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ABSTRACT

Since the Revolution of the 25th of January 2011, Tourism in Egypt has been facing major problems. Among these is the large number of unemployed tour guides due to trip cancellations. An increasing need emerged to develop strategies in order to improve the current situation of tour guides.

The main objectives of this research are to implement entrepreneurial approaches in the field of tourist-guiding. The study deals with starting a personal business as a tour-guide, through promoting tours and all related services. Such an enterprise has the advantage of being managed from home through the internet, using online applications and social media websites, not to mention the possibility to produce a large income.

The research will conduct a qualitative approach by interviewing a number of Egyptian tour-guides.

One of the main conclusions of the study is that Entrepreneurship would help tour-guides know how to market the services of their business. This requires building contacts with companies and individuals on all levels. The success of the business is accomplished by providing clients with the best offers they can get and to possess the know-how of promoting the required services.

Recommendations of the study include that tour-guide should look for entrepreneurial ideas doing all the effort needed to make their business succeed. It is also highly recommended to create coordination with tourism suppliers and to build alliances with all relevant tourism promoters.

Key-words: Tour-guides, guided tours, entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is becoming increasingly competitive. For many countries, tourism is an important sector of their national economy, an industry where tourists consume a wide range of products and services (Nassar, 2012). This adds up to the domestic demand with an impact on the economy and job creation. These activities contribute to national wealth and to the income of individuals and their households. On the

other hand, international tourism provides foreign currencies to destinations and impacts positively on the balance of payments. Hence, it is considered to be more labour intensive than any other productive sectors (UNWTO-ILO, 2013). It is also considered as the life blood for developing countries, where it provides an effective transfer of income from developed to developing economies. Indeed, tourism is an important source of foreign exchange and foreign investment in many developing countries (UNEP, 2013).

The creation of professionally trained guides has thus become an essence. An increasing number of people are interested in travel and tourism. This has consequently created demand for intermediaries to link up travellers with what they want to consume as they travel and to make interesting and informative commentaries (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014).

Tour guides are one of the key front-line players in the tourism industry. Through their knowledge and interpretation of a destination's culture, communication and service skills, they have the ability to transform the tourists' visit into an experience and knowledge level. Service professionalism has become an important issue as destinations compete for tourists in a very competitive environment (Chang et al. (2012). However, according to Mak et al. (2011), *"the tour guiding profession has been the "Cinderella" of the tourism industry: attractive, useful, but often neglected"*.

Egypt has been going through very difficult times for almost four years now. Tourism has been badly affected by the Revolution of January 25th, 2011. Tourist guides of Egypt have never lost hope that tourism will recover and visitors will flood the great sites of Egypt again (WFTGA, 2014). Consequently, needs have arisen for entrepreneurial behaviour. Tour guides have to implement innovative methods in order to move forward with their career.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of the study is to examine tour guides' roles in promoting tourism in Egypt as a tourism destination. Therefore, the study identifies and evaluates roles of tour guides in creating a good destination image, establishes the need for tour guides' training to aid in tourism promotion and development, investigates challenges faced by tour guides and identifies possible solutions to challenges tour guides face in Egypt. One of the main objectives is to assess tour guides' attitudes towards using Information and Communication Technology in their business and to evaluate their ability to create an atmosphere of creativity and innovation. This study seeks to examine the critical issues impacting the service quality and professionalism of the tour guiding professions serving the Egyptian tourism market.

METHODOLOGY:

The goal of this study is to provide a clear understanding rather than to generalize findings. Therefore, the research relied on the qualitative approach and consisted of two phases;

-Phase 1: a pilot study with experts in the field was conducted to gain base for interview questions. This step was important to ensure validity and reliability of questions.

-Phase 2: a series of in-depth interviews was conducted with representatives of tour guide associations, and selected tour guides in Egypt in order to explore the critical issues related to tour guiding. Data collected was transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

Based on some new findings, a set of recommendations was formulated. A key recommendation included the implementation of a series of procedures that will help improve the Egyptian tour guides' situation and working conditions. It is recognized that the experiences faced by the Egyptian tour guides are unlikely to be unique and there may be some issues and problems raised that are common to the guiding profession in most other countries.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW:

Very few studies have dealt with the professional status and issues faced by tour guides. A number of researches have been devoted to define tour guides and to explain the different roles performed by them and the qualifications required for the profession (Pond, 1993; Howard et al., 2001; Prakash & Chowdhary 2010; Mak et al., 2011; Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014; Weiler & Walker, 2014;). Cohen (1985) was a pioneer of making tourist guiding a matter of scientific attention. He defined a tour guide as a pathfinder, a leader, an animator and a mentor who not only produces attractions in the marginal regions of the ecological tourist system but also reproduces the attractions in the central regions of the system.

