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## ***The Political Economy of Tourism in Tunisia***

by ROBERT A. POIRIER and STEPHEN WRIGHT\*

THE African continent currently faces severe political and economic crises. Massive debts, unpopular structural adjustment programmes (S.A.P.s), spiralling population growth, democratisation, and régime transformation are all testing national cohesion. Externally, the rapidly changing global environment, marked by the demise of the cold war and the continuing difficulties being experienced in Europe and the Middle East, also provides immense challenges to African policy-makers.

The arguments about how best to tackle these and other problems revolve around contrasting solutions. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (E.C.A.) and many member-states are very keen to seize the opportunity for renewed growth through increased regional co-operation, as well as national self-reliance and self-sustainable development, thereby limiting dependence upon external resources.<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, promoted primarily by the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) and the World Bank,<sup>2</sup> is the neo-modernisation strategy of revitalising Africa through renewed foreign investment and management, as well as increased privatisation and diversification within domestic economies. Along the continuum lie many intermediary positions.

For many years, revenue from tourism has been perceived as a possible saviour for some of Africa's most beleaguered economies, as a means to generate much-needed foreign exchange, and at the same time to improve services, employment, and infrastructure that will enhance 'development'. Such optimism has been based on the knowledge that the economic potential of tourism has long been self-

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<sup>1</sup> See U.N. E.C.A., *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation* (Addis Ababa, 1991). Also, Ann Seidman and Frederick Anang (eds.), *Twenty-First-Century Africa: towards a new vision of self-sustainable development* (Trenton, NJ, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See, especially, World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa. From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: long-term perspective study* (Washington, DC, 1989).

evident, at least at the global level. According to the World Tourism Organisation, overall receipts in 1991 were \$278,000 million, of which Africa accounted for only approximately 1.5 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

However, tourism in North Africa accounted for as much as 14.8 per cent of total export revenues in 1989: earnings for Egypt were \$2,400 million, for Morocco \$1,100 million, and for Tunisia \$1,000 million.<sup>4</sup> Although Tunisia's earnings from this sector dropped slightly to \$941 million in 1990, and precipitously the following year to \$674 million as a result of the Gulf war, government estimates for 1992 show an anticipated reversal of the decline, with revenues close to \$900 million.<sup>5</sup> Despite these figures, doubts remain concerning the prospects for tourism in other regions of the continent, given the lack of infrastructure, the paucity of resources, and the limited attractions of some areas, including the existence and/or threat of political instability. Nevertheless, in view of sub-Saharan Africa's economic marginalisation and malaise, it is somewhat surprising that so few leaders seem to have encouraged serious dialogue on the potential financial advantages of persuading many more visitors to stay/travel in their country.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Tunisia, a policy of promoting tourism and, in particular, 'package' tours, has been consciously pursued by the Government since the 1960s. This makes the country an ideal case-study in order to assess the benefits and hazards of creating what is undoubtedly both a special and increasingly important sector of the economy, and so may allow us to draw some conclusions of relevance to the rest of the continent.

#### THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

The 33-year personalistic rule of President Habib Bourguiba was ended as the outcome of a peaceful coup led by Zine Abidine Ben Ali in November 1987. Since then Tunisia has experienced a number of socio-economic and political changes, leading generally in the direction of pluralism and openness. Many political prisoners were released, a constitutional amendment limited the tenure of the President, and the ruling *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique* (R.C.D.) was for the first time successfully challenged and defeated in municipal elections. In

<sup>3</sup> World Tourism Organisation, *World Tourism, 1970-1991* (Madrid, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin: economic series* (London), 28 February 1990, p. 9855.

<sup>5</sup> *Nord Sud Export* (Paris), 27 November 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Wright and Robert A. Poirier, 'Tourism and Economic Development in Africa', in *TransAfrica Forum* (New Brunswick), 8, 1, Spring 1991, pp. 13-27.

other words, there is evidence to support the Government's claim that the country's polity has been reformed.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, so-called Islamic 'fundamentalists' have posed the greatest threat to the R.C.D. via their movement known as *An-Nahda*. This supported 'independent' candidates in the 1989 national and 1990 municipal elections who won 14 and 30 per cent of the votes, respectively. The fact that the organisation has not been permitted to exist as a legal opposition party, and that some of its leaders have been detained, inevitably raises questions about the Government's commitment to democratic reform, as well as the overall stability of the state.<sup>8</sup> The repression of *An-Nahda* has been openly criticised by the Tunisian Human Rights League and by Amnesty International, and the U.S. State Department is reported to have made a formal protest.<sup>9</sup> This official harassment of the Islamists undoubtedly contributed to the civil unrest experienced on several university campuses, as well as the plots to overthrow Ben Ali in May and September 1991.

