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The Impact of Small and Medium Enterprises on Achieving Sustainable Development in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the role of small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises in achieving sustainable development in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The study followed a descriptive methodology and tested causal relationships using a simple random sample of about 363 respondents. The study reached several conclusions, the most important of which are as follows:

1. There is a positive role for small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector in the Eastern Province to achieve sustainable development through economic and environmental methods.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the small and medium enterprises of the tourism sector in the Eastern Province in achieving sustainable development.

3. The social dimension's role was not sufficient to help small and medium tourism enterprises achieve sustainable development in the Eastern Province.

4. The investment environment pushes small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector to achieve sustainable development.

5. Financing has low impact on helping small and medium tourism enterprises achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: small and medium enterprises, sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Earth Summit in 1992, the world, especially at the academic and specialized levels [9], has witnessed the emergence of the term "sustainability," which has become a school of thought with clear foundations and methodologies. The sustainability of small enterprises is one of the central concerns in this regard.

The concept of sustainability, as established in the relevant studies, is linked to three dimensions: the economy[13], the environment, and society. Although these three dimensions are interrelated and overlapping, the definition of sustainability differs according to the perspective that is considered.

In light of the rapid development in the world today, interest in the sustainability of resources is increasing, especially with the crises of global economies and the pressures and burdens countries suffer from that have led to the emergence of a new type of state. Global economies also tend to support small and medium enterprises due to their great contribution to the development of the overall

economy, because small and medium enterprises constitute about 90% of the institutions in the world and they constitute between (50% - 60%) of the workforce in the world. It was necessary to provide all forms of support to these vital sectors due to their importance and work to know their problems and solve them to increase their growth.

Today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seeks to consolidate sustainability in its resources as it expands its income base to non-oil sources, as its economy was negatively affected during the Covid-19 pandemic, as the value of oil fell to its lowest levels, and this was a reason for increased interest and tendency in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to support small projects And medium-sized ones, which form the cornerstone of the Kingdom, as they have become an essential element in building an integrated strategy for the post-oil economy. Consequently, many authorities and bodies fully support this promising sector in order to fully perform its role and contribute to achieving the comprehensive development goals of the country embodied in Vision 2030.

Indeed, the sector was able to prove its capabilities as the number of small and medium enterprises has grown to 626,000 facilities in 2020 compared to 560,000 facilities in 2019[12].

The Ministry of Commerce[12] and Investment confirms the growth of enterprises in the eastern region, which increased by 24% for companies and 11% for institutions during the three years prior to 2021.

Saudi Arabia is heading toward more sustainable enterprises, the most important of which are tourism enterprises of all types.

Saudi Arabia is considered a fertile field for research projects, and this study aims to determine the relationship of small and medium tourism enterprises in the Eastern Province to society, the economy, the investment environment, financing[27], the level of impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the sustainability of these enterprises, knowledge of the surrounding environment, and the state's directions toward sustainable development for all economic projects.

The Kingdom is a destination for religious and recreational tourism, and the Ministry of Tourism expects 100 million tourists by 2030. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's experience with the global drop in oil prices during the Covid-19 period, and the economic problems it caused at the local and international levels, led to a search for sustainable income sources other than oil.

Among the literature shows that are linked with this paper in some respects [11] It tends to know the resources that small and medium enterprises need to develop new innovations to achieve sustainable development.

Innovation is one of the most important factors in the sustainability of small and medium tourism enterprises, whether in Saudi Arabia or in any country. This explains the reasons for stopping some enterprises that do not have any competitive advantages.

This study focused [13] on the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the ability of small- and medium-sized enterprises to survive and be sustainable. It also looked at the radical change in the work environment after Covid-19, and confirmed that the flexibility of these projects and their ability to innovate helped them achieve sustainability.

The study discusses[31]worldwide economic disasters prior to Covid-19. It uses BORDA technology to measure success factors for avoid the failure of small and medium tourism enterprises , as it finds that the most important solutions are marketing and good planning and management, as well as financial support through loans.

The study aims[33]to explore the strategies that small and medium enterprises depend on for sustainability in Zimbabwe. Also targeted owners of successful projects that have been ongoing for five years or more. The results confirmed that the most important factors for success were passion, dedication, customer satisfaction, and hiring employees with appropriate skills.

literature agree that small and medium tourism facilities play an important role in advancing the economy, and this paper has focused on the role of these projects in achieving sustainable development through the economic, social and environmental dimensions of Saudi investment.

