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# A STRATEGY FOR TOURISM AND URBAN REGENERATION IN ALGERIA

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### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to address the complex relationship between tourism, environment and the city. The main focus will be to identify best policies in practice for a sustainable urban environment using thorough comprehension and investigation.

Algeria is a mosaic of culture, history and traditions; indeed many Mediterranean civilizations occupied this territory and left behind their tracks. Unfortunately, our country did take very little or no advantage of these opportunities to develop an adequate policy for a real tourism industry.

Future tourists, who could be attracted to the Algerian rich and varied assets, have expectations and needs to be satisfied. Besides, Algerian cities need to continuously renovate and improve their facilities in order to boost a new tourism market. Tourism has to be developed and managed while benefiting the resident population, contributing to the enhancement of the urban environment instead of its deterioration, and avoiding to become a financial burden to the local authority.

Eco-tourism, as a dynamic approach for sustainable urban development, could serve to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It also pleads for cultural heritage preservation and urban regeneration. Among some case studies, Setif will be extensively analyzed.

An insight evaluation of the urban and architectural landmarks may help to identify 'value indicators' leading to a contemporary vision towards this patrimony. Then, the issue will be how to preserve and regenerate this cultural heritage which is necessary for any strategy concerning eco-tourism and sustainable development in Algeria.

Key words: Strategy, Cultural heritage, Sustainable development, Urban Regeneration, Tourism.

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### 1- INTRODUCTION:

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Eco-tourism, as a dynamic approach for sustainable urban development, could serve to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It also pleads for cultural heritage preservation and urban regeneration. Among some case studies, Setif will be extensively analyzed.

An insight evaluation of the urban and architectural landmarks may help to identify 'value indicators' leading to a contemporary vision towards this patrimony. Then, the issue will be how to preserve and regenerate this cultural heritage which is necessary for any strategy concerning eco-tourism and sustainable development in Algeria.

Hence, this work will aim to address the complex relationship between tourism, environment and the city. The main focus will be to identify best policies in practice for a sustainable urban environment using thorough comprehension and investigation.

### 2- ECO-TOURISM AND LOCAL CULTURES:

Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible eco-tourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, initiatives by hospitality providers to promote recycling, energy efficiency, water re-use, and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are an integral part of eco-tourism.

Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to Eco-Tourism. Many professionals have been involved in formulating and developing eco-tourism policies. They come from the fields of Geographic Information Systems, Wildlife Management, Wildlife Photography, Marine Biology and Oceanography, National and State Park Management, Environmental Sciences, Women in Development, Historians and Archaeologists, etc.

Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world gross domestic product, 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly.

Tourism is changing rapidly as nature, heritage, and recreational destinations become more important, and as conventional tourism is forced to meet tougher environmental requirements. This presents a challenge to government and private enterprise to develop new approaches to the tourism market. Successful tourism must benefit local populations economically and culturally to give them incentives to protect the natural resources which create the attraction. Strategies must be economically feasible if private investors are to support the projects.

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### 3- ALGERIA AS A GATE FOR ECOTOURISM:

In Algeria, as with countries worldwide, ecotourism is an industry focused on tourism in the natural areas of the country. It both conserves the environment as well as sustains the livelihood of Algeria's local people. Due to the expansive landscape and its great biodiversity, ecotourism in Algeria is ideal. Large areas of Algeria have been declared protected areas and an extensive network of National Parks has been established.

Algeria is a country of exciting ecotourism opportunities: from exploring the country's beautiful Mediterranean coastline to venturing into the Saharan Atlas mountains, the options are endless.

The tour operators and other professionals of tourism are expected to stick to the high standards of ecotourism. They must promote good ecological practices, contribute to the preservation of natural areas and make use of local services - thus supporting development of the population. Eco-tour guides are called to provide tourists with interesting information on the ecosystems, natural rock formations and wildlife of Algeria.

For instance, adventure ecotourism in the *Ksours* of Algeria may include trekking, traveling by camel and horseback riding. All of these activities will not only acquaint the tourist with the wonderful natural scenery of Algeria, but also the isolated communities scattered throughout the country; such as the Mزاب or Touareg.



Figure 1: An overview of Sidi Brahima's Tomb in El Attaf – the Mزاب.

### 4- OPPORTUNITIES OF ECO-TOURISM IN SETIF:

Regarding the present globalization tendencies, the North African countries have got all kinds of assets to play an important role of exchange between both sides of the Mediterranean Sea through their collaboration to ambitious projects of socioeconomic and cultural development that can boost sectors such as tourism, agriculture and horticulture, etc.

