

Enhancing the Ksourian Heritage through Sustainable Tourism Development in Algeria: A Strategic Orientation Attempt

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Abstract

This article highlights the important role that tourism can play in the preservation of Saharan heritage, notably the Ksours, and explains how we can promote sustainable tourism in this area known for its uniqueness and sensitivity. In order to accomplish this, we will examine tourism in Algeria as well as the Master Plan for Tourist Development (SDAT) and its new tourism vision. Before giving our strategic orientation essay for sustainable and cultural tourism, we analyze the Algerian government's action plans to expand this sector, as well as the value of the Ksourian legacy within that sector.

Key words: Sustainable tourism, Ksours, Saharan heritage, tourism policy, Algeria.

INTRODUCTION

Accessible natural and cultural heritage resources have historically been recognized as the most essential determinant in a nation's economic and social prosperity. However, heritage in Algeria was rarely recognized as a national resource until recently. In addition to playing a crucial role in the particularization of peoples and groups by serving as an intangible reference to their cultural and civilizational identities, the commercial interest in heritage as a whole is increasing as the quest for new economic resources grows. Due to its ability to play a crucial role in development, particularly economic growth, cultural tourism has the potential to grow on a huge scale in the modern day. It is literally cited in every remark regarding the new pillars of local development, especially for the benefit of local citizens and the living environment. Due to its ability to generate wealth, jobs, and even sustain income, tourism is today's key driver of the economy's prosperity and the new engine of sustainable development. As a result, the Algerian government decided to equip itself with a strategic framework of reference and a vision for 2025, supported by the objectives in the Tourist Development Scheme. This happened because of Law 02-01, which was passed on December 12, 2001, and set up the National Scheme of Territorial Planning (SNAT) which deals with planning and sustainable development.

In recent years, Saharan tourism has been one of the most popular types of cultural tourism, because it has proven that the Sahara can play an undeniable role in tourism and in the economy. Despite Algeria's enormous potential in the tourism industry, the Algerian Sahara remains underdeveloped. This desert, which stretches across the entire southern portion of the country and offers a panoramic diversity of ergs (sandy deserts) and regs (rocky deserts), preserves to this day the famous rock paintings of the Tassili (which date back to very ancient times) and shelters rather typical architectural products that demonstrate a cultural wealth (figure 1). In fact, Saharan cities have a rich and extraordinary cultural and architectural heritage known as "ksours" in Algerian architectural parlance (Naidja, Chettah et al., 2022). These are part of the cultural legacy of southern Algeria and demonstrate not only its historical and sociological development but also a successful blend of tradition and modernity. This perfect symbiosis can easily lead to the promotion of sustainable historical tourism in terms of sustainable development.

These Ksours, formerly utilized as caravan rest stops and supply depots, are today living testaments to man's adaptation to the notoriously parched and hostile Saharan environment (Naidja, Chettah et al., 2022). This inherited wisdom of adaptation is passed down through the generations. This intergenerational transmission demonstrates the fundamental importance of the legacy in the community's resistance. Sadly, due to a shift in lifestyles and the rapid urbanization of Algerian territory, this heritage is in jeopardy of extinction, endangering the uniqueness of these Saharan regions. This sense of place is frequently linked to the concept of heritage, which is created by all of the variables that contribute

to the autonomy and individuality of its bearers, as well as its evolution over time. If we adhere to the “principle of ethical responsibility,” which holds our generation accountable for the life and development of humanity in the making, we must consider the long term and the preservation of nonmarket goods and services in the management of human societies and the environments in which they exist (Passet, 2001).

