

Versatility in Hospitality Industry around the Globe

A Case Study on Sustainable Tourism in Kuwait

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Abstract: *The desert was always part of the Arabian culture and a way of life. After the discovery of oil during the 1940's traditional Arab societies become urbanized and settled in newly constructed cities and towns. The desert become a place to visit for leisure and entertained by locals and tourist. In Dubai, the desert is used as a tourist attraction for foreigners. In Kuwait, the deserts is a seasonal attraction for families and group during the winter time. This involves informal leisure activities that endanger the fragile desert environment and cause its pollution and degradation. This sheet discusses the impact of informal desert tourism activities on the desert sustainability in Kuwait. It warns against the negative impact of current practices on the fragile desert environment as a result of informal local tourism activities and also impact on tourism after covid-19. It suggests sustainable measure to deal with the planning and designing for desert ecotourism facilities that aim at protecting the fragile desert environment and eventual extinction.*

Keywords: Economy, community, oil, tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, short for ecological tourism, is a form of tourism that aims being ecologically and socially conscious. It aims at minimizing the negative impact of traditional tourism on the natural environment. Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry.

The concept of “ecotourism” can be misunderstood and misused in practice by placing hotels and accommodation developments in natural landscapes that destroy the ecosystem and the fragile balance between the fauna and flora. As Salama put it, “more and more tourists are increasing abounding traditional vacation for a new type of tourism that gives them the sense of nature.

Trekking in mountain, bird watching, archaeological digs, desert and photo safaris, and scuba diving are all new types of vacation that attract tourists to travel to relatively remote and unspoiled areas. This type travel is referred to as nature-based travel, ecotourism, or environmentally sustainable tourism”.

The purpose of this sheet is to explore the challenges Kuwait faces in developing tourism due to the particularly unique political-economic system of rentierism Kuwait’s tourism industry is relatively underdeveloped in comparison to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, drawing relatively fewer international tourists. Research examining the political economy of tourism in Kuwait has received little attention in the academic literature. However, recent fluctuation in oil prices and uncertainties of the globe economies to diversify and reduce their dependence on oil-based income. To address the increased risks several rentier economies, particularly in the Gulf, have focused on tourism as a means of economic diversification.

This study provides both a macro-level analysis of the political economic obstacles to tourism development in Kuwait and the macro-level challenges that have resulted, particularly in relation to mega development projects, such as the proposed multi-billion dollar Failaka Island development and airport expansion project . While insight from this study are usual for understanding the role of tourism in the rentier economies, this study will also help to further theorize tourism and public diplomacy within the field of international relations and political; economy.

Different from other GCC countries, Kuwait has legged behind in tourism and faces difficulties due to its historical image and geographical location. Tourism is an important tool of diplomacy due to its impact on awareness, image, and influence on international audiences.



Map of Kuwait

II. CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM IN KUWAIT

The future development of tourism in Kuwait faces many obstacles such as lack of tourism infrastructure, attraction and a challenging environment for private industry. Recently, there has been renewed focus on developing the tourism sector in Kuwait as a part of a wider economic diversification strategy meant to reduce the dependence on the oil revenue that makes up the majority of the GDP. This new focus on tourism, however is met with particular challenges and opportunities.

Amongst the pressing issues in revitalization of tourism in Kuwait is the country's relationship and proximity to Iraq. Although the 1990 Gulf War and the direct military threat are long over, tension between the countries is still high, especially with Iraq's current political instability.

The proximity to Iraq, in addition to a heavily guarded demilitarized zone along the 240 km border, gives potential visitors a negative perception of safety in Kuwait. The lack of attraction for tourists is another obstacle for Kuwait's tourism industry. The visitation to Kuwait has been relatively low over the past decades due to inaction by the government to promote international tourism. In one of the only academic tourism papers on tourism in Kuwait, Alhemoud and Armstrong (1996) concluded, in a study of university students and English-speaking foreigners in Kuwait, that neither group was very impressed by the country's tourist attraction, human-made or natural.

While the total tourism receipt have increased, the percentage of the country's exports represented by the tourism industry has decreased from 4% in 1998, likely a result of the September 11th attacks and subsequent war in Iraq. While the number of international tourists travelling to Kuwait is quite low in comparison to other top destination in the region, there is a large number of international day 'visitors'. According to Kuwait Tourism, about 82% of the nearly 3.8 million International inbound tourist arrival numbers are in stark contrast to the outgoing tourism market. In 2007 there were 2.7 million outbound tourists from Kuwait. The outbound tourists spend USD 8.2 billion which accounted for nearly 27% of the country's total imports including 23% in 2010 and 24% in 2014 (World Bank, 2016). The scale of this outbound market suggest that there is untapped potential for growth in the domestic tourism industry.

