

Tourism development in Qatar: towards a diversification strategy beyond the conventional 3 Ss

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Abstract

Research on tourism development in oil-dependent countries is still in its infancy arguably because the tourism sector itself is new in those countries. This paper makes a contribution filling this gap with a focus on the diversification strategy which Qatar seems to be pursuing. The pursuit of the conventional 3 Ss model of Sea, Sand and Sun by Qatar in terms of its tourism development trajectory seems to be the only focus of its tourism development strategy. Against a backdrop of phenomenal growth, Qatar then incorporated the 4Ss of Safari, Skyscrapers, Sport, Shopping, and Surgery to offer a diversified product which appeals to sport enthusiast; a shopper; safari adventurer; a landscape and architectural admirer; health enthusiast (or just patients) for surgery; and a holiday maker for sea, sand, sun thereby establishing its own competitive advantage in the tourism sector. The framework of Qatar's offerings and model of tourism development of Qatar are this paper's major contributions as they open up new research areas as to whether endowments can be expanded/diversified as is the case of Qatar and whether growth trajectories are context specific. For Qatar, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions, Festivals, History, Heritage, Desert, Sea, Nature reserves and Safari are all part of a single experience.

Keywords: tourism; Qatar; sea, sand, sun; Skyscrapers; sport; shopping.



Source: <http://www.mannzili.com/userfiles/image/qatar%20doha%20tourism.jpg>

INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourism has been an international phenomenon and it has occurred despite occasional economic crisis. As highlighted: “Despite occasional shocks, international tourist arrivals have shown virtually uninterrupted growth – from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995, and 1087 million in 2013” (UNWTO, 2014:2). The last four decades have witnessed the tourism sector becoming one of the leading industries globally and as such many developing countries have used tourism as a possible development tool (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007:334). Expansion and diversification of the tourism sector, competition amongst countries to attract tourists and role of tourism in development are the key relevant issues linked to the tourism sector (COMCEC, 2014:1, 2). Specifically regarding Islamic countries, it has been advanced that tourism can play a vital role in the development of members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) who are now prominence to the sector (COMCEC, 2014, p. 1).

In Qatar, tourism is a relatively new but growing sector and Qatar's tourism industry which did not exist 10 years ago is now vigorously advertising the country as a luxurious travel destination (Shachmurove, 2009, p. 13). The Qatar Tourism Authority 2013 Tourism Statistics Report indicates a positive outlook of the tourism sector as in 2013 the number of visitors grew 10% from 1.2 million in 2012 to 1.32 in 2013. This growth was facilitated by the introduction of new events and festivals as well as other tourism products (Al Mohannadi, 2014). Other important tourism related structures, activities and documents, such as the Doha Exhibition and Conference Centre, the Hamad International Airport, and the National Tourism Sector Strategy, have been just finalised or will be soon finalised (Al Mohannadi, 2014). However, Qatar

tourism is a work in progress as its aim is to grow much faster and targeting to attract 7 million visitors by year 2030 (Al Mohannadi, 2014).

This paper will not discuss the tourism development strategy in relation to political or economic issues such as the greater liberalisation and permission of 100% foreign ownership (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011, p. 47; see also WTO, 2014, p. 66). It will also not discuss tourism issues linked to political and economic matters in Qatar or other Gulf States (for these issues, see for example: Sharpley, 2008; Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007; Formanek, 2013; Hazbun, 2004). It will also not explore the issues regarding the exploitation of workers linked to the construction of sport and tourism facilities (see for example: Equal Times, News at Work, 2012). This paper, instead, will present an exposition of the diversifications of tourism products. To that end, the article will propose a schema showing the tourism diversification strategy currently underway in Qatar. It will specifically pay attention to new 3Ss (*sport, shopping and skyscrapers*) as a tourism attraction.

