

**INCREASING LOCALS' INTEREST IN TOURISM
CASE: SAUDI ARABIA.**

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Due to a recent drop of oil prices, Saudi Arabia (SA) realised the necessity to change its oil-based economy to a more diverse economy. The country's Vision 2030 chose tourism as one way to do so. However, studies have shown a lack of interest and awareness towards tourism from the local population. This thesis was commissioned by Haya Tour, a Destination Management Company, based in Riyadh.

This study aims to increase awareness regarding the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia. It gives clues on how to create an attractive image of the field in Saudi's society in order to attract more people in the tourism process.

Semi-Structured interviews were conducted with four tourism students from Saudi Arabia, to understand their motivations to study tourism and identify solutions to improve the interest given to the tourism industry. The results indicate that Saudis tend to have a negative image of tourism, which could be improved by educating locals about tourism and implementing actions to attract more people in taking part to the tourism field.

Key words Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, Middle East, Vision 2030, Tourism Development, Economy Diversification, Locals' involvement

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SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SA Saudi Arabia

GCC Gulf Cooperation Council

1 INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia (SA) has recently started to develop its tourism industry. The recent drop of the oil prices created an awareness in the Middle Eastern countries about the necessity to diversify their economy. Several countries in the region started to develop 2030 Visions, to diversify their income, in which one of the main objectives is tourism development. (Export 2018.) In this context, Saudi Arabia is changing its political and social structure, from an oil-based economy to an economy viable in a long-term and able to face future challenges (Kamel 2017).

I have always been interested in and curious about Arabic countries and Arabic cultures. It is very far from my culture and yet present in the daily life of my native country, France, which created a desire to learn more about it and understand it better. I have started to learn the Arabic language recently, which developed even more interest in learning about Arabic countries. It came to me naturally to write my bachelor's thesis about a subject that passionate me and to connect it to the tourism field. Realising my thesis about Saudi Arabia is a way to learn more about my interests and discover from a different point of view one of the most conservative countries in the world (AFP 2019 as cited in France 24 2019).

The objective of this thesis is to increase awareness regarding tourism in the Saudi society by giving clues on how to create an attractive image of tourism in the country's society, as a way to attract more people in the tourism process.

This thesis was commissioned by Haya Tour. Haya Tour is a Destination Management Company (DMC) based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and run by Mrs Salwa Al Qunaibit. The DMC offers various heritage and cultural tours all around Saudi Arabia. Throughout our discussion, the commissioner raised some issues about tourism in Saudi Arabia, as for instance, the lack of awareness in Saudi community regarding tourism, the field having a negative reputation in the country, the lack of tourism education and the need for more tourism professionals, this being added to the tendency in Saudi society to believe visiting heritage sites is reserved for western tourists. However, Saudi Arabia has a great potential for tourism development, with various historical and cultural places,

natural assets and a unique and welcoming culture (Al Qunaibit 2019a). The commissioner expressed the interest to know how to raise awareness about the industry in the country as well as how to attract people in taking part in the tourism industry in KSA. (Al Qunaibit 2019b.)

Following the objectives and background, the thesis is divided into two main parts. The theoretical part gives a background to the thesis and for the commissioner. The second part is empirical and focused on research to answer the commissioner's questions. Qualitative methodology was used for the research. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted through with tourism students from the country.

2 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE REGION

2.1 Saudi Arabia

2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula, at the junction between Asia and Africa. It has borders with Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq and Jordan. It is surrounded by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf (Figure 1).

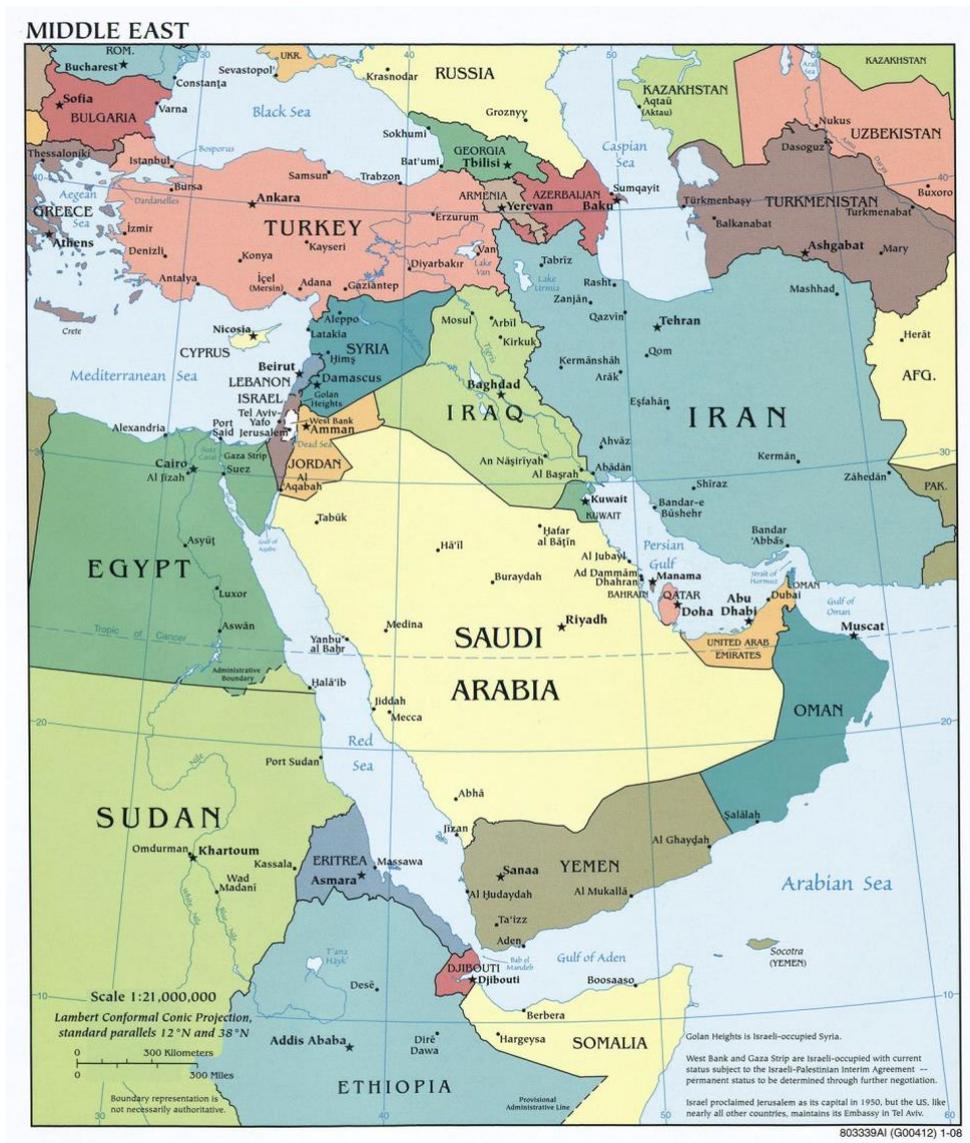


Figure 1. Political Map of the Middle East (Taxomita 2019)

Divided in thirteen regions; Jouf, Northern Border, Tabuk, Hail, Madinah, Qasim, Makkah, Riyadh, Baha, Asir, Jizan, Najran and Eastern Province; it is the second biggest country in the Arab World, after Algeria, and the fifth biggest country in Asia. In terms of population, the country witnessed consequent growth between 1960, with 4,09 million inhabitants, and 2015, with 31,54 million inhabitants, which represent a rise of 600 % in 55 years. (Nurunnabi 2017.)

Saudi Arabia has a long history, the first inhabitants were discovered between 15 000 to 20 000 years ago. It hosts the birthplace of Islam and is still nowadays a role model for the Muslim world. (Wynbrandt 2010.) The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 and ruled by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud since 2015. It is an Islamic state under the constitution of the Holy Quran. (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2019.) King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud named his son Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Crown Prince in 2017, making him the future King of Saudi Arabia (BBC 2019).

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud acts as the King, the Prime Minister, the custodian of the two Holy Mosques and is the highest authority in the country. He designates the Crown Prince, who will succeed him. The Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, acts as Deputy Prime Minister and future King. The government counts 21 other Ministers, some of them also being Princes, part of the council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is responsible for overseeing all the financial, executive and administrative matters. They vote for the resolutions, however, in case of disagreement, the Prime Minister casts the tie-break vote. (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2019.)

