

DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECO-SYSTEM FOR  
TOURISM SECTOR IN SULTANATE OF OMAN

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my wife, brothers, and sisters, who taught me that even the largest task could be accomplished if it is done one-step at a time.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to develop an entrepreneurship ecosystem framework for the tourism industry in Oman, in which the entrepreneurship and tourism industries had been identified as the key priorities in the effort towards economic diversification in the 2040 vision. The framework can be used as a baseline for entrepreneurs and their stakeholders to start and sustain their business. Currently, the impact of entrepreneurship is limited and its contribution to the national GDP is relatively insignificant. From review of prior research on entrepreneurial ecosystem, mixed method was employed to develop a framework that can help to support and enable entrepreneurs to seize opportunities in the tourism industry as well as to establish and sustain their business. This research collected data through interview with 20 experts from various institutions who have had experience and knowledge in tourism sector and entrepreneurship which constitute of academics, managers, and entrepreneurs. A survey of 124 entrepreneurs as well as interview with human capital experts at Oman universities were also conducted. The data collected was analysed to evaluate the current ecosystem framework. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data and descriptive analysis for the quantitative data in order to develop the new entrepreneur ecosystem framework. Based on the results of the data analyses, the research was able to identify the main challenges which are funding, support programs, regulations, qualification and training, and innovation. The research also identified eight (8) main areas that define the main pillars of the proposed system, namely, entrepreneurship policies, financing, non-financial support services, human capital, entrepreneurship market, entrepreneurship culture, innovation, and opportunity recognition, supported with the number of programs in each domain and institutions in Oman. This research has therefore proposed the entrepreneurial ecosystem framework and contributed knowledge with regards to entrepreneurship ecosystems.

## ABSTRAK

Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk membangunkan rangka kerja ekosistem keusahawanan bagi industri pelancongan di Oman, di mana industri keusahawanan dan pelancongan telah dikenal pasti sebagai petunjuk utama dalam usaha ke arah kepelbagaian ekonomi dalam wawasan 2040. Rangka kerja ini boleh digunakan sebagai garis dasar untuk usahawan dan pemegang taruh untuk memulakan dan mengekalkan perniagaan mereka. Pada masa ini, impak keusahawanan adalah terhadap dan sumbangannya kepada KDNK negara secara relatifnya tidak ketara. Daripada kajian semula terdahulu tentang ekosistem keusahawanan, kaedah campuran telah digunakan untuk membangunkan satu rangka kerja yang berupaya membantu menyokong dan membolehkan usahawan untuk merebut peluang dalam industri pelancongan serta untuk mendirikan dan mengekalkan perniagaan mereka. Penyelidikan ini mengumpul data melalui temu bual dengan 20 pakar dari pelbagai latar belakang institusi yang memiliki pengalaman dan pengetahuan dalam sektor pelancongan dan keusahawanan yang terdiri daripada ahli akademik, pengurus dan usahawan. Tinjauan terhadap 124 usahawan serta temu bual dengan pakar modal insan di Universiti Oman juga turut dilaksanakan. Data yang dikumpul dianalisis untuk menilai rangka kerja ekosistem semasa. Analisis kandungan digunakan untuk menganalisis data kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif untuk data kuantitatif bagi membangunkan rangka kerja ekosistem usahawan yang baharu. Berdasarkan keputusan analisis data, kajian ini dapat mengenal pasti cabaran utama iaitu pendanaan, program sokongan, peraturan, kelayakan dan latihan, serta inovasi. Penyelidikan juga mengenal pasti lapan (8) bidang utama yang menakrif tonggak utama sistem yang dicadangkan iaitu, dasar keusahawanan, pembiayaan, perkhidmatan sokongan bukan kewangan, modal insan, pasaran keusahawanan, budaya keusahawanan, inovasi, dan pengiktirafan peluang, disokong dengan bilangan program dalam setiap domain dan institusi di Oman. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini telah mencadangkan rangka kerja ekosistem keusahawanan dan menyumbang pengetahuan berkaitan ekosistem keusahawanan.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

Critical factors	-	Factors which Make Success Sustainability
EE	-	Entrepreneurship Ecosystem
Entrepreneurship	-	Defines all Initiatives, Start-ups
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GEI	-	Global Entrepreneurship Index
GEM	-	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
MOT		Ministry of Tourism
NCSI		National Center of Statistics and Information
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organisation
RIYADA	-	Define the Public Authority for SMEs Development
SEC		Zubair small enterprise center
SME	-	Micro, Small, and Medium- sized Enterprises
UN	-	United Nation
WEF	-	World Economic Forum

