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ECO TOURISM FOR A TERRITORIAL STRATEGY OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CASE STUDY OF ALGERIA -

THE STRATEGIC INTEREST OF THE KSOURS AND AN ECO SAHARAN TOURISM

- MEANS AND CONDITIONS OF A SAHARAN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Introduction

Regional disparities between Northern and Southern Algerian regions gave rise to many dramatically urban and environmental consequences. Up to now most of the Algerian cities and population are concentrated on the littoral at the opposite of the arid and semi-arid region which represent 87% of the country and regroup only 1/5 of the whole population. Their density is lower than the unit per km, one of weakest to the world.

This intense concentration of the population and cities in the North has very quickly driven The rise of urbanisation induced an overuse of the main natural resources: water and

agricultural lands largely concreted. The strong pressures exerted on natural local heritages and ecosystems witnessed their ability to satisfy urban populations' needs.

Northern Algerian cities accumulate currently many urban crises: housing shortage, rise of unemployment, amount of urban violence.....

Last decade proved that Northern Algerian regions attractiveness turned into a source of trouble and a new planning policy vision emerged. It claims that arid lands are susceptible to constitute the basement of the Future Algerian sustainable development. Recently this idea received extensive attention. Moreover there has been increasing recognition of the importance of southern regions

Although the idea of promoting the Sahara existed since the independence of the country, its valorisation remained partial and without general perspective. Up to now just a very small number of great cities emerged in Algerian south. Development strategies promoted by the successive Algerian government in the Sahara regions are far from being sustainable.

Limits of the Centralised development strategies implemented in the Algerian Sahara

Oasis space is deeply affected through different levels: architectural, urban and territorial, this has negatively affected social practices and religious observances firmly rooted in their historical biotope.

The traditional Saharan system founded on the three components: palm grove, water and ksours, is endangered because of the profound social, economical and cultural mutations imposed on ksourian populations and which have strongly altered the oasis ecosystem.

Urban Saharan agglomerations have witnessed high population growth over the last decades. This high growth cannot be attributed to natural increase only, but also to a significant counter flow of immigrants from adjacent rural areas. Contrary to the rapid urban growth of Saharan cities their hinterland have witnessed a dramatically slowing down in population growth ever observed through their history, menacing thus its ecological and cultural balance. A lot of ancient cities: « ksours », completely disappeared and with them oases, sources of water and vegetation that they contain.

The rapid urban expansion of Saharan cities accelerated the palm grove decline which used to have an important regulating role on the economic level. Several oases cities digested nearly or completely their phoenicicole heritage. In addition to this, the use of inappropriate urban strategies influenced negatively not only the ecology but also the future local and global cultural ecosystem.

The spatial organizations, the architectural and urban ancient production very specific to the local Saharan context seem to disappear gradually to the profit of the modern strange conceptions imported. High Buildings, very large streets disregarding the prospect, maladjusted materials of construction, inappropriate morphology contrasts with the natural landscape while exacerbating gaps between requirements imposed by the aridity of the area and those parachuted conceptions.

Moreover the recent national trend of developing the infrastructure, public amenities and sanitary facilities in spontaneous districts increased the already growing orientation of the villagers towards the modern Saharan cities and accelerated the desertification and the abandonment of the ksours.

It is today more than ever necessary to re-examine Algerian Saharan development principles by promoting a sustainable development strategy. A decentralized cooperation and a new connection between the local and the national and the local and the international are the suitable remedies to the whole Algerian territory dysfunctions.

Protection and valorisation of local resources = local and national response to the problem

Saharan cities should be reconsidered in order to be truly active. Their attractive power must firstly and simultaneously be accompanied by an endogenous reinforcement of the local cultural and social ties thanks to the local energies and abilities and a national impulse of activities. These activities by themselves, the jobs they will generate are susceptible to revalorise the local resources and the local natural and cultural heritage

Cultural tourism could constitute a powerful economic lever for the revalorization of these regions, the protection of the natural and cultural local heritage and the preservation of the whole Algerian ecosystems.

