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An economic analysis of the role of traditional craft institutions in promoting tourism: A case study of Ghardaia- Algeria

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Abstract--This study aims to highlight the current state of traditional handicrafts in the Wilaya of Ghardaïa as one of the sectors that serve as a potential attraction for tourists of various types, and to explore its role in stimulating tourism activity in the region. This is particularly relevant in light of tourism being regarded as a multifaceted industry closely linked to other economic activities. The study presents statistics related to local artisans in Ghardaïa, as well as data on tourist arrivals to the region over the past four years. The findings indicate that traditional handicrafts contribute significantly to the promotion of both domestic and international tourism.

Keywords--Tourism, Traditional Handicrafts and Crafts, Economic Growth.

Introduction

Tourism, often referred to as “blue gold,” has become one of the most promising and vital economic sectors, especially in light of the growing global focus on tourism as a key driver of comprehensive development. It is increasingly relied upon to stimulate economic growth, with considerable political returns, social benefits, cultural impact, and human interaction. The economic significance of tourism lies in its ability to generate foreign currency and attract capital. In many countries, the tourism industry forms the backbone of their economy, as it is considered the largest global employer and a powerful tool for combating unemployment. Moreover, tourism serves as an expansive market, encompassing various other industries such as commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture.

Like many other nations, Algeria, despite its substantial energy resources, is compelled to seek alternatives to this traditional economic model. It has thus redirected its development strategy toward the tourism sector, especially given its abundance of distinctive and diverse tourist attractions.

Traditional handicrafts are an inseparable part of Algeria's cultural and historical identity. They embody and reflect the spirit of creativity and artistry passed down through generations. As such, Algeria seeks to invest in these assets by creating an ideal synergy between traditional handicrafts and tourism, with the aim of leveraging and capitalizing on their combined potential.

In this context, and to further explore the topic, we pose the following research question:

How do traditional handicrafts contribute to promoting tourism activity in the Wilaya of Ghardaïa?

➤ **Research Objectives:**

This study aims to shed light on the state of traditional handicrafts in the Wilaya of Ghardaïa and to highlight their role in enhancing tourism in the region. It does so by examining the various crafts practiced by local artisans and their appeal to tourists visiting Ghardaïa. The region is well known for its strong tourism potential and for being a hub of traditional craftsmanship. Notably, these crafts typically require limited capital investment while relying heavily on skilled labor.

➤ **Research Significance:**

The importance of this research stems from Algeria's increasing interest in identifying new avenues for economic growth. Tourism is viewed as one such opportunity and a potential alternative to the hydrocarbon sector.

➤ **Research Methodology:**

To address the central research question, the study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, covering the topic through three main axes.

I. The Conceptual Framework of Traditional Handicrafts

1. The Concept of Traditional Handicrafts:

According to UNESCO and the World Crafts Council during the Seminar on Crafts and the Global Market held on October 8, 1997, in Manila, Philippines, a product is considered traditional if it is made by artisans manually, with the aid of hand tools, or even mechanical equipment—provided that the manual contribution of the artisan constitutes the most significant component of the final product. These products are typically manufactured without mass production, using raw materials derived from sustainable natural resources. They are characterized by distinct features which may be functional, aesthetic, artistic, creative, cultural, decorative, symbolic, or meaningful. Such features often reflect ideological or social perspectives, which in turn grant these products a social, cultural, and economic function (Sebti & Sahraoui, 2018, p. 295).

In Algeria, traditional handicrafts are defined according to Ordinance No. 96-01 of 1996 (as cited in Guerine, 2022, p. 4) as: "Any activity involving the production, creation, transformation, artistic

restoration, maintenance, repair, or the performance of a service that is primarily manual in nature, practiced on a permanent basis, either in a fixed, mobile, or exhibition format, and carried out individually, within a cooperative of traditional crafts, or as part of a traditional crafts enterprise." The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) categorizes traditional handicrafts into four groups, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 01: Categories of Traditional Handicrafts According to UNIDO

Category	Characteristics
Artistically Creative Crafts	Activities producing items with high creative content, requiring advanced skills and techniques.
Folk and Traditional Arts	Products reflecting expressions inspired by local and national traditions and cultures, requiring high levels of manual skill and craftsmanship.
Traditional Handicrafts	Workshops producing authentic traditional products made by hand, often in large quantities. If such workshops evolve into labor division systems, their products are no longer considered part of traditional crafts.
Industrial Production	Refers to traditionally inspired items or reproductions made by automated machinery in large volumes.

