

Analysis of the difficulties of promoting the practice of impact assessment of public policies: An empirical study in the Moroccan context

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Abstract

In an unpredictable context in Morocco marked by severe budgetary constraints, a growing demand for the efficient use of public funds and the rationalization of financial resources, knowledge and measurement of the net effects of the public actions put in place seem essential. Indeed, at a time when citizens aspire to good results, the use of evaluation has also become an absolute priority to be taken into consideration.

In this respect, there has been considerable interest in integrating this this evaluation into the process of setting up and implementing public policies (PP), thanks to the efforts made by public authorities. However, despite the significant progress made, the institutionalization of this practice is still in its early stages.

This article aims to provide an in-depth understanding and analysis of the extent to which measures of the impact of public policies on the target population have been implemented in the Moroccan context. The aim is to identify the difficulties that negatively affect the integration and generalization of this practice in the functioning of public services.

Empirically, analysis of the results revealed that the degree of integration of the practice of impact assessment of public policies in the Moroccan context remains low-due to several difficulties hindering its institutional and organizational anchoring.

Keywords— *Impact assessment, Public policy, Institutionalization, Morocco.*

Introduction

In every country in the world, the evaluation of public policies and programs remains a central issue at the heart of any public debate concerning the measurement of the effects of public intervention, and the modernization and reform of public action.

In this same sense, in an era of new public management emergence, impact assessment has emerged as a questioning method and essential practice in the world of public policy, since it enables the overall performance of all the actions carried out by the State and the Local Governments to be assessed.

Interestingly, this topic constitutes the subject of a body of scientific literature. More than 11 years ago, Gertler & al, (2011) presented a focused definition of impact evaluation, specifying that it is a kind of structured evaluation based on a specific type of evaluation questions. These questions aim at researching and identifying the impact or causal effect of a public policy or program on a given outcome.

In this context, referring to the work carried out by Ceneviva & Farah (2012), it proves that impact assessment remains one of the essential tools based on the production of evidence enabling innovative and alternative solutions to be proposed to the various problems detected in conducting public interventions. The two aforementioned authors add that it is indeed a practice intended for improving the effectiveness of different public spending, quality management, and the control of the actions carried out by governments.

In the Moroccan context, in recent years, the evaluation of public policies has taken on crucial importance for public authorities and has become the focus of all economic debate concerning the measurement of the impact of public interventions. Indeed, the attention given to promoting this practice, which was gradually beginning to develop, was also reflected in the country's stated commitment to developing this approach. This has been achieved through the creation of a series of independent public institutions specialized in carrying out the evaluation studies on public interventions.

Furthermore, the 2011 Moroccan Constitution represented an important turning point in consolidating and boosting the practice of public policy evaluation as a necessary component of the implementation process of any public action. The adoption of this Constitution has stimulated this practice, particularly through the strengthening of the Parliament's powers to carry out evaluation missions (articles 70 and 101).

However, despite these remarkable efforts, several researchers, particularly those originating from Morocco,

have identified a series of recurring constraints limiting the development of the practice of impact assessment of public actions (policies, programs, systems) in the Moroccan context.

For our article, the choice to delve deeper into this research issue is justified by the importance of the institutional anchoring of this practice, given its usefulness as an effective mechanism for improving public management, modernizing the State, and producing evidence relating to the effectiveness and efficiency of public actions.

Our research seeks to deepen our reflection on the extent to which public policy impact assessment is applied in the Moroccan context. By shedding light on the involvement of the various stakeholders interested in promoting this practice, we seek to provide elements of an answer to the following essential question: **What are the five major difficulties that make difficult the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context?**

In the same vein, our article will be structured as follows: In the 1st axis, we will dissect the process of institutional anchoring of public policy evaluation in the Moroccan context.

The 2nd axis will be devoted to the objective identification of the five major difficulties hindering the integration of impact assessment in public services, with focus on assessing public action.

Finally, the 3rd axis will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of the results obtained from the empirical analysis, which offers a synthesis of a set of future perspectives that we believe will be of great use in improving and strengthening the practice of impact assessment in the Moroccan context.

