

Tourism And the Issue of Sustainability in Morocco: The Case of The Seaside Resort Taghazout

^[1] Mohamed Ait Nacer, ^[2] Khalid Benamara, ^[3] Lamiae El Bezzari

^[1] FHSS, Ibn Tofail University, Territory, Environment and Development Laboratory, ^[2] Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant, Ibn Zohr University, Research Unit in Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development, ^[3] FHSS, Ibn Tofail University, Territory, Environment and Development Laboratory
^[1] mohamed.aitnacer@uit.ac, ^[2] k.benamara@uiz.ac.ma, ^[3] lamiae.elbezzari@uit.ac.ma

Abstract

Tourism has long been a crucial activity for the Moroccan economy, making a significant contribution to the country's GDP. As a result, this sector ranks high among the State's priorities, and it receives paramount importance in terms of planning and investment. The objectives of the tourism plans differ. Mainly stemming from the directives of international financial institutions, these objectives will contribute to the boom of mass tourism, disregarding the social and environmental dimensions of "touristified" territories. It was not until the development of Vision 2020 that the concept of sustainable tourism emerged, which "sustainably values territories, populations, heritages, and spreads its beneficial effects in the most remote areas of the Kingdom" (Program Contract 2011-2020, 2010: 5). The concept of sustainable tourism is relatively recent, and the first guide "towards sustainable tourism" was published in 2006 by the UNWTO and UNEP. As for the global criteria for sustainable tourism introduced in December 2019. The aim of this study is to assess the extent to which Moroccan tourism meets the criteria for sustainable tourism in destinations. The criteria to be analyzed are applied to the resort of Taghazout, which is Morocco's foremost coastal resort in terms of development.

Index Terms—Global sustainable tourism criteria, seaside resort, stakeholder involvement, sustainable tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, sustainability has become the watchword for almost every sector of the global economy, notwithstanding the varying degrees of its integration from country to country and sector to sector. In Morocco, the development of sustainable tourism seems to be a wise choice and could address real challenges of sustainable development (Arib, 2005: 41).

This is possible, provided that Moroccan stakeholders, both public and private, become aware of the limitations of mass tourism by demonstrating a strong commitment to alternative tourism (Hmioui and Leroux, 2019:19). In practical terms, this awareness should be translated into the form of collaboration and mobilization of all tourism stakeholders (institutional, investors, professionals, tourists, civil society, citizens) and a coordination of their efforts (Moroccan Charter of responsible tourism, 2016:3).

The review of a portion of the literature on sustainable tourism in Morocco notably reveals the destructive risk of tourism to the environment (Hadach and Id-Dali, 2019:23) and its socio-cultural and natural repercussions (El Azyzy and El Kiz, 2020: 68). There is a glaring situation of ecotourism and an irresponsible and unsustainable exploitation of resources (Ibid:73). The importance is emphasized of converting the abundant abiotic factors in the hinterland, such as in the example of Tata, into territorial resources (M'barki et al., 2017: 478). Lastly, there is a low rate of Moroccan beaches classified as green sectors, with only 16% on the Mediterranean coast (Er Ramy *et al.*, 2023: 14).

II. EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN MOROCCO

The integration of sustainability into Moroccan tourism originated in 2001, on the occasion of the framework agreement for the ten-year tourism vision for 2010, albeit in a more symbolic manner by highlighting the country's potential. 'These potential also meets the new expectations of tourists in search of a change of scenery, tourism with a strong cultural imprint of originality, and a marked ecological dimension, as well as those seeking human connections with local populations' (Royal Speech, 2001).

The year 2006 represents a pivotal moment for sustainable tourism in Morocco. Firstly, through the adoption of the Moroccan Charter for Responsible Tourism and the establishment of the Moroccan Committee for Responsible Tourism, tasked with, among other things, the implementation of this charter.

In the same year, two guides were developed: the first, 'Towards Sustainable Tourism,' aimed at decision makers, and

another, 'Guide for Responsible Travelers,' for the benefit of tourists. Also in the same year, the Mohamed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection (FM6E) introduced the Blue Flag label for beaches, which was later expanded in 2016 to include marinas. This is an environmental and tourism label awarded to beaches committed to sustainable tourism practices. One year later, the same foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, introduced the "*Clef Verte*" (Green Key) label in Morocco. This international label is intended to reward tourist accommodations for their dynamism in environmental management (Bouaouinate and Saloui, 2016). Simultaneously, the Ministry of Tourism launched the "*Trophées Maroc du Tourisme Durable*" (formerly Morocco Sustainable Tourism Awards), aimed at encouraging the most committed stakeholders in terms of sustainable tourism. They aim to recognize projects and initiatives that have stood out for their actions in favor of sustainable development.

