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**Sustainable Tourism in Tunisia at the Service of
Regional Development**

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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s and 1990s, Tunisia promoted tourism as an economic sector with a strategy that was oriented towards mass seaside tourism thanks to the establishment of very good hotel units all along the Tunisian coast, particularly in the tourist areas most renowned for their beautiful beaches. This was in fact a political choice to ensure rapid economic growth. With the rise of Tunisia as a tourist destination in the Mediterranean, European tour operators were increasingly demanding by imposing on Tunisian hoteliers the “All Inclusive” formula and tariff conditions in their favor to ensure the filling of the hotels. In addition, the political instability caused by the Arab Spring (the Tunisian revolution) and recently the COVID-19 health crisis, have only paralyzed the tourist sector and further weakened the Tunisian destination in the last decade. Given this observation, it was necessary to find another alternative and open another window to reposition Tunisia as an attractive destination but with another vision. In this context, several national and international initiatives have focused on supporting sustainable tourism projects. These initiatives could develop a new form of responsible tourism that ensures circular economy, preserves biodiversity, respects the environment and reduces energy consumption and the release of CO₂.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable tourism, development, tourism crisis, Tunisia

Introduction

In Tunisia, tourism began to develop in the early 1960's. Currently, it represents one of the pillars of the Tunisian economy and account for 14% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and 20.4 % of Tunisian exports in 2020. In the latter year, tourism revenues covered 50.6% of the trade balance deficit. On the social level, tourism offered then nearly 96611 direct jobs and 289833 indirect ones.

It is clear, however, that the planning of Tunisian tourism focused on the coast. As the main actor in the sector, the Tunisian government planned the development of seaside touristic zones in its first ten-year development plan: 1961-1971. In Tunisia, there are currently 11 touristic areas, 9 of which are predominantly coastal. More than 85% of the touristic establishments are concentrated on the coast. Similarly, 90% of the investments in tourism happen in coastal regions. This resulted in several environmental and social issues. This is in addition to the decline in economic profitability due to the prevalence of discount offers based on an “*All Inclusive*”, formula.

Given the changes in tourism and the new trends at the international level, the Tunisian government must implement a medium-term and long-term strategy to adapt to changes in demand and market requirements. The diversification of the product and the offers is necessary to be able to meet an international demand for continuous growth. The development of authentic and sustainable tourism in the interior regions of the country could have a positive impact on the social, economic, environmental, and cultural levels.

Literature Review

In preparing the bibliography, I made use of various books, articles, studies and reports, mostly in French. I also consulted some references in Arabic and English.

In total, there are more than 100 bibliographical references that were used across this work. In order to engage with the conceptual approach, I have made use of works that deal with the concept of sustainability in tourism. Several studies and reports have been carried out not only by a number of national organizations such as the ONTT and the MEDD (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development) but also an international ones such the United Nations—a 2004 study titled Cultural Tourism in Tunisia. This is to provide a general overview of cultural tourism in Tunisia.

I have also used statistics published by major governmental organizations such as the censuses of the INS (National Institute of Statistics), the annual reports of the ONTT (Tunisian National Tourism Office) and the ODS (Office of Development of the South).

Methodology

The tools used in my research are diverse. They include a conceptual part that deals with my reading of and engagement with important theoretical arguments. This is in addition to a field work in some interior regions that have opened to ecological, environmental, geographical and human tourism. However, it must be said from the outset that the conditions for sustainable development are not yet ready to ensure economic dynamism and social balance because of high population growth, high unemployment, and massive legal and illegal emigration to European countries, which generates a strong economic crisis difficult to manage.

Research Approaches

The present work focuses on three parts:

- The first part deals with the conceptual approach: it is about clarifying the concepts of cultural and sustainable tourism. Moreover, I will examine the state of cultural tourism in Tunisia, the challenge to and opportunities for its development, as well as the equitable distribution of tourism projects and the problem of seasonality.
- The second part focuses on the presentation of the geographical, human, heritage and socio-economic specificities of the studied region.
- The third part is devoted to the study of the tourist activity in the interior regions. I will highlight the following aspects:
 - The state of the art of the valorization of the heritage potentialities and the actors who are responsible for it (local actors and stakeholders).
 - Tourism activity and its impacts on local development: focus on the efficiency of the infrastructure in the studied region and its specificities. In addition to modern accommodation units, the study area offers several specific and alternative accommodation possibilities.
 - The impact of sustainable tourism on socio-economic, cultural and environmental development.