The stunning electoral 'victory' of the *Front islamique du salut* (F.I.S.) in the first (and, so far, only) round of general elections in Algeria, in December 1991, sent shock waves throughout the Maghreb, and is bound to encourage future challenges to Tunisia's political leadership. It is also reasonable to expect that the demonstrated strength of F.I.S. militants, as well as the assassination in June 1992 of Mohamed Boudiaf, the Algerian President of the army-backed *Haute comité de l'état*,<sup>10</sup> will have a negative impact on the tourist industry in the North African littoral, even if not nearly as damaging as that caused by the Gulf war during the previous year.

On the economic front in Tunisia, President Ben Ali has taken steps to reinforce the liberalisation trend begun by Bourguiba in 1985, thereby placating the I.M.F. and Western banks.<sup>11</sup> The 1987-91 five-year plan called for a major reduction in the number of state enterprises, although the term 'privatisation' was not officially used.

<sup>7</sup> See L. B. Ware, 'Ben Ali's Constitutional Coup in Tunisia', and Dirk Vandewalle, 'From the New State to the New Era: toward a Second Republic in Tunisia', in *The Middle East Journal* (Washington, DC), 42, 4, Autumn 1988. See also, I. William Zartman, 'The Conduct of Political Reform: the path toward democracy', in Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia: the political economy of reform* (Boulder, 1991), pp. 9-28.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Halliday, 'Tunisia's Uncertain Future', in *Middle East Report* (Washington, DC), March-April 1990, pp. 25-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Middle East International* (London), 28 June 1991, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> See Mohand Salah Tah, 'The Arduous Democratisation Process in Algeria', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (Cambridge), 30, 3, September 1992, pp. 397-419.

<sup>11</sup> Clement Henry Moore, 'Tunisian Banking: politics of adjustment and the adjustment of politics', in Zartman (ed.), op. cit. pp. 67-97.

According to Abdelsatar Grissa, the Tunisian state enterprises had 'become a *fetter* rather than a *factor* of economic development', and 'the principal cause of the growth of the country's external debt'.<sup>12</sup>

In order to encourage foreign investments, the Government has eliminated most restrictions on the repatriation of profits, and has generally facilitated the transfer of resources from the public to the private sector.<sup>13</sup> The improvement in external relations following the establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union (A.M.U.) in February 1989, combined with overtures to the European Community, led to renewed external interest in investments in Tunisia, including 'the purchase of three important privatized hotels (1,650 beds) by a Swiss group'.<sup>14</sup> The geographical location of North Africa, adjacent to Europe, continues to be an asset that can be further exploited to increase both tourism and general trade.

However, the success of Tunisia's structural adjustment measures has so far only been moderate. Political uncertainties, combined with 'natural' disasters such as plagues of locusts and droughts,<sup>15</sup> have harmed the economy sufficiently to cause external investors to be wary of the tourist sector. It was reported in 1991, albeit partly as the result of the Gulf war, that Tunisia expected to lose \$867 million worth of exports, as well as capital inflows of \$204 million from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab funds, thereby leading to a flat rate of 'growth' rather than by the anticipated 4.5 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

#### TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

The Government's apparent shift to privatisation is more a consequence of necessity generated by the failure and inefficiency of state-run enterprises, combined with prodding by external interests and agencies, rather than any strong ideological commitment.<sup>17</sup> Tunisia's leaders have obviously tried to pursue a wide variety of strategies designed to maximise their country's comparative advantage in international trade. Resort tourism has been perceived by policy-makers as one of the best ways to improve the country's infrastructure while simultaneously becoming since 1974 the second largest earner of foreign exchange. With some 800 miles of spectacular beaches on the

<sup>12</sup> Abdelsatar Grissa, 'The Tunisian State Enterprises and Privatization Policy', in *ibid.* p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Vandewalle, *loc. cit.* p. 616.

<sup>14</sup> Grissa, *loc. cit.* pp. 124-5.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher S. Potter and Allan T. Showler, 'The Desert Locust: agricultural and environmental impacts', in Zartman (ed.), *op. cit.* pp. 153-66.