Based on this and Saudi Arabia's tendency to radically transform its oil dependence with diverse resources, which focused on small and medium tourism enterprises and worked on their sustainability, the need to study this topic arose from an attempt to answer the following study problem:

• Is there a role for small and medium tourism enterprises in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province in achieving sustainable development? Please note the following sub-questions:

1. Is the size of the current small and medium enterprises stable in a way that helps them develop and achieve sustainable development?

2. Do small and medium enterprises, especially those related to tourism, contribute to achieving sustainable development in the social, environmental, and economic fields in the eastern region?

3. Are there strategies upon which small and medium enterprises have relied to achieve sustainable development?

4. What steps has the Kingdom taken to achieve sustainable development through small and medium enterprises in the field of tourism?

5. Does Covid-19 affect the achievement of sustainable development goals in the tourism sector?

By answering these questions, this paper will contribute to the community by:

(1) Showing the relationship between small and medium enterprises and the achievement of sustainable development in Saudi Arabia.

(2) Determining the role of the local community and the academic community in supporting small and medium enterprises to revive the tourism sector.

(3) Determining the role of these small and medium enterprises in developing the economic, environmental and social sectors related to unemployment and improving the level of growth.

(4) Determining, at the research community level. the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on these enterprises, especially in recent periods.

(5) Proposing ways to address the difficulties faced by owners of small and medium enterprises in the eastern region.

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. Small and medium enterprises, especially those dealing with tourism, contribute to achieving sustainable development.

2. 2. Small and medium enterprises are considered important elements in achieving sustainable development in all fields.

3. The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia can achieve sustainable development through its strong infrastructure.

4. 4. It is necessary that tourism projects, whether small or medium, be flexible to achieve sustainable development.

5. Small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector have not been significantly affected as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tools and Methods

Based on the nature of the data collected and the approach taken in the study, the researcher found that the most appropriate tool for achieving the research objectives was the questionnaire. The researcher designed an initial questionnaire to be used in data collection and information, which was presented to a group of arbitrators for advice and guidance. Appropriate modifications and deletions were made to produce the questionnaire in its final form; it was then distributed to members of the sample in order to collect the necessary research data.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections, as follows:

Section 1: general data

1. Company size

2. Nature of business activity

3. Company type

4. Promotion or advertisement of the activity

Section 2: Economic Dimension

Section 3: Social Dimension

Section 4: Environmental Dimension

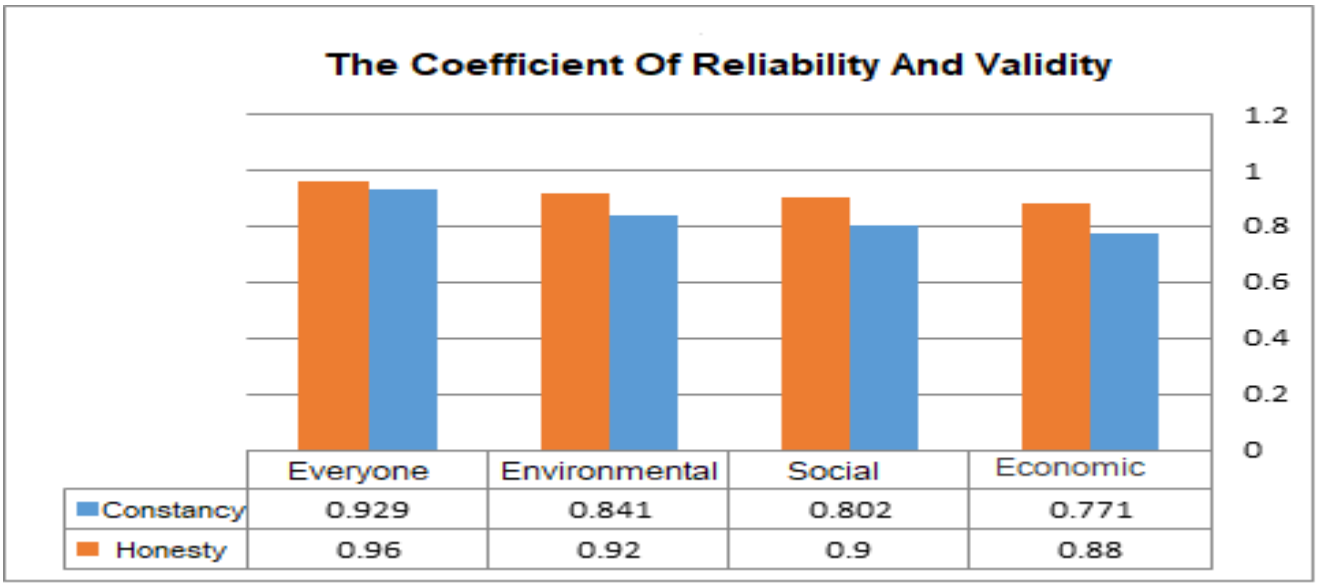
Section 5: Difficulties

A five-degree Likert scale was used to enter the answers of the sample members on the questionnaire items.

