

INSIGHTS INTO THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES OF ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN IRAQ

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Abstract: Tourism development is one of the important ways to achieve integrated economic development through the compatibility between the various productive and service sectors, and to make progress in quality and level of life. Yet this purpose cannot be achieved as a final aim without achieving the benchmarks in both the productive and service sectors. But the questions that arise regard the obstacles that hinder the path of the sustainable tourism development in Iraq and their impact on the tourism sector in the country. The research deals with descriptions of the most important determinants of domestic tourism in Iraq and shows that many of these quantifiable factors are of notable quality, while some are quantified and possibly included in the model record. From here, the focus will be laid on these factors as a driver and a motif to address the negative issues in the tourism industry of Iraq, especially since Iraq has become increasingly dependent on domestic tourism, more than on international tourism, in the light of deteriorating security conditions that stand as a major impediment in the entry of foreigners inside the country.

Key words: tourism, tourism development barriers, tourism promotion, Iraq

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon and has become lately one of the largest industries in the world. The impact of tourism is extremely varied. On the one hand, it plays an important and certainly positive role in the socio-economic and political development of the destination countries by, for instance, creating new employment opportunities. Also, in certain instances, it may contribute to a broader cultural understanding by raising awareness and instilling respect for the diversity of cultures and ways of life. On the other hand, as a tool in creating jobs, tourism is nowadays the most important source of national income to some countries because of its prominent position in the development of the community, in the area where rebounding public services grow through modern facilities to relax and enjoy the beauty of nature and the study of civilizations.

According to the expectations of some scholars, the world economy in the current century will soon be led by the three service industries, namely “communications, information technology and tourism industry”. Tourism has thus become an integral part of the industry and includes many fields like Planning, Investment, Construction, Marketing and Promotion.

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Iraq possesses multiple elements of tourism attraction, among which ancient civilizations, holy, places for all religions in the world and the nature of the mountains and rivers stretching from north to south across Iraq. Despite these advantages, its share within the world tourism is still below its potential, because the tourism sector in Iraq faces many restrictions, notably concerning the overall security situation, failure in adopting policies and lack of investment in infrastructure and basic services. These compelling issues need careful and long-term analysis so the development of the tourism sector could finally become an integrated and productive part in the process of economic development.

METHODOLOGY

Depiction of the difficulties of tourism development implied that we used different statistical data and information from central institutions, literature, and other sources such as interviews or dialogues with representatives of different institutions. The main hypothesis is that tourism development in Iraq is connected with numerous less visible aspects. These could be catalogued as difficulties, which explain why tourism is not significant in the present-day Iraq economy. To demonstrate what kind of difficulty strongly influences the sustainable development of tourism, our analysis has divided them into two categories: difficulties which are closely connected to tourism (internal environment), and difficulties which are closely connected to the general environment of tourism development (external environment). The main approach focuses on the logical interaction between different factors and conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There is no doubt that the tourism offer and the tourist attraction, both extremely rich and diverse, have increasingly diversified. However, as long as there are important obstacles and problems, they are not enough to achieve the expectations and demands and do not contribute to attracting tourists. Taking into consideration the huge tourism potential of Iraq, there seem to be very few signs that this activity could be further developed in the future, with the main causes being the little interest in promoting the Iraqi tourism and a bad environment to sustain promotion of effective policies in the field.

SYSTEM OF DIFFICULTIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Difficulties generated by the internal environment

Long-term issues of political instability and security

This difficulty is one of the main factors affecting the tourism offer, because it is highly sensitive to tourism demand. For example, one year (1989) after the end of the Iraq-Iran war, with the country showing signs of stability, the number of foreign visitors to Iraq totaled a number of over one million persons (1,025,149). In the following period, the number of visitors decreased progressively, with 70-80% due to the circumstances of the hot zone that followed the 1990 Gulf War. This regression is explained by the fact that Iraqi media publicly announced the use of depleted uranium weapons in the war, with direct effects on people's health. At the same time, there is yet another element, the economic blockade, which led to a decline in the medical care system and subsequently triggered the spread of many diseases, a fact that became a phenomenon. Taking into account the political situation and constant decrease of individual and collective security, the tourism offer has been drastically affected. The tourism supply is the basic engine of tourist demands. All these are repelling factors for foreign tourists and for inbound tourism (Al-Houri, 2000).

