

ISSUES OF TUNISIA TOURIST REGIONALISATION

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SUMMARY: *On the basis of natural and anthropogenic values in Tunisia are developed various forms of tourism. Beaches, cultural manifestations, congress and the Sahara are particularly interesting and lately health, sport and recreation, nautical and ecotourism are being developed. The tourist offer in this country is not spatially distributed. Due to the fact that the Tunisian tourism is an important source of revenue, employs a significant percentage of the population and affects the development of the region. The territory of the state is divided into tourist regions for the purpose of equitable development, which differ from the administrative division and the division into geographic regions. Each of the tourist regions are regarded to principles of homogeneity and complementary. The division of the tourist regions in Tunisia dates back four decades, with occasional reformulations.*

Keywords: *Tunisia, tourism, geographical regions, administrative divisions, tourist regions*

INTRODUCTION

Geographic region is a part of the Earth's surface area occupied by objects that are inorganic (relief, climate, soil, water), organic (plants, animals, man as a physical being) and anthropogenic (human society and its visible artifacts in space) (Vasović, 1971, 15).

Many domestic scientists have dealt with the issues of defining tourist-geographical regions, usually starting from the definition of the geographic region given by Milorad Vasović (1971). Therefore, many researchers in the field of geography and economics, trying to consolidate relations and events related to tourism and space, as well as everything in that area, have given their views on this issue and on the basis of previous empirical considerations have defined the tourist region. Prikrič (1971) emphasis on tourism values, regardless of their origin, that their quality and quantity dominate all

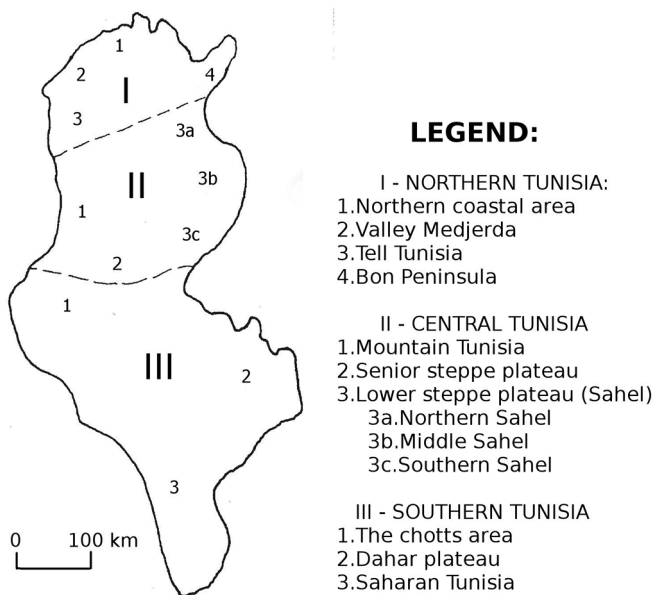
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other values, wherein tourism is the most important as an activity. Vasović and Jovičić (1974) under the tourist-geographical region imply space area wherein tourism is the dominant function, and the physiognomy of space is mainly a consequence of this feature. If development level is observed, tourist regions can be divided into: potential, affirmed and developed. Facilities which fulfill geographic region are constantly correlated according to Vasovic, i.e. continuously interact with each other, and as a result of this, there is a constant change between them (Plavša 1997), which is very important for the tourist industry, and it can be said that tourist movements are involved in these changes (Plavša, 2010).

GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS AND TOURIST REGIONS OF TUNISIA

The separating of the physical-geographical regions and their comparison with the anthropological and geographical regions, has been realized where the two most regionalisation “match”, and geographical regions of Tunisia are divided into: North Tunisia (consists of north coastal area, the valley Medjerda, the Tell Tunisia and the Peninsula Bon), the Middle Tunis (which is area of the Tunisia mountain Jebel ech Chambi, senior steppe plateau and lower steppe plateau – the Sahel) and the Southern Tunisia (consists of chotts, the Dahar plateau and the Sahara Tunisia are extracted) (Davidović, 1999).