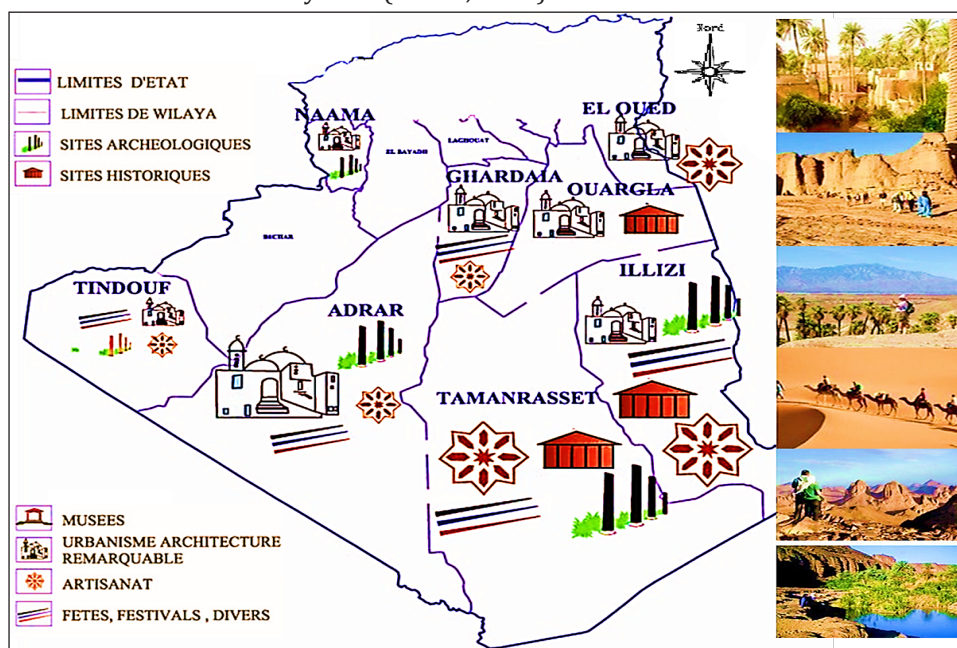


Figure 1. The cultural and landscape diversity of Algeria’s Sahara (authors combination from web and SDAT, 2008, Book1, p40)

Long ignored and relegated to the background, the tourist industry is now the focus of Algerian policies that have been working for over two decades to rehabilitate it to the point where the ministry of Land Management, Environment, and Tourism (MATET) has deemed it necessary to implement a Master Plan for Tourism Development (SDAT) in 2008. There is already a first draft for the development of Saharan tourism, particularly in Ksour, based on some principles. Indeed, the Saharan region comprises around 80 % of the country’s total area (almost two million Km²) and has an undoubted tourism potential (figure 2), supported by a legacy and an indigenous culture that have earned it the label of “premier tourist destination” (MATET, 2008a). Thus, tourism in the Sahara is associated with adventure, authenticity, and tranquility. However, it is clear that this type of tourism lacks creativity and vitality. Thankfully, the diversity of scenery afforded by its major tourist regions and the charm of the sites have compensated for the country’s lack of originality, both in terms of production and commerce.



Figure 2. The significance of the Algerian Sahara’s surface (authors’ combination from google maps)

Our dilemma revolves around a central issue: the growth of Saharan tourism and the state’s marketing plan. The objective of this article is to examine the contribution tourism can make to preserving the cultural and historical heritage of Ksour. We shall openly criticize the tourist development of this cultural and historical treasure, as well as its position as a major development lever. How can we encourage responsible and sustainable tourism in this culturally

diverse and fragile region? To address these issues, our essay will first examine the concept of sustainable tourism before examining tourism in Algeria, the ideas of the SDAT, and the country's new vision in this field. We will highlight, through an analytical approach, the Algerian government's ambitions to strengthen this sector without disregarding the importance of Ksourian heritage within it. Finally, we identify the obstacles that hinder its long-term growth.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, A MULTI DIMENSIONAL AND MULTI SECTORAL CONCEPT

Although "sustainable tourism" is a development tool in a number of nations, notably in the developing world, no consensus has been reached on the precise meaning of this key term, which remains unclear. However, tourism's sustainability is now built on the same pillars as sustainable development, and all attempts to define this concept are merely an adaptation of tourism to the Brundtland Report's concept of sustainability (1987). Therefore, sustainable tourism refers to any form of tourism that satisfies the current needs of tourists, the tourism industry, and the host community without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Machado, 2003). This is tourism that is economically sustainable and does not deplete the resources upon which its future depends. These resources essentially consist of the natural environment as well as the values and social equilibrium of the host society.

Sustainable Tourism: Aliterature Review

In order to define sustainable tourism, we must retrace its steps. In reality, it is a multi-step process that began in the 1990s. Since then, international meetings and events listed in Table 1 have been held to try to define and explain it.

