A new decade for social changes
Thermal Tourism, Attractiveness And Governance In A Mountain Municipality, Perspective Of Local Populations: The Case Of Hammam-Guergour In Algeria

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Abstract. Tourism activity plays a major role in the socio-economic development of territories, and especially more active and crucial in vulnerable regions such as mountainous areas. The purpose of this article is to participate in the development of thermal and mountain tourism in the municipality of Hammam-Guergour. It puts together the scientific literature on the topic and unveils the bond breaks of the population's socioeconomic and political connections that obstruct the tourism image. In the multi-criteria analysis, economic indicators were not only inappropriate to the development of tourism attractiveness, but also to the living environment indicators of the population reflecting a lack of satisfaction. The participation of the population in the decision-making process remains very disadvantageous, delaying the liberation of the region. A new vision of tourism policy focusing on direct participation of local residents (participatory tourism) would stimulate tourism activities in the municipality.

Keywords. Thermal Tourism, attractiveness; Governance; multi-criteria analysis; participatory tourism

1. Introduction

Nowadays, post-Covid19 tourism tends to promote and develop domestic tourism after the significant fall in the number of international tourists, (Kyrylov et al., 2020). According to the World Tourism Organization, International Tourist Arrival has declined 70% compared to 2020 in the same period last year due to limitations on travel and closing of many borders around the world (UNWTO, 2021).

In spite of support and accompanying measures taken by many governments to the benefit of economic activities shaken by the pandemic, (Qiu and al., 2020) including the tourism sector, because of the closure of economic and tourist flights. Tourist activity still needs the return of foreign tourists, which remains postponed due to the spread of new virus mutants, after successive waves that hit many countries. From this point of view, the necessity to promote local tourism is evident; it is an opportunity to encourage local tourism after periods of crisis.
(Backer and Ritchie, 2017). Hence, it is an occasion to reinforce the territorial attraction of many regions that were neglected even before the pandemic.

The attractiveness of a territory is a multidimensional concept (Poirot and Gérardin, 2010) which proves the influence of local investments and the socio-economic and cultural variables of the population (Frochot and Leghofer, 2018). In fact; It has been considered from the point of view of the actors on which the attraction of a territory works, than compared to the factors that determine this attractiveness for households or for investors. (Poirot and Gerardin, 2010). It is a powerful lever for the development and revival of territories much more for weak spatial entities, such as the mountain.

Tourism is a strategic opportunity for the regions, but it must be seen with a local vision, adapted to reality. This type of tourism development necessitates the participation of all the parties involved, including residents. This approach is sometimes called “participatory tourism”. (López and Curiel, 2010).

Tourism activity remains a part of innovation and change, and in its dynamics it is assumed that the entire local and regional economy is involved. The local official must adopt a public policy favorable to the emergence of the mountain tourism economy (Jacquet-Monsarrat and Jolivet, 2002). The challenge of this activity is to maintain its spatio-temporal durability. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), mountain tourism has great potential to stimulate local economic growth and social change, due to its integration with other economic activities, job creation, and local population development.

Studying a tourist area prompts us to question the way the locals perceive their future and, similarly, the role and organization of the local authority. Thus, the involvement and adaptation of indigenous populations to various potential changes is critical (Dahles and Keune, 2002; Garrod, 2003) in the development of landlocked mountain areas sensitive to multiple risks. This weakness applies to the mountain as well as to the tourist activity (Duglio et al., 2019). And so, the organic expression, mountain-tourism, is an interesting introduction to studying the dynamics of local tourism, and to stimulating the attractiveness and future of mountainous regions. (Gwiazdzinski et al., 2010). It is quite clear that the contemporary development of the mountain economy owes a great debt to tourism.

Considering the necessary infrastructure and equipment made available to visitors, while protecting an adequate living environment for the resident population. (Gill and Williams, 1994). Many countries make use of the natural resources that exist, and in the first place thermal waters to develop ecotourism in mountainous regions, even though they are exploited in many alternative sources of fossil energies (Ristić et al., 2019) and thereby, we find thermal water exploited as a source of global tourism (Ouz and Akpinar, 2010), and mountain tourism in particular, where in many societies it has been mainly associated with health and treatment, as well as religious practices and social traditions. It has been one of the models for the emergence of mountainous areas (Boekstein, 2014), due to its tourist attractiveness, regardless of the lack of equipment and support as is the case in Algeria.

