

THE PUBLIC POLICY HUB

The Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Egypt's Ecotourism Hotspots

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect AUC Policies or views.
They are published to stimulate further dialogue on issues and challenges facing Egypt
in an attempt to expose graduate students to practical policy solutions.

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Executive Summary

Ecotourism is defined as the responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves education as well as high potential for economic development. Accordingly, ecotourism activities must minimize the environmental impact of using the location, build environmental respect and awareness for the environmental and cultural practices, provide positive experiences for both the visitors and the host, and provide financial aid, empowerment and other benefits for the local people. Ecotourism allows countries to make use of their economic as well as their social potential. On the economic side, it can be considered a valuable source of sustainable revenue, and on the social one, it contributes to the local communities' wellbeing and enhancement of life conditions.

Over the years, the world witnessed countries, such as Peru and Nepal, applying successful ecotourism policies and making use of them in order to integrate the local community within the tourism industry for economic development and sustainability objectives. In the light of the importance of ecotourism to the national economy, the Egyptian government realized the untapped treasure of ecotourism in Egypt. Accordingly, both the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Tourism have been exerting efforts to regulate tourism activities and integrate sustainable environmental measures in current policies. Nevertheless, there are still some obstacles hindering the effective enforcement of the current laws and policies. One of these obstacles is the economic recession that hit Egypt after the 2011 revolution. Other obstacles include the lack of coordination between the government and the private sector as well as the absence of effective mechanisms to productively engage the local community into the tourism industry.

Problem:

Naturally, Egypt's location has empowered it with a significant biodiversity which can be found in its four physiographic regions: The Western Desert, Nile Valley, the Eastern Desert, and Sinai. These diverse landscapes and topographic features range from the rugged mountains of South Sinai and the Eastern Desert, to the coastlines of The Red Sea and Mediterranean which are storehouses of highly distinct marine ecosystems. Despite these high biodiversity resources, the country's ecotourism industry has been facing a huge drop since 2011 following the political instability that took place in Egypt. After contributing 11.3% of the Egyptian GDP in 2010, the whole tourism sector has contributed 5.6% of the Egyptian GDP in 2017 (Global Environmental Facility, 2018).

Not only has this drop affected the growth of the ecotourism industry, but it also came bearing negative impacts on natural landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity because of the poor management of resource consumption and tourism practices during the past few years, which has ultimately led to substantial environmental threats. For instance, the increase in boat numbers and capacity are a significant threat to coral reef biodiversity. In addition, poorly regulated hotel infrastructure, like increasing energy consumption and insufficient waste management also have

negative environmental effects such as water pollution from sewage and industrial effluents. With the current interest that the Egyptian government is showing towards the ecotourism sector, it is time for a sustainable plan to address the main problems facing this sector while empowering its main calibers for the success of the ecotourism industry.

Recommendations:

Based on the analysis of the problem, current policies, different stakeholders, and challenges as well as opportunities within the ecotourism sector, this policy paper -targeting the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency and requiring collaboration from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism - recommends the following:

Training and introducing capacity building programs to local communities in ecotourism spots in Egypt, along with repairing and maintaining ecotourism hotels and implementing an on-ground green certification system for hotels that are eco-friendly and abide by sustainability rules.

Working on both the sociocultural and environmental pillars of ecotourism, this will raise the level of local awareness about the significance of preserving ecotourism spots through local training and capacity building programs. It also simultaneously urges tourism businesses to be ecofriendly and sustainable by offering a system of green certifications which results in less taxes and more governmental support for such businesses.

Other complementary policy suggestions include:

- ***Building and implementing creative marketing and advertising strategies to introduce Egypt's ecotourism spots to interested audiences.*** This aims at bridging the gap between global environmental travelers and the sustainable ecotourism areas in Egypt, utilizing an effective marketing mix to bring Egypt to the limelight of countries currently supporting ecotourism and sustainability.
- ***Easing the requirements for building new eco-lodges or starting environmentally -friendly or sustainable tourism businesses in Egypt.*** Eliminating bureaucracy and implementing a more flexible system for initiating new ecofriendly businesses will encourage more business stakeholders to invest in sustainable eco-friendly tourism projects and ultimately increase the services available within those environmental areas, leading to an overall better environmental tourist-experience in Egypt at a lower cost.

Section I- Background:

Ecotourism is one of the core principles that establishes a concrete integration between tourism on the one hand and environmental conservation on the other hand. According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism is defined as “the responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). It has also been defined as a form of tourism that is nature-based, which adds a new dimension of sustainable development to the

core concept of tourism. The term ecotourism, therefore, refers to a concept under a set of principles as well as a concept that refers to a major market segment. Another definition that has been introduced by the IUCN (now called the World Conservation Union) defines ecotourism as the environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has a low negative visitor impact, and provides a beneficial opportunity for the local community to get involved in the tourism industry. Other definitions identified the main characteristics of ecotourism as activities which contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, sustain the well-being of local people, include learning experience, involve responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry, involve local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people, and require the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources.

Based on the main philosophy behind the concept of ecotourism, the international ecotourism society has set some core principles of ecotourism that should be met and applied during tourism activities. Accordingly, ***ecotourism activities must:***

- Ensure the well-being of the host places
- Enhance environmental respect and awareness among tourists as well as local society
- Expose tourists to a positive experience
- Enhance the economic development of the local community
- Raise tourists' awareness of the political and economic aspects of the host society
- Provide real effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity.

In addition to the above-mentioned principles, other scholars have also stated that for activities to be considered as ecotourism, they must:

- Encourage supportive responsible businesses which give a special attention to the involvement of the local community with the objective of enhancing the economic development of the host economy.
- Focus on identifying the main spots and locations that can be categorized as ecotourism destinations based on research and credible environmental studies.
- Emphasize the use of environmental and social baseline studies, as well as long-term monitoring programs, to assess and minimize impacts.
- Ensure that tourism activities do not exceed the acceptable limits and most importantly do not bring any form of harm to the social, natural and cultural assets of the local community.

