

Athens Journal of Tourism



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GILDIS TACHIR & AHMED ALALI

Improving the Syrian Coastal Area in the Context of Sustainable Tourism

Athens Journal of Tourism

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The *Athens Journal of Tourism (AJT)* is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of tourism and related disciplines such as culture, leisure, recreation, geography, urban planning, heritage, sports, historical cities, landscape, architecture etc. The AJT considers theoretical and empirical papers as well as case studies and policy papers. The journal's aim is to be useful to both academics of tourism research and the practitioners of the tourism industry. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by [the Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit](#) of the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). All papers are subject to ATINER's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement. A journal publication might take from a minimum of six months up to one year to appear. All papers are subject to ATINER's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

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The current issue is the first of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Tourism*, published by the [Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER



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A World Association of Academics and Researchers

16th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies

3-6 April 2023, Athens, Greece

The [Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs](https://www.atiner.gr) organizes the 16th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies, 3-6 April 2023, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies](https://www.atiner.gr). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of Mediterranean Studies, such as history, arts, archaeology, philosophy, culture, sociology, politics, international relations, economics, business, sports, environment and ecology, etc. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2023/FORM-MDT.doc>).

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **Closed**
- Submission of Paper: **21 February 2023**

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Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/fees>

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- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
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- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
-

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- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **8 May 2023**

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- **Dr. Peter Jones**, Co-Editor, [Athens Journal of Tourism](#) & Professor of Management, University of Gloucestershire, UK.

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- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

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Natural Capital and Natural Asset Management in the Hospitality Industry

By Martin G. Wynn^{*} & Peter Jones[±]

There has been some recent interest in the role that natural capital can play in the transition to a more sustainable hospitality industry. However, little work has been published in the academic literature on the role of natural capital in the hospitality industry and how it can be assessed, and this represents a gap in that literature. With this in mind, this short exploratory paper outlines the origins and definition of natural capital, looks at some of the ways in which the hospitality industry benefits from natural capital, explores the relationship between natural capital and natural asset management, and provides an illustrative cameo case study of how one of the leading companies in the hospitality industry, namely Marriott international, has addressed natural capital in their most recent environmental, social and governance report. The paper concludes that there is, as yet, very limited universal recognition of natural capital as an element of sustainability strategy in the hospitality industry. Indeed, even where it is in evidence, natural capital is still viewed within the idiom of economic growth and the continuing expansion of the hospitality industry. The paper suggests, however, that the adoption and adaptation of asset management practices may provide a more realistic way of assessing and measuring the current and evolving value and condition of natural capital.

Keywords: *hospitality industry, tourism, natural capital, natural asset management, Marriott International*

Introduction

There has been some recent interest in the role that natural capital might play in facilitating the transition to a more sustainable hospitality industry. Legrand (2021), for example, argued that ‘nature and its ecosystem services are at the center of the hospitality business proposition: from food and beverage offers to guests’ enjoyment of natural landscape at a destination.’ However, little work has been published on the role of natural capital in the hospitality industry and this represents a gap in the hospitality academic literature. With this in mind, this short explanatory paper examines available secondary sources, including the academic literature as well as industry reports. The methodology deployed here is a qualitative evidence synthesis, which Grant and Booth (2009) see as ‘method for integrating or comparing the findings from qualitative studies’ that ‘looks for themes or constructs that lie in or across individual qualitative studies.’ The sources of information were varied, coming from a number of academic databases, and Google was used with relevant search strings to locate additional material,

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including industry reports, consultancy blogs, and policy documents from international agencies.

The article has seven sections. This introduction is followed by a short literature review, which includes the original outline of the origins and definitions of natural capital, and some new material which explores two of the main natural capital research themes, namely valuing natural capital and the role of natural capital in sustainable development, and provides a summary of attempts to theorise natural capital. Then some of the ways in which the hospitality industry benefits from natural capital are discussed, and the relationship between natural capital and natural asset management is reviewed. A cameo case is then provided, featuring Marriott International - one of the leading companies in the hospitality industry – focusing on how the company has addressed natural capital in their most recent environmental, social and governance report. A discussion section identifies, and briefly examines, some key emergent issues, and the final section offers some brief conclusions and possible future research agendas.

Literature Review

Missemer (2018) suggested that the origins of the use of the term ‘natural capital’ can be traced back to the nineteenth century, but that only in the 1990s did it become widely used by ecological economists. Its increasingly widespread use reflects the recognition that the environment plays a fundamental role in underpinning economic activity and human well-being. For the UK’s Natural Capital Committee (2015), the concept of natural capital can simply be defined as ‘the elements of the natural environment that provide valuable goods and services to people such as clean air, clean water, food and recreation.’ That said, Fletcher et al. (2019) claimed that ‘the definition of natural capital remains ambiguous’, but that increasingly the concept is used to ‘emphasise the monetary value of natural resources.’

While academic research on the role of natural capital to date is fragmented and lacks a coherent structure, two interlinked themes, namely valuing natural capital and the role of natural capital in sustainable development merit attention here. Azqueta and Sotelsek (2007) suggested that while economic analysis provided several methods to value changes in environmental assets, there was an increasing demand to move into valuing natural capital, namely natural resource stocks, land and ecosystems. In looking to explain this increasing demand, Azqueta and Sotelsek (2007) argued that not only does sustainability require that proper account be taken of capital depreciation and the need to value natural capital changes, but also that the stock of natural capital in a given territory be valued in order to identify the main components of social wealth or to help to adequately plan changes in land use.

Islam et al. (2018) focussed on the importance of natural capital for sustainable development and concluded that incorporating monetary valuations of natural capital into sustainability decision making will allow direct comparisons between natural capital and other types of capital assets, and thus the measurement

of the productive base of the economy. Costanza (2020) emphasised the importance of natural capital for sustaining human life on earth, and argued that valuing natural capital is about assessing its contribution, in complex interaction with built, human, and social capital, towards the goal of sustainable wellbeing of the whole system of humans and the rest of nature, and it is built on the recognition that sustainable wellbeing cannot be achieved without the wellbeing of the rest of nature. Bateman and Mace (2020) acknowledged that the concept of natural capital was gaining traction as recognition grows of the central role of the natural environment in sustaining economic and social wellbeing, and welcomed early indications that a natural capital approach to decision making was being accepted within government policy processes and the private sector.

Turning to attempts to theorise natural capital, while Oliver (2018) outlined a number of benefits from the conceptualisation of natural capital, he did not offer any conceptual frameworks. Fenichel and Abbott (2014) suggested that treating natural resources as capital in economic theory goes back at least 200 years to classical economists but that the paucity of estimates of the value of natural capital that are grounded in economic capital theory suggests that in practice the treatment of nature as capital remains largely metaphorical, and that failing to close the gap between theory and practice may demote natural capital from its current status as a powerful metaphor to an empty buzzword. More positively Fenichel and Abbott (2014) looked to provide a theoretically motivated approach for recovering natural capital prices that expands beyond idealized management to encompass current, likely inefficient, management institutions. More specifically, Jones and Wynn (2019) claimed that the development of theoretical work on natural capital was fertile territory for future research.

Natural Capital and Hospitality

The hospitality industry uses, and draws heavily on, natural capital in a number of ways. Tourism, which feeds many elements in the hospitality industry, is often based around destinations which look to exploit the natural environment in a wide range of locations, and the perceived quality of the tourist experience often depends on the quality of such environments. More specifically, the tourism industry exploits a variety of beach locations, and in Europe, for example, the Lonely Planet (2022) advises ‘no matter your taste in beach, Europe obliges. From the wild, wind-lashed shores of the Atlantic coast to mountain-fringed Arctic bays where whales raise their tails, and the sunlit, snuggled-away coves of Italy and Greece.’

Cruising looks to blend elements of tourism, hospitality and entertainment and many cruise packages offer trips to what are often perceived to be exotic destinations and unique natural environments. Under the banner ‘Galapagos Islands: Be Awed by Nature’, Hurtigruten Expeditions (2022), for example, market the opportunity to ‘explore the islands, forged in fire that changed our understanding of the natural world’, to ‘amble alongside giant tortoises and marvel at the magnificent waved albatross’, and to ‘follow in the footsteps of Charles

Darwin', in 'a truly otherworldly adventure.' Further these cruises offer the opportunity to 'explore the vast archipelago on our small expedition ship with our expert Galapagos guides. They'll lead you on excursions and activities including kayaking, nature walks, snorkelling, and wildlife watching, as well as lead lectures and talks on wildlife and current conservation efforts' (Hurtigruten Expeditions 2022).

Royal Caribbean (2022) offer the opportunity to combine some of its Alaska cruise packages with inland tours 'before or after your cruise.' Here Alaska is described as 'one of the most breathtaking natural landscapes on earth', where tourists can find 'ancient glacial valleys, majestic river canyons and misty emerald forests', and can journey to 'Denali National Park for a glimpse of roaming brown bears and moose.' These tours have local adventure guides, who are able to provide local perspectives on the landscapes and wildlife, and guests are accommodated in 'lodges and hotels', which allow 'easy access' to the 'great outdoors' (Royal Caribbean 2022).

Inland areas in many countries offer a wide range of tourism destinations, which generate a variety of opportunities for the hospitality industry. In the Lake District in northern England, for example, tourism is the main source of income for the economy, and some 20 million tourists visit the area annually. The range of hospitality facilities includes conference venues, luxury hotels and spas, boutique bed and breakfast establishments, and large numbers of restaurants and public houses. In marketing the area's conference facilities, Cumbria Tourism's (2022) message is 'bring your meeting or conference to this beautiful part of the country and delight your delegates by taking advantage of the breathtaking scenery of the Lake District.' In promoting '6 pubs and cafes with fantastic views of the Lake District', the Great British Life (2021) encourages visitors to various pubs to 'sit outside and you'll have gorgeous views of the surrounding fells', to 'pull up a chair on the terrace where you will be able to look upon glorious panoramas of some of the Lake District's most spectacular scenery', and to 'enjoy the panoramic views across Windermere.'

The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (2021) catalogued a variety of ways in which hotels can manage their impacts on biodiversity by adopting more responsible procurement practices and by focusing on longevity, circularity and resource efficiency. At the same time, the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance claimed that a variety of products used in the building and operation of hotels can have detrimental impacts on wildlife that hotels need to address. Here the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance suggest that reducing single use plastics can lessen the impact of plastics on marine life and purchasing sustainably certified products, such as timber, paper, palm oil, and seafood, can help to stop the overexploitation of natural habitats.

More generally, a clearer focus on natural capital can help mitigate climate change and enhance biodiversity, and can be a potentially important element in engaging with international sustainability frameworks. Legrand (2021), for example, argued that 'nature is not only a capital component available to businesses, but a source of solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change and protect biodiversity while ensuring the well-being of staff and guests alike.' In a

similar vein, zu Hohenlohe (2021) claimed that healthy ecosystems are essential to the hospitality industry's food and drinks offer, that 'without healthy ecosystems, 'all food production is in peril', and that the hospitality industry is 'in a unique position to have a positive impact on the restoration and preservation of so many of the world's ecosystems and natural environments, which have the additional value of being potential carbon sequestration areas.' More specifically, Legrand (2021) argued 'considering the value of nature to the hospitality industry and the threat of biodiversity collapse, recording and accounting for natural capital and integrating the outcome into the decision-making processes while setting regeneration targets is crucial.'

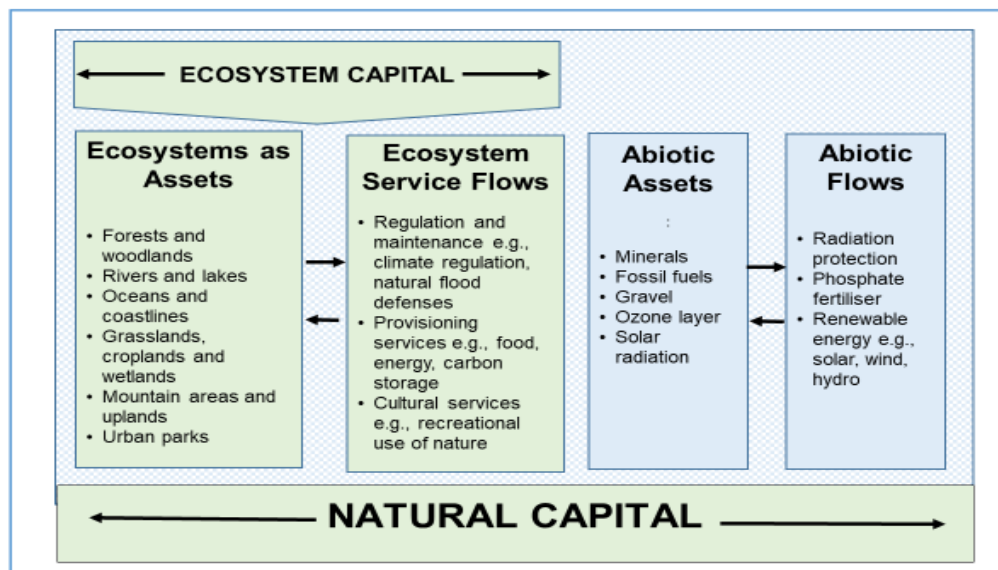
Natural Capital and Natural Asset Management

The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (2021) suggests that 'as an industry, hospitality also relies heavily on the natural world around us; for materials to build our properties, food and beverages to serve to our guests and a local environment to entice people to visit.' More specifically, natural capital is considered by some authors as comprising a range of natural assets. For example, the World Forum on Natural Capital (2017) defines natural capital as 'the world's stocks of natural assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things' and argues that natural assets provide a wide range of services, often referred to as ecosystem services, which ultimately underpin human life and economic activity. The European Commission (2019) make a distinction between ecosystem capital and abiotic resources as the main components of natural capital (Figure 1), but note 'in reality, there is no clear-cut boundary between biotic and abiotic components', but 'this distinction helps to identify and classify different types of natural capital, which is important in the context of developing a natural capital accounting approach.' Dong et al. (2019), in their study of international tourism in Hainan Province, China, put this in a wider development context, suggesting that natural capital flows start to draw on the natural asset inventory when demand exceeds availability. They note that 'natural capital includes natural capital flow and natural capital stock [i.e., assets]. When natural capital flow cannot meet the needs of regional development, it begins to consume natural capital stock. Therefore, the assessment of the current utilization status of natural capital flows and stocks is not only the basis for regional ecological construction evaluation, but also an important indicator of the effectiveness of regional sustainable development strategies.'

Natural capital accounting can be seen as 'a tool to measure the changes in the stock of natural capital at a variety of scales and to integrate the value of ecosystem services into accounting and reporting systems' (European Commission n.d.). It facilitates the creation of a register of natural assets and a range of associated services, which can allow integration of natural capital into socio-economic information systems and decision-making. The objective is to enable governments, businesses and individuals to appropriately value natural capital ecosystems and assets, and take responsibility for maintaining and monitoring

their status, including their extent, structure and condition. While forests, lakes and grasslands are some of the more obvious ecosystems assets, natural capital also includes ‘ecosystem service flows’, encompassing, for example, climate regulation, natural flood defences, carbon storage, and the pollination of crops by insects, which are equally vital to human life on earth. As such, the protection of natural capital is vital to continuing human and economic wellbeing, and poorly managed natural capital is a social and economic, as well as an ecological, liability.

Figure 1. *Natural Capital Assets and Service Flows (based on: European Commission 2019)*



In the context of the hospitality industry, the ‘Network Natural Capital Accounting’ project was run in Germany from 2018-2020 by the Global Nature Fund (2020), and looked to promote the application of natural capital valuations, to help hotels and restaurants to identify dependencies and effects of, or on, natural capital. Some of the recent literature has focussed on the challenges involved in measuring natural capital and has explored how natural capital can be analysed and reported as an asset owned by the public at large, public authorities or private sector operators. Yenidogan et al. (2016) argued that one of the key challenges in triple bottom line accounting in sustainability reporting within the hospitality industry is the difficulties involved in measuring natural capital. The question also arises as to how best to store and report on this data. Jones and Wynn (2019) suggested that asset management systems, often a module within financial management software, could be used with some adaptation to hold data on natural capital, resilience and other sustainability measures. There are already examples of this in the public sector where authorities must hold information on natural capital under public authority control. For example, the British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2019) observed that

‘asset management processes have traditionally been applied only to engineered infrastructure. However, there is growing evidence that by considering natural assets within asset management processes, local governments can decrease capital, operations, and maintenance costs, increase levels of service, enhance their ability to adapt to climate change, and reduce the community’s unfunded liabilities – all while protecting or enhancing the multitude of other benefits that natural asset bring to communities.’

Cameo Case Study (Case Example): Marriott International

In this section, a simple cameo case of Marriott International is discussed to provide a corporate dimension to the hospitality industry’s perception and adoption of the natural capital concept. Marriott International is a US multinational company that operates, franchises and licenses hotels, timeshares and residential properties. The company, founded in 1927 by J. Willard Marriott and Alice Marriott, is the world’s largest hotel chain by number of rooms. Just over 2,000 properties within the overall portfolio are operated by Marriott, but the majority of them are operated by other companies via a variety of franchise agreements. There are 30 Marriott International brands including Ritz-Carlton, the J.W. Marriott Hotels, St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, Four Points by Sheraton, and Le Meridien. 70% of the company’s properties are located in the US or Canada, with a further 20% being in Europe or the Asia Pacific region.