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

The tourism industry is considered as one of the promising and important sectors and as the main feeder to the national income for many countries. Consequently, it has become a top government priority in Oman, which is given high attention in on developing and promoting it to the best, leading to a bigger contribution to the national economy. Indeed, it is approved as one of the main five economic sectors within ~~current~~ strategic plan (Five –Year plan 2016-2020) where this plan aims to diversifying the Sultanate’s economy rather than focusing on one income source (which is Oil & Gas (Khalifa, 2018)). The report by World Economic Form in 2013 predicted that tourism in Oman would become one of the largest industries (WEF et al., 2013), with reference to 2018, Oman successfully attracted about 4.2 million tourists from different countries, a massive increase reached to 2.1 million in 2017 (Designer, 2019). The increased prioritization of tourism sector in the Sultanate translates into a rise in investments in the industry. In an economic impact analysis report on travel and tourism, the World Travel Tourism & Council (WTTC) states that in 2016, travel and tourism is expected to reach OMR 273.3mn (3.0% of total national investment) and is expected to rise by 10.5% in 2017. It should rise to OMR 492.8mn in 2027 (3.7% of total GDP). The WTTC report further demonstrates the significance of the travel and tourism industry and forecasts growth in different areas. In 2016 the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was OMRI,929.9mn (7.3% of GDP). This is expected to rise by 8.3% in 2017, and by 5.9% per annum to OMR3,716.4mn (9.0% of GDP) in 2027. In addition, travel and tourism supported 7.2% of total employment in 2015 (157.500). This is expected to fall by 2.6% in 2017 to 153,500 jobs and rise by 3.5% pa to 216,000 jobs in 2027 (WTTC, 2017). The reason for the fall has not been identified. In its 2017 economic impact report WTTC placed the Sultanate ninth in terms of overall tourism industry

growth, and Tanteedh-driven projects place it third out of 185 countries for capital investment growth (Haitham Hasan, 2017). In a recent article in the Times of Oman, Vikram Loomba, Director of Advisory Services at PwC; stated that whilst generating employment through the tourism sector is important, the greatest benefits to the Sultanate can be obtained through encouragement of entrepreneurship in the travel and tourism industry, Creating opportunities for SMEs to "thrive in the travel and tourism sector is crucial towards pris sector participation, and has a multiplicative effect on GDP: larger national or regional initiatives will the translate into localised opportunities as well" (Haitham Hasan, 2017).

Besides, developing nations, including Oman, are updating their business entrepreneurship ecosystems to achieve the best possible performance. Governments encourage entrepreneurship to achieve economic growth by boosting the area for entrepreneurship and advancing innovation (jnsen,2017). This has become a profitable project for countries that are aiming to achieve economic development through set of strategies. The core of entrepreneurship ecosystems plays distinct roles in appealing to youth to become an entrepreneur, which is good for the individual and the country.

The importance of entrepreneurship for individuals and the country is one of the key aspects of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Stam, 2015). It is based on the principle of attracting those who dream of self-employment but who do not fully understand the concept of entrepreneurship and those who expect some aid from the government. In this regard, many authors have argued about the effect of the creation of new companies and entrepreneurs on the concept of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Isenberg, 2011). Accordingly, Oman recognized the role of entrepreneurs as actors; they have the potential to add value at a satisfactory level to the Omani economy and act as agents in the creation of new wealth. In Oman, however, entrepreneurial ecosystem is doubtful because the concept itself is new and in most of the economy of Oman it is not highlighted (Issa & Thomas, 2018).

The ecosystem for the entrepreneurship represents a group of stakeholders who play multiple roles with the aim of enabling the establishment and growth of

start-ups or supporting the current business owners to develop their businesses. Its application remains necessary to achieve success and growth by enabling them to achieve wealth that can benefit the individual and society as well as the economy. The ecosystem is based on an interrelated dynamic that evolves and changes with the development and economic growth of entrepreneurship. The ecosystem works to provide possible policies and procedures, find appropriate financing channels for an entrepreneurial venture, creates a stimulating and supportive culture for entrepreneurs, create a set of support mechanisms (including infrastructure, accelerators, and business incubators) and develop the human capital that can build entrepreneurial facilities, in addition to the presence of suitable and supportive markets for pilot projects (Isenberg, 2011). Hence, it is important to study the ecosystem considering the rapid and continuous changes in the global economy and the characteristics of each country separately. This is in addition to the economic growth and job creation on the one hand, and creativity and innovation on the other hand.

In its future vision, the Sultanate has identified the entrepreneurship and tourism development as the main priorities in efforts to diversify income sources (Supreme Council for Planning, 2016; Talal, 2017). To maximize the benefit of multiple opportunities and to fulfil the commitments of the Sultanate's Vision 2040 an urgent need has emerged to study and create an integrated system to support entrepreneurship for small business in tourism industry (Jansen et al., 2017). Both sectors that have a positive impact on the diversification of income sources in the Sultanate and increase its contribution to the GDP. Owoade (2016) defined the entrepreneurial ecosystem as "all activities, functions, and programs related to realizing opportunities and establishing institutions to follow them". However, entrepreneurship ecosystems as an empirical concept are important to provide the environment that has distinguished features to support entrepreneurs for growing and sustainability, where they can reinvest their time, money, or expertise to support their entrepreneurial activity.

In both areas, the entrepreneurship, and tourism industry, have been relatively clear growth and achievements during the past years with the support of

the government and the private sector (Jansen et al., 2017). However, these sectors need to have further improved to have the ability to compete and gain more opportunities (Tanfeedh, 2017). Accordingly, this research looks at the entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman, specifically the position and the significant role of youth who have interests to operate in the tourism sector, whilst identifying opportunities and discovering new ways to boost economic growth.

