

The role of Living Heritage in Sustainable Tourism Development. Case Study: Fishermen and Fishing Practices in Alexandria.

DINA EZZ EL-DIN

Tourist Guiding Department, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt

SAMAR ELKASRAWY

Tourism Department, Alexandria University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage is considered as assets inherited from the past but of high value for the present and the future of a country. According to UNESCO, **the “intangible cultural heritage”** designates the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. These also include traditional craftsmanship.

Tourism is a major development form, and its relation to heritage and conservation activities is significant. Heritage tourism is a kind of tourism that focuses on communities that have unique customs, unique form of art and different social practices. The local community has a leading role in refreshing the heritage of the city and hence, attracting more tourists. As heritage tourists spend generously, it is expected that increased revenue can be brought to the community and country that hosts them and can be an engine of economic growth and sustainable tourism.

The Egyptian civilization can be considered as one of the oldest that introduced the fishing practices. Fishing is one of the important crafts especially in countries with sea coasts and inland waters. Therefore, Alexandria, interesting Mediterranean city, was considered as a valuable case study.

The purpose of using the qualitative approach at this study was two-fold: first to explore and compare between ancient and new fishing practices in order to emphasize their continuity, and second to discuss the notion of heritage tourism in terms of heritage conservation and tourism management.

Key Words: Heritage tourism, intangible heritage, Fishermen and fishing practices, Alexandria, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the UNESCO General Conference raised the issue of the importance of safeguarding of traditional culture and folklore¹¹. However, the UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in 2003 was the main event that shed light on the importance of intangible heritage in order to be recorded with the intention of preserving it as treasures for coming generations.

Although the idea of preserving and listing heritage sites and later tangible and intangible heritage was born in Egypt when the UNESCO raised its campaign and fund to rescue the Nubia temples that were threatened by the construction of the High Dam in Egypt, only seven sites are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) and two on its Intangible Cultural Heritage List; namely "*Al-Sirah Al-Hilaliyyah epic* (2008) and "*Tahteeb, stick game*" (2016) <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/egypt-EG>

Many studies have discussed the fact that cultural and heritage tourism is able to attract more tourists than other types of tourism. It is worth mentioning that cultural heritage areas rely intensively on intangible cultural heritage in the sense that tourists are not only interested in visiting and observing the sites but also exploring the life of the local people, their traditional handicrafts, folklore, etc. (Rodzi et al , 2013; Petronela, 2015). Therefore, the local community has a leading role in refreshing the heritage of the city and thus attracting more tourists. As heritage tourists spend generously, it is expected that increased revenue can be brought to the community and country that host them and can be an engine of economic growth and sustainable tourism.

Nevertheless, the intangible cultural heritage is at risk if the local community does not recognize what is actually happening to their cultural heritage and might erode if no action or protection is taken (Rodzi et al., 2013). Furthermore, it can be negatively affected by industrialization, urbanization, westernization and globalization (Roders, 2011; Lee, 2015); hence, much attention should be paid in order to avoid any negative impacts of heritage tourism and thus preserve and safeguard the authenticity of the intangible cultural heritage.

This study aims at shedding light on the importance of intangible cultural heritage in developing heritage tourism and their socio-economic benefits for the local community. It also discusses the role of the local community in safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage and the preservation of their identity.

In order to fulfil this aim, Alexandria, interesting Egyptian Mediterranean city with inland waters, was considered as a valuable case study in order to discuss an important craft of living heritage; namely, fishing practices.

¹¹ Folklore is more restrictive than intangible cultural heritage

ALEXANDRIA AS AN ANCIENT MARINE CENTER: (ALEXANDRIA BEFORE ALEXANDER)

Alexandria occupies a coastal area enveloped between the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Mariut Lake to the south. It is situated about 210 kilometers northwest of Cairo (Husar, 2007).

Rakotis is the name of the village that became Alexander's capital. It was occupied by fishermen and this part remained the district of the native population after the establishment of Ptolemaic Alexandria (Morcos, et al, 2003). Rakotis was presumably one of twelve existing villages at this region. They were hamlets or protection points guarding the site's inhabitants against pirates' attacks. (Morcos, et al, 2003; Sousa, et al, 2013).

Archaeological remains provide evidence of early human activity in Alexandria. Sediment cores from the East Harbour of the city were found, of which some sections are radiocarbon-dated to the period prior to the arrival of Alexander the Great to Egypt (around 2300 years B.P.). The core sections include potsherds, planks of pine, heavy minerals, organic matters, lead concentrations and some rock fragments (Stanley, et al, 2007).