The paper is significant to inform tourism practice because up to 2008, it has been advanced that “the planning of tourism in the Middle East, particularly in oil-dependent rentier states, remains under-researched—arguably a notable omission given the political economic structures in such countries” (Sharpley, 2008, p. 14). Therefore, this paper makes its contribution by filling this gap and investigating an aspect of tourism diversification in Qatar, possibly a country very much with little research on it and also as a result of the newness of its tourism sector. The paper posits that Qatar is pursuing a diversification strategy in the tourism sectors which goes beyond the conventional 3Ss of *Sand-Sea-Sun* to exploit other Ss, namely, *Shopping-*

Surgery-Sport-Skyscrapers. Its offerings also include MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and culture in its tourism product portfolio. While this strategy seems to be yielding positive results at the moment, only time will tell if Qatar will focus on tourism as a new strategic development sector and continue to grow sustainably. Also of interest would be the new strategies which Qatar will have to put in place from time to time to keep the tourism sector on a sustainable and viable growth path.

METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper is based on a literature survey in which secondary sources of data such as books, journals and the internet were consulted. Secondary data are data collected by others and not the researcher him- or herself (Welman, Kruger & Mitchel, 2012). The information gathered in the literature review process was sufficient to enable the construction of a model of tourism development in Qatar and a typology of a typical tourist to Qatar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The share of the Middle East region in international tourism has been negligible in the 1970s and 1980s as a consequence of various wars and conflicts in experienced in the region and “the huge oil rental incomes following the October 1973 ‘oil boom’” that permitted to transform relatively poor countries to extremely wealthy ones (see Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007, p. 335). However, writing in 2007, Mansfeld & Winckler, (2007, p. 336) argued that after the ‘oil decade’ and specifically from 1986, the Arab countries realised the potential of tourism to counteract the combined effect of decreasing oil revenue and population growth (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007, p. 338). In many countries in the Arab world, especially the oil-rich countries, tourism was culturally unwelcome and economically needless, but things changed and some countries such as United Arab Emirates (UAE) have placed tourism at the centre of

their economic development agenda as a way to diversify and generally to promote the economy while reducing dependency on fluctuating oil prices (Sharpley, 2008, p. 13, 14). The UAE was possibly the first country in the region to recognise the potential of tourism and to successfully exploit it as early as in the 1980s such that visitor spending accounted for 18% of GDP overtaking oil and gas revenues with 17% in 2002 (Henderson, 2007). Dubai has been seen as a possible model for Qatar through ideas that Qatar’s “most immediate inspiration lies next door: the bling-bedecked Cinderella story of the travel industry, the emirate of Dubai” (Sherwood, 2006, p. 2).

Diversification in tourism can be linked to two matters: first diversification of the economic sector as a whole; secondly diversification within the tourism sector. Qatar seems very much in line with both these trends as it uses tourism as a diversification strategy as well as to be less dependent on oil and energy resources (QTA, 2014). The Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 seems to suggest the need to diversify within the tourism sector as reflected in the excerpt below:

For any tourism strategy to succeed, it needs to focus on areas in which the country has a distinctive appeal and a competitive edge, all while offering a diversified tourism offering and a varied portfolio of products that can appeal to different segments of tourists. In that regard, the National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 is holistic in that it seeks to promote not only leisure and family-oriented tourism, but also cultural, business, sports, health and wellness, ecotourism and educational tourism” (QTA, no date, p. 10).

The issue of diversification within the tourism sector is the concern of this paper and specifically, to investigate how a tourism product diversification strategy is evolving in Qatar, with a special focus on 'new' 3 Ss, namely, *Shopping, Sport and Skyscraper* attractions.

Many tourism destinations have enhanced the tourism sector based largely on the 3Ss (*Sand-Sea-Sun*) typology, however the same destinations need to go beyond the conventional 3Ss and adjust the 3Ss models to current new tourism typologies by offering new innovative tourism attractions, services and facilities to remain competitive to avoid stagnation or decline (see for example Cameron & Gatewood, 2008; Bachvarov, 1997; ECLAC, 2008; Aguiló, Alegre & Sard, 2005; Sheldon, 2005). Following issues of diversification, the consumer profile for the next 20 years has been sketched as follows: "Preferences of tourists will become polarized and demand for innovation and variety will rise; the emphasis will be on comfort and adventure. For product development, 3S (that is, *Sun-Sand-Sea*) will be replaced by 3E (that is, *Excitement-Education-Entertainment*)" (COMCEC, 2014, p. 5). It would be of interest to see how Qatar gears towards these proposed changes by diversifying the traditional 3S products towards new possibilities.

