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Building a destination-operating model for successful transformation during adversity: The case of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt

Abstract

The aim of this study is to highlight how tourism development trajectories' (TDTs) boundary-spanning nexuses can be used to prevent abandonment of Egyptian tourism destinations during adversity. This study argues that this aim can be achieved by investigating rational synergistic solutions, which may ultimately help generate a corrected context for destination transformations. However, despite rising concerns about TDTs, many abandoned destinations across the globe are failing to fully integrate TDTs' promises into their transformation strategies and operating models. The findings reveal that capitalizing on TDTs' boundary-spanning nexuses and alignments may help create meaningful change and allow collaborative values to enable a leap forward in the ways of operating destinations. Based on findings, it is concluded that understanding TDTs' interconnected links may build better contexts for destination transformation. A useful destination-operating model to address the interests of destination planners and concerns of struggling businesses for successful transformations is presented.

Key words: destination development trajectories; transformation; intervention; destination operating model; Sharm el-Sheikh; Egypt

Introduction

Traditional assumptions hold that destination transformation incorporates both structural amendments of the current situation through redesign of systems and processes and attitudinal improvements in the ways in which people consider and understand their interconnected links, with the aim to create better contexts for destination transformation (Breakey, 2005; Pavlovich, 2003, 2014). However, to achieve persuasive transformation that affects the performance of a destination, leaders and businesses must innovatively transcend systems, models, processes, structures, and attitudes to combine values and audacious shifts (Henderson, 2002; Rodríguez, Williams & Hall, 2014). These transformational pursuits primarily include discovering multiple tourism development trajectories (TDTs) or patterns that create synergistic change, support collaborative values, and recognize people with active mindsets (Saarinen, 2004). These TDTs enhance joint production systems and enable integrated sets of value-focused activities to help produce a leap forward in ways of operating destinations and businesses (Breakey, 2005; Faulkner, 2002; Pavlovich, 2003).

So far, however, there has been little discussion on the conceptual and strategic bases for understanding the TDTs notion's contribution to positively influencing destination transformation contexts. As key players in building better contexts in which abandoned destinations can survive, leaders should work closely in a visionary manner with businesses and executives to delineate and realize needed breakthroughs in destination-operation models. Achieving real breakthroughs, however, demands that from

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the outset, the parts and parties in the destination development process merge in a new compatible TDT (CTDT) centered on a unified, compelling tourism development vision to guide all destination transformation quests (Mekawy, 2014; Russell & Faulkner, 2004). This missing consideration identifies a key gap in destination transformation research, which has precluded finding answers to questions about effective transformation in research results (McLennan, Ruhanen, Ritchie & Pham, 2012). The following research question thus arises: which approach, breakthrough, or real-world intervention can help better address the destination transformation anxieties of various stakeholders?

Egyptian destination management scholars, strategists, and planners, in particular, have not focused on research on potential destination transformation interventions or on TDTs (i.e., synergy nexus, strategic approaches, and operating models) to prevent abandonment of Egyptian tourism destinations. Nor are such destination transformation issues clearly noted in the Egyptian government's refreshed 2013–2020 tourism strategy developed by the Egyptian National Competitiveness Council (ENCC, 2013; Mekawy, 2014). Hence, this qualitative research study has three overarching goals: 1) to investigate and deliberate upon the conceptual differences between the connotations of "destination transformation" and "destination change," a question often overlooked in destination management literature (Breakey, 2005; Faulkner, 2002); 2) to enrich understanding of TDTs' features and synergies, which may deliver breakthroughs in destination transformation practices at stressed destinations in Egypt and elsewhere; and 3) to introduce a useful destination-operating model to address the interests of destination planners, concerns of struggling businesses, and desires of tourists for successful transformations.

Literature review: tourism destination and transformation concerns

The idea of transformation is among the most significant points distinguishing the schools of thought on destination management (Pavlovich, 2003, 2014). Despite its critical practical importance, transformation remains under-theorized. The notion of transformation was described forty years ago by George Land (1973), the father of (business) transformation theory — a cornerstone theory of natural processes that integrates the principles of creativity, growth, and change into corporations' strategic planning and organizational transformation as the depiction of the structure of change in natural systems (Hess, 2010). Land's (1973) seminal work, *Grow or Die: The Unifying Principles of Transformation*, illustrates change as a series of joining S-curves, each with two cutoff points — the moments in time when the rules of survival change. Land (1973) made the influential distinction between three dissimilar sets of dominant rules for survival: entrepreneurship, success and growth, and diversification (Hess, 2010).

Land's line of thought implies that the system of tourism destination development with S-curves (called TDTs in this paper) must account for possible transformational procedures and currently applied practices to make sense of times of uncertainty and adversity. This development system may eventually help provide possible sustainable solutions for several destination transformation problems (i.e., operational challenges, destination abandonment, employees' biased attitudes, and poor business performance) in negatively affected destinations (Pavlovich, 2003; Saarinen, 2004). In destination transformation contexts, therefore, transformational change may entail a process of changing the destination's appeal, mainly shaped by one (or more) productive TDT, from this inbound-based TDT (ITDT) to a domestic-based TDT (DTDT) or from one tourism development pattern to another. This destination development system also implies the process of moving from one destination development stage, state, or identity to another (Saarinen, 2004).

So far, however, destination transformation scholars have rarely discussed providing an understandable foundation to grasp the conception of the transformation-governing protocols that should be used by the parties responsible for operating the development system within a given destination under transformation. It, therefore, can be argued that a set of transformational approaches and interventions, along with a proactively prepared code of behaviors, is critically necessary in the various settings of diverse destination development systems (Mekawy, 2012; Russell & Faulkner, 2004). To date, tourism science has adopted a broad view on the role of transformational change perspectives in destination management, including controversial approaches (Faulkner, 2002; Pavlovich, 2003). Most scientific and professional information describes the dynamics of change in the businesses in threatened destinations and explains the ineffectiveness of survival intervention actions and the causes of complications of change (Saarinen, 2004).

However, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the tourism business environment has changed dramatically over the past twenty years between 1990 and 2010, leading to more uncertainty than ever about the growth of destinations (OECD, 2014). The most significant factors include the growing emergence of unpredictable terrorism attacks, the intentional downing of civilian planes, and sudden social and political unrest, which have tremendously weakened some tourist destinations, making them ghost towns (Breakey, 2005; Hossny, 2018). Such radical global transformation, which severely harm tourist flows to destinations, has required that scholars, policy makers, destination entrepreneurs, and travelers discover new explanations, clarifications, notions, operating models, and knowledge that did not exist even three decades ago between 1980 and 2010 (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). Such transformations entail facilitating alignment between alternative, peer-to-peer TDTs notions, which play noticeable roles in destination experiences today, and new synergistic, systematic uses of destination resources, competencies, and capabilities (Breakey, 2005; Richards, 2010).

However, most national and international destination development systems — not to mention operating models, particularly those related to trajectory interconnection schemes — have not kept pace. This failure highlights the importance of revisiting the concept of destination transformation and its role in undergirding the operating mechanisms of TDTs' interrelationships. A sound conceptual base, therefore, is needed to develop existing ideas about the intrinsic properties of destination transformation contexts (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Ateljevic & Tomljenović, 2016). The next section outlines noteworthy features on the concept of destination transformation and introduces the required conceptual basis of the TDTs notion to help develop new approaches, reframe perspectives, build destination-operation models, design intervention strategies, and eventually, positively influence destination transformation.

The concept of destination transformation: problematic connotation notes

Most previous tourism studies utilized the terms "destination change" and "destination transformation" generically or in a default manner, leading to some disproven claims based on misunderstandings, misconceptions, and oversights (Condevaux, Djament-Tran & Gravari-Barbas, 2016). This situation indicates confusion about the concepts of change and transformation in the tourism literature on destination management, revealing a critical definition problem. The main aim of this article, therefore, is to describe a destination transformation concept for those unfamiliar with the notion and to discuss the extent to which change and transformation theories help to understand structural change in a unique monotrajectory-based destination (Zahra & Ryan, 2007). To address this challenging conceptual issue, the author followed a refined, innovative, three-step platform approach. The first step in identifying the meanings of the two words ("change" and "transformation") was to investigate them in a trustworthy

dictionary to determine their semantics and possible similarities and dissimilarities in usage (Murphy, 2003). This step clearly emphasized objectivity over subjectivity.

Second, the use of the two terms in destination management literature was traced and critically analyzed in comparison to the dictionary definitions. The significant concern was not the use of the purely theoretical definitions of the concepts of change and transformation but, rather, understanding their key differences (Breakey, 2005). Change and transformation involve two different approaches to developing a sustainable future for a destination through targeted alterations (McLennan et al., 2012). However, the basis of using both effectively to safeguard a destination's robustness for the future is recognizing their significant differences. The third step of the three-step platform was to propose an operational definition of destination transformation to guide this argument. This step is significant because adopting well-defined concepts and consistently using words can help avoid any possible ambiguity (Murphy, 2003).

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* published in 2016, defines *change* as "to subrogate or replace with another." However, *transformation* is defined as a major and radical change, usually in the way that someone or something looks (Breakey, 2005). These two words often have a degree of relationship, but a new informational opening can be found by making decisions based on the unique influences of dissimilarities (Murphy, 2003). Non-experts may argue that the two words are semantically similar because their contextual meanings both refer to the use of diverse influences to modify a destination's status quo with the aim to attain better results. To casual observers, this statement seems to be true. However, misconceptions regarding the words' dissimilarities critically hinder the construction and adoption of sustainable destination transformation systems, operating models, strategies, and approaches today (Faulkner, 2002).

Based on this argument, the second step of the proposed multiplatform approach was to stimulate discussion on considering connections between understanding transformation concepts and their real-world usage. This debate explored the extent to which a state-of-the-art literature review on strategic planning for a destination could help identify ways of treating the problematic fuzziness of the destination transformation concept to verify possible operational differences. Finally, this clarification could help answer the study's key question: why are these differences significant? In short, it is essential to distinguish destination change from destination transformation because the terms are often used interchangeably in the tourism literature. Destination change refers to new and discursive discourses or to digressive and incremental modifications in existing identities, TDTs, practices, and processes (Breakey, 2005; Saarinen, 2004). In contrast, destination transformation usually refers to a fundamental institutional change that allows replacing a traditional TDT with another or forming a new future path of development within the same destination (McLennan et al., 2012). Drawing on the notion of definite and gradual adaptation, this core argument in this paper is that the concept of destination change should be understood by grasping the idea of making momentary responses to external influences (i.e., tourism crises).

This new grasp of destination transformation will compel concerned partners to temporarily modify certain fixed initiatives and programs, whether cross-cutting or not, to achieve the desired results for a particular TDT (Condevaux et al., 2016). However, this type of alteration is considered to be a type of tentative, reactive intervention using policy change and provisional remedial actions (Rodríguez et al., 2014). The implication is that in many critical cases, the extent of the alterations of a destination's surroundings may make the progressive adaptation tactic inadequate, particularly during a sudden, profound, destructive collapse of the influx of international tourists (Amara, 2016; Henderson, 2002).

This inference, in turn, may lead to the realization that destination transformation should be realized through grasping all the radical and profound systematic activities performed by concerned people, bodies, and businesses within the destination's TDTs. This recognition should be guided by modifying the main philosophies, values, beliefs, and principles underlying why governments, businesses, and individuals make certain arrangements (Breakey, 2005). Unlike destination change, sustaining destination transformation does not require any external influence, and its fundamental nature makes it more likely to be enduring and pragmatic (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Based on the third step in the proposed multiplatform approach and the reviewed literature, this paper suggests an unambiguous operational definition of the destination transformation concept, as follows, supported by the notion of a willing attitude mind-set amid destination leaders and businesses (Yip, Wong & Ernst, 2008).