<sup>16</sup> *Middle East International*, 3 May 1991, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Grissa, *loc. cit.* p. 121.

Mediterranean coastline and some intriguing historical sites, and with multitudes of eager European tourists looking for ways to spend their sizeable 'discretionary' incomes, it is not surprising that the promotion of tourism has been a key policy in the pursuit of economic growth.

Much has been written elsewhere as to the extent to which, if at all, tourism produces overall net benefits rather than harmful setbacks for 'developing countries'.<sup>18</sup> There appear to be two main analytical approaches:

(1) This requires an examination of tourism as part of a larger set of interrelated political, social, and economic issues that go beyond the country-specific focus. It considers wider questions regarding core-periphery relations and the management of international tourism, and requires measuring 'costs' or 'consequences' that are difficult to identify.

(2) This depends upon relatively straightforward quantitative measures of specific economic indicators, such as earnings or jobs created. It emphasises performance criteria, which are considered to be somewhat independent of other sectors, and is open to the criticism that it ignores, or is insensitive to, the broader societal issues raised by tourism.

We wish to synthesise these approaches by examining the impact of tourism in the widest possible context: (i) economic, and (ii) environmental, social, and cultural. The first includes those factors such as foreign-exchange earnings, G.N.P., employment, and costs, as well as the infrastructure needed to support tourism.<sup>19</sup> The second refers to the physical impact on land, water, air, and other natural resources caused by the influx of tourists, and by the construction of facilities for the seasonal population increases and movements within the country, as well as those factors that impinge on social and cultural change, including language, attitudes, behaviour, and beliefs, all important issues in an Islamic country faced with an introspective evaluation of its religious bases.

It is clear that the strategy adopted for the development of tourism in Tunisia has attempted to manage the impact of both sets of factors in order to minimise negative costs and maximise perceived benefits.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Emanuel de Kadt (ed.), *Tourism: passport to development?* (New York and Oxford, 1979); Alister Mathieson and Geoffrey Wall, *Tourism: economic, physical and social impacts* (Harlow, 1982); and John Lea, *Tourism and Development in the Third World* (London, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> The traditional view that the industry has proved to be more of a burden than a blessing to infrastructural development is strongly challenged by the World Tourism Organisation, *Economic Review of World Tourism: tourism in the context of economic crisis and the dominance of the service economy* (Madrid, 1988).

TABLE I  
Tunisia's Lodging Establishments and Bed Capacity, 1970-91<sup>a</sup>

Year	Establishments	Bed Capacity	Mean Capacity
1970	212	34,297	162
1975	273	62,397	229
1980	319	71,529	224
1985	420	93,275	222
1986	434	98,668	227
1987	443	100,456	227
1988	465	104,854	226
1991	532	123,188	232

<sup>a</sup> Source: Office national de tourisme tunisien (O.N.T.T.), *Le Tourisme tunisien en chiffres* (Tunis, 1991).

However, before focusing upon these issues in detail, it is important to consider the Tunisian tourist market in terms of its 'consumers': from where do they originate? how and why are they attracted? and what socio-economic and political constraints are consequently placed upon the policy-makers?

Over the last decade, some 80 per cent of tourists to Tunisia have been Europeans, while many of the others have come from Libya,<sup>20</sup> a significantly high number by African standards for intra-regional tourism. These figures have fluctuated widely in response to political unrest. For example, during the mid-1970s, when tensions ran high between the régimes in Tunis and Tripoli, the number of Libyan tourists fell dramatically. Similarly, during the 1991 Gulf war, the number of European visitors to Tunisia fell by 64 per cent, although it soon recovered afterwards.<sup>21</sup>

Tourism's sensitivity to political unrest or war, either within a country or region, has been well documented.<sup>22</sup> Events that have little direct bearing on a particular area or resort can seriously undermine its attractiveness for visitors: the game parks of Kenya suffered badly in the 1970s during the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia, and the tourist industry became decimated in Sri Lanka during the state of emergency in the 1980s. By way of contrast, it should be noted that the

<sup>20</sup> For a general review of Tunisian tourism, see Economist Intelligence Unit, *International Tourism Reports* (London), 4, 1988, pp. 20-39.

<sup>21</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin: economic series*, 28, 10 October-November 1991, pp. 10571-2.

