Effective Local Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism Development in Rural Destinations

A Case Study of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql Villages, Sultanate of Oman

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the

University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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In the name of Allah,

The Compassionate, the Merciful,

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe,

and Peace and Prayers be upon

His Final Prophet and Messenger

Declaration

I certify that no part of this work has been submitted previously or accepted in substance for any degree and it is not being concurrently submitted for any other academic degree. I also declare that the outcome and result of this work are my own independent work and investigation, and it does not contain research material that has been submitted previously unless it is cited and well-referenced according to academic research ethics guidelines.

Signed:

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March 2022

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic activities, particularly tourism development, are recognised as a main economic driver worldwide, including in the Sultanate of Oman, where economic diversification strategies are being adopted to reduce the contribution of oil and gas revenues to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Government of Oman has taken important measures to increase the potential of tourism across the country, especially in rural areas, to capitalise on the country's unique natural resources and cultural treasures and, in the process, to encourage the participation of local communities. This study demonstrates that tourism operations in rural destinations of Oman, mainly in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, are not entirely effective to conserve resources, achieve wellbeing among the local residents or improve the tourist experience. This ineffectiveness is attributed to inadequate and insufficient local participation, resulting in increased migration of local youths to the capital and major cities in search of better livelihoods, a diminished sense of belonging among the locals and a lack of authenticity in the experiences of tourists.

This research reviews the existing literature on citizens' participation in different socioeconomic activities, including the tourism industry, to develop a methodological framework to examine the nature of local participation in the Omani context. Using the participatory approach, this study engages with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors, as well as local residents in the studied villages, through qualitative research methods. The literature review, combined with an analysis and interpretation of primary data, shows that the Government of Oman has viewed local communities as key partners in the development of the state since the 1970s. This development has been built around offering equal educational opportunities to all, with involving citizens in decision-making processes. However, a lack of awareness, training and funding, combined with inadequate plans, have limited the participation of the local population in tourism development initiatives in the studied villages, thus highlighting the need for practical measures to be implemented that support these initiatives and strengthen the ability of the local community to use their natural and cultural resources for tourism purposes.

Hence, this research establishes a practical methodological framework to maximise the involvement of the local community in a more sustainable management of their assets, both tangible and intangible. The aim of the framework is to link locals with their assets, enhance the inclusion of locals, strengthen their self-esteem and sense of ownership, build economic self-sufficiency and engage them in a cultural dialogue with tourists by offering a range of authentic natural and cultural products. At the national level, the framework is expected to help reduce the migration of locals, especially young people, by encouraging them to invest in their resources and promote Oman as a tourist destination. Furthermore, this framework will contribute to the Oman Tourism 2040 Strategy and Oman 2040 Vision by providing practical steps for developing rural destination areas, developing the capacities of the host communities and contributing to the stake of knowledge at the national and global level.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the soul of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Sultanate of Oman (May his soul rest in peace), the man who built modern Oman, who believed that nation-building requires educating and building capacity amongst citizens. In addition, it has strengthened Oman as a country of peace and dialogue, two fundamental principles for dealing with each other as well as resolving problems and conflicts between nations.

I dedicate this work to the souls of my father, brother Nassir, and nephew Ahmed (may Allah protect them in paradise). Although they are no longer with us, they have given me the strength and motivation to pursue my doctoral studies.

I also dedicate this thesis to my mother, wife, and children Mohammed, Ahmed, and Abdullah for their patience with me during my research period, to my father-in-law Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Mashrafi, and brothers-in-law Abdullah, Saleh and Majid for being with me in difficult times, for their continued encouragement and support during my absence from home. Finally, I dedicate it to my brothers, sisters, nephew Ahmed bin Salim, and all the family and friends who have supported me in various ways.

My deepest thanks go to all members of my family, relatives, and friends for being my source of inspiration in this research, and to all those who have supported me throughout my education.

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Glossary of Arabic Terms

a'abiyah	عابيه	(pl. *awabi*) Cultivated area or yard.
abaya	عباية	A long female dress from neck to feet.
Ad-Dakhliyah	الداخلية	The interior region of Oman.
Aflāj	أفلاج	(sing. falaj) Traditional Omani water system that supplies the traditional settlements with water for domestic and agriculture use.
Aini falaj	فلج عيني	A falaj type which is sourced from a spring (*ain*).
Al Wathbah Academy	برنامج الوثبة	Training program offered by Bank Muscat to enhance the capabilities of customers in finance and project management.
al'alan	علعلان	A coniferous family, juniper tree, he found in heights of Jabal Al Akhdar and Jabal Shams with a branched stem that may reach a height of 12 metres.
Alaya	العلاية	Settlement located at a higher topographic level.
al-Nizam al-Asasi lil-Dawla	النظام الاساسي للدولة	The Basic Statutes of Oman.
Al-Raffd Fund	صندوق الرفد	Governmental body providing free-loan interest for Omani entrepreneurs to establish their SME enterprises.
arif	عريف	Responsible person for aflaj water distribution.
Ash-Sharqiyah	الشرقية	The eastern region of Oman.
atm	عتم	A wild olive with small fruits, from which a teeth cleaning twig known as *miswaak* is derived.
Bayt	بيت	Dwelling, also locally known to indicate big dwellings in the settlement.
bidar	بيدار	(pl. *biyadeer*) Farmer.
Burqu	برقع	A mask weared by women when they get outside home to hide their faces from foreigners
Dāudī falaj	فلج داؤودي	A falaj type that taps underground water via long horizontal channels, which reach to the aquifer through vertical shafts. Its name refers to the Prophet Suleiman bin Da'ūd within a legendary event took a place before the 10th century BC to reduce the drought, which was constructed into ground tunnels to convey groundwater from the mother well to cultivated areas.
Eid	عيد	An important religious festive day celebrated by Muslims after the Holy month of Ramadan and the 10th day of Thu al-Hijjah.
Ghailī falaj	فلج غيلي	A falaj type that is sourced from seasonal or permanent surface water diverted from the wadī (*ghail*).
Hais	هيس	Hand-hewn plough pulled by bulls.
halwa	حلوى	Traditional sweet made from starch, sugar, ghee, cardamom and saffron.
Hāra	حارة	(pl. Hārat) Traditional tribal residential quarter.
Henna	حنا	Green paste made from mashed leaves of the henna tree, which is used to dye hands and feet, which upon drying normally takes on a red or dark-red- colour.
Jahal	جحال	(sg, Ja'Hla) Clay pot water cooler used for drinking in the dwelling and mosque.
kohl	كحل	Ground stibnite powder used as an eye cosmetic.
kubz regag	خبز رقاق	Traditional homemade bread.
laban	لبن	Light yoghurt or sour milk produced by shaking milk for a while into a large leather churning bag known as *sqa*.
Luban	لبان	Natural gum that consists of a resinous dried sap sourced from Boswellia sacra, a wild tree of Dhofar, in southern Oman, from which an essential oil is distilled to make incense.
ma'alih	مالح	Salty fish stored in containers.
ma'al-ward	ماء الورد	Rose water used by boiling roses into oven.
Majlis A-Dawlah	مجلس الدولة	State's Council of Oman.
Majlis Al-Baladi	المجلس البلدي	Municipal Council.

Majlis Ash-Shura	مجلس الشورى	Parliament or Consultative Council of Oman.
Masjid	مسجد	Mosque, place of worship.
Mrāq	مرق	Small narrow opening in a wall, which provides natural ventilation and lighting.
Musala	مصلى	Prayer area smaller than a mosque.
Omran	عمران	The Oman Tourism Development Company.
qabidh	القابض	Treasurer who manages the financial affairs of water system like rental fees collection of *falaj* properties, funding repairing and maintenance projects.
qa'sha	قاشع	Sundried sardine fish.
Ratab	رطب	Fresh dates.
Riyada	ريادة	The Public Authority for Small Medium Enterprises Development.
Rizha	رزحة	A genre that combines dance, poetry, singing, acrobatic feats, and music.
Sabla	سبلة	(pl., *sbal*) Social meeting place for males, which can be private for one tribe or communal for mixed tribes.
sarooj	صاروج	Traditional reddish artificial pozzolana obtained by calcining clay, which was traditionally used as mortar and render material in houses, forts and aflāj.
sawaqi	سواقي	(sg. *saqiyah*) designated waterways for irrigation
Sheikh	شيخ/ رشيد	Tribal leader.
Shuwa	شوا	Roasted spicy meat Shuwa wrapped by banana leaves into a container made from palm-tree leaves.
Shiwawi	شواوي	(*sg. shawi*) Pastoralists living on livestock and herding
Sih /tamr	سح / تمر	Dried dates for human consumption.
Simah	سمه	Mat made from palm-tree leaves used for eating, sleeping and praying.
Souq	سوق	The traditional market for trading exchange. It can be a built structure or open area used for this purpose.
sqa or makadah	سقا / مخاضة	Leather bag made from goatskin used to store water or to churn milk to produce laban.
Sufala	السفالة	Settlement located at a lower topographic level.
Tabil	طبل	Drum made from tree trunk and animal leather, commonly named *rahmani* and *casir*.
Tanfeedh	صندوق الرفد	Governmental body providing free-loan interest for Omani entrepreneurs to establish their SME enterprises.
Tanowr	تنور	The pit to roast meat during Eid.
Tawi	طوي / بئر	Water well.
Thuraya	الثريا	Pleiades star cluster or seven sisters and it is a conspicuous object in the night sky.
Wādī	وادي	Dry rivers which discharge storm rain water from the mountains to the lower flat lands.
Wakil	وكيل الفلج	Islamic agent administrating falaj affairs (wakil al-falaj).
Wali	والي	The representative of government in province with less degree and power than governor.
Waqf	وقف	Islamic mortmain for charitable purposes.
Wilayat	ولاية	Administrative region.
Za'fran	زعفران	Saffron.
zait Al-Shoa	زيت الشوع	Substance extracted from the Al-Shoa tree and used to treat diabetes, blood pressure, paralysis, joint pain, skin diseases, malaria, fistula wounds, and to massage nerves and joints.
Zajerah	زاجرة	A massive wooden framework with a well-wheel called *manjor* located in the middle. Beasts of burden such as bulls and donkeys rotate a wooden wheel through a rope connected with a large bag made from goatskin to pull up water from the well.
Zamootah	زموته	Green syrup derived from a plant known as Ajwain, used as stomach acid relief.
Zaree	زري	Name of gold and silver thread woven into fabrics to create intricate patterns in traditional Omani garments.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of this research, which begins with an overview of the Omani context from an ecological, administrative and economic viewpoint. As this research focuses on tourism as a socio-economic activity aimed at the participation of the local community, this study conducts a review of recent advances in the tourism sector, which is supported by facts and figures, including the contribution of tourism to Oman's GDP. The rationale for the study of local participatory approaches to tourism development, is then discussed, followed by the research questions, aim and objectives.

This research conducts case studies of the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, highlighting demographic, environmental and cultural aspects and tourism opportunities and statistics. The chapter culminates with a discussion of the research methodology used to inform the primary data collection and a description of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Overview of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is located in the southeast quarter of the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean to the south and east, respectively, the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, the Hurmuz Strait and Iran to the north and Yemen to the south (Zhao et al., 2010) (Figure 1). The Sultanate of Oman covers an area of 309,500 km2 and has a coastline that stretches for nearly 3,165 km from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the borders of the Republic of Yemen, and it overlooks three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea. The land area of Oman consists of various topographical features, such as valleys and coastal plains (3%), desert (82%) and mountain ranges (15%). The Hajar Mountain in the north reaches up to 3,000 metres above sea level, especially in the Jabal Shams Mountain, while the Jabal Samhan and Jebal Qura in the southern part of Oman stand 2,100 metres above sea level (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:29).

Figure 1: Map of Oman (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2017).

The climate in Oman is usually hot and dry (Searle, 2019:11-13), with average temperatures typically below 40°C. The maximum documented daily temperature in May was 46.8°C, while the minimum temperature in January was 14°C (Al-Bahry et al., 2014:10-11) (Figure 2). However, the temperature in northern Oman can exceed 50°C – the highest temperature recorded in June 2018 was 50.6°C (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:39) – and the humidity can reach 100 percent (Nielson, 2014:135). In winter, the temperature drops to freezing, especially in the northern mountain ranges (Searle, 2019:11-13). The weather is most pleasant for tourists between October and April, especially in the northern part of Oman. However, the Dhofar Governorate in southern Oman has a cool summer due to the monsoon season and winds from the Indian Ocean; lower temperatures attract tourists from neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Lust, 2014:742).
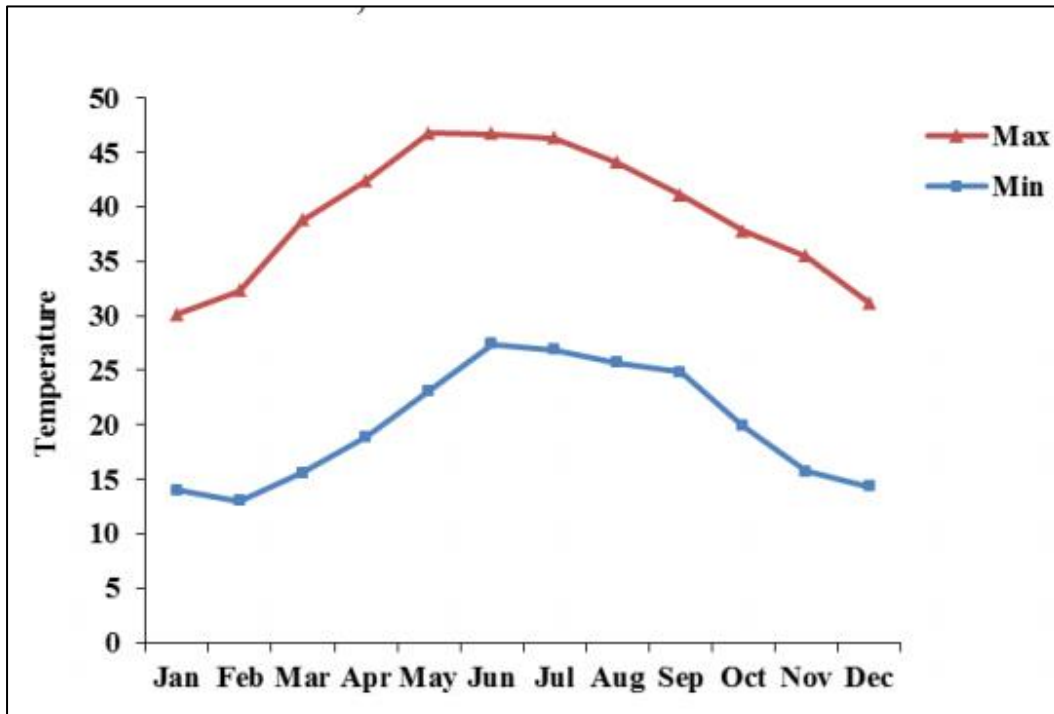
Figure 2: Maximum and minimum daily temperatures in Oman (Al-Bahry et al., 2014:11).

1.1.1 Governance and Constitution

The system of government in Oman is a monarchy that stems from the Al-Busaid dynasty and was led by Ahmed bin Said Al-Busaidi after the collapse of the Al-Ya'arubi dynasty in 1741 (Plekhanov, 2004:50; DeFrain and Asay, 2014:122). Before the 1970s, Oman was isolated from the rest of the world. When HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said took power on July 23, 1970, peacefullys deposing his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur of Muscat and Oman, he used a large part of the oil revenue to accelerate development, especially for infrastructure and education (Al-Farsi, 2007:2-3). HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said ruled Oman for almost 50 years and passed away on Friday, 10 January 2020, aged 79. A day later, his cousin Haitham bin Tariq became Sultan under Article 6 of the Basic Statutes of Oman on 6 November 1996 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 1996) (Figure 3). Haitham bin Tariq previously held the office of the Minister of Heritage and Culture and Chairman of Oman 2040 Vision, the government's strategic plan to improve socio-economic productivity, quality of life and wellbeing.

Figure 3: HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik (left) shares his condolences with citizens upon the death of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said (right) during his oath as Oman's new sultan (Al Watan Newspaper, 2020).

The Basic Statutes of Oman (*al-Nizam al-Asasi lil-Dawla*), declared in 1996, are the first written constitution to guarantee rights within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence that follows Sharia and customary law (IBP, 2015:30). A fundamental clause of this law is that Omanis, regardless of their religion, gender and origin, are equal and equally protected according to Article 17:

> All citizens are equal before the law, and their public rights and duties are equal. There must be no discrimination between them based on gender, origin, skin colour, language, religion, sect, place of residence, or social status. (The Official Gazette of Oman, 1996).

With regard to participation in decision making, two legislative bodies were formed in the 1990s: the State Council (Majlis A-Dawlah) and the Consultative Council or parliament (Majlis Ash-Shura) (Cordesman, 2004:210; Al-Masroori, 2006:107; Jones and Ridout, 2015:202). Valeri (2009:168-169) stated that Oman's ruler appoints the representatives of the State Council (Majlis A-Dawlah) from among those with previous knowledge and experience, such as ministers, undersecretaries, officials, judges and ambassadors, while members of the Consultative Council (Majlis Ash-Shura) are exclusive representatives of the provinces and are selected by the locals without government interference (Ayalon, 1993:600-601). According to

Al-Kathiri (2007:102), the Ash-Shura electoral mechanism is that all citizens, men and women over 21 years of age, have the right to vote for their representatives on the Ash-Shura Council. Provinces (wilayat) with less than 30,000 inhabitants have only one seat, while provinces with more than 30,000 inhabitants are entitled to hold two seats within this council.

However, Ash-Shura candidates must be over 30 years old and have a good profile and reputation in society with sufficient knowledge and experience in government roles (A-Subhi, 2016:31-32). The seats in the Ash-Shura Council increased from 59 in 1991 to 86 in 2015 due to population growth in some provinces (Katzman, 2019:4). In the latest Ash-Shura election, 86 members were selected to represent their province, of which two were women (Oman News Agency, 2019a). Membership in Ash-Shura is four years, during which time existing candidates can reapply (Stöckli, 2011:3; The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011a:6). Before the elections, candidates can use their image, experience and career to promote their agenda, programme and opinions in the media and in public places in the provinces (A-Subhi, 2016:32).

1.1.2   Administrative Regional Context and Population

Muscat is the capital of the Sultanate of Oman. The country is divided into 11 governorates, which are divided into 61 provinces or wilayat (Figure 4), according to Royal Decree No. 114/2011, issued on 26 October 2011 (*The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011b*). Figure 4 shows that the Dhofar Governorate has the highest number of provinces, while the Al-Buraimi and Adh-Dhahirah Governorates have the lowest, with three each.
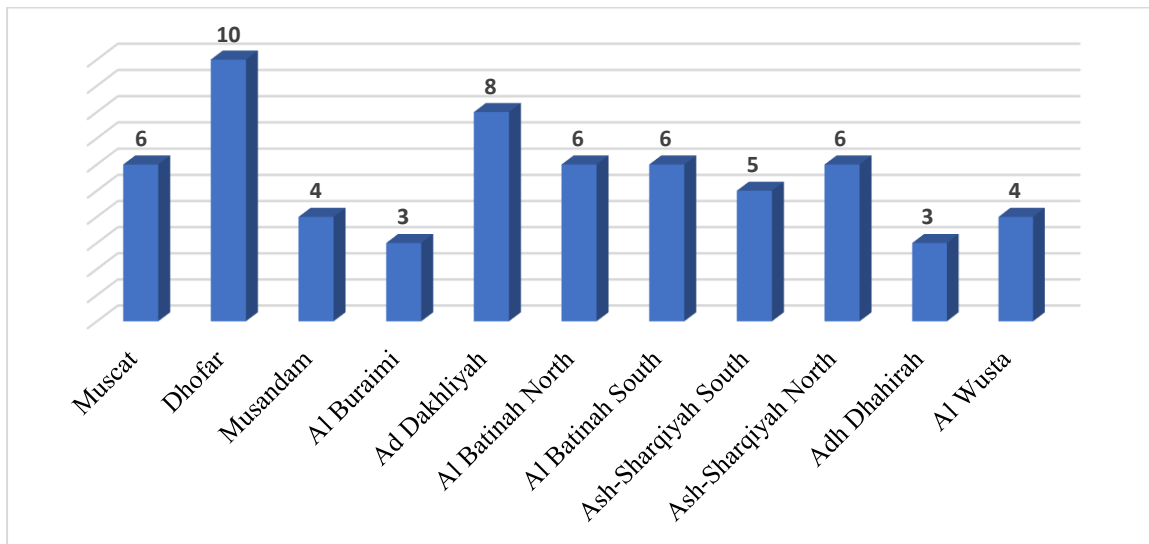
Figure 4: Administrative regions in Oman (Oman, National Centre of Statistics and Information 2019:30-32).

At the end of 2019, the total population of Oman was predicted to decrease by 137,000 from the previous year and therefore reach 4,481 million. The population is made up of 2.736 million (61.1%) Omanis and 1,745 million expatriates (38.9%) (Figure 5). According to the latest statistics, Omani men account for 50.4% of the population and Omani women for 49.6%, 78.3% of expatriates being male and 21.7% female. The highest population density is in Muscat, with a population of 1,305.055 million, followed by Al-Batinah North with 786,154 and Musandam Governorate with 49,135 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:58).
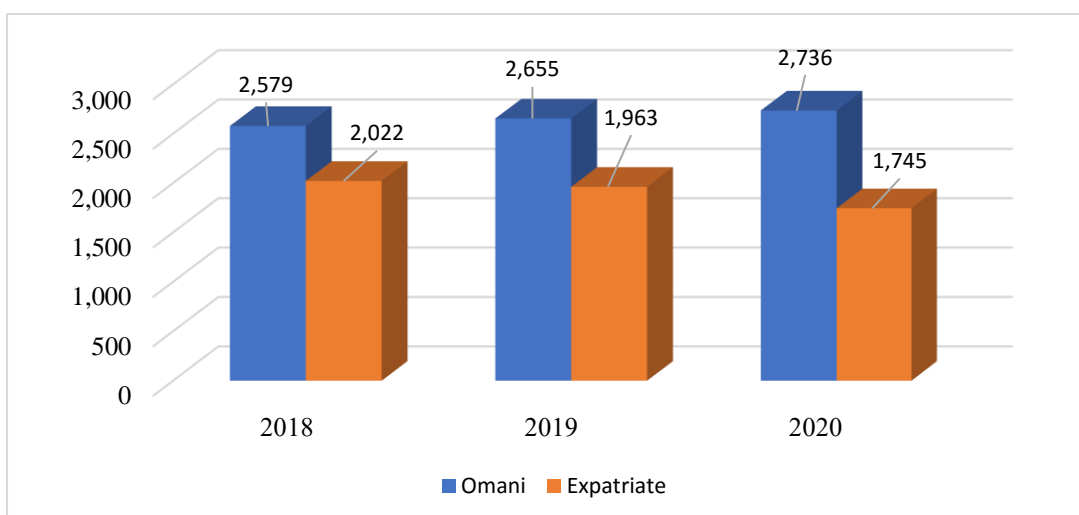
Figure 5: Population indicators in Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:58).

The majority of Omanis are Arabs. Islam is the state religion, with the majority of Omanis being Muslim. However, non-Muslim citizens, such as Christians and Hindus, are free to pray in churches and temples built by the government (Lipton, 2002:80-81; Pradhan, 2013:118; Jones, 2013:32; Cordesman, 2018). Arabic is the official language in Oman, although English is widely spoken (Oxford Business Group, 2009:6-10). Some Omanis speak several indigenous languages, such as Mehri and Jibbāli/Šaħri in the southern part of Oman, and Šiħħi in the northern part of Oman, mainly in Musandam. Others speak non-indigenous languages, such as Fārsi/Persian, Kumzāri, Baluchi, Kojki/Luwāti, Zidjāli, and Swahili. A minority can speak other non-Arabic working languages, such as Malayalam, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Egyptian (Al-Balushi, 2016:82-88).

1.1.3   Education

The first word in the Holy Quran that is revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is *Iqra* meaning 'read*'*, which indicates the importance of reading and learning as a means to seek knowledge (The Holy Quran, 30:597). This word encourages men and women to seek knowledge regardless of their gender (Goveas and Aslam, 2011:233). The education was prioritised as one of the goals of Oman's Renaissance, as it was seen as key to unlocking Omanis' potential to actively take part in the state-building process. Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al-Said, the builder of modern Oman, believed that education was essential to the development of the country: 'Educate our citizens, even under the shade of a tree' (Wiseman, 2009:26). In his vision, the share of oil revenues (Goveas and Aslam, 2011:232) and the acceleration of infrastructure development (Kéchichian, 2008:114-115; Funsch, 2015; Jones and Ridout, 2015) was geared towards education. As a result, while only three primary schools existed before 1970 (Al-Farsi, 2007:2-3), by the end of 2020, Oman had 1,182 public, 662 private and 46 international schools (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:402).
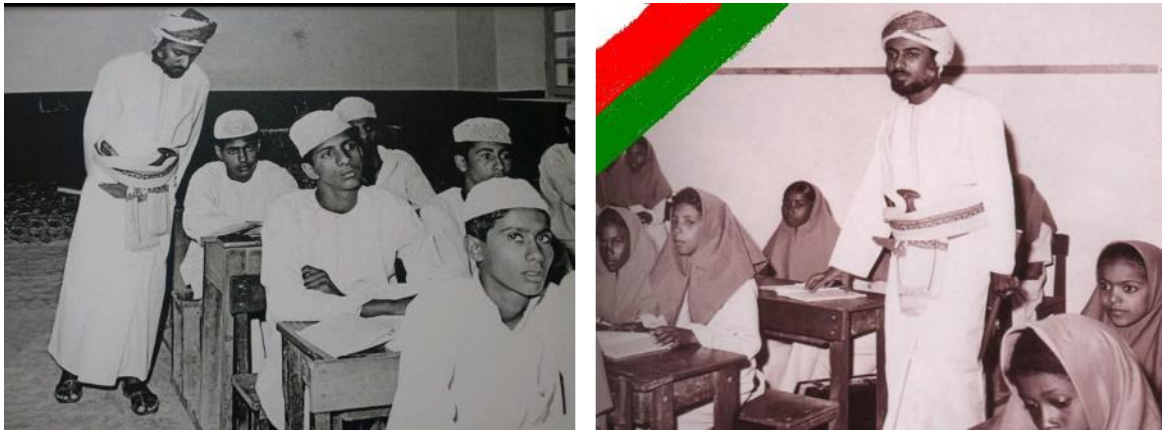
Figure 6: Visits of HM Sultan Qaboos to boys' school (Majalisna, 2015a) and girls' school (Al-Mattarish, 2014) at the beginning of the 1970s indicate that education is a priority for both genders.

Owing to the equal educational opportunities offered to women alongside men since the 1970s (Haddad and Esposito, 1997:155), Oman has made significant education progress over 50 years. For example, in 2019, the number of female students in public schools was 322,261 (49.3%), while the number of male students was 331,411 (50.7%; Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:409). In higher education, in the 2018/2019 academic year, females performed slightly better than males, as they dominated enrolment in higher education, reaching 17,141, which corresponds to 52.1% of the total population of registered students. In the 2019/2020 academic year, there were 15,897 female students (54.1%) compared to 13,496 male students (45.9%; Figure 7; Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:416).
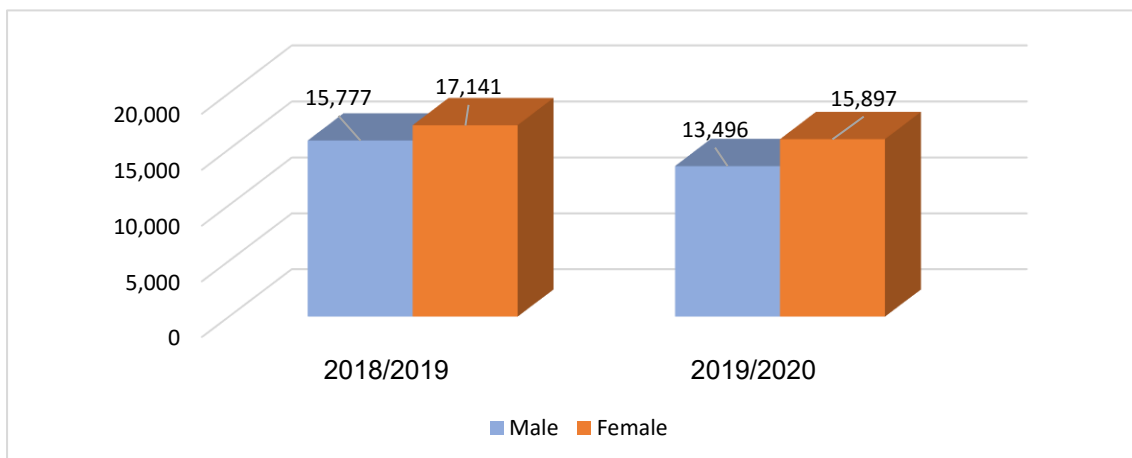
Figure 7: Number of students registered at universities and colleges by gender (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:416).

1.1.4 Women's Empowerment

As the previous section has shown, the Oman government has created equal opportunities for both genders in education towards encouraging them to participate in the State's development. This concept was reinforced in the following official speech at the opening of the Annual Council of Oman on November 16, 2009:

> We are convinced that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women. This is because – and there can be no doubt about this – it is like a bird that relies upon both its wings to fly through the sky. How could it manage to do so if one of its wings was broken? Would it be able to fly? (Oman, Ministry of Information, 2009).

In the past few decades, women in Oman have steadily enrolled in universities, and it is estimated that they make up a third of civil servants (Tomppert and Nazir, 2005:204-205). The significant advancement of women in various disciplines, and their involvement in administrative and technical roles in the public and private sectors, ensures that they have free access to information and data, which promotes their empowerment. As Figure 8 shows, the proportion of women employed in the public and private sectors increased from 142,705 (32.9%) in 2017 to 155.201 (33.4%) by the end of 2019.
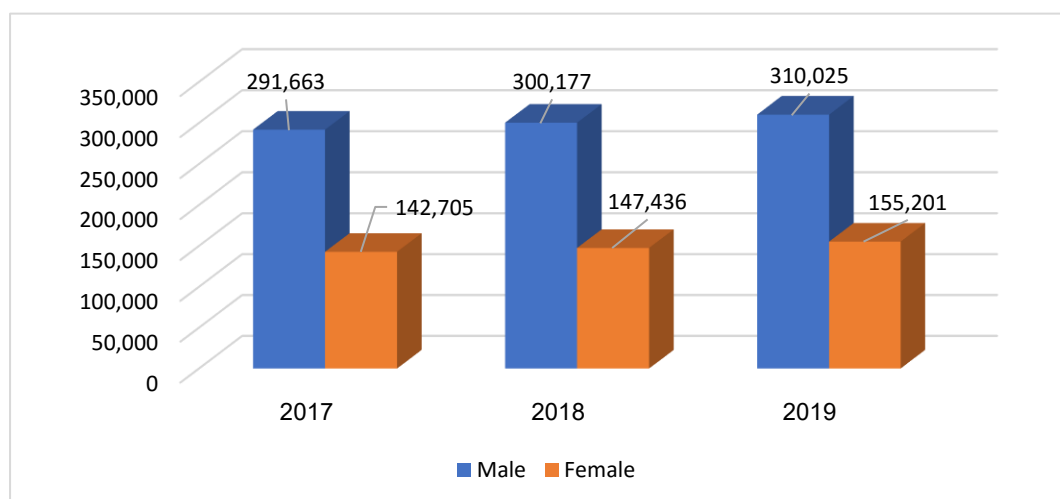
Figure 8: Employment in the government and private sectors in Oman by gender (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a:108).

Women's empowerment has taken place at multiple levels of decision-making, with many women having a portfolio that includes cabinet, undersecretary and ambassador positions (Kelly and Breslin, 2010:351-352), in addition to those elected to the State Council (Majlis A-dawlah) and Consultative Council (Majlis Ash-Shura) during public elections (Valeri, 2013:274).

Figure 9: H.E. Minister of Education of Oman: Madiha bint Ahmed Al Shibaniyah (left) (Oman Ministry of Education, 2018) and H.E. Undersecretary of Tourism of Oman: *Maitha* bint Saif *Al Mahrouqi* (right) (The World of Finance and Economy, 2015).

To improve livelihoods, the government of Oman seeks to promote Oman as a country where men and women take collective responsibility (Figure 10). In addition, women are officially celebrated every year on Omani Women's Day, held on 17 October (Funsch, 2015; Forster, 2017:208-210; Petrocelli, 2019:148) for their contribution to state development.

Figure 10: The official logo of Omani Women's Day (left) and Omani Women's Day celebration (right) (Al Jahwari and Al Jahwari, 2018).

1.1.5 Economic Context

Oman's national currency is the Omani Rial (OMR). The lower denominations are known as Baisa. 1,000 Baisa corresponds to one OMR. OMR is the equivalent of 2.6 USD and almost 2 GBP (Thomas, 2014:102). Since oil was discovered in commercial quantities in late 1964, Oman, like other GCC countries, has been relying on oil sales to run its economy. The daily average output reached about 978,400 thousand barrels in 2018 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a:137). Overall, oil and gas revenues contributed to 72% of Oman's GDP compared with non-hydrocarbon that contributes 28%. However, oil and gas products are influenced by the international supply and demand factors dictated by the most industrialised countries, particularly the US, the European Union, China and Japan, to achieve political and economic goals. As such, oil prices fluctuate, disrupting the development budget for countries that depend entirely on oil revenues. In Oman, for example, oil prices have fallen sharply by 45% since September 2014 due to weaker international demand and greater supply (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2015:5-7). In numerical data, oil prices dropped from 30 billion in 2014 to 26 billion in the same year (Bloomberg News, 2020).

As Oman has seen crude oil exports plummet, limiting some of the country's development processes, various economic diversification measures are being taken to increase non-oil revenues by strengthening sectors such as manufacturing, transport and logistics, tourism, fishing and mining. In particular, the Government of Oman, in cooperation with the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) of the Malaysian government, has launched the national economic diversification improvement programme known locally as *Tanfeedh*, which is part of the ninth five-year plan (2016-2020). This plan focuses on strengthening the non-oil sectors to increase diversification efforts using targeted and achieved numbers to reduce reliance on the oil and gas sector (Hamid and Amin, 2017, p. 2). Public and private sector representatives, such as experts, academics, officials, practitioners and legislators, as well as citizens, have attended scheduled workshops known as *Tanfeedh workshops* to address and overcome the issues around Oman's developmental plans towards achieving economic diversification (Al Lawati, 2017) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Tanfeedh workshops (left) and officials listen to a participant explaining the outcomes of workshops (right) (Tanfeedh, 2017).

The Oman government is not only satisfied with the boost in the non-oil sector but has also developed a long-term strategy to achieve ambitious political, economic and social goals. This strategy, known as Oman 2040 Vision, is defined as follows:

> Oman *2040* Vision is the Sultanate's gateway to fac*ing* challenges, keep*ing* pace with regional and global changes, creat*ing* and leverag*ing* opportunities to promote economic competitiveness and social wellbeing, *and* promot*ing* growth and confidence in all economies to build social and development relations across the country (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019:6).

1.2 Tourism Development in Oman

Oman has enormous tourism potential derived from its unique cultural heritage. As a testament to the government's commitment to safeguard the country's heritage of around 81 restored fortresses and castles, some of which are popular tourist destinations (Oman, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 2018). The intangible heritage expressions include folklore, sociocultural traditions and customs and culinary traditions. Oman is also a place of breath-taking natural beauty, ranging from nature reserves to wadis and from mountains to sand dunes and spectacular marine environments, which attract a range of tourists. According to Lawrence (2010:109), Oman has great geological diversity, ranging from ancient granites, which are related to early continental plates, to ophiolite rocks, and to a variety of sediments that originally formed on the ocean floor. Oman can be viewed as a world-class geotourism destination in the Middle East. These natural and cultural assets afford experiences of relaxation and discovery to international and local tourists alike.

Figure 12: The village of Balad Seet at the heart of the Western Hajar Mountains in Oman, combining the beauty of traditional buildings with that of palm tree oases, cultivated terraces and mountainous landscapes (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2018).

As the richness of Oman's natural and cultural resources makes it a popular travel destination, the tourism sector is a promising non-oil sector that the government of Oman relies on to support the local and national economies. The government has thus taken successful measures to capitalise on the abovementioned resources by developing various infrastructures and facilities to encourage local and international tourism that will support the Omani economy (Oman Observer Newspaper, 2017). One crucial step towards enhancing tourism was the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism of Oman in 2004, according to Royal Decree number 61/2004 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2004). The tourism authority was previously a department within the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The government has continued to build infrastructure to boost tourism in Oman by launching Muscat and Salalah Airports (Atheer Newspaper, 2020). In addition to the creation of important infrastructure to improve the socioeconomic sector, investments have been made into accommodation by stimulating foreign and local capital, thus increasing the number of hotels by 24.7% from 412 in 2018 to 547 by the end of 2020 (Figure 13). This increase is reflected in a 17% increase in the number of hotel rooms from 22,182 in 2018 to 26,733 in 2020 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b and Oman, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, 2021).
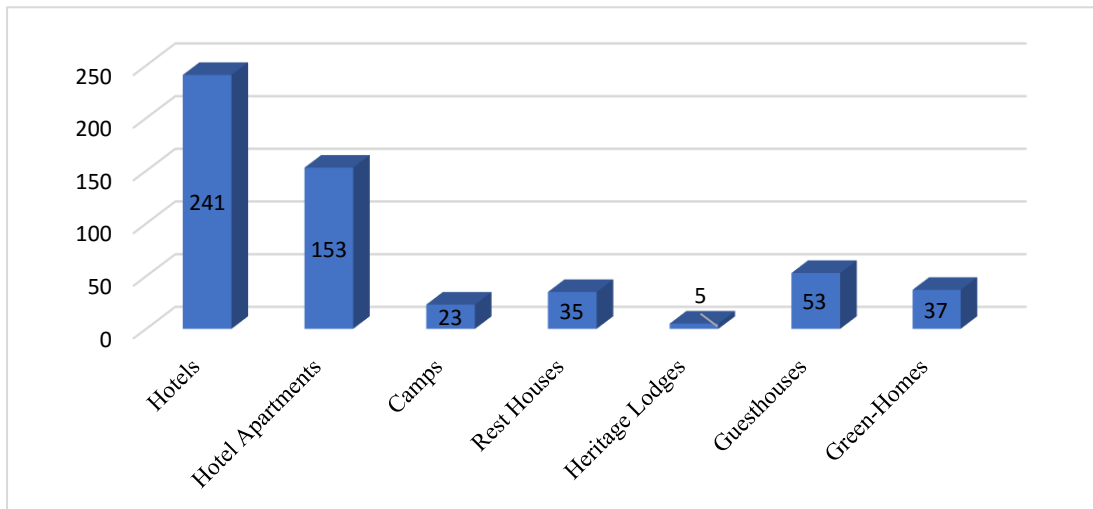
Figure 13: Accommodation provision in Oman according to 2020 statistics (Oman, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, 2021).

These super infrastructure building efforts have extended to places that are characterised by a wealth of natural and cultural values, with the aim of providing a meaningful experience to tourists that allows them to connect to the place and the people. For example, the Turtle Reserve in Ras Al Jinz, Ash-Asharqiyah Governorate, has eco-tour activities for tourists to spot the Olive Ridley and Loggerhead Turtles and endangered turtle species, such as the Green and Hawksbill. In addition to offering accommodation, the reserve includes research laboratories, an interactive museum and other attractive facilities (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016). Historically important building heritage sites have also been restored to welcome tourists. For example, Al Hazem Castle has two huge cylindrical towers that have been renovated and converted into cannon exhibitions. According to official statistics for 2017-2019, the average number of visitors to the Turtle Preserve was 45,288 tourists, while more than 19,000 tourists visited Al Hazem Castle (Figure 14 and Figure 15).

Figure 14: Tourists can experience seeing turtles at Ras Al Jinz turtle reserve (left) and a cannon located in the great tower of Al Hazem castle (right) (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020a).
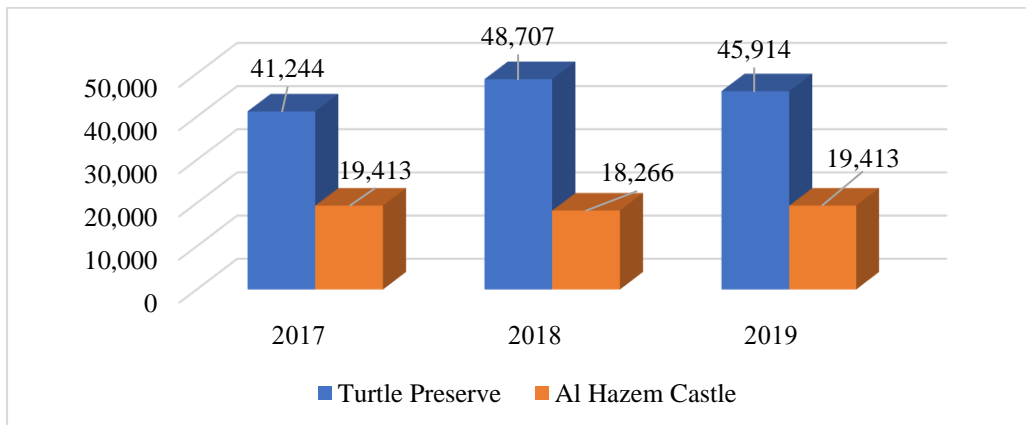
Figure 15: Tourist statistics for the Turtle Preserve (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020) and Al Hazem Castle in Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a).

The tourism marketing efforts outline the government of Oman's intention to promote Oman as a worldwide destination, as Oman's national airline, Oman Air, continues to expand worldwide connections to popular international cities. It currently flies to more than 50 destinations worldwide (Wings of Oman, 2020). The Ministry of Tourism views international travel and tourism exhibitions as a platform through which to promote Oman as a global travel destination (Table 1). The Ministry of Tourism has therefore been increasing its participation in international tourism promotional events and had a goal of reaching 28 events by the end of 2018, including sport events, challenging nature and adventure activities, such as diving, and cultural events (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2019a).

Table 1. The Main International Tourism and Travel Exhibitions in which the Ministry of Tourism has participated (Source: Oman, Ministry of Tourism)

Event	Country/City	Month
ITB	Germany/Berlin	March
ATM	UAE/Dubai	April
Sea Trade Cruise	USA/Miami	April
IMEX	Germany/Frankfurt	May
IBTM	Spain/Barcelona	November

The overall indicators for tourism and travel performance show that the number of inbound tourists in 2019 increased by more than 2% compared to the previous year. In addition, expenditure increased by 27.6% from RO 532 million in 2017 to RO 684 million in 2019. In addition, the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP in Oman reached 2.8% by the end of 2019 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a). On the other hand, above stated figures decreased sharply due to movement restrictions round the world including Oman due to Covid-19. For example, the number of inbound tourists has declined to 869 thousand tourists (Figure 16) and the tourism share to the GDP decreased to 2.3% by the end of 2020 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:464)
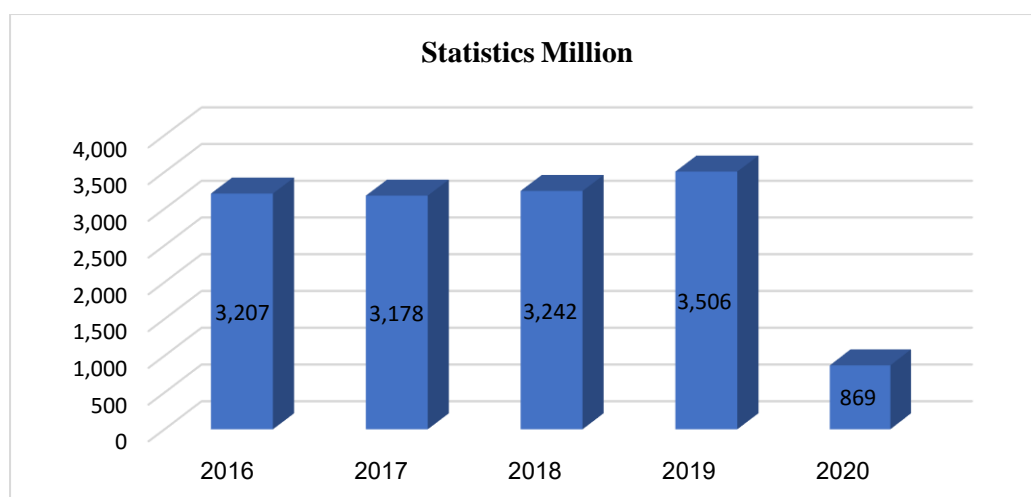
Figure 16: Number of inbound tourists between 2016 and 2020 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:464).

The government of Oman has been implementing a tourism strategy informed by an in-depth analysis of both resource capacities and the potential of national and international tourist markets. In 2016, the Ministry of Tourism's 2040 strategy was launched to position Oman as

a world-class travel destination. According to a report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva (2018:2-3), this strategy aims to diversify the economy by creating job opportunities and making Oman the world's leading destination for discovering and meeting. Oman's target is to attract more than 11 million tourists, increasing its tourism shares to 6% by 2040. In short, tourism development has become a priority agenda for the government of Oman to stimulate non-oil sectors and improve local and national economy.

1.3 Research Problem

Numerous villages in Oman attract local and international tourists because of their spectacular natural features and cultural uniqueness. Tourism growth has impacted these natural and cultural assets, highlighting the need to put in place measures for their sustainable use for tourism purposes. Oman's tourism plan (2006-2010) has chosen sustainability as the approach to developing unique natural and cultural sites by strengthening the role of the local community in maximising local economic benefits and preserving natural and cultural resources (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2006:4). Oman's 2020 Vision highlights tourism as a socio-economic sector that benefits the community by showcasing cultural and natural heritage assets while preserving underlying values (Strolla and Peri, 2016:60). In addition, the Oman's tourism 2040 strategy maintains that locals should effectively contribute to decision-making processes in the planning and management of tourism (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016:9).

The official vision suggests that local residents of rural areas should play a key role in resource conservation, wellbeing promotion and the enhancement of the tourism experience in rural areas. However, local participation is currently limited or nonexistent in current tourism operations in numerous villages in Oman, which contradicts the key tenet of this approach. As such, the tourism operations in these areas do not support sustainability, especially in terms of cultural heritage preservation, community wellbeing and tourism experience. This study therefore examines the inadequateness of the local participatory approach in two of the most popular rural tourist destinations in Oman: the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen in Western Hajar and the village of Muql in Eastern Hajar. The aim is to propose practical steps to strengthen local residents' participation and contribution to preserving natural and cultural assets, improving locals' wellbeing and enhancing tourists' experience.

1.4   The Research Rationale

Internationally, the tourism and travel industries are seen as key to stimulating the global economy. The above statement is evidenced by figures issued by international organisations, particularly the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). In 2019, international arrivals grew by 4% to 1,460 million and international tourism receipts increased by 3% to 1,481 USD billion. This increase means that the tourism sector recorded additional export revenue of 80 USD billion from international tourism compared to 2018 (UNWTO, 2020:2-8). In Oman, as mentioned in Section 1.2, the number of inbound tourists increased by more than 2%, reaching 3,506 million in 2019.

The increase in tourism revenues as shown in the abovementioned figures clearly demonstrates that tourism could only reach this growth with supporting factors, such as air transport, which increased the connecting cities to more than 22,000 worldwide destinations in 2019 (International Air Transport Association [IATA], 2020:34). Moreover, the interaction of host communities with tourists and the provision of different products and services have been shown to benefit both improving residents' standard of living and enhancing visitors' experiences. This interaction is also related to the implementation of a sustainable approach in the early 1990s, which aimed not only to protect natural resources from negative impacts, such as deforestation due to the construction of resorts, but also to strengthen the role of the local community as a key player in the balance between resource conservation and economic purposes (UNESCO, 2014:12; Bello et al., 2016:476; Snyman, 2017:248; Wondirad, 2017:280; UNTWO, 2017:4). This role of host community indicates that the optimal use of natural and cultural resources for socio-economic activities, including tourism, should be evaluated through an effective local community participatory approach.

Like other global destinations, Oman has adopted a sustainability approach to developing rural travel destinations in Oman, as mentioned in Section 1.3. However, tourism operations in rural areas suffer from inadequate participation of local residents due to a lack of regulations, knowledge and understanding of tourism by locals, leading to scepticism about it as an economic activity. Many locals are unwilling to invest in tourism because they consider it a

new business phenomenon that contradicts Islamic and cultural traditions (Al-Masroori, 2006:35; Al-Baleushi, 2008:158; Al-Shaaibi, 2011:5-16). The consequences of these issues have resulted in the inappropriate use of sociocultural and environmental resources for socioeconomic and tourism purposes.

For example, the majority of traditional buildings have been neglected following youth migration to the capital and surrounding cities looking for better living standards (Bürkert et al., 2007, p. 9; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015, p. 114; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2014a, p. 35; Al-Hashim, 2015, p. 10). The abandonment of traditional buildings and activities has also led to changes in the social structure, as parents have to hire semi-skilled expatriate workers, mainly from Asia, to manage their agricultural activities (Qasim, 2012:113- 115; Pradhan, 2013:115-117; Dutton, 2013:139). However, no strategy has been developed to restore these traditional villages by engaging the local community to utilise their resources. Al-Shaaibi (2011,Ch:6-18) asserted that no clear plan exists for empowering local residents to plan and develop tourism in Oman.

This research examines the causes of the above factors and their implications and develops a practical framework to increase the contribution of local people to the sustainable rehabilitation and development of traditional rural destinations. Defining an effective local participatory approach will incentivise the local community to resettle and maximise its involvement in the control and conservation of local natural and cultural assets. This proposed approach will provide an opportunity to promote economic self-sufficiency, whereby locals, especially the most entrepreneurial ones, can develop authentic products and provide services to enhance the tourists' experience. This approach will not only encourage locals to reduce their dependency on external agencies, such as tour operators, but also revive traditional activities, such as agriculture and crafts.

At the national level, strengthening local community participation will contribute to reducing the unemployment rate, which reached 2.8% in 2019, of which 1.3% were men and 0.99% were women (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a). This, in turn, will reduce the percentage of overseas workers who make up 42.5% of the Omani population in

2019 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020b). The reduction in the number of expatriate workers will limit employee remittances abroad, which rose 1.4% from OMR 3.774 billion in 2017 to OMR 3.829 billion at the end of 2018 (Central Bank of Oman, 2019:103). Tourists will also benefit from this effective local form of participation, as they will be able to try local foods and take part in traditional activities, such as plantation and harvesting (Asker et al., 2010:89-90; Saarinen, 2010:721; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1356; Brandt and Huagen, 2011:38-39). In addition, this effective local participation will strengthen the tourists bond with the destination and the people through creating meaningful experiences and unforgettable memories. The overall expected fruits of this research will make a significant practical contribution in line with Oman 2040 Vision and Oman's Tourism 2040 strategy for decentralisation, as their strategic dimensions are aimed at promoting regional and local development.

1.5 Research Questions

This research seeks to find answers to the following three questions:

- What are the impacts of tourism on the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, two popular rural destinations in Oman?
- What are the existing local attitudes and initiatives to promote the development of tourism to improve livelihoods?
- What interventions should the concerned stakeholders take to overcome obstacles and problems that limit local community participation and sustainable tourism development in Omani villages?

1.6   Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore an effective local community participation framework for sustainable tourism development in rural destinations in the Sultanate of Oman.

The objectives set to achieve the research aim are as follows:

- Critically review relevant theories and examples concerning tourism impacts and the concept of local participation in socioeconomic and tourism development.
- Examine the nature of plans, programmes and initiatives of relevant public and private sectors to determine the extent to which they aim to improve community participation in tourism planning and management.
- Evaluate the economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts of tourism on rural areas and the livelihood of the local community.
- Explore the opinions, attitudes and experiences of residents towards tourism, with a view to involving them in current and future tourism management in rural destinations.
- Develop an effective participatory framework by proposing a set of recommendations to improve the contribution of the local community to sustainable tourism development in Omani villages.

1.7   The Case Study Areas

The villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql were selected as the case study areas for implementing a local participatory approach in tourism development in the Omani context. Before delving into the two case-study villages, this section provides an overview of traditional settlements in Oman from geographical, topographical, economic and social perspectives. Oasis settlements in Oman are classified into six types: Drainage Oases (0.3%), *Kawr* Oases (0.5%), Urban Oases (1.7%), Mountain Oases (3%), Foothill Oasis (46%) and Plain Oases (49%) (Luedeling and Buerkert, 2008:1181). Hilltop settlements are called *alaya*, while foothill settlements are known as *sufala*. Examples of this type of settlement can be found in Ibra in the As-Sharqiyah Governorate (Korn, 2010:53).

From an economic viewpoint, and before oil was discovered in commercial quantities, settlements in inner Oman relied on agriculture as their main socio-economic activity due to the availability of water (Al-Hashimy, 1994:197). The *falaj* irrigation system (pl. *aflaj*) is the main water distribution infrastructure for most traditional agricultural settlements (Birks, 1978:74), without which human habitation would not have been possible (Costa, 1983:275). Omanis gained access to groundwater by digging tunnels and canals that use gravity to make water flow from aquifers or surface springs towards settlements and agricultural fields (Norman et al., 1997:35). According to Al-Sulaimani et al. (2007:3-4), there are three types of *aflaj* systems in Oman (Figure 17): *da'ūdī falaj* (21% of the total *aflaj*), the *ainī falaj* (33% of the total *aflaj*) and the *ghailī falaj* (46% of the total *aflaj*).
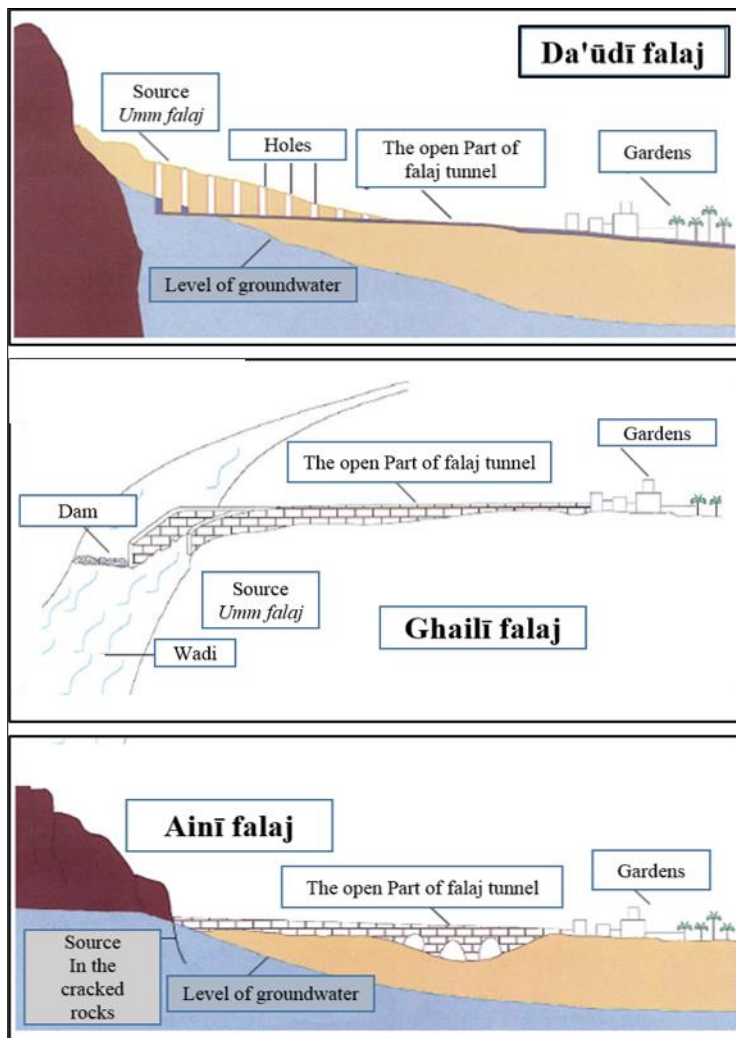
Figure 17: Three types of *aflaj* in Oman (Oman, Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Resources, 2005:40).

The majority of settlements, especially in inner Oman, are fed by *aflaj,* whose water is used for irrigation of cultivated areas, especially self-sufficient crops such as date palms (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2014b:33; Al-Abrī, 2014:73; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:10). However, some settlements rely on wells to draw water from the water table to the surface (Al-Hashimy, 1994:197). Traditional wells, called *zajerah*, used animals such as bulls and donkeys to turn a wooden wheel through a rope, which was connected to a goatskin sack where water from the well was poured (Richardson and Dorr, 2003:171-172). For example, *ayjah* stone settlements in Sur are irrigated by around 95 wells in which water is stored in goatskin sacks and transported by donkeys (Sheriff, 2004:102). The ancient city of Qalhat is partially fed by wells supplied by valleys, known as *wadi*s (Bhacker and Bhacher, 2004:22).

Several academic researchers (Damluji, 1998; Al-Salimi et al., 2008, Bandyopadhyay, 2004, Bandyopadhyay et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d; Al-Abrī, 2014; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015) have investigated oasis settlements in different regions of Oman from urban and architectural viewpoints. The settlements are an ensemble of traditional structures comprising private housing, communal facilities and defensive elements, as well as open spaces in which residents carry out their daily life activities, conduct communal practices and live a unique lifestyle. The case-study villages presented in the following sections feature these characteristics.

1.7.2   Misfat Al-Abryeen

Misfat Al-Abryeen is a village in the province of Al-Hamra in the Ad-Dakhliyah Governorate and is home to 24,528 Omanis and 2,899 expatriates (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020b:31). It is a small settlement perched on the steep walls of two intersecting valleys over 950 m above sea level (Ibrahim et al., 2001:46), two and a half hours from Muscat, the capital of Oman. This village is fed by spring water from the *wadi* side to the north of the settlement, irrigated by the traditional water *falaj* system. This water system is thought to have existed before the tribesmen settled in the oasis (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:37-39).

Figure 18: Map of Misfat Al-Abryeen village in Al Hamra province in Oman (Oman, Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019b).

Figure 19: Misfat Al-Abryeen affords panoramic views of the traditional settlement and lush plantations (Ali, 2013a).

Date palms stand on well-maintained terraces on the edge of the *wadi,* next to various crops, such as citrus fruits and bananas (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016:37). The steep topography has shaped the buildings into clusters that comprise a hundred houses built from stone, mud

and *sarooj* (a pozzolana-like fired clay), along with palm trunks and logs from mountain trees such as *al'alan* and *atm* as ceiling beams (Damluji, 1998:289). The largest and oldest houses in this settlement are *Bayt al-abaytayn*, *Bayt as-safa* and *Bayt al-aqd* (Gaube, 2008:172). In Misfat, like in other settlements in rural areas, the buildings have been neglected following the migration of natives into cities for employment and better life opportunities (Heard- Bey, 1972:309; Mershen, 2007:196; Beukert and Schlech, 2010:11-12; Al-Hashim, 2015:10). A government report commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism in Oman confirmed that most traditional buildings have been lying derelict for long periods, which has led to the collapse of roofs, the dilapidation of walls and sometimes the complete collapse of structures, which disrupt the original architectural appearance (Figure 20) (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:57).

Figure 20: Plaster cracks on the walls because of water infiltration (left) and collapsed roofs due to a combination of rain and lack of maintenance (right) (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:70-121).

In Misfat Al-Abryeen, as in other similar settlements at the foot of hills or on mountain plateaus, villagers move about either on foot or by donkey, following specific routes. While in the past the trails primarily met the needs of the villagers, today they offer adventurers the opportunity to explore the natural diversity as well as settlements and surrounding places. For example, trekking path W9 (Figure 21 and Figure 22) starts from the date palm vegetation and *falaj* and runs for 9 km towards the junction, where the first sub-route W10 runs for 3.5 km to Sharaf Al-Alamayn village. The second sub-route, W8, runs 5 km to Balad Sayt village (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2005:10; Walsh and Darke, 2016:230-231).
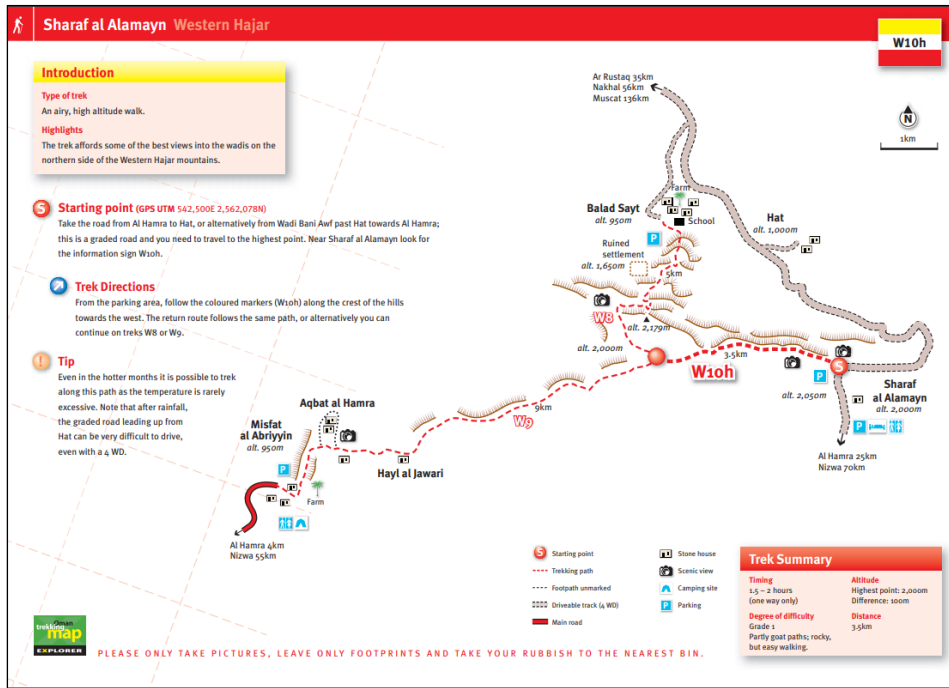
Figure 21: A map of the trekking paths that connect Misfat Al-Abryeen with other mountainous settlements (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, Trekking, 2005:10).

Figure 22: A section of trekking mountain path W9 towards the outskirts of the Misfat Al-Abryeen village (Claire, 2018).

Despite the dilapidated state of its built fabric, Misfat's architectural richness attracts a range of international and domestic tourists. In response to their needs, various initiatives have been taken to position this village on the tourist map as a single rural destination where visitors can experience natural and cultural assets. For example, a visitor centre has been created at the downhill, which includes a cafe, toilets, a parking area and signs, while two traditional houses at the top of the hill, immediately outside of the main access gate into Misfat, have been restored and surrounding irrigation routes rehabilitated (Figure 23). These facilities have been subcontracted to the recently established local company, Al-Misfat Al-Ahliyah LLCC (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015).
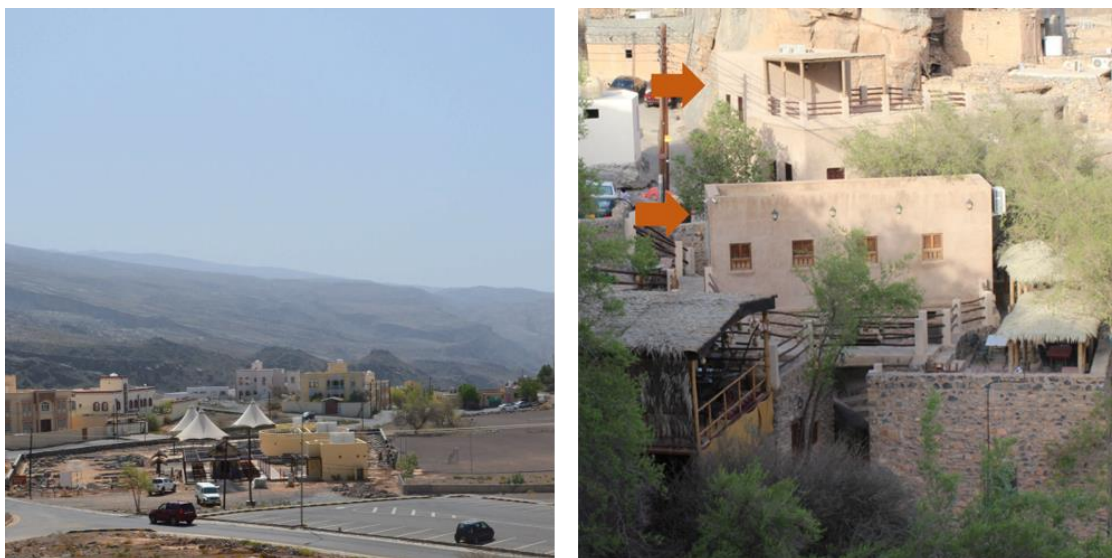
Figure 23: Visitor centre in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (left) (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:146); two renovated houses owned by the government have been converted into accommodation and restaurant services (right) (picture taken by the researcher on 18 July 2018).

Within the village, a few small local businesses, mostly lodgings, have been started by locals to respond to the growth in visitor numbers. For example, the Misfat Old House is the first of such initiatives hosted in renovated old buildings (Figure 24). It is a simple structure on two floors with windows overlooking the palm plantations, agricultural terraces and *falaj*, where tourists can lodge and receive breakfast and dinner (Jackson and Stables, 2018).

Figure 24: The Misfat Old House was the first accommodation facility set up by a local businessman by renovating old buildings (picture taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

There are no official statistics for the visitors to this village; however, some relevant statistics have been compiled to give a general idea of the number of tourists. For example, the average number of tourists staying at Misfat Old House between 2016 and 2018 was 1,483 (Figure 25).
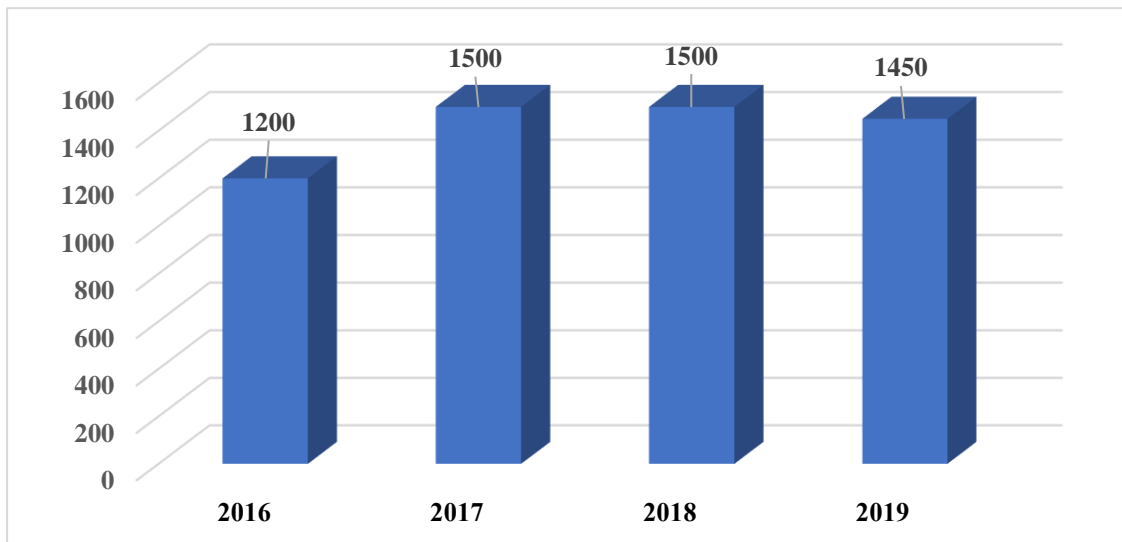
Figure 25: A number of tourists staying at Misfat Old House (Source: Ahmed Al Abri, 2020).

Misfat Al-Abryeen is less than 30 minutes from Al Hoota Cave, a famous natural cave up to 800 metres below ground level. A geological museum has been set up to demonstrate the geological and habitat features of the cave and the surrounding area, particularly blind

fish (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016a). The average number of tourists targeting this cave between 2017 and 2019 was just under 64,000 (Figure 26). Given the location of the cave, it is reasonable to assume that visitors to the cave will most likely have the opportunity to visit the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen.
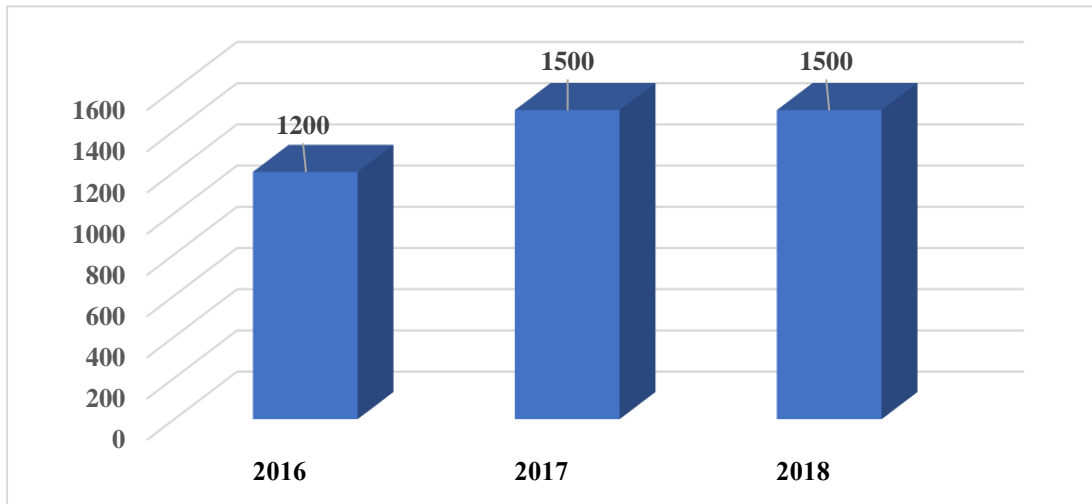
Figure 26: Number of tourists visiting Al Hoota Cave (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020d).

1.7.3   Muql

Muql is one of the main settlements in Wadi Bani Khalid province (wilayat) in the As-Asharqiyah North Governorate (Figure 27). It is located about 203 km from the capital, Muscat. According to Oman's 2019 statistics, the population comprises 11,279 Omanis and 1,868 expatriates (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020:33). Muql is situated in the Eastern Hajar Mountains, which are characterised by exposed geological features (Audley, 2013:15). The village is distinguished by its fabulous location, with freshwater pools fed by permanent valleys flowing from the Eastern Hajar Mountain (Saif, 2015:257).

Figure 27: Map of Muql village in Wadi Bani Khalid province in Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019b).

The pools at Muql offer panoramic views of the landscape where tourists can have a picnic, relax and swim (Audley, 2013:15). The areas on either side of the *wadi* and pools are covered with date palms extending over 5 km (Walsh and Darke, 2017:256). The villagers built a few small dams to divert the water from the basins into traditional channels to irrigate the cultivated areas. Palm trees are mainly grown on terraces on both sides of the *wadi* and the basin area (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2012:48).

Figure 28: View of the pool area and date palm trees in Muql village (Ali, 2013b).

Muql Cave is another natural feature of the village. The fascinating sound of underground water flowing through rock channels (Oman Air, 2014:26) attracts tourists and adventurers (Saif, 2015:257). Other tourism assets in Muql village and Wadi Bani Khalid Province are hiking trails. The existing hiking trail, E35 (Figure 29), stretches from the village of Muql to Wadi Tiwi on the coast of the Eastern Hajar Mountains. This trail has become popular with tourists who want to hike for 28 km, which usually takes between 14 and 18 hours (Oman, Ministry of Tourism 2005:11-12).
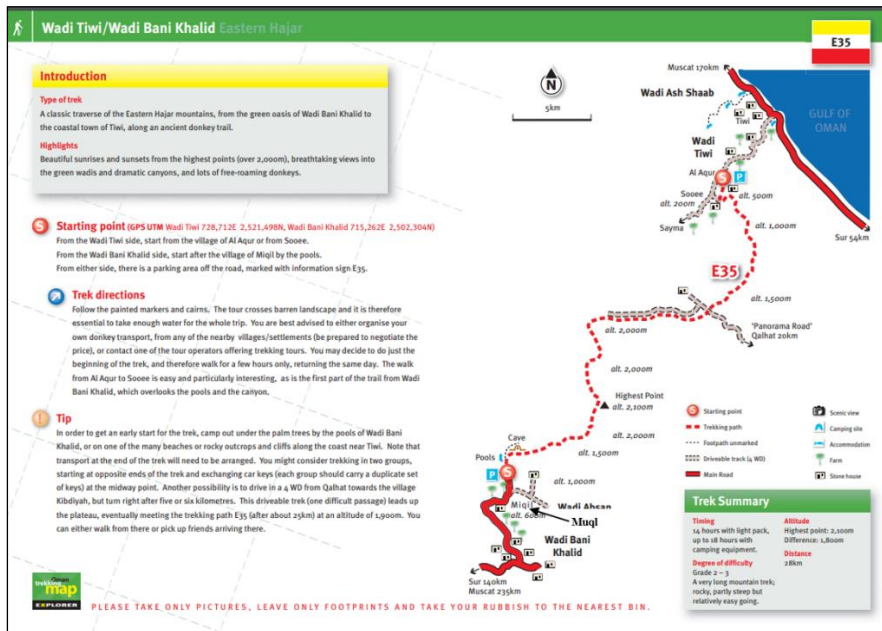
Figure 29: A map of trekking paths that connect Muql village with the coastal settlement of Tiwi (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, Trekking, 2005).

The residents' dwellings are intertwined with cultivated areas that they inherited from their ancestors. The houses are self-built from local stone and *sarooj*, with some being villas (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2012:48). In the province of Wadi Bani Khalid, traditional building materials include palm fronds and trunks as ceiling components (Damluji, 1998:373). Unfortunately, most of the traditional buildings have been neglected for many years due to local migration (Walsh and Darke, 2017:256). Nevertheless, the attractiveness of the pools area has pushed the government to provide various infrastructures to meet the needs of tourists.

For example, tourist facilities include visitor centres equipped with toilets, a few shops selling local products, a restaurant, a parking area, a café with toilets in the pool area and signs (Figure 30). According to official statistics, the number of tourists gradually increased by 66.1%, from 112,877 in 2015 to 220,320 by the end of 2019 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b).

Figure 30: The unused visitor centre in Muql village (left) and the coffee shop building in the pools area (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on 29 July 2018).
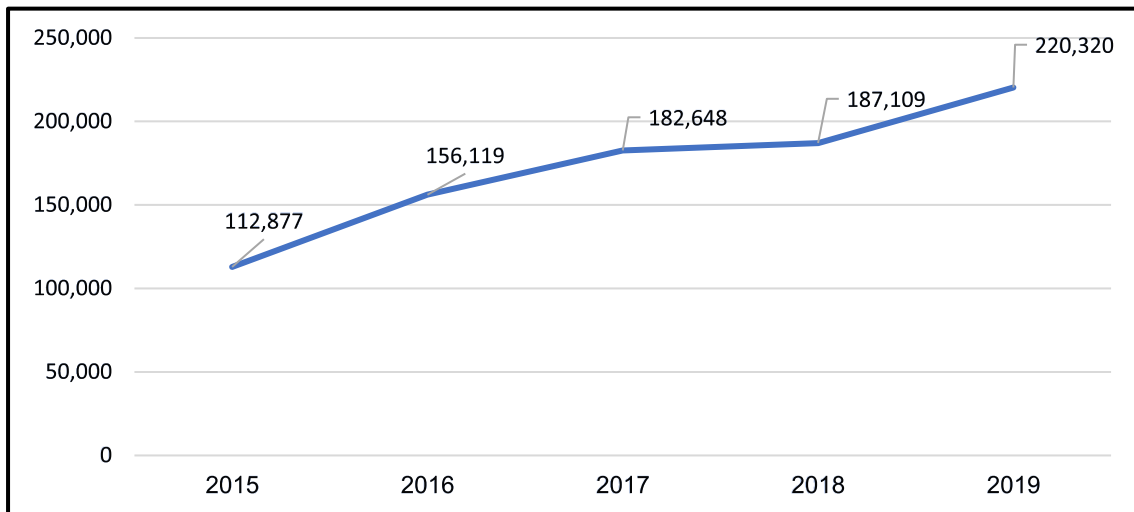
Figure 31: Number of visitors to Muql village in Wadi Bani Khalid province (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020c:32).

1.8 Research Methodology

To understand the extent and dimensions of the participation of local communities in the socio-economic and tourism development of Oman and to develop an effective participatory approach, a research methodology was developed comprising four phases (Figure 32). Phase 1 determined the scope of this research by highlighting the research problem, research aim and objectives and the questions that this research intends to answer. This scope provided background information on relevant worldwide examples, theories and frameworks that have been reviewed and analysed to identify the main arguments. This phase provided a clear overview of the suitable research methods, mainly qualitative, to investigate the phenomenon of local participation in socio-economic development, which was addressed in Phase 2. A qualitative research approach allows us to obtain data and information from concerned stakeholders at the government, private and local levels through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, site observations and document analysis.

In Phase 3, the data obtained were assessed to determine the main initiatives by concerned bodies in the government, private sector and tourism, as well as initiatives by the local community, promoting the necessary local participation in tourism development in both examined villages. The interpretation and analysis of the above issues took place in Phase 4, during which current initiatives were assessed and the impact of effective local participation in sustainable tourism development in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql in Oman was evaluated. A series of recommendations was developed based on an analysis of the findings to strengthen the above approach.
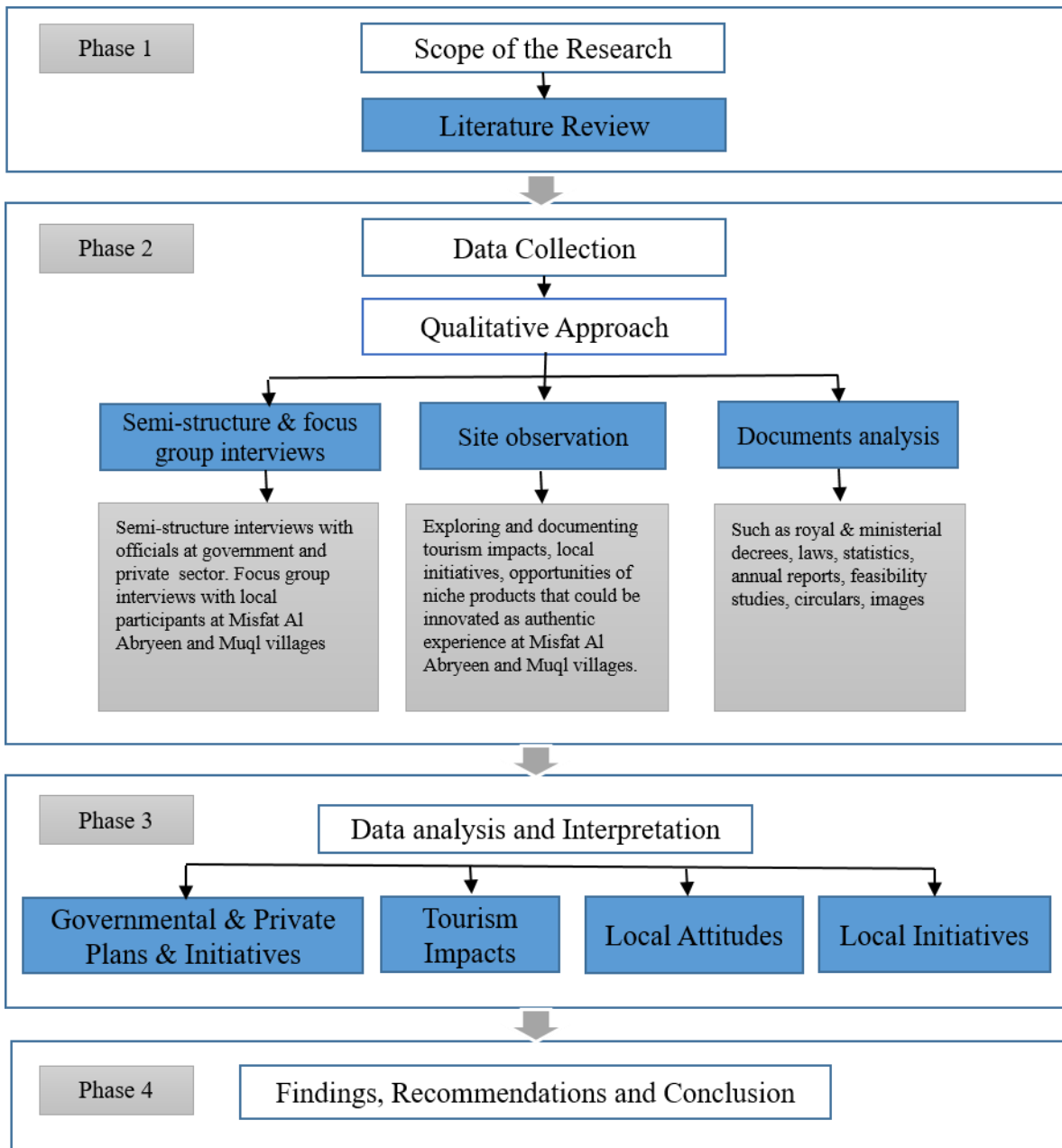
Figure 32: The research methodology structure.

