

Strategic Planning as a Legal Mechanism for Achieving Sustainable Tourism Development in Algeria

نظام التخطيط الاستراتيجي كألية قانونية لتحقيق تنمية سياحة مستدامة في الجزائر

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Abstract:

In its pursuit of developing the tourism sector from an ecologically sustainable perspective, Algeria has adopted strategic planning as a core approach in this field. This research paper aims to analyze the evolution of strategic planning in Algeria's tourism sector; tracing its trajectory through the approved tourism development plans and highlighting their role in achieving sustainable tourism development. The study seeks to address the following central research question: To what extent is the strategic planning system adopted in Algeria effective in achieving sustainable tourism development, considering its forward-looking nature?

key words: Sustainable tourism development - Tourism spatial planning- Master Plan for Tourism Development - Tourism in Algeria, Sustainable tourism -Strategic planning in the tourism sector.

المخلص:

اعتمدت الجزائر لتنمية قطاعها السياحي وفق منظور ايكولوجي مستدام، نظام التخطيط الاستراتيجي في المجال، موضوع هذه الورقة البحثية التي تهدف إلى تحليل تطور التخطيط الاستراتيجي في المجال السياحي بالجزائر، وتتبع مساره من خلال مخططات التهيئة السياحية المعتمد وبيان دورها في تحقيق تنمية سياحية مستدامة، في محاولة للإجابة على الاشكالية التالية: ما مدى فعالية نظام التخطيط الاستراتيجي المعتمد في الجزائر، لتحقيق تنمية سياحية مستدامة في المجال بالنظر لطابعه الاستشرافي؟
الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية السياحية - مخطط التهيئة السياحية - المخطط التوجيهي للتهيئة السياحية - السياحة في الجزائر - التخطيط الاستراتيجي في المجال السياحي.

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Introduction:

Amid growing calls for environmental sustainability, tourism — like other economic sectors — has come under increasing scrutiny due to its multifaceted impacts on the environment at various levels. This has prompted many countries to reconsider the ways in which tourism is established and optimally exploited in order to achieve environmental sustainability in this domain. Like many other nations, Algeria has sought to lay the foundations of sustainable development as a developmental strategy in the tourism sector. This shift came after recognizing the importance of tourism in its capacity to support the national economy, alleviate social burdens through job creation, reduce unemployment, increase income, and combat poverty, among other benefits.

Currently, within its developmental policies and in line with global trends, the Algerian state is working to promote and advance the tourism sector with the aim of positioning Algeria as a premier destination for international tourists, capable of competing with leading countries in the field. The goal is for tourism to become an additional source of wealth alongside other economic sectors. However, this objective can only be realized through strategic planning that integrates all tourism activities into the broader tools of spatial planning and urban development, thereby ensuring sustainable tourism development.

This is the very principle that Algeria has embraced in developing its tourism sector from an ecologically sustainable perspective, as embodied in the various tourism spatial planning schemes that form the subject of this research paper.

The present study seeks to clarify the concept of strategic planning in the tourism sector and the requirements for its success, in light of Algeria's tourism potential, which constitutes the foundation of such planning. It further traces the evolution of this planning process through the approved tourism development plans and evaluates their role in promoting and sustaining tourism in Algeria. In doing so, the paper attempts to answer the following research problem:

To what extent is the strategic planning system in the tourism sector effective in achieving sustainable tourism development in Algeria, given its prospective and forward-looking character?

This question will be addressed using two primary methodologies: the descriptive and analytical approaches. The study is divided into two main sections. The first section examines the evolution of strategic planning in Algeria's tourism sector, while the second section evaluates this strategic planning through an assessment of the outcomes of implementing the Master Plans for Tourism Development (Horizons 2025–2030).

Section I: The Evolution of Strategic Planning in Algeria's Tourism Sector

Interest in tourism planning by governments and international organizations began notably after the Second World War, coinciding with the growth of international travel and the increasing diversification of tourism forms. In essence, tourism planning does not differ significantly from planning in general; it is fundamentally based on the tourism

resources available in the country. Moreover, its strategies are influenced and shaped by the political and economic variables that define the direction and orientation of planning in each period.

