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Creative Tourism as a Catalyst for Enhancing Sustainability Levels in Small Communities in Egypt

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The early 21st century has witnessed the emergence of the creative turn concept into tourism strategies. Creative tourism became a tool to distinguish communities and eliminate serial consumption of cultural tourism resources, as it depends on active engagement with local communities through sharing creative talents and skills like painting, crafts, dancing, festivals, culinary, etc. In this regard, the paper aimed to shed light on the potential of creative tourism as an innovative alternative to traditional cultural tourism and its ability to enhance sustainability levels, especially in smaller communities.

Accordingly, the interrelationship between creative tourism and sustainability levels was discussed through an analytical-descriptive methodology. A sample of entrepreneurial travel agents was tested through semi-structured interviews to estimate the potential opportunities and threats that may challenge applying creative tourism initiatives in small communities. In conclusion, the paper proved that creative tourism has an impact on reinforcing the concept of sustainability on the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural levels in small communities in Egypt. Besides, a creative map was proposed to locate the creative tourism potential of the well-known small communities in Egypt.

1. Introduction

Being distinctive has always been a target not only for a lot of people but also for places. Creativity is considered a powerful method to accomplish this target. Amabile (1988) argued that through creativity, new services could be generated in various spheres to solve a problem or to link traditional patterns with innovative processes to create beneficial forms of art (Amabile, 1988 in Eskiler et al,2016; Hjalager,2010).

The concept of the “creative turn” has affected many arenas; the tourism industry was one of them as the need for distinction in products and places became a crucial element in any destination (Zukin, 2009; Richards, 2011). The creative turn concept in the tourism industry has emerged in tourism studies as an alternative form of traditional cultural tourism (Richards, 2020; Richards, 2011). Likewise, creativity as a process is the most vital asset in any community, as through this process individuals can develop innovative products and

services that might contribute to eliminating the impacts of traditional mass tourism (Florida & Goodnight, 2005).

Linking creativity with places had a tremendous effect on attracting individuals with creative talents or skills to specific cities, offering those cities an affirmative shift in their economic and social growth (Florida, 2002 in Richards, 2020). Thus, applying creative tourism initiatives in small communities, which lack many capacities gained by larger ones, will enhance the image of these smaller communities and develop their abilities.

Despite the growing studies in creative tourism, especially for small-scale places and rural areas (Lewis & Donald, 2010; Blapp and Mitos, 2018; Duxbury et al., 2019; Richards, 2019; Li & Kovas, 2021), a few of these studies have referred to the role of creative tourism in maintaining sustainability standards in smaller communities (Korez-Vide, 2013; Duarte and Marujo, 2022). Besides, Pratt (2008) and Richards (2011) declared that the effects of creative tourism activities on communities were not totally proven on an empirical level (Pratt, 2008; Richards, 2011). Thus, the contribution of the study lies in investigating the impact of adopting a creative tourism approach on improving sustainability levels in small communities in Egypt. This will be achieved by answering the following questions:

- What are the impacts of applying creative tourism initiatives on the three levels of sustainability in small communities?
- How can creative tourism initiatives reinforce the quality of life for members of small communities?

To address the research gap and answer the research questions, the paper will discuss the concept of creative tourism, the advantages of applying creative tourism in small communities, and the potential of creative tourism in enhancing sustainability levels in small communities through analysing the results of the empirical study on a sample of entrepreneurial travel agents who work in this field. Finally, a creative map will be proposed to illustrate the creative potential of smaller communities in Egypt.

2. Literature review

2.1. The Concept of Creative Tourism

The creative turn was the major driver that influenced the shift from the traditional forms of consumption in tourism to the creative ones (Duxbury et al., 2019; Bhargava and Guleria, 2021). The creative form of consumption in tourism is known as "creative tourism". UNESCO (2006) has referred to creative tourism as an approach that engages travellers through a participative experience in activities that mainly rely on various talents and skills in the spheres of crafts, folk arts, design, film, gastronomy, music, etc. These creative activities should distinguish the destination from other ones (UNESCO, 2006; Sava, 2021; Li & Kovas, 2021).