1.9 Thesis Overview

This thesis is organised into seven chapters (Figure 33), which describe the research journey, from the identification of the research topic and scope to the proposition of a framework for effective community participation in sustainable tourism development. Chapter One starts with an overview of the environmental, administrative and economic context of Oman. It explains the rationale for the research and discusses the research topic, questions, aim and objectives. This chapter also provides a background of the case study areas, namely the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, two popular tourist destinations in Oman.

Chapter Two discusses the relevant literature on community participation in tourism development from theoretical and practical viewpoints. This chapter shows the emergence of sustainable tourism in the early 1990s as an approach introduced to encourage planners, developers and marketers to demonstrate their commitment and responsibility in conserving natural and cultural resources by enabling the local community, owners and stewards of those resources to manage them. Awareness, training, funding, legislative initiatives and indicators of host community participation in tourism are analysed and reviewed to identify the obstacles to this approach and actions have been taken to address them. The chapter also analyses theoretical frameworks developed since 1969 that deal with the common elements of citizens' participation in socio-economic life, including tourism. This chapter concludes by highlighting the knowledge gap in the literature at the national and international levels.

Chapter Three deals with the primary data collected through a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis and site observations. Chapter Four discusses citizens' participation in decision-making in Oman. It focuses on 'Meet-the-People' tours led by the government to promote dialogue and an exchange of views with citizens on livelihood and state development issues. It also discusses the Ash-Shura Council, the Consultative Council formed through public elections to represent the people in decision making and oversee the performance of the government to meet the needs of the people. This chapter also examines development plans to assess the extent to which citizens can exchange their views and concerns with decision-makers. Awareness raising, training, funding and

legislation initiatives are reviewed to assess the effectiveness of promoting local participation in socio-economic and tourism development. This chapter also provides an overview of Omani women's participation in public life to examine the progress they have made in education and other aspects of life.

Chapter Five analyses the data collected from local respondents in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql. The chapter begins with a discussion of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism on the two villages. The attitudes and perceptions of respondents are analysed to understand how locals view tourism in their villages. This review also examines the hospitality initiatives offered by locals in terms of accommodation, tours, handmade products and training initiatives to understand the concept of authenticity in tourism. The chapter determines the strengths and weaknesses of local participatory approaches in the two villages.

Chapter Six analyses key tourism development initiatives organised by the government, private sector and local community in the two villages. This analysis has led to the development of a best practice framework for local participation in sustainable tourism development in rural areas, with a focus on Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages. The six phases of the framework are based on examples from around the world that have overcome obstacles, encouraged local people's participation, enhanced the tourism experience and promoted their contribution to local welfare.

Chapter Seven discusses the key findings from the analysis while reviewing the research objectives to ensure that they have been met. The chapter puts forward a set of recommendations for government bodies, private institutions and the local community. Finally, it presents the limitations to the research, future research opportunities, the contribution to theory and practice and some personal reflections.

	Introduction The research problem, aim, objectives, questions and methodology	Chapter 1
Objective 1	**Literature Review** Tourism impacts, sustainable tourism, local participatory approach, relevant typologies & frameworks	Chapter 2
	Research Approach Research methods; particularly semi-structured interviews, focus group to obtain information at governmental, private sectors and local level. Carried out alongside document analysis and site observation.	Chapter 3
Objective 2	**Citizens' Participation in Tourism Development in Oman** Findings from participants at governmental and private sector participants, document analysis related to plans, initiatives particularly awareness, training, financing and legislations	Chapter 4
Objective 3 & 4	**Tourism Impacts, Local Attitudes and Initiatives** Findings from participants in Misfat Al Abryeen and Muql villages	Chapter 5
Objective 5	**Towards Effective Local Community Participation Framework** The interventions suggested by participants at governmental, private and local level to build effective participatory form	Chapter 6
Objective 5	**Recommendations and Conclusion** Main findings, recommendations, research contribution, personal reflection, limitations and future research.	Chapter 7

Figure 33: The structure of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review evaluates and reviews previous publications on key related topics to inform the research objectives (Coles et al., 2013:195). The review is an essential research method for collecting, evaluating and synthesising the relevant publications to obtain a comprehensive overview of the identified research (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016:16-17; Hewitt-Taylor, 2017:38). The key function of a literature review is to defend, refute, add a change or propose a new theory for some existing theories and ideas (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016:16-17). A literature review evaluates the relevant literature and suggests what is not yet known (Poot, 2014:236) and helps to establish links between what is being studied and what has been studied (Kumar, 2018:58). It also helps to understand the context of the selected study by identifying the relationship between ideas and practice (Hart, 2018:31-32).

This literature review identifies the theories and case studies relevant to understanding the concept of local participation in tourism development. The review thus helps to examine the essential variables associated with the factors responsible for the success or failure of the local participatory approach in socio-economic activities. Since the local participatory approach is geared towards the eventual empowerment of the local residents in managing their resources for their own use, the dimensions of the dual concepts of power and empowerment are an important aspect of this investigation. In addition, as the local participatory approach has become an important area of research for academics since the latter half of the 20th century, this study reviews relevant typologies and frameworks to identify how they relate to this research. This review is expected that the literature review will make a significant contribution to determining the research methodology for linking knowledge with results (Hart, 2018:31-32).

2.1 Tourism

Extensive literature has emerged since the last century, focusing on global economic activities, including the tourism industry. Figure 34 presents definitions of the term tourism by organisations and institutions worldwide.
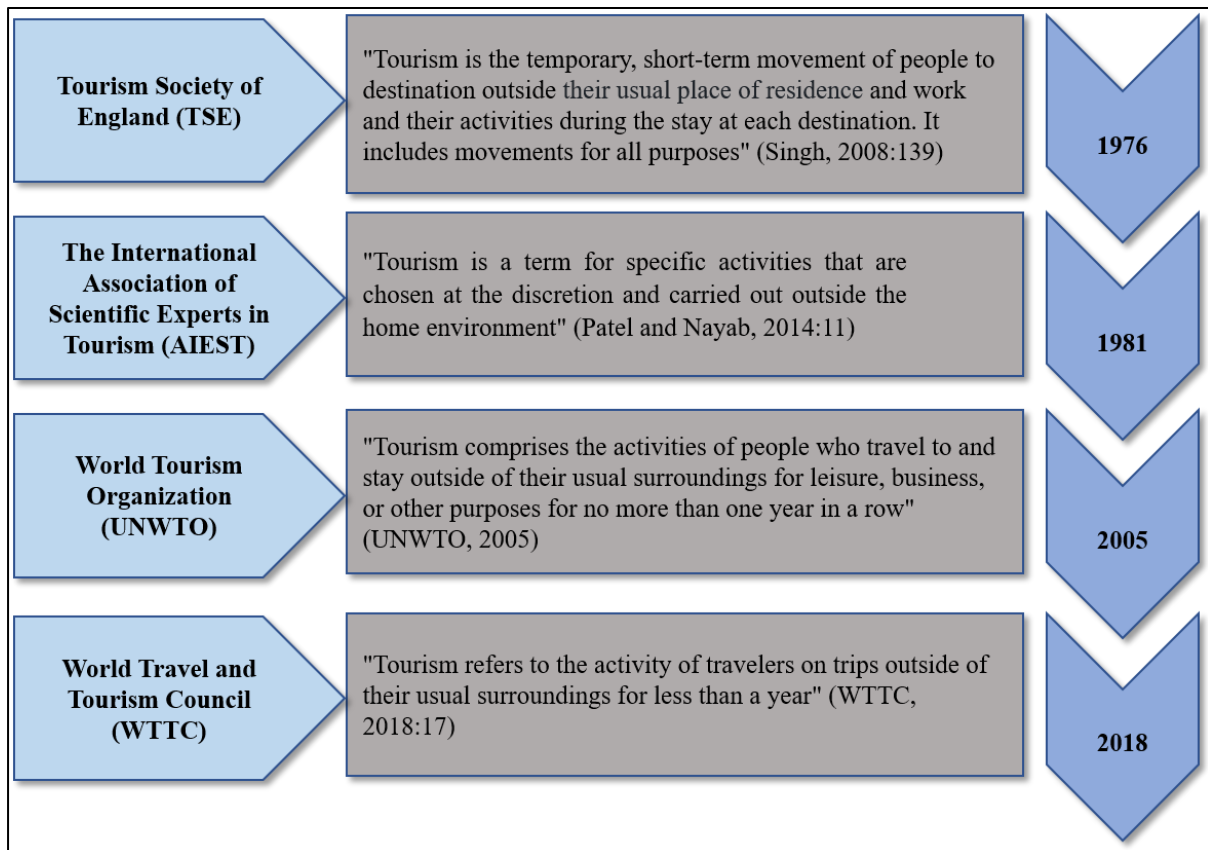
Figure 34: Definitions of tourism provided by different worldwide organisations.

Despite the definitions in Figure 36 being presented at different times by various international organisations, they focus on a similar concept of tourism that involves individuals or groups of people outside their usual environment. At this time, tourism is not only geared towards the needs of travellers but also fulfils a simultaneous socioeconomic agenda for the host communities and countries. Deller (2010) and Jaafar et al. (2015) supported the view that tourism is a tool to improve economic growth towards income generation and job creation by stimulating local and economic development.

Minimising human poverty and helping society start its own enterprises to improve the quality of life is a fundamental driver of employment (Sebele, 2010:140). However, although tourism is seen as an effective means of improving the quality of life of the locals (Doğan and Morady, 2017:134), it also improves other socio-economic activities, such as agriculture and handicrafts (Haven- Tang and Jones, 2012:29). This shows that tourism thrives when it relies on other socioeconomic activities as assets to run tourism products and services. In other words, as suggested by Zainal et al. (2012:499-500), tourism satisfies all relevant beneficiaries in different economic sectors because it enables entrepreneurs, workers, suppliers and households to fulfil their aspirations in different areas of life.

In addition to economic aspects, UNESCO claimed that tourism promotes cultural dialogue and peacebuilding between tourists and host communities and nations: 'Tourism can play a vital role in intercultural dialogue and in building peace, by favouring the recognition of cultural diversity and thus understanding and respect' (UNESCO, 2014:11-12). In a similar vein, Jaafar et al. (2015) stated that tourism builds a cross-border relationship between the host community and visitors to meet the satisfaction of both parties. In addition to the economic benefits of tourism development in a particular destination, the associated communities also benefit from this heightened sociocultural interaction (Butler, 2017:199).

The tourist industry is becoming one of the fastest and largest socioeconomic sectors in the world. For example, international tourists increased by 4% to 1.460 million, and international tourism revenue reached 1.481 USD billion in 2019, up by 4% from 2018. At the same time, the export revenues generated by tourism rose by 7% to 1.7 USD trillion in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020:2-3). Further, the tourist industry provided employment opportunities for approximately 330 million people worldwide in 2019, accounting for around 3.5% of total global employment (WTTC, 2020:3). In addition, the number of air passengers is expected to reach seven billion annually by 2034 (IATA, 2016:43).

2.2 Sustainable Tourism

The term *sustainable tourism* was discussed at the United Nations World Commission on the Environment and Development (UNWECD) summit in 1987. It was launched during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which was held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992, known as the Rio Summit (Weeden, 2013:5; Fletcher et al., 2013:225-226; Dangi and Jamal, 2016:4). Brebbia et al. (2014:136) justified the reasons for the innovation of sustainable tourism by helping planners and developers adopt strategic plans to reduce the socioeconomic and ecological impacts of different tourism activities. The World Tourism Organization (2005) defines sustainable tourism as 'Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities'.

Likewise, UNESCO (2010) describes sustainable tourism as 'Tourism that respects the local people as well as the traveller, cultural heritage and the environment'. These definitions have put sustainable tourism in the right shape for resource management to meet visitor expectations and local needs and to enhance future opportunities (Mojic and Susic, 2014). Sustainable tourism unites all activities and aspects in which natural and cultural assets are designed so that they benefit the socioeconomic development and national pride of the community and preserve the cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2014:12). In addition, UNTWO (2017:4) has identified sustainable tourism as a well-designed form of tourism that aims to preserve the values of cultural heritage, involve host communities and promote intercultural understanding and peace.

Sustainable tourism has also been developed to make the most of cultural heritage while preserving and enhancing these resources, maintaining cross-sectoral links and supporting collaboration and partnership between all parties (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). Lee (2013:44) expressed that this sustainable tourism form was carefully considered in the development of the tourism industry to contribute to economic growth, support the local population, develop a better understanding of the environment and culture and improve the quality of life of people in the community. Sustainable tourism leads to the independence of the host community

because they make the most of their natural and cultural resources, preserve the environment and achieve better living standards.

Holden (2016:26) and Sharma and Rao (2019:12-13) summarised the concept of sustainable tourism as an approach taken to improve socioeconomic and sociocultural tourism, gain economic benefits for the host communities and achieve the sustainability of the resources. The existing literature also stresses that the host communities, as key players, should be enabled to run local tourism businesses, not only because they own the resources but also because they have a better understanding of the area than outsiders (Park and Kim, 2016:355). Bello et al. (2016:476) found that the planning agenda in the context of sustainable tourism must enable the host to participate in decision-making processes. Snyman (2017:248) added that a host community participation approach to sustainable tourism is essential to preserve the natural and cultural values and to develop a range of products and services to achieve the socioeconomic goals. From practical point of view, numerous studies address the key role of residents in managing their natural and cultural resources by reviving traditional activities like agriculture handmade products, involving tourists in harvesting and participating in cultural events, as in Japan and Malasiya (Asker et al 2010), Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), Norway (Brandt and Haugen, 2011).

In the Omani context, several publications have been related to the community participatory approach in the travel and tourism industry, such as Omani employment in the hotel sector (Al-Balushi, 2008) and local participation in the Wave resort (Al-Shaaibi, 2011) and to the multi-stakeholder approach used at tourism resorts in Oman (Al Maamari, 2020). However, these studies have focused on the resources and assets of public institutions and private investors who dominate decision-making processes as owners, not on local residents. An insufficient number of studies have been conducted to focus on the optimal role of host communities in using their resources in the tourism business in the Omani context. This may be attributed to the fact that tourism in Oman has recently begun to focus on construction in the hotel and resort sector in the capital, Muscat, as well as in main cities that have good networks of infrastructure, roads, electricity and water, as well as telephone, internet and civil defence services.

Consequently, information such as statistics and official documents such as annual reports have been made available to meet research needs, in addition to the knowledge and experience of officials regarding the hotel sector. In contrast, remote areas have not been sufficiently developed as tourist destinations because they lack basic services. Furthermore, the matter of residents' involvement in tourism management has not been considered because planners and decision makers are inexperienced in the community participatory approach (Al-Shaaibi, 2011) because tourism is a new sector and time is needed to understand its aspects and dimensions.

2.3 Tourism Planning

Like other socioeconomic enterprises, tourism moves through different stages of planning to achieve its goals. Several concepts have been developed over the past few decades to define the role of planning in tourism. Rose (1984) provided a comprehensive definition of planning as a 'multidimensional activity that seeks to be integrative; it embraces economic, social, political, psychological, anthropological and technological factors; it is concerned with the past, present and future'. As tourism has become one of the key socioeconomic activities for local and global travel destinations and for promoting local and national economies, a planning agenda with a particular focus on tourism has developed. Getz (1987) defined tourism planning as 'a process based on research and evaluation which seeks to optimize the potential contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality'. More recently, tourism planning has been defined as a strategic, future-oriented process that serves as a decision-making aid for achieving the desired and agreed-upon goals. Edgell et al. (2008) stated that 'strategic tourism planning in its simplest definition is envisioning a desired future for a destination, tourism organisation, or other entity and then organizing and implementing the steps to get there'.

Saarinen et al. (2019) confirmed the above concept in their definition of tourism planning, which they described as a method of aligning tourism development processes to benefit relevant stakeholders inside and outside of a specific goal. Goeldner et al. (2000) dealt with some common tourism planning goals that focus on building facilities and infrastructure to serve tourists and locals and improve the livelihoods of the locals by involving them in the tourism business and optimising tourist satisfaction by enhancing their experiences. The

fundamental goal of tourism planning is to ensure that tourist facilities are compatible with the natural and cultural environment of the destination.

Host communities are ignored in some destinations because they lack skills and knowledge (Okazaki, 2008). Phillips and Roberts (2013) argued that involving affected communities in this partnership approach is necessary not only to support tourism planning but also to bridge the gap between planners and the public. The partnership approach is usually driven by several processes, from the initial idea to the eventual implementation, in which the stakeholders share the fruits of this approach (see Table 2). A key point in this model is that appointing a leader with administrative technical and financial capabilities is crucial in establishing a partnership approach that includes representatives drawn from the public, private sector and local citizens. Previous studies in the literature have addressed the issue that leading institutions and organisations have played a significant role in using tourism as a tool to preserve values, enhance the tourist experience and benefit local communities, such as Chitwan National Park in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia (Timothy, 2012), Ecotrust in Indonesia (Graci, 2013) and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan (RSCN) (Teller, 2002; Wismayer, 2012; UNESCO, 2017).

Table 2: Tourism Partnership Model (Selin and Chavez, 1995; Graci, 2013)

	Stage	Description
1	The Antecedent	To appoint reliable leadership for the partnership initiative after identifying associated stakeholders.
2	The Problem-Setting	To commit to their work together through increased consultation, communication and joint action to monitor and assess problems and their impact on people and places.
3	Direction-Setting	To focus on setting goals through shared tasks, interpretations, and transparency.
4	Structuring	To assign roles and responsibilities to stakeholders to ensure that all participants fulfil their roles and responsibilities, as well as responsibility for financial resources.
5	Outcome	To exchange concerns and opinions and most importantly, to share the fruits of this collaborative approach with stakeholders representing public, private organisations, locals, schools, volunteers, etc.

However, these studies did not explain the criteria used to determine the body responsible for leading the initiative in the community participatory approach to tourism development. Such criteria are used to measure the extent to which these organisations are capable of managing the community participatory approach from administrative, technical and financial perspectives. As addressed earlier in the previous section (2.2), in Oman, few studies have been conducted on the use of the local participatory approach in sustainable tourism. Therefore, the issue of appointing a responsible body to manage this initiative has not been addressed. Mershen (2007) confirmed that no governmental body or non-governmental institution had been appointed to take or facilitate an initiative related to community participation in decision-making processes and tourism development in Oman.

Another main point of the above model is the establishment of a multi-stakeholder approach to allow stakeholders to share views, objectives and concerns and to confront issues collectively. Although existing frameworks (Garrod, 2003; Bello et al., 2016) address two-party partnerships between research teams and host communities to conduct preliminary studies, there are few governmental authorities in Al-Shaaibi's (2011) framework. However, these frameworks have not adopted a multi-stakeholder approach by involving concerned stakeholders at the private and local levels to share skills and knowledge or fund local initiatives. In contrast, for example, all relevant stakeholders, such as local businesspersons, schools, funders, volunteers, tourists and the local community, were involved in the conservation of natural and cultural resources and the promotion of tourism development on Gili Trawangan Island in Indonesia (Graci, 2013).

In South Korea in the 1980s, this partnership approach was created by governmental support to involve local governments, affected families, grape producers, and friends to resolve issues related to declining grape consumption. Collective interventions were made to allocate budgets, vineyards were earmarked as special areas to grow grape products, and companies were organised for distributing and developing educational programmes for tour agents to promote the area as an agro-tourism destination (Lan and Chau, 2020). However, these partnership approaches must explain the legislative, technical and financial capabilities of each involved stakeholder to designate the roles and tasks among them based on their competences and disciplines. This designation of roles would help to maximise collective actions towards

sharing information, objectives, and concerns, as well as reducing the risks of conflict and overlaps that limit the effectiveness of regulative frameworks related to socioeconomic and tourism development (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Shaabi, 2011; Al-Shanfari, 2012) in the Omani context.

However, the planning agenda was considered larger and ideal compared with implementation, which led to difficulty in defining the achievements of a predetermined goal. Previous studies in the literature refer to common barriers of conflict between powers, a lack of accountability and stakeholder involvement, and conflicts between public and private stakeholders (Dodds and Butler, 2009). In addition, the lack of awareness, financial skills and focus on economic prospects at the expense of social and environmental considerations have also been identified as hindering the successful implementation of developed "ideal" plans (Kasemsap, 2016). Garrod's (2003) and Al-Shaaibi's (2011) frameworks have suggested implementing monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that tourism planning is credible, reliable and capable of achieving goals at the local and national levels. However, the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation processes were not used to augment and improve existing plans and strategies that were formed to boost the national economy and reduce issues and disruptions that emerged during the implementation stage. Ehler (2017) noted that one reason for the failure of plans associated with projects, such as the marine spatial strategy, was that the outputs of monitoring and evaluation were not used to adjust and revise the existing plan.

2.4   **Tourism Impacts**

Tourism enhances the livelihoods of host communities, which in turn enhances the tourism experience through sociocultural dialogues and interactions at the recipient destinations. Tourism also creates a better understanding and awareness for planners, developers, communities and tourists to meet their different expectations and aspirations (Dangi and Jamal, 2016:4). However, since the tourism sector relies on some sociocultural and natural resources to achieve its predetermined goals, these activities have positive and negative effects on economic, socio-cultural and ecological contexts.

2.4.1 Economic context

In terms of the economic context, tourism has become a major driver of employment, foreign exchange income and economic growth and has enriched other sectors, such as banking, transport and the service sector (Cooper et al., 2008). The existing literature in the field of tourism has examined which tourism activities improve the economy of host communities and travel destinations and has found that tourism serves areas such as agriculture, art production, handicrafts and household products at host destinations (Saarinen, 2010; Xie, 2010). These activities sometimes require the conversion of historic buildings in rural areas where local residents can act as hosts to accommodate tourists (Asker et al., 2010; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011; McClain, 2015). The local initiatives also offer tourists opportunities to try the local food and collect handcrafted items that bring the local residents' income (Haven- Tang and Jones, 2012; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). In this way, stakeholders, especially local residents, can preserve the values of the cultural heritage and present their products as essential elements of local and national economic development.

The tourism industry could therefore encourage locals and other stakeholders to serve tourists by which they achieve gainful employment. In other words, the increasing number of tourism establishments increases employment opportunities in tourist destinations (Sharma, 2004; Cukier, 2004:167; Gautam, 2008; Sebele, 2010; Holloway and Humphreys, 2012; Mensah and Mensah 2013; Amir et al., 2015). The existing literature categorises the employment opportunities offered to locals and those who serve tourists with different products and services into three types: direct, indirect and induced employment opportunities (Gautam, 2008). Mensah and Mensah summarise these three types in the following excerpt:

> Direct employment refers to employment created in, for example, hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and airlines. Indirect employment refers to employment in activities that are dependent on tourism, such as construction, transportation, agriculture, etc. Induced employment refers to additional employment… such as health, communications and banking, among others (2013:31-32).

This brief overview shows that tourism could encourage locals at travel destinations to preserve their heritage values and make the most of them through tourism and that tourism could work towards preserving those values that the locals view as a source of income. However, there are

negative economic effects of tourism. In cases where tourism companies are run by non-local owners, tourism destinations can experience financial losses because the owners transfer a major part of their financial returns to other parts of their country and establish separate enterprises elsewhere, as in Cox's Bazar destination in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2010).

In the Omani context, although previous studies in the literature have addressed the community participatory approach in tourism, particularly in the hotel sector, information about job opportunities in surrounding hotels and resorts has been insufficient, especially at the managerial and technical levels, as at the Wave Resort (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). While Al Maamrai (2020) argued that locals expect that the building of resorts would create job opportunities for locals, he did not survey the number of job opportunities for locals offered by the Sifah, Nahda and Jabal Akhder resorts. Furthermore, inadequate studies have been conducted on tourism operations in rural destinations. The job opportunities offered by the hotel and resort sector are designed according to international standards of hospitality in serving leisure and entertainment goals. Hence, no platform has been offered for locals to participate in innovating products and services by the optimal use of local materials and aspects related to their spectacular environments and unique cultural heritage, such as harvesting, manufacturing souvenirs from local materials, and experiencing stays in typical traditional lodges, as offered in Japan and Malaysia (Asker et al., 2010) and Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). Moreover, in Norway, for example, innovative products and services include organic vegetables and wedding events (Brandt and Haugen, 2011).

In addition, in Nepal, women have been empowered economically through enabling them to serve food, sew clothing, make wallets and produce art (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). Women offer guiding services in Namibia (Zeppel, 2006) and South Africa (Giddy, 2020). However, previous studies on tourism in the Omani context have not explained its impact on women's participation in travel and tourism development. This may be attributed to the fact that tourism contradicts traditional Islamic principles, according to which parents influence their children's future career choices, such as in education, health or social development (Al-Balushi, 2008; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al Hasni, 2017).

2.4.2 Sociocultural context

Tourism also has sociocultural consequences if, for example, tourism income is geared towards financing education by paying school fees (Hejazeen, 2007; Sebele, 2010; Holloway and Humphreys, 2012). This means that the local residents will be able to ensure that their children study in educational institutions. However, the existing literature also highlights other educational opportunities that tourism has provided for locals, such as learning foreign languages to serve tourists. Several authors have claimed that local residents of tourist destinations learn multiple foreign languages because tourists cannot speak the local language (Rahman, 2011; Alhasanat and Hyasat, 2011; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017). As a result, the exchange of cultural dialogue has strengthened interactions between tourists and locals in a way that enhances the tourists' experience and maximises the benefit of the locals. Other relevant stakeholders, such as local tour operators, have also benefitted from learning foreign languages, such as English, French and Spanish, to communicate easily with tourists (Holloway and Humphreys, 2012). Cultural events are other mechanisms by which tourists and locals can participate in cultural exchanges and where locals can sell authentic products (Laing and Frost, 2014; Yasuda et al., 2018). Tourism not only creates global awareness of poverty and human rights violations (Thilakavathy and Maya, 2019), but it also bridges people and nations through dialogue and interactions to create respect and peace.

By contrast, several studies have noted a range of negative sociocultural impacts ascribed to the tourism industry. According to Holloway and Humphreys (2012), in some rural areas, local thieves deliberately target wealthy tourists with illegal acts to steal travellers' money, and taxi drivers overwhelm tourists by manipulating their meters. Mustafa and Abu Tayeh (2011) found that in host destinations in Jordan, local children drop out of school to pursue income-generating tourism activities. Some sociocultural effects are also attributed to tourist behaviour, which makes locals uncomfortable about receiving tourists, especially in Muslim countries. One example is that visitors tend to wear socioculturally unacceptable clothing, suggesting a lack of respect for local norms and the privacy of locals (Page and Connell, 2014). Some Muslim travel destinations such as Satun province in Thailand have taken steps to prevent behaviour that is contrary to the Muslim tradition and notions of privacy, including banning smoking and consuming alcohol and enforcing an appropriate dress code for tourists (Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017).

The locals have also been angered by visitors photographing sensitive features without permission (Walley, 2010). Tourists take photos to document their experiences at the destination (Berger, 2010) and share them with others and craft memories (Miettinen et al., 2019). However, this is considered to be another unacceptable behaviour, especially in rural areas, as tourists could view the images negatively, especially if they focus on undesirable aspects, such as dirty places and naked children (Bruner, 2005). Some locals feel that tourists do not respect them (Murphy, 2013) and that they interfere in their daily or routine lives (Lawson, 2013).

Another issue that causes inconvenience to residents is the increase in traffic, which causes congestion on roads, blocking access even in emergencies (De Lima and Green, 2017). The tourists also block local residents' access to their homes and land (Lowe and Pidgeon, 2019). Allan (2017) claimed that local tourists leave greater footprints than foreign tourists, who are probably more polite and respect residents' privacy. This is attributed to a lack of signs and directions, as well as poor performance by the tour guides, resulting in tourists inadvertently violating local privacy, getting lost and losing track of the right paths (Morrison, 2018). The existing literature suggests that measures should be taken to mitigate the effects of tourist behaviours. For example, some protected Caribbean locations use teaching and learning materials effectively (Herrera-Silveira et al., 2010). From a practical viewpoint, Al-Saadi (2015) recommended that tour operators and tour guides should educate tourists about respecting the privacy of the local community. De Lima and Green (2017) added that tour operators must take their responsibility seriously to provide tourists with sufficient information to enhance their experiences while increasing the satisfaction of the locals.

Previous studies on the Omani context have not addressed language learning as as abridge to communicating widely with tourists who wish to explore their culture, despite the fact that English is a second language used frequently in Oman (Walsh and Darke, 2016). Locals, particularly males, in most places in Oman perform and organise traditional folklore, which are called *rizha* (Reynolds, 2007). Previous studies have not considered the positive effects of this folklore on building cultural exchanges and interactions amongst host communities and locals, in addition to worldwide cultural events (Laing and Frost, 2014; Yasuda et al., 2018). Regarding

tourism experience enhancement, previous studies have not addressed experiences in which tourists prefer to be involved. In general, tourists prefer leisure and entertainment experiences that are available at hotels and resorts but not in rural environments. Rural tourism offers tourists experiences beyond leisure and entertainment, such as harvesting, performing local folklore, and staying in heritage places (Asker et al., 2010). For example, in the Himalayan part of India, by learning how locals had shaped the harsh environment to meet their livelihood requirements, tourists became connected to that place (Apollo et al., 2021).

2.4.3 Environmental context

Natural features have become a critical source of value, attracting tourists to explore spectacular sights and different environments and to experience a variety of eco-friendly activities. The destinations create a range of programmes to provide planners, developers, communities and tourists with a better understanding and awareness of the nature conservation values of socioeconomic goals (Dangi and Jamal, 2016). For example, Graci (2013) found that stakeholders and entrepreneurs have taken the initiative to promote the replanting of coral reefs and preserve the cultural heritage in Indonesia. Schools in Surama village in Guyana encourage schoolchildren to promote environmental education by including the new generation in nature-related activities, such as bird watching (Karwacki, 2014). Other locations such as Northumberland, UK (Treadwell, 2017) and the Colorado Plateau (Mitchell and Gallaway, 2019), have taken measures to prevent light pollution in many rural areas and to promote dark tourism or astronomical tourism, which offers tourists the opportunity to see objects in the sky.

Despite the numerous measures developers have taken to mitigate the environmental impacts on tourism destinations around the world, recent literature has increased due to the severe impact people have continued to have on fragile and stunning environments. For example, Sebele (2010) observed that outside agencies had developed several tourist facilities at the expense of the local environment and culture. Buckley (2012) explained that these amenities include the construction of luxury resorts that adversely influence local values and wildlife. These resorts are located in fragile environments that are rich in different types of flora and fauna. However, the resorts host many tourists beyond the capacity of the location. These resorts affect the fragility of the coastal environment, the beach and the coral reefs, and conflict

with the nature of the ecosystem (Wong, 2012). This unsustainable development normally occurs with soil erosion and water pollution that affects natural areas (Fayos-Solà and Cooper, 2018; Singh and Dwivedi, 2017).

The movement of tourists also has a negative effect on the natural surroundings. Holloway and Humphreys (2012) found that the movement of tourists via public and private transportation carriers increased the amount of pollution from fuel, oil and exhaust gas entering the rivers, lakes and landscapes, leading to soil erosion, health problems for tourists and disruption to wildlife. Additionally, at the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia, the coral reefs have been damaged by people walking over them (Pocock, 2019), and graffiti and art left behind by tourists on rocks disrupts the natural and cultural beauty (Mustafa and Abu Tayeh, 2011).

The influx of tourist activity leads to environmental pollution, such as unmanaged solid waste and damage to flora and fauna. This strain on natural resources puts the load-bearing capacity of the vegetation at risk and reduces the chances of sustainability, as has been seen in the Nubra valley in Kashmir (Singh and Dwivedi, 2017). Various methods have been proposed to reduce the environmental impacts of tourism activities, including introducing an approach for business- and culture-friendly tourism through sustainability services (Holden, 2016; Sharma and Rao, 2019). According to Pornprasit and Rurkkhum (2017), fixed rules have been formulated in some destinations to support ecological sustainability without destroying coral reefs or other natural species. Nevertheless, the current rules and awareness-raising programmes are insufficient to conserve natural resources. However, Batabyal (2018) suggested that the carrying capacity approach could reduce the pressure on natural resources, particularly in natural water pools.

In the Omani context, rural environments and their positive effects on host communities and tourists have not been addressed in the literature. Oman offers fabulous environmental experiences, such as star gazing, which has been considered a key dimension of the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy (Jamal et al., 2018). Worldwide destinations have utilised the quietness of rural destinations to involve tourists and locals alike in significant sky object observation, such

as in the Anniviers District in Switzerland (Grèzes et al., 2018) and the Ogden Valley in the US (Blond, 2020).

Although Al-Shaaibi (2011) has addressed the limited accessibility caused by traffic congestion due to the construction of the Wave Resort project, that limit the accessibilities, however, there is no intervention has been proposed to overcome this issue despite its negative effects on both tourists and locals (Lowe and Pidgeon, 2019). Moreover, Al Maamari (2020) did not provide sufficient detail about the environmental consequences of the construction of resorts in Oman. The construction of these resorts has negatively affected the environment, particularly the erosion of beach soil at the Wave Resort in Oman (Kwarteng et al., 2016).

2.4 Community Participation Approach to Tourism

Existing literature in socioeconomic field including tourism has been concerned with the citizen's participation approach since the last century, when numerous studies discussed the phenomena of public participation in socioeconomic development from different angles. Various frameworks have been developed to address the issue of citizens' participation in decision-making to represent themselves and improve their quality of life by reducing their dependence on external factors (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; White, 1996; Tosun, 1999; Garrod, 2003). In the tourism sector, the community participation approach, particularly in the concept of sustainable tourism, has emphasised that the benefit of local people as key players is an essential agenda for achieving sustainability.

According to Mago (2011), Park and Kim (2016), and Pornprasit and Rurkkhum (2017), participating local communities contribute to tourism by preserving their values as essential assets to improve the tourist experience in host destinations. Therefore, by participating in the tourism business, the locals can make use of local products, such as food, beverages and handmade products. Since the locals have access to the natural and cultural assets, it is ideal to direct the local participatory form to the empowerment phase, where the locals can participate effectively in decision-making processes (Sofield, 2003; Garrod, 2003; Butcher, 2010; Mago, 2011; Timothy, 2012; Bello et al., 2016). In addition, empowerment aspect focuses on

improving the skills of the disadvantaged and poorest people so that they can participate in socioeconomic development and improve their quality of life (Scheyvens, 1999; Narayan-Parker, 2002).

Various cases at various global destinations show that when locals reach the empowerment stage, they have better control over the resources. One example was the formation of a local entity in which the locals participated in the decision-making process to share the benefits of tourism. In Japan, farmers have initiated a collaborative approach (One Life Japan) to manage various tourism activities based on cultural and natural values (Asker et al., 2010). In Kenya, a community-based organisation has been established that enables local people to protect natural resources by promoting socioeconomic development, including tourism (Abindu Village, Kenya). Its membership consists of 35 local members, 15 of whom are women (Odede et al., 2015).

In Thailand, small- and large-scale agritourism operators have established groups called agritourism communities to focus on agritourism opportunities in Samut Songkhram Province (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015). In Botswana, a local institution was set up to encourage people to control their resources in five villages: Mabele, Kavimba, Kachikau, Satan and Parakarungu (Stone, 2015). In addition, locals in Guludo Village in Mozambique developed a committee called the Nema Foundation, which consists of a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and representatives from agriculture, fisheries, water, health and education (Carter-James and Dowling, 2017). The above examples show that locals were enabled through formed local institutions to participate in decision-making processes to control their natural and cultural resources in developing and improving economy.

However, these local institutions did not sufficiently address or explain the representatives of external bodies, mainly from the private sector, how to provide resources and technical support to improve locals' control of their resources and how they are used. Because locals lack skills and knowledge related to tourism operations (Manyara and Jones, 2007; Okazaki, 2008), it is crucial that the board of institutions or cooperatives at the local level include representatives from the private sector, such as tour operators. Tour operators are considered key partners in

tourism development because they not only market the rural destinations locally and globally, but also provide technical and financial support in sharing the benefits of tourism with locals. For example, tour operators in Botswana, mainly safari operators, provide locals training in marketing, guiding, safety and hospitality (Stone, 2015).

In Satun Province in Thailand, tour operators improve the performance of local communities by encouraging them to learn about the history of their village, the geography of the region, as well as foreign languages (Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017). From a marketing point of view, yacht operators stopped tourists on Mentawai Island in Indonesia to encourage local producers to sell their handicrafts directly (Jamal and Robinson, 2009). In addition, tour operators developed promotional brands in Ranong Province in Thailand (e.g., Discover traditional culture and Untouched Thailand) (Dolezal, 2011). In Samut Songkhram Province in Thailand, they also promoted local destinations by developing advertising materials, such as brochures (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015). Regarding operations, in Chitwan National Park in Nepal, tour operators encouraged local women to make local products, such as clothing, leather goods, and art (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011).

In the Omani context, previous studies on the community participatory approach in tourism development were conducted by Al-Balushi (2008), Al-Shaaibi (2011) and Al Maamari (2020), who did not consider forming local cooperative to enable locals to participate effectively in decision-making processes. These studies discussed locals' participation in the hotel and resort sector, which is owned by non-local investors, not residents. In this participatory approach, the performance of locals is limited to implementing what owners need to meet their agendas and expectations, as explained earlier (Section **2.2**). However, more detailed and wider participation approaches are required to improve community participation in decision-making.

2.5 Initiatives toward capacity building of local community

As forming of local entity at local level is considered as a means to facilitate the interaction and support between the locals at destinations and external bodies (Bello et al 2016), interventions required to empower locals to present their values because they have insufficient knowledge about their values more than outsiders (Ghaderi et al. 2017). In simple words, to strengthen local people's abilities to represent themselves and participate effectively in decision-making processes to improve their quality of life, action is needed to raise awareness, provide training and funding, and improve the legislative domains by putting effort, time and cost into collaborating with other parties to successfully reflect the locals' approach to onsite participation. This section discusses the nature of initiatives related to awareness, training, financing and legislation provided by stakeholders in the public and private sectors and at local levels for the effective participation of local communities in managing natural and cultural resources which would improve the economic benefits of tourism in worldwide destinations and in Oman.

2.5.1 Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising is essential for encouraging locals to treat the concept of tourism positively. Previous studies show that locals in tourism destinations suffer from insufficient awareness and skills that prevent them from using their resources for socioeconomic and tourism products. From a knowledge viewpoint, locals in some travel destinations lack the skills and knowledge to make the best use of their resources. Mershen (2007) explained that the way individual sand camp facilities in Oman are operated leads to aggressive competition between owners rather than encouraging them to work together to improve the quality of the products. Similarly, Haven-Tang and Sedgley (2014) showed that rural places in Wales are dominated by small businesses where owners compete with each other rather than collaborate due to a lack of awareness. Additionally, a lack of awareness among external agencies, especially tour operators, has led to the exclusion of locals from the benefits of tourism (Timothy and Tosun, 2003; Okazaki, 2008).

Sociocultural barriers are another fundamental factor that arises due to the lack of awareness among locals in the development of travel and tourism, especially in Muslim countries. In the

Omani context, parents discourage their children, especially women, from working in the tourism sector, where they are likely to interact with people from different cultures. The tourism industry, especially the hotel sector, is seen as an unlawful source of income that contradicts Islamic traditions (Al Belushi, 2008; Al Hasani, 2015). Al-Balushi (2008) explained that the hotel sector is host to some illegal activities, such as serving alcohol, gambling and offering rooms to unmarried people. Al-Shaaibi (2011) added that some hotel establishments, which have nightclubs and permit the sale of alcohol, contradict Omani traditions and conflict with the values of the Islamic faith.

Tourism in rural destinations has been considered a tool for building cultural dialogue and sharing peaceful principles among tourists and host communities (UNESCO, 2014). However, previous studies in the literature have not addressed interventions to correct the narrow view that locals and parents have about the concept of tourism. The lack of awareness and knowledge about tourism as a source of income and the need to enhance tourists' experiences has been exacerbated by the traditional influence of parents on their children's career choices, which have tended to be in professions in health and education not only in Oman (Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al Hasani, 2015) but also in Libya (Joubran, 2014) and Hawraman Takht in Iran (Ghaderi et al., 2017). In addition, such traditional practices have led locals to refuse any tourism development in their areas and to resist any governmental developmental initiatives related to tourism. An example is resistance to the Ain Al Kasfa project operation in Al Rustaq Province in Oman (Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al-Riyami et al., 2017).

The lack of awareness and knowledge, as well as a lack of funding and bureaucratic regulations, have been considered the main obstacles to local participation in tourism development (Yüksel et al., 2014; Kasemsap, 2016). Previous studies in the literature have suggested various measures and interventions to improve locals' awareness and increase the development of rural destinations. A fundamental intervention is the development of an independent plan for raising people's awareness, which does not conflict with other management agendas, as Saarinen (2010) recommended. However, previous studies have not considered an integrated awareness plan provided by representatives drawn from the public and private sectors and local communities, which could be examined in particular case studies. Interventions and measures proposed to raise the awareness of host communities about participation in tourism

development have been suggested for different worldwide destinations. However, it seems no particular case studies have been performed to address the feasibility of raising the awareness of host communities in particular regions.

For example, public awareness programmes, such as interactive programmes, education and street games, have been implemented to raise awareness in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). This awareness programme also includes lectures, brochures and signboards, as in Satun province in Thailand (Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017), as in the Caribbean, outdoor campaigns (Morrison, 2018) were carried out to raise residents' awareness of the positive work of heritage conservation and tourism. In Oman, awareness campaign called Tourism Enriches had been conducted in 2005 (Baporikar, 2012). Education is important to increase awareness and raise understanding among the younger generation about the importance of their resources in socioeconomic and tourism products. In Indonesia, a curriculum was developed to raise awareness (Graci, 2013). The Jordanian government set up a five-year awareness programme in 2017 to target around five million students (Morrison, 2018). The above measures would make the locals, especially in rural areas, more confident and trusting in the concept of tourism (Li and Hunter, 2015).

However, in promoting tourism development, tourism agencies have benefited from social media (Gohil, 2014), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn (Al-Badi, Tarhini and Al-Sawaei, 2017). For example, destinations promote their products, such as crafts and food products, via social media platforms, such as Monmouthshire in the UK (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014) and Iran (Ghaderi et al., 2017). However, only a few previous studies have highlighted the importance of hiring influential people to share their practical experiences with host communities via social media platforms because they better understand the conditions of rural places compared with non-local specialists (Manyara and Jones, 2007). In the Omani context, according to Al-Shaaibi (2011), school visits are a tool for increasing the understanding of the new generation about the concept of tourism. However, previous studies have not addressed the consequences of outdoor activities that aim to widen the knowledge of schoolchildren about tourism in practical ways, such as watching craftsperson while they manufacture souvenirs and observing practitioners, which are tourist experiences offered in Surama, Guyana (Karwacki, 2014) and by some museums in Cyprus (Polyniki, 2019).

2.5.2 Training

The shortage of skilled labour is thought to limit the ability of locals to understand the dimensions of their resources to make a living. Locals suffer from a lack of educational and training-related skills that are required to positively participate in socioeconomic development. According to Okazaki (2008) and Bello et al. (2016), the provision of education and training for locals is seen as an obstacle facing regulators and tourism operators because it costs time and money. In other words, regulators are struggling to involve locals in tourism management, especially in places such as Botswana (Sebele, 2010). Huang and Chen (2015) stated that these barriers prevent the local community from exchanging views and participating in decision-making processes, which in turn hinders the sustainability of the tourism business. Mak et al. (2017) claimed that the locals are currently not encouraged and welcomed to participate as essential partners in tourism development.

Various interventions have been suggested to develop locals' skills and techniques to achieve optimal use of their resources. However, no comprehensive training plan has been proposed, particularly as the result of case studies, to be managed by partnerships among the public and private sectors and locals to enhance host communities' capabilities of participating in tourism and other economic activities. Previous studies have addressed various training initiatives in different rural destinations offered by two parties, not the multi-stakeholder approach, to designate roles and tasks according to competence. For example, Dodds and Joppe (2005) found that hoteliers in Gambia involved locals in determining how to package their products as promotional packages. Likewise, Al Amri (2008) found that the Zighy Bay Resort in Oman offers teachers for locals to learn English so that they can communicate with international tourists who speak English.

On the other hand, tour operators provide training initiatives for locals, as tour operators in Botswana, primarily safari companies, who have made an effective contribution through training programmes to leadership, hospitality, marketing and safety standards (Stone, 2015). For example, since a local guide provides an important interpretation for tourists, qualified guides should involve the local trainees in learning guiding techniques (Nepal and Saarinen,

2016). In Indonesia, training has been expanded to include small-scale restaurant workers, taxi drivers, host family owners, entrepreneurship training and foreign language learning (Timothy, 2012). Similarly, Haven-Tang and Sedgley (2014) noted that the Adventa programme, which is part of the EU LEADER initiative, funded training and workshop programmes to empower local producers to market and brand local products of local destinations in Monmouthshire in the UK.

Previous studies have emphasised that school-age children have benefited from the education and training programmes offered by various institutions to improve their understanding and skills in using their resources. One such intervention involved observing some heritage and tourism developments in Indonesia (Graci, 2013). In addition, in China's Huangdu Province, outdoor activities enabled children to learn cultivation activities, which form one of the main sources of income (Cong, 2011). The school children are also encouraged to develop handcrafted items, such as miniature pots (Lancy, 2018). In addition, school children in Cypriot villages (Polyniki, 2019) and in Surama village in Guyana visit museums to understand how handcrafted products, such as sweet preparation, are made as tourism products (Karwacki, 2014).

On the other, studies addressed various methods used to fund initiating training centre, as a portion of the tourism income in Casamance village in Senegal was used to build a training centre for specialised programmes related to marketing, hospitality, leadership and cleaning for local residents (Zeppel, 2006). Moreover, an education and training centre has been set up and financed by the International Animal Welfare Fund (IFAW) in Vava'u in the South Pacific (Moscardo and Walker, 2011). The training is not just about improving the locals' knowledge and skills but is also about ensuring tourists are engaged in watching and swimming with the marine life to appreciate the country's most important natural treasures. In addition, as a means to fund training initiative, some travel destinations, such as Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011) and the Mijikenda Makaya Forest in Kenya (Makuvaza, 2014), redirect part of the tourism revenue to finance school fees and training opportunities.

In the Omani context, the government offers free education and training programmes to support locals' capacity-building (Al-Hajry, 2003; Al-Harthy, 2011). However, inadequate efforts have been made to encourage youth to be involved in the private tourism sector, which has led them to prefer work in the public sector because it is known to be more secure (Al-Balushi, 2008; Clark and Postal-Vinay, 2009; Al Hasani, 2015). Moreover, no integrated training has been proposed to build the capabilities of locals in rural destinations despite several studies conducted on multi-stakeholders' participation, including host communities. For example, according to Al-Shaaibi (2011), training that enables locals to be tourist guides should include housekeeping, hospitality and marketing, which are offered by safari companies in Botswana (Stone, 2015). Although locals in rural places are more conservative than those in cities (Al-Shaaibi, 2011), previous studies have not proposed methods for accessing conservative communities by hiring local trainers who have a better understanding of sociocultural conditions than non-local trainers (Manayara and Jones, 2007).

2.5.3 Financing

Financial resources are considered the main driver for implementing the tourism infrastructure development and capacity building plan because the aim is to share the benefits of the businesses with all involved partners, especially the local people. However, Bello et al. (2016) stated that the concept of involving the local population in tourism development is not only time-consuming but also expensive to finance. Various circumstances and barriers related to tourism facilities and capacity building have been attributed to a lack of financial resources. According to Sebele (2010), a lack of funds made it difficult for locals in Botswana to participate in local and global exhibitions and events promoting community development. In addition, Graci (2013) found that even local businesspeople are hesitant to support community initiatives financially because they do not meet their commercial needs. Furthermore, Ghaderi et al. (2017) argued that, according to officials in some Iranian destinations, no budget is allocated for tourism and community development.

Previous studies in the literature have considered a range of measures and interventions to secure financial resources to fund initiatives related to the community participatory approach in tourism development. However, funding is reliant on individual initiatives, not on a

partnership approach that includes all concerned bodies to finance training programmes, infrastructure construction and cooperative social responsibility (CSR). For example, a part collected revenue were directed to support the training of the local people (Zeppel, 2006; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). Concerning tourism infrastructure construction, Legrand et al. (2012) claimed that some tourism revenues also support the development of the tourism infrastructure. They explained that collecting revenues from lodging fees, licence fees and taxes from the hospitality industry helps the government and authorities to fund resources, such as conservation and restoration programmes, and contribute to the improvement of transportation and amenities. Makuvaza (2014) also pointed out that in the forest of Mijikenda Makaya in Kenya, part of the income from cultural trips, the sale of souvenirs and beekeeping businesses support the development of education, infrastructure and women's initiatives. Odede et al. (2015) provided a similar example in Kenya, claiming that income from visits and membership fees and donations to finance tourism products and services are used to preserve natural and cultural values.

On the other hand, some external agencies take on cooperative social responsibility (CSR) to repay the locals and maximise their interests, since the CSR programme is known to go beyond profit maximisation (Manente et al., 2016). For example, yacht operators stopped tourists on Mentawai Island in Indonesia to encourage local producers to offer them their handicrafts directly (Jamal and Robinson, 2009). Additionally, tour operators in Thailand help locals to innovate marketing brands (e.g. Discover the Traditional Culture and Untouched Thailand) to promote their destinations (Dolezal, 2011) and support local tour operators in developing advertising material such as brochures (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015). According to Rahmawati et al. (2016), locals in Bali, Indonesia, can participate in various CSR programmes to support their standards of living, such as replanting coral reefs and improving soil quality to increase fruit production, secure food and improve waste and recycling management.

In Oman, sponsoring small and medium enterprises (SME) in the tourism sector has been reliant on a public budget derived from oil and gas revenues to support development programmes. For example, a fund institution was set up to finance SMEs with interest-free and guaranteed loans of up to 100,000 OMR (200,000 GBP) (Al-Balushi and Anderson, 2015). The aim was to give young people, especially job seekers, the opportunity to establish businesses

based on various socioeconomic activities, including tourism (Hussein, 2014; Al Maimani and Johari, 2018). This funding institution provides substantial support for improving individual initiatives and promoting a self-employment programme in tourism and other socioeconomic activities. Also, Oman, like other countries, relies completely on oil and gas revenues, which have decreased sharply since 2014 because of several worldwide fluctuations in oil prices (Mubeen et al., 2017). Previous studies have not considered alternative measures for financing tourism development, especially during financial crises, through applying visitors' charges and adopting CSR programmes to spread a culture of "giving back" to the community.

For example, the tourism infrastructure, such as visitor centres, helps to control the tourism movement and mitigate any loss of financial resources that might occur when external agencies run tour guide programmes. Visitor centres in the Tulear region of Madagascar (Buckley, 2010), Petra in Jordan (Teller, 2013) and Hungary (Prebensen et al., 2017) apply practical methods that enable locals to control their resources and organise tourists' activities. Adopting a CSR programme, as tour operators did on Mentawai Island in Indonesia (Jamal and Robinson, 2009) and in Thailand (Dolezal, 2011), encourages locals to promote their products to tourists. For example, in Monmouthshire in the UK, financial support is obtained through local initiatives in rural areas, such as Haven-Tang and Sedgley's (2014) Adventa programme, which is a part of the EU LEADER initiative, providing support for the marketing and branding of local products to improve target profiles.

2.5.4 Regulations

The existing literature has analysed the impact of legislation on accelerating the development of rural destinations by encouraging locals to participate in decision-making processes. Studies have shown that bureaucracy and lack of transparency are the main problems preventing residents of tourism destinations from obtaining adequate information on tourism performance that will enable them to start getting involved in socioeconomic activities, especially tourism businesses (Tosun, 2000; Manyara and Jones, 2007). The findings showed that bureaucracy dominates all legislative, financial and operational processes in tourism development and is seen as one of the obstacles to implementation, along with a lack of awareness and resources (Yüksel et al., 2014).

Other studies that examined various cases relating to a lack of transparencies suggested that regulators of public and private institutions were preventing locals from receiving any economic benefits. For example, Sebele (2010) noted that newsletters were created in English, even though the majority of the community understood only the local language in some tourism destinations in Botswana. In addition, the tourism authority held a meeting with the community once a year to deliver the annual report but did not allow locals to participate in the discussion and express their opinions or concerns. Moreover, the central government collaborated only with external parties in the elaboration of their plans, while other institutions, such as the community, were unable to speak openly (Park and Kim, 2016). Moreover, Ghaderi et al. (2017) found that locals in some Iranian destinations were not invited to attend official meetings on tourism development.

These examples show that the governments do not consider locals important in the development of tourism businesses, as they fail to consult the community or inform locals about tourist opportunities in their locations. This low level of transparency leads to suspicion in the community and a reluctance to participate in public forums. Mak et al. (2017) described that the government in Hong Kong has made no effort to consider community voices and opinions when planning the tourism development. The existing literature has addressed locals' responses to being excluded from participating in decision-making processes. Ramos and Prideaux (2014) found that the locals felt inferior and disappointed with the way the external bodies presented local values to tourists. Furthermore, because policies are kept away from local parties, locals are likelier to harass and enrage tourists, which in turn slows down local economic growth (McLaughlin, 2015). The additional implications of these policies leave locals upset, with outside agencies refusing to act on their behalf: 'The community refuses to allow outsiders to interfere or make a decision on behalf of the community and expresses that no one understands the nature of inheritance better than the community itself' (Ghaderi et al., 2017:9).

The legal framework in Oman is not exempt from the above issues, even though the government has implemented various legislative incentives to encourage citizens to start businesses to improve their quality of life. However, the legal framework used to encourage

the participation of the local population in tourism development is ineffective. This issue may be attributed to the government's recent recognition of tourism as a promising economic sector. However, decision-makers have insufficient experience and knowledge about the economic and sociocultural dimensions of tourism (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). As a result, the government hired international experts who lacked knowledge and experience about the Omani context to formulate developmental plans (Al-Wahaibi, 2016) that did not include the views and opinions of citizens or their participation in economic development.

Previous studies in the literature observed that bureaucracy was a problem that prevented the creation of local businesses related to socioeconomic tourism activities. According to Al-Mataani (2017), this bureaucracy encompassed strict regulations that hindered entrepreneurship and economic development, including tourism. Studies in the Omani context have attributed this legislative matter to the distance between the affected institutions in the public sector. According to Al-Masroori, 2006: 311), "Each organization is more concerned about its regulatory mandate without considering what it means for other organizations or what impact it might have on others. It seems to work in isolation from other organizations". Al-Shanfari (2012) confirmed that legislative issues related to the promotion of socioeconomic status were based on overlap and poor coordination between public bodies. Al Zeidi (2016) added that institutions in Oman played different roles and tasks related to human resource development but failed to consider the guidelines and considerations of others.

Previous studies have addressed the consequences of bureaucracy and poor coordination among public institutions in Oman. However, no study has discussed specific laws that limit citizen participation in socioeconomic development, including tourism. Moreover, no specific legal clause has been analysed to explore its strengths and weaknesses related to enabling local communities in tourism development and entrepreneurship. This limitation exists in relevant frameworks, such as the following: interests in participation (White, 1997); and a model for effective local residents' participation in tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). This may be attributed to the fact that some frameworks were developed by reviewing secondary sources but not on the results of actual case studies. Examples are Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, Pretty's (1995) participatory typology, and Garrod's (2003) and Bello et al.'s (2016) frameworks.

2.6 Dimensions for an effective local participatory approach

This section discusses the dimensions for an effective approach to local participation in the management of socioeconomic activities, mainly tourism, which lies in the dimensions of resource conservation, experience enhancement and wellbeing. Many theories and relevant examples from studies worldwide are discussed to provide insights into the nature of involving locals in managing the resources, the types of authentic products that attract tourists to the destination and the forms of local wellbeing due to thriving tourism operations.

2.6.1   Resource Conservation

The involvement of food producers, tour operators, hoteliers and craftspeople has been emphasised at the local level not only to generate an income, but also as a practical way of preserving the values as the main asset of tourism. The literature discusses many cases around the world where the effective local participatory approach has contributed effectively to the conservation of natural and cultural resources. According to Asker et al. (2010:89-90), ex-residents who left their village of Bario, Malaysia, to improve their living standards in cities, are returning to renovate their traditional buildings for tourists and open art galleries. Alongside, tourists are learning about local cultural aspects and participate in rice plantations to experience traditional socioeconomic activities.

In Norway, some local farmers have remodelled their farms to carry out various activities to improve the tourists' experience. One of these activities involved setting up a museum to demonstrate the history of traditional agriculture. In addition, some farming activities have been reactivated through the cultivation of vegetables and fruits of various crops as organic products and the importing of local meat (Brandt and Haugen, 2011:38-39). In Nepal, locals were encouraged to create souvenirs and wallets using raw materials (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1355-1356). Haven-Tang and Sedgley (2014:63) stated that local producers in Monmouthshire in the UK want to offer their traditional handcrafted products, mainly drinks, food and art, to tourists in outlets and local festivals.

The locals in some rural destinations have also taken various nature conservation initiatives in cooperation with the affected interest groups. For example, the national park in Nepal has established a programme to conserve flora and fauna through the recruitment of residents with control permits (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1357). In a similar case in Indonesia, taxes were collected from all visitors and users to finance a monitoring and conservation programme of natural assets, which recruited residents to conserve coral reefs (Graci, 2013:33-34). In Jordan, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation took the initiative to mitigate the environmental impact of Wadi Rum by engaging residents in the renovation of abandoned historic homes (France, 2016:309-313).

These examples show that the effective participation of local residents in the tourism business contributes greatly to preserving culture and resources. Maintaining these natural and cultural values also strengthens the identity of locals by enhancing a sense of ownership of their places and heritage values. Al-Shaaibi (2011, Ch5:23) pointed out that this sense of ownership is more common in rural areas than in cities, where the locals are more attached to their location: 'The place attachment focuses on the environmental settings to which people are emotionally and culturally attached' (Altman and Low, 2012:5).

According to Al-Hashmi (2015:13), attachment to a place reflects the significance of these natural and cultural heritage values for livelihoods in the past. Boley et al. (2014), Park and Kim (2016:366) and Strzelecka et al. (2017:565) argued that this attachment to a place and sense of personal responsibility lead to a psychological strengthening with the place since the locals are more likely to want to preserve their assets, which in turn increases their self-esteem and confidence to demonstrate their values as tourism products. The result is that the locals can present their values more authentically than outsiders because they are better informed (Park and Kim, 2016:355; Ghaderi et al., 2017:9).

According to Timothy and Teye (2009:247), locals have even renovated their buildings to host tourism activities rather than demolish them for modern development. Lee and Chhabra (2015:106) also observed historical renovation work in accommodations in Singapore, India

and Vietnam. These renovated buildings not only generate income but also give residents a sense of identity and attachment to the place, which tourists can experience when they stay in a renovated building rather than a luxury resort (McClain, 2015). Modica and Uysal (2016:67) added that tourists feel a sense of connection with the place and the people, especially when they have an unforgettable experience.

2.6.2   Experience Enhancement

The participation of the local community in socioeconomic and tourism development adds an additional dimension by bringing authenticity to the products and services offered by the locals. According to Knudsen and Waade (2010:5), authenticity means that tourists experience the places they visit. Authenticity is associated with something real, true and genuine (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). Ruane et al. (2018:131) described that 'authenticity can be understood in terms of how well tourists experience places and people who live in them, meet their preconceived ideas, or have a feeling for what the respective travel destination is about'.

The existing literature provides numerous examples of local products and services in various worldwide destinations that enhance the tourists' experience of the destination. For example, by staying with a local host family, tourists can meet farmers and handicraft makers who run the tourism operations in rural destinations, meaning they can easily try the local food, attend local events such as folklore, learn the culture and practice harvesting products (Asker et al., 2010:89-90). As such, tourists can enjoy a wide variety of local foods and fruits and collect local souvenirs prepared by the locals (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1359). In addition, local communities can develop innovative tourism packages, including arts, food, drinks and handicrafts, to attract tourists during festivals (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014:60).

However, traditional buildings are not supposed to be converted to provide homestay opportunities for tourists (Asker et al., 2010; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1361; McClain, 2015) but rather to offer tourists the opportunity to try local food. Khirfan (2016:77) noted in Jordan that some traditional apartment buildings have been restored and converted into restaurants and cafes. Moreover, Smith and Oleynik (2017:204) stated that several traditional

houses in Shiraz, Iran, have been converted into accommodations and restaurants to serve tourists. Additionally, Gonzalez-Perez (2017:37) provided examples of historic buildings in the Caribbean, particularly in the Dominican Republic, that have been restored and converted into recreational areas to provide tourists with a variety of accommodation, shops and restaurants.

Cultural events also strengthen the ties of tourists to the place and the people. For example, as Brandt and Haugen (2011) noted, in addition to building a museum to illustrate the history of agriculture in agricultural products, space was also provided for visitors to hold wedding ceremonies and conference products with local food supplies in Norway. According to Haven-Tang and Jones (2012) local food and beverage producers participate in the local food festival in Monmouthshire in the UK to not only generate income but also demonstrate their cultural uniqueness.

Some destinations also offer attractive products that differentiate them from other destinations. For example, the eco-day event, organised twice a year in Buyukkonuk village in Cyprus, allows thousands of tourists to enjoy local organic food and participate in entertainment activities such as cycling, hiking, donkey rides and cooking (Klotz, 2015). Donkey rides have become a popular cultural product among tourists to demonstrate the efforts of animals in the construction of settlements by carrying personal items and building materials.

Nature-based products offer an additional platform for locals to share environmental exploration and educational principles with tourists. For example, many destinations worldwide, such as Ngong Ping Village in Hong Kong (Wong, 2017), offer cable car tours to explore the nature from above. A cable car tour in the Montserrat province of Spain was created with private investment that not only allows tourists to explore beauties, but also avoids getting stuck in traffic jams (Aulet, Altayó; Vidal-Casellas, 2019).

Residents can also offer trips to view migratory bird species in rural areas. Karwacki (2014) explained that bird-watching activities have increased in the village of Surama in Guyana due

to the richness of animals there. This type of tourism also offers school children a great experience to learn and appreciate the natural values, which in turn encourages tourists and locals to preserve and maintain these values (Mgonja et al., 2017).

Moreover, astronomical tourism has recently emerged and been promoted such as Dark Skies, offered in Northumberland, UK, where the effects and disturbances of light are minimised to offer clear views of the stars (Treadwell, 2017). Likewise, in the Anniviers district of Switzerland, locals have worked with experts to develop Star Park to attract tourists who want to observe the elements of the sky (Grèzes et al., 2018). An excellent night sky is also seen as an attractive product for viewing spectacular stars on the Colorado Plateau (Mitchell and Gallaway, 2019), which enables tourists to explore celestial objects (Soleimani et al., 2019).

In addition to the tourists who have gained significant experience in dealing with natural and cultural products, the locals have gained experience and knowledge to understand not only the desires of the tourists but also how to promote the rural and authentic quality of products. For example, in the Thai province of Ranong, in collaboration with Adaman's discovery company, marketing brands have been introduced that are known to 'Discover the Traditional Culture and Untouched Thailand' (Dolezal, 2011). Likewise, a brand has been initiated for local products called made MiM, meaning Made in Monmouthshire in the UK (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014). The locals of Monmouthshire also use social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Instagram, to sell their authentic products (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014). Pornprasit and Rurkkhum (2017) found that volunteers and managers of local businesses worked together to promote the Satun province in Thailand as a travel destination at various marketing events and exhibitions, such as travel trade shows and television channels.

The authentic experiences of local operators in various worldwide destinations show that the locals are not only financially stronger in terms of income generation but also psychologically stronger because they are proud and confident to offer their products to tourists. These experiences help tourists to feel the characteristics and authenticity the destinations. In other words, managers and developers of tourism destinations should aim to strengthen the physical,

mental, emotional, social and spiritual feelings of tourists during their stay (Andrades and Dimanche, 2018).

2.6.3   Community Wellbeing

The third dimension of an effective approach to local participation in the use of their natural and cultural resources for socioeconomic purposes is reflected in the prosperity of local development and the wellbeing of the host communities. The existing literature shows that the locals obtain economic benefits that help not only to maintain and operate their local initiative but also to enhance the social aspects and solidarity amongst locals. According to several studies (Saarinen, 2010; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011; Ramos and Prideaux, 2014; Sebele, 2010; Holloway and Humphreys, 2012; Butler, 2017), part of the tourism revenue is put towards building new homes and paying education fees for local children. It also helps them to build new houses and buy better food products (Stone, 2015).

Tourism also contributes to increased wellbeing among local residents because it supports community solidarity through the development of community facilities. For example, Ramos and Prideaux (2014) stated that in some rural areas, tourism helps poor and low-income people achieve a better standard of living. Jaafar et al. (2015) reported that the poorest families were able to benefit from selling crops and handcrafted products as souvenirs. Stone (2015) explained that in Botswana, part of the income received finances farmers to replace traditional agricultural tools with new technologies, fertilisers and livestock reinforcement.

These global examples show that local tourism management has enabled locals to build new homes, secure groceries and pay school fees. The benefits of tourism go beyond sharing the fruits of tourism, as the solidarity approach helps low-income families create their own businesses. In Botswana, Stone (2015:90-91) noted that the commitment of the participating locals towards their societies benefitted all residents through setting up communal facilities such as a tent for wedding and burial ceremonies.

However, as mentioned in section 2.5.1, various sociocultural barriers prevent women from participating effectively in tourism, particularly in the hotel sector. However, as Boraian (2008:26-27) argued, when women are economically empowered, other types of empowerment will be assured and achieved. The literature states that in some destinations, women improve their wellbeing by strengthening economic independence, which they can do by preparing food and making handicrafts and working as a guide at the administrative level in Namibia (Zeppel, 2006:285), working as an initiative leader in Indonesia (Graci, 2013) and acting as decision-makers in Kenya (Odede et al., 2015:14). The success of these women can improve the experience of tourists in cases where they prefer to be guided by a female guide (Gao, 2019:92). In the Omani context, people consider women to be better informed than men, especially with traditional medicines, through their knowledge of mixing natural herbs (Gebauer et al., 2007:73).

The review of the literature indicated that no previous studies have been conducted on the use of sustainable tourism and the community participatory approach to managing tourism development in rural destinations in the Omani context, which was previously addressed (section **2.2**). However, a range of possibilities and dimensions related to resource conservation and tourism experience enhancement could be achieved if an effective community participatory approach were used in Omani villages. For example, previous studies have found that many traditional houses had been neglected, which was due to inhabitants' migration to cities to seek better livelihoods and living standards, such as in Manah (Bandyopadhyay, 2004), Al-Hamra (Al-Abrī, 2014) and Mirbat (Al-Hashim, 2015). Utilising such traditional buildings as a tourism product would help to preserve the architectural landscapes, such as traditional lodges in Japan and Malaysia (Asker et al., 2010), Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011) and Nicaragua (McClain, 2015). Traditional buildings have been restored and converted into cafés and restaurants, such as those in Jordan (Khirfan, 2016), Iran (Smith and Oleynik, 2017) and the Dominican Republic (Gonzalez-Perez, 2017).

In addition to private dwellings, traditional communal buildings can be preserved and utilised as tourism products. In particular, *sablah* are meeting places where locals welcome guests and resolve conflicts between locals and other tribes (Nebel and Richthofen, 2016). Allowing tourists to explore the content and role of *sablah* buildings in locals' lives by experiencing a

coffee ceremony (*qahwa*) with dried dates, ghee and coffee (Ibrahim et al., 2001) would help to build a cultural dialogue and respect among host communities and tourists (UNESCO, 2014).

Similarly, agricultural activities have played a significant role in Omani civilisation throughout history by providing a way of life for people in hardship circumstances and environmental conditions. Previous studies have found that a key element in sustainable agriculture is the use of the traditional water supply (*aflaj*) system to distribute water rights to shareholders and farmers. The amount distributed depends on the size of share; in the *aflaj* system, the rich are entitled to a higher number of shares to irrigate their cultivated areas, which is considered a socially accepted rule (Al Marshudi, 2001; Al Ghafri et al., 2017; Nash et al., 2017). Presenting the traditional water supply as a cultural value would encourage locals, especially youth, to preserve the traditional water distribution system by using sundials during the day and the movement of stars during the night (Al-Sulaimani et al., 2007). Many knowledgeable Omanis that used sundials and stars to distribute shareholder water rights distribution are no longer living, and this traditional knowledge system has not been well or comprehensively documented (Nash, 2017).

In addition, locals can preserve the cultivation equipment used by farmers, such as a belt made from palm leaves is to climb date palm trees for harvesting (Scherpenzeel, 2000) and a hand-hewn plough (*hais*) powered by bulls for field ploughing prior to plantation (*haratha*) (Al Farsi, 2014). Their preservation may be ensured by displaying them in an open-air museum on farms, as in Norway (Brandt and Haugen, 2011). Traditional methods of beekeeping may be presented by placing beehives in hollowed-out trunks of palm trees, similar to an open-air museum in Sadecki Bartnik in Strozya in Poland, which allows tourists to view a variety of beehives that have been in use for over two thousand years (Cesur, 2021). In addition to viewing this traditional equipment, tourists in Oman could also participate in agricultural activities, such as planting and harvesting, such as in Japan and Malaysia (Asker et al., 2010).

Natural resources can be preserved by locals and experienced by tourists based on an effective local participatory approach. There are many mountainous and heritage foothill settlements in Oman, including the Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages (Luedeling and Buerkert, 2008).

Tourists would be offered opportunities to learn how locals have shaped the harsh environment to meet their livelihood requirements. In the Himalayan part of India (Apollo et al 2021). Similarly, tourists have the opportunity to experience mountain landscapes that have been shaped by locals. In addition, locals could revive mountain routes linking interior and coastal settlements. In interior settlements, locals export dates and vegetables and import fish from coastal settlements (Richardson and Dorr, 2003; Al-Sawafi, 2010; El-Mahi, 2011). Hiking opportunities encourage adventurers to explore mountain trails and experience caving in mountain plateaus. In line with Oman's Tourism 2040 Strategy to promote stargazing activity to achieve niche tourism in Oman (Jamal et al., 2018), adventure experiences would extend to exploring the sky at night because most rural places in Oman are not affected by light pollution. Similarly, tourists experience astro tourism in the Anniviers District in Switzerland (Grèzes et al., 2018) and in the Ogden Valley in the US (Blond, 2020).

2.7 The Theory of Community Empowerment

The above review of previous studies focuses on the concept of the local community participation approach to tourism development. The findings show that the locals have reached the empowerment stage, which means they are able to preserve their natural and cultural resources, enhance the tourist experience and promote local wellbeing. Since empowerment is considered an effective approach to promote local participation, this section provides an overview of the concepts of power, empowerment, community empowerment and its dimensions to encourage the local community to manage their resources in socio-economic and tourism development.

2.7.1   Concept of Power

To understand the concept of empowerment, it is important to provide a clear meaning of power and its forms. Power refers to the ability of the individual and the collective to achieve the desired result (Oliga, 2007:73) and 'to influence people to behave in ways that may not be in their own immediate self-interest' (McCool, 2009:143). This power can come from various resources, such as knowledge, wealth and cultural norms (Mondros and Wilson, 2010:5). Robertson (2015: 1) stated that power refers to the degree of effective participation by people

in various social, economic and political areas to achieve their goals. Furthermore, Pratto (2016:15) explained that power is associated with different practices between people in different aspects of life and that the practice can be positive or negative that serves to reward some people and punish others. Strzelecka et al. (2017:557) defined power as a way of achieving goals by increasing the individual and collective ability to resist others who dominate power to change power over.

'Power to' refers to the ability of people to make changes for the betterment of their lives (Alsop, 2005:5). It leads people to recognise their priorities and objectives and to face different circumstances to support their interests and goals. 'Power over' encompasses corruption, violence and discrimination and focuses on people who have disempowered someone to dominate others and prevent them from any benefit (Alsop et al., 2006:232). Pratto (2016:5-9) classified power into two forms: *Dominating Power* and *Transformative Power*. Dominating Power restricts the ability of another party to do something against this power's interests and goals, while Transformative Power strengthens equality and reduces the effects of poverty through different enterprise developments. This power does not dominate or restrict the freedom of others, but rather creates stability and security because of the fairness and inclusion characteristics of top-level politicians and bottom-level people.

2.7.2   Concept of Empowerment

In the 1980s, the concept of empowerment was described as a means of change towards real public participation by addressing the relationship between practitioners and their clients in the public health sector (Laverack, 2009:5-6). Various definitions have been used to explain empowerment from the perspective of their disciplines. Rowlands (1997:14) described empowerment as the concept in which people perceive themselves as part of the decision-making process. Wilkinson (1998:44) defined empowerment as a reaction to and rejection of traditional management policies that restrict the use of resources by people. Saden (2004:93-94) confirmed this point in his description of empowerment as a form of response to threats and problems that prevent people from achieving a better quality of life.

The World Bank described empowerment as 'the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives' (Narayan-Parker, 2002: xviii). This definition is used in the World Bank's poverty reduction programmes in countries such as Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, which focus on empowering very poor people. In reality, empowerment does not solely refer to poor people, as it also works to improve the skills of disadvantaged and marginalised people, which is shown Scheyvens' (2009:464) definition of empowerment: 'Activation of the confidence and capabilities of previously disadvantaged or disenfranchised individuals or groups so that they can exert greater control over their lives, mobilise resources to meet their needs, and work to achieve social justice'.

The above definitions show empowerment as human interventions and interactions related to the individual and collective approaches to changing institutional policies to achieve their goals. In the literature, however, it was noted that in addition to strengthening the individual and the community, the conditions of the organisational framework which enables the empowerment of organisation (Hardina et al., 2006:188-189; Laverack, 2013:54). An empowerment organisation is 'one that is democratically managed, and its members share information and control over decisions and are involved in the design, implementation, and control efforts towards goals defined by group consensus' (Laverack, 2013:54).

An analysis of the definitions of empowerment shows that between the 1960s and 1970s, empowerment referred to *power sharing*, and between the 1970s and 1980s, the focus of empowerment changed to that of *fostering human welfare*. Between the 1980s and 1990s, it became a term referring to fostering productivity (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006:266). Oosterlynck et al. (2019:115-133) argued that the meaning of empowerment as productivity-focused allows people to participate in decision-making processes by taking responsibility, promoting a sense of ownership and working with a teamwork approach.

General concepts of empowerment show that a number of benefits result from the empowerment approach. For example, people are given the same opportunities to improve their aspects of life by encouraging them to participate in decision-making processes and

control their resources (Alsop et al., 2006:29). In addition, the dependency on external bodies is reduced by improving their ability to solve problems and conflicts (Zimmerman, 2012:55). Islam (2016:61) noted that these abilities put people in a position to negotiate and influence decision-making processes to achieve their goals.

2.7.3   Community Empowerment

Of the many definitions of community, the most relevant refers to a social network of people associated with a sense of identity and common interests in a relatively cohesive geographic location, such as a neighbourhood or housing estate (Adams, 2008:153). Numerous sources have explained community empowerment from different perspectives and disciplines. Sofield (2003:8) described community empowerment as a process the community undertakes to achieve its results, whereas Saden (2004:90) found that community empowerment promotes the individual's ability to work with others to achieve their common goals by teaching them to work together, make group decisions and overcome challenges to maximise community benefit. Murphy and MSPHyg (2012:337) explained that the concept of community empowerment refers to the provision of sufficient skills to the community that enable them to participate in decision-making processes to accomplish their tasks related to the development and implementation of plans.

The literature has expanded to address the reasons for promoting community empowerment. Most studies focused on providing equal opportunities that enabled people to obtain information that increased their understanding and awareness of participating in decision-making processes. Zemmerman (2012:55) confirmed this statement, stating that empowering the community implies access to all resources, such as leisure facilities, health services, socioeconomic activities and educational opportunities, without discrimination. Empowering the community helps people recognise their rights and obligations to access political structures to make the necessary changes that coincide with their goals (Strzelecka et al., 2017:557).

From a political viewpoint, empowerment promotes local governance by empowering locals to represent themselves, exchange views and express their opinions and concerns. This form is

seen as a key success indicator for decentralisation, which means that decision-making processes are close to the local level (Narayan-Parker, 2002:148). Pratchett (2004:363) described this point as task autonomy when the central government allows the local government some freedom to take various measures and initiatives. However, to reach this level, capacity building is required so that the community can participate in decision-making processes (Yolanda, 2008:184), since being unfamiliar with political tasks could lead locals to experience business failures (Chang et al., 2012:707-719). Zimmerman (2012: 46) suggested exchanging experiences and knowledge with external bodies on certain aspects that are not known to community leadership. Kezar (2013: 124) described the type of support that is required at the local level: 'People need sufficient training, financial and technical support and the right information and resources to enable them to act with authorities towards sharing the leadership and taking responsibilities'.

A community empowerment approach also promotes equality amongst the locals and other relevant stakeholders. According to Alsop et al. (2006:196), all community members can enjoy different opportunities and have equal rights to improve their lives. Lekoko (2015:14) stated that community empowerment provides equal opportunities for all in leadership positions, provides problem-solving mechanisms and a fair distribution of the benefits. In addition, the community empowerment approach is a way of breaking free from injustices and the influence of outsiders (Fadte, 2017:215). Moreover, community empowerment goes beyond the self-interest approach by empowering disadvantaged people and minorities and supporting the families of low-income households by strengthening solidarity (Ramos and Prideaux 2014:466).

The above review shows that the community empowerment approach provides significant opportunities for the community to improve their abilities technically and contribute financially to their goals, socially, economically and politically. The core result of this change lies in the redistribution of resources, the reduction of powerlessness and the enjoyment of justice and wellbeing (Laverack, 2013:55). Community empowerment not only focuses on the participatory nature of decision-making processes through skill enhancement but also offers the same opportunities to further leverage the available resources.

2.7.4   Dimensions of Community Empowerment

The aforementioned concepts of power, empowerment and community empowerment reveal several dimensions of empowerment that impact community settings from economic, social, psychological and political perspectives. This section determines the extent of the benefits of community empowerment supported by valid examples from various socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects.

2.7.4.1 Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment is the ability to develop a viable infrastructure that enables the community to generate income for facility development (Scheyvens, 1999; Shapley and Telfer, 2002:152). Disadvantaged segments of the community are encouraged to participate in administering business programmes, participate in small business ownership and provide employment opportunities (Timothy, 2007:207). More precisely, Nyaupane and Poudel (2011:1354) stated that economic empowerment is a means of improving livelihood and quality of life by motivating the community to invest in the development of products and services. It also helps them control their natural and cultural resources (Ramos and Prideaux, 2014:466).

Carter-James and Dowling (2017:225) claimed that when economically empowered, locals use their resources to make various handcrafted products that they sell to tourists as souvenirs. In doing so, local residents create employment opportunities for local producers and suppliers to improve their standard of living and achieve financial stability. This point is corroborated by Butler (2017), who noted that economic empowerment is a fundamental solution for employment when a community feels financially stable. The success of the community empowerment approach is aimed at making the community financially independent so that the locals generate an income from their businesses to fulfil their economic and social endeavours. In simple terms, they control their income in such a way that they maximise their businesses profitably, which enables the community to meet basic needs, such as housing, health and education (Lekoko, 2015:15).

2.7.4.2 Social empowerment

Several studies have examined the nature of social empowerment from a theoretical viewpoint. Social empowerment is related to building local balance and community cohesion to achieve successful community initiatives related to education and infrastructure development. It supports the community members in coming together to achieve their common goals (Scheyvens, 1999; Scheyvens, 2002). Typically, cohesion occurs as soon as collective action is taken to resolve threats that harm people's interests. In some cases, suffering and blaming oneself is likelier to cause harm than assist in collective actions and interests (Saden, 2004:222). Laverack (2005) argued that collective action requires working with communities and with other partners to share decisions about overcoming problems and improving the quality of life in general. Lekoko (2015:14) observed that social empowerment is associated with the good stimulus to collaborate in setting goals, defining roles and distributing responsibilities without anyone dictating the decision-making.

In addition, social empowerment leads to community solidarity and fosters collaboration in managing local initiatives to improve the locals' quality of life (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002:152). As such, several collective initiatives by the locals indicate social empowerment. An example of such a collective initiative is the construction of a tent for wedding and memorial services in Botswana, financed by a portion of the business proceeds (Stone, 2015). In a similar example, a portion of tourism revenue in Guludo in Mozambique was used to establish a water supply system and clinics to provide health services to residents (Carter-James and Dowling, 2017:225).