Table (1) *shows the reliability coefficient and validity of the questionnaire axes. The reliability coefficient (Alpha Cronbach method)*

N	Research axes	Alpha Cronbach		Adjective
		tool stability	Authenticity of the tool	
1	The first axis: the economic dimension	**0.771**	**0.88**	High
2	The second axis: the social dimension	**0.802**	**0.90**	High
3	The third axis: the environmental dimension	**0.841**	**0.92**	High
	Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the study as a whole	**0.929**	**0.96**	High

Figure No. (1) *shows the reliability and validity coefficient of the questionnaire items*



It is clear from Figure 1 that the reliability and validity coefficient of all questionnaire sections is high, greater than 70%. Thus, the researcher confirmed the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, which gives full confidence in the validity of the questionnaire and its ability to analyze the results.

Analysis and results

The Hypothesis Test

1. Testing of the first major hypothesis:

The first main hypothesis states that "there is a positive and statistically significant role at the level of significance $\alpha \leq 0.05$ for small and medium enterprises of the tourism sector in

Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development."

The following sub-hypotheses are derived from it:

1) There is a positive role with statistical significance at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ for small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development through the economic dimension.

2) There is a positive role with statistical significance at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ for small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development through the social dimension.

3) There is a positive role with statistical significance at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ for small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development through the environmental dimension.

Table (2): *the results of the correlation analysis and multiple regression to test the role of enterprises in achieving sustainable development*

correlation coefficient			Variable	Calculated T value	regression coefficient		The result
R	R^2	sig			β	sig	
0.128	0.016	0.015	economic dimension	2.316	0.131	0.021	Acceptance
			social dimension	1.410	0.92	0.159	Refusal
			environmental dimension	3.027	0.185	0.003	Acceptance

From the table (2) it is clear that:

The calculated value of the multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.128 at a level of significance 0.003, which is less than the theoretical significance level, meaning that it is statistically significant. This indicates a weak correlation between the dimensions and the role of small and medium enterprises.

• The value of the coefficient of determination (R2) was 0.016, which indicates that the dimensions explain 1.6% of the role of small enterprises in achieving sustainable development.

• There is a positive and statistically significant role at a significant level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for small- and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development through the economic and environmental dimensions. This is evidenced by the calculated (T) value of 2.316 and 3.027, respectively, which is greater than its tabular value at a significant level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). The type of effect was determined through the value of the coefficient (β).

Table (3): *Results of multiple and simple regression analysis to test the role of enterprises in sustainable development*

The dimension	The coefficient of (R^2) determination	F	Sig
Economic	0.015	5.362	0.021
social	0.005	1.988	0.159
environmental	0.025	9.163	0.003

• The statistical data in Table 3 also indicate that there is no statistically significant role between the social dimension, and this is indicated by the calculated (T) value of (1.410), which is less than its tabular value at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Stepwise regression analysis was used, as shown in Table 3, to determine the order of entering the dimensions in the prediction equation.

Figure (2) *shows the percentage of the coefficient of determination (R2) for all dimensions*

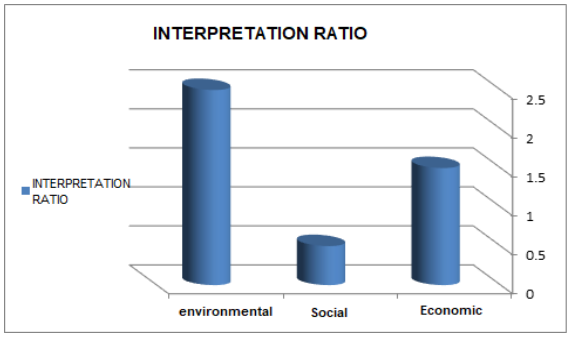


Table 3 and Figure 2 show the arrangement of the dimensions in the equation to predict the sustainable development of the dependent variable, where the environmental dimension variable ranked first, where (2.5%) was the value of the variance in the dependent variable. This explanatory power added to the economic dimension variable whose value accounted for (1.5%) of the variance in the dependent variable. The order of social dimension was the last.