The conventional 3Ss in tourism are still a valuable tourism attraction despite various global issues such as climate change such that Amelung & Viner, 2006, p. 359 argue that empirical data do not show any signs of plummeting competitiveness in destinations which offer sun and sand propositions. At a time, when there were doubts about whether sun and sand destinations can still maintain their competitiveness. However, the conventional 3Ss can still persist if coupled with new innovative and diverse tourism products, adjusted and placed in a sustainable development framework. For example, a study on the Balearic Islands revealed that introducing new innovative

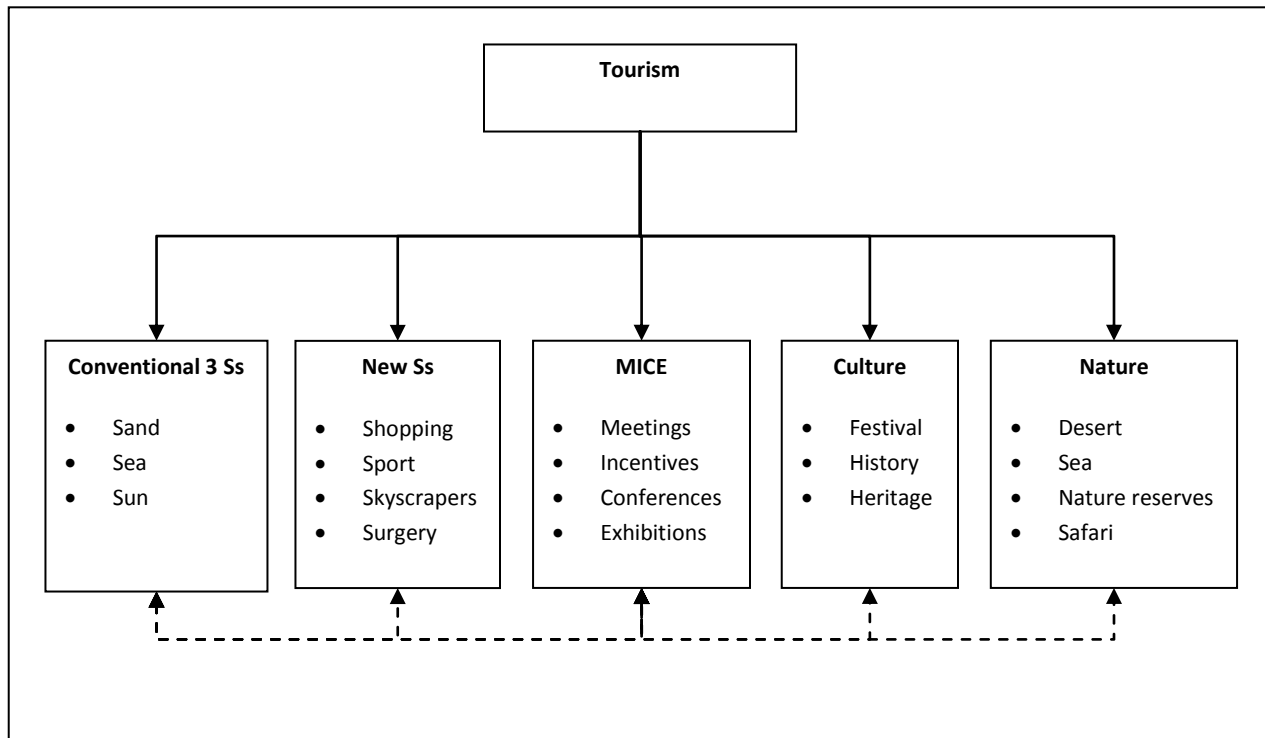
products with a focus on the individual needs are still in line with Sun and Sand propositions (Aguiló *et al.*, 2005, p. 229; see also Sharpley, 2002, p. 234 about regeneration strategy of *Sea-Sun-Sand* destinations). Sheldon (2005, p. 10) precisely argues that many islands portray and sell the "Sun, Sand and Sea" image and may find it imperative and necessary to expand their product offerings because the 'Sun, Sea and Sand' proposition is available on many other islands. It can be argued that all localities which compete on the conventional 3Ss market should explore alternatives in order to diversify or differentiate. As such, it can be argued that the conventional 3Ss (*Sand-Sun-Sea*) proposition should be attuned to contemporary tourism demand expectations and be located within a sustainable development framework to remain competitive and, at the same time, diversification of the tourism products beyond the 3S is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to comprehensively enhance the competitiveness of a destination given the emerging needs the 3Es present.