Ceramic fragments including cooking vessels, bowls and jars were also found. It is clear that the city chosen by Alexander to be the new capital was an already existing town with inhabitants. The collected findings show that a coastal population has presumably flourished in this area seven centuries before the Ptolemaic period (Stanley, et al., 2007).

Even before the arrival of Alexander the Great to the site and the establishment of a capital there, the island of Pharos has already gained a significant fame in the Greek literature, namely writings of Homer, due to its importance to international navigation (Sousa, et al, 2013).

Alexandria grew from a small port town to become a great metropolis and an important scientific and artistic centre (Sousa, et al, 2013).

PAST AND PRESENT FISHING PRACTICES

The present research is focusing on the revival of the ancient fishermen sites in Alexandria. This would be achieved by means of incorporating their settlements, their working habits and practices in tourism itineraries and consequently enabling them to preserve their heritage. Fishing is known and practiced by the Egyptians since the earliest times. This is documented by scenes depicted in tombs which date back to the Old Kingdom (Davies, 1936).

Fish was consumed by the ancient Egyptians since the Prehistoric Period; evidence is in the form of skeletal remains that date back to the Palaeolithic Period. Some Khurmusan sites (an upper Pleistocene industry c. 45.000 B.C.) have records of fish exploitation, particularly the Nile Catfish. Furthermore, investigations conducted at the site of Lake Qarun at El-Fayum have revealed evidence of fishing practices dating back to the Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic Periods (Brewer, 2001). Also, the rock art of El-Hosh, 30 km south of Edfu on the west bank of the Nile, has unique designs that were interpreted as representations of fish traps dating back to the Epipalaeolithic Period (c. 8000 B.P.) (Huyge, 2009).

Fishing has always been one of the major activities practiced by the ancient Egyptians. Egypt's coasts extending in the north and the east, together with the long distance traversed by the Nile have paved the way for fishing to be a great industry (Daumas, 1977). Information about fishing practices in the northern coasts during the dynastic period is less available than that in the south. Scenes depicting fishing are more preserved in the cemeteries to the south of the delta (Daumas, 1977). These representations are sufficient to witness the adoption of fishing techniques and tools (dragnets and lines) that are very similar to those of modern Egypt.

Representations on walls of tombs and temples dating back to the Dynastic period show a clear understanding of fish anatomy and fishing practices. Also, fishing scenes in ancient Egypt usually depicted the tomb owner involved in the activity being accompanied and helped by his family members; namely his wife and children (Feucht, 1992). Similarly, in modern Egypt, fishing communities living along the coasts involve their children in all phases of the process; from transport to selling of the fish (Samy, 2015).

LIVING HERITAGE VS HERITAGE TOURISM

Living heritage includes intangible as well as tangible heritage (Poulios, 2014). This study is more concerned with intangible heritage; however it will shed light on some of the remaining wooden houses left from the times of the ottoman. Therefore, the living heritage approach will be discussed.

Heritage tourism is defined as “travelling to experience the places, artefacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources” (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008). Therefore, it can serve as an effective tool to generate income, tax revenues, and jobs, diversify local economies, and improve the local quality of life (Jiang and Homsey, 2008).

Trying to find a definition for intangible heritage, most of the literature review embraced the definition set by the UNESCO Convention in 2003.

According to the UNESCO Convention in 2003 “*intangible cultural heritage*” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity” (www.unesco.org).

The above mentioned definition was further determined as follows (www.unesco.org):

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;

- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

Moreover, the term cultural heritage is extended to include not only heritage sites and monuments, natural gardens and landscapes, but also all forms of productions as well as crafts and trades, rural and urban heritage as well as customs, folklore, oral and performing traditions, religious or profane manifestations (Barrio et al, 2012).

According to Cominelli and Greffe (2012) "*Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) concerns "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that belong to communities and are held by specific members"*

Bakar et al (2014) stated that "*Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to human skills, practices, expression and instruments which form the transmitted practices of local cultures*" and is expressed through processes, phrases, know-how and abilities (Petronela, 2015).

In this respect, heritage sites are evaluated in a more broadened, better and distinctive way relying on its natural and human resources and practices. The distinction between tangible and intangible is thus reflected by its artificial nature.

This in return adds more segmentation and niches to heritage tourism (Barrio et al, 2012), being able to make more individualized experiences. In addition, other types of tourists than heritage ones experience also a large amount of heritage even if they were not motivated or had the intention for cultural heritage.

