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Urban development and tourism planning reality in the province of M'sila: A case study of Bousaada city – Algeria

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Abstract. Tourism is a vital economic resource that can't be excluded from government economic policies. In many countries, tourism is one of the most important sources of income for the local economy. In addition, urban development specialists consider tourism as a factor activating the city's urban dynamics, through the creation of new income sources, i.e. the support of urban economy and the development of infrastructures, the creation of specific and quality local services, the establishment and structuring of broad social and cultural relations, etc. The province of M'sila and the city of Bousaada became a known tourist destination that counts high tourist numbers every year since the French occupation. Consequently, it is necessary to understand and identify the tourism reality of this city to assess its current situation. The diagnosis is based on the inventory and evaluation of the various sites and tourist attractions available, both natural and archaeological.

Keywords. Urban development - tourism development - state - city - tourism potential - tourism expansion zone - Bousaada city

Introduction

Many of the world's cities are experiencing rapid urban growth and an active development in various sectors. However, the planning and implementation of these projects is sometimes at the expense of the city's historical and urban heritage. The latter is considered a priceless asset that must be preserved given its considerable role as a key factor in the development of the tourism sector. This sector has gained great interest in view of what it can provide as development opportunities for the city.

The revival of the tourist sector based on the architectural heritage and local environmental elements requires a planning policy that would revitalize the city. To this end, and through this study, we aim to highlight the main guidelines and conditions needed and required to achieve this desired dynamism, which, of course, is embedded in a comprehensive and sustainable development process involving the city's historical and urban heritage and all the local environmental elements.

Based on this premise, an important question arises: does the reality of the Algerian city confirms or denies the tourism sector condition. In other words, is the tourism sector a

significant factor in creating an urban dynamic within the Algerian cities? It is precisely what we will tackle in this study focusing on Bousaada city.

Methodology

1. Study area presentation.

➤ **Historically:** M'sila was founded in 917 AC by Abu al-Qasim Muhammad bin Abdullah and was called Muhammadiyah. It was also known as Zabi. Its name is believed to be linked to the Masilia tribe, which expanded its influence to include what was known in the past as the Numidian region. With the disappearance of this tribe, the name of the city remained M'sila. The province of M'sila is a very rich historical region, as man has inhabited it for thousands of years, and many cultures have flourished there, as evidenced by the ancient excavations depicted in rock drawings and the roman monuments remains (water channels, tanks, ancient dams).

➤ **Geographically:** M'sila is situated in the central part of northern Algeria and belongs to the high plateau region. It covers an area of 18175 km², at 240 km from Algiers city. It was designated as province after the 1974 administrative division and its main cities are: M'sila, Bousaada, Sidi Issa. It is limited to the north by Bordj Bou Arreridj, the northeast by Sétif, the north-west by Bouira, the east by Batna, the west by Médea, the southeast by Biskra and to the south-west by Djelfa. The strategic situation of M'sila province makes it a bridge between the north and the south, the east and the west and an intersection of the national roads 45 and 60 (**M'sila Tourism Directorate, 2008, P03**).

➤ **Topography:** M'sila region is a transit zone between the Tellian Atlas series and the Saharan Atlas series. The geographical composition of this region is as follows:

- The mountainous areas on both sides of Shatt El Hodna.
- The central region consisting mainly of the highlands.
- The Al-Sabkha area represented by Shatt El Hodna in the central-eastern part.
- The sand dunes area.

The largest rivers in the region are Wadi Al-Qasab, Wadi Luqman, Wadi Lahem, Wadi Suwayla, Wadi Masif, Wadi Majdal, Wadi Al-Shair, Wadi Bousaada.

➤ **Climate:** M'sila's climate is continental with desertic influences. Summers are hot and dry, and winters are very cold. For precipitation, the highest rainfall occurs in the northern part that receives about 480 mm per year (Jabal Al-Shok, Shatt and Noug), while the driest areas are in the extreme south and receive less than 200 mm per year.

2. Tourism capacities in M'sila

M'sila is determined to promote tourism development and to harness its capacities to ensure that tourism becomes a real and effective development factor (**Fig.1**).