(Guerine, 2022, p. 04)

2. The Importance of Traditional Handicrafts

(Abir, Othman, & Ben Awali, 2020, pp. 155–156; Sebti & Sahraoui, 2018, p. 296)

- Cultural and Civilizational Dimension:**
 Traditional handicrafts are considered a fundamental component of national identity across all societies. They reflect the uniqueness and authenticity of a community and embody the accumulated civilizational output of people who have historically interacted with their natural environment. Therefore, traditional crafts are essential to preserving ancestral heritage.
- Social Dimension:**
 This sector has the potential to absorb unemployment and create job opportunities by relying on simple tools needed by artisans to engage in productive activities. It thus contributes to forming a micro-economic fabric among productive households. Moreover, the sector plays a significant role in the social integration of youth, protecting them from various forms of delinquency and marginalization.
- Economic Dimension:**
 The sector possesses considerable competitive advantages due to the uniqueness and specificity of its products, which vary from one region or country to another. This uniqueness enhances its marketability when quality standards are respected. Furthermore, traditional crafts help attract tourists and generate foreign currency income.

3. Characteristics of Traditional Handicrafts

Identifying the characteristics of the traditional handicrafts sector is crucial for distinguishing it from other economic activities. Being part of the small-scale industry category, traditional crafts share several features with other small enterprises. These characteristics can be summarized as follows (*Ait Said, 2013, p. 55*):

- **Ease of establishment:** Craft-based businesses require low start-up capital, utilize simple production tools, and rely on local resources.
- **Individual operation and centralized decision-making:** The business is typically managed by its owner, who is simultaneously the financier, producer, seller, and marketer.
- **Low labor cost:** The capital-to-labor ratio is low, allowing for more employment opportunities with minimal investment.
- **Limited production volume:** Output is generally low due to the small size of workshops, which are often family-based.
- **Cultural, civilizational, and social significance:** Traditional products reflect the qualitative aspects of people's lifestyles, traditions, and identities. They express spontaneous artistic creativity among various communities and serve as a source of income and social stability.
- **Challenges in meeting standardized quality norms:** Traditional products are composed of three essential elements—raw materials, symbolic motifs, and crafting techniques. Their authenticity lies in the interplay of these components, which may be compromised by strict quality control frameworks.
- **High net foreign currency income:** Traditional crafts significantly contribute to cultural tourism by offering unique, exportable products that attract foreign tourists.
- **Prevalence in rural and semi-rural areas:** The roots of traditional crafts are deeply tied to these environments.
- **Informal sector integration:** A significant portion of artisans operate without formal registration or licensing.

4. Classification of Traditional Handicrafts in Algeria

The Algerian legislature divides traditional handicrafts into the following categories (*Abdeljabbar & Haji, 2016, p. 48*):

Artistic and Decorative Traditional Crafts:

These refer to handcrafted products sometimes made with the assistance of simple machines to create functional and/or decorative items. They carry artistic value and serve as a medium for transmitting ethnic skills. Based on the function of their products, this category is divided into:

A. Artistic (Decorative) Crafts:

These crafts are characterized by originality, uniqueness, and creativity. They require high artistic talent, long production time, and refined raw materials, which explains their high market value. Such crafts do not usually involve

division of labor. Their main function is decorative, and they embody expressions tied to the traditions, cultures, and rituals of a society.

B. Functional (Utilitarian) Crafts:

Unlike artistic crafts, these do not require high artistic skills. The design is usually simple and repetitive, relying on sequential production and task distribution. This applies even to home-based artisans. Their primary function is to meet the practical, everyday needs of people.

