

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE RED SEA COAST: STILL POSSIBLE?

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1 ABSTRACT

The Red Sea is a unique resource whose potential has not yet been realized. Since the 1980s development for mass tourism has destroyed large areas of the northern Red Sea coastal stretches as exemplified by the city of Hurghada. Innovative initiatives have taken place to protect the remaining parts of the Red Sea (From Marsa Alam city South), including several guidelines by the Red Sea Sustainable Tourism Initiative (RSSTI) in 2000-2004 that focused on developing ecotourism and coastal planning for the region, followed by another pilot programme named Livelihood and Income From Environment (LIFE) in 2005-2008 which supported implementing pilot projects in national parks to demonstrate examples of the appropriate process. Since 2008 there have been several initiatives to introduce sustainable practices (e.g., Solid Waste Management and Mooring Buoys) led by local NGOs such as HEPCA.

Despite these attempts, the development pattern has not changed much and the knowledge gained remains within a limited number of people. The main obstacles to improved planning and development are: (i) An institutional problem where the responsible authorities (both tourism and environment ministries) do not coordinate with each other nor with the many stakeholders, (ii) Practitioners typically borrow designs from the Nile Valley architecture rather than developing a local and appropriate one for the Red Sea, and (iii) The lack of understanding of the Red Sea system (i.e., drainage, soil, marine life, and natural habitat) resulted to several inappropriate land subdivisions and allocating development in vulnerable areas.

The solutions for such complex problems can be summarized as follows:

(i) Elevate land use planning above the ministry level, so that planning is not limited to one ministry (such as housing, tourism or environment) with a very specific mandate for one type of development, but rather an overarching exercise that is a product of a higher level proposed committee at the prime-minister level.

(ii) Architecture and planning education to incorporate appropriate planning tools and building technologies, and not limit this arena to the Nile Valley architecture. Learn from the local tribes' knowledge about best site selections criteria and building styles and seeking guidance from relevant experiences in the region rather than copying western countries.

(iii) Land use suitability maps that can guide development in the region without harming the environment and while being locally implementable within the local market dynamics.

1.1 Keywords

sustainable tourism, land use planning, Red Sea.