Map 1. Geographical regions of Tunisia

Source: Davidović, 1999

Northern Tunisia is the coastal areas towards the north, the Tell Atlas mountain range and valley Megerda. This region is the most populous and economically most important part of the country.

Northern coastal area extends from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the south of the valley Megerda. The south-western border of the region is Algerian-Tunisian border and on the northeast is Gulf of Bizerte. The volcanic island Galite belongs to this area. The central part of the area extends towards the Kroumirie Mountains. The larger centers are Tabarka and Bizerte.

Valley Medjerda is primarily morphological unit. The areas extends towards the southwest - northeast and from the Algerian-Tunisian border to the Tunisian Gulf. Larger urban centers are Jendouba, Beja and Tunis.

Tell Tunisia is a mountainous area of northern Tunisia. Mountain series is an extension of the mountain Tela from Algeria. This series consists of mountains Tebursuk. Urban centers are El Kef and Tebursuk.

Bon Peninsula is located in the northeast of Tunisia, between the Tunisian and Hammamet Bay. Geomorphological - this is the youngest of the territory of Tunisia. In the southern part of the peninsula settlements are Nabeul and Hammamet and in northern is Korbus.

Central Tunisia is the largest region in Tunisia. It is a part of the mountain, a senior steppe plateau and lower steppe plateau.

Mountain Tunisia, where Jebel ech Chambi is the highest part of the country. This area is represented by a group of mountain Tebessa. The altitude of the area is 1000-1500 m and mountainous character causes the absence of larger settlements.

Senior steppe plateau makes the transition zone between the lower steppe lands to the east and mountain landscapes in the west.

Lower steppe plateau is known as the Sahel. The regional Sahel, as geographicaly isolated region extends from Djebel Zaghouan in the north of the coastal zone to the Libyan border. Physical-geographical space is a natural steppe and as a result of this, man transformed it into a cultural steppe. This is the region of the most fertile soil in Tunisia. Due to the specificity of its individual parts are defined as the northern, middle and southern Sahel. *Northern Sahel* is located in the Gulf of Hammamet and extends from Hammamet to Sousse. *Middle Sahel* covers the area around Sousse and Sfax. This area is a region of olive trees, which give it basic quality. In this area, the coastal cities of Sousse, Monastir and Sfax and inland is Kairouan. Middle Sahel belongs to the neighboring archipelago Kerkennah. *Southern Sahel* is located in the hinterland Gabes Bay. This regional unit belongs to the island of Djerba.

Southern Tunisia is the second largest region, but economically and demographically least important. In this area are chotts, Dahar plateau and the Saharan Tunisia.

The chotts area spreads towards west - east. The most prominent chotts in Tunisia are Garza, Jerid and Fejaj. This area represents the northern border of dates. The largest settlement is Gafsa, and on the coast are Jeridi Tozeur and Nefta. This area, exit to the

Mediterranean Sea between Gabes and Sekhire, divides the southern Sahel region into two parts, or it can be said that these two regions are intertwined here.

Dahar plateau is a special regional continent south of Tunis, between the southern Sahel, the Northeast and the Great Eastern erg on the west. It spreads from the north to Matmata Tunisian-Libyan border to the south. Its physiognomy of this region breaks the monotony of southern Tunisia.

Saharan Tunisia is desert with all the features of the Sahara, or its western part, which represents the Great Eastern Erg. Larger villages in this region are Medenine and Tataouine (Davidović, 1999).

