

Ecotourism as a tool for promoting local development in Algeria

*Hebali Daho**

Abstract:

This research aims to demonstrate the importance of ecotourism in Algeria and the extent to which it can be utilized to support local development, especially since local collectivities suffer from a deficit in meeting the needs of their citizens and covering the costs of development programs, thus continuously needing new funding sources. Ecotourism activities in Algeria face a series of legal, economic, and social challenges that have hindered their development and promotion to the level of ecotourism activities in developed countries, which contribute to supporting local development and still require continuous financial support to address the weakness of their indicators. To implement effective ecotourism, a comprehensive national strategy must be adopted, involving various stakeholders, especially local communities and associations active in the field of ecotourism, with a focus on the sustainability and continuity of tourist sites.

Keywords: ecotourism, local development, sustainability

1 Introduction.

Local development requires providing diverse funding sources to cover the costs of projects aimed at addressing the needs of local populations. This has driven many countries to exploit their natural tourism resources to promote investment activities and projects while considering the preservation of environmental sites to ensure their sustainability and avoid any negative impact on them

Algeria experiences weakness in local development indicators primarily due to a lack of funding sources, which in turn leads to a centralized local development decision-making process. In contrast, many regions in the east, west, south, and north are rich in natural sites that could serve as a basis for ecotourism investment, contributing to the improvement of the quality of life for local residents and raising local development indicators.

Based on that, the following issue can be raised

How can ecotourism support local development in Algeria?

From this issue, the following questions arise:

¹ Received: February 06, 2026; Accepted: March 12, 2026; Published: September 15, 2026

© 2026 The Author. Published by IMCRA. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, adaptation, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author and source are properly credited.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



* University of Mascara 29000, DZ : dahohebali@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1043-7734>

What is the concept of ecotourism and local development?

What are the opportunities and challenges of activating ecotourism to support local development in Algeria?

How can we achieve eco-tourism that supports local development in Algeria?

To answer these questions, we propose the following two hypotheses

1. .Algeria is characterized by considerable natural tourism potential, which faces multiple challenges in its exploitation. Algeria is distinguished by considerable natural tourism potential, but its exploitation faces multiple challenges.
2. .Achieving effective eco-tourism in local development requires adopting a participatory national strategy. Achieving effective eco-tourism in local development requires adopting a participatory national strategy.

This study aims to:

- Highlighting the concepts of ecotourism and local development.
- Highlighting the natural tourist potentials in Algeria and the challenges of exploiting them to support local development.
- Presenting proposals to overcome challenges and realizing a genuine and effective eco-tourism that can serve as a pillar for local development

2.Ecotourism and local development.

Tourism is considered an ancient human activity that began with the advent of human mobility and evolved with the development of transportation and communication means, as well as the increasing ability to access more distant areas. It has now reached the point of adopting new concepts in tourism and linking it to the environment and sustainable local development.

2 .1.The concept of eco-tourism and its importance

The concept of eco-tourism spread widely in the early 1990s after the global environment conference Eco 92, evolving into a distinction between general tourism in natural areas and tourism that focuses on preserving the environment and nature while simultaneously achieving the well-being of local communities where eco-tourism areas are located. (Orozco, 2024)

The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of local people through a strategy that aligns environmental protection with social development." (GROVE, 2024)

The term "ecotourism" is widely understood to describe travel that is rejuvenating to natural areas, focusing on forms of tourism that preserve natural environments and cultural heritage with minimal impact on them. However, the definition of ecotourism is much more complex than this description. Ecotourism is often confused with adventure tourism, educational tourism, rural tourism, or cultural tourism, and in reality, there is a significant diversity in the goals and values among these categories. (Karimov, 2024)

The activity is classified as ecotourism if: (Orozco, 2024)Contributed to environmental conservation.

- Strengthened and engaged the civil society that supports tourism activities.
- Creating a link between tourists and the areas they visit.

