

# Assessing Sustainable Tourism: Trends and Efforts in Essaouira in Morocco as a Coastal City

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**Abstract:** Tourism is a crucial source and an added value in many developing countries. In Morocco, the sector is of paramount significance with a national GDP of about 20% and its effects have become noticeable. The methodology which is used in this study is qualitative while the data is analyzed according to a process-based approach in two longitudinal periods, from 2001 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2014. Through a process-based longitudinal study, the effects of tourism were analyzed highlighting the three pillars of sustainability, namely the economic, environmental and socio-cultural milieu in Essaouira in the south-west of Morocco. The objective of this paper is to identify, among others, the notorious impacts of mass tourism on fragile destinations in terms of their load capacity, promotion of youth employment and respect for indigenous traditions. This study also aims to assess the influence of tourism on certain destinations that depend, to a large extent, on this activity. It also seeks to test a series of indicators germane to sustainable development in sensitive areas. Within results, it was found that tourism, as an industry, is related to the international community and the tested sustainable development indicators revealed that tourism is environmentally destructive. Job creators in this field contributed to the changes that occurred in the indigenous people's lives and the state's intervention was of paramount significance to preserve the existence of a potential vanishing culture.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, Essaouira, Destination, Socio-Cultural Environment

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism represents an opportunity for the city of Essaouira and for the state to obtain its needs from foreign currency and tax revenues. It is also an opportunity for local people to earn a stable income and employment and an opportunity to improve the city's basic infrastructure requirements such as railways, airports and other prerequisite utilities that the resident seeks in his daily life (in conjunction with international tourists) [1-2]. Essaouira does not have many alternatives as it does not possess other resources which can assist its local economy. Tourism and fishing are the two chief activities the city relies on to increase its prosperity [3]. Yet, economic prosperity, induced by tourism, is not guaranteed due to several factors encompassing the world's economy, tourists' safety and the local economy itself. Every tourist destination longs for achieving certain economic benefits [5] including the local share of goods and services

purchased by tourists in addition to attracting national and international investors that could help improve the industry within the city [4, 24].

Basically, the economic performance of a country or region is determined by the performance of its businesses and its industries. Any given region becomes competitive when it concerns itself directly with many thriving businesses, especially when it lives training effects, creates institutions and produces commodities that have external repercussions [6, 20]. The goal in this study is to evaluate the weight of tourism as the central activity in Essaouira, to provide a simple and reproducible method so as to enable the authorities of the city to easily measure the impact of this activity and to help local people promote their standard of living [6]. For this reason, this study was conducted in 2014 in the region of Essaouira so as to set up a general assessment concerning the economic impacts of tourism on the whole territory. So as to fulfill this objective, a different

methodological choice was implemented and relied on employees and self-employed people who are deductively related to tourism. These basic jobs were used to provide an added value to the sector for the sake of administering statistics concerning unemployment in the destination.

## 2. The Evolution of Tourism in Essaouira

### 2.1. The Hotel Industry

In Essaouira and several areas around the globe, the hotel is considered as the major component in the sector. Hotels were directly contacted in the city to estimate the toll of jobs and the correlation between the number of beds and the number of created jobs (Table 1). In order to extrapolate the total population, 70% of the responses confirmed the immediate relationship between the number of beds and the rate of the created jobs [8].

These findings demonstrate that four and five-star hotels represent 24% of the hotel capacity of the city and employ 41% of all jobs in the sector; one-star hotels represent 20.50% of the capacity and private residences represent only 10.72% in the sector. This leads us to say that the correlation between employment / beds is higher in high-end hotels and most jobs in these hotels are seasonal and unstable.

The hotel sector generated a total turnover of 392 733 120 Moroccan Dirham based on an average expenditure of 632 MAD per night for 372,035 overnight stays in 2014 (according to the official statistics of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and according to the average expenditure of foreign tourists in Morocco). Based on an average of 160 MAD per night, spending is estimated to reach 75,525,600 MAD in Essaouira.

The gross operating profit (GOP) is another parameter that is employed in the survey to calculate the economic impact of tourism. It represents the economic result of the company that ignores how the business is financed and it encourages the company to evaluate its business policy. It is estimated that its contribution in the industry reaches 15% (about 58,909,968 MAD). The tax levy is around 4% for local taxation represented in the tourist promotion tax and the tourist tax and 1.2% for national taxation (VAT) (about 20,422,122 MAD). Regarding the intermediate consumption, the direct operating costs represent 52% of the turnover of the hospitality industry which is estimated to reach around 204,221,222 MAD in the city. The added value thus can be calculated by subtracting the turnover of intermediate consumption and other expenses, equal to 92,564,176 MAD, representing a rate of 23% which is below the national average of 35%.