2.1. Host facilities:

2.1.1. Hotels: the province's hotel capacities are 953 beds in nine hotels and 212 beds in four dorms as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Hotel classification and capacity in M'sila

city name	hotel	capacity	number of rooms	class
M'sila	hotel El Kalaa	316	/	3 stars
	hotel El Qasb	60	/	Recently opened

Bousaada	hotel kerdadaa	67	42	4 stars
	hotel el kaid	142	75	not classified
	hotel el ikama tayiba	38	18	not classified
	hotel alazouzi	101	48	not classified
Ouled Djeradj	hotel el djazayer	38	15	not classified
	hotel elshams	52	21	not classified
Sidi Aissa	hotel el fath	39	/	not classified
	hotel djbel elnaga	92	/	not classified
	hotel el nasr	176	/	not classified

Source: M'sila Tourism Directorate .

2.1.2. Tourism and travel agencies: These were created under law n°06-99 of April 4, 1999. The aim of tourism and travel agencies is to provide all the services required by a tourist, from transport to hotel reservations, organize the main aspects of it comfort and promote tourism. There are five agencies and two subsidiaries in the province (**M'sila Tourism Directorate, 2008, P11**).

2.1.3. Local tourism offices: There are two tourism offices in M'sila province: Bousaada local tourism office and Al-Ma'adeed local tourism office.

2.1.4. Cultural facilities: include museums and cultural centers such as:

- The Archaeological Museum El Hoddna in M'sila.
- The Nasreddine Dini National Museum in Bousaada.
- The archaeological museum of Qal'at Bani Hamada in the municipality of Al-Ma'adeed

2.2. Archaeological and natural sites

The M' sila province offers numerous archeological and natural sites. Here are some examples:

2.2.1. M'sila: It is characterized by:

- The difference between Hoddna hills and the mountains.
- Grasslands on both sides of the Wadi Al-Qasab.
- The mineral spring of Al-Araibi, adjacent to the Al-Qasab river banks.

2.2.2. Al Ma'adeed:

- Al-Ma'adeed Mountains.
- Bani Hamada Castle, a World Heritage Site (**Fig.1**).
- Pine forest.
- The caves located east of the forest.



Figure 1: Bani Hammad Castle, the first Hammadid capital

2.2.3. Source of Dhalaa:

- A mineral spring located 29 km from the headquarters of the province.
- The Laasal caves dating back to the antiquity.

Upon reviewing the natural, archaeological, historical and natural properties of M'sila province, it is evident that the province can provide a suitable climate for the development of various tourism activities such as climatic tourism, animal hunting, mountain climbing and hiking, in addition to cultural tourism.

3. Tourism development prospects

The main tourism development plan for the southern part of the country covers five areas of M'sila and Bousaada. Each of the priority tourism areas contains at least one tourism development zone. However, the secondary areas do not include any tourism development zones at least at this time (**Bouchouarib Souad, 2000, P18**). Consequently, procedures therein are limited to historical and tourist places and attractions and its protection to stimulate tourism within the province. Therefore, the decree No. 88/238 of 05/11/1998 announced the emergence of Tourism Expansion Zones. These are distributed as depicted in the following map (fig.2).

➤ **M'sila region:** this region includes two areas (**Master Plan for the Territorial Planning of M' Sila Province Phase 2, 2012**):

- The Tourism Expansion Zone in M'sila: includes the Qasab Dam and the Belaarbi Mineral springs

- Al-Ma'adeed Tourism Expansion Zone: includes the Bani Hammad Castle, the pine forest, the Al-Ma'adeed Mountains and the caves.

➤ **Bousaada region:** this region includes:

- The Tourism Expansion Zone of Bousaada



After identifying the Tourism Expansion Zones in M'sila province, the master Planning Scheme of the Southern Region recommends the creation of these zones to develop many interesting tourism sectors in the region. Moreover, the most important thing in this scheme is to determine the concession areas in tourism investment, as it considers the qualifications of each area and the degree of its importance in the revitalization of tourism. In the proposed plans, it also focused on the construction of hospitality facilities to extend the period of stay, through the careful exploitation of historical places and monuments.

The most important tourism features of Bousaada city and related challenges facing its monuments and hinder the tourism activity were examined. The latter should be taken into consideration in tourism planning and development in a rational and thoughtful way following plans that take account of all the community characteristics and the visitors' expectations, all of which guarantees a real tourism development.

- Urban expansion at the expense of the Tourism Expansion Zone [TEZ].
- Urban expansion at the expense of the oasis.
- Destruction of part of the ancient urban fabric (the palace).