Moreover, tourists became increasingly associated with the concept of participating in creating their own experience rather than being just spectators without engaging in the activities (Illincic, 2014). The ultimate desire for those post-modern tourists is to gain an authentic and participative tourist experience that provides them with a profound interpretation of the essence of the place, heritage, and community (Landry, 2010).

Besides, Richards and Raymond (2000) argued that creative tourism is an innovative approach through which tourists can develop their talents and skills in many aspects by participating in interactive tourism activities that are relevant to the destination's characteristics (Richards and Raymond, 2000 in Illincic, 2014).

Hence, creative tourism depends on the existence of the creative potential of the destination. Smith (2015) clarified that creative tourism can be applied in various spheres, for instance, crafts, visual arts, gastronomy, music, etc. Also, utilizing intangible resources is considered the core element in organizing creative tourism activities (Richards and Wilson 2006, 2007).

Furthermore, effective creative tourism should follow four main dimensions: First, the active participation of tourists in various activities. Second, self-improvement through continuous learning. Third, encountering authentic experiences. Fourth, using local resources (Wurzburger et al., 2009; Carvalho, 2014; Richards, 2020; Li and Kovas, 2021).

In addition, creative tourism uses the arts to represent tourism resources through engaging tourists in interactive activities and practices (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Bhargava and Guleria, 2021). Transferring creative knowledge between tourists and local communities can offer generous creative content to many travellers and will result in enriching the tourist experience (Binkhorst et al., 2010 in Richards, 2011; Munar, 2011).

Also, there are many privileges in applying the concept of creativity to tourism activities, in particular for small communities. In the following, the study will clarify these advantages.

2.2. The Advantages of Applying Creative Tourism in Small Communities

The potential of creative tourism development is heavily concentrated in large communities due to the cluster existence of creative people and industries. On the contrary, small communities lack these potentials (Richards, 2019). Thus, these communities tried to apply creativity to their cities through copying the exact steps of larger ones. The negative effects of imitating larger communities' strategies in creative development on smaller ones reveal that the adoption of creative tourism must be consistent and relevant to the community's characteristics (Lewis & Donald, 2009). Therefore, developing a re-sizing strategy of creative development in smaller communities will prevent policymakers from getting into what is called the creativity trap and prevent the serial reproduction of creative activities (Meijers et al., 2015; Blapp and Mitas, 2018; Richards, 2019).

Additionally, Richards & Wilson (2006) argued that the rise in individuals' needs for self-actualization is considered a vital motivation to apply creativity in tourism activities. This motivation created the class of postmodern tourists. Also, utilizing individuals' skills in tourism activities will positively affect the image of the destination and raise its attractiveness for both residents and foreign visitors.

Likewise, involving creative activities within tourism programs will attract tourists who seek an authentic experience that requires active participation and continuous learning (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Li & Kovas, 2021). Thus, applying creativity in the field of tourism will generate numerous advantages for the destination as it helps in strengthening the essence of the identity and raising the uniqueness of the community through enforcing the creativity levels of its individuals.

Furthermore, adopting a creative approach to tourism destinations will stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit among individuals in the artistic and cultural spheres. Moreover, creative tourism might utilize old buildings and abandoned sites to host its creative activities at any destination (Mommaas, 2004 in Richards, 2011).

Also, Duxbury et al. (2019) argued that creative tourism is considered a sustainable approach that suits small-scale areas. Therefore, applying creative tourism initiatives in smaller communities may result in tremendous enhancements in sustainability levels in these communities.

So, in the following, the study will discuss the potential of creative tourism to enhance sustainability levels in smaller communities.