Finally, I will discuss the challenges that face the development of cultural and sustainable tourism in the interior regions of Tunisia and propose some solutions.

The Classical Bases of Sustainable Tourism Development

The concept of “*sustainable development*” was coined in 1987 by the “*World Commission on Environment and Development*”, known as the Brundtland

Commission. This concept developed within the UNCED at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in June 1992.

The extension of the concept to tourism took shape in 1995 during a meeting organized in Lanzarote (Canary Islands) by the UNWTO. This led to the publication of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism. According to this charter, sustainable tourism is “*tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts by meeting the needs of visitors, professionals, the environment and host communities*” (www.tourism durable.net). Sustainable tourism development is essentially based on environmental, social and economic aspects.

- Environmental sustainability means promoting tourism that preserves ecosystems and minimizes environmental impacts.
- Social sustainability involves tourism activity that improves the living standards of the local population without overexploiting resources.
- Economic sustainability involves creating a tourism activity that enables effective economic development of the host communities in the medium and long term.

The principles adopted by Dennis Meadows, presented to the Club of Rome in 1972, which emphasized the “*unsustainable nature of indefinite population growth, the use of exhaustible resources, and the increase in pollution*”, as well as the need to reach a point of equilibrium, in order to avoid the return of famines in poor countries and the asphyxiation of wealthy countries by increasing pollution levels.

- Equity and rationality in the use of resources.
- The emergence of civil society.
- The involvement of local communities and the reinvestment of subsidies from this activity.
- The implementation of a new system of redistribution of wealth and natural resources.
- The eco-development process comprises five dimensions, the main principles of which are as follows.
- A social dimension: a more equitable sharing of and access to wealth
- A cultural dimension: integration of endogenous resources and roots into development and modernization models.
- An economic dimension: a more equitable distribution and management of resources.
- A spatial dimension: a reduction in regional disparities.
- An environmental dimension: optimizing the use of resources for social benefit and reducing impacts.

Since its inception, the concept of sustainable tourism has generated much debate. At first it fascinated researchers. Some of them opined that sustainable tourism “*can be summarized as an approach developed to reduce tensions*

between local residents and the tourism industry". (Hughes, 1995). Others believed that *"sustainable tourism has the potential to become a tangible expression of sustainable tourism development"* (Berry Sue and Landkin Adele, 1997). It is therefore *"consolidated as a pillar of current tourism resource management"* (Med Forum, 2001, p. 16).

Yet, several research studies have criticized the notion of sustainable tourism development. Some consider it a *"myth"* that is difficult to achieve. For some authors, *"there are no exact definitions of sustainable tourism..."*. The notion was conceived as an ideology and a viewpoint rather than an exact operational definition (Clark, 1997; In Saarinen jarokko, 2006).

In my opinion, in the context of cultural tourism, the three aspects already mentioned are not sufficient. This is true because sustainable tourism must safeguard the cultural specificities of each region of the world. The cultural aspect remains one of the few elements that escape the logic of globalization.

Knowing that *"without culture there is no tourism"* (Hunzike and Krapf, 1942; In UNESCO, 1976), cultural tourism is partly based on the valorization of local cultural identities. In fact, *"they do not describe social objects, they create them and help them to appear"* (Ballesteros Esteban and Ramirez Macarena Hernandez, 2007). Subsequently, cultures, identities, local heritages, as pillars of cultural tourism development, are *"symbolic, open, political and dynamic. They go beyond the description and representations of societies"*. (Ballesteros Esteban and Ramirez Macarena Hernandez, 2007).

Tunisia: Natural Potential

Tunisia is the smallest country of the Maghreb with an area of 165,000 km² and a population of about 12 million inhabitants. Located at the junction of the two Mediterranean basins and despite its small surface area, Tunisia is wide open to the Mediterranean with 1,300 km of coastline and a vast continental shelf of nearly 80,000 km². The diversity of species and landscapes is relatively high and distributed over the 7 major types of ecosystems found in the Mediterranean basin: coasts, islands, wetlands, mountains, steppes, desert and oases.

