Social Tourism in Egypt: Travel Agencies’ Perspective

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Abstract

Social tourism is one of the significant tourism patterns that has appeared in the eastern lump. There were camps prepared for workers at the different tourist areas for renewing their activity, psychological and physical abilities. Nowadays, it has become clear in many countries that mass tourism tours are organized at low prices with various facilities, including cheap accommodation, and there is what is called premium tourism system that permits travel opportunity for any one at any time on a condition that the fees of the tour could be paid on a number of premiums as followed in the U.S.A. The latter is also called tourist saving system as the tourist manages to assign certain amount of their income as a deposit within a fund box for travel purposes. Switzerland is considered a pioneer destination that applies such system in which social tourism includes youth tourism, disabled tourism and solidarity tourism.

Egypt has many obstacles that could affect social tourism, including population growth, high rates of unemployment, high poverty rates and their consequences on governmental expenditure in addition to other obstacles that might stand as a hindrance in front of developing social tourism pattern. This current study aims to assess the current status of social tourism in Egypt, the abilities and available resources of social tourism, identify the obstacles of social tourism in Egypt. The research depends on the descriptive approach, deep-structured interviews accompanied with open-ended and open-closed questions addressed to Egyptian travel agencies. The main finding of the study is that social tourism in Egypt has many obstacles. The study provides- with support of the real field view- some recommendations directed particularly to develop the social tourism in Egypt.

Key words: Social tourism- Solidarity tourism- Youth tourism- low prices tourism- Egyptian destination.

Introduction

Tourism is considered a vehicle for the economic development in Egypt. It resembles approximately 40% of the total services’ exports (Tohamy & Swinscoe, 2000, P.12), 19.3% of the foreign currency, 7% of the total local income directly that is raised to 11.3% if the indirect contributions of the tourism sector is added (League of Arab States, 2005, P.5).

Additionally, tourism stands as one of the most significant sector of the country in providing work opportunities as the percentage of those working at such sector counts for 12.6% directly or indirectly of the total number of workers in Egypt (Farag, 2007, P.11).

Social tourism is one of the significant tourism patterns that has appeared in the eastern lump where there were camps prepared for workers at the different tourist areas for renewing their activity and psychological and physical abilities. Nowadays, it has become obvious in many countries that mass tourism tours are organized at low prices with various facilities, including cheap accommodation, e.g. hostels, three-star hotels or less and there is what so called premium tourism system that permits travel opportunity for any one at any time on a condition that the fees of the tour could be paid on a number of premiums as followed in the U.S.A (UNWTO, 2007). The latter is also called touristic saving system as the reserves manage to assign certain amount of their income and deposit it within a fund box for tourism. Switzerland is considered a pioneer at applying such system in which social tourism includes youth tourism, disabled tourism and solidarity tourism (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/social-tourism/calypso/index_en.htm).
Context of the Problem
As one of the worldwide destination, Egypt has started paying attention for social tourism due to the community's satisfaction of such new pattern, meeting the requirements of locals (Eraqi, 2000, P.15). Consequently, Egypt has to exert a lot of efforts in order to develop such modern touristic pattern. Social tourism has witnessed a great worldwide significance (Krippendorf, 1989, P.28). Hence, Egypt has recently carried on propaganda about such new tourist pattern and attracts attention of those who are responsible for tourism development to pay more attention to citizens with limited income not only by providing them with the basic goods and services, but also by a complete extent that includes new perspectives implying social tourism. There is a number of challenges that should be put into consideration in planning such pattern, e.g. human over population and population increase that devour economic growth sources or reduce the impact of the economic growth in Egypt. Moreover, there are priorities of governmental expenditure in Egypt (Hasenein, 1994, P.39).

Significance of the Study
The importance of the present study stems from the following perspectives:
1. The economic significance of social tourism and studying the extent of its development as a new pattern.
2. Determining the importance of social tourism in Egypt.
3. Analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing social tourism in Egypt.
4. The study recommendations that could contribute in increasing Egypt's portion of social tourism.

Study objectives
The present study is geared towards the following:
1. Assessing the current status of social tourism in Egypt.
2. Assessing the abilities and available resources of social tourism.
3. Identifying the obstacles of social tourism, including marketing and organization, infrastructure, technical and human cadres, customs legitimates and dealings, etc.

Statement of the Problem
The problem of the present study is represented in the fact that Egypt has not benefited from such new pattern; social tourism. Additionally, Egypt still has many obstacles that could affect social tourism, including population growth, the high rates of unemployment, poverty rates and its consequences of governmental expenditure and other obstacles that might stand as a hindrance in front of developing social tourism pattern.

