



Payments for Environmental Services in Tourism: Cash for Improvement and Conservation of the Assets

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ABSTRACT- After the start of 2020 Vision and other development projects in Morocco, tourism has been highlighted with a certain solemnity. It is seen since then, as one of the stilts of economic resources and the driving force behind development. Indeed, the sector has renewed its managerial strategies by defining very ambitious objectives which allow the consolidation of different types of tourism, in particular sustainable, rural and nature tourism. These new types of tourism has been taken in consideration after the new spans the world has experienced, in particular, the enhancement of cultural heritage, protection of the natural heritage and the environment, the new rural destinations, etc.

From the idea of breaking down the barriers between these different considerations; wanting to participate in tourism's management of our country and catching attention to new natural and touristic places. We got carried away by the idea of having it all under one roof, what led us to Payments for Environmental Services (PES).

Our project is the definition of a PES fund allowing the preservation, safeguard and enhancement of natural/touristic sites, it will emerge in Tafraout/Ameln. A region belonging to the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve (ABR), which offers exceptional geographic, socio-cultural resources as well as natural potential, allowing it to become a destination for sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

The establishment of a PES concept in this region will take the form of funding a preservation and safeguard system, which will aim to: consolidate the management efforts deployed in environment, nature and tourism by the stakeholders; allocate the necessary financial needs to management costs and fill the funding shortfalls of the State for the benefit of the enhancement, structuring and preservation of natural touristic sites.

However, this project raises a variety of questions related to the determination of the stakeholders and their mission, the definition of the environmental service the region needs, its cost and its beneficiary, etc.

How much will this funding be? For which safeguard approach? Who will be the beneficiary? Will this new managerial method be efficient? And so many other enigmas and foginess will be solved through this article.

Keywords: Payments for environmental services, tourism management, environment, sustainable tourism, management of natural and cultural assets.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most profitable and opportune economic sectors, this industry has made good results and wealthy incomes for countries endowed with historical, natural, cultural, economic and technological potentialities. These potentialities facilitated the creation of several tourism products, it allowed to diversify them and to support the advent of new types of tourism, including environmental tourism and responsible tourism, which particularly arouse our interest in this publication.

Nowadays, tourism faces many issues, whether it is globalization, customers that became more demanding or competition.

This competition between destinations or even between tourism actors in the same country in order to take pioneering positions, has placed the tourist in a very privileged situation and engendered changes in his behavior, his expectations, his requirements and his needs and consequently modified the policies of tourist establishments and actors. Today, customer satisfaction is the supreme pillar of management strategies and approaches. However, this satisfaction is often made despite the environment, the respect for nature and the preservation of heritage.

In the same context, Morocco's decision to open the portal of the rural and natural world to touristic activities is biased; from an environmental point of view by the absence of a real sustainable management

policy.

Motivated by the imperative need for rigorous protection of the environment, the heart of our reflection is to propose innovative guidelines for: safeguarding touristic sites of landscaped interest, planning strategies for sustainable tourism, satisfying the tourists and guaranteeing a quality life for the locals. Our contribution is the creation of a PES fund as a new tool for sustainable tourism development, which will ensure the management, the sustainability and the safeguard of the natural and cultural assets in Taфраout/Ameln which is part of the UNESCO world heritage.

1. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE PES?

Guided by the quest for answers to the multidimensional question: Can we adopt PES as a new managerial tool for tourism development?

We found ourselves faced with a perilous research adventure. We faced highly delicate constraints in the process of defining the links between the concepts of our research. Connections that we want to weave in your mind through definitions and characteristics related to the PES.

To familiarize our readers with the concept of PSE, we dedicate a few lines to this dogma to clear out its main foundations.

The PSE is a recent approach, which is particularly implemented in the context of protected areas with natural, geotourism and eco-tourism potential recognized either at the local, regional, national or international level.

According to Mayrand&Paquin: "The PES is a relatively new mechanism which aims to promote positive environmental externalities through the transfer of financial resources between the beneficiaries of certain ecological services and the service providers or managers of environmental resources". (Mayrand&Paquin, 2004)

They explain that, "The fundamental principle of PES is that resource users and communities that are able to generate environmental services must be compensated, and those who benefit from these services must pay them. As a result, these benefits are internalized. From this point of view, the PES approach is similar to the polluter pays principle by creating positive measures to encourage the protection and conservation of the environment".

PES are also "a voluntary transaction, where a clearly defined environmental service is purchased by one or more users from one or more suppliers". This last definition reveals the main characteristics of PES, in particular that it is a voluntary transaction, during which no one is obliged to participate. It reconciles nature conservation and economic development by determining the environmental service and its economic value. (Wunder, 2005)

It should be noted that the PES mechanisms have the particularity of involving local population in the policy of ecology and influence positively her daily living.