Ecotourism is spreading in several countries around the world and is considered a suitable solution for developing tourism and meeting environmental needs simultaneously. It aims to reduce the impact on the environment, promote nature conservation, encourage environmental culture, and provide economic

resources for local communities. It is closely linked to government policies aimed at preserving the environment and protected areas. (Mokodongan, 2024)

Based on the previous definitions, ecotourism is a human activity that facilitates the exploitation of natural areas for recreation while ensuring environmental preservation and avoiding negative impacts on it, guaranteeing the sustainability of natural diversity on one hand and the continuity of tourism exploitation on the other. The focus of all this is the quality of human life and the development of the region it occupies

Table 1: Criteria for Evaluating Ecotourism

Number	Elements	Indicators
A	Organization	Management institutions and their characteristics Key stakeholders Resource ownership structure
B	The policy and management plan	Resource management and conservation Development of eco-tourism Community use of resources Community participation in environmental conservation activities
C	Activity	Implementation of zoning regulations against resource exploitation Environmental education and conservation by local communities. Monitoring tourism activities. Providing tourism services.

Source : (Mokodongan, 2024)

Through the table, it becomes clear that ecotourism is based on three main elements: organization, which is overseen by management; policy and management planning, which is related to resource management and conservation; and activity, which constitutes the content of ecotourism (environmental culture, local communities, services, and tourism activities.)

Ecotourism is of great importance as it is considered a global industry that creates jobs and contributes to economic growth. It is also a tool for developing countries in the field of natural resource development and environmental conservation to achieve the goals of green growth and global sustainable development, and to promote a sense of belonging (GROVE, 2024)

Ecotourism supports the sustainable use of resources, benefits local communities and economies, and even wildlife. It also contributes to establishing positive environmental exploitation rules to mitigate negative impacts. The potential of healthy ecotourism includes well-collecting data, developing a management plan, considering nearby recreational options, and partnership opportunities with wildlife organizations. It also enhances the potential for population growth and biodiversity in a healthy and appropriate manner (Karimov, 2024)

Ecotourism contributes to providing job opportunities for local communities directly in the tourism sector, such as working in hotels and restaurants, and indirectly in sectors like handicrafts, agriculture, fishing, and construction. Statistics indicate that 1.3 million people in developing countries work in ecotourism, and tens of millions benefit indirectly, increasing the economic benefit to the local community. Emerging ecotourism sectors in remote areas can also support poverty reduction efforts (Karimov, 2024)

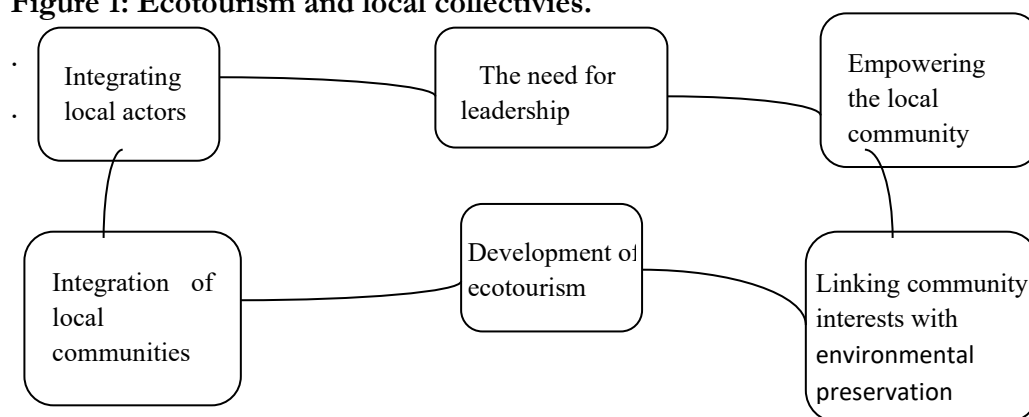
:Ecotourism plays an important role in

- .Helping to protect sensitive environmental sites -
- .Contributing to reducing the environmental impact on the earth -
- .Creating opportunities for local communities -
- .Helping to understand and teach the cultures of communities -
- .Raising awareness of the necessity to preserve the environment -
- .Helping to appreciate the beauty of nature -
- .Raising awareness to preserve at-risk spaces -