It is a very weak percentage, less than 3%, which shows there are other variables that achieve sustainable development.

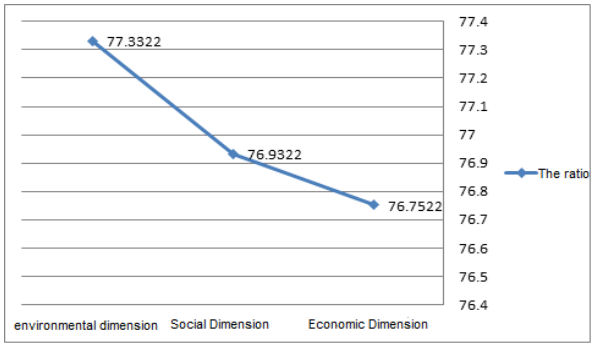
To determine the level of availability of the dimensions of sustainable development, a one-sample T-test was used, as follows:

Table (4) *One-samle T Test*

Dimensions	T	df	Sig	Mean	The level
Economic Dimension	108.124	363	.000	3.83761	76.7522
Social Dimension	93.840	363	.000	3.84661	76.9322
Environmental Dimension	100.053	363	.000	3.86661	77.3322

Table 4 shows that all dimensions have significance, that is, they are available in different proportions. For further clarification, the following figure has been prepared:

Figure (3) *shows the percentages of availability of each of the dimensions*



It is clear from Figure 3 that the environmental dimension was the most applied dimension; the percentage of its application was 77.33. Next in line was the social dimension, which reached 76.93, followed by the economic dimension, which is the percentage of its availability (76.75).

Based on the foregoing information, the following can be summarized:

- Partial rejection of the first main hypothesis with regard to the social dimension due to the simple role in achieving sustainable development for small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector, and partial acceptance of the null hypothesis which states the following: There is no statistically significant role for small and medium enterprises at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).) in the tourism sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development through the social dimension.

- Partial acceptance of the alternative hypothesis on the economic and environmental dimension, which sees the existence of a positive and statistically significant role at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for small and medium enterprises of the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia in achieving sustainable development.

2. Testing of the second major hypothesis:

The second major hypothesis states, “Small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia will encounter difficulties in achieving sustainable development.”

The following sub-hypotheses are derived from it:

1) The discouraging investment environment affects the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development.

2) The difficulty of obtaining financing affects the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development.

3) The Covid-19 pandemic affected the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development.

Table (5): *Results of the correlation analysis and multiple regression to test the difficulties and the role of enterprises in achieving sustainable development*

Correlation coefficient			**Variable**	**Calculated t value**	**Regression coefficient**		**The result**
sig	**R^2**	**R**			**sig**	**β**	
0.000	**0.050**	**0.224**	FINANCE	2.001	0.046	-0.068	Acceptance
			INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT	1.729	0.085	0.048	Refusal
			CORONA	3.847	0.000	0.134	Acceptance

From Table 5, it is clear that:

1. The calculated value of the multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.224 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the theoretical significance level. This means it is statistically significant, which indicates the existence of a correlation between the role of small and medium enterprises and the difficulties of obtaining financing and dealing with the discouraging investment environment of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. The value of the coefficient of determination was R2 (0.050), and this indicates that difficulties explain 5% of the role of small enterprises in achieving sustainable development.

3. The difficulty of obtaining financing has a negative statistically significant effect at the level of significance $\alpha \leq 0.05$ in the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development, and this is evidenced by the calculated (T) value of 2.001, which is, respectively, greater than its tabular value at a significant level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). The type of effect was determined through the value of the coefficient (β).

4. The investment environment did not have a significant impact on the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development, as evidenced by the calculated (T) value of 1.729, which is less than its tabular value at a significant level greater than $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

5. The statistical data in Table 5 also indicate the existence of a statistically significant role for the Covid-19 pandemic. This is indicated by the calculated (T) value, 3.847, which is greater than its tabular value at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

Table (6): *Results of multiple regression analysis and T-test The role of enterprises in sustainable development*

The dimension	**The coefficient of determination (R^2)**	**F**	**mean**
Finance	0.001	0.202	3.7802
Investment environment	0.008	2.899	3.2775
Corona pandemic	0.036	13.388	3.8681

This is evident from the following table:

The Covid-19 pandemic explains 3.6% of the value of the discrepancy in the role of enterprises in development. As for financing and the investment environment, its percentage does not reach 1%.

