

# An Integrated Planning Framework for Sustainable Tourism: Case Study of Tunisia

S. Halioui, I. Arikan, M. Schmidt

**Abstract**—Tourism sector in Tunisia faces several problems that range from economic challenges to environmental degradation and social instability. These problems have been intensified because of the increased competition in the tourism market, the political instability, financial crises, and recently terrorism problems have aggravated the situation. As a consequence, a new framework that promotes sustainable tourism in the country and increases its competitiveness is urgently needed. Planning for sustainable tourism sector requires the integration of complex interactions between economic, social and environmental aspects. Sustainable tourism principles can be implemented with the help of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process, which ensures the full integration of economic, social and environmental considerations while planning for the tourism sector in Tunisia. Results of the paper have broad implications for policy makers and tourism professionals.

**Keywords**—Sustainable tourism, strategic environmental assessment, tourism planning, policy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

TOURISM has become one of the most dynamic growing industries in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As an important source of income and employment, it contributes to the world's economy and plays an effective role in the rapid growth of the local environment and local economies. Efficient planning for tourism strategies should be implemented, in order to guarantee the sustainability of the industry [3]. Tourism planning can be defined as a plan type which reveals the economic and physical facilities, the objectives to be achieved for a given period in the tourism sector, tools to achieve these goals and projects to be performed [4].

Strategically well-prepared tourism plans are effective for preserving the destinations' culture and heritage, historical sites, natural habitats and physical environment. Likewise, local economic tourism strategies provide environmental sustainability, social profits and economic development for the local community. Carefully thought out and well integrated tourism plans within the master development plans of the countries make a difference for the tourism industry [5].

Planning for tourism development is a complex activity, it faces several challenges related to infrastructure facilities, legislative and policy framework development, building partnerships, promoting the destination and following a

sustainable economic environment and sociocultural imperatives [6]. Therefore, Involving government, tourism planners and other tourism stakeholders that play a strategic role in the development of the tourism activity is required at an early stage [6].

The tourism sector in Tunisia is one of the most dynamic economic sectors in the country. The direct contribution of the sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 is around 7.4% and it is likely to increase by 4.6% in 2015, in addition the sector creates around 473 thousand jobs in 2014 [12]. The tourism sector in Tunisia has been suffering from several challenges such as the low profitability, the degradation of tourism service's quality, the decreasing competitiveness of tourism products, etc. Recently, the 'Jasmine revolution' consequences, in 2011, have caused social and political instability, which deeply affected the image of Tunisia, and as a result affected the decision of tourists to visit Tunisia [8]. Nevertheless, tourism development implies a range of negative environmental impacts such as the degradation of natural resources, coastal degradation due to the increased urbanization of the coastal urban area, pollution mainly resulted from wastewater and the increased traffic and changes in marine ecosystems, etc. [9]. Tourism development also causes important socio-cultural impacts that result in a change or loss of values and native identities, ethical problems (child labour and child exploitation) and unbalanced economic tourism revenues [11]. Reviewing literature on sustainable tourism has provided several sustainability concepts, and tools for tourism sustainability management [13], however few researches on sustainable tourism practices have been found in the Tunisian context [1].

This research shows the role of SEA in promoting sustainable tourism. SEA is a decision-making support tool, implemented for promoting sustainability in the country [9]. It helps to anticipate the impacts of policies plans and programs on the environmental, economic and sociocultural sustainability pillars. Using SEA has several benefits especially in developing countries. However, so far, there is no legal requirement for SEA in Tunisia.

## II. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING

Sustainable tourism began to be used from the late 80s and early 90s [9]. Reviewing literature on sustainable tourism allowed identifying the important principles to be considered while planning for sustainable tourism; such as making touristic arrangements driven by demand rather than supply, giving priorities to local community, arranging twelve months oriented tourism, creating a network of public transportation,

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community participation, use of clean energy, use of existing infrastructure, preservation of social and cultural identity, managing tourism investments as flexible, developing oriented and long term tourism development plans [5].

Elaborating a tourism strategy is followed by the preparation of Tourism management plan, which is a written, distributed and approved document defining the problems and opportunities about protecting the natural, cultural and historical values of an area, including all the parties in planning and implementation phases, which is updated dynamically at regular intervals [9]. In line with these definitions, the goals of tourism management plans are to set a balance between tourism development and the natural, cultural and historical values of an area, where sustainable tourism planning is intended, and to decide how to use and protect the available resources. Besides, sustainable tourism planning should maximise benefits for the local population and determine ways to increase public participation in the planning process.