Pond (1993) explains that skilful tour guides are of the most valuable assets a tourism company can have, since they are in many ways in the front line of a business or company; they are the ones who interact the most with visitors.

Tour guides are those who possess enthusiasm, knowledge, personality qualities and high standards of conduct and ethics that enable them to lead groups of people or individuals to the important sites while providing interpretation and commentary (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014). They are the information-givers and caretakers (Mak et al., 2011). Through their knowledge and interpretation of a destination's culture, communication and service skills, they have the ability to transform the tourists' visit into an experience and knowledge level (Chang et al., 2012).

On the other hand, fewer studies dealt with Egyptian tour guides in particular. El-Sharkawy (2007) conducted an in-depth research about the requirements Egyptian tour guides must fulfil, shedding light on the historical background of the profession in Egypt. Furthermore, although some studies discussed tourism in Egypt after the Revolution of January 25th, 2011 (Nassar, 2012;; Abdou & Zaazou, 2013; Khodair, 2013; World Bank. 2013), no research tackled the issues of Egyptian tour guides and the problems and challenges they are facing, particularly after the revolution. The present study tries to involve entrepreneurship with tour guiding as a means of overcoming the actual situation. This research would

thus represent one of the first attempts to deal with tour guiding with respect to entrepreneurship and innovation.

5 TOURISM AND TOUR GUIDES IN EGYPT:

Tourism is a dynamic economic sector that generates substantial foreign exchange earnings. Due to the forward and backward linkages of the sector with other activities, it tends to generate employment and income opportunities (UNEP, 2013; WTO-ILO, 2013).

In Egypt, around 70 sectors profit from the tourism industry which creates jobs across the board. It is considered a main provider of jobs where tourism employment (direct and indirect) is about 12.6% of the total employed population, with 1.2 million workers directly engaged in hotels and another 1.5 million in travel and other related tourism services, according to reports of January to December 2009 (Handoussa et al., 2010).

Since Egypt is a major tourism destination, accordingly it provides great job opportunities on all levels for those who work in the field. Generally speaking, the rise in need for travel in the tourism industry usually increases the demand for tour guides to provide tourists with all the necessary information and relevant services (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014).

In the growing movement toward organizing and professionally accrediting positions within the travel industry in Egypt, the first official tour guides' association was founded in Egypt in 1965. In 1983 the Egyptian Tourist Guides Syndicate (EGTGS) was created. It established a sophisticated database about tour guides and their working conditions (El-Sharkawy, 2007).

Egypt has the largest tourist guides association in Africa; the EGTGS has today more than 17,000 members, according to the syndicate's database. It is also a founding member of the Arab Tourist Guides Federation (WFTGA, 2015).

Through the EGTGS Egypt is a member of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Association (WFTGA). The EGTGS was established by law, part of the Egyptian constitution; Law N. 121 of 1983 organizes the work of tour guides in Egypt. It implies that Egyptian tour guides must be licensed by the Ministry of Tourism and be a member of the Egyptian Guides Syndicate (Ministry of Tourism, 1983; El-Sharkawy, 2007).

Like tour guides all around the world, Egyptian tour guides have to fulfil qualifications and to achieve responsibilities and roles. Tour guides are representatives of a region, they are crossing points between tourists and destinations; they are interpreters making sense of the destination's culture and heritage (Mak et al., 2011).

They also contribute to the promotion of a tourist destination since they can sell the next tour (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014), not to mention their leading, interpretative, inspiring and entertaining roles in a given geographical or environmental setting in which they apply specialized knowledge of various languages

(Howard et al., 2001; McGrath, 2003; El-Sharkawy, 2007; Prakash & Chowdhary, 2010; Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014; Moteka, 2014,). They are also the “ambassadors” entrusted with the public relations missions of the destination (Holloway, 1981; Pond, 1993).

6 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES:

For many years, tour guides in Egypt have been suffering from major problems. Some of these are in fact common issues for tour guides in all countries such as the lack of recognition by employer, low social status, low and unstable income, lack of commitment, and high turnover rate and inadequate employment protection (Ponds, 1993; Mak et al., 2011).