- Pollution of Oued Bousaada.
- Sand extraction using sand quarries.

4.1. Natural features

4.1.1. Oued Boussaada: This is one of the landmarks associated with the city. Indeed, the first nucleus of Bousaada city emerged adjacent to the Wadi Bousaada. Its most important characteristics include:

- The water flows from springs located along its banks and remains flowing continuously.
- The river's course is meandering due to natural obstacles.

However, this river is subject to pollution, since it has become a dumping ground for waste and sewage from nearby chaotic habitation like Sidi Suleiman. This pollution has affected the ecological diversity of the river and reduced its touristic relevance.

4.1.2. Palm Oasis : It consists of the oasis and the trees located along the Bousaada valley. The oasis is considered the lung of the city with 500 gardens and 10,000 palm trees. In addition, it provides a place for leisure and enjoyment of the scenic landscape, and a source of income for over 700 families. However, nowadays the area is reduced due to the concrete construction and the selling of agricultural plots for real estate, as shown in **figure 3**.



Figure 3 : Aerial images of bousaada oasis (left 2001 right 2021)

Based on a comparison of the two images using Geographic Information Systems, the surface area of the oasis has decreased by approximately 45 hectares over the last 20 years, requiring urgent intervention for its protection.

4.1.3.The sand dunes: These sand dunes are part of the local heritage as they represent the Sahara desert in a steppe area located in the northern part of the city (**URB-SE, 2008**). They attract a large number of tourists because it is the closest sand to the north (fig.4).

4.1.4.Mountains: Boussaâda city is located on a mountainous area where the northwest and southwest sides

4.1.5.distinguish two mountains, which are Kardada Mountain and Jabal Izz al-Din.

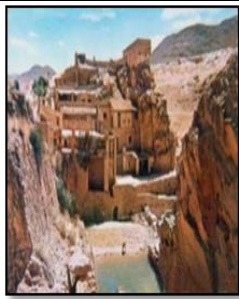




4.2. Historical features.

Because of the different historical periods that the city has experienced, many monuments and archaeological and modern zones are available, enhancing the tourism importance of the city and defining its own style. However, some of these monuments are

unbalanced, both in the building fabric and in their neglect and lack of proper exploitation (Barakat Zine El Abidine, 2003,P112).

Table 02 presents the most important monuments with a short description of their current conditions.

Table 2: Most important historical and cultural assets including a brief description of their value and their current condition

	Ferrero mill	The Ferrero mill was constructed in 1948 for grinding corn and wheat. It has always been a wonderful tourist site, located at about 02 km from Bousaada, on the meandering banks of the river. However, it has lost most of its components and suffers from pollution problems as it is flooded by the sewage from Sidi Suleiman's chaotic quarter. This requires an urgent intervention for its conservation.
	Clock tower	The clock tower dates back to the French occupation period in Bousaada. The inhabitants of Bousaada fiercely resisted the occupation, so the occupation forces established the fortress and named it Cavaignac in 1852, and it has become one of the important tourist attractions of the city.
	Nasr El Din Diniyeh Museum	The Nasr El Din Diniyeh Museum was founded in 1993 to honor the memory and artwork of the painter Nasr El Din Diniyeh. This museum was built in the garden that housed the first known residence of the painter Dinah. It comprises two exhibition halls and an administrative building with valuable exhibits.
	Mausoleum of the Painter Nasreddin	A French painter that converted to Islam after visiting the city, he was involved with the inhabitants in their opposition to the occupation. After his death, he was buried in the city.
	Grandson of Emir Abdul Qadir Al-Jazaery	He was the grandson of Emir Abdul Qadir Al-Jazaery and the son of Emir Khaled. He died and was buried in Bousaada in the year 1900.

Source: Created by the researcher using data from the SDAT W DE M'SILA + data from the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture

4.3. Cultural features.

The cultural heritage of Boussaada city constitutes a diversified collection of customs and traditions characterized by an artistic aesthetic that reflects the intellectual and social background of the region. This heritage is often expressed in folk songs, dance, cuisine and traditional crafts. This product must be marketed through festivals and exhibitions to preserve it from the globalization trend (Youssef Nacib, 1986, P79).