Kuwait has a long tradition of domestic leisure and recreational activities. Many Kuwait families construct short-term tents in large camping communities in the desert during the winter months. During these cooler months, many Kuwaitis spend weekends or evening in these tents, many of which are furnished with all the comforts of home.

Additionally, there is a large number of beach chalets, where Kuwaitis spend time pursuing leisure activities. Recreational activities including four-wheeling, jet skiing, boating, fishing, horseback riding and falconry are popular. The pursuit of these recreational activities combined with a large number of outbound tourists from Kuwait indicates there is a potential for demand that could be captured through the development and promotion of the domestic tourism industry.



Short Term Tents

Since 2004 there has been a large development push in the tourism and hospitality industry. Hotels and resort have been built including Hilton, Four Season, Jumeirah and Intercontinental. The massive increase in hotel beds combined with the planned hotel and resort components of the mega development (\$85 billion City of Silk, \$3.3 billion Failaka Island) creates the need for the development of attraction to draw leisure tourists to Kuwait.

Currently, the market is largely made up of business tourists, most of whom are connected to the US military operation Iraq and the energy sector. While Kuwait has relaxed visa procedure for the certain region (e.g. GCC, North America, Australia, and most of the Western Europe) (Stensgaard, 2004), visitors from other region still have to deal with often complicated and tedious visa procedures.

The country's potential perceived authenticity combined with its accessibility and proximity to potential source markets provide some of the necessary draws for international tourists. Unique attraction for visitors include the iconic Kuwait Towers, the Liberation tower, Old Souk and Grande Mosque, the waterfront Corniche, and an array of beautiful beaches. Kuwait's tourism website also includes several other attraction for visitors including amusement parks, ice skating rink, swimming pool complex, resorts, yacht clubs, parks, and Green Island the first artificial island in the Gulf region. Kuwait also offers visitors a unique opportunity for experiencing authentic culture experiences and interaction with the local people.



Liberation Tower

Some experts in the tourism industry point to the lack of government support and coordinated marketing initiatives as the main obstacles to increasing number of international tourists and keeping domestic tourists in Kuwait.

The tourism sector in Kuwait is handled by a small division of the Ministry of Commerce Industry, and not by a separate ministry or board. This means that any international promotional activity and campaigns, such as the ITB in Berlin or the World Travel Market in London are supported by the private sector entities such as Kuwait Airways, the tourism operator Kuwait Tourism Services, and the Kuwait Hotel Owners Association. Essentially, many in the private sector feel that the tourism industry is treated with indifference by the government.

This perceived lack of support reflects the ongoing challenges for private businesses in Kuwait, and the perceived general lack of support is arguably changing, as many Kuwaitis have recognized the need for economic reforms and

diversification of the economy. The recent expansion of the hospitality industry and the recent general economic reforms suggest a shift in the perception of the tourism industry's role in securing the economic future of the country.

III. TOURISM, DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Tourism can play a large role in diversification of the economy if challenges are overcome. Tourism has been a central part of the strategy of several oil-dependent rentier states in the Gulf and elsewhere. Additionally, the development of tourism in Kuwait could also help to alleviate some of the challenges associated with Kuwait's unique form of 'popular rentierism'.

The relation between tourism and development has been explored by many scholars interested in prescribing solutions for tourism while promoting development (Bianchi, 2004; Brahman, 1996; Wall, 1997). The literature differs on whether tourism is connected to political economy especially in the face of privatization and the neoliberal turn. Scholars have also explored how rentier economies and neo-patrimonial states promote tourism. However, the relation between tourism and public and diplomacy needs theorizing, especially in the era of uncertainty of the global financial system.

Public diplomacy refers to acts the state engages in with other actors and networks to influence outside audiences. Kuwait struggles to create a beneficial environment for the public and the network. The difficulties suffered by the private sector can impact diplomatic relations. Besides being an economic activity, tourism can lead to diplomacy and contribute to a deepening of international relations.

Studies from marketing and branding have been highlighted in the public diplomacy literature. Moreover, international scholar Joseph Nye has introduced the concept of 'soft power' to describe "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Soft power is the degree to which a country's culture activities or values become attractive to outside audiences. These soft power tools have also been recognized as important in the public diplomacy literature. In the twenty-first century, tools in public diplomacy include educational exchanges, media, culture and arts. New tools such as social media have also proved to influence government and international opinion. In Kuwait, a developed tourism industry can allow for tourists' exchanges in person or through social media.