2.1.2 Saudi Arabia's Industry

Saudi Arabia is one of the fastest growing economies in the region Middle East & North Africa. Its most developed industry is the oil industry. In fact, Saudi's economy is 90 % oil-based and has a big impact on the country's GDP. The oil industry enables the country to have the foreign exchanges needed for the economy. (Sultan & Haque 2018, 282.)

In 2015, the oil production represented 23 % of Saudi Arabia's GDP, with USD 150 billion. In 2018, the oil industry as a whole represented 45 % of the GDP, second after the service industry, with 50 %. It constitutes 90 % of the exports of the country. It has a role on the country's economic growth, but also on the Middle East economic growth, with a rise of 5 % in 2016. The oil industry is also a tool for the country to build business partnerships worldwide, with the United Arab Emirates, China, India, Singapore and Egypt for instance. (Jawadi & Ftiti 2019, 12–13.)

However, with such a big role on the country's economy, the fluctuation of the oil's price can also affect it. A sudden decrease in the oil's price will have a big impact on the GDP. (Sutlan & Haque 2018, 281.) For instance, after the oil slump in 2014, SA's stock market lost 10,7 % and reached 16 % of public deficit in 2015. Moreover, the price of the barrel has been decreasing these last few years (Figure 2). (Jawadi & Ftiti 2019, 12–13.)

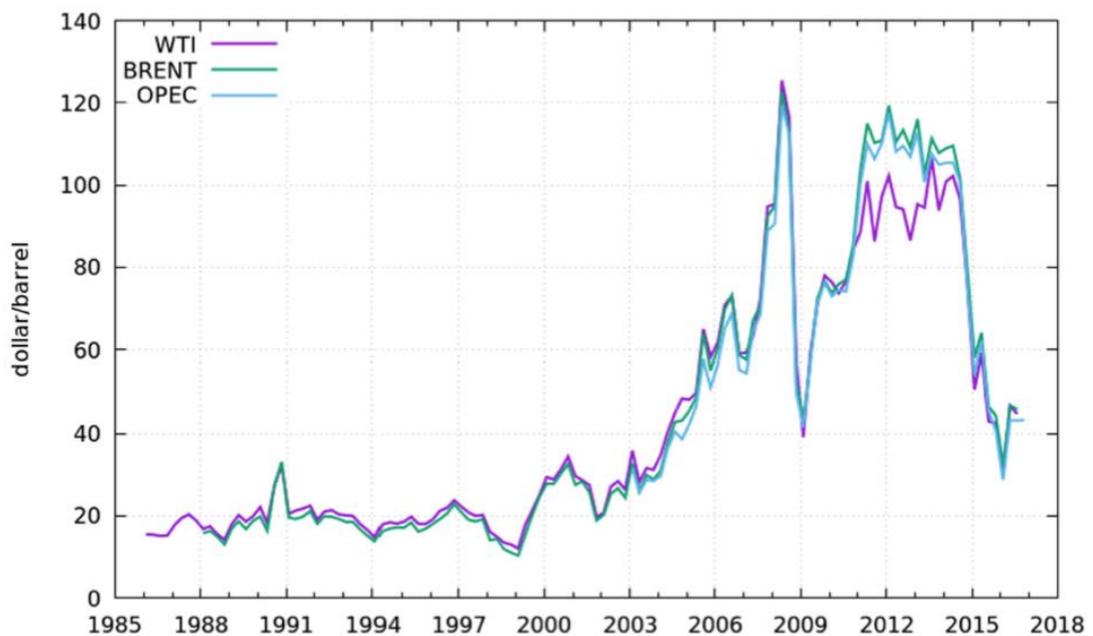


Figure 2. Oil Price Evolution (Bottazzi 2016 in Jawadi & Ftiti 2019)

The oil production is expensive for the country, which is the reason why the government decided to reduce its production, from 7,2 million barrels per day in 2016 to 6,6 million barrels per day in 2017. This initiative is meant to protect

the economy from being oil dependent. Furthermore, to ensure the stability of the economy, the government decided to develop other industries by creating Saudi's Vision 2030. (Jawadi & Ftiti 2019, 13.)

2.1.3 Saudi's Vision 2030

Saudi Vision 2030 is a project started in 2013 and implemented by Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, son of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. It primarily aims to develop SA's economy. This project is a long-term blueprint to achieve the government's goals. It relies on three pillars: being the heart of the Arab and Islamic World, becoming a major investor worldwide to diversify the economy and becoming a hub connecting three continents (Vision 2030 2019).

It has several other objectives, such as creating a sustainable economy, offering opportunities to entrepreneurs, creating new legislations to regulate the economic system, applying the Islamic principle of moderation, connecting Asia, Africa and Europe, creating digital services, making the country more appealing for tourists and bringing income by developing the tourism industry. (Jawadi & Ftiti 2019, 13.)

Two big projects have been implemented as part of Saudi's Vision 2030, Neom and the Red Sea Project. Both are seeking to develop tourism industry in the interest of Saudi's Vision 2030. Planned for 2025, Neom is a project of a new city of 26 500 square kilometres, in the region of Tabuk, on the Red Sea coast (Export 2018). It will operate independently from the rest of Saudi Arabia (The Economist 2017). Strategically placed between three continents, it will be a hub between Africa, Asia and Europe and a major place for trade, innovation and knowledge (Neom 2018). The Red Sea project is a tourism project, aiming to create an ultra-luxury and sustainable destination in a unique location. It will be visa free for most of the nationalities. The project includes an archipelago of 50 islands, volcanoes, desert, mountains and will promote the local culture. A part of the Red Sea Project will be completed and available for use by 2022. (The Red Sea Development Project 2019.) The government created the Red Sea Development Company,

which will develop an economic zone with specific regulations regarding visas, its own social norms and its own business regulations. (Export 2018.)

As other countries in the Gulf, for instance the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia started realising the importance of diversifying its income sources in order to be less oil dependent. The tourism industry offers a great opportunity to do so, as it is a fast-growing industry. (Tayeh & Mustafa 2011.) Moreover, the country is able to invest its incomes from oil industry into developing tourism and improving the infrastructures (Yusuf 2014).

2.2 Tourism Industry in Saudi Arabia

Tourism in Saudi Arabia and more broadly in the Middle East, is growing fast but irregularly. In fact, in 2000 in the region Middle East & North Africa, the number of international arrivals was 37,38 million for 89,18 million in 2017, a growth of 238,6 %. More specifically in Saudi Arabia, the number of international arrivals in 2000 was 6,58 million for 16,11 million in 2017. However, numbers show an unstable growth in the country, in fact the number of international arrivals was 18,26 million in 2014, 11,77 % less than in 2017. (The World Data Bank 2019.)

2.2.1 State of Tourism in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, a third of the yearly visitors are coming for religious purposes. In fact, the Hajj during the month of Ramadan and the Umrah during the rest of the year, are the main reasons for tourists to visit the country (Boniface, Cooper & Cooper 2012, 359–360). Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, it is a pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah that all Muslim should take at least once in their lifetime, if they are financially and physically able to do so. It takes place each year from the 7th to the 12th day of the last month of the Islamic year (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019a.) Umrah is also a pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah, with the difference that it is not compulsory and can be made at any time of the year. It is a less important pilgrimage for Islam, taken whenever one enters the holy city of Makkah. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019b.) Both are concentrated in the holy city of Makkah. However, the government allows religious visa holder to travel for 30

days in the rest of the country. Another form of tourism in Saudi Arabia is business related tourism, which is mainly concentrated in Riyadh and Jeddah. (Boniface, Cooper & Cooper 2012, 359–360.)

Although the country has offered visas for Muslims visitors and recently for visitors attending sports and cultural events, on 27th of September 2019, Saudi Arabia announced the creation of an e-visa, hence opening itself to tourism, as part of Vision 2030 (Al Jazeera 2019). If it used to be one of the most difficult country to enter, Saudi Arabia is now able to deliver electronic visa for citizens from 50 countries, for tourism purposes. This is a historical turn for the country and its tourism industry. (Saudi Arabia Visa 2019.) After launching the tourism visas, the country received 24 000 visitors in 10 days, which is promising for the tourism development (Al Jazeera 2019).

2.2.2 Tourism assets in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is home of a wide range of natural places as well as cultural and heritage sites. The country registers five UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Sites and more than four thousand archaeological sites. (Export 2018.) It has important pilgrimage routes and disposes of some of the oldest archaeological sites of the world (Yusuf 2014).