The geographical situation of Tunisia confers to its ecosystems a wide interdependence with the whole Mediterranean and Saharan-Indian region. The country rich in contrasts, includes vast mountainous areas in the north and east, well watered constituting the ultimate extension of the Atlas and Saharan Maghreb, the latter being the water tower of Tunisia. It is also a country of high arid steppes drained by endoreic wadis and low coastal semi-arid steppes ending with a low coastline, not very rugged and extending into the sea by a vast continental shelf. Its Saharan zone shelters the Chotts, vast natural salt lakes, sometimes located below sea level, the great Eastern Erg as well as the Dahar massif where the wadis sink and which ends with a gigantic slope which extends between Matmata and the Libyan border. Finally, the Jeffara is a coastal plain, not very unevenly dotted with small hills and small sebkhas and the island of Jerba is a fragment.

Tunisia: Cultural Potential

Tunisia, crossroads of civilizations, has always been a cultural bridge between Europe and Africa and between the Mashreq (Arab East) and the Maghreb (Arab West). Great civilizations have succeeded each other from the pre-Neolithic period: the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Vandals and the Byzantines followed the Libyan occupation. Many Arab dynasties dominated Ifriqiyyah from the 7th to the 16th century. After a short Spanish occupation, the Ottomans ruled it. The suzerains of the Ottoman Empire reined over Tunisia until the 20th century. The end of the Beys' reign coincided with the French occupation. The French protectorate lasted from 1881 to 1956.

Tunisia is the privileged heir of an exceptional multicultural legacy: the civilizations that have succeeded each other and the cultural mixing that has resulted from it have created an astonishing mixture that is unique in its diversity. This is also true in terms of archaeological remains as well as intangible heritage in its entirety. The basement contains countless ancient remains including many buildings of great historical value: the ancient cities of Carthage, Dougga, Utica, the amphitheater of El Jem, Bulla Regia, the Roman mosaics, Oudhna ... etc.. On the surface, it is the Arab and Ottoman buildings that largely dominate in the historic quarters: Mosques, Ribats, Ksour, Zaouias, and Souks. In addition, an interesting architectural heritage of the colonial period still persists in the modern Tunisian city with its striking neoclassical style.

In addition to these urban vestiges, rural Tunisia also has historical villages, rural landscapes (oases, olive groves, vineyards...) and practices and customs that still persist today, bearing witness to various historical periods.

Moreover, a rich intangible heritage has survived despite the acculturation required by the advent of new occupiers or new civilizations, even if this heritage is currently endangered by the modernist hegemony. A part of this heritage could nevertheless be preserved if the following measures are taken:

- Political will (traditional clothes, Andalusia music, written memory...)
- Development of the tourist industry (handicraft activities of the tourist regions, weaving, pottery...)
- Particular adequacy of practices with the environment (oasis way of life)
- Cultural isolates among certain communities living in regions those are not very accessible

However, as it is poorly circumscribed and often little known to decision-makers, intangible heritage is potentially threatened. Based on oral transmission and learning, this heritage is rapidly eroding due to the acculturation of the communities that hold it in favor of the standardization of lifestyles. Many elements of this rich secular knowledge are in danger of ultimate disappearance (poetry, rhymed prose, pharmacopoeia and traditional medicine, gastronomy, herbal medicine...). These and others folk cultural and pseudoscientific practices have little or no market value.

Tourism and the Cultural Tourist

Over the years, cultural tourism has evolved across the world. Several countries are trying to promote this type of tourism through the valorization of their cultural and natural heritage. However, the cultural tourist clientele remains inferior to that of the masses that tend to prefer seaside destinations. For this reason, one fully agrees with those who hail cultural tourism as “*a noble*” and “*an intelligent*” tourism (Du Cluzeau Claude-Origet, 1998, pp. 37-38).

The geographer Lazato-Giotart suggests that “*the debate on cultural tourism remains open*” (Lazato-Giotart Jean-Pierre, 2003, p 69). He espouses the view that these type of tourism “*attributes the highest importance to the knowledge and presentation of cultural and natural heritage*” (Chasse Suzanne; In Lazato-Giotart, 2003, p 69). In discussing “*culture as a destination*”, Lazato Giotart proposes a definition of the “*geography of cultural tourism*” based on “*the observation, analysis and frequentation of cultural artistic centers in a permanent or episodic way in time and space without any value judgment at the level of the motivations which can go from the simple curiosity to the study trip*” (idem. p. 70).