2.3. The Potential of Creative Tourism to Enhance Sustainability Levels

In general, sustainability in tourism should consider asserting the well-being and quality of life of the local communities and preventing any distortion that may affect the local identity (SA Dorcheh & B Mohamed, 2013). As for the interrelationship between creative tourism and sustainability, Korez-Vide (2013) discussed that creative tourism development should establish an acceptable equation between the three main sustainability pillars.

According to The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), creativity provides an advantage to communities in achieving sustainability (UNDP, 2023). In addition, goal number 11 of the Sustainable development goals (SDGs) is concerned with establishing sustainable communities. Thus, sustainability as an approach must be applied on the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural levels to be effective (Blancas & Lozano-Oyola, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

Furthermore, sustainability principles can be applied on any scale and through any form of tourism activity (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). Therefore, small communities with creative potential have the opportunity to enhance their sustainability levels, as these communities can develop a balance between the costs and benefits of tourism activities.

Accordingly, creative tourism can contribute to the enhancement of sustainability levels in small communities through the following principles (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005; Rogerson, 2007; Hannigan, 2007; Thongsamak and Jitpakdee, 2019; Begum, 2021; UNEP, 2023): (a) participation of all the community members in formulating a clear vision and setting a tourism strategy and goals with all the other stakeholders from governmental institutions, the private sector, and other tourism parties; (b) the optimal exploitation of natural resources without causing any harm to the ecological system; (c) preserving the identity of the community, which constitutes its cultural heritage; (d) improving social services in the host communities on the educational, health, and recreational levels; (e) providing fairly distributed economic benefits to all parties included in the tourism activities by increasing employment offers, and reinforcing the well-being of the community members; (f) providing support to the residents of the communities, and encouraging the establishment of strong local leadership; (g) ensuring a high degree of tourist satisfaction and delivering an authentic experience to all participants.

Besides, it is important to note that improving the quality of life for local communities is considered the ultimate goal in applying sustainability on the economic, social, and environmental levels (Maitland, 2007; Cavangnaro & Curiel, 2012). Hence, sustainable creative tourism activities could effectively contribute to achieving this goal.

3. Methodology

The aim of the study lies in investigating the potential of the creative tourism approach and its impacts on reinforcing sustainability levels in small communities in Egypt and how this can enhance the quality of life for community members. Thus, a descriptive-analytical methodology was employed to describe the theoretical part related to the concept of creative tourism, its advantages, and the interrelationship between creative tourism and sustainability levels.

The study targeted entrepreneurial travel agents who organize creative tourism programs in small communities in Egypt. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of these entrepreneurs working in the creative tourism sphere to explore the types of organized

creative initiatives in small-scale communities and examine their influences on catalyzing sustainability levels.

As there is no evidence of the total number of entrepreneurs working in the field of organizing creative tourism initiatives, the study tested a purposive sample of 17 entrepreneurs who organize creative tourism programs and initiatives for small communities in Egypt. The head offices of these entrepreneurs are located mainly in Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria. The interviews were held in the period from February 2023 until April 2023, and the sample declared their desire to remain anonymous. According to Creswell & Poth (2016), the size of the sample is considered valid and appropriate in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

4. Results

The study employed a semi-structured interview method with a sample of 17 entrepreneurial travel agents who work in the creative tourism sphere. The following dimensions reveal the main results reflected in the conducted interviews:

4.1. The Years of Work in the Sphere of Creative Tourism

About 60% of the selected sample has organized creative tourism activities since less than 5 years ago. The other 40% of the sample started their business in tourism 10 years ago. However, they didn't initiate their creative programs until 2018.

4.2. The Area of Specialization

Almost 75% of the entrepreneurs working in the field of tourism are mainly specialized in environmental and eco-friendly activities. For instance, eco-tours, bird-watching activities, farming tours, lake tours, hiking tours, etc.

On the other hand, the main area of specialization for the other 25% of the sample is organizing traditional cultural trips. Despite that, in the last few years, these agencies have started to merge some participative creative activities among their traditional programs.

