

MEASURING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT AT LEBANESE RURAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT: *Managing sustainable tourism at rural cultural landscapes is about maintaining a balance between sustainable tourism practices and protecting landscape values. In Lebanon, rural cultural landscapes are affected by the ineffective management and protection, as well as, the inappropriate land uses. The main purpose of this research is to improve sustainable tourism management at rural cultural landscape in Lebanon through assessing the protection level of the landscapes' values and measuring sustainable tourism management practices. Therefore, a sustainable tourism approach for rural cultural landscape management has been developed and 118 indicators were measured. Data were collected based on twenty semi-structured interviews with main stakeholders in two different villages, considered as rural cultural landscapes: Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine. Furthermore, non-participant observations were conducted to explore several rural and cultural aspects of the landscapes. The study revealed that the historical identity of the landscapes is negatively affected by the decline of the agriculture sector. Moreover, the values of both landscapes are being affected by the lack of effective co-management and cooperation. The scoring system adopted showed two different levels of sustainable tourism management: weak in Bkassine and fair in Maasser El Shouf.*

KEYWORDS: sustainable tourism management, rural cultural landscape, Lebanon, sustainable tourism measurement, scoring system.

INTRODUCTION

According to McCool and Moisey (2008), rural cultural landscapes are those associated with the history of indigenous people and the associated issues of territory, dislocation, secret knowledge, lost language and sacredness. Karpodini-dimitriadi (2000) complements this view by stating that “*rural cultural landscapes form an essential part of societies' heritage, and they are significant witnesses of the past and present relationship between man and his natural and built environment*”. This definition shows that rural cultural landscapes are the symbol of cultural and natural heritage.

Sustainable tourism deals directly with the concept of cultural landscape, by promoting the protection of the environment and the cultural heritage, while satisfying present and future needs (Byrd, 2007; Gagnon, 2007; Lejeune, 2010). Since it was introduced in 1972, tourism destinations are trying to maintain a sustainable tourism development. Some countries have followed the guidelines of the international sustainable tourism charts to develop their national sustainable tourism plans, while others have developed local sustainable tourism management models (Stevens, 2006).

In Lebanon, sustainable tourism is not well implemented. This is due, first, to the absence of a national sustainable tourism policy, for instance, in 2015, the country witnessed the launching

of the first comprehensive national rural tourism strategy (ministry of tourism, 2015). Second, to the inappropriate land uses (Fawaz and Peillen, 2004), and last but not least, to the lack of cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in creating sustainable tourism packages (El-Baba, 2015). Moreover, few local sustainable tourism initiatives and projects have been developed in Lebanon, but with no scientific publications, thus, it is difficult to reference these projects.

Lebanese rural cultural landscapes are major attractions for sustainable tourism, and are mostly affected by its ineffective implementation. The management of this concept needs to be improved, since rural population constitute only 12% of the total Lebanese population (Central Administration of Statistics [CAS], 2014), which is an indicator of culture deterioration and damaged identity. Additionally, the agriculture sector is the main driver of change for rural landscapes (Rovai, Andreoli, Gorelli, and Jussila, 2016), which accounted in 2013 for 7% only of Lebanon's GDP (Byiringiro, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural cultural landscape: conceptual and historical evolution

Natural territories are made up of a collection of landforms, such as mountains, hills, plains, and natural vegetation, etc. (Dérioz, 2010). In order to survive, people have occupied these territories and have built strong connections with the surrounding environment. The term landscape has been then added to the concept of natural territories, describing the human-environment relationship. Combining these two terms, has contributed to the introduction of cultural landscape concept in the 19th century.

According to the American geographer Carl O. Sauer, "*cultural landscape is an area of natural features, modified and influenced by cultural forces, with intangible values not immediately evident, such as literature, poetry, painting, myths, cultural events, rituals and traditional production, etc.*" (Mitchell, Rössler, and Tricaud, 2009). It is worth mentioning that, few natural territories exist today without cultural values, such as abandoned rural territories, while cultural landscapes cannot exist without natural features (Buergi, 2002). Concerning the concept of rural cultural landscape, it is defined similarly, but within a rural context.