A) Algeria's Tourism Potential as the Foundation of Strategic Planning in the Sector

The tourism potential of a country constitutes the cornerstone of strategic planning in this field. Algeria, often described as a "continent" due to its vastness and diversity, possesses considerable tourism assets that qualify it to become a distinguished tourism destination both domestically and internationally. These assets can be summarized as follows:

1- Natural Potential:

Algeria's natural tourism resources are characterized by:

- **Geographical Location and Territorial Extent:** This has resulted in a remarkable diversity of climates, landscapes, vegetation cover, and living species, as well as numerous natural reserves ¹.

- **Historical, Cultural, and Archaeological Heritage:** The successive civilizations that have flourished across the region have left behind a rich historical and archaeological legacy filled with monuments such as fortresses and ancient sites. These bear witness to every human settlement and activity the country has known throughout different historical periods, extending back to prehistoric times ².

- **Social Composition Diversity:** Algerian society is composed of a rich social mosaic that includes various tribal and ethnic groups united by a common religion and national identity. These include Arabs and Amazigh (Berber) communities such as the Chaoui, Kabyle, Mozabites, and Tuareg. Each group possesses a unique folk and social heritage, which has contributed to making Algeria's overall social and cultural legacy both rich and diverse ³.

2- Material (Man-made) Potential:

In addition to its natural assets, the Algerian state has enhanced the country's tourism potential through significant material investments and institutional efforts aimed at advancing the sector. These include:

- **Legal and Regulatory Framework for the Sector:** This has been established through the issuance of necessary laws and regulations to promote tourism, along with the creation of numerous bodies responsible for its organization, management, and oversight. The most important of these are ⁴:

- Law No. 03-01 of 17 February 2003 on the Sustainable Development of Tourism ⁵, which aims to improve and promote a supportive business environment for the advancement of the tourism sector.

- Law No. 03-03 of 17 February 2003 concerning Tourism Expansion Zones and Tourist Sites ⁶.

- The establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries since 1963, pursuant to Executive Decree No. 474-63 dated 20 December 1963 ⁷.

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- The National Tourism Office, created by Decree No. 21488 dated 31 October 1988.

- The National Agency for Tourism Development, established by Executive Decree No. 98-70 dated 21 February 1998 ⁸.

- The National Institute for Tourism Studies, established by Executive Decree No. 98-94 dated 10 March 1998 ⁹.

- The National Committee for Facilitating Tourism Activities, created by Executive Decree No. 39-94 dated 25 February 1994 ¹⁰.

- **Development of Infrastructure:** Algeria has allocated substantial resources to the development of the necessary infrastructure for tourism. This includes the construction of museums, hotels, and travel agencies, as well as major infrastructure projects — particularly in the transport sector (road, air, and maritime). Key examples include ¹¹:

- **Road Network:** Algeria possesses more than 104,000 km of roads, of which 25% are national highways. It is also connected to the Sahel African countries via the Trans-Saharan African Unity Road, which stretches 2,344 km. Additionally, the East-West Highway, linking Algeria with Tunisia and Morocco, extends over 1,216 km.

- **Rail Network:** The country has a railway network spanning 4,200 km, of which 215 km are electrified. This network connects many northern cities and accounts for 17% of land transport, carrying both passengers and goods.

- **Air Transport:** Algeria has 55 airports distributed across the country, including 12 international airports and the remainder domestic.

- **Maritime Transport:** The country has 17 ports, some specialized in hydrocarbon exports and others multi-purpose. Its maritime fleet consists of 74 vessels for the transport of passengers and goods.

B) The Trajectory of Strategic Planning in Algeria's Tourism Sector:

Like many other countries, Algeria has paid special attention to tourism since independence¹², integrating it into its national development plans in a manner consistent with the prevailing circumstances and developmental requirements. This process unfolded across two main phases, during which the tourism planning system evolved from general planning — within the framework of a comprehensive inventory of resources and the implementation of development programs — to a more systematic and structured approach aimed at executing a strategy of sustainable tourism development through dedicated tourism spatial planning schemes.

