

Short thesis for the degree of doctor of philosophy (PhD)

**Small and Medium-Sized Towns in The Era of
Economic Globalization: A Case Study of Algeria**

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1. Introduction

The integration into global value chains/production networks became a key research issue in understanding the spatially uneven development in the era of globalization (Coe & Yeung, 2019). These approaches positioned between macro and microeconomics focus on the organization of spatially fragmented production systems connecting different regions and nations and on the upgrading possibilities (a shift toward higher value-added and capture) of the participants with particular attention to the global (semi-) periphery (Gereffi et al., 2005; Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002; Yeung & Coe, 2015). Research highlights the dynamic processes of strategic coupling, where multiscale assets and institutions shape regional participation in GPNs, with outcomes influenced by factors like state policies and local capabilities (Dawley et al., 2019; MacKinnon, 2012; Yeung, 2015). Recent studies recognize the state's multifaceted role as a regulator, producer, and buyer, shifting from solely facilitative functions to active participation in response to global trends like neo-nationalism (Horner, 2017; Smith, 2015).

Local economies, particularly in cities and small towns, emerge as critical drivers of economic activity. Cities leverage dynamic localized capabilities, such as knowledge and resource management, to foster growth and innovation, while small towns contribute through strategic assets like infrastructure and policy frameworks, enabling GPN integration (Hoover & Giarratani, 2020; Audretsch, 2007). However, Algeria's rentier economy, heavily reliant on oil exports, poses significant challenges to economic diversification and urbanization. This structure, characterized by state-controlled revenues and bureaucratic inefficiencies, restricts private-sector growth and exacerbates reliance on external rents, leaving the economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations (Aurèlia & de la Cámara, 2005; Hami, 2021; Matsunaga & Bouyssou, 2000).

Urbanization in Algeria reflects broader economic challenges, characterized by rapid yet uneven growth following independence. While large cities expanded due to internal migration, smaller towns have increasingly played a crucial role in alleviating urban pressure and promoting balanced regional development (Bousmaha et al., 2021). Their growth highlights the intersection of urban and economic geographical research, particularly in addressing spatial rebalancing and economic diversification. By fostering urban-rural interactions and integrating into broader economic networks, small towns contribute to sustainable urbanization while reducing regional disparities. These dynamics underscore the interconnectedness of global production networks, local economies, and Algeria's rentier economic structure, reinforcing the strategic importance of small towns in national development policies.

2. Aims and structure of the research

The primary aim of this research is to explore the complex interplay between small and medium-sized towns (SMSTs) in Algeria and their roles in the global production network (GPN), with particular attention to the socio-economic and spatial transformations in the context of economic globalization.

The specific objectives of this research are:

- Urbanization as a Catalyst for Economic Growth: Urbanization creates economic activity, innovation, and labor concentration hubs. Algeria's urban centers are increasingly serving as engines of growth by connecting local economies to broader global markets. Well-urbanized SMSTs can mitigate overconcentration in large cities, distributing economic benefits evenly across regions.
- Integration with Global Production Networks (GPNs): On the one hand, explore the sectoral and regional patterns of Algeria's

participation in global production networks, focusing on the influence of the country's rentier-state economic structure on its integration into the global economy. On the other hand, by integrating into GPNs, Algerian industries in SMSTs can access global markets, improve production standards, and benefit from knowledge transfer.

- State's Role in Development: Algeria's state policies, such as subsidies, infrastructure investments, and industrial decentralization, are critical in fostering urban growth and integrating local industries into global systems. The state's push to develop SMSTs aligns with its goal of reducing urban-rural disparities and ensuring equitable development.
- Importance of Small and Medium-Sized Towns: SMSTs are intermediaries between rural and urban economies. They provide localized production capabilities, close-knit community ties, and cost-effective labor, which are essential for industries requiring proximity to both raw materials and markets. Focusing on SMTs helps alleviate the pressures on larger cities, fostering sustainable urban growth.
- Conduct a Case Study of an Algerian Small Town's Integration into GPNs: Investigate how a specific small town in Algeria can be integrated into global production networks, offering insights into the processes and factors that facilitate or hinder such integration locally.
- Unique Algerian Context: Algeria's resource wealth, especially in hydrocarbons, and its strategic geographic location between Africa and Europe make it well-positioned for GPN integration. However, the country's vast territory and uneven development necessitate a balanced approach, where SMSTs become pivotal nodes of growth and development.