Ecotourism brings economic benefits to local communities by generating revenues that can be reinvested in other initiatives. Additionally, local communities become more inclined to support ecotourism when they perceive its financial benefits, which in turn creates sustainable economic opportunities, job opportunities in tour guiding and services, reducing reliance on other sources such as overfishing or deforestation (Joshi, 2024)

In developing countries, economic opportunities are limited, so they rely on eco-tourism by integrating local communities in utilizing nature and wildlife, which generates financial income that is reinvested in supporting local infrastructure and development, creating a cycle that benefits both the community and the environment simultaneously (Pagare, 2024)

Figure 1: Ecotourism and local collectivities.



Source : (Pagare, 2024)

Ecotourism generates income for local communities through direct and indirect economic activities, where local companies active in hospitality, catering, and tour organization can develop their businesses and create job opportunities through tour guiding and marketing handicrafts, contributing to poverty reduction and improving local quality of life.

The increase and growth of ecotourism lead to the improvement of local infrastructure, as investments in roads, telephone networks, the internet, and other necessities increase, benefiting both tourists and local communities. (Pagare, 2024)

The importance of ecotourism means the absence of negatives. In most cases, developing ecotourism projects requires the expansion into additional lands and the development of ecotourism sites through land acquisition, which leads to the displacement and migration of indigenous communities that have lived in harmony with their surroundings for long periods. This situation forces the indigenous people to abandon their ancestral lands, leading to a cultural and emotional disconnection from their environment and the extinction of traditional practices. Additionally, the construction of new buildings disrupts the serene atmosphere of the landscapes and negatively impacts the local wildlife. (Mahisha, 2025)

2.2 Concept of local development.

The implementation of the state's public policies in its economic and social aspects requires giving due attention to the peculiarities of the regions by assessing their resources and needs and the means to develop them.

Development is viewed as a relative concept that changes over time and space. In terms of time, the level of development on which the classification of countries by growth is based changes from period to period (the metrics). In terms of space, each country has its own economic, social, and cultural characteristics that distinguish it. Therefore, it is difficult to define a unified concept of development. (Sania, 2014)

Local development is defined as general-oriented policies and programs aimed at bringing about desirable change in local communities to raise the standard of living and improve income distribution. It is a comprehensive process that covers all areas of local needs, balanced in distributing efforts according to the priority required by the development movement and the level of investment. It takes place within a coordinated framework among various local actors through cooperation and positive interaction. (souleiman & Taha, 2012).

Local development has become part of a comprehensive global vision based on local geographical characteristics and demographic factors, aiming to change the local culture in a way that helps create a participatory environment, achieve economic integration, and improve citizens' lives. (Fahmi, 2025), Local development is based on unifying the efforts of individuals at the local level with government efforts to find solutions to local community problems within a coordinated and integrated framework that does not deviate from the goals and efforts of comprehensive national development. It is characterized by being : (mohamed & grid, 2016)

- A subsystem of comprehensive development.
- A continuous local dynamic process.
- A series of planned changes to achieve the community's goals based on its resources and local energies.
- It touches all areas of human life, both economically and socially.
- An interactive cooperative process among multiple parties.

The importance of local development stems from its ability to create competition among local communities in attracting investment to their regions, which contributes to the development of the state's economy (PIKE, 2016). Therefore, local development is a comprehensive process that relies on the joint efforts of various actors (state, local communities, citizens, private sector, civil society) aimed at achieving local and national public interest. It includes essential elements such as:

- Planning, which involves setting programs and organizing the means and resources necessary for their implementation and the required timelines for that.
- Integration, which means the necessity of harmonizing efforts in each field with similar efforts in other fields and the financial and human contributions that local communities receive from various organizations.