Destination transformation consists of shifting from one TDT to another or from one tourism development pattern to another. This fundamental change management strategy is aimed at intentionally and substantially reshaping the destination's performance, productivity, appeal, and identity. This goal is accomplished by systematically applying a typical significant change, developing the destination's TDTs and their interrelated components. Doing so requires close alignment of the destination TDTs' resources, capabilities, people, strategies, procedures, and competencies with the overall strategy and vision for development. Ultimately, this approach helps reinvent new growth contexts and strategies.

In this context, the paper's main interest lies in the use of *transformation* as an expressive term that may help create the conceptual basis for understanding the TDTs notion. Tourism scholars, destination leaders, and businesses, therefore, should recognize that this conceptual background of destination transformation studies — the system of connotations, norms, opportunities, opinions, and models that supports and informs their research — is a key part of the design of any destination-operation model. Such a model depends upon the idea of the synergies of destination TDTs (Baggio & Cooper, 2010). The following sections illustrate the value of the TDTs notion by demonstrating how destination transformation in practice encompasses several TDT patterns that ultimately may require different systematic explanations and approaches. The significant case study of Sharm el-Sheikh is presented to promote this discussion.

Strategic alignments for destination transformation

Originally, many different schools of thought emerged on destination transformation management approaches, each with its own protagonists (Saarinen, 2004). However, many have not been evaluated from a strategic perspective, particularly when there is an imperative need for an operational paradigm to overcome the odds against a destination's success. To develop a strategic alignment transformation (SAT) approach that may help successfully align ITDTs' and DTDTs' strategies and resources and ultimately reinvent destination growth contexts and strategies, the available research identifying SAT success features was reviewed (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). Three leading motifs recurred throughout the literature: (1) understanding of TDTs' specifics; (2) mutual understanding of the interoperability effect among all TDTs; and (3) integration of these understandings into destination transformation and development efforts. Based on these motifs, scholars have advocated a variety of approaches to encourage cross-trajectory harmonization solutions and two-way practices that include TDTs' joint production systems and integrated sets of value-focused activities (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). However, the study found no literature suggesting approaches, models, interventions, or breakthroughs for use in early-stage destination transformation, such as close alignment of the destination's TDTs' resources

and managing boundary-spanning nexuses between ITDTs and DTDTs to prevent destination abandonment during adversity.

The aim of this section is to present an approach that consolidates a clear understanding of destination transformation within TDTs' boundary-spanning nexuses and operational synergies activities. This approach can serve as a technique to ensure alignment between TDTs' strategies and the destination's overall development strategy in order to support effective, sustainable growth that prevents abandonment of destinations and mitigates businesses' struggles when facing adversity. The strategic alignment of knowledge about TDTs has become a priority in most destination development strategies and processing plans (Selen & Ogulin, 2015). However, the alignment of the mode of destination transformation demands more than endorsement of the destination's progress. Alignment is about interchange, cooperation, partnership, reliance, and positioning all levels of TDTs on the same page regarding key future development goals and objectives. It, therefore, is argued that aligning TDTs' strategies, policies, plans, and practices remains a major challenge for destination transformation (Breakey, 2005).

The proposed SAT approach, regardless of its specifically nontraditional foreknowledge, radically changes leaders and businesses' mind-sets toward destination performance and productivity. Instead of continuing to pursue remedial actions to fix any harmed TDT, the SAT approach uses TDTs' boundary-spanning nexuses and synergies to achieve operational valuable results when destination leaders and businesses span TDT boundaries (Yip et al., 2008). These valuable results exceed what is required. They comprise a wide variety of tourism development outputs that differ in how TDT production is achieved, and they are classified differently for future destination development purposes (McLennan et al., 2012). The proposed SAT approach, which is essential to prevent abandonment of tourism destinations, seems to be effective at fostering destination transformation research. For example, Sharm el-Sheikh, once an iconic tourist destination in Egypt, has suffered dramatic social and political transformations (Althnayan, 2012; Hossny, 2018) that have turned it into a deserted city (Hossny, 2018). These new transformations provide a distinct context for exploring the possible interconnections, linkages, and alignments between a harmed ITDT and another promising DTDT within the destination-operating system.

Methodology: case site, context, problem and situation

In this research, the investigation site is the Sharm el-Sheik resort. Sharm el-Sheik is an Egyptian tourist destination located in South Sinai Governorate, on the coastal band along the Red Sea (Althnayan, 2012). As a destination, Sharm el-Sheikh has faced operational trouble, and its performance and appeal have experienced a harmful situation. The destination businesses' overall productivity has dropped, and personnel seem to have low enthusiasm. The problem started when the terrorist bombing of a Russian plane taking off from Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2015 profoundly influenced Egypt's tourism industry in general and the Sharm el-Sheikh resort in particular. According to statistics published by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt (CAPMAS, 2016), international tourism to Egypt sharply decreased by 51.2% in the first half of 2016 compared to the same time period in 2015, largely due to a slump in Russian tourists after the 2015 terrorist bombing.

The same report also shows a decrease of 14.9% in British citizens and 6.4% in German citizens among inbound tourism arrivals (CAPMAS, 2016). International tourist nights spent in Egypt also fell from 49.5 million to 13.5 million, a sharp decline of 70.5% in the fiscal year 2015/2016, leading to the worst destination development scenario since 2010 (CAPMAS, 2016). Emerging professional reports

have also traced the problem to when domestic tourism-based practices and activities were suggested to improve the destination's operational efficiency (Hossny, 2018). However, Sharm el-Sheikh businesses and employees seemed to be unwilling to follow this alternative for destination growth during tumultuous times of change. Since then, many obstacles have been put in place to limit any increases in influxes of local tourists to Sharm el-Sheikh. For example, Sharm el-Sheikh government leaders required that all promotional campaigns be directed at local markets as a mandatory operational intervention method to provisionally counterbalance the severe shortage of international tourists (Amara, 2016). However, Sharm el-Sheikh businesses and employees have not shown strong commitment to welcome and retain local tourists under these imposed operational rules. Instead, many businesses have applied rigorous instructions against locals in their internal service delivery systems.