Marriott has been reporting on their initiatives for managing natural capital since 2015 (Marriott International 2015), and the company’s 2021 Environmental and Social Governance report (Marriott International 2021) states that the company ‘believes protecting and enhancing the ecosystems where our properties are located supports the sustainability and increases the resiliency of the communities where we do business, so that they remain vibrant destinations.’ Additionally, the company notes that to ‘accelerate leading-edge practices that protect natural capital and increase resiliency’ is one of its key priorities for 2022-25 (Marriott International 2021). Marriott maintained that it would continue to focus on ‘environmental challenges from deforestation to bycatch to reef degradation and more’ and that it had ‘invested in scalable, replicable projects to support the world’s natural capital resources.’ As an illustration of its concern for natural capital, Marriott initiated a ‘Good Travel’ programme for the Asia Pacific region, which affords ‘guests the opportunity to create a positive impact in local communities’ as regards environmental protection, community engagement, and maritime conservation’ (Marriott International 2021).

The company identified both its contribution to ‘Life on Land’, and to ‘Life Below Water’ (Marriott International 2021). As regards the former, the company emphasised the importance of ‘understanding the vital role trees play in the fight against climate change’, and noted that the company ‘continued to invest in reforestation efforts across the globe’. For example, the company’s Juma REDD+ project aims to curb deforestation and associated greenhouse gases in a 7,000 square kilometre reserve in north western Brazil and provides education, medical care, social empowerment, and a monthly stipend for local residents who

voluntarily commit to protect the rainforest. The company also recognises that mangroves play a critical role in protecting coastlines from severe storms and providing livelihoods to coastal communities, and that mangrove forests are important for conserving biodiversity, storing carbon, and serving as nurseries of the sea. The company reported on its work in planting mangrove trees along the coastline of Momi Bay in Fiji, and in mangrove clean-up programmes in Doha.

In terms of 'Life Below Water' the company acknowledged the significance of coral reef ecosystems as the 'rainforests of the ocean', in protecting shorelines from damage and erosion, and in acting as breeding grounds and shelter for a wide range of marine organisms, which support local tourism economies. This included the introduction of an innovation at Ritz-Carlton in Okinawa, where guests were invited 'to participate in coral planting and education from interacting with the Onna Village Fisheries Cooperative to making seedlings in the Onna Fishing Port.' Marriott properties also host year-round programs to protect nesting sites across the Caribbean and Latin America, and undertook projects to address the overexploitation of crabs in Thailand, and to protect sea turtles off the coast of Peru. Marriott hotels have successfully operated on-site sea turtle rescue programs, and in 2020, hotels across the region successfully released approximately 85,000 baby turtles.

The company also recognised that 'the spread of sargassum algae across Latin America and the Caribbean has led to devastating impacts on the hospitality and tourism industries and the environment'. Marriott are partnering with the Ocean Foundation, a community foundation, to support a sargassum mitigation project, which aims to convert sargassum seaweed into organic compost, which can be used by local farmers, and is designed to remove the seaweed from the beaches and sequester and store carbon in the soil. To mitigate these impacts, Marriott partnered with The Ocean Foundation to support the Insetting Carbon Through Sargassum Mitigation Pilot Project. The project aims to convert sargassum seaweed into organic compost, which can be used by local farmers. The concept is designed to remove the seaweed from the beaches and sequester and store carbon in the soil, which can generate extra income for the farmers. Following the success of this pilot project, Marriott will support The Ocean Foundation in its aim 'to expand the project to additional locations around the Caribbean region.'

Discussion

The Marriott cameo case provides some useful insights into how one major hospitality company has employed the concept of natural capital to inform its Environmental and Social Governance report. This highlights some deeper issues that merit further consideration. Firstly, generalisations cannot be made about the significance of natural capital within Marriott International because the case study provides a number of specific illustrations of the company's approach to natural capital, but they should be seen as just that - examples, rather than universal practice. They may well have been carefully selected to show the company's commitment to the concept of natural capital and sustainable development in the

hospitality industry. There is no clear evidence within Marriott International's Environmental and Social Governance report to suggest that the company's approach to sustainability is comprehensively underpinned by a wholesale commitment to natural capital. This would in theory involve Marriott adopting natural capital principles with all its suppliers in its extended supply chain, and this at present seems a long way off, although such an approach is being adopted by some operators in other industry sectors, such as textiles and clothing.

Secondly, the Marriott cameo case study is drawn from the company's Environmental and Social Governance report and is essentially descriptive with no real strategic analysis or measurement of the importance of natural capital to inform the report. For example, materiality - which looks to identify the societal and environmental issues that present risks or opportunities to a company while taking into consideration the issues of most concern to external stakeholders – does not feature in discussion of Marriott International's focus on natural capital. Such material issues are not identified nor is their impact assessed. Here, the increased costs of looking to protect natural capital on which many tourism and hospitality companies depend, would be a major issue for investors, for the company itself, and for customers. At the same time, the Environmental and Social Governance report provides no treatment of how what may be competing positions on natural capital between stakeholders might have been reconciled, or how Marriott International went about the independent verification of its claims about natural capital.

Thirdly, the issues noted above underline the relevance and value of treating natural capital as a series of defined assets that can be measured and monitored. At present, this approach is largely confined to the public sector, from municipal authorities up to international agencies, but is of increasing relevance to industries such as hospitality that rely on natural capital assets, either in their local environment or within their own premises. This aspect of asset management is likely to attract increasing attention in future years which will drive further conceptual development and raise new data and systems management requirements.

Fourthly, there are more fundamental and complex issues about natural capital and its relationship to sustainability and economic growth. While a focus on natural capital is generally seen to be compatible with a transition to a more sustainable economy and society, in the hospitality industry, protection of natural capital is often seen as a way of justifying continuing growth. Allied to this is the practice of what Schendler and Toffell (2013, webpage) described as 'operational greening', in which companies fail to 'recognise the primacy of climate change.' While the issue of climate change is a global issue, driven by many sectors of the economy, the size and geographical reach of the hospitality industry means it can potentially exert a powerful influence on many of the production and consumption drivers of climate change.

Conclusions

This paper offers an exploratory review of the role of natural capital in the hospitality industry. The paper has looked at some of the ways in which the hospitality industry benefits from natural capital, and discussed the concept and application of asset management in this context. Through examination of a cameo case study, some key emergent issues were identified. Above all perhaps, two conclusions can be drawn. First, natural capital is still linked to continued expansion of the industry, which is seen by some critics to be the antithesis of sustainability. Second, applying asset management practices to the assessment and measurement of natural capital may provide a way of analysing and reporting its real value and condition. However, Oliver (2018) pointed out that natural capital is fundamentally different to other forms of capital and requires a different treatment if people are to be convinced to adopt pro-environmental behaviour. Ultimately, any evaluation of the potential of natural capital's contribution to greater sustainability in the hospitality industry must embrace such criticisms, and must be reflected in the development of new natural asset management frameworks and practices.

The authors recognise that the paper has a number of limitations, not least in that it is based on secondary sources, drawn in the main from the Internet. Nevertheless, the authors believe that as an exploratory review of natural capital and natural asset management in the hospitality industry, it captures some of the key issues of relevance today and provides a platform for future research. This might profitably involve primary research on whether, and how, a range of stakeholders are putting pressure on companies within the hospitality industry to introduce the natural capital concept in their sustainability strategies. The adaptation of asset management systems and frameworks to accommodate natural capital could provide new perspectives for initiating such change in the hospitality sector. Researchers may also wish to explore if, and how, customers' perceptions of the sustainability credentials of companies, as reflected in their commitments to natural capital, influence customers' patronage behaviour. Elsewhere in the supply chain, there are also interesting opportunities to examine if, and how, a wide range of suppliers are embracing natural capital in their sustainability strategies and developing relationships with the major corporate players within the hospitality industry.

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Opportunities for Digitalization in Marketing Management of Health Tourism in Bulgaria

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With the development of the tourism industry worldwide, there is a need for proper and sustainable management of the specialized types of tourism and one of the most developed one is health tourism. According to the tourist zoning in Bulgaria, seven regions with basic and extended specialization in the field of health tourism can be distinguished. Embracing digitalisation throughout the tourism industry will help to develop the health tourism business in a post-COVID-19 era. This will include analysis of the opportunities digitalisation opens up for marketing, product and tourism destination management. According to the Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria digitalization is not just a change but a mandatory transformation for the tourism in Bulgaria to be efficient and competitive. In this paper, the authors strive to disclose opportunities for digitalization of marketing management on national level as well as in specific tourism regions in Bulgaria. In the article good international practices of digitalisation in the health tourism field are analysed and specific measures for the external marketing of the destination are proposed to implement in the marketing management of the health tourism in Bulgaria.

Keywords: digitalization, marketing management, tourism regions, health tourism

Introduction

The topic of the paper is dictated by the growing importance and perspective of digitization in all sectors of the economy in recent years. The increase and diversification of tourists' needs, on the other hand, lead to the need for a more detailed study of the possibilities for digitalization of the marketing management of specialized forms of tourism (health tourism, in particular). The importance of the topic is related to the possibility and need for specialization and advanced marketing management by the interested parties in the field of health tourism and the possibilities of using digital solutions in the tourism industry. In the policy for the development of tourist areas in Bulgaria, in seven, out of a total of nine separate tourist areas, nomenclatural elements are laid down regarding the priorities for the development of health tourism, which is a prerequisite for their specialization, as well as for branding Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism.

The object of this study is the marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria, subject is the digitalization as a global phenomenon and the opportunities it provides for the creation of an effective marketing plan for the development of destinations for health tourism. The main purpose of the paperwork is to achieve,

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through digital solutions in marketing management, improvement of health tourism in the tourism regions with main and extended specialization in health tourism in Bulgaria.

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions can be raised:

1. Can digital marketing replace the traditional marketing in health tourism management?
2. What is the role of the digitalisation in tourism industry?
3. How the digitalization can be implemented in the health tourism industry?
4. What are the possibilities of digitalization of the marketing management of health tourism?

Literature Review

The present study focuses on the digitalization as a tool used in the marketing management, but it should be noted that in the process of its creation the essence and characteristics of marketing in tourism, marketing and health tourism are considered. The review of the literature on those subjects shows the existence of a wide variety of different scientific research.

Regarding marketing in tourism, the publications of Vanhove (2018), Victor et al. (2009), Kotler et al. (2017) and Tsonev (2017) are analysed.

Travel and tourism marketing differs from the other forms of consumer marketing practices. By applying marketing principles in the management of the travel and tourism industry, businesses can provide quality products and avoid developing unnecessary or unsustainable products. Tourism products can be “ideas”, “services” and “goods”, with the tourism industry mainly offering services.

Organizational marketing management is the process of analyzing, planning, implementing, and controlling to execute programs aimed at creating, maintaining and expanding mutually beneficial relationships with target markets to realize the organization's objectives. Marketing management has its own logic that develops in several stages.

The first stage is the analysis of the marketing environment and the gathering of marketing information about it. The organization must assess the marketing environment, the market of intermediate buyers (other organizations) and the market of end buyers (citizens, families, households), assess the common and different in their consumer behavior, identify its key competitors and their behavior, create a system of permanent marketing information.

The second stage is the creation of a marketing action program. This stage is the most creative, it is the core of the management. Here the organization must segment the market and select a target market, ascertain the positioning of its goods, create competitive advantages, and develop a competitive strategy, develop and coordinate the elements of its marketing policy. At this stage, a complete marketing program is formed to reach the consumer, using a combination of minimum four elements (referred to as the 4 Ps), which is called marketing mix.

The tourism industry covers a wide range of activities and types of organizations. The range of activities and constant demand creates certain difficulties in managing tourism enterprises, namely (according to Vanhove (2018)):

- Sales volatility: tourism is a sector that is heavily influenced by the growth and drop in the economy, as well as the different levels of demand throughout the year.
- High product perishability: Unrealized sales of most tourism products and services are losses, therefore tourism products are considered perishable.
- High fixed costs: The need for administrative and operational staff and constraints imposed by the specific nature of the investment creates a fixed structure with insufficient flexibility.
- Labor-intensive activities: Tourism is an activity involving interaction between people.
- Low return on investment (ROI): Tourism is a sector with a low return on capital invested and a high capital intensity.

The marketing of tourism businesses and destinations is a key aspect of their performance and sustainability. The marketing function of the tourism enterprises is hampered by constraints such as: scarce cash flow, lack of marketing expertise, size of the business, clientele related, tactical and strategic issues. Businesses consider the marketing function peripheral to their requirements, mainly relating to sales and promotions provided. This perception has evolved from the ability of enterprises to make sales without undertaking marketing activities.

The major changes in the tourism marketing since 2000 reflect a more sophisticated development and different demand, where customers are more likely to make purchasing decisions through interaction with suppliers on the internet. Undoubtedly, significant changes have been introduced to the operation of tourism businesses, irrespective of the company size, in terms of marketing via the Internet, thus fundamentally changing the traditional marketing mix typical of the 1990s (Victor et al. 2009).

Kotler et al. (2017) and Tsonev (2017) are analysing in their research and publications the marketing mix and its application in the tourism industry and in the digital world. The 4P in the traditional marketing are no longer enough and needs to be amended and upgraded to 7P (adding People, Physical evidence and Process) and 4C (Co-creation, Current Currency, Community Activation and Conversation))

Marketing mix is a standard tool to help companies plan their offerings and the way they present them to consumers. Marketing has 4 defining aspects called the “four P’s” – derived from the name of the English terms - respectively: product, price, promotion and point of sale. The proposed product/service is usually developed on the basis of consumers’ needs and desires identified through market research. With some adjustments, these elements are also applicable in tourism marketing. In the service industry, there are other non-permanent factors that a company can use to influence the demand for services. These include service

workers and customers. Thus, the four factors included in the marketing mix of commodity marketing should be expanded to seven for the service industry by including 3 more elements: *people* – employees and clients; *physical evidence* – buildings, uniforms, etc. and *process* – actually feasible procedures and actions for the provision of services. The detailed marketing mix in tourism is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Marketing Mix in Tourism

Product policy	Type of tourism product and service Level of service After-sales service Guarantees
Price policy	Rental, letting or sale Discounts Payment terms Process flexibility Value perceived by the user
Distribution policy	Location Accessibility Distribution channels Structure of distribution channels Sales by sales agents Sales from service providers
Communication policy	Public Relations Advertising Sales agent incentives and incentives for customers Personal selling Customer relationships
Participants' policy	Company culture and ethics Interpersonal behavior in the company Interpersonal behavior with customers Employee duties and freedom of action Frequency and intensity of contact with customers Duration of contacts with consumers Appearance and dress code of the associates
Physical evidence policy	External attractiveness of the location Internal attractiveness and interior Equipment
Process policy	Marketing survey of consumers' needs Consumer involvement Demand control Quality control Buyer input Service methodologies and procedures Logic, technology and sequence of actions

Source: Authors' systematization.

According to Kotler et al. (2017), in a digital and communications-connected world, the marketing mix has evolved to define more active consumer participation, and it has been recommended that the four P-s should be revised as the four Cs: Co-creation, Current Currency, Community Activation and Conversation, respectively:

co-creation, current currency, community activation and conversation). Co-creation relates to the influence of users on product design, especially in product/service customization, giving rise to a better value proposition. Currently, taking advantage of the wide-ranging information system, enterprises define different price propositions for different consumers based on past purchase patterns (store location, consumer profile, etc.).

In the field of the digital economy, value is equivalent to a currency, changing accordingly to the needs of the market. With the widespread digitalization taking place in all areas of the economy and the growing internet consumption, a new specialized term in theory and practice has quite logically been introduced, namely – digital marketing.

Regarding digitalization, publications of Zlatanova (2020), Frankenfield (2021), Sustain-T (2007) are used. Regarding health tourism, the publications observed are of Padilla-Meléndez and Del Aguila-Obra (2016), Robert et al. (2013), Smith and Puczko (2014) and Basmadzhieva (2020).

The use of digital media channels such as search engines, online advertising and partnership marketing give a competitive advantage, improving understanding of customer needs, making products more affordable, expanding distribution channels and increasing sales with the help of marketing campaigns. Internet marketing consists of marketing tools and online techniques with the most popular and accessible being: websites, online ads, banners, emails, blogs, channels, commercials and social networking.

Internet marketing also includes SEO (Search Engine Optimization) or website optimization. According to Zlatanova (2020), this is a digital marketing method that deals with the positioning of websites in search engines according to certain keywords or phrases that relate to the content of a website. The goal of SEO is to increase traffic to the website. Statistics show that 90% of the users of websites are reached through a search engine.

Network marketing (affiliate marketing) is also an important method of internet marketing, where a company pays a commission to each user due to which new customers are brought in who have purchased a product or service from them (Frankenfield 2021).

With the advent of the digital age, we are witnessing a new profile of consumers manifesting globally that is set to become the majority in the near future – a middle class of urban youth, with greater mobility and connectivity. According to Sustain-T (2007), the main user groups are called YWN (Youth, Women, Citizen (Netizen) - Internet Citizen). Young people are the first to adopt the proposed new products and technologies and the trends followed by the society. As information collectors and holistic buyers, women are characterized as effective heads of the family, guiding with their opinions the financial managers in charge of purchases and assets. Internet citizens are social connectors as they connect, converse and communicate effectively with their peers. They perform the function of prescribing and contributing content online. Together, these groups represent the key to innovative marketing strategies in sustainable tourism.

About marketing management can be noted the papers of Presenza (2005), Arbogast et al. (2007), Basmadzhieva (2020), Kotler et al. (2019) and Tsonev (2015).

In the conducted empirical study are examined the issues, related to the features of the marketing management of health tourism, the product policy in the field of health tourism at macro level in Bulgaria and the application of marketing management in the field of health tourism in the country.

For the purpose of the current paper, we use the following definition of marketing management adopted by the American Marketing Association: "Marketing management is the process of planning and implementing policies of pricing, promoting and distributing ideas, products and services aimed at making exchanges that satisfy both individuals and organizations."