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In this context, the Highlands in Algeria and particularly Setif own enormous possibilities to integrate the region into the Mediterranean space through the touristic potentialities that are still untapped. This consciousness is necessary today because the whole region is called to diversify its resources in order to guarantee a better economic balance.

In general, the urban public spaces in the Algerian cities seem to be dislocated, drawing a socio-spatial mosaic dreadfully lacking unity. Negative, monotonous and anonymous open spaces are characteristics of the large waste land between buildings included in the huge amenities. Nevertheless, several successful urban spaces in the country present interesting cases to study, like in Setif where some positive urban spaces are offering better conditions for a sustainable environment and marking the contemporary history of the city.

Setif is a welcoming and open city, where people feel at home: it is not necessarily a city for its proper region. It is rather a city that gives a feeling of security and relief, it provides personal exuberance. The spatial quality of some public spaces provided them permanence and "sustainability". The aesthetic values of architectural and urban spaces are often determinant factors for the urban environmental quality.

In addition to its strategic geographical position at the national level and its important population reaching 1.5 million, the Wilaya (Province) of Setif is the greatest in Algeria just behind Algiers. Its agricultural resources and varied industrial fabric confer the role of an attractive pole for economic, commercial and cultural exchange matter. These excellent assets can also serve to promote an eco-tourism generating a sustainable development at the regional plan.

At the national level, most of the existing urban network is composed of small and medium cities. Their recent urban transformations, linked to the advent of the market economy, modify the scale of their influence territories. The case of Setif is a good illustration of this phenomenon, where the administrative limits of the Wilaya seem spontaneously disappearing for a larger space that is called 'region'. (Madani et al., 2002)

The influence area of Setif widely overlaps its administrative boundaries, as a Wilaya (County), to cover a whole region going from Béjaïa, Bordj Bou Arreridj, M'Sila to Mila and Jijel. Its present urban network is composed of small and intermediate cities where the advent of the market economy is drastically modifying the profile of their influence territories.

This conferred importance is due to its strategic geographical location, population reaching 1.5 million, natural resources, economic potentialities, role as a regional pole of exchange and trade, sciences and culture. This diversity lifts Setif to the rank of Capital for the Highlands. However, its enormous tourist potentialities remain even untapped. These excellent assets can certainly serve to promote a generating eco-tourism for a sustainable development at the regional plan.

### 4.1- Clues of Setif attractiveness:

The future of Setif is rooted in its history, in the process that led to its existing economic, social and spatial characteristics. The changing lifestyles and location of people, business and facilities generate a redistribution of urban functions on the territory of the city. These changes occur in particular through the land use remodelling.

Setif offers goods and services relatively specialized not only destined to its local population, but also to those of its broad regional influence area. Its weekly markets (Souk) - especially that on Friday, with their crowds from elsewhere confirm its leading rank on the socio-economic level. We should point out that throughout history and during the Roman period Setif was an enormous domestic market and

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played the role of transit city until its decline during centuries later. In addition to the fertile farmland surrounding such a site, Setif becomes now an industrial and academic pole, a major commercial centre, a city of culture and sports. Today, its population reaches 300,000 inhabitants and it covers over 3000 hectares.

This city - a bridge between the East and West, and particularly the north and south, is also a major exchange crossroad. This important communication network will soon be reinforced once the project of the east-west highway is achieved and the airport (10 km from the city) is extended. In addition, the University of Setif, with its 56,000 students, ranks fifth in Algeria and its growing importance has required a second university.



Figure 2: A view from the west side of Setif, the New Campus in the front.

### 5- DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES OF ECO-TOURISM:

The new spatial usages, socioeconomic and cultural facilities intricated as complex networks must be identified and evaluated to well conduct any local development project.

Nowadays, tourism represents one of the most capable relay activities to create an economic dynamics in areas hit by unemployment and poverty. Heritage as a major asset for the touristic development can, in turn, gain notoriety and make profit for its safeguard.

In spite of its success, from the economic point of view, tourism should not be developed on the detriment of heritage that is a gender in our history, but is very weak by its exhibition to all kinds of risks linked to the modern life. The understanding of tourism-heritage relationship stands before their systematic combination.

Indeed for the eco-tourism, heritage requires a particular consideration due to its historic or natural value, strategic position in the city or the region and socioeconomic and cultural role. A successful eco-tourism project must promote the effective preservation of the entire local ecosystem, to be economically viable in order to attract investments and be sustainable, to be well planned, financed, managed and sold intending to respond to an excessive demand concerning environment and leisure for a real eco-touristic development.