These severe operational interventions have pushed employees to behave in a biased manner, producing unfavorable experiences for locals. Consequently, Sharm el-Sheikh has lost both local and international markets, the majority of employees have been laid off, and many businesses have closed. Sharm el-Sheikh, once a favorite holiday destination for nationals and internationals, has become a ghost city after the tragedy of the 2015 Russian plane crash (Amara, 2016; Hossny, 2018). Detecting such changes in Sharm el-Sheikh's community suggests that a reference situation exists. Sharm el-Sheikh, therefore, was proposed as a unique case study for a set of transformation challenges, including destination transformation and destination leaders and businesses' reluctance to shift their mind-sets or approaches to cope with the changing operational nature of this destination (Amara, 2016).

Rationale for selection of this destination

The case of Sharm el-Sheikh, a destination experiencing tumultuous change and uncertainty, was chosen because it is representative of the reception of transformational change by many harmed destinations, struggling businesses, and reluctant-to-change individuals. The case underlines that traditional survival strategies and approaches (Breakey, 2005; Hossny, 2018), crisis effects (Laws & Prideaux, 2005), and the prejudiced tendencies among destination residents (Breakey, 2005) tend to aggravate the problem of abandonment experienced by destinations and businesses during adversity (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Notably, there is a lack of case studies on abandoned destinations that draw on evidence-based practices that inform transformation pursuits, approaches, and interventions. This case study, therefore, may help to explain the best current theories and evidence for strategic approaches, well-informed interventions, and rational synergistic solutions that may positively influence destination transformation (Faulkner, 2005; Hossny, 2018) through considering the TDTs' promises.

As a single extreme case study, Sharm el-Sheikh reflects a high degree of failure to prevent destination abandonment during successive Egyptian tourism crises (Amara, 2016; Hossny, 2018). Extreme cases of such critical phenomena can be helpful to understand the causes of exceptional but significant happenings (Neuman, 2000). For example, Sharm el-Sheikh was selected based on evidence that using traditional approaches may lead to incomplete knowledge that hinders improvement of destination's TDTs' productivity, operational potentials, and sustainable business transformation (Amara, 2016). In particular, Egyptian professional tourism reports indicate that Sharm el-Sheikh's tourism development system and the contemporary changes that have threatened it shed light on the issue of smooth transitions from one TDT to another in a destination under transformation (Hossny, 2018). The Sharm el-Sheikh case presents a rare case of abandonment due to notable failures to adopt well-informed interventions in destination transformation pursuits. This case, therefore, may contribute to the understanding of how the TDTs notion can positively influence destination transformation contexts and prevent abandonment.

Data collection, data analysis and techniques

For this empirical review, information on the case studied was gathered from multiple data sources, and multiple methods, strategies, and related theories were used to obtain a broad understanding of the destination abandonment phenomenon. Triangulation of sources involved biographical data, professional reports, quantitative data, phenomenological study, sensory experience (rather than rationality alone), and informal conversations with employees and entrepreneurs in destination businesses sites (e.g., Sharm el-Sheikh restaurants, hotels, airport, and visitor centers) and destination leaders' offices (e.g., city council and governorate headquarters). In July 2016, 25 leaders, 18 tourism planners, 33 entrepreneurs, and 52 employees in destination tourism workplaces were contacted to ask if they were willing to participate in this case study. After obtaining the required permission from the concerned authorities and businesses, only 105 interested participants out of 128 respondents (82%) — 19 leaders, 14 tourism planners, 28 entrepreneurs, and 44 employees — were informally approached in the pre-specified sites.

Participants were qualified for inclusion if they had worked in Sharm el-Sheikh for the past five years; had a minimum level of knowledge regarding the concepts of tourism development, TDTs, destination operating model, destination transformation, destination change, synergistic solutions, and strategic interventions; understood the risks of tourism crises; and showed enthusiasm for participating in assessment of the case study's outcomes through e-mail. To address ethical issues in research, the participants were notified that they had the right to withdraw from the informal discussions at any time. The investigator noted repeated views, perceptions, and comments by the surveyed participants. The data collected through informal conversations were analyzed using thematic analysis and field notes coding techniques (which included analytic memos, details of informal conversations with staff, and recording of personal experiences, perceptions, and circumstances).

In this context, informal conversations, as an inconspicuous method of data collection, were considered to be valuable to understanding and capturing the destination's transformation, growth, and operational contexts in which the participants interacted to cope with transformational changes. Epistemologically, this approach could reduce potential threats to the validity of the results obtained from the case analysis and investigation (Neuman, 2000).

Validation of conversations outputs

To establish the trustworthiness and rationality of collected data, the participant-checking technique (Neuman, 2000) was utilized, which relied heavily upon sharing the interpreted data, reported descriptions, and findings with the investigated participants. This technique gave the participants a second chance to crystallize their meanings, fine-tune reports, and supply extra information if needed. This technique also increased the capability to verify the truth in the current case study. This method is believed to have been of immense value in this case study because it allowed the researcher to double check some discussions to determine the integrity of the conversations and the reasonableness of the obtained information in this case study. Finally, the empirical evidence established that grounded theories could enable improvement of the research (Neuman, 2000).

At the end of the study, the researcher returned to a destination business investigated and presented the interpretations of the repeated comments by the surveyed participants. During the presentation attended by the surveyed participants in addition to five other entrepreneurs and the business owner, a set of illustrations described the initial thoughts for the destination-operating model heavily based on the TDTs notion. The attendees shared important comments generally endorsing the interpreted

ideas. Some improvements were proposed, mainly related to the graphical visualization of the TDTs notion through separated but crossing trajectories. The initial thoughts on the TDT-based destination-operating model and its related terminologies also received emphatic support.