Productive Traditional Handicrafts (Modern Utilitarian Crafts):

This includes the production of ordinary consumer goods without special artistic features, targeting families, industries, and agriculture. These crafts are characterized by a high degree of specialization and do not reflect the culture or identity of a specific community. They are widespread globally and are often referred to as small industries.

Service-Based Traditional Handicrafts:

These encompass activities where the artisan provides services such as maintenance, repair, or artistic restoration. Algerian artisans typically draw inspiration from Berber, Andalusian, Arab, African, and Mediterranean heritage. Traditional Algerian products are diverse, reflecting the customs and traditions of each region. Examples include pottery, artistic ceramics, glasswork, weaving, carpets, jewelry, copperware, leather goods, alfa fiber products, musical instruments, and woodwork.

In addition to the functional diversity of traditional crafts, the sector also possesses the following characteristics:

- Belongs to the private sector;
- Requires minimal capital investment to launch;
- Is often practiced by locals, making it community-driven;
- Relies on relatively simple tools and equipment, often operated manually;
- Is geared toward satisfying the essential needs of local communities (e.g., clothing, furniture, food processing);
- Draws labor from a diverse and flexible pool (students, housewives, etc.);
- Operates in modest spaces such as home rooms, small shops, or compact workshops.

II General Concepts of Tourism Activity

The field of tourism and travel—which encompasses transportation, accommodation, and tour programs—is considered one of the largest industries in the world, attracting a significant portion of the global workforce. The tourism industry is also regarded as a major export sector, as it generates foreign currency and external transfers, thereby contributing directly to the national economy. Additionally, it serves as a powerful stimulant for small and medium-sized enterprises and acts as a key driver for construction, banking, and financial services. Below, we present the most important concepts and meanings related to tourism.

1 The Concept of Tourism:

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure or other purposes. A person's usual environment includes a specific area near their place of residence, along with all the locations they visit regularly and frequently (Wachach & Samaini, 2020).

EGUYE Freuler views modern tourism as a natural phenomenon of the contemporary era, driven primarily by the growing need for recreation, a change of scenery, and a culturally aware desire to appreciate the beauty of natural landscapes (Khentar & Qelesh, 2019, p. 197).

However, this definition is somewhat limited as it focuses solely on the human and psychological aspects while overlooking the economic and cultural dimensions. A more comprehensive definition is provided by Tawfiq (2008, p. 24), who considers tourism as the movement of individuals across both space and time, either internationally ("global tourism") or domestically ("domestic tourism"), for a period of no less than 24 hours. This movement must not be for permanent residence and can serve purposes such as cultural enrichment, business, religious practices, sports, and so forth.

It is also important to note that the tourism industry includes both public and private organizations involved in developing, producing, and marketing goods and services aimed at fulfilling the needs and enhancing the well-being of tourists (Tawfiq, 2008).

Tourism can thus be defined as an activity through which individuals travel from their place of residence to another location in search of rest, recreation, and the exploration of places that differ from their own in terms of heritage, culture, nature, or even health-related attractions.

As for the tourist, he or she is someone who leaves their usual place of residence to spend time in another location for leisure and entertainment, provided they stay for at least one night and for no more than one year. This definition includes domestic tourism, international tourism, religious pilgrimage tourism, and conference tourism (Saad, 2017, p. 10).