In this regard, this research focuses on introducing the entrepreneurship ecosystem for small business as one of the successful ways for developing Oman tourism industry, and it looks at the examples of different structures for the entrepreneurship ecosystem of the previous studies. This research also identified number of challenges which have a negative impact on the sector's growth. It also focusses on opportunities that currently exist in the tourism industry, and the best ways to determine and understand the factors required for the support system of small business in the Sultanate' tourism industry. This research also provides recommendations on the best ways for entrepreneurs who intend to start their business in the tourism industry. The research places the findings in the context of comprehensive theory and international research related to entrepreneurial and tourism development.

The economy of developing countries faces real challenges in establishing the diversification of income sources, providing jobs for thousands of education outputs, economic and logistic competition among the countries of the region, as well as the danger of relying on a major source of income such as oil and gas, which has fluctuated in recent years, especially the GCC countries (Said, 2018). In this context, the entrepreneurship can add more value to Oman's economy in terms of economic activities and development. For example, they have a direct positive impact on the development and growth of export and import (Strickling, 2016), while it has a positive outcome to nation's GDP by offering to the government additional revenue streams such as tax and other ways (Magd & McCoy, 2014). According to Shammari, (2010), entrepreneurship can support innovation in Oman which can have a head start in providing and developing new products and services. Although the entrepreneurship has the majority of employments that are unskilled labor, it also

provides an opportunity, which facilitates the environment for them to develop their skills to the advancement of the society and the economy as a whole (Magd & McCoy, 2014).

A report published by Zubair SEC in 2017, mentioned that the Sultanate of Oman has a high potential for growth in the entrepreneurship but not yet been fully achieved because it is still in its early stage of development (Jansen et.al, 2017). Meanwhile, the Oman strategic plan of development (2016-2020) and Central bank of Oman (CBO) identified entrepreneurship development as a key target, reflecting the assessment of the status of an entrepreneurship. In this stage, the support system framework is needed to enhance this sector because the current approaches of entrepreneurship provided by the government are not sufficient to make them grow as expected (Acs, Zoltan, et al., 2017). The support system for entrepreneurship is important to Oman economy because the ecosystem includes a large established businesses (start-ups and up-scale) that can provide rich and inclusive information about the business area which can either be accessible or shared (Mason & Brown, 2014; Shaima, 2017). The entrepreneurship ecosystem has emerged as a solution and response to the various issues that entrepreneurial activities face on an ongoing basis (Aaltonen, 2016), whereby sometimes resulting in failure or non-growth. Like most research by different scientists, they have studied the ecosystem of entrepreneurship in Western countries, but few are known in developing countries. Specifically, the number of attempts that have been made to create an ideal ecosystem for entrepreneurship in Oman is exceptionally low. Oman and other developing countries have different characteristics compared to other developed countries.

According to the CEO of the Public Authority for the Development of SMEs (Riyada), the goal of the entrepreneurship sector is expected to contribute 30% to the national GDP by the end of 2020 (Kutty, 2018). However, based on the last information gathered on this issue it showed that currently contributes only 16% to the Sultanate's GDP (NCSI, 2021) (no data specific for tourism entrepreneurship). Thereby, in order to increase the contribution of entrepreneurship, needs to enhance



entrepreneurial activities via relevant infrastructure to overcome the challenges faced by them (Lina, 2017).

Entrepreneurs face various challenges to have the ability to strike a balance in their projects with specific reference to the tourism industry, there are four main issues for entrepreneurs to start their business highlighted by the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh) Tourism lab (Tanfeedh report, 2017). These issues are summarized as follows:

1. Difficulties with regulations and procedures as part of government role. Entrepreneurs are suffering from the long series procedure and should contact different parties regarding starting a tourism business and obtain the business license.
2. The entrepreneurs have a shortage of the right skills and good experience to drive their business especially in the tourism industry, meaning knowledge which is necessary about the market is scarce.
3. Due to the geographic location of the Sultanate of Oman, the current tourism offerings are limited, especially in the winter.
4. Because of shortage of tourism season as well as the limit of tourist visiting their relatives and friends it creates a short market for small business.

Despite the challenges faced by many researchers to conduct their studies in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and this topic has not been explored, it is believed that this is an important task. However, in order to develop an efficient supporting measure, it is essential to gain a holistic understanding of the environment in which entrepreneurs are operating. The solutions lie in the existence of an ecosystem that follows specific steps to create a friendly environment for this sector to grow and compete. Thus, this research will address the weakness of Oman entrepreneurship and find opportunities by developing an entrepreneurship ecosystem framework as