Findings

To grasp how to develop an operation model that supports destination transformation pursuits, a descriptive ethnographic investigation was conducted, surveying several professional individuals from the destination. In this section, the findings from informal discussions with destination leaders, entrepreneurs, planners, and employees are presented, along with the contextual descriptions, methodological explanations, and case rationality previously detailed. The fundamental rationale for undertaking these informal discussions was that knowledge of Sharm el-Sheikh stakeholders' views on the potential inter-relationships between its TDTs that reflect real-life experience could produce positive transformations and eventually help prevent destination abandonment and business struggles amid adversity.

Participants' perceptions of the TDTs notion and its linkage to Sharm el-Sheikh's current growth context, performance and appeal

In general, several participants, particularly entrepreneurs and employees, indicated surprise at being asked about a term they had never heard of. Consequently, they expressed a desire for a simplified, detailed definition that aided grasping the TDTs notion's relevance to the destination's growth context, performance, and appeal issues. In particular, the majority of the surveyed participants had limited awareness and understanding of the TDTs notion and its ties to destination performance and appeal. This opinion was evident in the reported comments made by several leaders, entrepreneurs, and employees, including statements by Omar, Raghad, and Amira (all pseudonyms). Omar understood the TDTs notion as follows:

I do not know this term exactly. However, I can guess that it is any new development pathway that contributes to reducing the problems of tourism development in Sharm el-Sheikh. TDT, therefore, can be regarded as a training course or copying of successful practices that contribute to solving the growing developmental problems in the tourist destination. However, it is good to see such notion in a designed way, and I would suggest the final designed TDTs model be distributed among Sharm el-Sheikh residents to help inspire their developmental and transformational efforts.

Omar's perspective on the TDTs notion implied simple thoughts about its features, components, and associated impacts. Likewise, Raghad, who claimed that she participated as a tourism planner in designing several tourism development plans and strategies, revealed a limited understanding of the TDTs notion:

I guess TDT is an envisaged roadmap that entails an intense process of producing remedial actions. In other words, TDT is what destinations leaders decide to develop to eventually help destinations survive.

In agreement with these views, Amira understood that:

TDT is the implementation framework within which developmental decisions are made to help recover the effectiveness of the destination's operations.

In general, the surveyed participants indicated that:

- They deemed their ignorance of fundamental transformational notions and terms (e.g., the TDTs notion) to be a major source of the failure to respond to successive critical calls for transformational change of Sharm el-Sheikh.

- They sensed that their wrong conceptual knowledge, approaches, and, most importantly, mindsets could be barriers to transforming the destination and improving their businesses' bottom line.

Sharm el-Sheikh stakeholders' perceptions of the current destination-operating model

The majority of the participants surveyed generally supported the notion that they lacked a collaborative operating model that encompassed the common TDTs, systems, and practices needed to drive Sharm el-Sheikh as a destination and its businesses and resources in a sustainable, productive manner. The participants also conveyed major anxieties about the feasibility of realizing such a model without clear visual controls that could help identify the operational problems. However, Sharm el-Sheikh leaders and planners also showed high degrees of commitment to understanding the scientific techniques by which the interrelationships between TDTs operate in order to grasp how to implement a smooth transition between TDTs.

Discussion and implications

Egypt's Ministry of Tourism reports indicate that although Sharm el-Sheikh has primarily been a classy resort site dedicated to serving international visitors, locals have also considered it to be a great option for beach, leisure, entertainment, and recreational trips, especially during uncertainty when prices fall dramatically (Amara, 2016). In this context, the challenge to positively influence Sharm el-Sheikh's transformation has required generating a new growth context in which tourism patterns, alternatives, and resources could be innovatively aligned with its TDTs system. Doing so could develop possible, sustainable solutions for its abandonment problem after the 2015 Russian plane crash transformed Sharm el-Sheikh into an abandoned destination as both international and domestic tourist arrivals dramatically fell (Hossny, 2018). Since the beginning of this crisis, domestic tourism-based practices and activities have not provided a reliable catalyst for recovery to sustain Sharm el-Sheikh as a tourist destination (Amara, 2016).

To the contrary, recent professional reports have indicated that the majority of Sharm el-Sheikh businesses and employees are reluctant to shift their mind-sets or approaches due to their inability to cope with the changing values, needs, and interests of more domestic tourists (Hossny, 2018). Unfortunately, this diagnosis reflects a clear lack of understanding among Sharm el-Sheikh residents about the TDTs notion and its synergistic solutions that can be used to overcome abandonment. Accordingly, one participant commented, "Sharm el-Sheikh businesses have inappropriately and drastically slashed prices to attract inbound tourism groups, and Egypt's government, keen to uphold inbound tourism traffic, altered its security and safety schemes following the disaster." These traditional but flawed intervention techniques have been unsuccessful and reflect a reactive mind-set rather than a proactive one that would be more effective at spotting and making the most of business transformation opportunities.

One possible explanation of this finding is that, in the wake of tourist crises, destination leaders and businesses have tended to focus their transformation pursuits on remedial interventions to enhance the traditional TDT's ability to respond effectively to strategic changes. However, the destination's TDTs' sense and potentials must be recognized to achieve meaningful change and realistic solutions to alleviate crises' negative impacts on destinations' attractiveness and competitiveness, leaders' behaviors and attitudes, and businesses' performance, financial success, and productivity levels. These TDTs' boundary-spanning nexuses, synergies, and alignments need to be capitalized on to create meaningful change and collaborative values that will enable a leap forward in the operation of Sharm el-Sheikh

and its businesses (Amara, 2016). Moreover, speaking with Sharm el-Sheikh residents revealed that leaders and businesses have tended to plan development strategies based on the concept of efficient, effective sustainable growth to prevent destination abandonment and business struggles. However, these change efforts have been conducted hastily, using traditional approaches and development trajectories ill-suited for the context of change Sharm el-Sheikh faces. This situation has led to incomplete knowledge of the TDTs notion, which has hindered the progress of the destination's performance, appeal, and sustainable business transformation.