During the 11th and 16th century, rural cultural landscapes, particularly in Europe, were associated with painting. Painters were inspired by the landscape's aesthetic characteristics. This was until the 19th century when scientists showed an interest in landscapes as field of research, adopted mainly by the English, German, and French schools of geography (Karpodini-dimitriadi, 2000). Starting 20th century until today, rural cultural landscapes are seen as major tourism attractions, especially, after the designation of outstanding cultural landscapes, with exceptional values, as World Heritage Sites (WHS) (Esposito and Cavelzani, 2006). Moreover, these landscapes have become in recent-years key elements to promote sustainable tourism (Samsudin and Maliki, 2015).

Sustainable tourism management: definition and successful models

Implementing sustainable tourism requires the management of the three dimensions of sustainability. Economic sustainability includes: local people employment, fair trade, overall management and planning, etc. Environmental sustainability necessitates the protection of

biodiversity (flora and fauna), monitoring tourism visitations, the existence of renewable energy techniques, and the existence and application of a code of conduct... (Europarc federation, 2014). Finally, indicators of social sustainability include: social integrity, gender equity, the active participation of local community, the protection of heritage and intangible values (International Unit for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2008). The international laws insisted on the protection of the intangible heritage as equivalent to the protection of the built environment (International Center for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments [ICCROM], 2009).

Sustainable tourism management at rural cultural landscape, is about making the landscape accessible for visitors, while protecting its valued aspects. Each landscape is characterized by its unique values. The best way to protect landscapes is to identify what values should be protected (Esposito and Cavelzani, 2006; Plieninger et al. 2013). Recently, experts in the field of cultural landscape management have developed new assessment techniques, based on an integrated approach that identifies all the values of the landscape, including natural and cultural, as well as, tangible and intangible (Stephenson, 2008; Antrop, 2005).

Moreover, sustainable tourism models have been introduced and implemented by researchers to guide tourism providers in managing tourism attractions. For example, the model developed by Razović and Tomljenović (2015) based on residents and visitors' perceptions on tourism development at the Croatian open-sea islands, provided important insights and implications to improving tourism development for the benefits of all the stakeholders. Furthermore, a conceptual sustainable tourism model has been developed to inform policy and decision making in North Mediterranean destinations (Farsari, 2012). This model combines different complex sustainable tourism theories into one framework that inform stakeholders based on knowledge to take corrective actions.

Initiating sustainable tourism indicators is also a comprehensive tool in measuring and managing sustainable tourism. For instance, a systemic indicator system was developed and applied by two researchers (Schianetz and Kavanagh) in 2008 on a holiday eco-village project in Queensland, Australia. Testing the system showed that with an adaptive management approach, measures can be taken to assess and develop strategies to prevent negative impacts on the environment, the socio-culture, and the economic sector of a tourism destination.

Study Areas

Two rural cultural landscapes in Lebanon were selected: Bkassine and Maasser El Shouf. The choice of the study areas was guided by several variables: landscapes that are distinctive with varied cultural and natural values, unique attractions, tourism services availability, and the integration of different sustainable tourism indicators in the management strategies of the landscapes.

