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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SERVICE QUALITY OF TOURISM PRODUCTS AND VISITOR'S SATISFACTION IN AKSUM TOWN, TIGRAI, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a fast growing industry. It has paramount contributions in the economy of a nation. However, without the consideration of the quality of tourism products such as accessibilities, accommodations, attractions, amenities and activities/entertainment facilities, tourism cannot adequately yield the desired outcomes. This paper attempted specifically to gauge the service quality of the accessibility services, amenities, attraction site facilities, accommodation and activities/entertainment facilities. This research paper employed descriptive type of research with qualitative approach. The subjects of study were inbound tourists visiting Aksum tourist destination. Questionnaire, FGD (Focused Group Discussion) and participant observation are among instruments for primary sources of data collection and secondary sources of data were accessed via document review. Sample is selected based on non-probability sampling particularly purposive/judgmental technique. The total numbers of the respondents were 400 and out of them 395 respondents respond the questionnaire. The researcher employed field editing, pre-coding coding and the gathered data were analyzed using SPSS (statistical package for social science) version 16. Based on the finding, tourists are dissatisfied by the quality of the accessibility/transportation access at the attraction sites, poor medical care in case of emergency and also they are highly dissatisfied by poor availability and quality of sporting facilities, recreational activities and cultural events which should display the heritage of people of the tourist destination. Furthermore, the inbound tourists found unacceptable/poor state of art technology and equipment in the service delivery at the attraction sites. The tourist destination personnel at accessibility/transportation found to respond tourist's requests in quick, assistance, pleasant and friendly manner. Consumers are highly satisfied with the safety and security provision to the tourists at the amenities. Besides, they are comfortable with appealing nature of the accommodation at the destination with their pleasant and friendly personnel. Furthermore, customers found the attraction site entrance fee very cheap and acceptable accessibility quality-price ratio. However, they are highly dissatisfied with regard to the amenities quality- Price ratio. The researcher recommends upgrading the accessibility facilities in order to offer opportunities for disabled tourist. Upgrading build environment and capacity building training programs for staff available at accessibility services, accommodation services, amenities, attraction sites facilities and activities/entertainments.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The term tourism has a plenty of definitions given by different scholars at different times. A more explanatory definition of the term comes from Roday *et al.* (2009) that takes tourism as "a temporary short term movement of people to destinations outside the place where they normally live and work and includes the activities they indulge in at the destination as well as all facilities and services especially created to meet their needs." An inbound tourism refers to incoming visitors in to a

country and outbound tourism constitutes outgoing tourists travelling from their country of origin to visit another country (Roday *et al.*, 2009). Tourism as an industry is hugely made-up of different businesses and organizations that render goods and services. It is the world's broad and fast growing industry in terms of employment, sale and foreign earnings, etc. In aspects of employment, for example, tourism has offered 259 million job opportunities for people around the world up to 2011 and this figure is expected to rise to 324 million by the year 2021 (WTTC, 2010, 2011). The contribution of tourism in LDC (Least Developed Countries) is paramount and the contributions include alternative source of foreign exchange earnings and tourism money that helps to support the community's infrastructure, income for the community as well

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as help in the conservation of cultural assets. Tourism also provides a wide range of different employment opportunities especially for women and young people; it creates opportunities for a number of Small and Micro Enterprises. Besides, the infrastructure developed for tourism sector can also make the communities around the destinations beneficiaries (Ashley, 2006). Ethiopia is well known for its various magnificent tourist attraction areas including the nine historical heritages registered and protected by the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization): From cultural sites, Aksum (1980), Fasil Ghebbi, Gondar Region (1979), Harar Jugol, the Fortified Historic Town (2006), Konso Cultural Landscape (2011), Lower Valley of the Awash (1980), Lower Valley of the Omo (1980), Rock-Hewn Churches, Lalibela (1978), Tiya (1980) and Simien National Park (1978) by natural categories (WTO, 2014). Thus, this research attempted to gauge service quality of tourism products and customer of satisfaction of Aksum destination which include the town of ancient civilization, the home of a number of tourist attraction sites including the Stelae Park (The Park composed of mainly three largest sophisticated and decorated stelaes), sites include ancient tombs, Tsion Mariam Church (the arc of the covenant is believed to be found) and Dungur place (Saied to have been the palace of The Queen of Sheba).