In the same vein, the first Moroccan Charter for Responsible Tourism was created in January 2016 by all stakeholders in Moroccan tourism gathered on the occasion of the Moroccan Day of Sustainable and Responsible Tourism. It is also noteworthy to mention Morocco's international presence and its participation in international initiatives in this regard, including being a member of the International Working Group (IWG/UNEP) from 2008 to 2011, a member of the steering committee of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism since 2011, and the president of said committee during the term 2013-2015.

At the same vision, the framework agreement of the 2020 tourist strategy, whose convention was signed in November 2010, dedicates this time one pillar of its action plan to sustainable development by aiming to position the country among the 20 largest global destinations and to establish itself as a reference in the Mediterranean region for sustainable development (Program Contract 2011-2020: 8).

In summary, whereas all these efforts reflect a notable enthusiasm from various stakeholders to support sustainable tourism in the country, the question arises as to the extent to which these initiatives are implemented on the ground. Hence, the objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the implemented programs and accompanying measures, taking the case study of the Taghazout beach resort project.

This leads us to pose the following question: To what extent does Moroccan tourism meet global criteria for sustainable tourism destinations? Case study: the destination of Agadir.

III. HYPOTHESIS

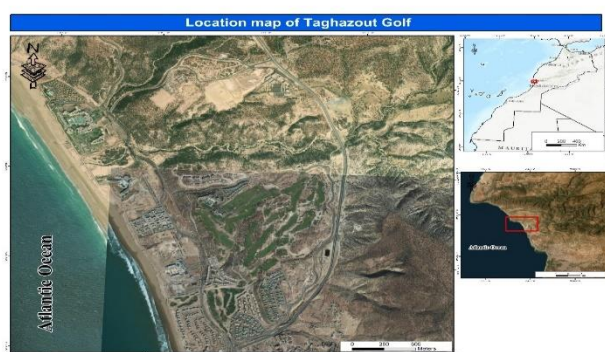
There are measures in place to promote sustainable tourism in the Agadir destination, but these measures may not be efficient enough to ensure genuine tourism sustainability.

IV. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To address the research question, we have opted for the qualitative method. This involves, firstly, participant observation, documentary analysis, and then conducting semi-structured interviews with public stakeholders, local associations, and representatives of traders and project leaders in the Taghazout area (see map below). Furthermore, given that we work on a specific site, we opt for the case study method, defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident...[and] relies on multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 1994: 13).

To do this, we first conducted a documentary analysis through the exploitation of laws, documents of several administrations and organizations (Ministry of Tourism, ONMT, OMT, UNDP, UNEP, etc.) to present the actions taken by Morocco for sustainable tourism, analyze their coherence with the SDGs and propose the challenges to include Moroccan sustainable tourism in the sustainable development goals, and an analysis of the scientific articles in order to delineate the theoretical framework.

The experience as a researcher in the governance of tourism can only be a great contribution to this research work based on our experience in the field.



map developed by the authors (2023)

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism is defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO portal, consulted on 01/11/2023). To be sustainable, tourism needs to make a positive contribution to the natural and cultural environment, generate benefits for the host communities, not put at risk the future livelihood of local people, and strive to anticipate and prevent economic, environmental, social and cultural degradation (INTOSAI, 2013: 11). Furthermore, it is not a separate practice or a specific tourism market. It is an approach that can be adopted by any tourism stakeholder by integrating the principles of sustainable development into their strategic management and/or the offerings they provide (Taoudi, 128).

In practice, tourist sustainability takes various forms and taxonomies: responsible tourism, ecotourism, geo-tourism, solidarity tourism, fair tourism, etc. These different forms, often referred to as an alternative, revolve around the concepts of development and sustainable tourism, each emphasizing a particular aspect (Taoudi: 130).

For the destination of Agadir, known for its mass tourism, this alternative tourism could postpone its decline, following Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle model, especially since the destination passed its glorious period more than twenty years ago.

Nevertheless, the real challenge of sustainable tourism for all destinations worldwide is its implementation and its implementation as part of a global strategy to achieve its goal of participation in sustainable (Idrissi, 2023: 26). This leads us to question the mechanisms of this implementation and, consequently, its evaluation.