Rich in History, Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and home of the two Holy Mosques of Islam, Madinah, the Prophet's mosque and Makkah, where Muslims go for the Hajj and Umrah (Lonely Planet 2019), making it one of the most important destinations for pilgrimage in the world and an important religious tourism destination (Yusuf 2014).

Cities like Riyadh and Jeddah have a lot of cultural places to offer. Riyadh, is one of the wealthiest cities in the world, hosts the UNESCO World Heritage Al-Turaif district, and one of the most important museums of the country. Jeddah is the gateway to Makkah and yet considered as the most liberal city of the country. Due to its history and its important foreign population, Jeddah's inhabitants have more liberties than in most of the rest of the country. Jeddah is home of a World

Heritage architecture in the old city and has some of the best diving spots of the country, thanks to its location on the coast of the Red Sea. (Lonely Planet 2019.) The country has archaeological sites, such as Mada'in Saleh, an ancient Nabatean city, similar to Petra in Jordan (Lonely Planet 2019).

The country also promotes nature-based tourism with its natural parks, caves, springs, seaside and islands. (Saudi Tourism 2019.) Indeed, the country has various natural assets, such as the Farasan Islands, the Red Sea, famous for diving and its great marine life, as well as Yanbu, with its white sand shores (Lonely Planet 2019). Saudi Arabia also has a big potential for developing adventure tourism, with sites like the Red Sea or deserts, as for instance Rub Al Khali desert, one of the biggest deserts in the world. (Saudi Tourism 2019.)

Finally, one of the main developing forms of tourism is the event tourism, with sports events, as for instance car races. (Saudi Tourism 2019.) The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) organises Seasons in different regions of the country. Saudi Seasons include eleven tourism seasons all around Saudi Arabia, with different activities promoting the different regions, for instance, sports, entertainment and business events. (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage 2019.)

2.2.3 Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism in Saudi Arabia

The development of tourism in Saudi Arabia is rather recent. One of the reasons the tourism industry has not been developed earlier was the government's fear of the cultural differences between tourists and the conservative society (Yusuf 2014.) Hence, the first form of tourism the country has been developing was domestic tourism, which is a way of preserving values, traditions and the identity of the country, at the same time as developing the industry (Burns 2007).

In order to attract tourists, Saudi Arabia has to market its new image to western countries. It is what the government have been trying to improve these last years (Yusuf 2014). However, as shown in Figure 2, Saudi Arabia is located in an economically, politically and culturally sensitive area, a region with conflicts and

very dependent on oil industries. The region Middle East North Africa is suffering from this image of a conflicted region, which gives a bad representation for the tourism industry (Timothy 2018).

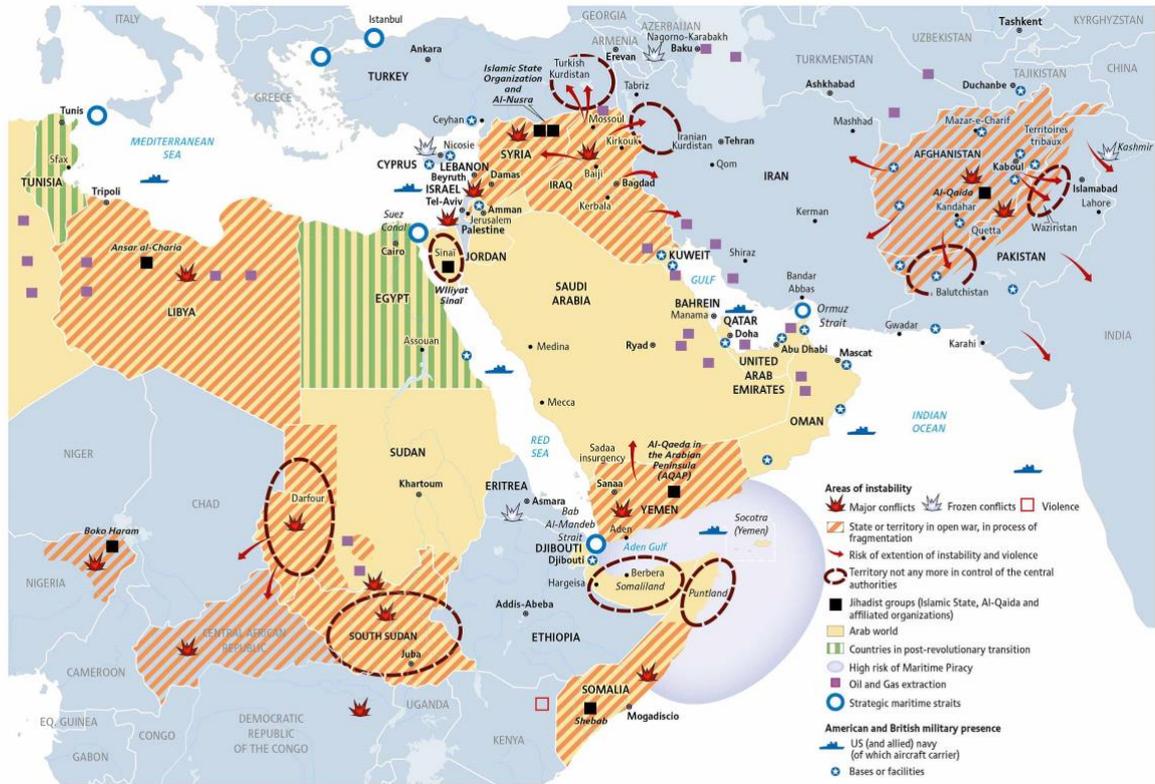


Figure 2. Middle East: Geography of Chaos (Rekacewicz 2015).

Although Saudi Arabia benefits from religious tourism, one of the main challenges for the industry is increasing the nights spent in the country and attracting visitors to other places than Makkah (Yusuf 2014). One of the main necessities is to develop and improve existing infrastructures. Saudi Arabia is aiming to receive investments to develop infrastructures, as well as to develop protected areas. It received USD 28.6 billion from private investors in 2016 for that purpose. Moreover, in order to enhance investments from private parties, the country created the Kalafah programme, which can loan up to USD 400 million for any tourism related project within the country (Export 2018).

Saudi Arabia is implementing new initiatives to develop tourism within the country, on a national and international plan. They are building new entertainment venues, theme parks and new hospitality and leisure structures. (Hotelier Middle

East 2017.) The country is also planning a new airport in Jeddah, which will be able to receive 100 million passengers. As mentioned earlier, two of the biggest investments made in the country are Neom and the Red Sea Project. (Export 2018.)

2.3 Tourism Development in Gulf Countries

Over the last years, the Middle East has been experiencing an important growth in the tourism industry. This growth is due to the efforts put into the industry from the governments of the Middle East & North African region. As Saudi Arabia, other Middle Eastern countries have developed tourism industry in order to develop their entire economy, as tourism is an industry that engages several other industries and therefore brings positive outcomes for the global economy of the country. (Saleh, Assaf, Ihalanayake & Lung 2015, 209–210.)

Developing tourism is a positive solution for economic problems, it creates new opportunities for the country, it is also a way to promote export trade and generate foreign exchanges. The tourism industry is also beneficial for local communities, indeed, it brings new infrastructures, used by tourists as well as locals and creates employment. In fact, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the number of jobs created by tourism was 277 million in 2014 and is expected to increase to 357 million in 2025. Finally, income generated by tourism can be reinvested in the country to improve living conditions, existing infrastructures as well as to protect cultural heritage. (Allowaish 2016.)

Oil prices have played an important role in the tourism development of this region. Their economy is vulnerable, as it is relying on the oil industry and has been affected by several crises, for instance the oil price decline in 2016, which slowed down Middle Eastern countries' GDP growth from an average of 2,4 % in comparison with 2014. Most of the Gulf Council Countries (GCC) have created National Development Plans to diversify their income, planned for the next 20 to 30 years, with 5 years of immediate actions to evaluate whether they will meet their long-term objectives or rearrange them. Being in a strategical place between Europe and Asia, GCC have positioned themselves as important hubs for the

aviation sector and are putting out their assets to make transits passengers stay and visit the region. (Trade Arabia 2017.)