These processes and activities are at the basis of the activities of macro-level tourism management bodies, such as the Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Boards, Tourism Agencies, etc. In this regard, marketing management is also applied by the Ministry of Tourism in order to create both a tourism development policy, of which its strategic marketing plan is a part, and also, in particular, the development of various priority types of tourism, including health tourism, which is the subject of study in this thesis.

Marketing management is considered in three areas:

- Activity management – assumes that the organization is seen as an open system and decision making takes into account both the internal capabilities of the organization and the requirements of the external environment, that is, the organization is oriented towards the market and is ready to constantly meet its requirements.
- Functional management – formed as a result of changes in the views of the governing bodies (Ministry of Tourism, Destination Marketing Organisations, etc.), which are based on the principle of "production needs to market needs". Marketing is involved in deciding production issues (related to the creation of tourism products and services), stimulating the introduction of innovative ideas and technologies, ensuring the supply of a competitive product. Together with finance, marketing ensures optimal allocation of the organisation's resources to obtain the desired profit. Marketing also solves issues related to the modern distribution of the product in order to satisfy needs and obtain profit.
- Demand management – it is provided through strategic and operational decisions for specific target market segments, formed on the basis of the use of complex of tools: product, price, distribution and promotion.

Marketing management is a set of principles, methods, means and forms for managing the process of demand formation. The marketing management process consists of the following stages:

- market opportunity analysis through marketing research;

- segmentation, target market selection and positioning;
- development of the marketing mix;
- implementation of marketing activities.

The management impacts concerning the properties correspond to the development of tourism destinations in a certain type of specialised tourism, in particular health tourism, as well as to the development processes in the identified type of tourism. In this regard, it is necessary to address the two destination management models popular in theory and practice, whose approaches to be applied selectively in the creation of the current model for digital management of health tourism in Bulgaria. There are two destination management models which are based on two concepts – the descriptive and the conceptual model. The authors who created the conceptual and descriptive models are respectively Presenza and Arbogast, Deng, and Maumbe.

According to the conceptual model, the roles of destination marketing organizations and their activities can be organized into two main functions:

- External destination marketing – The main operational or tactical marketing activities of the destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are described in the Destination Marketing Wheel (see Figure 1). These operational marketing activities are put in place after the basic strategic marketing activities, such as image definition, branding and positioning, have been completed. Operationally, the external destination marketing function should aim to attract visitors to the destination. Specific activities aim to influence the actions of people outside the destination.

Figure 1. *Destination Marketing Wheel*



Source: Presenza (2005).

Web marketing is shown as the largest component in the Destination Marketing Wheel because of its growing importance as an effective and efficient way to send marketing and other messages to stakeholders.

- Internal development of the destinations – According to Arbogast (2007), it can be viewed as various forms of activities (other than marketing) that are undertaken by destination marketing organizations to develop and sustain tourism in the destination. The destination development function is internal, i.e., its activities are directed towards initiatives within the destination itself. Many of the activities require actions and resources from other stakeholders in the destination.

Regarding health tourism, publications of Smith and Puczko (2014), Tsonev and Basmadzhieva (2017) and all relevant regulations in Bulgaria are analysed like: Concept for Tourism Regions of Bulgaria (2015) and the Tourism Law (2013).

In the specialized literature there are several authors whose scientific paper works are specialized in the field of health tourism and there are many classifications and terms. From these, we can summarise that health tourism is a specialised type of tourism in which normal tourism activities are associated with an active intention of improving people's health. The general term is health tourism, although medical tourism, spa tourism or balneo tourism are often used as synonyms, which is wrong and could lead to confusion in theory and practice. All the terms that are used as synonyms are in fact subdivisions of health tourism. (Smith and Puczko 2014).

According to Tsonev and Basmadzhieva (2017) the terms “recreational” or “medical” tourism, including fitness and wellness, echo relatively new trends in health tourism. The main idea of this innovative trend is the improvement of the client's (tourist's) physical condition and health, which is not necessarily linked to the application of natural healing resources.

In Bulgaria, according to the Tourism Law (2013) there are several conditions for practicing different types of specialized tourism, besides the traditional mass (Black Sea and winter), which includes health, spa, wellness, camping, rural, cultural, adventure, eco, wine, gourmet, event, hunting, congress tourism. In contemporary tourism theory and practice, there is also talk of destinations for entertainment and experiences.

Bulgaria is also a popular destination for health tourism and prevention. Our country has rich traditions in the field for several reasons, and the presence of mineral springs proven to be beneficial for health is among the most popular areas of health tourism in our country. Many balneo resorts across the country offer a variety of specialised professional services. Bulgaria is among the countries that combine low prices of medical services with professional expertise of medical staff and can become a preferred destination for so-called health tourists. In the context of specialised types of tourism, and in particular health tourism, it is necessary to identify the relevant places offering these subtypes of tourism. These places are also subject to marketing management linked to the internal capabilities of destination marketing organisations.

It is important to clarify that there are three normative documents in Bulgaria that affect the issues related to the types of health tourism, namely the Tourism Act, which corresponds directly with the Ordinance on the conditions and procedures for the certification of the various health tourism centres (2 and 04-14), as well as the Concept of Tourism Regions in Bulgaria. Given the ubiquitous digitisation of many services, and given that the Internet is all around us, it is no surprise that they are all available online on the website of the Ministry of Tourism, and in the National Tourism Register,¹ which is also electronic, there is a subdivision entitled “Balneotherapy (medical spa), spa, wellness and thalassotherapy centres”. The Concept of Tourism Regions in Bulgaria (2015) concerns tourism products and their specialisation by tourism regions, while the Ordinance is concerned with specific establishments, their equipment, and the specific activities to be carried out in them. There are certain problems and inconsistencies, which we have addressed in the current study. It is no coincidence that the thalassotherapy centres in the left figure, which are not present in the Concept, and medical tourism in the right figure, which is not addressed in the Tourism Act and Ordinance, are coloured differently.

Health tourism means taking care of the body and soul through treatments that make people feel good – massages, herbal treatment and exfoliation, workouts, water baths, diets. Health tourism also includes diagnostic tests to identify possible health problems, rehabilitation courses including physical and psychological counselling, as well as programmes to relieve stress, change diet, reduce injuries due to physical exertion and even improve sex life. Health tourism is a general term encompassing types of tourism related to prevention, treatment or rehabilitation.

The Tourism Act (2013) gives the following definitions for the above centres:

- “Balneo (medical spa)” is a centre, either independent or part of an accommodation place, located in an urban or resort environment, where therapeutic procedures based on natural healing factors (mineral water and/or healing mud) are applied. The centre is a medical institution within the meaning of the Medical Institutions Act.
- “Spa centre” means a centre, whether independent or part of an accommodation property, located in an urban environment or in a resort, in which a variety of procedures, programs and rituals are offered, involving the use of water – mineral, spring and other water permitted by law, and/or healing mud and/or sea water and/or other natural factors, by applying classical and non-traditional methods of influence aimed at anti-stress, relaxation and psycho-physical recovery, as well as aimed at the beauty of the human body.
- A “wellness centre” is a centre, either stand-alone or part of an accommodation property, located in an urban environment or a resort, which offers a variety of recreational and beauty treatments, programs and anti-stress rituals, as well as holistic approaches to achieve the

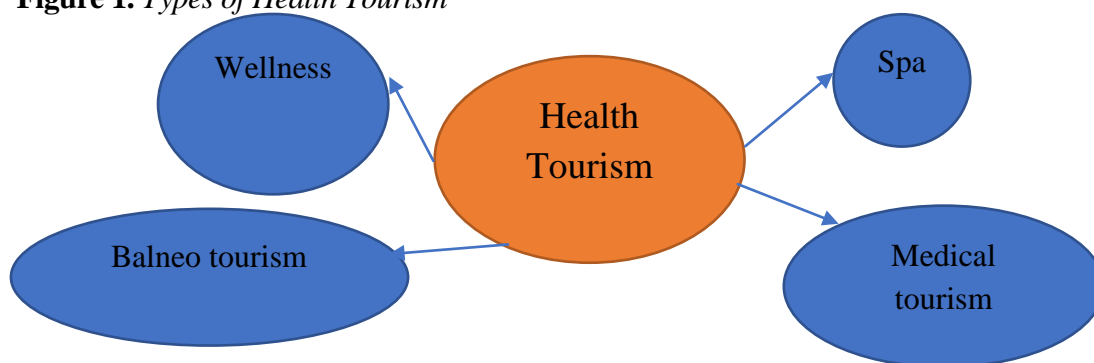
¹<https://www.tourism.government.bg/en/pages/national-tourism-register>. [Accessed 1 February 2022]

physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, professional and social well-being of the individual. The use of water and natural factors in the center is optional.

- A “thalassotherapy centre” is a centre, either stand-alone or part of an accommodation property, located in an urban environment or a resort, close to the seashore, which offers programs and rituals involving the use of sea water and/or naturally derived products, and/or liman mud, through classical and non-traditional therapeutic methods of influence aimed at restoring psycho-emotional and physical health, as well as aimed at the beauty of the human body, which are offered in a specially equipped rooms, halls and premises. The therapeutic activity is supervised by a doctor with a specialty in physical and rehabilitation medicine.

Figure 2 presents different types of health tourism, which could be found in the territory and tourism practice in Bulgaria.

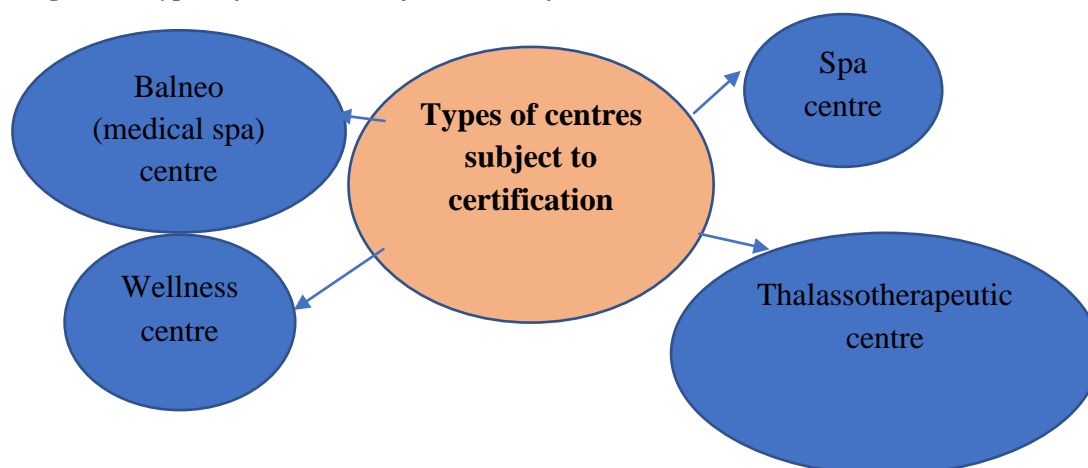
Figure 1. *Types of Health Tourism*



Source: Author's systematization of the Bulgarian legislation.

From the figure we can summarize that among the most common types of health tourism, which are also found in the Bulgarian regulations are spa, wellness, balneological and medical tourism.

In addition to the Tourism Act, which aims to create conditions for the development of specialized types of tourism – cultural, health, spa and wellness, rural, eco, congress, children and youth, adventure, sports, hunting, golf and other tourism on 29 January 2016 was created Ordinance on the conditions and procedure for certification of a “balneo (medical) centre”, “spa centre”, “wellness centre” and “thalassotherapeutic centre” and then repealed on the basis of Article 138, paragraph 3 and 4 of the Tourism Act and was issued an Ordinance No 04-14 of 9 October 2019 on the conditions and procedure for the certification of a “balneo (medical spa) centre”, “spa centre”, “wellness centre” and “thalassotherapeutic centre”, according to which the types of centres subject to certification determined according to the services they provide (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Types of Centres Subject to Certification*

Source: Author's systematization according to Ordinance № 04-14.

The products offered in this type of tourism activity are not mass and unified. There is a possibility to individualize them according to the needs of each tourist.

Methodology/Materials and Methods

The methodological framework is based on the systematic and holistic approach and more specifically includes:

- Induction and deduction
- Observation.
- Analysis and synthesis – of the current situation in the health tourism in Bulgaria.
- Analogy and comparative analysis – in the discussion of the good practices.
- Statistical and descriptive methods – in the empirical research.
- Survey research.

Results

The author has developed a system of indicators for a complex evaluation of the marketing management of health tourism. Based on the obtained empirical results, are derived recommendations for the development of health tourism in the country through the implementation of digitalization and innovation in marketing management. In the current paper the authors answered to the research questions, stated in the introduction, and we can point out the following results:

1. The digital marketing cannot replace the traditional marketing – they need to be used in parallel. In the current research the main areas in which

digital marketing has transformed tourism marketing management are explained and analysed.

2. Digitalisation is driving innovation, growth and globalisation and is completely changing perceptions of travel itself. The authors described the basic principle that any digital and social media plan at micro-, macro- and meso-levels, part of marketing management, should follow.
3. In the paper good practices are analysed to find ways how digitalization can be implemented in health tourism in practice, to bring added value to the industry. These good practices can be used as example an idea for a future model for marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria.
4. The opportunities for digitalization of marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria are analyzed and certain recommendations are provided. For this purpose, a methodological framework based on 9 criteria and 33 indicators for research and evaluation of marketing management of health tourism is created. Based on the survey results and determining the coefficient of significance of each criterion, a comprehensive assessment of the marketing management of health tourism at the macro level in Bulgaria was made according to marketing specialists and expert. The specific measures proposed are grouped into 5 categories, namely health tourism in its entirety; medical tourism; spa and wellness tourism; thalassotherapy and spa tourism; external marketing of Bulgaria and in particular Sofia Region.

Discussion

Digital Marketing – Nature

It is recommended that digital marketing does not displace traditional marketing, but that the two practices coexist and complement each other's functions. Digital marketing promotes and encourages more activity and results, while traditional marketing introduces interaction with the consumer.

Connectivity is probably the most essential element of the changing marketing history. Interaction leads to a surplus of information, resulting in a greater importance of the opinions of friends and family members and a decrease in individual attention.

Collaboration is another element particularly important for the positioning and promotion of services offered by tourism enterprises as part of the marketing management in tourism, in particular health tourism. It provides an opportunity to increase the productivity and reduce the costs of these enterprises and organizations involved in the sector.

Digital marketing and the Internet as a phenomenon have largely transformed tourism marketing and tourism marketing management. This transformation is expressed in five main areas:

- Transformation of tourism market research

The most profound effect that social media has had on the travel industry to date is the democratization of online comments, ratings, reviews, and feedback left by consumers. Nowadays, tourists go online to research their future, planned-to-visit tourism destinations and accommodation properties. When booking a tour, 89% of millennials plan whistle-stop tours and vacations based on content posted by their peers online. This is done using social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram, specialist review websites such as Tripadvisor and comments and ratings left on Google Maps.

- Increasing social sharing

People have always enjoyed sharing and showing photos and videos of their travels to family and friends. What social media has done is make it easier and more empowering for people to share travel experiences with a wider audience than ever before. According to various studies, over 97% of millennials share photos and videos of their travels online, building an influential network of peer-to-peer content that serves to inspire potential guests.

This trend has not gone unnoticed. Many hotels and resorts have started social contests and campaigns to ensure they get some credit for their guests' social activity. An interesting example can be seen with the Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants chain, who are using guests' wedding photos instead of specially taken professional photos to advertise the locations designed to host wedding events. The campaign encourages guests to take photos, tag them with the hashtag #KimptonWeddings – and ultimately create user-generated content for the brand that is free, authentic and repurposed across its marketing channels, especially in their Instagram page².

- Improved customer service

Customer service and satisfaction have also changed because of social media. Most travel brands have a prominent social media presence, which is used when necessary to provide assistance to customers who contact the company with a question, need for advice or complaint. Companies that respond to complaints in a sincere and genuine manner develop strong reputations among current and potential customers. Additionally, social media can serve as a social listening tool to uncover customer information that is needed in the marketing management of the enterprise or organization. Listening to customers through social media can help any brand create an exceptional and personalized experience.

- Transforming travel agencies

Social media has also had a major impact on the travel agency model. The availability of information and the ease of self-service booking have forced travel agencies to adapt from a simple a-selling model to a more digital one. Travel agencies are not obsolete – they are still responsible for 55% of all airline bookings, 77% of cruise bookings and 73% of package bookings. But many agencies have shifted their focus from the in-person to the online experience as they adapt to new technology and market trends, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In the last 2 years, the percentage of online bookings has increased even more given the need for social distance, and this trend is expected to be maintained.

²<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/kimptonweddings/?hl=bg>.

- Changing loyalty programmes

As most traders know, acquiring new customers is much more expensive and difficult than retaining existing ones. Loyalty programs have become a fundamental part of the travel business model, and social media has had a huge impact on the way travel businesses build loyalty programs. Many customers understand that the opinions they share on their individual profiles and channels have a huge impact on everyone employed in the industry. As a result, these guests feel entitled to compensation for the positive word-of-mouth marketing they do for a brand. More than 25% of millennials who participate in loyalty programs are very likely to post a review, photo or comment about a brand in exchange for loyalty points.

From all of the above, we can conclude that marketing and marketing management have changed significantly over the years, with digitization having a major impact on the processes and activities. In this regard and for the purpose of this study, it is important to examine the role of digitalization and digital marketing in tourism, particularly health tourism.

Role of the Digitalization in Tourism

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the tourism industry has undergone drastic changes. Whereas travel planning used to involve visiting a travel agency office or flicking through a catalogue or guidebook and being told by a friend was the most reliable guide to what to expect and how to make your experience more satisfying, nowadays globalisation and digitalisation have helped to manage travel almost entirely online. Through the technological advancements, travellers can book a flight and hotel in seconds, get reviews on local attractions, and personalise their experience to the highest degree. The development of the so-called “sharing economy” is forcing companies to constantly redefine their definition of tourism and adapt the way they work.

