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# Concept, opportunities and challenges of urban tourism in the Arab world: Case studies of Dubai, Cairo and Amman

## Abstract

This paper aims to provide a better understanding of the current situation of urban tourism with referring to the experiences of the Arab World. By using bibliographic documentation and descriptive-analytic method, this paper addresses the main opportunities, impediments, and challenges of urban tourism in three Arab cities (Dubai, Cairo and Amman). This paper indicates that the three cities have many opportunities stemming from their location and their rich tourism resources. Moreover, urban tourism in these cities should confront some internal (country based) and external (global and regional) challenges such as seasonality, pollution, congestion, competition, funding and instability. Some recommendations and policy implications were suggested. The paper concludes, by arguing, that common internal and external challenges need to be addressed in a systematic manner within the broader cultural and tourism policy context in which urban tourism is now implicated. There is a lack of literature on urban tourism within the Arab countries, which is attributed to that tourism in the Arab world is heritage dominated type. Therefore, this research also attempts to bridge the gap in the existing literature about urban tourism in the Arab cities.

**Key words:** urban tourism; instability; urban growth; sustainable tourism; Arab world

## Introduction

Urban tourism has attracted scholars and researchers during the last decades. Some scholars have pointed out that the number of urban tourism arrivals has increased in a steady manner (Page & Hall, 2003, Wober, 2002, Bock 2015, Aksoz & Bac, 2012), The main growth of tourism is occurring in the urban areas and cities (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, Estelaji, ., Sadeghian & Beyhaghi, 2012, Bock, 2015) with so called urban tourism (Aksoz & Bac, 2012), as a vital sector having important impact in terms of gains in income and employment, eventually dependent upon the features and resources of urban areas (Bock, 2015).

Urban tourism is recognized internationally as a crucial industry that offers potentials for economic and job growth (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). The role of urban tourism in supporting the sustainable management and use of local urban resources is largely recognized and is rooted within the discourse of urban tourism itself (UNWTO, 2014). Gratton, Shibli and Coleman (2006) confirmed that tourism in cities, which hosts the bulk of the entire journeys and the total overnight stays; make the most of the socio-economic benefits to those cities as they are spaces of attractions for tourists. Urbanisms with the new forms of socio-economic and political changes have given way to an unforeseen and speedy development process in all areas of existing tourism practice (Ioannides & Timothy, 2010). The Arab world, home to 357 million people in 2010, is considered as one of the most urbanized areas in the world, with a rate of 56 % of its residents living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2012). Arab countries offer a

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central potential for large scale tourism development, with focus on both urban and heritage tourism (Daher, 2007; Mustafa, 2010). Urban tourism is considered as an energetic factor for economies in the Arab World through getting foreign currency and providing job opportunities for local communities (Mustafa, 2010), especially for poor countries whose energy resources are inadequately little like Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon. In 2015, the Middle East recorded 4.6% (54 million) of the world's total arrivals (1 billion and 184 million) and 5.4% of receipts (856 billion US\$) (UNWTO, 2015). In the countries of the studied cities, the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP generated directly plus its indirect and induced impacts are great. The WTTC country report indicates that about (8.7%) of the United Arab Emirates GDP was generated from travel and tourism in 2016 (WTTC, 2016a). Egypt and Jordan have higher rates (11.4%) for Egypt (20.7%) for Jordan (WTTC, 2016b; WTTC, 2016c). Despite the high rate of Jordan's tourism contribution in GDP, the UAE ranked (28) and Egypt ranked (30) internationally, which means that both are heavily dependent on tourism (WTTC, 2016a; WTTC, 2016c), while Jordan ranked (68) internationally (WTTC, 2016b). Gulf countries, which their economies based principally on nonrenewable energy (Oil), are investing also in the tourism sector to be a renewable substitute supporting their economies. However, the Arab world is faced with numerous problems and challenges in developing its urban tourism (Henderson, 2006).

Although urban tourism is a worldwide form of tourism, it has received a disproportionately (Aksoz & Bac, 2012) small amount of attention from scholars (Ashworth & Page, 2011). There is now an extensive body of literature concerned with urban tourism in major cities in the developed world (Ismail & Baum, 2006, p. 214), but tourism issues and urban tourism in the Arab world have been neglected (Law, 1993, 1996; Page & Hall, 2003; Wober, 2002). Although the richness and diversity of tourism products in the Arab world, the information provided concerning urban tourism in major cities is limited. More importantly, there has been no reported research on the comparison of urban tourism among Arab cities.