Statement of the Problem

Tourism plays an important role in development a nation's economy. Nevertheless, the particular nation cannot get the multidimensional benefits of the tourism industry without providing quality and competitive tourism products (Kandampully, 2000; Atilgan *et al.*, 2003). The tourism products, commonly known as the five A's of tourism, include Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, Attractions and Activities (Gruescu *et al.*, 2010; Roday *et al.*, 2009). Accessibility refers to the transport and transport infrastructure to arrive at the destination and in the destination. Usually a tourist wants to have a comfortable and trouble free travel. Besides, there are other significant factors to be taken into consideration before making a journey like cost, convenience, time for travelling and safety (Baum and Kokkranika 2005; Roday *et al.*, 2009). Accommodation encompasses services like comfortable bed, sanitary facilities with adequate water supply of different temperature. Accommodation services range from average tourist lodge to five star hotels. Without a fitting accommodation there would be no tourism since accommodation is seasonal home of the tourists (Baron and Harris 1995; Sharpley, 2005; Roday *et al.*, 2009). Amenities denote the facilities available at the destination that are used in fulfilling the needs of tourists. Amenities contain food and beverage facilities, communication services, Forex assisted by ATM (automatic teller machine), appropriate dirt disposal systems and public toilets, medication (emergency service), power supply and general safety and security (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 1999; Gronroos, 2000; Roday *et al.*, 2009). Attraction is the major reason for making travel to a particular destination. Attractions with excellent supply of built environment and sufficient physical facilities improve the potential that the tourism industry will satisfy visitors and can have a positive impact on development of the industry (Telfer, 2005). Activities/entertainments include different events,

sporting activities and other entertainment facilities which are the product of the culture of the local community inhabiting the destinations. Normally tourists are interested to visit the cultural events which do not belong to them or are not practiced in the area in which they are from. These events can persuade tourists to delay their leaving. Affordability/value for money does not officially belong to the five A's (Amalgam) of tourism. It cannot be cast aside either since it is the term found in between tourism product and the amount of money to be allotted for that particular product. Tourists want to spend their money to get the right and equivalent product to that amount (Ryan, 2005; Pender, 2005). However, in Ethiopia, there is an urgent need to increase the quality of tourism products which hinder the satisfaction of tourists; to change the monotonous food menus and increase the supply of good quality hotel accommodation in order to foster the competitiveness of the sector (World Bank, 2006, Mitchel *et al.*, 2009; Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia, 2008). Non-existence or limited opportunities for entertainment and other activities in the historical sites are not helping the sector to obtain more from the tourist spending (Ashley, C. 2006; Mann, S 2006 cited in Haileab 2013). Furthermore, measuring tourist satisfaction is an important component in the carrying out of destination performance assessment/research, due to the close relationship between the levels of tourism products service quality and tourist satisfaction (Lovelock and Wright, 2002; Zeithaml and Bitner (2000). Therefore, an ongoing and systematic measurement of satisfaction with destinations is a valuable exercise that offers tangible benefits to tourism products suppliers (Albassam and Alshawi, 2010; Clerides 2009). Therefore, this paper is to assess the service quality of the aforementioned tourism products and visitors' satisfactions in Aksum town since service quality directly affects customer satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

The general and basic objective of this study is to gauge service quality of tourism products and visitors' satisfaction in Aksum town. The general objective of the study is believed to be achieved by addressing the following specific objectives:

- To gauge the quality of the accessibility services to the sites.
- To assess the quality of the accommodation facilities.
- To examine the quality of the amenities.
- To measure the quality of attraction site facilities.
- To assess the activities /entertainments quality.