In addition, 90% of the organized programs are being implemented in small communities like El Burulus Lake, Nubia, Saloga and Gazal protectorates, Nuweiba, Tunis Village, Dahshour, Wadi-Degla protectorate, Saint Catherine, and farms around Egypt.

4.3. The Awareness of the Concept of Creative Tourism

Despite the efforts of all the sample members in organizing programs that include some creative activities, they are not aware of the concept of creative tourism as an alternative approach to traditional cultural tourism programs. So, their goals are mainly related to economic benefits in the first place.

4.4. The Vision and its Compatibility with the SDGs

The existence of a clear vision is considered a vital element in creating effective creative tourism activities. Also, linking these activities with well-formulated objectives will contribute to achieving the vision. On the contrary, only 6 % of the sample has a clear vision that is related to one or two of the SDGs. The other 94% of the sample has neither a clearly formulated vision nor objectives.

4.5. The Determents of Choosing the Creative Activities' Themes

As for 65% of the sample, the determining process of the theme of creative activities among any tourism program is partly compatible with the characteristics that distinguish the

destination. On the other hand, 35 % of the sample has no clear plan about the process of choosing the relevant theme of the creative tourism activities.

4.6. The Adopted Spheres of Creative Tourism

As previously mentioned in the theoretical part, creative tourism could be applied to various spheres: gastronomy, crafts, design, music, dancing, folk art, festivals, etc. Crafts represent the most employed creative sphere in tourism activities organized by 80 % of the sample size. The other 20 % organize programs related to cookery classes of traditional local food, painting, and folk arts. The following photos represent crafts classes in Tunis Village and Dahshour attended by the researcher during a field visit.

	
<p>Photo.1 Creative tourism activity in pottery making in Tunis Village.</p>	<p>Photo.2 Creative tourism activity in handicraft making in Dahshour.</p>

4.7. The Adopted Environmental Sustainability Actions

Through this dimension, the interviews explored the environmental sustainability efforts of the organized creative tourism programs. About 70 % of the sample applies waste management procedures through their organized activities. They also pursue the proper standards of water use, biodiversity, and the preservation of wildlife and plants. Furthermore, their creative activities mainly rely on utilizing local food and organic products from the same community during the implementation of the programs.

One of the interviewees declared that his agency organizes an initiative to clean the shores of Nabq which is a natural protectorate area in the red sea. However, the other 30 % of the examined sample do not take actions that could conserve natural resources or preserve the environmental standards in the communities that are welcoming the creative tourism programs.

4.8. The Adopted Socio-Cultural Sustainability Actions

The majority of the interviewees expressed their interest in raising the social sustainability of the small communities, and 80% of them clarified that they organize educational workshops for the community members on topics related to farming techniques, local food,

heritage, and many other topics that may result in raising their cultural awareness. These workshops and efforts can positively affect the capacity building of community members.

Besides, 20% of the agencies that were interviewed announced that they organize special workshops for children in neglected villages in Saint Catherine; these workshops include painting, crafts, photography, and writing classes on topics related to the environment, for instance, painting the local planets in the surrounding areas.

4.9. The Adopted Economic Sustainability Actions

The entrepreneurs in the field of creative tourism share the goal of gaining more economic benefits for their agencies; however, 88% of the sample clarified that they mainly rely on residents of the communities where they organize their programs to provide all the guidance, local food, and also local transportation services. Moreover, women have a great opportunity to raise their income by teaching how to make local crafts to the participants in the creative tourism activities.

The other 12 % of the sample has a mixed team from the local community and from the agency itself. Thus, there is a potential for economic leakage during the handling of the creative tourism activities organized by those agencies.

4.10. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

All the interviewees declared that they do not follow any mechanisms to monitor or evaluate the impacts of their programs on the environmental, socio-cultural, or economic levels.