The structure of the research is presented in Figure 1

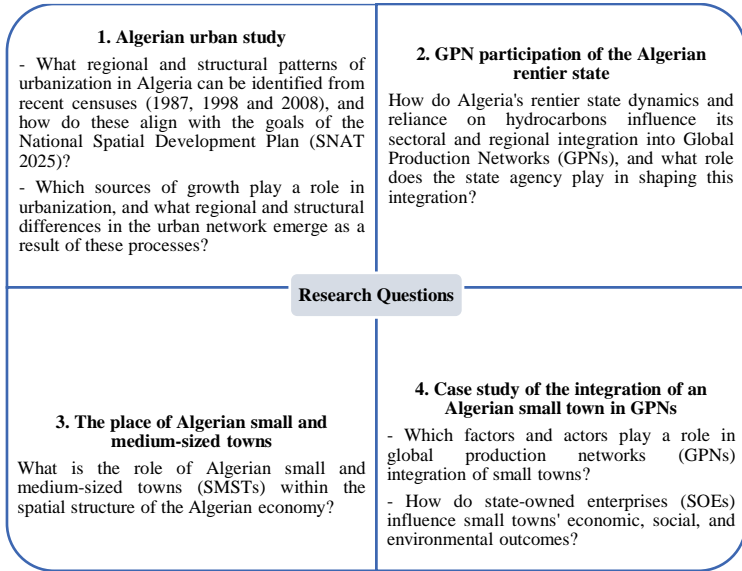


Figure 1. The structure of the results. Source: edited by the author

3. Materials and methods

The dissertation utilized secondary data, as shown in Table 1, in conjunction with primary data obtained through semi-structured interviews, the specifics of which are outlined in Table 2.

Table 1. List of the different secondary sources. Source: edited by the author

Group of sources	Source	Purpose
Literature	-Urban /Urbanization -Cities and towns	To define urbanization processes, analyze the role of towns in spatial and economic development, and

	-Small and medium-sized towns	emphasize the significance of small and medium-sized towns in shaping balanced urban networks.
	Rentier State	To examine how Algeria's rentier state model impacts economic structures and governance.
	Globalization /GPN research	To comprehensively understand how global economic forces and state structures shape urban and regional development, especially in the context of smaller urban centers within global and national economies.
Statistical data	General census of population and inhabitants of 1987, 1998, 2008	For examining Algerian urbanization trends across regions
	Export data from the International Trade Centre	Examines the economic progress in Algeria between 2003 and 2022
	Foreign trade data of International Trade Centre	Examines the place of Algeria in cement exporters and imports
	OPEC	To have the needed data about the Algerian oil prices
	Algerian economic census of 2011	To have the needed data about the distribution of economic entities in Algerian SMSTs

Economic and policy documents	Algeria's National Spatial Development Plan (SNAT, 2025)	To compare our results with the state's strategies for reducing spatial inequalities and enhancing the attractiveness
	Master Plan for Development and Urbanism of Sigus.	To have the needed information about the case study of Sigus
	Deferent Algerian cement factory web pages	To summarize the cement plants in Algeria
	Official Journal of the Algerian Republic (SGG)	To obtain the relevant Algerian laws
	Newspaper articles	For examining the industrial development of Algeria's small towns
	Deferent Algerian development programs	To have a background about the national socio-economic context of Algeria

