

## ESSAOUIRA, “THE WIND CITY” AS A “CULTURAL PRODUCT”

With 10 figures

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*Zusammenfassung:* Essaouira, „The Wind City“ als kulturelles Produkt

Die nachfolgenden Ausführungen zeigen am Beispiel der marokkanischen Küstenstadt Essaouira die Genese und die Vermarktung einer Stadt als „cultural product“ (SCOTT 1997) an internationale Touristen. Dabei wird zunächst das theoretische Konzept des kulturellen Gutes im Kontext von ökonomischer Globalisierung, stilisierter Individualisierung und europäischer Gentrification erläutert. Eine kurze historische Skizze des ehemals ökonomisch prosperierenden Handelshafens Essaouira verdeutlicht die heutige periphere und marginale Lage der Stadt im Marokko des 20. Jahrhunderts. Danach werden die kulturellen Güter des Ortes geschildert. Eine wichtige Gruppe von Konsumenten sind die in den letzten Jahrzehnten in die Altstadt zugezogenen Europäer. Es kann gezeigt werden, dass die kulturellen Güter des Ortes für die Europäer als Hintergrund und Bühne dienen, und die nachfolgend als „postmoderne Güter“ bezeichneten Werte „Atmosphäre und Kreativität“ sowie „Individuelle Verwirklichung und gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz“ als Ursache und als Motivation dienen, aufgrund derer die Europäer die Altstadt von Essaouira als Wohnstandort wählen. Im Vordergrund steht dabei die Freiheit der Europäer, die gegensätzlichen Positionen von Individualität und Gesellschaft leben zu können. Damit kann Essaouira für die europäischen Neu-Souiri als „place on the margin“ im Sinne von SHIELDS (1991), wo für Europäer andere Regeln und Normen gelten als im Zentrum Europas, bezeichnet werden. Es ist zu hoffen, dass die zukünftige Stadt- und Regionalplanung die kulturellen Güter des Ortes bewahrt und nicht einem in der Planungsdiskussion favorisierten Massentourismus (PLAN AZUR 2003) opfert.

*Summary:* The following paper discusses the genesis of a town and its marketing as a “cultural product” (SCOTT 1997) to international tourists, taking the Moroccan coastal town Essaouira as an example. First, we will explain the theoretical concept of cultural product in the context of economic globalization, self-fashioned individualization and European gentrification. A brief outline of the history of the once flourishing port town of Essaouira illustrates the current peripheral and marginal situation of this town in 20<sup>th</sup> century Morocco. After that, we will describe the local cultural goods. An important group of consumers are the Europeans who moved to the old town during the last few decades. It can be shown that the cultural goods of Essaouira act as a backdrop and stage for these Europeans, and the variables “atmosphere and creativity” and “individual self-realization and social acceptance” that are referred to below as “post-modern goods” serve as reason and motivation, inspiring them to select Essaouira’s old town as their home. In this case, emphasis is placed on the freedom the Europeans there enjoy in being able to live opposing aspects of individualism and social acceptance. As a result, Essaouira may be called for the European new Souiri a “place on the margin” as described by SHIELDS (1991) where Europeans are subject to other rules and norms than in the heart of Europe. It is to be hoped that future urban and regional planning will preserve Essaouira’s cultural goods and not sacrifice them during planning discussions in favour of mass tourism (PLAN AZUR 2003).

Tourism in Essaouira or Mogador<sup>1)</sup> is very different from tourism in other cities in the Kingdom of Morocco. There are no tourists who typically book package programmes and spend their entire holidays in the town, and up to now large tour operators have avoided Essaouira. There you will primarily find individual tourists, water sports enthusiasts and day-trippers enjoying an excursion from Marrakech or Agadir. Instead of bars, parties and sunbathing, there is predominantly art, culture and sports. What processes and goods contribute to the fact that tourism in Essaouira is different? What role do Europeans play in this and why are Europeans attracted to the old town of Essaouira? Before

answering these questions with the aid of empirical analysis, we will present some theoretical concepts concerning the current global processes of economy and culture.

*1 Economic globalization, cultural goods and self-fashioned individualization and European gentrification*

The phenomenon of economic globalization – the transnational cross-linking of markets and societies as a result of the formation of a broad world market and an increased mobility of funds and people – has been a



Fig. 1: The location of Essaouira in the Kingdom of Morocco  
Die Lage der Stadt Essaouira im Königreich Marokko

central topic since the early 1970's (MCMICHAEL 1996). This involves an extensive amalgamation of culture and market, the *commodification of culture* (KRÄTKE 2002, 207). The worldwide acceptance of a market society in the form of market-based production of cultural goods and market-related self-fashioning of individuals competing for social positions while predominated by a mediatization of social communication, consumption patterns and lifestyles are rudimentary characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century societies. It seems as if our world is becoming more cosmopolitan and eclectic in respect of consumption (SCOTT 2004).

Borders between nations and their societies have become more and more permeable over the last two decades because of the influence of global political organizations, the expansion of the world market and the world shrinking due to the reach of mass media. A consequence is the growing awareness of the relationship between familiar and exotic and the "crystallization of the entire world as a single place" (ROBERTSON 1998). For all that, globalization has not triggered a cultural uniformity, but instead has revealed a greater plurality of cultures and thus a greater variety of alternatives for many individuals (SCOTT 2004).

Globalization's impact on a society becomes more intensive in relation to the society's involvement with the global economy, which apparently applies primarily to "acting global cities" (SASSEN 1997). Nonetheless, global perspectives are given serious thought and adapted to local conditions throughout the world. This "adoption and acquisition of goods and services on a global or near-global level for increasingly diverse local and particular markets" (ROBERTSON 1998, 198) is practiced virtually everywhere. The resulting hybridization, diversification and pluralization produce a "global culture" (KRÄTKE 1995) with "global cultural flows" (URRY 2004, 170).

<sup>1)</sup> The name "Essaouira" is based on the Arabic word "Es Saouira", which means "the fortified place". The settlement was first known by the Berber name Amogdul. The Portuguese later gave the port town the name of Mogdura. The Spanish and French, however, called the port Mogador, which remained its official name until Morocco gained its independence in 1956. Today, the port town goes by either Essaouira or Mogador, even though Mogador is frequently used for the medina quarter.