Tourism in Arab countries is the heritage dominated type (Daher, 2007). Given the notable gap in the existing literature about urban tourism in the Arab cities, this research attempts to bridge the gap revealing the importance of issues of urban tourism in the examined cities and their potentials. The main aim of this paper is to analyse and discuss the internal and external challenges facing the urban tourism in three Arabic cities (Dubai, Amman, and Cairo). To reach a comprehensive discussion of the current state of urban tourism, further arguments concerning the opportunities and challenges of urban tourism in these cities were made.

## Literature review

Urban tourism has been recognized recently as a field of academic research (Mbaiwa, Toteng & Moswete, 2007). Towns and cities have functioned as important locations for tourism activity since ancient times with the accommodation and entertainment function of the preindustrial city (Page & Hall, 2003, Ioannides & Timothy, 2010). However, what is presently considered as an urban tourism is not the result of a sporadic development but the result of cumulative developments of urban transformations and conditions (Al-Saad, 2014). The first appearance of urban tourism was after the economic decline of the cities in the UK, Western Europe and Northern America in the late 1970's (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Murillo, Vayá, Romání & Suriñach, 2013). This bad economic condition has led to adopt tourism as a catalyst to boost urban economies. So, tourism has been chosen to become the active driving force in the city economies (Ashworth, 1989). In the second half of the 1980s, on the wave of worldwide economic recovery, some of the impacted cities started to regain more than former

through tourism and urban regeneration activities which seem much more selective than that of urban decline (Van den Berg, Van Der Borg & Van Der Meer, 1995). After these events, the field of urban tourism became a more researchable topic. After the 1990s, it attracted many journal articles, textbooks and edited collections of books (Law, 1996; Shaw & Williams, 1994, p. 2002).

Urban tourism is a complex concept and its definition has been a subject of debate and has shown a significant rise in research literature from the late 1980s onwards. It is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon and many scholars and institutions have defined it differently. Urban tourism is generally defined as travel to urban cities, neighbourhoods, towns and areas (Law, 1996), where the main motivation is the enjoyment of attractions, facilities and services (Page, 1995) and it has become a generator of current practice for promoting city image and competitiveness in recent years (Page & Hall, 2003). The European Commission (2000) defined urban tourism as "*a group of tourist attractions or activities located in towns and cities and offered to visitors from elsewhere*" (p. 21). Despite numerous definitions of urban tourism, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2012) offered this definition "*trips taken by travellers to cities or places of high population density*". Those visitors are attracted to the urban areas for different purposes such as business, conference, sport, culture and entertainment. However, an exact definition of the concept is still being debated (Law, 1993) due to the complexity and diversity of cities.

Researchers and scholars have different ideas about the city based facilities and factors attracting urban tourists. Based on the functionality, cities can be classified into two main types: 1) Tourism historic cities: ancient places of great archaeological, architectural and cultural identity which attract tourists (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990, p. 2) and Converted cities: modern places, which have artificial tourist attractions and equipped with tourism services and facilities to attract visitors (Law, 2002, p. 5). Cities have pivotal importance in the travel industry due to different characteristics such as the diversity of cultural offerings in a relatively small area, attracting different tourists of different types. Moreover, cities are spaces where extensive networks of facilities such as transport, hotel facilities, business facilities and night activities are located. A study of Wöber (1997), which was conducted on 35 cities in Europe, indicates that approximately half of the travellers (46%) to these cities arrived for business purposes while only about a quarter of them (27%) visiting for leisure and recreation, and 8% visiting friends and relatives. This type of tourists prefers business and MICE tourism because they look for the place with the highest skyscrapers, thousands of lights, the biggest shopping malls and special short-term events such as meeting, incentive, conference, events (MICE).

Considering that the concept of urban tourism is somewhat new, there are a lot of opportunities, accompanied by challenges to overcome. Opportunities and challenges for urban tourism have been noted in the literature (Tyler & Guerrier, 1998; Dharmwani, 2013; Kidane-Mariam, 2015). Related to this, two studies examined the opportunities and challenges of tourism in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Rajasthan, India. The first study conducted by Kidane-Mariam (2015), argues that Addis Ababa has tremendous opportunities such as the rich and diversified cultural and natural heritage, fast rate of economic growth, and significant expansion of urban development. At the same time, it faces challenges such as poor sanitation conditions in smaller hotels and restaurants; mismanagement and/or neglect of existing tourist destinations; lack of trained manpower in the tourist corridor; and lack of strict control and regulation of tourist related infrastructures and services. The second study stated that Rajasthan State has all the elements to become a model state for tourism in the India because of its culture, tradition, cuisine, costumes and its numberless art forms (Dharmwani, 2013). On the other hand, Rajasthan faces challenges of underdeveloped transport and communication networks and

problems of accommodation and lodging facilities (Ibid). Challenges exist for governments and the private sector as partners to manage tourism in cities cooperatively.