As the above description shows, the concept of social empowerment lies beyond the self-interest approach, as it focuses on promoting collective action and strengthening solidarity and harmony; the community shares the same interests and partners in the success and failure of their initiatives. Additionally, social empowerment creates a sense of community spirit that connects community members to their place and to each other. Timothy (2007:207) claimed that social empowerment can reduce disparities between individuals, families and tribes, as social capital strengthens community wealth as a means of achieving common goals. By

contrast, individual local companies can cause economic conflicts and disagreements among locals, which can affect the sustainability of the business (Ramos and Prideaux, 2014:466).

2.7.4.3 Psychological empowerment

According to Sharpley and Telfer (2002:152), psychological empowerment generates a sense of self-confidence and pride in the cultural and natural assets of community. From a tourism point of view, strengthening the mind means respects and recognition, giving foreigners a positive view through experience with local heritage products offered by locals (Scheyvens, 1999). Timothy (2007:208-209) explained that psychological empowerment is a way of showing community culture to visitors and achieving people's satisfaction through community business initiatives. Boley et al. (2014) add that this psychological empowerment would increase the emotional connection between locals and their places.

Ramos and Prideaux (2014:466) explained that this emotional connection tends to increase when locals present their important cultural heritage values to tourists in local places and at outdoor events. Furthermore, psychological empowerment has become an essential agenda in various places to empower local people. For example, locals are encouraged to seek further education and training opportunities to demonstrate their cultural identity, not only to feel proud and confident but also to share that feeling with tourists and link them to the place they visit locals in the village (Carter-James and Dowling, 2017:229). This overview of the nature and benefits of psychological empowerment at the community level shows that promoting this dimension helps foster a sense of pride, self-worth and wellbeing as local residents engage in a range of activities that serve to improve the tourists' experience. As such tourists develop a sense of place attachment that encourages them to share their experiences with their relatives and friends or make a repeat visit to the same destination (Buckley, 2009:194-195).

2.7.4.4 Political empowerment

Political empowerment offers individual members and groups of a community the opportunity to express their concerns and perceptions and to share in the decision-making (Scheyvens, 1999) of development initiatives (Shapley and Telfer, 2002:152). Alsop et al. (2006:232) stated that political empowerment enables the community members to recognise their priorities and rights to overcome different circumstances to support the realisation of their interests in general. However, ignoring the opinions of local people often leads to conflict and disagreement. Therefore, Timothy (2007:207) cautioned that developers and planners should allow locals to ask questions and consider their concerns about life issues.

As has been observed at various travel destinations, when local institutions were established to enable locals to represent themselves, the locals became politically empowered (Ghaderi et al., 2017:9). Such institutions provide the locals with a broad platform through which to share their views and concerns with the relevant authorities about the use of the local resources. In simple terms, the locals not only share a sense of ownership in the decision-making processes but are also responsible for the impact their decisions have on increasing corporate productivity and sustainability. This dimension treats all locals equally and represents their concerns fairly without discrimination (Boley et al., 2014).

The literature review revealed two conflicting views of community empowerment. In the first view, community empowerment is based on a "bottom-top" approach, as addressed by Arnstain's (1969) ladder of citizens' participation, Pretty's (1996) participatory typology and Garrod's (2003) model. Brunnschweiler (2010) argued that this model cannot be applied to empowerment because governments, not grassroots, dominate the decision-making processes. In the second view, community empowerment is based on both a top-bottom approach and a bottom-top approach, similar to the Interests of Participation approach (White, 1996). The review of relevant case studies related to empowering communities in tourism development showed that empowerment can be based on a top-bottom approach because regulators and policy makers can distribute power and the benefits of development among the public at the bottom level. For example, various top-level initiatives have been taken by several entities in

the public and private sectors to empower local communities in managing tourism businesses, such as Chitwan National Park in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia (Timothy, 2012), Ecotrust in Indonesia (Graci, 2013) and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan (RSCN) (Teller, 2002; Wismayer, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). These examples indicate that regulators and policy makers empower the public to reduce poverty, enhance inclusion and provide freedom in order to achieve stability and security (Pratto, 2016).

In Oman, the government has taken various measures and interventions to enable citizens to participate in state development. For example, the Ash-Shura Council was formed in the 1990s to represent the public sector in decision making through public elections to comment on developmental plans, question the performance of government entities and interrogate service ministers (Al-Azri, 2012, Clinton, 2014; Voskressenski, 2017). In addition, education is free for both genders to participate in the development of the Omani state (Al-Hajry, 2003; Al-Harthy, 2011). Furthermore, as a means of encouraging entrepreneurship in economic development, a funding institution was formed to finance SMEs with interest-free and guaranteed loans of up to 100,000 OMR (200,000 GBP) to establish businesses in various economic activities, including tourism, to promote self-employment (Hussein, 2014; Al-Balushi and Anderson, 2015; Al Maimani and Johari, 2018).

However, no empowerment initiative has been applied to enable the participation of local communities in tourism development (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). As previously mentioned, the reason is that interest in the tourism sector emerged only recently when an institution designated to the travel and tourism sector was established in 2004 (Al-Masroori, 2006, Al Belushi, 2008; Al-Shaaibi, 2011). The initial view of officials at that time was focused on the hotel sector, specifically in the capital, Muscat, and in the main cities where transportation networks and electricity and water services were available. Although services such as restaurants and antique and gift shops are not available in remote areas, sites such as Misfat Al-Abryeen Village attract tourists (Mershen, 2007).

2.8 Typologies and frameworks related to the public participatory approach

As public participation has become a point of interest for academic and industrial perspectives since the 1960s, several publications have addressed the causes and problems of this approach in various socio-economic activities and aspects of life. The core content of these publications focuses on the phases of public participation, from non-participation or passive participation to the empowerment phase, when citizens participated in decision-making processes. Other frameworks were collected and reviewed (Figure 35) to determine their links with the concept of sustainable tourism, which has become the end goal of this research by developing an effective local participatory approach to conserve resources, improve the tourist experience and maximise local benefits.
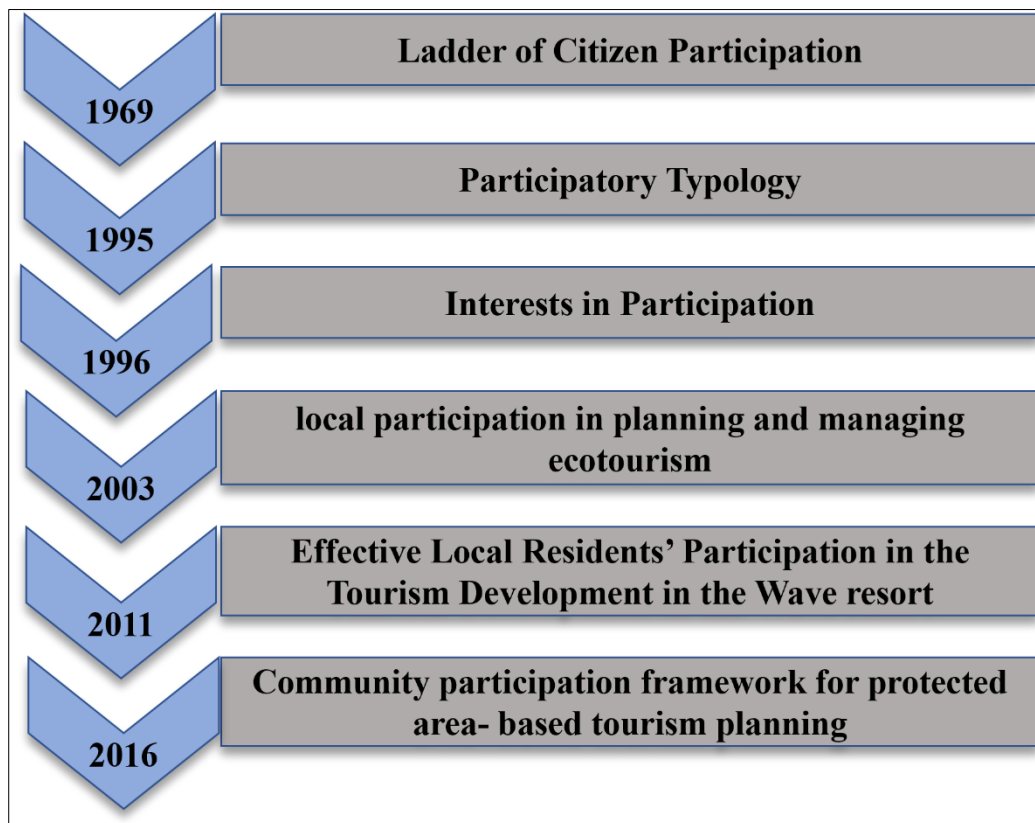
Figure 35: Typologies and frameworks related to the citizens' participatory approach between 1969 and 2016.

2.8.1 Ladder of Citizen Participation

The Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 36) was developed based on reports analysing federal programmes, specifically urban regeneration, poverty alleviation and model cities, in the United States. According to Cornwell (2008:270) and Tosun (2006:494), Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation consists of eight rungs, which are divided into three categories: the category at the bottom of the ladder relates to non-participation; the middle category emphasises the degree of tokenism (e.g. informing, consultation and placation); and the category at the top of the ladder relates to degrees of citizen power (e.g. partnership, delegated power and citizen control). The non-participation category offers citizens no opportunity to participate in meetings or dialogues related to programme development, as it is assumed that citizen participation does not add value to planning or decision-making. The main players here are the government officials, who work to ensure that elite people, rather than society, benefit from government grants.
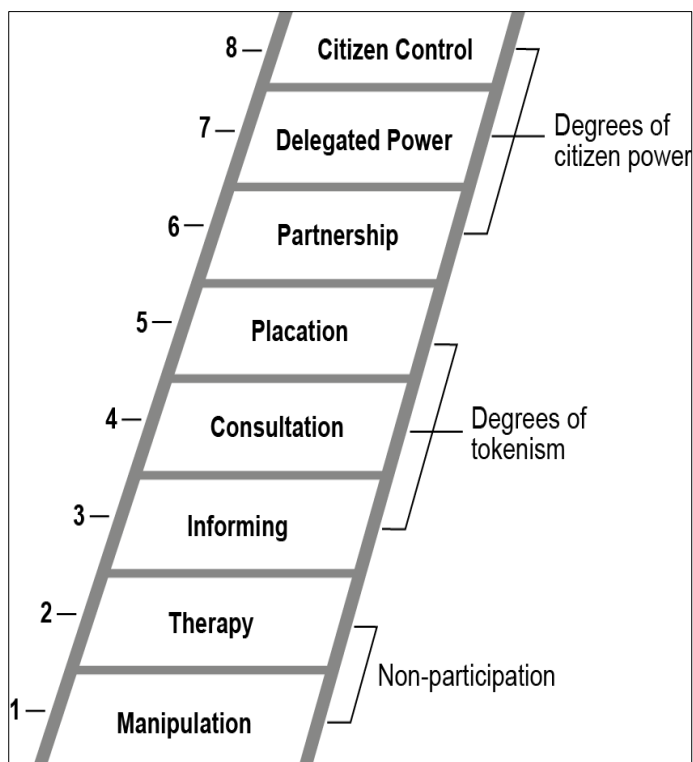
Figure 36: Ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969:217).

The tokenism category involves informing citizens about decisions made without their input. Citizens are consulted so that they can share their opinions and give feedback; however, there is no guarantee that their opinions will be taken into account. This category indicates increased citizen involvement, but power is dominated by non-local bodies. The top category increases the power and influence of citizens in decision-making processes. In other words, citizens are allowed to share their opinions and participate effectively in decision-making processes (Bello et al., 2016:481). Establishing a local non-profit cooperative is a fundamental sign that most administrative and decision-making powers are transferred to the citizen level (Arnstein, 1969:221-223).

The citizen's participation approach relied on passive participation to enable the powerless to participate in future development programmes (Al Masroori, 2006:117-118). In other words, this approach reforms the programme so that excluded people can share the benefits with society. Although this ladder has been developed over the past five decades, it is recognised as one of the best approaches to achieving community participation (Cornwell 2008:270). Okazaki (2008:513) described Arnstein's participation ladder as 'useful not only to identify the current level of community participation, but also to define the steps required to promote greater involvement. Likewise, Newsome et al. (2012:205) stated that Arnstein's (1969) ladder 'provides a useful summary of these possibilities, ranging from no opportunities for involvement (i.e. non-participation) through to stakeholders having complete control of planning and management of an area (i.e. citizen control)'.

Today, this ladder has become a tool for studying and evaluating the nature of citizen participation in the tourism industry. The ladder was used to measure the nature of community involvement on Coron Island in the Philippines based on stakeholder performance. The results placed the community on the non-participation rung (Okazaki 2008: 522–523). The ladder was also used to determine the actual and expected participation of the community in Tai O village in Hong Kong, and the results positioned the actual participation of the community on the consultation rung (Mak et al., 2017: 2–11).

Even though this ladder was developed based on a review of development studies, it is not comprehensive enough to be applied as a sufficient local participatory approach in areas where locals own cultural and natural assets, such as tourism activities. For example, it does not provide clear citizen participatory processes, from non-participation to empowerment in a particular place. Therefore, it is difficult to monitor citizen stakeholders' attitudes and interventions by considering only one stage. This stage in the ladder describes citizens' participation in a city model programme and renewable energy and housing grants in the US, in cities such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC (Lauria and Slotterback, 2020; Korda et al., 2021). However, there is a need to consider all participatory processes, from non-participation to empowerment in a particular place, to provide a sufficient picture of the attitudes of citizens and external bodies (Tematicos, 2019).

Therefore, as stated by Tritter and McCallum (2006), the citizens' ladder does not address the monitoring and evaluation processes for each rung in order to assess effectiveness, unlike Garrod's (2003) model and Al Shaaibi's (2011) and Bello et al.'s (2016) frameworks. The purpose of applying monitoring and evaluation processes is not only to detect unforeseen problems during the implementation stage, as Garrod (2003) addressed in his model, but also to build communities' capabilities to understand the issues related to tourism development, such as in Bello et al.'s (2016: 480) framework. These limitations apply to Pretty's (1996) participation typology, which is described in the following section.

2.8.2   Participatory Typology

The participatory typology contains seven steps (Table 3), starting from manipulative participation, where official bodies have all the decision-making power, to self-mobilisation, where the public controls their resources due to their effective influence on decision-making processes. Cornwell (2008:270-271) stated that this typology uses a participatory approach, which starts from 'bad', when people cannot make changes, to 'better', when people can take initiatives and without external intervention. Bucher (2010:201) explained that the seven participatory characteristics of Pretty's (1995) typology emphasise the distribution of power by concentrating on the nature of power between individuals and groups.

Table 3: Participatory Typology (Pretty, 1995:1252)

Type of Participation	Participation Characteristics
Self-mobilisation	Because people have control over decision-making, they can take initiatives independently to make a difference. A network with external parties provides people with technical support for their initiative.
Interactive Participation	People and external agencies collaborate in the development of the plan, the formation of local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones to show that people share control of the resources and share the benefits.
Functional Participation	People are involved in the external bodies to achieve the company's goals, although they were not involved in developing the plans for these companies. The participation of the people therefore continues to serve the goals of external parties rather than serving their own interests and therefore people must be more empowered to serve their interest in which this is not the case with functional participation.
Participation by Material Incentives	People participate by contributing sources. For example, farmers provide a field or labour for an external agency experimental scheme for learning. Their participation is not involved at the end of the incentives.
Participation by Consultation	Individuals are consulted to provide information or to answer questions to outside organisations to gather information and define a problem. The issue here is that consultation here does not mean participating in decisions.
Passive Participation	The external bodies inform people about what they have planned, decided or done without listening to their responses.
Manipulative Participation	Official bodies represent people without giving them any power or legitimacy.

The level of empowerment in this typology is shown in the interactive participation and the level of self-mobilisation where people are allowed to participate in decision-making together with external bodies. In addition, the formation of a community organisation in this typology indicates that the community becomes independent in the decision-making process (Bello et al., 2016:481). A review of development studies shows that this typology has been used to examine the decision-making processes for agriculture and water supplies in various countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Tosun, 2006:494). However, a similar issue is in Arnstian's (1969) citizen's ladder, which has not been described in the participatory processes in a particular place. However, it does refer to monitoring and evaluation processes, as explained in section (2.8.1)

2.8.3   Interests in Participation

This typology comprises four categories: nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative (**Table 4**). It was developed through the investigation of real cases related to community involvement in areas such as the formation of women's groups and the support of community initiatives by NGOs in fisheries and in opposition to government policies. Cornwell (2008:271) explained that this typology shows that community participation has fewer leaders and more ways in which people can participate. It is useful to understand why and how different forms of participation are used at different stages. According to Turnhout et al. (2010), White's (1996) typology shows that local people take different paths to influence and represent their expectations and aspirations.

Table 4: Interests in Participation (White, 1996: 7)

Type of participation	Top - Bottom	Bottom-Up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

Pettersen and Solbakkem (1998: 321–322) summarised the participation levels as follows: nominal participation refers to participation by the community through its passive involvement in serving the interests of the decision-makers; instrumental participation promotes the donor's reputation, while the community bears its participation costs; representative participation ensures that the sustainability of the project positively reflects the interests of the people, whereby the participating people achieve a leverage effect; and in transformative participation, donors and people work together towards empowerment. This category shows that empowerment can be both bottom-up and top-down, as NGOs have taken the initiative to empower the local community through training opportunities to support local business development, in turn, local community were enabled to control their business in exchanged collaboration with external bodies.

This empowerment category involves the formation of local cooperatives to reduce dependence on external agencies, mainly the government, and to serve the poor and disadvantaged

communities to strengthen solidarity and improve their quality of life (White, 1996:8-9). This White's model is real-life case shows that transformative power serves to share power and equal interests with local participants and promote equality and justice (Pratto, 2016:5-9). By contrast, White's model refutes Tosun's (1999) typology that effective community participation comes from the lowest level and not from a higher level.

Numerous examples show that effective community participation and empowerment have become a priority agenda in some tourist destinations. For example, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) is a non-profit organisation led by the King of Jordan, which the Jordanian government has given the responsibility to protect the wildlife and the culture of the community (Teller, 2002: 488; Wismayer, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). The RSCN has focused on conserving the natural and cultural values of the Dana Biosphere Preserve, located in the southern part of Jordan, by empowering local people. Another example of effective community participation and empowerment is the railway-led initiative in the UK to promote local food suppliers, which is featured on the menus, and the provision of marketing for accommodation providers on their websites (Lane, 2016:449-450). Oosterlynck et al. (2019:115) gave an example of the Thara project, which succeeded in including minority cultures, especially Roma youth, in training courses through a top-down approach so that they could feed the labour market. This initiative improves the self-esteem and self-confidence of these minorities and counteracts diverse approaches to discrimination and unequal access to mainstream institutions.

Although the above points show the importance of participation, they describe only the participation processes in different countries and not in separate places, which does not allow for monitoring one particular case, as in Arnstein's (1969) ladder and Pretty's (1995) typology. Furthermore, this typology describes only the importation of goods and foodstuff from outside a village for local consumption, while managing tourism sustainability relies on the optimal investment in one indigenous culture and natural resources, as Tao and Wall (2009) described in Shanmei Province in Taiwan. Moreover, in this typology, the initiative of empowerment was taken by local NGOs and not by the government.

The literature addresses various internal and external issues faced by local NGOs in managing various socioeconomic activities, particularly where governmental attitudes and perceptions of NGOs' performance in many places around the world are negative. For example, the Ethiopian government deregistered some NGOs; however, there were some restrictions on their work due to insufficient transparency related to funding from external donors, who were considered to have political agendas rather than charitable aims. In addition, rules, bureaucracy and rigid regulations have been considered obstacles for local NGOs who apply for government funds or attempt to access financial resources, such as in Kenya (Batti, 2014:58–60). In addition, some NGOs initiatives are not sustainable with long-term visions because of financial instability, insufficiently qualified personnel, and poor inter-sectoral partnerships, as well as the corruption of officials in terms of issuing hunting permits counter to wildlife management, such as in Nigeria (Wondirad, Tolkach and King, 2020:154).

2.8.4   Model of Local Participation in Planning and Managing Ecotourism

The model of involving the local population in ecotourism planning and management was proposed as part of a Study on Marine Ecotourism for the EU Atlantic Area (META) (Figure 37). According to Idziak et al. (2015:1343-1355), Garrod's (2003) model contains eight steps and is one of the best-known models because it focuses on the practical aspects and methods of promoting local community participation in marine ecotourism projects. This model uses a top-down approach (Weeden, 2013:8).
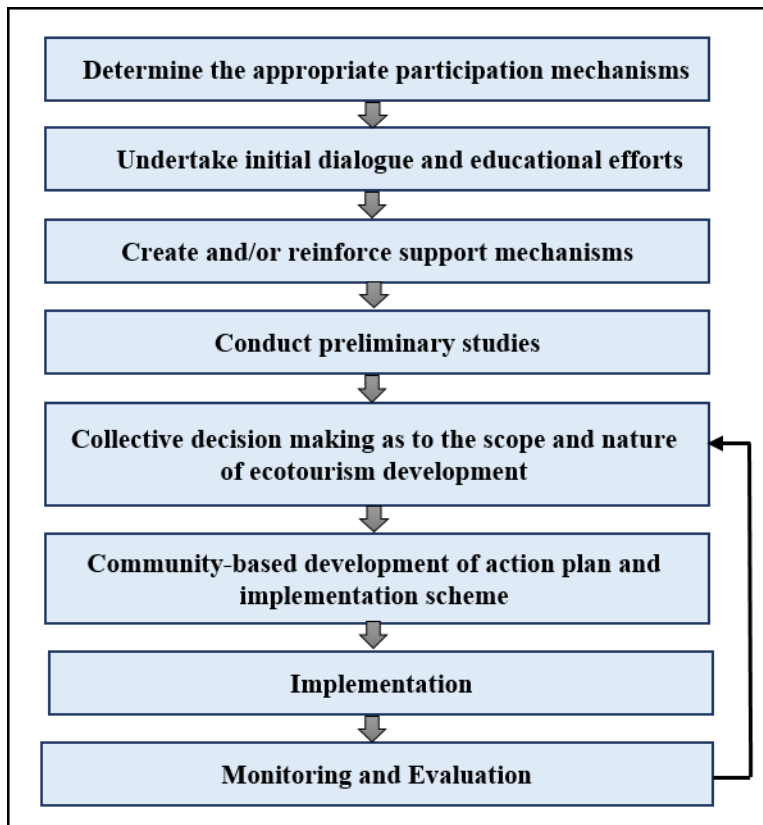
Figure 37: Model of Local Participation in Planning and Managing
Ecotourism (Garrod, 2003:47).

Brunnschweiler (2010:35) criticised the top-down approach, arguing that the local community may not have enough opportunities to participate effectively in the decision-making processes. However, using a bottom-up approach can help change locals' attitudes towards participating in decision-making processes. This model has been shown to have taken the lead in dialogue, alongside promoting capacity building through educational efforts as fundamental steps for engaging the local community from the initial idea. The possibility of failure, as Brunnschweiler (2010:35) asserted above, would decrease since the critical phases would take place after the dialogue and education programmes were assured. In other words, external agencies should endeavour to involve the local community in the first phase by promoting an exchange of views and providing educational incentives to share power with the local community. Holladay and Powell (2013:1193) supported that the aforementioned external agency initiatives should offer a means of encouraging residents to control the resources. This is an essential phase which comes at the second stage in the Garrod's model, which ends with monitoring and evaluation processes to evaluate the efficiency of the application of the model onsite. Idziak et al. (2015:1345) stated that this model addresses all stages related to local participation.

Despite its top-down approach, Garrod's model involves the local community without imposing ideas in planning and preparation from the initial idea through to its implementation. However, it does not refer to established local bodies or institutions that enable local communities to express their views, opinions and concerns (Scheyvens, 1999). In other words, the movement of the decision-making process to local areas is not addressed, which indicates that locals have not been politically empowered (Ghaderi et al., 2017). Unlike existing frameworks and typologies, such as Arnstian's (1969) citizens' ladder, Pretty's (1995) typology and White's (1996) typology, which are discussed earlier in this chapter, the formation of a cooperative or entity in the local area indicates that citizens and local communities are effectively involved in decision-making processes. Similarly, a review of case studies worldwide showed that forming local entities or institutions in local areas indicates that decision-making processes move to local communities in collaboration with external partners, such as governments, donors and practitioners, such as a tourism-based organisation in Kenya (Odede et al., 2015) and a community-based tourism institution in Botswana (Sone, 2015).

2.8.5 Model for Effective Local Residents' Participation in Tourism Development in the Sultanate of Oman

This framework was developed based on a field study conducted at the Wave Resort in Oman, which is known locally as Al Mouj. The framework consists of seven phases, starting with the creation of the first idea and ending with the evaluation of interventions, which involves monitoring known phases to identify the main issues and appropriate interventions (Figure 38). The monitoring phase is based on Garrod's (2003) model, which assesses performance at a specified level. However, existing frameworks, including Bello et al.'s (2016) framework, did not show that the outputs of monitoring and evaluation were used to revise official visions to improve them and tackle issues observed during the evaluation stages. Ehler (2017) suggested that monitoring and evaluation outputs should be used to adjust and improve existing plans.

Because the sustainable tourism approach is seen as the backbone of this research by strengthening the role of the host community in taking action to conserve its resources, enhance the tourist experience and promote local wellbeing, this model appears to be heading in the opposite direction to sustainable tourism development. The following review, with supporting publications, determines the extent to which this view is true and establishes whether this framework is applicable for use in rural areas where the host community has natural and cultural assets.
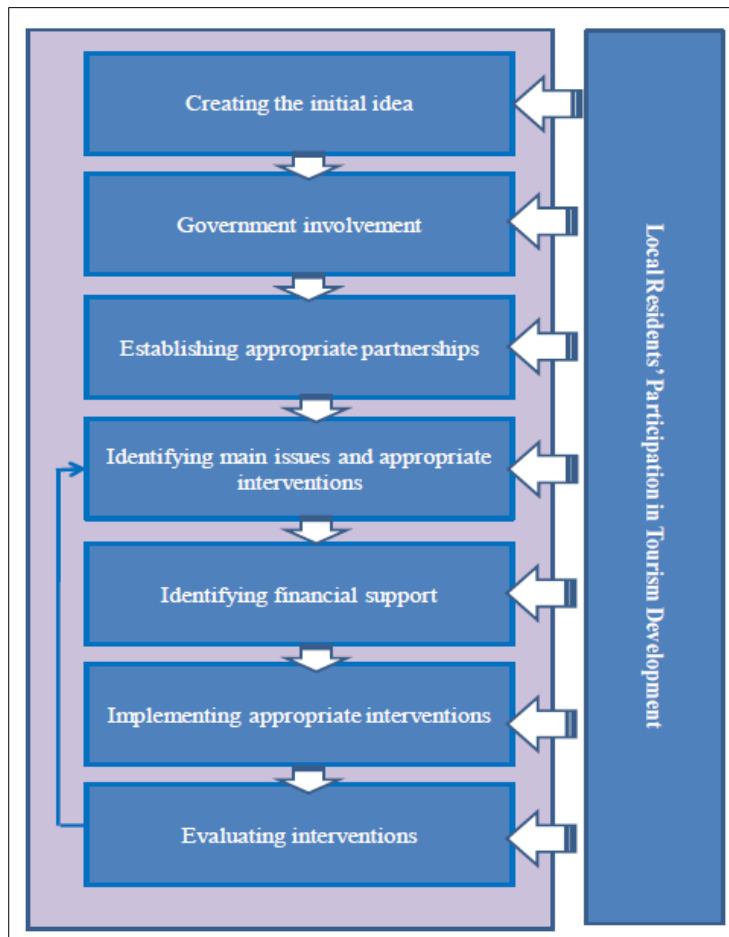
Figure 38: Proposed framework for effective participation by local residents' participation in tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Shaaibi, 2011:Ch6:4).

The Wave resort in Al Mouj was built on a sandy beach in the heart of Muscat's capital, Oman (Claereboudt, 2019:38). Ghasemi et al. (2018:133) described the resort as an artificial island built on reclaimed land covering 400,000 m2. It has 850 luxury apartments, 700 magnificent villas, 250 boats and an 18-hole golf course. As a result of this cultivation work, satellite images show that the beach is being eroded (Kwarteng et al., 2016). Most of the above facilities and luxury accommodations are owned by Omani investors and expatriates who have adequate

financial budgets, such as ministers, CEOs, famous worldwide sportspersons and entrepreneurs. The area surrounding this project is considered to be the main business and investment zone where many commercial malls, such as Oasis Mall and Carrefour City Centre, have been initiated.

This resort has been built for specific market segments, especially wealthy investors and elite tourist groups, which are too expensive for the majority of local and international tourists. Didero et al. (2019:90-91) claimed that this postmodern project meets the needs and expectations of young wealthy urbanites. Most residents of the area surrounding this resort come from the elite, who feel attached to postmodern and urban development. However, other locals do not feel tied to this project because they have lost their sense of ownership of the land now that the resort and its facilities belong to the citizens and international investors. This means that the assets of tourism do not belong to the locals and have lost their authenticity. Additionally, the appearance and architectural style do not reflect the original surroundings, as this resort has Western-style architecture that has increased in most commercial and residential areas in Muscat (Jafari and Scholz, 2018). Such, this resort is not characterised by authentic natural and cultural aspects that unite locals and tourists alike.

Al-Shaaibi (2011) developed a model to identify the appropriate mechanism for including the local community in the tourism development that lives in the area surrounding the resort. The above rating for the resort shows that the proposed local involvement approach has not worked effectively as the locals lack the natural and cultural values that make the tourists' experience meaningful. Simply put, the locals have not been empowered by the concerned shareholders at the resort, particularly the government and private investors, to participate in negotiations. Therefore, their participation is at the behest of the investors, not in decision making (Huang and Chen, 2015). Therefore, this framework does not refer to entities or bodies that enable local communities to share their views, opinions and concerns, in contrast to Arnstian's (1969) citizens' ladder, Pretty's (1995) participatory typology and White's (1995) interest in participation.

2.8.6 Community Participation Framework for Protected Area-Based Tourism Planning

The community participation framework has been developed to overcome the limitations of other studies and to promote community participation in the tourism planning of protected areas (Figure 39). According to Abukhalifeh and Wondirad (2019:91), this framework was developed to encourage the local community to participate in decision-making processes to achieve tourism sustainability. The framework developed by Bello et al. (2016) comprises four phases: the participatory planning elements, the preparation phase, the action phase and the outcomes. Given that the contribution of locals to planning is limited due to insufficient access to resources (Mandić, 2019:255), a resource accessibility stage is considered one of the first phases for accessing information on human, financial and material resources to improve the community's understanding of the problems and issues related to planning processes (Zielinski et al., 2020:727).
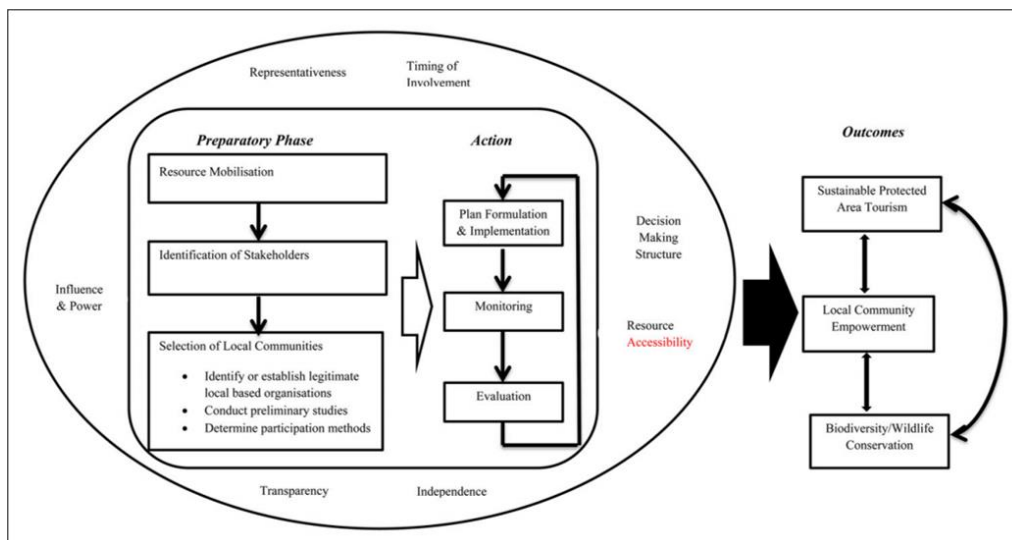
Figure 39: Community participation framework for protected area-based tourism planning (Bello et al., 2016:473).

Bello et al. (2016) emphasised that the local participation approach in tourism planning should be oriented towards empowerment so that locals can effectively participate in decision-making processes. Zielinski et al. (2020:727) explained that this independency helps simplify the planning processes, especially if it is proposed in more unbiased methods due to the decentralisation that is taking place at the community level. To achieve this empowerment, capacity-building initiatives are required by providing education and training programmes to

provide significant levels of empowerment for local people. However, in contrast to Garrod's (2003) framework, in which educational endeavour is classified as a crucial phase in the framework to reduce the barriers associated with the lack of knowledge and skills connected to the community, in this framework, education and training are not considered essential phases, in other words it is prerequisite and mandatory element for community to facilitate their participation.

In addition, Garrod's (2003) and Bello et al.'s (2016) frameworks both put the monitoring and evaluation phases as the final phase to evaluate the outcomes of local population participation in tourism planning. This framework focuses on local participation in tourism planning based on protected areas as a niche product of ecotourism. Even though this framework focuses on the planning phase, it could be easier to achieve than implementation. In other words, it does not address the implementation measures in which concerned stakeholders should intervene to ensure that the implementation meets the predetermined planning agenda. The literature review revealed that no plan has been achieved or implemented entirely because of internal and external factors related to bureaucracy, lack of funds, lack of skilled resources, and lack of awareness (Yüksel, Yüksel and Culha, 2014).

For example, the lack of awareness of host communities limits tourism development. Conflict with local communities has resulted in cancelling tourism projects that are constructed according to existing tourism plans, such as the Ain Al Kasfa project in Oman (Al-Shaaibi, 2011, Ch5:40; Al-Riyami et al., 2017:165). In addition, there is insufficient awareness and knowledge of locals about utilising their natural and cultural resources in tourism development as a source of income, such as in the Satao Elerai and Kilitome conservancies in Kenya. Locals persist in activities that are not favourable for resource conservation, such as retaining large amounts of livestock. In addition, women are not considered major partners in decision-making processes, which limits their valuable participation in tourism development (Imbaya et al., 2019).

Further issues, such as the lack of skilled and trained human resources and funding within tourism institutions, limit the development of tourism, especially in relation to private sector

investment, such as in the Pakistani context (Arshad, Iqbal and Shahbaz, 2018). The lack of funding has resulted in limiting the number of relevant stakeholders, so organisations are unable to acquire financing or educate and train their staff to create strong organisational structures. They continue to suffer from a lack of leadership and tourism readiness, which was addressed by Samardali-Kakai (2013) in the Jordanian context.

External factors were also observed in tourism and travel industry, especially conflict and a lack of collaboration among concerned stakeholders, which causes delays in and failures to implement executive planning. For example, conflict among concerned stakeholders has resulted in limiting collaboration to achieve the same goal, such as in Poland, where conflict among environment protection and tourism agencies was attributed to the requirements imposed by laws on environmental protection, preventing joint economic projects, especially tourism in the Białowieska Forest (Kapera, 2018). In the Pakistani context, conflicts have occurred among sectors related to the tourism industry, particularly the environment, forestry, highways, and wildlife (Arshad, Iqbal and Shahbaz, 2018). There is a lack of shareholder participation mechanisms, such as meetings and environmental education, which facilitate interactions between government and communities in marine protected areas in the Colombian context. Consequently, opportunities to participate are limited (Ramirez, 2016).

2.9   The Standpoint of the Review

This chapter links relevant theories and practices to examine the research problems and questions. For example, the literature discusses reasons for adopting the sustainable tourism approach to build an effective local participatory approach in order to encourage the positive effects of tourism and minimise its negative effects. The literature stresses that creating effective local participation requires fundamental initiatives in terms of awareness-raising, training, funding and regulatory frameworks. However, the relevant literature on the community participatory approach does not explain a method for fostering a multi-stakeholder approach that involves relevant stakeholders at the public, private and local levels to maximise sharing their views or designating tasks based on their competences to avoid overlap and conflict in operations. This issue was also observed in the review of the literature on existing frameworks related to tourism development that address two-party partnerships, such as

Garrod's (2003) model and Bello et al.'s (2016) framework or few governmental bodies, such as Al-Shaaibi's (2011) framework.

Garrod's (2003) model and Bello et al.'s (2016) framework were developed for a sustainable tourism approach. However, these frameworks did not explain practical interventions required by stakeholders at public, private and local levels to build community capabilities in tourism planning and management. These frameworks were developed based only on secondary sources. Specific case studies were not conducted to determine actual community participatory approaches, define relevant issues and obstacles or propose appropriate interventions. Therefore, a local participatory framework based on an actual case study to promote sustainable tourism development has not yet been developed to address local concerns or include necessary interventions by key stakeholders. In the Omani context, the application of existing frameworks is limited to secondary resources that differ from country to country because of sociocultural, economic and legal conditions (Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al Zaidi, 2016). Nevertheless, above analysis the literature review revealed the need for a practical local participatory framework, as the sustainable tourism approach has become an essential agenda for developing rural destinations.

At the national level, the tourism sector in Oman is considered a promising economic sector to reduce the country's reliance on oil and gas revenues (Hamid and Amin, 2017). In addition, sustainable tourism is a well-designed approach to transforming the country's natural resources and unique cultural features into authentic products, as stated in the Executive Plan 2006–2010 and the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy. However, an insufficient number of studies have been conducted at the national level to determine whether the sustainable tourism approach complies with the aforementioned national agenda. Therefore, the present study aims to fill the above-mentioned gaps at both the global and national levels to meet the strategic dimensions of the Oman 2040 Vision and the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, which promote decentralisation and the enhancement of the roles and capabilities of host communities in regional areas to strengthen their participation in the socioeconomic development of the country.

2.10 Summary

The literature review showed that an effective approach to local participation is a critical element in promoting sustainable tourism development in global destinations (Garrod, 2003:48; Bello et al., 2016; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017:4; Wondirad, 2017:280). An assessment and analysis of relevant case studies, theories, typologies and frameworks show that the rationale for promoting this concept is to preserve natural and cultural resources as assets of tourism, enhance the tourist experience and achieve local wellbeing. This theoretical background limits the current knowledge and it appears that due to the lack of frameworks based on actual studies illustrates the practical stages of effective local participation in sustainable tourism development has not been fully explored.

This understanding of what is missed and not yet addressed in the literature would help designing research questions by identifying the appropriate research methodology and to move to the collection of primary research data. Kumar (2018:58) and Hart (2018:31-32) claimed that the literature review helps to inform the primary data by identifying the appropriate research methods to address and understand relevant problems and issues related to the proposed study. Numerous scholars, such as Joubran (2014), Park and Kim (2016) and Kenawy (2015), emphasised the above discussed lack of information existing literatures, as the concept of the local participatory approach was seen as a phenomenon linked to respective players at public, private and local levels and the qualitative approach is seen as a suitable method to consider relevant factors, integrate the results into theoretical ideas and propose a new perspective. The qualitative approach uses interviews, focus groups, document analysis and site observations to determine whether local participation in tourism development is sufficient in rural areas in Oman and to fill the knowledge gaps at the global and national levels.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed that community participatory approaches in socio-economic development have become a common phenomenon in most global destinations, requiring the involvement of relevant stakeholders. This chapter discusses an appropriate research approach to study local community participatory approach from different perspectives to achieve the predetermined aims and objectives of this research presented in Section 1.6.

The chapter begins with an overview of the research methodology and qualitative approach. The chapter presents the nature of the questions posed and their effectiveness in obtaining diverse information as well as sampling and accessibility. Finally, this chapter shows the steps related to the data collection mechanism involving governmental, private sector and local participants in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql in Oman. Data reliability, validity, triangulation, ethical considerations and findings are also discussed, and the limitations to data collection and research are presented.

3.1 Research Methodology

Research is an intensive and focused search for knowledge and understanding of social and physical phenomena and involves various activities to identify facts, principles, applications, and theories. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge and aims to seek answers and interpretations for questions by applying specific processing (Kumar, 2008:1-2). Research is a process aimed at studying problems, answering questions, developing knowledge and suggesting a solution to specific problems (Punch, 2013:4; Tavakoli, 2012:29). Merriam and Tisdell (2015:19) described research as everyone having the common notion of investigating something in a systematic way. In everyday life, we talk about research to inform our decisions and decide on a particular course of action. Scholars agree that any research study needs a suitable methodology to achieve its predetermined goal.

The research methodology is the design strategy or action plan process underlying the choice and use of particular methods and linking this choice and use of methods to the desired results (Crotty, 2003:3). Tennis (2008: 106) described the research methodology as combining epistemic positioning and research methods, or the so-called techniques that created to obtain reliable results in the selected sample.

The methodology thus provides a plan or way to obtain data and information, whether by interviewing people, observing physical conditions or human actions or monitoring behaviours, to achieve the desired results. This plan can be implemented through several research tools, such as a case study, survey, grounded theory, archival project or action research (Saunders et al., 2012). There are different types of research methodologies – qualitative, quantitative or mixed research methods (Table 5). Qualitative methods are used to comprehend aspects of word creation, particularly textual analysis, which is a tool for discussing, interpreting and understanding characteristics of visual or recorded messages for the phenomenon under investigation.

However, quantitative methods are used to collect numerical data, which can either be compared or counted using a numeric pattern (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015:537–538; Leung, 2015:325). Closed questions are used in quantitative research, while open-ended questions are used in qualitative research (Mack et al., 2005:3; Rubin and Babbie, 2009:94; Gabryś-Barker and Wojtaszek, 2014:130; Peterson and Shenoi, 2014:55). The quality of the research results is affected by the choice of method. An appropriate research plan enables the researcher to answer the given research questions and allows the research results to achieve the aims and objectives.

Table 5: A comparison between qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods (Cooper and Schindler, 2008; Bryman, 2016)

Features	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Purpose of research	Inductive: building theory, in-depth understanding and interpretation	Deductive: describing, predicting and testing theory
Ontological orientation	Constructivism	Objectivism
Sample design	Purposive samples - non-probability	Random - probability
Sample size	Small sample size	Large sample size
Researcher involvement	Higher researcher participation with high bias potential	Limited, controlled, less bias
Participant involvement	Pre-tasking, orientation	Less preparation required
Type and analysis of data	Written data Verbal statements and pictorial descriptions converted to verbal codes (using manual or computer assistance)	Statistical and numerical data Verbal description converted to numerical codes (often software assistance)
Time consumption	More time needed for data collection and analysis	Less time needed for collection and analysis (using software assistance)
Contacting participants	The researcher observes a phenomenon and records verbal responses	The researcher has direct and indirect contact with participants
Meaning of data	Possibilities to probe participants A deeper level of understanding is the norm, allowing the researcher to develop insights from interpretation of data and test processes to form a theory	Limited opportunity to probe participants Limited ability to re-interview respondents

3.2 Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach is used to obtain an interpretation and deeper understanding of people's social characteristics, such as circumstances, experiences and opinions, to learn and understand their context (Moriaty, 2011:2). According to Hammong and Wellington (2013:91) and Scott (2014:372), qualitative research offers researchers the opportunity to interact directly with people through face-to-face or telephone interviews and to discuss things in dialogue. Qualitative research involves interacting with people by observing, talking to them, hearing about their everyday aspects and exploring their opinions, perspectives and feelings (Taylor et al., 2015:20). In addition, qualitative research aims to improve the design and interpretation of previous traditional surveys and investigates new theories or phenomena that have not previously been investigated (Mohajan, 2018:42). According to Cottrell and McKenzie (2010:236-237) and Stacks (2016:172-173), three main methods of qualitative research are employed to obtain the required data and information on a particular phenomenon or study area: in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observations.

In this study, the researcher examined relevant worldwide case studies and existing theories and models to explore the phenomenon of the local participatory approach in socioeconomic development, including the tourism industry. This early in-depth review confirmed a qualitative approach as the most suitable method for examining the views, attitudes and opinions of concerned stakeholders in this study (Manyara and Jones, 2007; Sebele, 2010; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Brandth and Haugen, 2011; Joubran, 2014; Park and Kim, 2016; Kenawy, 2015; Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015; Al-Saadi, 2015; Butler, 2017; Al Maamari, 2020). This study therefore conducts site observations and document analysis, and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with government officials, representatives of private institutions and residents in the Omani villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen in Al Hamra province, and Muql in Wadi Bani Khalid province, to investigate both the current state of community participation in tourism operations in the two villages and stakeholders' views and perceptions about it.

This research uses the above-mentioned two 'case study' locations within rural destinations with a focus on sufficiency and efficiency of local community participatory form in tourism development from the perspective of the public, private stakeholders and the local community, determined by the research questions (Section 1.5). Studies on research approaches have provided definitions of a case study approach. Merriam (1988:16) described a case study as an intensive and holistic study, description and analysis of particular instances, phenomenon, social units and behaviours. According to Simons (2009:21) and Yin (2009:18), a case study is an in-depth investigation and analysis of a particular project, phenomenon and context from different angles to build sufficient inquiries and understanding on the relevant subject matters. A case study refers to anything measurable and testable, such as an entity, phenomenon or behaviour. Yen (2009:45-47) classified the case study design into two main types – single and multiple case studies – where both types can be either a holistic or embedded unit of analysis. The unit of analysis refers to a major entity that is being focused on, studied and analysed (Mills et al., 2010:838-839), or things, person or entity is being studied, which is determined by the research questions (Vogt et al., 2012:355).

3.2.1   Justification of the Choice of Case-Study Villages

From an geographical and environmental perspective, the two village locations selected for study represent important differences: Misfat Al-Abryeen, located in the Western Hajar Mountains of central Oman, and Muql in the Eastern Hajar Mountains of the eastern region. Misfat Al-Abryeen is a seasonal tourism destination due to temperatures as high as 40^0C during the summer, while Muql is an all-season tourist destination due to the breezes in the freshwater pools, especially in the summer season (Section 1.7).

Since the 1990s, tourism has grown in both villages as a result of infrastructural development, including roads, internet, electricity and water supply. While this may also be the case with several other tourist destinations, the two villages – uniquely – have experienced community-led initiatives in hospitality, tour guiding and handicrafts sale and several other aspects of tourism development, thus making the two locations eminently suited to the focus of this study. The availability of data in the form of several official reports, statistics and publications on the natural and cultural aspects of these villages compared to any other destination was another determining factor in the case study selection. The ongoing government and grassroots initiatives undertaken in the villages have helped obtain a 'live' and rich picture of the nature of the local participatory approach and tourism operation in general. The study sites thus offered the opportunity to examine the level of resident involvement and interest in tourism enterprises, and their approaches to tourists and tourism business requirements.

Both villages are popular touristic destinations, about which the majority of the potential research participants in the purposive samples, drawn from the local community to the governmental and private sectors, have had adequate information, deriving from their professional or personal experience of the villages. Undertaking this research at less prominent touristic locations – such as Al-Alya and Wadi Al-Huquain in South Al-Batinah and Wadi Shab in South Ash-Sharqiyah – would have meant that not all participants would have had quality information and thus would not have helped to enrich the data or the research in general. However, most importantly, the data on the local participatory approaches to tourism destination development is at its richest at the two villages, which contributed to the choice of the two sites.

3.2.2   Question design

It is important to ensure that the research questions are focused and directed to obtain rich and useful information that helps achieve the aim and objectives of the study (Gill et al., 2008:292). May (2011:106) argued that question design is the most crucial part of the research. Wilson (2014:25-26) stated that question design also requires planning, skills and time to complete and analyse. The questions should be clear and unambiguous so that the respondents can easily understand them. While the researcher may think that a question is self-explanatory, the respondents' interpretations may well differ.

Gray (2014) emphasised that it is important to develop a research question in systematic order to ensure data flow and smooth retention. For example, the qualitative approach should mostly use open-ended questions, and the researcher should initiate an interview with questions that are easy to answer to build trust with the respondents and obtain more information later, especially for difficult and sensitive questions (Gill et al., 2008:292). Wilson stated that interviews should start with closed questions that are relatively easy to answer (2014:25-26), and Alase (2017:13) stated that the bottom line of qualitative research questions should be open-ended questions to obtain more knowledge and information. According to Riazi (2016:160), the question types should be in a clear order to avoid bias and systematic errors.

Interviewing local communities is likely to require the use of plain language rather than academic language if the aim is to gain an understanding of their views and perceptions. For example, Ponterotto (2010:418) explained that it is reasonable for the researcher to conduct a study in the participant's native language to ensure that the respondents are comfortable. Taylor and Starks (2016:418) maintained that participants feel comfortable using their local language. Olson (2016:58) stated that it is recommended that the interviewer use a language that respondents normally speak to understand the essence and the meaning of what they say.

The interview questions in this research were developed in line with Gray (2014:385-386) and Alase (2017:13) (please see Appendix Four). As mentioned in Section 1.1.2, since Arabic is the official language in Oman, and English is widely used in government and private business

sectors, though less by inhabitants in remote locations, the research questions have been written in both Arabic and English, including the introductory letter, participation sheet and consent form (Appendix One). Steps have been taken to ensure that the interviews questions yielded reliable and credible data before commencing the fieldwork. For example, the interview questions were shared and discussed with an expert (who specialises in feasibility studies for rural community development) and, academics (who have a background in community participatory approaches in the hotel and tourism sector) and linguists to ensure that they were designed to obtain the desired information and to avoid any ambiguity. Furthermore, these people, particularly the expert and the executive manager currently working in different roles in tourism management, used their operational and practical experience to specifically advised on the design of questions about tourism functions in the selected villages. Following these discussions, some questions were removed because they were redundant, some were revised because they were ambiguous, and new ones were added.

3.2.3 Sampling

Qualitative research uses a purposive sample to illuminate the subject under study through a selection of groups or individuals who have known or expected characteristics related to the areas of study (Ritchie et al., 2013:143; Patton, 2015:264-265). The qualitative research considered a selection of study participants or sources of information based on the expected richness and relevance of information relevant to the research questions (Yin, 2011:311).

Several factors determine the selection of a purposeful sample. For example, Ritchie et al. (2013:131-132) stated that it is important to achieve a balance between the number of people taking into account different age groups or socioeconomic categories. The specific nature of research may require the study of the opinions and circumstances of a subgroup little known to others. The targeted sample does not have to be large, and interviewers should carefully select their interviewees to meet the criteria for diversity and symbolic representation (Ritchie et al., 2013:143-144). Gentles et al. (2015:1782) asserted that the qualitative approach requires a small sample size compared to the quantitative approach since it aims to obtain information that corresponds to understanding the depth, variation and complexity related to the phenomenon studied, whereas the quantitative approach uses many samples to make statistical estimates. In the qualitative approach, purposive samples are accompanied by snowball

sampling, which is considered to be chain-referral sampling where primary data sources nominate other potential participants in a particular domain (Bagheri and Saadati, 2015:2-3). In other words, researchers identify one individual who meets the study criteria, and this participant recommends someone else to participate in this study since they are more knowledgeable and experienced or are active practitioners in the subject (Perrin, 2020:207).

This study has used two methods to identify the relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors at different levels concerning the community participatory approach in tourism development in Oman (Table 6). First, a review of relevant case studies shows that there are key players in sustainable tourism development, such as the different members of host communities that are considered the owners of natural and cultural assets at tourism destinations and who benefit from their involvement in tourism development. This was observed in case studies from Malaysia and Japan (Asker et al., 2010), Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), Norway (Brandt and Haugen, 2011), Botswana (Stone, 2015), and Kenya (Odede et al., 2015) and stakeholders have been identified accordingly.

Secondly, official bodies are considered crucial in the regulation of sustainable tourism that potentially shape host community development at tourism destinations. For example, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Manpower in Oman provide various initiatives that play a significant role in youth training and involvement in the tourism and hotel sector (Al-Shaaibi, 2011; and Balushi (2008) in Oman. Likewise, the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia has provided entrepreneurship training and foreign language classes for small-scale restaurant workers, taxi drivers, and host families (Timothy, 2012). Managers of the Chitwan National Park in Nepal have also collaborated with the local community to share the fruits of tourism development (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011). A comprehensive listing of public sector stakeholders was drawn up for Oman.

Private sector stakeholders who will have developed an understanding of the community participatory approach in sustainable tourism are the tour operators, who manage tour programmes and attract tourists to visit destinations of interest. This research identified and engaged several such private sector operators in Oman for which understanding was developed

through several examples. Safari tour operators in Botswana, for example, participate in sustainable development by providing training related to hospitality, marketing, and safety for host communities in villages in Botswana (Stone, 2015). Tour operators have contributed to the creation of marketing brands for rural destinations, such as Discover the Traditional Culture and Untouched Thailand in Thailand (Dolezal, 2011). Furthermore, a corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme offers English language classes at Zighy Bay Resort in Oman (Al Amri, 2008). In Indonesia, a CSR programme focuses on the rehabilitation of coral reefs and on increasing fruit production in Bali (Rahmawati et al., 2016).

The second method used to identify relevant stakeholders involves reviewing official documents, particularly the annual reports of public and private institutions in Oman. Understandably, the annual report published by the Ministry of Tourism shows that it regulates and licences the tourism products of rural destinations such as heritage lodges, green homes and guest houses to encourage locals to invest in rural tourism (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2016). However, the public authority of SMEs, *Riyada* reports that it provides 112 training programmes that focus mostly on entrepreneurship in various economic activities including tourism, and 106 training programmes in Oman for youth entrepreneurship (2020). Through its CSR programme, the Omani tourism development company, *Omran* sponsored training, financing and marketing for the Omani youth who produce local delicacies like chocolate and fruit in Jabal Al Akhdar province (2015). Regarding financing, the Public Authority for Craft Industries funded 1,062 craftsmen in 2018 and helped them to acquire machinery and raw materials, which increased by 91,289.5 OMR in 2019 (Oman, the Authority for Craft Industries, 2019). Likewise, banks provide funds for training; for example, Bank Muscat initiated the *Al-Wathbah Academy* programme to fund training, financing, accounting and human resources (Bank Muscat, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that this research aimed to gather a sample of participants who represented various positions, responsibilities and roles at the official and social levels to study their views and perceptions from all sides. For example, at the official level, officials in decision-making positions, such as ministers, undersecretaries and owners of private businesses such as tour operators and craft-making businesses, were interviewed to determine whether the institutions they represent or the entities they own have prioritised the participatory

community approach as a strategic agenda. At the operational level, executives, such as directors-general, directors and executive employees in public institutions and private entities such as banks, were interviewed to explore methods for implementing projects connected to the participatory approach in tourism on the ground. At the social level, local participants, namely village leaders (sheikh), elders who practice traditional activities such as agriculture and herding, youths, practitioners and females, were offered the opportunity to express their views and share their concerns.

Table 6: Selected Sample of Government, the Private Sector, Independent Participants and Residents

Governmental institutions	Private companies & Operators	Local participants
Supreme Council for Planning	Oman Tourism College	Local participants at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in Oman
Ministry of Tourism	Oman Tourism Development (Omran)	
Ministry of Heritage and Culture	Local banks in Oman	
Ministry of Manpower	Tour operators	
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Accommodation providers	
Ministry of Education	Freelance tour guides	
Public Authority for Craft Industries	Food stuff sellers	
Public Authority for SMEs Development	Craft makers	
Al-Raffd Fund		
Majlis Ash-Shura Council (Consultative Council)		
Oman Woman Society		

3.2.4 Accessibility of research participants

Wilson (2014:30) stated that an introductory letter explaining the research background and goals is required for participants or sponsors to nominate the right participants for this study. Taylor et al. (2015:50-51) explained that most institutions have a simple system to access employees at an operational level. The access to research participants was helped by the researcher's personal circumstances working for the Ministry of Tourism in Oman. This researcher has experience in developing rural destinations in Oman working for the Ministry

and had thus established excellent network of contacts and working relationships with concerned stakeholders in both the government and private sectors. Private sector access was clearly facilitated by the resercaher's role in the Ministry. Additionally, the researcher had previously interacted with locals in both the studied villages, which the researcher visited on various occasions with the technical team of the Ministry.

3.3 Data Collection

Sources of evidence can be extracted from documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009, 2014). To obtain rich and diverse information to support arguments and the quality of the research in general, this study conducted semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis and site observations (Figure 40). These combined methods helped to triangulate the results to better understand the context.
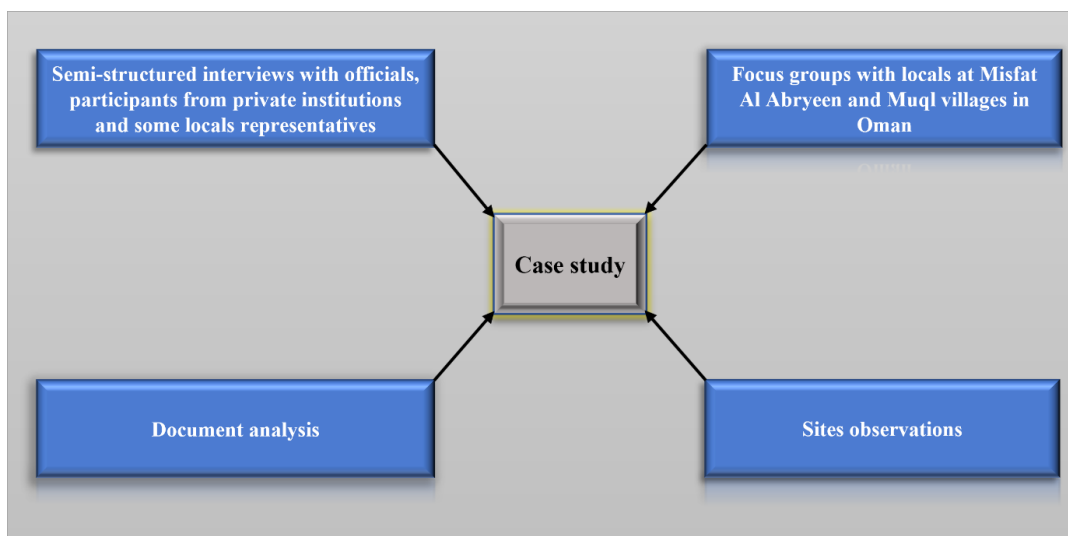
Figure 40: The sources of data used in this study (the researcher's work).

Concerning practical data collection, all necessary measures were taken to ensure that data were collected in a manner that complied with ethical criteria and procedures. After the agreed appointment with the participants and before the interviews took place, an introduction was given to participants, supported by the Participant Information Sheet, in which the reasons for carrying out this research project were explained so that consent could be obtained before starting the conversation. The consent form and the Participant Information Sheet were

developed in both Arabic and English so that all participants could be informed about the guidelines and their rights regarding their voluntary participation. The majority of participants in both the government and private sectors, as well as men from both villages, agreed with the interviews being recorded, as most of them had previous experience. However, a few participants at government sector, the females in both villages, preferred not to be recorded, since they felt uncomfortable participating as explained below (Section 3.3.2).

Most of the semi-structured interviews took place in official stakeholder premises in a quiet space, such as an office or a meeting room. Other interviews were held at a café in commercial malls, such as the spacious Muscat Grand Mall and the Carrefour Centre, or conducted over the phone. Participants from the two village communities were interviewed through focus groups conducted at the community meeting hall (*sbal*) in Misfat Al-Abryeen, and in the local guest room (*majlis*) in Muql, and some on local farms under the shade of trees. Most of the interviews were conducted in Arabic. English was used with a few participants in public and private institutions in Oman, who were open to using either language.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method that aims to gather facts, attitudes and opinions on research topics that are being investigated by encouraging respondents to discuss related factors and issues during the interview. As closed and open-ended questions are used, the findings could provide qualitative and quantitative data (Wilson, 2014:24-25). Gray (2014:385-386) pointed out that semi-structured interviews are not standardised and consist of a list of topics and questions that must be addressed by the researcher. Depending on the direction the interview takes, it is expected that additional questions will arise or changes will be made to some questions that were not included at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, open-ended and emerging questions provide more valuable and multivalent data than surveys do.

Therefore, such interviews were undertaken with all representatives of the governmental sector and private institutions, who represent the strategic and operational levels. In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews and valuable discussions increased the number of participants, and as a result, a larger amount of information was collected, which enhanced the research. The conversation with purposive participants at governmental and private institutions resulted in additional interviews with participants who had specific knowledge and experience related to this research. Therefore, the total number of participants representing the governmental sector was 34, and 22 participants were from the private sector (Figure 41).
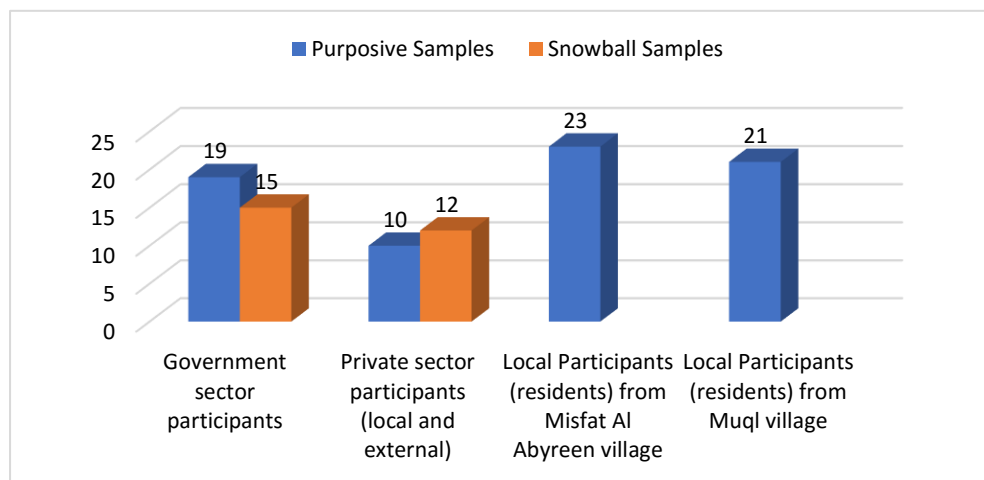
Figure 41: Number of participants in governmental and private sectors as well as local participants in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages.

The participant questions focused on three areas: (1) the nature of the plans, programmes and initiatives offered to encourage community participation in tourism development in Oman, with an emphasis on the selected villages; (2) the current level of local participation; and (3) the barriers to achieving the plans and initiatives and the actions necessary to address these challenges. The questions were directed at different participants representing the strategic and operational levels, especially in the governmental sector, and others representing external private institutions, including freelancers and local businesspeople that deal exclusively with tourism development in rural areas, mainly in the selected villages.

However, most of the participants, particularly representatives of public and private institutions, preferred to focus on the field and competence of the institution that they represented. The interviews showed that there is no particular institution focused on whole

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initiatives related to awareness-raising, training, or financing associated with the legislative framework. For example, a participant representing the Al-Raffd Fund focused on one initiative, particularly the financing of SMEs, and participants from the Ministry of Manpower talked about training opportunities. Some interviews focused on more than one initiative, such as the Ministry of Tourism, which focused on awareness-raising and legislation. In addition, CSR representatives from banks addressed the community participatory approach from a training and financing perspective. Table 7 provides an overview of the dialogue and discussion related to the initiatives of the community participatory approach in Oman.

Table 7: An overview of dialogue and discussion with representatives from public and private institutions and freelance participants

Participant	Scope of interview
Supreme Council for Planning	Approach to developmental plan formulation
Ministry of Tourism	Awareness-raising Licensing of tourism products Tourism development and marketing
Ministry of Heritage and Culture	Documentation and conservation programmes for cultural heritage sites such as forts, castles, villages, underwater antiques and World Heritage Sites. Licensing of private museums and restoration programmes
Ministry of Manpower	Training opportunities and Omanisation levels in the private tourism sector
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Commercial law and licensing schemes for SMEs
Ministry of Education	Educational curricula related to heritage management and tourism development
Public Authority for Craft Industries	Training in craft industries
Public Authority for SME Development	Training and orientation for SME entrepreneurs
Al-Raffd Fund	Financing SME enterprises
Majlis Ash-Shura Council (Consultative Council)	Representing citizens in decision-making processes
Omani Women's Association	Empowering women in socioeconomic development
Oman Tourism College	Training programmes in tourism, hospitality and guiding
Oman Tourism Development (Omran)	Tourism development and CSR programmes
Local banks	CSR programme related to training and financing
Tour operators	Promoting rural destinations and involving locals in managing tour programmes
Accommodation providers	An opportunity for locals to become involved in hospitality
Freelance tour guides	An opportunity for locals to become involved in tour guiding
Food sellers	Providing goods to meet tourists' consumption needs
Craft makers	Manufacturing souvenirs

During the writing stage of this research, it became clear that some of the main points and statements from the interviews needed further clarification, supported by real-world examples. This necessitated contacting some of the participants yet again to get more information about some of the key points to strengthen the research arguments related to awareness, training, financing and legislative initiatives. For example, an interview with an official revealed that a green home initiated by the Ministry of Tourism was not permitted on a farm irrigated by the

aflaj system, according to clauses 46-48 of the Oman Law on the Use of Agricultural Land (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2017). Further phone interviews with the participant clarified the rationale behind the above-stated clause, that it was to avoid focusing on tourism at the expense of enhancing agricultural activities. Another example was a statement made that the hotel sector in Oman was an inappropriate employment place for the youth, especially those who came from rural backgrounds, because these hotels encouraged activities not condoned by Islam, such as drinking alcohol and nightclubs. Since it was crucial to support this point with examples, the researcher communicated again with the same participant, who stated that many examples support this point, not only in hotels that serve alcoholic beverages but also in hotels that do not provide this service.

3.3.2   Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is a useful interactive method that obtains significant information from many participants at one time and takes less time than conducting individual face-to-face interviews. Typically, this method involves a moderator or facilitator to manage seven to ten participants (Harris et al., 2013:44). The focus group does not consist of a collection of individual interviews, but rather an interaction between the moderator and a group of respondents who analyse a particular topic. Generally, this interaction provides participants who have a perspective and experience an opportunity to share ideas and listen to each other's viewpoints (Ritchie et al., 2014:214-215) and to offer alternative or contradictory perspectives. Wilson (2014:84-86) clarified that the purpose of this interaction is to examine the attitudes, feedback and opinions of the participants to obtain enough information and explanations about problem-solving, study design, description of events and the product's manufacturing problem.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the focus group method was deemed an appropriate method to examine the divergent attitudes, perceptions and experiences of residents in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql to identify the circumstances, characteristics and problems regarding the nature of the community participation in tourism development. Six focus groups were conducted, with between four and six respondents in each one. At the same time, some keys stakeholder participants, especially farmers and makers of handicrafts, were unable to attend designated focus group interviews because of prior commitments, which led the

researcher to conduct individual interviews with them. In addition, female participants in both villages were phone interviewed separately, because the women felt more comfortable to share their opinions over the phone than face-to-face. This attributed to fact that female in rural places felt shy and nervous while they speak face-to-face with non-local person.

Residents of both villages were asked about the types of tourism products that attract tourists to visit their villages and their relationships with the tourists, government and private developers, and tourism operators in the study area. In addition, their attitudes, perceptions and comfort towards tourism were sought, and the current local initiatives to promote tourism and socioeconomic development were discussed. Finally, the questions aimed to understand the current barriers to local participation in tourism development and obtain the respondents' suggestions for overcoming them.

3.3.3   Document analysis

A wide range of documents relating to the phenomenon under study is needed for a systematic assessment and analysis from different angles. These documents include advertisements, brochures, newspapers, letters, institutional reports and media programmes (Bowen, 2009:27-28), as well as online resources and archival material (Leavy, 2014:444). Such documents can provide statistical or numerical data compiled by previous researchers (Yen, 2009:120-121; Yen, 2014:125). In this study, many published and unpublished material on the examined villages were obtained from government and private sector institutions. Most of the sources collected were statistics, laws issued following royal and ministerial decrees published in the Official Gazette of Oman, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and agreements between governmental institutions and private operators (Table 8).

Table 8: A list of collected and anaylised documents

Title	Source
Royal Decree: Promulgating the Basic Statute of the State	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 1996)
Royal Decree: Issuing the Labour Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2003)
Royal Decree: Establishes the Ministry of Tourism and appoints its. Minister	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2004)
Royal Decree: Endorses the administrative division of the Sultanate and regulate the work of governors	(The official Gazette of Oman, 2011)
Royal Decree: Promulgates Municipal Councils Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011)
Royal Decree: Reformation of the Cabinet of Ministers	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011)
Royal Decree: Establishing the Public Authority for the development of Small and Medium Sizes Enterprise and Issuing its regulations	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2013)
Royal Decree: Promulgates the Cultural Heritage Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019)
Royal Decree: Promulgates the Minerals (wealth/resources) Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019)
Royal Decree: Issuing of Oman's new Commercial Companies Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019)
Royal Decree: Establishing the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020)
Royal Decree: Forming the Council of Ministers	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020)
Royal Decree: To amend the name of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, defining its specializations and approving its organizational structure	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020)
Royal Decree: Abolish the Public Authority for Handicrafts Industries	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020)
Royal Decree: Provincial and Municipal Affairs System' issued	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020)
Ministerial Decree: Organising the training for Omanis	(Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, 1999)
Ministerial Decree: Issuing the Executive Regulations of the Tourism Law	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2016)
Ministerial decree: issuing a regulation on the use of agricultural land	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2017)
Ministerial decree: determining participation fees in international exhibitions and workshops	(The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019)
Annual report 2019	(Oman Development Bank, 2020)
Statistics and Indicators for 2016 & 2018	(Al-Raffd Fund, 2016-2018)
Statistical Yearbook 2018 -2019	(National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2018- 2020)
Statistics of Omani and expatriate employees in tourism private sector	(Ministry of Manpower, 2019-2020)
Statistics of visitors for Salalah Tourism Season by Nationality 2019	(National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019)
Statistics of Omani tour guides by the end of 2019	(Ministry of Tourism. 2020)
Statistics of tourist accommodation establishment.	(Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, 2021)
Statistics of graduated students 2013-2019	(Oman Tourism College, 2020)
Annual Report 2015- 2020	(Ministry of Tourism, 2016 - 2020)
Annual Report 2018	(Public Authority for SMEs Development Riyada, 2019)
Annual Report 2018-2019	(Oman, Public Authority for Craft Industries, 2019-2020)
Final National Strategy	(Ministry of Tourism, 2006)

A Brief of the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2020)	(Supreme Council for Planning, 2016)
Oman Tourism 2040 Strategy: Executive Summary	(Ministry of Tourism, 2016)
Oman 2040 Vision (Preliminary Vision Document)	(Oman 2040 Vision, 2019)
2nd Sustainability Report	(Omran, 2013)
Economic Review 2015: First Quarter	(National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2015)
Omanis survey on savings and investment	(National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2018)
Sustainability Report 2019	(Bank Muscat, 2020)
Foreign Investment	(National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020)
Wadi Bani Khalid Feasibility Study	(Ministry of Tourism, 2012)
Memorandum of Understanding	(Ministry of Tourism and Bank Muscat, 2015)

3.3.4 Site observation

Observation, which is considered an important primary data collection method, consists of the direct observation of various aspects of the case study, such as real events, human actions, behaviours, buildings and physical environment. These observational data would support or be consistent with arguments and interpretations against narrative evidence (Yen, 2012:11). Practically, location settings, people and events are documented using field notes, photographs and audio recordings (Yen, 2012:11; Gray, 2013:177; Yen, 2014:115).

Numerous site visits were carried out in the villages under investigation to identify the relationships between the narrative data provided by the residents and the actual context of the villages. Observations in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql (Table 9) were focused on exploring and describing the natural and cultural environments, various socio-economic activities of local people, the nature of tourism infrastructure and the positive and negative effects of tourist movements.

Table 9: Site Observations in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql Villages

No	Village	Start date of site visit	End date of site visit
1	Misfat Al-Abryeen	17 July 2018	19 July 2018
2	Muql	28 July 2018	30 July 2018
3	Misfat Al-Abryeen	26 December 2018	26 December 2018
4	Muql	26 August 2019	26 August 2019
5	Muql	22 December 2019	22 December 2019
6	Misfat Al-Abreen	27 December 2019	27 December 2019

3.3.5 Reflection on the Data Collection Mechanism

The data collection mechanism benefited from the researcher's dual vantage point of outsider to the subject matter, in his government official role, and insider, himself having a rural background. As for the former, meetings with participants, especially in the government and private sectors, were facilitated by the researcher's network of contacts within government and private sector institutions, which helped conduct a substantial number of 34 interviews. Specifically chosen for their snowball sampling potential, interviews with decision-makers and government executive and operational personnel opened the doors to additional interviews in both the government and private sector. Moreover, the researcher's government employee status enabled smooth access to unpublished documents such as official reports, ministerial decrees and memoranda of understanding. as well as confidential documents. This crucially allowed to examine the government sector's performance in relation to plans and initiatives encouraging citizens and local communities' participation in socioeconomic and tourism development.

The researcher's insider/ outsider vantage point enabled participants in both villages to freely express their opinions and concerns about the government's efforts in infrastructure development and technical and financial capacity building in tourism operation. This helped critically evaluate existing official visions and plans, implementation processes, and the extent to which the visions were formulated to achieve goals. On the other hand, having a rural personal background contributed to gaining deeper insights at the local level in the villages studied, through easy access to local youth, elders and females. The shared tribal cultural background facilitated meetings with key stakeholders in both villages. for example, through chain-referrals by sheikhs. In addition, the tribal cultural background helped the researcher comfortably conduct meetings with locals, especially elders in the field, while they were busy tending to the farmlands or making handicrafts. It also motivated locals to generously talk about traditional activities they performed in the past, besides telling engaging anecdotal stories.

In addition, sharing the same socio-cultural values with locals in both villages helped explore females' views, despite the interviews being conducted by phone. Guardians and female participants felt comfortable about sharing their views and concerns about tourism because the researcher shared the same background and understood cultural communication boundaries, avoiding asking sensitive questions.

3.4 Data Transcription and Analysis

The semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings conducted in Arabic were translated into English. The transcription was helped by the researcher's rural origin, which helped in fully understanding the sociocultural context and nuances of the responses. This characteristic strengthens the reliability and credibility of the research: the more the sociohistorical context of the text is understood, the more sensitive and profound its interpretation will be (Gillen and Petersen, 2005:147).

As suggested by Saunders et al. (2016), the thematic patterns emerging from interviews were based on the aims and objectives of the research study. Although the data collected was extensive and computer software for qualitative analysis, such as NVivo, was available, manual data analysis and thematisation were deemed appropriate. The transcribed material were grouped into themes connected to the concept of local participation in tourism development, particularly in the studied villages and in Oman in general. From translation to interpretation, the data transcription and analysis took five steps (see Figure 42).
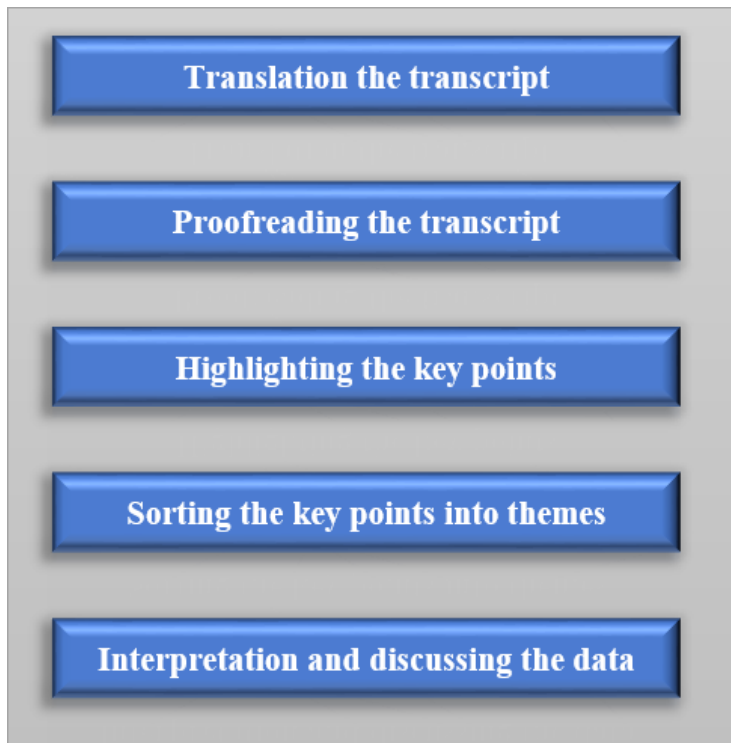
Figure 42: The five steps of the data transcription and analysis for this research.

3.4.1 Reliability, Validity and Triangulation

Reliability refers to minimising the number of errors and biases in the research project. Some of the previous studies have been assessed as weak; to ensure that the study content is consistent with the objectives, the interviewer should not be directly involved with the tasks being judged. A robust research fieldwork protocol is essential to ensure reliability of the fieldwork (Yin, 2014:49). It is also necessary to ensure that bias has not influenced the results (Noble and Smith, 2015:34). The reliability of qualitative research, according to Leung (2015:326) and Cypress (2017:256), lies in the consistency of practice, analysis and conclusions.

In this study, a fieldwork protocol was developed in line with university ethics policy and procedures, which specified the research project's goals and suggested samples and key questions that ensured the research aims would be met. In other words, fieldwork represents the steps that were taken by researcher to carry out data collection, for example, interviews questions, consent form, participation sheet, samples and risk assessment associated with fieldwork project. The government, private sector and residents' participants were requested

so that research questions could be answered as means of reduction reduce errors and subjectivity.

Validity relates to the extent to which the data collected in the research project are correct and credible. A valid study should show what happened, existed and is true (Gray, 2013:692; Cypress, 2017:256-257). Leung defined validity as follows:

> Validity in qualitative research means 'appropriateness' of the tools, processes, and data. Whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, the design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate, and finally, the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015:326).

In this study, as already mentioned, majority of the interviews were recorded in Arabic to reduce the possibility of misinterpreted answers during data transcription. The aim of this project was explained clearly in Arabic to the participants verbally and through information sheets to ensure that they fully understood the scope. Given that the interview questions and answers were written and recorded in Arabic and the answers then translated into English which could have led to inaccuracies through translation. To address this issue, both Arabic and English responses were thoroughly reviewed to ensure that the transcribed material was entirely consistent with the collected primary data.

Triangulation, which is used for qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods (Wilson, 2014:74), refers to using more than one approach to study certain phenomena to improve the confidence and reliability of results and the quality of research in general (Bryman, 2004:1). According to Gray (2013:692), triangulation involves using multiple methods or data sources to examine a specific phenomenon simultaneously or sequentially to improve the reliability of the data. Triangulation is intended to reduce the limitations and errors for those studies to obtain richer data. In this study, data triangulation is used to examine the same phenomena related to the concept of local participation in tourism in two rural destinations by investigating the perceptions and opinions of three parties: government institutions, private entities and the residents of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages.

3.4.2   Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, along with the requirements for full anonymity and confidentiality of data gathered through interviews and focus groups, are a key component of research involving human participants. Yin asserted this matter in the following statements:

> Anonymity is necessary on some occasions. The most common rationale occurs when a case study is on a controversial topic. Anonymity then serves to protect the real case and its real participants. A second occasion occurs when the issuance of the final case report may affect the subsequent actions of those that were studied (Yin, 2014:197).

This study adhered to the University's ethics policy, with the data collected being intended only to fulfil the aim and objectives of this research. Before the interviews began, it was clearly stated in English and Arabic, both verbally and in writing through the participant information sheet and in the consent form, that the confidentiality and data protection of the information were guaranteed through complete anonymisation of the names and identities of the participants and that no harm would occur as a result of taking part in the study. Considering the researcher's familiarity with the sociocultural context of the respondents, questions that could have been uncomfortable to answer were avoided.

The names and identities of participants were anonymised by providing alphanumeric codes that only identified the sector and the village they represented (Table 10). Where participants gave their consent to use photographs depicting themselves, these were included as visual aid to support the research arguments. Such consent was recorded of participants during interviews. However, due care was applied to avoid the inclusion of any sensitive or controversial information associated with the participants' images.