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION OF TUNISIA

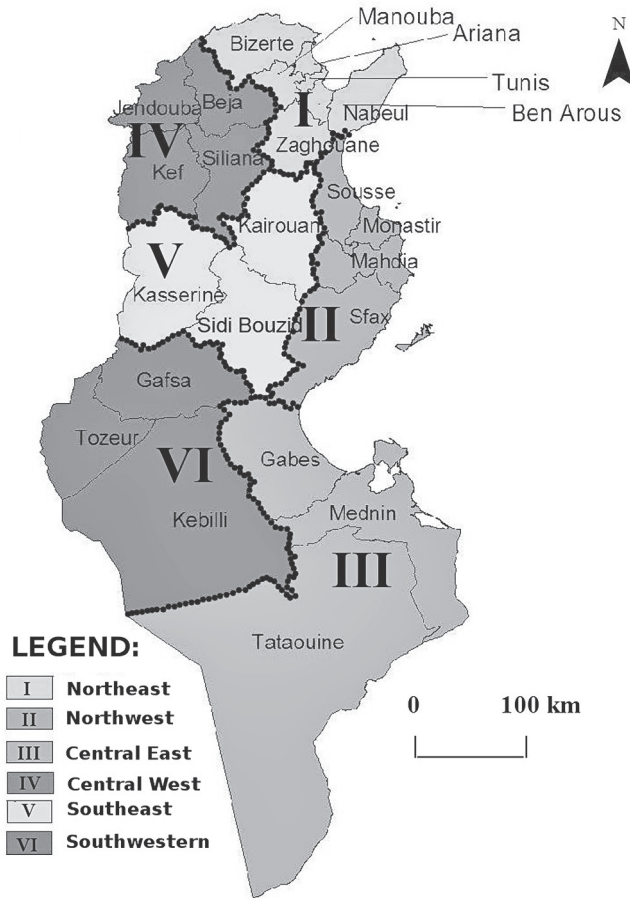
Beginning in 1956, modeled on the French Departments Tunisia is administrative-ly divided into 14 governorates (Arabic: Wilaya). There were later formed new governorates, mainly by the division of the existing into smaller. That is a densely populated urban area of the city Tunis which is divided into four governorates, and also large surface governorates in the south and west of the country where are 24 of them today.

There are major differences between the densely populated north and almost uninhabited south of the country, and also between the coast and inland. All major cities are on the coast, although the interior of the northern and middle Tunisia in proportion to density population, as well as the island of Djerba in the south. It is extremely expressed migration of population from rural to urban areas, especially to the capital. Division into governör was the decentralization and there are efforts for the development of local administrative centers and for creating better living conditions especially in centers in the governorate wherein have been implemented numerous institutions.

Due to the efficient functioning of the state apparatus, starting from the sixth plan (1982 to 1986) the governorate geographical position was grouped and the following regions were formed:

1. Northeast: Bizerte, Tunis, Ariana, Manouba, Ben Arous, Zaghouane and Nabeul;
2. Northwest: Jendouba, Beja, L' Kef and Siliana;
3. Central East: Sousse, Monastir, Sfax and Mahdia;
4. Central West: Kairouan, Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid;
5. Southeast: Gabes, Medenine and Tataouine and
6. Southwestern: Gafsa, Tozeur and Kebili.

In thirteen governorates that exit to the coast (from Bizerte to Medenine) live about 65% of the population, with a high population density (140 inhabitants/sq km). Urban population in this part constitutes 75% of the population. Central parts of the country (governorates Beja, Siliana, Zaghouane, Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid) are primarily depopulated due to the internal immigration, and the urban population constitutes only 30%. Governorates in the west of the country (from Jendouba to Tozeur) are extremely depopulated, primarily by reason of the difficult living conditions of mountain and desert regions.



Map 2. The regions and governorates in Tunisia

Source: *developmed.blogspot.com, Lalic, M.*

TOURIST REGIONS OF TUNISIA

Tourism in Tunisia is organized so that the top of the “pyramid” is the Ministry of Trade and Tourism. Under its supervision is the National Office of Tourism (*Office Nationale du Tourisme tunisien - ONTT*). Agency tourist area (*l’Agence foncière Touristique - AFT*) and *Société hôtelière et Touristique de Tunisie (SHTT)* turned into the Tunisian Federation of Hoteliers (*La federation Tunisiene de l’Hotellerie - FTH*).