An important amount of the existing research on tourism in different Arab countries pointed that tourism development is driven by economic motives as it is an alternative venue for revenue source (Henderson, 2006; Weigert, 2012). Arab countries of the Middle East have been investing in urban tourism since the second half of the last century to develop national economies. Therefore, the challenge ahead and their associated factors lie in the adequate management and the sustainability of urban tourism development. They should respond to the needs and expectations of tourists without negatively affect the image of the city and the residents' standard living. According to the Conference on "Tourism and the City: The Challenge of Sustainability", cities face a double challenge: Firstly, they should be able to respond to the expectations and needs of the growing number of tourists (Aide Memoire, 1999). Secondly, they should ensure that tourism is developed and managed in a sustainable way that it benefits the resident population, does not contribute to the deterioration of the urban environment and social well-being (Ibid).

## Methodology

The purpose of the research is to analyse the nature of urban tourism and its pattern regarding the physical attractions and their concentration within a city that might attract patterns of urban tourism to specific locations. Within this context, this research aims to determine the challenges and opportunities facing urban tourism in the Arab World. Considering the lack of studies about urban tourism at cities in the Middle East, the authors chose Amman, Dubai and Cairo as a case study.

The choice of Dubai, Cairo and Amman cities was intentional, as they represent various types of rich and diversified urban attractions. They have been chosen as case studies of urban tourist destinations for the following reasons: a) they attracted most of the tourist investments and tourists in their countries; b) they have rich and diverse attractions of urban tourism (Leisure, business, sport, adventure, cruising and shopping); c) they have different geographical locations on the map of the Arab World; d) the wealth and economic situations in these cities are different. The research takes the form of a comparative case study of three urban tourism destinations. Due to the nature of the topic; this research used analytical and descriptive approaches as adopted by (Pforr & Hosie, 2009). The desktop research design was adopted throughout this research. The data were gathered through a review of documents and literature. The researchers have collected data from published works related to the subject such as works of tourism promotional literature, official government based reports, documents, articles, websites and e-resources. To analyse the contents of documentary materials the researchers have employed interpretive and descriptive method analysis. The researchers grouped related data into suitable themes, then these themes were analysed, this enabled the researchers to identify the opportunities and challenges likely to affect urban tourism. It is important to underline that urban tourism in Arab countries has not been made a topic of deeply rooted research by national academicians or professionals and such an important topic area is underestimated.

## Urban tourism in the three cities, opportunities perspective

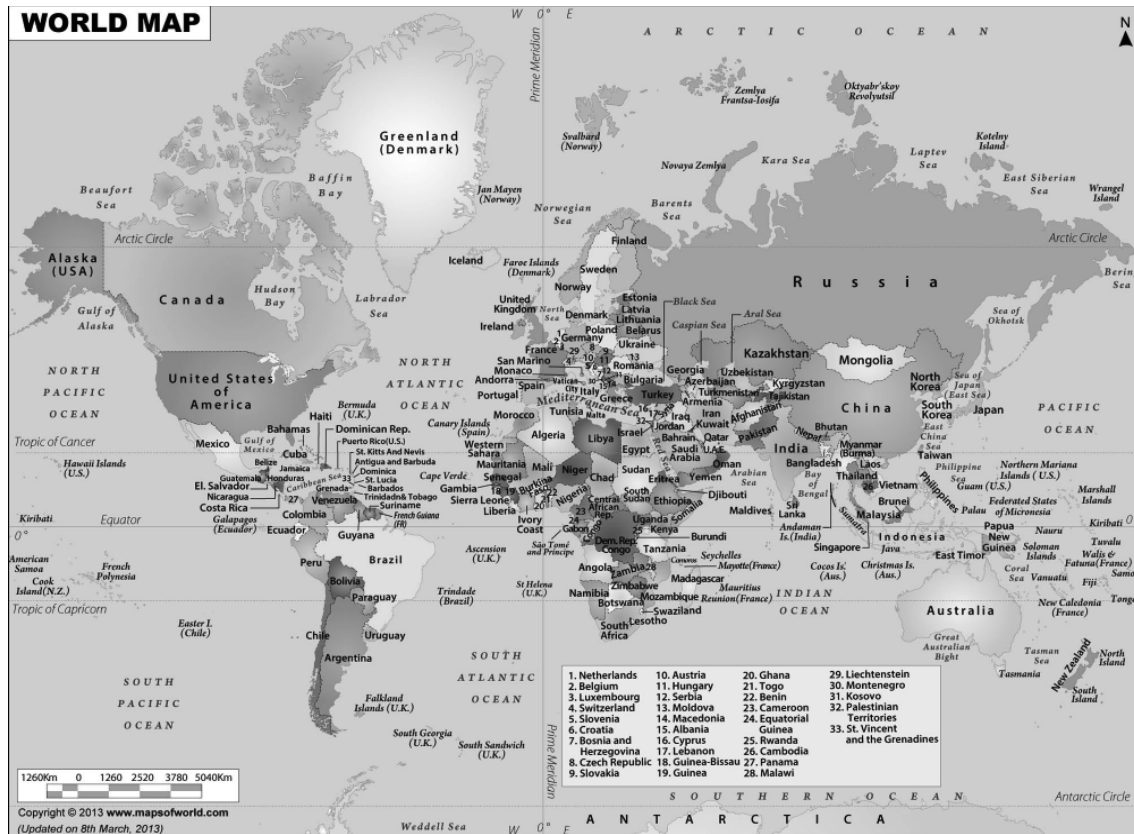
To analyse the opportunities for urban tourism critically, the research compares tourism attractions, trends and policies of urban tourism in Dubai, Cairo and Amman. Research findings show that the diverse range of cultural heritage, sport, shopping, wellness, and leisure attractions are one of the