a key solution for growth and sustainability. This research was motivated by the limited investigation in relation to the entrepreneurship eco-system in Oman.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Oman is one of the Arabian country (GCC member) in which tourism sector has grown considerably since 2000s, where the World Economic Form report in 2013 predicted that tourism in Oman would become one of the largest industries (WEF et al., 2013). In reference to 2018, Oman successfully attracted about 4.2 million tourists from different world countries, a massive increase compared to 2.1 million in 2017 (Designer, 2019). Oman has multiple tourist attractions, especially in cultural and nature tourism fields. Muscat has been chosen as the best tourist destination around the world by American travel guide publisher (Lonely Planet) in 2012 as well as has been chosen as the capital of Arab tourism in 2012 (I'Aon, 2013). The report issued in 2015 by the World Economic Forum (WEF) rates countries by their competitiveness in travel and tourism. Sadly, the rank of the Sultanate has dropped from 57 to 65 (Jansen et al., 2017). Oman failed to build on its potential for tourism, whilst other countries in GCC like UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have created good business climates, built adequate infrastructure, and enhanced some tourism outlets (Tanfeedh, 2017). Therefore, Oman's government needs to make large efforts to make the country more attractive by set up the Oman's tourism strategy 2020-2040. Although there is great potential performance of the Oman's tourism industry and growth in the last few years, the contribution of that to the nation's economy remains to be "relativity limited", 2.6% in 2018 (National center S&I, 2019). The government is looking towards this sector to be a significant contributor to the economy among some sectors in Oman's strategy for economic diversification. However, this research seeks to explore the challenges that make this sector unattractive and more contribute to the country's economy

In addition to that, the Oman tourism industry is considered as a great potential for entrepreneurs for the following reasons: the number of tourists is growing over the past years, and the plenty of opportunities for new services and

products for the same sector, and the little number of competitors and projects in tourism sector that can be considered as a real source of income for individuals. According to recent survey by ZSEC showed that 59% of entrepreneurs which are not active in tourism would consider starting a business in the industry if it is easier to establish a project in the and there is a better support system for entrepreneurs (Jansen et al., 2017). The total number of small business that operate directly in the tourism sector are limited compared to total start-ups (190 out of 13795) which accounts 1.4 % only of the total number (Riyada, 2019). While the national plan is expecting to contribute 30% to the GDP at the end of 2020 (Kutty, 2018), reports pointed that the contribution of the sector still limited at 16% only (The Firm, 2021). This indicates that the consequence of its contribution by tourism entrepreneurship is limited too. The figures showed that the entrepreneurs in tourism sector face many challenges and barriers to survival and limit their growth or many entrepreneurs have hesitation in entering tourism market even though some supports are available from different public and private sectors. Thereby, further in-depth research about barriers for entrepreneurship in the tourism industry is needed. This research seeks to explore the most prevalent challenges that entrepreneurs face in the tourism industry.

In addition to above, a lack of literature as there limited of empirical or theoretical study related to Oman entrepreneurship ecosystem for the tourism industry is the basis for doing the study. The literature which is discussed in this research concludes that the current support system for entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman still did not cover all aspects of the entrepreneur's need (The Firm, 2021). The current ecosystem has many critical barriers. For instance, the current support system has shortage related to the role of government such as: regulatory and administrative burdens and support service as there are no special legislations and regulations for entrepreneurs. Rather, they resort to the general legislation applied to all companies, and long procedure for doing business (Issa & Thomas, 2018; The Firm, 2021). Even though there is financial support by the government and few number of the private sector entities, but the current conditions of funds supply show problematic (e.g., payback structure for short term loans, and finding customer as the result of lack of trust between entrepreneurs and large firms) (Khan & Krishnamurthy, 2016; Saqib et al., 2017). It has shortage also in entrepreneurs' education and necessary knowledge and skills. For example, shortage

in national labors due to unskilled, hesitant to go to private sector due to lack of trust, and limitedness of the entrepreneurship program in higher education, shortage in knowledge and skills in the field of business (Al Bulushi & Bagum, 2017; Jansen et al., 2017). One of the important issues in Oman current ecosystem is that shortage related to innovation and the way to identify opportunity. The current ecosystem lacks in encouraging innovation, opportunity recognition that are necessary for future business (Schwab, 2019). Reports showed that Oman has weak position for most innovation elements (Acs, Zoltan. Szerb, 2019; Bosma et al., 2019;)

The literature revealed some issues that require further studies for better understanding and to study the proper ways that can provide a model to enable these businesses to succeed. The literature showed limited studies available on the entrepreneurship ecosystem for Oman. While the Sultanate of Oman does not have the official structure of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, there is still a need to do more studies for a better understanding of the factors enhancing the Oman ecosystem. Based on entrepreneurship ecosystem theory by Isenberg, 2011 “each ecosystem must be unique in each region different from the other”; therefore, Oman would require a unique ecosystem that can suit its environment. Based on the discussion of previous frameworks it showed that some areas are not addressed and are important to meet for entrepreneurship in Oman, especially in the tourism industry such as innovation in tourism and opportunity recognition, industry’s knowledge, language, skills to provide services in this industry, supply chain, manpower, support policies, knowledge in finance and management. However, the theoretical concept of ecosystems remains underdeveloped, thus making it difficult to understand their structure and influence on Oman entrepreneurship. Thereby, entrepreneurship as a field need to be understood more in terms of what makes it weak (challenges), and what type of support (factors) is needed to enhance the activities in tourism sector to be more effective.

### **1.3 Research Goal**

The research attempts to explore the challenges in tourism industry and entrepreneur's business-face to determine the critical factors that have a positive impact on Oman's entrepreneurial activity. The findings of this research, thereby, guide the mapping of Oman's ecosystem to enhance entrepreneurial activities in the tourism industry.

#### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

The main question of this research is: "what is the suitable supportive structure framework that can enables entrepreneurs for starting and growing their business in the Sultanate's tourism industry?" The following research questions (RQ) are used:

RQ1. What are the most important challenges in the Sultanate's tourism industry?

RQ2. What are the existing and future opportunities for growth and innovation in the tourism sector in Oman?

RQ3. What are the critical issues that entrepreneurs face in running a business in the tourism industry?

RQ4. What are the critical factors that entrepreneurs needed to enhance their activities in tourism industry in Oman?

RQ5. What are the government role to promote entrepreneurs to respond for the opportunity's recognition?

RQ6. What are the necessary programs and support organizations involved in the Oman ecosystem that assist entrepreneurs to develop their business?

### **1.3.2 Research Objectives**

The following research objectives (RO) are used to answer the research questions as follows:

RO1. To identify the most important challenges in the Sultanate's tourism industry.

RO2: To identify the existing and future opportunities for growth and innovation in the tourism sector in Oman.

RO3: To determine the critical issues that entrepreneurs face in running a business in the tourism industry.

RO4: To explore the critical factors that entrepreneurs need to enhance their activities in tourism industry in Oman.

RO5: To determine the role of government to promote entrepreneurs to respond for the opportunity recognition.

RO6: To develop a supportive structure with necessary programs and support organizations that enables entrepreneurs for starting and growing their business in the Sultanate's tourism industry.

### **1.4 Significance of the Research**

As the tourism sector is an important sector identified by the Omani government as one of the strategic sources in income diversification in the future vision of “Oman 2040”, this sector will gain momentum and is expected to have a large contribution to the sultanate’s GDP. Therefore, the development of an entrepreneurship ecosystem framework is the key to this contribution and would contribute to the success of these enterprises. However, this research aims to find a road map for the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Sultanate and specifically, the

critical position and enabling Omani entrepreneurs who are operating in the tourism sector to identify opportunities and exploring new ways to foster economic growth.

By mapping a new ecosystem framework in the tourism industry, the policymakers in Oman can take advantage to set up new policies, regulatory, and external assistance that an entrepreneur need. The Oman government can adopt this proposed framework to overcome the challenges and barriers that prevent the growth in the tourism sector. Meanwhile, it can be a guideline to inspire Omani youth to establish their own tourism business and to tackle the current problems that are faced by entrepreneurs in the sector. Thus, we believe that this research will contribute much to have a good understanding of how the entrepreneurial ecosystem should work in Oman, while other sectors can benefit from this framework as well. In addition, the policymakers can pay greater attention to developing their strategy in how to implement this framework to motivate the business owners or to develop initiatives for them to start their own business based on the requirement stated in the framework.

Moreover, in terms of the research side, the results of this research will contribute more on additional knowledge to the current literature regarding entrepreneurship ecosystems. Note that, this study is unique as the first of its kind on mapping entrepreneurship ecosystem research in the Oman and it is unique as it used different types of data collection mixed method (qualitative research, quantitative survey).

## **1.5 Scope of Research**

This research aims to explore the important elements for Oman's entrepreneurial activities to set a suitable framework for the entrepreneurship ecosystem. As the Sultanate of Oman has considered the growth in the entrepreneurship sector and tourism development to be an important resource in economic diversification, this research focuses on the entrepreneurship ecosystem, including Initiatives, entrepreneurs in the tourism industry and may include other industries in Oman to fulfil the shortage in entrepreneur's sample. The target group

in this research are the main players within the Oman ecosystem and tourism industry such as entrepreneurs, support organizations (formal & informal institutions) with different levels (manager, CEO, experts), academics in the same field, incubators, successful entrepreneurs, and Future Educated human capital.

Data was collected from interviews with 20 key players in the Oman entrepreneurship ecosystem and tourism industry to find specific insights regarding the support of system framework in the Sultanate of Oman (Appendix B is a list with details of stakeholders that have participated in the interview). Supported data was collected from a survey of (210) enterprises in the same sector and complementary sectors in Oman (more details are in Chapter 3). However, this research also will be as detailed as possible when the data limitation and time constraints become easy and available to obtain due to the multiplicity of agencies that provide services to entrepreneurs and because of various statistics provided by the parties.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

The research methodological framework consists of seven phases described in Figure 1.1 below:



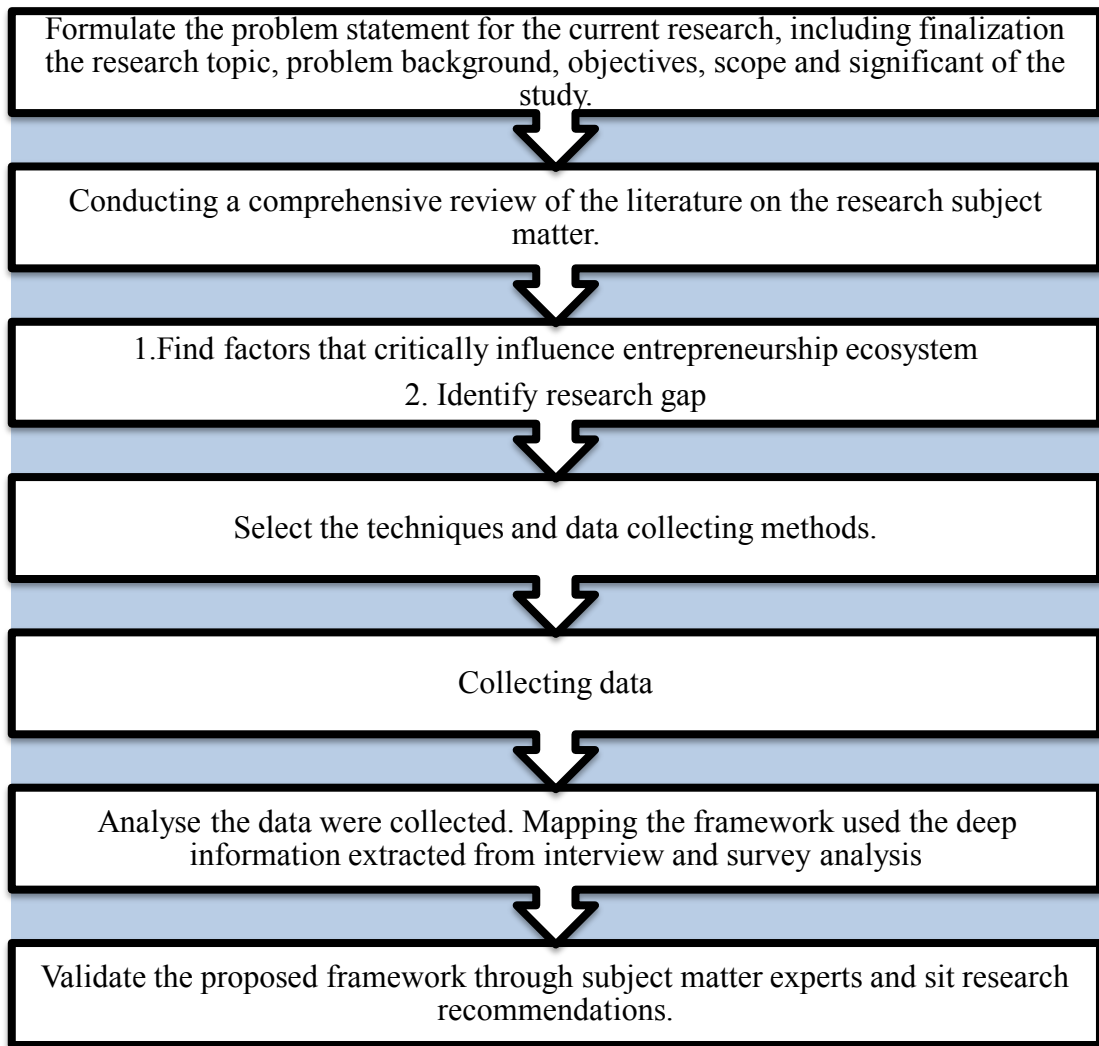


Figure 1.1 Research Structure

This thesis outlines the conceptual ideas behind the framing of the Omani entrepreneurship ecosystem as well as the outcomes that present themselves as a result of the mapping process. The thesis is structured in five parts as follows: chapter one is the introduction of the core concept, while chapter two is the review of the literature, chapter three is the research methodology, chapter four is the data collection and analysis, and Chapter five is the discussion, conclusion, and recommendation supported by the presentation of the new model of Oman entrepreneurial ecosystem support diagram.

Chapter one outlines the introduction of the thesis, which describes the issues behind this research, and outlines the critical problem that this research seeks to solve. Research questions and research objectives are stated to determine which

critical ways are necessary to find the solution to the issues. Chapter two outlines the framework through which a sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystem framework can be developed. The first Part in this chapter allocated to the target sector in the current research - tourism sector- where the sector was reviewed on the current situation in the Middle East and then in the Sultanate of Oman as an individual case. As the result, what can this sector present to small businesses in terms of available opportunities? It has been given a clear vision about the tourism sector in Oman based on Oman 2040 tourism strategy. The research has been supported with some examples for best practices in entrepreneurship businesses in the tourism industry that have occurred in the Middle East. For the second part the research has given more details on entrepreneurship in order to set out the factors that can give critical support for entrepreneurs. Second: at the same time, this research prescribes key strategic elements that can improve the Omani ecosystem through tested and tried international practices. The research also focuses in this chapter on the Omani case to give some investigation on what type of the present ecosystem is to find out the shortages in ecosystem nowadays. The initial entrepreneurship framework was developed for the Omani ecosystem based on best international practices and is reviewed and revised by the specialists according to the methods specified in the research.

Chapter 3 provides details on research methodology, such as research design where this research uses (mixed-method approach). Research instrument (face to face semi-structured interview and survey questionnaire). Data collected by interview and survey and data analysed by content analysis. Also, research described the research population and sampling, independent and dependent variables. This research used the Delphi technique as part of the data collection and analysis. The Delphi technique is a broadly used and accepted technique for collecting data from respondents within their area of expertise. The method was designed as a group communication process that aims to reach a convergence of opinion on a particular issue. Chapter four discusses findings from two methods interview, and survey questionnaire. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings and identifies the results which in turn lead to presentation of reconditions and shape the final diagram for entrepreneurship ecosystem for the Sultanate.