In my opinion, this definition is very relevant as it shows the close relationship between cultural tourism and geographical notions such as space and flows. On a spatial scale, cultural tourism is not limited to a well-defined space. “*Artistic and cultural foci*” are more spatially diffuse. What is essential is that the motivation to visit exists. The cultural tourist space is thus “*the overlap of tourist spaces*” (Du Cluzeau Claude-Origet, 1998, p 47). This pushed certain authors to consider that “*the cultural element must always and by all means remain integral part of any tourist activity*” (Serres, 1979; In Lazato-Giotart Jean-Pierre, 2003).

The Cultural Tourist

Table 1. Behavioral Differences between the Mass Tourist and the Sustainable Cultural Tourist

	Mass tourist	Sustainable cultural tourist
Typedetouriste	Passive, static, indifferent, low level of education	Active, dynamic, participative, imaginative, cultured
Motivations for travel	Sun and beach/Single theme vacation/Low prices	Nature, culture, sports, local gastronomy, business... Different motivations throughout the vacations
Type of offerrequired	Organized by TOs	Individual. Intended for very specific groups.
Type of attendance	Mass; seasonal	Distributed throughout the year. Controlled according to the capacity of reception.
Type of accommodation required	Large hotels conventional, apartments and campgrounds	Small hotels with character, alternative accommodation (gîtes rural, green campings...).

Activities in the tourist destination	Attendance at bars and nightlife venues, fast food outlets, water parks, and recreational parks, minigolf...	Itineraries for walking, cycling, sailing, attending music festivals, visiting museums and historical centers.
Behavior, impact on the environment	Offensive and aggressive, uncontrolled, irresponsible, expanding.	Productive and respectful. Controlled and accepting the limitations imposed by the capacity of reception. Agent of development.

Source: Med Forum, 2001, p. 34.

The tourist is “any person travelling for pleasure and moving away for more than 24 hours and less than a year from his usual place of residence” (League of Nations, 1937; In Deprest Florence, 1997, p 6). Nowadays, “the tourist is in constant renewal”. (Deprest Florence, 1997). For a long time, “many tourists were passive visitors: their main need is to see new places and capture images with their cameras to re-experience them on their way home...” (T. Herbert David (ed), 1995). Over time, the cultural “tourist gaze” is different. Indeed, “apart from the mass clientele, cultural tourism attracts a whole holiday population that is much more eclectic, curious, experimentalist, occasional cultural tourists” (Du Cluzeau Claude- Origet, 1998, p. 13). A comparative approach between the mass tourist and the sustainable cultural tourist is presented in the table above:

In contrast to mass tourists who were “concerned with their own convenience, ignorant of nature, and uninterested in morals, politics, and economics” (Deprest Florence, 1996, p. 6), cultural tourists enjoy “learning about culture and nature. The enrichment of personal knowledge is the primary motivation” (Thimoty and Boyd, 2003, p 70). For this reason, Du Cluzeau proposes for the very cultivated clientele “a guide lecturer of great renown, recruited essentially for his intellectual qualities and his thorough knowledge of the visited sites. He does not deal with any logistical problems such as reservations, charters...” (Du Cluzeau Claude-Origet, 1998, p. 59).

According to Claude Origet Du Cluzeau there are three types of cultural tourists:

- A clientele specialized in one theme and highly motivated: “monomaniacs”.
- A clientele also highly motivated, but by all cultural themes: «bulimics», followers of “cultural broths”.
- A clientele of occasional, curious, eclectic, but very majority on the sites and the cultural events of the ZT (Du Cluzeau Claude-Origet, 1998, p. 9).

In our opinion, this typology is interesting in that it was based on the degree of motivation. Bob Mc Kercher and Hilary Du Cross proposed a more profound typology, based mainly on the motivation, the tourist’s view but also on the experience realized in the field of cultural tourism. The authors propose five types of cultural tourists:

- The “*premeditated*” cultural tourist: This is the person normally associated with cultural tourism that travels for cultural motivations and seeks a deep tourist experience.
- The “*the sightseeing*” cultural tourist: He or she travels for cultural tourism motivations, but seeks a shallow experience.
- The “*serendipitous*” cultural tourist: for him, cultural motivations are not an important reason to visit a destination, but he ends up having a deep cultural tourism experience.
- The “*causal*” cultural tourist: He identifies cultural tourism as a weak motivation to visit a destination and seeks a superficial experience.
- The “*incidental*” cultural tourist: for him, cultural tourism is not a basic motivation for visiting a destination, but he visits cultural heritage attractions. (Mc Kercher Bob and Du Cross Hilary, 2000, p. 39).