Another important aspect of ecotourism is that it has a very high potential for economic growth. Since it is mainly based on the sustainable use of natural resources of the host countries, ecotourism creates an economic niche that guarantees a sustainable flow of revenues. On the cultural and environmental

level, ecotourism has a very high potential for educating travelers on sustainable tourism and therefore, it transforms the meaning of the tourist's responsibility through empowering the tourist with the opportunity to choose a means of travel that is positive for the environment. At the same time, the main guiding principles of ecotourism help governments realize the potential for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of its components.

In fact, most of the recent definitions of ecotourism have taken a different direction than the traditional concepts of environmentally-friendly activities.

In other words, integrating "sustainability measures" in defining ecotourism has created a whole new philosophy of regulating tourism activities/tours in a way that ensures taking both economic and social aspects into consideration.

The most common definitions of ecotourism by the International Ecotourism Society highlights not only the importance of maintaining the natural wellbeing of the visited destinations but also the importance of investing in the natural resources of the local community and generating revenues to contribute in the economic development of these places.

On the social level, unlike before, members of the local community are identified as one of the key stakeholders of the tourism industry. The new concept of ecotourism emphasizes the participation of the local community through learning, planning and executing ecotourism projects as a core pillar of sustainable ecotourism. The reason why integrating the local community as a primary stakeholder in the process is very important lies in the value of "knowledge" that locals have.

Naturally, inhabitants of the local communities have a deep understanding of the social, economic, and political nature of the place. They therefore have the ability to determine what types of activities or projects suit their community and to forecast the probability of the future success and sustainability of tourism projects. On the cultural side, involving people from the local community in the industry ensures a proper representation of the place in the activities of the project which does not only contribute in homogenizing the project with the surrounding environment but also creates a thematic edge to the different projects which are driven from the uniqueness of the local culture.

- Successful Examples of the Locals' Efforts in Promoting Ecotourism:

As previously discussed, integrating the local community in ecotourism industry is one of the primary steps for ensuring the success as well as the sustainability of the tourism industry. In fact, there are many success stories around the world where governments, policy makers, and private sector companies have realized the high potential of involving local communities in the planning processes of ecotourism projects. In Peru, the project of managing the Posadas Amazons is one of the unique experiences that is worth investigating. Posadas Amazons is one of the key landmarks in Peru and is considered a main destination for tourists around the world. In order to effectively manage the place RainForest Expeditions (RFE), the private company responsible for the location, realized the

importance of working with the local community as a key partner. They, therefore, decided to sign a joint legal contract with a local entity representing different local inhabitants to divide the profits of the project 60% for the community and 40 % for the company. Additionally, RFE decided to involve locals in the management and decision-making process, not only as partners but also as owners. According to RFE reports, the first year of managing the site witnessed some challenges which have to do with the lack of professional experience of the members of the local community. One year later, the situation changed, as locals got more acquainted with their assigned responsibilities and the components of ecotourism. They gained experience and became more skilled in how to manage the place effectively. RFE also reported that people's sense of ownership was one of the main factors that contributed to the success of the experience. Because of their deep awareness of the economic and social framework of the place, locals were able to tailor management decisions and plans in a way that takes local socio-economic aspects into consideration while weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the different development options.

Another example of the successful integration of the local community for sustainable ecotourism is the Langtang Project in Nepal. Women in Nepal suffer from different social and economic problems such as high illiteracy rates, poverty, and gender inequality. They are, however, highly skilled when it comes to handicrafts making activities such as weaving. The Nepali government made use of the skills of the local women in order to ensure the sustainability of the project and improve the economic conditions of the local community at the same time. Women were integrated into the project as key decision makers who were consulted in many issues such as the type of fuel to use for cooking services and types of handicrafts to be offered for sale for tourists, (ibid.). The management board of the project has also contracted local talented women to organize cultural events where local songs and dances are presented in return for a stable income.

These two examples highlight the great value of community-based tourism. What is seen in the two cases is how important it is to make the best use of the local resources available. These resources do not necessarily have to be in the form of monetary funds; they can be human capital and the accumulation of skills, knowledge and experience that the local community possess.

- Ecotourism in Egypt:

Egypt is one of the countries in the world that has a great potential for ecotourism. According to the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), Egypt has a total of 29 protected areas declared by law, which occupies 15% of the total area of Egypt. In addition, the Egypt's Tourism Development Authority (TDA) declared that Egypt has the potential of 4 ecotourism zones, namely: coasts, deserts, riverbanks and wetlands. In fact, previous efforts were exerted by the Egyptian government to make use of the untapped treasure of ecotourism in Egypt since the 1990s. Some of the previous as well as current policies to enhance ecotourism in Egypt are:

1- The Council of prime ministers on 15 March 1997 in the papers 94 and 95, issued a number of objectives for the development of the tourism sector to be achieved by the year 2017. The strategy comprises the following goals:

A) Increasing tourists' numbers to reach a minimum of 27 million by the year 2017 from the 8646 million achieved in 2006.

B) Increasing the number of nights tourists spend in Egypt to reach the limit of 237 million nights by 2017.

C) Increasing the capacity of the accommodation sector to reach the capacity of 617,000 rooms by 2017.

2- The Ministry of Tourism under the leadership of Dr. Rania Al Mashat has been currently exerting some efforts to improve ecotourism as well. They include:

A) The minister has announced "the five- pillar strategy" which aims to diversify the types of touristic activities in Egypt. As for ecotourism, the five-pillar strategy emphasized the need to fortify Egypt's ecotourism industry by putting money into repairing its eco-touristic hotels, advertising its eco-touristic destinations and training staff to be more environmentally friendly as a strategic priority for the ministry.