VI. GLOBAL CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The idea of Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) was initiated in 2007 with the creation of an organization named "Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria." It brings together a coalition of 32 partners, coordinated, among others, by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The objective was to promote a better understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal principles of sustainable tourism. Through the development of a set of universal and globally accepted criteria, the partnership took the first step towards standardizing a common language for sustainable tourism. Thus, to align with the definition of sustainable tourism, destinations must engage in an interdisciplinary, comprehensive, and integrated approach centered around four main objectives : i) Demonstrate that destination management follows a sustainable logic; ii) Maximize socio-economic benefits for the host community and minimize negative impacts to the minimum; iii) Maximize benefits for communities, visitors, and cultural heritage, while minimizing impacts to the minimum; IV) Maximize positive effects on the environment and minimize negative impacts. The criteria have been designed to be used by destinations of all types and sizes.

Criteria structure:

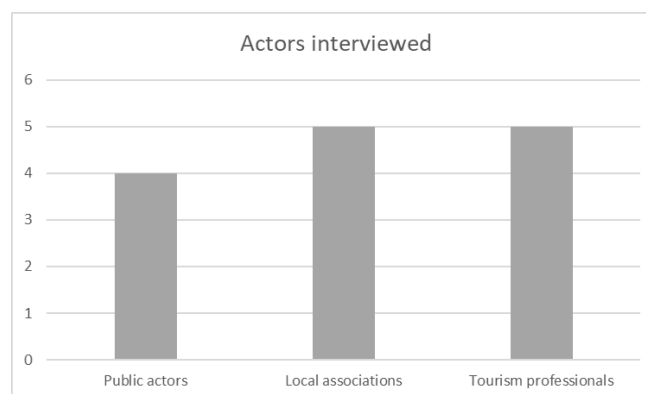
The last revision of the GSTD criteria took place in 2019 and was developed based on two rounds of consultations with stakeholders. The next revision is expected to take place approximately in December 2024.

Section A : sustainable management	Section C: cultural sustainability
A(a) management framework and structure	C(a) protection of cultural heritage
A(b) stakeholder involvement	C(b) visits to cultural sites
A(c) pressure and change management	
Section B: socio-economic sustainability	Section D: environmental sustainability
B(a) ensuring local economic benefits	D(a) conservation of cultural heritage
B(b) social well-being and impacts	D(b) resource management
	D(c) waste and emissions management

The criteria structure (GSTC, 2019 :3)

VII. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

A total of 14 players were interviewed, as follows:



A. Sustainable management section

The analysis of responses allows us to distinguish between: Questions where the majority of responses (more than 80%) lead us to conclude the following result: Private tourism stakeholders (professionals and local civil society) were not consulted or involved when the CRTASM action plan was drawn up, nor do they have access to this action plan.

Questions for which the grouping of affirmative responses "yes" and partially affirmative responses "partially" in comparison to negative responses "no" give rise to the following findings:

- Sustainable tourism initiatives, such as the Green Key label, are partially supported and encouraged.
- Local populations are only partially involved in the management and promotion of their destination.

B. Socio-economic sustainability section

Whereas the majority (88%) of responses confirm the existence of training programs to support local tourism businesses, with a significantly low rate (22%) for the right to exercise trade union rights, the wages paid for tourism activities only guarantee a low (67%) or average (33%) standard of living. Managers' support for the creation of tourism SMEs is low (75%). On the other hand, the contribution of tourism activities to the solidarity economy is average, according to the majority of responses (66%), or low for the remainder (33%). This can be explained by the fact that more than half (54%) of those interviewed confirmed that tourist circuits enable visitors to contribute to the economies of the localities visited, and that local products are identified, promoted and available for sale to these visitors.

As far as tourism statistics are concerned, only 40% of responses attested to their availability, but they were not used either in the promotional strategy or in the distribution of flows and seasonality.

Finally, the question of tourism companies' support for local communities does not meet with unanimous approval among the actors, since while half of them deny this support, the other half confirm it, at least partially (8% and 42% respectively).

C. Cultural sustainability section

In terms of cultural sustainability, an analysis of the responses confirms that intangible heritage is not being promoted (83%), that there is no program to protect and preserve local cultural heritage (83%), and that no revenue has been earmarked to finance the preservation of cultural resources (75%). Intangible heritage has not yet been catalogued by managers (75%), and the contribution of annual festivals to its preservation has not been confirmed by stakeholders.