major opportunities for urban tourism in **Amman**. It is the most visited tourist city in Jordan as arrivals at classified hotels reached 1.1 million in 2015 (MoTA, 2015). It attracts different segments of tourists because of its richness of many ancient and modern attractions. Amman is an old urbanized capital with a rich history and much-diversified cultural heritage resources especially in "*Al-Balad*" area, the down town of Amman. Al-Balad is the core cultural heritage centre due to being "an urban centre based on a Greco-Roman city plan, with an acropolis (the Citadel), temples, and a lower city." (Shawash, 2011). What qualified Amman to be the capital of urban tourism in Jordan is that it is the main consolidated gateway for visitors entering to Jordan through Queen Alia International Airport - Amman Airport. QAIA served 7,095,685 passengers in 2015 and being able to handle up to 12 million passengers by the end of 2016 (Queen Alia International Airport, 2016). Internationally, the opportunity of urban tourism at the city of Amman lies in the reality of its location at cross roads between East and West with a well-developed necessary infrastructure for tourism (see Figure 1). In terms of accommodation and restaurants, there is a mixture of luxury and budget hotels ranged from luxury hotels like The Regency Palace to budget hotels like Roman Theatre Hotel. Furthermore, there is a wide range of fashionable boutiques, shopping Malls and Souqs which rebrand Amman as a living city of values, image and identity (Khirfan & Momani, 2013). Taking a closer look at urbanization of the city, one can realize that local authorities have been fully engaged in the development of heritage resources of the city and maintaining the historic nature of some districts of Amman rendering it the primary appeal of the city. In the last decade, historic urban areas like Al-Balad, Luweibdeh district and Rainbow street were transformed to centres of touristic and cultural attractions. They attracted various cafés, restaurants and other openings that of different natures of "culture," "environment" and "heritage," as well as some NGOs such as Jordan River Foundation, and the Royal Film Commission (Shawash, 2011). Day after day, Amman recognizes the considerable returns of modern infrastructure on urban tourism. Greater Amman Municipality is working on some urban development projects that intended to facilitate tourism and boost its attractiveness in the eyes of both international and local tourists as well; The most recent and important projects of the Municipality include: Amman Expo Centre, Hashemite arena Project, and Rehabilitation Project for Habes AlMjali House (Greater Amman Municipality, 2016).

From an analysis of a series of different documents (USAID, 2012; MHUC, 2012; Nasser, 2007), it is clear that various opportunities have influenced the success of urban tourism in **Cairo**. The capital of Egypt for over a thousand years is a World Heritage Site with Outstanding Universal Value. Consequently, it is the most visited tourist destination in Egypt. Tourists are estimated to be increased from 3.8 million in 2012 to 8.85 million in 2023 (MHUC, 2012). Sceneries, facilities, bustling nightlife and the city itself, as well as the advantage of low cost of services and products, contribute to attracting tourists to Cairo. In addition, the tourist importance of Cairo emerged from being a focal entry point in terms of air and sea arrivals. It is considered the main air gateway for international visitors in Egypt as 14 million travellers passed by Cairo through Cairo International Airport (MHUC, 2012). It occupies a unique location which enabled it to exchange culture between Asia and Africa. The various ancient civilizations made Cairo an extraordinary tourist destination among other cities in the world (Nasser, 2007), as it received more attention since the discovery of ancient Egyptian archaeological heritage and interpretation of the hieroglyphics. The eternal Pyramids of Cairo symbolizing imaginary historical pictures for many people all over the world and throughout ages (MHUC, 2012). The Egyptian museums are also considered the richest museums in archaeological collections. Due to the greatness and high concentration of the Egyptian antiquities and other tourist attractions in the city centre of Cairo, most of the new accommodation projects (hotels and restaurants) are concentrated in