Economic interdependencies are also tied into other different dimensions of globalization that in turn have spurred the standardization of locations. For instance, print media, movies, music, TV and Internet have created global markets in the cultural sector. With Internet a new area – cyberspace – has evolved that facilitates an effective exchange worldwide, thus establishing global markets available to virtually anyone. The homogenization processes mentioned are accompanied by an increase in consumption in many societies. This is where the globalization process and the post-modern phenomena meet and strengthen one another. It is not just a matter of consumption and possession, but rather the possession of *certain things* and the *type* of consumption. For the *society of the spectacle* (LASH a. URRY 1994), the symbolic content that locations and goods represent has gained an all-encompassing significance. The value that material goods have for consumers is no longer limited to physical consumption or use of products. In fact, the material culture has become important as a social label. How you live, the clothes you wear, the car you drive, what you read, watch, drink and eat, and where you spend your vacations – all these things are increasingly becoming the yardstick by which we are measured as a person in society (cf. DANGSCHAT a. BLASIUS 1994). And there is the constant need for self-fashioned individualization, for new sources consistently to emphasize personal expression and one's own distinctiveness (cf. EGNER 2002).

The culture industry with its advertisement, publishing, mass media and entertainment sectors has developed into a factor, significantly influencing locations, regions and landscapes due to the fact that material consumerism has taken on an ever-increasing significance in the repertoire of symbols, opinions and customs of post-modern cultures. This so-called "place making" has become a key instrument (cf. KRÄTKE 2002; LASH a. URRY 1994). Nowadays, advertisements tout more and more a "specific attitude towards life" that is linked with a product than a direct benefit offered by the product. Many advertising concepts rely on locational stereotypes, such as "romanticized place myths" (LASH a. URRY 1994, 260); after all, exotic or spectacular locations provide the appropriate context or background for a product. The image of locations and the image of consumer goods like foodstuff products, architecture and pop culture become merged in the global media market. In end effect, the identity of contemporary cultures is very much anchored today in the consumption of material goods as well as in *visual* and *experience-orientated* consumption, in other words the acquisition of images and the experience of impressive locations, regions and landscapes.

Even though the idea of a uniform global culture evolving represents a significant simplification, post-modernism's focus on material, visual and thrill-oriented consumption has caused many aspects of local culture to cross regional and/or national borders. "First world" tourists do not only visit foreign countries but also move to these strange countries and make themselves at home in historical inner-city neighbourhoods. This relocation introduces a process, frequently seen in the built-up metropolises of industrial countries as of the late 1960's (GLASS 1964), into the old, socially stressed and physically neglected neighbourhoods of third world cities. These socially, economically and physically decaying neighbourhoods are upgraded, restored and/or redesigned as a result of middle or upper class people moving there (FRIEDRICHS 1996). This gentrification process, which varies greatly in different parts of the world (LEES 2000), has another variation in Morocco (ESCHER et al. 2001). The relationship between cultural goods, lifestyles and gentrification has been discussed in-depth (JAGER 1986) such that it is now encouraged to incorporate this development into a city administration's planning discussions (SLATER 2004). Managing and leveraging gentrification for urban development has to be promoted for the cities of Morocco as well.

In this context, almost every element that makes up a location or a city is checked for marketability and then integrated in the market. The subjective construction of the cultural product – the city – plays a dominant role in this, while taking into account the perception of visitors and tourists, in other words the customers and consumers. After all, they represent the "demand" and thus stipulate the pattern. Economic goods are no longer only material. They are *cultural products* (SCOTT 1997, 323) within a *cultural economy* or even *cultural products-industry* that relate to a wide variety of goods in connection with lifestyles. The point is an ever-growing range of activities that deal with producing marketing goods and services. This includes primarily the (in)direct allocation of aesthetic or semiotic attributes. "Such goods and services [...] are extremely heterogeneous in their substance, appearance and sectoral origins" (SCOTT 1997, 323). Such cultural products can come from traditional craft industries "engaged in the transformation of physical inputs into final outputs" (SCOTT 1997, 323) such as clothing, furniture or jewellery. With these goods, consumers develop their own distinct variety of individuality, self-affirmation and demonstrate social class. SCOTT (1997, 323) also points out with regard to *cultural products* that "in other cases, they are more properly thought of as services in the sense that they involve some personalized transac-

tion or the production and transmission of information” like tourist services, live theatre or print media, museums or advertisements. Moreover, he discusses a third form – a hybrid form – that encompasses music and movie productions or publishing firms. A decisive point that characterizes all *cultural products* is described by SCOTT (1997, 323–324) as follows: “Whatever the physico-economic constitution of such products, the sectors that make them are all engaged in the creation of marketable outputs whose competitive qualities depend on the fact that they function at least in part as personal ornaments, modes of social display, aestheticized objects, forms of entertainment and distraction, or sources of information and self-awareness, i.e. as artefacts whose physical gratification to the consumer is highly relative to utilitarian purpose”. Therefore, the modern cultural economy produces aesthetic and symbolic goods and services, whereas their symbolic content is directly linked to their direct subjective benefit for the individual consumer. The more an individual is able to freely organize his or her income, the more he or she is inclined to consume the above-described goods. The consumption of all these *cultural products* expands very quickly – and the *cultural economy of cities* (SCOTT 1997) is created.

The historic old town of Essaouira is one of these cities that is largely exposed to the gentrification process and thus is integrated in Morocco’s economy today as a cultural product.

## 2 *Essaouira – a port town and “gate to the world”*

Essaouira is located on a peninsula along Morocco’s Atlantic coast about 150 km to the north of Agadir and almost 180 km to the west of Marrakech. Because of its geographical location, its moderate climate and calm harbour protected by the “purple islands”, the town was a popular anchorage for seafarers of ancient times. The king of Mauretania, Juba II, supposedly established a purple dye factory on the purple islands across the bay from Essaouira, because there was a great demand for it in Rome at the time of Jesus’s birth. Favoured by trade winds and its ideal location, trade between Europe, Africa and America began to flourish there, bringing great financial and cultural wealth to Essaouira in the age of sail (ROSS et al. 2002). Later, the town became an important trading base for Portugal. In 1506, Portugal’s King Manuel ordered a fortress to be built at the entrance to the port. Only some parts of the fortress are still standing today. A large number of Portuguese settled in Mogador, as Essaouira was known during this period, to encourage the cultivation of

sugarcane in the region with the aid of slaves from Senegal.