Significance of the Study

Primarily the outputs of the study are believed to have a great importance to the Aksum destination tourism product suppliers /stakeholders (i.e. those who are delivering accessibility, accommodations, attractions, amenities and activities/ entertainments services) in order to reassess/ reevaluate their service quality and to take practical actions. The results of the study are also estimated to help the Aksum and Tigray Culture and Tourism Agency at large to re visit the service quality of the Aksum destination tourism products. Finally the research

paper is believed to throw light to subsequent research in the field.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This paper delimits service quality as measured by inbound/international tourists' perceptions that are framed in line with theories about service quality of tourism products. This research solely relies on the English language as far as international tourists are concerned.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research paper employed descriptive type of research with qualitative approach. The qualitative aspects were dealt with how respondents / people feel or think about the quality of tourism products (Amalgam of Tourism) of the destination (i.e accommodations, attractions, amenities and activities/entertainments services).

Data Types and Sources

The research used both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were questionnaire with five Lickert scale, FGD (Focused Group Discussions) and participant observation. Semi-structured participant observations were favored for flexibility. Secondary sources of data were document analysis primarily concentrating on customers' feedback book and earlier researches on the topic under discussion.

Sampling Design and Sampling Size

Due to the nature of the study, the researcher used non-probability sampling particularly purposive/judgmental technique. The total numbers of the respondents were 400. Out of the total sample 395 respondents respond the questionnaire

Data Collection Procedures

The necessary data were collected by enumerators and researcher themselves. In order to have an error free and genuine research, the enumerators are adequately briefed as to how and where to distribute and collect the questioner. Accordingly, they are informed to distribute and collect the questionnaire papers after tourists have returned from attraction sites and settled in accommodations namely Yeha hotel, Remhal Hotel, consolar Hotel, Branna Hotel, Exodus Hotel, ZeArc Hotel and Africa Hotel and other accommodations in which tourists are believed to temporally reside. In addition, participant observations were carried out by the researcher, by acting as a tourists and consuming all tourism products provided by Aksum destination. This system is believed to enable the researcher to gather information which may not be obtained by the other mechanisms of data collection.

Data Processing and Analysis

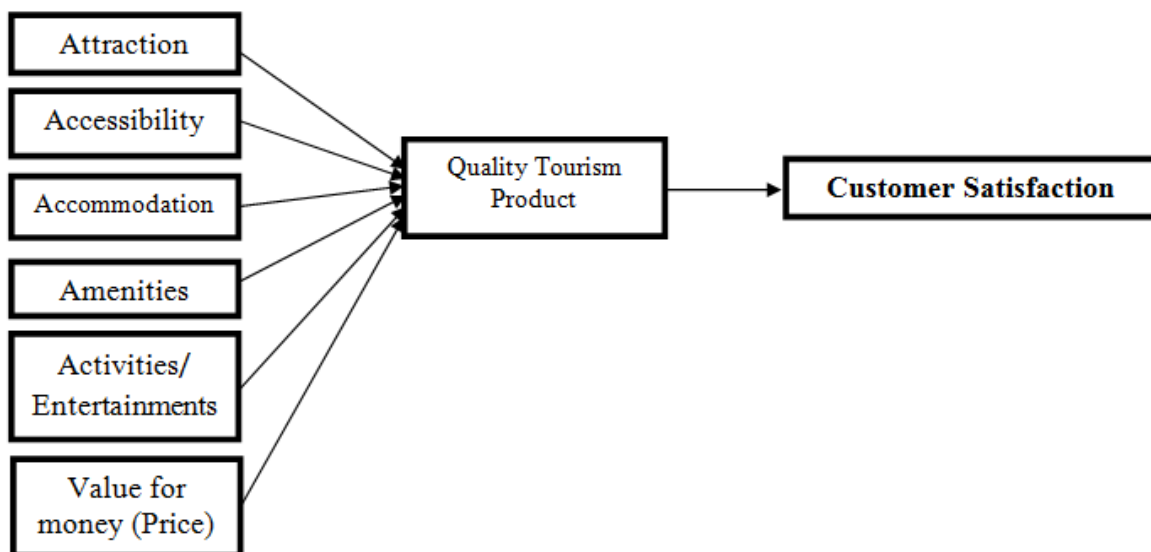
The researched employed field editing, pre-coding coding and the gathered data were analyzed using SPSS (statistical package for social science) version 16. Then after the data is interpreted using descriptive statistics. Based on the result, conclusion is drawn and recommendations are forwarded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic of Respondents