The most recent Algerian general census was in 2008, as the planned census for 2018 was postponed to September 2022 due to challenges posed by COVID-19 and financial constraints, and its results are yet to be compiled. These census records offer a consistent and comprehensive dataset, ensuring uniformity in spatial and settlement size structures for the periods surrounding the transition into and out of the millennium. Algeria's 2011 economic census was its first and only one, serving several key purposes. First, it aimed to update the directory of individuals and entities, forming the backbone for statistical operations at the National Office of Statistics. This directory provides a comprehensive, reliable, and current database for economic analysis. Second, it offers a sampling framework for enterprise surveys, particularly in the private sector, which had previously been

less understood. Third, it facilitates monitoring various economic sectors (excluding agriculture), such as industry, commerce, construction, and services. Finally, it contributes to developing key activity indicators, particularly for the private sector, which plays an increasingly significant role in Algeria's economy.

The National Spatial Development Plan (SNAT) serves as the spatial framework for our regional analysis, emphasizing strategies to reduce spatial disparities and enhance the appeal of selected regions over the next two decades within sustainable development. The research analyzes Algeria's economy alongside Morocco and Tunisia, focusing on differences in commodity and regional trade structures. It highlights the utility of foreign trade data as a tool to assess and describe the countries' overall participation in global production networks, and the chosen timeframe the export data between 2003 and 2022 is justified by the availability of consistent data and the impact of globalization and new economic policies in Algeria during this period.

For the analysis, I used figures, tables, charts, and maps made by Excel and ArcMap software for good visualization of the quantitative part of the results. Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) was also employed to examine the dynamics and variations in concentration across 97 commodity categories and 212 geographic regions. The HHI is a widely used measure of market or sectoral concentration that reflects the degree of concentration within a particular industry, market, or economic structure (Hirschman, 1945). I also used the Location Quotient (LQ) which is an analytical tool used in economic geography and regional planning to measure the concentration or specialization of a particular industry or sector within a specific geographic area compared to a broader reference area (Isserman, 1977). LQ helps identify the relative specialization of an economic sector within a medium-sized town, small town, and the smallest urban settlement compared to a broader area. An LQ greater than 1.5 suggests a

significant concentration or overrepresentation of a particular activity in the town.

The cement industry is a compelling case study due to its multifaceted relevance to Algeria's economic and regional development strategies. As the country seeks to diversify its economy beyond hydrocarbons, the cement sector emerges as a vital component of the non-hydrocarbon economy, aligning with efforts to broaden economic bases and reduce dependency on oil and gas revenues. This industry is critical in addressing the surging domestic demand for construction materials, fueled by significant infrastructure and construction booms in recent years. Beyond its domestic contributions, Algeria's cement sector has gained prominence as a major exporter, supporting the national objective of enhancing export diversification through resource-based industries. Predominantly located in smaller towns, the cement industry significantly influences local economies and communities, providing a valuable lens for examining socio-economic transformations in these areas. While environmental concerns associated with the sector are widely acknowledged, there remains a research gap regarding the broader developmental effects of cement factories. This presents an opportunity to investigate the intersection of economic growth, environmental considerations, and localized development impacts, highlighting the cement industry's dual role in fostering economic advancement and posing environmental challenges. One of the cement factories is located in Sigus, a small town that aligns with the type of city under study, representing one of the key reasons for selecting this town. Additionally, Sigus is classified as an overrepresented industrial town, and my connections enabled me to conduct several interviews, as shown in the table below.

Table 2. List of interviewees and their contributions to the case study of Sigus. Source: edited by the author

Position of interviewee	Contribution of interviewee
Operations manager of Sigus factory	General presentation of the Sigus factory, orders to the workers to help us in collecting the needed info.
Head of production department of Sigus factory	Production information about the factory.
HR manager of Sigus factory	Employees' information about the factory.
A laboratory engineer of Sigus factory	Presentation of the products and their quality.
A mechanical engineer of Sigus factory	Presentation of the production (oven, machines etc.).
Environmental inspectorate / Directorate of Environment of Oum El Bouaghi province	Presentation of the environmental effects.
Director of the Directorate of Energy and Mines of Oum El Bouaghi province	Presentation of the relation between the factory and the directorate (of energy and mines), and order to the head of the fuel office to give us more information.
Head of the Fuel Office / Directorate of Energy and Mines of Oum El Bouaghi province	Completion of information collected in the factory.
Mayor of Sigous municipality	Presentation of his role in the foundation of the plant.
Directorate of Commerce of Oum El Bouaghi province	Presentation of the relation between the factory and the directorate (of commerce).
Directorate of Industry of Oum El Bouaghi province	Presentation of the relation between the factory and the directorate (of industry).