The Alaouite Sultan Mohammed Ben Abdallah re-established the town in 1766/67, transforming it into a transatlantic trading centre and thus connecting his kingdom with major trade routes. Naturally sheltered, the harbour of the peninsula was expanded to become a large trading port, through which many Moroccan and African goods were shipped all over the globe. To bolster the town’s defences, the sultan ordered the French engineer Théodore Cornut to build fortifications based on the style of France’s famous master architect Vauban. He designed Essaouira with a chessboard-like layout. A new era was ushered in for Essaouira. Arabs, Berbers, Jews and representatives of European merchant organizations were promised tax breaks as long as they settled in the town (cf. BYER 2002). Sultan Mohammed Ben Abdallah invited Jewish merchants and jewellers to move there in order to profit from their trade connections. He also offered personal protection and diverse trading monopolies. His policies were successful. In 1900, almost fifty percent of Essaouira’s population – 25,000 people – at that time were Jewish. Only after tension started to increase between Israel and Arab countries between 1963 and 1967 did most of the Jews leave the town and moved to Casablanca, France, Canada or Israel. The presence of Jews, Europeans and Americans lent the town a cosmopolitan ambiance and culture. Today, the Souiris attribute their cultural and religious tolerance to their long-term historic contact with a large number of nationalities and peoples. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Essaouira was the most important trade port and largest transshipment centre in Morocco. Since the large caravans from Timbuktu ended in the town, Essaouira was also called the “port of Timbuktu”. Important trade partners like Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Brazil built consulates there, thus highlighting the significance of their trade relations (cf. ROSS et al. 2002).

In 1880, the French conquered Western Sudan, causing the transcontinental trade routes to move and Essaouira’s prosperity gradually to decline. The final deathblow to Essaouira’s economy came, however, with the rise of steamships and the policies of France’s protectorate government, which controlled the region from 1912 to 1956. The town was hardly taken into account during Morocco’s restructuring in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the port was expanded and modernized, Essaouira was not able to compete with new maritime centres, such as Casablanca, Kenitra (former Port Lyautey), Safi and Agadir. As the town was also not integrated into the new railway network, it lost

important ties to Morocco's hinterland and the nation's capital Marrakech. These general conditions more or less ensured that the historic buildings of Essaouira's old town remained in a poor state of repair.

Since its economic decline in connection with its decolonization, Essaouira recently began to evolve again into a flourishing town and it is right on track (cf. BYER 2002). ROSS et al. (2002) attribute this revival to a group of Moroccan actors that are marketing Essaouira as a cultural product to visitors and tourists and have invested in its historic old town. In addition to that, European investors have also been moving to the town since the 1990's, putting their money in buildings of the old town quarter and refurbishing them partly at great expense. The trend of buying a house or business in Morocco started in Marrakech (ESCHER et al. 2001) and has reached Essaouira in the meantime. Although Essaouira was regarded some years ago as a hot tip and an alternative to Marrakech, it has become the focus of investors' attention with its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001.

### 3 *"Essaouira Spirit" or the shaping of a cultural product*

"Essaouira" as a cultural product comprises the materiality of the historic old town, the climatic conditions affecting air and water, its history, the day-to-day rules that apply to locals and visitors in Essaouira as well as the technical possibilities for utilizing the location. In this case, the image that Essaouira has acquired over the ages and the image that is being purposefully fostered play an above-average role. The product has been shaped and given a distinct trademark to help the location prevail and distinguish itself from other locations. After all, the purpose of the image should attract a certain international target audience to visit the location. It is only logical that particular attention is placed on buyers, users and other consumers when shaping the product. Tourists' demand for cultural goods may be regarded as an "impetus" of the cultural products-industry, since the importance of cultural resources, and their selective marketing have been recognized in their context early on.

Touristically speaking, Essaouira can be reduced to the historic old town with its complete surrounding walls. Even in the mid 1960's, other "goods" did not play a role in describing the town for European tourists. The Guide Bleu describes the artistic value of the entire ensemble of Essaouira's medina as follows: "Its medina is one of the most picturesque along the entire Atlantic coast" (BOULANGER 1966, 391).

The "Association for the Preservation of the City of Essaouira" was founded by members of well-off, influential families from Essaouira during the 1990's. The core of the association includes 18 to 20 representatives from business, academia and politics. André Azoulay, an adviser to Morocco's king and Essaouira's most prominent son, is also a member of the association. Its official aim is to revive the town from its long slumber and to make it interesting for an international audience. In addition to promoting the city, the association organizes a variety of cultural events, such as readings, concerts, theatre, cinema shows and workshops (ROSS et al. 2002). After the town council fulfilled various requirements, Essaouira's old town was designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2001 with the following explanation: "Essaouira's medina is an exceptional example of a late-18<sup>th</sup>-century fortified town, built according to the principles of contemporary European military architecture in a North African context. It has been a major international trading seaport in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, linking Morocco and its Saharan hinterland with Europe and the rest of the world" (UNESCO 2004).

As a result, Essaouira attained a seal of approval from a global institution and has become a global asset. It is not only the medina that makes Essaouira but a large number of elements that have been implemented or discovered over the years in Essaouira. The hot summer months, from June to August, when schools are out of session in Morocco, is when Moroccans from all over the country and especially Marrakech come to relax and enjoy the sun and wind on the beach in cooler Essaouira. There summers are rarely hotter than 30°C, due to the steady breeze coming in from the Atlantic and cooling the town, while Marrakech is used to temperatures of up to 50°C. Essaouira is just a two or three hour drive from Marrakech. This form of tourism was already established during the 1960's, when the first European tourists came there. Due to the steady breeze, European visitors do not really come there to partake in sea and sun tourism.