This last type is close to the profile of the mass tourist who seeks the sea and the sun, but prefers to visit cultural curiosities at the same time. It is therefore not surprising to find in some references that half of the tourists visiting Tunisia consider themselves cultural tourists (JICA, 2001). It is enough to visit a museum or an archaeological site for a mass tourist to be included in this category.

Sustainable Tourism in Tunisia: State of Play and Problems

During the last decades, Tunisia has been known as a cheap seaside destination even if it a country that abounds in cultural and natural treasures which are unfortunately very badly exploited. Tunisia “*does not manage to insert the dimension of cultural heritage in the tourist sector which would be however more legitimate*” (World Bank, 2002). In this context, a survey conducted by the JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) to know the perception of Tunisia by tourists showed the following results:

Table 1. *Reasons for Visiting Tunisia*

Reason	Rates
Seaside	82%
Cultureuonly	5.2%
Sahara and nature only	9.1%
Culture+Sahara+Nature	3.6%
Total	100%

Source: JICA, 2001.

Although these results show that “*a significant number of beach vacationers choose Tunisia for its cultural side and natural beauty in addition to its beach product*” (JICA, 2001), Tunisia still remains a beach destination of the first degree. The cultural product is only a supplement. The problem becomes more serious when we realize that “*only 1/10th of tourist flows is generated by Tunisian TO*” (Chapoutot Jean Mahdi and AFT, 2002). Thus, “*the positioning of Tunisian operators on the international tourism markets compared to the major players in*

these markets is unfavorable and generates downward pressure on sales prices and therefore significant threats to the economic balance of the activity” (World Bank, 2002).

The Tunisian tourism actors announce that the European TO are mainly responsible for this situation. This because they impose their tariff conditions with the concept “*All Inclusive*” to sell the Tunisian seaside product. This is controversial as these TO—especially European ones—who opine that Tunisia has not invested in developing its cultural product and hasn’t done enough to diversify its tourism offer rings. As a result, “*most of the TOs interviewed strongly recommend an aggressive promotional strategy on the cultural aspects of Tunisia that have been neglected until now*” (JICA, 2001). They would therefore ask for additional efforts to change the tourist image of Tunisia. Indeed, “*unlike Egypt, Turkey, and Morocco, Tunisia does not enjoy a considerable benefit of powerful and widely recognized emblems representing one of the attractions it offers to visitors. The pyramids of Cairo, the Hajja Sofia mosque of Istanbul or the medina of Marrakech enjoy this status and are strongly promoted internationally. Tunisia currently lacks this type of asset or attraction*” (JICA, 2001). Currently, competition has pushed Tunisia to seek new ways to diversify the national tourism product and attract a clientele of a higher quality. One of the best solutions lays in the valorization of the heritage potentials of the country to develop cultural tourism. Tunisia does not lack in cultural assets that could be widely recognized. This is, for example, the case with the amphitheater of El Jem or the site of Dougga both of which could be real competitors to the Moroccan Medinas or the pyramids of Egypt. The problem lies in the absence of an effective strategy to make these assets more appealing on the international market. Compared to competing destinations, Tunisian tourism lacks competitiveness especially in the merchandising of the national cultural product.

Tunisia is full of diversified cultural treasures as it boasts preserved archaeological sites, historical and ethnographic museums located in almost all cities, historical villages, an impressive biodiversity and heritage. However, this potential could not be developed to better exploit it in the right direction and put it on the path of tourism development. Moreover the touristic visits and tours have become monotonous and lack any touch of innovation. Eco-tourism suffers almost the same problem in the interior regions because of the lack of diversified offerings and the archaic laws that stifle any innovation efforts.