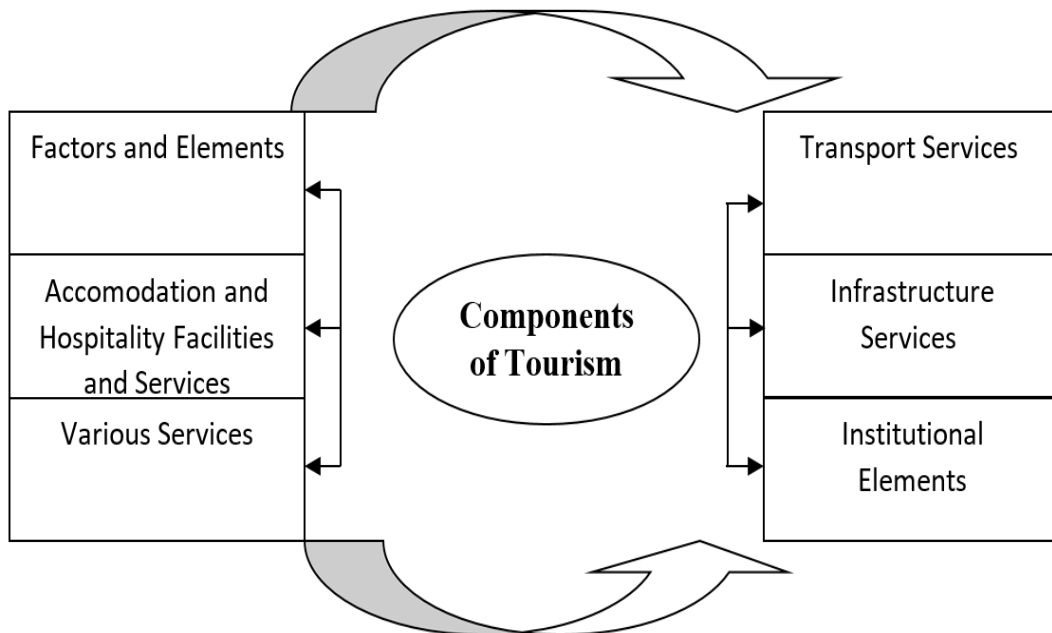


Figure 01: Components of Tourism
(Kafi, 2014, p. 24)

2. Characteristics of Tourism:

Tourism is characterized by a set of distinctive features, the most important of which are (Al-Rahbi, 2014, pp. 25–26):

- The diversity and multiplicity of tourism activities and their connection to many economic sectors.
- The suitability of the tourism climate, in its broad sense, is considered one of the key factors influencing the tourism product.
- Tourism demand is not solely dependent on the availability of resources, diversity of capabilities, services, and the like.
- Tourism demand is influenced by the level of economic welfare, technological advancement, and cultural and political factors that are often beyond the control of states.
- The tourism industry is closely linked to issues of economic and tourism development in many countries, especially developing ones.
- A lack of perfect competition, particularly for certain rare tourism components or resources, and the difficulty for some countries to produce alternative tourism products.
- Tourism demand is characterized by elasticity.
- Tourism demand largely depends on the financial capacity of the tourist.
- Tourism demand does not exhibit repeatability.

3. Types of Tourism:

There are many ways to classify tourism, with the most commonly adopted categorization as follows:

Table 02: Types of Tourism

Classification Type	Types
First: By Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holiday and leisure tourism - Business tourism - Health and medical tourism - Training and educational tourism - Sports tourism - Heritage and historical site tourism - Hobby tourism - Social tourism - Conference and meeting tourism - Shopping tourism - Religious tourism - Cultural tourism - Other purposes
Second: By Group Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual tourism - Group (organized) tourism
Third: By Age Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth tourism - Young adults tourism - Mature tourism - Retirement/senior tourism
Fourth: By Length of Stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Day tourism - Seasonal tourism - Transit tourism
Fifth: By Geographic Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic tourism - International tourism
Sixth: By Nationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foreign tourism - Expatriate tourism (nationals living abroad) - Local citizen tourism (domestic tourism)

(Al-Sayyid, 2020, pp. 28–29)

The table provides a comprehensive overview of the various ways tourism can be classified, highlighting its multidimensional nature. The most extensive category is "**By Purpose**", encompassing 13 distinct types of tourism that address recreational, economic, religious, cultural, and personal needs. Classifications based on **group size** and **age group** emphasize the importance of tailoring tourism services to different demographic segments. Other classifications such as **length of stay**, **geographic scope**, and **nationality** offer valuable insights into travel patterns and help in designing targeted marketing and development strategies.