From the analysis of the informal discussion's findings, it is evident that Sharm el-Sheikh — which should be focused on merging its TDTs around a consolidated tourism development vision for times of adversity — has failed to articulate a multidimensional viewpoint that can be used to build a shared view of the growth context studied: shifting the destination's appeal from the ITDT to the DTDT to prevent abandonment and businesses struggles amid adversity. In practice, destination residents and businesses should have access to large-scale sources of knowledge — whether through their recognition of the destination's context of growth, designs, and patterns of tourism production or the business environment, development experience, staff expertise, and tourist demands (Condevaux et al., 2016; Selen & Ogulin, 2015). However, the participants reported that Sharm el-Sheikh residents and businesses collected, engaged, and exploited knowledge related to the TDTs in an incoherent, muddled, unproductive way that significantly weakened the destination's performance, appeal, and operational ability to evolve.

This line of thought implies that the destination's TDTs knowledge grounds can be considered to be Sharm el-Sheikh leaders, businesses, and staff members' recognition of what productive patterns of development exist and what different kinds of tourists desire. Employing this knowledge in a collective manner can help Sharm el-Sheikh leaders and businesses accomplish transformations, more efficiently improve businesses' performance, decrease business risks, and fully exploit growth opportunities. Consequently, the core argument of this research is that effective transformation pursuits must follow strategic principles and knowledge-transfer networks that do not further impair destination businesses and employees. These networks' cognitive, operational, longevity, and knowledge features and their synergized vision for the destination can then help develop the improved transformation strategies required to reduce difficulties during change and uncertainty (Baggio & Cooper, 2010).

Deliberation on Sharm el-Sheikh stakeholders' perceptions of the current destination-operating model

Key findings from the informal discussions conducted provide evidence that Sharm el-Sheikh has a great tourism development strategy, but it has been poorly executed in practice, often producing no results relevant to either destination transformation or business survival. One important comment from the participants' confirms this finding:

The misaligned destination-operating model was the main source of Sharm el-Sheikh's businesses' poor performance and the degradation of the destination's appeal in the wake of the last crisis of the Russian plane crash in October 2015.

To successfully carry out a new transformation strategy in today's fast-changing tourism environment, destination leaders and businesses must more quickly create critical TDTs-level alignment and synergies around the strategy's vision and approach to metamorphosize (Faulkner, 2002). The first step to do so is to determine whether the destination and its residents and businesses have a shared overall operating model. If so, they can cascade the novel transformation strategy down to each TDT in the

destination and out to each activity in the business. Accomplishing this requires a new approach to strategic alignment — one that handles the transformation hurdles and constraints and ensures that businesses and individuals can be organized to more resourcefully and satisfactorily deliver and execute the destination's transformation strategy. To tackle this problematic operational context, this research has developed a new transformational approach called the SAT approach, which identifies misalignments and gaps in the execution of transformational change pursuits during adversity.

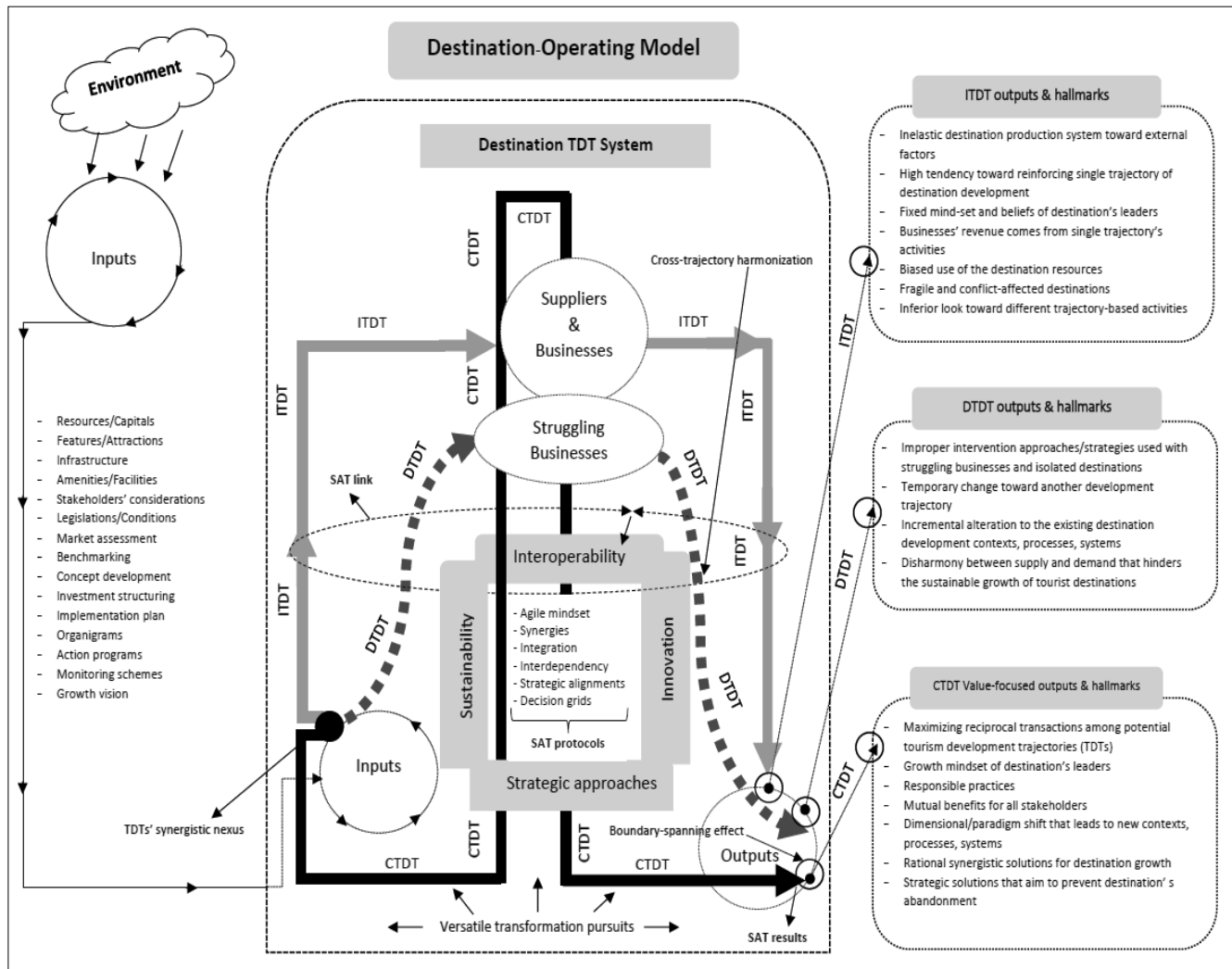
This approach was developed using two intrinsic dimensions (TDTs' strategic synergy and TDTs' functional synergy) and boundary-spanning alignment across these two dimensions to make smart use of supportive basic productive resources and functions and to extend the interoperability effect among all TDTs during destination transformation to prevent destination abandonment and business struggles (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Similarly, deep analysis of the case study revealed that Sharm el-Sheikh leaders and businesses have customarily operated within the boundaries of the ITDT to fulfill their communities' needs, services, and concerns — and also within the mind-sets of incoming international tourism groups the businesses commercially serve (Yip et al., 2008). However, this focus reflects limited strategic forethought on how destinations should be run to deliver value to their tourists and the wider community. In this age of inclusive correlations, synergies, and alignments, it is perplexing that destination leaders and businesses have fully concentrated their growth plans on a single component (i.e., the ITDT) of the destination complex system. Effective interventions based on strategic alignment foresight are needed to cross the boundaries of TDTs to support holistic perspectives for operating the destination, which are more beneficial than a singular outlook during transformation (Faulkner, 2002, 2005).