Table 1. A literature review on the concept of sustainable tourism

| Source | Year | Elements of definition |
|---|------|--|
| The World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism | 1999 | This code incorporates the bulk of sustainable tourist development ideas. It emphasizes the importance of tourism as a vehicle for personal and communal fulfillment that fosters global understanding and mutual tolerance. It stresses tourist mobility and, as a result, explains the rights of workers and entrepreneurs in this industry. In 2001, the General Assembly of the United Nations ratified this code. |
| Ecotourism Declaration of Quebec | 2002 | This is the proclamation of the World Ecotourism Summit, which was held in 2002 as part of the International Year of Ecotourism sponsored by the United Nations. It provides a summary of the recommendations of the participants to governments, tourism experts, and other stakeholders regarding several steps to be taken to assist the development of ecotourism and make all forms of tourism more sustainable. The environmental component received particular attention. |
| Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development | 2002 | In its Plan of Action, the Summit urged the promotion of sustainable tourism as one of the answers to the protection and management of natural resources and the conservation of biodiversity. |
| | | The guide identifies a series of policy implications for ensuring the long-term viability of tourism. These consequences are stated in 12 objectives for sustainable tourism: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic viability: to maintain the viability and competitiveness of tourism sites and businesses in order for them to thrive and produce long-term profitability.• Local prosperity: maximizing tourism's contribution to the host destination's economic growth, particularly the amount of tourism spending that helps the local community.• Quality of employment: Increase the amount and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including income levels, working conditions, and equitable employment opportunities, without regard to gender, race, or handicap.• Social equity: to pursue a broad and equitable distribution of tourism's economic and social benefits within the beneficiary community, notably |

| | | |
|--|-------------|--|
| World Tourism Organization (Towards sustainable tourism, a guide for decision makers) | 2006 | <p>by enhancing employment, income, and services for the poorest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor satisfaction: to provide all guests with safe, enriching, and valued activities, without discrimination. • Local control: In consultation with other stakeholders, provide a way for local communities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes linked to the management and future evolution of tourism in their region. • Community welfare: Maintain and develop local communities' quality of life, including social structures and access to resources, collective services, and life support systems, while preventing any kind of deterioration or social exploitation. • Cultural richness: respect and strengthen the host communities' historical legacy, original culture, traditions, and unique characteristics. • Physical integrity: maintain and improve the quality of urban and rural landscapes, and avoid physical and visual environmental degradation. • Biological diversity: conserve natural spaces, ecosystems, wildlife, and plants, and minimize damage to them. • Rational use of resources: to use as few scarce and non-renewable resources as feasible in the creation and operation of tourism infrastructure and services. • Purity of the environment: to cut down as much as possible on air, water, and land pollution, as well as waste from tourist businesses and visitors. |
|--|-------------|--|

Source:synthesized by the authors,2022

This table demonstrates that environmental concerns have received greater attention than economic or social concerns. This emphasis is on the westernized concept of tourism sustainability, while developing nations, whose primary priority is economic development, are effectively absent. With all of these publications, we've also been able to figure out the most important parts of sustainable tourism, which we show in figure 3.