### 2.2. Catering

Catering is an essential process performed by hotels to attract the attention of tourists and satisfy their tastes. Nevertheless, this process does not necessarily take place within the hotel itself as some tourists choose to vary their dishes, especially fish products outside the boundaries of the

hotel. This activity is mostly performed by collective tourists and does not contribute enough in creating jobs like hotels. In 2014, the number of people who were employed reached 123 [9].

### 2.3. Travel Agencies

Travel agencies, escorts and tour guiding are the other pivotal activities that can help create jobs and positively contribute to the added value of the tourism industry. These activities provide 140 direct and indirect jobs in the city and the bulk of them employ their own means involving the transportation of tourists, guiding, etc. On the other hand, these travel agencies are not utterly exploited by local tourists as most of them prefer arranging their own activities without benefiting from the services of the city's travel agencies and the process causes certain economic damages to the sector [10].

## 3. The Indirect Effects of Tourism on Essaouira

Tourism, in addition to other industrial sectors, helps fortify the services provided to tourists and local people as well. This survey exhibited the value and priority of electricity, gas and food suppliers in the city. The scarcity of certain pivotal services will absolutely oblige tourists to favor other destinations rather than Essaouira. Data analysis has so far shown that tourists consume approximately 25% of the energy provided by ONEE, which is the mere supplier of electricity in the city. Furthermore, statistics in this study demonstrated that tourists consume approximately 52% of the goods and commodities offered in Essaouira by several companies while 23% of other services incorporate telecommunications and transportation [11, 13].

Essaouira also encompasses 97 companies and suppliers located in different parts in the city. During this investigation, it was of paramount significance to test the toll of purchases given by those suppliers [12]. Amongst the 58 investigated companies, only 12 approved of sharing data regarding their turnover while dealing with the city's hotels whose major suppliers are Aswak Assalam and Carrefour Supermarkets.

The rate of turnover achieved by two large supermarkets is significant due to their contributions. To illustrate, this essentially means that certain hotels and supermarkets such as Aswak Assalam and Ryad Mogador supermarkets are part of YNNA Holding which is possessed by a wealthy entrepreneur who endeavors to self-supply certain services. Wholesalers and other companies supply hotels, which are the main consumers, with food products [14].

Regarding the consumption of energy, especially electricity, ONEE is deemed as the only supplier in the city, as is mentioned above, and it is a public company managed by public employees. In other Moroccan cities such as Casablanca, Marrakech, Fez, Rabat, Tangiers, etc., this essential sector is controlled by private institutions. The toll of consumption in the city reached 25%, but the minute

amount absorbed by hotels is difficult to administer due the abstention of ONEE in Essaouira to share its statistics

regarding hotels.

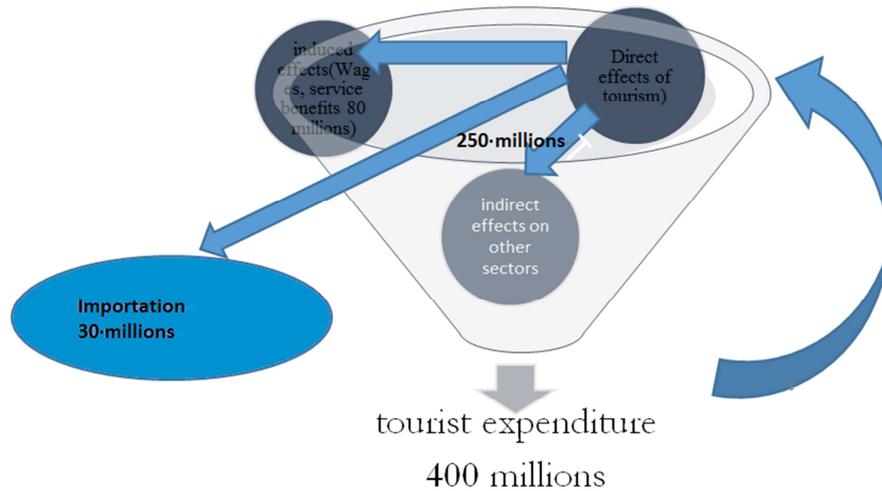


Figure 1. The economic effects of tourism on Essaouira.

## 4. The Environmental Impact of Tourism

Since the Rio Summit in 1992 and adoption of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 2001 in Johannesburg, the rules of conduct were set out and the states and companies (airlines, hotel chains and tour operators) were invited to take measures to make tourism a non-destructive sector. Tourism development should not destroy and affect the environment negatively. It is supposed to maintain biodiversity and natural resources to achieve an effective sustainable development. Certainly, tourism may be responsible for the protection of large areas of natural habitat, wildlife, forest reserves, and remarkable landscapes [25]. Tourism has interests in maintaining the quality of the environment since it constitutes an essential resource sector [15, 27]. A clean and healthy environment is vital to the success of tourism. In several locations, the environmental degradation caused by tourism continues to generate financial losses and no human being is willing to attend water polluted beaches or walk in parks covered with waste [16-17].