The role of ecotourism in supporting local development in Algeria. The role of ecotourism in supporting local development in Algeria.

Local development in Algeria faces multiple challenges, the most significant of which are the lack of funding sources and the difficulty in meeting local requirements. Therefore, it is essential to exploit the natural tourism potentials that characterize each region.

3. Local tourism resources in Algeria.

The natural areas in Algeria, which could be suitable for establishing investment projects in various regions, are distributed throughout the country. For example, natural reserves are among the best sites

for hosting eco-tourism activities, as mentioned in the doctoral thesis by researcher Bouachach Samia: (Samia, 2022)

- El Kala National Park.

It is one of the most important national parks located in the northeast of the country in the state of El Tarf, and it is home to many lakes (Lake Tonga, Lake Malah, which is the only lake in Algeria that is directly connected to the sea, and Lake Oubira). It was established in 1983 and recognized by UNESCO in 1990.

-Tlemcen Reserve.

Located in the northwest of Algeria in the Tlemcen province, it includes important historical sites and contains biological diversity, as it is home to approximately 141 species of animals, including 100 different species of birds, and other endangered creatures.

-Thénia El-Had Reserve.

It is a dense forest consisting of various types of trees, the most important of which is the Atlas cedar, located in the Tissemsilt province.

- Kouaria National Park.

Located in the Béjaïa province, this area is named after the stunning natural landscapes it contains, the most notable of which are the towering Kouria Mountains, rising 672 meters above sea level, allowing for the formation of hanging slopes.

- Jijel National Park.

It is located in northern Algeria, home to the Djurdjura mountain range from which it gets its name. Many endangered species and various birds, such as the golden eagle and the long-legged buzzard, inhabit its land. It consists of dense forests, valleys, and caves.

- Blazma Reserve.

The Belzama Reserve is characterized by its moderate climate, which ranges from humid or semi-humid to dry or semi-dry. It is located in the northeastern region of Algeria and includes the Belzama mountain range. It also contains approximately 300 species of living organisms, including 59 species of endangered animals, in addition to around 400 different types of plants.

- Chrea National Park.

The Chrea National Park is located 50 kilometers southwest of the capital, Algiers, and is home to many endangered species. It attracts more than 10,000 visitors annually and features an environmental museum aimed at raising public awareness.

These reserves are part of the many natural sites that Algeria is known for. Below, we will present details about the area of these reserves and other tourist areas in Algeria to highlight the potential opportunities for eco-tourism exploitation.

Table 2: Classification of sites eligible for ecotourism in Algeria.

Designation	Number
National parks	12
Nature reserve	18
Nature park	2
Ramsar wetland site	50

Source : (Ministry of Environment and Life Quality of Algeria, 2025)

Based on the table data, it is clear that Algeria possesses significant and diverse tourist attractions, with the number exceeding 80 sites, including parks, reserves, and wetlands, each characterized by unique features. This allows for the establishment of a natural base for eco-tourism investment.

Table 3: Area of regions eligible for ecotourism in Algeria.

Region	Area
Charia National Park	26,600 hectares
Cultural Park of Tassili	138,000 km ²
Cultural Park of Ahaggar	633,887 km ²
Tighanimine National Park	8832 hectares
The national park of Djurdjura	18850 hectares
Kouraya National Park	2080 hectares
Belzma National Park, Batna	26250 hectares
El Kala National Park	80000 hectares
Tlemcen National Park	8258 hectares
The National Park of Mergueb, M'sila	16481 hectares
Jebel Issa National Park, Naama	24400 hectares
Thénia El-Had National Park, Tissemsilt	3435 hectares
Taza National Park, Jijel	3,807 hectares

Source : (Ministry of Environment and Life Quality of Algeria,2025)

The area of the desert parks exceeded 700,000 square kilometers, while the area of the parks in the northwest and southwest reached more than 170,000 hectares. This is a significant area and a great opportunity for eco-tourism investment.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Crafts, the number of tourists in 2023 exceeded 3 million, including 254,662 between October and December in the desert tourism sector alone. Meanwhile, the number of travel agencies reached 4,999, and the traditional crafts sector includes 447,716 activities that provide more than a million jobs. (Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, 2025)

Table 4: The global ecotourism market.