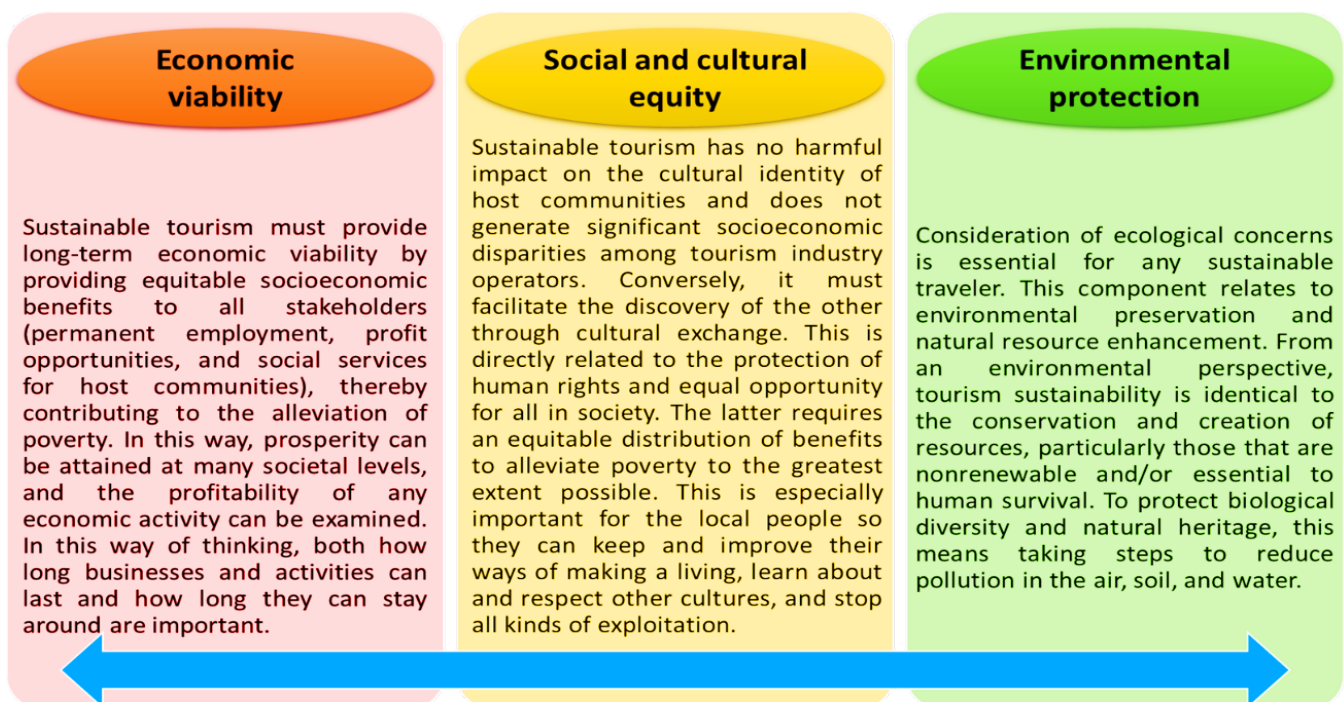


Figure 3. the most important pillars of sustainable tourism (Authors, 2022)

SAHARAN TOURISM IN ALGERIA: BETWEEN DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES

After being excluded for so long and frequently suffering from poverty, 93 Saharan and pre-Saharan regions of the world welcomed tourism with open arms, thereby insuring their economic and social development (Boukberouk, 2008, p. 289). Although this type of tourism is new, its popularity and direction have evolved over time. From the “Sahara of Nomads” to the “Sahara of Scientists and Industrialists” to the “Sahara of Tourists” (Choplin and Roullier, 2006, p. 29). The image of “the Citroen mission” being telecast in 1922 marked its debut as a destination for adventure travelers. However, the 1930 trans-Saharan rally marked the beginning of Saharan tourism in Algeria. It was planned to mark the 100th anniversary of the French colonists’ conquest of Algiers. This rally consisted of a timed drive to and from Sudan via Tamanrasset (southern Algeria) with conventional vehicles. If the primary objective of this rally was to demonstrate that traversing the Sahara with modest cars was possible (Minvielle, 2008b, p. 51), it had a significant impact at a time when tourist penetration in the Sahara was only beginning (Minvielle, 2008a, p.10). This long-ignored corner of the globe attracted an increasing number of tourists, which stimulated the imagination. Discovery, the yearning for authenticity, and tranquility have all contributed to the expansion of Saharan tourism. In spite of this prospect, the tourist offers provided were largely equivalent to beach models (large, air-conditioned luxury hotels with swimming pools, golf, and other leisure activities), indicating a lack of understanding rather than a lack of political will to promote this business. Even though this information got to the Algerian government late, it’s a good thing that it did, because the government has a plan for growing tourism in the country.

A Master Plan for Tourism Development in Algeria

In 2008, the Algerian government developed the Master Plan for Tourism Development to enhance the tourism industry (SDAT). The latter serves as the strategic framework of reference for the entire country’s tourism policy in accordance with the goals of sustainable development and outlines the Algerian State’s vision for national tourism development in the short term (2015), which has already been surpassed, and in the long term (2025), which will soon be attained. This plan is the instrument that will contribute to the revitalization of the Algerian tourist sector (ANDI, 2013) since it expresses the political intention to adjust the tourism sector’s perspective by incorporating it into a national socioeconomic development strategy. Its principal objective is the preservation of historical and cultural assets.