Figure (4) *show the percentages of interpretation and application of difficulties*

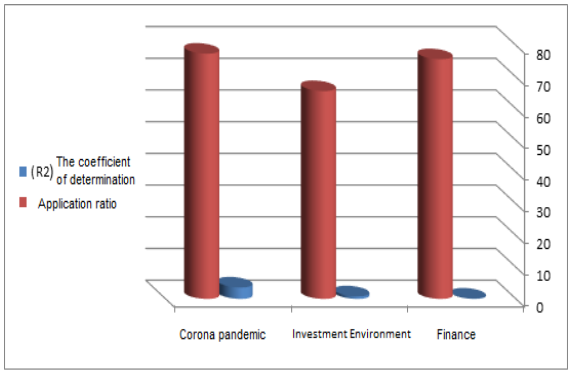


Figure 4 shows that the Covid-19 pandemic explains 3.6% of the value of the discrepancy in the role of enterprises in development. As for financing and the investment environment, its percentage does not reach 1%.

Based on the foregoing, the following can be summarized:

• Partial rejection of the second main hypothesis about investment environment, and partial acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states the following: There are no difficulties for the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development related to investment environment.

Partial acceptance of the second hypothesis, which acknowledges the existence of difficulties for the role of small and medium enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector in achieving sustainable development

Discussion of the Results

Economic Dimension

After the results showed the role of tourism enterprises in achieving development through the economic dimension, the researcher used the T-test and the one-way ANOVA to obtain the following:

- A large percentage of companies and institutions provide good and innovative products and services that meet the diverse needs of tourists and others, which enhances the role of these effective facilities in the field of tourism development.

- 81% of enterprises seek to obtain a quality certificate.

- 80% of the enterprises confirm that the state's support contributes to the flowering of tourism enterprises.

- 74% of enterprises seek to hire new workers or create new jobs, which contributes to reducing the unemployment rate.

- Of the enterprises, 69% contribute to the development of the field of industry.

These statistics are based on the results of the survey and were not an official

Figure (5) *shows each axis with the questionnaire items associated with it*

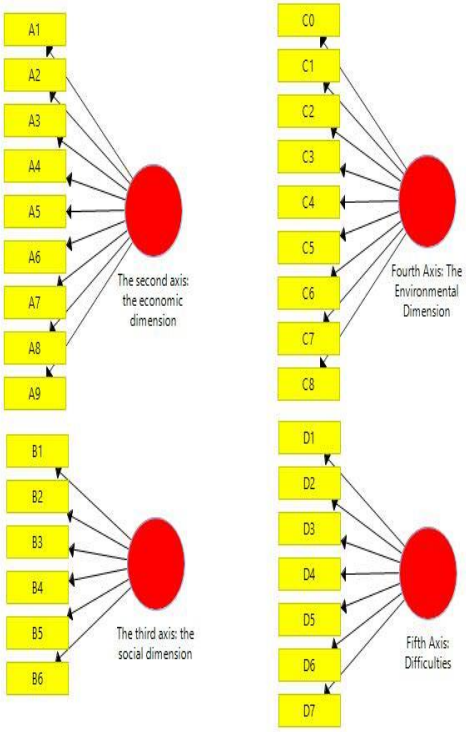


Figure 5 shows the results of the responses to the questions of the economic, social and environmental hubs, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on Saudi small and medium tourism enterprises.

Environmental Dimension

After the results showed the role of tourism enterprises in achieving development through

the environmental dimension, the researcher used the T-test and the one-way ANOVA to obtain the following:

- The enterprises seek to reduce waste and encourage recycling by 80%.
- The projects educate community members about the importance of preserving the environment, with a percentage of 80%.
- Small and medium enterprises comply with environmental protection laws by 80%.
- Small and medium enterprises contribute to educating tourists and the community about the importance of rationalization of various resources such as water and electricity by 77%.
- Small and medium enterprises spread the culture of environmental protection among their employees and customers, at a rate of 76%.

Table (7): *Nature of enterprises activity*

Activity Type	N	Economic Dimension		Environmental Dimension		Overall Average
		Mean	The ratio	Mean	The ratio	
PRODUCTS	202	3.889439	77.78878	3.951045	79.0209	78.40484
MANUAL SERVICES	99	3.881033	77.62065	3.87991	77.5982	77.60943
SERVICES	63	3.603175	72.06349	3.574956	71.49912	71.78131

Table 7 shows the nature of enterprise activities in the economic dimension and the investment environment.