the central, west and east of Cairo, and other districts of Cairo. According to Egyptian Hotel Association (2017), there are approximately 157 hotels with 27,000 rooms in the Cairo city, 48% (11,600 rooms) are in central Cairo, 22% are in east Cairo and 27% are in west Cairo. Traditional Shopping in Cairo attracted most of the visitors because traditional products in Souqs (markets) meet various tastes with lower prices like Khan El-Khalili Bazaar which contains more than 30 different crafts with more than 300 thousand workers (Maarouf & El Alfy, 2012). The city of Cairo has adopted a regeneration of major tourism development projects diversifying its tourism product to attract more visitors. According to the Greater Cairo Urban Development Strategy, six projects for tourism sector were proposed: 1) Developing Nile islands as nature reserves project; 2) Development of therapeutic tourism project; 3) Ensuring that hotel rooms and tourist sites in the GC meet quality specifications project; 4) Establishing an Arabian horses centre project; 5) Ecotourism and safari tourism project; and 6) Introducing additional capacities and potentials to air transport project (MHUC, 2012).

Figure 1  
World map



Source: Maps of World (2013).

After the first commercial oil discovery in the United Arab Emirates at Umm Shaif in Abu Dhabi in 1958 (OPEC, 2016), the economic development enhanced the tourism industry in most of the Emirates especially **Dubai**. In the late 1980's the UAE government aimed to find alternative sources of national income after falling oil production and the exigency of economic alternatives system (Sharpley, 2008). Through various plans, Dubai directed its efforts to the tourism investments, which became after a short time a dynamic supporter to the economy of UAE. Some officials have indicated 20-30% of

Dubai's GDP is tourism related including transport, impact on retail and other associated industries and services (Emirates NBD, 2014). The influx of huge wealth and economic prosperity has drastically altered the tourist nature and urban system of the city. Accordingly, Dubai reflects physical urban renaissance by repositioning itself through the development of huge and world urban and tourism development projects (Stephenson, 2014). The built environment has been improved (e.g. the Burj Khalifa Tower), as well as luxurious accommodation ranged from one-star hotels to seven-star Burj Al Arab hotel. In 2016, the five-star hotels have the highest number of total available rooms (31,507), 32% of the hotel inventory in Dubai (Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2016a). Such services and facilities and the reputation and prestige of its management qualify Dubai to host several international sporting and business events yearly. They range in size and scale like the world's richest horse race (Dubai World Cup) and the Barclays Dubai Tennis Championship (Dubai Update, 2011). Dubai is one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the world (EIU, 2003) due to the accelerated increase in the numbers of the international guests yearly, as they reach 4.10 million in 2016 (Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2016a). In the last five years, the numbers of the international guests have no decline or even stability, representing an indicator of continuous increase of tourists' numbers soon. Dubai attracts tourists because of the diversification of its urban tourism product (Ahmed, 2015); it possesses cultural resources, new tourism activities, MICE tourism, Night / Evening tourism, and other Dubai attractions that cannot be experienced in any other city. The series of mega urban development projects made Dubai the city of superlatives (the biggest, the longest, the highest, and the world's first). It has a group of unique tourist attractions in the world, most of them have been recognized by the Guinness Book of records such as the world's tallest tower (Burj Khalifa), and the world's biggest shopping mall (Dubai Mall). Tourists are also attracted to Dubai because it is stable and secured politically. Dubai is considered as one of the safest destinations in the Arab world due to its multicultural and moderate nature. Cultural diversity contributed to the stability of the city with little threat of civil unrest and low crime rates (Henderson, 2006); Dubai has a high percentage of expatriates, around (80%) of 2.7 million populations in 2016 (Dubai Statistics Center, 2016).