The causes of this situation are multiple, several obstacles slow down the development of cultural and sustainable tourism in Tunisia. This is in addition to the fact that cultural and sustainable tourism is still considered only a complement, if not a secondary activity, compared to the seaside tourism which is considered by the capitalists the base of tourism. The image of Tunisia as a cheap tourist destination has not changed since the 1960’s as it is still widely believed that “*tourism equals hotel business*”. Thus, with this policy imposed by the Tour Operators on the one hand and hoteliers on the other hand, and with the selling off of prices, the power of European tourists in Tunisia is very low compared to competing tourist destinations.

As a result of this situation, cultural and sustainable tourism in Tunisia has not yet occupied the place it deserves. In fact, it continues to be neglected and its development seems unlikely. In reality, there exists no clear strategy of the state to act and change the image of tourism in Tunisia. Only a few individual micro projects managed by people passionate about the sector, have been able to take off after facing multiple obstacles by having a caesarean birth.

We further note that the classic and mass beach tourism remains a fragile product in the face of various global and local crises, including international health crises such as COVID-19. For example, during the year 2020 and in this context of international tourism crisis, local tourism has been particularly active. Since the first wave of the pandemic in March 2020, Tunisians have taken refuge in nature: activities in natural parks and the countryside, hiking in the mountains, camping in the wilderness, small stays in guest houses and rural cottages scattered ... etc. This confirms the general trend in the context of Post COVID-19 worldwide: *“in the short term, it is clear that local tourism will be favored”* (Martin and Ricci, 2020).

Towards a Sustainable Tourism Sector in Tunisia

The numerous challenges that directly impact the tourist offerings and the quality of the tourist services are multiple. Hence, a strategy aiming at the improvement of competitiveness of the tourist sector is necessary. At the national level, the studies devoted to the hindering problems are not sufficient. Additionally, such studies must be supplemented by thorough regional studies to effectively deal with the specific challenges.

The dire situation of tourism in the region has a negative impact on the operation of tourist establishments in tourist areas such as Matmata and Tataouine. The hoteliers are facing serious financial problems. To overcome this situation, it is necessary to *“make a financial inventory of hotels”* (ONTT, 2010, p. 7). The recent study conducted by a French consulting firm for the ONTT (Tunisian National Tourism Office) in 2010 emphasizes the fact that tourist units are categorized into four classes according to the severity of financial problems: hotels in light difficulty, hotels in medium difficulty and hotels in serious difficulty and very serious difficulty. This is followed by *“proposing a viable restructuring plan including debt rescheduling based on the repayment capacity of the hotel unit as well as a revision of the interest rate in line with market practices”* (ONTT, 2010, p. 29). In addition, the assistance and monitoring of this strategy by competent financial experts is necessary. Hoteliers receiving subsidies and debt rescheduling must propose an action plan to show their willingness to overcome the current critical situation. It is therefore a question of *“cleaning up the financial situation of the sector by improving the finances of the private sector and freeing up the necessary margins for future developments”* (ONTT, 2010, p. 8).

In my opinion, this strategy proposed by the ONTT has its limits not the least because it can solve the financial problems only temporarily. The resolution of financial problems must pass essentially by the revision of the current economic

and fiscal policy of the country to find the origins of the evils caused to Tunisian tourism.

Marketing in tourism must go beyond the local scale and it should no longer be done by small local investors. The development of new type of alternative accommodation and the adoption of a national marketing strategy must be adopted by the state to go beyond the borders and radiate abroad. In this context, *“the establishment of a development plan for alternative accommodation and the promotion of development of these new types of accommodation are necessary”* (ONTT, 2010, p. 9). It is therefore a question of *“accompanying the implementation of a new governance of the tourism sector”* (idem, p. 14).

The Promotion of Tourism in the Interior Regions

In my opinion, the promotion of tourism in the inland regions is a necessity of the first order to promote cultural and sustainable tourism should be considered as an independent cultural tourist destination. This is part of the need to revise the regionalization of tourism in the country. It is therefore essential to “review the mapping of the current TZs dating back several decades to facilitate the development of tourism projects in the new areas, especially cultural” (ONTT, 2010, p. 13). The tourism marketing strategy can be implemented by relying on several assets, it is mainly:

- To insist on the local specificities of the region: the uniqueness of the tangible and intangible heritage is one of the strongest points of tourist attraction.
- To rely on the cinematographic production as an element of tourist marketing. Since the 1970s, Tunisia was a privileged place for the shooting of several internationally renowned films. It is in the south of Tunisia, in the middle of the desert expanses, that parts of the original trilogy (episodes IV - V - VI) and of the “Prelogy” (episodes I - II - III) were shot, especially episodes I (shot in 1997, released in 1999), II (shot in 2000, released in 2002), III (shot in 2003, released in 2005) and IV (shot in 1976, released in 1977). The filming locations are Ajim, Tataouine, Ksar Ouled Soltane, Ksar Hadada, Sidi Driss, Sidi Bouhlel, Chott el-Gharsa (Ong Jmal). The Berber village of Zeraoua, in turn, has also experienced the shooting of several films of international renown such as “The Rite of Man” (2007), “Let it be” (2010) and “Black Gold” (2010).
- NICTs are a new means that the marketing strategy must rely on to develop e-tourism. These new technologies “should help strengthen the value proposition of tourism in Tunisia” (ONTT, 2010, p. 33). On the other hand, “for the impact of marketing to be effective, the gathering of information on assets, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is necessary to form a strategy” (Chapoutot Jean Mehdi and AFT, 2002, p.

- 3). Therefore, “the strengthening of e-tourism training must promote the professionalization of the sector in ICT” (ONTT, 2010, p. 36).

Tourism in Tunisia post COVID- 19: What Prospects?

The pandemic of COVID-19 has severely impacted world tourism. The sector, although accustomed to crises, has never been through a test of such magnitude by recording a drop unprecedented in its history with -72% of tourist entries in 2020 compared to the previous year. The anthropologist in tourism, Saskia Sassin, in a special issue of the magazine *Spaces* of January 2011, makes an estimate on the consequences of the epidemic of COVID-19 on tourism. According to her: “with the pandemic, the State and the territories have the opportunity to take up a fundamental political question: that of opting for a better distribution of tourist flows and benefits on the territory. She points the finger at over tourism, which she considers totally unsustainable from an ecological point of view, and advocates a conception of travel that integrates time, encounters and exchanges” (Sassin, 2021).

As for the destination Tunisia, while waiting for official figures, the Tunisian Minister of Tourism announced in the press that the country has recorded during the year 2020, compared to the previous year, a drop in tourism revenue of -64%, while tourist arrivals have fallen by -78% and more serious for overnight stays - 80.5%. In Tunisia, the return to nature through tourism and recreational practices “backcountry” is a trend that has already begun even before the COVID-19. The institutional failure at the level of the Ministry of Tourism, which its administrations remain inadequate with the new circumstances, has however never prevented the emergence of some scattered and ecological tourism projects carried by the territorial actors. Faced with the crisis of the hotel industry, in recent years we have witnessed the proliferation of alternative structures of tourism “in the home”: furnished rental houses, eco lodges, guest houses and cottages, throughout the national territory. The rigidity of the regulations and the bureaucracy force these promoters to market their offers as bed and breakfast, through different international selling platforms. In 2019, at the national level, there are already 467 beds in bed and breakfast spread over 50 establishments approved by the national tourism office and 282 beds in 16 rural lodges (ONTT, 2019).

With the new trends, the evolution of the demand and the emergence of profiles of younger and more curious tourists, highlight the need for another concept of tourism that requires certain standards and requirements. In the inland regions, the diagnoses have shown several failures in tourism development that remains incompatible with the spontaneous practices of the new type of tourist. In some areas, the infrastructure is in a lamentable state and far from being adapted to tourism; signage and rest areas are almost absent.

Responsible Actor: Example DMC TACAPES TOURS TUNISIA

- TACAPES TOURS is a responsible travel agency committed to creating positive impacts to people and places in Tunisia. Its mission is to introduce its guests to the diversity and richness of Tunisian culture, nature and history through immersive and authentic experiences, while respecting local communities and the environment. Its tours contribute to the economic development and sustainability of the Tunisian destination. It offers comfortable and unusual accommodations in troglodyte cottages, eco domes, luxurious palm wood huts in the oasis, gastronomy based on local products, experiences with local communities, meetings with rural women who manage micro-projects...etc.