III An Overview of the Traditional Handicrafts Sector and Its Role in Supporting the Tourism Industry in the Wilaya of Ghardaia

The traditional handicrafts sector plays a significant role in enhancing tourism revenues, as tourists often seek to take home souvenirs that reflect the culture of

the country they visit. It is well known that the growth of tourism income is closely linked to the influx of tourists to a particular region. Like other Algerian provinces, the Wilaya of Ghardaia is a distinguished tourist destination due to its rich historical heritage, natural beauty, and the authenticity of its local traditions. Ghardaia, with its ksour (fortified villages), traditional markets, and oases, is an ideal destination for tourists eager to explore Saharan culture and experience adventure in a unique environment. Moreover, the region is renowned for its diverse wealth in artistic traditional crafts, which have gained both national and international recognition thanks to the creativity and exceptional craftsmanship of its artisans across various specialties. The most prominent and popular activities in the traditional crafts sector include:

Traditional Textile Industry: Ghardaia is synonymous with the *Ghardaiya carpet (zarbiya)*, known for its intricate patterns, various shapes, and vibrant colors that reflect the culture of the Ghardaiya society. The region celebrates this heritage annually with a national carpet festival. The *zarbiya* is the most sought-after product by tourists due to its unmatched quality and artistic value, and it is exported to many Arab and foreign countries. Among the most in-demand types are the *Nilah* carpet and the *Hanbal*.

Traditional Clothing: The region is distinguished by its traditional attire worn in daily life and during special occasions. For women, this includes garments such as the *mlehfa* and *kambouz*, while for men, the *burnous*, *qashabiya*, and traditional trousers are common.

Pottery: This includes household utensils such as drinking and dining sets, as well as decorative artistic items.

Copper and Jewelry Crafting: These products serve both everyday use and ornamental purposes.

Leather Crafting: This includes a variety of everyday leather products such as shoes, slippers, saddles, water bags (*guerba*), and buckets.

1. Distribution of Artisans in the Wilaya of Ghardaia by Activity

Table 03: Distribution of Registered Artisans in the Wilaya of Ghardaia as of 30/06/2024

Category	Number of Registered Artisans as of June 30, 2024	Percentage
Traditional Artistic Crafts	4,248	59.75%
Traditional Production Crafts	571	8.03%
Traditional Service Crafts	2,290	32.22%
Total	7,109	100%

Source: Directorate of Tourism and Traditional Handicrafts of the Wilaya of Ghardaia

As shown in the table and figure above, the number of registered artisans in the Wilaya of Ghardaia reached 7,109 by the end of June 2024. The largest proportion is represented by artisans registered in traditional artistic crafts, accounting for 59.75%, or 4,248 artisans. According to information obtained from the Wilaya Directorate of Tourism and Handicrafts, over 3,670 of them are engaged in decorative traditional crafts.

The high number of artisans in this category compared to the others is mainly due to two key reasons:

- The local artisans' strong focus on rug weaving, embroidery, sewing, and the production of traditional sweets, which are both culturally significant and financially rewarding.
- The availability of financial support through loans provided by support institutions. For example, the National Agency for the Management of Microcredit (ANGEM) offers loans of up to 250,000 DZD, and the National Fund for the Promotion of Handicrafts grants loans reaching up to 500,000 DZD.

As for traditional service crafts, the number of registered artisans stands at 2,290, representing 32.22% of the total. On the other hand, the number of artisans engaged in material production crafts is the lowest, with only 571 registered members, accounting for just 8% of the total.

It is also worth noting that the total number of registered artisans in the Wilaya of Ghardaia saw a significant reduction following the promotion of El Menia to the status of an independent Wilaya prior to the beginning of 2020.

2- Tourist Flow in Ghardaia Province from 2020-2023:

Table 04: Tourist Flow in Ghardaia Province for the Period Between 2020-2023

Year	Quarter	National Tourists	Foreign Tourists	National Nights	Foreign Nights
2020	First	18,525	938	27,063	1,619
	Second	0	0	0	0
	Third	4,792	27	11,924	28
	Fourth	15,397	308	19,239	744
2021	First	20,235	269	29,903	363
	Second	10,531	157	15,651	225
	Third	8,073	173	13,517	225
	Fourth	20,756	532	37,674	803
2022	First	17,712	595	27,957	906
	Second	9,191	484	16,591	807
	Third	9,620	156	18,000	252
	Fourth	20,420	1,735	38,121	2,142