Study hypotheses
The current study is basically based on testing the following hypotheses:
1. There are few exerted marketing efforts of Egypt as a social tourism destination.
2. There are lack of natural abilities and resources of social tourism.
3. There is a weakness of the infrastructure in tourist attractions.
4. There is a lack of the technical and human qualified staff.
5. There is absence of coordination among the governmental authorities.

Data collection sources
Data collection sources were varied between secondary and primary sources. Firstly, the secondary sources were resembled in books, researches, reports, and periodicals related to the subject of the study. Secondly, the primary data were represented in the pilot study on
which the researcher depended (Khalifa, 2000, P.124). They were means of qualitative data collection method, resembled in those unstructured interviews for testing the hypotheses of the study, including Tourism Ministry Administrations and Authorities, the Egyptian travel agencies category (a) as they are based on tourism programs according to the law.

**Study Methodology**

Inductive, qualitative and descriptive methods were employed throughout the study as follows:

**First:** inductive approach that was used to analyze the previous studies related to the subject of the present study in order to achieving results that could facilitate reaching total generalizations.

**Second:** qualitative method which was employed to test the study hypotheses and achieving its objectives, using SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis). Additionally, the descriptive and analytical methods were also employed for analyzing all the secondary data. The field study was undertaken throughout designing interview form to be distributed on the Egyptian travel agencies category (a) as they arrange the different tourism programs to visit Egypt, in order to investigate such pattern and if there was a direction in their plans and programs for developing such pattern of tourism or not. The form helped identifying their suggestions for developing such pattern of tourism, deterring the obstacles facing the development of social tourism according to the previously mentioned tourism companies as well as the statistical analysis of all the data collected.

**Inbound social tourism in Egypt as an analytical study:**

By analyzing the interviews for identifying the concept of social tourism in Egypt and its futures as well as its weaknesses and strengths, there were many points clarified as follows:

- According to the previously mentioned interviews, most interviewees did not know the concept of social tourism. Besides; they linked such concept mostly with tourism and its social significance for tourism, on one hand. On the other hand, few could identify the concept of social tourism.
- According to the study, majority did not think that Egypt has social tourism as the developed countries.
- The different opinions of the interviewees concerning the reasons for that low status of social tourism in Egypt were as follows: because of poverty, a result of the governmental focus on other priorities, due to the weakness of the vocational syndicates in Egypt as mostly stopped or under the auspices of the country, because of awareness lack among the society members, and due to the bad condition of the infrastructure. Additionally, there are other reasons, e.g. tourism activation does not focus on social tourism, the priorities of tourism companies, and their preference not to deal with Egyptian.
- Majority holds the view that Egypt has the success constituents for encouraging social tourism, especially after the 25th of 2011 January Revolution, whilst minority sees that Egypt still has much time to succeed at the field of social tourism.
- Few believe that the most important strengths of Egypt for achieving social tourism are tourism attractions, and the variety of tourist attractions. In addition, there is a possibility for achieving fairness of incomes distribution after the revolution. In addition, there is a social interrelation among the Egyptian people to stand as one of the strengths for establishing social tourism, minority finds the prices harmony could be strength. Other reasons of Egypt's strengths for encouraging social tourism are about 5% of the sample,
considering different religious correlations, e.g. Al Moulid tourism, dedications to God, visiting relatives and others.

- Concerning the challenges that might face social tourism in Egypt, some interviewees think that the most important challenge is the low incomes and consequently the decline of tourism on the spending expenditure priorities of the Egyptian family, while some others believe that the size of the Egyptian family resembles a great challenge for social tourism because of the high cost of the trip. Other interviewees hold the view that the real challenge is represented in the lowness of syndicates, labor institutions, and local associations as mostly stopped, or under the auspices of the country, or even not found. Moreover, there are many Egyptians are not gathered under any labor umbrella, such as workers, farmers, fishers, and other social categories in Egypt. Some interviewees find the lack of infrastructure, and its high cost, the lack of services at gardens and parks, including restaurants, water closets, etc. stand as a challenge. Additionally, some sees that the cultural level and low awareness represent a challenge. The problem of tourism marketing and specially tourism activation resembles a challenge in front of social tourism for some respondents, on the one hand. On the other hand, some mentioned that another challenge could be inefficiency of the parks and public places that can accommodate many Egyptians, arousing different problems as pollution, accumulation of rubbish, traffic jam, and others. Very few people talked about other reasons and challenges in front of security lack and study problems, including holidays, lack of leisure time for many Egyptian families even on holidays because of private lessons, etc.