B) The ministry, in cooperation with the Egyptian Italian Environmental Cooperation Program (EIECP), is working on developing ecotourism in a number of areas, most notably Fayoum, Nuweiba and other areas so that they abide by international standards.

C) The ministry trained 1,250 employees, who work in different touristic governorates, in health and safety, and is working in cooperation with the World Tourism Organization (WTO) to modernize the standards for the industry and conduct digital check on hotels.

3- The Ministry of Environment also exerted efforts to promote ecotourism:

A) The Minister of Environment, Yasmine Fouad, revealed on the margins of the annual meetings of the African Caucus for the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which took place in August 2018, that the Ministry of Environment is preparing to offer 30 natural reserves to the right of use for 5 to 10 years. Since then, the ministry has started offering natural reserves, starting with Nabq and Wadi Degla with the aim of developing the reserves' infrastructure.

B) The Ministry of Environment allocated 3 million Egyptian Pounds to replacements and renovations, and improving services and securing reserves, adding 120 new sandbags around the coral reefs in the reserves of Ras Mohammed, Abu Jalum and Taba. They are also following up with the diving and snorkeling activities to avoid any damage that could happen to the coral reefs.

- Shortcomings of the Current Policies:

Despite issuing different legislations to regulate tourism activities, analysis and desk research have shown many existing obstacles that hinder the country from the effective enforcement of current laws and policies of ecotourism, as discussed below (Gouda, 2012):

1- Egypt's economic system was severely hit after the 2011 revolution, which had its negative effects on the sector of tourism in general. Statistics released by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have shown that the tourist flow in Egypt decreased by about 45% to reach less than 9 million, compared to over 14 million in 2010. Additionally, there was a drastic decline in the main operations of the tourism industry that included all sectors starting from hotels accommodation to outsourcing and entertainment services. Consequently, according to a 2011 report by the International Tourism Organization, Egypt is no longer on the list of the 20 top tourism countries, which it had joined in 2010 (Ramzy, 2013).

2- The lack of coordination between the different governmental institutions was another huge obstacle in the path of successful ecotourism policies in Egypt. Although ecotourism development requires intensive coordination between the different concerned authorities, there is a duplication of work plans across the different institutions which creates a redundancy in work operations. There is also a lack of communication between the concerned authorities which results in a major conflict and incompatibility of the work plans.

3- The lack of financial resources could also be added to the obstacles' list. Since most of the development plans require intensive funding, financial resources are considered to be one the major challenges facing the Egyptian government (Gouda, 2012).

4- Another obstacle lies in the lack of an appropriate legal framework. Although many laws and ministerial decrees have been issued for the protection of the environment and the promotion of environmentally friendly touristic activities, there is a lack of an overarching legislation that creates a link between tourism and environmental activities. There is also a lack of clear legislations identifying the roles and responsibilities of the different concerned governmental institutions as well as other stakeholders.

5- Widespread illiteracy and low standards of living among the inhabitants of the rural places where many of the ecotourism destinations exist hinder the implementation of ecotourism. In other words, most of the ecotourism projects are executed in low income societies which suffer from various problems such as high illiteracy rates, tough economic conditions and limited access to the proper health and infrastructure services.

6- An integrated planning approach on the policy making level is missing, which creates duplication and overlapping of responsibilities and planning strategies as well as adopting weak enforcement measures.

7- There is a lack of tailored/customized policies and plans according to the various regional advantages and needs. Despite the fact that ecotourism attractions share the same general characteristics, each region has its own unique natural landscape as well as community norms and culture which might not be reflected through the generally applied laws and policies.

8- The active participation of the local community in the tourism industry is absent. Most of the tourism projects and activities are usually planned and implemented by outsiders who do not live or come from the region where these projects are implemented. As a result, the local community, which is one of the core stakeholders of the industry, ends up being marginalized.

9- There is a limited local community awareness of the importance of the ecotourism heritage of their respective communities.

10- There are no effective governmental incentives that foster ecotourism activities among the private sector and encourage locals to take part in sustaining the currently existing natural reservations.

11- Public services and infrastructure facilities in the country are in an overall bad condition.

- Scope:

As previously discussed, ecotourism in general has several components which reflect eight main principles that characterize this unique kind of tourism. Nevertheless, not all of these principles have to be included in developing a sustainable plan for ecotourism in all countries. Each country can choose the principals most suitable for its conditions. Thus, in this paper the focus will be mainly on the principles that are more related to Egypt's current eco-touristic potentials and needs which are believed to be: the preservation of natural resources and eco-touristic sites, which Egypt has in abundance, in addition to the engagement of local communities to maximize their economic benefit while minimizing any negative impacts on their culture. The paper will focus on improving the two main pillars that shape the important components of ecotourism and reflect its important principles. These pillars are human capacities as well as eco-touristic sites and natural resources.

Those two main principles were chosen to be the focus because, despite having the capacity for four ecotourism zones including coastal, desert, riverbanks and wetland zones as mentioned before, Egypt's natural ecotourism spots were hugely neglected since the 2011 revolution. In addition, the political and social changes in the country since then resulted in the deterioration of the capacities of workers and staff of ecotourism. Therefore, policies should focus on preserving the natural and human assets of Egypt prior to thinking about improving the industry as a whole.

- Why Choose This Scope?

In February 2016, Egypt Vision 2030 has been launched by the Government to demonstrate Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy that frames the government's actions for the next 15 years. It will also cover the economic, social, and environmental dimensions for a long-term development strategy.

This approach will give Egypt the opportunity to integrate the three dimensions of development in national development plans and strategies which includes work on the sustainable use of natural resources to improve the livelihoods of surrounding vulnerable communities. A partnership with national authorities, NGOs and the private sector is thus needed to introduce basic services to those communities and marginalized areas in order for them to become financially sustainable and first-class ecotourism destinations.