Issues of Tourism Development in Algeria

The Master Plan of Tourist Development (SDAT) says that the following five major problems are making it hard for Algeria to develop tourism:

Economic Prosperity: This issue is separated into two parts: the contribution of foreign funds through external means of payment and the dynamism of the economy as a result of the effects of tourism on other sectors such as industry, handicrafts, and agriculture.

Jobcreation: Directly or indirectly, the tourism industry must create a lot of jobs and take up a big chunk of the unemployment rate. At the same time, it must stop people from moving to the coast, which is a good sign for the economy of the territory.

Regional planning and local development: Tourism must help local development by following the economic logic of valuing and preserving both tangible and intangible resources. This is because both the environment and tourism are important parts of sustainable development.

Cultural issues consist of preserving and enhancing cultural, historical, and religious heritage.

Creating a brand image for the country: Tourism must help build and improve Algeria’s reputation at home and abroad.

To solve these problems and make sure Algeria’s tourism boom is successful, the SDAT has suggested five foundational dynamics, which we will talk about below.

The Dynamics of Tourism Development in Algeria

Dynamic No.1: Algeria’s first targeted dynamic to enhance its appeal and competitiveness is the expansion of its tourism industry. This marketing strategy aims to offer this destination a new image and counteract the prejudices and adverse attitudes that are emerging towards the tourism industry in Algeria. This dynamic depends on the creation of a marketing plan, the implementation of an operational action plan, and the creation of a system for keeping track of tourists.

Dynamic No.2: It depends on the creation of top-notch tourism centers and communities. These locations have strong tourism potential and are conducive to highly influential and easily accessible businesses. They will be the main focus of tourism growth in Algeria. These ninety priority poles illustrate the confluence of settlements, tourist infrastructure, and territorial development projects. The Algerian government has chosen places rich in historical and natural resources that are also centers of expertise for this dynamic. Thus, the predicted tourism expansion is contingent on the uniqueness of each location. Prohibited are the standardization and consistency of initiatives.

Dynamic No.3: It is predicated on the formation of a tourism quality plan, since it has become essential to deliver quality services that promote Algeria as a national and international tourist destination. In this context, the development of information technology and the significance of adequate training in the tourism business were emphasized. And all this with the intention of continuously updating the material and human visitor population.

Dynamic n°4: It is highlighted that close intersectoral cooperation with all sectors is necessary for a well-planned tourism development. It is just an issue of the transversality of all the players and industries (transportation and the handicraft industry in particular) that could contribute to tourism development. Tourism growth cannot be envisaged independently of other businesses.

Dynamic n°5: The evaluation is based on the financial component of the strategy and the budgets committed to tourism development. It is a collection of incentives and technical-legal procedures meant to encourage investment and guide investors throughout their projects. We cite, among other things, the study and evaluation of projects; tax relief; facilities and benefits in terms of extending credit to banks; the development of an investment support fund and a shared credit guarantee fund, etc.

Given that the Algerian government has been silent on the matter for nearly three decades, we may conclude that these five dynamics could represent the turning point for the Algerian tourism industry. Before, there was no tourism policy because the government had ignored this industry for a long time.

Saharan Tourism in Algeria: Assessment and Prospects

Although the SDAT explores in depth the difficulties that must be resolved and the potential that must be developed and fully exploited in Algerian tourism, it gives Saharan tourism a lower priority than beach tourism or tourism in other regions of the country. This document assigns a substantial number of projects to the tourism poles of excellence in the north of the country, but only a small number to those in the south (see Table 2). Therefore, the majority of investments are undertaken along the 1200 km of Algeria's coastline. This shows that the Algerian government values mass tourism in cities and seaside tourism more than tourism in the Sahara, which has always relied on its beauty to attract tourists.

Table 2. Distribution of tourist poles in the Sahara of Algeria

| Tourist poles of excellence | Northeast | North Central | Northwest | South-East "Oasis" | South-West "Touat-Gou-rara" | Great South "Ahaggar" | Great South "Tassili" |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Number of projects | 23 | 32 | 18 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 80 | | | | | | |

Source: SDAT,2008, Book5, P.6

As for the immense benefits that tourism in the Sahara provides, they are terribly neglected. We can divide their traits into two categories: natural and cultural. It is possible to quantify the natural qualities of the Algerian Sahara. This area is regarded as a natural wonderland and an outdoor museum. There are prehistoric archaeological relics as well as wonderful natural features. Furthermore, the virginity of desert places, the uniqueness of their species, and the singularity of their environment are tourist assets that should be developed. In addition, from a cultural perspective, the numerous Saharan tribes, such as the Tuaregs and the Mozabites, etc., offer a total change of scenery. We would add the friendly nature of the Saharan people, who are known for their humanity. And it is already a useful asset that can significantly improve the quality of the stay (MATET, 2009). The SDAT did not exclude Sahara tourism from its broader strategy. As shown in figure 4, nine different projects are helping to change the way the Sahara is used for tourism.