Bkassine

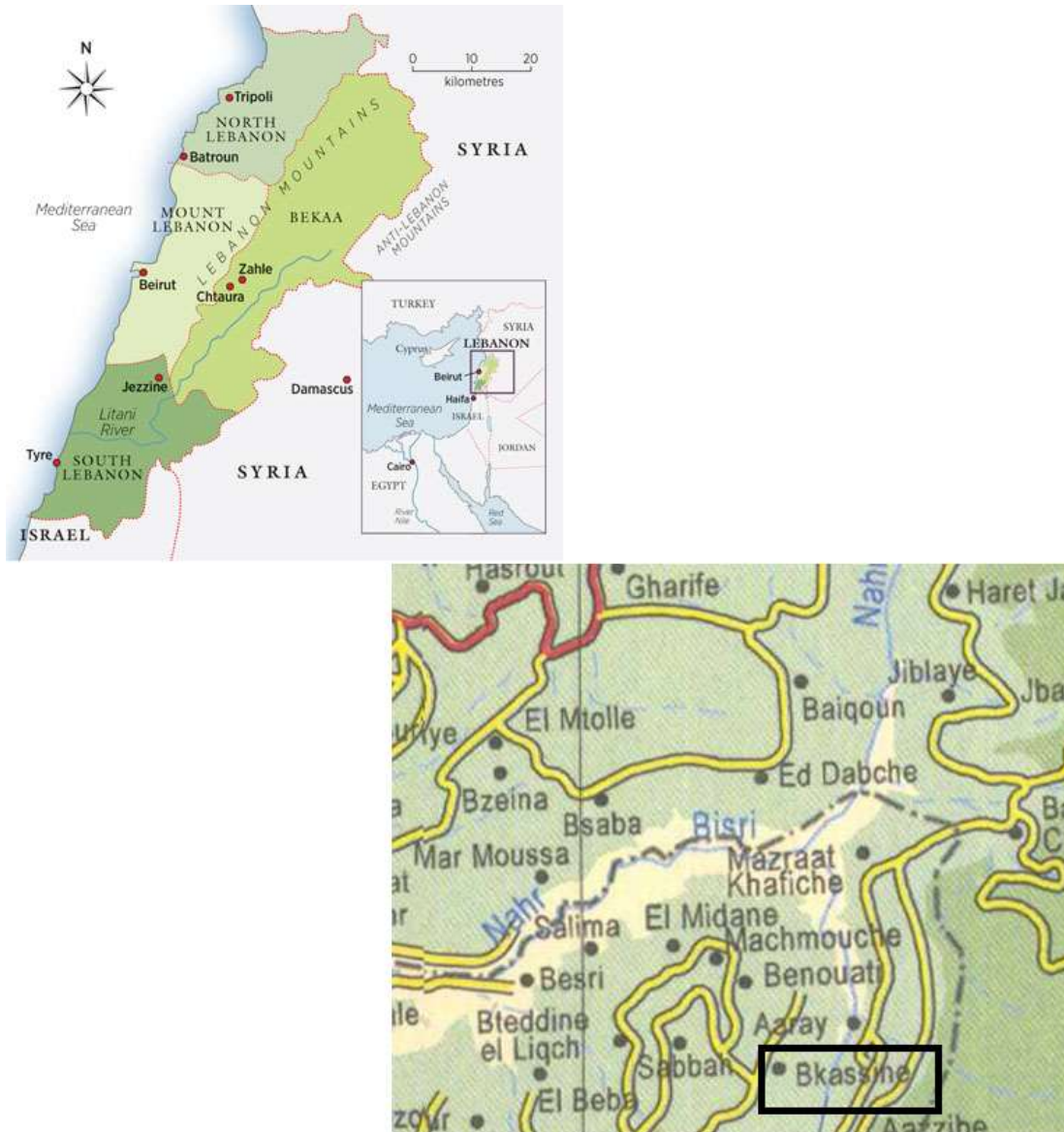


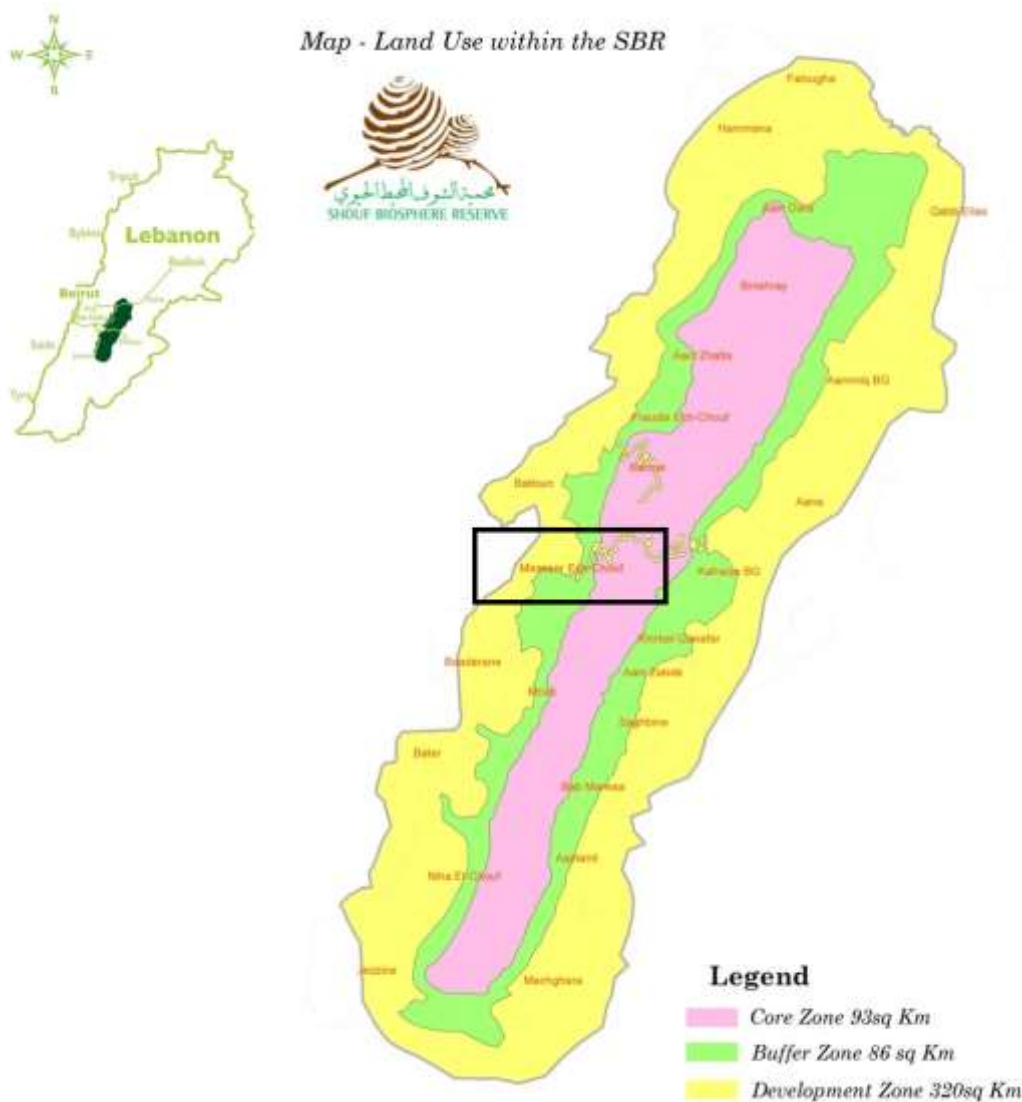
Figure 1: Geographical location of Bkassine (source: interview-personal communication)

Bkassine rural cultural landscape lies in the South of Lebanon, and is part of Jezzine which is a central district in South Lebanon (figure 1). It has an area of 510 hectares, at an altitude of 810 m above sea level. Bkassine has population of 1000 residents, from which 500 are permanent. Additionally, it has a forest known as “Bkassine Forest” with an area of 2,200,000 m². The forest is gifted a large and exquisite pine forest: Bkassine Pine Forest (BPF), which covers an area of 1 million m², making it the largest pine forest in Lebanon and in the Middle East (<https://bkassinepinepark.wordpress.com/>).

The origin of the landscape' name is Phoenician, symbolizing "the city of sin", meaning the sun or the moon. In the French language, Bkassine means "Bécasse", which is an endemic bird (land chicken) and it is abundant in Bkassine (Hnainy, 1999; Ghanem, 2007). The landscape has also a unique cultural heritage and it was identified in 2001 by the National Institute for Heritage as a typical traditional village (<http://www.baldati.com/Bkassine>).

Maasser El Shouf

Figure 2. Geographical location of Maasser El Shouf (source: personal communication)



Maasser El Shouf rural cultural landscape is located in the South East of Lebanon, and is part of the Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR) (figure 2). The SBR includes 24 villages, and is considered the largest in Lebanon (5% of the Lebanese rural territory), with the most extensive cedar stands accounting for 25% of the remaining cedar forests in the country (<http://www.shoufcedar.org/>). As shown in figure two, the SBR is divided into core zone

(representing the nature reserve, where activities are controlled under the nature reserve' international law), the buffer zone (for tourism and non-tourism activities) and the development zone (for tourism and non-tourism facilities). Maasser El Souf has an area of 1,843 hectares with 1,250 above sea level, and a population of 1,450 people, from which 950 are permanent residents.

The name "Maasser El Shouf" is associated to the existence of mills "Maasser" in Arabic, which was a main source of income for local residents, and "Shouf" since the region is located in the high mountain. It is a traditional village with recognized cultural heritage (<http://www.maasserelchouf.org>).