Focusing on human capacities and preserving the natural resources have been chosen specifically because of the expected efficiency that both pillars will have on the development of the ecotourism sector in Egypt. Noticing Egypt's high potential as a nature-based tourism destination and preserving eco-touristic sites and natural resources are identified as a high priority for the sustainable development of ecotourism. Given the fragile nature of these sites to other external factors, more attention is thus needed for managing these sites and resources. Furthermore, the inadequate attention for the well-being of the environment and natural resources could lead to the exploitation of these resources in an irreversible manner like what happened in one of the most highly rated scenic areas of the world. In this case, the exploitation was caused by the resorts' tourist boats of the Red Sea which exerted damage to the coral reefs known to be the most spectacular worldwide.

Moreover, one of the most important objectives of sustainable tourism is helping local communities to develop, improve and continue according to their own cultural and environmental terms. This shows that investing in human assets is another important priority for ecotourism development, since the engagement of local communities directly in the planning and implementation of tourism projects usually leads to the success of delivering local benefits and to make these projects sustained over time.

Building the capacities of local communities will also have two main direct impacts. Firstly, there is a social impact which revolves around making nature's values visible to local and surrounding communities and mainstreaming the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services into decision-making at all levels. Secondly, it will have an economic impact by encouraging the creation of a green economy which is the economy that aims at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities, and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment. Green economy also ensures fairness in recognizing global and country-level equity dimensions, particularly in assuring a just transition to an economy that makes a better use of resources, and is environmentally- friendly and socially inclusive.

Lastly, the previous experiences of countries that have similar potentials and challenges like Egypt have proven that focusing on infrastructure reforms and building human capacities are the main priorities for developing this sector of tourism given the important role that these two factors play.

Section II- Problem Statement:

As per the Egyptian Minister of Tourism, Rania El-Mashat, there has been an increasing interest in diversifying the types of touristic tours that Egypt offers now which has encouraged the tourism ministry to direct its support to Egypt's ecotourism industry especially with Egypt's capacity for the four ecotourism zones as mentioned earlier. This interest is also expressed by other stakeholders like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) which, in December 2018, has helped in the establishment of an interpretive center, an ecotourism agency, and a refrigeration enterprise to work on a successful project in the Red Sea Governorate to establish sustainable tourism activities. These activities will include reef restoration, ecotourism, and solid waste management in partnership with the Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association, the Egyptian Government, and the Red Sea Governorate to promote an improved management of Egypt's natural resources in the Red Sea coast.

However, the current situation shows a huge gap between such goals and the available resources and their utilization to achieve the intended goals. Despite the high potentials that Egypt has towards the ecotourism industry, the feasibility of implementation is not ensured with the current deteriorating conditions of the main resources needed in this field.

Natural and human resources are the cornerstones of ecotourism industry. These resources could vary from one country to another depending on the capabilities of each country. Yet, in all contexts, these resources usually need to be identified, improved and then protected to be used sustainably in the ecotourism industry. For Egypt to do so, there comes the main challenge of gathering all stakeholders to work together, which might trigger tensions among them as each stakeholder is usually focusing on their own benefits only (Kenawy, 2015).

As per our interview with a former economic advisor at the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, the Egyptian government has not given any support to the private sector to be familiarized with or change in a way that could be eco-friendlier according to the ministry's current orientation. Rather, the government has burdened this sector with obligations to pay all their delayed taxes since the setback that they have experienced because of the 2011 revolution. This then made the private sector lose any interest in the issue of protecting natural resources or the environment and only focus on gaining as much profit as possible to make up their previous losses. This example then shows one side of the challenge in the collaboration of stakeholders to work in this industry.

To create a sustainable ecotourism policy, we identified several calibers to work together for the success of this policy. The human aspect as an identified

important caliber in this process needs to be improved to engage effectively in it. Human resources here include both the local communities of the eco-touristic sites and the staff working in this industry. Improving the human caliber would include several processes depending on the disadvantages that would be identified in the calibers and the needs or aims that each country would set in its policy.

In the Egyptian context, there is a lack of knowledgeable, aware, well-trained and skilled staff working in the field of ecotourism in Egypt. This problem has been even more evident in recent years after tourism started to return to its normal rates since the 2011 revolution and it has been identified in all tourism sectors. As ecotourism was not very well-integrated in the tourism map of Egypt, the lack of qualified staff currently working in this field is even a bigger issue. Consequently, this can have a very negative effect on the level of ecotourism services provided to tourists because individuals working in this field should be familiar with what it means to work in an eco-friendly environment and possess deep knowledge of the main principles to do that. The way that these individuals are acting and dealing with the environment they work in should also be eco-friendly, as they would be considered guiding examples to people visiting the sites they work in. The data collected from research and interviews showed that the lack of this kind of trained staff would even affect the ecotourism industry negatively as these individuals are usually the front-liners in dealing with the natural resources and environment and their lack of knowledge and poor skills could lead to the destruction of these other resources.

Additionally, local communities are also another human resource that need to be taken into consideration while implementing any ecotourism policy. The neglect and marginalization of these communities have always been a trend while creating any eco-lodges or eco-touristic projects. This had a negative effect on the success of these projects because of the local community's feeling that they are ousted from their environment and are not getting the benefit that they deserve from the businesses implemented on their home towns. Data collected from interviews also showed that local communities are usually aware of the importance of their surrounding environments and are also familiar with the ways of not harming these sites and how they protect them. However, the current industry makes them feel marginalized because they are usually perceived as entertainers to the tourists and visitors of their places. The local community are rarely integrated in such business which made them unable to get the economic and social benefits expected to be received by them as natives of these sites.