Figure 4. SDAT initiatives to reform the Sahara's tourism supply (by authors)

The latter's research elucidates the Algerian government's goal for Saharan tourism and defines methods for its expansion. In fact, the government has capitalized on the heritage and environmental potential of Saharan regions through these efforts in an effort to increase their exposure as heritage tourist destinations. Each region's tourism product is shaped by its tangible and intangible heritage, which may include handicrafts, the system of water sharing in ksours and oasis, vernacular architecture, etc. In this context, and in an effort to reinforce the cultural character of each Sahara region, the SDAT advised expanding the space-time accessibility of a number of locations by constructing a variety of routes and tourist routes. This concept developed, among others, from a survey of foreign tourists' perceptions of the tourist offerings in the Sahara of Algeria.

THE ROADS OF THE KSOURS: A PROJECT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE REHABILITATION OF KSOURIAN HERITAGE

If the decline or even agony of the ksours is inevitable, it is not utopian to apply new dynamics that result in the reappropriation of this heritage (Frérot, 2005). To protect and revive this Saharan heritage, several international, national, and local initiatives and procedures have been formed. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) were the first organizations to include the concept of sustainability into a program of this sort. In close proximity to cultural routes, the "ksours route" is a pilot effort created by these two organisations to network specific ksours on a geographical scale (Mahrou, 2011). Algeria's tourism offices in the southern wilayas did the necessary planning and development studies for tourist circuits like the ones in Bechar and Adrar.

In 2000, following the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by the United Nations, UNESCO adopted a plan of action on the cross-cutting issue of the fight against poverty and extreme poverty. This action plan also served as a follow-up to the World Summit on Ecotourism in Quebec (2002), the Rio+10 Summit (2002), and the World Tourism Organization's global code of ethics for tourism. The project "Sahara of cultures and peoples, towards a strategy for the sustainable development of tourism in the Sahara in the context of the fight against poverty" was part of this action plan. Algeria, the nation with the largest Sahara in terms of land area, benefited in this regard from the aforementioned experimental endeavor. Adopted at the 2003 international workshop in Ghardaia (Algeria) and launched in 2004, this project was provided with a budget of 1,732,619 US dollars to develop sustainable tourism in the Saharan regions of Algeria (UNEP, 2006). This project focuses on the wilayas of Béchar, Adrar, and OuarglaGhardaa, and more especially Taghit, Béni Abbes, Timimoun, El Attaouf, Aghlad, and Guentour (figure 5), in order to safeguard the local cultural and ecological assets (APS, 2004). For the benefit of the local people, several multidisciplinary training workshops, internships, heritage restoration sites, help with starting small businesses, exhibitions, animations, and films have been set up so that they can take part in the different stages of this local development project.

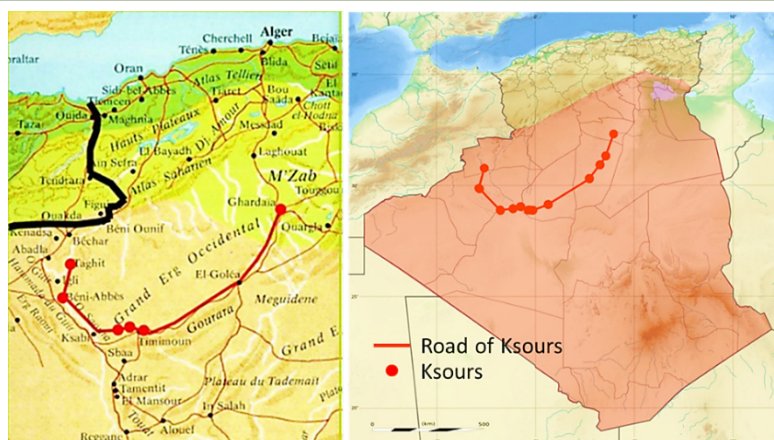


Figure 5. Road of ksours connecting the intervention sites of Taghit, Beni Abbès, Timimoun, Guentour, Aghlad, and El Atteuf in the wilayas of Béchar, Adrar, and Ghardaia in Algeria (authors based on UNESCO, 2004)

