6 Innovative collaborative approach

The Fez-Meknes bi-pole boasts a multitude of innovation structures (Figure 1), cross-fertilization areas that bring together the academic world and businesses in a collaborative approach. Their mission is to encourage the emergence of innovative projects and to support them as they evolve. Based on an institutional proximity approach, these structures play an active role in economic development, integration and wealth creation.

[3] TAMWILCOM is a Moroccan group specializing in financial services and digital solutions.

Innovation Structures	Fez Smart Factory	An ecosystem whose aim is to design devices for innovative methods, on a demonstration scale, developed by startups using Industry 4.0 concepts.
	Agro Energy TIC Valley	A mixed testing platform designed to develop research and innovation activities in the fields of bioenergy and energy storage. The recovery of different types of green waste and agricultural by-products to generate energy (electricity, biogas, heat) and store this energy.
	Agritech	The aim of a regional innovation centre will be to help unlock the untapped potential of the Fès-Meknès region with a 'green revolution 2.0' in traditional activities, specifically the agri-food sector, and to develop a transition towards regional growth through innovation.
	Incubateur UEMF	A support structure to help entrepreneurs create start-ups and spinouts in innovative fields. It offers the necessary skills, infrastructure and tools, including financial ones, by providing support throughout the incubation and commercialization phase, drawing on a network of financial and industrial experts.
	USMBA Innovation City	The Ministry of Industry, Trade and the Green and Digital Economy and Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University (USMBA) have collaborated to build this structure to encourage research, innovation and technology transfer within businesses. It has a market-focused research and development space and a technology transfer structure.
	Fez Technopark	This project aims to accelerate the Region's economic and social progress by setting up a regional incubation centre. It includes a collaborative workspace; the Fab lab, which facilitates prototyping; a production studio for Film, TV and Music, as well as a space dedicated to civil society in order to strengthen links with civil society actors linked to the field of entrepreneurship, innovation and financing.

Figure 1. Different innovation structures in the Fez-Meknes bi-pole (CRI, 2024)

The universities, notably the Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University (USMBA) and the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez (UEMF), are now more than just training grounds, but will also serve as bastions for regional innovation. They are creating links between academic institutions and businesses, as well as hosting start-up incubators. The Solar Energy and New Energies Research Institute (IRESEN), the Central Guarantee Fund (CCG), MITC and the Fez-Meknes Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services (CCIS), and many others, are all playing their part in a profound transformation of the bi-pole, giving it the opportunity to see current developments as real opportunities.

5. Results and discussion

Revitalizing an area is a complex process that goes beyond the physical and material aspects. It involves recreating the conditions that will revitalize the local ecosystem, encouraging innovation, conviviality, solidarity and economic development.

The Fez-Meknes cluster is seen as an ideal compromise. It offers the proximity needed to establish partnerships and share knowledge. It is also large enough to host organizations of critical size, capable of carrying out collective projects with an international scope. This applies to vertical industrial relations and science-industry collaborations (Zuliani & Grossetti, 2004).

The urban ecosystem of Fez-Meknes offers original operating models and provides businesses with the resources available to maintain their constantly evolving competitiveness. Urban nature can also play an essential role in revitalizing urban ecosystems by helping cities to protect themselves and adapt to environmental change (Mccormick, 2020).

It seems that innovation in the Fez-Meknes bi-pole is close to the understanding of innovation developed in the theory of Translation, and retained here as a process emerging within a network of institutions. It is clear that all the actors are seeking to build an urban ecosystem that enables institutional proximity to be combined in the production of innovations.

Despite the commendable efforts made to date, it has become clear that the complex challenges facing the bi-pole are complex and persistent. The differences and disparities in development are the main causes of structural imbalances, and they exceed the current capacities of the initiatives put in place. The bi-pole must rise to these challenges if it is to achieve balanced and harmonious development of the area.

Based on the findings of our analysis, we are in a position to formulate recommendations aimed at meeting the urban challenges adapted to the specific needs of the Fez-Meknes bi-pole:

- Opt for inclusive and participatory planning, involving citizens, all stakeholders and local communities in the planning process to ensure that projects meet the real and specific needs of the population.

- Education and vocational training need to be strengthened in the Fez-Meknes bi-pole in order to train a skilled workforce that is adapted to the needs of the labor market, thereby promoting employability and the creation of quality jobs.

- Investing in physical, social and digital infrastructure to improve accessibility, connectivity and quality of life for residents. Integrating smart and green technologies to improve the efficiency of urban services and protect the environment.

- To enhance the region's cultural and natural heritage in order to develop sustainable tourism and create jobs in this sector. Support local cultural initiatives, such as festivals, events and artistic projects, to consolidate the region's identity and appeal.

- Strengthen the region's economic infrastructure and business hubs to attract investors, encourage the emergence of new industries and diversify employment opportunities.

- Encourage the establishment of diversified economic activities in the region by putting in place incentives, thereby creating an environment conducive to job creation

- Adapting local services to the resources available, the local context and the aspirations of the population.

6. Final considerations

This study's methodological innovation lies in the way the qualitative approach was integrated with cross-theoretical and empirical perspectives. Using a thematic analysis grid, we developed an understanding of the conditions for innovation in urban ecosystems.

This approach enabled us to identify the cultural, historical, and social particularities specific to Fez-Meknes that influences the dynamics of institutional proximity and urban innovation. These contextual aspects, often complex and interwoven, could not have been captured with other methods, which tend to standardize urban realities without taking into account the singularity of each environment. In this way, the qualitative approach revealed the subtle interactions and logic of action specific to local actors, offering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the bi-pole.

By exploring these aspects, our research aims to provide critical insights and practical recommendations for decision-makers, urban planners and local actors to promote innovative solutions and effective institutional proximity management, thus contributing to the creation of more sustainable, resilient and connected cities. Institutional proximity also refers to the notion of coordination. The complexity of interaction and coordination between formal and informal institutions may also provide an interesting analytical key for studying innovation in the management of urban ecosystems and offer an interesting perspective for future studies.

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Charifa Mamouni Alaoui
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University (USMBA), Morocco
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2402-7921
✉ charifa.mamounialaoui@usmba.ac.ma

Oumhani Eddelani
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University (USMBA), Morocco
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2419-8348
✉ oumhani.eddelani@usmba.ac.ma