4.4. Tourism equipment capacities

The accommodation capacity of Bousaada city has been estimated at 432 beds and 219 rooms, based on all the hotel infrastructures, classified and unclassified. There are also two hotels currently under construction. It is noteworthy that some hotels, existing or unfinished, are urban in nature and almost lacking the ancient local style. They are also not classified as the city is expected to contain high-end accommodation. The Kerdada Hotel is the only hotel that possesses this feature while maintaining its local character, placing it in an advantageous position at the local, regional and national levels

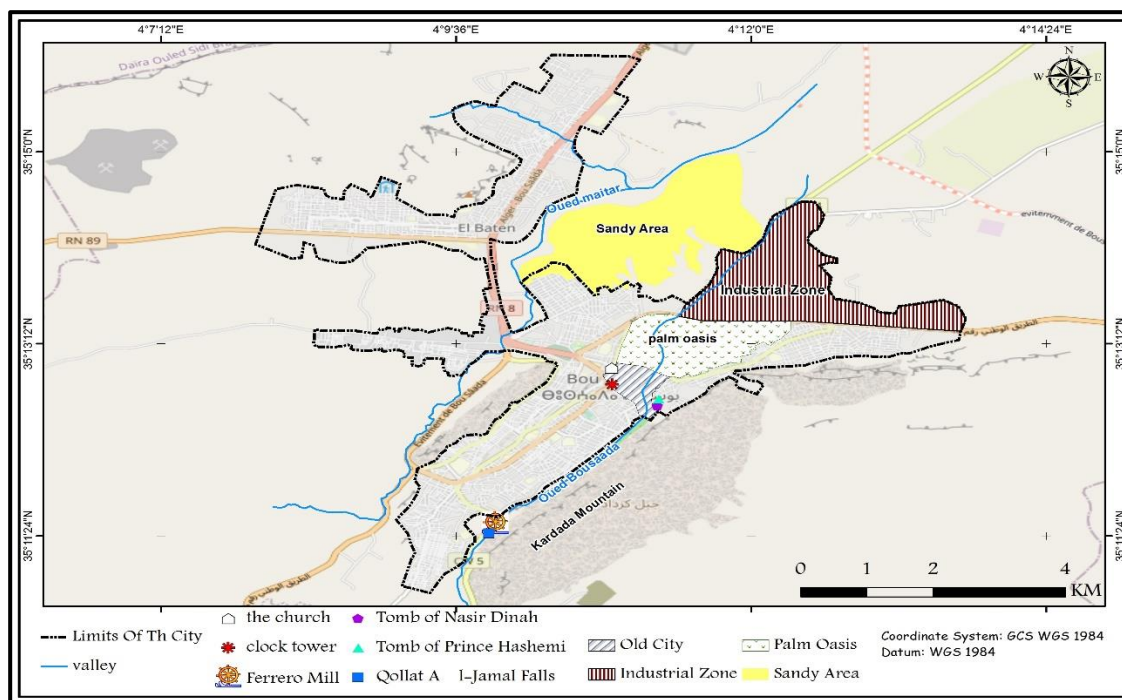


Figure 4 : bousaada - tourism potential and qualifications

Source : created by the researcher from sdatt w de m'sila data + field survey

4.4.1. Tourist facilities.

Tourist facilities in Bousaada city are represented as follows

- **Tourism and travel agencies :** Two tourism agencies exist within the city of Bousaada: Bousaada Tour Agency and Al Safina Travel and Tourism Agency
- **Offices:** The city of Bousaada hosts one office only: the Local Office of Tourism.
- **Hotel and Tourist Center:** Public institution under the supervision of the Tourism Ministry with an accommodation capacity of 150 pedagogical places, which ensures the training of technicians in hotel specialties and provides training for tourist or semi-tourist facilities.

- Handicraft facilities
- Museums: The Nasr al-Din museum, previously mentioned, and the Mujahid museum, which displays a collection of antiquities

4.4.2. Tourism Expansion Zone

The Tourism Expansion Zone of Bousaada city was determined by Decree No. 232-88 of 05 November 1988 relating to the identification of tourism expansion zones. Indeed, the area is near some tourist sites that have not yet been exploited, such as Wadi Bousaada and the Ferrero Mill (**URB-SE, 2008, P56**).

It is limited to the North-west and south-west by Sidi Suleiman district and from the northeast and southeast by the national road n°08. Its surface area was estimated at 45 hectares, but it lost a third of its surface area due to the spread of chaotic habitats.