This pilot project demonstrates an aspirational objective to increase cooperation between the various actors in order to establish cultural tourism circuits and consequently revitalize the local economy in the Saharan region. By depending only on the participation of local people, efforts concentrated on the rehabilitation of ksours using ancestral ways were unquestionably directed toward the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage, as well as the improvement of circumstances for tourism activity (UNESCO and UNDP, 2005). This project is part of a global attempt to create transborder circuits through the Sahara along the same lines as UNESCO cultural routes and European cultural routes. This project's notable outcomes include the participation of local actors in the rehabilitation work; the training of young unemployed women and men in the framework of reception and tourist animation; the valorisation of earthen architecture; and the recycling of manufactured items (UNDP and UNESCO, 2005).

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT OF THE KSOURIAN HERITAGE

The decision by the Algerian government to promote the growth of Saharan heritage tourism is strategic and iconic. Despite the paucity of projects in this sector, this pick accurately reflects the diversification of tourism and its future in the face of increasing competitive pressure. These are the objectives of this strategic realignment:

- To enable the tourism industry to achieve its previously unrealized tourist potential in the medium term through the use of innovative products that will keep it competitive among others.
- Let poor areas get economic help from tourism, but only if they keep their cultural and natural heritage, especially the Saharan Ksour, safe.

In addition, this tourism orientation involves the implementation of a tourism development strategy with an emphasis on sustainability. This is essential because the rise of tourism in a location entails the development of these areas, which could increase the vulnerability of already fragile regions. These projects seem pertinent since they try to remedy the deficiencies in the tourism offering in the Sahara. However, they fail to account for an element that looks critical to the viability of any tourism enterprise in the Ksour's fragile environment (figure 6). This policy helps the local people by getting them involved in planning and carrying out different projects. The restoration of the ksours and their reappropriation by its inhabitants could significantly contribute to the formation of a new sustainable development dynamic in the Saharan regions.



Figure 6. sensitive environment of some Algerian Ksour such as Bounourain Ghardaia (left) and Djanet'sksar (right)

Through the roads of Ksours and economic activity that may support it, this history can unquestionably serve as a catalyst for economic growth and the use of different local resources. In turn, this encourages the creation of jobs and the retention of a local population that merits all forms of help to improve its level of qualification in step with the evolution of the created services. This simple method can easily contribute to the increase of the area's worth and life. Even though developing the Ksourian legacy comes with a lot of economic problems, it can be a big part of setting goods and services apart. This is because the process can lead to a wide range of activities:

- Conservation or restoration of ksours using traditional and cultural technologies necessitates the mobilization of specialized labor, local artisans, and public works corporations.
- The restored and repaired ksours generate numerous employment opportunities associated with their operation and maintenance. The growth of tourism in these ksours creates both direct and indirect jobs, as well as more cultural resources.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tourism in the Sahara cannot be separated from sustainable development and must adhere to the protection of natural and cultural resources. According to the UNWTO, sustainable tourism is a technique that serves the current needs of tourists and host regions while preserving and boosting their future prospects. Sustainable tourism is not a simple concept; it refers to an industry that integrates the management of all resources to satisfy socioeconomic and aesthetic goals without compromising cultural integrity, important ecological processes, or biological diversity. The second crucial aspect underlined by this research is that the valorisation of heritage serves not only as a method of territorial identification and assertion in a climate of continual rivalry, but also as a means of wealth production through economic activities like tourism and trade. Although its type and significance vary from territory to territory, preserving and encouraging a more balanced geographical distribution of growth necessitates enhancing its legacy. Thus, a greater distribution of heritage resources facilitates a more equitable territorial development. Therefore, it is necessary to transfer the creation and management of local history to local communities and actors. This perspective on the past is essential to the concept of sustainable development. If this idea wants to include ways to respond to environmental and social-economic crises while taking into account the specificities and know-how of the populations, especially when it comes to making money for them and their countries, then it is important to think about the relationship between a population and its (environmental and built) patrimonial wealth when talking about sustainable tourism.

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