Historically, Hydrotherapy has allowed the emergence of many resorts that enhance the healing qualities of mountain thermal waters (Revil, 2004) justifying our selection of the study area. (Hammam-Guergour)

Also, democracy and good governance are important for the continuity of tourism development (Marchesin, 2004), and nothing will be done without the direct participation of the public (Štetić, 2012, Alouat, 2019; Theys, 2002). It is a question of elaborating an approach towards and from the inhabitants, based on their knowledge and their know-how. (Faburel,
This democracy is expressed by an impetus of actors to take part in the development and by a free and voluntary mobilization “of the society in its diversity.” (Combe, 2015).

In Algeria, very few studies have focused on the tourist attractiveness of mountainous territories. The qualitative deciphering of the tourist value of the territories shows that the understanding of this socio-cultural phenomenon is very complex.

The issue of tourist attractiveness can be part of the general thinking of developing and building attractiveness through the promotion of regional resources. (Pecqueur and Gumuchian, 2007). We should note that our study puts the stress on three segments, namely: economic attractiveness, living environment, governance and local democracy.

According to what is mentioned above, we consider the following problem: Why does the municipality of Hammam-Guergour, in spite of its important tourist potential, fail to develop its territory either locally or regionally, and even to incite national tourist attractiveness? What new approach can encourage local representatives to put in place a strategy to revive its tourist attractiveness? A tourist attractiveness that does not involve the local population is likely to produce its opposite by making the same territory more repulsive. Is this the result of our case study in Hammam Guergour municipality?

We take into consideration the hypothesis that the hindrance in the development of mountainous tourism (Municipality of Hammam Guergour) is linked to the imbalances of local governance that caused division and separation from the local population. Finally, an action plan is developed to activate the attraction and tourism activity of the municipality. All this is part of the logic of harmonious and respectful development in the mountainous and communal environment of the municipality.

2. Theory and methodology

The municipality of Hammam-Guergour is situated in the North-West of the province of Sétif (36° 19′ 00″ North, 5° 04′ 00″ East). It is part of the large southern slope of the Tell Atlas (Figure. 1). In the whole of the municipality, the altitudes swing between 585 m and 1614 m, dominated by the mountains of Kram el Ghar, and the mount of Tafath. A mountain area surrounded by the chains of Babors and Bibans, marked by very strong slopes, (52.16% of the area of the municipality > 24%) (PDAU.2007). It covers an area of 85.7 km², with an estimated population of 18,871 inhabitants for the municipality and 11,428 inhabitants for the capital of the municipality in 2018. (DPSB, 2018).

The municipality is characterized by the Mediterranean climate, with a hot and dry summer and a cold and wet winter, with 700 mm of rain on average per year.

The thermal site of Hammam-Guergour is situated at the foot of Djebel THAFAT at the northern exit of the GUERGOUR gorges which surround Oued Bou-Sellam, on the edge of National Road No 74.

Hammam-Guergour is a place of history. The appearance of geothermal water constitutes the founding element of the agglomeration, which actually allowed for long periods of enjoyment of ancient civilizations. (Camps, 2000).

The municipality enjoys an important tourist potential, with a very dense forest, represented by the Ouled Rezzoug forests and the Babors in the North-East of the region. The Oued Boussellam which crosses the cliffs of Hammam-Guergour contains 15 species of fish of Algerian continental waters. (Bacha and Amara, 2007). The strong radioactivity of the thermal waters of Hammam-Guergour is their main and exceptional characteristic which places them first in Algeria and fourth worldwide after the baths of Brembach (Germany) and the Jachimov baths in former Czechoslovakia and the baths of Ile from Ischia in Italy ( Kebir, 2018).
For this study, we have used the multi-criteria analysis grid, by evaluating the tourist attractiveness of the municipality. According to (Necissa and Chemrouk, 2020) Multi-criteria analysis is the means that has the advantage of leading to an evaluation based on multi-sectoral criteria, which is necessary due to the diversity of guiding principles for planning and development. This method is easy to use and helps analyze data effectively without resorting to complex procedures (Largy-Nadeau, 2017).