Among the Law Acts that have created better conditions for tourism development one that occupies a high place was passed on April 14, 1973, which regulated the arrangement of the tourist zone. This act is established *AFT*, whose main role is to regulate the transfer of land which is located in the tourist zones.

It was developed a comprehensive program to equip the tourist zone. *AFT* organized and secure operation of this program decree on the 15th of May 1973. Its role was to work on the realization and objectification of state power in the land sector.

The execution of this mission was easy in terms of legislation, with the incentive policy, by the mobilization of loans with long repayment periods and with favorable interest rates and formation of specialized banking institutions.

Plan arrangement has been the starting point for the rational management of primary tourist resources, taking into account that it is a predominantly (if not exclusively) beach tourism, and that is- coast. Basic standards that must be met is 100 beds/ha, followed by 0.25 m landlocked/bed, 8-10 sq m beach by tourists. It is necessary to protect the environment, and green areas and archaeological sites are specially protected.

This plan was the basis for a program of infrastructure: international airports, roads, other installations (electricity, water, telecommunications).

After some time, the concept of tourism arrangement has quite evolved: accommodation facilities have not just been hotels, tourist residence have been developing, supply and organization of leisure time (so-called animation) occupy an increasingly important place. In the initial period of tourism development hotels have used the same scheme - linear housing on the coast.

The Decree of April 1973. formed the tourist zones: Tunis-north, Tunis-south, Hammamet-Nabeul, Sousse and Djerba-Zarzis. Subsequently, it formed the zone Monastir in 1975, tourist zone Mahdia in 1976, Kerkennah and tourist zone Tabarka-Ain Draham in 1981.

The development of tourism and realizing its importance for the country, following the example of Italy, Tunisia is divided into tourist regions, which in accordance with the central tourism development plan brought programs and undertook extensive promotional activities (Duričić, Romelić, 1995).

Over time there has been a redefinition of the tourist zone and the territory of the whole country has been divided into ten tourist regions and it was formed the eleventh region in 2002: Yasmine Hammamet, as a brand new destination.

National Statistical Institute (*Institut national de la statistique Tunisie, INS*) and the National Tourism Organization (*Office National du Tourisme Tunisien, ONTT*) defines eleven tourist regions.

Tourist regions (excluding Yasmine Hammamet) constitute several neighboring governorates. Due to the established and highly accentuated tourist office, Yasmine Hammamet is singled out as a special tourist region, although it is part of the governorate Nabeul.

The two of these eleven regions do not only exit on the coast, while the other is a distinct localization on the coast, although the greater part of the region is located in the interior (Bizerte-Beja, Tabarka-Ain Draham, Sousse-Kairouan, Djerba-Zarzis-Gabes).

Beach tourism makes about 95% of all tourist activities, which is a result of tourism development and expansion of capacity at existing locations.

Region Tunis-Zaghouane is primarily focused on business and conference tourism and is important component of cultural tourism, and there is a beach tourism in the area of Gammarth and La Marsa. In this region are significant archaeological sites, primarily Carthage, Utica, Bardo Museum and the medina of Tunis.

Table 1. Overview of the tourist regions in Tunisia

Nº	Tourist region	Governorates	The tourism form
1.	Tunis-Zaghouane	Tunis, Ariana, Manouba, Ben Arous, Zaghouane	Cultural, congress, beach
2.	Nabeul-Hammamet	Nabeul	Beach
3.	Sousse-Kairouan	Sousse, Kairouan	Beach, cultural, religious
4.	Yasmine Hammamet	Part of the governorate Nabeul	Beach, nautical
5.	Monastir-Skanes	Monastir	Beach, golf
6.	Mahdia-Sfax	Mahdia, Sfax	Beach, business, cultural
7.	Djerba-Zarzis-Gabes	Gabes, Medenine, Tataouine	Beach, Sahara
8.	Gafsa-Tozeur	Gafsa, Tozeur, Kebili	Sahara, event
9.	Sbeitla-Kasserine	Siliana, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid	Cultural
10.	Bizerte-Beja	Bizerte, Beja	Cultural, beach
11.	Tabarka-Ain Draham	Jendouba, L' Kef	Beach, eco-tourism

Source: www.ins.net.tn, Lalic, M.