Another important event during the recent evolution of Iraq was the collapse of the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, and the emergence of a new administration created under UN coordination. Marked by a strong instability, the entire period after Saddam is characterized by high insecurity, which is not favorable for tourism development. Despite of promises and prognosis on the post-Saddam evolution, it is still difficult to predict the consequences and end of present-day turbulences.

Basic and specific tourist display can be understood as a complex of major problems, which generates a huge political instability (figure 1).

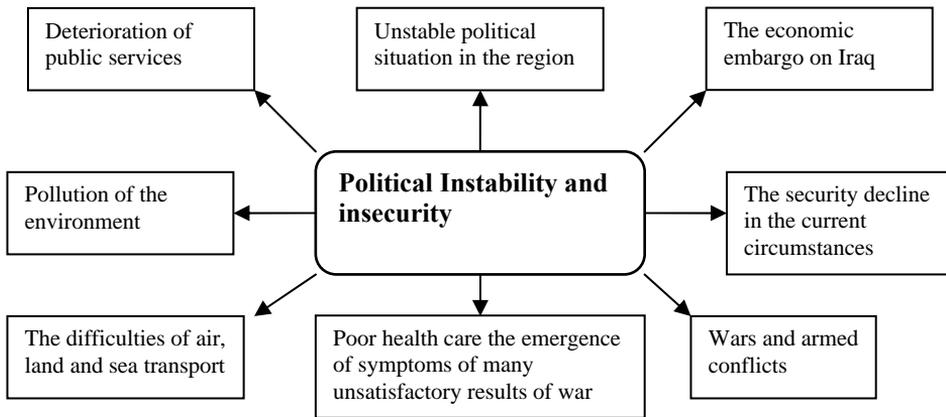


Figure 1. Major factors as a source of political instability and insecurity in nowadays Iraq

It is well-known that a tourist searching for convenience will be primarily looking for personal security and peace of mind. If these factors are not available, other elements and attractions can't be an important pull factor for tourists. In the light of the current circumstances of the country, we conclude that factors such as political instability and insecurity serve as major barriers hindering the present and future sustainable tourism development of Iraq.

Economic situation

Monetary instability: The absence of a clear and stable monetary policy in the present-day economic development of Iraq affects the marketing process of the tourism product. This leads to fluctuating demands for the national tourism sector, reducing the capacity of attracting local and foreign investment.

The importance of monetary policy in inbound tourism is connected with the high sensitivity of the demand to price. Frequently called "flexibility", this sensitivity affects the mobility of incoming tourism and limits competition and seasonal market of tourism products. Given this situation, we identified some obstacles or problems, which could be developed in further, more detailed studies. Among these restrictions, we mention the followings:

- intense competition between Iraq and the other Middle East countries as far as tourism products are concerned; there is a strong correlation between competition and political stability, and many parts of Middle East are favored.

- limited or little demand for the Iraqi tourism products for the time being.

- most tourism demand focuses on religious/sacred tourism and archeological tourism as: the ancient city of Babylon, the shrine of Imam Ali (AS), the city of Samarra and the ancient city of Ur. etc. They are world famous archeological sites. A small percentage of the tourism demand on cultural tourism and an even smaller percentage on business tourism will probably be practiced in north of Iraq especially Kurdistan region. As for other forms of tourism therapeutic tourism or ski tourism demand is limited or virtually non-existent.

- absence of seasonal fluctuation (seasonality) as regards tourism demands, for any of the three main forms of tourism (religious, cultural/archaeological, business). For example, religious tourism is compatible with several religious occasions, while business tourism corresponds with various economic conferences and trade fairs being held.

- contrasting differences in pricing based on the type of tourist group and the purpose of the visit (Wahab, Grompon, 1976).

Weakness of tourism promotion: Following the logical steps of our analysis, the most important issue is represented by the weaknesses deriving from tourism promotion. The success of promotion depends on the coordination of the seller's efforts towards establishing information outlets and facilitating the sale of goods and services, or accepting a certain idea. Concurrently, promotion means developing specific activities in order to forge communication with different markets through advertising, publication, public relations, media, video and audio, printing services and Internet. Making a good promotion implies physical evidence and processes of service delivery, as well as service producers to accomplish and embody the mental images carried by tourists from destinations (Abu Rahma, 2001).