## 1.7 Operational Definitions

Here are the definitions of the ecosystem framework variables.

### 1. Human Capital

Human capital (experiences, skills, and education) is a significant factor of business failure/success in the entrepreneurial ecosystem's education pillar. The chance to transform the skills, experiences, and knowledge that should be necessary in new business is represented by the learning process (Guerrero & Espinoza-Benavides, 2021). Human capital is known as knowledge and skills that entrepreneur and labor force possesses that are relevant to the entrepreneurial activity (Gustaf & Knut, 2016). It can be transformed into a real source of value to achieve market competitiveness which enable start-ups to cope with sharp competition in Market (Al ziyadat et al., 2016). Human capital necessary for Oman due to shortage in entrepreneurs' education and necessary knowledge and skills. Shortage in national labors due to unskilled, hesitant to going private sector due to lack of trust. Limit the entrepreneurship program in higher education and shortage in knowledge and skills in field of business.

### 2. Financial Support

Financial sources for entrepreneurs is an important condition for their growth and survival. Nykänen, (2018) argue that, the financing in any ecosystem is highly important, but in same time depends on the type of venture or start-ups. For example, a service enterprise like consulting requires less funding than the construction firm. Besides, the important of finance could directly influence to the idea success. According to Gustaf & Knut, (2016) the high percentage of start-ups failure on growth and survival is due to the lack of funding from venture capital. This domain contains a list of types of financial supports for start-ups and upscaling such as: family and friends, micro-loans, venture capital funds, angle investors, and loan and debt (Isenberg, 2011). The importance of this factor lies in the Omani ecosystem that current ecosystem has shortage related to finance and market.

### 3. Entrepreneurship Culture

Wiele (2017) defined culture as what makes an organization or region unique, while Stam and Ven (2018) see culture as degree to which entrepreneurship is valued in society. Therefore, society's culture has a major impact on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, where it has directly affects to individuals attitudes towards entrepreneurship and thus the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur ( Beggar, 2016; Regh et al., 2018). In the area of development, it is increasingly known that culture and attitude, together with other schemes such as social protection, are significant factors that determine the level of the country's entrepreneurship.

The presence of this factor in Oman ecosystem will undoubtedly enhance the individual's entrepreneurial culture of citizens and value addition for long-term creation of entrepreneurship culture (Al-Abri et al., 2018), which in turn will lead to sustainability of entrepreneurship (Thomas, 2016). Social value is an important indicator could measure the Omani youths' perception on the importance of entering entrepreneurship in the Sultanate. Kabbaj et.al., (2016) pointed out that, to promote the social culture for entrepreneurship, it must start with increasing awareness about the importance of social entrepreneurial activity and its sustainable impact that might be generated for the individual, risk-taking, creativity and innovation. For instance, how many Omanis believe that the entrepreneurship is the better career choice for them? (Hernán, 2018). This will indicate how much effort made to spread the culture of entrepreneurship in the past.

### 4. Entrepreneurship Policies

The policy domain refers to the extent to which national policies give support to the entrepreneurship in the ecosystem (Xavier, 2016). According to Spigel (2017), it is important that entrepreneurship sector have different policies that undertake state-run assistance to provide support through direct funding or remove barriers to new start-up creation. Regional policy for entrepreneurship must focus on building essential support for new initiatives and programs rather than waiting for initiatives themselves to provide entrepreneurial cultures and networks (Spigel, 2017). Policy

elements consist of; regulatory framework, institutions, financial support policy, and taxes policy (Knut, 2016). Accordingly, offering specific regulatory framework for Oman context is necessary, because there are difficulties with regulations and procedures. Entrepreneurs suffering from long series procedure should contact different parties regarding starting a tourism business and obtain the business license.

## 5. Market

Access to market plays an important role in moving entrepreneurship activities and it is one of the main pillars for establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region (Nir, 2014; Kalinina et.al, 2017). Understanding social market for entrepreneurship is a critical step forward to understand social enterprises (Kabbaj et al., 2016; Schaper, 2015). As a result, smart regional government can provides enough information to entrepreneurs about market such as: market condition, how the region can provide assistant to developing the successful ecosystem, or make it easy to access to international market, and make it easy access huge number population in domestic market (Wiele, 2017). According to Aaltonen (2016), launching the first product may determine the fate of any entrepreneurial venture, thus, start-ups must discover market opportunities and benefit from flexible labor market. New entrepreneurs are lacking in experience and structures that support sales activities and marketing, but usually they can build these experiences by learning in the time when they repeated the product or service they launch and sell.

In Oman market, start-ups and SME have a large potential of opportunities from both formal and informal institutions where such SMEs should tap from them when these companies show some support to them through different channels (Thomas, 2016). Nevertheless, in the growth stages, several elements will develop towards entrepreneurship, which become not only national but global as well which in turn lead to the network become denser. The previous studies within Oman context showed the need to promote market elements due to the current ecosystem has shortage to enable entrepreneurs deal with market conditions with effective way. Entrepreneurs face some barriers such as; low productivity; recession; rising competition with foreign

products; lack to determine their customers; lack to access to new market & new customer.