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Victor B. Teye, 'Liberation Wars and Tourism Development in Africa: the case of Zambia', and 'Coups d'Etat and African Tourism: a study of Ghana', in *Annals of Tourism Research* (Elmsford, NY), 13, 4, 1986, pp. 589-608, and 15, 3, 1988, pp. 329-56.



North African states, at present, account for 60 per cent of the continent's tourist revenues, a result of both their geographical proximity to Europe and perceived political stability.

All this relates to the second issue of how to attract visitors to a country. The 'selling' of overseas holidays has often little to do with facts. European tourists have to be persuaded to visit relatively unknown African locations rather than the nearer and 'safer' resorts that have major tourism programmes.<sup>23</sup> Often this marketing leads to stereotyping – 'lush jungles' and 'tropical paradises' – as well as factually incorrect material designed to sell the 'pleasure periphery' to Europeans.<sup>24</sup>

Tunisia has felt the need to portray itself as a European destination. Although currently taking only two per cent of all Mediterranean tourism, policy-makers believe there is greater long-term benefit in Tunisia being perceived as a sun-and-sand European/Mediterranean location, rather than an 'Arab' state. Such a reorientation, while helping to increase receipts from tourists, has serious social and cultural repercussions for the indigenous inhabitants. However, given the economic/financial advantages of the Common Market in 1993, as well as the opening up of Eastern Europe, some analysts believe that more and more holiday-makers will be attracted to vacation in their own continent, rather than travel to more 'exotic' locations.<sup>25</sup>

#### THE ECONOMICS OF TOURISM

Tunisia's few modern hotels were concentrated in the capital and other cities until the Government decided in 1962 to focus on tourism as an integral part of its overall development strategy. As will be seen from Table 1, the 'lodging establishments' and 'bed capacity' more than doubled and tripled, respectively, from 1970 to 1991, making Tunisia one of the fastest growing tourist economies in the world. This was achieved despite an overall decline of 34 per cent in investments between 1984 and 1991, from Tunisian dinars 113.2 million to TD 78.8 million.

<sup>23</sup> Allan M. Williams and Gareth Shaw (eds.), *Tourism and Economic Development: West European experiences* (London, 1991 edn).

<sup>24</sup> See Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes: international tourism and the pleasure periphery* (London, 1975); Jonathan Crush and Paul Wellings, 'The Southern African Pleasure Periphery, 1966–83', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21 4, December 1983, pp. 673–98; and Mansouri Mohammed, 'Moroccan Tourism Image in France', in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15, 3, 1988, pp. 558–61.

<sup>25</sup> David L. Edgell, Sr., *International Tourism Policy* (New York, 1990), pp. 120–1.



From its origins in the early 1960s, tourism in Tunisia has primarily been a mass phenomenon; that is, designed around the 'packaged' group-holiday resort concept. In fact, approximately 80 per cent of all visitors (primarily European) to Tunisia come in groups.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the policy emphasis has evolved to support gigantic, highly integrated 'tourist enclaves' that provide a full range of services. These amount to an extension of European culture within Tunisia that, *inter alia*, provides a major challenge to the nation's cultural fabric.

Tourism was initially expanded in the marginal areas between Hammamet–Nabeul and Djerba, and the erection of hotels along this littoral served to accentuate the existing concentration of cities, infrastructure, industry, and, consequently, the economic/political power bases of the country. In the early years, the Government was responsible for 40 per cent of the accommodation facilities constructed between 1960 and 1965, but thereafter the development of the tourist sector was taken over by private investors, both domestic and foreign, who were responsible for almost all the new buildings after the end of the 1960s. During the following decade, an ambitious and sustained programme of expansion saw the number of lodging establishments and beds rise by 49 and 84 per cent, respectively, between 1972 and 1982.

The majority of hotels are still located in the vicinity of Tunis, although most beds are to be found in establishments that have access to the beaches of Hammamet–Nabeul, followed by those of the 'Sahel' (a section of the eastern littoral) and the Djerba–Gabes islands. This is not surprising: the facilities in the capital are old and relatively small, whereas the coastal hotels are newer and, on average, much larger, and have been built expressly to cater for the growing numbers of European visitors seeking sun, sea, and sand.