New public diplomacy literature has also emphasized the role of non-state actors in impacting the attractiveness and image of a country. The role of international and non-governmental organizations in the current global arena inspires this body of literature. Furthermore, following global terrorist attacks around the world in places like New York, London and Madrid, scholars have been debating how non-state actors such as terrorist organizations can impact a state's diplomacy.

The most recent Istanbul Atatürk Bombing of 2016 are illustrations of the role of non-state actors that can be detrimental to tourism. The case of Kuwait shows how rentier economies can have difficulties in diversifying their economy and developing tourism in the current global arena. Neighbour to Iraq, close to unsafe destinations and with a turbulent historical past, Kuwait struggles to develop its tourism and attract as many tourists as the GCC neighbours. In the current international political economy, uncertainties that affect tourism and diplomacy have mushroomed. A rentier economy in the GCC such as Kuwait is in a vulnerable position due to geographical location, historical legacy and pressure of the current global economy.

IV. SUMMARY

AN ECOTOURISM EXAMPLE FROM KUWAIT

Serious attempts were made by Kuwait government to protect areas in Kuwait, 'some of them were fenced and designated as nature reserves, and one as a "National Park"'. Yet, no serious attempts were made to develop ecotourism in the desert in Kuwait. Regional conflict and wars during the eighties and nineties did not permit the development of projects in the desert. Most tourists' projects are located within the urban area and the southern coastal strip called Al-Kheran.

The Subiyah Resort is designed by the Kuwait firm SSHI. The project is located at the northern part of Kuwait on Khour Al Subiyah overlooking the Bubiyan Island. The beach front extends to about 500 meters and is regarded as shallow water area with a high percentage of deposits due to its proximity to the Shatt Al-Arab delta. The resort components are a hotel with 100 double-rooms, a resort with 63 chalets, various cafes and restaurants, a Spa health club and marina complex for servicing private and rental boats of sea-bound visitors.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PLANNING & DESIGN FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TOURIST FACILITIES IN THE DESERT OF KUWAIT

The gap between ecotourism theory as revealed in the literature and ecotourism practice as indicated by its on-site application. The framework to help achieve a balance between conservation and development through the promotion of synergistic relationship between natural areas, local population and tourism. The framework can also be used to assess the status of ecotourism in particular site or locality.

Any ecology project requires the adoption of a different approach to architecture. This approach should be based on four principle that should be taken into account while designing ecologies, [2]Farouk El-Baz, "A river in the desert". These are:

1. Design solution grow from the physical surroundings of a place and its interaction with culture setting around it.
2. Design should be based on environment criteria and environment constraints.
3. Local communities should be involved in the design and implementation processes since they have acquired knowledge and expertise in design and building over the years.
4. Design should be integrated harmoniously with nature and architectural forms should not compete with, but should complement within natural landscape.

Utilizing this approach, asset of sustainable design guidelines for Kuwait desert Eco lodging can be outlined. They can be categorized in term of site considerations, economic strategies, and community planning.

SITE CONSIDERATIONS

1. The site selection should provide a variety of camping levels and supporting facilities, including free camping, fixed camping, recreating and sports, and different gathering places to accommodate the different needs of the visitors.
2. Environment controls and passive techniques should be used to provide maximum comfort for the users.
3. Any existing natural elements in the site, such as tress, water resources, facilities or utilities, should be preserved and maintained.
4. Site development, building orientation, shading elements and other environment design techniques should be used according to a comprehensive environment study.
5. All building material, colours, facades, roof treatment, entrances and parking areas should reflect the character of the project that calls upon desert traditions while accommodating modern lifestyle.
6. Material and colours used in an Eco lodge project should be of good quality and high durability to sustain weather condition. It is also preferred to use local material as much as possible.
7. Landscape design should give special attention to unifying the entire project. It is to attempt to unifying the entire project. It is to attempt to highlight building entries, soften building masses, provide image to site development, and define site edges.
7. Landscape design should mimic the natural desert environment surrounding the site. It should sustain all weather conditions and preserve natural water resources.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

1. Environment techniques are to be used to reduce the energy cost of the resort.
2. Appropriate thermal insulation to exterior surfaces should be utilized.
2. Massive walls should be used to increase the time lag effect.
3. Small window should be used to avoid undesired hot outdoor air, and to reduce the effect of the intense sunlight while adequately lighting the interiors during the daytime.
4. Light interior surface, especially for the ceiling, should be used to diffuse the sunlight that enters through the small window.
5. Light exterior surface colors to minimize the absorption of the interior radiation.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