According to [8] a result-oriented management approach should be adopted for tourism planning. This approach consists of four phases. The first phase can be counted as the stage where supply and demand are reviewed by assessing the tourism potential of an area. In the second phase, tourism strategies are designated in line with the reviews. The third phase involves applying the designated strategies and explaining how to apply them. The fourth phase is necessary to observe the results of the application and sustainability.

### III. SEA: AN INTEGRATED PLANNING FRAMEWORK

SEA is a process that aims to assess the environmental, social and economic implications of developing and implementing policies, plans and programs (PPP) [11]. Besides, the implementation of SEA aims at communicating mitigation measures to decision makers and monitoring the implementation of PPP [11]. Numerous definitions have been proposed for SEA. Among the most used definitions was suggested by Partidário and Rosário, they suggested that implementing the SEA helps to ensure the full integration of relevant biophysical, economic, social and political considerations into decision making in order to achieve sustainability [7]. It is important to mention that SEA represents a platform for stakeholders' communication. Furthermore, a successful implementation of the SEA process requires the involvement of local population [7]. Therefore, implementing SEA for the tourism sector in Tunisia will promote sustainability of the sector. The tourism strategy in Tunisia has to be defined as the creation of sustainable tourism-oriented planning in terms of preserving cultural and natural assets, increasing the local community's quality of life and ensuring the continuity of the population. Intensive development of tourism results in the annihilation of the attraction of the districts and increasing environmental deterioration. That is why unplanned development and practices that give harm to the natural and cultural texture of the touristic locations should not be allowed.

### IV. SEA AND POLICY ANALYSIS IN THE DECISION MAKING CYCLE FOR AN INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Both SEA and policy analysis process can be used before or after the implementation of the strategy. SEA is a flexible process that can be implemented according to the situation and can be used at all stages of research, it can be employed before the implementation of the policy "ex-ante" (predicting if the potential policy will achieve the SEA goals), during the implementation of the strategy "integrated", or after the implementation of the strategy "ex-post" (in order to evaluate the policy outputs and provide useful feedback to policy makers) [4]. According to policy analysis methodology, [7] suggested that policy alternatives can be evaluated both by "looking backward" and before the implementation of the strategy (providing feedback at an early stage).

#### A. SEA and Policy Analysis Procedures

There is no "one-size-fits all" SEA process, and there is no need to try to formulate a common SEA process [7]. Nevertheless, some SEA researchers admitted that SEA process follows typical steps that can be summarized in Fig. 1 [10].

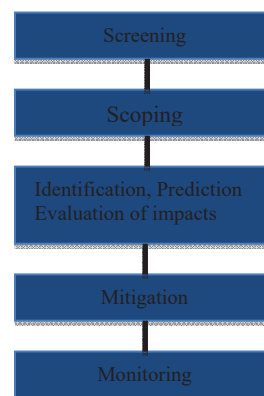


Fig. 1 SEA Process [10]

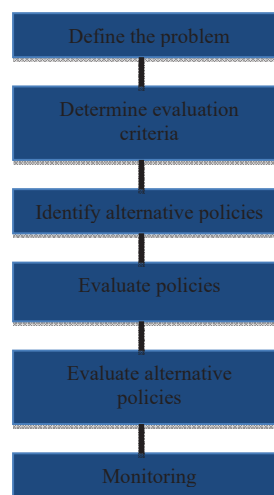


Fig. 2 Policy analysis process [2]

Similarly with policy analysis process, different researchers have used many procedures [2]. The most used and common method is summarized in Fig 2.

*B. An integrated Framework: Adapted SEA for the Tourism Sector in Tunisia*

After comparing SEA and policy analysis on the basis of some elements selected through reviewing literature, these two planning processes were used to design a framework for the research based on both SEA and policy analysis process. The designed process is mostly inspired from the SEA process, and uses some steps from the policy analysis process.

While examining the two procedures (SEA and policy analysis) we find that the screening and scoping step in the SEA corresponds to the problem definition in the policy analysis process. Unlike the basic SEA process, the policy analysis includes a determination of evaluation criteria step.

SEA helps to evaluate the strategy and in some cases, identifies other alternative policies with the help of scenario analysis, similarly the policy analysis process identifies alternative policies and this can be done through using several methods namely (literature review, surveys, etc.). The next step is the evaluation of alternative policies that correspond to the impact prediction. Proposing some mitigation measures is an implicit step in the policy analysis process although its importance, however it is one of the most important steps in the proposed SEA framework (as shown in Fig. 3). For SEA mitigation is one of the most important steps and it exists in all proposed methodologies for the SEA process. Fig. 3 presents a schematic overview of the process for this research. Ideally planning for sustainable tourism should be at all levels of the development planning.