The impact of tourism on the Tunisian economy has been substantial although, as is normally the case, sometimes difficult to see and, given its 'multiplier' effect, often hard to measure.<sup>27</sup> Proponents of this sector's further development have argued that tourism can not only ease the endemic shortage of foreign exchange, as well as reduce urban under- and unemployment, but also provide both price and income elastic substitutes for traditional exports that face less secure futures.

Tunisian trade statistics indicate tourism's all-important rôle in the nation's economy: in fact, the 'industry' occupies the primary position

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Ryan, *Recreational Tourism: a social science perspective* (London, 1991), ch. 5.

TABLE 2  
Percentage Distribution of Hotel Facilities by Region, 1986-8<sup>a</sup>

Region	1986		1987		1988	
	Hotels	Capacity	Hotels	Capacity	Hotels	Capacity
Tunis	27	13	28	14	27	14
Hammamet-Nabeul	19	29	19	28	18	28
Sahel	26	36	26	36	26	37
Djerba-Gabes	15	16	14	16	15	16
Gafsa	8	3	8	3	8	3
Bizerte	6	4	6	3	6	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>a</sup> Source: O.N.T.T., *Le Tourisme tunisien en chiffres* (Tunis, 1988).

TABLE 3  
Coverage of Trade Deficits by Receipts from Tourism, 1970-88<sup>a</sup>

Year	Imports TDm	Exports TDm	Deficit TDm	Receipts TDm	Coverage (%)
1970	160.4	95.8	64.6	31.6	48.7
1975	572.8	345.6	227.2	115.2	50.7
1980	1,428.4	904.8	523.6	259.7	49.6
1985	2,131.4	1,435.1	696.3	415.0	59.6
1986	2,303.7	1,403.7	900.0	385.8	42.9
1987	2,509.1	1,770.7	738.4	550.2	74.5
1988	3,167.0	2,055.5	1,111.5	1,080.0	97.2

<sup>a</sup> Source: as for Table 2.

for products and services exported.<sup>28</sup> The significance of this sector is highlighted by the fact that it contributed TD 200 million in foreign receipts in 1981, which equated to 44 per cent of the trade deficit. By 1988, only seven years later, these figures had dramatically increased to TD1,080 million, or 97 per cent of the trade deficit, as may be seen in Table 3. This explains the Government's ongoing commitment to develop this sector still further.

Apart from being such an important source of foreign exchange, tourism also provides a great deal of work because it is essentially a labour-intensive economic activity. A traditional political justification for state enterprises has been the provision of jobs, albeit sometimes

<sup>28</sup> Tourism is normally classified as an 'export' in Tunisia's trade statistics.

wasteful and redundant.<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt that Tunisia's unemployment problem is serious, and that it carries the potential of social and political disruption, especially when combined with the rise of militant Islamists. Official data for 1987 showed that more than 400,000 Tunisians were unemployed, which amounted to 14 per cent of the 'active population', while an additional 40,000 to 60,000 enter the job market annually.<sup>30</sup>

Privatisation has increased the pressure to generate more employment, and tourism has played a rôle in reducing the problem, at least to some extent, in the private sector. Indeed, an uninterrupted rise in the number of jobs in this multi-facet industry was experienced in every year between 1962 and 1988,<sup>31</sup> when it accounted for 39,000 in full (and a further 6,000 in seasonal) employment, as well as some 120,000 in indirect employment.<sup>32</sup> According to the *Office national de tourisme tunisien* (O.N.T.T.), a 1991 increase of 6,654 new beds resulted in the creation of 2,661 jobs, thereby bringing the total for direct employment in this sector to 49,275, an increase of 10,000 in just three years.<sup>33</sup> Thus, export promotion that continues to generate additional work is a priority of the most recent five-year plan.

A study carried out by O.N.T.T. in 1988 estimated the number of jobs directly created by tourism at between 0.88 and 1.12 per hotel bed, depending on occupancy rates, a figure comparable to findings in other developing countries.<sup>34</sup> Because it is difficult to obtain all the relevant facts about employment in handicrafts, the data include both those whose activities could be regarded as a direct outcome of tourism, such as the retailers of souvenirs, as well as the producers of crafts whose work is obviously closely linked to tourism. Classified as 'indirect', however, was the general retail employment generated by the purchases of such sundries as films, cigarettes, and newspapers, and this may partly counterbalance the overestimate from including craftsmen among the direct employees. It is very difficult to calculate with any accuracy the number of underemployed involved in tourism, such as the street vendors and touts, as well as those in the shadowy fringes of prostitution.