The conventional 3S have been acknowledged in Gulf States as providing a comparative advantage such that Gulf Cooperation Council countries have an opportunity to give Europeans a proposition which offers Europeans, year round winter-sun holidays especially in areas around the Mediterranean (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007, p. 343). The potential of other Ss has been widely acknowledged (see for example: *Shopping* in Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007, p. 353; *Surgery* in Connell, 2006). This paper posits a comprehensive 7Ss model which combines the two Ss models, namely, the conventional triple S (sea-sand-sun) and the 'new' 5Ss (*Sport, Skyscrapers, Shopping, Surgery and Safari*) model. The comprehensive model would include: *Sea, Sand, Sun, Sport, Skyscrapers, Shopping, Surgery and Safari* with the intention to provide *Excitement-Education-Entertainment*.

Products diversification in Qatar tourism

This section presents the current tourism product sectors in Qatar with the aim to investigate the potential of some of the new Ss (*Sport-Shopping-Skyscrapers*). While they may not be the focus of this paper, it is important to highlight that MICE, cultural tourism and nature in their various aspects are also key tourism attractions in Qatar, such that “Qatar is becoming prominent on the cultural itineraries of travellers” and is focusing on MICE tourism segment “to further stamp its travel and tourism credentials” (Al Nuaimi, 2011, p. 13; see also QTA, no date, p. 13). The Qatar National Tourism Strategy (QTA, 2014, p. 8) indicates that the Government of Qatar’s

approach in tourism is “multi-pronged and has focused on several key areas” which include “constructing an exceptional urban landscape” and world-class MICE facilities (see QTA, 2014, p. 8). Fundamentally, one of the Qatar National Tourism Strategy’s (QTA, 2014, p. 18; see also page 21) priority areas is the diversification of its tourism product offerings. This reinforces the basic underlying argument in this paper for diversification of tourism product offerings beyond the conventional 3Ss without excluding them but properly managing them in order to take into account current trends in tourism demand and matters of sector sustainability. Graph 1 (Framework of offerings) shows a diagram showing the various tourism product segments offered in Qatar.



Graph 1. Framework of offerings exemplifying the level of tourist products diversification in Qatar

It can be noted that Dubai has also been diversifying its attraction on a similar line (including *Sport, Shopping* and modern city-*Skyscrapers*). This thrust is evident from the way in which tourism agency advertise the

UAE. For example, the JC Holiday (2014/2015, p. 8) advert reads: “Who would want more than sun, sand, sea, sports, unbeatable shopping, top-class hotels and restaurants, intriguing traditional culture,

history, amazing architecture and a safe welcoming environment?" Similarly, the diversification of Dubai reverberates in literature, for instance, Henderson, (2007, p. 37) writes:

There have been endeavors in Dubai to diversify its attractions, but those of the coast dominate and seaside hotel resorts provide various recreational facilities. The constant sunshine, desert landscape, its Bedouin culture and the modern city (which incorporates a few heritage sites) are also deemed to have tourist appeal. Shopping in the souks, malls and duty free outlets is prominently advertised and regular shopping festivals are organized. The Emirate additionally hosts international sporting competitions.

There is evidence suggesting that Qatar is following Dubai in its tourism development trajectory (see Sherwood, 2006, p. 2). However, it is worthy of mention that from a QTA perspective, this could not be the case, because other perspectives are present which suggest that when making the comparison between Dubai and Qatar, Qatar "has embarked on a different course" (de Boer in Sherwood, 2006, p. 4).

