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Review

What are Appropriate Cultural Tourism Policies for Palestine?

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Cultural tourism has been identified as one of the most important of the World tourism markets. Palestine crowds a vast treasure of cultural heritage sites and attractions and the level of competition in the region to attract cultural tourists is increasing and every country in the region tries to represent an area of significant economic benefit to heritage sites. Each country in the region is looking carefully at their policies and management practices to focus on issues such as infrastructure and quality of services, partnerships and packaging opportunities, entrepreneurial approaches with the private sector, and at the meantime continuing to enhance the level of cultural heritage preservation. This paper aims to shed light on the importance of cultural tourism in Palestine and it attempts to suggest an outline for a viable tourism policies and strategy that lead to create a tourism development plan. The future plan will take into account the specific needs and development perspectives for the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza which seeks to a regional comprehensive tourism package. The suggested policies aim to increase future tourism economic development and positive social and economic outcome.

Keywords: Culture, Tourism, Policies, Palestine

INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism and tourism industry in Palestine is not a new phenomenon. Palestine is located on the crossroads between three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. It is considered the cradle of civilization and a place of the world's three major religions (Alavi and Yasin, 2000; Wizermass and Al-Hiyari, 1987).

After the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, several necessary steps were carried out to promote tourism. First, an economic agreement was signed between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel on 4 May 1994. Second, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was established and took responsibility for reorganizing the tourism industry in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Up till now, and because of political unrest and the Palestinians' limited resources,

the ministry was not successful in its mission. However, the Palestinian ministry of tourism has its own plan to develop the basic infrastructure. For example, it is working to encourage investors to increase the hotel rooms from 2,400 to 14,000; reorganize the internal transportation, restaurants, tourism agencies and other segments; and rehabilitation of religious places and cultural centres. Moreover, the ministry is in charge of upgrading laws and regulations to meet the needs of today's tourism industry (Al-Khawaja, 1997).

Tourism benefits derived from peace are great and play a major role in eliminating negative attitudes and intentions among enemies. It also helps in creating salient economic and social developments. Tourism, on the other hand, is considered highly labour intensive

(Jamson, 2000). Domestic and international tourism in 2003 combined to create over 200 million jobs worldwide (WTO, 2004). Tourism output reached \$3.4 trillion in the same year and the industry's contribution to the world's gross domestic product reached 11.4 per cent. Furthermore, more people engage in pleasure and tourism business than ever before according to demographic statistics. As a result, Palestinian tourism issues merit considerable attention (Cheong and Miller, 2000). However, Fleischer and Felsentein (2000) argue that despite tourism being considered as job generating, it is also blamed for creating low wages and only seasonal employment. However, tourism creates one job among 20 jobs in the Middle East, despite the low investment (about 2 per cent) in this important sector. To compare, investment in tourism on the international level is about 7 per cent (Abu Dayyha, 1997). This helps in creating one job in tourism among each 15 jobs created in general, world wide (Al-Khawaja, 1997; Jamson, 2000).

Abu Rabah (1998) reports that:

"... tourism industry is a major base for future economic development in Palestine. It requires, therefore, perceptive and clear policies with vision and prospects. To execute such policies, all Palestinian governmental offices should be involved. Assessments of the tourism infrastructure and tourist characteristics are needed."

He also adds that, at present, tourism in Palestine lacks policies for the public and private sectors. In addition, marketing and information studies, which take the responsibility of upgrading the image of Palestine as an important tourist attraction place, are absent.

In Cyprus, there has been a remarkable growth in tourism and tourist arrivals during the last 20 years. It was perceived that economic progress would be achieved by means of job creation and foreign exchange earning. On the other hand, there has been a growing concern for social, cultural and environmental costs imposed by tourism (Ayres, 2000).

A high proportion of unskilled labourers characterize the tourism industry in Palestine; those who were educated to serve in this industry are very few (Abu Rabah, 1998; Szivas and Riley, 1999). Therefore, the Palestinian tourism industry should have plans to rehabilitate those who are involved in every level of this salient economic sector. Furthermore, the Palestinian tourism industry should incorporate religious, cultural and geographical aspects. One may consider the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip to have great potential for tourism development. For instance, the Gaza Strip shoreline promotes the possibility of accommodating 60-80 hotels with 200-room capacity each. The needed investment for this project totals up to \$920 million. Moreover, the shore of the Dead Sea can market 400 hotels each with 200-room capacity and their total cost is estimated at \$300 million accompanied by the creation of 120,000 jobs (Bethlehem 2000 Project, 1998).