According to a survey undertaken by the O.N.T.T. in 1975, hotels in Tunisia typically employed young persons: 33 per cent were less

<sup>29</sup> Grissa, loc. cit. p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> Institut national de la statistique, Tunis, 1987.

<sup>31</sup> O.N.T.T., 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, op. cit. p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> O.N.T.T., 1991.

<sup>34</sup> See Reginald Herbold Green, 'Towards Planning Tourism in Developing Countries', in de Kadt (ed.), op. cit. pp. 79-100. Also, Ahmed Smaoui, 'Tourism and Employment in Tunisia', in *ibid.* pp. 101-10.

than 23 years old, and only 5 per cent were within ten years of retirement age. Females accounted for 16 per cent of all tourism personnel, and were usually relegated to low-wage house-cleaning responsibilities, thereby confirming Cynthia Enloe's observation that they 'are presumed to be naturally capable of cleaning, washing, cooking, serving. Since tourism companies need precisely those jobs done, they can keep their labor costs low if they can define [them] as women's work.'<sup>35</sup>

The mobility of those working in hotels tends to be high because of the seasonal tourist fluctuations. It was reported in 1975 that the cumulative effect of job changes had resulted in a staff turnover rate of 29 per cent every three years. This proportion, although high, is not a serious sectoral problem because it refers, in most cases, to movements between hotels. In fact, the drop-out rate from the industry is low.

As regards the educational background of those employed in tourism, the same O.N.T.T. survey found that about a fifth had no formal education; 45 per cent had some primary education, 32 per cent had attended secondary school, and 2 per cent had been to a university. Some supervisory staff had benefited from specialised courses in France, although most employees continued to be trained on the job. The importance of improved 'service' had been quickly recognised by the Tunisian Government, and hence several schools and institutes had been established to provide the needed expertise in this sector. In 1988 alone, over 300 diplomas in various hotel/restaurant management and tourism programmes were awarded.<sup>36</sup>

The situation in Tunisia, however, is similar to that which prevails in most African countries, in that the labour requirements of tourism are especially 'suited' to the prevailing economic conditions, namely relatively high unemployment, and generally low levels of education, skills, and literacy. When compared with most other industries, tourism can employ people with relatively little specialisation. Thus, it is possible to absorb a large proportion of the work force from traditional sectors of the economy with a minimum of training.

Tourism creates relatively few managerial and professional posts, and these are often filled from other sectors and/or by specially recruited expatriates. The expansion of this industry, and others in Tunisia, led to an exodus of those from agriculture and fishing who believed that work in either a factory or a hotel was less back-breaking and offered the advantage of a fixed income. Considering that almost

<sup>35</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> O.N.T.T., 1988.

all Tunisia's beaches are prime locations for package-type holidays, efforts to maximise that advantage have contributed to a disproportionate growth along the Mediterranean littoral, at the expense of the central and southern regions of the country, and often to the detriment of agricultural production.<sup>37</sup>

Such skewed and uneven development makes it difficult to gauge the real impact of tourism on employment. This reaches beyond a narrowly defined destination area, so that a concentration simply upon where the tourists are located can mask changes elsewhere. Since new jobs are often part-time, or taken by those seeking a second source of income, tourism helps to ensure that those already working are more fully utilised, but may not lead to an appreciable decrease in unemployment. The highly seasonal nature of tourism inevitably contributes to fluctuations in both local and regional work. Although attractive to those who only seek seasonal jobs, notably students, such temporary requirements tend to appeal to those on the periphery of the labour force, and can discourage the establishment of non-tourist industries and activities in those areas.

As might be expected, the financial returns from tourism peak in Europe's summer months, with occupancy rates approaching 100 per cent, as opposed to round 84 per cent from November to March. However, aggressive marketing strategies are promoting Tunisia as a 'winter sun' destination, and the Government hopes to offset seasonal fluctuations by cashing in on the growing affluence of those with an increasing propensity to take vacations also in December and January. The overall dominance of Europeans in the pattern rises in the summer and falls slightly in the winter, albeit then compensated to some extent by the importance of North African tourists, primarily from Libya.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

The most common criticism of tourism in the Third World has been its alleged harmful impact on local environments and cultures. The 'greening' of the industry, though difficult given the constraints imposed by structural adjustments, has become a much touted objective. The 1989 Hague Declaration on Tourism, for example, called for its promotion in terms of 'sustainable development', and sought to encourage 'alternative forms... which favour closer contact and understanding between tourists and receiving populations,