Head of the Directorate of Civil Protection of Oum El Bouaghi province	Conveyance of internal intervention plan of the plant.
Lawyer of the province of Oum El Bouaghi province	Presentation how the process of land expropriation and compensation which took place through him.

The interviewees were chosen based on their direct connections to the Sigus factory, focusing on individuals with relevant interactions and insights into its operations. The interviews were conducted openly and personally, allowing for in-depth discussions tailored to each participant's specific experiences and roles within the factory. Each interview typically lasted about an hour and was recorded, with detailed notes taken. The primary question was about the interviewees' relationship and role with or within the Sigus factory, encouraging open discussions and comprehensive responses. This approach ensured that the information gathered was both specific to each interviewee and consistent in addressing key aspects of their involvement. The interviews were then compared with one another and, when relevant, cross-referenced with available statistical data, enhancing the consistency and reliability of the research through this triangulation process.

4. Scientific Results

Thesis Statement 1

Algeria is characterized by large disparities, with a significant population concentration in coastal areas influenced by its geographical, historical, and socio-political characteristics and the need for spatial rebalancing, which aligns with the goals of SNAT 2025 for regional development.

The research indicates that urbanization in Algeria has historically concentrated in coastal regions, particularly in major cities such as Algiers, Oran, Constantine, and Annaba, due to better economic opportunities and well-developed infrastructure (Figure 2). However, recent trends highlight a significant shift toward non-coastal regions, especially in the Highlands, where nearly one-third of urban population growth has been recorded, with the Highland Centre experiencing the most substantial expansion. Although urban population growth in the southern regions has been the highest, the expansion of the urban network has primarily been limited to the Hoggar-Tassili region, while in the Southeast, there has been a decline in urban settlements exceeding 5,000 inhabitants. This illustrates a complex pattern of urbanization, with some regions experiencing dynamic growth while others face stagnation or decline.

The research articulates how the findings reflect and relate to the goals outlined in SNAT 2025, which focuses on alleviating spatial inequities and enhancing urban-rural interactions. The plan emphasizes the necessity for a balanced distribution of population and economic activities across the country and particularly advocates for development strategies in underrepresented regions. This research shows that understanding these dynamics is essential for

implementing policies that truly support balanced urban development, reflecting the specific needs and circumstances of different regions.

The research articulates the challenges faced in achieving the ambitious goals of SNAT 2025, such as difficulties in policy implementation, socio-economic barriers, and the legacy of colonial urban structures. At the same time, it identifies opportunities for utilizing existing urban settlements and demographic trends to enhance urban planning and development initiatives.

The connection between the empirical findings and policy implications provides a foundation for future discourse on urbanization in Algeria. It suggests that comprehensive analyses like this research are essential for formulating strategies that optimize resource allocation, enhance infrastructure, and promote sustainable development aligned with national priorities.

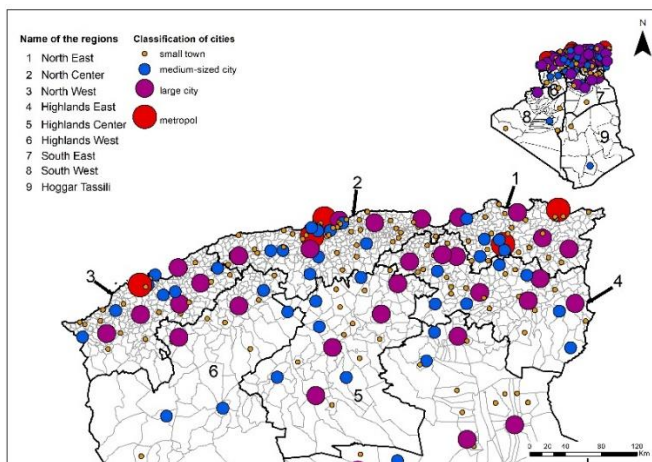


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of urban settlements of different sizes in 2008. Source: edited by the author based on the data of the relevant census