As mentioned earlier, there is a multitude of factors that engage in the process of ecotourism. Among these factors is the complex and unbalanced relationship between tourism and the environment. This is because tourism depends on the environment and the latter is easily impacted by tourism. Natural and eco-touristic sites are thus another important resource that are ill equipped currently in Egypt and need to be improved for the success of a sustainable ecotourism policy.

Nowadays, many of these sites and locations are suffering from severe destruction because of the misuse of these resources. This is due to the lack of awareness that both visitors and workers in these sites have. In some cases, the damage to these sites is irreversible and can lead to the loss of the natural and eco-touristic value of the whole site. The already structured hotels, camps and motels in these sites could also have a negative effect on them if the way these hotels and camps are disposing their waste and their use of energy is not eco-friendly, which is the most common case in Egypt.

Coral reefs, for example, are one of these resources that were negatively affected by tourism, as per our research in several documents and articles concerned with such environment preserving issues, most of the corals in the Red Sea are threatened by the mismanagement of human activity in the area, leading to several environmental impacts on marine life. For example, coral deterioration disturbs the coastal ecosystem, which causes coral death, the loss of many marine creatures, and fish reduction (Khalaf and Kochzius, 2002).

Therefore, this policy paper's core focus is to design a plan to preserve eco-touristic sites and the natural resources across Egypt and use them sustainably to improve the livelihoods of the local and surrounding communities.

Objectives:

The paper aims at finding out the main challenges facing the ecotourism sector in Egypt and realizing the needed actions to be taken by different stakeholders, especially the government, to achieve a more successful ecotourism policy in Egypt. The objective of the suggested policy within this paper would be developing a tourism that preserves the environmental spots of Egypt and their diversity, and simultaneously brings social and economic benefits to the locals in terms of employment, income generation, revenue generation, and foreign exchange.

There is a need for commitment from Egypt as a whole to the goals of sustainable tourism development. Thus, in order to bridge the gap between ecotourism development and environmental areas conservation in the country, the paper aims at developing a policy that gives direction and opportunity to different stakeholders, especially locals, to understand their role in the development of ecotourism in Egypt.

Section III- Methodology

Stakeholders Definition:

It is of huge importance to acknowledge the importance of engaging stakeholders in the policy making process to apply an action plan for the integrated management. Stakeholders are classified into two fundamental groups: both primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are being classified as the key beneficiaries in the project, and those considered as intermediaries are the secondary stakeholders.

These two levels of stakeholders would help in analyzing the policy, as their categorization will efficiently prevent any potential conflicts or disagreements between the two types. The collaboration and participation between these groups is a fundamental aspect in the cooperation mechanism and the planning process of the policy.

Mainly, the weight of tasks within an organization aiming to request changes in its planning, lies on the primary stakeholder. Partnering with other stakeholders is vital in implementing a sustainable development plan. The identification of stakeholders determines the stakeholders who will take part in the planning process, depending on their previous experience in applying activities in the field and the future activities' consultations. Thus, it will help in expanding the participation scope of inclusive efforts.

The analysis in this paper identifies the key stakeholders in developing the Egyptian ecotourism field. Additionally, it highlights the current challenges in the synergies of stakeholders and the common areas of cooperation or unity. The analysis is conducted through three consecutive steps as elaborated by Reitbergen-McCracken and Narayan (1998), as well as being supported by the documentations and activities of the European Commission and the World Bank. Every step of these three steps is being backed up with matrices and tables, in order to aid in the facilitation between the decision makers in the process.

- **Step One:** identifying the profiles of secondary and primary stakeholders and their interests
- **Step Two:** evaluating the importance of secondary and primary stakeholders and their influences
- **Step Three:** summarizing the relationships between secondary and primary stakeholders

Dependent tables and matrices also showcase the complexities of the relationships between the stakeholders, focusing on their priorities and points of strengths or weaknesses, to create a broader perspective which would harness the consensus of the mentioned stakeholders.

Eventually, recommendations are being suggested with possible joint-effort collaborations between the stakeholders to maintain a convenient management system in the policy-making process.

1. Stakeholder Identification

- Pivotal stakeholders represented by the Ministries of Environment and Tourism are considered the primary decision makers, being supported by existing legislations.
- Sustainable development criteria should be observed in every step of the development exercise; the engagement of the public is crucial even if they represent the 'informal' sector. Economic, social, and environmental issues must be jointly addressed for the local community. Thus, representatives of the local community are considered integral.

- The increased participation of civil society is required at this stage as 'lobbying' for popular support would be an important asset. Two of the most active NGOs are listed and more could be added at a later phase.

- Primary Stakeholders:

Two in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the primary stakeholders' groups. The first one was with Dr. Ayman Hamouda, the General Manager of Diversity of Species and Races in the Nature Conservation Species in the Ministry of Environment, also known as the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA). The interview was held on the 8th of July 2019, which lasted for more than three hours. Several questions were asked to the ministerial representative such as:

- What are the main critical problems that hinder the expansion of ecotourism projects in Egypt?
- What could be the role of the local community in developing the ecotourism sector in Egypt? To be more specific, how would the local community of the eco touristic sites be engaged in the development and creation of these sites?
- What are your recommendations/ insights to improve the status of the ecotourism industry in Egypt? Which options/ policies are the most feasible in your point of view?

Based on the interview with Dr. Hamouda, many insights were used throughout the policy paper, and was of a great value in the stakeholder's analysis in relation to secondary sources. The second interview was held with Dr. Adla Ragab, Former Deputy Minister of Tourism and the current president of 'Misr Travel', on the 14th of July, lasting around 2.5 hours. Some of the questions in the interview were:

- What is the vision of the ministry towards improving the status of ecotourism in Egypt?
- What are the cross-cutting areas of joint work and collaboration between both the Ministries of Environment and Tourism?
- Who are the main stakeholders that the ministry is currently addressing to achieve its vision?