Flower children, hippies and assorted counterculture types have changed the face of tourism in Essaouira: sunbathing in the summer turned into a year-round activity; tourist life shifted more and more to the medina. In particular, the trips embarked upon by young people to Morocco and India in the 1960's embodied the search for an alternative to European schemes of life. While some hippies – French, German, American and others – leased or bought into the historic old town, no other stimulus was felt in Essaouira on the part of landlords at that time (ROSS et al. 2002). Buildings were only used as dwellings and not renovated. The primary goals



Fig. 2: Essaouira at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Essaouira am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts

included inspiration, self-actualization or adventure. An extreme lifestyle, as observed in the group of "explorers" with hashish, drugs and alcohol as well as excessive sex orgies, became a part of Essaouira. Visitors frequently ignored the moral and religious values of the local population. The laws that apply in Europe did not apply there, to a certain extent people were in a "grey" zone. At the height of the hippie movement, the locals began to resent foreigners so much that it became necessary to recommend visitors to curb their activities.

Famous rock stars like Cat Stevens and Jimmy Hendrix began spending time in the town at that time. It is said that the castle sunk in the sand on the beach inspired Hendrix to write the song "Castle in the Sand". The rock stars were also inspired by the music of local brotherhoods, in particular the *Gnaoua*. With the art of their music, the *Gnaoua*, who are descendants of slaves from Sudan, Senegal and Guinea who worked on Portuguese sugar plantations, shape the cultural landscape of the town today. The so-called "*Lilas*", evening and nocturnal ceremonies, during which guests are put in a trance-like state as a result of intoxicants, music and dancing, are popular. In 1999, the International *Gnaoua* Festival was founded and is now well-known beyond the borders of Morocco.

In the early 1980's, outdoor sports began to establish themselves, and in this context Essaouira was rediscovered as a result of the extremely favourable winds prevailing there. Supposedly, it started with a Swiss man who goes by the name of Jack and owns surfing schools on Marbella as well as Tarifa and who settled in Essaouira about 20 years ago. At his suggestion, the town begins to market itself as the "Wind City" in order to attract surfers. During the same period, Michel Sautereau, who was then president of the surf club *Fun & Fly*, played a key role in the development of windsurfing in Essaouira. At the end of the 1980's, he managed to bring French surfers to the town and thus establish its popularity in the international surfing community (ROSS et al. 2002, 51ff.). Essaouira has evolved meanwhile from a hot tip to a permanent factor of Morocco's surfing scene. More and more surf hangouts and surf schools as well as surf shops began to appear on the beach in the old town. In the Internet you will find ads, saying: "Besides Tarifa, Essaouira is the windy surf spot for Europeans looking for a place where wind is guaranteed from May to August" (Windsurfing).

Around 1920, many Europeans came to the trading port to buy wood products from locals. In 1922, an Italian started the first studio that constructed car and ship bodies using wood. The first craft studio was founded by a Frenchman in 1925. The overall goal of France's

handicraft policies was to initiate inlay work and similar crafts, among other things. Since the 1970's, small workshops have been set up along the Skala to sell directly to tourists. Nowadays, they can be found almost everywhere in medina. Even today, the popularity of thuya products like boxes with secret compartments, bookends, tables or chess sets remains undiminished.

In 1952, Orson Welles produced his film "Othello" in Essaouira. The medina with its magnificent fortified walls was the best location that could have been found for the film. To honour Welles, a plaza right next to the port was recently named after him. In the meantime, Essaouira has become a popular location, increasingly selected by international film studios. The Danish gallery owner Frédéric Damgaard arrived in Essaouira in the 1970's, opening a gallery that is located in the Kasbah of the town and which focuses on the works of only local or Moroccan artists. Gradually, more and more galleries appeared (cf. JMAHRI 2002), some belonging to foreigners, displaying their own work and some belonging to local Moroccan artists (cf. DAMGAARD 2002). More tourists, locals and even newcomers moving from Europe to Essaouira continue to come for inspiration and live out their artistic creativity there. A wide variety of artistic activities have established themselves meanwhile in the town (cf. HELLER-GOLDENBERG 2002). The result: Essaouira has gained the reputation of being an arts town. Admittedly, the lines between art and commerce are often very blurred.

Consumer goods from Essaouira, in short the "Essaouira Spirit" include: the medina, walls, buildings, wind, sea, beach and music as well as wood and paintings. These goods are being prepared and marketed in a suitable manner. Essaouira has entered a global platform and thus exposed itself to the world as a product with an established history that has been shaped and improved in the meantime according to given standards. A perfect cultural product for Europeans marred as a rule by rationality. The travel guide *Lonely Planet* sums up the town as follows: "Essaouira is the most popular of the coastal towns with independent travellers, and only rarely do you see package tourists here. The town has a magnificent beach that curves for miles to the south, and its relaxed atmosphere is in complete contrast to the souq cities of Marrakesh, Fès, Meknès and Tangier" (FLETCHER et al. 2001, 428). Or even more succinctly: "Essaouira Spirit. Ancienne capitale hippie et nouveau temple de la world music" (ALLALI a. ZIZI 2002, 16).

Today, the cited goods are in high demand, and are being bought, consumed and even fashioned by visitors and tourists from Morocco and all four corners of the world, especially Europe. These goods have to be linked

with a special group of the new Souiris – the Europeans living in Essaouira's medina.

#### 4 *The new Souiris in the Medina of Mogador*

The Europeans living in the old town play an important role as actors in the medina, since the majority of these new Souiris spend most of the year there or live there permanently. Europeans are thoughtful when constructing and restoring their homes and thus alter the face of the medina. They also make significant investments and as a result have an interest in preserving their home and in shaping the town. What could not be accomplished through a variety of actions and measures to save the neglected buildings became achievable by means of a process implemented during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "Foreigners, principally Europeans, buy and/or rent lodgings in the North Africa's historic old towns and, by doing so, contribute to restoring, transforming and finding new uses for the buildings" (ESCHER 2001, 23). Nowadays, the old towns are also at the mercy of the capital of the European "invaders" (ESCHER 2001, 36). In addition to the many visitors, they contribute to modifying everyday life in the medina as well. When asked why they decided to move to Essaouira, common responses are: "*The weather, people, easy to get to, convenient*". There is also the "sex" factor that appeals to homosexual and heterosexual foreigners. Many Europeans have noticed that "Here anything can be had for money" (cf. BYER 2004). As in other cities of Morocco, the gay community is an important driving force for the development of Essaouira by foreign investors.