Digitalisation is driving innovation, growth and globalisation and is completely changing perceptions of travel itself – today it seems more accessible and convenient than ever. Even if it does not provide a radically new concept, technology can speed up and facilitate access to a particular service, with all the structural implications this entails.

More and more people prefer to book rooms, rent cars, and pay for excursions through their smart phones and mobile applications. In addition to offering a full range of services, mobile devices are becoming something of a living companion, knowing us better than anyone else and anticipating our desires before we've even thought about what to choose. Social media and review-sharing platforms have turned travellers into full-time content creators and guides.

The ability to collect data and analyse it is perhaps the most crucial element of digitisation. By processing personal data, companies learn more about customer behaviour and optimise their services. Consumers are increasingly looking for a higher degree of personalisation, flexibility, simplified interactions, and payments. They want to be served equally seamlessly across all channels and they want full integration and coordination between mobile applications, offices, and phone bookings.

Growing travel demand, especially in emerging markets, presents an opportunity for new entrants. Digital companies are looking for stronger customer relationships, dramatically changing operations and seeking to better understand traveller preferences. Connected devices and artificial intelligence (AI) will provide efficiency gains in the industry. Technology will also impact the industry's workforce, with employees able to receive real-time information and make decisions while helping AI focus on its core strengths.

Over the next decade, four key themes are expected to be with a main significance to the digital transformation of the travel industry:

- The experience

Travellers will receive an experience tailored to their habits and preferences. Throughout the journey, companies will optimise the customer experience by collecting and sharing data and continuously generating ideas and drawing conclusions. Over time, the journey will become increasingly integrated with other daily activities.

- Industry relations

Roles in the ecosystem are becoming increasingly blurred as participants compete for the customer relationship. Platforms that facilitate collaborations across the ecosystem will continue to emerge, while information sharing will be increasingly determinant of relationships between businesses.

- Digital enterprises

Digital technologies that revolutionize manufacturing, optimize the use of real-time assets, and ultimately augment the industry's workforce will transform operations. Innovations such as 3D printing, AI, IoT, virtual reality (VR) and digital platforms will enable agile working and changes to core operational processes.

- Safety and security

A concerted effort to protect data and enhance cybersecurity for travellers will be critical to maintaining trust and public safety. Digital technologies can be leveraged to create a secure environment with broad boundaries.

Companies should take advantage of these trends quickly, or at least prepare for their impact, for two important reasons:

- The digitization of everything around us – when technology is affordable and small, there are fewer and fewer barriers to connecting devices, vehicles, people and things.
- Diverse consumer expectations – influenced by practices in other sectors, customers in the travel industry are becoming more demanding.

There is a possibility that tourists may prefer the institutional website to make a booking or subsequent purchase of tourism products and services for several key reasons, such as:

- Availability of a database of products, services, events, structures, benefits that can be updated in real time by different entities.
- The predisposition of web pages with good accessibility.

- The availability of interactive or georeferenced maps (the latter as innovative tools, which are able to represent the characteristics of a territory in terms of spatial coordinates, distances and geographical features).
- The full presence of all information on routes and, more generally, on the characteristics of the mobility possible within the scope of an area, as well as the provision of e-booking and e-commerce services.

There are several institutional websites available in Bulgaria, such as the one of the Ministry of Tourism, the Official Tourism Portal,³ as well as the various websites and social media profiles and pages of the Organisations for Management of the Tourism Regions and others. These and similar websites could host relevant information on types of tourism in Bulgaria (including health tourism), accessible to foreign tourists from key target audiences.

It is necessary that any digital and social media plan at micro-, macro- and meso-levels, part of marketing management, should follow basic principles including:

- 1) With the variety of mass media available, a principle should be established from the outset – to develop a logical and consistent use of media.
- 2) The second principle identifies the use of all available media as impractical and justifying high costs. Concentrating activity in certain media is an advantage, according to the objectives of the enterprise or institution.
- 3) The third principle recommends that the website should be the centre of the digital strategy. It should be developed as the central management and showcase of the entire company. It should present and explain the nature of the business, its positioning, the nature of the products/services offered, the aspirations and future goals of the enterprise.
- 4) The fourth principle justifies the mandatory management of all digital channels.
- 5) The need for staff to manage digital channels in a particular company represents the fifth principle.

Having examined the basic role of digitalization in tourism, it should be clarified some of the basic terminology in the field of health tourism in Bulgaria in particular and also the good practices in the field should be analysed, to identify opportunities for applying the principles of digitalization in its marketing management.

³<https://bulgariatravel.org/>. [Accessed 1 February 2022]

Health Tourism and Good Practices

Considering the specificities of the health tourism in Bulgaria, it is necessary to review the best practices in the development of health tourism worldwide to assess the opportunities for digitalization of marketing management in Bulgaria.

The first selection criterion we have chosen is according to the implemented good government policies for the development of health tourism. As an interesting example, we can point to Taiwan, whose government has successfully intervened in the development and promotion of health tourism through the internationalization of the health sector and the creation of an international health industry park connecting airports and major hospitals. Turkey's government policy, on the other hand, is linked to a programme to demolish old hospitals and replace them with medical facilities intended primarily for foreign tourists travelling for medical treatment. Digitalisation is widely used in the medical tourism, and the Turkish website My health Turkey is a case in point.⁴ This is an organization with decades of experience and knowledge in the health sector, involved and affiliated with the leading hospitals in Turkey. Through this platform, could be reached all the necessary information for a patient – a potential consumer of medical tourism.

Countries have also been selected on the principle of popular destinations for health tourism with a certain specialization, and for this purpose, it has been considered the Lonely Planet's chart top 10 destinations for health tourism, which have different specializations and from which we can draw ideas and example. Among these destinations we can highlight Israel, which specialise in medical tourism in a wide range of diseases, as well as in rehabilitation with water from the Dead Sea, and Macedonia, which specialise in dental treatment. Some countries and clinics have online systems for booking appointments, consultation (including online) and overall travel, stay and treatment arrangements.

The last criterion by which best practices are selected is according to the innovations applied in the field of health tourism. Of these, we can single out India, where the most widely sought-after by tourists and foreigners is Ayurveda alternative medicine, which is natural and holistic medicine treatments. Dubai, on the other hand, is associated with the large investments made in the construction of the innovative "all-medical zone" and numerous high-tech accommodations.

Opportunities for Digitalization of Marketing Management of Health Tourism in Bulgaria

Based on the theoretical propositions discussed so far in the current paperwork and considering the results of the empirical study, a model for marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria can be created. The current paper will only highlight the recommendations related to the possibilities of digitalization of the marketing management of health tourism, which on future stage can be used by the Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM) or the Ministry of Tourism to build a model for a specific region or a national one.

⁴<https://www.myhealthturkey.com/medical-cost-reduction-service/>

According to the trends and forecasts considered in the “Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria” 2014-2030, prepared by the Ministry of Economy and Energy in Bulgaria, “...domestic tourism will focus on diversification of tourism products and offering thematic tourism products in the field of cultural heritage, modern culture, protected natural areas, health tourism, historical, sports, religious tourism, business and others”. Among the main priorities is to increase the share of specialised types of tourism leading to year-round and more intensive occupancy. With its vast information resource, internet enables tourists to check hotels, weather forecasts, provides information on local food and can connect tourists with others to share opinions on their chosen destination. Thus, the vast information resource available to modern tourists presents tourism entrepreneurs with a whole new set of challenges. Given the new demands of tourists, they are forced to make new and significant investments for which they expect a good rate of return. Developing and promoting specialised tourism products is seen as a means of overcoming the problem of seasonality and creating an emotional bond between foreign tourists and Bulgaria.

The methodological framework of the study of the marketing management of health tourism includes a strategic marketing plan for the development and management of health tourism in Bulgaria in the context of its specialization. In the empirical study, firstly, we created a methodological framework based on 9 criteria and 33 indicators for research and evaluation of marketing management of health tourism (see Tables 2 and 3).

Based on our study, seven out of nine tourism regions have an extended specialization in the field of health tourism and only one of them has it as a main specialization. We believe that from these 7 for more detailed analysis, specific recommendations and activities in the strategic marketing plan, we should select 1 that in its “extended specialization” section mentions health tourism in all its types, and more specifically Region Tracian Valley, Region Sofia, Region Varna and Region Burgas. It is important health tourism locations to be included in the external marketing of destination Bulgaria with videos, websites and catalogues, in order to promote them. All 7 tourism regions where health tourism is implemented have a good online presence - some of them have Facebook pages and others have specially developed websites. The website created by the Ministry of Tourism for Brand Bulgaria lists all the regions, but could also link to their websites and Facebook pages and give more information and publicity, such as this in the first recommendation we could give related to the digitalization of the marketing management of health tourism.

As digitalisation has progressed, paper surveys are becoming less common, so we conducted an online survey, using a specialist website – Kwick Surveys, among marketing professionals and other management staff, as well as tourism experts. The survey questions directly correspond to the criteria and indicators mentioned above. The aim of the analysis is to compare the judgement of those working in tourism specialised enterprises with those from the experts in the sector. The survey was prepared and distributed via email and other online communication channels – it was sent to the Ministry of Tourism, to municipalities and to business people and we received responses from all stakeholders. The

results were summarised directly on the website, then analysed and compared by criteria and indicators, which were subsequently ranked in order of importance. A key area with the potential to digitise the marketing management of health tourism are specifically the marketing research related to potential and actual health tourism consumers, health tourism sites, and industry professionals.

Based on the survey results and determining the coefficient of significance of each criterion, a comprehensive assessment of the marketing management of health tourism at the macro level in Bulgaria was made according to marketing specialists and experts:

Table 2. *Summary Indicators for Complex Assessment of the Marketing Management of Health Tourism at the Macro Level in Bulgaria According to Marketing Specialists and Managers*

External factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in the destination	0.05	4.08	5	0.816	0.041
Legislation	0.06	2.75	5	0.55	0.033
External marketing of the destination	0.11	1.95	5	0.39	0.043
Internal factors - Infrastructure	0.07	3.16	5	0.632	0.044
Internal factors - Superstructure	0.12	3.12	5	0.624	0.075
Internal factors - Specialized superstructure	0.20	3.22	5	0.644	0.129
Image and perception of Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism	0.14	2.29	5	0.458	0.064
Internal Marketing - Human Resources	0.12	2.90	5	0.58	0.070
Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism	0.13	2.59	5	0.518	0.067
Total	1	26.06	40	5.212	0.566

Source: Author's systematization.

Table 3. *Summarized Indicators for Complex Assessment of the Marketing Management of Health Tourism at the Macro Level in Bulgaria According to Experts*

External factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in the destination	0.05%	3.66	5	0.732	0.037
Legislation	0.06%	2.86	5	0.572	0.034
External marketing of the destination	0.11%	2.52	5	0.504	0.055
Internal factors - Infrastructure	0.07%	3.60	5	0.72	0.050
Internal factors - Superstructure	0.12%	3.40	5	0.68	0.082
Internal factors - Specialized superstructure	0.20%	3.53	5	0.706	0.141
Image and perception of Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism	0.14%	3.05	5	0.61	0.085
Internal Marketing - Human Resources	0.12%	3.80	5	0.76	0.091
Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism	0.13%	2.87	5	0.574	0.075
Total	1	29.29	40	5.858	0.651

Source: Author's systematization.

At the end of our research, we prepared a list with recommendations with the idea of providing it to marketing managers in tourism regions and to experts in the Ministry of Tourism, in order to successfully develop and manage newly established tourism regions, in particular Sofia Region, which can be approbated by the Organization for management of the tourism region Sofia. We have described recommendations, some of which are related to the possibilities of digitalization of marketing management of health tourism.

The specific measures proposed are grouped into 5 categories, namely health tourism in its entirety; medical tourism; spa and wellness tourism; thalassotherapy and spa tourism; external marketing of Bulgaria and in particular Sofia Region.

Among the activities related to health tourism in its entirety, we can highlight respectively the creation of measures to stimulate Bulgarian tour operators to offer health tourism packages and the development of joint health tourism products between Sofia and other Balkan capitals, which could be offered digitally, with the possibility of online booking and payment. A mobile application could be also created.

In terms of the medical tourism, we pay particular attention to the creation of an international medical park, which would integrate all the known medical centres designated for Sofia Region, following the example of Taiwan, and the establishment of international partnerships with hospitals or foreign tour operators offering medical tourism packages. Similar to the Turkish My health Turkey website, an app or online portal could be created for the medical tourism in

Bulgaria – with information on the treatments, provided in Bulgaria and access to services offered by leading clinics in the country.

Regarding the spa and wellness tourism, among the most essential measures are the development, implementation and regulation of innovative methods – massages, manual therapies and treatments following the example of India. The opportunities for digitisation and automation here includes digital services in the spa and wellness hotels, also smart tourism – online check in, digital spa and wellness menu with the offered services and mobile apps for alternative wellness services - such as meditation and yoga - to complement the services offered on site.

From the fourth group of measures related to balneology and thalassotherapy we highlight the creation of a development plan and quality, sustainable and targeted management of the Central Bath in Sofia and the specialization of the spa hotels and centers for the needs of tourism and certification of services by type of treatment and type of mineral water, including digital marketing and quality and effective publicity.

The last group of measures is related to the external marketing of the destination and here the most significant are the creation of an advertising video for Sofia Region as a destination for health tourism; the creation of an online 3D catalogue of Sofia Region as a tourism destination with health orientation and the development of a digital calendar of events in the field of health tourism at the level of location and an overall calendar for Sofia Region and the preparation of a plan and forms of their publicity.

In our opinion, three main recommendations can be made related to the possibilities of digitalization of the marketing management of health tourism, which are relevant for each of the nine regions, as their implementation would lead to greater efficiency in their development and respectively in the tourism industry of Bulgaria:

- Improving the presentation of information and tourism opportunities of the regions in terms of the offered products and services on the electronic sites and social networks. In today's environment of widespread digitalization, such approach can be very effective and successful for the tourism business. On the other hand, information provision and systematization of the offered tourism products and services and their full promotion would contribute to the formation of the final tourism product by tour operators according to specific tourism needs.
- Creation and maintenance of an up-to-date database of tourists visiting each tourist attraction in the area, especially with regard to the natural ones. The second recommendation focuses on the marketing management of the area, as its implementation will enable the analysis of preferences of the actual users. The results of such information provision would be conducive to the creation of product development strategies, both for the area in terms of public policy and for business in the regards to the tour operators.
- Implementation of innovative approaches in presenting and promoting the

tourism opportunities of the region, through different formats and possibilities of videos, interactive approaches to present images and information, etc.

Conclusion

From the point of view of Bulgaria's macro-level management and considering the identification of health tourism specialization according to which 7, out of 9 regions, have a main or extended specialization in the field of health tourism, we conclude that Bulgaria could be branded at the macro-level as a destination for health tourism all year round.

We believe that a comprehensive marketing management and positioning strategy for the newly created 9 tourism regions needs to be developed as there is currently no such strategy. There is a need for more effective presentation of the available tourism resources in order to attract visitor's interest, through participation in tourism forums/exhibitions and conferences, paid advertising on tourism platforms, etc. Such a positioning strategy could be targeted at specific sites or at specialised types of tourism products related to the consumption of the various services offered in the area.

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Crisis of Competition: A Conceptual Review of Hospitality and Tourism Industries

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The hospitality and airline industries tend to be in a never-ending competition. This competition in many situations leads to a crisis with many forms such as price wars, emergence of a new competitor with lowered price products and competitors following fast-second strategy. So, this paper is a conceptual research that outlines these different forms of crisis of competition. Furthermore, it indicates how organizations face competition and how they set strategies for survival and coexist in the highly competitive market. This paper also overviews case studies from the hospitality and airline industry and their response to competition.

Keywords: crisis of competition, concept of competition, competitive position, price wars, fast-second strategy

Introduction

One of the main objectives of every firm is to sustain a competitive advantage. In fact, a significant amount of organizational resources is spent just trying to stay ahead of rivals. The competitive battles in which firms engage take place as firms vie for potentially incompatible positions. Alternatively, successful competitiveness often is the result of the ability to determine rational capability (through the strengths and weaknesses and a rigorous attack) to fulfill customer needs that are well defined through closeness to the market (Zigu 2018).

Price war is considered a situation that is triggered off when the supply of a company exceeds the demand for a certain category of products or services that leads to a competition between producers. Within the context of this scenario, companies may lose their customers due to the price-cut at the competitor's (Ali 2018). Price wars may happen between hotels due to a global economic crisis that may lower consumer demands for hotel rooms.

Emergence of a new competitor can form a crisis too. When a new competitor enters the market and offers a product or service at a lowered price, this leads to customers moving from the company to the competitor which puts a high pressure on companies in order to stand ahead of competitors. This can be seen in the case of emergence of Low-Cost Carriers (LCCs).

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Some companies do not like to enter the market with new product. Instead, they prefer to take the product of another company and modify it, add special or new features that is not found in the competitors. It is not necessary to be the first entrant in the market in order to win. Many second movers won against their rivals and built a strong competitive advantage which breaks a crisis to the competitors (Markides and Geroski 2005). Finally, companies can win the competition and survive through innovation and uniqueness (differentiation), rather than following a culture of continuous improvement and learning.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to overview the concept of crisis of competition and its different forms. It mainly focusses on discussing the crisis that happens due to the competition between the hospitality and tourism companies and not highlighting the different types of crisis. In addition, it addresses how organizations face competition and how they set strategies for survival and coexist in the highly competitive market. Furthermore, this paper overviews case studies from the hospitality and airline industry and their response to competition.