## 6. Non-Financial Support Services

The support structures mean “all support services offered from formal and informal organizations of business initiatives, start-ups to facilitate the process and promote the entrepreneur’s action to grow” (Knut et al, 2016; Kabbaj et al., 2016; Pajala, 2018). These supports can enable new ventures to focus on their business on their area of expertise instead of buying for specialist service and support (Mason & Brown, 2014). Professional support has a very important role in the ecosystem. Lawyers, bankers, insurance agents, and other experts are all part of this community and should be trained on the specific characteristics of start-up societies. The processes and actions vary from one country to the next. Support structures can come with different types such as for first stage of development (e.g., business incubations, business accelerators, and co-working space), for upscaling (infrastructure, mentors, media support, and business services providers) (Knut et al, 2016; Isenberg, 2011). All these services offered by several organizations work a way to support especially the new ventures where most their business models are derived from original business incubator (Al-Abri et al., 2018). The main challenges that small business face are: lack of necessary knowledge in terms of how to do the firm's strategic planning, how to find customers, lack of skilled labour, competitions with others in the market, lack in advance technology, lack how to do marketing strategy, difficulty to get raw materials, lack in training and necessary skilled in accounting, human resource, supply chain.

## 7. Innovation

Innovation is a result-oriented measure, it can't be considering a mean to achieve a goal. The degree of innovation indicates the level to which an organization is open to innovative ideas, exploring new ways of doing things, creative in its operational methods, embraces and facilitates new solutions to customer demands and promotes a positive attitude (Vicente et al., 2015). Innovativeness increases the willingness of the company to adopt new ideas. A company with a high level of

innovation continually develops new products and technological processes that enable it to respond to competition and adapt to changes in demand environment (Tsai & Yang, 2013). It can improve innovation policy or fostering the innovation culture, as well as understand the people's perspective regarding innovation needs where it should take in the account an entrepreneur as an agent of change (Malecki & Edward Malecki, 2018). This may give the policy makers some insight in which direction to move in order to strengthen this domain (Knut, 2016; Spigel, 2017).

## 8. Opportunities Recognition.

Sustainable growth of entrepreneurship is linked to how opportunities are identified in a particular sector. According to Global Entrepreneurship Index, economic growth is positively related to opportunity entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs envision businesses that are scalable and have a high growth potential. They also have the ability to turn those visions into reality. They complete tasks. They navigate obstacles by going over, under, and around them. In this regard, as the tourism industry in Oman is still new and has variety of special sites in Middle East, the Sultanate may offer huge potential opportunities for small-scale local business. There are many types of businesses that have entrepreneurs' touch. For example, many recognition the opportunity in heritage accommodations, tourism services, food and beverages, and nature and adventure (Aulia & Almandhari, 2015).

### 1.8 Summary

This chapter discusses the introduction to the research topic in the background that let the reader know about the situation of Oman's economy and familiarize them in which sectors that Oman vision 2020 has been focused to diversify sources of income. The entrepreneurship sector and tourism industry were within the targets of both visions. The entrepreneurship sector in Oman, like the other developing economies, is still suffering from some issues which limits their start-up businesses growth. This chapter also presents the importance of the existing ecosystem as a supportive system for entrepreneurship in the Sultanate. According to this

introduction, the research problem is formatted, and the main purpose of this research is stated along with the research questions and research objectives. The chapter finally concludes with the significance of the research, scope, and general outline of this research. Moreover, it has been shown through the data that the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship sector to the national economy is limited if we compare it with other countries. To tackle this problem, the researchers used the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem as the ideal solution to enhance entrepreneurial activity in the tourism industry in the Sultanate.

Table 1.0.1 Research summary

RQ	RO
RQ1. What are the most important challenges in the Sultanate's tourism industry?	RO1. To identify the most important challenges in the Sultanate's tourism industry.
RQ2. What are the existing and future opportunities for growth and innovation in the tourism sector in Oman?	RO2: To identify the existing and future opportunities for growth and innovation in the tourism sector in Oman.
RQ3. What are the critical issues that entrepreneurs face in running a business in the tourism industry?	RO3: To determine the critical issues that entrepreneurs face in running a business in the tourism industry.
RQ4. What are the critical factors that entrepreneurs needed to enhance their activities in tourism industry in Oman?	RO4: To explore the critical factors that entrepreneurs needed to enhance their activities in tourism industry in Oman.
RQ5. What are the government role to promote entrepreneurs to respond for the opportunity's recognition?	RO5: To determine the role of government to promote entrepreneurs to respond for the opportunity recognition.



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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### Indexed Journal

1. Al-Abri, M. Y., Rahim, A. A., & Hussain, N. H. (2018). Entrepreneurial ecosystem: An exploration of the entrepreneurship model for SMEs in Sultanate of Oman. *Mediterranean journal of social sciences*, 9(6), 193-193. (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). (Indexed by SCOPUS).
2. Al-Abri, M. Y. & Abdul Rahim, A. (2022). The Difference Between Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 15:1: 807-821. ([https://versita.com/view-article/?s\\_id=397](https://versita.com/view-article/?s_id=397)) (Indexed by SCOPUS).