2.3.1 Dubai

One example of a Middle Eastern country that developed tourism activity is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for instance the Emirate of Dubai. Dubai's Emirate was originally a desert and the city of Dubai was a fishermen and pearl divers' town. Dubai is now the most famous of the seven Emirates in the country, in particular for its experiences and touristic sights. It is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and one of the safest, with a very low crime rate. Nowadays, Dubai can be perceived as a benchmark tourism destination in the Arabian countries. Thanks to tourism development, Dubai is no longer perceived as an oil-business Emirate but as a tourism destination. Moreover, the previous income from the oil industry made possible big investments and a rapid development. (Schwaighofer 2014, 20–24.)

A study has been made about the perception of tourism by Emiratis of Dubai, their attitudes towards cultural, economic and behavioural differences between local people and tourists, after the success of Dubai as a tourism destination. It also evaluated the feelings of Emiratis towards a potential growth of tourism in the next years, as planned in the Vision 2020 by the government. The study has been realised in 2015 on 428 participants, all Emiratis citizens of Dubai. On the total of participants, 50,5 % of the respondents were males and 49,5 % were females, all from 20 years old to over 60 years old and from different social background. (Zaidan & Kovacs 2017, 298). The study found that 90,66 % of the respondents were in favour of tourism and tourism activities in Dubai, only 1,4 % are completely opposed to tourism presence and activity. Dubai attracts millions of visitors every year, however, 59,4 % of the respondents find the number of tourists appropriate and 20,8 % think the number of tourists should increase and 9,2 % think it should increase significantly. Several other questions have been asked from respondents to determine their point of view regarding tourism development in Dubai. The authors found that 62,6 % of the respondents believe Dubai's development first serves tourists' needs rather than locals' needs,

however, 64 % think Dubai would not be what it is nowadays without tourism activity. 83,3 % said tourism is essential for the city's prosperity. Finally, the majority of the respondents, 56,7 % are satisfied with Dubai's goal to attract 20 million tourists by 2020 when 43,3 % are not. (Zaidan & Kovacs 2017, 298–303) This study shows that tourism development is perceived in a positive way in this Middle Eastern country. (Zaidan & Kovacs 2017, 303.)

To conclude, it appears that overall, Emiratis have a positive attitude towards tourism activity in Dubai. It is also believed that Dubai would not be what it is if it were not for tourism. Moreover, the majority is favourable to a further growth of the tourism activity. This study shows that the efforts the government has made to develop tourism in the United Arab Emirates, specifically Dubai, is received positively by Emiratis, as it benefits the city and its economy. (Zaidan & Kovacs 2017, 303–305)

2.3.2 Sultanate of Oman

As other countries in the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman is developing the tourism industry. The government has implemented Vision 2040, an updated version of their previous Vision 2020, aiming to develop an economy that is not oil-based, to prepare the country to the decreasing oil production (Khan & Krishnamurthy 2016). Developing tourism industry will benefit the whole region as well as the country, through the creation of job opportunities (Khan & Krishnamurthy 2016).

To develop the industry, Oman's government is trying to increase the number of Omani workers in tourism when the majority of employees in that field are foreigners. In that perspective, Khan and Krishnamurthy (2016) realised a study to understand the reasons why tourism students are willing, or not, to develop tourism businesses in Oman.

This survey was realised on 223 tourism students from different regions of Oman. Among these students, 57,4 % are female and 42,6 % are male, 84,8 % study tourism by choice. The authors determined the three main reasons students

chose to study tourism are, the perspective of a career in the field, because they obtained a scholarship and because tourism was the only major offered to them. The main reasons for choosing a job in tourism are, having a good starting salary, having a society-respected job and a job accepted by their family. The main motivation for female students is the absence of sex discrimination in the tourism industry. Among all the respondents, 66,8 % are not aware of the possible careers available in tourism and 73,1 % are not aware of the job vacancies in tourism. Moreover, 76 % are not aware of the tourism development happening in Oman and 87,9 % do not have knowledge of the tourism campaigns made by the government. Finally, only 33,2 % show interest in entrepreneurship. (Khan & Krishnamurthy 2016.)

The study concludes that tourism students are not motivated by interest in the field but by social and cultural pressure and are not interested in opening a business. The number of SMEs in the tourism field are limited as Oman students prefer traditional jobs and do not want to take risks in investing in tourism sector. In fact, it is common for tourism students to drop out of tourism studies because of a lack of awareness in the future of the industry. Oman's government should focus more on entrepreneurship by Omanis and communicate better to students in order to better develop the industry. (Khan & Krishnamurthy 2016.)

2.3.3 Qatar

After the economy crisis of 2008, Qatar has decided to expand significantly the tourism industry, hence, not relying on natural resources anymore (Newstex Trade & Industry Blogs 2015). During the year 2016, tourism brought USD 27,9 billion to the GDP of Qatar (World Travel & Tourism Council 2017, in Abdallah & Al-Bakry 2019, 603). Qatar's government is aiming to increase this number by 5,2% before 2030 and increase employment by 5,33% by the same year. (Abdallah & Al-Bakry 2019, 603.)

If the country started by developing Doha's area, the development of infrastructures and international sports events are participating to enlarge the process to the rest of the country. (Newstex Trade & Industry Blogs 2015.) One

of Qatar's goals is having locals involved in tourism. To reach this goal, several projects will be implemented, for instance Doha Tourism Project, a seaside project based on marine theme and Qatar's heritage, that will offer possibilities for local companies to be involved in the economy of the country with low leases (Trade Arabia 2018). As part of its Vision 2030 plan, Qatar is starting a new project called Next Chapter, which will be implemented during the next five years in six different regions across the country and financed by national and international investor. Next Chapter is developing products and services to enhance the tourism experience in the country. This project also aims to place Qatar as a meeting place for culture, authenticity and modernity as well as sports, business and family entertainment. Through this project, Qatar's government wants to create a relationship between tourists and residents, in order to improve their experience and create a conducive environment for tourism development. (M2 Communications 2017.)

Over the past few years, tourism has already contributed to Qatar's economy and started settling in the country. To maintain the growth of tourism, Qatar has decided to develop a different approach than the seaside tourism, with, for instance, the New 3S, for Sports, Shopping and Skyscrapers, with for example the football World Cup in 2022. (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri 2015, 2.) It is also aiming to develop all-year round festival and event tourism to attract visitors all year round (M2 Communications 2017). Moreover, the country is planning to become a world class destination for MICE tourism, following Dubai's tourism development's model (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri 2015, 3).

3 LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TOURISM

3.1 The Role of Community's Involvement in Tourism

In order to understand how the local communities can be involved in tourism, we need to know what community involvement means. Community involvement is the propensity of the local people to implicate themselves into the daily life of their living environment (Lee 2013 as cited in Fun, Chiun & Songan 2014, 61). Locals' involvement has a major impact on the success of tourism development in a region. They are impacted by the activity, on an economic and social aspect, in a positive or a negative way. This is the reason why their voices are important for decision makers. (Eshliki & Kaboudi 2011, 333–334) Moreover, if they are indisposed to participate in tourism development, its positive impacts will only benefit the elite of the society (Ndivo & Cantoni 2016, 275).

To have local involved in the tourism industry, they need to feel interested in it. Being part of the implementation and being part of major decisions will increase their support (Niezgoda & Czernek 2008 as cited in Muganda, Siriman & Ezra 2013, 55). It is important for local people to be involved and heard about the tourism sector, in fact, the tourism activity affects their place of living, their direct environment. Moreover, tourism activity has a great impact on the local communities, it brings income to the city, region and country. For long-term objectives, the involvement of the local communities is essential, that is why the country should value people's opinion. To that end, initiatives have already been implemented in Saudi Arabia, such as increasing consultation with tribes' leaders when developing new projects or products. (Seddon 2000, 11)

Studies have shown that the impact tourism has on local communities differs according to their culture and traditions; thus, their willingness to invest themselves in the tourism industry differs according to the same elements (Eshliki & Kaboudi 2011, 335). Having people involved in the tourism process is very important for the development of the activity, it is a way to make sure the industry will grow. If the locals benefit from the tourism activity, they will be eager to participate in it and to develop it (Pongponrat 2011 as cited in Muganda, Siriman

& Ezra 2013, 55). Furthermore, local community participation is essential to the planning and management of tourism (Drake 1991 as cited in Eshliki & Kaboudi 2011, 334). Community's involvement is very dependent on their skills, competences or capitals. Without a minimum of financial or social capacities, it is hardly possible to have an impact or a role to play in the tourism industry. (Ndivo & Cantoni 2016, 275)

In order to make tourism a tool for the economic development of a country, local communities are a key factor (Ndivo & Cantoni 2016, 275). In fact, when developing tourism, the lack of community involvement has been proved to be a barrier for tourism development (Muganda, Siriman & Ezra 2013, 56).