Promotion activity of tourism in Iraq suffers from several obstructions or problems, which diminish the attraction of tourists, and cause some negative effects on the economic activities nowadays. Some of these obstructions are: lack of clarity in the promotional mix that would ensure a successful publicity for tourism in Iraq; few promotional policies based on proper scientific research among the ones implemented by the Tourism Authority or by private sectors or professional organizations working in the tourism sector; management deficiencies within the overall structure of the Tourism Authority and lack of a specialized department charged with fulfilling the process of tourism promotion of tourist products in Iraq; decrease of tourism publications promoting national values and their related services; absence of a national strategy for tourism promotion by use of prints and films; failure in determining the basics of promotional design of the country code (National Logo) as well as in identifying particular logos for every province of Iraq and giving a clear tourism picture for those provinces and as it is the case in the developed countries of the world; limited access to international information networks (Internet) to provide essential knowledge regarding the Iraqi tourism product; insignificant role of embassies and cultural centers abroad in the promotion of Iraqi tourism product and other marketing outlets.

Other initiatives of tourism promotion are hindered by the following deficiencies: limited satellite contribution or limited coordination between the Tourism Authority agencies in making use of Iraqi Satellite TV channels in this field; low international promotion and participation in foreign fairs for the promotion of tourism products and poor representation in international organizations concerned with tourism activity; lack of special publications for archaeological sites; few initiatives in proclaiming special occasions for tourist shopping that would resemble similar events from neighboring countries. This is mainly due to the lack of integration, for now, of major components. The Tourism Authority has nonetheless defined and promoted "The tourist week"; little or no promotion of folklore, historical monuments and heritage within the many local events and celebrations for the purpose of benefiting from tourism programs (Al-Alaq, al-Tai, 1999).

Weak development of complementary services and facilities

The importance of complementary services is that they constitute an outer framework for the tourism product as they approach and complement the tourism product and required services which are brought to tourists. Without them tourism products remain static and incomplete. However, problems once again occur, affecting tourism activities and supplementary services in Iraq, which, in turn, have negative effects on the domestic and inbound tourism.

Insights into this issue reveal as an important obstacle the weak performance of the hotels' system. The main cause of low attractiveness is low level of investment and difficulty in elaborating a development plan for investment recovery. The second issue would be inadequate capacity (occupancy rates) for hotels to meet the demand, especially in the peak of the tourism season. In this respect, we need to point out the losses, particularly in areas with high levels of religious attractiveness. Here, because of the lack of a booking system, hotels do not make use of their full capacity, which eventually results in many empty beds. This prevents plenty of travel and tourism companies to find an adequate place for their groups.

Last but not least, another issue deals with the decline of tourism transportation, which is far from supporting the potential of tourism development in Iraq. An equal negative impact is caused by the lack of specialized transport companies, specifically dedicated to tourism. Tourism transportation can be correlated with high degrees of infrastructure deterioration, as shown in (figure 2).

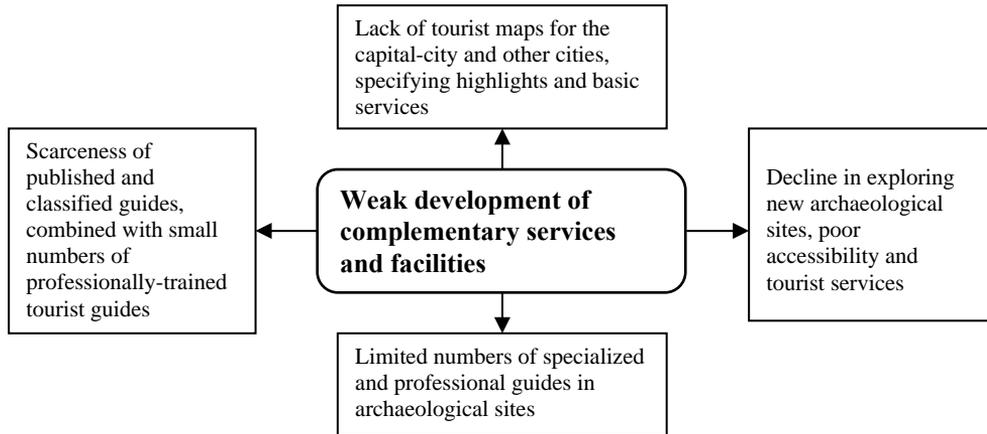


Figure 2. All four exemplified features are missing from Iraq but are regular aspects in developed countries of the world, where tourism plays a key-role in the economy

Restrictive cultural issues

Iraq has enforced many behavioral rules in the course of time, which occasionally confuse Western visitors who are not familiar with local customs or culture and may sometimes face difficulties. Homosexuality is illegal and kissing in public is considered inappropriate. In addition, visitors are required to obey Muslim religious restrictions even if they are not Muslims themselves, such as not consuming alcohol anywhere except in some licensed venues.