To enhance the role of the tourism sector in the economies of Dubai in 2013, the government of Dubai launched a strategic roadmap named *Tourism Vision 2020* with the key objective of attracting 20 million visitors per year by 2020, doubling the number welcomed in 2012 (Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2016b). This was followed by efforts of the governmental authorities to qualify the city to accommodate the future numbers of tourists and to handle the accelerated increase in numbers of passengers. The civil aviation industry has progressed at speed and Dubai International Airport is the world's busiest airport after traffic exceeded 78 million passengers in 2015 (The National, 2016). Dubai Airports forecasts 85 million passengers this year (Ibid). Nevertheless, the government of Dubai constructed and opened a new airport (Al Maktoum International Airport) in 2010 because the current aviation facilities exceeded their capacity and national Airlines have considerable growth in the last ten years. To sum up, these three cities are considered amongst the first attractions in their countries exhibiting different slogans to attract mass tourism. They are considered as meeting places between the east and west of the World.

## Challenges of urban tourism in the studied cities

Since 2011 or so, certain Arab countries have experienced political instability and rapid socioeconomic changes. These transformations have affected and caused severe stress mainly to the tourism sector in the capital cities. On this basis, the research recognizes that the tourism sector in these cities is facing many challenges globally, nationally and locally, thus the research endeavour five major challenges

facing urban tourism in the case study, seasonality, pollution, congestion, instability, competition and funding. These challenges are not necessarily exclusive but they are interrelated phases of urban tourism development. In the following, these results are discussed in detail.

Rapid urbanization, demographic growth and weakly developed resources for urban tourism are the most mentioned and observed challenges encountered by urban tourism at **Amman** city. Amman is Jordan's largest city and the most populous. The city of Amman inhabits 4 million (DoS, 2015). It has been noted that different infrastructure has been deteriorated due to the dramatic population increase from 1 million in 1994 to 4 million in 2015 (DoS, 2015). Most of the main arteries have exceeded their capacity, for example, the main streets are experiencing human and traffic overcrowding at the city centre. In the same time, the city lacks comprehensive urban planning initiatives, with very few urban development specialists or architects working for the municipality. In addition, and following the review of the promotional material of the city of Amman, one can conclude that while the city is rich in its historical and heritage attractions, there have been different places and attractions that were not considered as potential for urban tourism development. Amman is suffering from limited support for domestic tourism by local tourism authorities, the high prices of urban tourism related services in comparison to Cairo and other neighbouring cities. According to Expatistan Cost of Living Index (2016), cost of living in Cairo is 63% cheaper than in Amman. Consequently, Jordanians choosing to travel internationally looking for cheaper destinations. In terms of cost of living, Amman positioned 131st out of 244 cities in the World and 9th out of 17 cities in the Middle East (Expatistan Cost of Living Index, 2016).

Global and regional challenges include geopolitical instability, competition and seasonality. Several studies indicated that the geopolitical situation influenced negatively the tourism sector in the Arab World (Chingarande, 2014; Madankan & Ezzati, 2015; Esmail, 2016). The challenge that could be concluded is that urban and demographic growth has clearly occurred in a period of political instability in the Middle East, economic stagnation and backdrop in tourism development and visitation. Amman and tourism activity have been significantly impacted by the national unrests in 2011 and fundamental changes and fight in Syria and Iraq against ISIS until now. Visitation and investments in the tourism sector have been substantially affected as the arrivals at classified hotels in Amman were decreased from 1.5 million in 2010 (before Arab Spring) to 1.1 million in 2015 (MoTA, 2010; MoTA, 2015).

Although **Cairo** is one of the leading tourist destinations in the Arab world it is still facing both internal and external challenges, such as population growth, political instability pressure and tourism based problems. The uncontrolled urban population growth is considered one of the observable problems in Cairo as it is the largest city in Africa and the Middle East. Cairo has an estimated 2016 population as high as 12 million, with a metropolitan population of 20.5 million, which represents the majority of Egypt's population (World Population Review, 2016). The historic centre of Cairo suffers from chronological problems such as very high residential densities, poor accessibility, narrow streets, the absence of vacant land and open spaces, and insufficient infrastructure and services (World Bank, 2008) which disturb and perturb the tourists during visiting the historic places in the city. Since the 1960s the historical centre of Cairo witnessed major urban development projects through the construction of buildings and complexes in various modern urban and architectural styles, which, however, are incompatible with the nature and function of traditional urban surroundings (Hassan, de Trafford, Youssef & Serageldin, 2008). These urban projects contributed to the destruction and demolition of different historical attractions (historic houses, historic shrines and mosques). One of the most observed examples is the urban transformation of the Darb al-Ahmar area of historic Cairo, which lost much of its historic fabric after the completion of Al-Azhar Park (Elshahed, 2016). Another problem