Region Nabeul-Hammamet is a typical region of the spa tourism, which from the beginning of the tourism development in Tunisia offers its exceptional natural conditions - beaches and clear sea. The most important centers are Hammamet and Nabeul. Significant archaeological sites are Kerkuane, and on the cape Bon and spa Korbus.

Region Sousse-Kairouan is a combination of the spa (Sousse, Port el Kantaoui), cultural and religious tourism (Kairouan).

The newly created region Yasmine Hammamet is a tourist zone, built in the late nineties of the twentieth century, in Hammamet Bay, south of Hammamet and administratively it belongs to the municipality of Hammamet. The area is only 278 ha, with about 4 km coastline. There are expensive high class hotels, modern marina with the apartment complex, modern Medina, theme park, and two golf courses are nearby.

Region Skanes-Monastir beside beach tourism offers all the amenities of golf, as well as cultural tourism (Monastir).

Region Mahdia-Sfax is focused on beach tourism, but Sfax is an important component of business and tourism. There are also significant archaeological localities: El-Jam and fortress in Mahdia.

The characteristic of the region Djerba-Zarzis-Gabes is beach tourism oriented on the island Djerba and oasis Zarzis, but also on Saharan tourism in the Matmata and especially recently in the south, in the vicinity of Medenine and Tataouine stay and circular tours through berber villages. On the island Djerba is the famous La Ghriba synagogue, religious sanctuary of North African Jews.

Region Gafsa-Tozeur is a typical Saharan region dedicated to tourism and touring in the desert and mountain oases (Mides, Chebika, Tamerza). Douz is important for event tourism: the famous Saharan festival.

Region Sbeitla-Kasserine is under-developed, both in tourism, and in global terms. It offers tourists mountain environment and historical sites.



Map 3. Tourist regions Tunisia

Source: ONTT, Lalic, M.

Two regions in the north of the country, Bizerte-Beja and Tabarka-Ain Draham are typical representatives of the regions that are largely continental and major tourist capacities are on the coast, which is quite different from the eastern coast - rocky and offers opportunities for fishing and diving. In the vicinity of Beja is famous site from Roman times: Dougga and in the region of Ain Draham is the mountain resort, air spa oasis and ecotourism Hammam Bourguiba.

Despite to the fact that coastline is 1,148 km and mild climate all year round, its history, archaeological sites, large tourist areas equipped to receive tourists in Tunisia is characterized by pronounced seasonality and very high concentrations of tourist activities on the coast.

An illustration of the tourism development in certain Tunisian tourist regions are represented in the tables 2 and 3. The data are for the period 2001-2010 and represent the average annual value of the first and second five-year periods, the share of each region, the ratio in number of beds in 2010/2001 and the mark of the development level in the region.

There is a huge difference in the number of beds in the regions: the most significant regions are Nabel-Hammamet, Sousse-Kairouan and Zarzis Djerba-Gabes, which are defined as areas with tradition. In these zones are more than 57% of accommodation capacities, they achieve about 65% of all nights. The largest tourist centers are: Hammamet, Sousse, Port el Kantaoui and in the western part of the island Djerba. Significant capac-

Table 2. Summary of accommodation capacities in Tunisian regions in the period 2001-2010