Concept of Competition

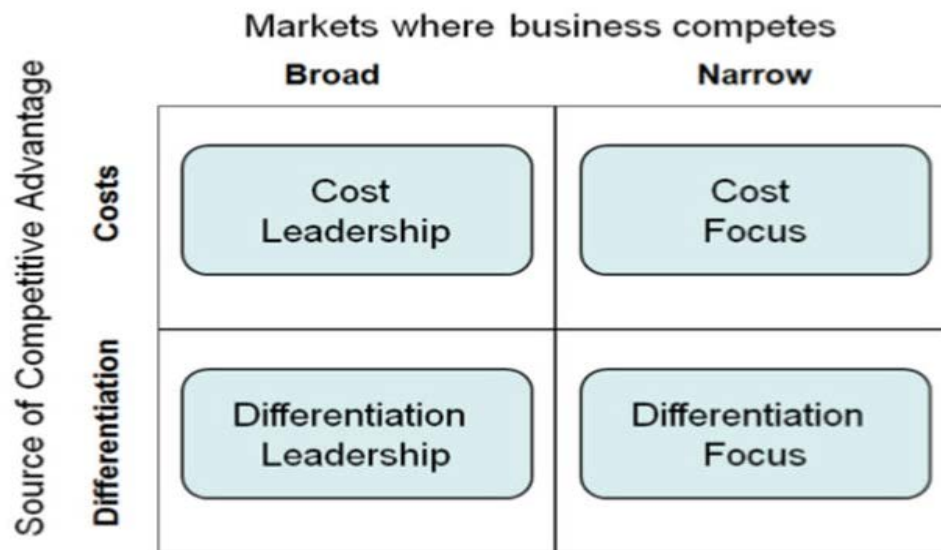
As mentioned by Cambridge Dictionary (2021), “competition refers to a situation in which a company is trying to win something or be more successful than someone else”. In other words, competition means the rivalry between two organizations or more selling the same products or services aiming to achieve more revenue, profit and market share. In order to achieve a competitive advantage over its competitors in the industry, companies define its long-term plan known as a competitive strategy. Its goal is creating a powerful position in an industry and generating a higher return on investment. This type of strategy plays an important role when the industry is very competitive, and consumers are provided with almost similar products (Rowley 1997, Zigu 2018).

Before setting a competitive strategy, a company must evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the industry and further allocate a competitive weight. Understanding the current competition, studying the needs of customers, and evaluating their SWOT analysis. Companies can study and evaluate based on their market share, SWOT analysis etc., which would eventually help them drive business and sales revenue (Kim 2010, Theintactfront 2018). According to Porter (1985), competitive strategy is divided into four types; cost leadership, differentiation leadership, cost focus and differentiation focus, as illustrated in Figure 1. Without these competitive strategies, it is difficult for firms to sustain in the competitive industry (Krämer et al. 2016, Zigu 2018).

With cost leadership, the main goal of the firm is to become the lowest producer in the industry, and this is achieved by producing in large scale which enables the firm to attain economies of scale. For example, Micromax mobile phones provide good quality products at an affordable price which contain all the features which a premium phone like Apple or Samsung offers. High capacity utilization, good bargaining power, high technology implementation are the factors

that are necessary to gain cost leadership (Rowley 1997, Kotler 2000, Kotler 2006).

Figure 1. Porter's Competitive Strategies



Source: The intact front 2018.

Based on the strategy of differentiation leadership, firm maintains unique features of its products in the market thus creating a differentiating factor. With this differentiation leadership, firms target to achieve market leadership. Firms charge a premium price for the products (due to high value-added features). For instance, BMW offers vehicles that are distinct from other car brands. BMW cars are more advanced, have better features and personalized services premium brand and quality, major distribution channels, consistent promotional support etc. are the attributes of such products (Rowley 1997, Kotler 2000, Kotler 2006).

Under the cost focus strategy, a firm concentrates on specific market segments and keeps its products low priced in those segments. Such strategy helps firm to satisfy enough consumers and gain popularity. Sonata watches focus on giving wrist watches at a low cost as compared to competitors like Rolex, Titan or Omega (Rowley 1997, Kotler 2000, Harvard Business Review 2001, Kotler 2006).

Finally, according to the differentiation focus strategy, firm aims to differentiate itself from one or two competitors, again in definite segments only. This type aims at meeting the demands of border customers who refrain from purchasing competitors' products only due to missing of small features. This is clearly a niche marketing strategy. For example, Titan watches concentrates on premium segment which includes jewels in its watches (Rowley 1997, Kotler 2000, Kotler 2006, Zigu 2018).

Crisis of Competition

Internationalization can be regarded as an indication of competition as companies search for routes to grow and win market share from rivals at home and abroad. Competitive pressures are heavy across the tourism industry and they can be interpreted as a sign of good health, from which customers and other stakeholders' benefit. However, they may prove destructive, acting independently or in combination with other agents, and become a catalyst of crisis of competition, which is a form of commercial crisis (Henderson 2017).

Economic and financial crisis can lead to a fierce competition between organizations. For example, the global economic crisis that happened in 2008 reduced the number of international tourists that made a competition between hotels and airlines. Moreover, health pandemics such as the global COVID-19 health pandemic has significantly accelerated the dumping of hotels' rates to attract more customers that lead to competition crisis (Henderson 2017).

Crisis of competition may happen due to several reasons; price wars between two or more organizations, emergence of a new competitor that threatens the profitability of an organization or the fast second strategy that some competitors adopt.

Price Wars

Price wars are a temporary phenomenon; they are considered a result of competitive pricing interaction between hotels (Bungert 2003, Ali 2018). Price wars seem a lasting result of the nature of competition, demand, and technology (Morrison and Winston 1996). Slade (1989) stated that "price wars are severe only when demand falls". However, high possibility of price wars' outbreak is one of the factors that make the pricing of services more difficult (Boz et al. 2017).

The meaning of a price war is always tricky, for the prejudice and abuse of the process (Zhang and Round 2011). Grundey (2009) defined price war as "a term used as an indicator to the state of intense competitive rivalry accompanied by a multi-lateral series of price reductions. One competitor will lower its price, and then others will lower their prices too in order to match. If one of them reduces their price again, a new round of reductions starts". One of the main reasons of price wars is competitors' reactions when the firm cut its prices leading other firms to follow it (Hanna and Dodge 1995). According to Merriam-Webster (2021), price war is defined as a commercial competition characterized by the repeated cutting of prices below those of competitors (Viglia et al. 2016). Zhang and Round (2011) indicated that it is difficult to identify the reasons for price wars, when it really starts, how and when it ends.

Not every price cut is a price war (Elzinga and Mills 1999). There are two main conditions that should be fulfilled to state the term of price war: (1) one of the companies tries to win market share by using offensive pricing, (2) companies make price undercuts to fall below the level of profitability, at least for main competitors in the market (Kramer et al. 2016).

Antecedents of Price Wars

One of the antecedents of price wars is overcapacity. It is considered as a facilitator of price wars eruption. Sooner or later, corporations use the overcapacity to increase sales by price cutting (Heil and Helsen 2001, Kotler et al. 2006). Markets that attract many customers usually have a lot of competitors. The result is usually exceeding capacity, making price wars, and loss-loss situations for all competitors (Kotabe and Helsen 2010). Numerous hotels may cut prices as a natural response to overcapacity, but the results of these reactions can be destructive if continued for a long period (Bowie and Buttle 2004).

Fierce competition occurs when there are many competitors in the market without differentiated services. This causes price wars in the long-term and many customers may buy the cheaper one (He et al. 2016, Indounas and Roth 2012). The result could be a price war that may satisfy the consumer's but not the firm's needs. Many of the benefits to firms that offer high perceived quality, including more loyal consumer, more repetitive business, and less sensitivity to price wars (Krämer et al. 2016, Hsu and Powers 2002, Jain 2000).

Another antecedent of a price war is a financial crisis. Eichengreen and Portes (1987) defined financial crisis as "a disturbance to financial markets, associated typically with falling asset prices and insolvency among debtors and intermediaries, which ramifies through the financial system, disrupting the market's capacity to allocate capital within the economy. During financial crises; consumers make buying decisions according to the special offers, not the brands. The leading companies have launched price wars, which have a negative impact on their brands and positions (Grundey 2009).

Moreover, pricing decisions play two major roles in marketing. Price influences how much of a product that customers buy. Also, it influences whether selling the product will be profitable (Cant et al. 2006). The corporation may tend to price cut for various reasons such as if the corporation cannot increase the volume of sales through the activities of the sales team, nor get back its market share. Furthermore, the organization also tends to price cut for penetrating the market through lower costs (Kotler 2000). It is too attractive, quick and effortless to cut prices to deal with an instant deficit in sales volume (Doole and Lowe 2008). So, increasing sales volumes is one of the distinctive impacts of price wars. The customers tend to choose the company which offers low prices (Ansu and Kwarteng 2016).

Lastly, according to Londhe (2006), price sensitivity means "the ratio of the percentage response in the quantity sold to percentage change in price". Price sensitivity of customers will determine the extent that an organization will have in raising its price (Kumar and Meenakshi 2011). The risk of price wars increases when price sensitivity is high (Dowling 2004, Marn et al. 2004).

Consequences of Price Wars

Price wars may be good for customers, who can benefit from lower prices (Grundey 2009, Heerde et al. 2008). But, the cost of a price war is expensive for

organizations (Smith 2012). The results of price cuts may lead to a negative image of the quality of the firm's products, less customer loyalty, weak competitive position (Kotler 2000), and the corporate's incapability to increase price again (Burnett 2008).

Consumers receive a negative image and mistrust towards business due to a price war (Hassali et al. 2013, Yannopoulos 2011). Price wars are risky as consumers will be usual to pay the discounted prices and hope to have the same prices in the next deals (Zeithmal and Bitner 2003). Also, price cutting may lead to persuading customers to purchase a product or service, on the other hand, this strategy can weaken brand loyalty (Dodds 2003). Furthermore, price wars may lead to damaging a brand's equity (Bungert 2003). Therefore, management should be very careful in reducing their room rates to impact on the reference price, even for short times (Viglia et al. 2016).

Price wars impact on the long-term profitability of all industries, especially the industries with oligopoly structures (Bowie and Buttle 2004, Lindstädt and Dietl 2010, Yannopoulos 2011). Ali (2018) stated that price plays a critical role in positioning. Price might use as a way that customers sentence the quality of product or service and also as a way that establishments attempt to position the quality of their services or products. Frequently, higher price with bundling values gets the company a strong competitive position. Contrarily, a lower price may weaken the competitive position of the firm (Kotabe and Helsen 2009). Undoubtedly, price wars reduce organizations' profits and contribute to their instability (Morrison and Winston 1996, Zeithmal and Bitner 2003, Smith 2012). Price war not only leads to lose profitability, but also it could lastingly damage a premium brand's competitive position (Kotler 2000, Yannopoulos 2011).

The loss of profitability and the weak competitive advantage of firms may be expected to result in bankruptcy. Bankrupt carriers could be the target of price wars designed to hurry their exit from the market (Morrison and Winston 1996). Likewise, market turmoil may lead some corporates to cut prices to get short-term monetary benefits. Lowering prices adds pressure to the survival of firms (Grundey 2009). Furthermore, it may lead organizations to exit from the market (Indounas and Roth 2012).

Emergence of New Competitors

The emergence of new competitors results in an intense competition in the market. Once the new competitor enters a specific market, the traditional organizations must respond and alter their operations in order to remain relevant and survive (Raynes and Tsui 2018, Ali 2018). There are two types of emerging competitors. The first type is the competitor that lowers its prices which is obviously clear in the airline industry. The other one is a new competitor that has benefited from the products in the market, added some modifications and then entered the market. This is what is known as fast-second strategy.

In the early 1970's, new kinds of airline such as LCCs have emerged on different markets. Additionally, there was an increasing number of mergers, take-

overs, and several types of alliance. The emergence of the LCC had a great effect on the airline industry and the way that network airlines operated (Detzen et al. 2012). LCCs were nimble organizations that had clear future orientated strategies that could easily adapt to the changing market conditions. This was particularly important as it allowed for a sustained competitive advantage over rivals to be achieved (Pearson and Merkert 2015). At the core of LCC strategies were simple streamlined product offerings, high capacity aircraft, mono-aircraft fleets, and efficient crewing methods (Graham and Vowles 2006). The legacy carriers struggled to compete with these fast-moving carriers with their low overheads and high customer satisfaction. As a result, these network carriers had to significantly alter their own operations in order to remain relevant and survive (Raynes and Tsui 2018). Their response was the creation of a multi-brand strategy and an airline-within-airline “AWA” or what is known carrier within carrier “CWC”.

Dual or multi-brand strategy is a response that has emerged as a result of intense competition and increased market saturation, which is forcing legacy organizations to look to innovation and new market segments in order to remain relevant and competitive (Raynes and Tsui 2018, Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). There is the potential for a considerable amount of risk to be involved in this kind of strategy, however, Detzen et al. (2012) suggested that this could be minimized if an organization understands exactly what it aims to achieve with a dual or multi-brand strategy, and what their own internal capabilities are.

In order to determine why the organization aims to develop a dual strategy and what their capabilities are, a SWOT analysis and a cost-benefit analysis are ideal methods of situational analysis (Markides 1999, Heracleous and Wirtz 2009). An organization can use this information to determine new market segments, additional customer needs, the ideal number of brands to offer, methods to spread risks across the brand portfolio, and achieve greater levels of operational efficiency (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000, Chan 2000, Heracleous and Wirtz 2009, Raynes and Tsui 2018, Markides 1999). Also, it can utilize this information in a strategic and targeted manner to develop a brand portfolio designed to achieve a competitive advantage. With a successful multi-brand strategy, an organization is able to offer products and services that meet the evolving needs of customers. Thus, improving loyalty and increasing market share (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000).

Organizations must take care to ensure that the multiple brands are complementary rather than competing. To do this, organizations must clearly define the scope of each of the brands to ensure there is minimal overlap. Moreover, these brands must avoid cannibalizing each other's target market, minimize the potential for confusion amongst customers through effective marketing, and not dilute their parent brands' values and earnings potential (Dev et al. 1995, Manga and John 2010, Shocker et al. 1994, Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). To minimize this risk, Batey (2008) and Morgan and Rego (2009) suggest that limited number of brands must be offered, and each brand should have its own clear market segments with no overlap. A multi-brand strategy that covers carefully selected market segments in a cost effective and efficient manner is a significant asset that can strengthen an organization's market position (Aaker

Joachimsthaler 2000, Dev et al. 1995, Raynes and Tsui 2018, Morgan and Rego 2009, Shocker et al. 1994).

The AWA or CWC strategy is considered another type of response taken by a number of airlines around the world to combat the aggressive growth of LCCs that followed the deregulation of the airline industry between 1970 and 2000 (Graham and Vowles 2006, Gados and Gillen 2008, Ramaswamy 2002). By creating an AWA, airlines would be able to deter the entry of LCCs into their home markets. They also decided to lower their own costs to a level which allowed them to compete more effectively against the new LCCs, whose operating costs could be up to 65% less than the legacy airlines (Doganis 2006, Graham and Vowles 2006).

The AWA strategy involves the creation of separate business units that mirror the operations of LCCs, target passengers that prefer low-cost providers and exploit the rapidly growing low-cost travel segment which mainline/legacy carriers had previously overlooked (Graham and Vowles 2006). This strategy offers four main potential advantages to the legacy carriers. Firstly, it might allow the airline to force down costs, especially of labour, to compete with LCCs. Besides, the AWA could be a more appropriate product for leisure or hub-bypass routes and thus function essentially as a sophisticated form of market segmentation in network expansion. Also, an AWA might permit pre-emptive market entry to stop an LCC entering the same market. Alternatively, an AWA could function as a direct competitive response to an LCC already operating in a market (Graham and Vowles 2006).

Examples of the most profitable AWAs from around the world include Jetstar, Silkair and Germanwings, all of them operate with a high level of independence from their parent airline (Graf 2005, Pearson and Merkert 2014), have modern fleets, compliment their parent airlines' route networks and have staff on separate contracts to their mainline counterparts.

The second type of emerging competitors is second-movers, or companies that are following fast-second strategy. Some companies prefer to enter the market with a new invention that has no similar product on the market (Buisson and Silberzahn 2010). These companies are after an approach called Blue-Ocean Approach. On the other hand, other companies wish to be innovators instead of inventors (Markides and Geroski 2005). They observe what is working in the marketplace and innovate it, to find a better way, do it better and then to go back to the market with that of improved offering, at perhaps even a better price (Buisson and Silberzahn 2010).

When a new line opens up potential new markets, everyone competing within those markets has a choice to make. Those who choose to move first are the pioneers who begin the process of establishing the new market. But historically, successful innovation is essentially a process that requires the linking of two different activities: the discovery and testing of a new product or service that creates an initial niche, and the transformation of the idea from a niche into a mass market.

In fact, many companies that choose to be pioneers exit the market pretty much as fast as they entered it. The fact that their presence in the market is not profitable— often it is very profitable, but on a scale appropriate to the market at

the time that they are in. For example, though the 35mm still camera was invented by an employee of Germany's Ernst Leitz Company (now Leica), which introduced it in 1923, Japan's Canon is credited with being the innovator that created the mass market in the latter half of the 20th century (Buisson and Silberzahn 2010).

The first-mover approach refers to entering first into a new market and setting up a strong differentiation strategy, through which firms can create and dominate a new area where profits abound. Contrarily, companies should not try to become pioneers, but should rather target the newly created market in second position and colonize it (Markides and Geroski 2005).