Wearing a bikini, swimsuits / trunks are only permitted in swimming pools areas, which are separated for men and women, and it is illegal to be topless. Wearing swimsuits outside such areas may result in arrest under public indecency laws. Because many of these rules are little known, foreign tourists from Europe and The Americas have been deprived of their freedom and/or of personal property on the grounds of exhibiting inappropriate behavior that would otherwise be familiar to them in their home countries. This is possibly one of the obstacles in attracting foreign tourists.

Other problems

Several other problems affecting the tourism sector can be further identified. They constitute important impediments for tourism activities, although they are general in nature. For example, the low productivity of the tourism sector is systematically ignored while the government focuses on other sectors. This has immediate economic effects. In this case, tourism is still pragmatic as a marginal activity which is not highlighted as an important national economic activity. One of the major priorities and strategic objectives of the central decision-makers is the exploitation and processing of oil resources, which have a large international market. The tourism development needs important investment in infrastructure, significant changes at an educational and cultural level, a new and innovative attitude of entrepreneurs engaged in the field, and of course, a strategic plan for future development (Meier, Gerald, 1968).

Part of the problems derives from the fact that the private sector participating in the tourism development process must meet more professional criteria and increase workers' confidence in their work. For this change to be undertaken it is necessary to diminish the volatility and ambiguity of the existing laws, and to define new legislative elements to adjust the performance of this sector.

It is worth revealing the fact that there are no connections between the agricultural and industrial sectors and the tourism activities. Tourism needs the support of these economic branches for at least two reasons: firstly, for a direct support, and secondly, for ensuring an economic alternative in the cases when tourism activity is only temporary. The synergy between the three sectors could provide high quality complementary services to accompany tourism activities.

Difficulties generated by the external environment

Entry visa

A problem of uttermost importance regarding the development of the tourism sector in Iraq is the entry visas required to enter the country. The policy of the state depends on the existing reciprocity between two states, which, in the light of the current situation, tends to hinder the development of tourism in Iraq. Being aware of Iraq's exceptional situation as a direct consequence of bad security situation, many countries express worries and refrain from granting an entry visa to Iraqi citizens. The Iraqi government must comply with the situation. Tourist receiving states used to grant many facilities along with the tourists' visas, some of them including special discounts commensurate with the tourists' length of stay (Tourism Authority, 2001). As for now, the situation in Iraq is quite different, which causes serious problems (figure 3).