It is very difficult to reconstruct the origin of Europeans moving into the medina, since there is usually no documentation or any traces to explore, as is the case with a Danish couple<sup>2)</sup>. This state of affairs remained in the years to follow. In the 1990's, however, the demand for real estate in the old town on part of Europeans began to increase. More and more European investors are taking notice of Morocco's historic old towns in con-

nection with Marrakech. The broadcast of the French magazine *Capital* provides a compelling impetus. The programme *Les Jackpots de l'Été*, which was aired on June 14, 1998 in French TV, focused on purchasing a house in the old towns of Marrakech and Essaouira under the title *J'achète ma résidence secondaire. Une maison de campagne à partir de 100.000 Francs*. Feature films, print media (Maisons du Maroc, Medina, Condé Nast Traveller, Lufthansa Magazine), the Temps du Maroc – a programme hosted in France throughout 1999 to showcase Morocco, and finally the Internet have contributed to further bolstering foreigners' interest in buying real estate in the medina. Even though real estate prices have increased substantially since 1998, it seems that they are still attractive to many investors. For instance, eight years ago, it was still possible to buy a nice spacious house for € 10,000. Nowadays, a small house, which is in need of repair, costs approx. € 30,000 or more, and there seems to be no end in sight for the upward spiral of prices. Even 9/11 and the March 2003 suicide bombing in Casablanca have had no apparent impact on the situation. The last empirical census of the five conducted in May and June of 2003 showed 298 non-Moroccan property owners who had more than 320 properties in the medina<sup>3)</sup>. More than fifty percent of the foreign property owners – 148 persons – came from France. The second largest group were Germans, amounting to almost 15%. Taking into consideration the distribution of the foreign properties in the medina, four aspects become evident: many properties owned by the Europeans living there are located primarily in the area of the wall close to the sea in the Bani Antar neighbourhood at the Skala, in the southern part of Kasbah in close proximity and with view of the harbour and at the edge of the Mellah. Without a doubt, safety and closeness to the harbour, as well as a view of the sea or roofs of the medina had a part in the selection of these areas. Frequently, acquaintances or friends of these European residents buy into the neighbourhood of the first buyer. The neighbourhood effect has led to the formation of small national concentrations, especially among non-French Europeans. Almost all of the German properties are located in the Skala neighbourhood. Many French properties, however, are scattered in the neighbourhoods of Chebanat, Bani Antar, Kasbah and Ahl Agadir.

<sup>2)</sup> A Danish couple, who came to Essaouira in the mid 1970's, was supposedly the first foreigners to settle there. Since both worked in the fashion industry, they trained some locals to become seamstresses and opened a textile factory on the outskirts of town. They sold their clothing from Essaouira to Los Angeles. After their passing in the mid-1990's, they bequeathed their entire estate in Essaouira to their trusted Moroccan servant of many years, who sold everything and today goes by the nickname "tailor".

<sup>3)</sup> This only included real estate with houses, in which foreigners lived, or were renovated, converted and/or used. The census did not take into account any possible speculative acquisitions and non-used real estate owned by Europeans.

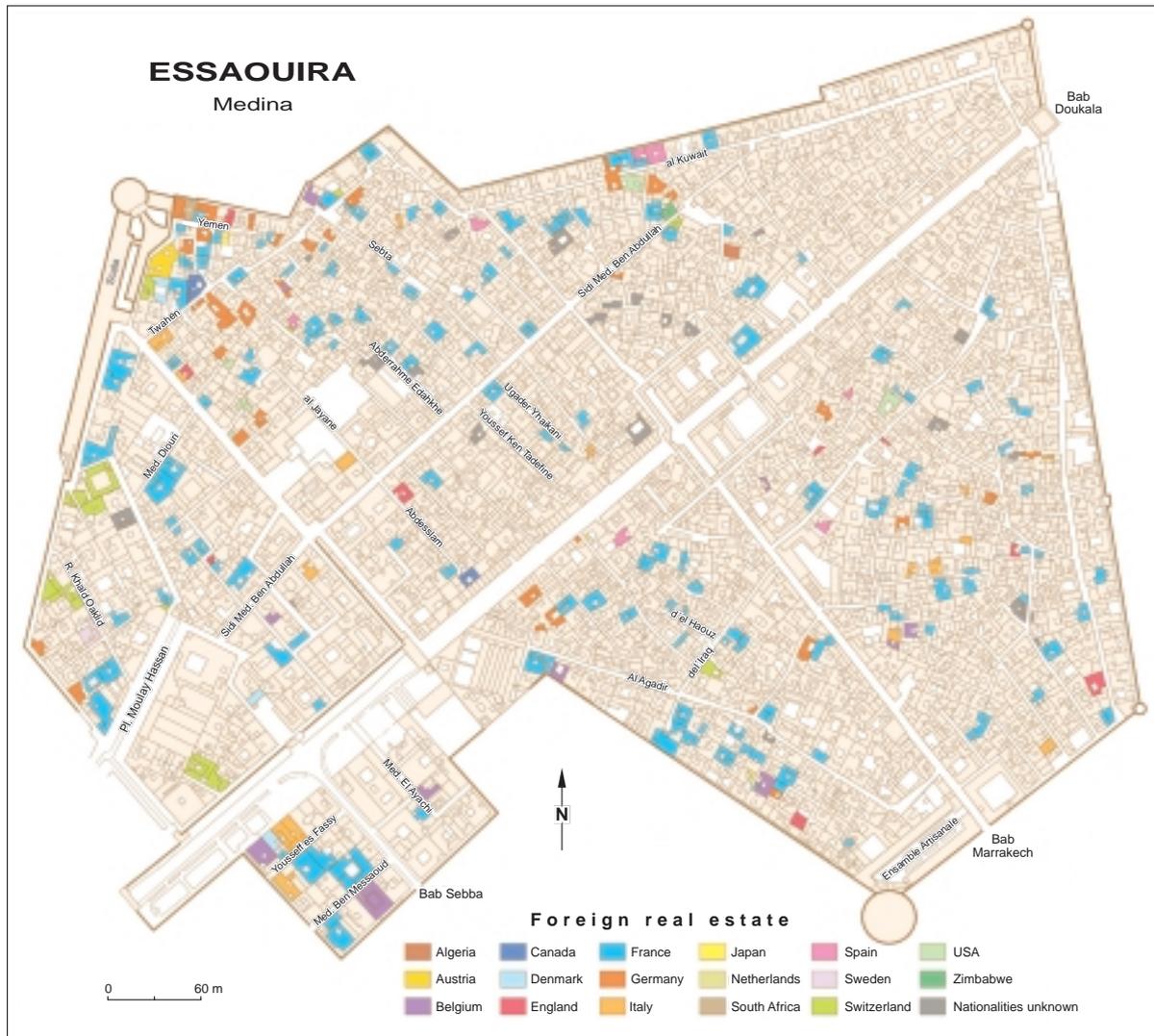


Fig. 3: Real estate owned by foreigners in Essaouira’s medina  
Ausländisches Immobilieneigentum in der Medina von Essaouira