Table 10: Criteria and Codes Used to Anonymise the Participants in this Research

The participant	Example anonymised code
A governmental participant	GOV-N34 GOV refers to the government sector N34 was chosen randomly
A participant from the private sector	PVT-N34 PVT refers to the private sector N34 was chosen randomly
A local participant from Misfat Al-Abryeen village	LMA-17 L refers to locals MA refers to Misfat Al-Abryeen village 17 was chosen randomly
A local participant from Muql village	LMU-17 L refers to locals MU refers to Muql village 17 was chosen randomly

3.4.3 Generalisation of Results

The possibility of transferring the results of a particular study to other contexts and population groups remains a matter of debate. According to Noble and Smith (2015:34) and Cypress (2017:259), the transferability of results to different contexts or environments is possible and can be assessed by taking into account the similarities between the social context, time, place and people. However, it has been argued that generalising findings to other environments or contexts generates errors, especially in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2009; Leung, 2015:326). Yin (2009) stated that qualitative data can only be generalised theoretically but not to participants.

As this study examines local participation in tourism development in two villages in Oman by examining the perceptions of the government sector, private sector and residents as key actors, it may be possible to transfer the findings to other rural areas in Oman with similar sociocultural, geographic and ecological characteristics. The findings are expected to benefit the understanding by decision makers in Oman of the nature of tourism development in other places and envisage the involvement of local populations. The eventual aim would be to develop a national framework to support, enable and empower local participation at tourism destinations, and remove all current barriers.

3.5 Limitations

This study used qualitative methods, mainly semi-structured and focus group interviews, which were considered useful methods to obtain diverse data from the participants about the local participation approach in tourism development in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql. However, certain limitations and restrictions were observed during data collection; for example, some participants were reluctant to have their interviews tape-recorded, fearing that stating facts could result in the loss of their governmental job. For this reason, a few participants preferred notes to be taken instead, while those who did not mind being recorded may have avoided sharing some sensitive information that could harm them later. This is possible because some participants were uncomfortable when expressing and answering questions while being recorded, leading some of them to give somewhat unclear answers, especially in response to questions related to evaluating the performance of governmental initiatives. Al Maamari (2020:113-114) also experienced this limitation in the Omani context when examining the perceptions of multiple stakeholders on the long-term success of tourism resort projects in Oman.

In addition, as stated in Sections 3.3.13.3.2 , some interviews were carried out remotely by telephone. However, face-to-face interviews are considered to be more effective and interactive than telephone interviews (Block and Erskine, 2012:30-32). Brennen (2017:33) explained that proper planning of the interview timing is critical to ensure respondents have enough time to participate without rushing to other commitments. Appointments were made with the respondents well in advance. However, due to various unexpected circumstances, several interviews with representatives from the public and private sectors had to be postponed and were eventually conducted remotely in the UK. Another limitation was that the interviews, especially those among decision makers, were interrupted by mobile devices ringing and receiving and sending messages and by people knocking on their office door, thereby they got distracted, shortened their answers and lost the train of thought.

A further limitation is that despite attempting to avoid any possibility of bias or giving hints to the participants to guide them towards specific answers, researcher bias can occur involuntarily and unconsciously. Numerous authors in research methodology, such as Evanoff (2005:67),

Boslaugh (2008:364) and Herkowitz et al. (2012:165), claimed that this issue is considered difficult to control and that the best research minimises the possibilities of bias: 'Chance or random errors are unsystematic, difficult to control and it is not known how they influence (or bias) the study results' (Whitehead et al., 2012:220). Even though the researcher came from a rural background, which did facilitate meaningful understanding of the responses and feelings of the participants – particularly at the local level, clarification was sought – more than once if needed, to verify field information and the transcription of the recorded material. However, data transcription could be affected by unexpected minor errors during the process, from Arabic and English, and could potentially affect thematic analysis.

3.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative research approach adopted to investigate the levels of local participation at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in Oman. The methods employed – semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, site observations and document analysis – showed that the phenomenon of local participation has been examined from different angles, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current plans, strategies and initiatives by stakeholders in government and private institutions. The findings provide insights into the impact of tourism on the studied villages, their communities' attitudes to and perceptions of tourism development and initiatives for its promotion. The findings also helped to identify appropriate measures that can be used to improve local participation in the sustainable management of tourism.

CHAPTER FOUR: CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN OMAN

As Limbert (2010:164-170) and Allen and Rigsbee (2014) stated, the Sultanate of Oman experienced a renaissance in education and significant economic change due to oil exploration in commercial quantities in the late 1960s. In addition, as stated in Section 1.1.3, oil resources have been directed to build modern Oman. This transformation took place with the involvement of Omani nationals as an essential part alongside the government. In other words, this continual progress required the creation of a platform for the government and its people to exchange views and play a collective role in the state's development. As this research aims to understand the exchange of views about self-sufficiency and wellbeing between the government and its citizens, the research questions explore the nature of the relationship between the parties involved in Oman's socioeconomic and tourism development.

Extensive information was obtained from the semi-structured interviews with officials and from an analysis of official documents. This chapter discusses the collected data and examines the concept and dimensions of citizen participation in decision-making processes in connection with socioeconomic and tourism development in Oman. The chapter starts with an overview of the steps that citizens have taken over the past five decades to participate in decision-making processes to improve their quality of life. In this context, the extent to which citizens can express their opinions and concerns and how this is reflected in national development and tourism plans is examined. In addition, this chapter evaluates initiatives, such as awareness-raising, training and financing programmes and regulations, to determine their effectiveness in enabling citizens to manage their financial resources.

However, since the laws in Oman provide equal opportunities for males and females in terms of education and employment, this research aims to understand the current status and nature of women's participation in socioeconomic tourism development. In addition, this analysis provides an insight into the sociocultural barriers that limit women's participation (Al Hasani, 2015:121; Al-Balushi, 2008:120-121; Al-Shaaibi, 2011, Ch5:15) and suggests an appropriate path for women's participation that is not at the expense of their socio-cultural values.

4.1 Citizens' Participation in Decision-Making Processes

As the literature addresses, the participation' approach is a gradual and staged process, as stated in the previous frameworks for citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; Garrod, 2003). This research examines the nature of the stages of citizen participation in Oman to understand how opinions and concerns have been shared between citizens and officials towards common goals. This examination determines in which areas citizens can express and share their opinions with the authorities.

As mentioned in Section 0, a platform has been built since the 1990s through the formation of Majlis Ash-Shura (the Consultative Council) to create a bridge between the Omani government and its citizens. This council has contributed significantly to representing citizens' socioeconomic development and wellbeing by directing and monitoring government performance (Plekhanov, 2004; Kéchichian, 2008:129-130; Bandyopadhyay, 2020). This Council also discusses the types of additional tools available to citizens to share their concerns and opinions with regulators and to pursue their interests without intermediaries. Finally, the national development plans are validated in this research to determine the extent to which these tools are effective and useful and to take into account the voices and opinions of citizens as a key partner for Oman's socio-economic and tourism development.

4.1.1   Overview of Omanis' Participation in Decision-Making Processes

In parallel with this modest renaissance of the education system in Oman, as addressed in Chapter Introduction (Section: 1.1.3), certain paths have been taken to encourage citizens to participate in decision-making processes and the development of the state. One such method is the annual 'Meet the People' tours that the Sultan developed with ministers and advisors in the early 1970s to reduce the gap between the government and its citizens by discussing their livelihood matters related to infrastructure requirements such as electricity services, health, education, roads (Ochs, 1999:130). King (2009:31) saw these tours as a response of the Sultan to keep to his promise for greater participation of Omanis in the country's development. These visits took place in a temporary camp some distance away from the residential area, where

residents and their representatives were allowed to meet him and ministers face-to-face without intermediaries (Figure 43 and Figure 44).

Figure 43: Sultan Qaboos listens to elders during the informal 'Meet the People' tour in the early 1970s (Majalisna, 2015b).

Figure 44: A face-to-face dialogue between Sultan Qaboos and his citizens during the formal annual 'Meet the People' tour in Bahla in 2013. Ministers sit on the right and left sides of the Sultan listening to this direct dialogue (Ministry of Information, 2018).

King (2009:31) noted that these democratic tours encouraged Omanis to request infrastructure projects such as roads, hospitals and schools. Allen and Regsbee (2014:47-48) described that this 'tour started as an informal excursion from the palace but became an important two-week official event in the 1990s when the sultan joined some ministers and other officials'.

A significant point of these tours is that the Sultan wanted to communicate directly with the people of Oman to hear their concerns about developing infrastructure or suggestions for improving the quality of life of Omani citizens (Plekhanov, 2004:275-276). Typically, these tours resulted in certain ministers of services being asked about the performance of the institutions. As a result, most of the decisions were made immediately by the ministers of services for implementation. For example, a respondent with long-term experience in developmental planning confirmed that some orders for new infrastructure reached the Ministry immediately after His Majesty visited various regions of Oman. Despite this being the fifth development plan its financial budget was approved (GOV-G23). This suggests that people were able to present their questions and opinions to the government and the government addressed their concerns about the direct implementation of these orders in return.

After these formal and informal visits since the 1970s, two legislature bodies were formed in the 1990s: the State Council (Majlis A-Dawlah) and the Consultative Council or parliament (Majlis Ash-Shura), as addressed earlier (see Section 0). Majlis Ash-Shura is responsible for reviewing and commenting on government policies and legislation to support economic development (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011a). Ismael and Ismael (2012:426) stated that the Council became a watchdog to assess and criticise the government's performance.

After peaceful protests in Oman in 2011, the Sultan responded to Omanis' requests to reform the government structure while maximising Ash-Shura members' role in supporting employment, education, training and economic sector development. The Basic Statutes of the State (al-Nizam al-Asasilil-Dawla) was modified in October 2011, and the Consultative Council (Majlis Ash-Shura) was granted more powers to perform various functions, including reviewing and contributing to the approval, rejection and amendment of legislation as well as discussing, criticising and interrogating ministers of service institutions (Clinton, 2014:1956).

At least 15 Ash-Shura members are allowed to enquire and interrogate each minister of service on their competence and performance (Al-Azri, 2012:141; Voskressenski, 2017:274-275).

Above point indicates that plans, strategies and agreements for the socioeconomic industry in Oman, including the annual state budget, should be referred to the Majlis Ash-Shura for review to ensure that these plans are geared towards society and the development of the state. Furthermore, all ministers of service should obey all instruments used by Ash-Shura members to assess government performance within a specified time (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011a:13). In other words, ministers have to forward the annual report to the Ash-Shura Council for discussion during public meetings (Figure 45), which the media covers and shares with the public. Participants (GOV-W02 and GOV-Y17, GOV-M13 and GOV-B06) reported that Ash-Shura empowers citizens to voice their concerns through government officials. A decision-maker expressed that the Ash-Shura approach has been His Majesty's vision since the 1980s, when his representatives were previously selected by the government. Ash-Shura members are appointed in independent public elections to contribute to and comment on the government's performance.

Figure 45: Majlis Ash-Shura (left) hosts the H.E. Minister of Heritage and Tourism (right) to discuss the performance of heritage and tourism sector, ongoing and future plan (Oman TV Mubasher, 2021).

These additional powers for the Majlis Ash-Shura were followed by another significant change towards greater citizen participation through the formation of the Municipal Council (*Majlis Al-Baladi*) according to Royal Decree 116/2011, dated 26 October 2011 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011c). Like Ash-Shura, its members are elected by the public every four years to represent all 11 Oman governorates (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011a). Since the Ash-Shura Council is a regulatory and legislative arm, this body plays an advisory role to the ministries of services towards the implementation and completion of public projects in Oman

(Budhwar and Mellahi, 2016:88). Alsalmi (2012:274) described this Council as 'another step towards democracy by expanding the scope of public participation in various aspects.

However, the government has taken additional measures to maximise interaction and direct communication with Omanis, to make them partners in the State's development and to raise awareness of the decision made. According to the official respondent (GOV-B06), the Ash-Shura Council created a hashtag on its social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to discuss a specific economic problem or other social phenomena directly with citizens and expatriates' residents. These collected and analysed answers were forwarded to the responsible body for further processing. Another example related to improving the networking between citizens and government decision makers without intermediaries by establishing the Customer Service Department in 2012, which is headed by the ministers of all government institutions and aims to pay greater attention to public matters. According to a participant (GOV-H21), the mission of this department is to serve all citizens by receiving their concerns and letters, following the service in question and responding to their requests and enquiries within a certain period.

Progress has also been made in promoting citizen participation in decision-making and in state development, starting from higher education. In other words, university students learn different modules and case studies of citizen participation in decision-making. This is confirmed by Budhwar and Mellahi (2016:91), who stated that 'The recent establishment of the Department of Political Science in Oman is also a clear indication of the Sultan's intention to gradually prepare Omanis for greater participation in decision-making'.

Omanis' involvement in decision making has come a long way since the modest education renaissance in the early 1970s and the formal and informal 'Meet the People' tours, up to the establishment of the Majlis Ash-Shura (Consultative Council) and Majlis Al-Baladi (Municipal Council) to contribute to and assess the government's performance. These significant advances not only narrowed the distance between the government and the people, but they also contributed to the selection of academics, practitioners and Ash-Shura members as ministers and cabinet members in Oman according to the royal decree issued 31/2011 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011d).

Despite peaceful protests in 2011, the citizens' demands were met overall, with 50,000 job opportunities offered to tackle unemployment (Kumaraswamy, 2013; Förster, 2014; Khan, 2016:214-215). However, the above discussion suggests that encouraging citizens to share their opinions and concerns with the government to contribute to decision-making is a top-level agenda, meaning that the government looked at citizens as key partners in the state and community development, which was consistently pursued through public consultation. The next section examines the current level of citizen participation in tourism and development planning. A distinction is made between cases where the voices of residents have been heard, assessed and translated in different ways by regulators in development plans and strategies.

4.1.2 Citizens' Participation in Developmental Planning

The Supreme Council for Planning is a governmental entity formed in 2012 that is responsible for drawing up development plans (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2012). This council is in charge of defining, preparing and reviewing the objectives of Oman's Fifth Developmental Plan in collaboration with other relevant government agencies for socioeconomic diversification (Times of Oman, 2016). According to a government respondent (GOV-A12), the Supreme Council for Planning sends a form to the ministries and authorities concerned to formulate the purposes and objectives of every fifth development plan to be reviewed and approved and to propose the budget required for implementation.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Majlis Ash-Shura is obliged, together with the State Council, to contribute to the preparation and review of the development plan (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2011a:13). These parties discuss development plans in workshops and meetings with public and private stakeholders, such as governors, the National Youth Committee, the National Human Rights Committee, and academics and researchers from various universities, particularly Sultan Qaboos University SQU (participant GOV-W31). A recent report on the Ninth Development Plan confirmed that several workshops and focus groups have been organised involving all parties to test the achievability of the development goals (Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, 2016:19-20).

As such, all parties at the public, private and local levels are involved in preparing the development plan through joint meetings with cabinet boards and members of the State and Ash-Shura Councils (Figure 46). These meetings provide Ash-Shura members with opportunities to persuade ministers as regulators to approve their requests, which are likely related to infrastructure development in their provinces. In this manner, an Ash-Shura member (GOV-M07) expressed the following:

> The Council of Ministers and the Supreme Council for Planning welcomed and replied to many of our comments and requests regarding the development of the province, particularly during the discussion of the ministerial report and the annual meeting with the Council of Ministers.

Figure 46: Left: H.H. Sayyid Fahad bin Mahmood Al-Said is the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers in the Sultanate of Oman and listens to Ash-Shura members (Al-Shabiba Newspaper, 2018). Right: H.E. Minister of Transportation was in dialogue with another Ash-Shura member during the meeting between the cabinet board, the State, and Ash-Shura members on 3 May 2018 (Al-Roya Newspaper, 2018).

The Supreme Planning Council created an e-participation platform as an informal means of communicating with the public to make decisions without mediators. This social media platform, which is available to the public, aims to foster interaction and simplify communication between the government and the citizens (Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, 2019). The comments and suggestions made by the public on this page are saved and checked by the concerned specialists (Figure 47).
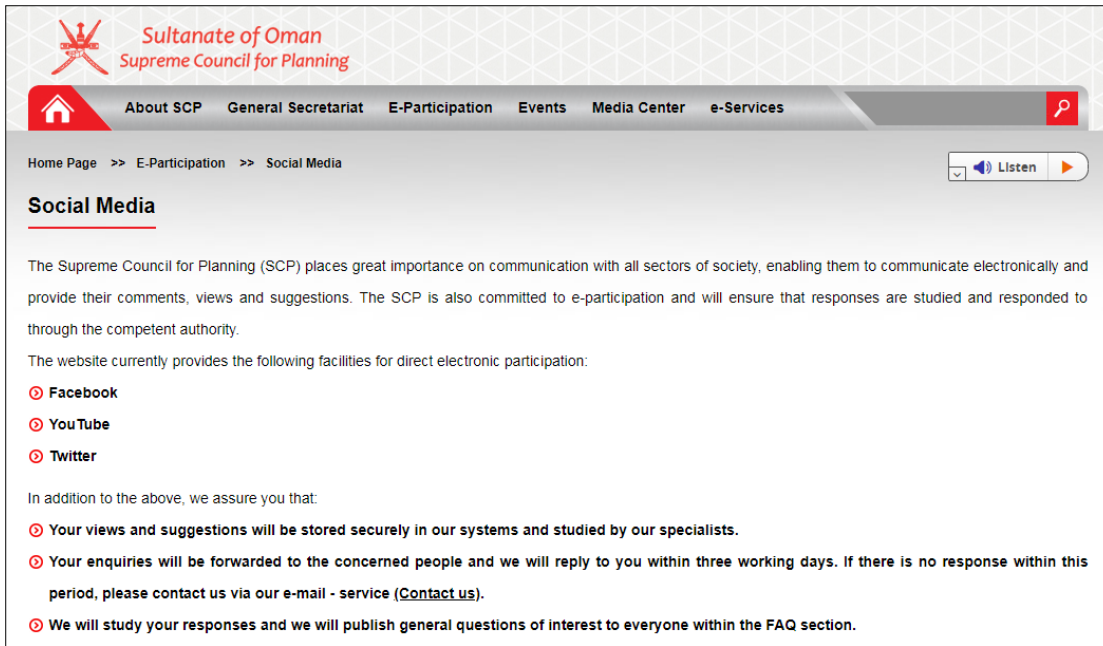
Figure 47: Webpage of the Supreme Council for Planning created to allow direct interaction with the public (Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, 2019).

According to the above stated formal and informal communication tools that are provided to planners and regulators to access citizens' views and requirements, the citizens have been defined alongside the government and the private sector as key stakeholders in socio-economic planning. This was confirmed by government officials (GOV-W31 and GOV-Y17). To prove this point, objective number eight of the Ninth Developmental Plan (2016-2020) is known as the 'development of governorates and the local community', in which a key stakeholder speaks about the importance of local community development in the context of national development (Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, 2016:52). This means that the role of the citizens is not limited to a proposal or opinion but is considered a joint venture between the planners and the residents of the development area.

As stated in Section 1.1.5, important steps have been taken to shape the future of Oman's socioeconomic, sociocultural and environmental issues in a longterm plan through Oman 2040 Vision. This vision is seen by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as a gateway to competitiveness and social wellbeing and is securely built on socio-economic development by identifying and overcoming challenges (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019:8). A participant (GOV-Y17) said that all stakeholders, including public institutions, the State and Ash-Shura members,

community members and university students, were involved in defining the scope of this vision. At the local level, a direct conversion was carried out with all the local representatives in the governor's office, Wali offices and universities, allowing young people to voice their concerns and opinions about this vision (Figure 48).

Figure 48: H.M. Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Sultan of Oman, Head of Oman 2040 Main Committee, discusses the pillars of the vision with young Omani people (Al Kalbani, 2019; Alroya Newspaper, 2019).

To prove that people's voices can be heard by these planners at the highest level when considering the most strategic directions of this vision, local communities have been frequently mentioned. For example, wellbeing and social life are the main elements of the known strategic direction of 'a decent and sustainable life for all' that aims to enable the local community to participate in various aspects of life. It was confirmed that 'Protecting young people's interests is a guarantee of the future. It stimulates their political, social, and economic participation and their contribution to shaping the future' (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019:21).

This analysis indicates that Oman 2040 Vision has heard the voices and concerns of most key partners, especially those at the local level. It also shows that planners and regulators have learned from similar planning and development processes in different Omani regions, which has led to many challenges, especially due to a lack of communication with residents. In short, the content of the Ninth Development Plan and Oman 2040 Vision shows that the government has reached a point where a transformation in the socioeconomic engine is needed to develop the private sector and local communities. These official visions are seen as additional support that community development has become an essential pillar in shaping the future of Oman's

socioeconomic sector through capacity building and skills development. This progress is attributed to a substantial platform which is provided for citizens, such as members of Ash Shura, local governors, youths and others, to express their views and concerns with regulators through formal and informal means.

4.1.3   Citizens' Participation in Tourism Planning

Community participation in development planning uses various direct and indirect means to convey peoples' views and opinions to relevant decision-makers. According to a participant (GOV-S71), the way the previous tourism plans were created was internal within government sector and spontaneous and typically involved some collaboration with experts in tourism matters, who did not see the need to examine the opinions at the local level. For example, Oman Tourism Plan 2006-2010 mentioned the goals of sustainable tourism as the best approach to achieve a balance between nature conservation values and tourism destinations (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2006:3-5). However, achieving these goals did not include the concept of community participation or partnership, leading to inadequate planning that limited community participation (Al-Shaaibi, 2011, Ch6:15). This outcome is attributed to inadequate expertise among the tourism decision makers, as tourism was a new sector.

Al-Wahaibi (2016) argued that decision makers hired international experts with a lack of understanding and knowledge of the context of Oman. Hamza et al. (2017:230-234) confirmed this finding in their recent study assessing the impacts of Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITC) in Oman, in which they found that the community had previously planned around nine ITCs in the region. However, the locals were informed after these projects were approved.

As the Omani government is working to develop economic diversification through a non-oil and gas sector (Strolla and Peri, 2016:58), the Ministry of Tourism in Oman was tasked with developing the Tourism 2040 Strategy for maximising tourism growth in GDP (see Section 1.2). To do so, the government needed to identify and consider the problems and limitations of previous tourism planning. As such, numerous workshops and visits to regional areas were carried out so that local partners such as governors, *walis*, sheiks, Ash-Shura and community

members, as well as the local population, could share their understanding preferences and requirements surrounding tourism (GOV-T12 and GOV-M13). These workshops were generalised to cover all Omani governorates allowing locals to share their opinions and concerns related to tourism development with officials (Figure 49).

Figure 49: Left: Locals and their representatives attend meetings and presentations with officials at the Ministry of Tourism and hired consultants for Oman's 2040 tourism strategy that was held in the chamber of commerce and industry in Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate. Right: Local attendees raise their opinions and concerns (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016).

After communicating and consulting with all stakeholder groups, their comments and contributions were reflected in the creation of the Tourism 2040 Strategy. As the decision makers noted, the importance of community participation as a key pillar in the management of local natural and cultural resources for tourism development purposes has been examined in depth (GOV-M13 and GOV-T12). A good portion of the strategy highlights the concept of community participation, particularly in the section titled 'Oman's Experience and Sustainable Tourism Development'. This strategy went further to the degree of empowerment where the community can effectively participate in decision-making processes (Ministry of Tourism, 2016b:9-38). As delineated, they 'maximize opportunities for the community and involve citizens in tourism choices that affect their lives, including decision-making, planning, and management processes' (Ministry of Tourism, 2016b:37).

As a part of this strategy, many initiatives have been taken in the tourism sector by innovating numerous forums with related actors, practitioners, scientists and entrepreneurs of SMEs (GOV-H21 and GOV-O41). The novelty here is that most of these initiatives show varying degrees of developing rural destinations through local community involvement. Specifically,

an initiative for rural communities' involvement, known as the 'Create the Host Community Participating and Benefits Programme' (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016b) was created. However, these collaborative initiatives have led to the fostering of economic development in rural areas by capacity building within local communities.

Several community consultation mechanisms have been adopted at the strategic and operational levels of the Ministry of Tourism to support the planning and management stages. These mechanisms consist of routine visits to rural destinations by decision makers, such as ministers and undersecretaries, accompanied by director generals and technical staff. As described by two participants (GOV-T12 and GOV-M13), these routine visits are made to residents in their life settings to discuss future tourism infrastructure development with them, whether funded through government or private investment. This opportunity allows residents to engage in direct dialogue with these decision makers and share information about the tourism business, including its advantages and disadvantages (Figure 50).

Figure 50: H.E. ex-minister of tourism listens to locals during a visit to the Samael province (Oman Daily Newspaper, 2017).

At the operational level, the regional tourism departments of 11 Omani governorates have taken on different roles in addition to the mechanisms mentioned above. According to one respondent (GOV-H21), these services receive a lot of communications from local representatives such as sheikhs, and the majority of locals are concerned about suggestions, licenses and complaints.

These comments are taken into account when preparing the annual tourism plan for the following year. The local participation in Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy development and regular site visits to local places suggest that planners have attempted to involve key stakeholders, particularly the community, in the various planning phases to address the lack of community participation in tourism management in previous plans.

In summary, the previously discussed arguments for maximising public participation in the development of the state, particularly concerning socioeconomic and tourism development, agree with the arguments that considered locals as key partners. In simple description, the top-level agenda of government in Oman was to involve citizens in decision-making to share opinions and concerns with regulators towards taking collective action to share the interests related to socioeconomic development including tourism. This method of formulating the developmental plan and visions is evidenced by the provision of various direct and indirect channels for citizens. This ensures that voices of residents can be easily heard and appreciated by decision-makers. The Oman 2040 Vision and Tourism 2040 Strategy confirmed this analysis, which prioritises strengthening local capacities for local and national economic development.

However, participants commented that is very rare that planning is in line entirely with implementation, where no economic plan was fully implemented due to various difficulties, such as the lack of administrative and financial capacity and conflicts with the local and private sectors (GOV-A12 and GOV-S71), as addressed by Yüksel et al. (2014:118-119) and Kasemsap (2016:205-206). As a means to ensure the credibility of socioeconomic and tourism planning during the implementation, this research identifies various initiatives associated with the above-mentioned planning, particularly awareness, training, financing and regulations, which are mainly provided by the government to determine the extent to which these agendas can be designed to fulfil the above-stated planning towards a local capacity building to participate in socio-economic and tourism development.

4.2 Initiatives for Enhancing Citizens' Participation in Tourism Development

Omanis have been provided with an important platform to participate in decision-making processes that concern socio-economic and tourism development. Community and regional development are the key features of development plans, and Oman 2040 Vision and Tourism 2040 Strategy, in particular, demonstrate that community voices were heard by regulators when developing these plans. The results of these official visions are consistent with the government's willingness to enhance the roles of local residents in utilising their natural and cultural resources for tourism purposes. Put simply, regulators clearly understand that residents can manage and represent their values more effectively than outsiders (Ghaderi et al., 2017:9).

Since community development in socioeconomic activities has become the goal of the above plans, awareness, training, financing and regulative initiatives have been put in place to ensure that community development in socioeconomic activities is reflected successfully in the field. This research discovered the nature of the above initiatives through grateful interactions with participants, particularly in the public sector. This section assesses the nature of these initiatives concerning the participation of host communities in their efforts to sustainably manage resources in a developmental and tourism context.

4.2.1   **Awareness-raising**

Awareness-raising is an essential step taken by worldwide institutions at public, private and local levels to improve the local communities' understanding of the benefits of natural and cultural resources in improving their life standards. The travel and tourism industry in various countries around the world has benefitted from awareness campaigns that sensitise the community to the benefits of selling products and providing services that improve their quality of life while enhancing the tourist experience (Snyman and Spenceley, 2019:175). The tourism sector in Oman also carries out such programmes to raise awareness among residents of the values associated with their natural and cultural heritage resources and to highlight the importance of taking advantage of the economic opportunities associated with tourism. For example, alongside external awareness campaigns, the tourism sector uses social media

platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to raise awareness and communicate marketing messages to the various beneficiaries (Al-Badi et al., 2017:84).

In this study, government officials at the strategic and operational levels were asked to answer a range of questions to examine the nature of the awareness programmes towards developing Omanis' abilities to capitalise on their resources to improve their livelihood. According to officials GOV-M14 and GOV-W08, there is a growing awareness among residents and visitors to conserve cultural heritage resources as a valuable asset while respecting locals' privacy. As one respondent (GOV-H27) explained, influential people in society have been hired to encourage people through social media communication and messages to respect local privacy and adopt respectful behaviours when visiting local destinations. An analysis of the messages shows that they are designed to guide visitors rather than encourage residents to use their resources (Figure 51). It was also found that some official accounts were dominated by messages, such as times for upcoming events, meetings with regional or international delegates, condolences and publicity and product launches. There is no independent account on social media designed to promote the understanding and knowledge of the locals towards participatory tourism development. Such an account is required for sharing objectives by key governmental institutions to encourage local residents to initiate enterprises to serve tourists.
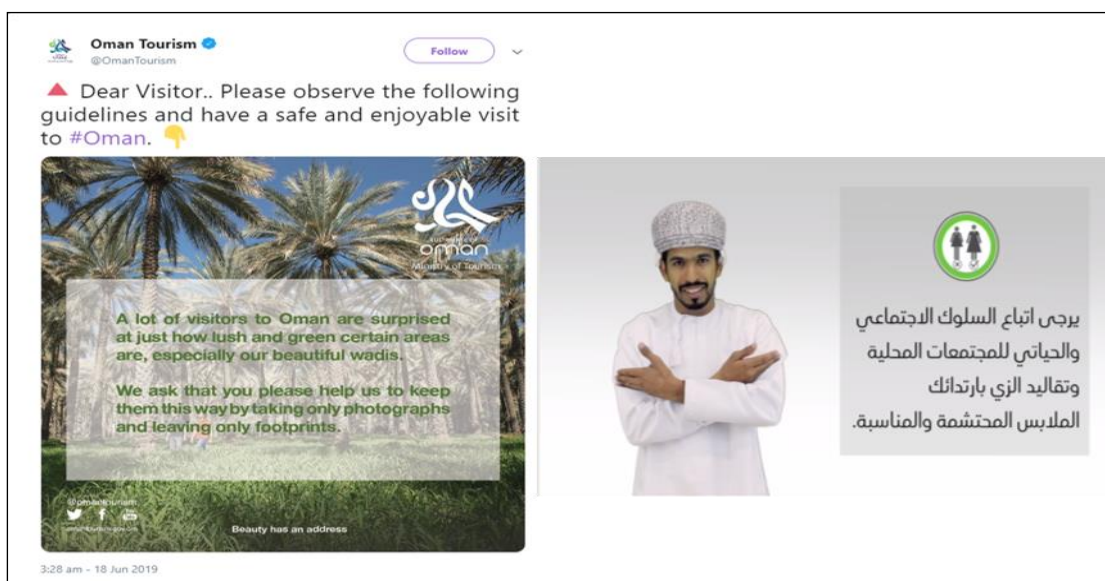
Figure 51: Left: A tweeted message to advise visitors to enjoy and respect the natural greenery of Wadis in Oman. Right: An influential person tweeted that tourists should respect the locals' privacy (Oman Tourism, 2019).

Likewise, printed booklets and e-brochures contain nothing to encourage the local community to interact with visitors. For example, the brochures published by the Omani Ministry of Tourism (2016a:3-40) contain colourful pictures with brief information on various points of interest, such as forts, castles, wadis, old historic buildings, folklore, contact details and maps. The final pages highlight some important tourism guidelines to advise visitors to respect natural and cultural values and to take precautions to protect themselves from the expected dangers that may occur during the trip (Figure 52). Nevertheless, the participants' statements show that promoting local participation in resource conservation and tourism development on social media platforms and in printed materials is a priority. However, it seems that social media, printed brochures and electronic brochures serve the marketing agenda far more than community awareness and educational capacity.
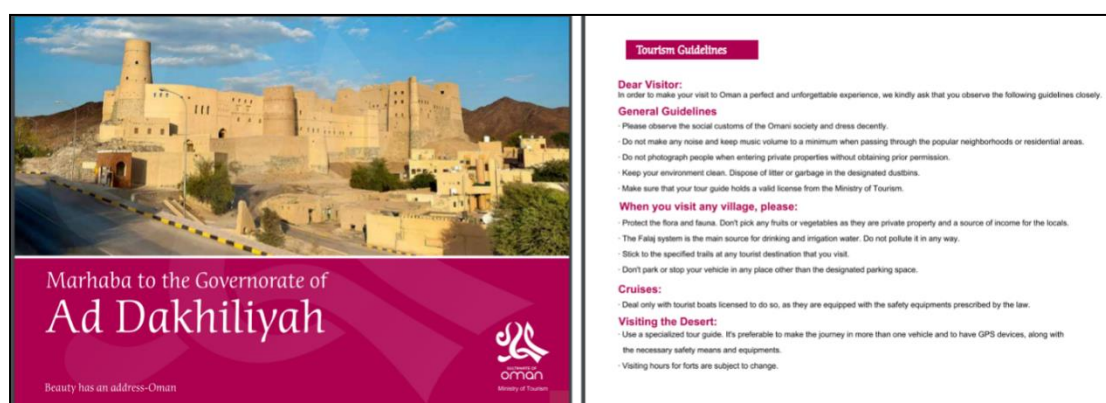
Figure 52: The cover of an e-brochure for the Ad-Dakhliyah Governorate in Oman (left) and tourism guidelines for visitors (right) (Omani Ministry of Tourism, 2016a).

An external awareness campaign has been used since 2005 to promote community participation in socio-economic development by fostering environmental, socio-cultural and economic understanding. The campaign entitled 'Tourism Enriches', which takes place in Oman, was implemented in conjunction with the UNWTO's agenda to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism (Baporikar, 2012:1542; Stephenson and Al-Hamarneh, 2017:162). According to two participants (GOV-G12 and GOV-H27), this campaign reached schools and universities to improve students' knowledge of various rural destinations and to develop a better understanding amongst the older generation and young people so that they can benefit from their resources in tourism-related business.

According to participant (GOV-H27) with many years of experience in the field, this campaign targets major rural destinations where the campaign team spends a few hours or half a day with the residents. This project is temporarily suspended due to the financial crisis following a drop in oil and gas prices. Since tourism in Oman is seen as a new business phenomenon that contradicts Islamic and cultural principles in some rural places (Al-Masroori, 2006:235; Al-Balushi, 2008:158) Al-Shaaibi, 2011:Ch5:16), it is difficult to change local perceptions of tourism within only a few hours; additionally, in certain areas in Oman, people have insufficient knowledge of the dimensions of the tourism industry. Thus, it would be worth redesigning this campaign to involve key stakeholders and Omanis who have relevant knowledge to share their skills and experience with all locals.

Collected responses reveal that there are two conflicted views about the level of awareness and understanding among the residents concerning the encouragement of socio-economic and tourism development. The first view shows that residents lack knowledge and understanding in this regard. For example, some residents of remote locations are often uncomfortable with tourists, especially in Muslim countries, where they do not respect their privacy and religious customs. Tourists, in turn, feel unwelcome (Page and Connell, 2014:298; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2019:51-52).

Participants GOV-H21 and GOV-G23 added that, despite reaching completion, the Ain Al-Kisfah hot spring project failed years ago due to conflicts with the local residents. According to Al-Shaaibi (2011) and Al-Riyami et al. (2017:165), the government gave assurances that tourists would respect the locals' privacy and avoid disrespectful behaviours, and it offered local employment incentives and a percentage of the benefits to local infrastructure development, education and the promotion of local products. However, the narrow vision of the locals regarding the benefits of tourism led to conflicts and parents chose other directions for their children's future (Al-Balushi, 2008: 120-121; Al-Shaaibi, 2011). Therefore, regulators should take measures to involve locals from the initial idea and before building tourism products to create trust and dialogue with attractive incentives, employment and outlets for selling local products such as food and handmade items.

Not all issues are attributed to the narrow vision of the locals but to the unwillingness of Omani youth to engage in traditional socioeconomic activities, including agriculture and handicrafts. Since these are no longer remunerative activities, they entail hard work that people are not willing to do, as this is no longer considered a rewarding activity. The younger generation is not interested in following their parents' footsteps to improve their livelihoods (Gebauer et al., 2007:473). These activities are now carried out by low-skilled expatriates, with the result that most of the skills and knowledge of Omani ancestors concerning these traditional activities have disappeared (Dutton, 2013:13). In addition to the lack of awareness, the above problem is also caused by the small Omani population (2,655.144 million Omanis compared to 1,962.783 million non-Omanis; Section 1.1.2). In this case, an effective awareness-raising programme with attractive incentives are crucial to encourage Omanis to preserve their traditional knowledge and experience. The literature in tourism studies has emphasised that traditional activities are a major tourism asset, capable of attracting visitors by promoting local products such as food and handicrafts, as has been observed in Japan and Malaysia (Asker et al., 2010:89-90; Saarinen, 2010:721), Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1356) and Norway (Brandt and Huagen, 2011:38-39).

The second view shows that residents, especially in remote areas have better awareness than before but skills and support are needed, participants (GOV-S71 and GOV-M13) noted. Some examples support this view, as some officials said that some residents have renovated their traditional houses to become museums exhibiting crafts and showcasing traditional life. However, some of them have closed as a result of poor marketing and tour operator support (GOV-M13 and GOV-O14). The closure of these traditional houses does not mean that residents have a lack of awareness but that they lack support to instruct tour agents to include visits to these museums in their tours. As a result, residents have to close their museum houses because they cannot cover expenses such as wages and utility bills.

Additional examples show that there is renaissance in Omanis' investment in utilising their resources into tourism products, namely green homes, guesthouses and heritage lodges, which are licenced according to Ministerial Decree number 39/2016 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2016:11). The collected data reveal that the number of licences for green homes has increased

over the past five years (Figure 53). For example, between 2018 and 2020, the number of licenced guesthouses increased from 18 to 30, representing 67%; likewise, the number of licenced green homes increased by 110%, from 10 to 21 products (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The above increase shows that locals, especially in rural destinations, are aware that providing services, such as accommodations for tourists, would provide an income for them.
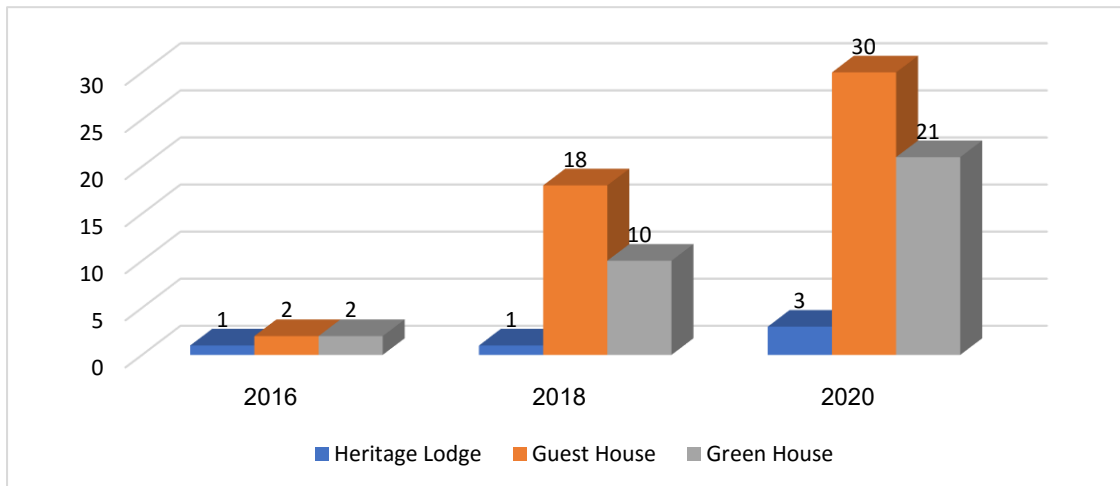
Figure 53: The number of licenced products between 2016 and November 2020 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b).

In conclusion, awareness-raising through social media, brochures and external campaigns does not appear to be effective in improving the understanding and knowledge of residents. Second, there is a lack of shared efforts between government institutions and private companies. More specifically, no joint awareness-raising programmes exist amongst key stakeholders, despite the common focus on the importance of natural and cultural resources to improve the quality of life of the host community (GOV-G23 and GOV-O41). Therefore, measures are needed to enhance locals' awareness of tourism and heritage values. It would be worthwhile to create an independent account on a social media platform to propose objectives. This proposed account, along with brochures and electronic brochures, should include photos and videos of a local destination and locals involved in various socioeconomic activities or practicing unique sociocultural traditions. This would be a great opportunity to get experienced local people to plan and tweet a variety of posts to ensure that locals are important partners from the start.

A good example of using social media was the Travel and Foundation in Croatia, which published a three-minute video in 2016 in collaboration with the well-known tourism institution TUI Care Foundation and the local community. In this video, locals share their positive experiences with tourists and work with tour operators to support local businesses (Croatia, The Travel and Foundation, 2016). Other examples include awareness campaigns, such as the 'One BVI Tourism Awareness Campaign' in the British Virgin Islands and 'How can Oregon's nature be good for business?' in Portland (Morrison, 2018:2-7).

This study found that, through the school curricula in Oman, efforts have been made to share the principles and dimensions of tourism and heritage management with the younger generation. For example, students in year 12 study The World Around Me and Social Studies, which deal with various aspects of Oman's heritage and tourism (Oman, Ministry of Education, 2015). These efforts could be expanded to target high school and university students by designing a long-term awareness plan to increase their knowledge of the importance of natural and cultural resources in building socioeconomic activities similar to those that attracted around five million students over five years in Jordan (Morrison, 2018:2-7). In addition, Trinidad and Tobago incorporated a designated curriculum to improve young people's understanding of the benefits of tourism in their countries and to change their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism as a promising industry (Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Tourism, 2020). These educational curriculums should contain outdoor activities that engage schoolchildren in resource conversations, as has been done in Indonesia (Graci, 2013:37-39) and Zanzibar (Dodds and Graci, 2012:151). The success of these efforts will ensure that people in the local community are key players and effective decision makers from initial ideas through to implementation.

4.2.2 Training

Many educational and non-educational institutions in the public and private sectors offer different qualifications and vocational training opportunities in the field of tourism. Institutions such as the Tourism Department at SQU, Oman Tourism College (OTC), and the National Hospitality Institutes (NHI) were founded to develop capacity in tourism management among young Omanis (Al-Balushi, 2008:175). The SQU Tourism Department offers a bachelor's degree in tourism and hospitality management and a master's degree in tourism destination management (SQU, 2014). OTC also offers bachelor's and diploma degrees in hospitality tourism, marketing and event management as well as short courses in tour guiding (OTC, 2019). The total number of graduates from SQU was 117, compared to 245 graduates from OTC between 2015 and 2019 (Figure 54).
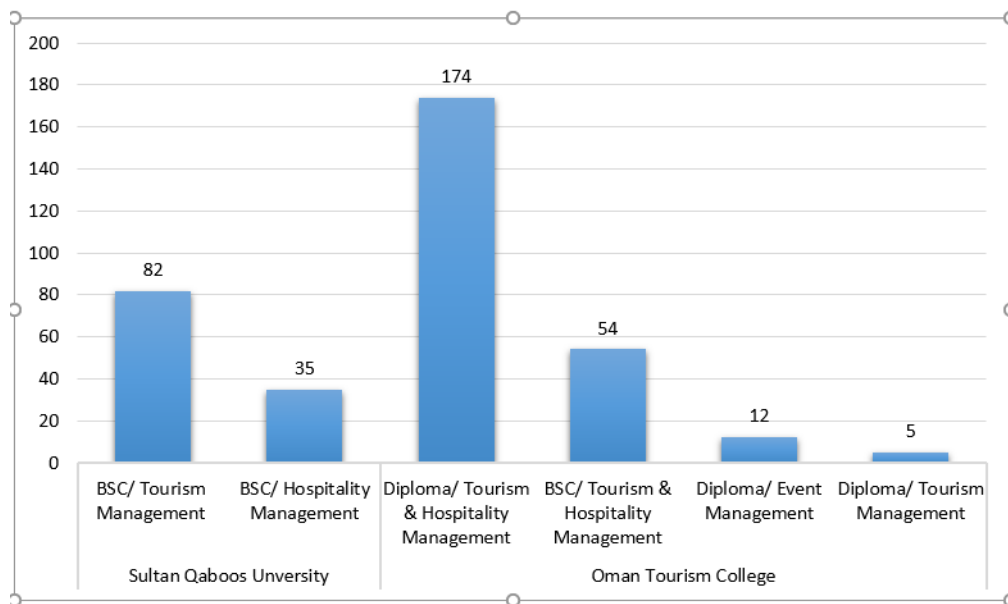
Figure 54: Graduates from the Tourism Department at SQU (2020) and OTC (2020) for the period 2015-2019.

The German Technical University in Oman, a private academic institution, offers two bachelor's degrees: Bachelor of International Business and Service Management and Bachelor of Science in Logistics (the German University of Technology in Oman Gutech, 2014). In addition, the NHI offers vocational training opportunities lasting between two weeks and 12 months in hospitality, cooking, hygiene, travel and entertainment (NHI, 2020) (Figure 55).
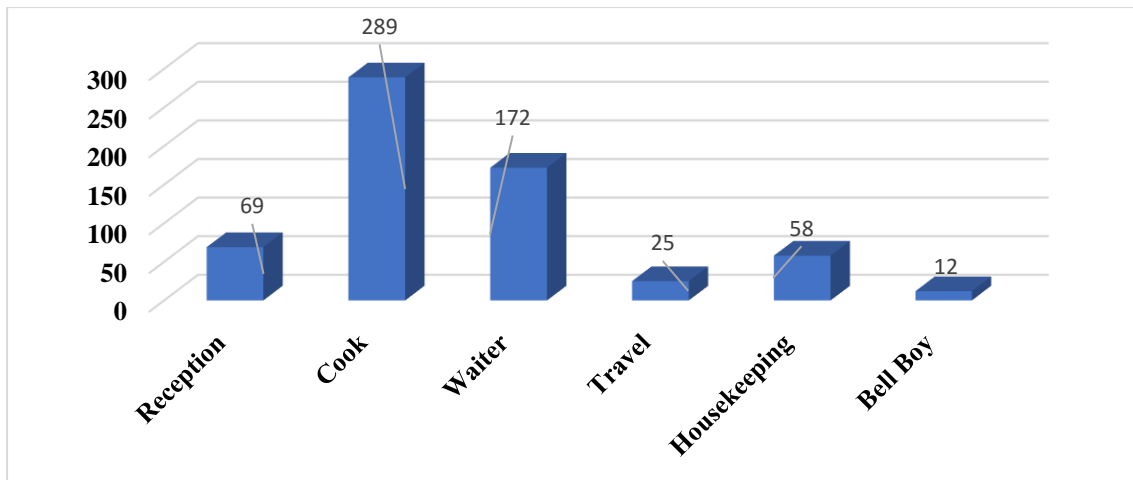
Figure 55: The number of Omani trainees at NHI for the period 2015-2019.

Concerning training, the National Training Fund provides the private sector with qualified and semi-qualified cadres. It finances training programmes with durations of 6 to 24 months through the 'Training-for-Employment' programme in cooperation with many recognised training institutes (Gonzalez et al., 2008:182). Non-educational public and private institutions also offer various training opportunities for young people and entrepreneurs in Oman. For example, in 2013, the Public Authority for SMEs, known locally as Riyada, was founded (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2013:6) to provide technical, financial and logistical support to start-up SMEs in Oman (Forster, 2017:210). This institution offers training in collaboration with other partners in areas such as accounting, marketing, finance and management. Officials confirmed that it also offers an orientation programme in which experts and CEOs of large companies, as well as managers of public and private companies, are invited to share their knowledge and experience with these SMEs and entrepreneurs (GOV-A17 and GOV-A13).

Likewise, the semi-private and private sectors, particularly oil and gas companies and banks, sponsor skills development programmes. For example, through the *Intillaqah* (meaning 'start' in English) programme, Shell Marketing and Oman LNG have provided business start-up-related training and technical and financial support, intending to encourage entrepreneurialism and self-employment (Al-Moharby and Khatib, 2007:46). Some local banks also offer free corporate social responsibility guidance and training programmes for Omani entrepreneurs in the areas of management, leadership, finance and marketing (PVT-CS3 and PVT-CS5).

These training courses and vocational and professional qualifications are a government priority and are offered free of charge by governmental and non-governmental institutions (Al-Hajry, 2003:206; Al-Harthy, 2011:97) for both genders (Donn and Al Manthri, 2013:158). Despite the fact that education and training opportunities are free, data show that young Omanis who hold academic or vocational degrees from tourism education institutions are generally unwilling to work in the private sector, including tourism. This research tries to substantiate this claim with numerical data, as Omanis account for 85.5% of total employment in the public sector, compared to 16.1% in the private sector (Oman, National Centre of Statistics and Information, 2020:108). The number of Omani employees in the private tourism sector represented 16,102 Omanis (10.7%) by the end of June 2020, compared to 133,941 non-Omanis (Oman, Ministry of Manpower, 2020). These data indicate that not all employees have received any training concerning the tourism and travel business (GOV-N22 and GOV-O14).

The findings show that one of the reasons for the shortage of tourism graduates in the private tourism sector is that Omanis prefer to work for the government, as it provides financially secure employment with more allowances and incentives (GOV-O14 and GOV-A12). Unlike banks, oil and gas companies, the private sector is unable to tackle financial problems, crises and bankruptcies, especially among SMEs (Clark and Postal Vinay, 2009:210; Al-Balushi, 2008:244; Al Hasani, 2015:121-122) in the Omani context. Additional barriers, as mentioned in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.3, is that locals tend to influence their children's future choices, especially in Muslim countries. They believe that working in the tourism industry affects the children's reputation and is in contrast to Omani Islamic traditions. Therefore, intervention should be taken by regulators to ensure that tourism is shown to be a tool for promoting cultural dialogue between tourists and the host community (UNESCO, 2014), not to contradict religious principles.

With regard to the vocational training programme 'Training for Employment', the respondents indicated that there are two main reasons behind Omanis' reluctance to embark on the programme. First, if trainees do not pass this programme, they must repay the government for training costs. Second, the trainee has to work with a specified approved company for at least twice the length of the training period before leaving to work in another company (GOV-L30, GOV-N22 and GOV-A12). It seems that this legislative condition serves only large companies

and young people who have already settled in the capital. For example, at the institutional level, the Training for Employment programme serves large companies, especially tour operators in Muscat and in big cities, who are financially equipped to pay the wages of trainee guides. Unlike large companies, SMEs find it difficult to pay salaries because they are generally forced to suspend tourism activities in the summer. At the individual level, trainees find it hard to adjust to working in these companies in capital and would welcome some additional allowance to cover rent, transportation and other expenses. Furthermore, while in full-time training, they struggle to find time to apply for jobs in the public sector. However, this programme encourages young people who have already settled in the capital with their parents and families to access training and employment opportunities in these companies.

Academic expert confirmed during an interview published by Oman TV General on 4 April 2018 that this condition is biased towards large companies with technical and financial capabilities, not SMEs (Oman Television, 2018). As a result, 15 of the 20 young Omanis enrolled in tour guiding training withdrew before starting this programme (GOV-L30). Therefore, regulators should reconsider the efficiency of this legislative clause to ensure that youth in rural destinations can benefit from this funded programme without needing to sign contracts with employers.

According to interviewed officials, another barrier to the success of the training programme in the tourism sector is the centralisation of all education and training establishments in the capital (GOV-O14 and GOV-S71). The majority of educational programmes subsidise accommodation, food and transportation to the capital. However, many young people, particularly women, living in remote rural areas such as Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages – the case studies of this research – are hesitant to enrol in these educational or vocational programmes since they do not guarantee employment after completion. Besides, in the capital, they would study in a sociocultural environment very different from that to which they are accustomed in their villages, which is unfamiliar and disorientating. In this way, the participants stated that certain non-tourism training programmes in regional locations were carried out in collaboration with Applied Science Colleges and private universities (GOV-O13 and GOV-Y13). This indicates that the above-stated educational institutions are capable of running training courses related to tourism and travel business at regional locations.

In summary, a general preference for working in the government sector, the centralisation of educational institutions, the framework restrictions on education and work in tourism, and the cultural stigma associated with the tourism industry – seen by many as an illegal source of income – constitute the main obstacles to training people to work in the tourism sector. In this context, it is believed that regulators could do more to reduce the impact of these barriers. For example, this study suggests promoting an attractive work environment in the private sector that has better incentives and services than the public sector, where airlines, transport companies, resorts, hotels and insurance companies can offer discounts on products and services. In addition, banks and financial companies should provide financial facilities with a reduced interest rate for housebuilding and marriages.

In terms of centralisation and the number of training institutions, all of these training programmes and funding initiatives should be combined into a single package to be regularly managed by a single body for all economic sectors, including tourism, in Oman (Al Zeidi, 2016:266-267). Regulators should also set up reputable training centres in rural tourism destinations to offer training in marketing, hospitality, guiding and housekeeping (Zeppel, 2006:223). These efforts would not be achievable without running local awareness programmes aimed at enhancing community understanding of the benefits of tourism in improving people's quality of life (Sections 4.2.1 and 4.3).

4.2.3 Financing

The government and private institutions in Oman offer various microfinance programmes, such as *Sanad*, *Intilaqa* and Oman Development Bank, to encourage young people to become self-employed by founding SMEs (Al-Harrasi and Al-Salti, 2014:34). In other words, these programmes encourage Omani entrepreneurship by providing people with the necessary advice, training and financial loans (Ashrafi and Murtaza, 2010:359). These programmes contribute to Omanisation in certain areas currently dominated by expatriates, such as grocery stores, ready-made clothing, butchers, carpentry and car wash workshops (Gonzalez et al., 2008:189).

One of these financial facilities is provided by the Development Bank of Oman to finance the creation of micro-, small-, medium-sized and commercial in the fields of industries, transport, logistics, tourism and mining with small interests (Oman Development Bank, 2019). According to participants at the decision-making level (GOV-M13), Oman Development Bank is considered one of the financial donors to encourage Omani investments in socio-economic and tourism development (GOV-M13). Numerical data show that around 6.8 million OMR have been approved to fund 172 different tourism enterprises, which represents nearly 11% of all loan approvals according to 2020 statistics (Figure 56) (Oman Development Bank, 2020:18).
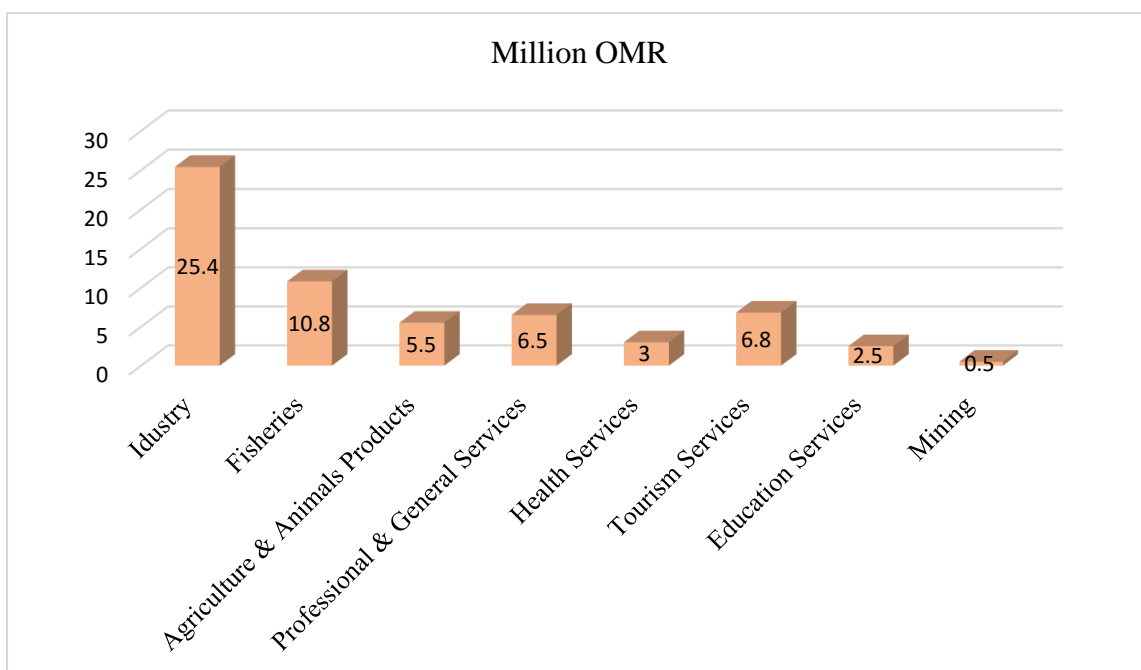
Figure 56: Approvals for loans according to 2019 statistics (Oman Development Bank, 2020:18).

The Oman Development Bank provides an incentive to exempt entrepreneurs from repaying the loan within a certain period. However, its financial loan contains a designated interest of 3% (Oman Development Bank, 2020:49). However, people from low-income backgrounds typically prefer to obtain an interest-free loan to initiate their business, such as an Al-Raffd Fund (GOV-A12 and GOV-N23). According to existing literature in the Omani context, funding programmes were merged into a single government entity called the Al-Raffd Fund in 2013 to provide microfinance to SMEs across the country – job seekers aiming to reduce pressure on public sector employment were given precedence (Hussein, 2014:50-51; Al Maimani and Johari, 2018:95). As highlighted by Al-Balushi and Anderson (2015:567), the

Al-Raffd Fund offers interest-free and guaranteed loans up to 100,000 OMR (200,000 GBP), which businesspersons have to commence repayments 24 months after the launch and continue paying for ten years (Al-Raffd Fund, 2019).

According to the International Society for SMEs (2014:8-9), the Al-Raffd Fund reduces residents' migration costs to cities and solves regulatory and administrative problems with SMEs. This microfinance programme is helping the local population to start up SMEs. Its aim is to give young people, especially job seekers, the opportunity to establish their businesses in various socioeconomic and tourism activities (Hussein, 2014:50-51; Al Maimani and Johari, 2018:95). However, indicators show that certain restrictions limit the benefits of Al-Raffd Fund. According to a participating official (GOV-Q33), Omani businesspersons still consider tourism activities to be new because they lack sufficient knowledge, meaning that the future of these activities is difficult to predict. This was confirmed by a government respondent in the following statement:

> Unfortunately, our records show that a small number of tourism enterprises have joined the training and funding on the tourism activities we offer. Although, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the SMEs Authority and the Ministry of Tourism to promote entrepreneurship in tourism. (GOV-A13).

This excerpt suggests that many Omani entrepreneurs prefer to invest in a fast-return business like the stock market, real estate or construction rather than risk investing in a relatively new sector like tourism. This has also been documented by Al-Masroori (2006:235), Al-Balushi (2008:158), and Al-Shaaibi (2011:5-16), and confirmed by recent statistics showing that tourism enterprises funded through the Al-Raffd Fund increased only slightly from 30 at the end of 2016 (Al-Raffd, 2017:5) to 31 enterprises, representing only 1.9% of all financed SMEs (Figure 57) according to 2018 statistics (Al-Raffd, 2019:5). Therefore, regulators should provide orientation and awareness programmes with financial and legislative incentives in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry to invite businesspersons in most of the governorates to build their understanding that the tourism business can flourish and work effectively.
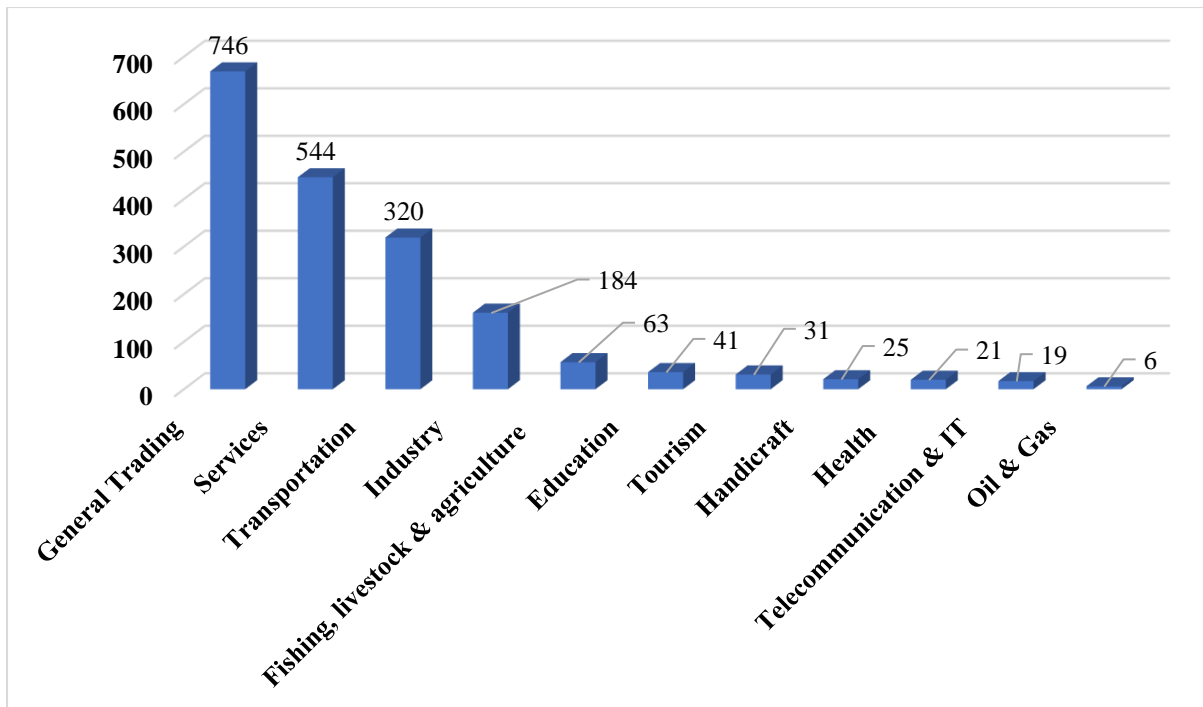
Figure 57: The number of private business initiatives in different sectors funded by the Al-Raffd Fund at the end of 2018 (Al-Raffd Fund, 2019:5).

An additional barrier associated with this micro-financial programme observed by collected data is that the Al-Raffd Fund does not fund the restoration of old buildings, not even for tourism purposes such as bed and breakfast accommodation, museums café, or traditional restaurants (GOV-Q33). This obstacle is due to a misconception between the above-mentioned utilisation concept and the construction of a new dwelling as a place of residence. In this case, few Omani contractors renovate historic homes using traditional materials such as *sarooj* and mudbricks, palm tree trunks and bamboo for ceilings because it increases the cost of restoration by up to 50% compared to using modern materials. One respondent gave an example of a 150 square metre house: renovation using modern materials costs 150 OMR (300 GBP) per square metres but would cost between 225 OMR (450 GBP) and 250 OMR (500 GBP) per square metre if traditional building materials were used (GOV-H21).

Since most villagers are low-income, they cannot afford to renovate old houses and are unwilling to get a loan from a bank because they would have to pay interest. As a result, residents neglect traditional houses or are forced to use modern materials for restoration, which destroys the visual qualities of traditional construction and leads to the loss of the authentic architectural identity of the village. For these reasons, regulators should remove these obstacles

to cope with licensing initiatives for tourism enterprises. For example, the regulatory authorities may require the applicant to prove to the Ministry of Tourism that the renovation of the building is for tourism purposes, such as bed and breakfast, restaurants and museums, not for local residency.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Tourism can organise financial programmes that can boost community participation in tourism development by fostering partnerships with local banks. MoUs have been made with local banks in Oman to prioritise funding for Omani SMEs in the tourism industry. Journalists have published this initiative in local newspapers, such as the Oman Observer Newspaper and Oman Daily Newspaper, in Arabic and English (Al-Shueili, 2015; Abdulla'al and Al-Jahwari, 2015). The MoUs signed with Bank Muscat contained eight clauses that provide financial support for tourism SMEs to train and finance tourism initiatives (Oman, Ministry of Tourism and Bank Muscat, 2015).

Some research participants confirmed that Bank Muscat responded to this initiative by funding the restoration of certain traditional houses in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen for tourism and community development purposes, which is discussed in the following chapter (please see section 5.1.1.1). So far, it is the only bank to have financed such an initiative. No other MoUs have been activated in areas where bank participants did not mention existing cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism in SME development (PVT-CS4 and PVT-CS3). All MoUs signed with Omani banks must be acted upon to ensure that the country's financial institutions implement their social responsibility towards community development. This, in turn, will encourage other financial institutions and donors to pay attention to socio-economic developments. To maintain the relationship between these stakeholders, these banks and other donors should be encouraged to film and market their promotional programmes in spectacular locations with fabulous views of rural tourist destinations.

4.2.4   Regulations

The literature claims that the legal framework of programmes related to socioeconomic and tourism activities has not worked effectively, particularly because of poor coordination between the concerned agencies (Al-Masroori, 2006:311; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al-Shanfari, 2012:4). Key responses, and documents such as laws and decrees were collected to understand the nature of these regulations. This section focuses on the legal frameworks that strengthen the capacities of local communities to use their natural and cultural resources. This analysis determines the extent to which these rules encourage residents to invest in socio-economic and tourism development by using their natural and cultural resources.

A few years ago, the Omani government offered various regulatory incentives to stimulate foreign capital and reduce Oman's investments abroad by promoting it locally. As shown, foreign investment in Oman increased by 12.1%, from 17,806.6 OMR million in 2017 to 19,969.6 OMR million in 2018. While Omani investment in foreign investment increased by 5.4% from 6,467.4 OMR million in 2017 to 6,813.8 OMR million at the end of 2018 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020c:18-39) (Figure 58).
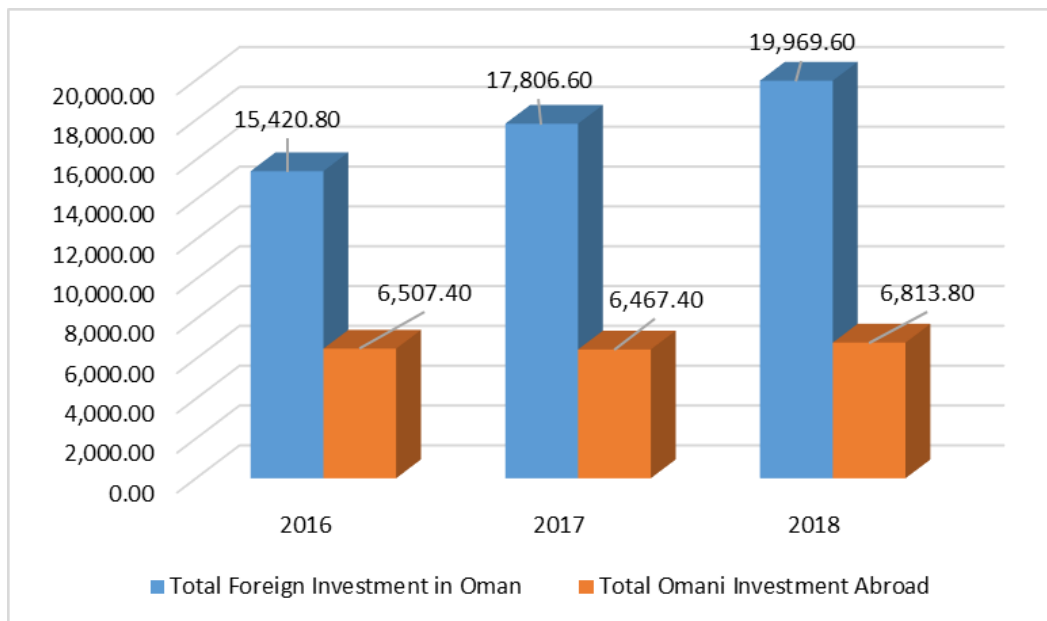
Figure 58: Total foreign investment in Oman and Omani investment abroad (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020c:18-39).

One of these regulatory incentives is the Invest Easy programme, which is an integrated e-transformation initiative designed to help investors and entrepreneurs apply online for a business licence (Al-Ruzaiqi and Baghdadi, 201:10-12). One respondent claimed that this programme allowed investors to apply online to register their business within minutes to reduce bureaucracy's impacts (GOV-M13). The participant added that this programme is paperless and prevents investors from having to queue in the one-stop shop of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as was previously the case with commercial registration. It also helps all relevant government institutions exchange up-to-date information about investors and, if necessary, take collective action against them if they fail to pay tax (GOV-T26). Table 11 shows the differences in business licence application between the traditional method and the Invest Easy programme method.

Table 11: General Impact on the Business Environment through the Invest Easy Programme (Oman, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2018:52)

Parameters	Before	After
Days to start a business	7 days	1 minute to 1 day
Number of internal processes	18	0 to 3
Number of interactions with responsible	17	0 or 1 maximum
Number of New CR registrations per year	7,000	31,000
Number of licenses per year	15,000	56,000

The above data show that this programme offers entrepreneurs opportunities to invest in different socio-economic activities. For example, the number of days to start a business decreased from seven days to between one minute and one day, while the number of interactions with the responsible institutions decreased to a maximum of one interaction instead of 17 follow-ups. Owing to these online services, the number of licences per year has increased from 15,000 to 56,000. These numbers indicate that an attractive investment environment has been created to stimulate local and foreign capital to invest in Oman.

However, the figures shown in Table 10 do not consider the duration of the procedure or the number of follow-up actions carried out by the applicant to obtain approval from the various institutions concerned. A participant (GOV-E05) provided an example to clarify the above. As

part of the preliminary approval requirements, applicants must contact the relevant government institutions to obtain their approvals separately. Once received, they must apply for final approval online through the Invest Easy programme. As specified in the Directory of Government Services published by the Ministry of Tourism (2018:29), and to obtain a licence, for example, for a greenhouse product, the applicant requires approval from the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, the Royal Police of Oman and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

One respondent (GOV-T26) summarised that the Invest Easy programme has brought the licensing process down to a few minutes, as previously applicants had to upload the approvals obtained from each institution to obtain the permit to start their business. However, this does not solve investors' long bureaucratic journey through different institutions to meet preliminary approval requirements. In very simple terms, the entrepreneur must contact these institutions to obtain their approval, while some of them must visit the location of the proposed enterprise before any business can be authorised. This finding confirms the results of the National Programme for Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh, 2017:61), which claimed that the time it takes to grant a licence to manage a business in tourism is one of the main barriers to the boom of the sector in Oman.

While foreign capital investment in Oman has increased by 12.1%, which is considered very low, Oman's investment abroad has increased by 5.4%, as shown above (Figure 58). These rates do not reflect the attractiveness of the business environment in Oman, suggesting that the current bureaucracy could lead investors to invest in real estate or stock markets instead of tourism. A telephone survey of around 1,501 Omanis over the age of 18, including workers, employers and job seekers, was conducted to explore their satisfaction with the return on investment (Figure 59). The respondents expressed a preference for depositing money into banks with interest and investing in real estate rather than in private companies, where 16% of investment problems are the result of overcomplicated regulations (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2018:31-32). The findings indicate that Omanis prefer to invest their money in banks and real estate activities that do not require multiple institutions to issue permits.
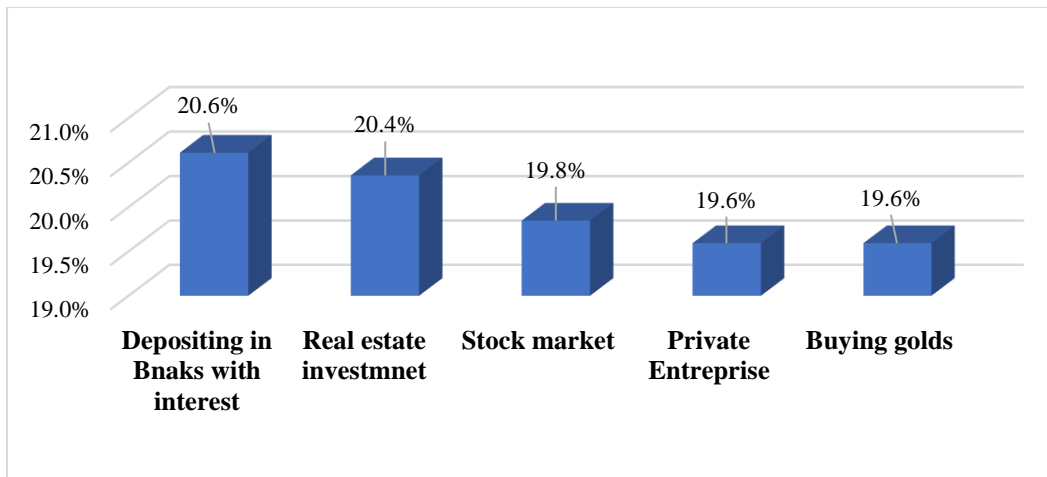
Figure 59: Omanis' satisfaction with investment returns (%) in Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2018, 31-32)

As shown in the annual report of the Public Authority for SMEs (Ryiada, 2019:8), the number of registered SMEs in Oman at the end of 2018 was 37,289 and the number of financed SMEs at the end of 2018 was only 2,000, corresponding to 5.3%. This low figure is despite the offer of the Al-Raffd Fund, which offers interest-free and guaranteed financial loans up to 100,000 OMR (200,000 GBP; Section 4.2.3). However, according to one participant (GOV-W33), the above percentage suggests that applicants encounter administrative difficulties not only with the statutes but also with the process of obtaining funds to start their business. Tourism is one of the sectors affected by these regulations, which has led to a slight increase in the share of tourism-financed enterprises from 30 financed enterprises at the end of 2016 to 31 financed enterprises at the end of 2018 (Section 4.2.3). Therefore, these regulations and bureaucracy limit investments in socioeconomic and tourism activities (Al-Mataani, 2017:31-32).

On the contrary, it is unfair to accuse the regulator of being late in providing approval, as the respondents confirmed that in addition to lengthy procedures with the concerned authorities, delays were observed on the part of the investors to submit the documents necessary for the finalisation of their file (GOV-Q32).

Initiatives have been taken at the government level to streamline the application processes and reduce the amount of bureaucracy. For example, Tanfeedh initiated the Enhance Applicant Services for All Tourism-related Projects, which provides customers in the tourism industry with optimised processes, as the following excerpt explains:

> This initiative aims to provide a clear and transparent set of standard operational procedures for investors to gain approval for their projects. It also aims to accelerate and streamline the application process for tourism projects… by setting up a single window for client services, which will come under the umbrella of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT). (Oman, Implementation Support and Follow-Up Unit, 2019:73).

This recognition and transparency is causing regulators to take new measures to reduce the length of time this regulation takes, which directs investors to other businesses. Also, the Ministry of Tourism is making most tourism enterprises exempt from financial guarantees in an attempt to encourage tourism investment (GOV-Q32 and GOV-E05). This is confirmed in Ministerial Decree No. (2019/56), which states that the majority of tourism accommodation facilities, including ticketing offices in Oman, are exempt from financial guarantees (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019a).

As part of this endeavour, regulative processes are promoted, particularly the Invest Easy programme, to stimulate local capital and maximise local investment. However, both the reviewed literature and the field data suggest that certain barriers should be reconsidered and assessed in terms of their impact on local investment in socio-economic development, including tourism, by narrowing the distance and enhancing collaboration amongst regulators. This is done by accelerating the establishment of a one-stop shop for customer services, as per the Tanfeedh initiative mentioned above. To integrate all the follow-up visits necessary to obtain the necessary approvals, investors will be encouraged to invest in the tourism sector, as applying for licences will take less time and will be more profitable.

In conclusion, the above arguments about awareness-raising, training, financing and regulations demonstrate that the Government of Oman is eager to empower citizens to participate in various socio-economic activities, including tourism. However, these initiatives did not appear to operate effectively in achieving proper citizen involvement in economic development because of the involvement of some related stakeholders. This issue is attributed to two reasons: the first reason is that the tourism sector was established only recently, in 2004 to be precise (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al Belushi, 2008), and the decision makers lacked sufficient knowledge and experience about the dimension of the local participatory approach in rural destinations. As mentioned previously (Al-Shaaibi, 2011), this lack of sufficient knowledge and experience with regulators led them to hire international experts with limited public involvement in developing plans related to tourism, including Oman 2020 Vision, which was developed by World Bank experts who were unfamiliar with the context of Oman, as Al-Wahaibi (2016) commented. Thus, some feasibility studies have been conducted to help locals in rural destinations develop their natural and cultural resources to enhance their contributions to and benefits from these developmental opportunities. However, these studies were placed in the rack of offices and were not implemented on the ground because of a lack of a clear vision for implementation, as one participant (GOV-A12) commented.

The second reason is that various public sector institutions are performing similar tasks related to socio-economic development, including tourism. In terms of training, educational institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Tourism College and National Hospitality Institution provide academic and vocational degrees for Omani youths, while non-educational institutions in the public and private sectors, such as Riyada, the Ministry of Manpower, banks and oil and gas operators, provide executive training opportunities for Omani youths to involve them in the private sector, as addressed in Section 4.2.2. From a legislative perspective, public institutions such as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Tourism, municipalities and the Civil Defense Authority are involved in licensing tourism products and activities, and entrepreneurs must undergo a lengthy bureaucratic journey involving the above-mentioned institutions to obtain a licence to operate their business, as explained (Section 4.2.4).

Conflicts, bureaucratic complications and delays in economic development processes emerge as a result of public institutions performing similar tasks related to tourism development (GOV-Y17). Despite this, many public institutions are still involved in regulative frameworks related to socio-economic and tourism development. However, as stated by participants (GOV-Y17, GOV-H21, GOV-M13 and GOV-G23), there is no specific institution that has been appointed with administrative, technical and financial capabilities to lead the community participatory approach in tourism development. Mershen (2007) made a similar point, stating that there are no specific institutional bodies or non-governmental entities in Oman that are responsible for facilitating local community participation in tourism development. To address this issue, regulators should appoint an institution to lead a community-based participatory approach to tourism development. Similarly, responsible bodies should be appointed with technical and financial capabilities in international destinations to assist local communities in making optimal use of their resources for economic purposes in tourism sectors, such as Chitwan National Park in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011) and EcoTrust in Indonesia (Graci, 2013).

Conversely, as some officials (GOV-R20 and GOV-T12) stated, public institutions performing similar socio-economic development tasks, including tourism, indicate that a collaborative approach among public institutions is ineffective for socio-economic development. Al-Masroori (2006), Al-Shaaibi (2011) and Al Zeidi (2016) mentioned that this lack of collaboration among regulative bodies in Oman causes delays in socio-economic and human resource development. As suggested by the participants (GOV-H21 and GOV-S71), intervention is required to foster a partnership approach and bridge the gap between regulative bodies involved in the Government of Oman by allowing objectives and views to be shared and working collectively to resolve issues associated with a community participatory approach in socio-economic development, including tourism.

Some rural destinations around the world have adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to unite all efforts provided by stakeholders in the public, private sector and local level based on their competence and disciplines in order to achieve integration in the designation of roles and tasks rather than conflict and disharmony. According to Graci (2013), dialogue and joint action involving the local community, local businesses, investors, employees, tourists and the local government in Gili Trawangan Island, Indonesia, were conducted as practical solutions to

reduce marine damage and coral reefs caused by tourism and illegal fishing activities. Lan and Chau (2020) provided another example of a multi-stakeholder approach that was conducted by officials in Yangdong County, South Korea, in which local farmers and grape producers were influenced to innovate practical solutions to boost grape consumption and increase household incomes. Owing to this collective action, various economic projects were initiated to boost grape production by creating grape distribution networks, innovating marking programmes and running educational programmes for locals and tourists.

4.3 Women's Participation in Tourism Development

As discussed in Section 1.1.3, Omani women excel in education, achieving higher scores than men in various educational institutions. Omani women have contributed to the development of the state by taking advantage of educational opportunities, both at home and abroad, to improve their participation in public life with men (Goveas and Aslam, 2011:233-234; Miller, 2014:33-35; Al Hasani, 2015:93-95). This section examines the concept of women in public life concerning socioeconomic development, particularly in the travel and tourism sector. As discussed in Section 4.2.2, a few educational institutions in Oman offer academic programmes that focus exclusively on tourism and travel.