Thesis Statement 2

Algeria is experiencing the first and second stages of urbanization, driven primarily by natural population growth and, secondly, by migration

Algeria is primarily undergoing a process of urban concentration, with significant growth occurring in small and medium-sized towns, particularly in the Highland Centre and Highland East. Large cities in these Highland regions have shown remarkable expansion, accounting for more than 50% of total population growth in this category. Meanwhile, medium-sized towns dominate the Highland West, and the Hoggar-Tassili region remains the only area without large cities, instead emphasizing small-town growth. The data also suggest that metropolises have played a limited role in the urbanization of non-coastal regions and have even experienced population declines in the Northeast. In contrast, suburbanization trends are evident in the North Centre, where urban population growth has outpaced the expansion of the urban network. These shifting dynamics highlight the increasing importance of smaller urban centers in shaping a more balanced and spatially distributed urban structure, reinforcing their role in Algeria's evolving urban network.

The study also identifies natural population growth as the primary driver of urban expansion, with rural-to-urban migration serving as the second source (Figure 3 and 4). Historical legacies, economic development policies, and socio-political challenges shape urban growth in Algeria. The impact of French colonialism established unequal urban infrastructures, primarily in the northern regions, reinforcing current imbalances. Economic development policies aimed at decentralization and modernization have created new industrial centers, attracting rural-to-urban migration. However, challenges such as the outdated management of public enterprises and civil conflict have constrained growth, ultimately influencing

migration trends toward coastal metropolises with better economic prospects and revitalizing certain Saharan regions through emerging industries.

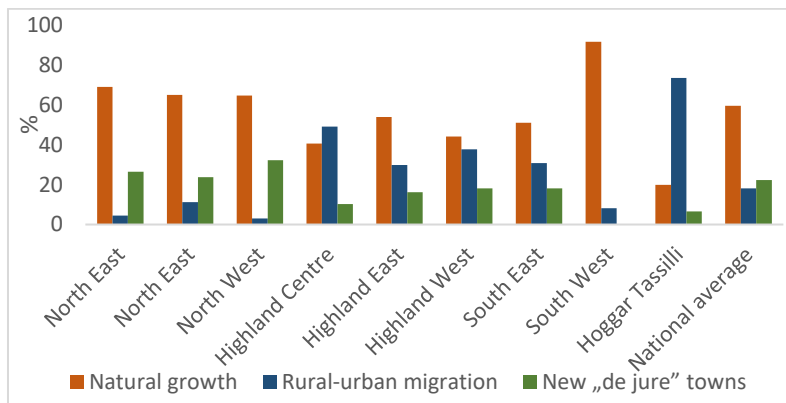


Figure 3. Sources of urban population growth in the regions (1987-1998). Source: own calculation based on the relevant censuses

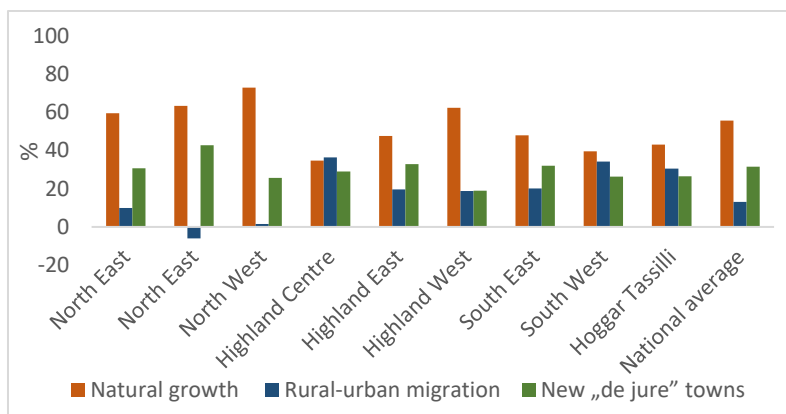


Figure 4. Sources of urban population growth in the regions (1998-2008). Source: own calculation based on the relevant census

Thesis Statement 3

Algeria is a rentier state that heavily depends on the hydrocarbon sector and needs economic diversification. The state plays a complex role in the production network.

