

# A new approach to sustainable tourism: Beyond environmental protection: The case of the Souss-Massa region

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## Abstract

The tourism industry is ranked among the largest industries in the world. However, the degrading effects of tourism have become a major concern and must be addressed quickly. From this negative perspective, the concept of sustainable tourism has emerged in the field of reducing the effects of tourism activities, which has become almost universally accepted as a desirable and politically appropriate approach to tourism development.

Our article presents the main ideas of sustainable tourism in the Souss Massa region. It involves economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects through the planning and management of tourism. In addition, we deal with the historical background of the idea of sustainability and the main international events regarding this topic while highlighting the negative effects of tourism that can be avoided by applying the principles of sustainable development.

**Key words:** Sustainable tourism- Management of tourism- Sustainable development.

## Introduction

Sustainable tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, while meeting the needs of visitors, professionals, the environment and host communities". Sustainable tourism applies to all destinations as long as they maintain a balance of ecological, economic and sociocultural aspects. This ensures the viability of the environment in question.

The concept of sustainable tourism has evolved since the 1990s. The 1992 Rio Summit brought together the terms sustainable development and tourism, but it was the first time that actual tourism practices were mentioned. At the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote, 1995, which defined the principles of sustainable tourism. Then, in 1999, the General Assembly of OMT adopted the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism which sets out various recommendations to guide the players in the territory. It is about promoting sustainability through environmental, economic, social, and cultural balance. (Luciani, 2016). It was not until 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg,

that sustainable tourism was recognized as a management strategy for the protection of natural resources. The culmination of this recognition came 10 years later, the 2012 Rio+20

conference discussed new ways of thinking about economic sustainability generated by sustainable tourism as a regional development tool. In addition, in 2004, the principles of sustainable tourism were updated by the Sustainable Development Committee. Since COP 21 in Paris in 2015, sustainable development, and thus sustainable tourism, is no longer just a concept, it has taken on implications for implementing measures. (Ruiz, 2014).

2017 was an increasingly auspicious year for sustainable tourism as the United Nations has declared it the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Sustainable Development. The purpose of this declaration is to develop sustainable tourism at the international level, thereby promoting understanding among all peoples, acceptance of different civilizations and increasing appreciation for the inherent values of different cultures. Today allows "to increase the contribution of the tourism sector to the pillars of sustainability" and therefore to draw attention to the dimensions and repercussions of this sector, often undervalued. This promotion of sustainability in tourism follows the Rio+20 conference declaration, which states: Well-designed and organized tourism can contribute to the sustainable development aspects and the creation of employment and business opportunities.

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Sustainability is one of the hottest topics trying to connect social, civil engineering, and environmental sciences with future technologies. As a set of goals, sustainability describes desirable environmental conditions and the ability of people to directly and indirectly benefit from them now and in the future. As a practice and action, sustainability describes human behavior that sustains and enhances human well-being and supports the ability of human societies to interact with the environment in ways that discourage reduced benefits.

Sustainable tourism development has received considerable attention in many scientific studies, especially tourism science, and has been one of the fastest growing research areas in tourism science since the late 1980s. According to Buckley (2012), the specific term “sustainable tourism” was first used almost two decades ago. During the first decade, basic frameworks from tourism, economics and environmental management were studied. The second decade gave rise to several conceptualizations and a series of critiques, including Sharpley (2000), Gossling (2002), Liu (2003), Saarinen (2006), Lane (2009b), and Liu (2013). According to Bramwell & Lane, two of the biggest founders of these concepts in the tourism industry, sustainable tourism addresses many of tourism's problems, including environmental degradation and severe impacts on society and traditional culture. It emerged as a negative, reactive concept (Bramwell and Lane, 1993). Gradually, the development of tourism was perceived as a solution capable of creating positive changes through the ideas of sustainable tourism.

There are many definitions of sustainability and sustainable development. The best-known definition of sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs” (WCED, 1987). This definition implies a link between economic development, environmental protection, and social justice, with each element reinforcing the other. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2001) has defined sustainable development as: “*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*”.