These interviews were enlightening tools that added further information as per the table below.

	Agenda	Arena	Alliances
Name	Strategic Objectives	Field of Action/ Scope of Influence	Relationship with Other Stakeholders
<i>Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA)</i>	<p>It has three main types of objectives:</p> <p>Strategic Objective</p> <p>The introduction and integration of any environmental approaches in all defined and related policies.</p> <p>Medium-Term Objective</p> <p>Preserving the national heritage, natural resources and the biodiversity in the environment</p> <p>Short-Term Objective</p> <p>Improving the standards of living by cutting down health hazards related to the high levels of pollution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out law number 102 established in 1983 to specifically protect the natural protectorates in Egypt as well as 1994's law number 4 to generally protect the environment • Maintaining joint relationships nationally and internationally in the environmental field, to support any system related to environment resources management • Innovating and adapting new environmentally -friendly technologies as well as investing in current market -based tools to improve the quality of environmental destinations • Applying any institutional reforms in the scattered units of the agency across Egypt's governorates also referred to as (EMUs) – Environmental Management Units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing partnerships with other environmental NGOs and enhancing these partnerships whether they were public or private • Boosting the local government's integrative capacity • Highlighting gender equality during the implementation of the policies' programs

Ministry of Tourism	Strategic objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping pace with trends in the tourism industry, which is a cornerstone of the ministry's structural reform program. • Encouraging innovation. • Participation of the country's youth. • Maintaining a tourism development plan in line with the UN development goals. 	When it is related to ecotourism, they are involved in green tourism through exploring the biodiversity in the ecotourism sites, while putting into consideration reserving energy, reducing the emission of toxic gases, using renewable energy sources, and protecting the natural resources of marine life.	The Egyptian government has collaborated with the UN, OECD and UNWTO to put some indicators that could evaluate and monitor the performance of ecotourism in Egypt.
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Here are some of the insights gained:

- Ecotourism is a very broad concept which could be called both green tourism and environmental tourism. There is no agreed definition, yet it includes bio-diversity, reserving energy, reducing emission of toxic gases, using renewable energy sources, and protecting the natural resources and life under water.
- In Gouna, there is something called green star hotels which was done in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). It is purely an Egyptian initiative and with a symbol inspired from the starfish and its color is green as a symbol of going green.
- This is being taken into consideration during Egypt's 2030 plan. Then a further verification was undertaken if the current activities implemented in ecotourism are eco-friendly or not. Examples include driving four-wheel cars in the desert during safari and bird watching, in addition to lighting fire and producing CO₂.
- As an encouragement to become eco-friendly, renewable alternatives like wind and solar power could be expensive but we can get more income from this. There was a regulation imposed on all new touristic projects to make at least 20% of their power from renewed and clean power.
- Workers in the local community, specifically those who work in the ecotourism destinations, are really aware of the importance and value of their environment, yet, they feel like they are mere entertainers and that this is the only source of income. However, they are usually interested in being business partners. Many partnerships usually take place between the tourism companies and the local community to ease the business between both parties.

Secondary Stakeholders & Special Interests Groups

- *(CEDARE) also referred to as the Center for Environment and Development in the Arab Region and Europe*

It is an Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) with its headquarters in Cairo, acting as an effective catalyst, to facilitate the collaborative action between the Arab Region, Europe and the International Community in the interdependent fields of environment and development.

- *Non-Governmental Organizations*

Examples: EcoConServ and Youth Love Egypt

EcoConServ is an environmental consultancy company in Egypt that offers numerous services to help in solving any challenging environmental problems and offering applicable solutions in the field. 'Youth Love Egypt' is a foundation which is established under the supervision of the United Nations to raise awareness about the scarcity and royalty of the ecotourism hotspots in Egypt, thereby promoting it to the public.

- *Local Community*

Examples: Ecotourism destinations' residents and tour guides.

- *Political Parties*

Egyptian Parliament is one example. Whereas the parliament representatives located in the ecotourism destinations such as Hurghada, might be interested in the sustainable environmental development

- *Lobby Groups*

One of the lobby groups refer to the media which aids in reaching out to people for more awareness about any important issues as well as institutions to promote the conservation of the environmental resources.

- *Sponsors*

A good example for sponsors is the United Nations Environment. UN Environment aims primarily to encourage Egypt to become a 'green economy': an economy that aims to reduce environmental risks and ecological scarcities with sustainable development that does not impact the economy negatively. They seek to do this by giving the government advice on how to transition to greener economic models and generate research to help policymakers change investments and policies in order to protect the environment and fund environmentally-conscious projects.

2. Stakeholders Classification

The analysis is mainly based upon personal interviews, discussion forums, telecommunications, electronic information exchanges, previous reports and studies, and information gathering from secondary sources.

Figure 1: below shows the table in which stakeholders were assessed.

Stakeholder Analysis									
Stakeholder	Criteria of evaluation						Decisions		
	Interests	Attitude	Power			Influence	Total	The need for involvement	Extent of involvement
H			F	P					

Scale									
Attitude	<input type="text" value="3"/> Highly supportive	<input type="text" value="2"/> Moderately supportive	<input type="text" value="1"/> Neutral	<input type="text" value="-2"/> Moderately negative	<input type="text" value="-3"/> Highly negative				
Power	H <input type="text" value="5"/> Very strong	<input type="text" value="4"/> Strong	<input type="text" value="3"/> Average	<input type="text" value="2"/> Weak	<input type="text" value="1"/> Very weak				
	F <input type="text" value="5"/> Very strong	<input type="text" value="4"/> Strong	<input type="text" value="3"/> Average	<input type="text" value="2"/> Weak	<input type="text" value="1"/> Very weak				
	P <input type="text" value="5"/> Very strong	<input type="text" value="4"/> Strong	<input type="text" value="3"/> Average	<input type="text" value="2"/> Weak	<input type="text" value="1"/> Very weak				
The need for involvement (If total)	<input type="text" value="> 10"/> Should be involved		<input type="text" value="< 10"/> Could be disregarded						
The extent of involvement (If total)	<input type="text" value="< 20"/> To be informed		<input type="text" value="20 - 30"/> To be consulted		<input type="text" value="> 30"/> In decision making process				