On the other hand ecotourism is susceptible to reorient the urbanization and the population from northern toward the southern regions and to attenuate the disastrous consequences of the concentration of the Algerian urban population on coastal regions.

Saharan ksours are the most favourable areas for the Algerian tourism promotion because of their exceptional character, the quality of their sites and possibilities of reception they could offer.

In relation with the general preoccupation of a sustainable development of the Sahara, ksourian heritage thanks to the eco cultural tourism are Susceptible becoming durable generators of activities and use once restored.

Various activities can be generated through the whole process of conservation and rehabilitation of the ksours, first of all conservation or restoration of ksours should mobilize at the same time specialized workers, local craftsmen. Secondly, Objects and patrimonial buildings restored generate many uses Directly related to their functioning and maintenance, and also various uses related to the direct and indirect animation of patrimonial resources: guides lecturers.... and, on the other hand, activities induced by restoration and rehabilitation processes , hotel trade , transport,

Of course cultural tourism cannot be the only and unique tool of a Sustainable development of the of Saharan regions Nevertheless the ksour rehabilitation could contribute extensively to create a new dynamic trough Saharan cities, on one hand by contributing to satisfy the pressing needs of lodging and on the other hand by improving the conditions of habitability through the ksours themselves.

What are the necessary conditions for the development of the ksours

For a local development project to be based on local resources, this must depend on how to integrate the local populations in the conception and the realization of the project.

The exploration of means and conditions capable to assure the efficient implication and public involvement of ksourian in the process of development of their daily life is a vital necessity.

To ascertain an intervention in this fragile space it is strongly necessary to integrate local population since the beginning at the stage of exploration and conception of an eco tourist - development project, because strange people will share periodically their urban neighbourhood. It would be necessary to establish firstly a participative diagnosis and then conduct investigation aiming to understand and explore the functioning and the way of life in the current oasis agglomerations

The ancient Ksours have been drowned by the different extensions which have been integrated into the urban structure.

The advanced deterioration and the indecency of dwellings that compose them encouraged their relative abandonment because some Ksours continue to be lived in spite of their deficiency.

Such project must reconsider strategies of “return into the ksours”, it Would be therefore necessary to re-examine how those who left ksours perceive their ancient dwellings.

The first objective of the rehabilitation of the ksours must be providing dwelling with public amenities and sanitary facilities. The experience of rehabilitation in the valley of the Mزاب showed that The improvement of habitability conditions inside the ksours encouraged the maintenance of their inhabitants.

The residential degradation of the ksours has been accompanied by deep social mutations. The ancient stratification nearly disappeared, it become necessary to re-examine the new basement of the sociological and spatial structure of the ksours

The occupation and the desertification of ksours have created a disruptive new dynamics especially on the sociological level. The fast growth of the population in Saharan cities during the last decade conjugates the natural growth to the accelerated increase in sedentary nomads.

This passage of a slow integration of nomads toward a rushed installation and juxtaposed of nomads and urban ksourian is susceptible to induce a diversity of practices that it would be imperative to analyze, in order to integrate as new parameters in any initiative or action undertaken.

It would be necessary to study how this cohabitation of populations with contrasted ways of life is lived? and what are the effects induced by this violent process of social mixture

The success of A sustainable planning strategy based on ecotourism depends on the

efficient implication of people concerned.

Previous decisions taken without consulting populations showed their limits.

It is important to reconcile the interests of the state with those of the individuals and the community to ascertain an efficient implication and involvement of the users in the program.

This is why religious associations, traditional zaouias and tribes that constitute the dorsal thorn of the civil society in the Sahara, must not be ignored. They can be vectors in any project aiming to develop those regions. Numerous scientific studies showed that traditional associations are still persistent and very influent in the whole country. This associative dynamism deserves to be analyzed positively to be integrated in any process of development.

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