Being the first mover has many disadvantages. The first mover may invest heavily in persuading consumers to try a new product, and second entrants would benefit from these informed buyers and would not need to spend as much on educating consumers. Second entrants can avoid mistakes made by the first mover. If the first mover is unable to attract consumers with their products, second entrants can benefit from this. They can reverse-engineer new products and make them better or cheaper. Second entrants can identify areas of improvement left by the first mover and take advantage of them. This can lead to a fierce competition between first and second movers (Harvard Business Review 2001, Markides and Geroski 2005)

Throughout the history, there are many examples to show that second market entrants became the big winners. For instance, Henry Ford did not invent the motor car, but when he saw the market opportunity afforded by the first clumsily built and expensive cars, he "innovated" the process for making them and, thus, brought cars to the masses. Moreover, the invention of the facsimile machine was credited to Scotsman Alexander Bain before the turn of the 20th century. However, it was not until the Japanese, as late-comers, developed and used this technology within their own business that the facsimile machine achieved popular use and success (Harvard Business Review 2001, Markides and Geroski 2005, Fast Second 2008).

Examples of Industries Response to Competition

Case 1: Ritz Carlton Hotel

Southeast Asia lay in a rough time in 1997, especially in the luxury product and service areas. The economy of this region was unstable, Indonesian forest fires caused great damage to the SMOG index, and tourism was clearly suffering. The economic crisis drastically reduced the value of the Malaysian ringgit to about half its value a few years earlier. The cost of a hotel room dropped along with the nose-diving currency. Hotels dropped their room rates even further. During this, all hotels in Malaysia entered a price war (Harvard Business Review 2001).

The Ritz-Carlton chose to steer clear of the fray. Instead of lowering the price to survive from the fierce competition between luxury hotels, McBride, the hotel's general manager, became creative. He greeted arriving flights with music, mimosas, and discount coupons. Passengers with reservations at other hotels

began to defect to the Ritz at alarming rates. McBride provided his mobile phone number in newspaper ads so people could call him directly for reservations. Guests had access to a “technology butler” who could fix laptops and other electronic devices. Ritz offered a “bath menu” of drinks and snacks to be served along with butler drawn baths. Guests who stayed longer than five nights received an embroidered pillowcase. The result was that Ritz Carlton won the war (Harvard Business Review 2001).

Case 2: Qantas Airways Group

Qantas Group’s operations were influenced by several events in both their external and internal markets. Externally, the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 hindered airline demand for the USA which resulted in Qantas reducing its services and suspending its flights to New York. These flights later returned to normal service levels in 2002 (Qantas Airways 2002). Domestic services of Qantas’s were also negatively impacted due to the large number of international travelers that connect onto to onward domestic flights. Bombings in Bali in 2002 heavily decreased demand to the city (Forsyth 2003). Air travel demand was also hindered in Southeast Asia and during 2003 and 2004 as a result of the outbreak of SARS and Tsunami. These resulted Qantas to reduce their flight operations by 20% across its international network in order to better reflect the lower demand for air travel. Some of the Asian routes most affected by SARS in particular faced reduced demand of up to 45% (Qantas Airways 2003). Huge marketing campaigns were undertaken in an effort to re-grow the affected markets through a number of campaigns such as, ‘Back to Thailand’ and SARS recovery fares.

The global financial crisis in 2008, the H1N1 virus during 2009 and sustained high fuel prices caused a widespread decline in passenger travel (Qantas Airways 2008). This led to a number of Qantas routes being suspended in order to increase operational sustainability. For routes that remained in service, a number were transferred to Jetstar (its low-cost subsidiary) in order to improve their respective operating performance (Qantas Airways 2009, Whyte and Lohmann 2015). It was these types of decisions and strategies such as allocating specific destinations to a specific airline within the group that has ensured the longevity of the Qantas AWA operation (Forsyth 2003).

Internally, bankruptcy of Ansett Australia during 2001 provided Qantas with an opportunity to grow significantly in a number of domestic and regional markets (Homsombat et al. 2014). Accordingly, Qantas Link responded to this opportunity by adding an additional five Bombardier Q300 aircraft and six Boeing 717 aircraft to its fleet to help fill the void (Qantas Airways 2002).

Positioning wise, Qantas has marketed itself as the premium airline and achieved this by focusing on continuous innovation, quality, reliability, and offering at least two if not three on-board classes of travel (Homsombat et al. 2014, Qantas Airways 2006). Firstly, Qantas implemented a number of innovations to remain ahead of neighboring competitors, such as individual in-flight entertainment for each passenger across all international classes of travel, sleeper seats and dining experience in its business class. On the ground, Qantas introduced a self-

service check-in option which reduced processing time to less than one minute, which proved popular with business travelers (Qantas Airways 2002, 2003).

In 2002, Australian Airlines was established as Qantas first AWA, its first AWA. It provided mono-class full service long-haul economy flights to leisure destinations in Asia (Forsyth 2003, Qantas Airways 2002). Its major aim was to operate flights that were previously served by mainline Qantas, as well as destinations that Qantas itself would not be able to achieve acceptable returns on. This airline-within-airline venture was independently managed from Qantas; however, it aimed to complement the existing Qantas services (Qantas Airways 2002). Due to the concentration of Australian Airlines' flights in the Asia, its performance was hindered by events including SARS in 2003, Indonesia travel warnings in 2002 and the Asian tsunami in 2004 (Qantas Airways 2005). Australian Airlines' operation ceased in June 2006 and was merged into the Qantas brand; many flights were later transferred to Jetstar (Qantas Airways 2006).

In May 2004, Qantas Group launched Jetstar as its second AWA. Jetstar at first was a domestic low-cost carrier operating a fleet of aircraft to major leisure destinations in New South Wales and Queensland. Jetstar's complemented existing Qantas operations, allowing the group to compete more effectively with LCCs such as Virgin Blue and Tigerair Australia, and provide the group with an airline in each of the two remaining core travel markets; short-haul and long-haul low-cost air travel flying to international leisure destinations, as well as opening up air travel to the new and rapidly growing price-sensitive/budget market segment (Homsombat et al. 2014, Qantas Airways 2003, Whyte and Lohmann 2015).

Case 3: Starbucks, McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts

During the time that Starbucks added breakfast sandwiches in their menus and drive-through windows, they invaded into the territory of McDonald's (Halpern 2008). McDonald's decided to begin its coffee line in 2005, which was rated better tasting than Starbucks' in 2007 by Consumer Reports magazine (Halpern 2008). McDonald's premium roast was regarded as the "cheapest and best" (Reiley 2009). Starbucks recognized the threat and quickly joined the war with their marketing campaigns and improvements. One of their responses was announcing that they would drop the price of their iced coffees (Reiley 2009).

Decreased sales of premium coffee due to downturn have caused brands as Starbucks to offer lowered prices to attract customers. McDonald's took advantage of Starbucks' lagged sales to offer in all of its U.S. branches its McCafe line of espresso drinks (Associated Press 2015). McDonald's marketing campaign aimed at attracting consumers to choose their beverage as an affordable alternative to the more high-priced Starbucks products. Starbucks immediately countered by running an ad claiming that its drinks are higher in quality than its competitors, and more affordable than consumers might expect (Associated Press 2015).

In 2008, some McDonald's franchisees added billboards in sight of the Starbucks headquarters that simply marketed their coffee. Starbucks did not respond in kind, claiming that its customer base is different (Jargon 2009).

In 2010, Dunkin Donuts chose to enter the battle and offered a Free Iced Coffee Day in its locations. Starbucks counteracted by offering their Frappuccino at half price at the same time (Noorbaloochi 2010). In order to cope with Dunkin Donuts large cups, Starbucks has test marketed their new cups. These cups were taller and will fit in car cup holders, that are ideal for commuters (Johnston 2010).

Case 4: JinJiang, Hilton and Viehost Hotels

Asia is considered the leading continent in the world that was affected by the COVID-19 health pandemic, and thus its hospitality industry has encountered serious challenges (Hao et al. 2020, Sun 2020). Accordingly, there was a fierce competition between hotels in order to survive. Many hotels closed temporarily or permanently as they weren't able to survive such as some of Meca Casino Hotels, Marriott Hotels and Wyndham Hotels. However, other hotels, such as JinJiang hotels, Hilton hotels and Viehost hotels, were able to put some strategies in order to survive in the competition (Liu et al. 2022). These strategies include reducing spending, lowering prices, featuring new services and technologies and advertising campaigns.

Similar to many other hotels, JinJiang added some specific services during the pandemic of COVID-19. They decided to use the robots, which were only used on greeting guests previously, to provide most services for consumers such as room cleaning and delivery. It also developed other special services such as pure rooms and in-room gym equipment. Besides, it also used online platforms to offer food delivery services for nearby people in order to effectively generate revenues for hotel (Liu et al. 2022).

For Hilton, the technology that other hotels have recently invested in during COVID-19 has been available for many years. Members of Hilton's loyalty program were already able to check in and out digitally. Hence, Hilton started to focus on how to ensure that customers could trust their entire brand to be clean and safe. Accordingly, they announced working relationships with other trusted brands that are producers of health, hygiene and nutrition products such as Reckitt Benckiser, Lysol and Dettol, and the Mayo Clinic (Kilgore 2020).

Viehost Vietnam hotel adopted focused on the cost-saving strategy in order to ensure that their financial capital would be sufficient for future operation. The hotel managed to reduce the useless investment and operating costs by suspending the buffet service in its restaurants and elevator operation. Furthermore, based on law that prevents hotels from hosting many consumers from staying in hotels, Viehost almost eliminated its campaigns and advertisements costs as they became useless. The notable service is the introduction of a paid quarantine service for foreign travelers to Vietnam (Hoang et al. 2021, Liu et al. 2022).

Regarding the previous case studies, it is obvious that hospitality and tourism companies are similar in the way that they may come up against different types of crisis that lead to a fierce competition in the market due to the threat of profitability loss and bankruptcy. But, the difference between them is that each company has its own approach and its own strategies in order to survive. During this period, companies are in what is known as "crisis of competition". Some of these

companies will be in a position to stay steady in their place or even grow and develop their brand while others will lose their brand and position in the market.

Conclusion

Every firm aims at sustaining a competitive advantage and staying ahead of competitors. For this reason, they depend on different approaches that may lead to the emergence of competition crisis. Based on the previous studies, it is found that there are two main different forms of crisis of competition; price wars and the emergence of a new competitor.

This research aims to highlight the concept of competition theoretically. Crisis of Competition and its different forms are also discussed. It has been argued that intensified competition can lead to a crisis as it slows down the accumulation of capital, reducing profitability and demand. Moreover, it posited that whenever a financial, political, environmental or health crisis happens, an intense competition arises between companies especially hospitality and airline companies in order to survive and keep their position in the market.

Price wars are the result of competitive pricing interaction between companies. The main cause of price wars is competitors' reactions when a firm cut its prices due to several reasons, the other firms follow it. These wars may be good for customers, who can always benefit from lowering prices. But, the cost of a price war can be too expensive for some organizations (Kopalle 2009, Spulber 2009).

Emergence of new competitors has two different forms; emergence of competitors with lower prices for products and services, and emergence of competitor depending on the fast-second strategy. Both forms can be almost risky for companies and may result in an intense competition in the market. For instance, the evolution of LCCs in the airline industry has negatively affected the operations of traditional carriers. Furthermore, companies that are following the fast-second strategy or who are known as second movers affect the first-mover companies as they can benefit from them, learn from their mistakes, add modifications and release an improved product (Fast Second 2008).

Nevertheless, every company deploys its own strategies in order to avoid bankruptcy and stay ahead in the market. Though markets can be unpredictable, companies depend on the facts to get a grasp of what is occurring. Thus, they must collect and analyze data continuously in order to uncover what is actually taking place in the market and decide how they can respond to competition with a plan that ensures success for them.

Limitations and Further Research

Like any other research, this study is bound by some limitations. Firstly, this paper is a conceptual research that relies only on theories based on existing literature and this may be less fact-based and not reliable. Also, there are little or insufficient researches about this topic cited which adds pressure to conducting the

research. Furthermore, time constrains limited the opportunity for gathering more information related to the topic. Future researchers can uncover other various forms of crisis of competition. They can also study the emergence of competition in different sectors other than the hospitality and airline industries. Finally, if this paper was conducted as a quantitative study rather than being a conceptual research, it would have more questionable reliability and validity.

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Improving the Syrian Coastal Area in the Context of Sustainable Tourism

By Gildis Tachir* & Ahmed Alali[±]

Tourism is an important field of industry that helps create a large number of job opportunities in many fields that contribute to economic development and increase personal and national incomes. However, when tourism is planned irregularly and without discipline, it negatively affects the environment and natural resources by threatening the environmental resources of future generations. Therefore, we need sustainable tourism development to strike a balance between economic growth on the one hand and the protection of environmental resources and social values on the other. This study aimed to investigate the conditions of sustainable tourism planning. In line with this goal, a picture of the physical potential of the region was created by using the literature data on sustainable tourism, environmental analysis of the Syrian coastal region, on-site observation and mapping method, and qualitative research techniques. Suggestions are put forward in line with the findings that are presented in the created table. We believe that the study will make a positive contribution to the literature to ensure sustainable tourism development on the Syrian coast in terms of urban, environmental, social, and global aspects.

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, the Syrian Coast

Introduction

Sustainable tourism contributes to economic development, employment creation, and infrastructure development in the host country. The concept of sustainable tourism started to emerge with the discussions on sustainability and the growing relationship between the environment and tourism at the Brundtland conference in 1987 with the title of “Our Common Future” (WCED 1987).

The total number of international tourists reached 1 billion in 2012, more than double the number recorded in 1990, and the World Tourism Organization expects it to reach 1.8 billion tourists by 2030 (UNWTO 2011, UNWTO 2017, Alčaković et al. 2017, Ovalı Kısa and Tachir 2017). In May 2022 point to international arrivals reaching 55% to 70% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022 (UNWTO 2022).

Syria has an abundance of tourist attractions of all kinds. The resorts are spread over the mountains in many areas in Syria, as well as there are beautiful Syrian coast resorts, where the sea meets the forest that covers the coastal mountains with a green carpet.

In addition, it is interspersed with rivers, waterfalls, springs, and lakes, and surrounded by forests on all sides. The coastal area also has excellent tourism

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potential due to its culture, history, and climate, as well as investment opportunities due to cheap labor and land (Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022).

The Syrian case is a clear example of how and why tourism can lose its competitiveness during the years of the ongoing war. The tourism sector in Syria suffers from many problems. The current state of war has led to weak strategic plans, deterioration of infrastructure, and lack of sustainability, hindering the development of the tourism sector. By solving these problems and applying the concept of sustainable tourism, the Syrian coast will be a popular tourist destination at the international and global levels.

Literature Review

Tourism produces extraordinarily positive economic outcomes and is one of the world's most important sources of employment and economic gains. On the other hand, it is a very complex sector, and many stakeholders are involved in this sector, sometimes with conflicting interests. The prevention of conflicts requires the correct and fair use of resources. Depending on how tourism is managed, it can have very positive consequences. Sustainable tourism plays a positive role in the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political development of destinations and creates significant development opportunities for many countries or communities. Uncontrolled tourism development can have devastating effects on natural resources, consumption behaviors, pollution, and social systems. The need for sustainable planning and management is vital to the survival of the industry (UNEP/MAP-METAP SMAP III Project 2009, UNWTO 2011, UNWTO 2017).

The World Tourism Organization has defined sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes fully into account its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, and supplies the needs of visitors, industry, environment and host communities” (UNWTO 2011). In addition, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes that “sustainable tourism provides more meaningful relations with local people and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues”. The days when this concept began to be discussed date back to the 1990s (Butler 1990, Wheeler 1991, Zell 1992, Pleumarom 1993, Wheeler 1994, Glasson et al. 1995, Ovalı Kısa 2007, Ovalı Kısa and Tachir 2017). However, problems such as noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, which are effective in shaping air transport and also one of the conditions of today's travel, increase the importance of the concept of sustainable tourism even more. Sustainable tourism is also a concept that attracts attention due to its relation with sensitive areas such as the use of clean energy, the protection of natural resources, and local culture.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also proposed twelve major goals for sustainable tourism in 2005. These principles are illustrated in Table 1 (UNWTO 2005, Streimikiene et al. 2021).

Table 1. *The Principles of Sustainable Tourism*

The principles of sustainable tourism		
1	Economic continuity	to ensure the local application of policies designed so that tourism methods and initiatives can maintain their success and continue to deliver long-term benefits, corporate competitiveness at the national and international levels, and thematic context.
2	Local development	Increasing the contribution of tourism to the host destination by supporting measures to increase the rate of spending in the local area, meeting with local producers and service providers, and overnight visitors.
3	Quality of employment	to support professional specialization, to increase the number and quality of local employment that tourism creates, by improving wages and quality of service, without discrimination on issues such as race, gender, and disability.
4	Social Participation and Gender Equality	An attempt to distribute the economic and social benefits obtained from tourism activities on a wide and equitable scale, to improve opportunities, income, and services provided to economically and socially disadvantaged people.
5	Visitor Satisfaction	To provide visitors with a safe, satisfying, sustainable, and innovative experience without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, or in any other way, and to support the phenomenon of the “responsible tourist”.
6	Local Oversight	To ensure that local governments consult with other stakeholders in tourism in the planning, management, and implementation stages, to strengthen local residents/communities and civil society in the development of tourism in the area and involve them in the processes.
7	Social Welfare	To maintain and improve the quality of life of the local population by providing them with access to social structure, resources, opportunities, and life support systems without causing social degradation and abuse.
8	Cultural richness	respecting the historical heritage, unique culture, traditions, and distinctive features of the local population and increasing their values.
9	Physical safety	maintaining and improving the quality of urban and rural areas and preventing physical and visual degradation of the environment.
10	Biodiversity	to support the protection of natural areas, habitats, wildlife, species, and endemism (native species) and reduce their damage, to increase their awareness of maintaining a balance of protection and use during and after these practices.
11	Effective use of resources	reduce the use of finite and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services, increase local ownership and national and international awareness when it comes to natural, cultural, and historical values, and use protection balance during and after these practices to increase their awareness.
12	Environmental impact	To reduce air, water, and soil pollution and waste production caused by tourism companies and visitors, inform local residents, business staff and guests, in the context of environmental impact, and disseminate concepts such as “responsible business” and “responsible tourist”.