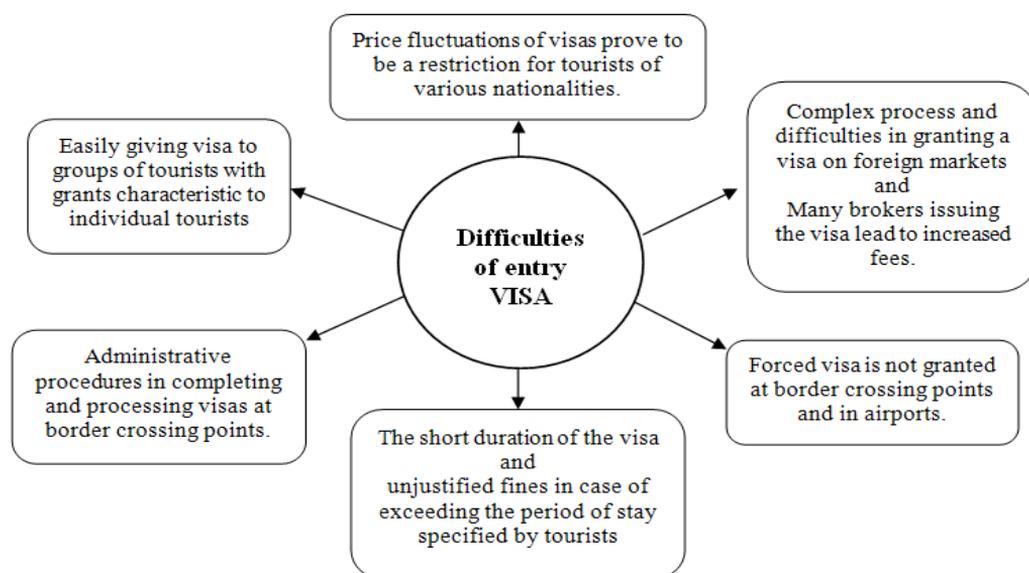


Figure 3. All difficulties connected with entry VISA have a significant role in diminishing the flows of tourists and in altering the attractiveness of the country as an important receptor for international visitors.

Border crossing points

Meant as outlets borders, the airports and border crossings and ports are important since tourists create a picture from these points which consists of first impressions regarding the services and the country. There are some important aspects that constitute issues which impede the arrival of tourists to Iraq (inbound tourism). Some of them are listed as follows:

- lack of awareness among workers at border crossing points on the importance of inbound tourism to the country as well as on how to deal with tourists
- low quality of existing services in these ports, especially at the border crossing points
- absence of intermediate services such as tourist information offices or visitor centers
- no signs or logos guiding foreign tourists and providing information about Iraq and its culture or any general information to help tourists create a first picture of the country

- prohibiting tourists to take along some of their purchases and gifts, although they have been paid for in hard currency.
- lack of primary services, especially in tourist ports, border crossing areas, such as restrooms, restaurants or places of laundry and other personal services or even basic accommodation for emergency situations that may require an overnight stay at the border.
- lack of entry and exit ports, especially for individual tourists and tourist groups within the border crossing areas, airports or ports, which often lead to delayed procedures for access and departure.

Conflict surroundings

This problem is directly connected to the political instability and low security in Iraq, where foreign tourist experiences are significantly affected by any process held in any of the country's destinations. The tourism industry is fragile, affected by political events, security problems or outbreaks of disease, with little notice regarding the emergence of a random crisis. The most dangerous crisis is provoked by terrorism attacks which have a negative impact on tourism industry. Following the events of September 11th, 2001 was considered the worst year in the history of international tourism, with the overall number of tourists having decreased with 0.6% compared to 2000.

Many scholars consider that this event was the biggest disaster in the history of the global tourism industry (Franjiata, 2002). Practically, it constituted the moment of the emergence of global terrorism as a worldwide phenomenon, which led to the occurrence of similar events like the ones on Bali Island (October 2002). The bombing affected the practice of tourism in Indonesia and the number of people visiting its tourist attractions diminished. It later influenced the events of Kenya in Mombasa on the rim of the Indian Ocean and the hotel bombing (Paradise). This one last event (28/11/2002) affected the practice of tourism not only in the region but also at a world scale, and was, in turn, followed by similar events like the Mumbai attacks (November 2008) and Utoya Island (July 2011). In this respect we notice that both the war on Iraq in 2003 and the emergence of terrorism in the country created a very serious problem which reflects on the national tourism industry. Besides spreading terror, the war causes daily killings of people and destruction of infrastructure and superstructure.

Clearly, this evolution does not encourage tourism development and as long as terrorism will continue existing in Iraq, it will destroy the image of the country among other countries in the world. Because of terrorism, the tourism sector has suffered a lot in Iraq. Terrorism created a negative image on Iraq as a country of wars, killing, destruction and terrorism. Iraq was considered the first country in the world in the manufacture of terrorism, which led to fears among foreigners entering the country, in addition to the migration of Iraqis to neighboring countries and European countries. It also led to weakness in domestic tourism. Terrorism is not confined to the destruction of the tourism in Iraq only. As everyone knows, the events that occurred in the Arab countries in early 2011, called "the Arab Spring", led to toppling dictatorial governments in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen.