The majority of the respondents which consists 24.05% are under the age range of 56-65 years, 22.78% under 46-55 years of range, 36-45 years old accounts 19.24%, 18.33% are 26-35 years old and the remaining less than 16-25 and above 65 years old account 8.86% and 6.83%, respectively. This data depicts that majority of the tourist flowing to the destination are people under the matured age which consists 57.21% male and the rest 42.78% female.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Own, 2013

The vast majority of respondents (47.08% of the total respondents) have education at university level. 28.86% attended education post-secondary levels. While 21.77% went to school at secondary level. The rest 2.27% of them attended only primary education. Out of the total respondents, the majority 96.96% spent 1-3 nights in the town, and only 3.03% respondents spent maximum number of nights 4-7 nights. On the other hand, there are no respondents that did not spend a single night and no respondent that spent more than 7 nights in the town.

The traveling composition of the respondents show majority 79.49% travel with their children, whereas, only 20.50% of the respondents without children. Majority of the respondents 31.89% collected the information about the destination from books and guides. Friends and relatives as sources constitute 14.177% of the total respondents, 11.64 % from media, 11.39% already know about the area before, internet accounts as source 10.88%, travel agency 9.62 % and 4.05% from fairs and/or exhibitions. Whereas 6.32% of the respondents simply claim that it was their travel package.

Accessibility

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 1. Accessibility

Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
1 Accessibility/transportation access to the attraction sites.	22.5	41.7	18.4	8.6	8.6	100%
2 The destination attraction sites are easily accessible to disabled guests	47.3	40.2	5.3	4.8	2.2	100%
3 The tourist destination is with easy location signposts/ landmarks at the destination.	47.3	44.5	7.5	1.01	0.5	100%
4 The staffs at the Accessibility/transportation are well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance.	22.5	22.7	36.9	13.4	4.3	100%
5 The tourist destination personnel's at accessibility/transportation respond tourist's requests in quick manner, assistance to customers.	11.6	44.5	13.4	19.2	11.1	100%
6 Personnel's at the tourist destination accessibility/transportation show willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions.	17.7	22.7	47.3	9.62	2.53	100%
7 The tourist destination accessibility/transportations have pleasant and friendly personnel's.	5.06	6.32	44.8	26.3	17.4	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Accommodation

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 2. Accommodation

Accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
8 Accommodations at the destination are appealing.	3.03	7.84	39.7	26.0	23.2	100%
9 The destination offer accommodation with clean furniture and equipment provided (Radio or digital TV).	2.53	32.9	41.5	18.4	4.55	100%
10 The staffs at the accommodation are well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance.	7.84	8.86	54.1	14.1	14.93	100%
11 The tourist destination personnel's at accommodation respond tourist's requests in quick manner, assistance to customers.	5.06	25.5	42.7	24.5	2.02	100%
12 Personnel's at destination accommodation show willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions.	1.51	0.75	34.1	39.7	23.79	100%
13 The tourist destination accommodations have pleasant and friendly personnel's.	0.75	10.1	46.0	25.3	17.72	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Amenities

