

# Coastal Tourism Development in Algiers (Algeria) How Sustainable is it?

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the study of a coastal tourism development in Algiers, Algeria. It explores the evolution of tourism in Algeria in general and the development of coastal tourist resorts in Algiers in particular. An analysis of the resort of Sidi-Fredj, near Algiers, will help to define the indicators involved in evaluating the level of sustainability of the design of this resort. The evaluation of the level of sustainability is obtained through the test of a sustainability matrix developed in recent research (Fadli, 2003) and named STAM "Sustainable Tourism Architecture Matrix".*



*How sustainable is the design of the Sidi-Fredj tourist resort? This question will be answered in this paper, through the analysis of the radar diagrams obtained by the STAM test. The level of sustainability of this resort will be evaluated in three areas: Environmental, Social and Economic.*

## Introduction

Algeria has yet to exploit tourism as a major economic factor. Despite great potential, due to remarkable natural sites, Algerian authorities shunned tourism for social and cultural considerations. Because the country enjoyed important hydrocarbon resources, the political leadership devoted little attention to what could have been a lucrative industry. However, since the mid-1980s, Algerian decision-makers sought to compensate for the dwindling foreign earnings (due to the drop in oil prices) by progressively liberalising and privatising tourist industry. The Algerian newspaper *Liberte* reported on 28 June 2002 that improvements in social stability and economic liberalisation resulted in an influx of foreign tourists. Algeria now appears as one of the suggested destinations in European tourist brochures (*Liberte*, 28/06/2002). This trend is likely to continue, albeit slowly, should security and economic stability continue to improve. Unfortunately the encouragement of tourism may have come too late because socio-economic problems during the last decade have blocked further tourism development. This section examines the evolution of the Algerian tourist industry since independence, and analyses the reasons that prevented successive Algerian governments from promoting tourism.

## Characteristics of Algerian Tourism

Unlike Morocco to the west and Tunisia to the east, Algeria has not yet launched a tourism industry. Since its independence in 1962, government policies have not encouraged any kind of tourism development and coastal tourist resort facilities have not been constructed, nor has the country's heritage been exploited to attract foreign tourists. Tourist receipts for 1990 were below \$150 million compared to \$1.5 billion for Tunisia and \$0.9 billion for Morocco

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(WTTC, 2000). Today, the necessity to develop a new approach applicable to the tourist villages in the west coast of Algiers means that learning from the experiences of other countries could be helpful in evolving a sustainable approach to tourism development in the Algerian context.

We could list the following points as the main factors that prevented Algerian authorities from undertaking vast tourism development programmes in this period:

### **A. Socio-Cultural Factor**

Algeria fought an anti-colonial war against France which negatively affected the perception that Algerians held about Westerners - the likely visitors to Algeria. During the colonisation, French attempts to destroy Algeria's social, cultural and religious identity resulted in adverse effects so that, for the Algerian people, the protection of their identity became paramount. Therefore, from both nationalistic and socio-cultural perspectives, tourism represented an anticipated negative impact on Algerian society.

### **B. Economic Factor**

Another factor, which prevented the expansion of tourism in post-war Algeria, was the structural problem Algerians inherited from the colonial era. Indeed, at independence, the tourist industry was virtually nonexistent, only less than 6000 beds in poor condition, were available throughout the country (*Etude Synthèse, évolution touristique - Synthèse study, tourist evolution- Revue de l'Institut des Sciences Economiques d'Oran, 1999, p 247*).