**Results and Recommendations**

There is a number of the study results as follows:

1. Egypt has various social tourism constituents that are being close to tourist exporting markets, low cost tourism programs, and various tourism attraction constituents for tourists.
2. Egypt has not achieved an appropriate level of inbound social tourism due to the low mediums of the great majority of Egyptian society members.
3. One of the reasons for the low rate of inbound social tourism in Egypt was the weak corporative and labor institutions or they could be under the auspices of the country. Moreover, there are many labors and professionals are not comprised within any labor umbrella.
4. According to the weak economic status of Egypt, social tourism has not been considered as one of the Egyptian governmental priorities as there are other important priorities, such as unemployment, education, health, and other issues that are still in question.
5. Many of the Egyptian society members with approximately percentage 74% do not realize the concept of social tourism.
6. The most important reasons for the low status of the Egyptian inbound social tourism are poverty and the big sized Egyptian family.
7. Egypt has the success constituents of social tourism.
8. Egypt has the success factors of social tourism, especially after the 25th of 2011 January Revolution, guaranteeing the fairness of distributing incomes and decreasing poverty.
9. The current Egyptian economic and social status does not permit activating Egyptian inbound social tourism.
10. According to the study, many Egyptian tourism companies with the category (a) do not realize the concept of social tourism.
11. According to the study, most tourism companies hold the view that social tourism is worthy considered to be a significant tourism pattern.

12. The most important suggestions of tourism companies that were related to the activation of inbound social tourism, was being assigned as one of the tourism development and planning set by the country.

13. The Egyptian tourism companies consider that the most important weaknesses were the absence of a fixed price policy and the weak marketing efforts for social tourism in Egypt.

14. Many companies recommended that there is a necessity for improving the labor and social status in Egypt, working on coordinating efforts and raising awareness of tourism social solidarity as one of the solidarity.

Study Recommendations
In the light of the previously mentioned study results, the following recommendations have been presented:

First, recommendations assigned for the Ministry of Tourism:
1. Paying attention to social tourism and put it into the priorities of the ministry, understanding its requirements, and working on providing them.

2. Inviting a number of decision makers to visit Egypt in order to identify the Egyptian tourism product. Accordingly, there would be accompanying media means with them besides the specialist writers and famous hosts, artists, and directors.

3. Constructing a tourism marketing box for Egypt and the funding of such box with a percentage of the profits of the Egyptian companies and hotels, e.g., 1% of net profit, concentrating on social tourism marketing, especially after the 25th January Revolution.

4. Activating the role of the regional authorities for tourism activation that is related to inbound social tourism activation.

Second, recommendations assigned for the Ministry of Investigation:
1. Studying granting incentives for tourism investigation in the field of social tourism throughout addressing syndicates, local associations, and labor institutions for constructing tourism and hospitality projects in Egypt.

Third, recommendations assigned for the Ministries of Culture and Higher Education:
1. The Ministry of Culture shall Plan for setting up fairs of the Egyptian antiquities along the year. Additionally, the tourism sector shall show some tourism products and services at such fairs. In other words, and such fairs would be a team work between both antiquities and tourism.

2. The Ministry of Higher Education has to increase youth camps from and to Egypt in order to encourage youth tourism that stands as one of the most important pivots of social tourism.

Fourth, recommendations assigned for the Egyptian tourism companies:
1. Paying more attention for social tourism markets as a promising market and working on reaching that type of markets, and not to rely on one traditional market or traditional tourism patterns.

2. Coordinating among companies or being integrated in order to be one tourism company able economically and mark tingly to pass through new markets and do not depend entirely on the governmental efforts in marketing.

3. Providing and offering tourism programs that could achieve the desires and aims of social tourists according to studying social tourist and his psychology in order to grante his loyalty and trust.
Fifth, recommendations assigned for the entire country:
1. Paying attention for the general cleanliness and beautifying streets and squares.
2. Working on solving the problem of transfers and transportation, and securing them throughout determining the accommodating capacity of streets as well as widening them. Additionally, fulfilling plans for roads that could allow vanishing traffic jam points.
3. Activating the laws of exploit struggle, e.g. reworking the taximeter.
4. Increasing security at routes and working on decreasing motorcycles and what so called tock tock (a hardtop motorcycle used as a hack) at streets that could be employed for some illegal and lawless purposes.
5. Increasing diplomatic cooperation among countries throughout exchanging visits programs and making agreements for the economic, industrial, commercial, agricultural and touristic cooperation.
6. Working on the maintenance of parks and public places as well as providing tourism and hospitality services at satisfying prices.

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