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Around the globe, eco-tourism is quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of vacationing. In an era of heightened environmental consciousness and accessibility to exotic locales, countries are busily promoting their natural resources as lures for tourists. The trick with eco-tourism is to preserve the natural resources while also promoting them and accommodating volumes of tourists.

Businesses are creating camps and eco-lodges, and natural resource managers are designing trails and tours. Most of the popular eco-travel destinations have fragile eco-systems, so it is important to maintain a careful balance between preservation and promotion - "sustainable development" - in order to ensure the long-term health of both the eco-systems and the tourism economies.

The most recent trends and forecasting studies by the World Tourism Organization indicate that cities will continue to be in high demand by tourists of all sorts, and the problems associated with the handling of these tourists will have to be more systematically tackled by all parties concerned.

Cities face, therefore, a double challenge. Firstly, they have to be able to respond to the expectations and needs of the growing numbers of tourists who are attracted to their rich and varied array of cultural, business, entertainment, shopping, sports and other attractions; furthermore, they need to continuously renovate and improve such facilities in order to maintain their share in the competitive tourism market and the benefits resulting from it. Secondly, cities have to ensure that tourism is developed and managed in such a way that it benefits the resident population, does not contribute to the deterioration of the urban environment but rather to its enhancement, and does not become a financial burden to the local authority.



Figure 3: The famous sea front in Oran.

## 6- ATTRACTIVE URBAN TOURISM:

The rejuvenation of urban spaces is a promising experience contributing socially, economically, physically and aesthetically to regenerate the local urban environment and leisure activity. The sustainable urban development provides city designers with criteria of social and ecological rationality that are different from those available in the market. Consequently, the concept of sustainability becomes the keystone of the urban development process.



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Some of the key stakeholders in urban tourism include:

- Private Sector i.e. airlines, hotel chain operators and owners, tour operators, credit card companies, tourist attraction operators (theme parks, events etc.), real estate agencies;
- Public Sector i.e. city managers (from the historic city to the seaside resort), transportation planners, bus and train operators, information departments, economic development agencies, national parks, national tourist organizations;
- Touristic Institutions i.e. museums, art galleries, historic facilities (e.g. the national trust) and educational organizations.

The Aide Memoir - "Tourism and the City: The challenge of sustainability" (1999), suggests three key dimensions of tourism in cities and urban areas:

**Products** - the anticipated changes necessary from tourist attraction providers; theme parks, operators of events (sports, shows, fairs), museums and hotels. What are their plans, how do they respond to the anticipated growth?

**Information** - How does a city make itself more tourists friendly? What are the information systems available to tourists? How do tour operators deal with this growing demand? How to accumulate information on customer preferences and requirement, seasonal changes, age groups etc.? How to develop enduring attractions which will provide sustainable development? What information does the city provide in order to attract tourist attraction providers?

**Impacts** – the economic and development opportunities as well as the impact of tourism growth on sustainable development, transportation, cultural and environmental, social and economic aspects.

## 7- CONCLUSION:

The tourist activity counts currently for the most capable relays to create an economic dynamics to decrease unemployment, exclusion and poverty. Nevertheless, the economic success of tourism should not, in any case, be done on the detriment of the environment and heritage.

Any eco-tourism project must necessarily respect the local eco-system, economic viability to drain the requisite investments, and being sustainable in order to reconcile the requirements of environment and tourism.

The tourism changes quickly according to destinations: nature, heritage and relaxation, that become more important, and according to the conventional tourism that is forced to answer to the strong environmental requirements. It presents a challenge for the government and the private enterprises that are called to develop new approaches towards the market of the tourism.

Eco-tourism has an interest to the local cultures, nature and research of new ways to live on our planet. Flora, fauna, and the cultural inheritance are its main destinations and attractions. The eco-tourism aims to reduce the negative effects of the traditional tourism on the natural environment, and heighten the cultural integrity of the local population.

Cities face a duplicate contest: first, they must be capable to answer to expectations and needs of an increasing number of tourists that are attracted by their rich and various attractions in matter of culture, business, leisure of shopping, sports and others; besides, they need to renovate and improve continuously such facilities to maintain their part in the competitive market of the tourism and

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advantages that result from them. Secondly, cities must assure a profitable tourism for the local populations without damaging their environment.

One of the goals to be met is to enable people enjoying and learning about the natural, historical and cultural characteristics of unique environments while preserving the integrity of those sites and stimulating the economic development opportunities in local communities.

It is clear now that successful eco-tourism projects must:

- Effectively promote the preservation of entire local ecosystems, not just individual species, vistas or sites;
- Be economically viable in order to attract financing and be sustainable;
- Be well planned, financed, managed and marketed in order to meet the stringent environmental and recreational demands of a true eco-tourism development.

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