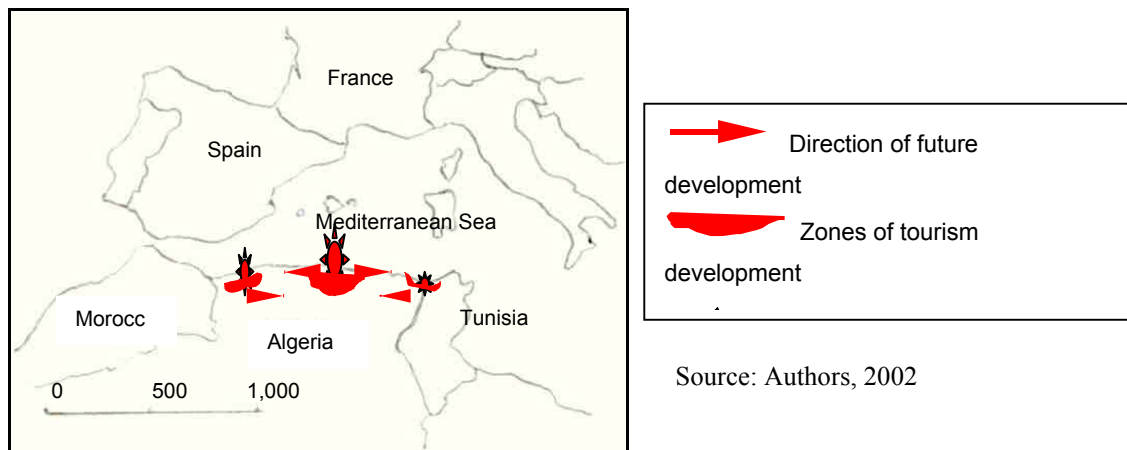
Clearly, whatever their true motivations, successive governments in Algeria saw tourism not only as a threat to Algerian society's socio-cultural and nationalist identity, but also lacked the means and the experience to develop tourism in the aftermath of the country's independence. Furthermore, having chosen a socialist path of development, albeit within the context of the socio-cultural identity (not compatible with socialism characteristics), Algerian authorities did not allow the development of a heavy presence of Western multinational corporations (MNCs).

Under Boumediene's rule (1965-1978, second president of Algeria after Ben Bella), the authorities were not oblivious to the potential for tourism. They were fully aware of the benefits that the country could reap. The National Charter of 1976, which contained a strong socialist direction, recognised that "*there are... many economic factors operating in favour of a rapid and extensive development of Algeria's tourist potential*" (Democratic and Popular Algerian Republic, *National Charter*, Ministry of Culture and Information, 1981, p160). The vision reported through these rules was splitting tourism into two categories: *National Tourism, and International Tourism*.

In the 1990s, the resorts along the coast have become housing facilities for the Algerian *nomenclature*. Only a few housing facilities are reserved for rentals and even those require a strong connection to the bureaucracy. The true objective, however, as admitted by the framers of the Charter themselves, was '*the currency savings resulting from the fact that the facilities created at home will lead many Algerians to spend their holidays in their own country*' (Zoubir, June 1997).

Although these are two positive factors, Algerian decision-makers put limits on international tourism development in order to preserve the society from inconveniences that can arise from such expansion.

**Figure 1: Tourism development in the coastal areas of Algeria in 2000**



### C. Environmental Factor

The new sites were of good quality, especially in their first years of existence. The government made major efforts to attract foreign tourists; the Office Nationale Algerien du Tourisme (ONAT), Touring Club, and the Agence du Tourisme Algerienne (ATA) were the state-owned enterprises in charge of promoting tourism and organising tours. But because of economical contradictions (i.e. artificial exchange rate of the Algerian Dinar – Algerian money) international tourists preferred to go to Tunisia and Morocco where they enjoyed and still enjoy more competitive deals. Furthermore, Tunisians and Moroccans had more experience in the tourist industry as it represents one of their main sources of revenue.

### The Algerian Coastal Tourism Development

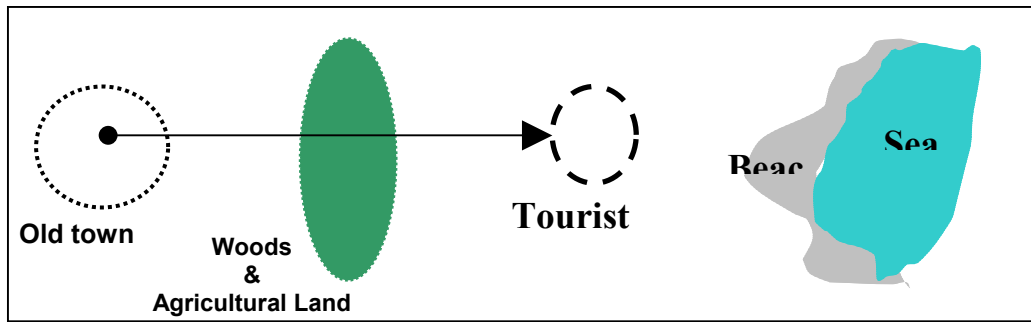
In the late 1960's the Algerian authorities developed massive tourism development programs in order to attract more international tourists. The French architect Fernand Pouillon was appointed to design several tourist resorts in coastal sites as well as in the southern part of the country. He opted for a point-zoned tourist centres in the coastal strip of Algiers. In 1968 he designed the Sidi-Fredj resort which was inspired by the southern vernacular traditional city of Ghardaia (South Algeria).