City tourism and urban tourism are no exception, where tourists experience all kinds of living heritage. For example, tourists in Alexandria make city tours and walking tours to discover its tourist sites, monuments, old heritage buildings , streets and above all they deal with people, shops, experience food, folklore, and sometimes observe all kinds of crafts etc. One example is the fishing practices. Local people have of course added and embroidered some modern fishing techniques and equipment; however, they still rely on some of the old ones, those past practices that they inherited from their ancestors.

In other words it can be said that the inherited living fishing practices can offer two-fold analytical dimension; the practices attracting tourists to observe or might even be experienced by them, i.e. the production of a cultural good by itself. The second dimension is the sea products being fished, which can lead to experiencing other types of cultural heritage practices like being involved in sea food preparation and tasting or also local handicrafts and souvenirs related to the Mediterranean with its fishing practices.

These two dimensions certainly will have their social and economic impact on the local people. More heritage tourists will be attracted especially when more creative heritage experiences will be packaged and sometimes two or more of them combined together for a more enriched experience.

It is worth mentioning that the *Mediterranean Diet* is listed as an intangible heritage in the UNESCO World Heritage List. A heritage that combines the eating habits of the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea¹² transmitted from one generation to another. It includes not only food but also traditional social activities and crafts linked to farming and fishing (Meduri et al, 2016). This

¹² Spain, Greece, Morocco, Portugal, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel

proves that fishing and fishing practices are important even to other intangible cultural heritage practices.

Accordingly, Cultural heritage tourism has a wide range of potential benefits, a strong market potential, and has seen a surge in popularity and implementation in various places in recent decades. Many local government agencies, preservation groups, and economic development advocates have a very positive view of heritage tourism, since it can be a powerful engine of economic growth while helping improve the quality of life for local communities (Jiang and Homsey, 2008).

ROLE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN PRESERVING LIVING HERITAGE

According to Poullos (2014) the community plays a leading role in the definition, conservation and protection of living heritage. This is done under the guidance of professionals, having secondary role, that are responsible for the capacity building of the core community. Therefore, heritage is seen as part of the present community's life

. "A living heritage approach calls for the safeguarding of heritage within the connection with the present community (continuity), by the present community and for the sake of the present community" (Poullos, 2014).

Heritage should not only be considered as a treasure from the past that need to be preserved but as living space that need to be handled and practiced by local communities and managed by their experts.

The role of the local community in preserving the intangible cultural heritage involves generating, recreating, transmitting and sustaining their intangible heritage. This preservation should also be extended to include artists, craftsmen and practitioners of the heritage itself (Bakar et al, 2014).

The UNESCO convention in 2003 stated that *safeguarding "means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage"* (www.unesco.org).

It can be said that the protection and safeguarding of non-material heritage is crucial in order to strengthen cultural diversity as rich assets for individual and societies. In addition, their promotion and maintenance are essential for sustainable development as well as a source of creativity and innovation. This can be explained by the fact that intangible cultural heritage involves knowledge transfer to present generations. In fact they recreate this know-how due to current conditions. For example, a potter would make other shapes of pots to cope with current needs, a weaver would create new models and a tailor would make clothes using modern synthetic fibres and tissues (Cominelli and Greffe, 2012). Concerning fishing practices, the same equipment from the past might be manufactured using similar but different materials or even recycled ones to save the environment.

Accordingly, it is the local communities who should share in putting the desired strategies and action plans for preserving and safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, local

projects should involve the communities of craftsmen and the enterprises responsible of the creation and reproduction of this heritage and encourage dynamics fostering innovation within a particular sector, as well as in other sectors (Cominelli and Greffe, 2012).

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Intangible cultural heritage should be perceived as an asset that need to be safeguarded and at the same time promote and use this asset to attract more tourists in an intelligent and creative way. In doing so, it is important to make all stakeholders, especially the local community, cooperate, collaborate and share in the formation of strategies, action plans as well as management (Meduri et al, 2016). The managing approach would naturally include a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and also evaluation and feedback in every stage. It should rely on the following five principles (Jiang and Homsey, 2008):

- **Collaborate** with partners and stakeholders.
- **Find the fit** between the needs of local community and visitors.
- **Make tourism experiences packages alive**
- **Focus on quality and authenticity**
- **Preserve and protect** local natural, cultural, and historic resources.