We should note that many studies in the field of evaluation of tourist activities have used multidimensional analysis, whether for the evaluation of tourist services (Rozman et al., 2009) or the level of satisfaction of tourists. (Jannach et al., 2014; Siskos and Grigoroudis, 2002.), and even for the allowance of tourist infrastructure (Zucca et al., 2008).

The multidimensional analysis procedure focused on the results of a field survey led in the study area during the period from January 01 to March 30, 2020; it was the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic in Algeria. The study was completed by the conduct of interviews with the different actors who would be directly or indirectly implicated in the tourism development dynamics in the municipality: Regional and local officials, elected members of the municipal assembly, local economic actors, heads of families and students, (Table 1), according to a semi-directive free-response interview guide with a heterogeneous sample of 60 people who allowed us, the evaluation and scoring of the criteria and indicators of the multi-criteria analysis (MCA).
Table 1. Details of the sample participating in the field survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>categories</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Place of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>officials and elected</td>
<td>- the general secretary of the sub-prefecture</td>
<td>- Seat of sub-prefecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>officials (region + local)</td>
<td>General secretary of the municipality</td>
<td>Seat of the municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 people</td>
<td>Tourism sub-divisional of the municipality</td>
<td>Tourism sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Transport sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public works Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Public works sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Environment sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Housing Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Housing sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth and Sports Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Youth and Sports sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health Sub-divisional</td>
<td>Health sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head of the chamber of commerce.</td>
<td>commerce sub-directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elected of the people's assembly of the municipality</td>
<td>seat of the people's assembly of the municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals 20 people</td>
<td>doctor; pharmacist; Dentist architect; teachers; administrators</td>
<td>Cabinets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trades people</td>
<td>Commercial premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local administrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population 20 people</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Sétif University 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heads of families</td>
<td>public place and workplace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The creation of the multi-criteria analysis grid is based on four steps. First, we choose themes, criteria and indicators, second, we determine the mode of evaluation, then we move on to the collection of data on the ground and finally, we proceed to the analysis and the graphical representation of the data by the radar diagram.

We were able to identify, throughout documentary research, a series of qualitative criteria and indicators in the form of questions on the factors of tourist and economic attractiveness, quality of the living environment and governance (Cusin and Damon, 2010; Bouhelouf et al., 2019; Necissa and Chemrouk, 2020)

The grid, so achieved, covers 30 indicators organized into three major themes (Table 2): economic development, social framework and quality of life, and management and governance. Afterward, we have evaluated the capacity of tourism to be mobilized in the local development process of the municipality.

Table 2. Indicators used in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Economy, is it at the service of the municipality’s</td>
<td>- natural and landscape resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- touristic image of the village (national or international influence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and quality of life Well-being</td>
<td>tourist attractiveness?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Do quality and environment of life encourage the municipality’s tourist attractiveness? | - The thermal waters contribution to touristic attractivity.  
- Tourist transport  
- Economic activities of the village linked to tourism  
- Public expenses associated with tourism  
- Services quality  
- Economic repercussions on the territory  
- Reputation of the municipality with investors  
- Tourist infrastructure |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance and management</th>
<th>Is governance at the service of the thermal tourism potential of the municipality?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                            | - Accountability: Is the executive accountable to citizens and parliament for how it fulfills its responsibilities?  
- Transparency: clear information to the public on the structure and functions of public administrations, and their plans for the future  
- Participation: the participation of the population and non-state actors in decision-making processes.  
- Predictability: respect for laws and the existence of the rule of law.  
- Effectiveness of public services  
- Control of corruption  
- Trust: to what extent do individuals and partners trust local officials?  
- Quality of the application of laws and contracts.  
- Independence of the judicial system |