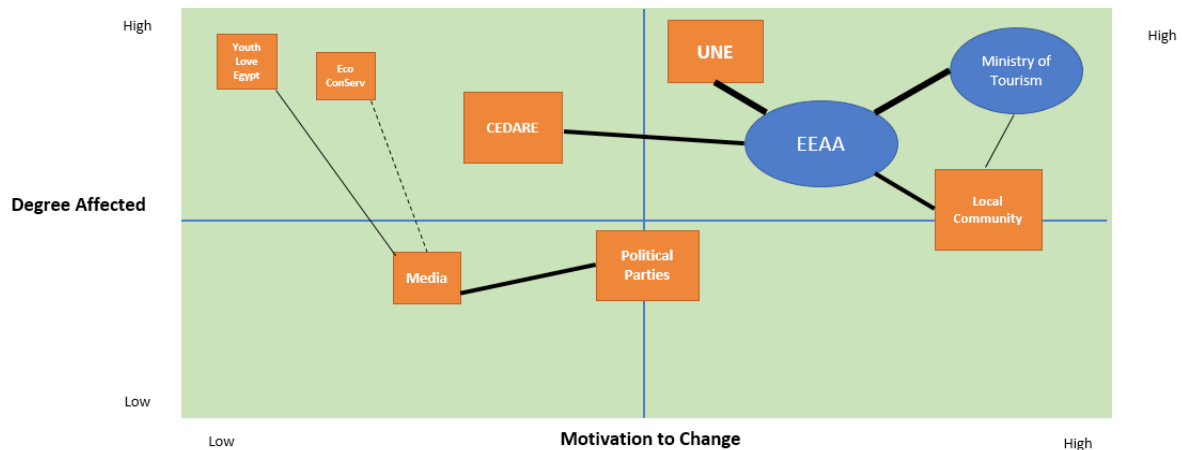
These above-mentioned threshold limits are guidelines and could be slightly modified.

- Attitude indicates the reactions of stakeholders towards the decisions at hand. It aims at indicating to what degree the stakeholder is supportive towards the issue in a scale from of 3 to -3 as 3 means highly supportive and -3 which means highly negative attitude.
- Stakeholders power identifies the potential resources of stakeholders and their mobilization ability to utilize financial, political or human resources into the process, being scales of 1 to 5, whereas 5 means very strong and 1 means very weak.
- Then 'Influence' is referred to as the stakeholders' score in a total sum of all their (Human+ Financial+ Political) resources.
- The Total column means multiplying the values of attitude and influence for every mentioned stakeholder
- Defining the measurement of the need for involvement basically relies on the total number. If the total was equal to or more than 10, it should be involved in the process, but if it was less than 10, then it should be disregarded.
- If the grand total of each stakeholder was a score of +30 then they are being considered as involved decision makers, having high negative or positive attitudes. If the score was from 20 to 30, then they should be consulted, having intermediate negative or positive attitudes. If the score was less than 30, then the stakeholders shall only be informed in the process, having a weak negative or positive attitude.

The primary and secondary stakeholder analyses are shown below in *Figures 2 & 3*.

Stakeholder	Criteria of Evaluation							Decisions	
	Interests	Attitude	Power			Influence	Total	The Need For Involvement	The Extent of Involvement
			H	F	P				
Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency EEAA	Improve Environmental Living conditions and quality of life	3	5	3	5	13	39	Involved	Decision-Making
Ministry of Tourism	Enhance the Touristic image of Egypt internally & externally	3	3	5	5	16	48	Involved	Decision-Making
CEDARE	Implementing environmental projects in the region	3	3	3	4	10	30	Involved	Consulted
Youth Love Egypt & EcoConServ	Lobbying for sustainable Development projects in the ecotourism field	3	2	1	3	6	18	Involved	Informed Only
Local community	Supports improving standards of living	3	3	1	2	6	18	Involved	Informed Only
Political Parties	Ensuring political participation of all users	2	3	1	3	7	14	Involved	Informed Only
Lobby groups (Media)	Awareness raising on ecotourism in Egypt	3	2	1	3	6	18	Involved	Informed Only
Sponsors (UNE)	Supporting governments in implementing environmental projects	3	3	4	3	10	30	Involved	Informed Only

3. Stakeholders Mapping (Figure 4):



Characteristics of the Stakeholders Mapping

- Every added shape represents a stakeholder that might be an individual, group or institution. The oval shapes stand for primary stakeholders, and the square shapes for the secondary stakeholders.
- The size of the shape represents the stakeholders' power base. Sizes are either big, medium or small.
- The thickness of the connecting lines represents the strength of the strategic relationship between the linked groups of stakeholders in terms of information change, frequency of contact, mutual trust, and compatibility of interests. Thick lines are strong relationships, thin lines are weak relationships and dotted lines are broken or terminated relationships.
- The stakeholders are distributed on a 2 x 2 matrix according to their beliefs about two values which are: their willingness to change in being part of solving the problem, and the degree to which these stakeholders are influenced positively by the intended change.

Objectives of the Stakeholders Mapping

This matrix has two main purposes:

1. To understand the stakeholders' mutual relationships and its strength/weakness.
2. To act as a catalyst that would accelerate the influence of one stakeholder to the other, further moving the latter to the upper-right quarter which is the preferred positioning of the designed matrix.