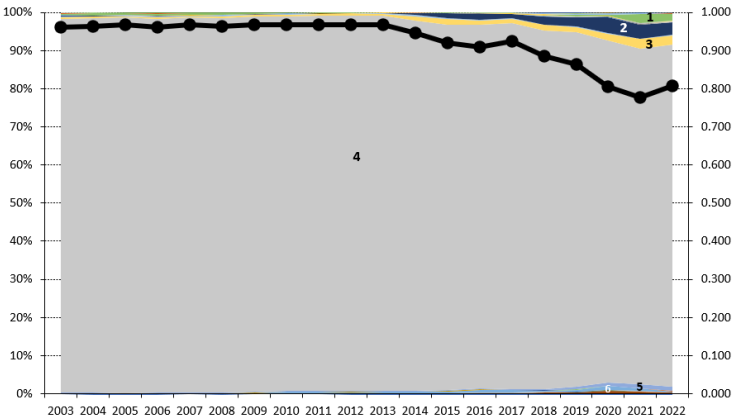
Algeria's economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, which made up around 92% (Figure 5) of its total commodity exports and about 43% of its budget revenues in 2022. The sector's contribution to GDP was substantial, with non-hydrocarbon sectors accounting for only 22% of GDP during the same period. This reliance on a single sector renders the economy vulnerable to global market fluctuations, particularly concerning oil prices, which can be volatile due to geopolitical events and economic changes. For example, a decline in oil prices can result in budget deficits and economic instability, limiting the state's ability to enact flexible and diversified economic policies. As a result, Algeria's strong dependence on hydrocarbons limits opportunities for growth in other sectors and intensifies the challenges of economic diversification.

The state's role in Algeria has historical roots in French colonial administrative traditions and was further reinforced after independence through a centralized, planned economy aimed at nationalizing key industries, especially the oil and gas sectors, which continue to shape its function as both a facilitator and regulator of economic activities today.

The research highlights how Algeria's trade policies reflect its status as a rentier economy. The state's focus on maximizing hydrocarbon revenues influences its trade agreements and relationships, often prioritizing short-term gains over sustainable economic growth. As a

result, Algeria's capacity to engage with global production networks and capital markets remains limited.

Algeria requires strategic reforms to reduce its economic dependency on hydrocarbons for sustainable growth. These reforms should focus on improving the business environment and enhancing human capital and infrastructure to support a broader and more resilient economic base.



Legend: 1. Iron and steel; 2. Fertilisers; 3. Inorganic chemicals; 4. Mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes; 5. Salt; sulphur; earths and stone; plastering materials, lime and cement; 6. Sugars and sugar confectionery

Figure 5. Commodity structure of the Algerian exports. Source: own calculation based on data of International Trade Centre

Thesis Statement 4

Smaller and medium-sized towns play a crucial role in regional economic development. They act as local service hubs, foster economic activity, and support national urbanization trends while hosting significant industrial sectors, making them essential to economic diversification and spatial development policies.

The research highlights that smaller towns are a crucial part of Algeria's urban landscape, comprising about 50% of the total urban population. These towns are vital for maintaining economic diversity and supporting local livelihoods, emphasizing their importance despite the dominant presence of larger metropolitan areas.

Smaller and medium-sized towns display unique economic patterns that enhance regional economies (Table 3). The research indicates these towns act as local service centers, offering jobs and essential services to surrounding rural communities. By fostering local economic activity, they contribute to national urbanization trends, enabling the distribution of socio-economic benefits beyond the main urban centers.