Raising awareness in the community about the advantages in working in tourism is important and would help them being involved and interested in the industry (Tayeh & Mustafa 2011). Researches have shown that tourism has a great impact on the economy of a country (Ismail & Turner 2008 as cited in Fun, Chiun & Songan 2014, 61). However, local communities do not always have a positive image of the tourism activity. In fact, despite its economic benefits, some aspects, such as sociocultural, legal and environmental impacts, can be considered as negative by the local community (Tosun 2003 as cited in Fun, Chiun & Songan 2014, 61). To reduce these negative impacts, it is primordial to include locals into the tourism process and to understand their wants as they have a very important role to play in it. If they benefit and see the positive in this activity, it will only help it to grow. (Tatoğlu et al. 2000 as cited in Fun, Chiun & Songan 2014, 64) Furthermore, when the community adopts a positive attitude towards tourism, it increases tourists' satisfaction and thus increases tourism development and helps its success (Tayeh & Mustafa 2011).

3.2 The Role of Entrepreneurship in Tourism

Entrepreneurship has a big role to play in economy growth and community's involvement in the society. It has been widely recognised as having positive effects on all the different fields of the economy (Yusuf & Albanawi 2016, 47) and has an equal effect on a country's economy, regardless the development of a

country (Stojanović 2018, 72). It also helps reduce poverty, providing jobs and income to a region (Salem 2014). A country's economy is more likely to grow if it has a well-developed entrepreneurial activity, as it will bring income that can later be used to reduce poverty or re-invested to create more job opportunities and hence more revenues (Salem 2014)

Entrepreneurship has been used as a tool to develop the less developed areas, organisations have been working on supporting and encouraging entrepreneurial ideas, with the objective of generating more income to reduce inequalities (Salem 2014). In fact, in developing countries, the economic growth is dependent on the entrepreneurial activities of the population (Yusuf & Albanawi 2016, 47). Apart from its positive effects on the economy, entrepreneurship is also a tool for social growth, as for instance it brings innovation, knowledge and technical changes (Nieva 2015).

Tourism entrepreneurship is an efficient way to develop the economy and businesses, especially in rural areas. In fact, tourism entrepreneurship enables regions to develop their tourism assets, such as fauna and flora, cultural and historical heritage and artefacts. Tourism entrepreneurship is a tool for giving interest to a place, by transforming and renovating its assets and creating new resources through innovative thinking. (Koh & Hatten 2014 as cited in Nongsiej & Shimray 2017, 2.) Moreover, tourism entrepreneurial process creates more opportunities than any other industry, as it requires more stakeholders than most industries (Atelievic & Li 2009).

In the process of diversification in Saudi Arabia, initiatives like entrepreneurship have a big role to play in the country, as it can be used in a wide range of fields (Salem 2014). It is a key factor to the rapid growth, as for instance through jobs creation and the implementation of a self-sufficient society and can benefit the country on the long run (Yusuf & Albanawi 2016, 48) Entrepreneurship has already in the past contributed to shaping the economy of Saudi Arabia and has contributed to rank it among the fastest growing economies in the world (Yusuf & Albanawi 2016, 49), this being a reason to further develop entrepreneurship in

the country and motivates it to develop an entrepreneurial mindset for its people (Nieva 2015).

3.3 Women in Saudi's Society

Women, however, are facing challenges in the country, regarding education and career advancement. In Saudi's society, the rules are made by the Sharia and Islam, following the traditional values, which emphasise on the importance for women to respect the socio-cultural traditions of the country, which has an impact on women's education and career (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan & Rajasekar 2017). In fact, cultural, social and religious factors play an important role in the position of women in the society (Hodges 2017).

Following these traditions, women in Saudi Arabia are facing difficulties to have a career outside of home, because of the deep-rooted values, according to which women are firstly homemakers, mothers and wives. These stereotypes are hindering their possibilities to pursue a career. Nevertheless, if women choose to pursue a career outside of the socially accepted fields, they might be seen as challenging the society and the cultural traditions. (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan & Rajasekar 2017.)

Women's education is a recent concept in KSA. The first school for girls was built in 1956 (Alsuwaida 2016) and higher education was made accessible in 1962. The Saudi's government has started to invest in women's education, giving women access to majors that have been previously reserved to men, at the Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University. Despite all the positive changes regarding women's education, it is not equally accessible in every region. Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam have more opportunities than Northern and Southern regions, due to their location and their culture. Moreover, opportunities are not enough for the demand and are not meeting the level of education given to men. (Al Alhareth, Al Dighrir & Al Alhareth 2015.)

Women are not given enough qualitative leadership trainings compared to the demand, which prevents them from taking leadership roles in their workplace.

Studies have concluded that culture in the Arab region is creating more challenges for women in the workforce and in the society in general. It is harder for women to access leadership positions and career advancement. Moreover, cultural factors in Saudi Arabia make the development of women's condition slower than in other Middle Eastern countries. (Hodges 2017.) However, women in Saudi Arabia want and are ready to change their place in the workforce within their country. They want the same opportunities as men, but their biggest challenge is to achieve their goal while respecting the laws and traditions of the country. Indeed, respecting a country's values and traditions is a major issue while making a change in a country. (Hodges 2017.) It is hard to implement change in Saudi Arabian society due to the conservative religious system currently in place in the country. While citizens retain an open mind, its religious history poses many obstacles regarding women's situation (Alsuwaida 2016).

Past that desire of being more involved, women have been able to take more responsibilities in the society, including in higher positions, although their participation in the workforce is still low, among the lowest in the world (Hodges 2017). If women in Saudi Arabia are receiving a higher and better education, with more opportunities, for example studying abroad (Al Alhareth, Al Dighrir & Al Alhareth 2015), they are not given better opportunities to work. The future of female leadership in Saudi Arabia is relying on society, but moreover on women themselves to change the traditional view of women and change the leadership system in Saudi Arabia. (Hodges 2017.)

4 THESIS PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Haya Tour

The commissioner for this thesis is Haya Tour, a Destination Management Company (DMC) created in 2009 and based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Haya Tour won the “Best Tour Operator in Saudi Arabia” award, in 2011 delivered by the Saudi Excellence in Tourism Award and under the patronage of Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz (Haya Tour 2015a.) as well as the “Saudi Arabia’s Leading Destination Management Company” award in 2017, 2018 and 2019 given by the Global Travel Awards in Dubai (World Travel Awards 2019). Haya Tour is seeking to deliver excellence to its customers (Haya Tour 2015a). Haya Tour provides a wide range of tours in Saudi Arabia, to sites such as Mada’in Saleh, the Edge of the world and Najran and to festivity like the Camel Beauty Festival. Its offer includes city trips, day trips and overnight trips, to provide the best experience possible (Haya Tour 2015b).

The CEO of Haya Tour, Mrs Salwa Al Qunaibit, was the contact person for the thesis. She raised several questions about tourism in Saudi Arabia, among them, how to attract the local community to take part in the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia and what could be the key to heritage and natural sites being protected by the local community (Al Qunaibit 2019b). From these questions were formed the research objectives.

4.2 Thesis Process

This thesis is part of the bachelor’s process for Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The official objective of the thesis is to develop and show the student’s capacity to apply their knowledge in a practical situation. It makes the transition between studying and working life easier. (Lapland University of Applied Sciences 2019).

This paper was written between April 2019 and November 2019. The time limit was important, difficulties were faced. In fact, it was challenging to find

participants for the interview and the reliable resources to write the theoretical part. The commissioner gave a great freedom about the thesis, which made it difficult to focus on one topic or question, however, after refocusing the questions we found the final objectives. As the topic is a subject for which I have a real interest, the motivation to write about it kept me enthusiastic throughout the whole process. In fact, the subject of this thesis came to me naturally, as Middle Eastern countries have always interested me. It was therefore an evidence for me to realise my research about tourism in Saudi Arabia.

The thesis writing was a very interesting process that allowed me to learn more about the topic and open my mind even more. The process made gave valuable knowledge and supported my professional growth. Moreover, it gave me the opportunity to mature future career projects.