The conflict in Syria lasts even nowadays. All of these events led to the major fall of the Arab tourism, especially Egypt, which was among the countries to compete in global tourism. All over the world terrorism is a major factor that affects all sectors involved in tourism. Following the 9/11 events, for example, the Amadeus system for international flight reservations pointed a 28% cancellation rate, which means 1.6 million cancelled reservations. The same events caused hundreds of U.S. companies operating in Europe and Japan to cancel. It was registered that 9500 canceled travels to the United States led to a loss of 13 million U.S. dollars over a period of only four days (11-14 September). Australia faced a loss in revenue of 2.5 billion dollars for the year that followed. France, which is the first country in the world to have received tourists (WTO Tourism, 2002) witnessed lower bookings and a 20% cancel rate of tourists. To what hotels and airlines experienced from the decline in operating rates, the dismissal of approximately 137000

employees in the United States, Europe, Asia, Canada can be added (WTO Tourism, 2002). Therefore, such events constitute a so-called tourism crisis, which represents an emergency to deal with for any country seeking to develop its tourism industry. There is a need for developing suitable plans for virtually any crisis (crisis or hazard management) due to war, diseases, accidents or natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, fires. Such plans seek to improve the image of a tourist destination.

Investment and government expenditures

Development of tourism in any country depends on the degree of government investment and spending for tourism as well as on the financial resources provided by the state in order to build retaining and supporting projects for infrastructure and superstructure development. This features raised many problems and obstacles which gradually led to the decline of tourism in Iraq (Tourism Authority, 2001) (figure 4).

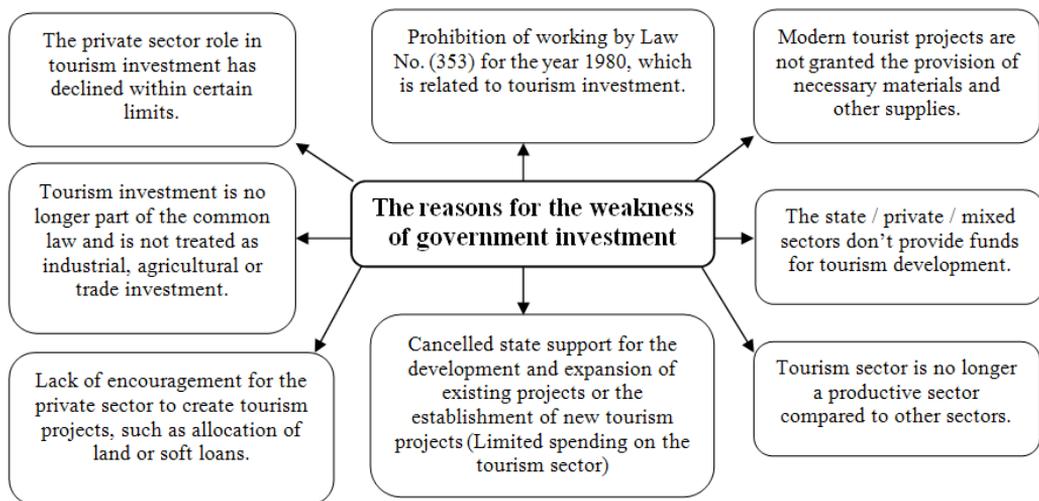


Figure 4. Major reasons for the weakness of government investment

The main reason for the weakness of government investment is the bad security situation in Iraq. Important businessmen and owners of companies fear of investing their money because of bombings that happened during the last decade, which led to the withdrawal of many foreign companies from Iraq.

Tourism legislation

Issuance of Law No. (14) of year 1996 came and it is now amended. Its role is to make sure tourism activity in Iraq regains its importance. The adoption of this law, which is called “the law of the Tourism Authority”, has taken upon itself the resumption of tourism activities. It is prepared by the competent central authority for this activity and the task of incoming tourism has been entrusted to the circle of aggregates within the organizational structure. It appears to have several supply constraints, some of which are as follows. The organizational structure needs to be revisited because its current state does not keep pace with the work of the Commission, which serves the tourism sector. Law No. (14) of year 1996 does not specify the duties and functions of the Commission (Tourism Authority, 2005). The authority clearly suffers from sagging regulatory and heaviness in the tasks. The authority experiences shortages of specialized groups in the field of tourism and hotels in Iraq, as well as poorness and absence of experts and expertise needed and necessary in this area. Among the difficulties the Authority faces are the slow management of tourism projects and the lack of decentralization of management.

A comparative view on competitive advantages of dubai and turkey in front of iraq

The future tourism development in Iraq must be projected in the entire region and especially within a comparison with the strongest competitors on the tourism market. For instance, due to the general climate in Iraq, Dubai and Turkey are advantaged, so in the next years tourism development could become a key element in also introducing tourism in Iraq.