### 5 European consumers of Essaouira

There is no doubt that the Europeans living in Essaouira’s old town were motivated to buy into the old town as a result of the cultural goods mentioned. Some things are still unknown however, for instance which Europeans live in the old town, what motivated them to move there and what are their interests in Essaouira. Based on qualitative interviews conducted with approx. one-third of all European property owners in the old town and a careful evaluation with regard to the topics asked, it is possible to break down the European prop-

erty owners into four groups: *Creative New Souiris*, *Active Opters-out*, *Well-off Tourists* and *Isolated Retirees*. Based on this approximate classification, it is only partly possible to assign many people to just one of these groups, as in many cases people can fall into several groups. The groups mentioned illustrate the interests and self-perception of the Europeans as well as their motivation for settling in the medina. The interests and needs of the Europeans residing in the medina are outlined metaphorically with the aid of characteristic quotes<sup>4)</sup> and representative mental maps selected for each group.

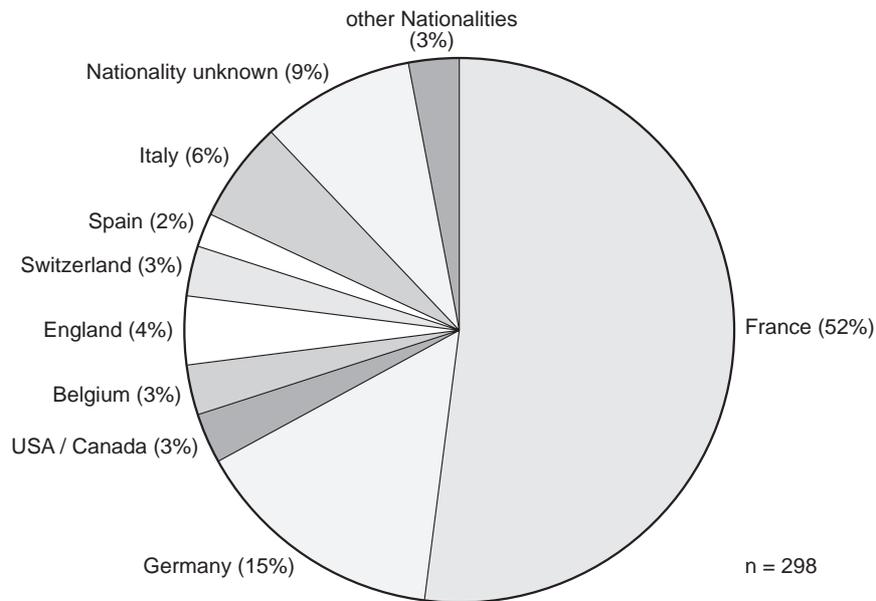


Fig. 4: Percentage of different nationalities owning real estate in the medina  
Nationale Prozentanteile am ausländischen Immobilieneigentum in der Medina von Essaouira

#### *Creative new Souiris*

The Creative group encompasses real estate owners in the medina who pursue artistic and creative activities in the broadest sense, including photographers, architects, painters, authors, web designers, advertising managers, scientists and the like. They are people who consciously shape and think about their lives very carefully. They have a great potential for creativity and enjoy discussion with strangers and others, as can be seen when examining their personal background. Fifty percent of all the property owners in Essaouira's medina make up this group. This group of people attaches great importance to having an above-average self-awareness. The people in this group have experience in a variety of creative professions. *I have done lots of different jobs. I've worked in an art gallery, I've worked as free photographer; I have done several different things. I'm very butterfly-like. Do a thing for a certain amount of time and then I'll say I'm interested in doing something else.* They have the assurance of living in a European community in Essaouira with people who have had comparable experiences. *Essaouira is full of people like me who have a different approach to life.* These open, urbane people are always in search of new challenges in order to test the depth of their own abilities

and ways temporarily or even permanently to escape the safe and secure life of Europe: *I need to realise a sort of potential in me.* The challenges Essaouira poses and how the town is perceived represent inconsistencies for this group of people that are welcomed and can be explored as a source for creativity. *I find that this place is very full of paradoxes.* It is not necessary for these Europeans to resolve these inconsistencies. Instead, they prefer to live with them. *I think the spirit of togetherness, which is also in part coexistence, between Europeans and the locals is very exciting.* To this end, it is incumbent upon the Europeans to try new forms of communication.

One should not forget that many well-off people in this group are not only interested in creating a pleasant place (of residence), but they are also keen on doing something now for the local arts and artists and therefore something for their own self-respect as well: *I saw this room and thought this could be a good place. There is no place for those people to expose. Then I heard the music and then I started working with a group of musicians from here, touring them in Europe.* After all, personal involvement alone would not suffice for artists who settle there: *You really have to have a topic here.* By hiring Moroccan employees, these Europeans also strive to do something for one's own sense of self-worth: *And also I feel for me it's good to employ Moroccan people.*

Many creative Europeans idealize the medina in their minds. In doing so, they emphasize the aesthetic and fresh atmosphere of the natural and cultural area that is reflected in the metaphorical and symbolic

<sup>4)</sup> The interviews were conducted in English, German and French. The quotes of the Europeans living in the Medina have been translated in English and placed in italics.

buildings, ships and fish. In addition to the environment, the community of the medina is idealistically structured: a peaceful coexistence with other religions and different lifestyles is the message of the *mental maps* the creative Europeans have.