Furthermore, an important defect of the business is seasonality. The seasonal nature of tour guiding offers guides little security and protection over their income, benefits, and employment status, consequently leading to their lack of commitment. This has undoubtedly resulted in a high turnover rate in the guiding profession, and the lack of skilled and trained tour guides (Ponds, 1993; Mak et al., 2011; Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014). Interviewed tour guides indicated that, during high seasons of work, they had recourse to some practices to increase their income such as selling goods or bringing tourists to various shops, encouraging tourists to make purchases that will generate sufficient commissions for the tour guides.

Altogether, the above issues have gradually led to a high turnover rate in the guiding profession. Tour guides started to look for joining other businesses if they were offered more favourable pay and working conditions. This has created difficulties in retaining skilled and experienced tour guides and thus, a decline in service quality and professionalism of the guiding profession.

On the other hand, tourism is a fragile industry which is highly vulnerable to internal and external shocks as diverse as economic downturns, natural disasters, epidemic disease, and international conflicts (Sönmez, et al., 1999; Nassar, 2012).

SINCE THE REVOLUTION OF JANUARY 25, 2011 HAS ERUPTED, Egypt has been undergoing a major political and social transition. At the same time, substantial economic disruptions have adversely affected all Egypt’s sectors including tourism (World Bank, 2013). While some believe that the revolution has ended, the tourism industry, similarly for other sectors of the economy, is still facing major troubles (Nassar, 2012).

Egypt in 2010 had 14.7 million tourists, but after January the 25th, tourism revenues dropped by 60 percent. The country has lost around two billion U.S. dollars in tourism revenues due to this political unrest which resulted in cancellations of trips (Abdou & Zaazou, 2013).

Given all the previously mentioned conditions, whether the frequent challenges of the business or the negative status after the revolution of January 2011, the need had arisen to look for new approaches to deal with problems tour guides are facing. Entrepreneurial activities must consequently be established.

Entrepreneurship is a multi-discipline phenomenon that involves change initiation, creative resourcing, entrepreneurial learning, innovation and creativity, as well as knowledge leadership, opportunity alertness, relationship management, and timing of action (Aghapour, et al., 2012).

Many developed Western economies recognized the role of entrepreneurial activities in stimulating innovation and change, employment and new venture creation, growth in economic activity and technical progress (Lugosi & Bray, 2008; Skokic & Morrison, 2011; Aghapour et al., 2012). Entrepreneurship and innovation are critical factors in tourism and are both central to the continued success and development of the industry, both globally and regionally (Blichfeldt, 2009; Lopez et al., 2009). Recently some entrepreneurial activities such as booking agencies and low budget hotels or airline have been established (Aghapour et al., 2012).

7 ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EGYPT:

Promoting entrepreneurship in Egypt for youth employment creation is a great challenge (Jochaud et al., 2014). The 2012 GEM Study (2012) has been the first to capture the effect of the 25th of January, 2011 revolution on entrepreneurship in Egypt (Hattab, 2013). Due to its vital role in job creation, opening up opportunities for youth, stimulating innovation and other aspects that contribute directly to the economic prosperity of the country, more attention has been paid to entrepreneurship in Egypt over the past few years. An increasing number of key players engaged in entrepreneurship in Egypt has appeared, such as The Middle East Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship, BADER entrepreneurship programme, EGYPRENEUR, INNOVENTURE, STARTUP WEEKEND and others, through activities organised in the different governorates of Egypt targeting all age categories including business plan competitions, global entrepreneurship week that has been held on annual basis since 2008, networking events, etc (Hattab, 2013).

The entrepreneurial life cycle includes crucial factors to be promoted in order for entrepreneurs to thrive: entrepreneurship culture, education and training, support services, access to finance, access to market and technology transfer and the promotion of innovation (Jochaud et al., 2014). These are indeed the major factors needed for enhancing and promoting tourism and tour guiding in Egypt in the future.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations of the research deal with various factors that mainly involve innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial activities. These, however, must be accompanied by a series of practices that will help to improve the present situation. In times of crisis, the main goal is sustainability and not profitability (Cernusca & Dima, 2010). There are some policies to be implemented:

8.1 Crisis management measures to be established:

The organization of a task force composed of local government officials, local travel and tourism industry professionals is highly recommended (Sönmez, 1999). This group should draft a current crisis management plan and develop a crisis management guidebook (Nassar, 2012). It will take the responsibility of restoring new levels of safety to an area of potential violence. It can also protect and rebuild the image of safety by re-establishing the area's business functionality and attractiveness (Nassar, 2012). A full recovery plan comprised of a partnership between the public sector (the Egyptian government) and private sectors (Tourism sector analysts and experts) needs to be developed to restore Egyptian tourism to its original state. It is also noteworthy that the Ministry of Tourism in Egypt has a main role in planning for the development of tourism and the coordination between public and private sectors. Its main efforts are encouraging enterprise development by resolving problems, removing constraints, and offering new opportunities (Handoussa et al., 2010). Tourism companies, on the other hand, must promote diversified tourism packages both for domestic and foreign tourists at relatively lower prices (Nassar, 2012).