Omani women have taken advantage of these academic programmes so that they can play a role in promoting the tourism sector. For example, even though the number of female students in SQU's tourism department increased from three students in 2017 to six students in 2019, which is considered very low compared to the 23 male students in 2019 (SQU, 2020), the female students at OTC scored higher than male graduates, especially in the areas of diploma/tourism and hospitality management and BSC/tourism and hospitality management in 2016/2017and 2017/2019 (OTC, 2020) (Figure 60).
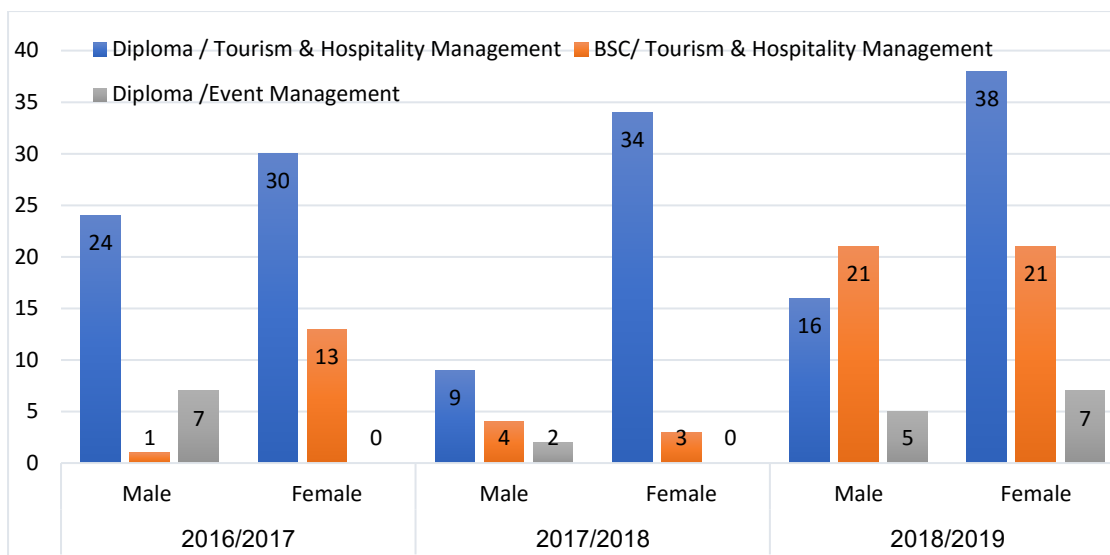
Figure 60: Graduates of OTC for the period 2016-2019 (OTC, 2020).

Figure 60 shows that Omani women enjoy a significant presence in education in Oman in general, as well as in tourism and travel studies, particularly at OTC. As the Omani government is keen to promote Oman as a country where men and women take on collective responsibilities and, in particular, to improve living standards, women have been empowered at the decision-making level (Section 1.1.4); however, their active presence in the travel and tourism sector is low. This can be seen in the total number of female employees (1,497) compared to male employees (2,590) (36.6% lower) in the tourism and travel sector between January and November 2019 (Oman, Ministry of Manpower, 2019). In particular, 572 women (18.8%) are employed in the hotel sector compared to 2,567 men (81.2%) (Oman, Ministry of Manpower, 2019). Similarly, female tour guides are 22 of the total, compared to 287 male tour guides in Oman (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020e) (Figure 61).
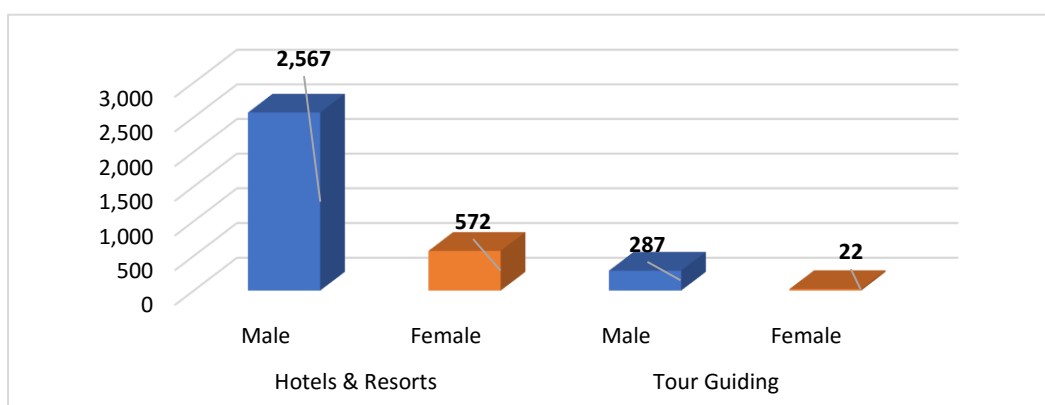
Figure 61: Number of Omani employees in the hotel and resort sector and in tour guiding activities (Oman, Ministry of Manpower, 2019; Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020e).

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The participants in this research attribute the absence of women in the tourism and travel sectors as employees to various economic and sociocultural barriers. According to the participants, government work has become the primary goal for job seekers alongside financial and training incentives (GOV-O14 and GOV-A12) due to the flexibility of working conditions. As pointed out by Al-Balushi (2008:244), Clark and Postal-Vinay (2009:210) and Al Hasani (2015:121-122), the public sector is financially more secure than the private sector, which means that the public sector is a more attractive and comfortable work environment for both genders than the private sector (Section 4.2.2). In particular, unlike the public sector, which depends on oil and gas sales, the private sector cannot confront financial crises. The oil and gas sector contributes more than 70% of Oman's GDP (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:170-171). As a result, the majority of Omanis are oriented to work in certain public institutions, even if their course of study does not match the job description (GOV-O14).

The above point also links to working hours, where working hours in the public sector are shorter than in the private sector and monthly income is guaranteed. In addition, various incentives and benefits packages are offered to employees. For example, working hours in tourism private sector jobs, such as hotels, resorts and travel, are higher than in government institutions and often involve long night shifts (GOV-O14 and GOV-E05). Long working hours and work shifts are often incompatible with family life, where women might need to work overnight at a hotel at the expense of home obligations (Cave and Kilic, 2010: 288). In this case, measures need to be taken to provide a comfortable working environment in the private sector that contains financial incentives, such as those in the public sector (Section 4.2.2).

The sociocultural barriers focus on the negative image of a tourism sector with Omanis, especially in rural areas, because they consider it an unlawful source of income, particularly in the hotel sector (Al-Balushi, 2008:120-121; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al Hasani, 2015:33-34). Because alcohol is served and gambling and night club activities take place in the hotel sector, it affects the reputation of the locals and conflicts with cultural traditions and Islamic principles

(GOV-G23 and GOV-O14). Al-Belushi et al. (2011:77) observed this belief among the locals while conducting a socioeconomic impact study for the Al-Jabal Akhadar settlement in Oman.

The findings of this research highlight a few consequences of this barrier within the household, in the neighbourhood and at the workplace. The first is that employed women could be forced to neglect their traditions and values to meet the needs of employers and tourists due to the job description. For example, the hotelier could force women to remove their *hijab* or dress in different clothes that contradict traditions to satisfy both visitors and employers. Al Belushi (2008:318-321) examined this point in the context of Oman, especially in hotels, where the workplace may not be compatible with Islamic and social traditions.

The second consequence is that it could affect their ability to raise the children. For example, if a woman spends more than eight hours or more at work, she would sometimes suffer from tension and depression, which could make it difficult to take care of her children (GOV-G23 and GOV-O41). Although housemaids have become a phenomenon in Oman, reaching 92,865 at the end of 2018 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:436), they cannot replace the role of the mother in childcare. As a result, an absent mother could lead to poor school outcomes or early school leaving, as evidenced by impaired relationships with peers, brothers and sisters (Ziegler, 2005:101). In addition, this poor childcare could also result in problems beyond the household, as children could follow immoral directions such as smoking or drug use. In turn, it could widen the disharmony and gap between the parents, mainly the husband and wife, resulting in divorce and family breakdown.

The third example focuses on the reputation of the family in the neighbourhood due to the work of their daughter or wife, specifically in the hotel sector. The neighbours could change their views of this family in a negative way, especially for those who work in hotels where alcohol is served. This issue makes locals feel uncomfortable because their children, especially females, work in tourism as an illegal source of income. A participant expressed his viewpoint in the following statement:

> Unfortunately, when people know that someone is working in a hotel, although this hotel sometimes doesn't serve alcohol like Bait Al Hafah and Ramada Al Qurum Beach, they are looking at that person, especially women, with a negative opinion (GOV-O14).

As a result, the person working in the tourism industry particularly the hotels, falls victim to the misunderstanding by neighbours that their salary comes from illegal sources. Even if this person has a good character in society before working in a hotel, their reputation in society is compromised and they often face rejection when they want to get married (Al Belushi, 2008:318-321). Therefore, awareness and educational programmes would improve the negative image of tourism, as a place where host communities and tourists share understanding and exchange cultural aspects. Meanwhile, regulators should address aspects related to Islamic principles and cultural traditions in terms of the nature of the job to meet employees' concerns and needs.

Because of the above-addressed arguments and as discussed in Section 4.2.1, Omani parents have an impact on the education and work choices of their children, especially women, whom they would prefer to study education and health science. Therefore, women's presence in education, health services and social protection is wide and comes as a result of cultural constraints (Kumaraswamy, 2018:128; Al Hasani, 2015:122), not only in Oman but also in other Islamic countries such as Libya (Joubran, 2014:91). To support this argument, the total number of females in the education and health sector is 60,948, compared to 39,485 male employees. Similarly, the presence of women in the area of social development is 1,388, compared to 1,203 men (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:124) (Figure 62).
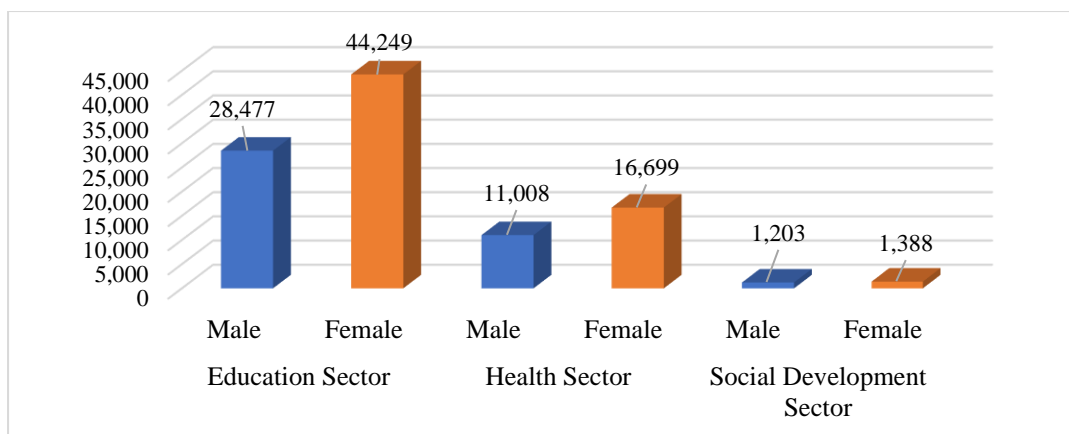
Figure 62: The number of male and female employees in the education, health and social development sectors in Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:124).

The government has taken several steps to encourage Omanis to participate in the private tourism sector by promoting self-employment in an attempt to address the shortage of Omanis in tourism, which contributed to a slight increase from 55% in 2017 to 56.3% at the end of 2018 compared to the government sector (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:108). However, the aforementioned economic and socio-cultural barriers and their consequences are considered to hamper the development of tourism in Oman. Regulators must take many steps to reduce the impact of these barriers in maximising Oman's participation in the travel and tourism sector, particularly women. Regarding the economy, Al Hasani (2015:121-122) stated that it is important to create attractive job opportunities with economic incentives in terms of wages, bonuses and leisure to keep up with a government sector, which is the preferred employment option among Omanis. Lower interest loans and other incentives should also be offered (Section 4.2.2).

To encourage Omanis to work in tourism, regulators must aim to reduce the current total costs incurred in the private sector, e.g. start-up costs, licence renewal, taxes and insurance. At the same time, incentives and legislative facilities are required by exempting SMEs from some taxes, such as the Ministry of Tourism, as well as those suggested in Section 4.2.4, to accelerate business productivity. To break down sociocultural barriers, awareness programmes should be developed to challenge negative perceptions of tourism and promote a vision of tourism as a place where cultural dialogue and peacebuilding takes place (UNESCO, 2014). Furthermore, a comfortable working environment should be developed that is compatible with cultural and Islamic principles, especially in the hotel sector, where jobs such as human resources,

marketing, bookkeeping and accounting (GOV-O41) provide a private environment and the right conditions for women to feel comfortable in the work environment.

4.4 Summary

Building on the considerations presented in this chapter, this study is based on the impression that the concept of citizen participation in decision-making about Oman's socio-economic development, including tourism, is a priority agenda. This impression indicates that the government of Oman is willing to allow the local community to participate in socio-economic and tourism activities and share the benefits of this participation. The context of Oman is seen as further confirmation that the local participation approach can also take a top-level priority, which is in line with White's (1996) typology, and Garrod's (2003) framework and, Al-Shaaibi's (2011) model, as addressed. This approach strives to generate prosperity, stability, and justice by engaging the local community effectively (Pratto, 2016:5-9). From the above analysis, it is evident that formal and informal 'Meet the People' tours have taken a fundamental approach to narrowing the gap between the government and its citizens, as many orders have been given to promote infrastructure development in response to local opinion. The Ash-Shura Council was formed to delegate decision-making power to the people of Oman, and Oman's steady progress over the past five decades shows that Omanis have the power to speak out and share views on participating in decision-making processes related to socioeconomic and tourism development.

Oman 2040 Vision and Tourism Strategy 2040 are expected to be effective, as the development of local communities and regional goals have been to achieve socioeconomic sustainability and the wellbeing of the local community. Furthermore, the study found that these initiatives are primarily focused on awareness-raising, training, financing and regulations, and the goal is to maximize benefits for the locals through optimal use of their natural resources and culture. However, these initiatives are currently not working effectively because the tourism sector was only established recently in 2004, and decision-makers need sufficient time to understand the dimensions of the participatory community approach to managing cultural and natural resources to maximise local benefits and enhance tourism patterns. In addition, overlap and poor coordination among institutions, particularly in the government sector, are considered

factors that limit the sharing of tasks and responsibilities related to community capacity building and tourism development opportunities in Oman. The next chapter examines the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql as the case studies of this research; these locations are popular tourist destinations in Oman due to their unique nature and culture. The previously mentioned problems and their implications will be explored to see if the village locals are trying to encourage community members to better use their resources and participate in the management of tourism activities.

CHAPTER FIVE: TOURISM IMPACTS, LOCAL ATTITUDES AND INITIATIVES IN MISFAT AL-ABRYEEN AND MUQL VILLAGES

As discussed in the literature chapter, world organisations have defined tourism as various activities carried out by individuals and groups of people outside of their usual environment (Singh, 2008:139; Patel and Nayab, 2014:11; UNWTO, 2005; WTTC, 2018b:17). Tourism benefits not only tourists but also the local community, which has the resources to play an important role in conserving resources, enhancing the tourists' experience and improving their wellbeing. This concept relates to the form of sustainable tourism, which emerged in the early 1990s (Weeden, 2013:5; Fletcher et al., 2013:225-226; Dangi and Jamal, 2016:4). A sustainable tourism approach relies on the host communities as the main actors to achieve the above goals. Countries around the world have used this form of tourism in their plans to expand rural destinations, including Oman (see Section 1.4).

This chapter presents Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, popular rural destinations in Oman, as case studies of tourism development centred on the local involvement of the communities. A rich dataset, including site observations, was collected to obtain a clear picture of the local participatory approaches underlying the management of tourism initiatives in the two villages. The analysed data are divided into three thematic areas: the impacts of tourism, the opinions and views of local residents and local tourism initiatives. In addition, barriers to participatory tourism development discussed in the previous chapter were considered, including the lack of awareness, the lack of financial resources and the regulations that limit citizens' participation in tourism management in Oman. The discussion is supported by statistics and elaborated by the government, private and local respondents' contributions to the research.

5.1 The Impacts of Tourism

According to the existing literature, tourism has many economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts at global, regional and local levels. In 2019, the tourism industry reached 1,500 USD billion in international revenue growth (UNWTO, 2020:1). This growth has contributed to an increased number of connections amongst worldwide destinations, which was expected to be more than 22,000 by the end of 2019 (IATA, 2020:34). From a cultural perspective, this continued growth helps build cultural dialogue and understanding between tourists and locals (UNESCO, 2014). However, it also leads to the damage of natural resources with outstanding universal value, such as the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland in Australia, which was damaged by the steady growth of tourists walking on the reef settlement (Pocock, 2019).

The Sultanate of Oman has also been experiencing the effects of tourism. As mentioned in Section 1.2, the number of tourist accommodations reached 492 in 2019 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b). This growth has multiplied job opportunities for Omanis, with 6,364 employees recorded in the hotel sector in 2019 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a:460). Drawing on these local and global examples, this research aims to fully understand the impact of tourism on the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql from economic, socio-cultural and environmental viewpoints. An examination of such impacts will help to not only understand the nature of local participation in the management of the tourism business but also indicate the extent to which residents are exposed to these impacts.

5.1.1   Economic Impacts

This section addresses the positive tourism impacts in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages that help those villages to improve the infrastructure to serve tourists, provide jobs opportunities for locals and encourage local enterprises. This section also discusses the negative effects of tourism movements and external businesses that capitalise on local resources due to a lack of tourism products. In addition, this study proposes some measures and solutions to maximise the benefits for the locals and reduce the negative effects by supporting local tourist businesses.

5.1.1.1 Positive Economic Impacts

The data obtained through interviews with stakeholders and through direct observations, mostly at the local level, reveal the economic impacts in both case-studied villages. Amongst the positive economic impacts is the development of infrastructure and tourism facilities. According to the UN Trade and Development Conference (UNCTAD), the public infrastructure in Oman is excellent, with road networks and electricity distribution continuously expanding, allowing for the connection of remote areas to the capital (201410). For example, in the transportation sector, developmental plans regularly include projects for road construction and asphalt to reach most of the Omani regions. The length of asphalted roads increased from 34,557 km in 2014 to 39,430 km by the end of 2018, an increase of 7,011 km (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:262) (Figure 63).
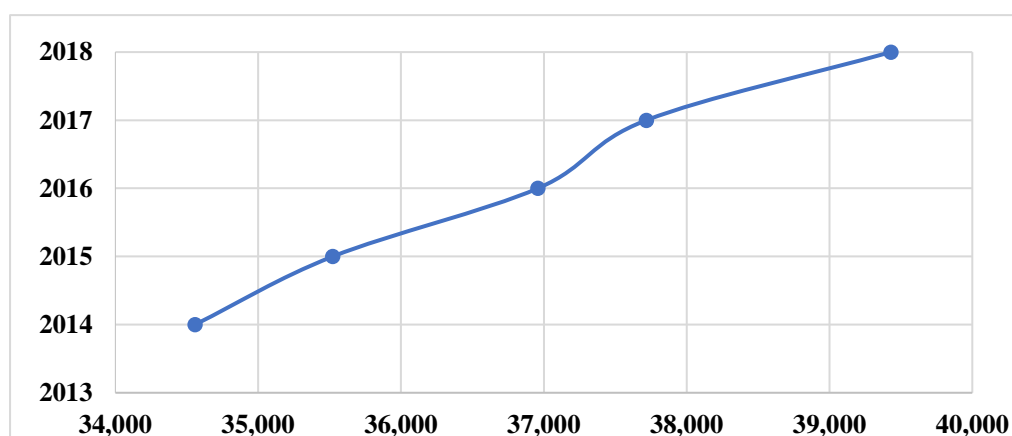
Figure 63: The total length of asphalted roads in Oman between 2014 and 2018 (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019a:262).

Al Hamra Province, which includes Misfat Al-Abyreen village, and Wadi Bani Khalid Province, which includes Muql village, have a good portion of the above-stated infrastructure, particularly transport networks, where dual carriageways have been constructed to connect them to main cites, especially Muscat. For example, the Muscat-Nizwa-Bahla dual carriageway connects to Al Hamra Province, including Misfat Al-Abryeen village. Likewise, both the Muscat-Ibra-Sur dual carriageway and Muscat-Qurayat-Sur dual carriageway connect to Wadi Bani Khalid Province, including Muql village. Due to these significant transport networks, which contain facilities such as fuel stations, supermarkets and grocery stores, the movement of tourists has increased, resulting in a variety of services and establishments being developed

to support both tourists' and inhabitants' needs, especially in the provinces nearest the studied villages.

For example, the number of tourists' establishments in Nizwa and Bahla adjacent to Al-Hamra, including Misfat Al-Abryeen village, reached 51 accommodations by the end of 2019 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b). In addition, a number of niche tourism products have been established to provide tourists with opportunities to explore the richness and uniqueness of cultural and cultural resources, particularly Nizwa, Bahla forts and Gebreen castle, which attracted 240,450 visitors by the end of 2019 (Oman, National Centre for statistics and Information, 2020a:453). In addition, Al Hoota Cave provides opportunities for tourists to discover the beauties and geological landscape of Oman, attracting more than 55,000 tourists by the end of 2019 (Section 1.7.2).
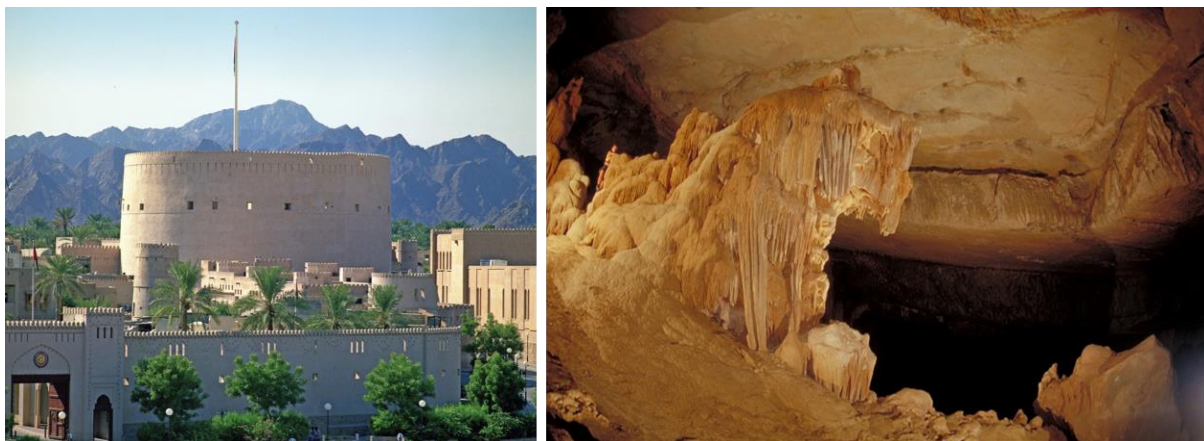
Figure 64: Nizwa Fort (left) and Al Hoota Cave (right) are in Al Hamra Province (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2014)

The movement of tourists has had a positive impact on improving tourism facilities in most provinces of Ash-Sharqiyah North and Ash-Sharqiyah South governorates adjacent to Wadi Bani Khalid province, including Muql village, where the number of accommodation facilities reached 113 establishments by the end of 2019 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2020b). Niche tourism products have also been improved to meet tourists' expectations. For example, Wadi Bani Khalid Province is close to Ash-Sharqiyah sand dunes, which are characterised by 21 camps that provide tourists with opportunities to experience the Bedouin lifestyle (Oman,

Ministry of Tourism, 2020b). In addition, tourists attracted to Muql village have resulted in enhanced ecotourism products, particularly Turtle Preserve in the Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate, which attracted an average of 45,288 tourists between 2017 and 2019, (Section 1.2).

Figure 65: View of Desert Rose Camp in Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate (left) (Source: Yahya Mohd Al- Hajri) and welcoming tourists to a tent in a Bedouin camp (Source: Salim Sultan Al-Hajri) in Ash-Sharqiyah sand dunes.

The impacts of the dual carriageway networks on the studied villages lie in the growing infrastructure, such as water and electricity, road networks and internet services. For example, road networks have been built to serve both residents and tourists (Figure 66), alongside schools, coffee shops, fuel stations, police stations and health services. Additionally, numerous supermarkets have been formed that enable tourists to buy goods, such as food, blankets, camping and barbecue equipment, while health centres provide health services for both locals and tourists.

Figure 66: Aerial photographs of Misfat Al-Abryeen (left) and Muql (right) showing the networks of asphalt roads that enable tourists to reach the villages (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019b).

Concerning the economic impacts of tourism on both studied villages, as noted in Section 1.7, the government has provided many tourist facilities to promote tourist movements in the two studied villages. Specifically, in Misfat Al-Abryeen, these include a visitor centre with a café, toilets, a parking area and signboards. In addition, the Ministry of Tourism has rehabilitated the traditional irrigational infrastructure, renovated two historic houses and leased them to the recently established Al Misfat Al Ahliyah LLCC. Three traditional houses have also been converted into a shop/information point, a bakery/workshop and a small restaurant (Figure 67) using funding from Bank Muscat to direct tourism returns towards community wellbeing (GOV-H21, PVT-CS5 and PVT-TO1).

The completion of the rehabilitation project was officially announced in a virtual ceremony on 30 November 2020 on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day celebration (Bank Muscat, 2020). This project integrates cultural heritage values management into sustainable tourism to preserve unique values, regenerate financial returns and offer an authentic tourism experience for visitors to explore the beauty of the village and experience local foods (Kutty, 2020). This project represents a collaboration of efforts between the government, the private sector as funder and the local level through a local company. These efforts succeeded in directing CSR to contribute to preserving cultural and natural values in a sustainable economic form.

Figure 67: The main gate under construction (left) (picture taken by the researcher on 27 December 2019), the bakery in Harat *ash-shuwa* or *shuwa* yard (middle) and Rogan Café (right) (ArCHIAM Centre, 2020).

Muql has similar infrastructures, including a visitor centre with toilets, a few shops selling local products, a restaurant, a parking area, a café with toilets by the pool area and signboards (Figure 68). However, according to official respondents (GOV-G23 and GOV-H21), the visitor centre and café with toilets by the pool area was awarded to non-local investor whose contract terminated recently. The government tried a few years ago through the Wali Office to prioritise

this project operation via local investors, but there was no interest from the locals at that time to invest. This lack of interest is attributed to insufficient knowledge and understanding about the tourism business in some rural destinations because tourism is considered a new business phenomenon (see Section 4.2.3). To ensure locals are partners in the tourism development in their locations, actions should be taken to involve the locals in awareness and training programmes, with financial incentives, to involve them in the tourism business.

Figure 68: The neglected visitor centre in Muql (left) and the coffee shop by the pools (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on 28 July 2018).

These tourism infrastructures enhance the tourists' experiences at these destinations, enabling deeper enjoyment of the local natural and cultural assets. While there are no official figures for the number of tourists who visit Misfat Al-Abryeen, tourists visiting Muql have increased by 50%, from 112,877 in 2015 to 220,320 at the end of 2019 (Section 1.7.3). Locals in both villages have reacted to the growth of tourist numbers by initiating tourism enterprises to meet tourists' needs and generate income as tourism operators. For example, data collected from Misfat Al-Abryeen residents show that the locals feel encouraged to renovate their traditional homes, mostly for tourism purposes. A local female stated that the growing tourism movement has encouraged owners to renovate their buildings and turn them into accommodation services (LMA-13).

According to June 2019 statistics (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2019b), three old buildings were restored and converted into licenced accommodation facilities, namely the Misfat Old House, Durat Al-Misfat and Hisn Al-Misfat. These accommodation facilities are marketed online via the popular Booking.com platform (Figure 69). These heritage accommodations confirm a trend of historic buildings being transformed into accommodation facilities such as

guesthouses and bed-breakfast services (Legrand et al., 2012:18-19). In addition, renovating the buildings gives residents a sense of identity and place (Lee and Chhabra, 2015:106), as has been seen in historical sites in Singapore, India and Vietnam.
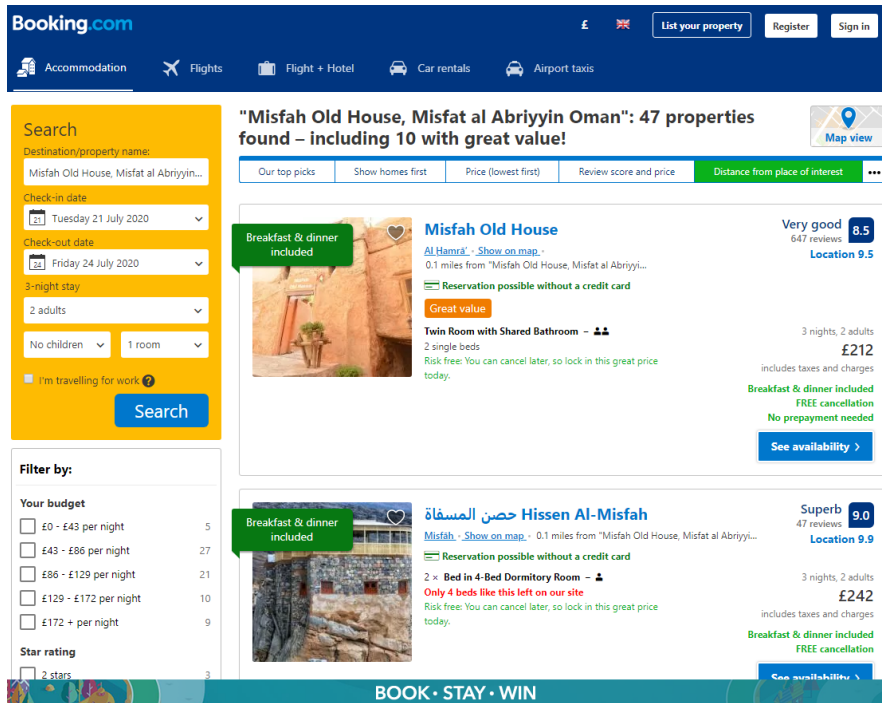
Figure 69: A screenshot of tourist lodges in Misfat Al-Abryeen, bookable through the Booking.com website.

In addition, from a site observation conducted on 20 August 2019, it emerged that local entrepreneurs had recently set up other relevant businesses, such as a beekeeping house, which has had a positive impact on tourism (Figure 70). Another house has also been renovated and converted into a museum, where rooms are thematically fitted with household and personal items to showcase their original use. The renovation of old buildings for new uses in connection with tourism helps preserve traditional structures, along with the values and ways of life associated with them (Timothy and Teye, 2009:247).

Figure 70: A licenced guesthouse (left) and a beekeeping shop (right), both renovations of old buildings
in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen (pictures taken by the researcher on 18 July 2018).

Unlike Misfat Al-Abryeen, there are only two private tourism facilities in Muql, namely the
Oman Handicrafts House and a 38-room guesthouse under construction (Figure 71). This low
number indicates that investment in tourism and local initiatives in Muql village is still very
low, and regulators should encourage locals to invest in the tourism business by providing
awareness and training programmes that include attractive financial and regulative incentives,
as proposed in Section 5.1.1.2.

Figure 71: The Omani Handicrafts House in the centre of Wadi Bani Khalid on the way to Muql village
(left) and the guest house under construction in Muql village (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on
28 July 2018).

The above examples show that new business opportunities are emerging, especially in the
hospitality, local produce and craft sector, which provides direct and indirect local tourism
businesses for locals. Tourism generates financial returns for countries and destinations and
supports the growth of other businesses such as agriculture, craft industry and fishing (Xie,

2010:118; Al-Shaaibi, 2011:Ch5:11; Hipsher, 2017:233). The increase in the number of tourism facilities generates job opportunities at tourism destinations (Sharma, 2004:25; Cukier, 2004:167; Gautam, 2008:88; Sebele, 2010:140; Holloway and Humphreys, 2012:11; Mensah and Mensah 2013:31-32; Amir et al., 2015:117). As confirmed by participants from public and private institutions, tourism raises revenue and offers job opportunities to host communities. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents from both villages confirmed that the tourism industry offers a variety of employment opportunities in various economic activities.

However, the number of workers in the tourism businesses in both villages is unknown, since the National Centre for Statistics and Information in Oman only provides information on the number of employees in the entire tourism sector in Oman. However, during the onsite visits, two residents interviewed in Misfat Al-Abryeen stated that tourism in the village has directly created nine direct jobs, including receptionists at three licenced accommodation facilities (Figure 72) and a tour operator called Canyon Adventures and Tours. Moreover, nearly 40 people are working indirectly in tourism (LMA-16 and LMA-10). One participant (LMA-10) stated that the tourism enterprises in Misfat Al-Abryeen provide 10 full-time and part-time job opportunities for expatriates at the junior level, particularly in housekeeping services. The involvement of expatriate workers is attributed to the low wages offered to these workers, as businesspeople or tourism operators may not be able to pay Omanis or locals who require higher salaries.

Figure 72: A young man working as a receptionist at a heritage lodge in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (left) (picture taken by the researcher on 27 December 2019). Two locals work as rescue staff at the pool area in Muql (picture taken by the researcher on 29 July 2018).

Amongst these jobs opportunities are male residents who earn money by picking up tourists from the airport and driving them to the destination and by selling honey and dates; female locals receive income by cooking, planting roses and preparing infusions such as *zamootah* (Figure 73), known for its stomach-ache relieving properties (LMA-09, PVT-A13 and PVT-A23). The involvement of local females in the tourism business indicates that local female producers have positive attitudes towards the tourism business.

Figure 73: A man climbs a palm tree to collect fresh dates to offer Omani coffee to tourists as they arrive at the accommodation (left). A collection of local products, including oil and rose water, made by local women (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on 18 July 2018).

In the village of Muql, two projects – cleaning, and rescue and ambulance services – were awarded to non-local Omani investors through public tendering to provide the necessary services for tourists at the pool area. The specification of rescue and ambulance services is rarely made available to companies in rural places, as they require capable operators mostly from the capital, main cities or sometimes from international suppliers who understand the regulations and measures required to ensure the safety of tourists, conduct regular training for the team members and provide the required equipment. Nevertheless, these projects provide around 12 direct jobs for local residents who work as rescue team members (see above Figure 72), while four local guides were employed by the government to provide guiding services for tourists (GOV-B15 and GOV-H21). In addition, the researcher interviewed a female participant who made various handicrafts from palm leaves, which are offered to tourists and international guests of government institutions (PVT-C18).

Similarly, some residents indirectly earn an income from the sale of agricultural products, such as mangoes and fresh dates, known locally as *ratab*. Additionally, school-age teenagers work as street vendors during the school holidays, offering a variety of products and services such as carrying tourists' luggage (LMU-23).

The above discussion shows that tourist activities in both villages offer direct and indirect employment opportunities through which locals are able to money. Tourism also enhances activities, such as agriculture and the craft industry. Thus, beneficiaries like entrepreneurs, employees, suppliers or households have access to better life opportunities, including education, and are financially able to build new houses, expand existing businesses or start new ones. Zainal et al. (2012:499-500) and Doğan, and Morady (2017:134) claimed that tourism was effective at enhancing locals' quality of life. However, actions should be taken to foster partnerships with key parties in the public and private sectors to maximise the benefits for the locals in terms of establishing enterprises, offering local foods and manufacturing handmade products.

5.1.1.2 Negative economic impacts

Despite the positive impacts experienced by host communities, the collected data show that the movement of tourists in both studied villages, especially during weekends and public holidays, has impacted and limited the movement of the locals and disturbed their comfort. For example, the increased traffic in both villages is considered to be mostly caused by unregulated tourist movement, which, as De Lima and Green (2017:277) stated, could have the extreme consequence of blocking access to hospitals or health centres in the event of an emergency. Residents also feel uncomfortable because traffic congestion prevents them from accessing their houses and places of interest. Lowe and Pidgeon (2019:27) argued that excessive traffic affects the enjoyment and use of land, as well as residential properties. Increased traffic also causes visual disturbances and puts pressure on the capacity of natural resources, which will be highlighted in Section 5.1.3.2.

Another negative economic impact is that some financial losses are incurred. Some participants claimed that non-local investors run their tourism businesses, capitalising on local natural resources and culture. A local participant in Misfat Al-Abryeen claimed that an external tour operator provided a non-local guide without engaging any local guide or assistant (LMA-10). In addition, accommodations in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen offer a variety of food and drinks for overnight or half-day tourists. However, some non-local operators try to limit the visit times in the village. A local entrepreneur confirmed that some non-local tour operators

plan to have lunch somewhere other than Misfat Al-Abryeen, while others offer their customers a lunch box from their hotel in the capital or another city instead of eating local dishes (PVT-TO1).

As stated in Section 5.1.1, Muql is a year-round tourism destination and there are limited local tourism initiatives; however, responses from Muql locals indicated that the tourism activities and experiences are free. For example, a local participant said that despite the high number of tourists, especially on holidays, Muql Village earns little money (LMU-25). An external tour operator claimed that locals have insufficient knowledge and experience related to language, communication skills and guiding techniques compared to non-local guides (PVT-TO4 and PVT-TO2). Nepal and Saarinen (2016:72) confirmed that private tour operators cannot rely on the local community because they have insufficient skills, proficiency in English and lack the practical techniques and experience required to deal with tourists.

These findings indicate that the lack of financial earnings in Muql is due to the lack of local initiatives related to accommodation and tour services for locals, which motivate non-local operators to run tourism activities instead of employing locals. As a result, non-local tour operators are more likely to invest their finances and spend their incomes in places different from where it was earned (Rahman, 2010:219-220). The loss of earnings in tourist destinations due to insufficient skills and experience related to managing tourism services and untapped local business opportunities prevents local communities from acquiring legitimate shares in these businesses. Measures are therefore needed to initiate a partnership approach with key stakeholders in the public and private sectors that will encourage locals to offer a variety of authentic products by engaging in various awareness and training programmes.

In summary, while some tourism infrastructure, facilities and services are provided by the government and locals of the studied villages to enhance tourists' movement, generate incomes and improve the locals' livelihood through creating job opportunities, this study found that locals' tourism initiatives were insufficient to maximise their benefits and to meet the expectations of tourists. Therefore, important interventions and measures are needed to encourage the locals to take on the direct management of their resources so that they can

experience the economic benefits and enhance the tourism experience. A partnership approach can be fostered through offering training programmes and financial and legislative incentives for the locals to innovate authentic products and services as a means to attract tourists, as has been done in Indonesia (Timothy, 2012:78). These incentives would encourage locals to develop skills in cooking, sewing, wallet making and painting (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1356), to engage tourists in traditional activities such as planting and harvesting, and provide accommodation for tourists to stay overnight at traditional lodges (Asker et al., 2010:89-90), as is done in local tourism destinations in Japan and Malaysia.

To enhance the tourism experience, locally made products for tourism-related businesses should meet the highest quality standards as well as consumers' expectations in terms of authenticity (Haven- Tang and Jones, 2012:1). This might entail, for example, innovating marketing branding for local products to show tourists that these products are authentic and unique. Examples of this are the 'Discover the Traditional Culture', 'Untouched Thailand' and 'Experience the Real Thailand' campaigns launched in Ban Talae Nok village in Ranong province in Thailand (Dolezal, 2011:132), and the MiM (Made in Monmouthshire) innovative brand that was developed to promote local authenticity and rurality (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014:65). In addition, tour operators should help locals market the abovementioned products through brochures and leaflets, as is done in Thailand (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015:105). The establishment of these key partnerships will encourage locals to be more proactive in promoting their heritage. In addition, partnerships between external bodies, such as tour operators and investors and locals, would work towards reducing loss of returns and fostering tourist satisfaction.

5.1.2   Sociocultural Impacts

As stated in Section 5.1, the site observation visits to Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages revealed various examples of the sociocultural effects of the tourism business. This section describes the positive and negative sociocultural impacts on both studied villages to promote local initiatives related to cultural aspects and minimise the potential of tourism to disturb the locals' culture, tradition and comfort.

5.1.2.1 Positive Sociocultural Impacts

The data collected from participants from the government and private sector, as well as some from the local residents from the two villages, were examined with respect to the positive impact of tourism on the development of intercultural exchanges between tourists and the host community. A government respondent involved in decision-making described tourism as a simple way for tourists to learn about sociocultural aspects and to respect the traditions and values of the locals (GOV-T12).

According to a tour guide participant, tourists want to learn about old buildings, traditional folklore, local agricultural activities and how to create unique crafts (PVT-TO3). Although responses from the locals highlight tourists' negative behaviours (see Section 5.1.2.2), some acknowledge that tourism promotes sociocultural understanding, which supports UNESCO's definition of tourism as a cultural dialogue between tourists and host communities (UNESCO, 2014). This dialogue provides opportunities for tourists to experience places not only visually, but also culturally, for example, by wearing traditional Omani clothing, trying traditional cooking and performing traditional activities such as harvesting. Figure 74 shows international tourists posing in Omani dresses at the museum in Misfat Al-Abryeen for a photo opportunity and climbing a palm tree to collect fresh dates (*ratab*) (PVT-M16).

Figure 74: Tourists wear the Omani typical dress (left) (Source: Mr Abdullrahman Al Abri) and a journalist climbs a palm tree under local guide supervision in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (right) (Ryan Pyle Production, 2017).

Despite having modest local tourism initiatives, the locals of Muql experience some degree of cultural exchange and dialogue with the tourists. For example, in both Muql and Misfat Al-Abryeen, tourists are keen to experience riding a donkey as a way to experience a key aspect of traditional life (Aliefendioğlu and Vizvári, 2017:62). In addition, tourists can engage in exploring nature and daily life in Omani villages. Collective folklore events run by locals also provide opportunities for tourists to become immersed in local cultural customs.

For example, during the Eid holidays in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages, locals organise traditional folklore, known locally as *rizha* (Figure 75) which combines dance, singing, poetry, acrobatic feats and music and is one of the most widely performed genres in Oman (Reynolds, 2007:154). Events and festivals within the host community are an important platform for tourists to learn more about the importance of folklore and crafts. According to Egger and Maurer (2015:289), cultural events organised by the host community encourage interaction and cultural exchange between tourists and locals, who can showcase aspects of their sociocultural heritage (Laing and Frost, 2014:137; Yasuda et al., 2018:125).

Figure 75: Locals perform the rizha folklore in Muql village (left) and local youth shows some actions with a sword in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (right) (Source: Abdullah Al-Subhi).

Another benefit from this cultural exchange for the host community is that most international tourists speak English, as well as people from the United Kingdom who ranked second after

India, with 134,702 inbound tourists to Oman in 2018 (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2019a). As such, the majority of local research participants know some English vocabulary, particularly greetings and thanks, and a few are fluent in English. Some locals, especially youths, try to learn similar words in other foreign languages, such as French, Italian, German and Japanese (LMA-08 and LMU-23) because they realise that tourists cannot speak the locals' language, as observed by Rahman (2011:269) in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

The findings indicate that locals in the two studied villages believe that tourism not only generates income but also provides a platform for cultural exchange (Alhasanat and Hyasat, 2011:145-146; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017:14) between the hosts and the guests, which contributes to building dialogue and creating mutual respect amongst nations. Therefore, the proposed partnership not only enhances locals' initiatives from an economic perspective but also encourages locals to show off their sociocultural values, such as traditional folklore events to tourists. This would not only help to increase tourists' understanding of local cultural values, but also create a global awareness and understanding of poverty and human rights abuses (Thilakavathy and Maya, 2019:96).

5.1.2.2 Negative Sociocultural Impacts

The observations in both Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql also revealed that certain tourists' behaviours have a detrimental effect on the daily life and privacy of the local population. Locals report that tourists, whether intentionally or not, often neglect visitor signage in the studied villages, wear inappropriate clothing, make a noise, throw water bottles and fail to follow safety instructions, which can result in serious injury or even death.

Two participants reported that tourists sometimes take unchecked paths to recently opened houses (LMA-10 and LMA-42). While this was confirmed during onsite observations, it is equally true that no signage is available to guide tourists the right way, except for the yellow signs leading to accommodation facilities (Figure 76). Another participant attributed this problem to deficient tour guidance onsite, saying, 'Unfortunately, some tour guides wait for their vehicles near the entrance to the old village. While tourists begin their journey without

guidance, they make mistakes and take unknown routes, disturbing locals' (LMA-32). While the above does not constitute a major issue for locals, it often results in tourists complaining about getting lost (Morrison, 2018:5-18).

Figure 76: Yellow signs installed on the electricity column to direct tourists to the accommodation facilities in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (picture taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

To minimise local reactions and maximise tourist understanding, operators and local businesses in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen should work with the institutions concerned to develop appropriate signage. As Timothy and Boyd (2015:204) have shown, it is important not only to provide information about places and routes but also to help tourists stay away from unknown or sensitive places. Stewart et al. (2017:70) explained that multilingual behavioural guidelines for tourists are important in remote destinations to reduce locals' reactions. Unlike Misfat Al-Abryeen, Muql does not experience this issue, as access to the pools area is located away from the residential areas, which are hidden by palm and mango tree gardens.

The literature attributes disrespectful behaviours towards the privacy of locals to a lack of care about their culture (Walley 2010:237). Lawson (2013:102) described these behaviours as interfering in the social lives of locals, while Murphy (2013:137) attributed these behaviours to a lack of understanding of local traditions. To prevent inappropriate tourist behaviours,

additional signage is needed in rural areas to encourage respect for locals' privacy (Figure 77). Some tourism destinations, such as Safari Tourism in Tanzania, offer pre-travel guidance to tourists about photography (Winks, 2009:31).

Figure 77: Two signboards were installed in Muql (left) (picture taken by the researcher on 26 August 2019) and Misfat Al-Abryeen (right) to guide tourists to follow the required guidelines, including asking for permission before taking pictures (picture taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

Another negative issue regarding tourists' visits to rural destinations, according to the local participants, is their inappropriate clothing. Local participants from Misfat Al-Abryeen viewed tourism as a beneficial activity only if tourists were dressed appropriately (LMA-14, LMA-26 and LMA-42). An elder from Muql village stated, 'Our culture and tradition obligate us to welcome and host any foreigners male or female, while they are required to respect our culture by wearing proper clothes and not drinking alcohol in our places' (LMU-07).

As women are more conservative in rural areas than in cities (Al-Shaaibi, 2011), some of them wear *burqa*, a face covering, when they leave their homes (Chatty, 2011:11). Local women, cover their bodies from head to feet with *abaya* (Smith, 2010:84; Darke, 2013:29); thus, the locals feel uncomfortable when tourists wear inappropriate clothing that fails to adhere to Islamic principles and traditions in Oman. Local women, especially in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen, refuse to use tourist routes to avoid seeing them in inappropriate clothes (LMA-10

and PVT-A13). The literature on this topic refers to various destinations in different Muslim countries. As Page and Connell (2014:298) argued, tourist misbehaviour and a lack of respect for local cultures because of their different religious beliefs leads to discontent among tourists. However, Pornprasit and Rurkkhum (2017:10-11) claimed that certain rural tourism destinations have tried to prevent tourists from misbehaving by directing them to dress appropriately, as in Satun province in Thailand.

Several participants (LMA-12, LMU-31, LMU-20, LMU-04 and LMU-15) reported that signage in both villages was successfully being implemented to raise awareness amongst visitors about wearing appropriate clothing (Figure 78). However, further efforts from tour operators are required to direct tourists to wear appropriate clothes to achieve a higher level of satisfaction among local residents.

Figure 78: General signboard installed in the parking area in Misfat Al-Abryeen to encourage tourists to wear appropriate clothes (left) (picture taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018). Signboard installed in the pool area in Muql, requiring tourists to wear appropriate swimsuits (right) (picture taken by the researcher on 26 August 2019).

According to Brosnahan (2019), tour operators should provide clothes to tourists who are unaware of local dress codes so they can cover exposed body parts. This practice is common at pilgrimage sites worldwide, such as mosques and churches that are open to visitors. For example, at the Blue Mosque in Turkey (Figure 79), a kiosk has been built that loans visitors headscarves free of charge. According to Molinari (2016), often in churches, multilingual posters can be found that warn tourists to wear appropriate clothing out of respect for the sanctity of the place, while cathedrals in Italy provide scarves for tourists to cover their shoulders upon entering.
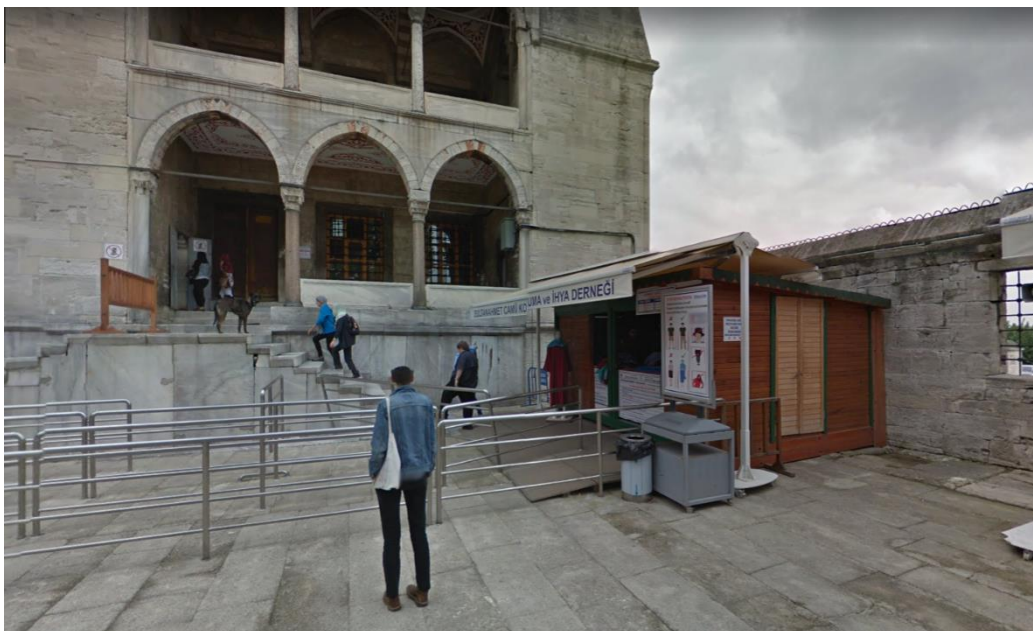
Figure 79: A kiosk loans headscarves to tourists free of charge before entering the Blue Mosque in Turkey (Source: Google Earth).

Despite adequate signage, guides and local services, a participant (LMU-23) claimed that the neglect of safety regulations and lack of adequate skills has led to accidents, including injuries and deaths, in Muql. This was confirmed by other participants, who claimed that most tourists enjoy the beautiful scenery of the valley, but some practices require a lot of skill, such as swimming, and some visitors have been injured or killed by falling onto a rock or drowning (LMU-09). Government officials reported that fatal incidents usually occur in the darkness when rescuers are off work (GOV-B15). To warn against such dangers, relevant signs are displayed on site, as shown in Figure 80.

Figure 80: Signs showing the swimming hours in the pool area in the village of Muql (left) and warning of a slippery slope (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on 26 August 2019).

Statistical data on injuries and deaths collected from November 2015 to September 2019 show that 330 tourists received rescue services and four drowned due to inadequate swimming skills (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2019c). Although no deaths have been recorded in the last three years 2016-2019, the number of injuries remains high, which negatively affects the reputation of the destination and the country in general. Other inappropriate tourist behaviours include noise and inappropriate garbage disposal, especially on weekends and holidays. According to a local respondent, tourists sometimes dwell at the site overnight, singing and making a noise (LMU-23). Other participants from Muql reported that some tourists put trash in its designated containers, while others leave garbage behind (LMU-26, LMU-09 and LMU-13). To mitigate these problems, regulators need to implement awareness programmes for tour operators, independent tour guides and tourists, improve the understanding of potential risks and hazards and direct tourists to respect the locals' comfort and to leave places clean after use.

To sum up, the findings show that tourists have experienced the sociocultural activities offered by locals, such as exploring the uniqueness of architectural buildings mainly in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, trying on local clothes and participating in harvesting activities, while the locals have learned foreign languages to smooth the exchange of cultural aspects. However, some tourists' behaviours affect the locals' privacy and traditions, such as wearing

inappropriate dress, taking unofficial tracks, being nosey, leaving garbage and failing to follow safety regulations.

These issues indicate that awareness programmes are needed to promote a better understanding for tourists to respect the local customs. This could be done by showing visitors promotional videos that explain the values of the site and the behaviours expected of them to minimise damage or by providing brochures that can inform the tourist experience (De Lima and Green, 2017:277). Awareness creation, supported by educational materials, has proved successful in various Caribbean protected areas (Herrera-Silveira et al., 2010:29-30). In addition, tour operators and tour guides in Oman should provide orientation sessions to educate tourists about local traditions and maintain the locals' privacy (Al-Saadi, 2015:85).

5.1.3 Environmental Impacts

This part discusses the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the natural landscape. This discussion highlights areas where locals and tourists contribute to preserving the environment through their involvement in eco-friendly activities. This section also proposes interventions required by concerned stakeholders to overcome the effects of tourism on natural resources.

5.1.3.1 Positive environmental impacts

The findings reveal a few examples of positive environmental impacts due to the natural uniqueness of the villages. According to local participants, most tourists take photographs of the agricultural landscape and geological features to document their experiences (LMU-19 and LMA-05). As such, interactions take place amongst tourists and the natural landscape in unique and individual ways beyond the economic side, which enhances the feeling of respect for nature. Taking pictures has opened new corridors of interaction between tourists and newly discovered places, these new experiences become time stamps for further dissemination between relatives or friends (Berger, 2010:12) or to share their experience with others and craft memories (Miettinen et al., 2019:78).

Another example of a positive environmental impact shows that some locals have owned donkeys to carry tourists, especially adventurers and their luggage, to the mountain plateau through unpaved mountain routes, not only to camp, but also to star gaze (LMA-32 and LMU-04). This means that those locals, especially tour operators, have a sense of awareness and understanding that maintaining these geological and mountain routes is a tool to generate income and enhance the tourists' experience.

While both studied villages were characterised with spectacular natural beauties (mainly agricultural terraces, palm tree oasis and geological landscape), the analysis related to positive environmental impacts shows insufficient efforts to build locals' understanding of the importance of natural resources in tourism development. Therefore, environmental awareness education is further required to increase locals' appreciation towards their inherited natural resources, such as flora and faunae species. One tool of this proposed environmental awareness is establishing interpretive signage that gives a scientific description of the flora and fauna characteristic of each villages. In addition, this environmental education could extend to conduct an outdoor campaign that includes cleaning natural features, maintaining mountain hiking routes, and cleaning and rehabilitating *aflaj* channels by involving locals' youth, students, tourists, volunteers, and businesspersons, as Graci (2013:33-34) addressed in Indonesia. This proposed environmental education is expected to enhance locals and tourists' positive interaction with natural values and the local landscape to reduce the effects of wider developments that exacerbate the fragility of these natural landscapes.

5.1.3.2 Negative environmental impacts

The findings also revealed some negative environmental impacts on the natural resources due to tourism development, such as resort construction (Buckley, 2012:87), natural pollution (Holloway and Humphreys, 2012:152-153) and graffiti (Mustafa and Abu Tayeh, 2011:90-91). This research found that neither village is isolated from the impacts of environmental tourism on its natural resources. For example, as stated in Section 5.1.1.2, overcrowded traffic not only affects the locals' comfort and limits the tourists' experience, but also affects the natural resources through visual disturbance and pollution.

Collected responses at local level mentioned that vehicle traffic congestion due to increased tourist movement has a negative impact. Although parking is provided, the number of vehicles, especially on weekends and holidays, is several times higher than the designated parking capacity (Figure 81). For example, the Misfat Al-Abryeen Visitor Centre has more than 30 parking spaces, which are insufficient to accommodate the vehicles of both locals and tourists during peak season (LMA-32 and LMA-10). The increase in traffic also means people have to queue in their vehicles often for more than half an hour to reach their houses or places of interest in the old village, a local participant (LMA-42) confirmed. The keeper (*wakil*) of the *falaj* system in the old village of Misfat Al-Abryeen is personally affected by traffic congestion during the tourist season because it makes it difficult for him to reach the village by car to monitor the water distribution in the agricultural fields. Hence, he had to buy a motorcycle to move around the old village (LMA-11).

Muql is also affected by traffic jams, with cars, vans and passenger vehicles occupying all available parking spaces, as shown in (Figure 81). One participant described that in the event of an emergency, such as needing to rescue someone, it is necessary to get a helicopter due to too many vehicles in the pool area (LMU-12).

Figure 81: Aerial view of traffic congestion along both sides of roads in Muql village (left) (Source: Rashid Al Sa'adi) and close-up view of vehicle overcrowding in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (right) (Picture taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

Other participants blamed the government for encouraging tourists to visit the pool area since this creates inconveniences for locals (LMU-08). For example, one local female claimed that the locals experience more problems, such as noise and pollution, than they do benefits from tourist visits (LMU-10). Tour operators also struggle to find parking for their vehicles. One tour guide stated, 'As a driver and at the same time a tour guide, my customers were saddened and disappointed by the traffic jams that affected their first experience in Muql village' (PVT-TO4).

In response to traffic congestion in both villages, some locals took measures to control the tourists' vehicle movement (Figure 82). For example, Al Misfat Al Ahliyah L.L.C. created additional unpaved parking areas to reduce congestion in old Misfat Al-Abryeen, especially during the tourist season. In Muql, an initiative was taken by a local youth two years ago during the Eid holidays to manage congested traffic by designating an additional unpaved parking area to accommodate additional vehicles. However, no other similar initiatives have been taken since (LMU-12 and LMU-09).

Figure 82: Locals initiated additional unpaved parking areas to reduce the traffic congestion in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (left) (Picture is taken by the researcher on 26th December 2018). Right: designated an additional parking area have been prepared to reduce vehicles congestion and in Muql (right) (Source: Rashid Al Sa'adi).

In accordance with the propositions of Tourism Development Plans for Muql (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2012:96) and Misfat Al-Abryeen (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2015:143-155), regulators should allocate designated sites and budgetary funds to reduce traffic congestion while serving locals and tourists alike. The plans propose providing a shuttle service to carry visitors from the main access gate of the village to the designated area where all cars, coaches and other vehicles should be parked. In addition, innovative transportation services, such as cable car services, should be proposed as long-term solutions. These could be introduced through government investment, as was done in Ngong Ping village in Hong Kong (Wong, 2017:172-175) or through private investment, as was done in the Montserrat sanctuary in Spain (Aulet et al., 2019:53-55). The idea of the cable car goes beyond transportation purposes and traffic reduction needs to provide tourists with opportunities to enjoy scenic views of the destination from above. While this falls within the remit of developers' commitments, tour operators should guide tourists responsibly across residential areas to avoid disturbing the locals and impinging upon their privacy (De Lima and Green, 2017:277).

Another negative environmental impact due to the tourists' movements is in Muql, where many tourists swim in the pool area, especially in the summer, as observed during the site visit on 26 August 2019 (Figure 83). Such a large number of tourists at one time puts pressure on the carrying capacity of the place. Additionally, since the pools in Muql feed the *falaj*, whose water

is issued to irrigate crops along both banks of the *wadi*, water pollution due to intensive swimming constitutes a health hazard.

Figure 83: Taken from the top of the hill, this picture shows the large number of tourists at the pool area in Muql (Source: Oman, Ministry of Tourism).

In light of the above, regulators should raise awareness amongst tourists about the potential consequences of swimming in the pools and limit the carrying capacity of the site to ensure that the area accommodates a reasonable number of tourists (Batabyal, 2018:204). This is done by controlling the number of visitors to the pools to protect the natural resources, as in the case of Al Hoota Cave in Oman, which allows no more than 750 people a day to preserve the natural habitat and the blind fish and bats (Al Hoota Cave, 2020). Additionally, there should be times when tourists are not allowed to swim so that the water can recover its natural properties. Doing so would require the collaboration of tour operators, tour guides, tourists and volunteers to ensure the recovery of pool areas. Local businesspersons could fund an awareness programme to conserve the natural pools, similar to the awareness campaign funded by businesspersons in Indonesia to preserve marine life (Graci, 2013:33-34).

In summary, both villages have the potential to attract domestic and international tourists due to the richness of their natural and cultural characteristics. The movement of tourists to those villages has had positive and negative economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts. From an economic perspective, some locals have benefitted from creating accommodation facilities, especially in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, as well as small-scale initiatives related to tours and selling handmade products. However, tourism has encouraged external bodies to run their businesses because they claim that locals have insufficient skills and knowledge to provide adequate services to tourists. From a sociocultural perspective, tourists can explore the local foods and wear local dress to create a memorable experience. However, the locals suffer from unacceptable behaviours among tourists involving noise, wearing unacceptable clothing, disturbing the locals' privacy and failing to follow safety regulations. In terms of the environmental impacts, increased awareness is needed to reduce traffic congestion, and the number of swimmers in the pools during the holidays and weekends needs to be limited and controlled to reduce the negative effects on the natural resources.

The above description of tourism impacts in the investigated villages shows that insufficient efforts and measures were provided by interested stakeholders to maximise positive impacts and minimise negative impacts. This demonstrates that no practical plan has been implemented to include the local community in the management of rural tourism despite the fact that locals are better equipped to represent their values to tourists than foreign operators (Park and Kim, 2016). In all the investigated villages, the government's role was limited to the construction of visitor centers and some basic services, such as toilets, guiding regulations and parking lots, with no regard for improving the local community's capacity to manage these facilities in a manner that benefits the community. This is because decision-makers in Oman have a limited understanding of the approach of community involvement and lack experience, as the tourism sector was only recently established in 2004 (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Balushi, 2008; Al-Shaabi, 2011), necessitating a sufficient amount of time to comprehend the various dimensions of community involvement in tourism management.

Since sustainable tourism is considered a well-designed form of tourism that aims to preserve cultural heritage values and promote intercultural understanding and peace through an appropriate local participatory approach (UNTWO, 2017; Snyman, 2017), interventions by concerned stakeholders are required to build a local community's technical and financial capabilities to manage their resources in a sustainable tourism approach. Locals should be involved in practical training related to learning a foreign language in order to improve their knowledge and skills and communicate effectively with tourists who speak other languages, just as Zighy Bay Resort in Oman provides teachers to help locals learn English (Al Amri, 2008). Additionally, Stone (2015) stated that locals in Botswana should be involved in leadership, hospitality, marketing and safety standard training programmes, as well as learning guiding techniques (Nepal and Saarinen, 2016), to maximise their financial returns. Furthermore, as Haven-Tang and Sedgley (2014) explained in Monmouthshire, UK, training is required to design tour packages that include arts, foods, drinks and handmade crafts in order to attract tourists and enhance their experience.

Financial programmes should be allocated through a multi-stakeholder approach to fund various initiatives related to building local capabilities. For example, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes should be directed to fund the rehabilitation of heritage buildings and natural resources, similar to the coral reef restoration programmes in Bali, Indonesia (Rahmawati et al., 2016). Tourists should be encouraged to buy local products by designating an outlet to promote them, just like yacht operators did on Mentawai Island, Indonesia (Jamal and Robinson, 2009). Marketing brands, such as Discover the Traditional Culture and Untouched Thailand in Ranong Province, Thailand, should be innovated to promote rural destinations and local products, and advertisement materials, such as flyers and brochures in Samut Songkhram Province, should be created (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015). The above-mentioned interventions, which will be discussed in the following chapter, will help locals manage their natural and cultural resources as tourism products for their own advantage and to enhance the experience of tourists.

5.2 Locals' Attitudes in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql Villages

Several studies have focused on defining the locals' attitudes and opinions towards tourism development. A case study of a small community in Folgaria, Italy, showed that people generally understand that tourism brings benefits (Gabriel et al., 2011:373). According to Carter-James and Dowling (2017:225), a positive perception of tourism enables locals to market their products directly to their customers, thus generating income. According to Frînculeasa and Chiţescu (2018:138), exploring and evaluating local perceptions and opinions helps planners, developers and decision-makers to solve problems and take advantage of development opportunities. This study identifies and evaluates the local perceptions about tourism in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql. The collected data are analysed according to three main themes: locals' opinions and views on tourism, experience working with tourism concepts and the preferred local tourist activities.

5.2.1   Locals' Opinions and Views about Tourism

Many researchers have evaluated the views of locals on the tourism business to determine their acceptance. For example, Michael (2009:97-102) reported that the people of a barbarian village in Tanzania were aware that tourism has become a source of income and cultural exchange between people and tourists. Similarly, local people in Jerash, Jordan, were positive about tourism in terms of income generation, job creation and wellbeing (Alshboul, 2016:98). However, Al-Shaaibi (2011) found that residents around the Wave Resort project in Oman did not fully understand the importance of tourism due to limited education and awareness.

Two different views were obtained in this study (Section4.2.1): the first was that the locals did not have enough information about the tourism concept, while the second was that the locals had a better view of tourism than before. The data gathered supported that the majority of local participants were aware that tourism helps create job opportunities, generate income from various associated activities, and conserve natural and cultural resources. Additionally, a few respondents said that tourism can promote cultural exchange between tourists and locals, while a few responded that tourism puts added pressure on natural resources and cultural assets.

As discussed in Section 5.1.1.1, the local awareness of the benefits of tourism is increasing. Locals in Misfat Al-Abryeen are starting to renovate old buildings for business purposes. One resident reported returning to the village to renovate his home to serve tourists (LMA-32); In addition, some locals are investing their capital after retiring in managing traditional accommodation services for tourists (LMA-16). Another participant (LMA-10) said that some locals who disagreed with the previous government initiatives to renovate traditional buildings had changed their minds about tourism and now offer a variety of tourism products after renovating their buildings. More than a decade ago, there were no tourism services or products in Misfat Al-Abryeen (Mershen, 2007:191).

However, the ongoing tourism development in this village shows that people have developed an entrepreneurial approach to tourism and now offer a variety of tourism products that meet the needs of tourists. While the village of Muql has fewer local tourism businesses than Misfat Al-Abryeen, the data show that the locals understand that tourism is a source of community development. For example, local participants (LMU-26 and PVT-FS8) found that some locals, including grocery storekeepers and crop producers, make money by selling tourists a variety of goods such as coals, baskets, mats and fruit juices, especially from November to April.

Compared to the growth of local tourism businesses in Misfat Al-Abryeen, the growth of tourism in Muql is modest. According to a resident of Muql Village, local businessmen in Muql village consider working in real estate, legal advice and the compensation process in Muscat as a profitable business location (LMU-23). However, this opinion is linked to their ignorance of the benefits of tourism as a new business phenomenon (Al-Masroori, 2006:235; Al-Balushi, 2008:158; Al-Shaaibi, 2011: Ch5:16). Businessmen in the area are familiar with the tourism industry but are more interested in quick-win businesses, such as real estate (GOV-T12). In other words, they have knowledge and understanding of the tourism business, but they are not interested in developing tourism-related businesses. Therefore, measures should be taken by regulators through a partnership approach and training programmes that include financial and legislative incentives to improve businesspersons' awareness and encourage them to participate in tourism, as stated in Section 5.1.1.2.

Additionally, some locals of both villages think that tourism affects natural resources and cultural values more than it brings benefits to the host community (Surabhi, 2019). According to the participants (LMA-14, LMU-10 and LMU-12), tourism allows visitors to enter the village without respecting the privacy of the locals; this has benefitted outsiders, especially tour operators, who have established businesses on the local land and utilised local resources. Sebele (2010:143-144) found a similar situation at Khama Rhino Sanctuary in Botswana, where outsiders dominated the tourism business, claiming that locals had insufficient skills and experience to manage the tourism business effectively. Timothy and Tosun (2003:198) and Okazaki (2008:512) claimed that when an external body (i.e. tourism operators) excludes the community from tourism benefits, tourism is perceived as having a negative impact on the community because of a lack of local involvement. Therefore, this view can be improved by involving the locals in the tourism activities appropriately.

The residents of both villages also had positive views towards tourism for two reasons. The first reason was because they learned from those with experience and knowledge (Odede et al., 2015:13; Butler, 2017:208-209). For example, knowledge shared by the educated and skilful man, considered to be the founder of tourism development in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen, led to the emergence of direct and indirect tourism services, especially accommodation facilities (LMA-09, GOV-S19, and GOV-T12). The second reason is that the people of Oman welcome the Sultan's call to participate in the country's development (Valeri, 2009:137; Al Araimi, 2011), whereby tourism is seen as a promised socio-economic sector:

> Tourism had 'great potential for growth and for making an effective contribution to economic diversification, since [Oman] possesse[d] splendid touristic assets such as its historic heritage, natural beauty, perfect environment, folklore, and traditional industries,' all enjoying full security. (Kéchichian, 2008:118).

However, the locals' appreciation of the benefits of tourism was not complemented by an understanding of the authenticity of the products and services offered to tourists. A decision-maker (GOV-M13) stated that the locals in the two villages have better views of tourism than before, but they need additional skills to manage tourism enterprises appropriately.

In other words, the products and services offered to tourists do not match their expectations of authenticity. For example, a recent conversion of an old building into bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Misfat Al-Abryeen, which significantly altered the existing structure and surrounding fabric, distorts the traditional identity of the village (Figure 84). This means that while the owner of this traditional house is aware that converting his house into bed-and-breakfast facilities generates income, he has insufficient skills and techniques to converting the building in line with the original architectural landscape. This use of modern materials can also be attributed to the high cost of using traditional building materials, as discussed in Section 4.2.3, which means that economic goals are achieved at the expense of the value and authenticity of heritage. In this case, interventions are required to encourage locals to adopt authenticity as a tool to enhance the attachment of tourists to the places and people (Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Ruane et al., 2018:131-132).

Figure 84: The house in Misfat Al Abryeen village before (left) (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015:153) and after restoration (right). It has been converted into a bed and breakfast accommodation known as Hisn Al Misfat (picture taken by the researcher on 27 December 2019).

Overall, the findings indicate that locals in both villages have positive attitudes towards tourism, as some have taken various initiatives to convert their traditional buildings into tourism products and offer local handmade products and tour programmes. Al-Saadi (2015:60-61) observed similar attitudes in other rural Omani places, particularly Nakhal province, where the majority of local participants who live near Nakhal Fort, and feel positive about the benefits

of tourism for their families, places and country. However, regulators and developers should conduct awareness and training programmes that include financial and legislative facilities to enhance locals' knowledge and skills, enabling them to effectively utilise their resources for tourism products.

5.2.2 Experience Working with Tourism

This section explores the experience of working in tourism as lived by local participants who have chosen to work in the tourism industry more than just for economic purposes. For example, a receptionist at one accommodation facility in Misfat Al-Abryeen village said they were glad to serve tourists, not only to generate income, but also to encourage them to learn a language other than English, such as French, Dutch and Italian (LMA-08). By encouraging them to learn foreign languages other than English, tourism enables enhanced interaction and communication between international tourists and the host community, as well as better information and knowledge sharing about their cultural heritage, values and resources (Rahman, 2010:114-115; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017:11-12).

One participant (LMA-32) stated that working in the tourism industry encouraged some of the locals to collect traditional items, such as kitchen utensils, handicrafts, clothing, jewellery and photographs, and exhibit them in a house converted into a museum (Figure 85) to showcase the life of their ancestors. Along the same lines, a craftswoman in Muql (PVT-C18) started making traditional baskets from woven palm tree leaves to showcase to visitors the intangible heritage of her ancestors (Figure 86). Visitors could buy these items as souvenirs to enhance their memorable experience and attachment to the place and people.

Figure 85: Collections of copper crockery (left) and mats and baskets made from local palm leaves and clay pots (right) (pictures taken by the researcher on 27 December 2019).

Figure 86: Baskets made from local palm leaves for harvesting fresh dates (picture taken by the researcher on 26 August 2019).

The development of a wide range of handicraft products illustrates that local people are aware that tourism serves as a bridge between them and their heritage and encourages tourists to engage more deeply with the sociocultural values associated with them. Active involvement in the provision of authentic products and services that meet tourists' expectations contributes to psychological empowerment among the locals and a sense of pride in their own heritage, particularly in rural areas (Carter-James and Dowling, 2017:229; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Altman and Low, 2012:5). One participant (GOV-W02) noted that strengthening the residents' connection with their place also mitigates migration to the cities.

5.2.3   Residents' Preferred Tourism Activities

Identifying the types of tourism activities in which local people prefer to be involved in their villages is key to understanding the local attitudes. To achieve this aim, people who had never worked in tourism were interviewed. What emerged was that some were happy to work as tour guides, others were more interested in making handicrafts and being involved in catering, and some preferred to work in management; only two respondents reported a lack of interest in tourism. While the majority of participants in both villages were interested in working as tour guides and providing tourists with general information about cultural and natural resources, elders with in-depth, first-hand knowledge of key features were happy to share their knowledge with tourists, students and researchers. The elders were proud and psychologically empowered to share their experiences related to traditional agriculture and trade exchange activities with locals and tourists. The elders were also aware that the passing away of knowledgeable people has contributed to the disappearance of traditional activities that connect them with the lives of their ancestors.

An elderly resident of Misfat Al-Abryeen (Figure 87) recalled helping a female researcher who was studying the stars and their importance in the traditional distribution of water shares in the *aflaj* system (LMA-26). This highlighted the importance of transferring the traditional method of distributing *aflaj* water – using a sundial in daylight and the movement of the stars at night – with others because most of the knowledgeable elders have passed away. One sign of the disappearance of this method is that locals currently use watches to distribute *aflaj's* water (LMA-11; Al-Sulaimani et al., 2007:7-8).

Figure 87: The researcher listens to elders during the focus group (left) (picture taken by Mohammed Al Mashrafi on 18 July 2018), and an elder (right) shares the history of Misfat Al-Abryeen village with Oman Culture Channel (Oman Culture Channel, 2020).

Similarly, another elder, since he was an agent (*wakil*) for *waqf*, stated that he wanted to introduce the concept of *waqf* funds and assets to charities, such as mosques, schools and cemeteries, as well as *waqf* for social solidarity by supporting the poorest families and children on religious occasions like Eid. An example of a *waqf* project (A conversation) is that some pottery pots (*Jihal*) have been hung near the *falaj* way (*sawaqi*) for thirsty locals and visitors to use (Figure 88). Palm and lime trees are allocated to fund this charitable work. The waqf project introduces a culture of solidarity among locals so that the poorest families or disadvantaged benefit from various charitable opportunities (LMA-16 and LMA-10). Ramos and Prideaux (2014:466) clarified that strengthening solidarity supports disadvantaged and low-income families in improving their quality of life.

Figure 88: A conversation with an elder at his farm (left) (picture taken by Mohammed Al Mashrafi on 18 July 2018). Pottery pot Ja'Hla (right) funded by waqf are hung beside drinking taps for locals and tourists (picture taken by the researcher on 18 July 2018).

A local participant of Muql village (LMU-20) described the history of trade exchange between Muql village, and Wadi Bani Khalid province in general, and Tiwi, a coastal village located around 28 km northeast of Muql village (Figure 89). He stated that locals in Muql village cultivated and exported fresh dates, mango and limes to Tiwi village via donkeys. They imported fresh fish during the winter and salted and grilled fish during the summer, as well as rice and spices (LMU-20). This finding is in line with what previous researchers claimed that the inner and agricultural villages focus on producing dates (Ibrahim et al., 2001), mangoes, lemons and bananas (Al-Sawafi, 2010), while coastal villages export fish to inner settlements (El-Mahi, 2011). Salted fish, known locally as *ma'alih* and dried sardines (*qa'sha),* were carried by either donkeys or camels (Korn et al., 2004).

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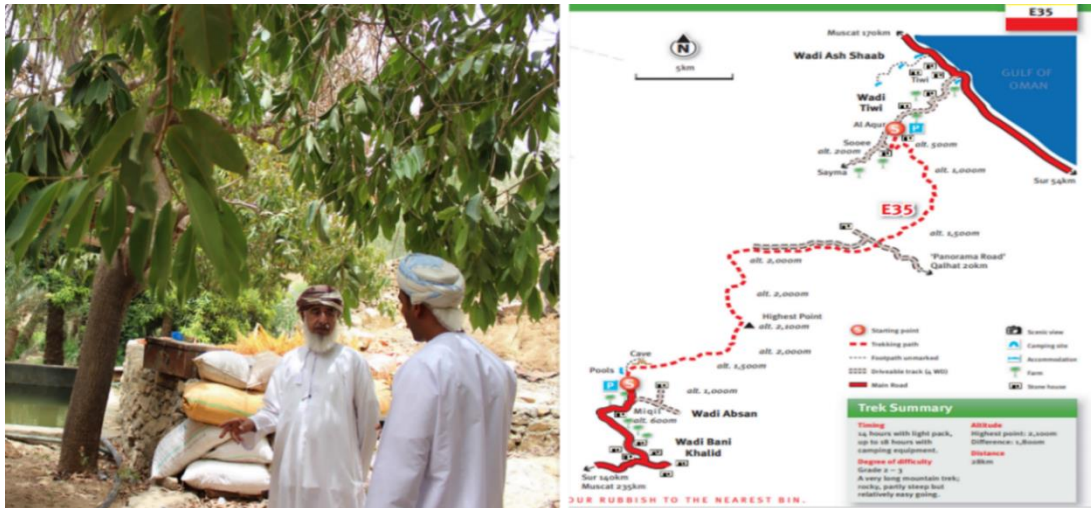
Figure 89: The researcher listens to a local participant about the history of trade exchange between the Muql and Tiwi (left) (picture taken by Rashid Al Sa'adi on 28 July 2018). The map shows the 28 km trekking path between Muql and Tiwi villages (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2005:11).

This history of traditional trade-to-village exchanges draws diverse people, such as scientists, researchers and adventurers, to gain sufficient knowledge of how to enable locals to improve their quality of life economically. However, these trails were used not only for socioeconomic activities but also for the political affairs of Sheikhs and tribal leaders, where they could exchange and discuss tribal issues and concerns. This was confirmed by a local elder (LMU-20) who carried a letter to Sheikh Salim bin Rashid Al-Sulti in Tiwi; he left Muql village in the morning and reached Tiwi after sunset.

These findings show that elders who share their knowledge realise that it is crucial to transfer the history of socioeconomic activities and sociocultural values to improve the tourism experience for both the locals and tourists, since most of the traditional methods have been lost with the passing away of knowledgeable people and the replacement of traditional methods with modern equipment.

Recently, major TV broadcasting companies such as Oman Television and Al Jazeera and online media such as YouTube channels have shown an interest in the elders' knowledge of aspects of traditional local life, interviewing some as part of documentaries covering the socioeconomic activities and natural and cultural features of traditional settlements (LMA-16 and LMA-10). However, as the footage is mainly in Arabic, access by a non-Arabic audience

is limited. Moreover, if traditional knowledge, which would have normally been transmitted orally across generations, is not preserved through documentation endeavours, the risk of it being lost forever is high. Therefore, it is important to empower youths through training, financial support and incentives to become translators so they can share traditional knowledge and history with tourists and ensure those intangible assets are preserved.

Women's involvement in tour guiding is still very limited in Oman. As discussed in Section 4.3, this is mainly because of the cultural norm that considers it inappropriate for women to work in mixed-gender sectors. May Al Kaabi, one of the few female guides in Oman, has attracted media attention and shared her single life and work choice with Wejhatt (2018) for a local journal focusing on tourism affairs in Oman (Figure 90). During the data collection, only one female respondent expressed an interest in training as a guide for female tourists (LMA-17). Generally, women's participation in tourism is sporadic and is still mainly limited to the demonstration of craft making to female tourists. Traditionally, female-dominated activities include items made of woven palm leaves, rose water and perfumes, traditional Omani cooking and traditional herbal medicine preparation (Gebauer et al., 2007:473).

Figure 90: May Al Kaabi with a tourist group carrying the Oman flag in front of the Grand Mosque in Oman (Wejhatt, 2018).

As previously mentioned, the locals are generally interested in developing handicrafts such as baskets and wallets, manufacturing various products such as souvenirs, and cooking and offering local foods to tourists (LMA-25 and LMU-26). These findings are in line with findings in the literature in several destinations worldwide (Saarinen, 2010; Asker et al., 2010:89-90; Mustafa and Abu Tayeh, 2011:91; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1356). However, unique activities have been identified in Muql. The village is renowned for the production of elite dates, with some called *sih* used by locals for daily consumption, while others are exported to nearby villages, markets and non-local consumers (LMU-20 and LMU-14; Al-Sawafi, 2010:107). During an interview with a local craftsman (Figure 91), the following emerged:

> Today, palm leaf containers are being replaced by plastic and nylon containers, avoiding the continued production of palms for the collection and storage of dates. Therefore, I would like to make small palm containers as souvenirs with local dates to offer to the tourists; however, I need support, marketing and a location to be able to offer this product. (LMU-17).

Figure 91: Elder makes different sizes of baskets from palm leaves (left) (picture taken by the researcher on 28 July 2018). Good quality dates for human consumption are separated from lower-quality ones used as animal fodder (right) (picture taken by Mr Rashid Al Sa'adi on 28 July 2018).

Additionally, a youth from the village expressed an interest in making traditional goatskin bags to sell to tourists but lamented the need for financial support and marketing to run this business (LMU-17). Normally, these traditional goatskins bags have two functions in Omani life: the smallest one, called *sa'an*, for preserving water, and the second one, named *sqa* or *makadah*, for making light yoghurt locally known as *laban* (Figure 92). Previous authors such as Sheriff (2004:102) and Richardson and Dorr (2003, p. 373) in the Omani context have described these goatskins bags that some used to store water, while other to produce light yoghurt *laban*.

Figure 92: Two leather bags made from goatskin to preserve water costs 18 OMR (36 GBP) (Source: Rashid Al Saadi) (Left). While the right picture shows a woman empties the light yoghurt laban from sqa (Richardson and Dorr, 2003:373).