Source: UNWTO 2005, Streimikiene et al. 2021.

These principles refer to the appropriate care, planning, and monitoring of sustainable tourism destinations. Some of these measures include preventing damage to environmental resources, acting as a force for conservation, development,

and implementation of sound sustainable policies in all areas of tourism, installing appropriate systems to reduce pollution caused by tourism developments, adhering to the precautionary principles, respecting the rights and needs of local people, protecting and supporting the cultural and historical heritage of people around the world, and implementing practices responsibly and ethically.

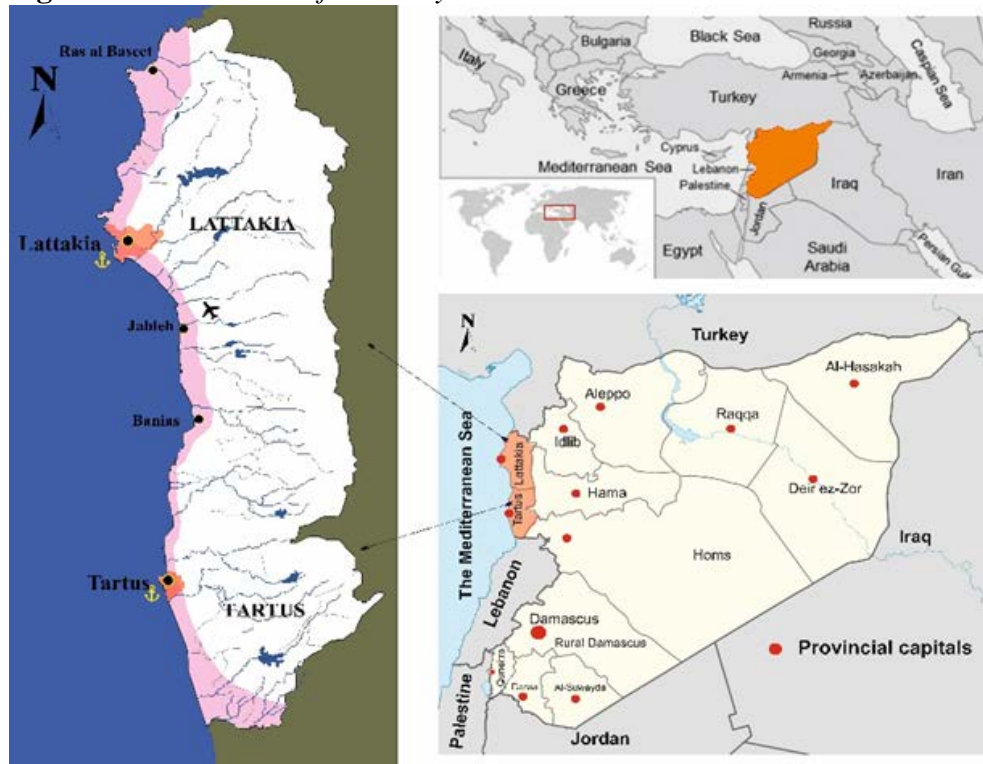
Sustainability sensitiveness has developed rapidly over the last few years, especially after the critical impact of COVID-19. Travel habits are changing and calmer destinations are preferred rather than crowded ones (Lew 2020). In the post-COVID world, changes in sustainable tourism are inevitable. In the future, a balance will be struck between visitor preference, locality, and regulatory constraints (Spalding et al. 2020). In line with this trend, it is foreseen that sustainable tourism will be evaluated with approaches where less developing countries are preferred, local is protected and environmental values, even carbon footprint, are taken into account.

Methodology

In this study, we aimed to develop suggestions for evaluating the potential of Syrian coastal areas in line with sustainable tourism principles. For this purpose, after the sustainable tourism literature review, environmental analyzes of the Syrian coastal areas (Lattakia, Tartous, Ras Al-Bassit, Jableh, Baniyas) were performed. The physical potentials of coastal areas were determined as a result of specific analyzes such as on-site observations, interviews with users of the area, photographing, and map studies. In line with the principles of sustainable tourism, separate proposals about environmental, economic, and social sustainability have been developed for the potentials identified in the coastal areas of Lattakia, Tartous, Ras Al-Bassit, Jableh, and Baniyas. Suggestions developed in this context can ensure the integration of Syrian coastal areas with Mediterranean coastal tourism.

Syrian Coastal Region

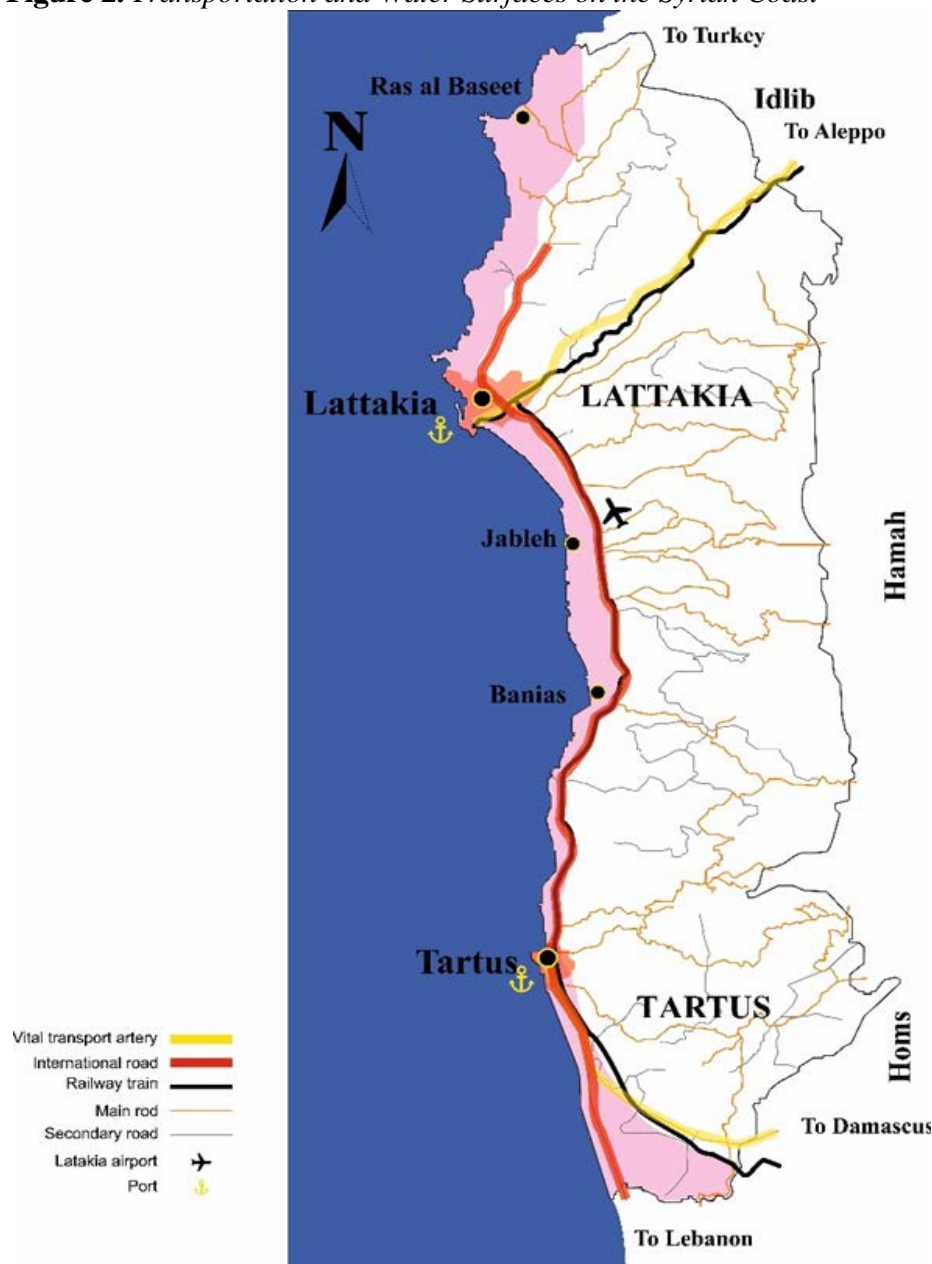
Syria is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and has maritime borders with Lebanon, Cyprus, and Turkey. The Syrian coast extends from Tartous Governorate in the south to Ras Al-Basket in the north in two main governorates: Lattakia and Tartous, with a length of 180 km (Figure 1). The Syrian coast is also characterized by cities, villages, historical sites, beaches, forests, mountains, springs, streams, rivers, and lakes. There are several small uninhabited islands on the Syrian coast, and there is the inhabited and well-known island of Arwad, which is a distinct destination for tourists. In the last century, the Syrian coast also witnessed the development of large marine facilities, including a commercial port in Lattakia, a commercial port and an oil terminal in Tartus, and the Baniyas oil port (Dayoub et al. 2018).

Figure 1. *The Location of the Study Area*

Source: <https://2u.pw/M9VPk>. Developed by Alali (15 March 2022).

Transport

A major highway connecting Latakia to Aleppo and the Euphrates Valley was completed after building a railway to Homs. Most of the city can be reached by taxi and other public transport. Buses transport people to various cities in Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. Latakia train station is located in Yemen Square. Chemins de Fer Syriens ran transport services, including two flights per day to Aleppo and a weekly flight to Damascus via Tartus (Ministry of Transportation 2022, Dayoub et al. 2018). The airport is located 25 kilometers south of Latakia and operates as a national and regional airport with regular flights to Sharjah, Jeddah, Riyadh, and Cairo. Latakia port is also a junction point in six organized cruises between Alexandria, Izmir, and Beirut. Additionally, there are irregular ferry services to Cyprus. Tartus has a developed network of roads and highways. A railway network operated by Chemins de Fer Syriens connects Tartus with the main cities of Syria, although only one passenger line is in service between Latakia and Tartus (Zhao et al. 2017). Unfortunately, most of these flights, both domestic flights between Syrian cities and international flights have stopped working due to the crisis that Syria is going through (Hijazi 2008) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Transportation and Water Surfaces on the Syrian Coast*

Source: <https://2u.pw/Drtlv>. Developed by Alali (17 March 2022).

The Climate

The Syrian coast has a Mediterranean climate, with average temperatures ranging from 12°C (53.5°F) in January to 27°C (81°F) in August, which is the warmest month on the coast (but often Inland too). These are the average temperature in the Sahel, the precipitation is 770 mm (30 inches) per year and is concentrated between October and April, with a maximum in winter. It rains 150/160 mm (5.9/ 6.3 inches) per month in December and January, and during the

summer months when there is no rain, the weather is hot and sunny but softened by the breeze.

In the Sahel, the sun shines regularly in the summer, while in the winter there is variability between cloudy and sunny days. The Mediterranean is warm enough to swim from June to October. There is a mountain range behind the coast, which is 1,562 meters (5,125 feet) high and separates the Mediterranean from the mainland (Musa 1997, Dayoub et al. 2018).

Urban Development

The coastline (the area where no construction permit is granted) will be extended to no less than 100m, and the current line is 75m so that the natural area that will be directly or indirectly affected by possible climate change will expand further (Dayoub et al. 2018).



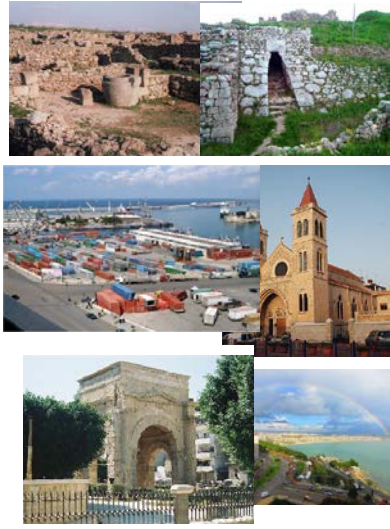
The coastal region faces many problems due to the intensity of land use and controversial demands for its use, which are often harmful to the natural environment. Filling or emptying coastal areas creates economic and environmental problems for coastal tourism and planning, as well as causing physical changes in coastal areas. To date, about a third of the length of the coast has been altered by the construction of structures such as hotels, restaurants, industrial plants, oil factories, and commercial ports, as well as extended rocky areas on the seafronts of coastal cities (UNEP/MAP-METAP SMAP 2009, Hassan and Hui 2020).



Some areas of the shoreline are under threat due to coastal erosion caused by engineering and development projects that do not take into account coastal processes and dynamics. Sea level rise caused by climate change may increase the impact of this erosion in the future (Rizzetto 2020).

Tourism

The Syrian coasts are located in the northwestern part of the Syrian territory and are affiliated with the governorates of Tartous in the south and Latakia in the north. The Syrian coast extends from the Tartous governorate in the south to Ras al-Bast in the north in two main governorates, Latakia and Tartous, with a length of 180km. It is about 35 nautical miles (65 km) from the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The Syrian coast includes many touristic, archaeological sites and many vacation spots (Al-Kanamah 2014, Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022), (Table 2).

Table 2. Tourist Attractions and Potentials on the Syrian Coast

	Potentials	Pictures
Jableh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A coastal city located 29 km south of Latakia. • It has an old port and is bordered by the sea to the west. • It includes an important Roman theater with a capacity of seven thousand spectators. • It includes the Sultan Ibrahim bin Al-Adham Mosque and Al-Mansoori Mosque. • It has ancient baths whose construction dates back to 900-1200 years. • The United Nations recognized the city of Jableh as an ancient city (Ministry of Tourism) 	
Banivas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal city. • The Banias River flows through it and the Sin River flows near it. • It has several important archaeological sites, including Al-Marqab Castle, the Seventh Tower, and Khan Bait Jabour. • It has a port for fishing and hiking. <p>It has an oil port and an oil refinery (Ministry of Tourism)</p>	
	Potentials	Pictures
Lattakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria's main port on the Mediterranean Sea. • An important city on the Mediterranean Sea. • It is one of the five cities established by Seleucus Nicator in the second century BC and named after his mother (Laodicea). • It contains some antiquities dating back to several historical periods. • It has economic importance as a vital lung and a major port for Syria. • It plays an excellent and active touristic role. With its beautiful nature, beaches, swimming pools, and forests, it is a tourist resort for recreation and swimming. • It is also a starting point for trips across the Syrian coast, whether on the beaches or in the green mountains. • Many events and art festivals are arranged in it. These tourism, cultural, sports, and artistic events attract Arab and foreign tourists. 	

Tartous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The city of Tartus is located in western Syria, on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. • A historical Phoenician city, which the Phoenicians called “Antarados”, and the Byzantines called “Tattoos”. • Opposite it lies the island of Arwad (Arados), a historical Syrian island that was a maritime kingdom. • The city includes ancient historical monuments from different civilizations. • It contains the first cathedral in the world, named after the Virgin, and today it has been turned into a museum that includes antiquities from the various Syrian eras and civilizations that passed through Tartous. • The tower of Tartous Castle, the main waterfront of the old city. • Church of the Knights Templar. • The Three Walls of the Old City. • Tartous Church - the popular bath. 	
Ras Al-Bassit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ras al-Bassit is located in the north of Latakia Governorate on the Syrian coast. • 50 km away from the city of Latakia. • The site has varied topography, starting with flatlands on the seashore and rising smoothly towards green hills and forests. • The site offers distinctive views of the Mediterranean, Jabal Al-Aqra, and Jazirat Al-Hammam with -wide open angles, which helps to enrich the visual perspective of the area. • The beach is sandy (Souda sand). <p>In the center of the site, there is the Sheikh Hassan River, which flows into the sea. (Ministry of Tourism)</p>	

Source: Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022. Developed by Alahi.

Tourism Planning Experiences

The movement of historical and schematic development in Syria did not start until the time of the French Mandate when the French made an urban survey of all the ancient, inhabited cities and archaeological areas such as Ugarit and Amrit. After that, due to the events and coups that Syria experienced until 1971, there was no noticeable organized development in Syrian cities, where the National Tourism Plan of 1974 AD was the first plan of a regional nature. Then, there was a gradual development of the organizational schemes for the major cities, but it was not based on the touristic purposes for the tourism sector, but rather the aim was in general to secure the housing and industrial needs.

Syrian coastal areas are important coastal areas facing the Mediterranean, in this context, there are international, local, regional, and sectoral studies in coastal spatial planning as well as collective studies involving international, local, and different disciplines (Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022, Al-Kanamah 2014), (Table 3).

Table 3. Planning Studies for the Tourism Sector in Syria

Date	Title	Company	Level	Scope
1974	National Tourism Plan	French company Otam	Regional	Syrian Coast Province
1988	Study of the tourism development area on the Syrian coast	General Company for Tourism Studies	Sectoral	Ras Al-Basit, Wadi Qandil, the northern and southern tourist city of Lattakia
2000	Study of the tourism development area on the Syrian coast	Domino's French company	Sectoral	Ras Al-Basit, Wadi Qandil, the northern and southern tourist city of Lattakia
2003	A management plan for the development of the tourism sector. Integrated management of the beach extending between Jbeil - Amchit (Lebanon) to Lattakia (Syria)	Center for Regional Priority Activities, European Union	Regional	The coastal area of Syria and Lebanon
2008	The project to develop the northern coastal region of Lattakia	A modernization project of municipal administration in cooperation with the Ministry of Local Administration	Sectoral	The northern tourist area of Lattakia
2011	Planning study for the Ras al- Bassit area	Consulting office (Damascus)	Sectoral	Ras al-Bassit area

Source: Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022, Al-Kanamah 2014.