1- The Phase of General Planning within the Framework of Comprehensive Resource Inventory and Implementation of Development Programs:

The outcomes of tourism planning during this phase were reflected in the adoption of the following key measures:

- **Issuance of the 1966 Tourism Charter:** The first concrete manifestation of this strategy was the issuance of the Tourism Charter on 26 March 1966. This came after a comprehensive assessment of tourism challenges, an inventory and evaluation of the

country's tourism assets, and the identification of the main orientations for tourism in Algeria. The Charter directed tourism activities primarily toward international tourism with the aim of generating hard currency, given Algeria's urgent need for financial resources to fund its various development programs. It also called for the establishment of specialized institutions for tourism training and the development of the hotel industry to qualify the workforce in the sector, while creating employment opportunities through the expansion of tourism infrastructure and Algeria's integration into the international tourism market ¹³.

• **Incorporation of Tourism into Development Plans during the Socialist Era:** During the period of socialist orientation until 1989, Algeria included tourism in its successive development plans, namely: the Triennial Plan (1967–1969), the First Quadrennial Plan (1970–1973), the Second Quadrennial Plan (1974–1977), the First Quinquennial Plan (1980–1984), and the Second Quinquennial Plan (1985–1989). In each plan, the state allocated material resources and implemented tourism projects, including the construction of hotels, mineral spas, tourism establishments, and the expansion of accommodation capacity, among others ¹⁴.

• **Shift in Tourism Development Strategy after the Opening-Up Period:** With the beginning of the new millennium, Algeria sought to establish a new concept of tourism development centered primarily on promoting the Algerian tourism product and integrating it into the global tourism market within the framework of sustainable development. Consequently, efforts were directed toward formulating a comprehensive and overarching framework for tourism activity that would encompass all branches of the sector. This involved designing an integrated and coherent tourism development plan that harmonizes with all tourism functions and activities from a sustainable perspective. It focuses on new tourism investment projects while ensuring integration between tourism projects and the environment ¹⁵, emphasizing the relationship between tourism development and overall economic activity, and defining its connection to environmental conservation and the requirements for preserving rare natural resources and deserts.

During this phase, Algeria's sustainable tourism development strategy relied on establishing a general policy framework focused on valorizing the country's natural and cultural wealth while preserving the environment and emphasizing the ecological dimension of sustainable development. To this end, the Ministry of Tourism, in January 2001, formulated a new strategy for sustainable development aimed at advancing and promoting tourism activities. In order to pursue this sustainable tourism strategy, the state established a legislative framework through the issuance of the following laws dated 17 February 2003: Law No. 03-01 on the Sustainable Development of Tourism, Law No. 03-02 on the Tourism Use of Beaches, and Law No. 03-03 on Tourism Expansion Zones and Tourist Sites ¹⁶.

The sustainable tourism development strategy encompassed the following key functions: tourism legislation and regulation, tourism marketing, tourism incentives and

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facilitation measures, provision and development of tourism land, protection of the natural environment from degradation and depletion, preservation of the authenticity of the cultural and civilizational environment and its protection from distortion, human resource training and qualification in the tourism sector, and the promotion of societal tourism awareness and the dissemination of a tourism culture within the community.

2- The Phase of Systematic Planning in the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy through Tourism Spatial Planning Schemes:

Tourism holds significant importance due to its capacity to support the economy, alleviate social burdens through job creation and unemployment reduction, increase national income, and combat poverty, among other benefits. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ¹⁷. Algeria has taken this into account by developing operational tourism plans implemented in successive stages (2010–2013) and extending to the horizons of 2025–2030. These plans aim to establish the foundations of sustainable tourism development, as reflected in the following schemes:

- **Sustainable Tourism Action Plan:** In the early 2000s, Algeria formulated a strategy for the development of the tourism sector up to the horizon of 2013, presented in a document titled “Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of Tourism in Algeria – Horizon 2010.” Some amendments were later introduced in response to new domestic and international developments, with the aim of injecting greater dynamism into the tourism sector. The plan focused on: identifying future choices for the rational valorization of the country’s abundant potential and activating it to position Algeria as a competitive tourism destination; defining qualitative and quantitative objectives for the year 2013; and specifying the measures and tools required for the implementation of the programmed projects with a view to building an independent tourism industry. One of the key mechanisms adopted in this program for developing the Algerian tourism product was the planning and development of tourism land.