4.3 Qualitative Method

Qualitative method gives a deep understanding of a problematic by collecting precise results and the point of view of participants the research, by asking them direct questions. Therefore, this method provides a more personalized approach to the research, rather than a standardized questionnaire. It also allows researchers to be more involved in the answers and collect the viewpoint of the concerned population, as it implies direct communication with participants (Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke 2004, 3–4). Qualitative research is naturalistic, ethnographic and participatory, it is mostly used in social sciences, as it allows the researcher to interact directly with a population (Kirk & Miller 1986, 9). Qualitative method can be used for further quantitative research. Although qualitative method implicates a small number of participants compared to a quantitative method, it gives deeper insights and understanding to the problematic, which is why it was preferred for this research. The differences between quantitative and qualitative methods are illustrated in Figure 3. Qualitative method also enables the researchers to tackle the problematic and its nuances, rather than using a firm scientific method. It gives more depth to the results and to the problematic. The researchers are able to use their intuition and therefore analyse the answers given. One of the main differences between a

quantitative and qualitative methods lies in the results obtained through each of them. When the quantitative method collects scientific data, the qualitative method collects direct answers to the questions. (Walle 1997, 530–532.)

Tourism Term:	Scientific Method	Qualitative Research
Anthropology Term:	Etic (Science)	Emic (Art)
Characteristics:	Formality Rigor emphasized Mathematical tools prominent	Insight/intuition employed Qualitative data employed
Especially Useful When:	Appropriate data can be gathered Questions can be attacked via the scientific method Many informants needed Adequate time for research available	Formal/scientific methods will not result in needed data Formal models are not useful Few informants are available Time pressures do not permit formal research
Net Result of Tradeoffs:	A sacrifice of possible important data and/or abandoning certain research topics is accepted in order that research is placed upon a firm's scientific foundation	Rigor is sacrificed for the sake of attacking questions which formal methods cannot easily pursue Insights/intuition of skilled researchers are allowed a free need Possible time savings

Figure 3. Science and Art Compared (Walle 1997, 532).

The main objective of this research is to find how to increase interest of Saudis regarding the tourism industry. This research gives answers and opportunities for tourism professionals, such as the commissioner, to understand how to attract more tourism professionals and how to improve the image of tourism within KSA. It is focused on students' perspective as they understand both the tourism professionals and the future students. As discussed previously, community's involvement is important for the success of tourism development, this research is thus focused on providing solutions to be more interesting for the local population and clues about attracting local population in the tourism field, on different levels, professionals or tourists. To do so, the research was conducted through qualitative research method, using semi-structured interviews as a way to collect answers. This method allowed me to collect clear and specific responses to achieve the goal of this research.

A qualitative method is exploratory and collect answers through open questions, therefore the collected answers cannot be predicted (Jennings 2013). As the main objective of this research was to find potential solutions to a problem, open questions were the most suitable way of collecting results.

4.4 Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interview (SSI) can be used when the researcher has enough knowledge about the topic but needs a subjective point of view. It uses a detailed interview guide, identical for all participants. All participants are asked the same core questions. However, as the questions are open, the interview is different for each participant. Researchers are able to investigate about the participant's answers. The framework of the interview is adaptable to each one of them.

The data collected through semi-structured interviews are different than what would be collected through a structured interview. During SSI, the researcher does not control the participant's answers, therefore the results can be subjects to interpretation. (McIntosh & Morse 2015, 1–2.)

There are several ways to conduct semi-structured interviews, face to face, through telephone, using internet and can also be part of a quantitative research. The interviews for this research were realised through internet calls, as the distance between the researcher and the participants did not allow us to do a face to face interview. This way of administering the interviews has its advantages and inconveniences. It makes it easier to reach a population that lives in a completely different area and it is less demanding in terms of time management. (McIntosh & Morse 2015, 7.) Moreover, due to the local culture of this research's participants, telephone interviews were identified as the best way of administering interviews, as it only includes audio communication and exclude visual aspects.

The semi-structured interviews were administered to tourism students from Saudi Arabia, as this population was identified as the most relevant for the research. In fact, students are able to give insights from a youth perspective as

well as from future tourism professionals. Nine students initially answered to the interview request, however, only four of them accepted to conduct the interview. The participants were asked questions about tourism studies in Saudi Arabia (Appendix 1), as well as working in Saudi Arabia, specifically in the tourism field. They have also been asked questions about the promotion of the tourism field and have been given the opportunity to suggest improvements and solutions to make the field more attractive to Saudi students and professionals. Due to the local culture and the age of the participants, the interviews were realised in an informal way.

To reach out to participants, I used networking. My acquaintance in Saudi Arabia sent e-mails to tourism students from different universities throughout the country. We then sent the invitation letter, in English and Arabic, to the interested students and arranged the interviews.

4.5 Credibility

When doing a qualitative research, credibility is a factor to be considered. The evaluation of trustworthiness is essential as research needs to prove their trustworthiness. Although researchers have argued that validity does not apply to qualitative research, this method needs a qualifying check. (Golafshani 2003, 600–602.) In qualitative research, credibility is potentially sacrificed, as the analysis of the results is based on the researcher's instinct (Walle 1997, 532).

Qualitative research does not follow strict rules and formulas. In fact, its analysis relies on the researcher's abilities and the effort put into the research (Golafshani 2003, 600). To be credible, the qualitative method has to be rigorously achieved to be replicable by other researchers. It should also give enough details about the data collected to allow other to evaluate the quality of the results (Patton 1999, 1990–1991).

The goal of this research is to give solutions to increasing Saudi locals' interest regarding tourism, in order to develop the field. The credibility of this research relies in the well-defined objectives and the rigour in collecting results.

4.6 Limitations

During the research process one of the main challenges faced was the language barrier. Due to the researcher's Arabic skills not being sufficient and the locals' English skills not being sufficient either, translators were needed. They helped translating the invitation letter for the interviews, as well as e-mails. They were also present during the interviews, using their English and Arabic skills. Consequently, the results of the interviews might have been biased by the translation and by the interpretation of the translators. The cultural difference between researcher and participants is also a limitation to the research. If cultural aspects have been taken into consideration, it could not be fully understood and might have had an impact on the research, especially regarding the formulation of the interview, which might have led to misunderstandings during the interviews.

Circumstances also created limitations during the research process. The interviews were initially planned for the early summer, however, because of Ramadan and local holidays happening at the same time, people were not willing to participate in the interviews. Therefore, interviews were postponed to early September.

Finally, another limitation is due to the gender of respondent, only female participated in the research. A research conducted on both male and female might have led to different results. Moreover, the results might also be different if realised on a bigger sample of participants.

5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS RESULTS

5.1 Results

The objectives of this research were to increase awareness regarding tourism among Saudis, by giving clues on how to create an attractive image of tourism in the country's society, as a way to attract more people in the tourism process. This research was conducted with tourism students from Saudi Arabia, to understand their motivations towards the field.

The semi-structured interviews were divided in three parts, the first part aimed to understand the process of university in Saudi Arabia, and their choice of studying tourism. The second part was centred on their curricula and the third one about their future in the tourism field. The respondents were four Saudi female students, majoring in tourism, from two different areas of the country. After conducting the interviews, the following results were collected.

5.1.1 University Process

All four participants described a rather easy process to enter university in Saudi Arabia. Future students have to register on a website to access the first year of university. Students can apply to the major of their choice at the end of the first year, which is a general year.

The first, we study (...) in general. (...) After that if you're good (...) you can after go in any major. (P2)

However, the major they study depends on their GPA (Grade Point Average). Respondents mentioned that to be accepted in the major they want, they need to have a high GPA.

The major you get depends on your GPA, you only get to choose if you have a high GPA. (P1)

If their GPA did not give them access to the major they wished for, students might study a major they did not like. This is the case of one participant who initially chose Law but has been accepted in tourism. This system means some tourism students are not necessarily interested in the field but still study it.

It was not my first choice, I actually wanted to study law, but things did not go well at first when I applied to university, tourism was my third choice. (P1)

If accessing higher education is not complicated, tourism is not one of the most popular major and is not valued by Saudi society.