Liu (2013) emphasizes a precise definition of 'sustainability'. This implies an important role for the state in preparing for the continuous improvement of living conditions for future generations. “Sustainable development” is more process-oriented and associated with controlled change that improves the conditions of those involved in such development. “Sustainable tourism” is defined as all types of tourism compatible with or contributing to sustainable development. “Sustainable tourism” requires both sustainable growth of tourism's contribution to the economy and society, and sustainable use of resources and the environment, achieved through a thorough understanding and proper management of tourism demand. (Liu,2013). Liu (1994) defined tourism development as a dynamic process of matching tourism resources with the needs and preferences of actual or potential tourists.

## II. METHODOLOGY & DATABASE:

### 1. Database:

The economic contribution of tourism activity in Morocco is certainly significant. Government officials increasingly see it as a strategic sector to support

economic development. But what about the environmental and social costs of sustainable development? The main purpose of this article is to examine the aspects in which tourism is a driver of sustainable development in Morocco, particularly in the Souss Massa region. The activity of sustainable tourism can be transposed to all tourist activities, it acts on the behavior of consumers and producers in the sector to ensure respect for the environment and the resources they use. The purpose of this practice is to educate population about sustainable production and consumption along the entire supply and demand chain. Thus, strategies and policies are necessary for all the actors of the territory.

Due to existing problems such as the lack of information on sustainable tourism in the Souss-Massa region, we attempted to develop our own database by combining several sources in order not to limit the sample. Our goal is to obtain as much information as possible about as many companies as possible that recognize the importance of sustainable development and incorporate it as a strategy into their activities. A sample of 25 companies, were selected. The interviews were conducted through the distribution of questionnaires, the preparation of interviews, etc. We also used computer databases of certain public institutions and annual activity reports of some companies.

### 2. Methodology:

Our article is based on multiple research papers by circulating paper questionnaires, online surveys, and interview settings, employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The legal form	Number of establishments	%
Businesses/Companies	10	40%
Sole proprietorships	7	28%
Non-profit organizations	5	20%
Partnerships	2	8%
Cooperatives	1	4%
Total	25	100%

s whose main activities are related to one of the following five industry groups: A sample of 25 units was processed in two phases.

2.1. Target Population  
The target group consists of Souss-Massa companies

**Phase 1:** All companies with an email address were invited to complete the survey on March 6th and 7th, 2020.

As of March 7, 2020, all companies without email addresses are included in phone interviews.

**Phase 2:** Companies that did not respond to the web component have been added to the phone component as of March 15, 2020.

It was known from the beginning that the target number of interviews in the transport sector would not be achieved. It was agreed that these "missing" interviews would be distributed to other sectors.

## 2.2. Survey:

The original survey was provided by the client and has since been revised and translated. The telephone version of the questionnaire was tested in February 25 and 26, 2020 with four respondents. Changes made to the questionnaire after testing were approved by the client.

Interviews were conducted in French or Arabic, at the respondents' choice. They lasted an average of 20 minutes on the phone and 15 minutes online.

## 2.3. Collection:

Collection was performed in two ways: Phone Collection and Web Collection. As shown in the following table.

	Date of collection	Response rate
Phone	7 Mars 2020	20,3%
Web	15 Mars 2020	12%

## 2.4. Weighting and treatment

Data were first validated to eliminate errors, outliers, or other anomalies. Data were weighted to all eligible and ineligible respondents by simple extrapolation to a shared distribution (geographic region and industry).

# III. RESULTS

The Sub-Saharan region of Souss-Massa, south of the High Atlas, offers two types of destinations: coastal tourism along the Atlantic Ocean (particularly around Agadir) and the mountain and valley countryside south of the High Atlas. Nearly every regional destination in Morocco has seen small-scale private tourism initiatives focused on sustainability (at least in a broader sense). However, the RDTR (Rural Tourism Development Network) in the Souss-Massa region seems to be the most

important private initiative in Morocco in terms of sustainable tourism.

In addition, a detailed study on sustainable tourism activities in the Souss-Massa region, conducted between 2012 and 2014, found that among the region's traditional hotel sector (mainly operated by national and international hotel chains), Club Robinson (by owned tour operator TUI) had a clear focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (El Boudribili 2014). Apart from this seaside resort, all other hotels and holiday resorts surveyed meet only the(rare) legal requirements regarding the impact of their activities on the environment, thus avoiding any additional commitment in favor of the idea of sustainability.