Region	2001-2005			2006-2010			Ration 2010/2001
	hotels	beds		Hotels	beds		
	number	number	%	number	number	%	%
Tunis-Zaghouan	112	21,887	9.97	123	23,329	9.82	116.97
Nabeul- Hammamet	137	44,671	20.34	130	44,875	18.89	100.24
Sousse-Kairouan	108	38,177	17.39	115	40,203	16.93	113.03
Yasmine Hammamet	34	12,965	5.90	43	17,910	7.54	186.56
Monastir-Skanes	48	23,364	10.64	51	25,330	10.67	116.16
Mahdia-Sfax	66	11,394	5.19	69	13,186	5.55	142.57
Djerba- Zarzis-Gabes	150	48,236	21.97	161	51,148	21.54	115.02
Gafsa-Tozeur	75	10,467	4.77	81	11,272	4.75	111.34
Sbeitla-Kasserine	11	553	0.25	12	534	0.22	79.63
Bizerte-Beja	15	2,745	1.25	20	3,138	1.32	119.27
Tabarka-Ain Draham	32	5,127	2.33	38	6,571	2.77	167.90
TOTAL:	788	219,586	100.00	842	237,496	100.00	117.47

Source: ONTT (2000-2012), Lalic, M.

Table 3. Summary number overnight stays of foreigners (in thousands) in Tunisia regions in the period 2001-2010

Region	Average overnight stay 2001-2005 (A)		Average overnight stay 2006-2010 (B)		Ration B/A	Degree development
	number	%	number	%		
Tunis-Zaghouan	1,762.3	5.98	1,953.3	5.84	110.84	affirmed
Nabeul-Hammamet	5,620.5	19.06	5,901.8	17.63	105.01	developed
Sousse-Kairouan	6,836.4	23.18	7,309.9	21.84	106.93	developed
Yasmine Hammamet	1,752.1	5.94	2,649.6	7.92	151.22	developed
Monastir-Skanes	3,433.8	11.64	3,736.3	11.16	108.81	affirmed
Mahdia-Sfax	1,478.5	5.01	1,892.7	5.65	128.01	affirmed
Djerba- Zarzis-Gabes	7,484.6	25.38	8,659.1	25.87	115.69	developed
Gafsa-Tozeur	674.1	2.29	850.3	2.54	126.13	potential
Sbeitla-Kasserine	9.8	0.03	17.6	0.05	180.00	potential
Bizerte-Beja	143.0	0.48	137.8	0.41	96.39	potential
Tabarka-Ain Draham	296.3	1.00	366.2	1.09	123.58	potential
TOTAL:	29,491.4	100.00	33,474.7	100.00	113.51	

Source: ONTT, Lalic, M.

ities in Tunis are in Monastir-Skanes zone. The new zone Yasmine Hammamet is in full swing, as well as the increasingly popular South (Gafsa-Tozeur) and Mahdia-Sfax. Other regions, especially those in the north are far behind.

THE EXCLUSION OF TOURIST CENTRES AND SITES IN TOURIST REGIONS IN ISOLATED GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS IN TUNISIA

The map 4 represents the spatial distribution of tourist offer in Tunisia. The main centres of *beach tourism* are located in the northern Tunisia (Nabeul, Hammamet) and Central Tunisia (Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia and the island Djerba). Centers of *Saharan tourism* stand out Tozeur and Douz. Numerous historical sites from different periods are the largest in Southern Tunisia, where are the remains of the Berber heritage. *Religious tourism* is primarily directed to Kairouan (Central Tunisia). The capital, Tunis, with its environment, and Carthage Museum Bardo is a major center of *cultural tourism*, and numerous archaeological sites are mainly located in North Tunisia (Dougga, Bulla Regia, Utica, Kerkouane) and Central Tunisia (El-Jam, Sousse, Kairouan, Sbeitla).

The most important national parks are distributed throughout the country. It is best known Ichkeul, in the north of the country, part of the heritage of UNESCO. In the north are the national parks: Feija, Boukornine, Zembra and Zembretta. In the Central Tunisia are Chambi and Buhedma, while in the south are Djebel and Sidi Toui. Ichkeul is the only national parks which has an important role in Tunisian tourism.