related to urban development is the lack of road capacity in Cairo which is a major hindrance facing the implementation of sustainable urban tourism planning (USAID, 2012). What made it worse is that there is a lack of funding for preserving and conserving these fragile heritage sites and the confused ownership of the land parcels in the historic core. Because of the urban population growth of Cairo, many kinds of pollution have appeared. They are generally resulted from construction and demolition debris, municipal solid waste, and industrial waste. Solid waste management is a big challenge for Cairo municipality due to the negative impacts of the uncollected or remaining waste materials on air and water quality, tourism and commerce. The city produces more than 15,000 tons of solid waste per day generated locally (World Bank, 2015). Visual pollution emerged mainly from haphazard urban sprawl especially in the overcrowded districts like Abbassia, Shubra and Helwan. Air and noise pollution is a serious problem due to decades of uncontrolled vehicle emissions, urban industrial encroachments and garbage burning. Most of the cars in Cairo streets are old and thus they are not equipped with modern systems of car exhaust. Due to the biomass burning, traffic, industrial emissions and secondary aerosols, a mysterious black cloud appears over Cairo every fall (Bang Quoc Ho, 2012) causing serious threats to the health of both residents and visitors. Therefore, tourists who are not familiar with such high levels of pollution will be more susceptible to the diseases (Khoder, 2007).

The political instability in Egypt generally, and particularly in Cairo which resulted from the civil unrests of Egyptians reduces sharply the tourist demand from the overseas markets in terms of visitation, hotel occupancy rates in addition to tourism related businesses during the last five years (UNWTO, 2012). The political life is still going to instability after 2011 revolution stepped down the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, which forced the travel agencies to choose alternative safe destinations for their tourist seasons. Tourist numbers in Egypt were decreased from 14.7 million in 2010 to 9.3 million in 2015 (CAPMAS, 2015). Such decline has collapsed the tourism industry in Egypt especially in Cairo and Sharm El-Sheikh as they are the most visited tourist destinations in Egypt.

Despite the potentials and opportunities that qualify **Dubai** to be a leader in the tourism industry in the entire World, numerous challenges still face the future of tourism development in Dubai. Although Dubai has a satisfied level of political, economic, and sociocultural stability, it is still susceptible to external changes and unstable situations. Due to its economic and tourist nature, it is more susceptible to the economic fluctuations, financial crisis, political volatility and terrorism in the World in general and the Arab world. Dubai was not far enough from the reflections of the global financial crisis in 2009 especially the greater downturn in Dubai's hotel industry. Hotel occupancy rate in Dubai declined by 16%, respectively, in the first four months of 2009 vis-à-vis the same interval in 2008 (Research and Markets, 2009). The proximity to the unstable and conflict countries influenced Dubai negatively where the terrorist attacks in Iraq and Syria distorted the overall image of the Middle East. Such events discourage tourists to visit the region especially Westerners as they are more vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

In terms of accommodation, Dubai competes for building extraordinary hotels with luxurious facilities as it has 94,217 hotel rooms in 2015, third of them are luxurious, and these rooms increase in an accelerated way yearly, 98,949 until June 2016 (Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2016a). Hoteliers reported occupancy rate of 86% in 2015 and 85% in 2016 (Ibid), but new rooms openings may confront a slump if visitors do not reach estimated numbers, which may push them to adopt low pricing strategy. Thus, economists may criticize the large sums of money investing in an industry as changeable as tourism, leading to a few fears of an economic recession. Another factor makes tourism industry in Dubai more changeable is seasonality, as the temperatures of Dubai are very high in the summer (40°C-45°C). There are some trivial declines in the number of Dubai tourists during the summer (Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2016a). Hotels typically reduce rates

during the seasons with lower demand to drive occupancy (Hotels and Hospitality Group, 2014). An official awareness of the seasonality has been adopted by the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing to counteract the seasonality impacts.

Another challenge of urban tourism development is the environmental issues and the lack of public spaces and unused lands which makes Dubai more jammed. Congestion and atmospheric pollution have been aggravated with the increase of private car ownership. The UAE government has enacted a considerable body of legislation such as the federal environmental law of 1999 (No. 24) which addresses the protection of the environment and development of its natural resources but it still needs more amendments to cope with the recent environmental challenges appeared like solid waste management. Dubai is used to obtain superlative world records, but obtaining the superlative record of producing waste in 2011 is a dissatisfied proud. The General Waste stream has increased from 550,350 tons in 1997, 1,523,822 tons in 2003 to 2,689,808 in 2011 (Saifaie, 2013). Recently, Dubai has made some efforts to recycle huge amounts of waste. In 2011, 175,000 tons of recyclable material were collected by Dubai Municipality and by private companies (Saifaie, 2013) and that is still inadequate on the way of agreeable waste management. Despite the cultural significance of the archaeological and traditional resources in Dubai, the artificial or the modern attractions have the lion share of Dubai's image. The complementarity between the past, present and future is a prerequisite for successful tourism development. Therefore, new initiatives have been appeared to conserve and rehabilitate some cultural and historic sites in Dubai. Until now, 160 historic buildings have been restored and by 2016, the Architectural Heritage Department plans to take this number up to 220 (Gulf News, 2016).