A second good example in the Souss-Massa area was the owner-managed lodge Ecolodge Atlas Kasbah. The place focuses on rural tourism and practices a holistic and sustainability-focused approach with a comprehensive environmental management plan covering water, energy and waste management. Apart from that, a social dimension is also included in terms of integrating local people and raising awareness among visitors who follow a broader approach of corporate social responsibility. A focus on sustainability is combined with high product quality, including a range of activities ranging from traditional excursions to traditional craft workshops (pottery, soap making, etc.).

While Club Robinson's commitment to sustainability is limited to a more isolated internal activity, the owners of Atlas Kasbah can see it as one of the rare examples of a single activity having a broader impact.

The owner of Atlas Kasbah has been a key figure since 2011 when some tourism professionals and academics founded the RDTR at the encouragement of the regional council. Its objective was to federate the small Its purpose is to bring together small tourists in the rural environment of the region to build and organize the rural tourism sector, to organize and manage all common interests and to promote rural tourism practices (promotion, communication, marketing). Promote the exchange of best practices, ensure the quality of rural tourism products, commit to sustainable and responsible rural tourism development, and build partnerships with local tourism stakeholders at national and international levels. (RDTR & Afkar 2013).

The main objective of the network is to strengthen the performance of small tourism activities by creating a network focused on capacity building and providing the service orientation necessary to participate successfully in the tourism market - which is marked by a high degree of competition. Besides developing and promoting the rural tourism product itself, orientation towards sustainability has been an integral part of RDTR's mission from the very beginning. At the same time, many marketing efforts have been launched, especially using the Internet and social media tools (RDTR & Afkar2013;), which are easily

accessible, have low entry barriers and do not incur high financial costs.

In order to strengthen the competitiveness of tourism in the region as well as the orientation towards sustainability in 2012, the RDTR began to work in cooperation with the Ibn-Zohr University in Agadir to establish a Quality and Environment Charter in Tourism (QET). The general assembly approved this charter in 2013 (El Boudribili 2014). The Charter paved the way for a classification system focused on two key aspects: Product quality and sustainability. It includes attention not only to classical aspects towards the environment, but also to human resources, local residents, visitor awareness, and other aspects related to an integrated understanding of sustainability. There are 4 levels from "Basic" to "Excellent". Two-thirds of the ranking points are related to quality aspects and one-third to sustainability (El Boudribili 2014). The classification system was previously open only to RDTR members (and thus can serve as an added value for members and increase their interest in joining the network). Of 48 of the RDTR members who own accommodations or restaurants, 44 were evaluated for ranking. Only two companies were purely and simply excluded from the ranking, this can be interpreted as a selective interest in networks of owners who have already demonstrated minimal quality and sustainability. However, if the ranking agency and the classified facility have a certain relationship, it can also be considered ambivalent. At the same time, only 14% of the theoretically possible points need to be achieved to be classified at the basic level (El Boudribili 2014). This appears to have relatively low barriers to entry and, through its initial baseline ranking, has medium quality and sustainability ambitions that hope to bring their business closer to sustainability issues in the future. It even attracts businesses. The process-oriented intention is demonstrated by the fact that only four properties (including, of course, the Ecolodge Atlas Kasbah as the highest-rated accommodation) received an "excellent" rating, suggesting, thus signaling to others that future improvements could lead to a higher ranking.

#### IV. CONCLUSION:

This article has provided an overview of the literature on the definition and application of sustainable tourism in the Souss-Massa region. The journal aims to provide an opportunity to support the efforts of researchers and practitioners and meet their need for easy access to sustainable tourism publications. In addition, English-language journals were also considered in this study.

This study has certain limitations. It should be noted that some of the data used in this review were collected from academic journals, and conference proceedings, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, textbooks and working papers not published in the literature on sustainable tourism. Excluded. This may mean that this review is not complete. However, it does provide a comprehensive overview as it contains the majority of

articles published by scientific journals. Therefore, this article provides academic researchers and practitioners with a framework for future research.

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