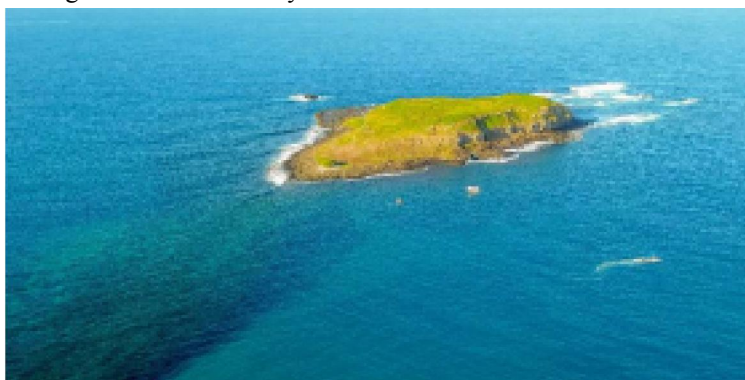
1. Building are to be as closely clustered as possible for the shade they offer one another and the public spaces between them
2. Orientation of principal facades of building should face south.
3. Shading elements should be used according to specific strategies.
4. Time related strategies such as the time shifting concept should be adopted in some parts of the project.
5. The swimming pool area should be well developed to be the center of attraction in the project in the summer season.
6. The camp area should be closed and well maintained during summer season.

V. CONCLUSION

The recent development in Kuwait have started to provide the necessary development of infrastructure for growth of the tourism industry. The development of Failaka Island, for example, is an integral part of Kuwait's future tourism development plans. The planned development of Failaka Island and the airport expansion aim at becoming the centerpiece of the strategy for Kuwait to emerge as a competitive alternative to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar as a leading destination for international long haul, regional, and domestic tourists. This is based on the study of [1]Helal, Ahmed (18 November 2020).

There have been several development plans for the island dating back to the 1960s which have been hampered by the political and economic landscape of Kuwait and the less than favorable environment for private sector cooperation, the feasibility of these proposed mega projects is questionable, as in the future expansion of the tourism industry in Kuwait.[3]Selvik, Kjetil (2011).

These challenges faced by Kuwait in developing the tourism industry can be overcome through government support the diversification of the economy and invest in the tourism industry. Cases of other GCC countries such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Qatar show that a political system that encourages mutual interests through public-private partnership is crucial for this development. Moreover, the Kuwait political system should avoid political deadlocks that can be detrimental to advancing the tourism industry.



Falaika Island

The Kuwaiti case shows how rentier economies are under new pressures to diversify their economies and how tourism development can be crucial to benefitting Kuwaiti diplomatic relations. The uncertainties due to oil price fluctuations and changing security in the region make the development of tourism more vulnerable. Moreover, as new public diplomacy recognizes the importance of social media and non-state actors in developing images and impacting diplomacy, tourist exchanges and interaction are much sought after. However, the interest of the state, public and businesses should be harnessed and facilitated for tourism and diplomatic relation to flourish.

The COVID 19 pandemic has forced the tourism sector to shift its focus to resiliency, sustainability and interconnectedness among diverse stakeholders in the sector. The UNWTO recently published strategic guidance for a responsible recovery of the tourism sector, recommending ways to support a responsible recovery from the current situation and to build better tourism. It outlines six lines of action: public health, social inclusion, biodiversity conservation, climate action, circular economy, as well as governance and finance. The diversity of these topic illustrates the major trends in the sector: recognition of the necessary coherence and cooperation between representative



of different social and economic sectors related to tourism.

The tourism sector's cross-cutting nature means that sustainability trends present in any relevant industry can - and should - be applied to tourism. That is why the globe trends of clean energy, green building and sustainable waste management, for example, are also reflect in tourism. At the same time, consumer demand for sustainable practices in tourism is inevitably growing, prompting the sector to

respond. However, studies show that consumer behavior is still difficult to predict when it comes to tourism, which is definitely something the industry should work to improve in the coming years.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has witnessed a considerable decrease in CO2 emissions, most notably within the transportation industry, including tourism-related transportation. Daily global CO2 emissions over all industries decreased by a average 17% by early April 2020 compared with 2019 levels. Simultaneously, the pandemic also caused severe economic loss for the tourism industry in general, as well as popular tourist destination.



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