Year	Quarter	National Tourists	Foreign Tourists	National Nights	Foreign Nights
2023	First	18,225	693	30,000	1,261
	Second	10,629	688	16,880	1,278
	Third	10,419	227	15,967	503
	Fourth	9,765	267	18,831	1,436

Source: Ghardaia Province Tourism and Traditional Industries Directorate

From the table, we can see that the number of tourists ranged between 39,987 and 60,726, with the lowest number recorded in 2020 due to the lockdown measures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The year 2021 saw the highest number of tourists at around 60,726, including 59,595 national tourists (domestic) and 1,131 foreign tourists. This was due to the lifting of lockdown measures in 2020.

A more detailed look shows that the fourth quarter of 2022 recorded the highest number of tourists, with 20,420 national tourists and 1,735 foreign tourists, totaling 22,155 tourists. This peak is attributed to the organization of the International Desert Tourism Festival in Ghardaia, held by the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries from December 9 to 11, 2022, after an 8-year hiatus. Ghardaia was chosen to host this important event due to its rich tourism and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, along with its distinctive traditional industries such as carpets and textiles, which attract foreign tourists in particular.

3- Methods of Contribution of Traditional Industries to Tourism in Ghardaia Province:

Authentic Cultural Experience: Traditional industries offer the opportunity to explore various cultural aspects through workshops and handicrafts.

Unique Products: Traditional products provide tourists with unique souvenirs that reflect the destination they visited, enhancing the attractiveness of the tourist destination, particularly given the distinctive textiles and carpets produced by artisans in Ghardaia.

Support for the Local Economy: The demand for traditional products boosts the local economy by creating job opportunities for artisans and generating new sources of income, improving the standard of living in local communities and reducing poverty. This is reflected in the statistics showing over 7,000 registered artisans practicing various traditional crafts in Ghardaia.

Heritage Preservation: Interest in cultural tourism contributes to preserving traditional crafts from extinction, as these arts are taught and passed down to new generations.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, which focused on the current state of traditional industries in Ghardaia and their role in stimulating tourism, we can summarize the following key points:

- Traditional industries play a significant role in attracting tourists from around the world, as reflected in the statistics observed in the study.
- The majority of artisans in Ghardaïa are engaged in artistic traditional industries, particularly carpet and textile production, which are key elements of the region's traditional industry.
- Ghardaïa benefits from various tourist attractions, evidenced by its selection to host a major event such as the International Desert Tourism Festival.
- Holding exhibitions can significantly boost tourism, especially those related to traditional industries.
- The diversity of traditional products in Ghardaïa contributes to attracting tourists.

Recommendations for the Tourism Sector in Ghardaïa and Algeria in General

1. **Integrate Traditional Industries into National Tourism Strategies**
Encourage the inclusion of traditional industries and crafts as a key component of tourism development plans, recognizing their role in attracting both domestic and international tourists.
2. **Support and Empower Artisans**
Provide technical, financial, and marketing support to artisans to enhance the quality, design, and marketability of traditional products, thereby making them more attractive to tourists.
3. **Organize Regular Craft Exhibitions and Cultural Festivals**
Institutionalize periodic exhibitions and festivals—such as the International Desert Tourism Festival—to highlight local heritage and crafts, which would increase tourist inflows and cultural engagement.
4. **Promote Authentic Cultural Experiences**
Develop tourism packages that include workshops, live demonstrations, and interactive experiences with artisans to offer tourists an immersive cultural journey.
5. **Preserve and Transmit Traditional Knowledge**
Establish training centers and educational programs to teach younger generations traditional crafts, ensuring sustainability and intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage.
6. **Develop a Label for Authentic Algerian Crafts**
Create a national certification or branding system for traditional Algerian crafts to protect their authenticity, improve visibility, and promote them on international markets.
7. **Encourage Ecotourism and Heritage-Based Tourism**
Leverage Ghardaïa's architectural, environmental, and cultural uniqueness to promote eco-friendly and heritage-oriented tourism that aligns with sustainable development principles.

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