- **Tourism Spatial Planning Scheme:** This scheme is defined as the set of general and specific rules governing the planning and use of a tourism expansion zone, along with the technical specifications for urbanization and construction, as well as the applicable agreements concerning the use and protection of built properties in accordance with the tourism character of the site ¹⁸. Its legal basis is found in Article 22 of Law No. 20-01 on Territorial Planning and Sustainable Development. According to Article 38 of the same law, it determines how tourism activities and their basic infrastructure should be developed, while taking into account the specific characteristics and potential of each area, as well as its economic, social, and cultural needs. It also emphasizes the rational exploitation of tourism zones and spaces. In this capacity, the scheme establishes rules for the preservation of sites and tourism expansion zones and their conditions, defines the requirements and procedures for locating tourism projects, specifies the types and

characteristics of facilities, and outlines the methods for site exploitation through the preparation of specifications documents (cahiers des charges).

The exploitation of tourism land is closely linked to the preparation of the Tourism Spatial Planning Scheme. The procedures for preparing such schemes are characterized by their lengthy and detailed nature, as stipulated by Executive Decree No. 07-86 (as amended by Executive Decree No. 15-78) ¹⁹. The objectives of this scheme are defined by Law No. 03-03, while the scheme itself includes regulations concerning building rights and easements, as well as technical plans for spatial development and basic infrastructure.

Section II: Evaluating Strategic Planning in the Tourism Sector through the Master Plans for Tourism Spatial Development (Horizons 2025–2030)

The legislator, within the framework of Law No. 03-01, has endowed tourism planning with economic, developmental, and environmental dimensions ²⁰. The system of master planning for tourism spatial development is regarded as an ambitious endeavor aimed at transforming Algeria into a tourism destination of excellence, capable of competing with leading countries in the field ²¹. This system translates the public authorities' vision for tourism development in the short term (2010) and medium term (2015), as embodied in the previously mentioned tourism development and spatial planning schemes. It has since undergone several developments, culminating in the Master Plan for Tourism Development with a long-term horizon of 2025, which was subsequently extended to 2030.

A) The Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2025 :

This plan represents the strategic framework for the sustainable development of tourism in Algeria up to 2025. It constitutes an integral part of the National Territorial Planning Scheme and serves as a tool for its implementation, thereby requiring full consistency with its provisions.

1- Content of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2025:

The plan is a comprehensive document through which the Algerian state presented its regional tourism project for the horizon of 2025 to all stakeholders and sectors. It was adopted by the legislator in accordance with Article 1 of Law No. 01-20 on Territorial Planning and Sustainable Development ²². Furthermore, Law No. 10-02, which approves the National Territorial Planning Scheme ²³, stipulates that the National Territorial Planning Scheme is prepared on the basis of 17 sectoral documents, among which is the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development.

Subsequently, the tourism legislative framework addressed this plan. Law No. 03-01 explicitly references the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development and establishes it as a reference document for all tourism development activities. It mandates compliance with the specifications set out in this plan when implementing tourism facilities and emphasizes the organized exploitation and preservation of tourism expansion zones and tourist sites. It further requires the integration of tourism activities into the broader tools of territorial planning and urbanization ²⁴.