The greatest impact was for production enterprises, with a percentage of 78%, followed by manual services, with a percentage of 78%. The services contribution was 71%.

From the Levene test, the level of significance was 0.000 for the environmental dimension and the economic dimension, indicating that the variance is homogeneous and there are no differences or.

This indicates that the nature of an enterprise's activity affects development in the environmental and economic fields.

Table (8): *enterprises size*

The Size	N	Economic Dimension		Environmental Dimension		Overall Average
		Mean	The ratio	Mean	The ratio	
Miniature	242	3.873278	77.46556	3.89348	77.86961	77.66759
Small	122	3.766849	75.33698	3.813297	76.26594	75.80146

Table 8 shows the size of enterprises' activities in the economic dimensions and the investment environment.

Microenterprises have the largest role in achieving development, with an average of 78 %, followed by small enterprises (75%).

From the Levine test, the significance level was 0.000 for the environmental dimension and 0.759 for the economic dimension.

This indicates that the difference is homogeneous which means that there are no differences in the role of SMEs in the environmental field. Thus it is more effective in the environmental field than the economic field.

Table (9): *Type of enterprises*

Type	N	Economic Dimension		Environmental Dimension		Overall Average
		Mean	The ratio	Mean	The ratio	
OTHER	67	4.119403	82.38806	4.12272	82.45439	82.42123
TOURIST SERVICES	40	3.888889	77.77778	3.952778	79.05556	78.41667
RESTURANT	58	3.844828	76.89655	3.925287	78.50575	77.70115
MAINTENANCE WORK	47	3.624113	72.48227	4.01182	80.23641	76.35934
SELL ITEMS	95	3.845614	76.91228	3.74386	74.87719	75.89474
HOTEL SERVICES	57	3.625731	72.51462	3.530214	70.60429	71.55945

From the Levene test, the level was 0.069 for the environmental dimension, which indicates the presence of variance between groups. As for the economic dimension, the level was 0.000, which indicates that enterprises in the field of the economic dimension have no variance. We conclude that the role of enterprises in the economic dimension is stronger than their role in the environmental dimension.

Difficulties and Treatments

1. The difficulty for institutions to obtain loans from commercial banks is at the forefront of challenges.

2. 2. Small and medium tourism enterprises have weak capital, which exposes them to stop working quickly.

3. 3. The lack of clarity of the idea of the small project for the owner himself, and the scarcity of sources of information about the project[21].

4. Lack of experience and time about the project owner because he is working in another job, which makes it difficult for him to continue.

5. The high costs of establishing the project, such as the high rents of offices and shops, the costs of furnishing, and the high costs of obtaining information and studies for the enterprise.

6. The absence of governance for such projects, as most of them are projects that lack financial, accounting, and control systems due to their high cost.

7. Difficulty obtaining qualified and trained workers.

8. The strong competitive market environment affects the survival of many small and medium enterprises, especially tourism ones, as there are companies with great financial capabilities, management experience, and effective marketing methods.

9. The lack of clear and accurate information about competing companies is an obstacle to the sustainability of some small and medium tourism projects.

10. Fees imposed on projects may be considered large, especially at the beginning, such as service fees, municipality fees, electricity, water, specifications, quality, and advertisements.

11. Lack of strong marketing and promotional campaigns for tourism in the Eastern Province.

12. The absence of a map of small and medium tourism projects showing the most profitable and sustainable projects for the investor and the national economy.

13. It is natural that the problems faced by all non-tourist small- and medium-sized enterprises are the same as those faced by tourism enterprises, especially since tourism projects are linked to the abundance of archaeological and recreational areas in the eastern region.

Recommendations

1. Facilitate procedures for obtaining financing from banks or government agencies.

2. Find centers to clarify the importance of tourism enterprises and make low-cost feasibility studies for enterprises[16].

3. Work on linking small and medium tourism enterprises to a comprehensive automated system through which work can be done to develop them and avoid errors that may lead to stoppage.

4. Work on identifying a responsible party for making a tourist map of the archaeological areas and recreational places in the eastern region, explaining to citizens which tourism enterprises have the best profit, return, and sustainability for the citizen and the economy.

5. Encourage small- and medium-sized tourism projects in the Eastern Province by providing more tax exemptions.

6. Provide funding sources and facilitate procedures for obtaining them for the advancement of this category of project.

7. Support young people in finding creative ideas while providing the necessary training in tourism guidance and introducing tourist areas in the eastern region.

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