4.5. Touristic programs.

17 tourism-related projects or infrastructures completed:

- Restoration of the Kardada hotel, the Al Qaed hotel, and their integration in the Algerian hotels chain.
- Construction of a tourist orientation office near national road n° 08

4.6. Lack of tourism planning

"Tourism planning is a particular model of social, economic, and natural planning that is unique in its concerns that arise from the nature and motives of tourism activity." (**Dober Finick, 1975, P65**)

It is also known that "Tourism planning is one of the most vital processes to develop tourism and cope with change. The development means the need to make changes, and the change can only be achieved through careful planning and monitoring." (**Kabashi Hussein, 2010, P133**). In addition to the lack of serious and effective tourist information (**Master Plan for the Territorial Planning of M' Sila Province SDAT, 2025, P56**).

Table 3: Bousaada area: positive and negative indicators, qualifications and expected risks

Positive indicators	Available qualifications
Bousaada city has beautiful natural features, important historical and archaeological sites, cultural heritage and well-balanced customs and traditions that differentiate the region from the others. A diverse historical, archaeological and cultural heritage that the region enjoys. The strategic location of the region in the heart of Algeria as a gateway to the Deep South. Moderate climate.	A significant tourist activity can be achieved by enhancing the existing tourist potential and structuring some facilities to boost the region's dynamism
Negative indicators	Expected obstacles
Insufficient mid-range hotels (2 or 3 stars) The geographical distribution of tourist services predominantly located in the city center. The weak contribution of association.	The risk of disappearance and deterioration of certain tourism components due to the

<p>The deterioration of the area's touristic image and the loss of its urban identity.</p> <p>Impediment on the city's features (sand depletion, water pollution, degradation of the old city).</p> <p>Rapid and unorganized urban expansion at the expense of touristic zones</p>	<p>negligence and disinterest of the concerned authorities</p> <p>The depletion of natural resources such as oases and sand due to random urban growth</p>
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Source: Produced by the researcher based on data from SDAT W DE M'SILA + data from the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture

4.7. Recommended adjustments and interventions

A series of practical interventions have been proposed to address the challenges outlined previously. These are serious efforts to advance the tourism sector in the city of Bousaada and M' sila. These interventions can be summarized in the map below.

Intervention levels: (**Barakat Zine El Abidine, 2003, P. 199, 200**)

➤ ***In the ancient city:***

- Locate degraded residential buildings and address each structure based on its maintenance, restoration and protection conditions.
- Improve buildings and surrounding areas from a visual standpoint and eliminate any encroachment or negative effects.

➤ ***In Oued Bousaada:***

- Clean the river from dirty water and hazardous estuaries.
- Secure riverbanks to protect the city from flooding.
- Renovate the Ferrero Mill and bring it back to its former state.
- Concentrate pedestrian traffic along Al-Wad road (the Corniche) and reduce car traffic.

➤ ***The sandy area:***

- Develop appropriate and consistent mechanisms and tools to preserve the sand and stop illegal sand excavation.
- Incorporate and apply the legal procedures related to the protection of natural resources.
- Revive tourism projects such as the therapeutic tourist village project on the Biskra road.

➤ ***Palm Oasis***

- Replanting new shoots of date palms.
- Establish an irrigation system similar to the traditional Fouqara system to provide water to the oasis and serve as an important tourist attraction.

➤ ***Tourism Expansion Zone [TEZ]***

- Protect these zones from chaotic construction and eliminate all illegal buildings.
- Ban garbage and solid waste disposal within these areas.

➤ ***Revival of the tourist route***

- Restoring the former tourist trail, starting from the oasis, running along the Bou Sa'ada Wadi, and finishing at the Ferrero Mill, to the southwest of Bou Sa'ada city.

- Removing all buildings along the valley that are disorganized and deformed for aesthetic purposes
 - **Ferrero Mill:**
- Renovate the mill to its original state.