### 4.1. Load Capacity in Essaouira

The concept of carrying capacity is based on a simple observation. To illuminate, all kinds of environmental and social degradation can greatly increase depending on the importance of the tourist traffic. The behavior of a solitary individual can result in significant damage. That is why it has become increasingly vital to be able to set tolerance thresholds which determine the tourist load capacity and is directly related the maximum number of visitors that can tolerate a given ecosystem. This tourist load capacity must also consider the behavior, aspirations and socio styles of tourists attracted to visiting a protected ecosystem [21]. Also, anticipating with sufficient precision the number of tourists to accommodate and planning entries by the most appropriate means are two essential tasks for determining the carrying capacity of a tourist destination [23]. In fact, decision-makers in Essaouira should endeavor to develop the destination and to take account of the knowledge gained by the study of the carrying capacity of the area concerned (Mogador Beach, Old Medina, Ile Mogador, Cap sim, Diabat, haha, Moulay bouzrektoun, Tafdna and Bhibih).

Table 1. Tourism function rate between 1994 and 2014.

Year	Population	Accommodations	Tourism function rate
1994	433 681	530.00	12.22%
2004	452 979	2130.00	47.02%
2014	520 412	5631.00	108.20%

### 4.2. Soil Characteristics in Essaouira

Almost all land in the province fall under the forest domain of the state with a dense stand of argan trees. Moreover, the environmental sensitivity of the site (forest, coastline) requires the promoter of tourism to take into consideration certain factors that might influence the region's ecological balance negatively [28].

In a study published in 2005, Chetouani et al. analyzed

coastal erosion in Essaouira [7]. They suggested that the destination undergoes extensive erosion associated with a decline in the coastline. This erosion is very clear in the city, where the waves abut at high tide, against the sea wall to the beach and against the wall of the city. The mechanical wave attack is, indeed, the fundamental process which is at the origin of the advanced state of degradation of the ramparts of Essaouira. This situation undermines the historical and architectural heritage of this city. Natural causes of this

erosion can be explained by very severe weather conditions that lead to high migration of the sands to the south. Natural causes of this erosion are attributed to the human activities that accelerate the process.

Indeed, this natural area has already been weakened by the weather and the environment has in general witnessed a kind of deterioration under the effect of certain socio-economic factors and the growth of the population in the region since the early 1990s. This deterioration causes destabilizing a fragile dune system, with landscape diversity unparalleled in the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The aspects of this degradation are numerous and include the expansion of the city and the development of several tourist facilities in the south which are generally done at the expense of stabilized dune system, the intensive deforestation (pasture and timber) that causes damage to the root system of plants which plays a very important role in fixing the dunes, the exploitation of the limestone crust related to dune formations, for the production of lime that may have ultimately negative consequences on the stability of the environment, and the extraction of sand and aggregates on the beach between the estuary of Ksob and Cape Sim, which leads to a deficit in the sediment budget.

To assess land use and the coast in Essaouira, our field study brings out two large protected areas: the island of Mogador and Bhibih littoral zone with an area of 10 square kilometers. The activities defined in these two areas are fishing and grazing with an ecosystem that is featured by fragility. The island of Mogador should be preserved so as to protect the city and mitigate the proliferation of some harmful tourist activities in this protected area.

#### **4.3. Preservation and Prevention (Water and Energy)**

The climate of Essaouira is moderate with an average temperature of 21 ° C all year which gives the destination a certain natural freshness. This affects the consumption of electric energy in the tourist establishments in the city. For the production of electricity, the region contributes to the production of 60 MW with an annual average deliverability of 200 GWh which is produced in Amogdoul Wind Farm which was inaugurated in 2007 in the CDM framework in accordance with the policy of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. At the environmental level, this project fuels the economy with 48 000 tonnes and contributes to a gas emission reduction of greenhouse gases by 156,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

The Green Key Approved establishments in Essaouira (Heure Bleue as an example) sensitize tourists to the significance of water. So in this hotel, which obtained the Moroccan Green Key eco-label in 2013, management and staff worked intensively to offer their guests upscale amenities in a unique setting while contributing to the respect of the environment. In order to optimally set up a successful model, 92 criteria are taken into consideration and include economizing the use of water and energy through resource management, designing an effective environment policy, managing waste, shedding light on environment

procurement, and sensitizing customers and encouraging them to participate in the process.