Strategies and plans should be inclusive of the following (Meduri et al, 2016):

- The enhancement of local resources
- The rediscovery of local identity
- The enhancement o local products, handicrafts and local entrepreneurship
- Raising community awareness of their heritage assets

This can be achieved by starting with the following steps:

- Identifying the individuals, groups and communities that stand for this heritage, its production and maintaining (Cominelli and Greffe, 2012; Bakar et al, 2014; Meduri et al, 2016).
- Recording and listing of the heritage
- Selecting practitioners according to the quality of their work (Cominelli and Greffe, 2012).
- Responsibility of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to collaborate with the local community in this response
- Organizing workshops and training programs with different quality and levels(Cominelli and Greffe, 2012).

In addition, a four-step implementation program was suggested by Jiang and Homsey in their Heritage Planning Guidebook (2008):

- Assess the potential for building heritage tourism program.
- Plan and organize the human and financial resources.

- Prepare for visitors, protect and manage your cultural, historic and natural resources.
- Market for success.

Finally, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis should be made in order to evaluate strategies, plans and programs. In terms of heritage tourism, strengths are the resources and heritage assets of a community that attract potential tourists. Weaknesses are the resources and services that a local community currently do not have and therefore discourage or prevent tourists from visiting. Opportunities include factors and facilities that encourage heritage tourism and thus, for example, new opportunities for jobs. Threats are factors negatively affecting the local, regional, or even national heritage tourism industry, such as economic recession, natural and human crises and disasters or sprawling growth.

These are general guidelines for managing intangible cultural heritage; however, every community has its unique and different characteristics and identity that are reflected on their heritage. These differences should be taken into consideration when managing one community's living heritage.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

As mentioned above, the study main goal was to explore the importance of intangible cultural heritage and the role of the local community in safeguarding it. The study also tried to put guidelines in notion of heritage tourism in terms of heritage conservation in order to achieve socio economic benefits for local communities.

Therefore, the study adopted the qualitative approach through two-fold:

- 1- to discuss the notion of heritage tourism in terms of heritage conservation and tourism management
- 2- to explore and compare between ancient and current practices of a craft considered as one of the most popular intangible heritage in Egyptian culture in order to emphasize their continuity.

In order to achieve the aim of the research, the study considered fishing practices in Alexandria as a valuable case study. The case study approach is suitable for both explanatory and exploratory researches (Saunders and Thornhill, 2009). In this study, a single case has been employed. This provides an opportunity to observe and analyze the phenomenon.

The data collection techniques within the case study were combination of interviews (semi-structured), documentary analysis and conducting walking tours in old fishing areas. Interviews were made with fishermen and local tour guides specialized in walking tours and city tours with emphasis on heritage were conducted. A walking tour with one of the most professional local tour guides was made.¹³

The research was conducted in the areas to the west of Alexandria, namely El-Max. This neighborhood is the site where the indigenous inhabitants of Alexandria lived before the

¹³ Special thanks are given to Ms. Al-Zahraa Adel Ahmed for her thorough contribution.

establishment of Alexander's capital. Also, this was the district where the native Egyptians continued to occupy after the city Alexandria was built (Riad, 1996).

El-Max, located in the Amriya district in the west of Alexandria, is inhabited by a community of fishermen who live on the canal of Al-Mahmoudyah. This was a waterway dug upon the orders of Mohamed Ali in 1820 to provide Alexandria with freshwater coming from the Nile. The canal was also destined for the navigation of cargo ships. The canal, which bears the name of the Ottoman Sultan Mahmoud II, runs to the south of the city until it enters the Alexandria harbor, the principal port of Egypt (Husar, 2007; Forester and Durrell, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Walking through El-Max, many old buildings stand as witness for great history and many stories to be told. Few remaining old wooden sheds that were once used for changing swim clothes were found (Fig. a). Two old lighthouses (Fig. b), that add beauty to the scene, still stand to guide boats.

Today, the canal is closed for navigation, a community of fishermen has settled around it. Their small and modest houses flank the water stream with their boats lined up by the banks. The inhabitants' activities include processing, storing, transporting, and selling fish. Fishermen knitting nets, others scrolling or spreading them to use in fishing were observed (Fig. c)

Despite the marvellous location and view, El-Max is rarely included in any tourist visits. It is however considered one of the most beautiful and inspiring places in Egypt, to the extent that some call it the "Venice of Egypt" (Fig. d).

For years, the area has been suffering from pollution caused by petrochemical industries. This has negatively affected the community as well as the aquatic environment.

Innovative strategies have to be implemented in order to raise both governmental and community awareness towards the wealthy resources of this area. Much attention should be paid in order to preserve the identity of the place. A site museum can be established in order to tell the story of the place and the old wooden cabins can be reused for tourist purposes, taking advantage of their history and the famous people who once used them. Restaurants with unique designs should offer typical dishes that are known to the Egyptians since the earliest times (dried and salted fish for instance).