5. Discussion

Based on the previous results, the following section aims at formulating the key findings and answering the questions of the study. First, the semi-structured interviews revealed that despite the decreased level of awareness of the concept of creative tourism as an innovative approach to tourism, the entrepreneurs' travel agencies organize tourism activities that include active participation from both tourists and local communities. Thus, these activities can be categorized as creative ones.

Besides, these entrepreneurs organize these creative tourism programs in many small communities around Egypt; this reveals that there is a clear recognition among them of the potential of these small-scale communities. Besides, the main themes of these creative tourism activities are relevant to the characteristics of any small destination or community where they are being held.

Second, the creative tourism activities follow most of the sustainability standards. As the process of exploiting natural or cultural resources takes into consideration preserving and sustaining them for future generations, this action leads to the concept of accountability that must be adopted by all tourism activities. Furthermore, many workshops and activities are being held to raise the capacity building of the local communities. Moreover, all the communities' members have a wide range of opportunities to gain direct economic benefits through participating in creative tourism activities.

Despite the previous privileges of the creative tourism programs in small communities, the entrepreneurs travel agencies have neither monitoring nor evaluation mechanisms for their organized activities or programs. Therefore, any sudden circumstances or impacts cannot be easily predicted. Finally, the study can conclude that creative tourism initiatives have a positive effect on the three levels of sustainability in small communities, and these positive effects can eventually reinforce the quality of life for their members.

In this regard, it is obvious that the previous discussion supports the theoretical findings that were shared through the literature review (Lewis & Donald, 2010; Blapp and Mitas, 2018; Duxbury et al., 2019; Richards, 2019; Li & Kovas, 2021).

The following map is proposed to detect the potential of small communities in the creative tourism sphere.

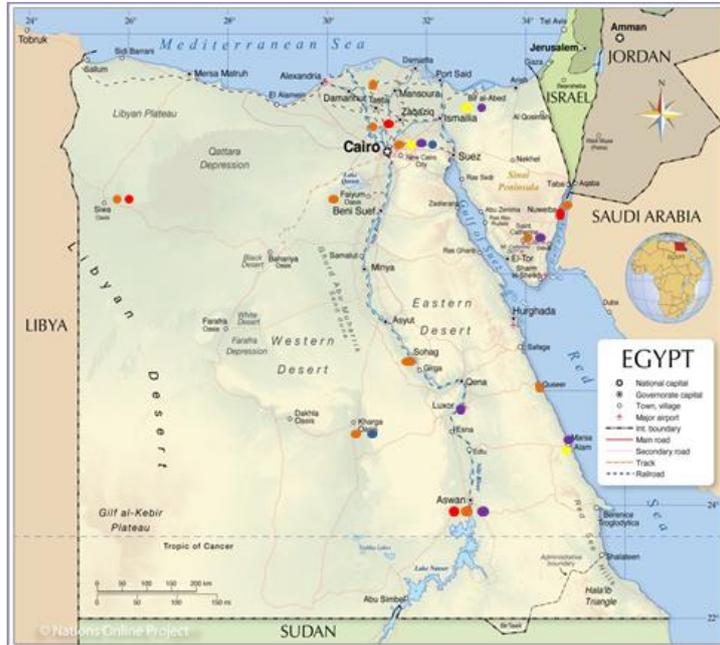


Fig.1. a map that highlights the potential creative spots in Egypt with their most relevant creative spheres.

Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/egypt_map.htm modified by the researcher based on the previous discussion

The following table represents the map key and clarifies the suggested places for each creative sphere based on the special characteristics of each community.