Sporting

The linkages of sport to tourism and associated literature has been growing in the last 30 years especially when sport is about special grand events such as the FIFA World Cup (Giampiccoli & Nauright, 2010, p. 43). Therefore, sport can be considered as a positive tourism strategy. In fact, sport tourists spend more money than conventional tourists to an extent that sport tourism is always more profitable than conventional tourism business and in 2007 it accounted for \$51 billion or about 10 per

cent of the total tourism spend (L'Etang, Falkheimer & Lugo 2007, p. 72). It is not surprise therefore that that Qatar is focusing much of its tourism growth in the sport sector, both from an athlete and spectator perspective. The QTA claims Qatar growing very fast as a leading place for enjoyment of sports for both athletes and spectators as such it has made a USD 2.8 billion investment in infrastructure in the past years in support of competitive sport (Al Nuaimi, 2011, p. 12). This growing influence can be seen when Qatar is increasingly being nominated as an international sport arena. For example, Qatar is a sought after venue by many international football clubs for holding winter training camps (Al Nuaimi, 2011, p. 12). Other sport competitions which have already been hosted in Qatar include Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) Tour competition and the 2006 Asian Games "which is the second largest sporting event after the Olympics" (Shachmurove, 2009, p. 13) and the Asian Football Confederation's Asian Cup in 2011 (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011, p. 196; see also Qatar Financial Centre Authority, online for more sport events hosted in Qatar). It can be inferred that Qatar is a leading global venue on the international sport calendar (King, 2008).

At the same time these sports events serve to posit Qatar as a global tourist attraction: "By hosting events such as the Asian Games (2006), Qatar is trying to *elevate its position in the global arena* and adding to *international awareness* of its potential as a *sports events* and *tourist destination*" (Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2009, p. 53, emphasis in original). On the other hand, from a visitor's perspective, by hosting the various sport events, "sport enthusiasts can expect to enjoy the experience of a lifetime in Qatar" (QTA, no date, p. 13).

The 2022 Football World Cup is seen as a milestone event for Qatar also linked to the country's tourism strategy as exemplified in this excerpt from authorities: "The Tourism

Strategy will certainly help Qatar better prepare for successfully hosting the World Cup in 2022 [...] But more importantly, the Strategy will help introduce Qatar to more people around the world ahead of the event, helping them discover what the country has to offer and further tempting them to visit it along with their family and friends during this milestone sporting event” (QTA, no date, p. 16).

The mooted idea of a Sport City is not by chance. A Sport City is not therefore an independent stand-alone idea but it should be viewed as a mega sporting project with linkages arguably such mammoth events (notably Asian Games in 2006, the bid 2016 Olympic Games, 2022 the Football World Cup). Qatar is developing its own Sport City (see Smith, 2010, p. 390, 395). The Qatar Sport City in Doha (called Aspire Zone) is very much integrated within the tourism master plan and in fact is “Part of \$15 billion tourism master plan to attract 1 million international arrivals by 2010” and it is part of the wider tourism approach which is “Aiming to promote Doha and Qatar as a popular venue for international events and to develop the region’s tourism industry” (Smith, 2010, p. 397, 398). Interestingly in the Doha Sport City, the main anchor attraction “will eventually be the 145,000 square meter Le Villaggio shopping mall” (Smith, 2010, p. 401) indicating the relevance of tourism and shopping to Qatar, besides the attraction of the conventional sport tourism (for athletes and spectators), in the development of the Sport City.

Shopping

Shopping is today recognised as a tourism attraction and various tourist destinations recognise this (Henderson, 2007, p. 37; Hazbun, 2004, p. 328). For example, shopping is amongst the three top attractions listed from a visitor survey in Hong Kong (Leiper & Park, 2010, p. 344) showing the importance given to shopping by visitors based on the excitement that the shopping experiences generate. It can be

said that tourism is specifically being linked to a tourism strategy because Dubai’s economy depends on its shopping experiences which were brought by the construction of very complex and luxurious shopping malls. To heighten the competition, recently Bahrain, also started constructing many shopping centers in pursuit of tourism growth (Formanek, 2013, p. 353). The relevance of shopping as a tourist attraction is also understandable given the manner in which tourism agencies market shopping as a tourism attraction. For example, a tourism brochure on the Gulf States and Jordan (JCHoliday, 2014/2015, p. 1) mentions that “We [the agency] will take you to the Middle East’s business hub also known for its extravagance in world record man-made projects, placidly azure private beaches and incredible shopping.”