South Africa	the Middle East	Africa	Europe	America	East Asia and the Pacific
%1	3%	4 %	17%	17%	58%

Source : (elfnissi & zin elabidine, 2023) .

Looking at the table, despite the available potential for Algeria in the field of eco-tourism, its share in the global market remains very weak, as it falls within the 4% that the entire African continent holds. Therefore, it is essential to work on making up for this delay by leveraging global experiences, especially the Chinese ones.

4 . Opportunities and challenges of supporting local development through ecotourism

Most local communities in Algeria face budget deficits that make them dependent on annual subsidies provided by the state, which are mostly conditional, meaning they are directed toward covering the costs

necessary to provide basic services to citizens. This reality drives us to seek other sources for financing local development.

Ecotourism is an important economic and developmental opportunity to support local development efforts in Algeria, given the wealth of tourist attractions it possesses, which can serve as a source of local funding and enhance the financial capacities of local communities through:

- Exploiting protected areas and national parks to establish tourism projects that provide additional job opportunities for local residents, expand the local tax base, and increase its revenues.
- Diversifying the local economy by creating new financial sources alongside other sources such as agriculture and industry.
- Establishing a base to incubate small projects in the field of traditional industry and services to promote local entrepreneurship and facilitate the integration of their owners into larger projects in the future.
- Ecotourism contributes to preserving the local environment, unlike general tourism, which exploits nature without considering the resulting impacts, which are often negative, leading to its destruction and the migration of local residents.
- The development of ecotourism leads to the revival of local cultural heritage and the utilization of its components to promote the region, create economic activities, and job opportunities for the residents, in addition to the financial returns generated from it.
- Ecotourism attracts national and foreign investments as it provides qualified natural sites, promotes them, and contributes to their preparation and utilization.
- The financial returns generated by eco-tourism activities (investments and tourists) contribute to supporting the finances of local communities, thereby increasing their financial independence and reducing the centralization of local developmental decision-making.
- Some regions in Algeria are experiencing stagnation in development despite having tourism potential, and thus activating eco-tourism will lead to the development of infrastructure (roads, water, etc.). And rehabilitating abandoned areas to resettle them anew.
- Algeria is characterized by the diversity of its cultural and heritage components, which vary from one region to another, and the diversity of its environment and climate between the coast, the interior, and the deserts, forming a varied base for eco-tourism exploitation throughout the year.

Environmental tourism in Algeria faces a number of challenges that limit its contribution to local development, the most notable of which are as follows:

- Weak infrastructure including roads, internet and phone coverage, and other services necessary to attract tourists.
- The lack of effective integration of local communities in the path of eco-tourism in the absence of a legislative framework that defines their roles and extent of involvement in this field.
- The activity of those responsible for overseeing eco-tourism is weak due to their insufficient knowledge of this activity and its requirements.
- Local communities cannot finance eco-tourism projects due to limited financial resources and the absence of a legislative framework that regulates this funding. Additionally, the lack of promotion of local tourism potentials weakens the chances of attracting private investors.
- Algeria is experiencing climate change characterized by low rainfall, high temperatures, and desertification, which threatens environmental sites and weakens their potential.
- There is no clear strategy in Algeria for promoting and marketing tourist sites internationally, which has contributed to weak tourism investments.

5. Conclusion.

The study concluded that environmental tourism activities in Algeria face a series of legal (weak regulatory frameworks), economic (lack of funding opportunities for tourism projects and weak self-financing by local communities), and social (lack of integration of local communities in tourism activities and insufficient training) challenges that have hindered their development and advancement to the level of environmental tourism activities in developed countries, which contribute to local development and still require continuous financial support to address their weak indicators.