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The plan is a substantial document comprising approximately 350 pages, organized into five volumes as follows:

- **Volume One:** Contains a diagnosis and assessment of the current state of tourism in Algeria.
- **Volume Two:** Outlines the strategic plan, including the five key dynamics and priority tourism action programs.
- **Volume Three:** Provides detailed descriptions of the seven poles of tourism excellence.
- **Volume Four:** Presents the operational plan, explaining the modalities for **implementing** the Master Plan.
- **Volume Five:** Announces the priority tourism projects.

Similar to the National Territorial Planning Scheme, the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development is subject to annual evaluation. It is also periodically updated and revised every five years to ensure its continued alignment with the country's tourism potential and its adaptability to the evolving international tourism market.

2- Evaluation of the Role of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2025:

The evaluation of this plan operates on two levels:

- **At the textual level:** As a forward-looking document, the plan does not view tourism merely as a sector of activity, but rather as a modern industry of high priority and a strategic pillar for establishing Algeria as a premier tourism destination of excellence.

- **At the implementation level:** On the practical level, the plan has encountered several legal paradoxes arising from a tourism planning process marked by periods of stagnation, complete interruption, and lack of continuity. The first paradox relates to the legal vacuum experienced by Algeria for eight years (from 2000 to 2008), the date of approval of the second Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development, which was prepared in 2007 and extends to the horizon of 2025. This legal vacuum had significant negative repercussions on tourism expansion zones and tourist sites, both legally and on the ground.

The second paradox lies in the fact that the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development is intended to serve as an implementing tool for the National Territorial Planning Scheme. Consequently, the former should be consistent with and not in conflict with the latter, which must precede it in both application and enforcement. However, the opposite occurred — a legislative oversight in which the implementing instrument entered into force before its foundational source²⁵.

B) The Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2030:

In reality, this plan is merely one component of a much larger and more comprehensive national strategy that encompasses all economic sectors. It represents a broad national strategic plan reflecting the Algerian state's vision for the comprehensive

developmental advancement of the country, of which the 2025 Master Plan for Tourism Development served as one of the key implementation tools.

1- Content of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2030:

This plan outlines the approaches through which the state intends to ensure the triple balance required for achieving social equity, economic efficiency, and ecological support. It serves as a mirror reflecting the state's aspirations regarding sustainable development and presents a comprehensive tourism project that engages the largest possible number of stakeholders, particularly local communities directly involved in tourism activities.

The Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2030 sets forth both general and specific objectives:

*** General Objectives of the Plan:**

- Positioning tourism as one of the main engines of economic growth.
- Promoting an alternative economy to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons.
- Organizing tourism supply toward the national market.

Enhancing Algeria's international tourism visibility and establishing it as a destination of excellence.

- Contributing to the creation of new jobs, primarily within the overall national economy.
- Helping to improve major economic balances (balance of payments and budgetary equilibrium).
- Generating positive spillover effects on other sectors (agriculture, construction and public works, industry, traditional crafts, and services).
- Reconciling tourism promotion with environmental protection and the valorization of historical and cultural heritage.

*** Specific Objectives of the Plan:**

These emerge from the objectives of its subsidiary plans and include the following:

- **Objectives of the “Algeria Destination” Plan:** Promoting Algeria's image to become a highly competitive tourism destination through an effective tourism marketing strategy that provides a renewed vision of the country.
- **Objectives of the Tourism Poles Plan:** Achieving balanced development by developing each tourism pole according to its unique characteristics and tourism specificities.
- **Objectives of the Tourism Quality Plan:** Enhancing the quality of the national tourism offer by focusing on training, education, and information and communication technologies in line with global developments in tourism products.
- **Objectives of the Public-Private Partnership Plan:** Fostering integration and cooperation between the public and private sectors. The public sector is responsible for territorial planning, infrastructure development, and security provision, while the private sector ensures investment in the sector.

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○ **Objectives of the Tourism Financing Plan:** Encouraging investment in the tourism sector through tax and financial incentives, supporting promoters and project owners, and facilitating and adapting bank financing for tourism activities.

2- Evaluation of the Role of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development – Horizon 2030:

The tangible targets set within the medium-term Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development have not been fully achieved. The action plan during the initial phase experienced noticeable delays, particularly with regard to tourism revenues. This has been reflected in the sector's contribution to gross domestic product, as well as in the number of tourists, hotel infrastructure, and jobs generated within the tourism sector²⁶.