#### Active opters-out

Most active opters-out came to Essaouira without any specific ideas. They did not want to be in Europe, and that is why they want to stay there, and they see the necessity of earning money. They turn to an activity that apparently promises good profit; they invest in a hotel, a maison d’hôtes, a restaurant or a shop. Another part of these Europeans moved to Essaouira for biographical reasons. That could be, for instance, due to being married to a Moroccan, or maybe they are people who were born in Morocco or who grew up there and would like to recapture part of their childhood.

Another part of this group of Europeans came to realize a dream: *We came here a year and four months ago to make our dream, to make a little hotel. To fulfill their expectations, they do not want a purposeful, functional arrangement. They strive to develop their own style. This is achieved either by means of decoration and furnishings or by mixing with guests in an extravagant fashion. We wanted a bit to mix the Mediterranean style with the Atlantic coast style. We didn’t want to do it very Moroccan either because there are lots of beautiful houses that have Moroccan style with a lot of money. And you need time, space and money to make it nice.* Members of this group have made substan-

tial investments that sometimes encompass their entire assets, which young travel entrepreneurs invest in the medina. *I had to sell my watch collection from house to house and then gave the people the money . . .* Success seems promising not only due to the aesthetics of the town and their scenic location, but also because of the beauty and the favourable climate. *Essaouira is a very special place. It is never cold nor does it really get hot here. That means we have tourists all year round.* And the young entrepreneurs know the tourists’ demand for Essaouira, since many of them happened to discover the port town as tourists themselves before deciding to settle there.

The ability to decide on how one wants to lead his or her life is important for this group of people. In Essaouira, they can determine how the day proceeds themselves, contrary to Europe where one is subject to tight time constraints. *In this time especially, there is no time. Only when you look for the sun and you know the hour a day. We’re never stressed, never.* Nevertheless, the medina is characterized by the daily shopping routine that manifests itself as subjective mental maps. The walk from one’s home to the market, the greengrocer’s stand and the wine shop or the lookout point at the Skala sticks in one’s mind and betrays the primary concern. These Europeans have a conventional economic interest in international tourism in Essaouira and thus endeavour to shape and further influence this according to their individual tastes and ideas.

Accounting for almost 25% of the European investors in the medina, they represent as very dynamic factor and provide a stimulating effect by purposefully

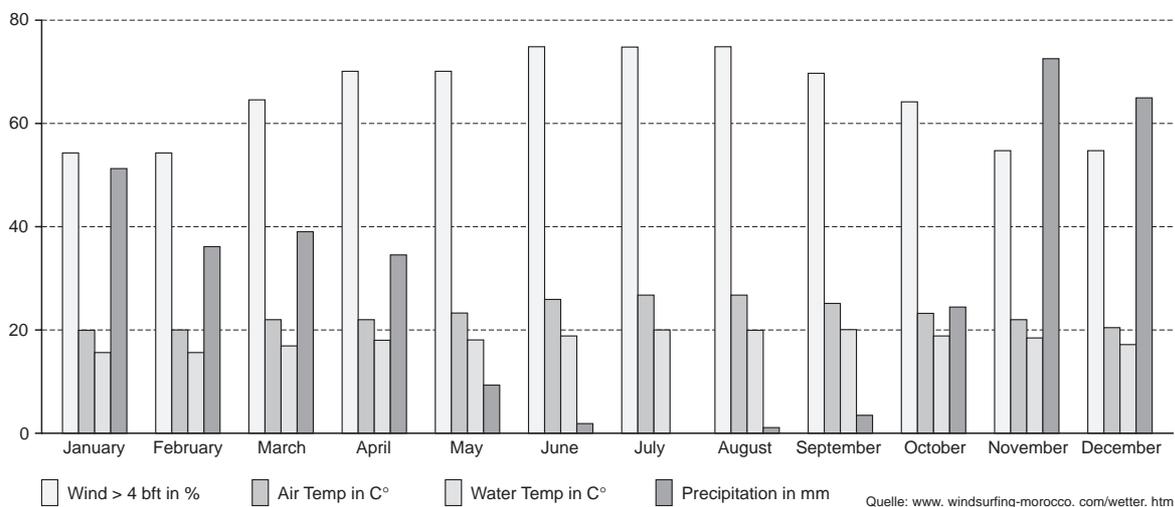


Fig. 5: Wind, precipitation, air and water temperature in Essaouira

Windverhältnisse, Niederschläge, Luft- und Wassertemperaturen in Essaouira



Fig. 6: Postmodernism's significance for Essaouira  
Das postmoderne Symbol der Stadt Essaouira

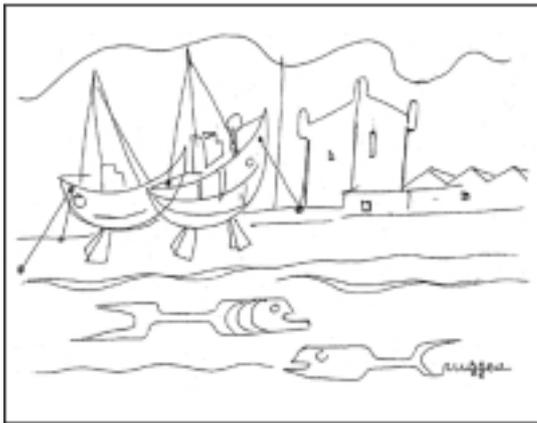


Fig. 7: Creative new Souris group  
Die kreativen Neu-Souiri



Fig. 9: Well-off Tourists group  
Die vermögenden Touristen



Fig. 8: Active Opters-out group  
Die aktiven Aussteiger



Fig. 10: Isolated Retirees group  
Die isolierten Rentner

The sketches, maps and symbols drawn by the Europeans living in Essaouira's medina reveal their perceptions and memories in respect to and about the old town. The drawing of a wave with a surfer has been the established marketing symbol for the town for a fairly long time now (Fig. 6). It reflects the easy and windy attitude towards life the European inhabitants have. Figures 7 through 10 were drawn by individuals during the course of interviews. Each of the selected sketches and drawings represents respectively one of the groups conceptualized by the authors for the foreigners living there.

linking international tourists to Essaouira whom they attract with the aid of modern media, such as the Internet: *One day, I suddenly had this idea to go online and register ‘essaouira.com’. Then I created a website. It has been relatively good from the get-go. [...] People are weird. When they hear that someone has already bought something and nothing bad has happened, they have more trust. Nobody wants to take the first step. But when they see that there are no problems, more and more come.*

Almost all the investors have one thing in common – their desire to isolate themselves in their subjective awareness: *I haven’t come here to meet Europeans, I hang out with the ones I like.* In other words, the contact that exists between the Europeans in Essaouira is rather selective or more often accidental. That is also a sign for the rather withdrawn, private and intimate life that was not even possible in this manner for many in their native countries, in part due to family or professional obligations.