The area of Jerusalem-Bethlehem combines the main elements of the Palestinian tourism industry. Israeli studies indicate that 91 per cent of tourists visit Jerusalem and Bethlehem, of which 85 per cent prefer to lodge in this area. This is taking into consideration that tourists usually stay more nights in areas of religious significance. The Jerusalem-Bethlehem area can incorporate an additional 100 hotels of 200 rooms each. The total cost of this project will be around \$200 million and 10,000 jobs will be created (Abu Dayyha, 1997).

The Israeli authorities have been in charge of international tourism in Jerusalem since 1967, and they execute their policies in such a way as to be the only franchised power. For example, the Israeli authorities do not allow their tourist groups to stay in Bethlehem for more than one hour (45 minutes to see the Church of the Nativity and 15 minutes for shopping). In addition, most of the generated revenues that come from tourism go to Israel. For example, Israel gets 85 per cent of the added value because it dominates transportation, lodging, food services and other facilities (Al-Khawaja, 1997). To compare, the Palestinian revenue from tourism is about \$120 million, but the Israeli revenue reaches \$2.6 billion (Abu Dayyha, 1997).

This paper aims to shed light on the importance of cultural tourism in Palestine and it attempts to suggest an outline for a viable tourism policies and strategy that lead to create a tourism development plan. The future plan will take into account the specific needs and objectives of the West Bank and Gaza which seeks to a regional comprehensive tourism package. The suggested policies aim to increase future tourism economic development and positive social and economic outcome.

Cultural Tourism in Palestine

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 and Bethlehem, Cultural Tourism has gone through important transformations and improvements in quality and variety of the products. Up till now, to ensure its sustainable development in the field of cultural development, the policy and resource issues need more focused attention to strengthen the links between culture and economic development through tourism. For more than 40 years, the dominant form of tourism in this area has been the conventional form, most of which typically was focused on the religious sites (Shomali, 2004). Cultural tourism seeks to address a segment within this conventional market that are either interested in or will be interested in cultural tourism concept of deepening tourist understanding of the Palestinian culture through spending more quality time in the Palestinian territories. This had undermined tourists' perception of the Palestinian heritage and culture. However, Cultural Tourism has been practiced on a small scale by some Palestinian individuals or NGOs after the first year of the

Intifada in 1987 where many delegations, mainly church groups, and fact finding missions, became interested in the Palestinian question and wanted to meet with Palestinians so as to show solidarity and sympathy with their cause (Beschouch, 1997).

Since 1994, the development of tour packages was in accordance with the goals of Cultural Tourism and designed to cover the socio-cultural aspects of the local community to better convey the current situation. In spite of this, the absence of a Palestinian National Authority until 1994 caused the Palestinian tourism sector to suffer from the lack of an adequate infrastructure, the absence of planning, deficiency in tourism policy and difficulty in initiation of promotional activities and insufficient number of qualified Palestinian tour guides. It was expected that the Oslo Accords will grant the Palestinian Territories the stability they need and the national authority to fulfil indispensable infrastructure requirements which are vital for the growth of the tourism sector (Bachlor, 1997).

In fact, the contribution of tourism and its related services to the Palestinian economy has always been pivotal. It always managed to weather the turmoil of economic recessions ensuing from political upheavals and struggles that characterized the area since the beginning of the century. The tourism sector had always proved itself to be income generating accounting for 38% of GDP in 1999 (UNCTAD, 2000).

In addition it induces direct employment through working in the field of tourism and indirect employment which depends on integration of tourism with other sectors in the economy. In view of the importance of tourism in the economy of so many countries, culture is seen as an important means to develop and renew tourism. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that cultural tourism has become one of the most popular forms of tourism with policy makers. A peaceful and comprehensive settlement of the conflict will naturally encourage tourism and restore confidence among tourists who will visit Palestine (Burns and Selwyn, 1997).

Importance and Trends in Cultural Tourism:

Palestine has a variety of features which present an outstanding cultural tourism potential. Cultural tourism means travel concerned with experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts, and special local lifestyles, values, traditions, events as well as other ways of creative and inter-cultural exchange processes (Kelly, 1998). Cultural tourism aims to attract those tourists whose motives are learning about other cultures, their way of life, habits, customs, traditions, and ways of thinking. This form of tourism is more in line with modern global tourism market trends and is thus likely to see a further increase within the tourism sector (Mckercher, 2002). It is important for the following reasons:

- It helps preserve the cultural heritage.
- It has a positive economic and social impact.
- It establishes and reinforces identity and fosters harmony and understanding among peoples.