Regarding the status of the wilaya-level (provincial) master plans for tourism spatial development — which serve as subsidiary plans aimed at identifying local tourism potential in each province and act as the starting point for tourism development from the local to the national level — these have not been completed in all provinces. While the provincial directorates of tourism have worked on establishing the foundations of tourism spatial strategy through these plans, their preparation has been finalized in only 35 provinces to date²⁷.

Conclusion:

This study concludes that, despite Algeria's distinctive tourism assets — which have the potential to position it as a tourism destination of excellence — and notwithstanding the various efforts exerted through successive policies and programs since independence, the true image and potential of tourism in Algeria have not yet been fully realized. The most significant of these efforts has been the national strategy based on strategic planning in the tourism sector, particularly the adoption of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development (2025–2030).

The evaluation of the plan's initial phases during the short- and medium-term periods revealed that it has not substantially achieved the set objectives. This shortfall is attributable to a range of obstacles hindering the development of the tourism sector in Algeria. These findings directly address the research problem posed in the introduction: the weak impact of the tourism sector on Algeria's key macroeconomic variables confirms the limited developmental performance of tourism. This situation reflects not necessarily a complete failure, but rather a clear inability of the adopted sustainable tourism development strategy to attain its short- and medium-term targets up to 2025. This assessment is supported by the following key results:

- The tourism sector in Algeria has benefited from a long-term strategy embodied in the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development up to the horizon of 2030. This plan incorporates five key dynamics designed to revive Algerian tourism and enhance the attractiveness of Algeria as a tourism destination in international markets.
- The tangible objectives outlined in the action plan of the Master Plan during its initial phase (2008–2015) experienced significant delays, particularly in the number of tourist arrivals programmed for reception. This has negatively affected tourism revenues in hard

currency and weakened the sector's contribution to the formation of gross domestic product in Algeria.

- Several provinces across the country have recorded delays in preparing local-level master plans for tourism spatial development. This has exacerbated the problem of tourism land availability and contributed to the random and unregulated spread of tourism investments.

- Despite the objectives set for partnership and financing within the Master Plan, and the conclusion of several agreements with banks, the financing issue persists. This is primarily due to the absence of a specialized body dedicated to financing tourism projects, coupled with the limited inflow of foreign capital resulting from various obstacles to investment.

Recommendations:

In general, it is recommended to avoid repeating past mistakes and to address the shortcomings and deficiencies observed in the implementation of the strategic development plan for the tourism sector. The aim is to overcome current gaps and achieve the long-term objectives set out in the Master Plan for Tourism Development up to 2030. This can be accomplished, in particular, through the following measures:

- Completing the preparation of wilaya-level (provincial) master plans for tourism spatial development, ensuring their effective implementation, and prioritizing the development of poles of tourism excellence and tourist villages. These constitute the cornerstone for transforming Algeria into a distinguished tourism hub. Strict oversight mechanisms should be established to monitor the execution of these plans.

- Activating the role of the private sector in tourism spatial planning and encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises to implement the projects outlined in the Master Plan.

- Strengthening the public-private partnership system in order to resolve the chronic problem of financing tourism projects.

- Offering competitive pricing combined with high-quality services, while guaranteeing the security and safety of tourists. This should be supported by the development of world-class infrastructure, particularly in transport and accommodation.

- Promoting domestic tourism by organizing and regulating its services and fulfilling its requirements.

- Removing all obstacles that impede the completion of the Master Plan for Tourism Spatial Development, especially those related to tourism land, administrative procedures, and bureaucratic hurdles.

- Employing innovative promotional methods to market Algeria's tourism image, particularly through the effective use of information and communication technologies.

- Investing in the qualification and training of human resources across all tourism specializations, and developing their skills in promotion and the management of tourism facilities.

- Benefiting from the successful experiences of leading countries in the tourism sector.

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