It, therefore, is proposed that an overall operating model based on foresight and aimed at advancing alignments and processes to deliver greater value to beneficiaries would challenge Sharm el-Sheikh officials to be strategically involved in foresighted operational interventions and to deliver a bundle of training programs to Sharm el-Sheikh leaders and businesses. Mastering transformative actions and decisions demands a holistic grasp of the unique components of a destination-operating model, so the next section introduces these typical components and briefly reviews the use of interoperability inception, boundary-spanning interventions, and synergy issues related to TDTs.

A proposed destination-operating model for successful transformation during adversity

Informed by the data derived from the informal discussions, the case analysis, and the literature review; a destination-operating model to maintain strategic transformation in tumultuous times of change was developed (Figure 1). The development of this operation model is based on the premise that understanding and managing the synergistic nexus among TDTs within the destination development system and knowing the variables that affect the transformation are essential to formulating transformation strategies and destination-operating models to produce more resilient, adaptable destinations (Richards, 2010; Yip et al., 2008). This understanding may help Sharm el-Sheikh businesses and leaders grasp how destinations transform, particularly during tumultuous change and uncertainty, by capturing the positive effects and links of a cross-trajectory harmonization solution.

Figure 1
A TDT-based destination-operating model



Accordingly, an early destination-operating model (Figure 1) was constructed to aid in conceptualizing the destination transformation variables and their links with clustered intervention to help prevent destination abandonment and business struggles during adversity. Cross-trajectory harmonization, as presented in Figure 1, entails identifying the differences and reframing the commonalities of the destination's potential TDTs to enhance their levels of interoperability, performance, profitability, and productivity. Doing so moves them in a new strategic direction and makes it possible to increase the opportunities for a successful transformation process for both the destination and its businesses (e.g., Breakey, 2005; Yip et al., 2008). Based on the reviewed literature, Figure 1 outlines the core of the proposed destination-operating model, which involves a persistent process of interventions, designations, and TDTs based on transformation management. Accordingly, this study highlights the destination TDT system presented in Figure 1 as the key part of the proposed destination-operating model.

This model incorporates the idea of destination TDTs to describe the specific ways in which destination transformation may occur in times of adversity. The proposed cross-trajectory harmonization solution

presented in Figure 1 can be effective at bridging intertrajectory boundaries in an innovative way that may help executives manage the synergy nexus challenges to achieve a joint vision, cooperative keys, and two-way practices for new, better destination transformation in the future (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). This strategic perspective can help tourist businesses, planners, governments, and other stakeholders positively affect the tourism policy making process, driving possible developmental transformation efforts in specific strategic directions. This solution might ultimately help increase the desirable transformation impacts on destinations and ameliorate long-term destination competitiveness (Faulkner, 2005).

However, although a specific strategic direction might achieve the desired threshold criteria of destination transformation of making business sense and making sense of experience, the crucial determinant in the decision making process seems to be the ability to extend the interoperability effect (OECD, 2014) among potential TDTs (Condevaux et al., 2016). In the strategic mode, interoperability defines the level to which systems, elements, and players can exchange and interpret collective data (OECD, 2014). Based on this discussion, in destination development and transformation practices, any two TDTs are considered to be interoperable if they can smoothly give and take data and then present, utilize, and disseminate data in an understandable manner in both directions and in the destination system as a whole (Althnayan, 2012; OECD, 2014). However, interoperability is relevant to destination transformation pursuits only because this approach achieves shared values.

In this convenient destination-operating model, each TDT seems to be able to retain its inherent landscapes even while harmoniously aligning with other TDTs via common properties, as depicted in Figure 1. Eventually, this may contribute to finding a new compatible TDT and radically transforming and improving the destination's future appeal and performance (e.g., Baggioa & Cooper, 2010). This approach allows improving the market share of struggling businesses by activating untapped TDTs and increases domestic tourists' satisfaction due to higher-quality tourist services in destinations previously unavailable. However, in Sharm el-Sheikh's experience, the needed interventions have tended to be detached because they were designed to increase the international tourist influx within individual TDTs, leading to more neglect of domestic tourists' needs, interests, and values.