Tourism as a major is belittled by the Saudi's community. (P1)

Only my mom now supports me and my small family, but everyone else keeps saying (...) that it has no future. (P1)

I did not expect it to be this important (...) I thought that it was not really wanted in the (...) field of work. (P1)

This might imply that Saudi community has not yet fully understood the utility of the tourism field in their country. It can also mean future university students might not want to study tourism because of the image it has in their society. In fact, one respondent said that she was not expecting tourism to be an important field

However, all of the participants have recognised that Saudi's Vision 2030 is giving importance to the tourism field in the country. People are starting to realise its value for the country

The Vision of 2030 is focused in this industry. (P1)

Things are changing here in Saudi due to the Saudi Vision 2030. (P1)

The tourism will help the economy, crease, raise. (P3)

Pros to Studying Tourism in SA	Cons to Studying Tourism in SA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an important industry in the country • There are a lot of opportunities in the field • Vision 2030 is developing tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locals do not have knowledge about the tourism field • It is not perceived as valuable in the country

Figure 4. Pros and Cons to Studying Tourism in Saudi Arabia (Donadey 2019).

Figure 4 shows the pros and cons to studying tourism, according to the four participants. The process of applying to university in Saudi Arabia is rather easy and encouraging for future students to apply to higher studies. However, tourism major is not one of the preferred majors in the country. In fact, Saudis tend have a negative image of tourism and tend to think of tourism only as hotel related jobs (Al Qunaibit 2019b). To attract more students in tourism, the image of tourism needs to change and improve. The government's initiative to develop tourism, with Vision 2030, is working since all the students have been encouraged to study tourism by Vision 2030. This project is starting to improve the image tourism has in the society. However, most of the students have shown interest only in guiding, and their curricula is focused on guiding, with courses about History, Geography, Saudi Heritage and Saudi Culture, with some courses about management. The country needs a wider variety of tourism jobs to develop properly. Only half of the students have shown interest in entrepreneurship, which is also an important point to improve in the tourism development. The studies curricula need to discuss more entrepreneurship content and management courses in order to give the students the knowledge necessary to start their businesses, which could improve the state of tourism in the country.

5.1.2 Curricula & Studies

The participants were asked to describe their curricula. From the results, it appears that the main focus of their studies is guiding. They have many courses about guiding, Saudi cultural heritage and traditions, as well as Islamic studies.

However, some participants mentioned courses about hotel and tourism management.

On the four respondents, three of them study tourism by choice and one of them originally wanted to study Law but has been accepted in Tourism. However, only one of them is not satisfied with this major and wants to change for another major, due to personal reasons.

Tourism major is not (...) a good choice for me and for my personality. (P4)

The three other participants have expressed their satisfaction with tourism major, however, one of them would like to see some changes in the structure of the major.

I could not have gone in a better place (P1)

I am so happy with my major. (P2)

I am happy with my major, but I think they need to fix some courses. (P3)

5.1.3 Students Future Plans and Ideas

The participants have been asked questions about their future plans regarding their studies and their career. They were asked if they are considering a career in Saudi Arabia or abroad, in which field of tourism they would rather work, how could tourism professional attract more people in working in the tourism field and finally they were asked if being a woman was a barrier to achieving a career in tourism in KSA.

If some students want to pursue graduate studies in the tourism field, the other want to work after graduation. The career the students are choosing are all related to guiding or teaching, with some students wishing to become university teachers.

I want to teaching [sic], you know, I want to be a doctor, doctor in my university. (P2)

If the university calls me and want, want me to be, a professor, I would be so happy with that. (P3)

However, both said they could also work as guide, P2 said that prior to being a teacher she would like to work as a guide for some time

But in the beginning, I want to work in tourist guide. (P2)

I want [sic] to be just like, a normal guide, tourist guide. (P3)

One respondent would like to pursue her studies in English, as it is an important language for the field.

I actually want to pursue my studies in English (...) I feel like it is really important to at least study the language. (P1).

When asked if they would like to study or work abroad, two out of the four students said they would like to study abroad, one participant prefers to study in KSA

I really want to study in America. (P1)

I prefer studying abroad. (P3)

I want to study in Saudi Arabia of course. (P2)

However, most of them want to work in KSA, when asked if she wanted to be a guide in Saudi Arabia, (P2) said it wanted to be a guide in her region and in all of Saudi Arabia.

I think it is better to work here. (P3)

I would actually only be down for Riyadh and Dammam. (P1)

Although the respondents expressed the desire to work in Saudi Arabia, two of them are willing to work abroad if they have the opportunity to do so

I wouldn't mind actually being a tourist guide outside of Saudi, (...) and if I have the opportunity, I would absolutely go for it. (P1)

I do not care if it is in Saudi or outside Saudi Arabia. (P4)

The respondents were asked the reasons why they want to work in Saudi Arabia. One of them mentioned the great jobs opportunities that Saudi Arabia offers. Another respondent mentioned the diversity of the tourism offer in the country and mentioned the opportunity that Saudi Arabia has to develop tourism, which is what motivates her to work in KSA. From the participants' answers, it appears that the country has a lot of opportunities in tourism.

I think that working opportunity (...) is way (...) better than any country. (P3)

Saudi Arabia have this amazing, amazing museum [sic] and amazing this place (...) So, we are now going to tell them about it, (...), to travel in Saudi Arabia. (P2)

Another participant mentioned that her motivations to work in Saudi Arabia relies on her willingness to protect the Saudi heritage

I really want to protect the entire Saudi heritage, especially in the place that I live in. (P1)

Students have shown interest in protecting and develop the tourism heritage in the KSA, they see a great opportunity in developing tourism in the country, which motivates them to study in this field. This is a positive point for the country, if locals are involved in the industry, the country does not have to recruit employees from abroad.

One of the main focus of this research was to find ways to increase locals' interest regarding tourism. Therefore, participants were asked to think about a way to have more people interested in the tourism field in Saudi Arabia. Their answers are focused on educating the local population about the field and the opportunities, through for instance being in touch with schools to present tourism to the students, sharing their passion for this field would create more interest about the field

I think we make like a, to call the school, to tell them we want to make a like, lecture something like, or they bring [sic] in the museum and describe them how is, there is amazing to work in (...) this place and major (P2)

And bring someone who love [sic] this major, and yani [Arabic], if you see someone like love this major, you will love it and you will go to this major. (P2)

Another respondent mentioned the feeling of belonging, make the local community understand that tourism is about their heritage, not only of their country but also of their direct surrounding

I guess that the answer to that is that we show that it is not only about the country, but it is also about your ancestors. (P1)

One solution mentioned was to create films about Saudi heritage and by local community to create a feeling of belonging

For example, have a, if it is like a movie, (...) let anyone that is involved in the film be from the society (...) this thing will help people and young people accept and actually see who they area and start, like, to belong in the place that. (P1)