### Sidi-Fredj Resort

#### Architectural Typology and Built Forms of Sidi-Fredj Resort

The Algerian coastal tourism development typology is very similar to the Tunisian tourism development. However, the natural topography and geography of the tourist sites provide larger sandy beaches, which is an important potential to tourism development especially in coastal areas. The existing tourist resorts, as well as planned projects, reflect a new approach to tourism development. A new generation of resorts, linked to an existing spatial structure (old coastal towns or villages) is under development. An atomised fragmented tourist spatial organisation seems to be smaller than the large Mediterranean marina-stations or lidos, but also integrated harmoniously within nature.

Figure 2

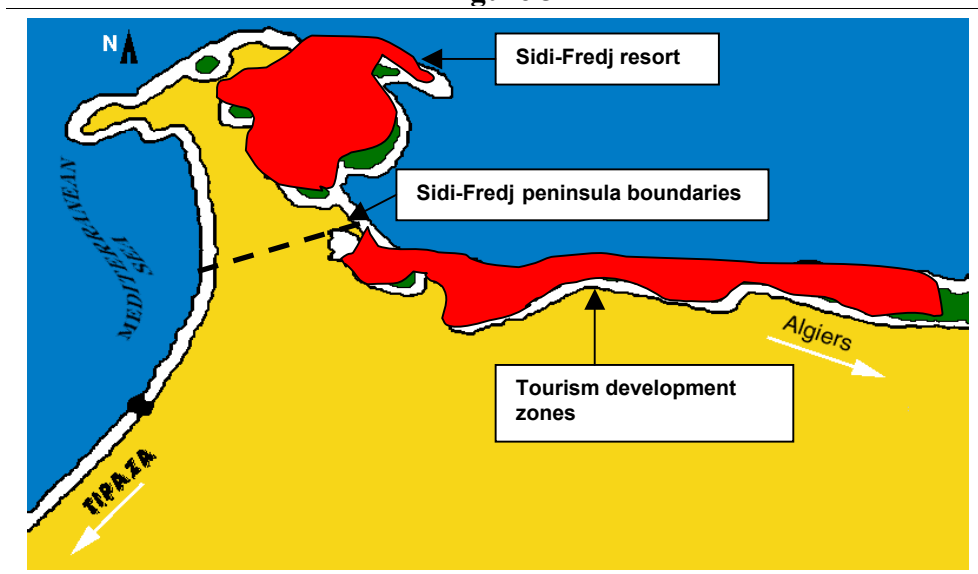


Schematic Organisation of the Algerian tourism development type (Fadli, F., 2002)

This justifies the expansion of tourist zones and the adoption of strict planning regulations in tourist zonings. A hybrid organisation combines continuous linear development (mainly created by the expansion of existing punctual marinas and other tourist villages) with atomised implementation of new developments. Initially developed as punctual autonomous tourism development; numerous resorts are now expanding but following planned regulations.

The resort is located on the Sidi-Fredj peninsula (hence the name of the resort). With 70 Ha of superficies, the Sidi-Fredj peninsula is surrounded in the north by a rocky seaside, and by two beaches on its eastern and western sides. The southern part presents a flat topography with dense vegetation, agricultural lands and forests. It is located in the Staweli district at 25 kms west of Algiers and 45 kms from the international airport Houari Boumedienne. The resort is linked to Staweli town centre by the national road CW133 (Chemin Wilayal 133).