8.2 Tour guides' education and training:

Educating and training guides is one of the great challenges in the present situation. A national theme curriculum must be created among academic institutions and tour guides syndicate, in order to deliver well educated and trained tour guides. This can be achieved by developing the educational programs adhered by the institutions, and the training courses organized by the syndicate under the patronage of the Ministry of Tourism (El-Sharkawy, 2007).

8.3 Entrepreneurial practices:

In this era of virtual communication, it is important to implement innovative tools to promote tourism and accordingly improve tour guiding, such as using websites and promoting tourism online through social networking (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) (Cernusca & Dima, 2010; Nassar, 2012).

It has to be mentioned that some tour guides have initiated an entrepreneurial practice in the past few years; they designed private websites for themselves, through which they can promote for their work and sell tours (Viator Tour Guides; Egypt Private Tours; Egypt Guided Tours & Tour Guides Directory). Interviewed tour guides mentioned that this trend is becoming more widespread among Egyptian tour guides. It enables them to promote tours and all its related services through the internet, using social media websites. Marketing their services requires building contacts with travel agencies, hotels, companies and individuals on all levels in order to provide their clients with the best offers. It has the advantage of being managed from home and to produce a good income. The key to success is to create coordination with tourism suppliers and to build alliances with all relevant tourism promoters. They explained that it only has the inconvenient of adding more taxes to tour guides. They are treated

differently by the government when they pay their taxes because they are the ones who organize the trips not travel agencies or tour operators.

In this respect, the researcher suggests the introduction of a new technology that might help tour guides improve their situation. It is a service offered online by tour guides in the form of Virtual Tours organized on the tour guides' websites. Such virtual tours will be paid online since they will be accompanied by commentaries and information given on the spot from tour guides to tourists. Tourists will have the opportunity to make a tour in sites through live videos or 3D sites, and to profit from guides' information.

Undoubtedly this might not totally satisfy tour guides who need live interaction with tourists, but it could be one of the proposed solutions for the present time. In fact, no one can deny that technology has had its negative effect on tour guiding with the development of Information and Communication Technology and the use of Tour Guides Applications that are now available on mobiles (Brown & Chalmers, 2003; Kenteris et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2012; Alshattnawi, 2013).

9 CONCLUSION:

To conclude, it must be mentioned that rising unemployment in Egypt is at the forefront of economic and social challenges (World Bank, 2013). THE importance of tour guides cannot be underestimated for quality tourism experience of tourists visiting a destination.

Tourism administrators and organizations have to help guides in carrying out their roles through creating a good work environment, superior quality of work life, pride in work, safe and secure jobs, not to mention good relationships with stake holders, and all procedures that enable them to enjoy their jobs and professionalism (Prakash & Chowdhary, 2010).

This paper raises a few issues about the intervention of technologies in tour guiding and the need to apply entrepreneurship in order to create innovative solutions that will cope with new trends and applications. Also, it points to the issue of funding that is necessary for tour guides, since the implementation of new techniques imposes financial resources (Jochaud et al., 2014).

The report of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2014 offers 10-years forecasts which assess and quantify the value of Travel & Tourism's contribution to GDP and employment. According to the information it provides, the direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was EGP 96.8bn (5.6% of total GDP) in 2013, and was forecast to rise by 1.9% in 2014, and to rise by 4.9% pa, from 2014-2024, to EGP 158.6bn (5.5% of total GDP) in 2024. The direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to Employment in 2013 was 1,251,000 jobs (5.1% of total employment). This was expected to rise by 2.4% in 2014 and rise by 2.5% pa to 1,648,000 jobs (5.2% of total employment) in 2024 (WTTC, 2014). These valuable forecasts undoubtedly indicate that the situation in Egypt is still promising.

It is noteworthy that research and development play a crucial role in enhancing entrepreneurship and promoting new high growth ventures. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a strong link between different sectors, particularly between the academic and the private sectors (Jochaud et al., 2014).

Finally, it is highly assumed that, with the return of political stability, tourism activities, including tour guiding, will have a new powerful start.

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