Preservation of Cultural and Historical Heritage

Cultural Tourism can make an important contribution to culture and historical heritage by providing means for keeping the traditions alive and financing the protection of heritage as well as increasing visitor's appreciation of that heritage. Tangible heritage may be considered a material manifestation or a symbol of cultural expression, either traditions of living society or those of past societies occupying the same area. Therefore, tangible heritage is focal point for anyone wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the society (Rimmawi, 1992).

In fact, there are several supporting trends influencing the market place for cultural tourism:

- Education is the most significant factor that influences cultural participation;
- Women participate more in cultural activities than men. They now control more income and are in positions of leadership;
- Globalisation is a new trend empowering cultural tourism and conference tourism. Event tourism has become also one of the flagships of cultural tourism; and
- It is important to be aware that tourists, who participate in a cultural event, spend more money than the average tourists and travel for longer periods of time (Riege, 2000).

Economic and Social Development

Cultural tourism has an important role in the development of the economy and social conditions of the host community as a whole and in providing new opportunities for social and economic development. Due to its diversity, cultural tourism provides new and alternative opportunities for the development of many areas of activities and regions (Tawfeeq, 1999).

- It is the task of the host community decision-makers to direct and support maximum sustainable use of the tourism potential for the achievement of the economic and social goals of the host community, which presumes coordinated activities of all parties engaged in tourism development (Costa, 1995).
- Within the economy, Cultural Tourism belongs to the sector of services, which is an important and strong part of today's economy in almost all of the developed countries and in a lot of developing countries (Khalaf, 1997).
- Cultural tourism has come to be seen as an economic activity, which offers additional opportunities to improve local employment and to earn additional income

by offering the visitors and tourists the opportunity to participate and appreciate the local culture (Fredline, 2000).

- Impact of cultural tourism on the general socio-economic development is expressed in the increase of demand for not only the services and products of cultural tourism businesses directly engaged in cultural tourism but also for the products and services of other economic sectors. It influences several economic sectors by providing means for sustaining the local culture (Costa, 1995).
- Cultural tourism creates jobs and increases income in regions and host communities of the destinations visited, where it is much more complicated and expensive to create jobs in other sectors (D'sa, 2000).

Increase of Understanding and Image Building:

Culture and heritage features are essential in building a country's image. It can be one of the key instruments in developing a positive image of a country internationally and an essential element in preserving and enhancing national and local pride and spirit (Shomali, 2004).

In a world that is troubled by conflicts and dislike of foreigners often based on misunderstandings, cultural tourism can facilitate cultural dialog, harmony, and understanding among people (Costa, 1995). More in-depth knowledge of other peoples' culture will stimulate understanding and a wish to cooperate. The creation of a positive image for a tourist destination and making it better known both in the world in general and in the target markets of tourism will effectively help to increase the demand for all products and services, including tourism services and products of the country in question (Costa, 1995).

What are appropriate cultural tourism policies for Palestine?

The Palestinian domestic, regional, and international policies should address several points. For example, the religious and cultural heritage attractions should have their "place identity", in which tourists get attached to them because of their symbolic and physical attributes. A person's attachment to a place is important in understanding his/her behavior, including repeat visitations. This will lead to an increase of tourists to a destination through referrals and positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, Palestinian policies must concentrate on establishing a fair relationship between business and tourists, because it helps to demonstrate a kind of destination attachment to a visited place. The attractiveness of the destination, past experience, satisfaction, familiarity with a destination and the age of the tourists may explain an attachment during their first

visit (Lee, 2001). Destination attachment is related to tourism experience, which represents a discourse of learning. The knowledge can be achieved through "understanding and collecting differences between 'self' (tourists) and 'other' (hosts)". This means of understanding may contribute to the tourist's personal growth and development. Therefore, tourism is an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition, but only on commercial activity (Li, 2000). Moreover, Palestinian tourism has to observe the gap between tourists' financial means and their ambitions (Jacobson and Kristian, 2000).