Given this compelling evidence, it has been suggested that shopping represents the fourth S for the Gulf States, thus the GCC tourist destinations seem to be offering similar experiences undergirded primarily by the four S’s of sun, sand, sea and shopping in the Arabian Gulf region (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007, p. 353). The official QTA website in its list of ‘Things To Do’ indicates shopping and lists 17 shopping malls and 5 souqs (QTA, online) as the major attractions for purposes of shopping further supporting and reflecting the importance which the QTA places on shopping as a relevant and viable tourist attraction. In that vein, the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 (QTA, 2014, p. 21) offers “Visitors ...exceptional urban experiences of a bustling city that offers excellent shopping, entertainment, dining and relaxation opportunities for families and individuals.” The shopping experience in the ‘bustling city’ leads us to the issues regarding modern cities, specifically, skyscrapers as the other, and potentially ‘new’, S in the tourism discourse.

Skyscrapers

Despite their relevance in tourism, skyscrapers, have not received much

detailed attention in tourism research and discourse that is “The tourism literature contains many brief remarks about skyscrapers but no detailed discussions or theoretical analyses of them as tourist attractions or as environmental issues salient to tourism” (Leiper & Park, 2010, p. 334). Thus, more research on the roles of skyscrapers in tourism is welcome (see Leiper & Park, 2010, p. 347). Consequently, skyscrapers represent one of the Ss which this paper is attempting to address. Historically, the United States of America has been without contending rivals in the possession of the global number of skyscrapers, however, recently skyscrapers are being built around the globe and the globalisation patterns “influence the proliferation of skyscrapers” (Al-Kodmany, Ali & Zhang, 2013, p. 22). In the context of the Middle East, while 20 years ago the Middle East only had one skyscraper taller than 150 metres, in 2015 it is projected that the region will boast 289 skyscrapers higher than 150 metres, most of them being in Dubai as the whole region also lends it weight to the construction of skyscrapers (CTBUH, 2013, p. 44).

The proliferation of skyscrapers is attributable to various reasons amongst which tourism is one of them. Thus, the influence of the forces of globalization, the accumulation of wealth, the desire my countries to demonstrate skyscrapers as manifestations of new found wealth, global tourism and views, albeit, political which consider skyscrapers as a way to attract tourists to a destination (Al-Kodmany *et al.*, 2013, p. 23; see also Leiper & Park, 2010, p. 333). There are problems and challenges associated with skyscrapers. For example, Leiper & Park, (2010, p. 342, 347) argue that using skyscrapers in urban environments for tourism marketing strategy should be attuned to the attitudes of the potential clients rather than relate to the thinking and feelings of pride of the crafters of the messages.

The importance and relevance of skyscrapers in tourism still remains notable. For example, tourism growth in Taiwan has been linked to the skyscraper *Taipaei 101* and “its reputation as the tallest building in the world” (Veasna, Wu & Huang, 2013, p. 515). Dubai’s “one-of-a-kind” strategy lures tourists and aims to invoke international interest by building high. Shanghai follows similar steps by aiming to attract tourists through spectacular architecture such by building the “100m (328 ft) wide Millennium Boulevard threading more than 100 skyscrapers in Pudong” (Al-Kodmany *et al.*, 2013, p. 32). The skyscraper Willis Tower in Chicago “has become one of the city’s main tourist attractions, due to the SkyDeck observation deck, opened to the public in 1974” (Firoiu & Croitoru, 2013, p. 95). The government of Dubai recognises the value of skyscraper as a tourist attraction as it appeals to tourists to take a journey in Dubai to see how the “city has transformed its desert dunes into iconic skyscrapers” (DTCM, online). Around the globe, many major cities advertise their skyscrapers as key features worth visiting in those cities (Leiper & Park, 2010, p. 347).