<sup>37</sup> Barbara K. Larson, 'Rural Development in Central Tunisia: constraints and coping strategies', in Zartman (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 143.

preserve cultural identity and offer distinctive and original tourist products and facilities.<sup>38</sup> Although difficult to measure with any degree of precision, tourism has clearly benefited other sectors in Tunisia, notably agriculture by promoting food production for consumption in hotels and restaurants. In the Sousse/Monastir region, for example, the irrigated perimeters of Chott Meriem and Bekalta furnish most of the fruits and vegetables consumed by tourists.

The competition for water, however, is particularly acute in this semi-arid country, not least because of the difficulty in providing an adequate supply for the Sahelian region, and the ensuing conflicts with other consumers cause significant social repercussions. Ever since the beginning of the century, various areas in the Sahel without water resources of their own have been obtaining what they need from the Haffouz basin west of Kairouan. A little further north, farmers destroyed the wells that had been sunk on their irrigated land at Jilma in an effort to supply water for Sfax. In 1970, a dam was constructed on the Nabhana river for an agricultural project north of Sousse, but much of that water is still being diverted to the city to help satisfy the needs of more and more tourists. In the Hammamet–Nabeul area, open conflict between citrus growers and hotel owners led the Government in 1973 to finance a large-scale project to pipe water from the Mejerda, Tunisia's main river, to safeguard the citrus fruits of the Cap Bon peninsula.

The competition for water is best illustrated by two figures: whereas the average daily consumption *per capita* of Sahelian residents is 60 litres, those living within the 'tourist enclaves' use as much as 300 litres per day. Tensions are bound to rise when local inhabitants see hotel owners watering their gardens or filling up their swimming pools, especially if/when the supply continues to be cut off sporadically in other parts of the city. Future development plans may need to include the construction of sea-water desalination plants specifically for tourist establishments, possibly financed by additional charges for all future accommodation.

The 1987–91 development plan of the *Office national de tourisme tunisien* recognised that the existing physical and human environment 'does not contribute to the improvement of Tunisia's image', and has a detrimental effect on the tourism industry. This assessment forced the Government to draw attention to the problems associated with public hygiene, security, beach hustlers, and inadequate public transport: the municipalities needed to be sensitised 'on the problem of garbage

<sup>38</sup> Edgell, *op. cit.* Appendix K, Principle III.

removal, beach maintenance, highways, ... public lighting, and insect control'. Although short on specifics or budgetary allocations, the plan called for the improvement of public transportation, emergency medical services, and the establishment of a fund to improve the environment.<sup>39</sup>

The cultural impact of tourism upon Tunisia has been immense, not least because the industry's enclaves can be understood as 'parks' within which European values and activities reign supreme. Contact with indigenous Tunisian culture tends to be packaged rather than spontaneous, contrived rather than original, whether in terms of organised exhibitions or mass-produced artifacts. Common sights in the West and elsewhere, such as scantily clad visitors on beaches, and open affection between men and women, offend many Tunisians. Tourism has undoubtedly increased the demand for prostitution, though it has not reached the scale of Thailand or the Philippines, nor has the fear of AIDS. The predominance of French and Italian programmes on television also serves to undermine Arabic values and language, and reinforces the pervasive presence of European culture.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, with constrained resources, uneven attractions, and a finite pool of consumers, it is impossible for the whole of the African continent to embark upon a major expansion of tourism. However, given prospects of comparative advantage, and the impetus towards private investment and the integration of markets, it should be feasible for a number of countries, and possibly regions, to attract many more visitors. But it is difficult to make the case within the current context of self-sustainable development. Tourism requires high levels of investment and infrastructure, and (as currently perceived) depends largely upon non-African consumers.

Caught by the pressures of structural adjustment measures, the instability of democratisation, and the insecurity of life in a post cold-war world, the prospects for major developments of tourism in Africa are realistically limited to just a few countries, and for the majority there is little or no chance to create a competitive and viable large-scale industry. However, in the light of the continent's economic malaise and marginalisation, and in spite of the negative social and environmental factors, all possible avenues need to be explored.

<sup>39</sup> O.N.T.T., *VII Plan. Le Développement du secteur touristique* (Tunis, 1986), pp. 9 and 30.