Managers, travel agents and tour operators can play an important role in educating tourists while entertaining them. In fact, tourism contains cultural capital that can be collected by tourists (Li, 2000). For this reason the tourism industry needs training for its labor force, especially those entering tourism from other sectors (Szivas and Riley, 1999). Those who are involved in the tourism industry should pay attention to the tensions, which occur not only between tradition and modernization, but also between host population and international tourists (Li, 2000). In addition, adverse social and cultural effects of tourism should be minimized. Extensive work should be carried out in order to create a high degree of mutual understanding between the host community and tourists, taking into consideration the benefits of the:

"... awareness of the environment, a local culture, conservation of man-made monuments and wild life presentation." (Dwyer and Forsyth, 1997).

But different societies usually respond in various ways to tourism, ranging from active resistance to complete adoption (Costa and Ferrone, 1995; Fredline, and Faulker, 2000; Besculides *et al.*, 2002).

Economic objectives, foreign exchange, production, job opportunities and infrastructure were not met by the promotion of large, industrially-scaled enterprises, but rather by small hotels which are more likely to market services to guests (Wanhill, 2000; Dwyer and Forsyth, 1997). It should be noted that Islamic tradition recommends having accompaniment on trips to distant places. Policy makers should heavily invest in educating and training tourism-related human resources and improving infrastructure, increasing quality and efficiency of tourism agencies, and investing in information and planning systems. A Palestinian employee in tourism services must know that his duty is to provide service to a paying customer not to his personal guest. Carrying out such behaviour does not mean that he is losing integrity. In addition, an integration of tourism-related strategies with other economic strategies should be carried out in order to insure internal consistency (Alavi and Yasin, 2000; Samawi, 1998). Palestinians must be prepared to be flexible, innovative and responsive to emerging market trends (Ayres, 2000). Heritage and culture of Palestine may furnish an authentic experience to a cultural tourist. Tourists may be attracted to Palestine because of its

historical heritage, which provides them with authenticity and belonging. But Palestinians have to satisfy their tourists, otherwise dissatisfaction may occur. For example, 50 per cent of the visitors coming to Jordan were dissatisfied with transportation and sanitary facilities; 40 per cent found information on site to be lacking, and guidebooks, brochures, maps, and on-site signage were judged to be poor (Kelley, 1998; Wait, 2000; Maqableh and Al-Sarabi, 2001). Palestinian tourism has to influence the tourist taste, such as eating habits and home decoration, by rehabilitating its society and upgrading its tourism services. Tourists are “seekers” experimenting with alternative ways of life (Jacobson, 2001; Augustyn and Pheby, 2000).

Proposed out line for cultural tourism Policies and Strategy in Palestine

The main goal and strategy of cultural tourism development and enhancement in Palestine is to ensure sustainable economic, social, cultural and spatial development based on preservation, maintenance and enhancement of cultural heritage through increased supply and demand, diversity and quality and sale of viable cultural tourism products and services. To achieve the main goals and strategy, the following policy issues and priorities need attention.

Cultural policy

The relationship between the cultural activates and heritage sites and tourism involves the unavoidably conflicting values of preserving and consuming. The key principles of sustainable cultural tourism are: responsible traveling; active preservation of culture and heritage traditions and values and ensuring the welfare and respect of the identity of the Palestinian society, its culture and way of life (Khano, 1997). The cultural tourism destination and the sites within it should be managed in a sustainable way to ensure the presentation of the values for present and the preservation for future generations. The heritage and cultural sites conserved and developed for tourism use should provide sustainable opportunities for both the Palestinian society and visitors to get the experience, and the Palestinian heritage and culture.

Social policy

Tourism and conservation activities planned and implemented in the destination should benefit first of all the Palestinian society, consider social and cultural impact and do not upset the local inhabitants (World Bank, 1990). Local community will participate in the

generating and sharing of the tourism revenues. There should be improvement of social environment and quality of life, development of better recreational opportunities for the local community and identification and support to local initiative as motivating power for cultural development.

Economic policy

Cultural Tourism brings about an increase in local production, the achievement of stability in the balance of payments, the increase in the budget revenues. It makes regional development more effective and balanced and it improves the overall infrastructure, general living environment and the quality of life. Cultural Tourism brings about a growth in GNP, increases in budget income and tax revenues, creates new jobs and preserves the existing jobs (Ayres, 2000).

Environment policy

Sustainable cultural tourism supports the preservation of natural heritage resources, considers natural limitations and carrying capacity, avoids the harmful effects of Cultural tourism on culture and the environment, and ensures that tourism will contribute to the development of local communities to the cultural fulfilment of visitors and to the enhancement of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage.