The Current State of Tourism

Because of the damages and losses suffered by the tourism sector, which led to a complete cessation of tourism activity in several cities and regions that witnessed turbulent political events in Syria since the beginning of 2011, especially in hot spots, tourism activity declined significantly in all Syrian cities, even in the capital, Damascus. The number of tourists coming to the country decreased after Western countries and regional countries gave stern warnings to their citizens not to come to Syria.

With the decrease in the percentage of tourist arrivals and tourism investments in Syria by 98% due to the crisis, 371 hotel facilities, 17 of which are in BOT format, and nearly 400 tourism projects, and more than 258,000 workers were stopped working in the tourism sector and partner sectors. The value of direct and indirect damages amounted to approximately 330 billion Syrian pounds, equivalent to 25 billion pounds per month. Since the crisis that Syria is going through has cast a shadow on excessive tourism investments, some projects have stopped working due to their occurrence in hot regions or their proximity to these regions, and the sanctions imposed on Syria have led to the reluctance of most contracted management companies to keep up with these projects (Syrian Ministry of Tourism 2022, Syrian Ministry of Transport 2022).

Environmental Problems on the Syrian Coast

The most important problems that the coastal strip suffers from are environmental, social, economic, and urban-related problems, for example;

1. **Uncontrolled urban development along the coast:** Rapid urban and industrial development, the absence of pollution control and treatment

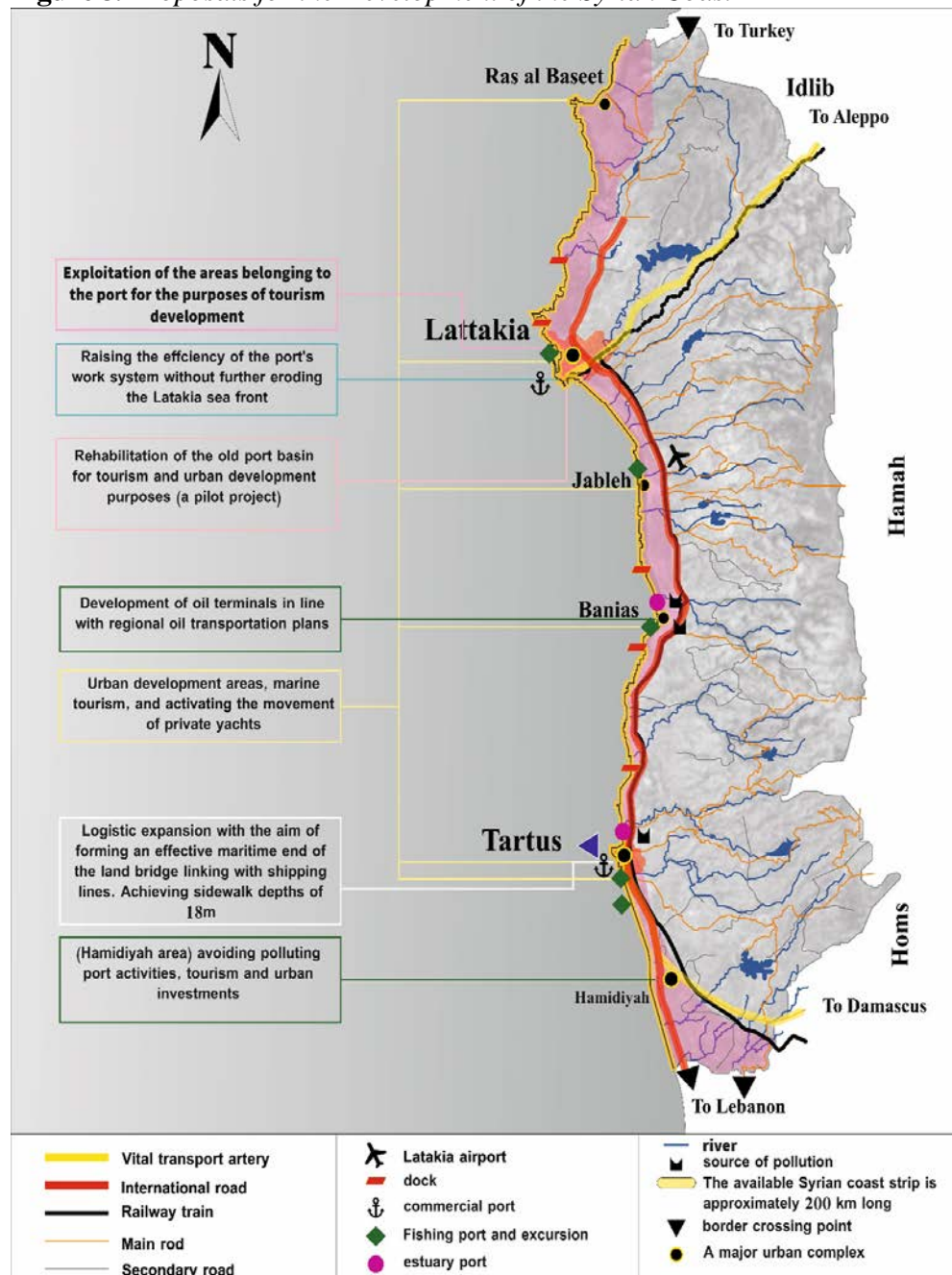
facilities, as well as uncontrolled development along the coastline, and the random expansion of uncontrolled low-density housing development have led to significant pollution of the coastal and marine environment.

2. **Water pollution:** It is the changes caused by groundwater, riverbeds, and air pollution in the marine environment that limit the effectiveness of beaches, seawater, coastal appearance, and tourism use.
3. **Degradation of vegetation cover and deforestation:** The depletion of forest cover is related to a variety of conflict-related socio-economic factors, including frequent wildfires, illegal logging, agricultural expansion, charcoal production, and weak state institutions in natural resources management and environmental development.
4. **Pollution by solid waste and beach waste:** It is caused by poorly protected landfills exposed to the wind (random dumps, piles of rubbish, and rubble from buildings and engineering projects), rubbish and plastic bags scattered on agricultural land, beaches, valleys, streams, or on roadsides, marine solid waste and dirt dumped on beaches.

Suggestions for Developing the Syrian Coastal Area in the Context of Sustainable Tourism Development

Although Syria has a comparative advantage in attracting tourists with its huge momentum in historical and cultural sites and its low prices, its share in world tourism is still far below its status and potential. Tourism in Syria still faces major obstacles that limit its growth, including the lack of investment in infrastructure and basic services, the lack of professional human and technical workforces, especially after the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, and most importantly, the lack of a policy to develop the tourism sector and promote and market its products. In addition, the tourism industry in Syria has been affected by the political and security events prevailing in the region, and the lack of security and stability will remain a major obstacle to the real development of this important sector (Figure 3, Table 4).

After reviewing the literature, material capabilities, and maps of the Syrian coast, a number of proposals were put forward for the development of the Syrian coastal area in the context of sustainable tourism development.

Figure 3. Proposals for the Development of the Syrian Coast

Source: The Directorate of regional planning in Syria. Developed by Alali. (13 May 2022).

Table 4. *Suggestions for Developing the Syrian Coastal Area in the Context of Sustainable Tourism Development*

	Objectives	Indications/Suggestion
The Environment	Improving the quality and continuity of the environment and landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the area of green land A survey of the general concept indicating general satisfaction with environmental conditions
	Minimizing the impact of new facilities on the interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of new facilities taking into account traditional construction compared to previous years
	Reducing the impact of transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the number of cars in the city center compared to previous years
	Reducing the amount of waste (especially on the beach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of recycling bins on the beach Increasing the number of trash cans on the beach
	Reducing untreated wastewater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of seawater quality manifested by blue quality
	Improving the landscape on the beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of trees on the beach and in the back area parallel to the beach
Economy	Improving the quality of the tourism product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing at least two tourist attractions based on traditional implementations
	Extension of the tourism season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of days of the tourist season to more than 120 days
	Increasing the quality of visitor experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The results of the surveys aimed at measuring tourists' understanding of the quality of the experience indicate that the expectation of quality service is increasing.
	Developing the tourism brands for the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A survey of tourists shows their recognition of the distinctive image of the studied sector
	Defining and applying the concept of destination management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a tourism development plan
	Developing simultaneous marketing of the sector as a unique and distinct destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing clear intent visual campaigns
	Introducing the image of catering, recreation, and accommodation facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting surveys on the perception of tourists on any topic
	Increasing the local population's share of tourism income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing domestic revenues from tourism
Social	Increasing the proportion of local products in the tourism sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of hotels offering local products Increasing the number of restaurants serving meals and local foods Increasing the number of accommodation facilities that reinforce the traditional identity
	Supporting the quality of life in the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing GDP
	Respecting the cultural and historical heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect for cultural and historical heritage should be expanded

Discussion

The aim must be to develop the Syrian coast and beaches as a distinct destination for tourism within the natural environment and present them as a high-quality tourism site, therefore, the coast was divided into several sectors to make it easier to deal with the coast.

Sector (1) Ras al-Bassit: The development and reserves of Ras Al-Bassit and avoiding continuous and intense construction near the sea provide natural spaces and create the greatest pleasure for tourists.

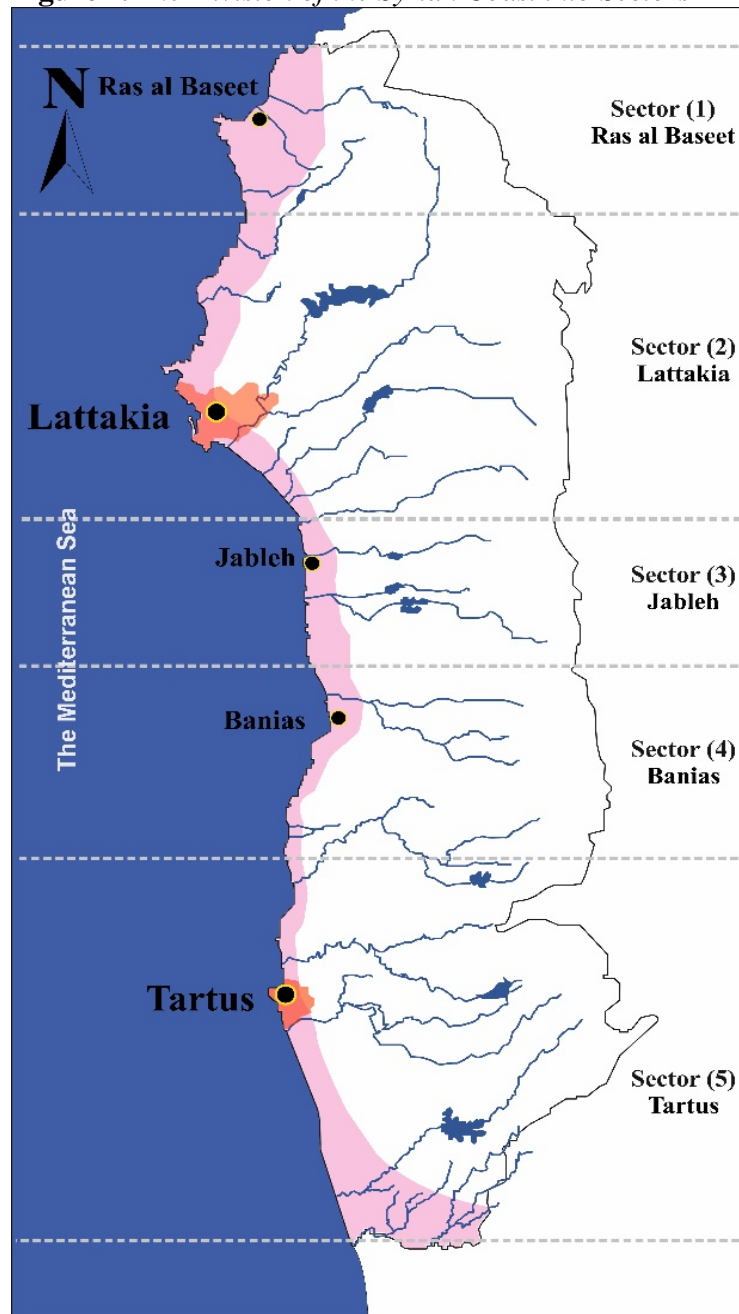
Sector (2) Latakia: It is logical that the unjust tourism sector development of Lattakia should be stopped and that this is accompanied by a high-level tourism plan that allows the area to renew the depleted resources and relieves pressure on the polluted environment.

Sector (3) Jableh: The area constitutes a planning area for diverse and sustainable tourism according to the region's rich environmental, cultural, and heritage data.

Sector (4) Baniyas: The unjust tourism development of the Baniyas sector must be stopped, and this must be accompanied by a high-level tourism plan that secures the area's renewal of isolated resources and relieves pressure on the polluted environment in estuaries due to oil and industrial pollutants.

Sector (5) Tartous: The area bounded between the Protectorate of the Prophet Matta, the archaeological fortress of Suleiman, and the Sheikh Dib Citadel constitutes an important and rich tourist planning area that is connected to multiple service axes, providing great flexibility in dealing with mountainous ridges and ensuring sustainability in tourism development (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *The Division of the Syrian Coast into Sectors*



Source: Developed by Alali (17 May 2022).

Recommendations

As a result of the above research and on-site monitoring analysis, the following recommendations should be realized in the Syrian coastal areas considering principles of sustainable tourism:

Economical Sustainability

1. Economic growth

- Expanding Lattakia Airport and establishing an investment mechanism in the tourism sector (increasing international travel and activating a contracting carrier system and air transport between governorates).
- Encouraging and organizing internal and external cruise ships and striving to complete the construction of ports in Ras Al-Bassit, Jableh, and Baniyas, and achieving the integration of tourist ports.
- Using scientific methods to gain more attractive and relevant economic ownership while preserving historical influences and ensuring sustainability factors.

2. Local development

- Improving all tourism features and possibilities in the field of investment and formulating attractive and high-quality tourism products that meet the needs of the tourism market.
- Diversifying travel and product models, targeting new travel markets, and developing existing travel markets.
- Investing in Archeology and History

3. Quality of workforce

- Establishing tourist ports and modern passenger terminals separate from commercial ports and terminals.

Social Sustainability

4. Ensuring social participation and gender equality

- Improving the level of service for the existing tourist areas:

5. Visitor satisfaction

- Creating landscaped gardens with pavilions and simple service toilets around the archaeological sites.

6. Local oversight

- Arranging an exhibition of marine tourism on the Syrian coast, inviting Mediterranean countries, organizations, and travel agencies.
- Religious tourism can be encouraged.

7. Social welfare

- Improving the level of service for cultural and archaeological sites.

8. Cultural richness

- Building Phoenician cities that simulate ancient city life and create a market for handicrafts that inspire life in Ugarit and Amrit

Environmental Sustainability

9. Physical safety

- Developing tourism management plans for archaeological sites and implementing sound and light shows at the sites.

10. Biodiversity

- Establishment of zoos within an integrated ecological framework and the use of unusual local biotypes (biodiversity).

11. Effective use of resources

- Building a comprehensive tourism project, providing facilities, encouraging qualified investment, and achieving balanced and sustainable tourism development.
- Encouraging investment in projects and activities such as water sports city cable cars, etc.
- Encouraging eco-tourism (nature-friendly) and exploration tourism to provide the needs and equipment for investing in the existing reserves.

12. Environmental impact

- Developing and strengthening infrastructures necessary to build tourist facilities.
- Developing travel vehicles and modernizing border crossings and tourist service centers.

Conclusion

As a result of the determination of the on-site observations, interviews with users, photographing and map studies, and an analysis of the Syrian coastal areas and in line with the suggestions and criticisms of the area, we suggest that it is necessary to develop the Syrian coast for tourism considering its contribution to the sustainability of the area and development of tourism revenues.

Therefore, in addition to increasing the environmental awareness of all segments of society and the tendency to solve environmental problems, it is necessary to increase the interest in the protection of the environment and natural resources. It also improves infrastructure and public services. Linear urban growth along the beach must be halted. The natural beaches, water resources, and marine habitats should be protected from pollution. In addition, the expansion of polluting industrial investments must be reduced and the environmental sensitivity of those in charge must be increased. The role of oil ports and estuaries for sustainable development must be activated in a highly efficient and technical way. Attention should be paid to the development of regulatory mechanisms and plans to ensure various development needs-investments and housing demands.

In this direction, the results of the study are as follows:

1. It is very important not to abandon and urbanize the Ras Al-Bassit, which has large green spaces, a sandy beach, and coasts where the mountains meet

the sea in line with sustainable eco-tourism and the prevention of marine pollution.

2. Lattakia, which has a lot of tourism potential, can contribute to sustainable tourism if the areas belonging to the port are exploited for the purposes of tourism development and archaeological areas are operated in line with sustainable tourism. It is also important to stop the uncontrolled urban sprawl on the coastline and reduce pollution caused by waste and sewage water.
3. Jableh is the area between Siano Hill, the Castle of Bani Qahtan, and the Cedars and Shuh Reserve, since this region has diversification based on rich environmental, cultural, and heritage facts, it is very important to consider it as an ecological tourism area.
4. In Baniyas, there is an oil refinery and an oil port, so if pressure is reduced on the polluted environment due to oil estuaries and industrial pollutants, this will contribute to environmental development.
5. Tarsus is an important area rich in tourism potential. Therefore, the pollution of ports and urban activities, which negatively affect sustainable environmental development and tourism investment, must be avoided.

The development of coastal areas and the protection and sustainability of the seas are extremely important. We have to keep the water clean; we have to protect the ecosystem because these are the parts of the cycle. In this direction, it is extremely important to use the coasts with the understanding of ecological and sustainable tourism.

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