The research underscores the role of these towns in promoting territorial balance within Algeria. As major cities continue to grow, smaller towns help alleviate the pressures of urban sprawl by absorbing some of the population and economic activities, thus contributing to more balanced regional development. This capacity for growth aids in stabilizing the urban network and supports national policies aimed at reducing regional disparities.

Despite their importance, the research recognizes that smaller and medium-sized towns often encounter challenges, such as insufficient infrastructure, limited access to resources, and investment gaps

compared to larger cities. The findings highlight the need for targeted policies that support the development and enhancement of these towns to ensure they can realize their potential role in Algeria's urban network, contributing to a more balanced socio-economic landscape.

Table 3. Distribution of economic entities by deferent types of cities and sectors of activities. Source: edited by the author using ONS 2008 and the Algerian economic statistics of 2011

	Number of enterprises/1000 inhabitants	% of enterprises	Share of sectors (percentage)				
			Construction	Trade	Industry	Services	Total
Metro-poles	14.23	7.52	0.98	56.32	8.16	34.54	100
Large cities	37.19	27.18	0.99	56.38	9.56	33.07	100
Medium-sized towns	35.65	13.55	0.79	58.47	10.02	30.73	100
Small towns	42.19	24.12	0.88	51.34	13.70	34.09	100
Smallest urban settlement	42.62	27.63	0.97	52.99	11.35	34.69	100
Total	34.98	100	0.93	54.51	11.01	33.55	100

Thesis Statement 5

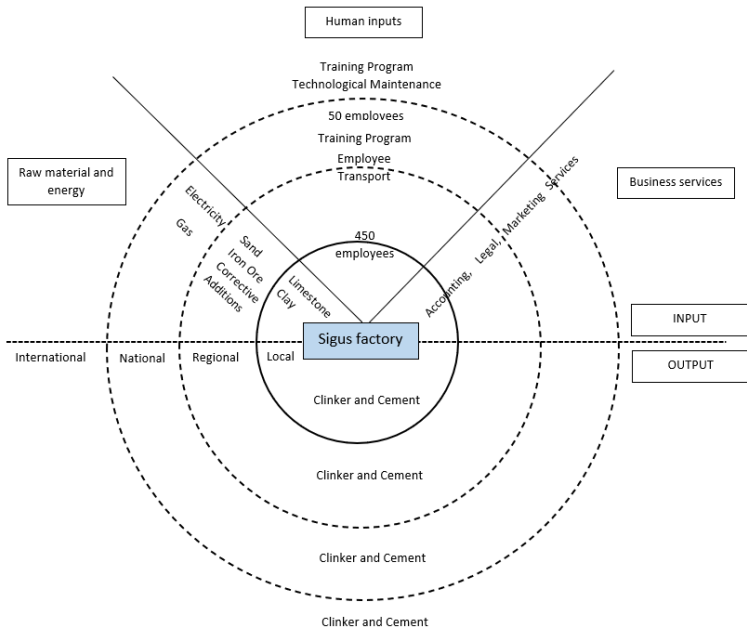
The small-town case study presents the multi-scalar embeddedness in the industrial production network, and the Algerian state functions as a regulator, facilitator, consumer, and producer.

The research emphasizes the critical role of multi-scalar embeddedness in integrating small towns into industrial production networks, mainly through a case study of a cement factory in Sigus, Algeria (Figure 6). It highlights the interaction between local, regional, national, and international dynamics, underscoring that the development and integration processes are not merely localized but influenced by broader frameworks.

A significant aspect of this integration is the multifaceted role of the Algerian state, which acts as a facilitator and regulator of industrial activities, a consumer of cement, and a direct producer through state-owned enterprises, thereby shaping the dynamics of the local and national economy. The study critiques existing literature for often neglecting this centralization, which dictates the nature of economic activities and opportunities in these regions. Regional resources and national policies must be considered to fully understand the economic restructuring and development of small towns.