#### *Well-off tourists*

One sixth of the Europeans living in the medina comprise the group of successful tourists. These Europeans have their second or third home in Essaouira. They have an above-average income in their native countries. In most cases, their houses and apartments have been restored and refurbished extensively. The houses are symbols and represent a specific dimension of their self-realization. Their work in Europe is so demanding that they almost have no time for anything else. In Morocco, they find the necessary relaxation and freedom to live as they see fit. *We are actually only interested in rest and relaxation. In Germany, we have a stressful job and there is a lot of hustle and bustle.* They explore the medina, even though they prefer as a rule to relax during their frequent stays and avoid excursions in the neighbourhood. *Nous restons ici, intra-muros. Dans la maison, toute la journée. Nous sommes contents.* Usually, they come to Essaouira for about three months altogether, distributed over the year during multiple stays. For these stressed Europeans each and every aesthetic quality of the town that has been discussed is important, regardless of how often or whether they still take notice of them. Even the cultural contrast, which evidently for these Europeans could also be regarded as the converse to their work environment, is of significance: *Fly 3 1/2 hours and you are in a different culture. You are greeted with other scents, other sounds, a different mentality. In the end that’s what is really fascinating.* Nevertheless, the diversity and foreign factor should not be excessive. Safety and personal freedom, in particular, are a must for these people. And they find these in Essaouira: *... people who have never been here because it’s just a Muslim country think everyone is the same as the other,*

*they don’t understand that it’s very liberal and very safe.* The Europeans there describe both the community and the Islam that is practiced as liberal: *Morocco is liberal, liberal Islam.* The only matter that bothers these tourists in Essaouira’s medina is the fear of meeting other Europeans: *I think the only thing we are concerned about is the sheer number of hotels. I think it may get to the point one day where it’s nothing but tourists. It will ruin the place.* They know their way around in the medina, as the very detailed map-like sketches reveal. They observe the changes unfolding in the town, in which they also play a significant part by adding their personal touch to their homes.

#### *Isolated retirees*

The Europeans of the “retiree” group deliberately chose to settle in Essaouira for the long run. They are familiar with Morocco, which they have visited frequently in the past. *We spent many years de vivre ici. Sortie, retourné, sortie, retourné. L’Europe et le Maroc avec l’idée fixe de dire un jour le Maroc va devenir la dernière étape de ma vie. Et la réalisation elle est arrivée. Je suis arrivé au Maroc dix années avant.* They are not bound to the European community and do not really maintain contact with Moroccans. They do have Moroccan servants to help with the house. In every aspect, they are very isolated. And they like the isolation, since they prefer to remain anonymous and not to be bothered: *One thing I really love about Morocco is that the people are not curious. In all the years that I have been coming here, not a single person has ever asked me where I come from.* They usually stay there for at least six months at a time every year or even settle in Morocco permanently, adapting in public to the customs and conventions of their host country. *People did not summon us here, we are here of our own free will. Therefore, I have to acclimatize.* They live on their savings, their assets or their retirement benefits. That is one reason why they decided on Morocco – life is inexpensive: *You can live here for about two euros, when converted to the local currency.* Moreover, Essaouira has the infrastructure that is important for elderly and yet gives them the feeling of living in a small village. *There is an airport, for when it is needed. There is a hospital too, even though it is dreadful. There is also a fire department, a pharmacy, and doctors. Yes, it is a city, it has everything, and yet it is still a village.* For this group, the medina is only a scenery that they enjoy, and the surroundings in which they take pleasure. Usually, these permanent tourists accept the medina as a whole and are less interested in the individual establishments and the details. They are also regarded by the Moroccans as tourists. While they do not wish to abandon their European ways and language, they expect to be received neutrally or even treated as a Souiri. *One thing that can be quite tiring*

*is sometimes you just wanna go into a shop and buy something, you wanna know how much it is, you are always treated as a tourist when you start the game. Sometimes you don't wanna play the game.*

## 6 Results

In spite of the varied generation situation and the different demands of the Europeans living in Essaouira, the goods sought out by Europeans can be categorized under “atmosphere and creativity” and “individual self-realization and social acceptance”. The European homeowners find their fulfilment in the medina through local *cultural products*. Creativity can evolve, be triggered and experienced for the Europeans in a culturally diverse, historically unique and liberal atmosphere. The assimilation of culture(s), extroversion, artistic expressionism and unconventional way of life are only possible, however, when living in the (old) town. After all, a “mere” tourist does not have the time to experience all of these phenomena and to allow himself to be inspired, let alone turn his life upside down. Only those who live between the walls, feel the cool Atlantic breeze on a daily basis, and internalize the smells

of the Suqs can use the atmosphere as inspiration creatively to actualize themselves. Individualization is very important! Essaouira has become a personal stage for where the curtain seemingly never falls. With all its possibilities, it offers a platform for an almost perfect self-dramatization. A play between worlds, cultures and rules. Basically, the cast is the same, while the directors change everyday. The audience, however, has no idea what transpires backstage.

Essaouira Spirit, the specific local colouring, the image and the status-quo of the medina with its historical events and the seemingly infinite possibilities for utilizing the location provide for the Europeans living there “atmosphere and creativity”, on the basis of which they experience “individual self-realization and social acceptance”. These are the postmodern goods that are in demand among the Europeans residing in Essaouira’s medina. Those goods can be found, in particular, at a “place on the margin” of the European Community. The medina of Essaouira should be preserved and maintained as a cultural product. It is to be hoped that future urban and regional planning will preserve Essaouira’s cultural goods and not sacrifice them during planning discussions in favour of mass tourism (PLAN AZUR 2003).

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