

## Abstract

The main aim of tourism development in Egypt is to enhance the living standards of the Egyptian people. However, the government has only focused on issues such as increasing income, creating new jobs, and maximizing foreign exchange earnings. The government has not given priority to utilising local culture as a tourism resource and enhancing community engagement in the tourism development process as a tool for sustainability. Balancing economic benefits and maintaining the heritage values in an ethnic minority community is a challenge. This dissertation seeks to understand the impact of tourism on ethnic minority community, focusing on the Siwa oasis in Egypt. The main research question to be explored is: “what are the effects of tourism development on local culture of an ethnic minority community and the local perceptions of lifestyle changes?”

A qualitative approach was employed to explore the impact of tourism development among the community. The research phase began with secondary data collection based on the research questions. Tourism development policy in Egypt was identified as introducing tourism to new destinations and minority rights, as well as women’s empowerment strategies. Semi structured interviews were carried out with key community members in Siwa oasis. Visits were made in May 2017 and November 2019, during which observation and interviews were conducted.

The study found that the Egyptian government has neglected the intangible culture heritage of the Siwan, which has limited Siwan participation in tourism. This is the result of a hegemonic tourism development plan that did not include the minority community’s needs. Thus, “development” did not lead to local empowerment; rather, any community benefits and opportunities were hindered. Accordingly, Siwan fear losing their identity and control which has led them to persist in their traditional social systems which impose heavily on women to pass on the Siwi language and their traditions to the next generation. The men were keen to protect basic features of traditional gender roles such as being the primary breadwinner and the guardian of his family. However, due to domestic tourism working mobilities, Siwan women were negotiating for more agency.

This dissertation uncovers the complexity of empowerment in Islamic society. Nonetheless the findings suggest that the Egyptian government should utilise the intangible cultural heritage of minority communities as a tourist attraction by relying on local people’s knowledge rather than the outside investor to promote the oasis. Accordingly, Siwan people should be involved in decision-making, which itself is a step forward in empowerment. In terms of empowerment, women should be enabled to participate in the tourism development process. While women’s involvement in tourism in such rural communities might be a challenge, by utilising intangible cultural heritage as a tourist attraction controlled by local people, women could be employed as they are considered knowledgeable professionals in this area. Ultimately, culturally specific approaches to development are essential for tourism to be an empowering force for local, especially rural, communities.