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 3. Amenities

Amenities	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
14 The destination offer public restrooms at the attraction sites.	52.6	33.9	13.4	0	0	100%
15 The destination posses clean and quality foods with variety range of dishes.	0.50	28.2	4.05	35.6	1.2	100%
16 The tourist destination provides medical care in case of emergency at the tourist destination.	53.6	41.7	2.53	2.02	0	100%
17 The tourist destination possesses safety and security for tourists.	0	0	3.03	49.6	47	100%
18 The staffs at the amenities are well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance.	2.02	3.03	46.8	43.0	5.0	100%
19 The tourist destination personnel's at the amenities respond tourist's requests in quick manner, assistance to customers.	3.03	6.32	41.7	24.0	24	100%
20 Personnel's at destination amenities show willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions.	2.27	7.59	31.3	41.0	17	100%
21 The tourist destination amenities have pleasant and friendly personnel's	0.50	1.51	42.5	33.9	6.0	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Accessibility/transportation plays a paramount role in the industry of tourism and hospitality. But, based on the data from this research, majority of the tourists are dissatisfied by the quality of the accessibility/transportation access at the attraction sites. Besides, the destination attraction sites are expected to be easily accessible to disabled guests, but Table 1 shows that consumers of the destination are highly dissatisfied.

These figures show us the destination demands major improvement with regard to accessibility/transportation service. Signposts may be simply directional or they may contain information. Nevertheless, as per the observation and data collected from the respondents the destination is characterized with poor signpost/ landmarks which results strong dissatisfied. Having well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance staffs at the accessibility/transportation plays a paramount role beyond the appealing nature. It helps to create confidence over tourists. As per the data, consumers of the destination are satisfied with the dress/uniform, neatness and appearance of staff. Furthermore, the tourist destination personnel at accessibility/transportation respond tourist's requests in quick, assistance, pleasant and friendly manner.

From the study we can understand that customers at the destination are satisfied with the appealing nature of the accommodation at the destination. Supporting your accommodation service with excellent and comfortable furniture to customers is a great means of satisfaction to guests. Besides, the rooms should be supported with equipments like radio and digital TV. But, as per the data gathered from the respondents and presented at Table 2, majority of the tourists are not satisfied with these services.

Attraction

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 4. Attraction

Attraction	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
22 The destination have attractive clean and comfortable build environment at the attraction site.	59.7	29.6	5.56	3.03	2.02	100%
23 Attraction sites support excellent state of art technology and equipment in the service delivery.	59.4	38.7	1.01	0.75	0	100%
24 The tourist guides at Aksum tourist destination are with ethics, knowledge and skill of clear explanation on attractions	15.6	26.0	31.3	14.1	12.6	100%
25 The staffs at the attraction sites are well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance.	10.1	5.82	37.2	27.5	19.7	100%
26 The tourist destination personnel's at the attraction should respond tourist's requests in quick manner, assistance to customers.	0	106	203	85	1	100%
27 Personnel's at destination attraction sites show willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions.	5.06	24.8	33.6	30.7	2.02	100%
28 The tourist destination attraction sites have pleasant and friendly personnel's	0	0	47.0	52.9	0	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Activities/Entertainments

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 4. Activities/Entertainment

Activities/Entertainments	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
29 The destination possesses excellent entertainments and activities.	58.2	24.8	10.6	5.06	1.2	100%
30 Availability of sport facilities and recreational activities	50.1	35.1	10.1	2.53	2.0	100%
31 The destination people cultural events and display of the heritage	45.3	36.2	10.8	5.06	2.5	100%
32 The staffs at the attraction sites are well dressed, uniformed and neat in appearance.	11.1	22.0	36.9	24.8	51.2	100%
33 The tourist destination personnel's at the attraction should respond tourist's requests in quick manner, assistance to customers.	5.82	3.54	34.1	31.8	24.5	100%
34 Personnel's at activities/entertainments show willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions.	9.11	29.3	36.2	11.1	13.9	100%
35 The tourist activities/entertainments have pleasant and friendly personnel's	19.7	25.8	44.0	5.31	5.06	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Table 2 show us customers of the destination are satisfied with dress/uniform and appearance of the staff at the accommodation facilities. Excellent compliant management and accepting customer's suggestion will assist the destination to go forward in the industry. However, the staff of the accommodation showed willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions. Besides, they are characterized by pleasant and friendly personnel.