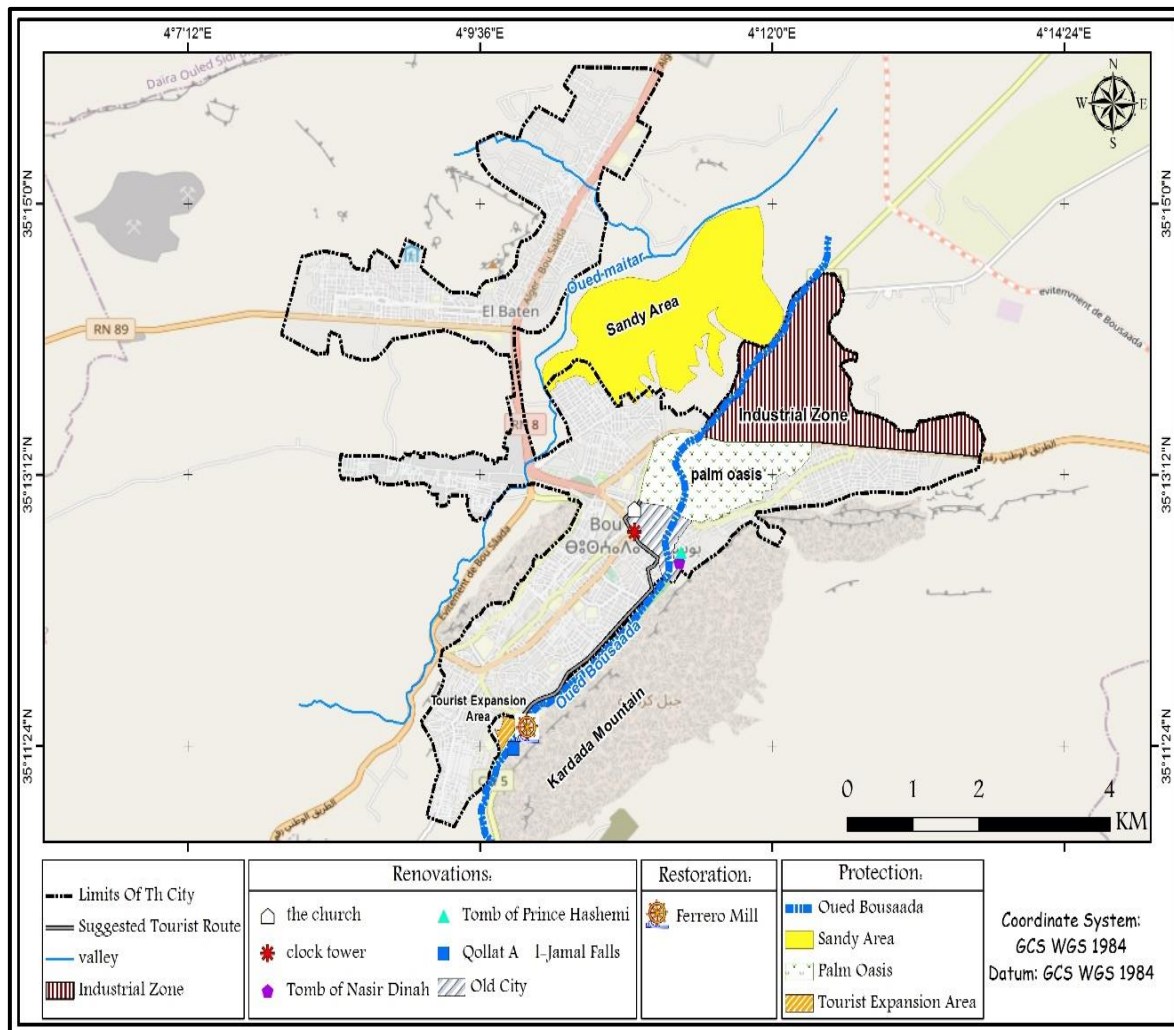


Figure 5 : Bousaada city - Locations of tourist sites for interventions

Source: Created by the researcher from the data of the SDAT W DE M'SILA - Data Ministry of Tourism

Conclusion

There are various causes of the decline of the tourism sector in the M' sila province and the city of Bousaada. Most importantly, the lack of a serious willingness to advance this sector for many years and the reliance on heavy oil revenues. In addition, most of the plans implemented lacked a clear vision and a comprehensive view of the tourism sector's role in the economic system.

It is worth noting that the tourism sector can contribute significantly to displacing urban dynamism in the city of Bou Sa'ada and the M' sila province. This can be achieved by making good use of the available capacities and adopting strict planning programs that focus on the

tourism characteristics of the region so that other sectors are complementary and supportive of the tourism function, rather than competitive.

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