Due to the TDT interoperability feature presented in Figure 1, the destination's appeal and growth and the businesses' profitability will endure (Saarinen, 2004). Traditionally, destination development pursuits have focused on the role of businesses and leaders in managing, investing in, and maintaining resources and activities that protect the boundaries of a given TDT (i.e., an ITDT) in order to support fulfillment of business goals and international tourists' needs and expectations (Breakey, 2005). However, in a biased manner, Sharm el-Sheikh's businesses have operated within a framework serving their individual interests and treating the attitudes of their own (inbound) tourist segments and markets as a separate part of the destination development system while neglecting locals' values and needs (Hossny, 2018).

So far, though, there has been little discussion, particularly in Egypt's destination management literature, about the proper strategic thresholds and paradigms for understanding the contributions of destination-operating models to enhancing destinations' transformative pursuits and appeal contexts, which are essential to prevent abandonment of tourism destinations. This research indicates that any attempt to change a destination's appeal using different, alternative TDTs, whether for destination transformation applications in Egypt or elsewhere, must be preceded by appreciation of the required, adequate strategic foundation underlying the formation and application of the optimal destination-operating model, which may help accomplish successful destination transformation. It, therefore, is argued that the pace of change and the gravity of the challenges in such crises demand that destination

leaders and businesses produce broad, consistent, higher-quality transformative contexts, and models, including destination-operating models.

Conclusion

The term "transformation" has received great attention in tourism destination circles but can have different connotations for various individuals, groups, and businesses. In this time of global interconnectedness, change, and uncertainty, transformation creates a need to generate new synergistic value — to expose new openings, to deliver new growth, and to equip the TDTs of any abandoned destination with innovative competencies for the possible alignment of their tourism production properties (Zahra & Ryan, 2007). To better understand this concern, one should recall the question of why some tourist destinations have tried to implement change programs for many years. So far, some destinations, including Sharm el-Sheikh, have either not accomplish the intended results or have simply failed. Here, it is claimed that it is the opacity and elusiveness of certain concepts, rather than the management process of alteration, that may lead to such undesirable ends. While change programs are not a complete cure to the abandonment of certain destinations, the importance attached to the connotations of transformation remain fuzzy in practice (McLennan et al., 2012; Murphy, 2003), particularly for Egypt's harmed destinations.

This paper has presented a novel, notional SAT approach to understand the context in which transformations help prevent abandonment of tourism destinations (Saarinen, 2004). It is concluded that the desired context that can yield positive transformation results can be achieved through a process of strategic alignment. Accordingly, it is argued that SAT protocols should combine aligned procedures of adopting synergistic nexuses among TDTs within the tourism destination development system, foster synergistic production principles in the execution of destination businesses' strategies, reframe the commonalities of potential destination TDTs to enhance their levels of interoperability, and enhance proactive tourism crisis management features. Such protocols may help take destination transformation pursuits to higher levels of excellence by driving practices throughout both the destination developmental trajectories and businesses. Doing so entails embedding SAT protocols in the daily activities of destination leaders, businesses, and employees in order to align attitudes, behaviors, mindsets, and strategic transformation management with the overall destination development strategies. In this context, it has been argued that the success of any destination at producing positive transformations, whether through research, planning, or application, comes down to one factor above all others: the destination residents' ability to understand and cross TDT system boundaries and move toward a shared development vision for that destination's future (e.g. Yip et al., 2008).

To strengthen the capability of the leaders, businesses, and employees in a destination — and scholars' ability to keep pace with different transformation contexts — efforts should be made to expose them to the design and operation of destination TDT systems. Rotations of staff among tourism development entities, industry businesses, and tourism destination research schools could help destination strategists, policy designers, decision makers, businessmen, employees, and researchers better understand and appreciate the challenges and requirements related to the development and use of knowledge on operating models relevant to managing destination transformation. Employee rotations can be implemented through a planned national tourism employee rotation programs. In this context, it is believed that instead of locking tourism employees into a single job category with a specific career path within the private and government sectors, destination entities and businesses should move qualified employees through a variety of positions within departments and teams of managing destination transformation.

However, it should be noted that achieving public–private innovation mobility programs among destination governmental entities and businesses is neither usual nor readily carried out but a perpetual, dynamic task in progress.

The study has both theoretical and managerial implications. First, the review helps close a gap in the destination transformation literature by elaborating an understanding of the main discrepancies between what "destination change" and "destination transformation" mean in the body of tourism literature on destination development. Second, regarding managerial implications, the review presents evidence supporting an approach to ensure the effective transformation of both tourism destinations and businesses to prevent destination abandonment and business struggles during adversity. Such an approach can potentially be targeted at achieving strategic alignment between the destination's TDTs and other pursuits aimed at reinventing the destination's growth contexts and strategies (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). These implications hold great significance for the future management of destination transformation based on the TDTs notion and the SAT approach.

Although the study has attained its overall goal, it inevitably has some limitations. First, the study was conducted during one short-term visit to the case site, which lasted three weeks. Undoubtedly, three weeks was not enough to investigate all the destination leaders, businesses, and employees' performance of activities and pursuits addressing various transformation problems. A longer time for such research would be beneficial. Second, the surveyed sample was small — only 105 participants — so it might not represent the majority of the destination stakeholders. To generalize the results for a larger sample, the study should involve more stakeholders in informal discussions. Third, this research was restricted to a partial qualitative analysis of published data that helped generate appreciation of the complexity and realities of the destination abandonment phenomenon, using various destination development patterns and trajectories found at Sharm el-Sheikh. However, it should be noted that the qualitative analysis method used in this study is not completely adequate for generalizing the findings to different larger transformation experiences (Baggioa & Cooper, 2010). Further research, therefore, should involve quantitative assessments of the destination development system, TDTs, business attitudes, and employee behaviors in the setting of destination transformation. Researchers should also investigate whether the use of qualitative assessment methods instead of thoroughly data-based information is critical to understand problematical destination transformation issues and contexts.

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