The Creative Sphere	The Symbol	Suggested Places	Special Characteristics
Gastronomy	●	Nubia, Siwa, Nuwbai, and Dahshour	Traditional food
Crafts	●	Dahshour, Old Cairo, Nubia, Siwa, Fayoum, Quseir, Kharga Oasis, Nuwbai, El Buruls lake, Sohag villages, and Saint Catherine.	Pottery, textiles, handicrafts. Farming techniques, dates harvest, traditional fashion, and making boats.
Visual Arts (Painting, Dancing, Folk Arts)	●	Nubia, Qena, Marsa Aalam tribes, Saint Cathrine, Ismailia, and Old Cairo.	Traditional dances, festivals, and folklore.
Design	●	Kharga Oasis (Hassan Fathy’s abandoned architectural village), Old Cairo.	Vernacular architecture, and traditional designs.
Music	●	Old Cairo, Ismailia, and Marsa Alam.	Traditional music, tribal musical events.

Table.1. the map key

Source: The researcher based on the previous discussion.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, applying creativity to tourism activities creates a sustainable source of benefits for destinations in general and smaller communities in particular, as these creative activities mainly rely on skills and renewable resources. This could result in enhancing the quality of life for local communities. The study proves empirical evidence of the entrepreneurial travel agencies' efforts in creating creative tourism programs that are compatible with sustainability standards at acceptable levels. The following recommendations represent the main actions that could help in developing a more sustainable creative tourism approach in Egypt in general and in small communities in particular:

- Developing a calendar that contains different creative tourism activities that are relevant to the special characteristics of different communities in Egypt. These creative tourism activities must cover the main dimensions of the creative tourism approach.
- Developing a re-sized creative tourism development strategy in smaller communities that reinforces the three main pillars of sustainability
- Create a map that proposes various creative tourism activities that are relevant to the special characteristics of small and neglected communities in Egypt. This could be a more innovative version of the previously proposed map.
- Raising the awareness of both locals and tourists about sustainability issues and encouraging them to act positively towards the environment.
- Encouraging entrepreneurs' travel agencies to monitor and evaluate the impacts of their creative tourism activities on a regular basis.

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السياحة الإبداعية كمحفز لتحسين مستويات الاستدامة في المجتمعات الصغيرة في مصر

دعاء سمير على السيد

قسم الدراسات السياحية – كلية السياحة والفنادق – جامعة الإسكندرية

المخلص

معلومات المقالة

شهد أوائل القرن الحادي والعشرين ظهور مفهوم التحول الإبداعي في استراتيجيات السياحة؛ وذلك استجابة للنمو السريع في معدلات السياحة الجماعية الثقافية. بذلك أصبحت السياحة الإبداعية أداة لتمييز المجتمعات والتخفيف من الاستهلاك المتزايد للموارد السياحية، حيث تعتمد السياحة الإبداعية على فكرة المشاركة الفعالة مع المجتمعات من خلال تبادل المواهب والمهارات الإبداعية مثل الرسم، والحرف اليدوية، والرقص، والمهرجانات، والطهي، وغيرها. من هنا يتمثل هدف الدراسة في تسليط الضوء على إمكانات السياحة الإبداعية كبديل مبتكر للسياحة الثقافية التقليدية وقدرتها على تحسين مستويات الاستدامة بالأخص في المجتمعات الصغيرة في مصر.

بناءً على ذلك، تمت مناقشة العلاقة المتبادلة بين السياحة الإبداعية ومستويات الاستدامة من خلال المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، حيث تم اختبار عينة من وكلاء السفر الرواد في هذا المجال من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة لتقدير الفرص والتحديات المحتملة التي قد تواجه تطبيق مبادرات السياحة الإبداعية في المجتمعات الصغيرة. وفي النهاية، أثبتت الدراسة أن السياحة الإبداعية لها تأثير على تعزيز مفهوم الاستدامة على المستويات البيئية والاجتماعية والثقافية والاقتصادية في المجتمعات الصغيرة في مصر. إلى جانب ذلك، تم اقتراح خريطة إبداعية لتحديد إمكانات السياحة الإبداعية لأكثر المجتمعات الصغيرة شهرة في مصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية

السياحة الإبداعية؛
الاستدامة؛ الثقافة؛
المجتمعات الصغيرة.

الدولية.

(JAAUTH)

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