2. MAKING THE PES MORE "TOURISTIC" ...

Going from these general definitions, we have tried to duplicate the concepts of PES on tourism. The principle behind the adoption of this mechanism in the tourism sector, refers to measuring the economic value that tourism actors (tourists, travel agencies, tour operators...) can give in exchange of discovering the ecosystem while contributing to its preservation, this action is named in PSE jargon, an environmental service.

Indeed, the landscape preservation services market is one of the least developed markets, yet its demand is not to detract. The sustainable tourism and ecotourism industry may be one of the main beneficiaries - and therefore demanders - of beauty's preservation services. In the same context, Mills & Porrastudied 51 payment systems for landscape preservation services. They found that this market had not reached maturity and had serious shortcomings; furthermore, the ecotourism industry may be willing to pay for the provision of these services.(Mills & Porrastudied, 2002)

Adding to that, the idea of natural and cultural heritage offers another interesting path to the establishment of PES.

2.1 Why Taфраout/Ameln?

Talking about the heritage, Taфраout/Ameln is a region in the south of Morocco. It is a part of the ARB that was declared on December 8, 1998 by UNESCO as Morocco's first Biosphere Reserve covering an area of approximately 2.5 million hectares.

The region has a whole myriad of natural and cultural attractions that make it a special touristic spot. The fauna, the history and the population are all assets that refine the brand image of this place. The flora is also diversified there, because the region is nestled between almond trees, olive trees, aromatic and medicinal plants and the Argan tree which represents a strong connotation among the inhabitants.

Tafraout/Ameln is also known for its geological characteristics, prehistoric interest sites and archaeological heritage, which attract not only tourists but also researchers, students and promoters of prospecting programs. This unique and precious heritage stand for both touristic and scientific interest and provides multiple information on lifestyle, tools, clothing, and ceremonies of old civilizations. Concerning today's civilization, the region is endowed with rich crafts and local products in abundance.

The local population is very attached to spiritualities, the town is precisely known by a very large number of "Marabouts"- places known for some specific spirituality rituals.

In addition, the local cuisine is also considered as a very attractive cultural element. It has been able to retain its originality and specificity despite external pressures.

These strong natural, cultural and touristic potentials are also accompanied by weaknesses which we try to remedy through our theory.

2.2 Behind the Scenes of the PES'Creation

As we mentioned previously, this theory aims to identify an empirical model for the implementation of PES and conform it to the tourism sector, particularly to sustainable tourism, for its ecological and environmental dimension.

To cross from theory to practice, we first studied the researches related to PES to be able to define the concept, followed by a documentary research attached to tourism and environment since we are trying to combine the two concepts, then we analyzed the regions of the world that adopted PES and have the same cultural, touristic and economic context.

Subsequently, we went to fieldwork by administrating 200 questionnaires -written in Arabic, French and were spelled sometimes in Amazigh- intended to the local population. 400 other surveys were written in English and French and were intended to tourists. The information collected from these questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS and Sphynx for quantitative data.

Afterwards, we conceived: a participatory territorial diagnosis, to unravel strengths and failures; a financial study and business plan to identify the "incomes" and "outcomes" of the project and a digital marketing study that will allow the region to have more visibility among the tourists.

In addition, various contacts with authorities and stakeholders of the project took place.

This methodological approach has enabled us to create a PES model adapted to our context, which will take the form of a compensation system, contributing to the development of sustainable tourism as mentioned before.

3. CONCRETELY, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Let us remember that this research work consists to create an approach that highlights the link between environment and tourism. Taking in consideration: the enhancement and the protection of the natural and cultural heritage, the tourist; between its expectations and its satisfaction, the environment and the impact of visitors' activities on it and the local population; her needs, her participation and her positioning towards the PES project.

The first step was defining the environmental service, the main challenge in developing a PES system is to define, measure and quantify the environmental services sought. It requires scientific knowledge and stakeholder's consultation to determine which services will attract beneficiary's participation. It is important to identify the services required then determine the levels of service desired. In our case, it is about a conservation program that helps manage the natural and cultural resources in Tafraout/Ameln in exchange of a "touristic tax".

Legally speaking, after checking the juridical texts, it turned out that nothing prevents from proceeding the PES. Especially since it is not a tax but a contribution, we only used the appellation "touristic tax" to make the concept understood among visitors. Indeed, we have chosen tourists as the main buyers of the program for two main reasons: the first one is the unique natural and cultural resources of the region that we have previously enumerated. The second is some echoes that we have heard as native from a nearby town. These echoes confirm that tourists coming to discover the area are concerned by the environment.