Public restroom at the attraction site is the first and foremost prerequisite. But, as per the data collected from the respondents and supported by the observation, the destination lacks the major component, restroom at the attraction site which creates a big dissatisfaction. This depicts that the destination lacks major task to establish/build restrooms at the attraction sites of the destination. Since tourists are from different part of the world with different climatical condition, different health history, the destination is expected to offer medical care in case of emergency at the tourist destination.

However, as per the data collected and ratified by the observation conducted by the researcher the attraction sites are with poor medical care in case of emergency. Safety and security for tourists which is the crucial point in the current tourism industry is satisfied by the tourist destination. As a result, Table 3 shows tourists are highly satisfied with the safety and security provision to the tourists. Besides, based on the finding, majority of the respondents are satisfied with quick response, assistance to customers, willingness to answer customer complaints and suggestions, pleasant and friendly staff of the amenities.

Value for money (Price)

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 5. Value for money (Price)

	Value for money (Price)	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
36	Accessibility quality- Price ratio	5.0	8.60	44.5	34.1	7.59	100%
37	Accommodation quality- Price ratio	2.2	5.56	45.0	28.3	18.7	100%
38	Amenities quality- Price ratio	2.5	49.6	42.5	3.29	2.02	100%
39	Attractions quality- Price ratio	0.5	2.53	17.7	32.4	46.8	100%
40	Activities/Entertainment quality- Price ratio	3.2	38.2	53.4	2.78	2.27	100%

Source: Survey, 2013

Attraction sites are the soul of the tourism destination. The attraction sites should be clean and with comfortable build environment. Nevertheless, as per the data collected and participant observation the attraction site is Poor with regard to clean and comfortable build environment. Technology is playing a great role at the tourism business throughout the world. However, majority of the respondents shows that they are dissatisfied due to poor state of art technology and equipment in the service delivery of the attraction sites. Ethics, knowledge, and skill of clarification and explanation of the guides are the heart beat of tourist destination. In this regard, majority of the respondents are not satisfied with guides clarification and explanation. However, customers are satisfied by physical appearance (well dressed, neat and in uniforms) of staffs at the attraction sites, reactions to tourist requests and necessary assistances in quick manner, willingness to handle customer complaints and pleasant/ friendly relationship with tourists.

Excellent entertainments and activities at the attraction sites plays pivotal role for the satisfaction consumers. However, the destination is not well organized to offer excellent entertainment and activities. Due to this, customers are highly dissatisfied by poor availability and quality of sporting facilities, recreational activities and cultural events which should display the heritage of people of the tourist destination. The tourist destination personnel at the attraction sites found to respond tourist's requests in quick and assistance manner.

Value for money (Price) is among the means for the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of tourism product/service consumers. As illustrated in Table 5, customers found the attraction site entrance fee very cheap and also accessibility quality-price ratio is acceptable and comfortable for tourists. However, they are highly dissatisfied with regard to the amenities and accessibility quality- Price ratio.

Recommendation

As per the research finding the following recommendation are forwarded by the researcher. The tourist attraction sites are expected to upgrade the accessibility facilities in order to offer opportunities for disabled tourist (guests). Due to this dissatisfaction from the customers, the government together with the stakeholders should improve the transportation infrastructure. The researcher also demands to give the clue to use MSEs (Micro and Small Enterprises) to outsource the accessibility facilities infrastructure. It is a source of job to MSEs and the other point is that they can conduct the

activities/improvements with fair price. Beyond the original attraction sites the tourist attraction sites should be equipped with build environment which can increase the satisfaction of the tourists. So, the concerned body, the government with the stakeholders should focus and create excellent build environment in order to avoid the dissatisfaction of customers. Also this part can be forwarded to the potential MSEs. Besides, there should be capacity building training programs for staff available at different activities of the destination (accessibility services, accommodation services, amenities, attraction sites facilities and activities/entertainment staff/personnel). In order to offer excellent training the attraction sites managers (Concerned bodies) should create great collaborations with Universities and Business Colleges in order to have sustainable capacity building trainings. Furthermore, since most of the attraction sites demand different technologies, the destination should equip the attraction sites with modern state of art of technologies.

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