Skyscrapers pose the challenge of how to integrate them into in the urban setting of Doha (see Mahgoub & Abbara, 2012, p. 640; see also Formanek, 2013, p. 350 about the need to properly integrate skyscrapers in the urban setting). The Government of Qatar recognises the environmental problems associated with skyscrapers and in their Qatar National Development Strategy 2011~2016 (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011, p. 230) point out that “Doha’s skyscrapers are often continuously air-conditioned and fully lit. The present patterns of growth and consumption need to be better managed in order to secure health and prosperity for future generations.” Nevertheless, according to Qatar Tourism Authority, there are more than 100 buildings and towers sprouting in Doha as construction cranes occupy the sky as hotels, financial centres, and offices are

built at Doha West Bay turning it into a huge world-class business and leisure center. By 2009, about 40 hotels had been constructed in Doha including Sofitel’s twin 27-story towers; Hilton, Hotel Khalifa, Millennium and Hyatt hotels. This made Doha “a symbol of a globalized city” (Mahgoub & Abbara, 2012, p. 641; see Mahgoub & Abbara, 2012 for a more detailed discussion on issues related to skyscrapers, their history, legislation, construction and environment in Qatar).

experiences, Qatar tourism has compressed the development phases of tourism development. Thus the early phase of its tourism development which presuppose the pursuit of the conventional 3 Ss model of *sea, sand and sun* like many tourist destinations has been almost compressed with the incorporation of the 5Ss of *Safari, Skyscrapers, Sport, Shopping, Surgery* and other diversification products (refer to terminology in Fig 1) heralded its maturity into a world class player in tourism development. All these offerings are intended to deliver the 3Es of *Excitement, Education and Entertainment* perhaps inadvertently.

Fig 1 below shows the trajectory of Qatar’s development in terms of its tourism propositions. This paper is proposing that based on international trends and

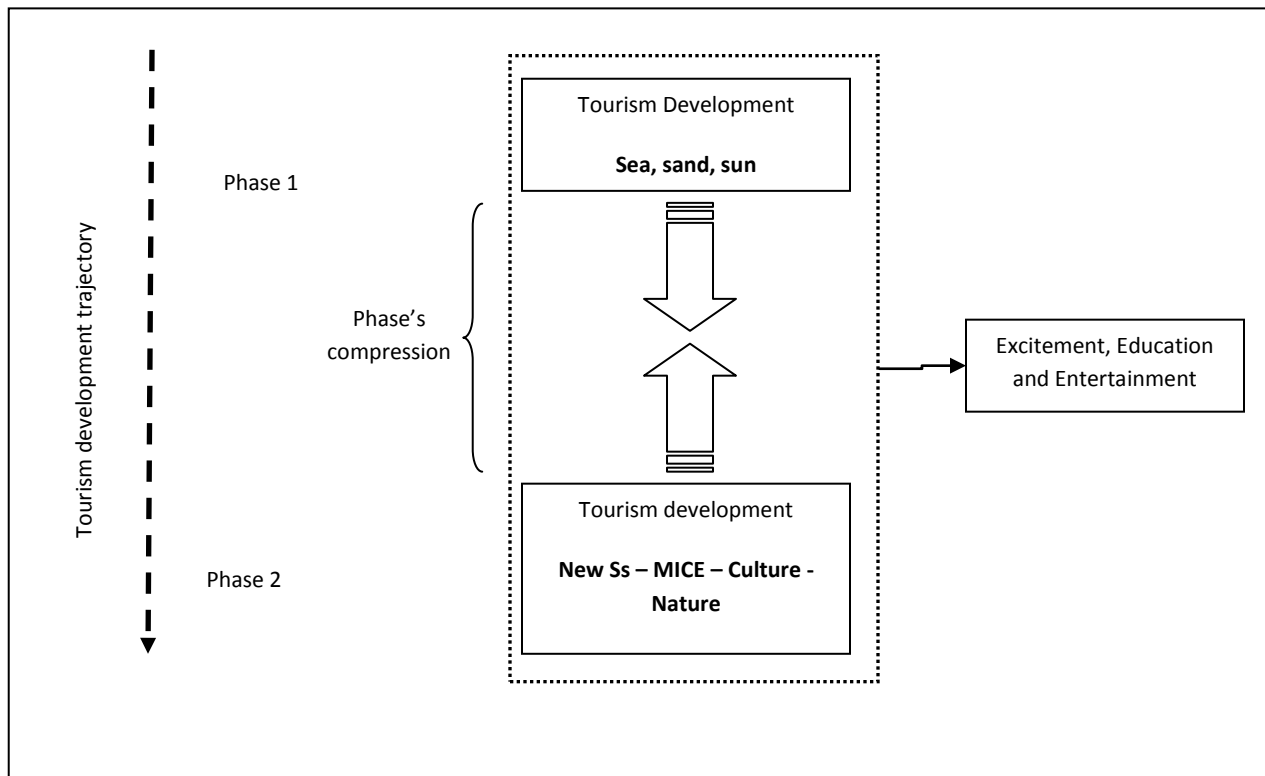


Figure 1. Towards a model of tourism diversification strategy in Qatar

This development trajectory depends to a large extent or has been made possible by the endowments which Qatar has especially the financial resources which are in abundance.