Focusing on the feasibility of setting a sense of ownership between stakeholders is a cornerstone in not only the participation phase, but also the creation of partnerships between the beneficiaries. The following is then needed to achieve this target:

- To present the benefits of mutual stakeholders' participation who shall implement the brief, thus attracting their interests.
- To establish the concept of commitment and its importance among stakeholders which would result in conducting transparent and objectives

discussions.

- Setting a clear information-sharing system to be accessible and efficient to the beneficiaries.
- Raising awareness to the public, about the broader partnership values that relies on accountability and democracy.

Section IV- Recommendations

Based on the problem and its stakeholders' analysis, it is concluded that Egypt needs to rely on both preserving the natural diversity of its ecotourism areas and the human resources of the country, since previous literature shows that those are the basic cornerstones for such industry anywhere in the world. Below are the main recommendations for the policies to be taken into consideration when addressing the ecotourism opportunities in Egypt, the advantages and shortcomings of each and the most recommended policy suitable for implementation in Egypt.

1. Building and implementing creative marketing and advertising strategies to introduce Egypt's ecotourism spots to interested audiences.

Despite having an abundance of diverse ecotourism spots, Egypt is yet to be recognized globally by eco-tourists. This option aims at introducing global environmental travelers to the sustainable ecotourism areas in Egypt. Utilizing the effective marketing mix that emphasizes the salience of the four marketing Ps (product, price, promotion, and place), this suggestion helps bring Egypt to the limelight of countries currently supporting ecotourism and sustainability.

The marketing strategy would comprise raising the awareness of Egypt's ecotourism spots, highlighting different activities for each of those areas and emphasizing how Egypt caters to most environmental travelers' interests. It would also include planning a transparent pricing system for the visitors and service providers and designing various attractive environmental packages/promotions that yield lower prices for those who chose Egypt as their ecotourism destination.

This suggestion has multiple advantages such as allowing Egypt to obtain a high rank among global ecotourism destinations, especially given the diverse natural environments of the country, increasing the number of environmental travelers to the country which directly allows for more job opportunities and eventually contributes to gaining more profit that could be directed towards Egypt's environmental perseverance.

However, that suggestion is not void of drawbacks, the biggest being the lack of community responsibility and environmental education, even among the locals of Egypt's ecotourism spots. That lack of awareness about how to preserve the environment, coupled with Egypt's general economic state and the need for locals to make easy money poses a huge threat to the safety, security, and preservation of the ecotourism destinations in Egypt. That is why an initial raising of environmental awareness to locals is strongly advised before advertising ecotourism spots and attracting global eco-tourists.

2. Easing the requirements for building new eco-lodges or starting environmentally friendly and/or sustainable tourist businesses in Egypt.

The majority of business owners in Egypt suffers from the bureaucratic processes of initiating a new business due to the strict rules they have to abide by, the papers they have to obtain and sign, not to mention the taxes and the bills they need to settle. This suggestion allows for an easier and more flexible policies for those who aim to start a sustainable eco-friendly tourism project, whether it is an eco-friendly hotel, eco-lodge or any environmentally-responsible and sustainable project within the tourism business sector.

That lenient process would encourage more business stakeholders to invest in more sustainable eco-friendly tourism projects and ultimately increase the services available within those environmental areas. All that would lead to an overall better environmental tourist-experience in Egypt at a lower cost, which will contribute to attracting more environmental travelers and raising Egypt's position within the ecotourism industry.

Nevertheless, this suggestion might also be hindered if the level of local environmental awareness remains less than satisfactory in Egypt.

3. Training and introducing capacity building programs to local communities in ecotourism spots in Egypt, along with repairing and maintaining ecotourism hotels and implementing an on-ground green certification system for hotels that are eco-friendly and abide by sustainability rules.

Stemming from the belief that ecotourism flourishes in countries based on three pillars; the sociocultural, environmental, and economic state, this suggestion works on two of those main pillars, the sociocultural and environmental, simultaneously and in parallel.

Human assets are one of the key elements to a successful sustainable ecotourism sector, so it seems only natural to start the process there. Raising the level of local awareness about the significance of ecotourism spots in the country and how to treat these locations right in order to preserve and endlessly benefit from them, would directly help the ecotourism sector in Egypt. That suggestion proposes to start the training and capacity building programs for locals so that they end up helping the industry instead of working against it. These programs will include specific courses with gained certifications at the successful completion of each program so that locals feel they are personally benefiting from the process as well as contributing to their environment. That personal incentive to get involved in the training programs will directly serve to enhance the skills and workmanship of the local communities including those who work in the tourism industry as well.

Along with such local communities' involvement, there would be an implemented system to maintain and increase the number of eco-friendly and sustainable businesses or hotels within the country's ecotourism areas. That will be in the form of green certifications of excellence that businesses would obtain after

following the main principles of ecotourism mentioned before, as well as an added governmental checklist of sustainability rules. Those businesses with green certifications would be granted less taxes and more governmental recognition, so the funds these businesses put into training staff or improving their resources would not be an extra cost to them, but rather an investment.

Conclusion

Egypt still has a long way to go when it comes to building and reforming its ecotourism infrastructure, that is why this paper's most recommended policy to start with in order to help the ecotourism industry flourish in Egypt is the third one: training and introducing capacity building activities to local communities in ecotourism spots in Egypt, and implementing an on-ground green certification system for eco-friendly hotels.

The paper proposes this as the best alternative policy for now as it works on the industry's infrastructure, whether from the environmental or the sociocultural side. The other aforementioned policy suggestions ought to be implemented after having a strong ecotourism infrastructure in the country. Therefore, it is strongly recommended for Egypt to start with capacity building and preserving its environmental spot, before moving on to easing the process of building new eco lodges, then finally to marketing and advertising the country as an eco-touristic hub.

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