I. Assessing the impact of public policies in Morocco: Literature Review

With to aim to promote the implementation of public policy impact assessment, it is pertinent to point out that the institutionalization of this practice is conditional on the provision of solid preliminary foundations, which represents a major issue that must be raised and taken into consideration by public decision-makers.

1. From Constitutionalization to institutionalization of public policies impact assessment

Regarding this point, it is imperative to discuss the process of integrating evaluation in the Moroccan public sector, which consists of certain institutions whose creation was a necessary condition for carrying out impact evaluation missions of public interventions.

1.1 Institutionalization, a foodstuff for public policies impact assessment

Numerous researchers around the world have examined the institutionalization of public policy evaluation. Among them, Jacob, S. (2005), argues that engaging in the process of institutionalizing this practice can make a significant contribution to triggering new approaches to public

management, by accrediting this new approach to everyday public service work.

Moreover, the author added that the institutionalization of this practice in the workings of public bodies constitutes a real challenge for public authorities in two important dimensions (cognitive and structural), which reflects positively on the image of the State. Similarly, S. Jacob (2005) argues that this represents a powerful lever likely to contribute strongly to promoting a culture of governance and rational management of public money.

In the case of Morocco, as in other countries around the world, the fact of working in an unpredictable context characterized by a scarcity of public funds makes it imperative to assess the impact of public spending. Faced with this reality, public managers are obliged to review and change the way they intervene; they must also think about investing in establishing the foundations of the evaluation approach.

Despite numerous efforts and tangible advances, the integration of impact assessment into day-to-day public action remains timid, with a worrying backlog. In fact, it has failed to live up to the aspirations of citizens demanding rationalization of public spending, as has been concretely reported in a series of research studies.

Indeed, this worrying finding was confirmed by Arcand (2014) in his research on the subject. He noted a worrying lack of impact assessment missions for social development programs in developing countries.

In the same vein, based on the work carried out by a group of Moroccan researchers, a remarkable problem was raised. It related to the existence of an incompressible confusion between evaluation and other related activities (audit, legality control, etc.) that arise in the field of public management.

Reflection on the crucial importance of impact assessment in guiding public action has led researchers to take an interest in addressing this research issue, particularly in the Moroccan context. They have highlighted the predominance of financial and administrative control in the evaluation of public action in most public institutions.

A case in point is the research carried out by M. Harakat (2006), who questioned the evaluation of public action in the Moroccan context, confirming the predominance of classic controls (audit, compliance control, etc.) in the sphere of public policy analysis. The aforementioned author criticized this observation, adding that the confusion between the various practices constitutes a real obstacle to the introduction and development of public action evaluation in the Moroccan context.

This is the background to the research carried out by Mourabit (2010) as general rapporteur of the Court of Account. He analyzed the experience of the Court of Account in evaluating the public policies implemented by the various development players.

Similarly, S. Mourabit affirmed that the evaluation work carried out by this constitutional institution is fundamentally based on a performance triangle comprising three inseparable components (objectives, means, and results). He added that, in

principle, the Court of Auditors' evaluation approach regularly relies on the use of the cost/benefit method, based on results and variances.

Nevertheless, according to S. Mourabit, the Court of Account does not fully carry out its functions and missions concerning the assessment of the effects of public policies and programs, due to a shortage of qualified human capital and competent experts capable of carrying out a reliable, rigorous assessment with quality results.

Based on the example of the Court of Account he added that, despite the incorporation of evaluative practice into the Moroccan institutional and organizational landscape, its activities remain scattered and unsystematic. In addition, S. Mourabit stressed that the visibility of evaluation in the modernization and assessment of the effects of public interventions is low in the eyes of most public officials, and is poorly confirmed in legal texts. The latter constitutes a mechanism for overcoming the inhibitions of certain stakeholders (Jacob & al., 2015).

For his part, Bencheikh (2013) raised an important question: the degree to which the practice of evaluating the net effects of public interventions has been implemented in the Moroccan context. According to the author, the willingness to introduce the evaluative approach remains fundamentally linked to the implementation of democratic principles in the various existing systems on the national level, giving priority to the need for "Accountability" to the detriment of other practices for assessing the effects of public schemes, notably evaluation.