As an example of a historical and cultural site in the destination, whereas access to the Kasbah of Agadir Oufella is ensured for the population according to 58% of the responses, access to the Wintimdouine Caves is not ensured by the authorities according to 50% of the interviewees, whereas only 25% confirm such access.

Our visits to these locations allowed us to observe that these two sites, which represent an opportunity for cultural and natural tourism in the destination, clearly lack adequate development, whether in terms of suitable facilities or due to a lack of promotion and interpretation guides.

D. Environmental sustainability section

In this section, all questions relate to the "Taghazout seaside resort" case study: 1) The availability of a system to monitor, measure and react to the impacts of tourism on the natural environment. A system that only 8% acknowledge exists, against 58% who deny its availability; 2) The existence of standards to ensure the conservation of species (animals, plants and all living organisms): half refutes the existence of such standards, against 17% who acknowledge their existence, and 33% for partial availability; 3) The use of renewable energies is only partial for the majority of stakeholders (58%) or absent according to 33% of responses, which explains the same trends for the question of energy efficiency, unavailable for 33% of stakeholders or partially implemented according to 42%; 4) Water management is only partially rational for the majority of stakeholders (67%), against 25% who do not recognize this rationality and only 8% who find it rational. This management is obviously influenced by tourism. This requires an assessment and control mechanism for the impact of this activity on water consumption, absent according to 33% of the responses or nearly absent according to the same rate. Our site visits revealed that the golf courses at the resort continue to be irrigated with drinking water, pending the start-up and connection of the long-awaited desalination seawater plant; 5) Proper treatment and safe disposal of wastewater are only partial according to the majority of collected responses (67% and 58%, respectively).

6) A relative majority of stakeholders (42%) admit to monitoring and controlling the quality of bathing water, with 25% of

other stakeholders noting partially monitoring; 7) Visitors are not informed about the quality of drinking water to encourage them to use it as an alternative to bottled water, according to the majority of responses (58%); 8) Campaigns to raise awareness, provide advice, and support waste management are only partial, according to 50% of stakeholders, and are rarely coordinated with civil society (67%); 9) Responses are scattered on the question of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and encouraging businesses to align with these efforts; 10) The majority (54%) believes that the Taghazout resort has infrastructure (bike paths, pedestrian walkways, etc.) to promote sustainable alternative transportation (bicycles, walking, etc.). This is a fact we have indeed verified on-site. However, it is noteworthy that there is an absence (58%) or near absence (33%) of means and/or measures to combat light and noise pollution produced and promoted to tourist businesses; 11) The majority (58%) declares that water scarcity is not taken into consideration, whereas only 16% confirm the opposite, and a quarter of interviewed state that it is only partially taken into consideration.



Images developed by authors (2023)

These two figures illustrate the harmful environmental effects resulting from the development of the "Tazegzout" golf course in place of hundreds or even thousands of Araganier trees, an endemic tree and emblematic natural heritage of Morocco.

CONCLUSION

Based on the documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and observational participation in the case study site, sustainability remains an ideal to be achieved at the destination of Agadir. It is still much more formal than real. Despite the labels and certifications obtained by the resort, and despite the panoply of projects incorporating the slogan of sustainability and the resulting actions, the reality on the ground confirms the limited scope of the approach currently being implemented.

The application of GSTC criteria for the destination of Agadir reveals the following:

In terms of sustainable management, local stakeholders and populations are neither consulted nor involved in drawing up the destination management action plan. As for promotion, this lack's authenticity and does not sufficiently promote local values and culture.

As for socio-economic sustainability, the contribution of tourism activities to the solidarity economy remains low, and the income distributed does not guarantee a decent standard of living. This does not prevent us from recognizing that tourist circuits enable visitors to contribute to the economies of the localities visited, and that local products are identified, promoted and available for sale to these visitors.

Regarding cultural sustainability, cultural heritage remains the weak link in tourism at the destination level. Due to a lack of valorization, this heritage does not have a program and financial means dedicated to its protection and preservation, and authorities fail to establish an inventory listing the relevant sites.

Finally, for environmental sustainability: the study shows that despite the water stress the region is experiencing, water resources are inadequately preserved, highlighting the absence of control, awareness, and monitoring programs regarding

the impact of tourist activity on these resources. The same observation holds true for waste management and the use of renewable energies.

This partially confirms our initial hypothesis: indeed, there are measures designed and implemented to promote sustainable tourism at the Agadir destination, but these measures are not very effective and lack efficiency.

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