In addition to these traditionally represented forms of tourism in Tunisia, new forms increasingly appear such as: thalassotherapy, health tourism and various types of selective forms of tourism.

Thalassotherapy is also one of an ever-present forms of tourism. Wellness and thalassotherapy centers are unavoidable in the offer of all prominent Tunisian hotel. Tunisia is becoming the second country in the number of thalassotherapy centers (after France) - over 250,000 clients per year. This form of tourism is represented in the tourist centers on the coast, primarily Northern Tunisia (Tunis, Hammamet, Yasmine Hammamet) and Central Tunisia (Sousse, Port el Kantaoui, Monastir, Djerba and Mahdia).

The best recommendation for *health tourism* is rich tradition and high quality service mark, and Tunisia is becoming selected destination for aesthetic, thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, dental treatments for numerous clients in Western Europe (not only for the lower cost of rendered services in relation to the stem) and also for Libya and Algeria which do not have such infrastructure. Tunisia has ambitions to become a country of choice for the provision of such services. Health tourism services are provided in hospitals of the city of Tunis and Bizerte (North Tunisia), Sousse and Sfax (Central Tunisia).

Tunisia is significant for *selective forms of tourism*, especially the so-called *Saharan tourism*. This form of tourism occupies an increasing number of somewhat "adventurous minded" modern tourists seeking new and unusual. Regions between Gafsa and Shott el Jerida, with oases of Tozeur and Nefti, with picturesque mountain oases, such as Chebika, Mides and Tamerza have become a destination for many tourists. On touring visits are two true desert destinations: Kebili and Douz and settlements in Matma-



Map 4. Spatial distribution of tourist offer of Tunisia

Source: teoros.revues.org

ta and Berber villages in the rocky desert. Region Medenine and Tataouine are the right starting point to explore the secrets of the Sahara. Few people can resist not to visit live stages where were filmed scenes from “Star Wars” or “The English Patient”, and have a ride through the famous Rommel road or through the dunes.

CONCLUSION

Tourism in this area began to develop in the nineteenth century, when it was kept under French colonial regime. It continued development of the tourism industry in the Maghreb countries led to the fact that nowadays they represent a large and interesting starting point.

Tunis, in regard to Morocco, started rather late to develop the tourism industry. Encouraged by the example of Morocco, the state government gave the initiative to study systematically the tourism potentials of Tunis and also started investing. Following the example of Italy, the country is divided into tourist zones, which are in accordance with the central plan of the country tourism development. The fact is that Tunisia does not have as many natural tourism resources as Morocco. However, Tunisia for its development, openness and orderliness is in the top of African countries.

Statistical data represent that Tunisia for the African proportions is relatively stable and economically developed country, and as such is the most attractive African country. Tourism in Tunisia and Morocco contributed in economic development, raising standards and life quality of local residents. Tunisia is developing its tourism based on the Moroccan model. The condition for this is setting up such a model of development that contributes to the country's position as a recognizable and attractive tourist destination.

Relatively favorable natural-geographic and socio-geographical conditions are utilized for tourism development, but there are untapped resources that should be used.

Travel trends are seen in terms of continued growth and development of tourism supply and demand and in terms of growing competition among tourist destinations on the world tourism market. The current orientation of Tunisia is on the beach tourism, but this phenomenon has many drawbacks, and there is the increase in presence of Saharan tourism, and should be expected the development of new offers (cultural, business, health tourism, eco-tourism, nautical tourism).

Due to the tourists saturation from traditional dispersion zone large hotel complexes and monotonous tourist areas emphasis is placed on equipping small hotels and houses built in the traditional style that can provide stay in authentic conditions, primarily in rural areas. This could lead to some geographical redistribution of tourist offer in Tunisia.

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