In his article entitled: « *L'évaluation des politiques publiques par la Cour des Comptes au Maroc* », Berrada (2019) also noted that the practice of impact assessment remains weak and is in its early stages in the Moroccan context. The author also asserted that Morocco does not yet have the cultural dimension relating to the promotion of impact evaluation of implemented public policies.

Moreover, this finding was confirmed by the number of impact assessment missions carried out, which remains limited, timid, and below expectations, given that over the period (1999-2021) forty (40) impact assessment missions were carried out, with an annual average of 1.82 in the various public action sectors (K. El MOUTAOUAKIL & A. BAGUARE, 2024).

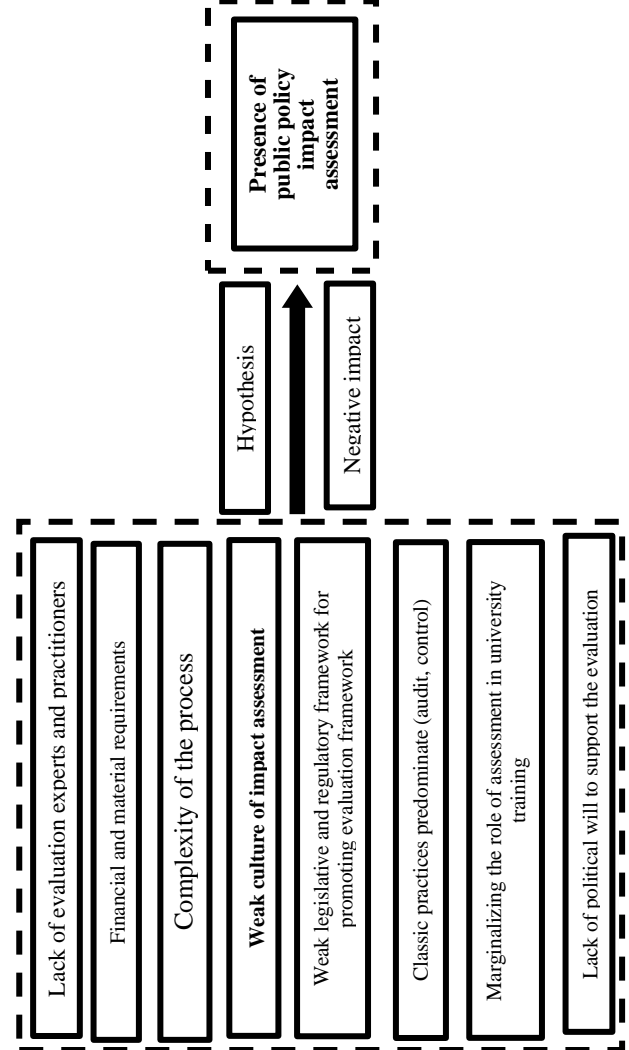
Similarly, this important conclusion has also been verified in research by Bencheikh (2021), according to which impact assessments are not applicable in the Moroccan context due to ethical considerations.

1.2 Conceptual model and research hypotheses

1.2.1 Research Model

An analysis of the theoretical and empirical literature on the same subject shows that the impact assessment of a public policy involves determining and shaping the causal link between the policy implemented and the changes observed.

Fig.1: Conceptual Model for the study



Source: Authors, based on literature review

Within this framework, our Research Model is based on an overall hypothesis suggesting the existence of a negative relationship between a set of major difficulties and the degree of integration of the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context.

1.2.2 Research hypothesis

Taking into account our research question, the hypotheses we propose to test are derived from and retained from the literature review dealing with this type of theme. They can be formulated as follows:

GH: The absence of public policy impact assessment practice in the Moroccan context is linked to a set of difficulties.

H1: The lack of experts and practitioners has a negative impact on the practice of public policy impact assessment;

H2: The need for financial and material resources has a negative impact on the performance of impact assessment missions;

H3: The complexity of the impact evaluation approach has a negative influence on its promotion in the Moroccan context;

H4: The weak culture of public policy impact assessment among public decision-makers is a major obstacle to its development;

H5: The lack of a strong will on the part of Moroccan public authorities is a worrying obstacle to the integration of impact assessment into public policy analysis;

H6: The more traditional controls dominate in the field of public policy, the lower the probability of resorting to the practice of impact assessment.

H7: The marginalization of public policy impact assessment in university courses has a negative impact on its development.