Selected Indicators were scored according to a balanced scale on a scale of 5 (Tab3.), we had previously defined, without any weighting which consists of assigning a weight or a specific value to the different indicators and criteria. For this purpose, we have chosen to use the simple average and not the weighted average, considering that all the indicators have the same importance (Necissa and Chemrouk, 2020).
Table 3. Rating scale used in the assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very unfavorable to tourist attractiveness</td>
<td>unfavorable to tourist attractiveness</td>
<td>Moderately favorable to tourist attractiveness</td>
<td>favorable to tourist attractiveness</td>
<td>Very favorable to tourist attractiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Results and discussion

The evaluation table established and interpreted by graphs of the radar diagram type … shed light on the areas of tourist attractiveness which record a shortage, and which necessitate an advancement, as well as those which present opportunities for a future development of the tourist attractiveness of the municipality. Finally, this analysis allows releasing lines of reflection for a new strategy of municipality’s tourism promotion.

3.1 Economy and tourism attractiveness

According to the (figure 2 ), generally seem unfavorable to the development of the tourism attractiveness of the municipality; As out of the ten indicators studied only two (natural and landscape resources and the contribution of thermal waters to tourist attractiveness) are above normal (3), both are considered to have natural potential. Nevertheless, four indicators: the number and quality of tourist infrastructures, public expenditure linked to tourism, the quality of services offered and the tourist brand image of the municipality are deemed to be non-performing (values below the attractiveness performance threshold, whose value is equal to 3). This low value reflects the weakness of the municipality’s tourist brand image. In addition, the indicators of tourist transport, economic activities linked to tourism, the economic benefits of thermal sites and the reputation of the municipality with investors are in an average range with respect to the assessment scale and require substantial improvement.
3.2 Social framework, quality of life and tourism attractiveness

The subjective nature of the notion of quality of life is combined with several socio-cultural and environmental factors. It is not the material conditions of life that matter but the judgments made on these conditions. The subjective indicators obtained by survey of the population thus make it possible directly to assess the quality of life (Tobelem-Zanin, 1995).

Of the ten indicators studied, only one is effective for the tourism attractiveness of the municipality (see Figure 3). It is the air quality which is very favorable to this attractiveness. A significant lack in the living environment and its quality is expressed by several indicators: accessibility and mobility, the level of connectivity, housing conditions and finally the satisfaction of the populations. The latter displays very critical values (below the average 03) which highlight the social malaise of the population.

The quality of life in the municipality supposes making the aspirations of the citizens consistent with the public policies acting on the segments of weakness raised.
In addition, the indicators: **conviviality and the local social atmosphere**; the security climate within the local society; **cultural heritage and feelings of belonging to the local terroir** are in the middle range with respect to the evaluation scale. This testifies to the expectation of the local population for a well-targeted public policy and the aspiration for a better future.

### 3.3 Governance and tourist attractiveness

The table of governance indicators can be used as a decision-making tool to identify the capacities and tolerance thresholds in which tourism can carry out its activities without nuisance.

By consulting the radar graph (Figure 4), it appears that all the indicators linked to the field of governance and local management are unfavorable to the development of tourism in the municipality; their values are below the average level. An indicator as: the participation of the population in the decision-making process is very unfavorable.

Methods adopted by local management have always been a subject of debate. Up till now, **local authorities** have not been able to respond to the aspirations of citizens, and this confirms the anchoring of a political crisis at the local level. The (hirak), which began more than two years ago, testifies to the rupture and failure of the practices and actions of officials with their population. The very centralized system (up/down) seems to be the greatest handicap in front of the dynamics of local tourism.
At last, the Multi-criteria Analysis revealed that the three themes studied do not contribute favorably to the tourist attractiveness of the municipality: the economy and the social framework and quality of life barely reach the favorable average, on the other hand local governance is considered unfavorable for tourist attractiveness.

This binding observation condemns the thermal tourist potential and places it in a waiting situation.
The empirical study reveals that the economic indicators are not favorable to the development of tourist attractiveness, not even those of the living conditions of the population which reflect a real social malaise. The participation of the population remains very unfavorable in the process of decision-making, and consequently, local governance is very centralized (up/down), and this generates a clear obstacle for the dynamics of mountain tourism.