This research considers planning for sustainable tourism in Tunisia; it proposes an integrated planning framework based on SEA and policy analysis process. The framework aims to assess the tourism strategy in Tunisia and suggests recommendations to authorities and tourism professionals in order to adjust the current policy or to use for preparing more sustainable future plans.

The main expected results from implementing the proposed SEA framework are the following:

- The historical environment, natural and cultural resources of Tunisia will be protected.
- There will be sustainable tourism management in Tunisia within the framework of management objectives.
- The necessary training for tourism professionals will be provided in order to enhance customer wellbeing.
- New products, which can be used by tourism agents in their tour programs, will be created, and competitive advantage over similar countries will be gained within the framework of product development objectives.
- Infrastructure necessary for sustainability tourism will be improved.
- Tourism potential of the country will be promoted and presented both in domestic and foreign markets within the framework of advertising and marketing objectives.

- The goals of pleasing the visitors and making them want to come again will be accomplished within the framework visitor management objectives.
- Increasing the authenticity of the destination, through focusing on cultural events and local festivals.

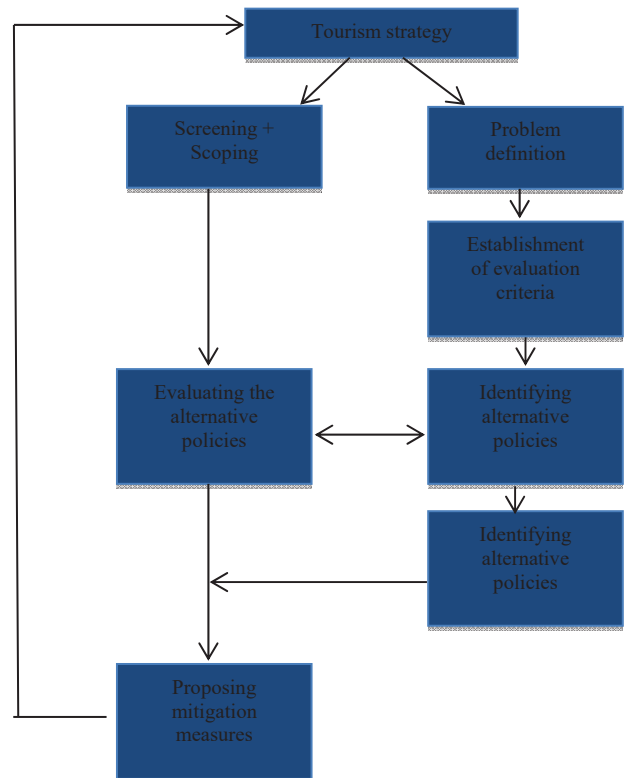


Fig. 3 The adopted SEA framework

After the implementation of the Tunisian tourism policy, it is important to monitor its application and to check the adequacy between the strategy implementation and the SEA objectives. Tourism professionals play an important role in the realization of the determined strategy programs and projects. For a maximum efficiency of the planning process, it is important to define which organizations and institutions will realize which projects in which timeline. Furthermore, for a successful integrated planning process, cooperation between public and private sector should be ensured.

V. CONCLUSION

Sustainability in the tourism sector should be taken into consideration at all the planning levels (policies, plans and programs). Furthermore, planning for sustainable tourism should integrate the environmental, social and economic aspects. Tourism legislations should be directive rather than compulsory. Recommendatory and orienting approaches rather than prevention should be adopted in legislations. Besides, tourism should not be conceptualized as a finite stream of revenue where profit maximization is the logical course of action, but as a renewable resource that requires care and attention in its utilization.

To enhance the sustainability of the tourism sector, local units governing the tourism activities, non-governmental organizations, private sector and the public should work in collaboration. The success of the current Tunisian tourism strategy depends on effective tourism planning. Implementing SEA is extremely helpful as it allows the early detection of the impacts caused by the tourism strategy, and proposing mitigation measures to tourism policy makers in order to improve the strategy.

The main challenge related to this study and that could inhibit the implementation of the SEA framework is related to the coverage and availability of data. Generally, in all tourist destinations the main primary data related to the tourism industry are limited to economic indicators, for instance: tourism arrivals, overnight stay, the balance of payments, and tourism revenue, etc. The available tourism primary data do not cover the whole environmental and social neither economic indicators.

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