2. Difficulties in the practice of impact assessment of public policies in the Moroccan context: Methodology and Results

As previously mentioned, Moroccan public decision-makers have chosen to commit themselves irreversibly to a new reform, making all public policies systematically subject to evaluation.

This second line of research aims to explore and gain in-depth knowledge of the major difficulties hindering the integration of the practice of public policy impact assessment within the Moroccan public administration.

1. Research Methodology

The method of data collection, the characteristics of the sample studied, and the analysis of the results obtained are successively set out as a roadmap enabling the researcher to provide some answers to the research question posed.

1.1 Data collection method

In the Moroccan context, understanding the degree of institutional and organizational anchorage of the practice of impact assessment of public policies necessarily requires knowledge of how this issue is perceived by the public decision-makers concerned. It is therefore based on an exploration of the major obstacles which negatively influence the integration and development of this practice within public institutions on national and regional levels.

To carry out this research, our approach consists of using the questionnaire technique. The latter remains the most widely used method of gathering information, enabling the researcher to connect the theoretical level with the field work level. Methodologically, we distributed the questionnaire to a group of public decision-makers involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies in various fields of public action.

1.1 Method for analyzing data

To process the data collected from our survey sample, we opted for an analysis using SPSS software.

1.2 Empirical Results

To answer our research question, our empirical methodology uses Ministerial Departments, Local Governments, and Public Establishments and Enterprises as our study population. We aim to gain precise knowledge on the major difficulties

hindering the use of impact assessment for the various public interventions implemented.

1.2.1 Sample characterization

Classification by gender

The table below clearly illustrates the gender of the respondents in our study sample.

Table 1: Classification of interviewees by gender

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Female	15	29,4	29,4	29,4
Valid Male	36	70,6	70,6	100,0
Total	51	100,0	100,0	

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Analysis of the data obtained on the population surveyed reveals that over 70% of the sample of respondents to our questionnaire is male, compared with over 29% who are female.

Classification by age

The following table presents and illustrates the classification of our survey respondents

Table 2: Classification of interviewees by age

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
20-30	17	33,3	33,3	33,3
Valid 30-40	26	51,0	51,0	84,3
40-50	7	13,7	13,7	98,0
50-60	1	2,0	2,0	100,0
Total	51	100,0	100,0	

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Classification by Working experience

The following table shows the professional experience of our sample.

Table 3: Classification of respondents by professional experience

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	3	5,9	5,9	5,9
2	6	11,8	11,8	17,6
3	4	7,8	7,8	25,5
4	6	11,8	11,8	37,3
5	6	11,8	11,8	49,0
6	6	11,8	11,8	60,8
7	5	9,8	9,8	70,6
8	1	2,0	2,0	72,5
9	1	2,0	2,0	74,5
Valid 10	3	5,9	5,9	80,4
12	2	3,9	3,9	84,3
14	1	2,0	2,0	86,3
15	1	2,0	2,0	88,2
16	2	3,9	3,9	92,2
18	1	2,0	2,0	94,1
22	1	2,0	2,0	96,1
25	1	2,0	2,0	98,0
30	1	2,0	2,0	100,0
Total	51	100,0	100,0	

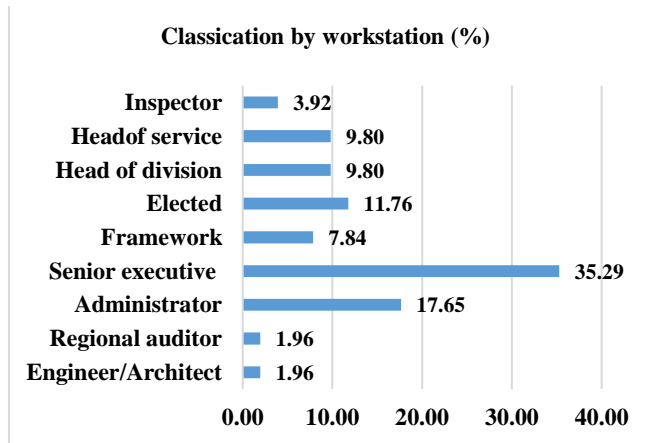
Source: Elaborated by the authors

As for the experience of the people questioned, analysis of the data relating to our sample shows that they have an average experience of 7.44 years, given that the experience of the people questioned during our survey ranges from 1 to 30 years.