Figure 3



Sidi-Fredj Peninsula location and Algiers West Coast tourism development (Adapted by Fadli, F., 2002 from Magellan map, 2002)

## Design Strategy

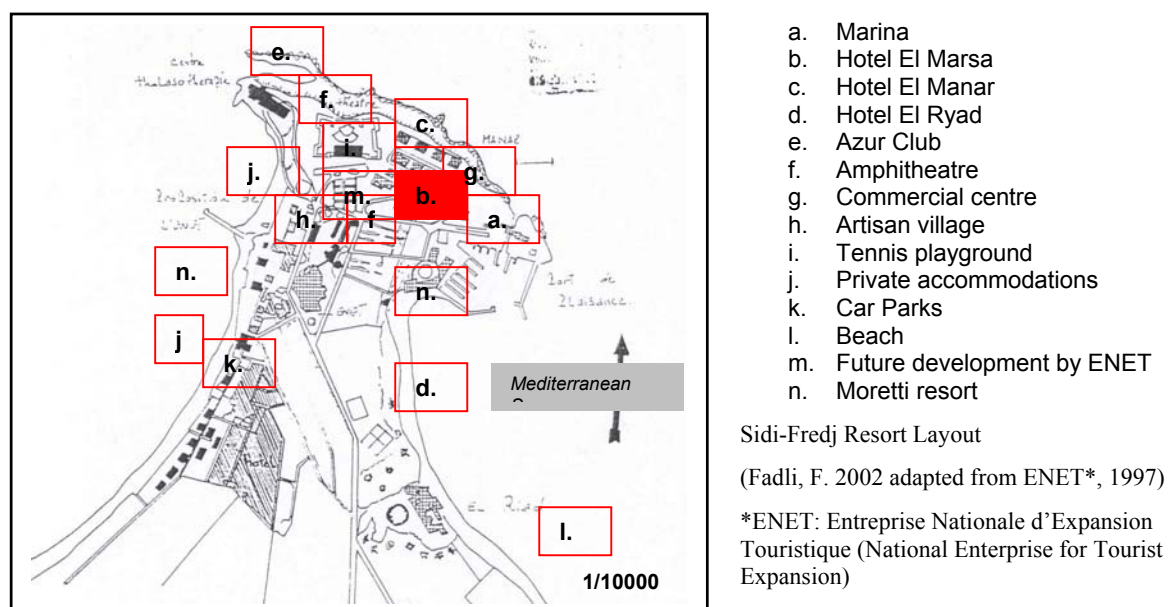
Pouillon aimed to create one of the biggest poles of coastal tourism in Algeria; the site was located on an interesting peninsula. The main objective was that the resort integrates the natural components of the site as well as keeping the traditional local architectural characteristics. To achieve this objective, the designer adopted a coherent design strategy consisting of the following points:

- The resort represents an atomised tourist space with low-rise buildings spread over the peninsula.
- The resort visualisation is in keeping with the natural and local characteristics of the site through a well-established integration.
- To create an intelligent combination of modern technologies and local traditional materials, which has been materialised into a homogenous design typology.
- The designer aimed to tackle the challenges of the environmental and the social impacts.

## Spatial Organisation

Sidi-Fredj resort has an atomised fragmented land occupation with a centralised spatial organisation. The leisure port (Marina) composes the core of this organisation and the main components are located along the seaside land surrounding the marina. Four hotels, a commercial centre, amphitheatre and leisure and green spaces compose the resort (Fig 4). The resort's facilities are spread all over the northern and eastern parts of the Peninsula. While these two sides of the peninsula were selected to locate the main resorts hotels and facilities, the western part is concerned with small individual accommodations with a maximum of two storeys buildings. The southern part of the resort consists of dense vegetation and forest and cover 275 Ha of superficies.

Figure 4



### Architectural Typology

The architecture of the resort incorporates the design principles of the traditional vernacular architecture. Pouillon analysed the organisational and typological characteristics of the local architecture and used its principles and concepts in the design of this resort. At a different spatial scale he re-interpreted the local traditional architecture by a design strategy based upon:

1. The linking of the spatial organisation inside and outside the buildings.
2. The juxtaposition between open spaces and built spaces in a simplistic cubical organisation based on a modular geometry. This organisation is formulated through the local and environmental integrations (Figures 5 and 6).
3. The use of local materials combined with innovative design responsiveness and functionality (Figures 7 and 8).