TYOLOGY OF TYPICAL TOURISTS TO QATAR

The typical tourist to Qatar is most likely to be wealthy given the tourist menu available; a sport enthusiast; a shopper;

safari adventurer; a landscape and architectural admirer; (to view the Skyscrapers); health enthusiast (or just patients) for surgery; and a holiday maker for sea, sand, sun. This implies that a variety of offerings could be Qatar's competitive advantage because it would represent a one stop shop for tourists. It would be very difficult for many countries to imitate such a trajectory.

DISCUSSION

The various tourist products are not isolated and unconnected experiences. They must be taken as one tourist package which offers differentiated products within it. For example, the different Ss and MICE can successfully be interlinked as advocated by the QTA by stating that MICE "Delegates have much to experience; from exploring the Inland Sea to embarking on a desert safari, the options are limitless. Qatar boasts a World Heritage Site, a timeless culture, luxury shopping, sun and sand; all just a short distance from meeting and convention venues" (Al Mohammadi, no date, p. 3). This can also be linked to Surgery.

The *surgery* S as a proposition is also promoted in Qatar by linking it to a European medical company, and the shopping S. Such that most medical tourists "visitors spend some time shopping, even if no further than hotel stores, and justify this (where they feel it necessary) on the grounds of the money saved through overseas health care" (Connell, 2006, p. 1098). The cross-sector linkage in relation to tourism is well recognised in Qatar, in fact the Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016 links the sport sector with tourism and see sport as an enabler to support the growth of tourism (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011, p. 202, 203).

The strategy of diversifying the tourist products which goes well beyond the conventional 3Ss products (sand-sea-sun)

without excluding them is certainly underway in Qatar. The results so far have been positive. Thus, the growth of the tourism sector, scaffolding on a diversification strategy, appears to have good prospects given the developments in the sector in recent years. The WTO, (2014, p. 65) reports that firms have recorded phenomenal growth of as much as 10% since 2000 buoyed by a plethora of events which include cultural and sports events as well as business exhibitions, workshops and conferences; against a backdrop of the construction of art galleries, museums and hosting of festivals to attract tourists.

CONCLUSION

The paper has investigated issues related to the diversification strategy being pursued in Qatar with respect to tourism development. In the literature review it presented issues related to conventional 3Ss model of attractions; the Qatar tourism landscape as well as its diversification approaches. It also made an exposition which focused on Qatar 'new' Ss (*sport-shopping-skyscrapers*). While MICE, cultural tourism and nature present opportunities for diversification, Qatar seems to have opted to develop the 'new' 3Ss of sport-shopping-skyscrapers. The paper makes a contribution by focusing on Qatar in order to investigate its tourism diversification strategy, possibly a country with little research done on its tourism development trajectory. The paper concludes that Qatar's diversification strategy in the tourism sectors goes beyond the conventional 3Ss (sand-sea-sun) to include others Ss (shopping-surgery-sport-skyscrapers) and MICE, culture and nature in its tourist product portfolio. While this strategy currently seems to be yielding positive results, only time will tell if Qatar will pursue the same trajectory into the future to ensure the sector's sustainability as well as the overall growth of the economy.

New research in Qatar and arguably in Gulf Countries is needed to unpack the

relationships and linkages between tourism and modern city skyscrapers, tourism and community development, tourism and environmental issues, tourism and corporate social responsibility, including specific form of tourism such as ecotourism, community-based tourism and so on between themselves and with each other. Research should address questions regarding the 'appropriate' combinations or whether should countries pursue a diversification strategy or a focus strategy (focusing on one element of tourism) and also inform what in what contexts these thrive in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of tourism development in other oil-dependent countries in a ways that can have positive effects on the country's economy and well-being of its population without jeopardizing the natural and social/cultural milieu.

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