Educational and investing in Human Capital policy

To promote awareness of the cultural heritage and its development, it is recommended that more people get trained and skilled people to know how to prepare and implement and create projects linked to cultural tourism development and investments. Palestinians have greater need for tourism education and training programs given their dependency on tourism as a mechanism for providing the funds necessary for overall economic development. A precondition for raising the quality of cultural tourism services includes enhancing training, integrating cultural heritage issues more in the regular secondary school curriculum, providing flexible educational measures to respond to the changes in the labor market, securing constant opportunities for upgrade training and retraining for people engaged in cultural tourism.

Governance structure and Administrative policy

There should be active involvement of regional and local cultural tourism-related authorities in the process of planning, decision-making and implementation.

Palestinians and all culture and tourism stakeholders should be involved in planning for both conservation and tourism industry alike.

Rehabilitation and Physical Infrastructural Policy:

Efforts should be made to ensure that the investments are made side by side with the general infrastructure into the cultural tourism infrastructure services and facilities to increase the level of comfort at sites, to ensure that the tourism investments are made also outside the established tourism centres and to ensure that cultural tourism interests are taken into consideration when making long-term infrastructure plans and decisions.

CONCLUSION

On the hope of Palestine's independence and peace will prevail on the region, Palestine will have a weak market share if compared to the Israeli market. However, Palestinians must prepare their own strategies according to their social and economic development goals, which aim to encourage the international and regional travel to their country. It is conceivable that the Palestinian independence could result in the influx of tourists from the Arab, Islamic countries and the rest of the world. In addition, political policies and processes would be a major influence on the tourism activities of the eastern Mediterranean region. Cheong and Miller report that:

"... relative to the substantial attention given to the practical business and marketing of tourism and its economic costs and benefits, very little is presented about its political nature." (Cheong and Miller, 2000)

In 1995, two and a half million tourists visited Israel, with 80 per cent, 40 per cent, and 20 per cent visiting Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, respectively (Khalaf, 1997). In addition, 92 per cent of tourists' expenditures in the areas governed by the Palestinian National Authority leak out in imported goods, but in Israel only 50-60 per cent of such expenditures leak out. This means that the Palestinians have to reduce the leakage effect; otherwise tourism will become a burden on their economy, alongside the deterioration of tourism infrastructure and environment. Moreover, the tourism multiplier will decrease as a result of importing tourism goods. But in Turkey, for example, the tourism multiplier is around 1.96, which means any dollar spent in the Turkish economy will create approximately two dollars in that same economy (Al-Khawaja, 1997).

This paper has revealed that tourism will play a major economic sector and have significant policy implications in Palestine, which lacks tourism facilities. Residents of different social fabrics have great potential to take part in tourism activities. Exemplary plans, with goals from the Palestinian authorities, will attract both local and

international investments. Hence, Palestinian authorities should be aware of constraints which lie on their tourism industry which conclude in the following: first, the Israeli military checkpoints at the entrances of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These check-points hinder the free movement of local people and tourists. Second, the Palestinian tourism industry lacks financial support, which is considered the backbone of development. Third, the Palestinian National Authority does not have either the power of issuing visas or controlling the borders. Also, Palestinian agencies lack communication with the rest of the world. Papatheodorou reports the significance of communication, advertising and information in promoting tourism (Papatheodorou, 2001). Fourth, the Palestinian tourism industry should have its mission accompanied with goals and objectives. Furthermore, a strategy should be developed to reach such goals. Israeli behaviours and policies are severe and hinder Palestinian tourism aspiration. Nowadays, Israelis have a strong grip on the flow of international tourists, starting from visa issuing, flights, lodging and tours within the country. Palestinian objectives can only be achieved by negotiations and joint-venture regional cooperation. Palestinian independence will allow authorities to establish their control over borders (land, sea, and air) which are considered the cornerstone of tourism success. By pursuing its tourism policies, Israel achieves great benefits, which are supposed to be channelled to Palestinian economy.

Finally, Palestine needs a national museum, tourism zones and cultural entertainment district at the centres of urban areas. Most importantly, east Jerusalem needs to be restored and beautified in cooperation with the municipality and the local institutions to pave the road for special sort of governance for the city in the future, since Israeli government are not interested in this part of the city (with the exception of the Jewish quarter). In addition, a museum for the Dead Sea area, visitor centres in historical cities and observation points for viewing the cultural landscape from the Palestinian mountains are very much needed.

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