The "inhabitant knowledge" then enters the territorial scene (Faburel and Chevallier, 2015) measures would mainly concern the local governance component for participatory democracy. A form of diverse proximity governance that combines geographical and institutional proximity of the actors is recommended. now, it is established that the choice in terms of territory no longer belongs exclusively to elected officials and technicians. These choices depend on negotiation with other actors, as well as the population in particular (Rancière, 2000).

On the other hand, a movement to recompose territories (landlocked area, mountain area) is in the running to qualify them as free zones for more financial and technical support. It is also a question of attracting and encouraging investment in the field of thermal tourism and reducing local taxation for local activities and crafts.

“Sectoralised” policies no longer manage to deal effectively with the problems of public order, which they are supposed to take care of (Nahrath et al., 2009) Knowing that one of the characteristics of tourist activity in mountainous regions is the multiplicity of actors (forest management, water management, agriculture management, tourism management and local authorities), and who have been targeted by the planned survey.

This diversity of local actors has caused administrative blockages, which explains the slowdown in tourism projects in the Municipality, and which confirms our hypothesis already stated. Democracy based on consultation and the participation of the population is essential for the continuity of tourism development (Marchesin, 2013; Garrod, 2003; Chiutsi & Saarinen, 2017)

The study area benefited from a tourist development plan (PAT), which dealt with the elements of the diagnosis, and proceeded to the identification of tourist products and evaluated the thermal load capacity. We found that the study of the (PAT) did not take into account the contribution of the local population in the future tourist dynamics of the municipality; something that our study tried to analyze.

Rare are the studies and research that focus on tourism and in particular on mountain tourism in Algeria. A proven lack is noted concerning the statistics inherent in the study in question (RGHP, 2008).

The size of the sample, however small it may be, cannot allow us to generalize the results to all the mountainous territories of Algeria, despite the fact that the questionnaire was well targeted and oriented towards the real actors of tourism at the local scale, such as the various local and regional officials, as well as the socio-professional categories of the local population.

We believe that this article contributes to the development of scientific research on the tourist aspect and its evaluation by the population in a mountain territory. It presents an image of the tourist attractiveness of the study area and the level of adherence of the population of the Hammam-Guergour center to the local tourist dynamics. “It is a question of developing an approach towards and from the inhabitants, based on their knowledge and does not remove them from inhabiting them” (Faburel, 2013).

finally, this analysis makes it possible to clear tracks for reflection for a new dynamic of tourist development of the municipality and to bring the population closer to tourism through more participatory tourist development actions (Patarchanov, 2012; Boulhila et al.,2022), such
as developing mini-parks for families and set up a cable car linking the crest of the *Fertla* massif to the urban center of Hammam-Guergour, and through the improvement of reception capacities, while protecting the mountain ecosystem. (See Figure 6).

**Fig. 6. Action plan for the development of the tourist potential of the municipality**

4. Conclusions

The mountain territory remains a vulnerable space for its future development, given its isolation and its complex topography. This state of fact leads us to think more about the actions to be taken and the methods to be considered to propel the tourist activity. This type of activity in the mountain environment requires the direct involvement of the local population.

The process of multi-criteria analysis has shown its relevance for evaluating and interpreting the complex problems of the municipality which have hindered the development of thermal tourism in the locality of Hammam-Guergour. The economic variable and the living environment do not in any way encourage the well-being of the tourist; the proven failure of the mode of local governance has generated the exclusion of the population in a voluntary or involuntary way from the process of development of the locality.

Alternatives are appearing on the horizon, encouraging local human skills and intelligence to emerge from the yoke of immobility. Balance and diversify tourist activities while preserving the biodiversity of the mountain environment.

The study unveiled a trilogy of process dysfunction as regards the tourist attractiveness of the mountain; that is to say a failure in the economic indicators; of the social framework and quality of life, as well as poor local governance; a new vision that comprises the local population in useful participation according to their different knowledge and skills. This vision is part of the logical path of tourism usually called “participatory tourism”.

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