Research Design

In total, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted and included the following interviewees. Maasser El Shouf as part of the SBR is managed by an Appointed Protected Area Committee (APAC), which is represented by a management team and Al-Shouf Cedar Society (ACS). So, in order to gather the information needed, interviewees selected at Maasser El Shouf included: the municipality's mayor, the manager of tourism activities and events at the landscape and the leader of the ACS, who is also the technical coordinator of marketing and communication.

Bkassine, on the other hand, is managed mainly by the municipality, so interviewees were: the municipality's mayor, and the responsible for the protection of the tourism attractions and other landscape' resources. One telephone interview was also conducted with the manager of La Maison De La Forêt- LMDLF (one major natural tourism attraction in Bkassine). Additionally, two major national tour operators were selected: Kurban and Nakhal, interviews were done accordingly with the manager of the department of domestic tourism and a reservation officer at the department of domestic tours.

The interviews included 118 indicators, in the form of workable questions, which are in majority qualitative, divided into seven categories (represented in the discussion part), related to the landscape physical aspects, natural and cultural resources, tangible and intangible values, issues of management and protection.... These indicators were developed based on the concept of sustainable tourism, and the results of the participant observations and interviews conducted by the European project HELAND (heritage and landscape) in Lebanon (<http://fthm-heland.com/>).

In order to identify the landscape' intangible values and their meaning for the local community, twelve residents at both landscapes were selected and interviewed. Respondents were selected to be long term residents, with age between 40 and 80, and long experience with the landscape. These interviews included open questions related to the nature of residents-landscape connection and the perceived values attributed to different features of the landscape.

Furthermore, the researchers relied on non-participant observations to reveal important facts about different aspects of the landscapes selected, and to compare between what was gathered through the interviews and what was observed on the field. The observations took place at the entrance of Maasser El Shouf Cedar Forest and at Bkassine Pine forest for two different times in each landscape during weekends. The researchers observed the behavior of visitors during their visit to these two natural attractions.

Scoring system adopted**Table 1. Scoring system per dimension adopted to measure sustainable tourism management**

Type of question	Empirical values				
	0	1	2	3	4
<i>Qualitative</i>	Weak	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent
<i>Percentage</i>	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
<i>Yes, or no</i>	Not existing		Existing but need improvement		Existing

The responses of the interviews allowed the researchers to attribute a score (empirical value) for each response depending on the type of the question, by adopting the method of quantitative codes from structured interviews (Lerner and Tolan, 2015), and scoring system per dimension (table 1). For example, for the qualitative questions, if the question was about the preservation of unspoiled sectors and the response was weak preservation, the score will be 0. For the percentages, if the interviewees were asked to attribute a percentage for the level of application of the strategic plan, and the percentage was 50%, then the score will be 2 and so on (for the full set of indicators with their results see <https://figshare.com/s/5e1ff6494e820f475209>).

The scores for all the indicators were added up given the total score for each category. A 100% weight score (Total score of indicators is between 0-20%: very weak; 21-40%: weak; 41-60%: fair; 61-80%: good; 81-100%: very good) was used to evaluate and compare between the results of the two landscapes. Finally, a hypothesis testing (paired difference test of means) was used to test and validate the results of the overall score of sustainable tourism management obtained between Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**Landscape values identified and their management strategies**

As discussed in the literature review, it is very important to identify and assess the landscape values. Table 2 represents the resources and their values as expressed by the interviewees. The cedar forest at Maasser El Shouf is part of the Shouf nature reserve, which was declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as Biosphere Reserve in 2005. The forest is home to the world's oldest cedar tree, estimated to be around 4,000 years old. The Bkassine pine forest is considered as "Hima Baladi", meaning that is owned by the municipality and protected since 1997 by Decision # 3, issued by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). The forests at both landscapes have great importance and values for both residents and visitors.