Classification by workstation

The table below clearly illustrates the categorization and classification of respondents according to their workstations.

Fig. 2: Classification of respondents by workstation



Source: Elaborated by the authors

Based on the results obtained above, the majority of those interviewed occupy senior management positions, with a rate of 35.29%, followed by directors, who account for a substantial 17.65%. In 3rd place, we find elected representatives from Local Governments with a percentage of 11.76%.

Table 2: Classification of sample organizations by type

Type of organization	Number	Percentage (%)	(%) Cumulative
Ministerial Departments	37	72,5	72,5
Public Establishments and Enterprises	7	13,75	86,25
Local Governments	7	13,75	100
Total	51	100 %	-----

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Finally, an analysis of the content of the questionnaires collected shows that the majority of respondents belong to Public Establishments and Enterprises (EEP), with an overall percentage approaching three-thirds (72.5%), followed by Ministerial Departments and Local Governments, notably the regions, with an equivalent percentage of 13.75%.

1.3.2 The difficulties of assessing the impact of public policies

The Moroccan case provides the framework for our research. It should be remembered that the main aim of this analysis is to identify the major obstacles that make it difficult to

integrate the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context.

The table below clarifies the results of our field analysis. It has enabled us to identify and gain a clearer idea of the difficulties that make it difficult to anchor the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context.

Table 4: Difficulties encountered in assessing the impact of public policies

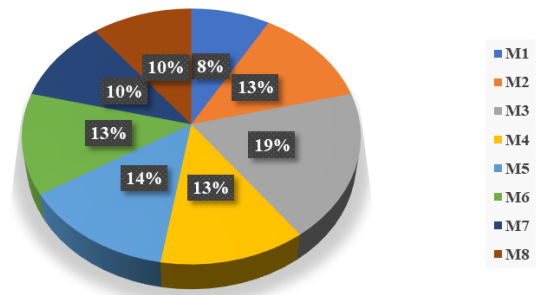
Difficulty modes	Major difficulties in the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context
M1	The predominance of other practices (audit, regularity control, etc.).
M2	Lack of strong political will to implement this practice.
M3	Lack of experts and practitioners in public policy impact assessment
M4	The complexity of public policy impact assessment process
M5	the need for financial and material resources to carry out public policy impact assessments
M6	The lack of a culture of policy impact assessment among public decision-makers
M7	The lack of a legislative and regulatory framework imposing public policy impact assessment
M8	The marginalization of public policy impact assessment in university training courses

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Analysis of the difficulties of evaluating the impact of public policies

Empirically, the arrangement of the modalities in the table above demonstrates the relevant results as shown in the graph below.

Major difficulties in the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context



Source: Elaborated by the authors

2. Results and discussion

The main aim of this empirical study is to identify in detail the major difficulties that stand in the way of promoting the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context.

Consequently, the results of our research also show that the lack of experts and practitioners in the field of public policy impact assessment is the first difficulty preventing the development of this practice in the Moroccan context,

followed by the need to commit the financial and material resources required to carry out this type of assignment.

As a second category of difficulties, our results confirm that the weak culture of public policy impact assessment among public decision-makers has been revealed as a major difficulty hindering the development of this practice in public services. Similarly, our results show that the complexity of the approach and the lack of a strong political will are among the major difficulties slowing down the promotion of impact assessment practice in the operation of public services.

In general, it is worth recalling that the empirical results obtained are in line with the theoretical literature, and in particular with the results we analyzed in the first part of our research, according to which the practice of impact assessment of public policies is experiencing a certain difficulty in the Moroccan context, due to the presence of a series of major difficulties requiring more effort and decisions.