In making a comparison between the annual consumption of this hotel and other five-star hotels in Marrakech, it was found that Sofitel Essaouira's consumption was below the standard of consumption of the other hotels. Indeed, and as was mentioned earlier, the climate of the city helps reduce the use of air conditions that are considered as a real burden in hotels in Marrakech, especially during summer.

## **5. Social Impact of Tourism in Essaouira**

Heavy tourism concentration in this destination might lead to negative attitudes and negative behavior towards tourists [22, 25]. If tourism is a sector that is not meant in general to destroy the social growth and economic policy in Essaouira, the industry's problems must be analyzed and processed in a direct way in the very near future. A number of indicators were tested to measure the social impact of an activity that is the main means of living in Essaouira, encompassing the harmony of tourists with the local traditions and local characteristics of the destination, the preservation of the cultural heritage and attractions in the city, the breakdown of the socio-cultural projects and tourism projects and the acceptance of the activities by people themselves.

### **5.1. The Study of Harmony with the Local Characteristics of the Destination**

The rate of the tourism function is an index which has been under use since the sixties by Ironsides. It is the ratio of the total capacity of tourist accommodation (marketed beds) and the total population of the place (permanent residents) [33]. It is calculated by the ratio of the accommodation capacity of a destination on the number of inhabitants multiplied by 100. This rate varied in Essaouira between 12.12% in 1994 to 108.20% in 2014 (Table 1). A rate of tourism function equal to 100 means that the destination could accommodate as many tourists as was the case of the permanent inhabitants of the city of Essaouira in 2014. This rate remains low in this coastline destination that relies on this principal product while it can reach 250% or even more in similar destinations. In fact, the capacity of this city can host more local and international tourists, especially in summer.

We can also raise the issue of land within the city which can be among the changes in tourism investments disabilities that can enhance the rate of the tourism industry [19, 29].

The concentration of tourists in the city center and in certain specific places is sometimes a source of problems. According to the statistics achieved while conducting this study, about 399% of the activities are accumulated in Diabat, in the south of Essaouira, and Mogador Golf. This accumulation affects not only the exploitation of resources, but the land as well. Furthermore, it is essential to consider local people's reaction vis-à-vis several tourist activities in Diabat, in particular. People in this area tend to show aggressiveness towards the tourist and the investor who is

sometimes banned from expanding the tourist product which affects the town negatively [30]. In addition, other areas in Essaouira are featured by mass tourism. To illustrate, Moulay Bouzraktoun, in the north of the city, is visited by a huge number of tourists and the latter sometimes exceed the number of the inhabitants, especially in April, May and June that witness the advent of Jewish people who tend to visit the shrines of their saints.

### 5.2. The Preservation of Cultural Wealth and Attractions in the Destination

A crucial destination is attractive and therefore the need for its preservation becomes sine qua non [18]. The preservation of the cultural heritage of the city has become mandatory. In fact the city is a cultural showcase of Marrakech-Safi area. In addition to the architectural appeal of the Medina and its geostrategic position, two major cultural events proved their importance in the life of local and international tourists while conducting this study in 2014. Ghnawa Festival is the most renowned occasion that takes place in June and that attracts the attention of Moroccan and foreign tourists. It is attended mostly by tourists interested in spiritual music, Jazz, Pop and Rock music. The second occasion that grabs tourists' attention is "the Andalusia" Festival where Andalusia music is played. These two festivals add more value to the city and enrich its resources in addition to the financial benefits of mass tourism.

## 6. Conclusion

Tourism which is deemed as an effective industry can directly contribute to the reduction of poverty in traditional and non-traditional communities and societies [34]. Also, Residents' perception of tourism can affect the ecosystem positively when the benefits of the industry are higher than the costs. The human capital can prompt people to consider the negative impacts of tourism on the destination and lead them to recognize certain tangible measures to preserve the environment and increase the benefits [30].

This field study has revealed that sustainability is germane to several stakeholders whose involvement in the tourist industry in the city is of paramount significance. Another crucial component in this research concerns also the effects of attrition on the economy of the city. When it comes to environmental issues, our research has shown that the destination needs setting street-network actors to move towards a closer cooperation in the field [26, 31].

The limit of this research can be attributed to the fact that it is limited to the destination of Essaouira which is characterized by a set of characteristics that other Moroccan destinations do not possess and this implies a limit in the extrapolation of these results in other Moroccan destinations. Also, this field study is beneficial in nature as it provides lessons that should be taken into consideration while dealing with this industry in general.

In fact, the analysis we propose is contextual and is limited to the city of Essaouira. However, it paves the way to several other studies that can shed more light on several aspects that we have not been able to address such as the changes in the

behavior of hotels and the perception-reaction of certain hosts and managers. These as well as other issues can provide a comprehensive reading on the opportunities and limitations of the tourism industry on sustainable development.

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