Table 2. Main landscape' values and their management

Landscape	Resources/attraction	Main value(s) associated	Management
<i>Maasser El Shouf:</i>			
Natural	Cedar forest	Historical, intangible, touristic,	SBR, local residents
	Ancient roman caves	Historical, intangible, cultural	SBR team
	Biodiversity (flora and fauna)	Touristic, cultural, economic	Local residents
Cultural	Old roman caves	Historical, intangible	Municipality
	Pounders	Historical, industrial	Municipality
	Roman burial sites	Intangible, historical	Municipality
	Pottery sites	Industrial, historical	Municipality
	Roman stone fortress	Historical, intangible, touristic	Municipality, SBR team
	Vineyards	Industrial, historical	Municipality
<i>Bkassine:</i>			
Natural	Bkassine pine forest	Historical, intangible, touristic,	Municipality, local residents
	Biodiversity (flora and fauna)	Historical, cultural, economic	Municipality
Cultural	Hydraulic mills	Intangible, historical, touristic	Municipality
	Old olive oil presses	Industrial, historical	Municipality
	Saint Takla church ¹	Religious, intangible, touristic	Municipality, private

¹ Saint Takla church is one of the oldest in Lebanon

Regarding the biodiversity richness at Maasser El Shouf, the landscape is home for 520 well-known types of flora species and, 14 rare types of plants, some from which have economic values such as the production of thyme. In addition, 338 types of well-known fauna species, and about 28 rare wild mammals and birds. With no statistical evidence, the mayor of Bkassine municipality has reported the existence of some well-known and rare types of flora species, 100 types of plants at Bkassine pine forest, with the pine trees have economic values. As well as many types of birds and endangered fauna species, especially the land chicken "Bécase" from which the name of the landscape derived.

As shown in table 2, two of the main attractions at Maasser El Shouf are exploited for tourism, while three are considered tourism attractions in the case of Bkassine. The majority of the resources have historical and intangible values, since they are considered as living heritage sites and reflect the identity of the landscapes.

According to Plummer and Fennell (2009), cooperative management model, which is known as co-management, reflects the shift in management from top-down to a partnership approach. It involves "the sharing of power and responsibility between key managers and local resource users". This co-management helps in protecting the resources for sustainable tourism. This

theory was adopted in the case of Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine to assess the management strategy implemented.

Table 2 shows that at Maasser El Shouf, some resources are being managed by the local residents in cooperation with the SBR team, while other resources are the municipality whole responsibility. However, in the case of Bkassine, local residents are only involved in the management of the pine forest in collaboration with the municipality, since they collect and sell the pine nuts. Other resources are solely managed by the municipality. Therefore, in both landscapes, the partnership approach and the sharing of responsibility is not well maintained, the power is associated to one or two stakeholders. This demonstrates that the protection of the landscape values is at risk.

Landscape' intangible values: meanings for local residents

The notion of authenticity at cultural landscape is very well enhanced, and is reflected by the strong relation people have with their physical and intangible environment. This gives the cultural landscape a unique character comparing to other tourism destinations (Chronis, 2005). The findings of the interviews conducted with the local residents at both landscapes compliment this theory. Results revealed strong connections with the landscape and an attachment and appreciation for the landscape's intangible values including myths, stories, memories, historical events, etc.

At Maasser El Shouf for example, the physical tangible features of the region such as the caves inside the forest (El Khouri sarcophagi), the Roman inscriptions, the grape presses, etc. were identified by the local residents as having memorable values, because they are associated with the 1800 and 1900s way of living, and they were principle source of economic revenues. At Bkassine, the intangible aspects identified by respondents were considered as influencing the heritage and the identity of the landscape. These mainly included stories and myths about meanings conveyed by names of places. For example, "Abou Samra path", embodying the victories of Abou Samra Ghanem who lived and died in Bkassine.

Agricultural activities attach people to their lands, these were the most important source of income at both landscapes. Today farming activities at Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine occupy only 10 to 20% of the economic sector and are considered as secondary source of income. This is a real example of how current values within a landscape can deteriorate its main aspects and traditions.