**Figure 5: Sidi-Fredj resort view from the east beach**



**Figure 6: El Marsa Hotel view from the leisure port**



**Figure 7: “Le Corsaire” building view**

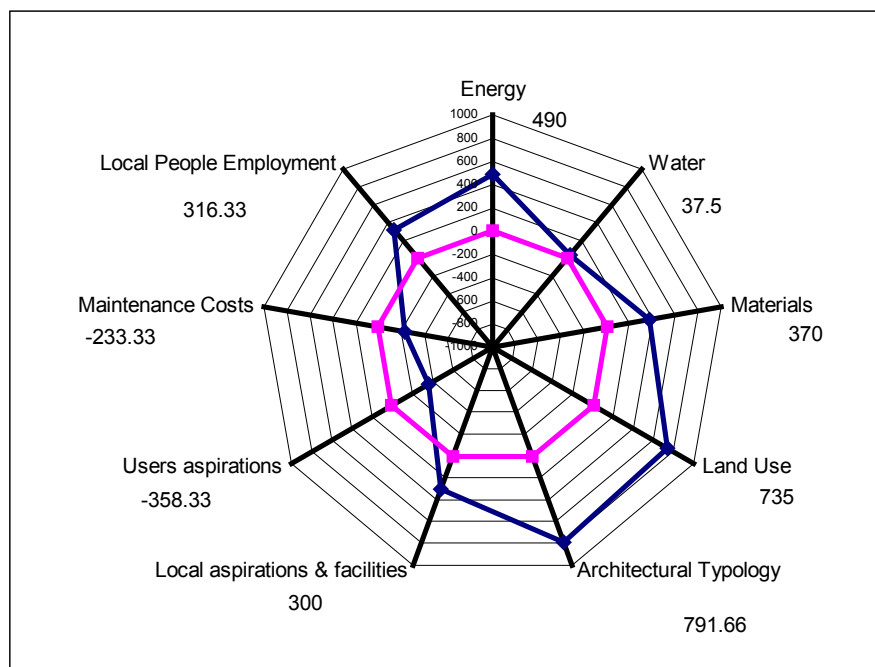


**Figure 8: Traditional architectural elements used in El Ryad Hotel**



### How Sustainable is the design of Sidi-Fredj resort?

The results obtained by using the model (STAM) developed in recent research, show the level of sustainability of the design of the Sidi-Fredj resort (Fadli, 2003). These results are clearly delivered through the radar diagram shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Radar Diagram of the Total Level of Sustainability of Sidi-Fredj resort**

Source: (Fadli, F.2003)

To interpret and analyse levels of sustainability of a project the following guidelines has to be adopted:

- The pink lines define the neutral zone: level of sustainability equals zero. It represents the medium area between the maximum positive and maximum negative levels of sustainability of a tested project.
- The blue line shows the contour of the zone defined by the levels of sustainability of a tested project.
- The origin of the axis represents the maximum negative level of sustainability.
- The outer lines represent the maximum positive level of sustainability.
- From the axis centre to the pink lines are the negative levels of sustainability area.
- Outwards the pink lines are the positive levels of sustainability area.
- The blue-hashed surface represents the positive levels of sustainability of the project.
- The line "0" or the neutral line, the pink line, separates the two main surfaces composing the levels of sustainability.

The analysis of the radar diagrams shows that:

- Importance was given by the designer to the environmental issues (Energy, Water, Materials and Land Use), while the social indicators (Architectural Typology, Locals aspirations and hopes, and Users aspirations) were given almost a similar attention. As a consequence, the overall levels are similar.
- The positive levels of sustainability are those represented by environmental and social sustainability indicators.

Economic issues (Maintenance costs, Local people employment) were almost neglected, thus the negative level of sustainability.

## Conclusion

Sidi-Fredj resort was developed in a period of time, where sustainability concepts existed but were known in a different terminology. By adopting certain planning regulations at the three levels of the spatial scale, the architect Pouillon developed environmental and social sustainability, with slight differences due to the designers' different philosophies and conceptual approaches. The role of the designer allows him to be the main key stakeholder in defining the directions and guidelines for tourism developments.

Therefore, the use of such methodology in measuring levels of sustainability allowed us to trace general recommendations for sustainable design and specific guidelines for existing and future tourist resorts developments. The use of radar diagrams provides designers, planners, regulators and researchers with a clear, useful and understandable mean to interpret the scores of levels of sustainability obtained by using the STAM matrix.

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