In short, the results of our research enabled us to validate five hypotheses initially put forward and to reject three. It turned out that the practice of impact assessment of public policies suffers from five major difficulties that slow down its development in the Moroccan context, as presented in the summary table below:

Table 4: Hypotheses validation

Hypotheses	Hypotheses testing
The predominance of other conventional practices (audit, regularity control, etc.) in the impact assessment of public policies	Not valid
Lack of strong political will to implement this practice	Valid
Lack of experts and practitioners in public policy impact assessment	Valid
The complexity of the public policy impact assessment process	Valid
The need for financial and material resources to assess the impact of public policies	Valid
Public decision makers' lack of familiarity with public policy impact assessment	Valid
The lack of a legislative and regulatory framework for imposing impact assessments on public policies	Not valid
The marginalization of public policy impact assessment in academic training courses	Not valid

Source: Elaborated by the authors

3. Prospects and future research

To justify public decisions and guarantee the rationalization of financial resources, Moroccan public authorities are aware of the decisive role of the evaluation approach as a new way of reorienting public actions and assessing their effects.

In response to the low number of impact assessment missions carried out, public decision-makers have launched a host of

concrete initiatives aimed at integrating and developing this practice into the workings of public services.

This strategic orientation has been considerably developed through the creation of a series of bodies and organizations specialized in the evaluation of public interventions, such as Parliament, the Court of Account, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, and, most recently (2021), the creation of the MICEPPI.

It should also be remembered that this desire has been asserted over the years by the extension of the prerogatives of a group of highly important players in terms of evaluating public interventions, notably through the affectivity of contributions and the provisions of the Constitution adopted in 2011 (article 70).

However, the results of our research show that the integration of the practice of impact assessment of public policies in the Moroccan context is lagging worryingly behind, as it is confronted with a multitude of difficulties that are blocking its institutional development and promotion.

At the end of this thematic review of research on the issue of integrating the practice of impact assessment of public policies in the Moroccan context, the preceding developments on this suggest lead us to issue a set of recommendations stemming from and emerging from our empirical investigation.

In this respect, a series of future prospects can be envisaged for the sake of contributing to the promotion of the impact assessment culture in the day-to-day operation of Moroccan public administrations, in particular:

- ✓ Strengthen and train the skills needed to carry out public policy impact assessments;
- ✓ Adoption of laws and regulations emphasizing the need to carry out impact assessments of public policies.
- ✓ Raising awareness among public decision-makers of the vital importance of impact assessment in the analysis and management of public policies;
- ✓ Broaden and strengthen the remit of the various players involved in the evaluation of public interventions on a regional level, based on the following principle: « All public action must be systematically evaluated »;
- ✓ Integrate impact assessment of public policies into accredited academic training courses at universities, to encourage the training of national experts in evaluation, rather than relying on foreign experience;
- ✓ Stronger political will to create a healthy environment conducive to the development of a culture of measuring the impact of public policies on the population concerned;
- ✓ Develop and design public policies based on a prior diagnosis based on internationally recognized criteria in the field of public intervention (relevance, coherence, etc.).

¹ Ministry of Investment, Convergence and Evaluation of Public Policies

Conclusion

To conclude this article, we can say that, faced with public demand for an assessment of the effects of public interventions, the question of evaluation is logically beginning to impose itself on public decision-makers to support their decisions and justify the allocation of financial resources.

This research has enabled us to highlight the current state of play with regard to the anchoring of the practice of impact assessment of public policies in the Moroccan context. Secondly, we have empirically identified the major difficulties preventing the promotion of this practice in Ministerial Departments, Local Governments Public Establishments, and Enterprises.

This first line of inquiry has enabled us to deduce empirically that, despite its remarkable evolution and significant achievements, the practice of impact assessment faces obstacles to its institutional and organizational development in the Moroccan context. Indeed, this practice suffers from five major difficulties that make its institutional promotion difficult.

Despite the relevance and significance of the results obtained from our empirical investigation, this is also our first attempt to analyze the degree of integration of the practice of public policy impact assessment in the Moroccan context, by pinpointing the main obstacles influencing its institutional realization.

It is traditionally recognized that for any scientific work, limits can be identified and figured out and that these constitute a path and a motivation for the realization and pursuit of more in-depth future research to broaden knowledge on the subject undertaken.

In our case, to achieve this end, more solid econometric analysis and empirical expansion seem important, and they can constitute a logical continuation of our research work to enrich the studies carried out on this kind of research topic and produce rigorous and scientifically valid results.

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❖ **Texts & official documents**

- ✓ The 2011 Moroccan Constitution;
- ✓ Organic law no. 111-14 on the regions.