In order to have a comparative view, we underline the main issue of tourism development in both areas, looking forward to seeing Iraq tourism develop in the future. Both areas attract millions of visitors every year, but we believe that in order to have a complete view of the Middle-East, the integration of Iraq has become a necessity.

Dubai as an exotic model for tourism development

Dubai is now one of the most important countries in the world with regard to tourism and it is a very close model for Iraq because it is an Arab country, having the same type of climate and environment. The tourism sector in Dubai evolved spectacularly and very fast because of the proper planning of the State, where tourism is now the second source of income after petroleum. The proportion of the revenues achieved increased within the last years. Dubai has an area of 1450 square miles and its natural harbour and shores make it a valid docking place for boats of all sizes. Dubai has a wide reputation in the Middle East and other nearby areas as a centre of attraction for visitors, businessmen, leisure travellers and shopping lovers.

Dubai has all the necessary capabilities to make it an attractive destination for travellers, combining the provision of comfort following the European model and the nature of the Eastern features. Shopping in Dubai, one of the most important activities brings tourists from around the world. Being an open tax-free city, it attracts many tourists. The price level is very reasonable for various types of available products that range from modern electronics with world-famous brands to traditional Arabic goods, in addition to many forms of gold jewels at precious unbeatable prices.

After successfully reuniting tourism experts in the Gulf, the Emirate of Dubai became a living example of the superiority of tourism and a launching pad between the Eastern and Western civilizations. Realistic figures brought Dubai to the front and impressive results provide this beautiful city with qualities of excellence. It has now become a window for international investment.

Dubai won the contest awards that World Tourism announced in New York in October 2003. Dubai International Airport was declared the best airport not only in the Middle East but also in the world, being ahead of Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Sydney and New York. It is the award-winning Best Airport for its collections and it won the Emirates' Airlines award in the Middle East.

Dubai's renowned Al Arab Hotel was named the best hotel in the world, with integrated rooms and also won the Dubai International Award for Best Trade on the conference centre, the Emirates Towers Hotel and the award for Best Conference Hotel. The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of the Government of Dubai was awarded the best body for tourism and organizing conferences in the Middle East. Dubai is known for its many historical monuments and heritage sites, among which ruins and archaeological sites, describing the dimensions of the whole cultural history of the Emirate. Among the highlights of Dubai there are the Al Fahidi archaeological Fort and Museum; the house of Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum, which was the residence of the ruler of Dubai from 1912 to 1958; Heritage and Diving Village; Ahmadiya School, the first regular school in Dubai that was established in 1912 and has been converted into an educational museum.

Turkey as a popular model for tourism development

Turkey, one of the countries which shares a border with Iraq, evolved dramatically in the tourism sector. Turkey is the closest example to Iraq. Sustainable development in Turkey was the result of state policy in the development of plans for the advancement of the tourism sector. One of the important things achieved by Turkey is the facility of receiving an entry visa, which enables tourists to receive a visa directly at the airport without any fees or conditions, such as booking a

hotel or otherwise. In addition, Turkey is the only country so far to allow passport holders of an old type (S), which are not allowed in any countries.

The tourist attractions in Turkey are hugely diversified. First of all, the geographical location of the country enables the connection between European countries and the countries of East Asia and the ones in the Arabian area. Secondly, its cultural and historical heritage is rarely found in other countries. All these issues are multiplied by the possibility to use different transport facilities, such as maritime and road ones. Tourist trips are favoured by a dense transport network which connects various Turkish cities and resorts.

In addition, Turkey is a country with unique clothing, footwear and leather goods as well as desserts, diverse glassware, antiques, perfumes etc. Complementary, we remark the quality and diversity of Turkish food, which is promoted by a large number of Turkish restaurants in the world. Another important aspect is a variety of leisure facilities and places, which create an interesting atmosphere.

SOME PROPOSALS TO DIMINISH THE BARRIER EFFECTS OF ACTUAL DIFFICULTIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Most recommendations emerging from this study are applicable after restoring political stability and security in Iraq. This synthesis on the main difficulties depicted during our analysis could offer the Ministry of Tourism an essential element for a forward-looking vision to build a national strategy for sustainable tourism development in Iraq. Practically, these recommendations intend to draw a framework for a tourism national strategy, based on the principles of sustainable development and its three dimensions of economic, social and environmental progress. This means supporting the economic and social well-being, preserving the environment, social and cultural values. The building of such strategy requires an operational strategic scheme as a basis for future development of tourism, according to the already existing tendencies worldwide.