Additionally, the interplay of local factors—like labor availability and infrastructure—combined with national policies and international market dynamics creates a complex environment in which the factory's operations are not only local but also reflect and respond to broader economic trends at national and global levels. This nuanced understanding of multi-scalar integration challenges oversimplified views of local economic development. It enriches the discussion

regarding the strategic coupling of small towns with industrial networks, informing future research and policy-making approaches.



"Local" means the municipality of Sigus and the province of Oum El Bouaghi, "regional" covers the neighboring provinces, "national" means the level of the country, and "international" includes relations outside Algeria.

Figure 6. Spatial relations of Sigus cement factory. Source: edited by the author.

Thesis Statement 6

Strategic coupling between industrial production networks and small towns' economies, exemplified by the case study of the large-scale state-owned cement factory, can generate growth and wealth, but it also poses risks such as social disruption and environmental degradation

The research provides a detailed analysis of the impact of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) on local economies, focusing on small towns through a case study of a cement factory in Sigus, Algeria. It highlights the concept of strategic coupling, demonstrating how the factory's integration into the local economy fosters economic growth through employment generation, infrastructure development, and enhanced local services. As an SOE, the factory aligns with national development goals, enabling government control over economic outcomes—an aspect particularly significant in Algeria's centralized economy. However, this top-down approach limits local community involvement in decision-making, creating both opportunities for strategic alignment with national priorities and challenges related to local acceptance and social impact.

While the factory contributes to economic development, it also presents challenges, such as declining real estate values near the plant, increased competition that pressures local businesses, and risks of social displacement and cultural erosion. Additionally, as a resource-based industry with significant environmental consequences, its operations underscore the necessity for sustainable practices and regulatory measures to mitigate negative effects. Addressing these complexities requires a balanced approach that maximizes economic benefits while minimizing social and environmental costs.

The research contributes to the broader discourse on SOEs' role in emerging economies, suggesting that they can serve as catalysts for sustained growth and community resilience when strategically integrated with local economies. SOEs can enhance long-term economic stability by fostering stable employment, improving workforce skills, and investing in local infrastructure. This analysis underscores the need for a reevaluation of SOEs' role in economic planning and development strategies, emphasizing a more inclusive and sustainable approach to their integration.

5. Future research

Future research should integrate updated census data to reevaluate Algeria's urban network and regional policies. A broader examination of Global Production Network (GPN) integration, including labor dynamics and environmental impacts, would offer a more comprehensive perspective. Investigating multilevel policy frameworks and local governance can enhance the understanding of production network integration. Further studies on small and medium-sized towns should explore their socio-economic, infrastructural, and sectoral roles in urban and economic development. Additionally, analyzing sector-specific contributions and local characteristics, such as infrastructure and workforce capabilities, will clarify their effects on regional integration.

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

1. Molnár, E., **Saidi, F. A.**, Szabó, K.: Strategic coupling on the European periphery: A case study of a small Hungarian town.
Tér társad. 36 (3), 122-144, 2022. ISSN: 0237-7683.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17649/TET.36.3.3424>
IF: 0.4

Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (3)

2. **Saidi, F. A.**, Saidi, I., Molnár, E.: Industrial Production Networks and Small Towns: A Case Study from Algeria.
Urban Sci. 8 (4), 1-20, 2024. EISSN: 2413-8851.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/urbansci8040180>
IF: 2.1 (2023)
3. Kozma, G., **Saidi, F. A.**, Molnár, E.: Local economic development strategies in a medium-sized city on the European periphery: a path to become an economic center of Eastern Central Europe importance.
Front. Polit. Sci. 6, 1-10, 2024. EISSN: 2673-3145.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1335735>
IF: 2.3 (2023)
4. **Saidi, F. A.**, Phinzi, K., Molnár, E.: Urbanization in Algeria: Toward a More Balanced and Sustainable Urban Network?
Soc. Sci. 12 (3), 1-19, 2023. EISSN: 2076-0760.
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5. **Saidi, F. A.**, Saidi, I.: The Development of Urban Policies in Algeria.
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Total IF of journals (all publications): 6,5

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