RESULTS OF THE SCORING SYSTEM**Table 3. Comparing the level of sustainable tourism management at the two landscapes**

Category of sustainable tourism	Maximum score	Maasser El Shouf			Bkassine		
		Value	%	Evaluation	Value	%	Evaluation
Conservation of natural and cultural resources	84	46	54.7	Fair	44	52.4	Fair
Tourism and community development	24	15	62.5	Good	15	62.5	Good
Monitoring tourism visitation	44	24	54.5	Fair	19	43.2	Fair
Use of new technology	64	29	45.3	Fair	5	7.8	Very weak
Effective overall management	112	59	52.6	Fair	38	33.9	Weak
Planning and research	80	58	72.5	Good	43	53.7	Fair
Successful marketing and promotion strategies	64	30	46.9	Fair	21	32.8	Weak

Scholars in sustainable tourism research argued that using indicators is a useful tool in measuring the development of sustainable tourism. Delgado and Saarinen (2014), showed through their extensive review of literature, that developing and adopting a set of indicators for a specific destination may prove more useful and accurate for assessing sustainability. The 118 indicators developed to measure sustainable tourism in Lebanon, helped in evaluating how every single aspect of the landscape is being managed to ensure sustainable development.

Table 3 revealed that the first category is evaluated as fair at both landscapes. The previous sections of the discussion showed that the landscapes resources and values are not being effectively managed due to the absence of a co-management approach which affects the conservation of these resources. External factors may also have influenced the conservation process. For example, interviewees stated that they are developing anti-hunting campaigns, but the ineffective application of the law n° 580, date 25/02/2004 (ministry of environment, 2013) in all the Lebanese regions, is obstructing collaboration between stakeholders. Additionally, the lack of awareness in Lebanon about the importance of intangible values for local residents has affected negatively the development of protection framework.

The category of “tourism and community development” is evaluated as good at both landscapes. Tourism contribution to economic growth is more effectively maintained than the

improvement of community well-being. For instance, as opposite to Bkassine with 1000 visitors to the Pine forest in 2013, Maasser El Shouf attracted more than 30,000 visitors with 15-20% annual growth. Despite the security instability since 2010 till now, the latter has been able to maintain tourism growth with emphasis on domestic tourism. This finding comes to support the results of Ghadban (2014) who stated that, *“the policy of domestic tourism helps the tourism destination to be less vulnerable to external shocks”*.

Regarding the third category, similar percentages are associated for both landscapes with fairly managed tourism visitations. For example, the restrictions presented in the form of panels at the four entrances of the nature reserve at Maasser El Shouf, and in the form of verbal communication at Bkassine are not enough to control tourism visitations. Moreover, visit restrictions (limited group size, seasonal limits) are not always being implemented. This could be interpreted either with the ineffective tourists and/or tour operator coordination, or with the mission strategy which emphasizes on the generation of revenues as the main tourism goal, especially that sustainable tourism has been recently introduced at the landscapes. Comparing the non-participant observations with the above results, it was obvious that visitors' behavior was not always friendly, instead damaging the environment and its resources, especially in the case of Bkassine cultural landscape.

The “use of new technology” was measured by the existence of GIS maps for tourism purposes, 3D modeling, virtual tours, etc. which are all methods of decreasing visitor's impacts on the society and managing tourism visitations while enhancing tourists' satisfaction. The overall score for this category is rated as fair for Maasser El Shouf and very weak for Bkassine. This is interpreted as the lack of available financial resources and the absence of skilled local employees to implement and operate this technology.

For the fifth category, Maasser El Shouf is evaluated as fair in its overall management, while Bkassine as weak. The former was able to implement more effective management strategies, developed mainly by the SBR team. For instance, the existence of an information office and the implementation of the international law No.532 that protects the nature reserve and its resources.

“Planning and research” measured mainly by the existence and implementation of business plan, action plan, strategic plan, crisis management plan, etc. is evaluated as good at Maasser El Shouf and fair at Bkassine. At Maasser El Shouf, the SBR team in coordination with the municipality, and many other stakeholders have developed many tourism and non-tourism plans. At Bkassine, the municipality in coordination with the Union of Jezzine municipalities has also created many plans, but due to the limited municipality financial resources, these plans are not being successfully implemented.

Last but not least, results of the interviews demonstrated that Maasser El Shouf is fairly developing and implementing marketing and promotion strategies, while Bkassine is weak in its implementation. Interviewees at both landscapes reported “Our budget, prioritized actions, and our limited staff capabilities are hindering the implementation of successful marketing strategies”.