Working in tourism management is only moderately appealing to the research participants; two from both villages stated they would like to take up an administrative position in a tourism enterprise (LMA-22 and LMU-19), and only one in Muql would like to work as either accountant, coordinator or official in general (LMU-03). This indicates that a few females would like to participate in managerial roles in tourism, which shows that women are aware that working in tourism can generate income and help families improve their quality of life. This positive view among some females to work in tourism management is thought to encourage other females to take the initiative towards working in a tourism business. Employment in this sector could lead to a break from the sociocultural barriers that currently limit female participation.

The existing literature presents various examples of women's presence in managerial roles. For example, women in Beqa in Fiji work as guides, entertainers, food caterers and handicraft sellers (Connell and Rugendyke, 2008:11-12). In addition, a woman was in charge of managing the Ecotrust programme on the island of Gili Trawangan in Indonesia (Graci, 2013:36). Moreover, Odede et al. (2015:14) observed that 15 of 35 members of a community-based organisation at the Abindu site in Kenya are women who are involved in decision-making and other managerial tasks. By contrast, two out of seven female participants said they would

consider working in tourism if it did not conflict with family obligations (LMU-11 and LMA-04).

As the above examples in this section demonstrate, the locals are aware that tourism generates income and improves their quality of life, so they have started renovating their historical buildings to provide a traditional homestay experience. In addition, locals who experience working in tourism feel comfortable when they consider that tourism brings not only economic benefits but also improves their communication skills with tourists and increases their attachment to their ancestors' activities and traditions. Furthermore, locals with no prior experience of tourism expressed interest in taking an active role in various tourism-related activities in their villages, which reflects a positive perception of tourism. However, it seems the infrastructure amenities and governmental initiatives related to awareness-raising, training, financing and regulative incentives are insufficient to translate the above-stated positive attitudes and perceptions into activities on the ground.

Therefore, regulators should work with key partners, such as tourism developers and operators, to implement local initiatives through training, fund businesses and provide technical and financial advice and marketing (Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Stone, 2015). For example, regulators should hire a knowledgeable local person to share their experiences with locals and conduct awareness programmes that offer financial and regulative incentives to encourage local businesspersons to invest in the tourism business. In addition, improving the knowledge among local youths about traditional sociocultural activities as intangible heritage values would prevent this knowledge from disappearing. Regulators could also set up a training centre to improve the capabilities of locals at the technical and managerial levels to manage their resources as economic products. The implementation of these initiatives, which will be discussed in detail from a practical perspective in the following chapter, would facilitate preserving the region's assets, enhancing the tourists' experiences and promoting the locals' wellbeing.

5.3 Local Initiatives for Tourism Development

The aim of sustainable tourism is to make better use of natural and cultural resources to improve the tourist experience and strengthen host communities (UNESCO, 2014:2; UNWTO, 2017:4; Snyman, 2017:248). Planners and developers worldwide have taken several actions to implement the principles of sustainable tourism by providing guidance to local residents on how to maximise local benefits and improve the tourist experience by offering authentic products. The existing literature considers that authentic products, especially local food and handicrafts, are attractive to tourists and meet their expectations (Asker et al., 2010:89-90; Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011:1359; Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014:60). Authentic products go beyond strengthening the locals' ties to their resources (Altman and Low, 2012:5), as they also strengthen the mental and spiritual connections between tourists and the destinations (Andrades and Dimanche, 2018:84).

Several local initiatives have been implemented in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql in recent years that attract tourists and generate incomes for the host communities. The data collected has provided a comprehensive snapshot of these initiatives, which form the backbone of tourism development in the two examined villages. This section examines these initiatives to assess whether they meet tourists' expectations, maximise local benefits and improve capacity building. In addition, the obstacles to implementing these initiatives are discussed from the perspective of the local, government and private sector participants, and recommendations are made on how to overcome them.

5.3.1   Accommodation Services

Accommodation is the main product offered by local entrepreneurs in Misfat Al-Abryeen, but it is absent at Muql. As mentioned in Section 5.1.1.1, these accommodation services are provided in renovated old houses (Figure 93). Typically, these accommodations consist of a reception, guest rooms, toilets and a place for food preparation. Approximately 36 rooms are offered by three licenced tourist accommodations in this village, which corresponds to 5.65% of the total number of rooms (1,254) in the Ad-Dakhliyah Governorate and 0.20% of the total

number of rooms (22,182) in Oman, according to the 2018 statistics (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2019a).

Figure 93: The lower terrace (left), where tourists eat and drink coffee and tea, and a double bedroom (right) at Misfat Old House Lodge (pictures taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

Accommodation providers have hired locals to provide catering in the form of three meals a day (Figure 94), except for drinks, which are prepared on site (LMA-16, LMA-10 and LMA-08). Accommodation providers recognise that including locals in this business is essential to the wider community's acceptance of the enterprise, as experienced in Japan, Malaysia (Aster et al., 2011) and in Norway (Brandt and Huagen, 2011). However, one participant lamented that the catering business opportunity had been given selectively to the close family circle of the accommodation providers (GOV-W23).

Figure 94: Mini crêpe (caroos) and chickpeas (left) and thin Omani bread (ragag) (right) are offered as a meal for tourists in an accommodation facility in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, which is prepared by local women in their houses (pictures taken by the researcher on 26 December 2018).

While no conflicts have been recorded between residents excluded from this business opportunity and providers, unlike in Gambia, where tourists have been harassed for this reason (Dodds and Joppe, 2005:10), it has been suggested that more households should be involved in catering, for example, by setting up a communal kitchen where all women, especially those who are unemployed, could prepare food for all lodges, including half-day tourists (GOV-W23).

This idea of fair distribution implies a collaborative approach between accommodation providers, which is currently non-existent (PVT-A13). At present, providers operate their business in isolation, with no collective discussion of the quality or price of services that should be guaranteed (PVT-A23). Aggressive competition between businesses is to be expected, as has been experienced by providers of desert camps in the dunes of the Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate in Oman (Mershen, 2007), where insufficient knowledge and a narrow vision have led them to compete between themselves rather than taking collaborative actions to provide diverse products that enhance the tourism experience. Similarly, some rural destinations in Wales are dominated by small-scale enterprises in Monmouthshire in the United Kingdom that often compete rather than foster collaboration due to a lack of awareness (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014:60).

Developing a local cooperative approach between accommodation and catering providers would facilitate collaboration, maximise benefits for the wider community and improve the tourist experience. Projects such as One Life Japan (Asker et al., 2010) and the Adventa Initiative in Monmouthshire in the United Kingdom (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2012:31) have taken a collaborative approach and created a harmonious environment between product providers. These providers share feasible experiences and take collective action to resolve any issues that limit the benefits and minimise the tourism experience.

Seasonality is an additional external factor that affects the functioning of these accommodations. As mentioned in Section 1.1, the temperature in northern Oman can exceed 50°C and the humidity can reach 100%. In northern Oman, the tourist season runs from October

to April. However, the Dhofar Governorate in southern Oman attracts tourists from neighbouring GCC countries during its cool, monsoonal, summer. Thus, the occupancy rate in Misfat Al-Abryeen's lodges during summer is so low that almost all rooms are empty (PVT-A23 and PVT-A13). In 2018, tourist numbers dropped by 87.7% during the summer in Misfat Al-Abryeen, with 25 tourists recorded between May and September, against an average of 203 tourists recorded between October and April (Figure 95). Seasonality also affects prices, resulting in half of the providers struggling to pay the wages of employees and catering services in off-peak seasons.
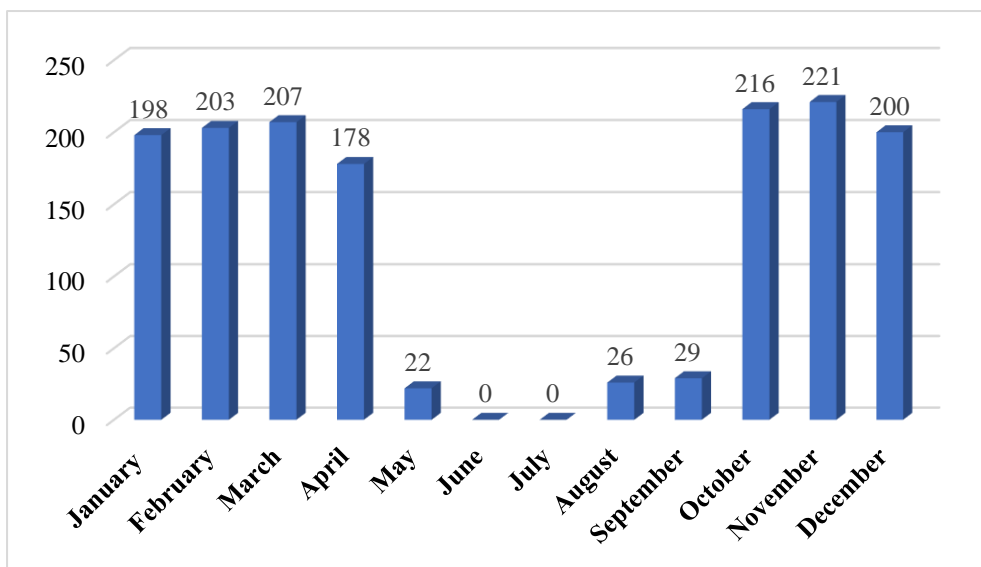
Figure 95: Visitors to the Old Misfat House Lodge in 2018. This property was closed for maintenance during June and July (Source: Ahmed Al Abri, 2019).

To maintain the winter occupancy rate, given that all accommodation facilities are equipped with air conditioning, two options could be considered. Accommodation providers could provide families, including students and teachers, with promotional packages during school holidays, from June to August, to mitigate losses during the off-peak season. The number of students and teachers is considered to have significant potential to increase the rate occupancy of the above-stated services, as there are approximately 106,973 students and 8,648 public and private school teachers in Ad-Dakhliyah Governorate out of 758,465 students and 65,544 teachers across Oman (Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2021:405). The second option could be to attract neighbouring tourists, especially from the GCC countries, to southern Oman, where the weather is pleasant in summer. This area is considered to have great

tourism potential, as it received 127,138 visitors in the summer of 2019 (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019c).

5.3.2 Tours

Tours are managed and offered by local youths in the two villages studied. Canyon Adventures and Tours is a licenced tour company based in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, which offers tourists cultural and adventure packages to explore aspects of local life. As Misfat Al-Abryeen is situated at the heart of hiking trails in the Western Hajar Mountain in Oman, it offers memorable adventure tours, including caving and the exploration of natural features (Figure 96). Activities such as these, run by SMEs, are able to offer local products to meet tourists' needs and expectations and increase the number of tourists in rural areas. At the same time, the Ministry of Tourism in Oman has recently been very active in providing operators with opportunities to promote Oman domestically and internationally through their businesses. The recently launched website called https://experienceoman.om, which promotes the natural and cultural resources in rural Oman destinations, is one example (Figure 97).

Figure 96: Canyon Adventures and Tours participation in ITB Berlin in Germany 2018 (left). Right: he conducts caving activities for few tourists (Source: Abdullrahman Al Abri).

In addition, the Ministry of Tourism, in coordination with the Public SMEs Authority, finances two to four local tour agencies by providing space in popular global tourism exhibitions such as WTM London, ITB Berlin and Arabian Travel Market Dubai. This incentive to participate is prioritised for tour operators that have not previously participated in similar tourism and travel exhibitions (GOV-G12 and GOV-H27).
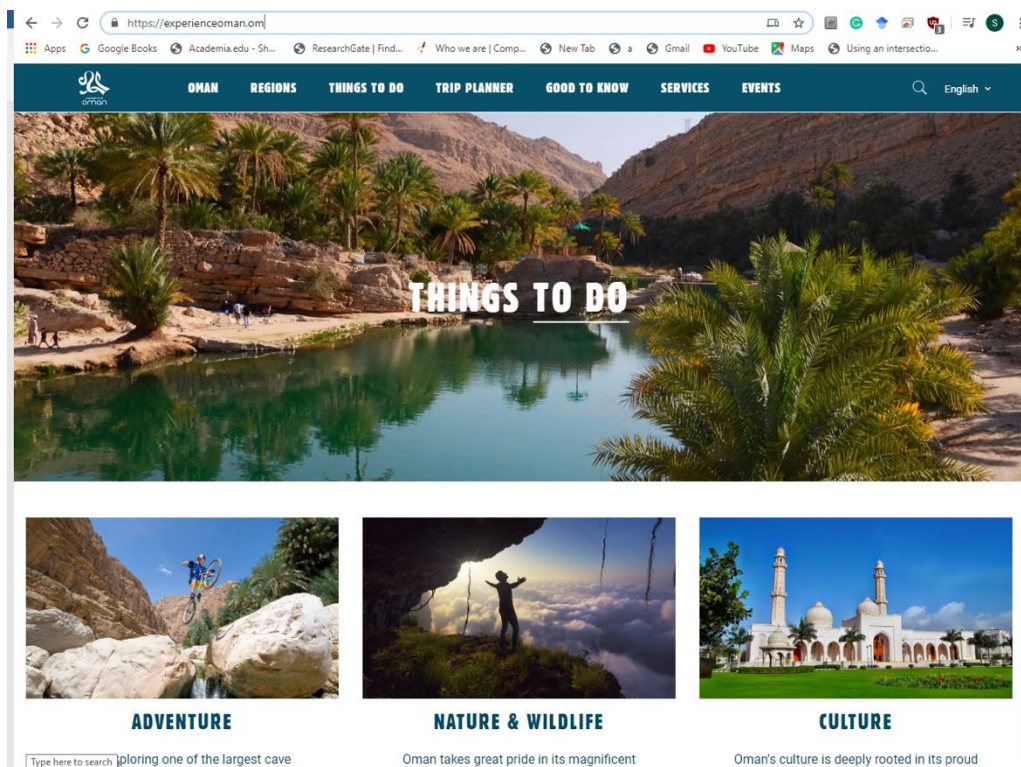
Figure 97: Screenshots from https://experienceoman.om show a variety of activities that tourists can experience in different rural areas (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2017b).

Notably, it is somewhat difficult for SMEs to self-fund after an increase in the participation fee for attending major international events, from 1,500 OMR (3,000 GBP) to 2,000 OMR (4,000 GBP) (PVT-TO1) (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019b). Sebele (2010:142) also stated that a lack of funds in the Khama Rhino Sanctuary in Botswana made it particularly difficult for locals to participate in local and global exhibitions and events promoting community development. The government participants argued that the fee rise is due to an annual increase in exhibition management costs, for which the government pays around 150,000 OMR (300,000 GBP), which is much more than what the participating tour companies pay (GOV-G12). To facilitate the participation of local SME tour operators, regulators should subsidise some of the travel expenses, such as plane tickets with Oman-Air, which flies to more than 50 destinations worldwide, including countries where tourism fairs and events take place (Wings of Oman, 2020).

Donkey tours are popular with tourists in both villages. In Misfat Al-Abryeen, donkeys are used to carry tourists' luggage and food across the mountains, especially to Jabal Shams and Jabal Akhadar, with the service costing 30 to 40 OMR (60 GBP to 80 GBP) (LMA-23 and LMA-32). In Muql, donkeys are used to transport tourists' luggage to the top of the Eastern Hajar Mountains, where tourists camp overnight or longer to stargaze and explore geological features (LMU-04). Here, pastoralists, or *shiwawi,* make money by offering dates and coffee and sometimes by preparing goat-based meals to tourists (PVT-TO1). Donkey rides are also provided for children; an elder who owned a donkey stated that he offered tourists and their children donkey rides for a few minutes in exchange for OMR until the donkey died (LMU-20) (Figure 98). Donkey tours have provided wonderful experiences for children, tourists and adventures in various worldwide destinations, including Cypriot villages (Aliefendioğlu and Vizvári, 2017:60-63) and in China (Ross, 2012:6). A cultural event could be held to remind tourists, elders and children of the role and efforts of animals, especially the donkey and camel, in the traditional life of people at the two villages. This proposed event should include various activities such as animal riding, Hiking, selling souvenirs and trying local dishes.

Figure 98: An elder offers a donkey ride to tourists and their children for a short tour of the pool area in Muql village (Source: Rashid Al Sa'adi).

The above tour services are offered by locals in both villages; however, the tour services in the two villages are mostly provided by external tour operators, as discussed in Section 5.1.1.2, on the grounds of the supposed lack of skill and education, English language skills and hands-on

experience among the locals (Nepal and Saarinen, 2016:72). Conversely, some tour operators, particularly in Misfat Al-Abryeen, work successfully with the locals to provide services (PVT-TO1). A freelance guide (PVT-GO5) confirmed that residents of the two villages were interested in guiding tourists, which would improve the tourist experience. A government official (GOV-O14) supported the point that a non-local guide would likely provide different information and interpretations that are not related to the site features. Local guides can take tourists on various interesting routes to eat local food and collect real souvenirs that non-local guides cannot. Park and Kim (2016:355) stated that locals have a better understanding of their values than outsiders and can thus provide tourists with insight information about their heritage values, which in turn improves tourists' knowledge and experience.

As discussed in Section 5.2.3, measures need to be taken by concerned regulators to involve locals with awareness training and financial support and incentives to enable them to participate effectively in managing tourism activities. The core of these incentives should be oriented to innovate an attractive tour package, such as an eco-tour programme, by demonstrating the natural characteristics and unique cultural treasures that both villages characterise. An eco-tour programme seems to be the most sophisticated approach to conserve resources, improve the tourist experience and maintain local wellbeing (Mgonja et al., 2017:171) because it focuses on creating a meaningful experience with tourists by exploring species of flora and fauna, such as the Gray Francolin bird that is active early and late in the day with great musical songs (Erikson, 2008:40), and allows tourists to enjoy local food and traditional accommodations.

It is also important to provide tourism amenities that encourage tourists to interact positively with the place and its people. This can be done by establishing a visitor centre as a gateway to the studied villages, either by redesigning existing visitor centres or initiating new ones. The feasibility studies produced for both villages confirmed that all external tour operators should be directed to deal with local tour guides to fairly redistribute the economic and social benefits. Visitor centres will also help control tourists' movements and reduce external interference (GOV-G23, LMA-10 and LMU-12). The cases of the visitor centres in Al Hoota Cave in Ad-Dakhliyah Governorate and Ras Al Jinz in Ash-Sharqiyah North Governorate showed that visitor centres play a significant role not only in providing a variety of services and facilities

and collecting entry fees, but also by enabling locals, especially guides, to control the tourists in a way that enhances their experience (Figure 99).

Figure 99: Visitor Centres of Al Hoota Cave in Adh-Khaliyah (left) and Turtle preserve in Ash-Sharqiyah South Governorate (right) (Oman Observer Newspaper, 2019).

As experienced in the Zwacks visitor centre in Hungary, where local guides act as guides, tourists are able to taste the foods made from herbs and drink freshly prepared spirits (Prebensen et al., 2017:132-133). Likewise, in the Tulear region in Madagascar, local guides wait during the day at the visitors' centre to guide tourists (Buckley, 2010:49). Similarly, in Jordan, Teller (2013:294) observed that local guides provide significant explanations as they guide the tourists. The aim is that providing a variety of tourism-based, nature- and culture-based products would encourage tourists to spend more in the studied villages to achieve as much as possible from their experience.

5.3.3 Handmade Products

Misfat Al-Abryeen offers a variety of services and products, including accommodation facilities, local food, crafts items, oil and honey. The bed-and-breakfast facilities and the beekeeping business allow local producers, mainly women, to sell their handmade items on their premises (PVT-A23 and PVT-H10). Woven palm frond handbags and woollen key holders are common souvenirs in both villages, and purses and pouches made from colourful fabrics reflect the patterns and style of Omani women's traditional dress. In addition, there are

a variety of foods prepared by the locals, in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, including bread, herbs and oil, as mentioned in Sections 5.1.1.1and 5.3.1. (Figure 100).

Figure 100: A handbag (left) comes from the Omani woman's dress in Misfat Al-Abryeen village. A place (right) offered as a free by accommodation providers to allow women to display and sell handmade items such as rose water, scents and local dates at the Misfat Old House Lodge (pictures taken by the researcher on 18 July 2018).

In Muql, similar products are made at home that include items such as bags, key holders (Figure 101) or at the Omani Craft House. However, there is no open-air museum or workshop in both studied villages where tourists can see first-hand how locals make souvenirs or prepare local dishes. Tourists are not allowed to meet local producers, especially females, while making these products. If tourists could participate in the process, they would better appreciate these traditional products.

Figure 101: Items such as bags and tissue boxes (left) are made from local palm tree leaves manufactured by a local woman at home in Muql village. A collection (right) of handmade products, including key holders and fans (picture taken by the researcher on 26 August 2019).

The lack of interaction between producers and tourists has an impact on their expectations. Accommodations may find it difficult to market local handicrafts because they may not necessarily know how they were made, understand the history of the craft or respond to customers' queries. As a result, tourists may be reluctant to buy these products regardless of their supposed authenticity because they might want to know more about the products beforehand. Tourists appear to be more interested in buying bee honey in Misfat Al-Abryeen, as the beekeeping business owner confirmed, without providing figures, that honey sales are good (PVT-H10). Being able to see local producers manufacture the souvenirs or food products gives tourists more confidence in their authenticity and convinces them to buy the products more than if they are just displayed in outlets or hotels (GOV-S71).

An accommodation provider in Misfat Al-Abryeen reported being asked by a group of tourists to allow them to watch how local food is prepared and having to hire women from the town of Al-Hamra to run a demonstration because those actually catering for him did not agree to the request (PVT-A23). Similarly, craftswomen in Muql would not allow anyone to watch how they make woven palm leaf items or key holders.

Other destinations in Oman offer tourists the opportunity to interact with local craftswomen. For example, the Muscat Festival is the most popular cultural heritage event in Oman, which takes place between January and February and attracts millions of tourists (Aulia and Rastogi, 2015:100-101). As the festival, women sell traditional handicrafts, consumer goods and food that are all made using traditional methods (Figure 102).

Figure 102: Two Bedouin women (left) offer a variety of accessories such as perfumes and incense (bukur) at a Bedouin camp at the Muscat festival (source: Muscat Municipality, 2018).

Bait Al-Safah is a famous Omani living museum in Al-Hamra, situated 20 minutes away by car from Misfat Al-Abryeen. This historic home has been renovated while retaining the old structure, including ceiling decorations, walls and doors with naturally ventilated windows (Al Abri, 2017). Since 2005, it has been a tourism destination, managed by local receptionists, guides, craftspeople and administrative staff (Al Ghafri and Al Hatali, 2018). According to the participants, Bait Asafah employs about 10 women who cook meals and bread, grind coffee and make oils for tourists (Figure 103). The local women agree to having tourists watch them work, although some women refuse to have their pictures taken, a wish that the project managers and tourists respect (PVT-A30).

Figure 103: Women in Bait Asafah museum produce oil called zait ashu'a (left) and local bread known locally as kubz rajaj (right) (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2014).

A Bedouin female nomad who partially converted her reed house in the desert camps in Ash-Asharqiyah Governorate, has an outlet for selling her craftworks, such as key holders handbags and rugs (Figure 104). She said that she and her husband welcome tourists by offering them free dates and coffee and selling a variety of homemade handicraft products. They were very thankful to the guides and tour companies who brought customers to their house (PVT-C15).

Figure 104: A part of Bedouin female's nomadic house (left), which consists of fronds and palm leaves and has been modified to offer and display handicrafts such as mats and key holders made from sheep's wool (picture taken by the researcher on 23 December 2019). The researcher is in dialogue about the materials of the key holders (right) (picture taken by Salman Al Hajri on 23 December 2019).

The above examples in the Omani context indicate that some conservative sociocultural norms that regulate traditional societies prevent women from interacting with tourists, as was confirmed by a participant (GOV-S71). This sociocultural restriction unrelated to Islamic principles is also seen overseas in Islamic and non-Islamic countries, as women in Libya have also been restricted from working in tourism (Joubran, 2014:91) and they are only allowed to cook in some tourist destinations in Zimbabwe (Zeppel, 2006:285). However, this research has sought the view of Islamic principles, where a participant from the Fatwa Office in Oman confirmed that women can participate in tourism if they are completely covered:

> Offering and selling local products to tourists by women with complete cover is proven without any suspicion. But, whoever chooses her concealment and prefers not to be viewed by people is worthy of the purposes of Sharia calling for concealment, chastity, and decency. This and Allah knows. (GOV-N16).

In summary, tourism is a bridge between tourists and locals that facilitates interaction and the exchange of sociocultural values, enabling a cultural dialogue between host communities and visitors (UNESCO, 2014). There is no religious prohibition on women's participation in tourism for income-generating purposes, as long as they are adequately covered and without any suspicion. Considering that the rights of men and women in Oman are the same according to Article 17, as laid down in the Basic Statutes of the State (The Official Gazette of Oman, 1996), locals in both villages should reconsider women's roles alongside men's in the promotion of local products. This can be done by developing orientation awareness programmes that aim to change locals' views about tourism to build an understanding that tourism activity in rural destinations is compatible with Islamic principles and cultural traditions.

5.3.4 Training Initiatives

An analysis of the data shows that few training initiatives in tourism management are organised by the locals in the two studied villages. In Misfat Al-Abryeen, for example, young people from the region are offered a training programme on orientation and tour guiding, which is said to help local trainees gain confidence in talking and dealing with tourists (PVT-TO1). Buckley (2009) and Manyara and Jones (2007) viewed this basic training as developing general skills as well as skills in interpretation and communication about natural and sociocultural assets, instructing about the responsibilities and duties of tour guides, and providing basic knowledge of how itineraries work, with the goal of achieving common tourism returns.

Safety training is essential, as guides and tour operators are responsible for the safety of tourists (Huddar and Stott, 201969). However, as these skills may not be available amongst local tour guides, specialised trainers may need to be hired to provide safety training. Locals, trainers and trainees would benefit from official guiding programmes offered by government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and the OTC. To this end, regulators should seek to remove legal barriers concerning training-for-employment so that local youths and local enterprises can benefit technically and financially from this programme without the need for a contract between the trainee and employer, as discussed in the previous chapter (4.2.2).

Tour operators should involve local trainees in their tours to share knowledge and practices, thus adding a hands-on element to the basic training. Tour operators should also find ways to fund local training in various tourism-related areas, including guiding (Stone, 2015). Effective and confident tour guides enhance the tourist experience and raise tourist satisfaction, thus increasing the chances that they will recommend the destination to others (Buckley, 2009).

An important training initiative observed during the fieldwork was a voluntary workshop in the province of Wadi Bani Khalid. The workshop is an initiative of the Halfa village Sport Team as part of the *Shababi* programme (Oman, Ministry of Sport Affairs, 2019), which

involves school-age children from Muql and other villages in various activities during the summer holidays, including weaving and crafting (LMU-18). The programmes was funded and sponsored by Omani companies to promote children's involvement in sport, culture and education (GOV-B15). This example shows that the sports sector is committed to building the next generation's capacities and considers it a priority to enable locals to independently manage socioeconomic activities in Oman.

The Cave project was initiated in Muql by local businesspersons by involving government, private organisations and schools in the Wadi Bani Khalid province to exhibit and sell handicrafts made from local palm leaves and to encourage school-age children from the village to actively participate in their promotion (GOV-B15 and LMU-25) (Figure 105). This initiative aims to develop school-age children's understanding of the socioeconomic values associated with their heritage. This collaboration shows that there is an awareness that a partnership approach is successful if all key players are actively engaged in and committed to the processes (Padin, 2012; Snyman, 2017).

Figure 105: Male and female schoolchildren in the Wadi Bani Khalid province display and sell some handmade items at the pools area in Muql village (Source: Ahmed Al Muslhi).

Additional innovative methods could effectively help to increase children's understanding and knowledge in schools about their natural and cultural resources in improving living standards. In other words, this initiative could be redesigned beyond offering handmade items to gear the knowledge and understanding of school-age children towards preserving their heritage as a cultural treasure. As discussed in Section 4.2.1, tourism and heritage management are a part of the educational curriculum in Oman.

However, there is still scope to enhance learning in these areas by allowing schoolchildren to try a particular craft related to clay and yarn and observe practitioners making crafts (Lancy, 2018:132-133). In Surama, Guyana, children visit museums and workshops (Karwacki, 2014:116-118) to learn how handicraft products are made. In addition, examples provided to museums in Cyprus have contributed to enhancing children's knowledge and skills, as explained in the following quotation:

> The Levant's Municipal Museum of Nicosia, the Cyprus Folk Art Museum and the Cyprus Food Virtual Museum that implement special educational programmes on ICH target young people and children. The Cyprus Handicraft Service organises training courses on various traditional handicrafts, including embroidery, weaving, pottery, woodwork, basketry, leatherwork and traditional costumes on a regular basis. The service also provides assistance and guidance to students and researchers studying the traditional handicrafts of Cyprus and publishes relevant material and manuals. (Polyniki, 2019:152).

In Oman, two workshops (Figure 106) were conducted by the ArCHIAM Centre in Misfat Al-Abryeen village in 2018 and at the National Museum in 2019 (The ArCHIAM Centre, 2020) to improve the younger generation's understanding of the importance of their cultural heritage. The first workshop focused on conserving traditional buildings, especially the Harat *ash-shuwa* area (area with the roasting pit) as a point of interest (Figure 106). It is seen as an innovative dialogue between the past, present and future of Oman in the hands of the residents (Oman Observer Newspaper, 2017). The second workshop focused on educating schoolchildren aged five to 12 to build their knowledge of the *aflaj* irrigation system, the backbone of the oasis settlements in Oman (Al-Sulaimani et al., 2007:1; Al-Marshudi, 2001:261). These workshops provided an opportunity to exchange views between school-age children (both boys and girls) and international experts to strengthen their bond with traditional sociocultural values.
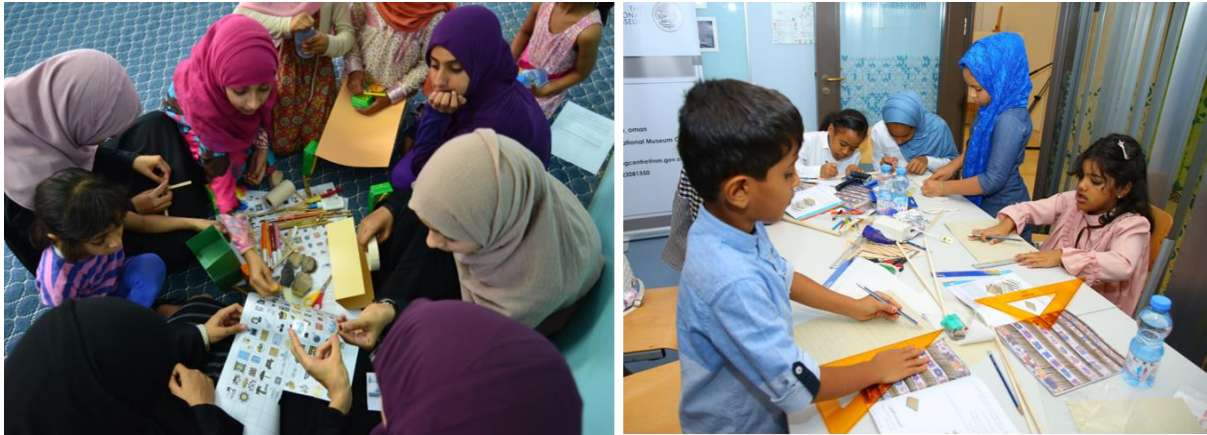
Figure 106: A workshop (left) conducted by ArCHIAM Centre for school-aged boys and girls in Misfat Al-Abryeen village that focuses on increasing the awareness and understanding of heritage architectural buildings. A second workshop (right) run by the ArCHIAM Centre for school-aged boys and girls in the National Museum in Oman (ArCHIAM Centre, 2020).

Alongside education, building school-aged children's capabilities to appreciate their history, roots and cultural values is a pre-requisite to strengthening their attachment to places and, in the long term, will promote tourism as a vehicle for cultural dialogue between visitors and host communities. It is important to ensure that this initiative is job-oriented to gradually involve children in industries related to traditional socioeconomic activities, especially the craft industry. This can be done by sharing some of the sales profits with the children to make it clear that the type of inclusion would generate income. However, such rewards should not affect the goal of building their knowledge and understanding or be at the expense of their educational curriculums. In other words, giving them financial rewards might make them focus on making money instead of studying in school, as has been observed in some tourist destinations, particularly Petra in Jordan, where many students have dropped out of school (Alhasanat and Hyasat, 2011:145-146).

This section addressed several local initiatives that support tourism development in the studied villages. A few accommodation facilities, particularly in Misfat Al-Abryeen, have narrowed the distance amongst accommodation providers to maximise benefits for the locals and maintain the standard of service quality. However, the collaboration approach amongst accommodation providers is essential to maximise the tourism' benefits to whole locals especially food providers. In addition, this discussion has shown that modest tour services are

offered by locals to meet tourists' expectations. However, as stated, new measures are needed to enable locals to innovate attractive tour packages by demonstrating natural and cultural values and to organise tourists' movements by initiating visitor centres and empowering local guides to create memorable experiences for tourists.

Moreover, the benefits locals receive from the tourism business are low due to the absence of interaction between the producers and tourists, which limits tourists from seeking further information about handmade products. Conducting awareness programmes would increase the locals' understanding that tourism is a method to achieve cultural exchange and peacebuilding amongst the locals and the tourists. This section ended with a discussion of the training initiatives run by local businesspersons in a manner that gives back to their people. However, reconsidering legislative clauses, funding and redesigning these training initiatives is crucial to direct them beyond the economic perspective and build an attachment with the locals, especially youths and children, to their cultural and natural values.

The above-discussed initiatives show that current operations related to accommodations, tours, handmade products and modest sharing skills in the explored villages operate spontaneously and individually, rather than collectively, to raise product quality in order to enhance the experiences of tourists and share tourism benefits, potentially causing disharmony and conflict among locals. According to Ramos and Prideaux (2014), individual enterprises and initiatives support self-interest approaches rather than collective and solidarity approaches. This research explored the views of local participants regarding their preferred approach to tourism activities in their villages, and most of them preferred to work collectively rather than individually. Local participants from the studied villages expressed that working collaboratively encourages dialogue and understanding among locals (LMU-15) and maximises their benefits while minimising self-interest opportunities (LMU-21 and LMA-09).

Therefore, stakeholders must intervene in the public and private sectors and at the local level to promote the formation of local cooperation entities in order to unite local initiatives to share the benefits of developments and confront issues collectively. Bello et al. (2016) stated that forming various institutions at a local level in worldwide destinations allows locals to share

their views and opinions with each other and promotes exchanged partnerships with external bodies to provide locals with technical and financial support. For example, a community-based organisation was formed in Abindu village in Kenya to allow locals to make maximum use of their natural resources for tourism development (Odede et al. 2015). Similarly, local institutions have been established in Botswana to help locals manage rural tourism opportunities (Stone 2015). Another similar example is a group called agritourism communities, which was established by small- and large-scale operators to focus on agritourism opportunities in Samut Songkhram Province, Thailand (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015).

5.4 Summary

Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql have experienced economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts due to rising tourism over the years. These impacts have benefited locals by allowing more products and services to be instigated to meet tourists' expectations, generate income, and engage locals in cultural dialogue with tourists. Other negative effects have also taken place such as ignorance of interpretative, instructive signs, traffic congestion and the increased number of swimmers in pools area, has also put pressure on resources and its fragility. In addition, Misfat Al-Abryeen is currently experiencing a tourism-driven renaissance, evidenced by the beekeeping enterprise and tour services. Also, as a result of this a growing number of older buildings being converted into accommodation facilities and museum. However, even though Muql is a permanent tourism destination only two initiatives have been developed: a handicraft house and an accommodation facility, which is still under construction. Those who work in tourism activities appreciate tourism not only for the income opportunities they offer but also as a gateway towards cultural dialogue with tourists. Locals both youths and elders who are not yet involved have voiced an interest in it.

Overall, tourism is positively perceived in terms of the economic and social opportunities it offers. However, to fully express its rich potential in maximising benefits for all concerned, several barriers still need to be overcome. These include the lack of skills and funds, conflicts with external bodies, especially tour operators, and the sociocultural barriers that prevent women from interacting with visitors. Reflecting on the conclusions of the previous chapter, these barriers are attributed to absence of vision toward building the community participatory

approach in tourism development and limited coordination between regulators, a lack of collaboration and support from external operators and conflicts among local tourism service providers. The next chapter proposes a practical framework to address these barriers and creates a practical steps to developing an appropriate local participatory approach to strengthen the local contribution in preserving resources, improving the tourism experience and achieving the wellbeing of locals.

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CHAPTER SIX: TOWARD EFFECTIVE LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Research through semi-structured interviews and review of government documents show that promoting local participation in tourism policy and socioeconomic development in Oman was a government priority, and was understood as such (Chapter Four). The Oman 2040 Vision and Tourism 2040 Strategy put the development and wellbeing of local communities and regions at the heart of socioeconomic sustainability. The development of host communities and regions in Oman took place through citizens' participation in decision-making and through direct communication with the institutions, particularly the Majlis Ash-Shura, to convey ideas and concerns about the development and livelihood of citizens to regulators and operators.

The Omani government has implemented various awareness-raising, training, and financing programmes, and has formulated regulative incentives to enhance Oman's contribution to local and national economic development. Such initiatives are designed to maximise local benefits through the use of natural and cultural resources. However, an analysis of the collected data showed that these programmes have not always been effective due to a lack of collaboration between government institutions (see Section 4.4).

In Chapter Five, an analysis of the data collected through site observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group meetings showed that locals at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql had positive perceptions of the tourism initiatives in their villages, including hospitality, tours, handmade product sale, and sharing of experiences with other locals. However, the analysis also suggested that only modest progress had been made in product development, which was still sporadic and did not appear to have achieved the level of authenticity that could attract the attention of discerning tourists. Insufficient collaborative approaches were also observed among the local accommodation providers, tour operators, and handmade food producers, which contributed to disharmony among locals and detracted from the tourists' experience. This conclusion was borne out by the persistent lack of awareness, skills, training, and financial

support, as well as conflicts with outside operators that prevented locals from benefitting from tourism initiatives, despite revolving around the natural and cultural resources of the area.

This study sought the views of both the public and private sectors, as well as the local community in the studied villages, about effective interventions to achieve community-oriented economic development, build local capacity, and create relevant private-public partnerships. The data analysed suggested that interventions should take place at both the planning and implementation stages. The planning phase requires collaboration as well as the sharing of plans and objectives between stakeholders, especially regulators, to ensure that locals are involved from the beginning. In the implementation phase, awareness-raising, training, and financing should take place to build knowledge, develop the technical and financial skills of the local people, and enhance the resources for sustainable business management.

Thus, although governmental-level vision, legislation, and broad provisions exist, as do community-level mechanisms for product development and capacity building, significant disconnects exist between and among these entities, hindering the effective development of tourism and community engagement. A new Omani framework is therefore necessary to ensure connectivity between the various governmental- and local-level policies and initiatives that exist.

This chapter aims to interpret the data presented in Chapters Four and Five, as well as carefully consider existing frameworks and case studies—mainly from Garrod's (2003), Al-Shaaibi's (2011), and Bello et al.'s (2016) studies—in proposing an effective framework to encourage local participation in sustainable tourism development in the studied villages, with the eventual goal of developing a national framework. It aims to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up approaches under the existing legislative context in Oman, informed by the data collected on the ground. Following a systematic procedure to ensure end-user and local stakeholder participation from the initial stage to implementation, I argue that any proposed framework should consist of six stages : i) determining the responsible body, ii) fostering partnership, iii) identifying hindering factors, iv) forming effective local cooperative, v)

offering authentic tourism products, and vi) monitoring and evaluating (Figure 107). In the following section, "Towards an effective framework," I further substantiate why the six-stage framework—as I propose—is necessary to create a mechanism that will enable the integration and evaluation of top-down and bottom-up initiatives for effective tourism and local development.
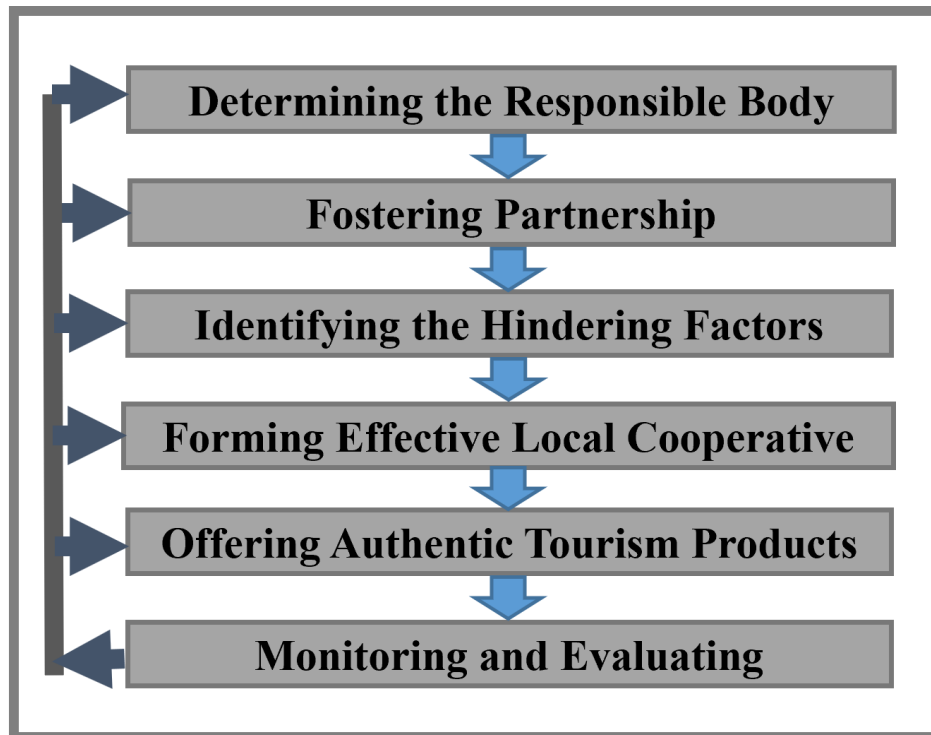
Figure 107: The best practice model for effective local participation for sustainable tourism development in the villages of Misfat Al Abryeen and Muql in Oman (created by the researcher).

Towards an effective framework

Determining the Responsible Body and Fostering Partnership

The Government of Oman provides a substantial platform for its citizens to share their views, opinions, and concerns with regulators regarding their participation in socioeconomic development, as demonstrated by the various official vision statements, especially Oman 2040 Vision and Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy (see Section 4.1). Many initiatives related to awareness-raising, training, financing, and legislative incentives are provided by relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors to build citizens' capabilities towards the optimal

use of resources for socioeconomic and tourism development. The main argument, however, is that these initiatives are not effective, as discussed earlier (see Section 4.2.4), since there is no institutional body created to coordinate such initiatives and to facilitate the participation of the local community in tourism development, as also confirmed by Mershen (2007). In Oman, the above-mentioned issues are due to a lack of collaboration and poor coordination among stakeholders (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al-Shanfari, 2012).

Therefore, this framework proposes the development of a responsible institution with regulatory, technical, and financial capabilities to be included in the framework to effectively embed local participatory approaches. The primary mission of this reliable entity would be to foster partnerships with public, private institutions, and local-level bodies to bring together, rationalise, and prioritise initiatives to build a community-based tourism approach, as has been articulated through UN SDG17 related to Partnership for Sustainable Development, especially in targets 17.9 and 17.16 (United Nations, n.d.).

Fostering partnerships would break down existing barriers, take collective action, and strengthen opportunities for collaboration by designating roles and responsibilities based on their competence (see Section 4.2.4). Although mechanisms are put in place, collaboration is the fundamental approach for bringing all stakeholders together to take joint action. A multi-stakeholder approach that includes public institution representatives, private and local businesses, children, tourists, and volunteers has succeeded in minimising the impact of illegal activities, as demonstrated by the case of the Indonesian island of Gili Trawangan, through replantation of coral reefs, running of awareness campaigns, and the provision of financial resources (Graci, 2013).

Identifying the Hindering Factors

This study has identified several barriers that have limited effective local participation in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in building local administrative, technical, and financial capabilities. Some initiatives, such as accommodation, tour services, food products, and handicrafts, were provided by locals in both studied villages (see Sections 5.1 and 5.3), but

they lacked spontaneity and authentic flavour to connect tourists with the place and people and to minimise the undesirable interference of external bodies, mainly tour operators and guides. Furthermore, the perception that tourism-related businesses were new and therefore unknown and may contain high levels of risk has led businesspersons towards 'quick-win' enterprises such as real estate development or providing legal services. Although locals are willing to participate in the development and management of tourism activities (Section 5.2.3), there is no practical initiative from stakeholders in the public and private sectors to involve the desired locals in tourism activities. Such issues hindering local participation and implementation need to be identified and addressed to enhance local benefits and improve the tourist experience.

The existing literature on international tourism acknowledges the challenges and barriers to local participation (e.g., Selin and Chaves, 1995), suggests the sharing of responsibilities and roles, and recognises the need for dialogue between the project team and the community (e.g., Garrod, 2003; Bello et al., 2016) and the need for intervention related to awareness, training, and financing (e.g., Al-Shaaibi, 2011). However, no practical plan has been proposed for awareness-raising, training, or financing using a multi-stakeholder approach that includes local and private sector representatives sharing knowledge and skills with host communities and funding local initiatives. From a legislative perspective, the existing literature has not examined the strengths and weaknesses of specific laws and their consequences on local participatory approaches to tourism development.

Forming Effective Local Cooperative

As identified in Section 5.3, in both the studied villages, there was a distinct lack of collaboration between local accommodation providers, tour operators, food producers, and craft product manufacturers, which can lead to conflict and disharmony among local operators instead of focusing on improving product quality. In an environment without cooperation, aggressive competition, such as was observed among sand camp operators in Oman (Mershen, 2007), and among small-scale enterprises in Monmouthshire in the United Kingdom (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014), leads to loss of revenue. Therefore, the formation of effective local cooperation mechanisms—community cooperatives—is essential to bring together under one-roof accommodation providers, tour operators, guides, handcrafters, and food producers to

capitalise on the political, social, and economic capital gained, and crucially, the local empowerment achieved.

The existing literature has long highlighted the advantage of not-for-profit cooperatives in supporting public housing and amenities projects and making loans available to locals to start businesses (e.g., Arnstein, 1969). The formation of local consumer entities for the import of goods to meet local consumption needs has also been discussed (e.g., White, 1996). In tourism, the crucial role of community-based organisations in planning processes has been reasonably well articulated (e.g., Bello et al., 2016). However, these do not introduce the central role of cooperative mechanisms in achieving local empowerment and producing vital rural socio-political capital.

On the social side, community cooperation includes locals, makes a concerted effort, and shares the development results among the participating people. It serves to minimise intervention by external influential people and helps to reduce self-interests. Therefore, the likelihood of conflicts between accommodation providers in Misfat Al-Abryeen, as mentioned in section 5.3) would be reduced, as anticipated problems are solved and the fruits of the efforts are shared. An analogous example is the agritourism communities formed in collaboration between large-scale and small-scale operators in Samut Songkhram province in Thailand (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015). On the political side, it empowers locals in both studied villages to convey a unified message collectively to discuss their concerns, views, and opinions among themselves, and to collectively raise these more effectively with external bodies, such as regulators, sponsors, tour operators, and external guides.

It also builds a sense of ownership in decision-making processes (Boley et al., 2014). The presence of a cooperative enables the local community to better align administrative and technical tasks with expressions of willingness and existing skills (also see Section 5.2.3) and to direct public and privately funded technical and vocational skills training opportunities according to community priorities. From the Omani perspective, this will parallel Stone's (2015) observation of the formation of a local institution to empower locals to share their views

and negotiate their affairs with external bodies, such as Safari companies, which offer local training opportunities in marketing, guiding, and hospitality. From an economic perspective, the cooperative not only promotes local financial stability and wealth distribution, as observed by Butler (2017), but it also encourages external bodies, such as funders, to sponsor local initiatives, as it distributes benefits across the entire community. Bank Muscat's initiative to renovate the traditional buildings at Misfat Al-Abryeen (Section 5.1.1.1) and to encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to seek area-wide benefits in the form of socially responsible local cooperative programmes is a step in the appropriate direction to translate their CSR.

Offering Authentic Tourism Products

There were several existing products and services in the studied villages, such as accommodation, tours, handicrafts, and food products, which were offered by the locals (Sections 5.1 and 5.3). Despite the diverse and unique natural and cultural values of the two studied villages (Section 1.7), the uncoordinated local tourism initiatives were not enough to convey an encompassing sense of authenticity and offer tourists an unforgettable experience. It is important, as Boley et al. (2014) suggested, that local producers and tourism players extend their level of authenticity to bind tourists' experiences and memories to the location, and engage the locals psychologically with their place to strengthen connections. The existing literature does not address the approach to tourism products and services that should be offered to produce differentiated tourist experiences. This could be attributed to several reasons: an emphasis on local community participation in tourism planning (e.g., Garrod, 2003; Bello et al., 2016), a focus on leisure and entertainment as assets of the postmodern product offered by private developers (Al-Shaaibi, 2011), or the perceived need to meet the expectations of elite groups and young wealthy urbanites (Didero et al., 2019). The discussion under this aspect of the framework will identify innovative tourism products and services in the studied villages that could deliver differentiated tourist experiences—going beyond the economic objectives— and will explore methods of branding, packaging, and marketing opportunities for the locals.

Monitoring and Evaluating

Once put in place, the proposed local participatory approaches would require regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the various framework stages during their planning and management (Garrod, 2003; Bello et al., 2016; Al-Shaaibi, 2011). These assessment outcomes should be geared towards supporting and making existing plans or strategies more effective, either at the local or national level, to help regulators make necessary changes to existing plans or for future considerations. Tourism planning and management cannot be preplanned, as several issues emerge during their implementation—for example, lack of financial resources; thus, shifting emphasis from the social and natural to the economic (Kasemsap, 2016), and conflict with private stakeholders (Dodds and Butler, 2009)—this study will explore the importance of applying monitoring and evaluation in the local participatory approach (see also Section 4.1.3).

Applying monitoring and evaluation processes will provide concerned stakeholders in the government and private sectors and local representatives with an analysis of the regulatory, technical, and financial effectiveness of each stage of the proposed framework. From a national perspective, the results of the monitoring and evaluation stage would help involved public, private, and local representatives to consider improvements to existing official visions, in particular Oman 2040 Vision and Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, which defined community capacity building as a priority, as explained in Section 4.1.3. Amending interventions appropriately to address unforeseen challenges and planning a participatory approach will help ensure credibility and reliability at the local level.

This framework is considered a reflective methodological structure that includes best practice planning and implementation processes that enable national and local stakeholders to undertake appropriate interventions for establishing a pragmatic local participatory approach to sustainable tourism development in the studied villages, as well as at other heritage tourism sites across Oman. The rationale for proposing this framework is also that it fits within the existing developmental visions projected by the government in Oman. It allows for the embedding of sustainability at the grassroots level, which is expected to play a significant role in managing economic resources for the future. It enables connecting the top-down and bottom-

up approaches to achieve the ultimate goal of focusing on building substantial local community-led tourism activities. Additionally, it provides a substantial opportunity for concerned stakeholders in the public and private sectors and local communities to engage in dialogue, exchange views, and form partnerships to be involved from an initial idea stage to successful implementation. This framework proposes an appropriate multi-stakeholder approach to local community participation without imposing thoughts or agendas from the outside on the host community, as Garrod (2003) stated. The stages of this framework are designed to identify the priorities, strengths, and weaknesses of each stage to ensure a smooth transition of power to the local level.

This framework is expected to meet the needs and expectations of concerned stakeholders from legislative, socioeconomic, and sociocultural perspectives. For example, it will guide government officials in developing an executive action plan to share power with regional centres in line with Oman 2040 Vision, aligning with its decentralisation agenda (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020e). Additionally, it is consistent with the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, which focuses on building capacity in local communities to optimise their resources for economic development to improve their livelihoods (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016b). This framework also encourages private sector initiatives to build an exchange partnership with host communities to share common interests rather than excluding them from any benefits.

From the local community's point of view, this framework ensures the participation of the local community from the initial idea to the empowered management of their own resources. As local residents have better knowledge and experience to represent their values than outsiders, the framework will enable them to build local technical capabilities for the practical management of their assets for socioeconomic benefits. The framework also offers future researchers the opportunity to identify the levels of ownership and participation reached by local communities in tourism-led initiatives. Strengthening the participation of locals in planning and management is necessary to enhance the practical measures of liveability in terms of education, awareness, training, and access to financial resources.

6.1 Determining the Responsible Body

Many governmental institutions in Oman are involved to varying degrees in promoting local participation in socioeconomic and tourism activities. However, this involvement has sometimes widened the gap among government institutions, which resulted in increasing the bureaucratic and complicated procedures especially for obtaining required license to operate tourism enterprise as addressed in section (4.4). This section examines the nature of this involvement and task-sharing between institutions, with the aim to explain why proposing the identification of a responsible institution in tourism development initiatives in the studied villages specifically and Oman in general is deemed crucial for the effective implementation of a local participation agenda.

The collected data show that several public sector institutions perform similar tasks related to tourism development in Oman. According to the government participants, some public institutions such as Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), Tourism Development Company (Omran) undertake tourism development tasks that are analogous to those carried out by the Ministry of Tourism (GOV-Y17 and GOV-S71). This overlap of undertakings with regard to tourism development extends into both regulative and developmental initiatives. For example, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shares certain regulatory responsibilities with the Ministry of Tourism. Investors must obtain final approval from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to run any tourism enterprise via the *Invest Easy* platform, which is managed by the aforementioned institution. It is an e-integration transformation initiative designed to encourage investors to apply online to get a license to run a business in one day rather than queuing at one-stop shop which takes a maximum of seven days, as stated (Section 4.2.4).

This program, however, does not solve the lengthy bureaucratic process that investors have to go through to obtain the preliminary approvals such as Municipality, Civil Defence, Ministry of Tourism. As a result, investors may change their mind and direct their financial capital towards less bureaucratic processes such as real estate, stock market or overseas investment, rather than the tourism business, as explained in section (4.2.4). From a tourism development perspective, confusion arises in the manner in which the Omran operates. It develops

sustainable tourism products using natural and cultural assets in collaboration with public and private stakeholders including communities (Omran, 2020). Its mission is akin to that of the Ministry of Tourism, particularly in terms of tourism infrastructure and product development (GOV-H21 and GOV-S71). This makes confusion arises due to unnecessary duplication in roles, tasks and responsibilities between Ministry of Tourism and Omran.

From an educational and training perspective, similar overlaps could also be observed. As noted in Section 4.2.2, education and training programmes are offered by governmental and semi-governmental organisations to build capacity in the tourism sector amongst Oman's youth. Higher education institutions award degrees and diplomas at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in addition to the vocational certificates offered by the NHI. Likewise, the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises' Development, known officially as Riyada, is also involved in the development of the tourism industry in Oman, offering free training and orientation initiatives to incentivise local entrepreneurs to invest in tourism development. However, government organisations offering tourism-related training do not always work in an integrated and collaborative manner, as training programs should be distributed to meet needs of regional places not to be centralised in the capital which make obstacle for youth to travel to the capital which include the travel and accommodation expenses, as addressed in section (4.2.2).

The data collected and analysed describe that the involvement of many governmental organisations in tourism-related initiatives does not help to achieve the ultimate goals. As participant noted that this involvement often leads to conflicts, bureaucratic complications and delays in the processes of economic development (GOV-Y17). For example, a budget has been allocated for the implementation of some projects to meet the needs of tourists' in certain remote areas that lack adequate asphalt road and electricity services. Coordination was made with the responsible authorities to repair the road and provide electricity service; however unfortunately, no budget allocation was made in the annual financial plan for road and electricity in these areas, making the initiatives redundant. Therefore, it is expected that these projects should be cancelled or the Ministry of Tourism should allocate a budget for road construction and electricity supply, which is not at all within its competence (GOV-G23 and GOV-H21).

This means that each institution is in an isolated working environment, where it focuses on achieving its agenda without consideration other institutions' agenda and priorities. Literature has investigated the above stated issues in the Omani context that due to poor coordination amongst public institutions, the existing regulative framework does not work effectively (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Shaaibi, 2011, Al-Shanfari, 2012). This overlap also generates increased bureaucracy and rigid regulations that hamper entrepreneurship and economic development (Al-Mataani, 2017). This task and responsibility duplication issue with its associated inefficiencies, and the complex and time-consuming nature of tourism business approval processes were highlighted during the Tanfeedh Workshops as the main challenges facing the tourism sector (Tanfeedh, 2017).

To avoid the overlaps and conflicts, it is essential that a government entity be clearly responsible for leading tourism development using the local participatory approach through partnerships with relevant stakeholders at the government, private sector and local levels. The citizens' participation approach is, in fact, considered crucial for enabling the locals to capitalise on their natural and cultural resources for their own benefit while improving the tourist experience (Ramos and Prideaux, 2014; Bello et al., 2016; Park and Kim, 2016; Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2017; Ghaderi et al., 2017). Adequate promotion by the main responsible body of local participation in socioeconomic and tourism development, is equally crucial, as observed in Chitwan National Park in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia (Timothy, 2012), Ecotrust in Indonesia (Graci, 2013) and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan (RSCN) (Teller, 2002; Wismayer, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). Additionally, a government representative should be appointed to lead in networking with other interest groups (Selin and Chavez, 1995; Graci, 2013).

The findings show that this mission could be led by two closely linked institutions: the Ministry of Tourism or the Riyada, as participant stated (GOV-Y17). While other participants stated that the Ministry of Tourism tends to be a regulative body in comparison with Riyada, which would be a capable governmental body to address this initiative from the administrative, technical and financial perspectives (GOV-H21, GOV-M13 and GOV-G23). This research identifies the

roles of above stated government agencies and examines their organisational structures to determine which entity is capable of leading the initiative for local participation in the development of tourism. The organisational structure of the Ministry of Tourism was studied to determine the extent to which this entity could lead participatory tourism development (Figure 108).

The Minister

Directorate General of Planning, Follow-up & Information
- Information & Statistics Dept.
- Planning & Studies Dept.
- IT Department
- Follow-up & Implementation of 2040 Tourism Strategy Dept.

Customers Services Dept.

SMEs Support & Tourism Initiatives

Security Office

Internal Audit Dept.

Archival Dept

The Minister Office
- Councils & Committees Dept.
- Media Dept.
- Organisations & International Cooperation
- Coordination and Follow-up Dept.

The Undersecretary

Tenders & Contracts Dept.

Experts Department.

Regional Tourism Departments

Legal Department

Oman Convention Office

Crises Management Dept.

The Undersecretary Office

Directorate General of Administrative and Financial Affairs
- Human Resources
- Administrative Department
- Finance Department
- Developmental Budget
- Public Relation

Directorate General of Customers Services and Quality management
- Investors Services Dept.
- Tourism Licenses Dept.
- Tourism Investment Dept.
- Hotel & Tourism Establishments Classification
- Hotel & Tourism Establishments Quality Control

Directorate General of Tourism Development
- Dept. Heritage Sites development
- Dept. Tourism Product Development
- Dept. Tourism Projects

Directorate General of Marketing
- Tourism Marketing & Promotion
- Abroad Bureaus
- Tourism Events
- Tourism Awareness

Directorate General of Tourism in Dhofar Governorate
- Tourism Marketing
- Tourism Development
- Administrative & Financial Dept.
- Investors services and licenses

Figure 108 Organisational structure for Ministry of Tourism in Oman

The relevant department at the Ministry of Tourism responsible for the implementation of a local participatory approach to tourism, called SMEs Support and Tourism Initiatives, was formed in 2015. Its mission is to collaborate with other institutions in government and private sector to implement initiatives encouraging Omani investors and young people to invest in tourism development.

Table 12: The responsibilities of the SMEs Support and Tourism Initiatives at the Ministry of Tourism (Source: Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2015)

	Description
	Encourage SMEs to achieve sustainability, innovation and expansion in their enterprises by create the competitive business environment.
	Propose measures that allow SMEs to participate in the local, regional and international tourism market.
	Prepare the necessary qualification programmes for SMEs and verify their implementation in cooperation with the competent authorities.
	Coordinate with governmental and private financing agencies to help facilitate SMEs in obtaining appropriate financing to implement their tourism projects.
	Work to strengthen the partnership between SMEs and large tourism companies.
	Follow up on determining the specific percentage of tenders that must be awarded to SMEs (10%).
	Follow up on tourism licensing procedures for SMEs.
	Address the challenges facing SMEs in the tourism sector.

Table 12 shows that the Department of SMEs Support and Tourism Initiatives supports a competitive business environment for entrepreneurs to invest in tourism businesses, offering opportunities for SMEs to participate in local, regional and international networking events to share experiences and knowledge, provides, in collaboration with concerned bodies, advice on business licensing procedures (GOV-N23), and contract third parties to provide relevant training opportunities and facilitate financing for SMEs. The department thus acts as a coordinator, advisor and facilitator, assisting entrepreneurs and investors throughout the tourism business start-up process, as participant (GOV-N23) express in following statement:

> One of the entrepreneurs wants to set up a tourist camp and has no experience knowing the feasibility of his proposed project. At that time, we coordinated with Riyada and prepared a feasibility study for him. The second example, an entrepreneur keen to build a hotel on his land and suffering from a lack of funds, was coordinated with the Oman Development Bank to fund his project.

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The Royal Decree 36/2013 establishes Riyada as the lead body in local participatory tourism development. According to Article 3, its key responsibility is to provide financial, administrative, technical, legal consultation and assistance for SMEs enterprises (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2013:9-10) (Table 13).

Table 13: The responsibilities of Riyada (Article 3 of Royal Decree 36/2013).

	Description
1	Provide an attractive regulative environment for growth and developing the SMEs
2	Accelerate finalising the issuing of relevant licenses and its regulations
3	Market products and services of SMEs in Oman and abroad by organising the participation in exhibitions in coordination with concerned bodies.
4	Establish centres to raise competitiveness abilities and product development to fit with worldwide standards.
5	Conduct training and qualification workshops for entrepreneurs from both genders to enable them to run their enterprises appropriately.
6	Coordinate with Al-Raffd Fund to facilitate obtaining an interest-free loan for establishing and expanding enterprises.
7	Coordinate with the Oman Central Bank to increase the financial facilities from the commercial banks.

A review of Riyada's organisational structure (Figure 109) shows that most of its departments were designed to promote the expectations of enterprises and SMEs development. For example, the Consulting and Studies Department conducts government policy studies to assess the effectiveness of these regulations related to business establishment and create an attractive environment for SMEs. The Department of Evaluation and Follow-up regularly conducts on site visits to SMEs enterprises to identify their needs and challenges they faced liaise with the concerned authorities and propose appropriate solutions. In addition, it works to assess the government laws and initiatives to ensure that they are designed to support SMEs and increase SMEs contribution to the national economy. The Mentoring and Training Department monitors

the implementation of workshops, events and training programmes with the organisations concerned so that SME entrepreneurs can benefit from examples of success and good practice.

The Marketing and Events Department works to promote the products and services offered by SMEs by organising exhibitions locally and internationally. From a financial perspective, the Support Enterprises' Development Department focuses on coordinating with concerned bodies to facilitate the raising of capital for SMEs to finance their projects. It must be noted that the Al-Raffd Fund moved recently to Riyada (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020a) following major administrative apparatus taking place in Oman's government, which will be discussed in Section 6.3.4. Investors need to register with Riyada to receive free training, orientation, help with feasibility study preparation, processes of securing financial loans via Al-Raffd Fund and marketing (GOV-A17, GOV-N23 and GOV-A13).
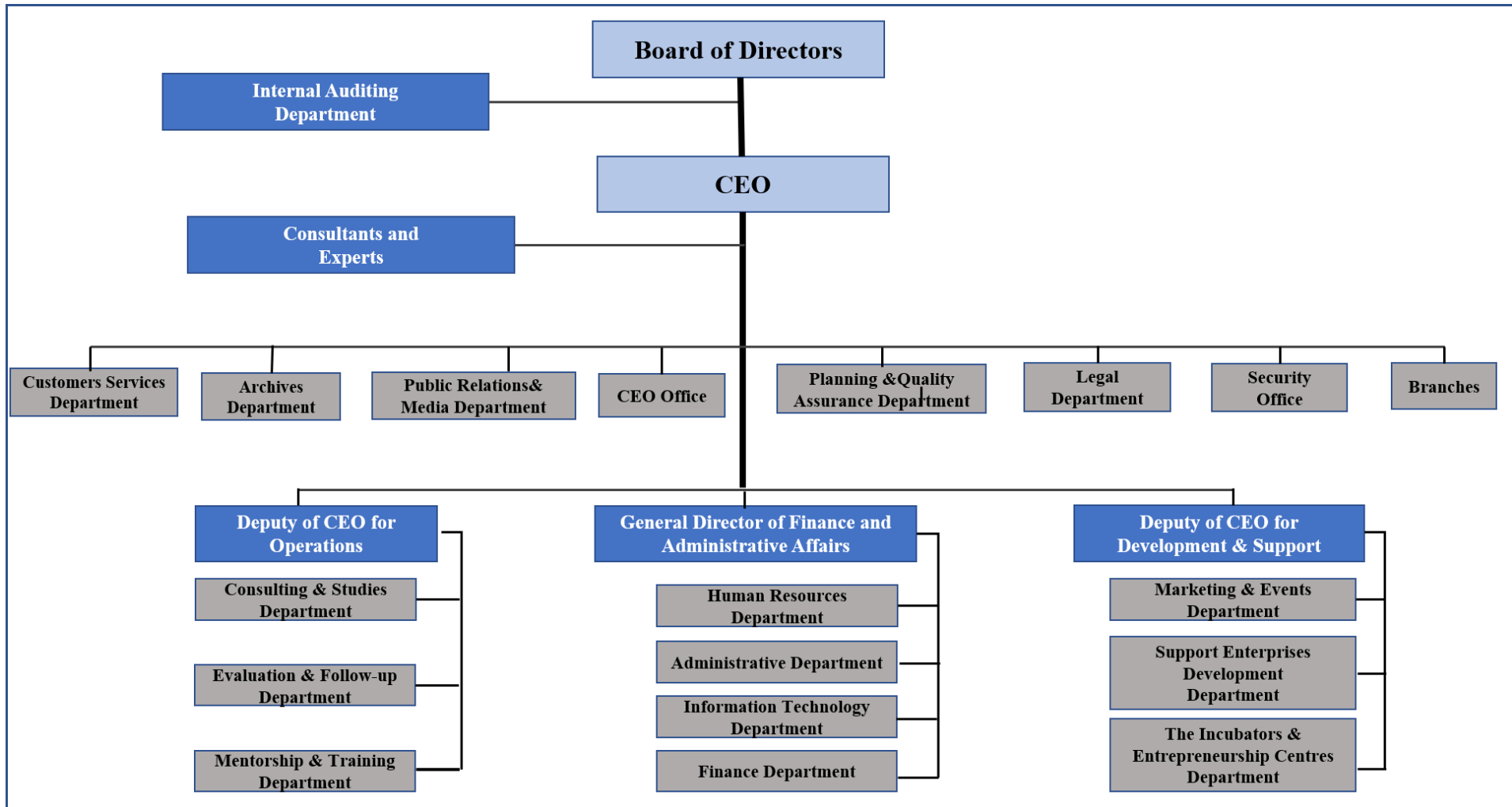
Figure 109: Riyada's organisational structure.

Based on the above review, Riyada emerges as an administratively, technically and financially capable unit to lead initiatives that promote local participation in tourism development in Oman and the studied villages in particular. It also appears to be the most suitable organisation to adopt the above approach, considering the Ministry of Tourism is more a regulatory body and has a much wider agenda that includes, amongst other things, also stimulating foreign capital, licensing hotel establishments and marketing Oman in regional and international exhibitions. The relevant government institution guiding this initiative is not only reliable from a legislative and financial point of view, as participants (LMA-10, LMA-09 and LMU-07) addressed, but it also able to advocate partnerships between concerned parties to set common goals, formulate a legal framework that serves the participatory approach and has the power to influence concerned stakeholders in relation to the allocation of budget, as stated by Pradikta (2017) in the case study of region of Yogyakarta in Indonesia.

The core task of responsible institution is to build substantial partnership approach with public and private sector as well as at community level to share objectives and integrate all efforts - in tourism development in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in Oman. This point is compatible with Oman 2040 Vision (2019) according to which this partnership provides facilitates socioeconomic development through a flexible and dynamic approach with less bureaucracy imposing costs on other stakeholders especially the private sector. In addition, it is working to improve mutual coordination and overcome overlapping roles to make the private sector and SMEs more confident in making an effective contribution to socioeconomic development and alerting to the changes to come.

6.2 Fostering Partnership

Existing frameworks address a partnership approach to encourage the community to become involved in tourism development but do not adopt a multi-stakeholder approach by involving concerned stakeholders at the private and local levels to share skills, knowledge, and funding local initiatives, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. For example, Garrod's (2003) and Bello et al.'s (2016) frameworks refer to a proposal of a two-party partnership between the research team and host communities to conduct preliminary studies. Al-Shaaibi's (2011) framework restricts access to partnerships between local and governmental authorities, mainly between the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Manpower, and the Ministry of Tourism. This framework does not consider the involvement of some key parties at the local level, such as the Ash-Shura Council, which acts as a public representative body to voice and comment on the government's performance (Section 4.1.1). It also does not refer to involving private sector bodies, such as tour operators, to play a significant role in the capacity building of the local community by running vocational and professional training, as exemplified in Botswana (Stone, 2015). The partnership with tour operators was extended to funding marketing brands for locals in Ban Talae Nok village in Ranong province in Thailand (Dolezal, 2011), brochures, and leaflets (Srisomyong and Meyer, 2015), and the MiM (Made in Monmouthshire) brand innovation to promote local authenticity and rurality (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014).

This study extends to consider a multi-stakeholder partnership approach not only within public institutions but also with the private sector and freelancers in Oman to propose a substantial collaborative approach based on the competences and disciplines of each partner. As discussed in Section (6.1), several bodies in the government sector are linked to the development of tourism in varying degrees; however, this involvement causes conflicts and overlaps rather than integration. This section discusses the nature of the existing partnership approach between stakeholders at the government, private, and local levels and measures the impact of this approach on the promotion of local participation in tourism development in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages. To this end, we examined several examples derived from collected data of products development, tour programmes, and formulated regulations to determine the extent

of the partnership approach among concerned parties and host communities in the studied villages.

The first example refers to a partnership initiative led by the government and private sector towards community building, particularly in both studied villages. For example, as stated in Section 5.1.1.1. Bank Muscat, a pioneering private financial institution, has been funding the renovation of some traditional houses in Misfat Al-Abryeen in collaboration with the Al-Misfat Al-Ahliyah LLCC and the Ministry of Tourism. The aim was to serve tourists with additional services (Bank Muscat, 2019) and to benefit residents from the operation of renovated buildings, especially Rogan Café, by providing job opportunities for local youth (GOV-H21, PVT-CS5, and PVT-TO1). This building renovation initiative reflected the significant efforts made by officials of the Ministry of Tourism to seek donors, particularly Bank Muscat, who would take the initiative to preserve traditional buildings as sustainable tourism products.

However, this initiative did not include a training programme (GOV-O41) to help locals develop sophisticated skills in the ways of heritage tourism operations and the development and sale of authentic products. According to participants (PVT-GO5 and GOV-A23), the lack of skills and experience of local youth in rural places to know how to provide authentic products was considered a major barrier to their participation. Okazaki (2008) and Bello et al. (2016) supported this analysis, stating that this problem is an excuse for external bodies to exclude the host communities from tourism's benefits in their places and arguing that providing education and training to build local skills requires time and money. By contrast, concerned stakeholders should take the initiative to share benefits with locals by involving them in training programmes related to offering authentic products, including a workshop held for local producers to offer and market their local products, as exemplified in Monmouthshire, UK (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014). Beyond training programmes, the initiatives should also be expanded to include leadership, hospitality, marketing, and safety standards, as Stone (2015) in Botswana addressed.

The second example addresses the nature of participating tour operators in Misfat Al-Abryeen Village in managing tour programmes. Two participants from the private sector stated that the Oman Ultra Trail event, in which ultra-runners participated worldwide, was awarded to a company based in Muscat in late November 2018. The event took place in rural areas where some reputable tour operators were active; although they wished to participate in the organisation of this event, their requests were ignored (PVT-TO1 and PVT-A13).

A government respondent (GOV-W02) argued that the company in Muscat was hired because of its understanding of and capability to meet the safety requirements, which were essential for the safety of the runners. This event succeeded in promoting Oman as a worldwide tourism destination (e.g., Oman Observer Newspaper, 2018; The Telegraph, 2019). However, local involvement might make the trail more exciting, since experienced local operators are more knowledgeable about natural and cultural characteristics than external bodies (Park and Kim, 2016). Additionally, involving local operators would create opportunities for national and regional companies to share and exchange experiences, particularly in terms of safety standards. Stone (2015) found in the context of Botswana that safari companies have made an effective contribution to improving locals' leadership, hospitality, marketing, and safety standards through training programmes.

The third example focuses on cooperation between regulators related to law formulation to maximise locals' involvement in Muql village. According to a local participant from Muql village who applied three times for a licence to establish a green home product on his farm, he was rejected because his farm was irrigated by the *falaj* system (LMU-07). The licensing of green home products was not permitted on farms irrigated by an *aflaj* system, according to legislative clauses 46–48 of the recent Omani Law on the Use of Agricultural Land; it is permitted on farms irrigated by well and dead *falaj* (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2017). This means that green home products are not allowed to be established in either village, as water is supplied from the *aflaj* system, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter (Section 1.7). A government official (GOV-Q32) claimed that this condition has been applied to prevent agricultural neglect by focusing on economic and tourism businesses. Hence, there is a need for concerned bodies to review the implications of this law by increasing cooperation to balance

farming and tourism activities, using tourism as a tool to protect and sustain agriculture for the benefit of locals and tourists.

For example, the development of tourism products in farms will encourage farmers to revitalise their farms by growing a variety of crops that offer visitors local vegetables, fruits, and meat, as Brandt and Haugen (2011) observed in Norway. Furthermore, as described by Asker et al. (2010), it provides an experience for tourists to take part in seasonal harvests, such as in Japan and Malaysia. It also creates various management and technical job opportunities. Indirectly, the product from this effort will encourage other suppliers, such as goat herders, local food vendors, and beekeepers, to become involved. Additional benefits could result in green home operators diverting financial revenue to invest in the maintenance and repair of the *aflaj*, the agricultural backbone of the settlements, as Al-Marshudi (2001) considered. As part of the environmental education curriculum, Delgado (2013) explored the educational benefits literature related to agriculture, where schoolchildren can participate in a variety of agricultural activities, such as harvesting. It also provides an opportunity for tourists and schoolchildren to participate in environmental education and biodiversity conservation, as in the Puducherry and Cuddalore regions in India (Alexandar and Poyyamoli, 2014).

The above-discussed examples derived from the collected data reveal that the partnership between government agencies, private institutions, and the local community in the case villages was ineffective. The collected responses confirmed the view that collaboration and partnership among public institutions, while better than before in most domains, have not yet reached an acceptable level, according to one government participant (GOV-R20) at the decision-making level. Another decision maker (GOV-T12) stated that the level of partnership and coordination between institutions was only 4 out of 10, especially in legislation that causes conflicts and delays in the operation of tourism activities. This analysis is consistent with the conclusions in Section 4.4: there is a lack of collaboration between regulators to take collective action to promote the local participatory approach in Oman, which, in turn, leads to a delay in socioeconomic and human resource development (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Al Zeidi, 2016).

Therefore, these findings indicate that fostering a partnership approach between the institutions concerned in the public and private sectors and at the local level is crucial to sharing the benefits of effective local participation in rural destinations. Participants (GOV-H21 and GOV-S71) clarified this by suggesting that bodies should unite to share their objectives, plans, and views to participate in basic ideas rather than making plans far beyond others. This proposed partnership approach would involve stakeholders in the dialogue and establish a fundamental relationship between them to resolve common problems. In partnership processes, this stage is defined as problem setting, which requires systematic processes for identifying stakeholders and defining their roles and responsibilities to pursue the final objective (Selin and Chavez, 1995; Graci, 2013).

Working in a partnership unites efforts to focus on specific projects across all sectors. As a result, these projects reduce pressure on the government and increase financial resilience at the local and national levels (GOV-H21). In the literature, the effects of the above-stated stage have been discussed in some worldwide destinations. For example, on Gili Trawangan Island in Indonesia, dialogue and joint action among the local community, local businesses, investors, employees, tourists, and the local government innovate practical solutions to reduce marine damage and coral reefs due to tourism and illegal finishing activities. Therefore, the main outcome of this partnership approach has been to monitor fisheries, conduct awareness campaigns for locals and schoolchildren, and encourage local businesspersons to fund conservation programmes (Graci, 2013).

Another example is agritourism. When South Korea's economy in Yangdong County declined in the 1980s due to declining grape consumption, a partnership approach was developed by the chairman of the county and the affected local families, grape producers, friends of the government to support and find solutions to boost grape consumption and increase household incomes. Therefore, the vineyard area was earmarked as a special place to grow the grape industry, with a budget allocated for investment. Various projects have emerged from this plan, such as organising professional companies for distribution and marketing, branding, building a concrete network with key distributers, developing educational programmes for key innovation agents, and running hands-on programmes for visitors (Lan and Chau, 2020).

Based on this view, this research has identified the key stakeholders at the public, private sector and local levels according to their competence and disciplines concerning awareness-rising and training, technical, and financial support and legislative incentives to maximise the collective action towards sharing the information, objectives, and concerns of the case villages (Table 14). The main task of this partnership approach is to build reliable teamwork to identify and address the hindering factors related to awareness, training, and financing initiatives to provide an appropriate mechanism, as will be discussed in Section 6.3 (*Identifying the Hindering Factors)* in this framework, to enable locals to offer tourism products to attach tourists to local places and people.

Table 14: The proposed stakeholders in the public and private sectors and local communities in Oman

Aspect	The proposed stakeholders	Description
Awareness and training	Ministry of Education Ministry of Labour Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Oman Tourism College (OTC) The National Hospitality Institution (NHI) The Public Authority for Small & Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) Omani Women Association	Educational institutions offer various educational curriculums on tourism, nature conservation and self-employment for year 12 students to raise their awareness (Section 4.2.1). After secondary school, higher education institutions offer vocational and academic degrees in tourism and hospitality, as well as vocational certificates in various related activities such as cooking, booking, reception and housekeeping. Non-educational bodies also contribute to the technical training and orientation of Omani youths to qualify them for employment in various business fields in the private sector and to spread the culture and dimensions of the self-reliance approach. As previously stated, these programmes are free of charge and are viewed as the government's main agenda for improving education and knowledge in various socio-economic activities (Section 4.2.2). Women have made significant advances in education and higher education (Section 4.3). The establishment of 59 associations in Oman shows that the government has prioritised women as major partners in generational education and state development (Oman, Ministry of Social Development, 2018).
Financing and technical support	Riyada Oil and gas operators The Development Bank Tour operators and guides	The government provides regulative incentives and financial facilitation to encourage Omanis to participate in socio-economic and tourism development. For example, a £200,000 interest-free loan has been provided for the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in different economic activities, including travel and tourism (Section 4.2.3). In addition, the Oman Development Bank provides low-interest loans for the establishment of microenterprises, SMEs and corporate enterprises in the manufacturing, transportation, logistics, tourism and mining industries (Oman Development Bank, 2019). Furthermore, commercial banks and oil investment companies, such as PDO and LNG, allocate CSR programmes to fund numerous infrastructures and economic products as a way of repaying the local community. Similarly, tour operators are considered key partners because they rely on natural and cultural assets in rural destinations to meet the needs of their tourists, as discussed in Section 5.3.2. It is important to reconsider their policies and plans to share tourism benefits with locals by allowing them to offer their authentic products and improve the experiences of tourists (Jamal and Robinson, 2009).
Legislation	Majlis Ash-Shura (Consultative Council) Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ministry of Heritage and Tourism The Governor's Office	The Ash-Shura Council is a public entity that can speak out and comment on the government's performance (Section 4.1.1). Furthermore, several governmental institutions offer various regulative initiatives and incentives to promote Omani participation in numerous socio-economic developments, including tourism. These incentives focus on obtaining a final business licence quickly through the Invest Easy programme (Section 4.2.4), as well as the introduction of tourism products that allow locals in rural destinations to convert their natural and cultural assets into products for tourists and to generate income to improve their quality of life, as previously explained (Sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3). According to Articles 22 and 23 of the Royal Decree 101/2020 on the Provincial and Local Affairs System, each governorate implements its development plan, including the allocation of financial budgets, and proposes practical methods for investing in natural and cultural resources for sustainable socio-economic development (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020e).