Tacapes Tours is a DMC (Destination Management Company) specialized in sustainable tourism and TRAVELIFE certified (www.travelife.info). Its objective is to anchor the concept of sustainability among tourism service providers in Tunisia and to participate in the sustainable development of the interior regions through thematic tours and activities. It aims to highlight the beautiful hidden facets of Tunisia and to enhance the multiple cultural and heritage wealth to present them to global tour operators specializing in sustainable tourism by inviting them to discover Tunisia through prospecting trips to put the destination Tunisia in their programs and brochures. Tacapes Tous has participated to the Forum Destination in southern Tunisia organized for travel agents of the DRV (German federation of travel agencies) who came to southern Tunisia from 06 to 11/05/2022 and who have greatly appreciated the sustainable tourism product of the destination.

“Sustainable tourism is the shortest way to bridge the distances between cultures and preserve our authenticity”. Nader Zidi CEO Tacapes.

Conclusion

The perspective of developing sustainable and responsible tourism must be part of a value chain and contribute to the mitigation of social and territorial disparities through an inclusive approach. To this end, the pandemic would have served as an indicator and gas pedal of an activity in full mutation. Moreover, in the context of Post COVID-19, the travel candidates advocate for a local and ecological tourism. Everything is in favor of a “soft tourism” in place of mass tourism. Pre COVID, moreover, like many other countries, Tunisia has been concerned by this paradigm shift.

Sustainable tourism implies the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage while respecting local communities and their interests as well as those of visitors and future generations. Thus, under the effect of the pandemic, the health dimension integrates this concept of alternative tourism. Moreover, the reorganization of tourism and its system should be a long-term process within the framework of a global and integrated approach, which mobilizes all the actors of the territories and destinations concerned. Cultural tourism highlights a strong positive dialectic relationship between tourism and heritage, each serving the

other. The cultural tourism offer is based on the discovery of heritage in its different forms. Heritage tourism tends to enhance historical heritage, ecotourism is based on the discovery of natural heritage and ethno tourism allows tourists to discover the culture and way of life of others.

The cultural tourist, despite its different categories, has a different profile from the mass tourist. He pays particular attention to the respect of the cultural, social, environmental and economic specificities of the host communities; he is also qualified as a development factor.

In Tunisia, cultural and sustainable tourism has started to develop since the end of the last century; it is part of the diversification of the national tourism product and improves the competitiveness of the sector. Currently, the promotion of cultural tourism faces several obstacles and the image of Tunisia as a cheap seaside destination has not yet changed and the causes are multiple: the heritage is not well valued, the impacts of tourism on local development are limited moreover no circular economy is ensured, the shortage of skilled lab or in tourist establishments, lack of promotion of local craft products diversified and quality to offer to tourists to encourage the tourist to spend Similarly, tourism has not contributed to curbing migration or reducing the high unemployment rate in the study area.

Various obstacles are at the origin of the bad management of tourism to develop the heritage, the land and legal problems are flagrant, they constitute an obstacle in front of the restoration and the safeguard of the heritage and its valorisation to exploit it in tourism. The centralization of decision-making and disagreement between actors at national, regional and local levels are also major obstacles.

As for the craft sector, chaos reigns, the standardization of craft products limits the merchandising of local crafts, the craftsman's house, the craft village and the craft market do not function properly. Various are the blockages that are behind this situation; in addition, the absence of a marketing strategy is one of the major obstacles to the development of this sector. Faced with this situation, it is necessary to revise the reforms and strategies of tourism in the region studied, the Tunisian legislator must think of solutions which make it possible to overcome the obstacles legal. A participatory approach must be legalized and decentralization is a fundamental aspect that strengthens democracy and local tourism governance. In terms of heritage safeguarding, it is necessary to prepare an effective strategy to set priority guidelines in this area. Thinking of the classification of sites with different heritage components as world heritage of humanity is one of the solutions to protect them and grant them international recognition, this thought is already beginning to develop, moreover Tunisia has more only 10 sites inscribed in the list of the chest of humanity.

The development of tourism in the region studied essentially involves two main strategic axes:

The first lies in the improvement of the existing tourist offer with an upgrade of the hotel infrastructure which is becoming essential. A redesign work is necessary for the reclassification of accommodation units to improve their services and align them with the requirements and standards of sustainability.

The second strategic axis consists in promoting sustainable and alternative tourism in the region studied. This type of tourism is essentially based on local actors; it does not require heavy investment. The role of the State does not go beyond the creation of a legal framework and the dissolution of administrative obstacles in the face of young local promises with their tourism micro-projects. All initiatives should be encouraged to develop this new promoter niche in the region studied.

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