Activating eco-tourism in Algeria and qualifying it to become a pillar of local development and a source of funding requires the following recommendations:

- Amending local governance regulations to allow them to integrate into the development of eco-tourism in the areas within their jurisdictions and benefit from the returns on their investments by funding local development projects.
- Improving local infrastructure to provide suitable conditions for tourism exploitation (hotels, roads, internet and telephone services, electricity, etc.).
- Developing a comprehensive national strategy for promoting eco-tourism by involving various stakeholders, especially associations active in this field and local communities adjacent to tourist areas.
- Simplifying the procedures for localizing investment projects in tourist areas by decentralizing the review of their files to accelerate their implementation with the participation of local communities.
- Marketing and promoting local tourism potentials.
- Protecting the environment by organizing tourism activities in a way that preserves the sustainability of the sites.
- Making ecotourism a main topic in local public policies, especially in areas that host qualified sites for it.
- Adopting global experiences in the field of ecotourism and working on establishing international partnerships to exploit natural areas.

These recommendations can serve as a foundation for launching a sustainable and effective ecotourism project on one hand, and on the other hand, as a key supporter and financier of local development.

References.

- Abdul Latif M & Abdul Rahman S. (2014). Studies in Economic Development. Beirut: Hassan Al-Asriya Library
- Al-Fanisi, M. F., & Zain Al-Abidin, M. M. (2023). Ecotourism in Iraq: The Southern Marshes as a Model, an Analytical Study. *Iraqi Journal For Economic Sciences*, 22, 261
- Ali Abidin, & Faida. (2019). The main features and indicators of corruption in the African continent. *African Studies Journal*, 41(1), 267-305.
- GROVE, O. (2024). ecotourism for sustainable tourism development in bilikisu sugbon sacred grove, oke-eri, ijebu north-east local government area., ogun state, nigeria. *AAUA Journal of Environmental Design and Management*, 3 (2), pp. 62-75.
- Joshi, P. (2024). *assessing the role of ecotourism in promoting wildlife conservation..* unified visions.
- Karimov, N. K. (2024). The Ecotourism Industry's Role in Environmental Stewardship. . . . *Natural and Engineering Sciences*, 9(2), , 9 (2), 293-308.
- Mahisha, A. A. (2025). the ecotourism paradox: environmental exploitation in dangarembga's this mournable body.
- Ministry of Environment and Life Quality of Algeria. (2025). Protected areas in Algeria... Gateway to sustainable ecotourism. Consulted on June 23, 2025, on the: <https://2u.pw/PkmRT>

- Mohammed, K., & Qareed, S. (2016). "Local Development and Social Participation: A Conceptual and Historical Approach," a presentation delivered at the National Conference on Local Management between Financing Issues and Rationalizing Local Development Decisions, with Municipalities as a Model. University of Guelma
- Mokodongan, T. (2024). Analysis of The Application of ecotourism principles in Indonesian natural tourism destinations: A literature review. *Journal of Indonesian Tourism,,), Hospitality and Recreation* , 7 (2), pp. 155-164.
- Pagare, S. R. (2024). . *ecotourism and its contribution to local communities in developing countries*. . unified visions.
- PIKE, A. R.-P. (2016). . *Local and regional development*. New york : Routledge.
- Samia, B. (2022). Management and Planning of Natural Reserves in Algeria Using Geographic Information Systems - Case Study of the Djurdjura National Park. Doctoral thesis. Faculty of Economic, Commercial, and Management Sciences, Algeria: University of Algiers 3
- Suleiman, S., & Taha, H. (2012). "Local Development Management in Algeria: Concepts and Mechanisms." *Journal of Administration and Development for Research and Studies*, (1), pp. 249-247.
- SUNDARAM, J. K. (2012). *Is Good Governance Good for Development?* Bloomsbury Academic.
- united nations. (2025, 9 15). *our work in africa*.
- world bank. (2025, 1 30).