The involved institutions should nominate trusted representatives with sufficient experience and knowledge of the concept of the local participatory approach, as participants (noted (GOV-S71 and GOV-G23) noted. Similarly, as discussed in Garrod (2003:49) in the following quote:

> *The designation and membership of this team should ideally reflect the priorities of the local community and provide expertise to the community in a range of areas, including tourism… It is also important to include members with experience from both sides of the participatory planning approach.*

To ensure that collaboration between stakeholders leads to a practical local participatory approach to tourism development, a coordination department within each institution is crucial to facilitate the sharing of views, objectives, and tasks among partners, as a participant (GOV-S71) suggested. Al-Shaaibi (2011) stated that this department or unit will be responsible for the effective collaboration between bodies involved in the success of tourism development.

In summary, as the tourism sector has experienced various complex problems due to the multiple influences of stakeholders, the partnership approach allows all stakeholders to work together by sharing their views and goals and creating new ways of jointly solving problems rather than acting alone (Bramwell and Lane, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Graci, 2013). The above-discussed arguments illustrate that this study extends the partnership approach to engage stakeholders at the public, private sector, and local levels in addressing relevant issues related to awareness, training, financing, and legislative frameworks. This proposed partnership approach is in line with the strategic dimension of the Oman 2040 Vision known as *A Balanced Partnership and an Effective Regulatory Role of Government*, which aims to build a substantial partnership among government, private sector, civil society, and concerned individuals to support SMEs and host communities to increase local investment, efficiency, and productivity and create a competitive economic environment in Oman.

6.3 Identifying the Hindering Factors

As highlighted in Chapters four and five, various barriers to awareness, training, and financing resources generally restrict local community and tourism development in Oman. For example, locals in both studied villages had a positive impression about tourism; however, their tourism development proposals were not enough to meet tourists' needs, as some saw tourism as a new business phenomenon that also limited women's participation due to the negative perception of the tourism concept (Section 5.2). The tourism service providers, particularly in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, operate with a single approach rather than integration, which results in potential for conflicts and disharmony among local operators (Section 5.3). Some of the locals in both studied villages offered some products for tourists, such as accommodations, tours, and handmade products, in an unorganised and spontaneous way and did not appear to reach authenticity (Section 5.3). Thus, there is a need to build local technical capabilities to offer products to attract tourists and minimise the unjustified interference of external bodies that claim that locals do not have sufficient knowledge and experience.

On the other hand, it was shown that the majority of locals in both studied villages were willing to share their natural and cultural values with tourists. However, there were not enough initiatives provided by the relevant stakeholders to invest in the aspirations of the locals to protect their values and improve their wellbeing and technical and management capabilities to enhance the tourist experience (Section 5.2). Therefore, as mentioned in Section 6.2, the rationale for proposing a partnership approach is to consider the above factors and provide appropriate interventions and solutions. This section takes into account the nature of the summarised factors with supported examples and the interventions required by the partners to overcome the consequences of the barriers towards community capacity building and the development of tourism in rural destinations.

6.3.1   Awareness-raising

Current awareness-raising programmes do not work well in the villages, as most have not been designed systematically to encourage locals to participate in tourism and socioeconomic development (Section 4.2.1). Even so, the locals in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql are positive about tourism (Section 5.2.1). This section discusses some examples from both studied villages to explore the awareness and knowledge gained by the locals about the benefits of tourism. Analytical interventions are suggested by public, private sector, and local community participants who proposed more systematic and achievable awareness-raising initiatives to support the locals and the new generation with sufficient knowledge and understanding of the importance of natural and cultural resources in sustainably improving living standards.

Two examples are observed from both studied villages that reveal the need to educate the locals about tourism as sources of income generation and cultural dialogue between locals and tourists, as defined by UNESCO (2014), as tourism benefits are shared among the locals, minimising the self-interest approach, as addressed by Ramos and Prideaux (2014). In the first example, according to participants (GOV-L23 and LMA-10), an owner of a guest house in Misfat Al-Abryeen village received a complaint from the court brought by his cousins, alleging that they were upset by visitors to his guesthouse. Based on this example, it is necessary to discuss two points. The first is that some tourists disturb locals and their comfort and privacy, which necessitates developing pre-trip instructions to guide tourists to remain quiet and show good behaviours while approaching or staying at these buildings to avoid negative reactions from residents, as observed by Winks (2009) in Tanzania. Orientation sessions can be provided by tour operators and guides to educate tourists on local customs and maintain the privacy of locals, as Al-Saadi (2015) found in Nakhal province in Oman.

The second point is that neighbours are more likely to complain since they are excluded from the benefits of the tourism business. This conflict is observed in some global tourism destinations, such as between hoteliers and tour operators and local community members in

Gambia, who harassed tourists for depriving them of the benefits of tourism. The tour operators and hoteliers needed to rebuild local trust by engaging them in tourism businesses, providing training, offering free space for local products, and encouraging them to support hotels with foods, fruits, and crafts (Dodds and Joppe, 2005). Ramos and Prideaux (2014) clarified this point by stating that individual enterprises can cause disharmonies and discord among locals, which in turn affects the sustainability of tourism enterprises. Therefore, it is essential to encourage tourism operators to share some tourism benefits with neighbours to minimise their reactions by serving tourists with foods and beverages prepared by locals. Meanwhile, some locals can work part-time or full-time as cleaners, receptionists, guards, housekeepers, etc.

In the second example, according to participants (GOV-B15 and LMU-25), the plan was developed with a budget allocated in collaboration with the Wali Office to hold an event in Muql Village. At the heart of the proposed event is a traditional folklore for tourists, the building of outlets and tents featuring local products, mainly Omani Halwa, and the selling of handmade souvenirs for the benefit of 50 families. However, a day before the event, another group of residents complained to the Ministry of Tourism about this event, claiming that it attracted tourists who did not respect the locals' privacy, especially in the way clothes were worn. As a result, the incident was called off due to local conflicts. The dispute led to the collapse of opportunities to bring locals together in tourism operations, although the Ministry of Tourism has since encouraged residents to form cooperative that represent the local community, control the tourism business, and benefit locals in the first stage, as also confirmed by respondents (LMU-25, LMU-07, and GOV-M13).

This conflict encourages external bodies to capitalise their businesses on local resources, as participants (GOV-H21 and GOV-H32) noted and as observed in Botswana (Sebele, 2010), which leads to the dominance of the benefits of tourism among influential or elite people who maintain their businesses at the expense of the locals. Rahman (2011) provides a similar example from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh: the lack of local partnership initiatives has led to limited tourism benefits. This causes financial leakage by encouraging external investors to capitalise on their businesses from local resources (Section 5.1.1).

The above example shows that building the awareness and knowledge of the locals about the benefits of collaboration in tourism activities is required in both studied villages. According to officials (GOV-R20 and GOV-L23), awareness should start with households and schools to raise the new generation with sufficient knowledge and understanding about their resources to improve living standards. Participant (GOV-Y17) added that building understanding and awareness is much needed with children at schools and home to accept others, work with others, maintain our values, and so on.

Awareness raising initiatives in education

This study has observed some awareness-raising initiatives towards building the capabilities of schoolchildren in Oman. As government participants (GOV-L30 and GOV-H27) confirmed, workshops were held in all 11 Omani governorates between 2012 and 2015 for 399 teachers of the social studies curriculum and 126 teachers in vocational courses at public schools to provide them with the dimensions of international tourism and tourism in Oman. Although this Omani awareness programme has been designed to allow teachers to understand the dimensions and benefits of tourism to improve the welfare of society, the aim is that they pass this experience and knowledge on to the younger generation. However, this programme has now been suspended (GOV-H27) due to oil price cuts and a financial crisis (Section 1.1.5).

Alternative measures are required to overcome this lack of financial resources associated with the above awareness programme. For example, large-scale companies, such as oil and gas operators and the mining sector, as well as SMEs that capitalise their business in local resources, can be invited to fund awareness-raising programmes. Graci (2013) observed a similar example in Indonesia, where local businesspeople fund awareness programmes for school-aged children to conserve marine conservation. Online awareness programmes could also be conducted for teachers and children to reduce the travelling costs of trainers and lecturers for governorates.

This study emphasises that concerned bodies should share their goal of developing systematic awareness plans for schoolchildren. For example, the School Visits Programme, run by the school board and the Tourism Industry in Grenada in the Caribbean, is an outdoor event in which students and teachers in elementary and secondary schools hold weekly visits between September and December and between May and June each year. This programme hosts various events, such as Careers in Tourism, to encourage students to serve tourists (Caribbean Tourism Organisation, 2014). These outdoor events should also allow schoolchildren to engage in practical knowledge building, such as learning about nature conservation (Graci, 2013) and observing crafters manufacture handmade items (Lancy, 2018; Polyniki, 2019; Karwacki, 2014) (Section 5.3.4). Furthermore, as stated in Section 4.2.1, awareness programmes should reach those in higher education with longer-term plans, similar to the five-year awareness programme designed to attract five million students in Jordan (Morrison, 2018).

Awareness-raising initiatives at community level

Public awareness is the next phase of the proposed awareness programme aimed at building a dialogue between officials and locals to share their opinions and concerns. Several public awareness programmes are conducted by relevant institutions in Oman, such as the half-day *Tourism Enrich* campaign, which was carried out in various rural areas, including the two studied villages in 2005 (see Section 4.2.1). This campaign could be redesigned to work effectively by bringing key partners together in a systematic dialogue to share knowledge and experience with locals. A similar campaign in Jamaica, *Tourism Awareness Week* (TAW), which runs alongside World Tourism Day on September 27, every year, offers a platform for officials, students, and local communities to share their views, opinions, and experiences (Brown, 2019).

The revised version of the awareness-raising programme should include hands-on workshops in which locals participate to share their experiences and knowledge with other locals. As participants (GOV-O41 and GOV-G23) stated, a great way to increase local people's awareness and knowledge of the benefits of tourism is by experiencing real-life cases and interacting with knowledgeable people to persuade them. Similarly, knowledgeable locals participated in awareness workshops within a project called *Community-Based Tourism*

Development in Central Java, Indonesia (Ward, 2014). Participant (GOV-H27) stated that this proposed campaign should hire influencers on social media to not only spread certain messages but also have face-to-face conversations with ordinary people and students, as these are likely to be welcomed by citizens and residents in Oman.

Social media awareness dissemination

An additional method proposed by this study is social media dissemination to offer an effective way to build local capabilities and promote tourism products. According to participant (GOV-W02), the social media platform offers opportunities for concerned bodies to share their plans with the public and allows them to comment on and share their views before the plan implementation. In this regard, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, current social media messages are largely aimed at guiding tourists to take precautionary measures and enjoy touristic values and beauty; most do not encourage locals to preserve their natural and cultural values.

As participant (GOV-G23) suggested, knowledgeable persons who have experience related to offering tourism products might share their experience in a short video or tweets to not only promote their products but also to convince other locals to participate in the tourism business. This statement can be applied to different examples, with local accommodation providers in Misfat Al-Abryeen Village (Sections 5.1 and 5.3) sharing the importance of traditional building conversion into an unforgettable experience that allows tourists to interact with the traditional lifestyle of locals, similar to Asker et al.'s (2011) observation in Malaysia and Japan. In Muql, donkey tour operators could also share experiences of the significance of animals, such as a donkey, as a means of transportation in the past, as in Cypriot villages (Aliefendioğlu and Vizvári, 2017) and in China (Ross, 2012) and as discussed in Section 5.3. Notably, various messages have been tweeted to inform the public about the definitions of cultural heritage and its importance in Oman (Figure 110) by quoting selected clauses from the Law of Cultural Heritage in Oman issued via Royal Decree 35/2019 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019c). Despite this significant development, translating these messages into foreign languages, especially English, would maximise benefits for local citizens and residents in Oman.

Figure 110: Tweets in Arabic talk about the significance of cultural heritage (left) and list the five definitions of cultural heritage (right): Public Cultural heritage, Private Cultural heritage, Tangible Cultural heritage, Intangible Cultural heritage and Removal Cultural heritage (Oman, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 2020).

These proposed methods for raising awareness are required for a collective action by concerned stakeholders to build the understanding of the new generation and the public about the importance of their natural and cultural resources for improving their life standards and enhancing tourists' experiences. This can be done by forming a Joint Awareness Team (JAT) to represent all involved partners, as suggested by officials (GOV-A12 and GOV-H27). The main task of JAT will be to design a practical systematic awareness plan that includes these methods with an allocated budget that encourages locals to get involved in tourism development and promote their entrepreneurial approach. The main content of this awareness plan is to develop a set yet flexible plan that includes indoor and outdoor activities for the new generation, engages influential people, runs campaigns, and utilises social media platforms to improve the knowledge of people and the understanding of the younger generation in the values of cultural heritage and tourism management. This proposed awareness-raising plan is consistent with Oman 2040 Vision's (2019) goal of *a society that is proud of its identity and culture, and committed to its citizenship*, which aims to increase citizens' knowledge and understanding about sustainable investment in their heritage, culture, and arts, thus contributing to the growth of the national economy.

6.3.2 Training

Many existing frameworks stress the importance of training in increasing community participation in socioeconomic development and empowering locals to control resources and maximise their benefits (Garrod, 2003; Al-Shaaibi, 2011; Bello et al., 2016). However, these frameworks have not provided a practical training mechanism that includes the managerial and technical areas required by a multi-stakeholder approach to build local capacity to manage resources in a way that maximises the benefits of all involved. In Garrod's (2003) framework, training focused on enabling local communities to understand the methods of scientific data collection during the preliminary study; hence, this framework did not move into the implementation stage. Bello's (2016) framework focuses on training to enable locals to access resources before and during the planning stage. Al-Shaaibi's (2011) framework focuses on tour guiding training for locals to support their private businesses and gain benefits, but it does not consider training opportunities in managerial aspects, such as marketing, hospitality, and management.

As this study stands on an essential partnership approach (Section 6.2), an integrated training plan is proposed through a multi-stakeholder' approach that involves locals who have knowledge and experience related to tourism operations, public, and private representative bodies, freelance, and local businesspersons. As addressed in Section 4.2.2, several educational and non-educational institutions in Oman and the private sector offer various academic and vocational programmes to develop youth skills and involve them in the private sector, particularly in tourism. The locals in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages have a positive impression of the concept of tourism, but they lack the skills and experience to offer authentic products to tourists.

According to an official (GOV-H27), host communities like to serve tourists for income but lack the knowledge and experience of dealing with tourists. Another official (GOV-H21) noted that the lack of skills and experience of locals concerning the packaging of products in attractive and authentic ways limits locals' benefits from the tourism movement. A

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representative from the private sector (PVT-G05) stated that the local communities in the studied villages had inadequate experience and skills to provide authentic products for tourists to attach to the place.

Another local participant (LMU-13) stated that locals lack experiences, understanding, and skills in tourism management; therefore, it is important to involve them in various workshops and training courses to educate them about tourism. This section analyses some practical interventions put forward by the participants to develop the skills and abilities of the local community concerning the use of natural and cultural resources for economic purposes.

Skills development and knowledge sharing

Involving locals who have experience related to tourism operations and trainers from rural areas is a positive preparatory step in developing locals' understanding of resource conservation and improving their livelihoods. These 'internal trainers', as argued by Manyara and Jones (2007), would better understand the sociocultural conditions of the residents than external experts. To apply this concept in both studied villages in particular and Oman in general, the researcher met with a local tourism developer in Misfat Al-Abryeen village and discussed the extent to which he had shared his experience of renovating old buildings into short-stay lodges with others:

> I have provided some free advice and consultancy to entrepreneurs interested in the renovation of old buildings into tourism products, mainly heritage lodges. With pleasure, I can share my experience with others who are in need of this type of knowledge. (PVT-A23)

Two participants (GOV-M13 and GOV-T12) confirmed that many beginners looking to convert their buildings into heritage lodges were directed by the Ministry of Tourism to contact the local tourism developer to obtain information and learn from his experience. This aligns with Butler's (2017) argument that qualified locals can share their knowledge and experience with those who need it. This preliminary training approach could require local accommodation providers, tour operators, and crafters to share their experiences with locals in both case villages. Elders expressed their desire to share their oral traditions related to socioeconomic

development, such as irrigation, agriculture, and inter-settlement trade, in the studied villages, as discussed (Section 5.2.3).

Omani experts with skills and knowledge could also be invited to share their knowledge with locals in rural locations, a local participant suggested (LMU-07). For example, an Omani expert gives a talk titled Tourism and Jobs, A Better Future for All at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Ash-Sharqiyah North Governorate on the occasion of World Tourism Day, held on 27 September every year (Oman Tourism, 2020a). In this case, knowledgeable and experienced local trainers should be paid financial remunerations to encourage them to keep sharing their experiences and knowledge with locals and embrace the concept of tourism.

Craft Training

Several administrative and technical training programmes are required to enable locals to learn the skills needed to develop an authentic product and draw tourists to the place and its people. One such skill is the making of handicrafts, which is seen as an essential phase in strengthening the locals' productivity by using available resources for promotional items. Locals could develop this skill by attending special training programmes offered by the government. In 2019, 15 training programmes were held for 195 participants who obtained a two-year diploma in craft making (Oman, Public Authority for Crafts Industries, 2020). These practical training incentives were funded by the government to encourage male and female youths to become self-employed in various socioeconomic activities, such as weaving, palm leaf products, carpets, textiles, ceramics, and carpentry. A participant (GOV-W08) stated that during the training period, trainees received an allowance of 60 OMR (120 GBP) as well as incentives such as access to tools, machines, raw materials, and marketing motives for those who complete the training programme. For example, support in the form of machinery and raw materials for encouraging craftsperson increased by 91,289.5 OMR in 2019 (Oman, Authority for Craft Industry, 2020).

A distinguished female entrepreneur won the Best Female Entrepreneur 2015 award for her remarkable success in developing and marketing Omani handicrafts made from palm, wood, leather, silver, textile, and ceramic products (Riyada, 2016). A site visit on August 30, 2020 was an opportunity to visit her outlet in Muscat called Handicrafts House (Figure 111), which offered products by various Omani craftsmen that reflected Oman's diverse topographical landscape and cultural richness. In a telephone interview with the entrepreneur, she related how she could share her experience and knowledge with other people who needed it:

> I have provided numerous workshops for male and female trainees in handicraft making and entrepreneurship sponsored by Oman India Fertiliser Company S.A.O.C (OMIFCO), Caledonian College, Ministry of Defence Pension Fund, Sultan Qaboos University, etc. I'm glad to continue sharing my technical knowledge and experience with anyone anywhere in Oman and abroad. (PVT-C12)

Figure 111: Entrance to Handicrafts House (left) in Al-Madina Plaza Complex in Muscat. Packages (right) containing items derived from Omani weaving style, such as tie and key holders, alongside local frankincense known as luban and perfumes (pictures taken by the researcher on 30 August 2020).

Management Training

The training programmes should also go further to holding classes and venues for workshops and lectures on tourism management. Participants claimed that locals in both case villages have insufficient skills and knowledge about financial and administrative affairs regarding tourism management and how to manage an SME (GOV-Q33). The official explained that some approvals were issued for different SME tourism enterprises that were not implemented, as

applicants were surprised that this business needed deep knowledge and experience in terms of profitability and sustainability (GOV-G23).

In response to this challenge, various training programmes related to entrepreneurship, finance, business administration and marketing, sponsored by Riyada, allow local entrepreneurs to start their businesses in various activities, including tourism, as participants (GOV-A17 and GOV-A13) confirmed. According to the 2019 annual report, 112 training programmes have focused mainly on entrepreneurship in various economic and tourism activities. Of these, 106 training programmes exist in Oman, which have targeted 2,713 entrepreneurs, as well as six overseas programmes, mainly in Malaysia, which benefited 18 participants (Riyada, 2020).

According to a CSR specialist from the private sector (PVT-CS5), the Al-Wathbah Academy was founded by Bank Muscat to support SME entrepreneurs with diverse administrative and financial skills in terms of finance, accounting, and human resources to achieve business success and sustainability. According to a 2019 report, more than 90 entrepreneurs have completed this programme (Bank Muscat, 2020). Similarly, the National Bank Oman (NBO) is inviting Omani youths and college students to participate in various training programmes related to business administration, financing, and leadership skills (PVT-CS3).

All of these programmes are offered free of charge by the above parties, and they invite experts, professionals, and CEOs to share their successes and experiences. However, most of these programmes are held in Muscat, which limits entrepreneurs living in regional governorates from benefiting from these programmes. It would be practical and more effective to decentralise these business administration and entrepreneurship training programmes to other locations in Oman to maximise benefits for those in rural communities and support their business sustainability (Section 4.2.2). Similar cases have been dealt with in the existing literature regarding training programmes for regional destinations, such as the Adventa Initiative in Monmouthshire (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014) and some safari companies in Botswana (Stone, 2015).

Tour Guiding Training

Tour guiding is another important training programme that not only enables local tour guides to benefit from tourists' experiences but also reduces unfair interventions from outside tour operators who hire non-local tour guides at the expense of locals' benefits (Section 5.3.2). Participants from the private sector claimed that so far there is no participation of local guides in our tour programme; as soon as they have better skills and knowledge in guiding, they would of course be included (PVT-TO4 and PVT-TO4). This issue should be considered to strengthen the skills of locals in terms of guiding techniques, as local guides are preferable since they have extensive information about the destination compared to non-local guides. For example, a non-local guide claimed that the locals had no desire to host tourists. By contrast, a local guide took tourists to his sister's house to taste local foods and experience traditional hospitality (GOV-A12). This means that local guides have good contacts and networking, as tourists are in a comfortable position in the presence of a local guide who is able to give tourists a real sense of the authenticity of locals and their heritage (Hultman and Cederholm, 2006). Nepal and Saarinen (2016), however, stated that non-local guides struggle to provide tourists with adequate knowledge and information because they have limited networks and access to local heritage.

Thus, guiding training is required to meet the needs of tourists and destinations, as local guides should share their experiences with those who lack them. Beyond the modest leadership training initiative offered by a local tour guide in Misfat al-Abryeen (Section 5.3.4), some local and leadership professionals expressed their desire to share their experiences with locals to shift the training to a more favourable level. For example, a licenced tour guide (PVT-G23) expressed that she would like to share her experiences with those who lack knowledge, especially women. Moreover, one famous female tour guide in Oman, who attracted a mixed group of international tourists to visit various attractions, especially in Muscat and nearby locations, wishes to share her guiding experience with Omani youths:

> I have provided on-site training for male and female students at Oman Tourism College within the actual group containing international tourists. Many of them, especially females, have a passion for being involved in guiding activities, but they hesitated due to insufficient knowledge about this job

initially, but they were convinced, continued, and admired the profession. (PVT-G21).

External bodies, especially the tour operators who capitalise their businesses on local resources, should also contribute by offering training to the locals in guiding, hospitality, and marketing, as was observed by Stone in Botswana (2015). Partnering local trainees with a non-local guide would help the trainees learn the leadership techniques and would also enhance their knowledge of the non-local guide (Nepal and Saarinen, 2016), thus benefitting each other. However, since both studied villages, which are characterised by a mountain landscape (Section 1.7), this guiding training should be extended to adventure activities so that tourists can explore spectacular mountain landscapes, as there is a lack of local guide specialists in adventure. As participant (GOV-W02) noted and consistent with Apollo et al.'s (2021) suggestion, guiding training for locals is vital for tourists to experience the mountainous landscape of the Himalayan part of India, where locals have shaped mountain features to make a living.

Oman Tourism College, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Manpower, has offered several training programmes to address this shortcoming. However, the legal obstacle associated with the training-for-employment programme that forces trainees to work with sponsors for a period no less than twice the training period should be reconsidered, as previously outlined (Sections 4.2.2 and 5.3.4 and suggested by participants (GOV-N22, GOV-A12, and GOV-L30). With the legal obstacles removed, once the training is complete, the local youth can practice tour guiding without the need for a sponsor. Thus, graduate trainees can effectively run freelance enterprises without a sponsor. Hence, building locals' capabilities in the profession, such as guiding, will help to serve tourists in the studied villages and fill the shortage of tour guides in Oman, particularly during the tourist season between October and April, as officials (GOV-O14 and GOV-E05) claimed. However, according to Oman's Ministry of Tourism (2020e), the number of Omani guides reached 312 versus 84 non-Omani guides by the end of 2019.

Further, learning a foreign language is essential to enhancing communication and interaction with tourists. In this respect, local accommodation providers at Misfat Al-Abryeen should provide training in a foreign language for locals interested in getting involved in tourism operations, for example, to facilitate communication and exchange information smoothly with tourists. The Zighy Bay Resort in Oman, for example, provides teachers to help locals learn English (Al Amri, 2008). As local participants (LMA-08 and LMU-23) who express a willingness to learn other languages, in addition to Arabic and English (Section 5.2.2), could share their knowledge with locals who wish to learn foreign languages (Butler, 2017).

It is recognised that the beekeeping owner's great effort involves his sons in tourism experience to have adequate practical training, as a local participant (LMU-10) described. However, this initiative should be generalised so that other schoolchildren receive sufficient hands-on training to gain experience by serving tourists in collaboration with local schools by orienting some outdoor activities to allow schoolchildren to package honey products and sell them to tourists. Many worldwide destinations offer opportunities for school-age children to participate in the tourism business and contribute to the preservation of their natural and cultural values, as in Chumbe Island in Zanzibar (Dodds and Graci, 2012) and Tele Island in Indonesia (Graci, 2013).

This detailed overview of the training programmes required to support local communities in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages has emphasised networking with local knowledgeable persons, external individuals with experience, private bodies and public institutions. This study examines the legislative obstacles related to training initiatives to empower locals' ability to share the benefits of tourism development in Oman, which are already evident in both of the studied villages. In short, all the efforts outlined above would help uplift the studied villages as competitive destinations, as the locals would be qualified to adopt sophisticated and proactive measures in dealing with and supporting tourists, making external help no longer necessary, or at least significantly reduced (Butler, 2017). This point confirms the goals of Oman 2040 Vision (2019) that education and vocational training are crucial to equipping youth and individuals with the skills needed to join the labour market, increase productivity, and improve the efficiency of the whole economy.

6.3.3 Financing

Existing frameworks have not addressed the variety of financial resources allocated to boost the local participatory approach to socioeconomic and tourism development. Relying on the public budget of countries with oil and gas economies is not always guaranteed due to several issues; one of them is financial crises due to oil price dropping, as in the case of Oman (Section 1.1.5). There are some alternative financial sources, such as adopting CSR programmes by agencies to support local development initiatives (Manente et al., 2016; Rahmawati et al., 2016). Part of the collected revenues could also be directed to fund training, as in Senegal (Zeppel, 2006) and Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), or to fund product development and conservation, as in Kenya (Odede et al., 2015; Makuvaza, 2014). This research addresses alternative financial resources alongside part of the public budget to support local participation in Misfat Al-Abyreen and Muql villages.

The responses collected from public and private participants and locals in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql claim that a lack of funds is the main obstacle hindering the implementation of the developmental plan and capacity building. According to official sources (GOV-M14), the lack of financial resources is seen as the main challenge limiting tourism development and the preservation of cultural heritage for tourism purposes; therefore, without this resource, no action can be taken. Two officials (GOV-G23 and GOV-H21) added that the lack of funding to build tourism infrastructure means that plans are like an ink on paper or an incomplete project. Likewise, participants from both studied villages stated that financial support is important for the construction of tourist amenities (LMA-26, LMA-14 and LMU-12).

This section discusses a wide range of interventions proposed by participants at the public, private, and local levels to ensure the provision of financial resources to build the skills of local communities to manage their natural and cultural resources into a sustainable tourism product.

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The first source of funding is the allocation of funds by government institutions. As discussed in section 1.7), some infrastructure facilities in both studied villages are funded through an allocated budget to serve tourists with basic services, such as visitor centres, car parking, and direction and interpretation signs. However, this allocated budget for the construction of tourism infrastructure has been suspended since 2014 due to a drop in oil and gas prices (GOV-S21, GOV-E02, GOV-M12, and GOV-12), which also limits the developmental plan implementation of the Muql project, as official noted (GOV-A12). Hence, Al Raffd Fund funding for SME businesses became a government priority, as the participants (GOV-M13) addressed. This study also emphasises that the legislative clause relating to funding tourism activities should be reconsidered as part of an interest-free programme by the Al-Raffd Fund to allow locals to renovate their traditional buildings to be heritage lodges, cafés, or museums, as discussed (Section 4.2.3). This obliges the owners to give their consent that the renovation of the building may only be used for touristic purposes, such as bed and breakfasts, cafés, restaurants, and museums.

In addition to the Al-Raffd Fund, participant added that banks could finance tourism development in both studied villages through low interest rates (GOV-G23). One of these banks is the Oman Bank of Development, which provides a loan for starting SMEs in many fields, including tourism, as noted by an official (GOV-M13). As this Bank applies an interest's rate calculates with 3% for SMEs enterprises as mentioned (Section 4.2.3), whereby locals in both studied villages come from a low-income background, financial incentives are required to encourage local tourism investment through tax exemption for certain years to minimise the impact of the above stated interest rates. Similar to fee and tax exemptions given to any investor wishing to invest in the tourism industry in the Musandam Governorate. These incentives exempt the investor from the "4%" tourism tax and the "5%" municipal tax from the actual operation of the project for 10 years, as the Oman News Agency (2019) reported.

The second proposed source of funding is encouraging a CSR programme, as this study observed one CSR programme, particularly the Bank Muscat initiative, that focused on completing some building renovations, including the main gate, as stated (Section 5.1.1.1), to provide basic tourism products for tourists (e.g., a shop/information point, a bakery/workshop

and a café). This study observed several reliable donors who have sponsored various cultural and tourism institutions through CSR programmes to support communities and tourists alike. For example, Jusoor is a notable CSR company that has sponsored many local initiatives, mainly the construction of the Cultural Centre in Liwa (Jusoor, 2019). This product is considered an important cultural platform that combines scientific, cultural, and intellectual aspects, as both locals and tourists have the opportunity to discover various amenities in this centre, especially the museum, the innovation centre, and the planetarium (GOV-B23 and GOV-M14).

Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG, 2020) supported the establishment of the Turtle Museum as part of the Ras Al-Jinz project in the Ash-Sharqiyah South Governorate (Figure 112). This product offers indigenous people, scientists, students, and tourists opportunities to increase their understanding and awareness of nature and ecosystem protection. The above initiatives are sponsored by the government or well-established companies—mostly oil and gas companies and banks—with existing CSR programmes to fulfil their commitments and responsibilities towards communities and the environment. Thus, these companies were able to support local communities with a range of services to strengthen their partnerships with locals.

Figure 112: Various types of turtles with interpretative information (left) are illustrated in the Turtle Museum funded by Oman LNG (picture taken by the researcher during a family visit on 27 August 2020). Liwa Cultural Centre (right) sponsored by Jusoor (Source: Hassan Al Jabri).

As one participant (GOV-T12) commented, the main interventions showed that measures should be taken to encourage large and SME companies to give back to communities by applying for CSR programmes as a compulsory activity to promote socioeconomic and tourism activities and infrastructure. To apply CSR programmes to tourism development, according to Omani Tax Law, all hotel and accommodation facilities in Oman must be taxed at 4% as tourism tax and 5% as municipality tax from total revenue. This study suggests that a small percentage—possibly 1%, for instance—could be set aside from the aforementioned 9% to support tourism development initiatives at rural destinations. However, the aim is not to charge accommodation establishments an additional percentage if regulators believe that any loss of revenue from the support provided to tourism infrastructure should be recouped by additional taxation. A similar example in the Omani context is that local crushers and quarries are obligated to pay 1% of total revenue to the province's development under a clause called the Society Service, following Article 16 of the new mining law of 13 February 2019 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019d).

However, this research shows that key donors in Oman, particularly PDO, LNG, and Jusoor companies, should take urgent unified action to encourage the development of tourism facilities, including heritage renovation and training centre establishment, especially in Misfat Al-Abryeen, because applying for the tax measures or applying CSR take time as certain legislative actions need to be approved. Aramco and Sabic Companies took the collective initiative within a public–private partnership approach to rehabilitate the historic Hay A-Sur district in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the necessary amenities that promote the place as a cultural product (The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2017). In Jordan, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation has implemented initiatives to mitigate the environmental impact of Wadi Rum, along with renovating abandoned historic houses (France, 2016).

Further, the CSR programme should not only be applied to the aforementioned tourist facilities, as the product also needs technical and financial support to improve the tourist experience and maximise the locals' benefits. This is similar to initiatives taken by hoteliers and tour operators in the Gambia, who allocated spaces for local products in their outlets (Dodds and Joppe, 2005),

as well as the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) in the United States, which has stores in every community area to promote local handicrafts and artworks as gifts and souvenirs (Leuterio, 2007). This study shows that several institutions support the development of authentic products. For example, Omran has provided various technical and financial assistance to empower Omani entrepreneurs and promote authentic local products. This company trained and empowered an Omani woman named Salma to develop her initiative, which involves making, packaging, and marketing chocolates (PVT-CS2 and Omran, 2015). Today, it is known that *Salma Chocolate* (Figure 113) is made from Omani ingredients like frankincense, thyme, and Halwa (Omani traditional sweet).

Figure 113: Salma Chocolates logo (left) and sample of prepared chocolates (right) (Source: Omran).

A government participant (GOV-S19) explained that these chocolates are offered to VIP guests and ambassadors at international events. The same report (Omran, 2015) also noted that a greenhouse project was initiated in Jabal Akhdar in Ad-Dakhliyah to give local farmers training to grow fresh vegetables, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, and lettuce. According to one CSR specialist (PVT-CS2), the opportunity to use such produce exists not only for the nearby Alila Resort but also for the surrounding inhabited places in Jabal Akhadar Province.

The third potential financial source is to use part of the collected revenues to support tourism development in both studied villages by controlling the tourist movement. This can be achieved by setting up gates or ticketing points where all tourists—including groups, individuals, citizens, and expatriates—pay entrance fees (Section 5.3.2), as suggested local participants (LMA-16 and LMA-10). This proposed gateway is one of the key outcomes of the Tourism Master Plan for Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages to control the movements of tourists in a way that enhances the tourism experience (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015; Oman Ministry of Tourism, 2012). Previous authors that part of the tourism income supported the development of the destination, such as in Senegal (Zeppel, 2007) in Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011) and Kenya (Makuvaza, 2014), alongside membership fees (Odede et al., 2015) in Kenya. Revenue from entrance fees and taxes from tour operators and tourists could help build tourist facilities and improve services in general.

This study shows that public and private sector regulators, as well as local developers, should take a secure and sustained partnership approach with key funders—particularly oil and gas operators, banks, and large corporations—to fund key tourist infrastructures and facilities that drive tourism and make the experiences possible. Furthermore, disseminating a culture of return as a CSR approach in all areas of the company would promote a collective working environment that not only benefits the local level but also strengthens the national level. On a global level, it drives SMEs and entrepreneurs towards a competitive integrated economy (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019). In short, securing financial resources is seen as a key driver in building effective forms of local participation in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql to conserve resources, promote the wellbeing of local people, and enhance the tourism experience.

6.3.4 Legislation

An additional factor identified in this research is related to the existing legislative framework; however, existing frameworks and typologies refer to the legislation in general without considering the strengths and weaknesses of specific laws or clauses related to the promotion of the participation of the local community in socioeconomic development. This research adds several relevant points enacted by royal and ministerial decrees to encourage citizen's participation in socioeconomic activities, including tourism. Chapters four, five, and six describe most of the legislative clauses, including their obstacles, that limit citizens' incentives to engage in socioeconomic and tourism activities in both the studied villages and Oman in general.

For example, the Invest Easy platform has expedited the issuance of final approval to run the business, as a participant (GOV-M13) noted. However, it does not address the lengthy bureaucratic process that investors must go through to obtain initial approvals from relevant institutions, such as the Municipality, Civil Defence, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry (GOV-T26). As a result, it diverts investors' attention to investing in less complicated businesses, such as real estate and the stock market, as detailed (Sections 4.2.4 and 6.1). This study proposes immediate steps to reconsider the implications of these regulations to encourage tourism development in Oman. One of the most important measures is to bridge the gaps between relevant public-sector institutions to provide additional facilities and incentives, especially exempting investors from unnecessary requirements. Similarly, as the Ministry of Tourism has exempted tourism enterprises from financial guarantees as a part of regulative incentives to encourage investors and entrepreneurs to invest in tourism businesses as participants (GOV-Q32 and GOV-E05) noted and discussed (Section 4.2.4).

It is also necessary to reconsider the effectiveness of laws related to training for employment to allow youth and local enterprises at rural destinations to take advantage of the technical training programme without the need for a contract to be signed between the trainee and the employer (Sections 4.2.2 and 6.3.2). This signed contract obliges the employer to pay wages

to the trainee for two years after completing the training, which makes it difficult for SMEs working in rural tourism to pay wages during the summer as off-season tourism, as in the case of Misfat Al-Abryeen village (5.3.1). This makes it difficult for the trainee to move to another job during the two years with a contracted employer. As a result of this obstacle, 15 of the 20 young Omanis withdrew before beginning the guiding programme, participant (GOV-L30) explained.

Furthermore, this study argues that regulators should reconsider laws related to the formation of green home products to maximise local benefits in rural areas. For example, the studied villages are irrigated by live *falaj* systems, which do not allow the establishment of green home products under legislative clauses 46–48 of the Oman Law on Agricultural Land Use (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2017). The participant (GOV-Q32) notes that the rationale behind this clause is not to focus on the tourism business at the expense of agricultural activity, as explained (Section 6.2). As tourism is seen as a key factor in improving socioeconomic activities, including agriculture (Mensah and Mensah, 2013; Doğan and Morady, 2017), it is essential that this law reconsider how tourism can be used as a tool to improve agricultural activity by building environmental education and conducting a cultural dialogue between tourists and locals, mainly farmers, as both studied villages rely on agriculture and animal husbandry as their main activities (Section 1.7).

For example, tourists participate in harvesting and learn about the *aflaj* system and animal husbandry. This involvement inspires famers to preserve traditional lifestyles and equipment, such as the hand-hewn plough called *hais,* which was pulled by bulls to plough the land in preparation for cultivation (Richardson and Dorr, 2003; Al-Ghafri et al., 2017) to display them in small museums, similar as in Norway (Brandt and Haugen, 2011). This museum could also show the traditional methods of beekeeping in Oman by placing beehives in hollowed-out trunks of palm trees. This is similar to the open-air museum in Sadecki Bartnik in Strozya, Poland, which allows tourists to view a variety of beehives that have been in use for over two thousand years, as well as its traditional material (Cesur, 2021). It also promotes the understanding of schoolchildren and tourists by engaging in environmental education by

installing informative signs that contain pictures about biodiversity species and their local and scientific names in different languages (Slaymaker, 2017).

An additional legislative clause in this research relates to the licensing of local cooperation businesses. According to official participants (GOV-T26) and Oman's Commercial Companies Law (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2019e), companies typically fall into two specific categories: a Closed Joint Stock Company, which requires a deposit of 500,000 OMR (1,000,000 GBP) as capital, or a Limited Liability Company, where the number of shareholders cannot exceed 50 persons. Although this law was recently enacted, these conditions seem to discourage the local community, especially in villages, from forming a cooperation for two clear reasons. First, the majority of locals in rural destinations are low-income earners, as discussed (Section 4.2.3), so it is impossible to allocate this huge amount as a capital requirement. Second, the number of villagers wanting to become shareholders in a proposed local cooperative is much higher than the maximum allowed under the new law.

For example, Al-Misfat Al-Ahliyah LLCC was established in Misfat Al-Abryeen in 2015 (see Section 1.7.2) to represent locals in managing their tourism resources. This legislative clause forced the founder of this company to register one person from each family to represent the entire household, while other families were never involved as members or representatives of the company (PVT-A23 and PVT-A13). Therefore, this legislative clause is a major step towards the establishment of productive cooperatives in Oman. This study, however, suggests a review of this existing law for locals to have due share from the established local cooperative, as they are from low-income backgrounds.

The legislative clauses discussed above indicate that regulators should reconsider the effectiveness of existing laws by establishing a flexible regulative approach to encourage participants in socioeconomic development in the studied villages and Oman in general. This point is in line with Oman's 2040 Vision (2019) goal of building a participatory, flexible regulatory system that is constantly updated, innovative, and close to development, to avoid

overlap between public institutions and to support socioeconomic development, including the tourism industry.

However, an administrative apparatus has been modified by merging and abolishing ministries, forming new ministries, and reducing the number of government agencies by almost half and the number of ministerial portfolios from 26 in 2019 to 19 ministers in 2020 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020b). Since cultural heritage is recognised as a key element of tourism development worldwide, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was established under Royal Decree 90/2020 (The Official Gazette of Oman, 2020c), after heritage and tourism remained administratively and financially independent institutions. As the above measures focus on the integration of the state's performance, the organisational and legal framework has been renewed and strengthened in a way that guarantees equal opportunities in all sectors, including tourism. Although these fundamental measures were only recently decreed while this research was in the advanced stage of the writing, it will take time for such measures to take root, and before one can assess their effectiveness in achieving productive and diversified socioeconomic prosperity in urban and rural areas, such investigation would be part of recommended future research.

6.4 Forming Effective Local Cooperative

The existing frameworks address the need to reach the stage of citizen empowerment through the establishment of local non-profit institutions. In Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizens Participation, the non-profit organisation shows that the majority of the grants received to finance economic enterprises, including public housing projects, buildings, and shopping centres, were directed by the local community. White's (1996) Interest of Participation demonstrates community empowerment by setting up a local consumer cooperative to provide services and products to community people in conjunction with other enterprises to improve community wellbeing. Garrod's (2003) framework did not address the formation of local cooperatives or institutions to enable the local community to manage the natural and cultural resources in an economic product such as tourism, perhaps attributing this to the fact that community participation is included in the preliminary study phase.

As for Al-Shaaibi's (2001) framework, forming a local entity is not addressed because there are no cultural or natural assets owned by people and can be presented as a product. The role of locals around the Wave Resort is only to implement the requirements of the management, whose members consist of government officials and owners of luxury apartments or their representatives. Bello's (2016) framework recommends a community-based organisation to facilitate interaction between the host community and stakeholders during the tourism planning stage. Further, some of the worldwide destinations show that locals are being empowered, reducing their dependence on outside agencies through the establishment of their local cooperation. For example, a *tourism-based organisation* in the Abindu sacred site in Kisumu County in Kenya has been initiated that empowers locals to negotiate with external bodies, such as the national government and private sector, regarding the development of eco-tourism opportunities during the planning and implementation stages (Odede et al., 2015).

In Botswana, a *community-based tourism institution* in five villages, namely, Mabele, Kavimba, Kachikau, Satau, and Parakarungu, indicates that decision-making processes have moved to the local community. This institution enables locals to decide whether to utilise financial tourism returns to fund socioeconomic aspects, such as supporting agricultural activities by providing tractors with trailers and ploughing equipment, or building tents as a shelter for community wedding and funeral ceremonies (Stone, 2015).

As a proposed partnership approach that involved key public, private, and freelance parties that share administrative, technical, and financial aspects with the local community (Section 6.2), this study further considers the effective involvement of mentioned parties to strengthen the role of the proposed local cooperative technically and financially and to explain the empowerment dimensions that would derive through establishing a local cooperation. As discussed in Section 5.3.4, managing the tourism process in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages is currently done spontaneously and individually, which leads to potential conflicts and disharmony among the locals. This study monitored the locals' perceptions in both case villages to determine the type of business in which they would like to be involved through a cooperation or individual approach. In other words, local participants were asked how

resources in socioeconomic and tourism products in the studied villages and across Oman could be appropriately managed. The majority of the respondents considered a cooperative umbrella the best method to ensure equal opportunities and sharing of common interests among the participating locals and partners. Although most of the responses from the local participants were similar, some of the responses contained meaningful interpretations.

For example, working together would increase understanding among locals and reduce the chance of errors, as they are involved in a collective constructive dialogue (LMU-15). Other participants said that teamwork would be better to gain more benefits than an independent approach, which only creates envy and intense competition (LMU-21 and LMA-09), while a participating elder expressed the following opinion:

> As tourism benefits all, we prefer and recommend working with a cooperative method because it is in line with the Holy Quran, as stated in 'cooperate in righteousness and piety but do not cooperate in sin and aggression (LMA-26). (Researcher note: verse 6: The Holy Qur'an: *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*).

Similarly, government officials GOV-N23 and GOV-Y17 held similar views that working in a cooperative context could help locals share the same interests and take risks together. Forming a local cooperative for natural and cultural resource management will promote equity and solidarity among locals to prevent a self-interest agenda. One participant explained that an established local cooperation would help ease pressure on the government by creating job opportunities for locals that would also reduce their migration to the cities (GOV-S71). From a legislative perspective, a participating official (GOV-T26) expressed that dealing with one active company that represents locals in a small village is much better for regulators in terms of monitoring corporate performance than dealing with 10 individual companies, most of which are idle.

As mentioned earlier, Al-Misfat Al-Ahliyah LLCC was established in Misfat Al-Abryeen in 2015 (see Section 1.7.2) to represent locals in managing their tourism resources. However, despite significant efforts by some locals, it does not work as effectively as it should. It appears that this firm lacks representatives who are supposed to perform different administrative and

technical tasks to fulfil its goals. Simply put, this company is run by a few local youths in a voluntary, modest, and unorganised way because there seems to be insufficient knowledgeable personnel to run this company. The local entity has to be organised and include key personnel at the decision and managerial level with representatives from other relevant stakeholders in the case of Misfat al-Abryeen village, similar to the Nema Foundation in Guludo village in Mozambique, which consists of chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and one representative from the education, agriculture, fisheries, health, and water sectors (Carter-James and Dowling, 2017). In Muql village, a conflict between the two parties restricted the establishment of local cooperative to manage tourism opportunities, which require awareness programmes that teach locals how to work in a collaborative manner (Section 6.3.1).

To improve these situations, the formation of a local cooperation body that shares the benefits of socioeconomic development among residents and partners should nominate well-qualified members who will help conserve resources, improve the community's wellbeing, and enhance the tourist experience. As locals in the studied villages seem unfamiliar with the concept of tourism and have not yet reached a point where they can offer authentic products, this research envisages the proposed local cooperation to include representatives from public and private institutions that can provide advice in tourism operations and add value to the concept of the community participation approach in tourism development. As two decision-makers (GOV-T12 and GOV-M13) noted, the government in Oman has been promoting the formation of local cooperation for the past decade, particularly in socioeconomic activities based on local resources, mainly tourism and mining, which benefit all residents. It is therefore necessary to designate a team that is capable of representing relevant government agencies to continue providing technical and financial support for the growth and stabilisation of local cooperation in Oman (Al Belushi, 2015).

Engaging knowledgeable people from the public and private sectors would make managing the local cooperation approach safer by maintaining and addressing the expected circumstances (Bello et al., 2016). This study suggests that the executive board of the local cooperation should include representatives from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Authority for SMEs, and Ministry of Labour, alongside the Omani Woman Society, which represents Omani women in

local and state development (Oman, Ministry of Social Development, 2018). Moreover, to foster partnerships, the representatives of tour operators and guides should be included on the board (Section 6.3.3). Since securing financial resources is an important pillar for the implementation of all administrative and technical programmes (Section 6.3.3), a member who represents key reliable donor bodies, such as banks, oil, and gas companies, and mining operators, should be part of this local entity. Local school membership would ensure that the concept of tourism development is reflected in the curricula, and outdoor events can be held to increase understanding and development skills among the younger generations, as discussed in Section 6.3.1.

Further, local members should be elected by the locals to represent them in local cooperation. The participating officials expressed that educated people, such as engineers, doctors, and teachers, can provide added value and are considered more reliable among the locals (GOV-Y17). To ensure transparency, locals prefer elderly persons with good standing to be leaders (Manyara and Jones, 2007). Representatives from both groups should therefore be included as reliable and respected members of the community. This proposed approach involving a multitude of representatives would maximise partnerships, develop networking opportunities, and provide important facilities (Bello et al., 2016) that the locals lack.

The first task of this board would be to appoint a qualified manager with an agreed salary from locals or external personnel to oversee the related administrative work and progress (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015). Executives of the board should receive compensation to ensure that they are committed to achieving predetermined goals. The board should create and design a practical business plan for implementing the main actions by initiating partnerships with practitioners, professionals, and academic advisors. The main aim of this plan is to take urgent action to preserve natural and cultural values, pursue education and training opportunities, and manage financial resources, including investing the shares of local people for profit and tourism development, and promoting the sites as differentiated destinations in local contexts and abroad.

Local individual enterprises can cause disharmony and social conflict among local businesspeople (Ramos and Prideaux, 2014). However, when the founders of small enterprises, such as accommodation providers and tour operators in Misfat Al-Abryeen, were asked about the opportunities to work under a cooperative umbrella (see Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2), the participants answered that they had nothing against being part of this form of cooperation (PVT-TO1, PVT-A23, and PVT-A13 and PVT-M16). This proactive and collaborative view of these operators would encourage them to share their experiences and knowledge for the benefit of all locals and partners. However, as one participant (GOV-S71) noted, the local cooperation formation approach in rural areas would not be achieved without legislative incentives. To facilitate effective cooperation formation, regulators should reconsider the legal clause concerning Oman's Commercial Companies Law of 13 February 2019 to allow all locals to officially register as shareholders, as discussed in Section 6.3.4.

This study also addresses the key empowerment dimensions derived from the formation of effective local cooperation from social, political, and economic perspectives. For example, from a social empowerment perspective, working with a collaborative approach reduces the possibilities of self-interest and strengthens the local inclusive (LMA-14, LMU-09, and LMU-25). The participants added that working in a collaborative approach brings together the whole community to gain the same and equitable benefits (GOV-W02). Examples from worldwide case studies have shown that local people are involved in a variety of activities via a collaborative approach through the establishment of local cooperatives to generalise the fruits of tourism. According to Ramos and Prideaux (2014), working in a collaborative approach can enable poor and low-income people in some rural areas to participate in tourism activities to achieve a better standard of living. The poorest families are able to benefit from selling crops and handcrafted products as souvenirs (Jaafar et al., 2015). Stone (2015) explained that besides traditional agricultural tools in Botswana, new technologies, fertilisers, and livestock strengthen a portion of farmers' incomes.

The second dimension is political empowerment, and participation in decision-making processes is encouraged because local people can express their ideas and concerns to others through local institutions. According to a local participant, forming a local cooperative can direct the government to listen to the entire area rather than listening to those who have a self-interest agenda (LMU-09). This means that listening to a collective voice is more effective than listening to individuals. From a practical point of view, the campsite and two traditional buildings converted to restaurants awarded to the Al-Misfat Al-Ahliyah LLCC in Misfat Al-Abryeen are more proactive in cooperating to persuade relevant stakeholders to award projects to a local cooperative rather than rent outsourcing (GOV-H21 and GOV-L23). A participant (LMU-09) in Muql village discussed the possibility of winning tenders for cleaning and rescue services awarded to non-local businesses if a local cooperative is formed.

The third dimension that can be achieved through the establishment of a local cooperative is economic empowerment, as locals develop the technical and financial capabilities to pursue their socioeconomic and tourism businesses in partnership with external bodies. According to participant GOV-H13, forming a local cooperative can gain support and facilitation from concerned authorities, such as the Al-Raffd Fund and Authority of SMEs, in terms of training and financing. This is consistent with what Stone (2015) observed in Botswana, as safari companies conducted an effective training programme for locals related to leadership, hospitality, marketing, and safety standards. Tang and Sedgley (2014) noted that the funded EU initiative provided training and workshop programmes to enable local producers to market and brand local products at local destinations in Monmouthshire in the UK.

The participating officials also added that foreigners, mainly funders, would be more convinced to fund collective initiatives than individual ones (GOV-M13, GOV-H21, and GOV-G23). This point was shown through the initiatives of Bank Muscat towards the renovation of traditional houses in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, as discussed (Section 5.1.1), as this initiative was designed to benefit locals collectively. However, two respondents went beyond financial support, stating that it was difficult to monitor and control the individual business to meet the quality of service performance (GOV-H21 and GOV-G23). This suggests that it is possible to unify many individual enterprises to achieve one predetermined goal rather than resolving

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conflicts and disharmonies during operation (Section 5.3.1) among accommodation providers in Misfat Al-Abryeen Village. Through local cooperation, locals can be motivated to share skills and knowledge with other destinations that are less economically empowered. As Odede et al. (2015) indicated, a community-based organisation in the village of Abindu in Kenya participates in related workshops and seminars to share profiles and experiences with other destinations.

Thus, the formation of a local cooperation is important for directing the role of the local community in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql to reach the level of empowerment by building exchanges between public and private institutions. This proposed effective cooperation is consistent with Oman 2040 Vision's (2019) dimension *Comprehensive Geographical Development, Following a Decentralised Approach that Develops a Few Urban Centres and Utilises Land in an Ideal and Sustainable Way*, which aims to empower local communities in governorates to build their capabilities to make optimal use of natural and cultural resources and to establish socioeconomic and environmental priorities. In Oman's 2040 Tourism Strategy (2016), operating in a cooperative environment can create significant economic benefits for the host communities and enhance their wellbeing.

6.5 Offering Authentic Tourism Products

That Existing frameworks do not discuss the use of natural and cultural values as an economic product to enhance the tourism experience and benefit the host community. For example, Arnstian's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation relied on grants from public institutions related to town planning programmes, renewable energy, and housing services. Participation Interest Typology, refers to products imported from outside the village to meet local consumption needs (White, 1996). Although Al-Shaaibi's (2011) framework mentioned postmodern assets, particularly luxury apartments, magnificent villages, artificial boasts, and 18-hole golf courses, these properties are owned by wealthy citizens and foreign investors, not locals, as also confirmed by Ghasemi et al. (2018), which is contrary to the idea that sustainable tourism based on natural and cultural resources should belong to locals (UNESCO, 2014;

UNWTO, 2017). Garrod's (2003) and Bello et al.'s (2016) frameworks focus on community participation in the planning stage by conducting preliminary studies that take into account the previous stage before recognising natural resources and culture. The present framework explored participants' perceptions and the results of site visits to identify the natural and cultural contents of both studied villages and to suggest various products that locals should offer to improve their living conditions while enhancing the tourist experience.

Although there were tourism services and products related to accommodation, tours, handmade, and food products provided by locals in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages (see Sections 5.1 and 5.2), the data collected indicated that local initiatives to provide products and services were not sufficient to benefit locals or to attract and connect tourists to Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages. According to officials, there is a shortage of tourism services in many destinations in Oman, including studied villages, despite Oman having rich, unique values and cultural and environmental potentials, such as beaches, mountains, and coastal areas (GOV-N33 and GOV-W31). The inadequate awareness, training, and financing capabilities discussed earlier in this chapter have contributed to this problem (Sections 6.3.1, 6.3.2, and 6.3.3).

This section provides an overview of the tourism products and services that locals can offer tourists based on data collected and site visits. Some accommodation services are offered by locals in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, two of which are in the licensing process, and some are being renovated. This study proposes a variety of products and services that go beyond traditional services, primarily accommodation services. For example, a converted traditional building has been turned into a café known as Rogan Café to welcome tourists and offer hospitality (Section 5.1.1.1). Similar as café and restaurants in Jorden (Khirfan, 2016), Iran (Smith and Oleynik, 2017) and in the Dominican Republic (Gonzalez-Perez, 2017). However, there are some cultural buildings that have historically been designated as heritage sites to welcome guests and provide indoor local foods and beverages, notably *Sablah*. This is a meeting place for locals to welcome guests and resolve conflicts between locals and other tribes (LMA-12 and Nebel and Richthofen, 2016). Locals can serve ceremonial *qahwa* with dried dates, ghee, and coffee for themselves and their guests (Ibrahim *et al*. 2001), and goats are

slaughtered for guests (LMA-12). *Sablah* also hosts economic activities, such as the well-known *tinna* auction that sells date crops*, which is run by an auctioneer called *delal* (LMA-16 and LMA-12).

There are two main traditional communal places, Sablah *Al-Hadair* in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Sablah *Al-Subarah,* which are in the shade of the trees in Muql village. These sites can be revived to welcome tourists as guests and to provide an opportunity to explore the role of Sablah in locals' lives, as the official GOV-L23 suggested. This suggests that traditional buildings can play an important role in providing food and beverages to tourists and in sharing respect and understanding between the host community and tourists. In line with Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy (2016), to promote Oman as a venue for meetings and events, Sablah Place could host the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism product, which has been growing rapidly as a global product in recent years (Evans, 2015). MICE offers a site for well-planned large business groups to come together for specific purposes, such as honouring their successful employees or important clients (Cater et al., 2015). Rural destinations, mainly historical settlements, can host various MICE. In Oman, most meetings are held to honour agency employees and/or to showcase their products, such as the Al-Jabal Akhdar Province, which hosted the launch of the new Mercedes model, and Nakhal Fort, which hosted a gala dinner for the Siemens group in 2018, as a participant (GOV-G12) explained.

Experiencing agricultural activity mainly of the *falaj* system is an additional potential product that tourists can experience, as the *aflaj* system is *ghailī falaj* in both studied villages as shown (Section 1.7), originated from permanent surface water diverted by the wadī (*ghail*), (Al-Sulaimani et al. 2007). According to participants, tourists like to walk through agricultural areas to see the *falaj* system in Misfat Al-Abryeen village (LMA-04, LMA-22, LMA-13, LMA-21), and three *aflaj* systems in Muql village, particularly *falaj al-hiali*, *falaj al-faradah,* and *falaj abu-ba'arah* derived from pools (LMU-23 and LMU-07). This activity allows tourists to understand the way water shares are distributed among shareholders and farmers and the traditional method previously used by sundial during the day and stars during the night, including falaj rotation *dawran* every 8th day (LMA-11 and LMA-26). As many knowledgeable Omanis who had experience using the sundial and the stars to distribute water rights to

shareholders have passed away, and as this traditional system of knowledge is not well documented (Nash, 2017), it is worthwhile to involve the remaining knowledgeable locals in both studied villages to share this knowledge with the tourists, as discussed in Section 5.2.3.

Particularly in Muql village, tourists have the opportunity to explore the method of water transportation to the top by using an animal-powered wheel (*zajirah*) built from *sarooj* and a half-palm trunk on top galloped by a fixed wooden wheel. The system used animals, such as bulls and donkeys, to turn a wooden wheel through a rope connected to a goatskin sack into which water from the bottom was poured (Richardson and Dorr, 2003). Local participant (LMU-23) stated that there is a certain *zajirah* in Muql village with preserved architectural forms, although it has been neglected since 1979; another participant (LMU-12) indicated that the *zajirah* is no longer used for irrigation.

Figure 114: two different Zajirah in Muql village are neglected by using a diesel engine and an electric motor to pull water (Pictures taken by Researcher on 29th July 2018).

As both studied villages are characterised by spectacular mountainous landscapes, adventure, camping, and geological exploration are promising products that mark these villages as differentiated tourism destinations. Participants from both studied villages (LMA-25, LMA-32, LMU-10, LMU-08, and LMU-26) stated that tourists like to experience hiking and climbing, as well as caving activity in Muql Cave. as participants (LMU-19 and LMU-10) addressed. For example, there are two marked mountain trails known as W9 in Misfat Al

Abryeen village and E35 in Muql village as mountain plateau destinations (Section 1.7.2), tourists like to hike on mountain trails, and local youth bring their luggage on donkeys to camp in the mountain plateau overnight, as explained (Section 5.3). However, these trails are operated on an individual and unsystematic basis, as they encourage local and international hikers and runners to start or end the hiking or biking event at these destinations in a manner that promotes these locations as distinguished hiking venues. One of suggested mountain events is mountain biking event, similar to one called *qahir altilal* in Wakan village, run in cooperation with Red Bull company (participant (GOV-H13) noted.

As mountain biking is considered a dangerous sport that can lead to serious injuries, safety measures must be taken to ensure that such events are well organised. Trails must be safe, especially slopes and edges, which are considered the most dangerous places (Brian and Lee, 2017). Not only must the organisers take on this responsibility, but the bikers must also attend specialised training programmes to ensure that they have the necessary skills and techniques to participate in this particular activity. According to Schmidt (2014), an excellent bike, helmet, shin pads, and well-trained arm and leg muscles are essential to managing the difficulties of mountain biking.

The mountain plateaus also offer camping and stargazing activities in both studied villages, as participant LMA-10 describes this activity that gives tourists a sense of quietness, where they enjoy stargazing and exploring objects in the sky, such as the Grand Canyon in Eastern Hajar Mountain. Several destinations around the world offer this kind of natural exploration opportunity, mainly sky objects, such as Star Park, which is an innovative tourism product developed by professionals and locals in the Anniviers district of Switzerland (Grèzes et al., 2018). The stargazing product in Ogden Valley in the US, a place of rare light pollution, encourages tourists to observe the stars, especially the nebulas factories, of star formation with the naked eye or with a telescope (Blonde, 2020). The development of a stargazing activity is considered a main task of Oman's Tourism 2040 Strategy to achieve a tourism niche in Oman (Jamal et al., 2018). It is essential to encourage tourists to stay overnight to observe celestial objects at night, especially when they are quiet and clear. This is an excellent tourism

opportunity, as both of the studied villages are rural destinations and are far away from light pollution.

In terms of culture-based products, the organisation of a cultural event is a product that can be set up in both studied villages to give tourists the opportunity to taste the various local foods and discover folklore, as participant GOV-B23 noted. As explained in Section 5.1.2.1, males in both studied villages organised traditional folklore known locally as *rizha*, and females developed handmade crafts as souvenirs (Section 5.3.3). However, there is no well-planned cultural event in either of the studied villages that allows tourists to participate in meaningful experiences related to folklore events, tasting local food, buying handicrafts, and participating in plantation and harvesting activities. Similar as observed in Japan, Malaysia (Asker et al., 2010), Indonesia (Saarinen, 2010), Nepal (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), Norway (Brandth and Haugen, 2011), and Monmouthshire' in the UK (Haven- Tang and Jones, 2012; Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014).

Organising cultural events with fascinating content in both studied villages so that tourists can explore the theme of cultural heritage and experience various activities. One of the proposed contents of this event is to show a variety of local food. Misfat Al-Abryeen village offered local food prepared by households, as participants (LMA-14 and LMA-05) stated. Tourists who stay at the Nizwa golden Tulip hotel in Nizwa also come to Misfat Al-Abryeen village just to experience the traditional food of the Old Misfat lodge (LMA-10). In contrast, as addressed (Section 5.1.1), the main obstacle is the lack of local tourism initiatives, including accommodation services in the Muql village, which limits the benefits to the locals from the tourism, as some tourists bring their foods with them when they visit the pools area, participant (LMU-25 and LMU-12) claimed. Nevertheless, Muql village is famous for its traditional grilling technique known as *mazbi* (Figure 115)*,* in which a lamb is roasted on white stones heated evenly using acacia underneath, as a participant (LMU-09) explained.

Figure 115: A fire was lit under the white stones (right) and meat steaks (mazbi) roasted over hot stones (right) are ready to be served in Muql village (pictures taken by the researcher on 22 December 2019).

Folklore activities can be organised by males in both studied villages (Section 5.1.2.1). This proposed event expands the opportunity for women from the area and tourists to interact and share a cultural dialogue with each other. A participant (GOV-L23) suggested that 'Omani Night' products should be presented to showcase the typical traditional wedding theme by inviting female tourists to attend and wear Omani dress and *henna*. Female tourists could thus participate in the rituals of a wedding ceremony and try traditional costumes, cosmetics, and perfumes. Varied experiences could be gained, for example, by wearing a long dress from head to toe (*abaya* Smith, 2010; Darke, 2013) or by wearing jewellery, such as necklaces, bracelets, and rings. (Wikan, 1991). Various cosmetic ingredients imported from Asia, especially India, such as powdered sandalwood, sandal, and saffron *zi'fararn*, as well as kohl, can be used to beautify the face and scent the body (Richardson and Dorr, 2003), while hands and feet can be decorated with red or dark-red henna (Wikan, 1991). This unique participation in weddings provides an unforgettable experience and creates a bond between female tourists and local places and people. Tourists could document their experiences by taking pictures of how immersed they were in the experience.

Interpretation and Guiding

Offering products and services in both studied villages required the interpretation and branding programme to promote local products locally and internationally. The collected data show two types of interpretation: face-to-face guidance and e-interpretation. As guidance services were provided, especially in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, by a local tour operator who operates various tours for tourists, as stated (Section 5.3.2), training in guiding is required for locals to run tour programmes in collaboration with an institutional body such as Oman Tourism Collage and by engaging freelance tour guides to share their skills and experience with locals, as discussed (Section 6.3.2). This training should expand to build local youths technically to manage adventure activities that require understanding of international safety standards, as both villages and Oman in general have insufficient well-trained local tour guides in this field, as participant GOV-W02 noted. This point was addressed by Apollo et al. (2021), who stated that officials should take steps to qualify youth to manage adventure tourism, as it is one of the important activities that adventure tourists like to experience in the Indian Himalayan part.

An additional point in this regard is the involvement of women in guiding the translation of products and services provided by local people, especially handicraft souvenirs, foods, and beatification accessories such as *henna* (Section 5.3.3). Female guides have better access to products made by families, and are often preferred as guides by female tourists, as discussed in Section 5.2.3 as highlighted by Gao (2019). Further, female guides become one of the tourists' priorities based on religious beliefs, as Giddy (2020) stated female guides were required by some companies in South Africa to allow female's tourists to experience activities such as sky diving. Therefore, it is important that women are included in guiding training in collaboration with the Omani Woman Society. Similar to *Zaree* initiative in collaboration with Omran and Omani Woman Society in Musandam Governorate, which has successfully qualified local females to engage cruise tourists in a wonderful experience of wearing traditional handmade Oman garments and henna (PVT-CS2 and Omran, 2015).

The second interpretation is the use of technology to define local tourism products and services. According to participant LMA-10, a recent local initiative called virtual tour innovated with in 3D glasses allows tourists to explore the whole village, agricultural areas, the *falaj* system and

Rogan Fort within fifteen minutes. This service provides a meaningful experience, especially for those who are physically unable to walk, such as the elderly and children. As this technology provides accurate and simple information about the places of interest, it is important that it be available in different languages in one application to maximise the benefits for regular tourists, adventurers, scientists, children, etc. An example in the tourism field is the application known as Oman Geoheritage Guide, which was developed and launched during the Third Global Geotourism Conference in 2011 in Muscat (Dowling, 2012). The app contains more than 30 geological points of interest in Muscat and all over Oman, which can be accessed freely via the Apple store and Google Play in Arabic, English, German, and French (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016e). This application encourages tourists to enjoy an authentic experience by connecting with Oman's cultural treasure and natural landscape (Schwarze, 2019).

Branding and Marketing

Another point is branding and marketing. According to officials, locals need knowledge and understanding of the branding and packaging of products to make them attractive and authentic to others (GOV-H27 and GOV-G12). Site visits by the researcher confirmed that most local products, especially in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen, had price tags for handicrafts, food, and handmade accessories, and did not have a marketing brand to distinguish them from other products made elsewhere in Oman or worldwide. However, certain institutions support local products and SME initiatives with branding and marketing programmes, such as the Al-Raffd Fund in cooperation with Oman Oil Company, which issues branding for successful SME enterprises (GOV-Q33). Omran also supports the *Salma Chocolate* initiative with packaging and marketing incentives (Section 6.3.2).

As packaging and branding not only distinguish products from others but also allow locals to express their local uniqueness and authenticity (Chanintornsongkhla, Moogem, and Phromprawat, 2021), it is essential to innovate unique branding so that these products represent the rurality of these studied villages in outlets, festivals, and social media platforms. For instance, 'Made in Misfat Al-Abryeen' and 'Made in Muql' in Oman could be used in a similar way to trademarks introduced for the province of Ranong in Thailand, which is known to use the phrase '*Discover the Traditional Culture* and *Untouched Thailand*' (Dolezal, 2011). A

similar brand has been initiated for local products called made MiM, meaning Made in Monmouthshire in the UK (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014).

From a marketing perspective, according to the official participant, the marketing efforts are not enough due to a lack of skills and funds, which has led some Omanis to reconsider closing their private museums because they found it difficult to cover utilities bills and staffs' wages (GOV-K12). Similarly, Sebele (2010) reported that locals at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary in Botswana struggled to participate in local and global exhibitions and events that promoted community development due to a lack of funds. Thus, it is important to work with concerned bodies to build local marketing capabilities, as official GOV-A12 noted, because locals in both studied villages are from low-income backgrounds (Section 4.2.3). This can be achieved by attending workshops offered by Banks and Riyada on management aspects, including marketing (Section 6.3.2). As there is an existing partnership with Oman Television and Radio to promote local destinations, as GOV-G12 stated, it is important to increase marketing efforts to highlight authentic tourism products to differentiate these villages from others. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, can be used to spread awareness messages (Sections 4.2.1 and 6.3.1) and encourage locals to promote their products, as an official (GOV-H21) observed. Foods and handmade items can be promoted on Facebook and Instagram, as in Monmouthshire in the UK (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014) and Iran (Ghaderi et al., 2017).

Enabling locals to showcase their products by interacting directly with tourists and clients is an additional tool to maximise local's benefits and connect tourists to places and people by participating in outlets, events, and exhibitions. According to participant GOV-G12, the Ministry of Tourism provides an opportunity for crafters and traditional folklore bands to participate in international events and workshops to add value to the workshops' themes and to promote their products. A similar example shows that local producers in Monmouthshire in the UK are willing to offer their traditional handcrafted products, mainly drinks, food, and art, for field trips and local festivals (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014). As participant GOV-G12 considered culture, crafts, dress, and food as the main content of a marketing plan, it is essential to incorporate these aspects into a marketing plan to allow locals to express themselves and

advance their values because they better understand the contents of their products than others (Park and Kim, 2016).

In conclusion, the ideas discussed above explored the richness of natural and cultural resources that help transform Oman's values into tourism products and services with attractive content. A partnership can be formed with stakeholders to create a substantial tourism products itinerary with branding and marketing initiatives. Locals can then present these products in a much more effective way, as they have more knowledge than outsiders. This itinerary will encourage tourists to participate in an unforgettable experience, gaining a sense of the place and its people (Modica and Uysal, 2016). These simple experiences create a local taste by encouraging tourists and assisting them to feel connected to the place not only with the studied villages but also with the heart and soul of Oman, as Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy (2016) intends. On the national side, these experiences will encourage the building of a competitive and inclusive economy in Oman and globally (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019).

6.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluating stage has become a focus for researchers to determine the extent to which planning and implementation remain in line with achieving the goals of the framework. One participant (GOV-W31) noted that tourism development is a socioeconomic activity where planning is critical and is usually assessed and compared through implementation. The implementation stages face several challenges due to various legislative, technical, and financial factors (Section 4.1.3). The local participatory approach to tourism development is not isolated from factors related to technical and financial capabilities, which require regulators to adopt monitoring and evaluating measures to reduce possible risks (GOV-T12, GOV-W31, GOV-A12, and GOV-S71). The final stage of the proposed local participatory framework development at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql is devoted to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and performance of the proposed stages of this practical framework.

According to participant GOV-H21, monitoring, and evaluation should focus on assessing locals' satisfaction, pre- and post-monitoring projects and working with the locals to guide them to take appropriate actions. Participant GOV-G23 provided a broader view by noting that one of the monitoring tools is to develop a timeline for each stage, assessing the level of performance and identifying issues that limit success during implementation. From a practical point of view, monitoring and evaluation need both practical quantitative and qualitative methods, including site observations, to check the designated tasks and interventions of concerned stakeholders in the public and private sectors and the local community, and to assess their progress towards achieving the goals (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). This will ensure that the development of the local community and rural areas is addressed and supported by a package of legislative and financial facilities to achieve the set goals. Beyond assessing the private sector, partnership is related to training, financing, and supporting local initiatives, as well as measuring the extent to which the local community utilises their resources for tourism products, as participant GOV-G23 noted. Official participant GOV-B12 added that identifying tourists' perceptions and satisfaction levels is important to ensure that local products and services meet their experience, as they can share this experience with others.

The monitoring and evaluation processes cannot be managed by regulators at the government level, who formulate developmental plans to meet their agendas at the expense of locals. This is an essential stage that requires the involvement of all stakeholder representatives, especially the local community, as key players in the tourism development approach. The involvement of the local community in monitoring and evaluations can help determine whether the benefits of involvement in tourism operations meet their expectations (Garrod, 2003). It will build locals' awareness and capacities about issues associated with tourism operations, making them aware of outcomes derived from the monitoring and evaluation stages (Bello et al., 2016). As mentioned at the beginning of this framework, consistent with the official visions, particularly the Oman 2040 Vision and the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation stages would help to identify the areas that need to be improved or redesigned in dimensions of the above-mentioned official visions related to effective community participation in socioeconomic and tourism development. As suggested by Ehler (2017), the

outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation stages should be used to adjust and revise the existing management plan.

For example, Oman 2040 Vision addresses the dimension *A diversified and Sustainable Economy that Embraces Knowledge and Innovation, Operates with Integrated Frameworks, Keeps Abreast of the Industrial Revolutions, and is Fiscally Sustainable*. This dimension aims to achieve diversification of non-oil sectors to contribute to the national GDP by building the skills of local people, encouraging entrepreneurship, preparing a fertile legislative and incentive platform, and optimal utilisation of natural resources. The dimension *A Decent and Sustainable Life for All* works to meet the needs of access to a sustainable wellbeing approach for local communities by promoting health and education services and enhancing partnerships with the private sector to empower local communities in future socioeconomic opportunities (Oman 2040 Vision, 2019). The feedback at this stage should be focused specifically on promoting the effectiveness of Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, particularly in a *Sustainable Tourism Destination* dimension aimed at maximising locals' participation in decision-making, planning, and management processes (Oman, Ministry of Tourism, 2016b).

Since these official visions were prepared through dialogue and discussion with the public, such as Ash-Shura members, workshops with academics and university students, and site visits to remote areas to meet with members of the local community, as explained in section (Chapter 4), it is appropriate that these visions be fed, reviewed, and evaluated through dialogue and discussion with the public, especially the local community, which will allow them to directly convey their experiences and concerns that arise during implementation of the visions with other partners in the public and private sectors. This point indicates that the local community is involved in the partnership approach as a key partner, from the initial idea and the implementation stage through the monitoring and evaluation processes.

6.7 Summary

An analysis of primary data and relevant global case studies revealed that essential efforts and measures must be taken by relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors and at the local level to build a practical framework for developing the technical and financial capabilities of local communities, which will enable them to develop tourism and socio-economic activities. The stages of the framework can be considered a roadmap with pillars aimed at building effective local community participation in sustainable tourism development in the Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages. This framework has identified the responsible body with legislative, technical and financial capabilities to lead the local participatory initiative using a fostering partnership approach with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors and the local community. This partnership is considered a fundamental platform for stakeholders to systematically share their objectives and viewpoints based on their specialisations and tasks in order to achieve a common goal.

Furthermore, this framework proposes realistic and practical interventions to overcome awareness, training, financing and legislative issues that limit locals from capitalising on their natural and cultural values and developing economic stability. These interventions aim to develop a cooperative business approach in which locals are allowed to manage their resources collectively and share the benefits of tourism businesses. In other words, locals can become capable, proud and confident in their ability to preserve their values, offer authentic products and share benefits collectively (Butcher, 2012; Ghaderi et al., 2017:9). The effectiveness and functions of this framework's stages were also monitored and evaluated to determine appropriate interventions for issues that may arise during the implementation stage. The monitoring and evaluation results would help involved parties in government, private sector and local representatives to consider amending and improving the existing official vision, particularly the Oman 2040 Vision and Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, which prioritises the capacity building of citizens to increase their participation in socio-economic development, including tourism.

In summary, this framework classifies the host community in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages as the main participants in managing tourism development by developing partnerships with related stakeholders and exchanging their opinions and views. Furthermore, the recent major amendment to Oman's governmental administration apparatus, which promotes decentralisation, would enhance the credibility and reliability of the proposed framework and the possibility of implementing it easily and conveniently in reality.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter closes this study with conclusions and recommendations. It proposes the best practice model for ensuring the participation of the local community in sustainable tourism development in rural destinations in Oman. The main questions posed by this research are answered and linked to the data gathered. The key findings relating to the local participation approach are discussed from three main perspectives: the government sector, the private sector, and the local level. Additionally, this chapter discusses the five objectives that were established to accomplish the aim of this research. At the same time, it addresses a summary of the theoretical and practical contribution of the research, personal considerations an outline of the limitations and future research opportunities. This chapter ends with the recommendations developed according to the main arguments in chapters four, five and six and have been broken down into three stakeholder-specific areas – the government and private sectors, and the local communities. The recommendations were made keeping in mind the tasks and roles of the above-stated parties.

7.1   Answering Research Questions

Three questions were posed by this research (Section 1.5) and this section provides answers based on the analysis of the data gathered mainly through interviews, document analysis, and site observations at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages, which were used as case study sites in this research.

First Question: What are the impacts of tourism on the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, two popular rural destinations in Oman?

This research has answered the question related to the impact of tourism on Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in Oman (see Section 5.1). The data collected illustrates that tourism operations in both villages have had an economic, sociocultural and environmental impact. From an economic perspective, numerous products and services are offered by locals in both villages, and three traditional buildings have been converted into heritage lodges in Misfat Al-Abryeen, namely Misfat Old House, Durat Al-Misfat and Hisn Al-Misfat, to allow tourists to have the experience of staying within traditional home accommodation. Some traditional buildings have been converted into a shop/information point, a bakery/workshop, and a small restaurant - a project that was funded by the Bank Muscat CSR programme to direct tourism returns for community wellbeing.

The aforementioned tourism amenities have created direct and indirect job opportunities for nearly 40 locals, as well as 10 full- and part-time job opportunities for expatriates, particularly in housekeeping services. In Muql two private tourism facilities – the Oman Handicrafts House and a 38-room guesthouse under construction, as well as cleaning and ambulance services awarded to a non-local Omani operator, providing around 12 direct jobs for residents who work as rescue team members. Four local guides were employed by the government to provide guiding services for tourists.

Alongside existing amenities, there are several services like tours, crafts and food products offered by locals to meet the tourists' needs. An adventure tour operator, Canyon Adventures and Tours, for example, operates from Misfat Al-Abryeen, and a modest tour operation using donkeys to carry tourists' luggage to the top of mountain plateau works in both the studied villages. Locals in both villages generate income by selling products to meet the tourists' needs, such as infusions with stomach-ache relieving properties (*zamootah*), souvenirs made from local palm leaves, and fresh dates known as *ratab*.

This research also identified the negative impacts of tourism that limit local benefits, such as external bodies – mainly tour operators, who capitalise on the natural and cultural resources of these rural locations, without involving the locals or activating the local economy. External tour operators often provide non-local guides instead of engaging local guides or assistants. Non-local tour operators arrange lunch somewhere other than Misfat, for example, while others bring along lunchboxes from their hotels in the capital or another city, instead of experiencing local dishes. Muql village is not isolated from this impact, either, as despite Muql being a permanent tourist destination that attracts a high number of tourists during holidays, it earns little to no money. This could be attributable to a lack of skills and knowledge related to guiding techniques, language, and communication skills.

Sociocultural impacts have been addressed in this study. Tourism goes beyond income generation; it is a platform for cultural exchange, building respect, and increasing understanding amongst tourists and host communities. International tourists have the opportunity to explore and experience traditional cultural values and practices, by wearing typical Omani dress, for example, or by learning to climb a palm tree to collect fresh dates. Tourists are encouraged to capture these experiences through photographs, to keep as a souvenir or to share with relatives and friends. To build cultural dialogue with tourists, young people in both villages learn different languages besides English, such as French, Italian, German and Japanese, which helps them engage better with the tourists and builds social capital. On the other hand, the research has illustrated behaviour of tourists visiting Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql that are often not aligned with the spirit of the locations. The wearing of

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inappropriate dress often contradicts local traditions, despite the presence of signage at both villages to raise awareness amongst visitors about wearing appropriate clothing.

Concerning the environmental impact of tourism on both studied villages, one issue that was observed during site visits and in documented pictures, alongside participants' answers, was that an increasing number of vehicles owned by the tourists themselves or tour companies during weekends and holidays are outnumbering the designated parking areas, thus creating an obstacle that limits locals' and tourists' movements. As a result of this overcrowded traffic situation, some locals use motorbikes to reach the agricultural areas, while tourists led by guides become disappointed while queuing for parking in Muql. Another issue is the increasing number of tourists who would like to swim in the pools in Muql but have inadequate swimming skills, which has resulted in the need for rescue teams to save some tourists. From an environmental point of view, the increase in tourist activities not only pollutes the aflaj water but also places pressure on the pool areas; there is thus the need to set a carrying capacity to ensure that the pools can accommodate a reasonable number of swimmers with adequate swimming skills.