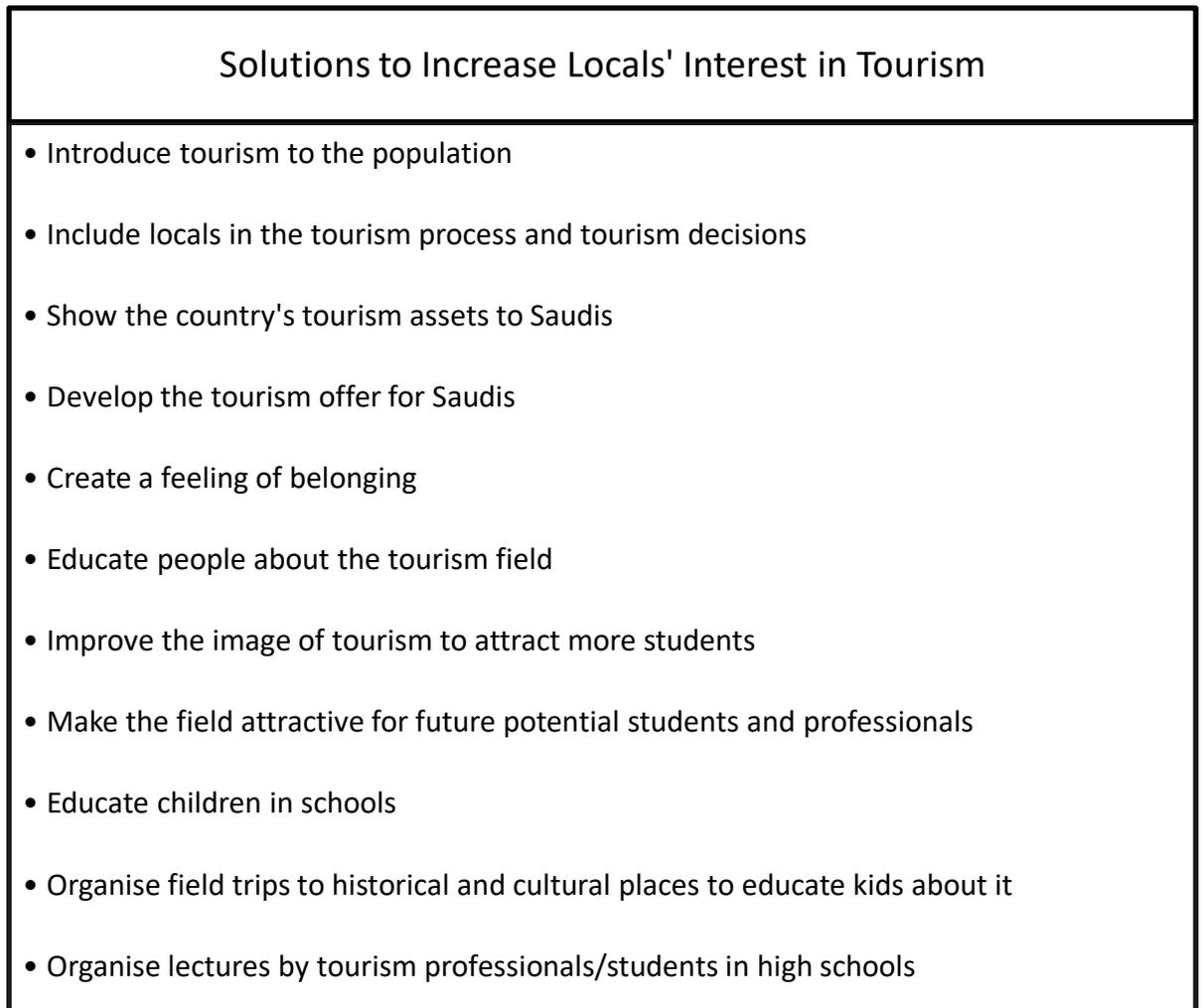


Figure 5. Solutions to Increase Locals' Interest in Tourism (Donadey 2019).

Figure 5 displays solutions given by participants to improve the image of tourism and increase the interest of the local community. Most of these solutions are focused on educating people about the field and about tourism in their own country, as it seems that the population is not aware of the tourism assets the country offers. Giving a feeling of belonging to the local community could be one of the solutions. In fact, if the population feels involved in the place, they will be more willing to take part in protecting it. Moreover, including locals in the tourism process, and in the tourism decisions, would also benefit the industry, as it will create interest. Saudi Arabia could promote the tourism field to its locals. For instance, show the population what the country has to offer in terms of tourism assets, cultural and natural heritage. Tourism professionals should develop further their tourism offers to Saudis. Indeed, if the locals are aware of what their country has to offer, they will be more enthusiast and able to promote it further,

or for instance by word of mouth. The younger population also needs to be educated. Solutions have been given, as for instance organising field trips with schools, to show the children their own country and make them realise it is important to protect their heritage. This could be implemented by local tour operators. For older students, for instance in high school, the solution that has been raised is giving lectures about tourism and tourism studies, to inspire them to study tourism, by tourism students or tourism professionals. The field has to be made attractive for potential students. Tourism needs to be promoted in schools and universities to create awareness and curiosity about it. Most of the solutions given in this research are to be implemented by local tourism professionals, in collaboration with other institutions, to develop and improve the image of tourism, thus increase the interest given to tourism and the number of tourism professionals.

As we have seen entrepreneurship is important for the development of the economy, the participants have been asked if entrepreneurship was an option for them. Half of the participants have shown interest in entrepreneurship, however they do not want to create a business right after graduating, but they want to work in tourism and gain experience first

I am actually planning on doing my own business, but only after I gained enough experience in the field. (P1)

After like five years, I might do my own. (P3)

Finally, on the four participants interviewed, only one has talked about a difficulty to work as a woman in Saudi Arabia, she said women are not equal to men, which makes it harder in the working life and life in general

As a woman yes, especially as a woman. Because, you are like seen second degree citizen here in Saudi if you are a woman, in everything, not only like in the work field, so yes, it is a little bit difficult. (P1)

Although, one participant has talked about her fear when starting to work in tourism, however after a first experience in the field she realized it has not been challenging

I was just scared, like people when they see this is a woman in Saudi Arabia and work, but no, there are so nice to me. (P2)

The two other participants do not perceive a difference in the opportunities for women, either in the education or the working life, the most important thing for them being having a degree

The most important thing is to have a, a degree, which is a Bachelor degree or more, so you can have the job you want to. (P4)

However, the three participants who do not think have less opportunities are from a different region than the fourth participant. As some regions of the country are more liberal than others, this might have had an impact on their answers.

Gender segregation can be a barrier for women to pursue a career, however, this depends on the region of the country, as seen in the results, it is only a concern for respondents from a more conservative area. The status of women in Saudi Arabia can make it harder to pursue a successful career, however, it is not impossible as a woman to pursue a career in the tourism field. Women majoring in tourism need to be shown it is feasible to achieve a good career as a woman. This could be promoted by local women entrepreneurs, or women who have succeeded in the field.

6 CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

This research paper was aiming to increase awareness regarding tourism in Saudi Arabia, by giving clues on how to create an attractive image of tourism in the country. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is anticipating the decrease of the oil industry with a Vision 2030, developing new industries, such as tourism. The country has a lot of potential and benefits from a great location, between Europe and Asia. In fact, other countries in the region, such as the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, have taken advantage of this location to develop their tourism industry. Religious tourism is well developed in Saudi Arabia, thanks to several pilgrimage destinations. However, Saudi Arabia has a historical and cultural heritage, which are a real asset for further development. Although it has a great potential in terms of tourism development, the local community has to be involved for it to be efficient.

In order to have the local population involved in the industry, tourism professionals need to implement several actions to rise interest from Saudis and to gain more tourism professionals to develop the field. The population needs to be educated about the cultural, natural and historical heritage of the country, as well as about the benefits of such development. As for now, Saudis are not fully aware of the tourism potential that their country has, nor of the opportunities that it offers in terms of employments. The local population needs to feel concerned about tourism and what it implies in the country, in order to be interested and take part in its development.

For this research, four semi-structured interviews were conducted, on four female tourism students from Saudi Arabia. From these semi-structured interviews, solutions to the problematic were given. One of the main solutions given was education. In fact, educating the local populations seem to be an efficient way of raising awareness about the field. This could be implemented through field trips, lectures and movies for instance. Another point made by participants, was to create a feeling of belonging among Saudis, by showing them their heritage and making them participate in its promotion and conservation. It seems that involving locals could have a positive impact on the outcomes of the field. Moreover,

developing the tourism offer to Saudis, and not only to foreign tourists, was mentioned as one solution to the problematic. Tourism professionals are the one who can implement these ideas and develop them for a more efficient growth.

Many solutions were given, and more could be thought about if the research was conducted on a bigger sample of students and professionals. This research was conducted only on female students. To collect more accurate results, it should be done on male and female students, as the results might differ. Moreover, the study could be developed further if realised by a local, who understands better the culture and traditions of the country. Finally, as the country is developing tourism, we can expect an improvement in the tourism education as well as in the implication of locals, which could lead to increasing the number of students and tourism professionals, as well as the tourism awareness.

This thesis process has taught me a lot about researching and my personal abilities. I faced difficulties and thought I would have to change my subject several times. In fact, the chosen research topic was not easy, due to the country's location, geography and context. However, my personal desire of learning more about Saudi Arabia kept me motivated throughout the whole process. I am satisfied with the outcomes of this paper, and sincerely hope it will be useful for the commissioner.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview's Questionnaire

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW TEMPLATE:

INTRODUCTION:

- Short presentation of ourselves

PART ONE:

- Can you explain the process of getting into university in Saudi Arabia?
- What are your motivations to study tourism?
- What were your expectations before starting your studies?

PART TWO:

- Can you explain your curricula?
- Do you get any professional experiences during your studies (internships)?
- Do your studies meet your expectations?

PART THREE:

- What are your plans for after graduation?
- What are your motivations to work in tourism?
- Do you want to study/work abroad?
- What are your motivations to study/work in KSA? / Why do you want to work/study abroad?
- Which field of tourism do you want to pursue a career in?
- Is entrepreneurship an option for you?
- Is it more difficult to find a job/study as a woman in KSA?
- How could you get people involved in the tourism field? (future students and people in the working life)