Overall level of sustainable tourism management**Table 4. Overall score of sustainable tourism management at Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine**

Dimension of sustainability	Max score (value)	Max score (percentage)	Maasser El Shouf		Bkassine	
			Value	Percentage	Value	Percentage
Economic	216	46%	132	28%	96	20%
Social	128	27%	59	12%	26	6%
Environmental	128	27%	70	15%	63	13%
<i>Total score</i>	472	100%	261	55%	185	39%

In order to assess the overall sustainable tourism management, the researchers grouped the seven categories into three levels (dimensions of sustainable tourism) (table 4). Social (use of new technology, and successful marketing and promotion strategies), environmental (conservation of natural and cultural resources, and monitoring tourism visitation), and economic sustainability (tourism and community development, effective overall management, and planning and research). The maximum scores (in terms of value and percentage) and results for each landscape were associated based on the results of table 3. The evaluation of the total percentage followed the same weight score adopted in the previous section. Accordingly, sustainable tourism management at Maasser El Shouf is evaluated as fair, and the management at Bkassine is evaluated as weak. Therefore, it is interpreted that Maasser El Shouf has a better sustainable tourism performance than Bkassine.

In order to statistically test this difference in performance, a paired difference test of means was used ($H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$ and $H_a: \mu_1 - \mu_2 > 0$ with $\alpha = 5\%$, $n_d = 118$ indicators, $S_d = 1.46$). Since the test statistic ($z = 4.82$) is greater than the critical value ($z_{\alpha} = 1.65$), then statistically, there is enough evidence to prove that Maasser El Shouf has a better sustainable tourism management than Bkassine.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, the measurement method of sustainable tourism management, proposed by the authors, helps tourism managers at rural cultural landscapes in ameliorating their management practices. In fact, it identifies the areas where improvement can be done and facilitates the decision-making process for tourism stakeholders. Moreover, this approach comes to illustrate that viewing the problem as interrelated, allows tourism managers to identify risks and develop corrective actions.

This approach can be applied worldwide, since the 118 indicators are related to the concept of sustainable tourism management. However, the values of each indicator and the weight score associated per category can differ between one rural cultural landscape to another, as well as, between developed and developing countries. There are many contributing factors to this change in values, such as but not limited to, the cultural background and the level of education of the interviewees, the level of awareness and knowledge about sustainable tourism development within a tourism destination, the level of protection of natural and cultural

resources, the effectiveness of the local and national protection frameworks, the degree of cooperation and partnering between the different stakeholders involved.

The statistical evidence of difference between Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine in their overall sustainable tourism management of the landscape, is due mainly to the partnership approach adopted and maintained by the management board of Maasser El Shouf. The latter has succeeded in building and maintaining a network of communication between internal and external stakeholders, but with limited participation of local residents. It is important to highlight again on the idea that sustainable tourism cannot succeed without the cooperation of all the tourism stakeholders, who might, in some cases, have divergent perceptions about the future. Accordingly, it is advised to share the results of this research with local residents and other internal and external stakeholders, by examining their views on sustainable tourism development, so that they can help in developing future scenarios and participate in all the stages of the management process.

Tourism activities should be developed in a way to satisfy visitors' needs and at the same time sustain the authenticity and traditional attributes of the destination. The best activity that fulfils these conditions, in the case of Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine, is farming. It is then recommended to organize farming activities in the form of tourism packages, which can provide visitors with a unique and memorable experience and simultaneously revitalize the agriculture sector.

Last but not least, the non-participant observations of the visitors' behavior, conducted by the researchers, are useful in improving the management of tourism visitations. Hence, it could be of a great value for stakeholders at Maasser El Shouf and Bkassine, and even for other landscapes' managers, who can observe the behavior of visitors all year round, compare between their changing attitudes, and take improved decisions accordingly.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this research should be discussed with regard to future studies. The studied sample, consisting of two rural cultural landscapes, is limited. To test the generality of this sustainable tourism approach, more empirical and theoretical studies should be conducted by the consideration of additional indicators. Such as, the type of tourism destination, the relation between the three dimensions of sustainability, etc.

Besides, the perceptions of tourists (as main stakeholders in sustainable tourism management) toward the landscape and its values, are to be considered with regard to future research. The role of tour operators in managing sustainable tourism at cultural landscape is critical, because they can affect negatively or positively the authentic image of the landscape. Eco-tour operators should be selected to measure and evaluate the way in which rural cultural landscapes as main tourism attractions are being promoted.

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