It is also recommended to encourage the production of good quality replicas of boats or lighthouses and other souvenirs to be sold in gift shops scattered in the area. This will add more job opportunities and will market the local products of the inhabitants. It is also important to create new sports activities such as deep-sea fishing.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that all stakeholders should collaborate in the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. The local community should be involved in all developing programs in the area. This will increase heritage tourism demand with its social and economic benefits.

Plate 1:



Fig.a: Old wooden sheds by the sea shore



Fig.b: The so-called (blind) lighthouse of El-Max

Plate 2



Fig.c: Fishermen' children involved in net production



Fig.d: Fishermen's houses overlooking El-Mahmoudeya Canal

REFERENCES

- Bakar, A., Osman, M., Bachok, S. and Ibrahim, M.(2014), Analysis on Community Involvement Level in Intangible Cultural Heritage: Malacca cultural community, *Elsevier, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 153, pp. 286 – 297.
- Barrio, M, Devesa, M and Herrero, L. (2012), Evaluating intangible cultural heritage: The case of cultural festivals, *Elsevier, City, Culture and Society*, 3, pp. 235–244.
- Brewer, D. (2001), "Fish" in The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt., *Oxford University press*, 1, pp. 532-535.
- Cominelli, F. and Greffe, X(2012) Intangible cultural heritage: Safeguarding for creativity, Elsevier, City, Culture and Society, 3, pp. 245–250.
- Daumas, F.(1977),"Fischer und Fisherei", *Lexikon der Agyptologie Band II*, Wiesbaden, cols.234.-242.
- Davies, N. (1936) Ancient Egyptian Paintings. *The University of Chicago Press*. Chicago. Illinois.
- Feucht, E. (1992), Fishing and Fowling with the spear and the throw-stick reconsidered. *Originalveröffentlichung* in: Ulrich Luft (Hrsg.), The intellectual Heritage of Egypt, (Studia Aegyptiaca XIV), Budapest, pp. 157-169.
- Forester, E. And Durell, L. (2014), Alexandria: A history and guide. *Tauris Parke Paperbacks*, London & Newyork
- Husar, A., (2007) Alexandria City Development Strategy-Documentation of the process and results, Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina.
- Huyge, D. (2009). Late Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic rock art in Egypt: Qurta and el-Hosh, *Archéo-Nil*, 19, pp. 108-120.
- Jiang, X and Homsey, A.(2008), Heritage Tourism Planning Guidebook- Methods for Implementing Heritage Tourism Programs in Sussex County, Delaware.
- Lee, J., Measuring the benefits of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Hall in Jeonju Korea: Results of a Contingent Valuation Survey, Elsevier, *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 16 (2015) 236–238
- Lenzerini, F.(2011), Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples, *The European Journal of International Law*,22 (1)
- Meduri, T, Campolo, D. and Loré(2016), The UNESCO Intangible Heritage As Input for The Development of Rural Areas: A Theoretical Model For the Valorization Of the Mediterranean Diet, *Elsevier, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 223, pp. 647 – 654
- Morcos, S., Tongring, N., Halim, Y., El-Abbadi, M. & Awad, H. (2003.) Towards integrated management of Alexandria's coastal heritage.Coastal region and Small Island Papers 14. UNESCO, 2003.
- Petronela, T. (2016), The importance of the intangible cultural heritage in the economy, *Elsevier, Procedia Economics and Finance*, 39, pp. 731 – 736.
- Poulios, I, (2014), Discussing strategy in heritage conservation, Living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation, *Emerald, Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 4 (1), pp. 16-34.
- Roders, A. (2011), Editorial: bridging cultural heritage and sustainable development, *Emerald, Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1 (1), pp. 5-14
- Rodzi, N., Zaki, S and Subli, S. (2013), Between Tourism and Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Elsevier, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 85, pp. 411 – 420

Samy, M. (2015), Status of fisheries in Egypt: reflections on past trends and management challenges. *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, October 2015

Saunders M. L. and Thornhill A. (2009), Research methods for business students. *Pearson Education Limited*, England.

Sousa, R., Fialho, M. C., Haggag, M. and Rodrigues, N. (2013)-Alexandria Ad Aegyptum. The legacy of multiculturalism in Antiquity. University of Porto, University of Coimbra, University of Alexandria

Stanley, J. et al., Alexandria, (2007) Egypt, before Alexander the Great. A multidisciplinary approach yields rich discoveries. *GSA Today*, 17 (8,) August 2007.

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/egypt-EG>

www.unesco.com