However, we did not require any amount of contribution to not to bias the foundations of PES. We therefore studied the tourists' ability to pay for this program through monetary compensation. The survey showed that they are ready to contribute with an average sum of € 5 per visit, in return of the implementation of the conservation program.

This program is a set of actions in order to promote tourism and environment which will allow both locals and visitors a certain satisfaction at different levels. We created it out after several formal and less formal discussions and interviews with tourists, inhabitants, local decision-makers, tourism stakeholders and scientific searchers. It is an assortment of approaches which essentially revolve around the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, the development of the touristic offers, the improvement of access to touristic information and the promotion of local products.

These actions -which we detailed in our research and during the administration of questionnaires to the tourists- have a cost. So we dedicated to it the financial part of the research, which informed us about all numbers related to the project. We have therefore established a cash flow forecast in order to study the profitability of our investment and measure our return on certain expenses incurred within the framework of this program. Indeed, by associating the statistical study relating the commitment of tourists to pay for the Environmental Services and the forecast of current and future visits we found out that our project shows a positive cash flow from the first year of operation.

2020's arrivals compared to previous years leads us to believe that we will witness a perpetual growth in terms of the number of tourists. Especially since we intend to market our PSE project through a good digital Marketing strategy.

In addition, to remain the social dimension of the PES concept; we believe that this system will generate employment to the local population and allow the financial support that the natives need. We also think that they will change their conception of the environment and see it as an opportunity through good communication and environmental education.

Moreover, we are keen on the empowerment of the local population in our project through her participation in the decision-making and in the development process. To do so, we asked inhabitants about their vision of PES, their points of view about the establishment of the project were positive. However, many of them suggested that an association from the region should be the manager and the guarantor of this project. Indeed, we had the same suggestion because we believe that if a local decision-maker or authority manage the incomes of the program, we will fall into legal anomalies. We therefore suggest "Pays de Tafraout", an association which made several efforts in development in the Tafraout/Ameln region; with the guidance and advice of a "more formal entity". Decision-makers such as the Regional Tourism Council, Rural Tourism Development Network and the National Agency for the Development of Oasis Areas and Argan Tree can be conciliators and intermediaries whom will intervene in the management of activities linked to the implementation of PES.

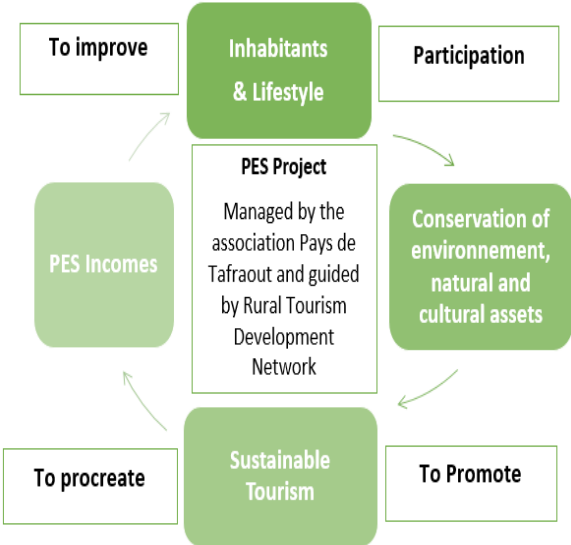


Figure 1: The PES cycle. (Lehmer,2021)

We believe that drawing a summary diagram of the cycle of the PES will facilitate the assimilation of the concept and the connections it forges between its aspects, making them somehow attached to each other.

II. CONCLUSION

In order to preserve and conserve the touristic and environmental assets of the Tafraout/Ameln, we have proposed a PES model: a contribution paid by the tourists for the implementation of the conservation program.

The tourist population, the natives and the local decision-makers were very interested by our project, which motivated us to tie up the notion of the PES, to dissect it and to remodel it so it becomes adapted to the tourism sector.

We believe that the studied area can be transformed through the PES vision. Indeed, of what concerns the local population; the inhabitants showed a predisposition to get involved in the protection of the environment, cultural heritage and natural resources.

In the matter of tourists, our E-marketing study shows that we are likely to attract a large number of visitors who are increasingly showing a particular interest to natural attributes and a certain environmental sensitivity. A type of tourists who are ready to donate 5€ per visit in exchange of a stay in satisfying conditions and responsible towards nature, environment and heritage.

Implementing our project as a new impetus for environmental and tourism management has been a difficult. However, the collaboration of different stakeholders made it more fluid. In the same context of success, we learned that the Municipality of Tafraout/Ameln intends to formalize the start of our project as soon as possible.

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