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by the data reviewed and discussed in this research, urban tourism in the Arab world represents an energetic sector with opportunities and potentials for tourism development regarding Dubai, Cairo and Amman cities having their own characteristics. Those cities have different opportunities, attractions and competencies for branding themselves. For example, Amman and Cairo are known for cultural heritage and leisure attractions, gastronomy, archaeological remains, old buildings, and traditional souqs and bazaars. Research findings show that the wealth of historic environment is one of the major opportunities for urban tourism in both cities. Both are old capitals with a rich history and much-diversified heritage resources which were invested to transform certain urban areas to touristic attractions centres. Because of being a mix of different attractions and service, the combination of all these opportunities makes possible to claim that the two cities are likely to continue as important urban destinations for the foreseeable future. The nature of tourism in Dubai is somehow different from Amman and Cairo. Dubai is known for entertainment, modernity, landmarks, malls, massive urban development and luxurious accommodation. The Dubiest attractions that cannot be experienced in any other city made Dubai the city of superlatives. The secure and stable political situation in Dubai and the United Arab Emirates, in general, is a great opportunity for tourism in Dubai.

Despite the success that Amman, Cairo and Dubai have had to date as premier destinations, they face some mutual challenges and each city faces different challenges, thus the research endeavour five major challenges, seasonality, pollution, congestion, instability, competition and funding. The three cities have not equal resources and capacities for developing their own urban tourism branding themselves. Both Cairo and Amman suffer from lack of investment in urban tourism development and infrastructure improvement. Jordan and Egypt focus on forms of tourism other than urban tourism such as heritage tourism. The political instability in Egypt which resulted from the civil unrest of Egyptians reduces

sharply the tourist demand since 2011. Although Dubai has a satisfied level of political, economic, and sociocultural stability, it is still susceptible to international, national and regional conditions which are influenced by financial crises, economic fluctuations, political volatility and terrorism. The three cities face some similar challenges of environmental issues, urban expansion impacts, waste production and the lack of public spaces which makes the cities more jammed. Eventually, the research concluded some recommendations that could contribute to the development of urban tourism in these cities.

## Recommendations and managerial implications

Based on a review of the literature and deep analysis of the challenges facing Amman, Cairo and Dubai, recommendations and managerial implications were suggested. They are supposed to help decision makers, tourism planners and tourism promoters in Amman, Cairo and Dubai cities to overcome the challenges, minimize the negative impacts of tourism development, and enhance the opportunities of urban tourism if properly implemented in the future. The following planning recommendations and managerial implications are forwarded with their possible considerations:

It is to give a priority to urban tourism development in national long-term policies and giving more attention to comprehensive tourism planning. Due to the diversity of the characteristics of urban tourism in Amman, Cairo and Dubai, planning requires involving various stakeholders with different and complex interests involved in tourism development. Stakeholders' participation is very much useful in accomplishing most of the development goals and getting logistic and financial support.

The three cities should develop their urban tourism products continuously by improving the infrastructure services; as well as improving tourism services and facilities and providing new ones. Enforcement of the current environmental legislation is necessary to protect the environment from the harmful impacts of urban development and population growth, as it still needs more amendments to cope with the recent environmental problems appeared like pollution and solid waste. Sustainable tourism development requires protection of the authenticity and integrity of the tourism resources. Part of the tourism revenues should be allocated for preserving the natural and cultural heritage sites from the urban expansion of the cities. Loans, grants and other financial support should be provided to the local authorities (like municipalities and tourism directorates) for developing the existing services and facilities in the cities such as signage, parking, cleanliness etc.

It is recommended that the governments should do their best to stabilize the political situations in Jordan, Egypt and UAE, and the Middle East in general, so it can ensure the safety and security of both tourists and local people. Brightening the dark image of the Arab region imprinted in the psyche of most of the tourists could bring back the tourism sector to normality, and then move it to growth. The ministries of tourism and tourism organizations in collaboration with the marketing authorities should study the competitors and how they exploit and promote the resources of urban tourism, and benefit from their experiences. In addition, they should study the local, regional and international tourism markets to identify the needs and desires of the tourists seeking cities as places to visit.

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