Second Question: What are the existing local attitudes and initiatives to promote the development of tourism to improve livelihoods?

Locals' Opinions and Views about Tourism

This research has answered the question stated above by analysing data collected mainly from interviews and site observations, as addressed in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 The discussion shows that locals in both the villages that were studied have positive attitudes towards tourism, on the whole. However, relevant stakeholders need to increase awareness, training, and financial incentives to maximise the locals' presence and benefits in managing their natural and cultural resources sustainably. Locals have converted their traditional buildings into accommodation facilities in Misfat Al-Abryeen, and one has been converted into a museum to meet the needs of tourists. The lack of accommodation facilities in Muql village has been attributed to the

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desires of local businesspeople to invest in quick-win enterprises such as real estate and legal services in the capital.

On the other hand, locals who have never participated in tourism activities in either of the studied villages have expressed their willingness to become involved in the technical and managerial aspects of tourism, despite insufficient capacity-building initiatives provided by concerned stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Some locals, especially elders, feel happy to share their traditional experience with tourists and transfer their knowledge on to a new generation. One knowledgeable elder in Misfat Al-Abryeen likes to share his knowledge with tourists and young people concerning the management of the traditional *aflaj* water distribution system, which employs a sundial during the day and until recently, the movement of the stars at night. Another local participant from Muql village shares his experience of exporting fresh dates, mangoes and limes to coastal settlements and importing fish, rice and spices using donkeys on an existing mountain trail. A craftsman has expressed his desire to make containers from palm leaves filled with dates to allow tourists to taste the variety of dates that differentiates Muql from other places in Oman.

Concerning tour guiding, a female participant from Misfat Al-Abryeen stated that she was interested in guiding female tourists since the interaction between tourists and local females, especially in rural places, is restricted due to sociocultural barriers. This desire to provide female-only tours offers a significant opportunity for female tourists to explore female-dominated activities, such as the cooking of local food, the manufacture of items from woven palm leaves, the manufacture of rose water and perfumes, and the preparation of traditional herbal medicine. At an administrative level, several locals wish to hold administrative positions in tourism enterprises; participants in Muql stated that they would like to work as accountants, managers, or tourism officials in general. The discussion above shows that locals with no prior experience of working in the tourism sector would be willing to be involved in a range of managerial, administrative and technical aspects of tourism. This local willingness must be harnessed and translated into reality by running awareness, training, and financing programmes to enable locals in both the villages to manage their resources in a way that benefits them and enhances the tourism experience.

Local tourism initiatives

This research has observed and evaluated some tourism initiatives run by locals, such as accommodation services in Misfat Al-Abryeen that offer tourists the experience of staying in a traditional lodge and taste food prepared by local families. Rather than working independently, which can lead to conflict and disharmony, the accommodation providers should collaborate to enhance the quality of their services to meet the tourists' expectations. Tour services, another initiative provided by locals in both villages, was studied. The services include donkey tours, which encourage tourists or their children to experience a short donkey ride, or taking the tourists' luggage to the top of a mountain plateau for a camping experience. Although Muql attracts more tourists than Misfat Al-Abryeen in winter and summer, there are no licensed local tour operator in the village. In Misfat, however, Canyon Adventures and Tours offer cultural tour, hiking, and caving activities. On the other hand, in response to the unfair competition from external tour operators, participants have suggested creating visitor centres in both villages, in line with feasibility studies particularly Wadi Bani Khalid Feasibility Study and Misfat Al-Abryeen master plan, to manage tourist flows and encourage external tour operators to engage local tour guides. In this way, the economic and social benefits would be redistributed fairly.

The variety of food and craft items produced by women in both the villages indicate that female residents welcome the economic benefits of tourism. However, narrow views about tourism that are perceived to contradict Islamic principles limit direct interaction between the local bread-bakers and souvenir-producers (who are mainly women) and tourists in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql. Despite this, some tourists have had an opportunity to watch women cooking and producing herb oils, such as at Bait Al-Safah Museum in Al-Hamra. Some tourists visiting the villages may be reluctant to buy the items because they may question the local authenticity of these products, and women, as the producers of these products, are the only ones who can answer the tourists' questions and convince them of this.

Voluntary training initiatives that run in both villages reveal that locals have a deep aspiration to educate their people and the new generations about how tourism can make an immense contribution back to their communities. Participants offer guiding orientations for local youth in Misfat Al-Abryeen village to build their confidence in dealing with tourists - a basic skill that enables them to convey their values to tourists in an appropriate way. In Muql schoolchildren are involved in exhibiting and selling handicrafts made from local palm leaves. This experience builds understanding and knowledge among schoolchildren that working in tourism results in income generation, while ensuring that traditional crafts are kept alive and are passed down. Some tourism initiatives run by locals include hospitality, tours, handmade products, and skills sharing. These initiatives are often run spontaneously, are disorganised, and there is no collaborative approach to unify all initiatives in systematic manner. However, locals in both villages would prefer to work in collaboration rather than working alone as a means to maximise benefits amongst locals and distribute risk.

Third Question: What interventions should the relevant stakeholders take to overcome obstacles and problems that limit local community participation and sustainable tourism development in Omani villages?

Chapter Six focuses on this question, which addresses the appropriate interventions required by relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors and at the local level to build the capacity of the host communities in Misfat and Muql villages. These interventions have been translated into the development of a framework as a methodological structure comprising six stages: determining the responsible body, fostering partnership, identifying factors, forming effective local cooperation mechanisms, offering tourism products, and monitoring and evaluating to feed back into the preceding stages. This framework builds on a multi-stakeholder approach to engage relevant stakeholders in dialogue and to exchange views to overcome issues that limit the locals' participation in tourism development by proposing practical solutions.

Determining the responsible body and fostering partnership

As has been noted earlier, some governmental bodies in Oman currently perform tasks related to tourism development that overlap and result in confusion, such as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprise Development (Riyada), and the Tourism Development Company (Omran). This overlapping of similar tasks amongst public institutions has resulted in increasingly complex procedures that investors who wish to invest in tourism enterprises would need to follow to obtain preliminary approval from concerned parties, such as the municipality, civil defence, and the Ministry of Tourism. As a consequence of the bureaucratic overlap amongst public institutions, investors prefer to invest in less regulated enterprises, such as real estate and the stock market, than in tourism.

The research attributes this issue to the absence of a single centrally appointed governmental body with the administrative, technical and financial capabilities needed to lead initiatives that promote local participation in tourism development. In addition, there is poor coordination and collaboration is lacking amongst public institutions to enable the sharing of objectives, views and taking collective action, as recognised by many government officials. Therefore, this research suggests that a determined and capable public institution, such as Riyada, should act as an administrative, technical, and financially capable unit to lead initiatives that promote local participation in tourism development in the studied villages. The core task of the proposed entity would be to foster a partnership approach to involve public and private bodies and the community in shared objectives and to integrate all efforts toward building an effective local participatory approach for tourism development in the studied villages.

This proposed partnership approach works to designate roles and tasks amongst stakeholders at the public, private and local levels, based on their competence and disciplines, to maximise the collective action towards sharing information, objectives, and concerns. As a means to solidify the multi-stakeholder approach, this research makes two key suggestions; firstly, each institution involved should nominate a person with sufficient experience participatory tourism development. Secondly, the formation of a collaboration department in each party involved is essential to keep the multi-stakeholder approach updated with the progress made by each institution in meeting targets. The core task of this multi-stakeholder approach is to identify

issues associated with awareness, training, financing, and legislation related to the community participatory approach in tourism development, and to address them holistically and in a concerted manner.

Identifying the Hindering Factors

This research has proposed a robust procedural/ operational framework to overcome issues and challenges that limit local participation in tourism development in the studied villages. As awareness-raising and administrative and technical skills are needed to build the capabilities of locals to enable them to become involved in tourism development, awareness programmes should start in schools and households to develop the understanding of the new generation about the importance of their resources in livelihood improvement. This awareness should extend to the public through a systematic awareness-building campaign by influencers through social media and face-to-face conversations. In addition, social media platforms should offer involved parties the opportunity to share their plans and views with the public and to enable the public to comment and share their opinions. Experienced locals in the tourism sector should also be encouraged to share their experience and knowledge with others who have relatively less experience. A practical awareness plan with an allocated budget can be designed by forming a Joint Awareness Team (JAT) to represent all involved partners.

Concerning training, especially regarding the renovation of traditional buildings, this research suggests that knowledgeable persons in the community should share their experience with other locals because they have a better understanding of sociocultural conditions than non-local trainers would. The locals, of course, will also have the opportunity to take advantage of free training programmes provided by authorities in the public and private sectors, such as those available for entrepreneurship, finance, business administration and marketing, leadership, and financing and accounting, as well as, for crafts making. In addition, some initiatives include knowledgeable personnel who are happy to share their knowledge about making souvenirs and tour guiding techniques. Furthermore, knowledgeable youth in both villages who have some proficiency in foreign languages could share this knowledge with their relatives and friends to increase the benefits of tourism and broaden their communications skills.

In addition to the Al-Raffd Fund, which was formed to finance SME businesses, practical interventions have been proposed to secure financial resources to fund certain initiatives in both villages. This research stresses that commercial banks should provide incentives for entrepreneurs to invest in tourism by reconsidering the interest rate because locals in both the villages studied are from a low-income background. As only a few private entities have adopted a CSR programme, such as banks and oil and gas operators that fund some projects in Oman including the Cultural Centre in Liwa, it is essential to promote a CSR culture amongst private entities to support communities' capacity building at tourist destinations. Another mechanism would be to direct part of the generated tourism revenue to fund or support businesses in the local communities. However, this will involve the immediate establishment of 'gateways' at designated visitor entry points to control the movement of tourists and to maximise revenue generation.

This research, having reconsidered some relevant legislation, offers suggestions to maximise local participation in tourism development. For example, this research suggests that exemptions are necessary to reduce the number of preliminary approvals from concerned institutions that investors currently need to obtain to run an enterprise. In addition, it is essential to reconsider the law related to training-for-employment to allow youth and local enterprises in rural destinations greater flexibility to take advantage of training programmes, without the mandatory need that a contract be signed between the trainee and the employer at the end of the internships. Moreover, to ensure that tourism is a tool to sustain agricultural activity in both the villages, it is important to allow locals to establish a green home product on their farms irrigated by the *falaj* system. On the other hand, it is crucial to review the law related to the licensing of local businesses because locals in both villages are from low-income backgrounds and they wish to be shareholders in these companies.

Forming effective local cooperative

Another significant intervention proposed by this research is the formation of an effective local cooperation body as a response to the desires of the majority of participating locals to promote teamwork principles and reduce self-interest in managing tourism activities in both the studied villages. At the national level, this proposed cooperation helps to share benefits amongst participating locals, creates job opportunities for locals, and reduces their migration to cities. This research asserts that this proposed local cooperation should consist of capable representatives from key public and private sectors who can share their skills and experiences with locals regarding tourism from administrative, technical and financial perspectives. Furthermore, local representatives with expert professional knowledge such as engineers, teachers and doctors could add value to the tourism operational aspects. In addition, to avoid any possible conflict and disharmony amongst tourism providers, this research has sought the views of local businesspeople who wish to be a part of this proposed cooperation.

Offering authentic tourism products

This research also encourages locals in both villages to offer authentic products and services to tourists and to optimise the use of natural and cultural resources. An example of the optimal use of cultural resources is the renovation of traditional buildings, such as a traditional lodge in Misfat Al-Abryeen. This research asserts that traditional buildings can offer a significant experience beyond accommodation, such as a *sablah*, a traditional public meeting hall. According to participant, the revival of the *sablah* building offers tourists the opportunity to learn that the historical role of *sablah* was to welcome guests and resolve conflicts amongst locals, and between locals and outsiders. In addition, experiencing agricultural activities encourages tourists to learn about the *aflaj* system and the traditional methods used for water distribution, particularly using a sundial during the day and the movement of the stars at night. Another unique experience for visitors to Muql village is observing how water is drawn using an animal-powered wheel (*zajirah*) – a practice that has been neglected since the late-1970s, as one participant noted.

Tourists are also drawn to the spectacular natural resources of the area, particularly the mountain landscapes, which offer adventure, camping experiences, and the opportunity to explore geological features. Tourists like to experience hiking, climbing and caving in Muql village. This research asserts that, given the topography, the villages in the study should be promoted as a start or end point of the hiking and biking events that attract international and local runners and cyclists. Alongside adventure activities, star gazing could be hosted on mountain plateau, where tourists can experience a sense of quiet while they explore the night sky, especially in the Eastern Hajar Mountain region.

Cultural events should be organised in a way that allows tourists to experience local food and folklore performed by locals in both villages. The Omani Night event was recommended by one government official to encourage female tourists to experience a typical wedding ceremony, wearing Omani dress, and decorating their hands with *henna*. Since the locals require skills related to packaging, branding and marketing to differentiate their tourism products from other destinations, this research suggests that collaboration with stakeholders is essential to effectively brand and market locals products. Some examples already exist, such as the support provided by the Al-Raffd Fund in cooperation with the Oman Oil Company to brand successful SMEs, and the Omran support for the branding and marketing of *Salma Chocolate*.

In addition, this research suggests that marketing could be conducted in collaboration with Oman Television and Radio, alongside social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to promote local products. Furthermore, encouraging locals to participate in local and international events by providing incentives and facilitation is important, similar to the initiative of the Ministry of Tourism that funds the participation of craftspeople and traditional folklore bands in international events. Participation in these events and exhibitions provides locals with a cultural platform to interact with tourists and companies and adds value to the theme of the events by promoting authentic local products.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The last issue addressed by this research is the monitoring and evaluation stage of the five-stage framework, which would assess the effectiveness of the capacity building of host communities to convert their natural and cultural resources into economic assets. As the local participatory approach is affected by technical and financial factors which limit its achievement and success, the monitoring and evaluation process must be covered pre- and post-project, and must therefore include a pre-project 'assessment' and a 'timeline' for each stage. From a practical point of view, this stage should assess the partnership approach to measure the strengths and weaknesses associated with the initiatives of the awareness, training, financing and legislative framework. Tourists' perceptions should be evaluated to ensure that the products and services offered by locals meet their expectations. Finally, the outcomes and feedback collected from the monitoring and evaluation stages should feed into and improve the existing official vision, particularly the Oman 2040 Vision and Oman 2040 Tourism strategy, which state that developing regional areas and enabling host communities is a priority to achieve the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism destinations.

7.2   Main Findings

The key findings ensue from the responses of the participants from the public and private sectors and from the residents, as well as from document analysis and site observations. Together they enhance the understanding of the concept of local participation in promoting sustainable tourism in rural areas. The findings related to concerned stakeholders in the government and private sectors are summarised below, including attitudes and initiatives of the residents in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql.

7.2.1   Citizens' Participation in Developmental and Tourism Planning

Since the 1970s, the government of Oman has offered citizens several opportunities to participate in decision-making processes towards the country's national development. Amongst these are the development of free state education and both informal and formal meet-the-people tours, which allow people in different provinces in Oman to talk to regulators and decision-makers to share their opinions and concerns. The formation of the Consultative Council, Majlis Ash-Shura, enables people to choose their representatives through public elections, through whom they can convey their opinions and concerns to decision-makers to influence the government's performance in meeting people's needs.

Numerous scholars have commented on the steady progress made in the participatory aspect in Oman since the formation of the Majlis Ash-Shura, which grants more power to the public by providing citizens with the opportunity to monitor and criticise the performance of service ministries and to ensure that their views and concerns are heard and implemented to meet their needs. This substantial progress has expanded to include the formation of a municipality council, which plays an advisory role to the service ministries that implement infrastructure and amenities related to education, health, transportation and power services.

Community participation and regional development are key aspects of Omani development plans – such as Oman 2040 Vision and Oman Tourism Strategy 2040 – which call upon local

communities, academics and practitioners to share their views with regulators to take advantage of tourism development opportunities to improve their living standards. This indicates that regulators and policymakers have taken lessons from challenges and issues associated with previous developmental plans that had excluded the public from participation in socioeconomic development. This could be attributed to the lack of knowledge and experience of the decision-makers because they considered tourism as a yet another novel business phenomenon. In addition to acknowledging public exclusion from participation in developmental plan formulation, hiring international experts with a lack of understanding and knowledge about the Omani context was another critical problem.

Although the abovementioned official visions address community development as a priority, such high-level strategy and planning is not often followed by their implementation. Few strategies or developmental plans have been implemented entirely due to a lack of administrative and financial capacity and conflicts with the local and private sectors. This reemphasises the importance of monitoring and evaluation as crucial steps to ensure that the strategic dimensions of the above-stated visions are designed to fulfil the integration public capacity towards participating in socioeconomic development. From a practical point of view, using monitoring and evaluation processes helps regulators and involved parties to uncover unforeseen challenges and issues that might occur during the implementation stage, and to feed those back to improve existing visions.

7.2.2 Initiatives for Enhancing Omanis' Participation in Tourism Development

Awareness, training, funding and legislative initiatives offered by relevant public and private sector institutions show that officials encourage citizens to participate in socioeconomic and tourism activities. However, these initiatives are not carried out systematically due to a lack of collaboration between institutions. This finding shows that the legislative framework in Oman does not work effectively in relation to citizens' participation in socioeconomic development, including tourism, for two main reasons. Firstly, there is no appointed public institution with legislative, technical and financial capabilities to facilitate the public participation in socioeconomic and tourism development by fostering a multi-stakeholder approach. Secondly,

there is poor coordination and a lack of collaboration amongst the institutions involved to unify all efforts related to legislation, training, entrepreneurship and business management.

This means that there is a need to designate the best suited administrative, technical and financial institutions to lead the initiative of community participation in tourism development in partnership with concerned bodies. This partnership should use a multi-stakeholder approach that designates roles and tasks to representatives from the public and private sector and local communities based on their competencies. In addition, the representative bodies should nominate an expert in community participatory approach.

7.2.3   Women's Participation in Tourism Development

Women have made steady progress, particularly in the education sector, where there are currently more female in higher education than male. Despite their significant presence at the decision-making level as ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors and members of the Majlis Ash-Shura, along with the Majlis A-Dawlah (the State Council), their participation in the tourism sector is limited due to sociocultural barriers, i.e., some tourism activities are considered contrary to sociocultural norms, especially in rural areas. This point reveals that the legislative framework approach in Oman has provided a substantial platform for male and female participation in state development according to the Basic Statutes of Oman (*al-Nizam al-Asasi lil-Dawla*). However, sociocultural barriers have limited women's participation in socioeconomic development, including in tourism, due to a myopic understanding of tourism's cultural and social role.

This narrow vision defines working in tourism businesses as contradicting Islamic principles and traditions because tourism is an unlawful source of income. As a consequence of this narrow vision, parents influence their children to choose careers other than tourism, such as education, health services and social development. This point shows that interventions related to awareness, training and legislative initiatives are needed to raise awareness about the economic and social benefits of working in tourism activities in rural destinations, which

provides not only an income opportunity but also an opportunity for cultural dialogue between the host community and tourists.

7.2.4 Economic Tourism Impacts

Numerous local initiatives in Misfat Al-Abryeen village such as accommodation, tour operators, grocery suppliers, and craft items provide direct and indirect employment opportunities for residents. This reveals that locals in this village have a better understanding that their involvement in the tourism business contributes to generating an income and improving their living standards. In addition, it shows that tourism contributes to increasing the growth of other economic activities such as food production, the craft industry, and agriculture, which provide job opportunities for host communities. In Muql village, there are lacks local initiatives that would create job opportunities for the inhabitants. The only exceptions are jobs provided by the government that provide guide services and rescue and emergency services in the pool area. Despite Muql's status as a permanent destination, it lacks sufficient local participation in managing its natural and cultural resources, which attracts external bodies to capitalise their business using local resources without benefitting the local residents, as also observed elsewhere in South Asia and Africa. This issue is attributed to a lack of awareness and training initiatives offered by concerned stakeholders in the public and private sector to enable technical and financial capacity building in the village.

Although there is a locally licensed tour operator in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, some external tour operators do not hire local tour guides. Similarly, external tour operators rely entirely on non-local tour guides in Muql village. This point shows that locals in both villages are not able to manage tourism operations in a way that enhances tourists' experiences, arguably showing that locals have insufficient knowledge and experience. Despite locals having a better understanding and knowledge of their values and therefore better placed to present their values than outsiders, they are not encouraged and welcomed as an essential partner in tourism operations. This issue has become an excuse for external bodies to limit sharing tourism benefits with locals.

7.2.5   Sociocultural Tourism Impacts

Tourists have had the experience of tasting local foods, wearing local dress, and participating in traditional activities such as harvesting in Misfat Al-Abryeen. This shows that locals are proud of their cultural values, folklore and crafts and have become empowered to present these to tourists. Learning about cultural aspects provides positive interactions and builds cultural dialogue and cultural exchange between locals and tourists. Some of the younger locals in both studied villages are trying to learn a foreign language to build understanding, respect, and cultural dialogue with foreign tourists. This positive impact reveals that the desire of some of the younger locals to become involved in tourism goes beyond generating an income as they wish to maximise their interaction and communication with tourists by learning a foreign language. Learning a foreign language is considered as a platform to build cultural understanding between tourists and locals and is a way to enhance tourists' appreciation of the local heritage and values in tourist destinations.

In contrast, certain tourist behaviours have had a negative impact on locals' comfort and privacy, such as wearing inappropriate dress, making a noise, and ignoring interpretive and instruction signage. This means that an insufficient effort has been made to minimise the negative behaviours of tourists that affect and disrespect locals' culture and comfort, and, in turn, tourists might be harassed and annoyed by locals. Therefore, multilingual behavioural guidelines for tourists are important in remote destinations to improve locals' reactions. For example, in some destinations, tourists are advised to dress appropriately and according to the local customs. Other destinations take measures to enhance the tourist experience by using various awareness programmes to encourage positive interactions and cultural dialogue with host communities; such measures include awareness videos, educational materials, and orientation before excursions take place. Concerned stakeholders should take initiative to fund these awareness programmes, potentially involving local businesses.

7.2.6   Environmental Tourism Impacts

Traffic congestion impacts the privacy and mobility of locals, puts pressure on resources, and creates a visual disturbance, especially in the peak tourist season and holidays. Several tourism destinations suffer from traffic congestion, which not only disturbs the locals' comfort, but also places pressure on natural resources and their capabilities. This means that there are no measures in place to accommodate the increasing number of vehicles, especially during peak season, which blocks road access, even in emergencies, and limits locals' access to their homes and land. As a result, stakeholders in some destinations have attempted to reduce the consequences of traffic congestion in natural places by providing cable car services. This service also provides the opportunity for tourists to enjoy a spectacular view of the destination from above. However, the potential negative visual impact of a cable car installation need to be kept under consideration.

In addition, visual disturbance and water pollution at the natural pools due to large numbers of tourists swimming there particularly in pools area in Muql. The pools area in Muql village provides a swimming experience for tourists, and, despite the warning signs, some tourists get injured due to inadequate swimming skills and experience. Therefore, measures are needed to ensure that tourists are safe, including educating tourists about the risks of swimming in the pools and advising them to take the precautions required to stay safe. In addition, a carrying-capacity approach should be taken to ensure that these resources can accommodate the increasing number of tourists.

7.2.7   Local Attitudes and Opinions about Tourism

Emerging local tourism enterprises indicate that locals have positive perceptions of tourism despite the lack of local tourism initiatives in Muql village. This means that locals in both studied villages have a better understanding and knowledge of tourism as a socioeconomic activity, as affirmed through other rural destinations across the world. However, awareness, training and financing incentives are needed for locals in both studied villages to offer authentic products and services that link tourists to a destination and its people as some locals still

consider tourism as a new business phenomenon that contains risks. In addition, the above-stated interventions would help local businesspeople, especially in Muql village, to change their perceptions and to invest in tourism rather than real estate and legal services in the capital, away from the village and their people.

Locals involved in tourism recognise that tourism provides benefits other than income generation, such as strengthening their cultural awareness and sense of attachment to their local area. Several destinations consider tourism as providing more than economic benefits and see it as a way in which cultural values can be preserved and celebrated; for example, handicrafts and antiques are displayed in museums. This kind of local involvement means that locals realise that tourism does not only provide economic benefits but is also a tool to broaden cultural dialogue and understanding between tourists and host communities. Another strategy to strengthen cultural awareness is for locals to learn foreign languages. Learning foreign languages also enables cultural exchange and dialogue amongst tourists and host communities.

Several local participants who have not yet been involved in tourism expressed a willingness to offer products and services to tourists that are related to traditional socioeconomic activities, such as agriculture and trade. In addition, some of them would prefer to take a role in technical and managerial tasks, such as guiding, accountancy, reservations and marketing. This means that despite insufficient efforts to raise the awareness of locals in both of the villages that were studied, the locals still have a positive attitude towards tourism and see it as a source of income, cultural dialogue, and as a tool to create a sense of attachment to their local area. However, concerned stakeholders have taken inadequate steps to enable host communities administratively, technically, and financially to make optimal use of their natural and cultural resources in the tourism industry.

This issue is attributed to poor coordination and a lack of collaboration to unify all efforts towards building citizens' capacities. In building a multi-stakeholder approach, it is essential to conduct training programmes to build the technical and managerial capacity of the locals. Similar capacity-building efforts can be seen to have been successful in Botswana, where safari

operators conduct training in marketing, guiding and hospitality; leadership training, hospitality, guiding techniques, entrepreneurship and learning a foreign language in Indonesia, and local food production in Monmouthshire in the UK.

7.2.8   Local Tourism Initiatives

Locals offer accommodation services, tours, local foods and crafts to tourists in Misfat Al-Abryeen village, while the two initiatives provided by locals in Muql are mainly guest houses under construction and the Craft House, along with modest services such as donkey riding tours and craft products offered by local women. However, these initiatives lack a collaborative approach between the local enterprises and with external bodies. This finding shows that the current collaborative approach amongst accommodation providers, tour operators and craft and food producers in Misfat Al-Abryeen village is expected to lead to conflicts and disharmony rather than focusing on increasing product quality. This issue has been observed amongst the operators of desert camps in the dunes of the Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate in Oman.

Therefore, the formation of a effective local cooperation body is essential to empower locals socially, to share the benefits of tourism fairly, and to confront issues collectively. Destination managers worldwide use local cooperatives as a basis for managing natural and cultural resources and converting these into economic and tourism products, such as a *tourism-based organisation* in the Abindu sacred site in Kenya, a *community-based tourism institution* in five villages, namely Mabele, Kavimba, Kachikau, Satau and Parakarungu in Botswana, and *agritourism communities* in Samut Songkhram province in Thailand. The unifying local initiative under a local cooperation goes beyond social empowerment, as locals would be politically empowered to represent themselves with less dependency on external bodies. A similar example, the Nema Foundation in Guludo village in Mozambique, helps locals to gain political strength to deal and exchange views with outsiders, as most of the related tourism projects must be approved by the locals.

In addition, there is no direct interaction between local food producers, craftspeople and foreign tourists, particularly women, due to the belief that tourism conflicts with tradition and is contrary to cultural and Islamic principles. This finding reveals a sociocultural barrier in the belief that working in tourism contradicts traditional Islamic principles, which, in turn, forces parents to influence their children, especially girls, to choose careers in sectors other than tourism, such as education and health. Nevertheless, tourism in rural destinations is as seen a bridge between tourists and host communities that facilitates cultural dialogue and is a means of exchanging sociocultural values. However, stakeholders' insufficient efforts to raise awareness in Oman to change the locals' narrow vision of tourism reduce tourists' interaction with food producers and craftspeople, most of whom are female. Women play a significant role in tourism management through their involvement in managerial and technical aspects, such as preparing a variety of local food, guiding, leading awareness and conservation initiatives, and participating as decision-makers.

In Misfat Al-Abryeen village, voluntary training in guiding techniques is offered by a person trained to share their skills with local youths. This indicates that a knowledgeable local person has a better understanding of sociocultural conditions in remote places than a non-local trainer. In addition, it shows that local people with tourism experience are committed to giving back to their people by sharing their skills and knowledge with them, thus enabling the community to share the fruits of tourism collectively. In Muql village, the Cave Project offers a training initiative that teaches schoolchildren how to sell handmade crafts. By involving schoolchildren in training programmes such as selling handmade products, tourism developers indicate that they are keen to build the capacity of a new generation. Training programmes such as the handicraft initiative increase young people's understanding and knowledge of the importance of local handicrafts as a tourism asset, not only as a means of generating an income, but also to preserve their cultural heritage. Tourism destinations worldwide run similar initiatives involving schoolchildren, such as handicraft manufacturing workshops offered by museums in Surama in Guyana, and workshops offering schoolchildren the opportunity to learn how handicrafts are made and to observe practitioners making crafts in some museums in Cyprus.

7.3 Review of the Research Objectives

As shown in Section 1.6, several objectives were formulated to achieve the aim of this study, namely strategies that foster effective local participation in sustainable tourism development in rural destinations. The following paragraphs review the objectives of this investigation:

Objective One: Critically review relevant theories and examples concerning tourism impacts and the concept of local participation in socioeconomic and tourism development.

Numerous publications have been reviewed that address the economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts of tourism at destinations. The literature emphasises that sustainable tourism is a well-designed approach to preserve natural and cultural values, enhance the tourism experience and ensure locals' benefits. The host community is considered a key driver of sustainable tourism, as locals have a better understanding of their resources. The in-depth review of relevant theories and case studies found that effective approaches to local community participation are established through awareness-raising, training, financing and legislation to strengthen the role of locals in collaborating with public and private sector organisations. Such an approach allows the conservation of resources, the enhancement of the tourism experience and the achievement of local wellbeing.

An analysis of the relevant frameworks and typologies showed that citizen participation has been a research interest since 1969. These frameworks agreed that a partnership approach amongst locals and external bodies is essential to share knowledge and experience with locals to enable their socioeconomic development. In addition, most of the frameworks highlighted that local cooperatives or organisations are signs that local residents have effectively participated in decision-making processes and economic development. Some frameworks emphasise that monitoring and evaluation are needed to assess the effectiveness of any local participatory initiatives in economic development.

This study addressed some of the limitations identified in the revised frameworks, including that they do not always apply to the Omani context; most of them are based on secondary sources, while others do not address sustainable tourism. In addition, these frameworks necessarily differ from country to country due to sociocultural, economic and legal differences. The literature shows that a practical, case-study-based framework for effective local participation in sustainable tourism development is needed, not only to meet the requirements of Oman 2040 Vision and Oman Tourism Strategy 2040, but also to satisfy the lack of studies on sustainable tourism development at the national and global level.

Objective Two: Examine the nature of plans, programmes and initiatives of relevant public and private sectors to determine the extent to which they aim to improve community participation in tourism planning and management.

Chapter four showed that regional and community development has been addressed as a priority in the development plan, mainly through Oman 2040 Vision, to promote decentralisation and encourage locals to actively participate in Oman's socioeconomic development. Likewise, the section titled 'Oman Experience and Sustainable Tourism Development' has emphasised that maximising opportunities for the community to benefit from tourism by involving them in decision-making processes is a key goal of the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy. While initiatives related to awareness-raising, training, financing and legislation have been put in place to enhance citizen participation in socioeconomic and tourism activities, these still require a systematic, collaborative approach to enhance citizens' capabilities.

Objective Three: Evaluate the economic, sociocultural and natural impacts of tourism on rural areas and the livelihood of the local community.

Data collected from the participants, especially the locals, along with site observations have revealed the economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts on the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql. Amongst the positive economic impacts is that tourism encourages locals to establish businesses, generating direct and indirect job opportunities. By contrast, it has been seen that businesses managed by external tour operators depend less on locals, thus concentrating on the benefits of tourism. Regarding the sociocultural impacts, the sale of local foods and handmade souvenirs fosters tourists' appreciation of the cultural traditions of the places visited. In addition, examples such as the locals learning foreign languages, and the tourists experiencing the wearing of locals dress and getting involved in crop harvesting, have further substantiated the positive sociocultural impact. Regarding natural impact, traffic congestion occurs due to the increased number of tourist vehicles, which not only impacts privacy and movement, but is also a pressure on resources and infrastructure and is a visual disturbance for destinations.

Objective Four: Explore the opinions, attitudes and experiences of residents towards tourism, with a view to involving them in current and future tourism management in rural destinations.

Data collected from local participants indicate that the inhabitants of the two case-study villages look favourably at tourism despite a lack of formal awareness-raising programmes. The site observations conducted highlighted that some local businesses that operate in association with accommodation facilities, tour services and the manufacture of food items and handicrafts are meeting the expectations of tourists. In addition, face-to-face interviews with experienced locals showed that they are comfortable with the idea that tourism goes beyond economic purposes. People who never got involved in tourism would be willing to take on technical and administrative tourism-related roles. Also, local providers of a number of services, such as accommodation, tours and handmade products, have come to realise that tourism capitalises on natural and cultural resources, generates income and improves life standards. A few local training initiatives have also been

documented in the area of tour guiding, traditional weaving and sale of handmade souvenirs for tourists.

Objective Five: Develop an effective participatory framework by proposing a set of recommendations to improve the contribution of the local community to sustainable tourism development in Omani villages.

Chapter Six presented a strategic framework that could easily be implements, comprising six stages: determining the responsible body, fostering partnership, identifying hindering factors, forming effective local cooperative, offering authentic tourism products and monitoring and evaluating. A set of recommendations is proposed for key partners at government, private and local levels to improve the credibility and reliability of the proposed framework. Section 7.6 presents these recommendations.

7.4 Contribution

This empirical research combines key theories, perspectives and ideas from secondary sources with field data gathered through site observations and interviews with stakeholders in the government and private sectors and with members of the local community in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, as well as through document analysis. The triangulation approach used in this study not only diversifies the research methods, but also contrasts the two case-study rural tourism destinations to identify the similarities and differences. Finally, the proposed practical framework for effective local community participation in sustainable tourism in rural Omani destinations is deemed to make a significant contribution to both theory and practice.

7.4.1   Contribution to Theory

A review of existing relevant frameworks and models shows that the proposed framework is robust and practical; the study is based on real-world cases and incorporates many different perspectives. The present study thus makes a key contribution to existing knowledge on the topic, both nationally and internationally. For example, at the national level, no studies exist that address the factors around local community participation as a way to promote tourism sustainability. An in-depth analysis of these factors has provided in-depth insights into the legislative, economic, sociocultural and environmental aspects that are responsible for the success and failure of the tourism business in Oman. The study is expected to encourage future researchers to conduct similar research both in academia and in the industry.

At the international level, as well, few frameworks based on real case studies have been developed so far that encourages local communities to participate in sustainable tourism development. Although the proposed framework may not apply outside of the Omani context, it nevertheless encourages further related studies globally that may uncover similarities between host communities in worldwide destinations with natural and cultural resources. In general, this framework is considered to add valued knowledge to studies in Oman because it not only considers the sociocultural, economic and environmental environments but also

contributes significantly to international literature, since this framework is practical, more reliable, accurate and valid, as it is based on empirical evidence than on secondary sources.

7.4.2 Contribution to Practice

This framework of local community participation for sustainable tourism development in rural destinations incorporates practical considerations that are derived from the analyses of realities. On the other hand, the framework incorporates the core principles of the Oman 2040 Tourism Strategy, which focuses on sustainable tourism and the important role host communities can play in it, sharing experiences with tourists and, in the process, developing a sense of ownership while earning a living. The framework aligns with the Oman 2040 Vision, in that it promotes decentralisation as a key for regional locations and local communities to become self-sufficient. The framework is applicable to rural destinations in Oman, the GCC countries and other Islamic territories that share the same sociocultural, economic, environmental and regulatory aspects. Furthermore, since the features of this framework are compatible with Oman's sociocultural, economic and legislative environments, it would form a decision-aiding tool that would help governmental decision makers to implement the framework's processes with ease on the ground.

This framework refers to initiatives and incentives to strengthen the capacities of locals to assume roles and responsibilities for the optimal use of natural and cultural resources in socioeconomic and tourist products. In addition, framework practically encourages the revival of traditional activities related to agriculture, animal husbandry and food production, and old crafts, most of which have disappeared or been neglected. Most importantly, at the national level, this framework would generate a fair distribution of strategic projects among regional locations, thus helping reduce demographic pressure on the capital and major cities. Also, the economic diversification fostered would reduce the country's dependence on oil and gas as a result of increased tourism revenues.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

In addition to the constraints and limitations noted earlier while collecting and transcribing the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Section 3.5), additional limitations were noted during this research journey. The publications and availability of government reports is patchy. For example, some institutions have failed to publish their annual reports on their portal, making it difficult to monitor the performance of these entities over the years related to their initiatives for citizens' participation in socioeconomic development. In addition, some official reports collected more recently were not published on the institutional portals, making it difficult to incorporate the contents of these reports during the advanced stages of writing up. The Annual Statistics Book published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information in Oman is usually issued in the second half of the following year, making it difficult to update some figures and statistics related to 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic not only caused stress due to the rapid and unpredictable spread of the virus, but also increased the number of deaths worldwide that impacted on the finalising of the thesis. It also meant I had to conduct interviews by phone rather than face-to-face, which led the interviewees to provide on occasions short and simplistic responses. These limitations have had impact on the thesis.

Concerning future research considerations, the application of the proposed framework, first and foremost in Oman, and subsequently across the GCC and other Muslim countries, would require further logistical considerations, and studies about the local sociocultural, economic and regulatory aspects. While the centuries-old collective administration of the *aflaj* system in Oman suggests an enduring local attitude towards consensus, collective interest and problem resolution, more research is required to explore the rationale behind the success of *aflaj* management as a cooperative enterprise in the absence of a written constitution. The findings from such a study would surely support the proposal for a cooperative enterprise for the management of natural and cultural resources in tourism products. At the national level, the decentralisation approach recently promoted following the law of the System of Provincial and Local Affairs, as discussed in Section 6.2, demonstrates the relevance of this framework to rural destinations. However, it will be useful over a period to evaluate the effectiveness of the law against the key dimensions of this framework in accelerating local community participation in socioeconomic and tourism development.

7.6 Recommendations

As this study has considered – as comprehensively as has been feasible – the perspectives, views and concerns of key stakeholders at the government, private and local levels, stakeholder-specific recommendations are needed to help each stakeholder implement measures to successfully apply this framework on the ground. This set of recommendations has been developed based on the discussion of key aspects in Chapters Four, Five and Six to achieve effective local community participation in Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql villages in the management of their resources and the use of these resources in creating sustainable tourism products.

7.6.1   Recommendations for the Government Sector

- Consider and implement a collaborative approach as the key basis for sharing objectives and visions and to enhance communication and interaction between the concerned institutions.
- Adopt new measures to establish a joint awareness team, an integrated training strategy, financial capabilities, and smooth legislative incentives, as discussed, with supporting arguments.
- Reinforce tourism objectives through awareness programmes that promote the tourism concept amongst locals, particularly that sustainable tourism is a bridge to build cultural dialogue and increase understanding between host communities and tourists. This is particularly important in rural destinations, where tourism initiatives are built through the optimal use of natural resources and unique cultural values.
- Support the establishment of an association of tour operators and tour guides that can undertake collective action to develop tourism within the local community. The example of the Jordan Tour Guides Association could be cited here, which was created to represent more than 1,200 tourist guides speaking more than 32 languages to improve the quality of the tourist experience in Jordan.
- Prioritise the participation of local representatives in local, regional and international events and exhibitions to promote the uniqueness of rural destinations.

- Provide online open access information and data platforms to inform people about developments in the tourism sector and make materials and studies freely available to benefit the public.
- Survey the opinions, aspirations, requirements and concerns of citizens before formulating laws related to socioeconomic and tourism development, and follow up regularly to ensure updated data availability and feedback.
- Appoint qualified officials with sufficient knowledge and experience of the concept of a community participatory approach to communicate and engage with the local community.
- Encourage private institutions to adopt corporate social responsibility (CSR) schemes to build collaborative partnerships with the local community by providing legislative and financial incentives for those who adopt a CSR scheme.
- Direct hoteliers, tour operators, tour guides and other suppliers to prioritise local products in their marketing agenda, enhance the cultural experience of visitors, and maximise local benefits.
- Involve and train local residents in business and marketing so they can promote local goods in the tourism development projects in their areas.

7.6.2   Recommendations for the Private Sector

- Exchange views, opinions and concerns with government institutions and local communities as a basis for a collaborative partnership approach to address problems collectively.
- Provide spaces and outlets to promote local products in hotels, points of sale and events at local, regional and international levels.
- Arrange for qualified local guides to lead tours with local trainees to enable them to learn from each other.
- Encourage tourists to be respectful and appreciative of local residents when visiting rural destinations.
- Adopt CSR programmes to give back to the host community, to achieve economic equality and wealth distribution through fair business.
- Help rural destinations innovate the branding of local products and services while guaranteeing their authenticity.

- Involve local communities to enhance the authenticity and meaningfulness of the tourist experience and avoid conflict with external agencies.
- Promote the creation of local cooperative bodies to limit individualistic initiatives that work against the common good.
- Sponsor initiatives for the conservation of natural and cultural resources, onsite training and solidarity, and cultural events.

7.6.3   Recommendations for the Local Community

- Adopt a collaborative and associative approach as the basis for interacting with government and private organisations. The obvious option would be to adopt a cooperative approach at tourism destinations.
- Trust that tourists who spend money buying locally produced items want to enhance their experience of the place and has a genuine desire to buy high-quality authentic products, and are not there to cause a nuisance to locals.
- Direct technical and financial resources towards developing community capacity and appropriately promoting the destination. Successful examples of initiatives discussed earlier that direct financial resources towards funding training programmes include those in Nepal, Kenya, at Casamance village in Senegal.
- Encourage local producers, including women, to directly serve tourists to maximise sales and profits.
- Share experiences and knowledge with locals to enhance their participation and to share the benefits of tourism with them.
- Innovate authentic natural and cultural tourism products to attract tourists and proudly promote the destination. Examples include the involvement of tourists in agricultural activities such harvesting in Japan and Malaysia and in Monmouthshire in the UK, and stargazing in the Anniviers district of Switzerland and in the Ogden Valley in the USA.
- Adopt a collaborative approach with local hoteliers, tour operators, guides and producers so that all parties can benefit economically from tourism and aggressive competition is discouraged. Competition and conflict have a negative impact on the tourists' experience, as observed amongst accommodation providers in Oman and amongst small-scale enterprises in the UK.

- Reinvest revenues from tourism to support solidarity and expand tourism amenities. Tourism helps poor and low-income families to sell their products and benefit from tourism opportunities. Promotion of a culture of solidarity is crucial at the local level.
- Involve the local youth during the school holidays in activities that build knowledge about the economic benefits of tourism and the sociocultural benefits of interacting with tourists, as seen in workshops provided for schoolchildren in many destinations.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: The Fieldwork project

Introductory letter in English

Local Community Participation

For Sustainable Tourism Development

[Sultanate of Oman]

Dear Sir / Madam,

 I am currently a Ph.D. researcher at the University of Liverpool and as part of my research, I am required to undertake a field work to meet my degree requirements.

My research project aims to develop a community participation approach as a mean for sustainable tourism development in Omani villages. Today, those destinations are suffering from lack of community participation that enables locals to manage tourism in a way that improves their life quality, having a better understanding of heritage values and enhance the local and national economy. Thus, this research will work with concerned stakeholders in public and private institutions and community themselves to investigate the reasons behind those issues that hinder the sustainable tourism development in rural areas. A set of interventions and recommendations will be proposed to overcome those issues' impacts toward community participation achievement in Omani villages.

As your authority is involved with this kind of research project, I would like to request an interview with yourself or someone who you think is useful. This interview will be recorded and your response held confidentially. Finally, the collected data will be used only for research purposes and I will respect the university rules regarding research methods.

I look forward to your kind response.

Thank You,

Said Al Mashrafi

Ph.D. Candidate

Principal Investigator: Student Researcher:

Name: Prof. Soumyen Bandyopadhyay   Name: Said Al Mashrafi

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المشاركة المجتمعية المحلية لتنمية السياحة

المستدامة في القرى العمانية

عزيزي المشارك / عزيزتي المشارك

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،

أنا حالياً أدرس بجامعة ليفربول بالمملكة المتحدة لنيل درجة الدكتوراه في الفلسفة، حيث أنني مطالب بالقيام بعمل بحثي ميداني تلبيةً لمتطلبات هذه الدرجة الاكاديمية.

يهدف مشروعي البحثي الى تطوير نهج المشاركة المجتمعية لتنمية السياحة المستدامة في القرى العمانية، حيث تعتبر هذه القرى اليوم وجهات سياحية تعاني من نقص في المشاركة المجتمعية التي تمكن أفراد المجتمع المحلي من إدارة السياحة بطريقة تعمل على تحسين نوعية حياتهم المعيشية، مع فهم أفضل للقيم التراثية سواءً كانت الطبيعية والثقافية وتعزيز الاقتصاد المحلي والوطني. وبالتالي سيعمل هذا البحث مع أصحاب المصلحة المعنيين بالقطاعين العام والخاص والمجتمع نفسه لبحث الأسباب الكامنة وراء تلك القضايا التي تحد التنمية السياحية المستدامة في الوجهات الريفية، فضلاً عن إنه سيتم اقتراح مجموعة من التدخلات والتوصيات للتغلب على تلك القضايا والتحديات سعياً لتحقيق المشاركة المجتمعية المرجوة في القرى العمانية.

نظراً لأن المؤسسة أو الجهة التي تمثلها لها علاقة بهذا النوع من المشاريع البحثية، أود أن تسمح لي بإجراء مقابلة مع شخصك الكريم أو مع شخص آخر تعتقد أنه مناسب وملائم ذو دراية بطبيعة هذا المشروع البحثي. إن لم يكن لديك مانع فإنه سيتم تسجيل هذه المقابلة والحفاظ على سرية البيانات المقدمة، وإلا سيتم استخدام كتيب لتدوين الإجابات والبيانات في حالة التحفظ بشأن تسجيل هذه المقابلة. وأخيراً سيتم استخدام البيانات التي سيتم جمعها لأغراض البحث فقط وسأحترم قواعد الاكاديمية للجامعة فيما يتعلق بأساليب البحث.

إنني أتطلع الى ردكم الكريم...

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،،،

سعيد المشرفي

طالب دكتوراه

المشرف الرئيسي: البروفيسور/ سومين بانديوبادي	الباحث: الطالب/ سعيد المشرفي
عنوان العمل: جامعة ليفربول، المملكة المتحدة	عنوان العمل: جامعة ليفربول، المملكة المتحدة
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LIVERPOOL

The following is a Participant Information Sheet for a PhD research project. It is a research project in the University of Liverpool, School of Architecture, carried out by Mr. Said Al Mashrafi. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

The title of the research

Provisional Title is: Local Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism Development in Omani villages.

The aim of this research

To explore the creation of community participatory framework for sustainable tourism development in Omani villages.

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

- I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Mr. Said Al Mashrafi from University of Liverpool. I understand that the project is designed to gather information for academic purposes only. I will be one of many people being interviewed for this research (the key Players in the public and private institutions, Shura member (consultative council), village leader and community members in two rural Omani villages who are related to community development and tourism development in Sultanate of Oman).

- My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation and there is no intended benefit. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

- If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

- Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from University of Liverpool. The interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. The interview and subsequent dialogue will be audio recorded. If I don't accept the recording, I will not be able to participate in the study.

- I understand that the information obtained from my interview will be anonymised and used so that it is not possible to identify me in the thesis or any reports using the interview material, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies, which protect the anonymity of individuals and ins

- titutions.

- I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded or writtin and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the research purpose. And the result will be in the final thesis.

- The recorded data will be transferred to university's secure server and destroyed from the recorder as soon as possible after the interview. All identifiable data, including transcript, will be stored on secured server only and it will be accessible by the researcher and the supervisory team only. All identifiable data will be destroyed after the thesis is complete and accepted. The anonymised data collected in the interview can be used in the thesis and other publications, e.g. journal articles and conference, papers.

- I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- I have received a copy of this information sheet.

For further information, please contact:

Said Al Mashrafi, The Liverpool School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Leverhulme Building, Liverpool L69 7ZN, United Kingdom, Mobile numbers: in the UK +447472042022 – in Oman +9689979099

Date …………………………………………………………………………….

Signature of the Researcher …………………………………………………………….

"If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know or contact my supervisor [Prof Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, Head of Department & Sir James Stirling Chair in Architecture At Liverpool School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Leverhulme Building, Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 7ZN] and he will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make."

Participation Sheet in Arabic

UNIVERSITY OF
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فيما يلي ورقة معلومات مشارك لمشروع بحث الدكتوراه وهو مشروع بحثي في جامعة ليفربول كلية الهندسة المعمارية، يقوم به الطالب/ سعيد المشرفي، قبل أن تقرر ما إذا كنت ستشارك من المهم أن تفهم سبب إجراء هذا البحث وما الذي سيتضمنه، يرجى تخصيص جزء من وقتك لقراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية ولا تتردد في طرح أي سؤال عما إذا منت ترغب في مزيد من المعلومات أو اذا كان هناك شيء لا تفهمه. أود أن أؤكد لك أنه لا يتعين عليك قبول الدعوة اذا كنت لا ترغب في المشاركة، وأما اذا ترغب بالمشاركة فيجب أن توافق على المشاركة.

شكراً لقراءتك

عنوان المشروع البحثي: إشراك المجتمع المحلي من أجل تنمية السياحة المستدامة في القرى العمانية

الهدف من البحث: تطوير نهج المشاركة المجتمعية كوسيلة لتنمية السياحة المستدامة في القرى العمانية

الموافقة على المشاركة في المقابلة البحثية:

- تطوعت في المشاركة في مشروع بحثي أجراه الطالب/ سعيد المشرفي، وأفهم أن هذه المشروع معني لجمع المعلومات والبيانات للأغراض الاكاديمية فقط. حيث سأكون أحد المشاركين الذين تمت مقابلتهم من أجل هذه البحث (المشاركون الرئيسيون في المؤسسات العامة والخاصة، مجلس الشورى وأفراد المجتمع المحلي في قريتين ريفيتين عمانيتين مرتبطين بتنمية المجتمع وتنمية السياحة في سلطنة عمان).
- أعلم أن مشاركتي طوعية وزن لم يتم الدفع لي مقابل مشاركتي وليس هناك فائدة مقصودة خارج نطاق البحث ويجوز لي الانسحاب والتوقف عن المشاركة في أوقت دون عقوبة.
- يحق لي رفض الإجابة على سؤال ما إذا شعرت بعدم الارتياح بأي شكل من الاشكال خلال المقابلة.
- تتضمن هذه المشاركة إجراء مقابلات مع باحثين من جامعة ليفربول بالمملكة المتحدة، وستستغرق المقابلة حوالي ١٥-٣٠ دقيقة، حيث سيتم تسجيل المقابلة سيتم تدوين الملاحظات
- أفهم بآن المعلومات والبيانات التي سيتم الحصول عليها من مقابلتي ستكون مجهولة الهوية وسيتم استخدامها بحيث لا يمكن تحديد هويتي في الاطروحة أو أي تقارير تستخدم مواد وبيانات المقابلة، وأن سريتي كمشارك في هذه الدراسة ستظل آمنة وستخضع الاستخدامات اللاحقة للسجلات والبيانات لسياسات البيانات القياسية التي تحمي إخفاء هوية الافراد والمؤسسات.
- أفهم وأوافق على أن مشاركتي سيتم تسجيلها صوتياً أو تدوينها وأنا على علم وموافق على استخدامك هذه التسجيلات او البيانات المكتوبة التي ستكون ضمن النتيجة النهائية للأطروحة.
- سيتم نقل البيانات المسجلة الى خادم الجامعة الأمن وأتلافها من جهاز التسجيل في أقرب وقت ممكن بعد المقابلة، وسيتم تخزين جميع البيانات التي يمكن تحديدها بما في ذلك النص على خادم مؤمن فقط وسيكون الوصول اليها من قبل الباحث والفريق الاشرافي فقط. سيتم إتلاف جميع البيانات بعد اكتمال الاطروحة وقبولها وكما يمكن استخدام البيانات المجهولة المصدر التي تم جمعها في المقابلة في الاطروحة والمنشورات الأخرى مثل المقالات الصحفية المؤتمرات وأوراق العمل.
- لقد قرأت وفهمت الشرح المقدم لي وتمت الإجابة على جميع أسئلتي بكل الرضا.
- أوافق طواعيةً على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.
- لقد تلقيت نسخة من ورقة المعلومات.

لمزيد من المعلومات: يرجى الاتصال بالباحث/ سعيد المشرفي، كلية الهندسة المعمارية.

جامعة ليفربول بالمملكة المتحدة

رقم الهاتف: (بريطانيا) 447472042022+   (عُمان) 96899479099+

التاريخ:

توقيع الباحث:

أذا كنت غير سعيد، أو إذا كانت هناك مشكلة فلا تتردد في الاتصال بي أو الاتصال بمشرفي الاكاديمي البروفيسور/ سومين باندويوبادي رئيس القسم وكرسي السير جيمس ستيرلينغ في الهندسة المعمارية بكلية الهندسة المعمارية بجامعة ليفربول بالمملكة المتحدة وسيحاول مساعدتك. أو لديك شكوى وتشعر أنه لا يمكنك القدوم إلي بها، فعليك الاتصال بمسؤول حوكمة الأبحاث على البريد الالكتروني ethics@liv.ac.uk وعند الاتصال به يرجى تقديم تفاصيل عن اسم الدراسة أو وصفها ليتم تحديدها، واسم الباحث المشارك، وتفاصيل عن الشكوى المراد تقديمها.

Committee on Research Ethics

Title of Research Project: Local Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism Development in Omani villages [Sultanate of Oman]

عنوان البحث:إشراك المجتمع المحلي لتنمية السياحة المستدامة في القرى العمانية (سلطنة عمان)

Name of Researcher: Said Khalfan Al Mashrafi

اسم الباحث: سعيد بن خلفان المشرفي

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

على المشارك تحديد ما يراه مناسبا بوضع علامة صح أو خطأ:

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am

free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

أعلم أن مشاركتي طوعية وأنا لدي مطلق الحرية في الإنسحاب في أي وقت أشاء ودون تقديم أي مبرر لذلك

I agree to take part in the above study.

أوفق على الاشتراك في الدراسة المذكورة آنفا

I agree to the interview being recorded.

أوافق على تسجيل هذه المقابلة تسجيلا صوتياً

I agree to the use of anonymized quotes in publications.

أوافق على استخدام ما أقول لأغراض الدراسة ونشره دون ذكر اسمي

I agree to my quotes being attributed to me.

أوافق على ذكر اسمي

Participant Name	Date	Signature
إسم المشارك	التاريخ	التوقيع

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
إسم الشخص الذي أخذ الموافقة	التاريخ	التوقيع

_____   _____   _____

Researcher	Date	Signature
الباحث	التاريخ	التوقيع

_____   _____   _____

APPENDIX 2: Research Ethic Approval

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

School of the Arts Research Ethics Committee

3 April 2018

Dear Prof Bandyopadhyay

I am pleased to inform you that your application for research ethics approval has been approved. Application details and conditions of approval can be found below. Appendix A contains a list of documents approved by the Committee.

Application Details

Reference:	2922
Project Title:	Community Participation Toward Empowerment In rural Omani villages
Principal Investigator/Supervisor:	Prof Soumyen Bandyopadhyay
Co-Investigator(s):	Mr Said Al Mashrafi,
Lead Student Investigator:	-
Department:	Architecture
Approval Date:	03/04/2018
Approval Expiry Date:	Five years from the approval date listed above

The application was **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

Conditions of approval

- All serious adverse events must be reported via the Research Integrity and Ethics Team (ethics@liverpool.ac.uk) within 24 hours of their occurrence.
- If you wish to extend the duration of the study beyond the research ethics approval expiry date listed above, a new application should be submitted.
- If you wish to make an amendment to the research, please create and submit an amendment form using the research ethics system.
- If the named Principal Investigator or Supervisor leaves the employment of the University during the course of this approval, the approval will lapse. Therefore it will be necessary to create and submit an amendment form using the research ethics system.
- It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator/Supervisor to inform all the investigators of the terms of the approval.

Kind regards,

School of the Arts Research Ethics Committee
sotares@liverpool.ac.uk
0151 795 3133

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APPENDIX 3: Fieldwork letters

Letter from the University of Liverpool

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Prof Soumyen Bandyopadhyay
Sir James Stirling Chair in Architecture
Head of School
School of Architecture

Leverhulme Building
Abercromby Square
Liverpool
L69 7ZN

T 0151 794 9548
W www.liv.ac.uk/architecture
E soumyenb@liverpool.ac.uk

Date: May 9, 2018

To Whom It May Concern

PhD Student: Said Khalfan Salim Al Mashrafi
Research Project: Community Participation Towards Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Promotion in Omani Rural Settlements

This is to confirm that Said Khalfan Salim Al Mashrafi, registerd for the Doctoral of Philosophy (PhD) degree at the University of Liverpool, UK is undertaking research on the factors and barriers that currently limit sustainable tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman. As part of this research, Said is required to undertake fieldwork in Oman.

Liverpool School of Architecture thus requests all concerned institutions and individuals in the UK and in Oman to provide the necessary assistance and support to Said to enable successful completion of this project during the fieldwork period, 1st June - 20th August 2018.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you require further information. I would like to thank you for your cooperation in advance.

Sincerely,

Prof Soumyen Bandyopadhyay
Sir James Stirling Chair in Architecture
Head of School
Liverpool School of Architecture
University of Liverpool
Leverhulme Building
Abercromby Square
Liverpool L69 7ZN

Letter from the Ministry of Tourism in Oman (The employer)

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Tourism
Muscat

< ٤٠١٨ / ١١٦٧ >

التاريخ: ١٣ فبراير ٢٠١٨م

Date: 13.02.2018

To Whom It May Concern

إلى من يهمه الأمر   المحترمون

Dear Sir / Madam

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،

Research Project / Community Participation
toward Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism
Promotion in Rural Omani Villages

المشروع البحثي / تطوير خطة لإشراك المجتمع
المحلي نحو التمكين لتعزيز السياحة المستدامة
في القرى العمانية

As part of the Doctoral of philosophy
requirements at the University of Liverpool
in the UK, We would like to inform you that
Mr. Said Khalfan Salim Al Mashrafi is
conducting research concerning the
factors and barriers that currently limit
sustainable tourism development in Rural
Omani villages as a means for developing
of above-mentioned project.

نود الافادة بأن الفاضل/ سعيد بن خلفان بن سالم
المشرفي يقوم حاليا بدراسة العوامل والتحديات
التي تواجه السياحة المستدامة في القرى الريفية
العمانية سعياً لتطوير الخطة أعلاه كجزء من
متطلبات درجة الدكتوراه بجامعة ليفربول
بالمملكة المتحدة.

Ministry of Tourism requests all concerned
representatives in public institutions,
private entities, members of consultative
council (Shura), village's leaders (Sheikh)
and local community members (Male and
Female) to provide assistance for this
researcher to undertake interviews, to
collect related data and information
toward enhancing the research value in
rural Omani villages. It is worth noting, that
the research will respect the research
ethics guidelines and collected data will be
used only for research purposes.

لذا ترجو وزارة السياحة من المعنيين بالقطاع
العام والخاص وأعضاء مجلس الشورى
والمشايخ وأفراد المجتمع المحلي بالقرى
العمانية (ذكور وإناث) تقديم العون والمساعدة
للمذكور أعلاه في إجراء المقابلات اللازمة
والحصول على البيانات والمعلومات اللازمة
التي من شأنها ان تعزز القيمة البحثية للمشروع
أعلاه، علما بأن المذكور سيلتزم بأخلاقيات
البحث في حصر البيانات والمعلومات المشار
اليها لأغراض البحث فقط.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation

شاكرين لكم سلفا تعاونكم المستمر

Best wishes

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام ،،

Eng. Zaher Bin Hamed Al Riyami

المهندس/ زاهر بن حمد الريامي

Director General of Tourism Development

مدير عـــام التنميــة الســـياحية

ص.ب : ١٠٠ مدينة السلطان قابوس، الرمز البريدي : ١١٥، تليفون، ٢٢٠٨٨٤٨٠، فاكس، ٢٢٠٨٨٤٨٣، بريد إلكتروني:info@omantourism.gov.om
P.O. Box : 200 Madinat Al Sultan Qabcos, Postal Code : 115, Tel : 22088480, Fax : 22088483, E-mail: info@omantourism.gov.om

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APPENDIX 4: Main Research Question

Questions for participants at the government sector

1- What are the roles and tasks of your institution concerning socio-economic and tourism development in Oman?

ما هي أدوار وزاراتكم / مؤسستكم فيما يتعلق بالتنمية الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والسياحية في عمان؟

2- Has the planning agenda of this institution addressed the stimulation of local capital as a priority, especially encouraging citizens to invest in tourism development in Oman, and how?

هل تناول أجندة التخطيط لهذه المؤسسة تحفيز رأس المال المحلي كأولوية، وخاصة تشجيع المواطنين على الاستثمار في تنمية السياحة في عمان،

وكيف؟

3- What is the nature of the initiatives and programs related to awareness-raising, training, financing, and legislation that your institution has provided to encourage citizen investment in socioeconomic and tourism business? And what is its level of effectiveness?

ما هي طبيعة المبادرات والبرامج المتعلقة بالتوعية والتدريب والتمويل والتشريعات التي قدمتها مؤسستك لتشجيع استثمار المواطنين في الأعمال الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياحية؟ وما هو مستوى فعاليتها؟

4- Who are your partners to support citizens, especially the local host community in rural destinations and Oman in general, participate in tourism development? And what is your level of satisfaction in this collaborative approach?

من هم شركاؤكم لدعم المواطنين، وخاصة المجتمع المحلي المضيف في الوجهات الريفية وعمان بشكل عام، للمشاركة في التنمية

السياحية؟ وما هو مستوى رضاك عن هذا النهج التعاوني؟

5- To what extent has this tourism development through the local community participation approach achieved its objectives in rural destinations, particularly in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql and in Oman in general?

إلى أي مدى حققت هذه التنمية السياحية من خلال نهج المشاركة المجتمعية المحلية أهدافها في الوجهات الريفية في عمان، وخاصة في

قريتي مسفاة العبريين ومقل؟

6- From your point of view, what are the current problems and challenges facing the local community participation approach in the villages studied and Oman in general, and what interventions are needed to overcome the stated challenges?

من وجهة نظرك، ما هي المشاكل والتحديات الحالية التي تواجه نهج مشاركة المجتمع المحلي في القرى المدروسة وعمان بشكل عام،

وما هي التدخلات اللازمة للتغلب على التحديات المذكورة؟

Questions for participants at private sector

1. What are the key tasks of your entity or company to develop the tourism sector in Oman?

   ما هي المهام الرئيسية لكيانك أو شركتك لتطوير قطاع السياحة في عمان؟

2. Have you offered any service or initiative to encourage the local community to participate in socioeconomic and tourism development?

   هل قدمت أي خدمة أو مبادرة لتشجيع المجتمع المحلي على المشاركة في التنمية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياحية؟

3. Do you have collaborative work with the host community in the villages of Misfat Al Abryeen and Muql and in Oman in general?

   هل لديكم عمل تعاوني مع المجتمع المضيف في قريتي مسفاة العبريين ومقل وعمان بشكل عام؟

4. What is your level of satisfaction with the performance of local participation in the development of tourism in rural areas, mainly in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql and Oman in general?

   ما هو مستوى رضاك عن أداء المشاركة المحلية في تنمية السياحة في المناطق الريفية وخاصة في قريتي مسفاة العبريين ومقل وعمان بشكل عام؟

5. From your point of view, what are the problems and challenges that limit local participation and tourism development in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql and Oman in general? What interventions are needed to overcome the potential of the barriers?

   من وجهة نظرك ما هي المشاكل والتحديات التي تحد من المشاركة المحلية والتنمية السياحية في قريتي مسفاة العبريين ومقل وعمان بشكل عام؟ ما هي التدخلات اللازمة للتغلب على إمكانات الحواجز؟

Questions for the local community at Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql village

1. What are the values and tourist attractions of your village?

    ما هي القيم والمعالم السياحية لقريتك؟

2. Is tourism in your village seasonal or permanent?

    هل السياحة في قريتك موسمية أم دائمة؟

3. What amenities and services are there in your village for visitors?

    ما هي المرافق والخدمات المتوفرة في قريتك للزوار؟

4. What kinds of activities do tourists experience in your village?

    ما هي أنواع الأنشطة التي يمارسها السائحون في قريتك؟

5. What are the main tourism benefits and impacts for your village?

    ما هي الفوائد والآثار السياحية الرئيسية لقريتك؟

6. Are you happy that tourists visit your village?

    هل أنت سعيد لأن السياح يزورون قريتك؟

7. Have you ever offered products and services for tourists?

    هل سبق لك أن عرضت منتجات وخدمات للسياح؟

8. Are you comfortable with the concept of working in tourism?

    هل أنت مرتاح لمفهوم العمل في السياحة؟

9. Do you encourage your children and the people of your village to get involved in the tourism business?

    هل تشجع أبناءك وأهالي قريتك على الانخراط في مجال السياحة؟

10. Would you like to get involved in the tourism business and what activities would you like to get involved in?

    هل ترغب في الانخراط في مجال السياحة وما هي الأنشطة التي ترغب في المشاركة فيها؟

11. Do you prefer to work together in a cooperative approach or separately in the tourism business?

    هل تفضل العمل معًا في نهج تعاوني أو بشكل منفصل في مجال السياحة؟

12. Is there any previous and existing work experience with public and private institutions for community development and tourism in your village? And how do you value this experience?

    هل هناك أي خبرة عمل سابقة وحالية مع المؤسسات العامة والخاصة لتنمية المجتمع والسياحة في قريتك؟ وكيف تقدر هذه التجربة؟

13. From your point of view, what are the barriers and problems that limit the development of tourism and the benefits for residents, and what are the solutions needed to reduce the consequences of these barriers?

    من وجهة نظرك ما هي المعوقات والمشاكل التي تحد من تنمية السياحة وتعود بالفوائد على السكان، وما هي الحلول اللازمة للحد من

    تداعيات هذه العوائق؟

APPENDIX 5: Interviews list and Samples of semi-structure interview

Interviews list

	Code	Sampling	Interview	Language	Form	Date	Duration
1.	GOV-B23	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	11/6/18	00:26
2.	GOV-M14	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	25/6/18	00:20
3.	GOV-O14	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	27/6/18	00:25
4.	GOV-E05	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	27/6/18	00:17
5.	GOV-W02	Purposive	SSI	English	Recorded	27/6/18	00:26
6.	PVT-CS4	Purposive	SSI	English	Recorded	28/6/18	00:14
7.	GOV-A12	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/6/18	00:22
8.	GOV-H27	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	1/7/18	00:25
9.	GOV-G23	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	1/7/18	00:23
10.	GOV-H21	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	1/7/18	00:30
11.	PVT-CS3	Purposive	SSI	English	Recorded	4/7/18	00:21
12.	GOV-W31	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	4/7/18	00:28
13.	GOV-R20	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	9/7/18	00:35
14.	PVT-CS5	Purposive	SSI	English	Recorded	9/7/18	00:20
15.	PVT-CS2	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	10/7/18	00:23
16.	GOV-A17	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	10/7/18	00:25
17.	GOV-A13	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	10/7/18	00:18

18.	GOV-Q33	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Note-taking	10/7/18	00:21
19.	GOV-Y17	Snowball	SSI	English	Recorded	12/7/18	00:26
20.	GOV-S71	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	16/7/18	00:25
21.	LPVT-A23	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	16/7/18	00:18
22.	GOV-N22	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	10/7/18	00:21
23.	LMA-16	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	17/7/18	00:15
24.	LMA	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	17/7/18	01:10
25.	LMA-10	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	17/7/18	00:10
26.	LPVT-A13	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	17/7/18	00:20
27.	LMA	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	17/7/18	01:25
28.	LMA-12	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	18/7/18	00:25
29.	LMA-32	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	18/7/18	00:12
30.	LMA	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	18/7/18	00:55
31.	LPVT-H10	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	18/7/18	00:21
32.	LMA-23	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	19/7/18	00:15
33.	LPVT-TO1	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	19/7/18	00:25
34.	GOV-L23	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	19/7/18	00:22
35.	LMA-05	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone call	22/7/18	00:12
36.	LMA-17	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone call	22/7/18	00:10
37.	LMA-21	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone call	26/7/18	00:12

38.	LMA-13	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone call	26/7/18	00:12
39.	LMU-12	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:23
40.	GOV-W24	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:17
41.	LMU-07	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:25
42.	LMU	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:50
43.	LMU-20	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:20
44.	LMU-17	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	28/7/18	00:23
45.	LMU	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	29/7/18	01:10
46.	LPVT-M16	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	29/7/18	00:21
47.	LPVT-FS8	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Note-taking	29/7/18	00:16
48.	LMU-11	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	29/7/18	00:13
49.	LMU	Purposive	FG	Arabic	Recorded	30/7/18	01:05
50.	GOV-B15	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	30/7/18	00:23
51.	GOV-M13	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	1/8/18	00:43
52.	GOV-G12	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	1/8/18	00:23
53.	GOV-T26	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	5/8/18	00:20
54.	GOV-N23	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	7/8/18	00:16
55.	GOV-T12	Purposive	SSI	English	Recorded	28/8/18	00:40
56.	GOV-Q32	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	18/10/18	00:15
57.	LMU-25	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	18/11/18	00:26

58.	GOV-B06	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	25/11/18	00:15
59.	LMU-31	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	28/11/18	00:15
60.	GOV-BO7	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	2/12/18	00:22
61.	GOV-L30	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	7/12/18	00:25
62.	GOV-W08	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	31/12/18	00:20
63.	GOV-S13	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	31/12/18	00:18
64.	LMA-04	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	2/1/19	00:23
65.	GOV-W23	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	3/1/19	00:17
66.	PVT-T03	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	23/2/19	00:17
67.	PVT-TO2	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	19/3/19	00:15
68.	PVT-T04	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	19/5/19	00:16
69.	PVT-G05	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	21/5/19	00:17
70.	LMU-14	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	26/8/19	00:15
71.	LPVT-C18	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Note-taking	28/8/19	00:15
72.	LMU-10	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	26/8/19	00:09
73.	LMU-23	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	26/8/19	00:30
74.	LMU-03	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	26/8/19	00:12
75.	LPVT-FS3	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	26/8/19	00:12
76.	LPVT-FS2	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Note-taking	26/8/19	00:15
77.	GOV-W33	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	6/12/19	00:14

78.	GOV-N16	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	8/1219	00:09
79.	PVT-C15	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	23/12/19	00:12
80.	LMA-08	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	27/12/19	00:15
81.	LMA-02	Purposive	SSI	Arabic	Recorded	27/12/19	00:17
82.	PVT-A30	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	24/1/20	00:20
83.	PVT-G23	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	16/8/20	00:16
84.	PVT-G21	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	16/8/20	00:15
85.	PVT-C12	Snowball	SSI	Arabic	Phone Call	23/8/20	00:21

Sample of semi-structured interview

The researcher:

Asalam Alikum

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful

My name is Said Al Mashrafi, and as you know that I'm undertaking PhD study at the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom.

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for accepting this interview, as you are one of the right officials who would surely add value to this investigation.

While reading a cover letter and participation sheet showing this research, it strove to identify relevant factors related to tourism development and the nature of local community participation in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql, and Oman. The interview would focus on the nature of your institution's role and its commitments related to the above participatory approach and its stated factors.

Before starting this interview, it is essential according to the research ethics guidelines that you read the participation sheet, consent form and checks the boxes that you agree with, then write your name and sign please.

The Researcher: When reading the consent form, would this interview be recorded for research purposes unless you prefer not to record this interview?

The interviewee: I do not mind to record this interview.

The researcher: thank you very much for this, it would help me to save time, in the meantime do not hesitate to suspend the recording if you want to express some points that you do not like to record.

The interviewee: sure

The researcher: What are the roles and tasks of your institution concerning socio-economic and tourism development in Oman?

The interviewee:

Since this ministry was established in 2004, it has taken various initiatives to promote tourism development through legislation and licensing of many tourism activities to stimulate local and foreign capital to increase the contribution of tourism to national GDP. Some of these activities were carried out on private land, while others required a land lease from the government for a specified period. Together with them, the marketing agenda was carried out locally and abroad to promote these activities and make them more sustainable and beneficial.

The researcher: what type of activities does this Ministry license?

The interviewee:

These activities are related to the creation of hotels, hotel apartments, luxury resorts, tourist services, licensing of tourist guide activities. Recently, various products have been authorized to add value to tourism development and encourage people to invest in tourism businesses such as greenhouses, heritage lodge, and guest house products.

The researcher: Has the planning agenda of this institution addressed the stimulation of local capital as a priority, especially encouraging citizens to invest in tourism development in Oman? and how?

The interviewee:

Of course, the planning agenda addressed the drive for local and citizen investment alongside foreign capital as an essential method of targeting tourism as a promised contributor to Oman's economy. As you know, the Tourism 2040 Strategy was recently approved, prioritizing the adaptation of the tourism sector to the level of satisfaction by supporting people, mainly investors, to invest in the tourism business. Through prior communication with numerous partners of public, private, and also local entities. For example, Ash-Shura members, governors, walis, and other local representatives had the opportunity to share their views and concerns through workshops and site visits; I think this strategy has resulted in realistic goals that are easy to achieve. One of the vital results of this interaction was that the local community ranked as a key player in the development of tourism in Oman.

The researcher: why did this strategy define locals or citizens as a key player?

The interviewee:

Because the tourism business touches the natural and cultural resources and other aspects of life in local places daily, without them, tourism would not be possible. For this reason, responsible personnel, such as a minister, undersecretary, or technical staff, make several routine visits to allow people in their places to share their views and opinions.

The researcher: What is the nature of the initiatives and programs related to awareness-raising, training, financing, and legislation that your institution has provided to encourage citizen investment in socio-economic and tourism business? And what is its level of effectiveness?

The interviewee:

Awareness programs: the Tourism Awareness Department has been designated in the organizational structure of this institution, its mission is to carry out various awareness programs to spread the culture of tourism and its benefits with the people and the new generation through the hiring influential social networks, finding people in their places, lecturing to students in schools, colleges, and universities. At the same time, conducting an investment awareness program in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Training: number of training programs and courses offered to encourage citizens to assume their roles and commitments to invest in tourism development, such as the academic programs offered by SQU, OTC, NHI. Along with the one-day workshops taught by this institution related to tour guiding techniques, quality control criteria in the hotel sector. In addition to the training programs offered by the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises

Financing: Most small local investors used to have a reasonable budget to run their businesses, while we mainly support local investors with a letter of consent (preliminary approval letter) to deliver to major Omani financiers such as the Oman Bank development, Al-Raffd Fund, banks especially for medium and large-scale projects.

Legislation: As mentioned above, several products have been regulated to allow locals and citizens to invest in their resources, such as heritage accommodations, greenhouses, and guest houses. In addition, the tour guide has been authorized to allow Omanis to participate in tourist services.

Concerning the degree of effectiveness of the initiatives and programs mentioned above, it is difficult to judge that the initiatives mentioned above have achieved their ultimate goals. However, it works to somehow encourage people, residents, and foreign investors to get involved in tourism development.

The researcher: I understand that some restrictions limit the achievement of these initiatives and programs.

The interviewee:

It is true

For example, some people, especially in remote locations, are willing to participate in tourism development, while others are not. This is attributed to the insufficient level of awareness, because people prefer to invest in a business that makes a quick profit, for example, real estate and the stock market. As in the oil sector, it obtains oil, then to a refinery to shipment it to obtain its income until tomorrow, while investment in tourism takes time to obtain financial returns. On the other hand, tourism is not about generating income and financial profitability; it is described as a simple way for tourists to learn socio-cultural aspects and respect the traditions and values of the residents. Not all people are aware of the benefits of tourism that go beyond economic objectives.

The researcher: Who are your partners to support citizens, especially the local host community in rural destinations and Oman in general, participate in tourism development? And what is your level of satisfaction in this collaborative approach?

The interviewee:

To be sure, there are several partners from both the public and private sectors who have collaborated with us to accelerate tourism development and encourage local people to participate in tourism. This alliance covers all regulatory, financial, and administrative aspects, for example, in regulation this institution cannot allow small, medium, and large tourism companies to operate without the approval of other authorities, mainly the public sector. In addition, this institution requests land from another entity, mainly the Ministry of Housing for tourism investment through public or private investment.

Even at the local level, the Governor, Wali and Ash-Shura members assist to achieve government performance, especially in projects that are carried out in local areas. Similarly, in the private sector, our partners like banks (Bank Muscat initiative to renovate some buildings in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen). Oil and gas operators will also finance various tourism initiatives in Oman, such as Hisn Senaislah renovation in the South Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate.

However, despite the aforementioned summary of collaboration with various organizations, from my point of view, the level of collaboration and coordination between institutions represents 4 out of 10, especially in the legislation that generates conflicts and delays in the operation of tourist activities. This is due to the overlap and communication gap between the responsible bodies, which have also confirmed Tanfeedh's initiatives.

The researcher: To what extent has this tourism development through the local community participation approach achieved its objectives in rural destinations, particularly in the villages of Misfat Al-Abryeen and Muql and in Oman in general?

The interviewee:

As you know, the two mentioned villages represent a constant advance to allow the local community to get involved in tourism activities, as these places are one of the first rural places in Oman to have a long experience in tourism. However, the local participation approach is not yet fulfilled in these places despite the emergence of some local initiatives, especially in the village of Misfat Al-Abryeen.

As I said before, the inhabitants of these places do not reach the level of maturity in which they have a serious desire to invest in tourist activities in which their places are rich. For example, Mr. Ahmed Al Abri is considered the founder of the tourism development renaissance because he is educated and has sufficient knowledge about the aspects and dimensions of tourism. However, some residents struggled to collapse Ahmed's initiative, which focused on renovating a traditional building into authentic heritage accommodation, despite being members of his family. This means that conflict between the residents themselves is seen as a barrier that limits the local benefits of tourism activities.

On the other hand, the government recommends a cooperative business form to share fruits with all partners, so a local cooperative has been started that represents the people in this village. This does not mean that tourism is perfectly directed in this village through a cooperative approach, which seems early to judge the success of this cooperative that needs time to evaluate its objectives.

In the village of Muql, the lack of local initiatives indicates that residents are not interested in participating in tourism even though this Ministry has encouraged them to offer their products and services for tourism on many occasions. In addition, there are some promises from the residents of Muql and Wadi Ban Khalid province to form a cooperative entity to carry out tourism activities. However, they did not fulfill their promise due to various problems, mainly conflicts between the locals themselves.

In short, that due to this insufficient knowledge and awareness, some places, even as I said before, are not prepared to invest in tourist activities.

The researcher: to what extent do you support Ahmed's initiative as the first heritage building turned into a tourist accommodation project?

The interviewee:

We view Ahmed's initiative as a pilot experience in Oman that has led to the emergence of other heritage products, where we recommend visitors to experience their stay here. In the meantime, we advise those interested in this experience to interact with Mr. Ahmed so that they have sufficient knowledge and understanding on how to renovate and operate.

The researcher: From your point of view, what are the current problems and challenges facing the local community participation approach in the villages studied and Oman in general, and what interventions are needed to overcome the stated challenges?

The interviewee:

As mentioned above, this number of problems faces tourism development and local participation initiative in both villages, mainly without collaboration between relevant institutions that require strengthening collaborative efforts rather than working for individual goals.

Additional work is needed to create awareness and knowledge of residents about the dimensions of tourism to ensure that people in the area are prepared and able to lead the development of tourism with a more collective approach and without self-interest, as this government promises to provide unlimited support for cooperative tourism enterprises and other socio-economic activities.

Lack of financial skills is considered another key barrier limiting tourism in rural destinations. In this case, it is essential to encourage SMEs large and small to adopt a CSR program is mandatory to return to the community, together with oil and gas operators.

In summary, the intervention required by the relevant actors as follows:

1- Public sector: must develop a clear vision and realistic plans

2- Private sector: must initiate an exchange association with locals in rural destinations to share fruits through investment and development opportunities.

3- Local community: must understand, approve and accept any tourism development plan compatible with its socio-cultural context.

Meanwhile, given that these interventions contain technical and financial aspects, it is essential to monitor and evaluate them to reduce any possible risks that may limit the achievement of the objectives of these interventions.

The researcher: Do you have any more points and suggestions to add in this regard?

The interviewee:

No thanks and good luck with your study.

The Researcher:

Thank you very much for your valuable time; in fact, it is a significant interview that would surely add value to my research project.

I wish you all the success and happiness.

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