In order to elaborate a project for the tourism development, the fundamental condition that needs to be fulfilled is having political stability and high security. In this respect the central government, regional and local administration should work together to reduce the period needed to diminish internal conflicts, to integrate the fundamentalist groups in the society and solve the ethnic problems. They deal with complex problems which are essential in attracting foreign tourists.

Firstly, there is a need for planning the monetary stability and for adopting a clear monetary policy in order to help the advancement of the economic sector in general and the tourism sector, in particular.

Secondly, there is a need for developing the tourist media. Because of the security situation, in the last period most of the foreign tourists have been afraid to enter Iraq despite the improved security situation in the north and south. Since tourists don't feel safe, there is a need to change the image in order to show them elements of tourist attractions in Iraq, especially for young generations who do not seem to have heard anything good about Iraq, only of murder and terrorism. It is preferable to sign agreements with global advertising companies or satellite channels at a high level.

Thirdly, there is a need for creating good international relations with neighbouring countries in order to secure the border from terrorism, and also for supporting tourism by providing facilities for entry visas or organized tours. This can be achieved by creating partnerships with neighbouring countries near Iraq, which help promote the tourism sector.

Fourthly, there is a need for reconsidering the tourist legislation and adjusting it so as to ensure compatibility between the amendments required. It is important to work on obtaining a Tourism Law basis, which includes a comprehensive organization for all the work performed for tourism, including the determination of the role of the Ministry of Tourism and its authority and the role of the public, private and mixed sector companies.

It is necessary to train groups of specialists for tourism development by sending them to developed countries. It is also necessary to open colleges and institutions for the study of tourism,

since for now the only section that teaches Tourism Administration belongs to the University of Mustansiriya. There, following my five-year work for the tourism sector in Iraq I concluded that there was a lack of cohesion between the tourism specialists. Therefore, I will suggest to officials of tourism in Iraq to be more interested in this subject.

CONCLUSION

The most important challenge for sustainable tourism development concerns the perspective and expectations that all stakeholders, particularly government policy-makers get involved and contribute to tourism at the local, regional and national level. Many developing countries view tourism as a vehicle for economic development, given its potential to earn foreign exchange and create employment. The existence of many obstacles and problems hinders the sustainable tourism development in Iraq. Among them, there are problems related directly to tourism and problems related to its external environment.

The absence of national policies and plans in Iraq reveals the necessity to adopt a method or principle of sustainable development for the tourism activity. Lack of Arabian cooperation in the field of tourism, in the development of sustainable tourism and in the exchange of experiences is a major problem. The lack of best practices and competencies in tourism management is another weak point. There is a strengthening of the Iraqi tourist sites through the Internet World Wide Web which promises a most important means of promoting tourism in the new millennium. There is a need for more promotional resources, however.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient support from the specialized institutes and universities to develop the research and study programmes for creating and training specialists in the tourism sector. This offer is not enough to cover the existing demands, and is not able to contribute to the increasing of the tourism activities. The Iraqi tourism needs specialised people, trained and educated to meet high-standard tourist demands, especially to ensure a high quality of the tourism services. The efforts must be focused on creating opportunities to increase the number of specialized and skilled manpower, connected with the needs of the current and future market expectations.

Analysing the entire spectrum of the tourism difficulties rises, clearly, the need to apply appropriate long-term marketing and promotional policies, involving Iraqi embassies, tourist offices, satellite TV and international information network (Internet). In addition, the general tour guide and tourist maps of cities in Iraq should be presented in international languages. Such kind of actions could create a national synergy for the further development of tourism activities in Iraq.

Because of the lack of support for the establishment of tourist festivals and weekly celebrations, tourism promoters have filed an appeal for managers of companies, journalists and writers interested in exploring tourism and for tourism experts and managers of international hotels to promote Iraqi tourism products. There is a need for a new mental picture of the Iraqi tourism among foreign markets in order to determine tourists to visit Iraq. There is a need for a sustainable tourism department at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and also for finding methods of sustainable development. There is a need for using investment projects in tourism and provide official scientific and specialized consultancy in this area.

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