

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURIST SITES LOCATED IN RURAL AND NATURAL AREAS. CASE STUDIES IN THE PROVINCE OF ENTRE RÍOS, ARGENTINA¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Universidad del Salvador, the Universidad Autónoma de Entre Ríos (both of Argentina), and the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (Brazil), have formed a network for reflection, discussion, analysis and research in the Mercosur field, in areas of common interest such as tourism, the environment, sustainable development and local development.

In this context, it has been of interest of the participating institutions to deepen the study of sustainability from the sociocultural, environmental and economic dimension, in rural and natural areas, where tourism is developed. Especially due to the vulnerability that they present as less intervened territories by the hand of man, and in which visitors begin to arrive each time with greater affluence.

The general objective of this work has been to study the application of sustainability criteria from the perspective of management, social-economic, cultural heritage and the environment, in tourist sites located in rural and natural areas of Argentina (Entre Ríos province) and of Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul state). The ultimate goal of this work has

¹ This article presents the partial results of the network research project: *Local development in rural and natural spaces through tourism. Methodology of analysis from the perspective of sustainability*. The network is integrated by the following universities: Universidad del Salvador (Buenos Aires, Argentina); Universidad Autónoma de Entre Ríos (Gualeguaychú, Argentina); Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (Brazil). Research team: Claudia Toselli (USAL - Project management); Andrea Takats (UADER - Co-direction); Guisele Martins Guimarães (UFSM - Co-direction); Márquez, G.; Cardoso da Silveira, P.; Traverso, L.; Ribeiro, M.; López, M.; Ceretta, C.; Pons, M.; Bastarz, C.; Flores dos Santos, V.; Grimaldi, C.; Bonaglia, B.; Goldaracena, M.; dos Santos, S.

been to transfer the results of this research to the sites where the study was applied, as well as to the municipal management bodies involved in the development of tourism and nearby communities, in order to capitalize on knowledge and teachings for future actions that contribute to sustainable local tourism development in the context of both countries.

Particularly, this article specifically presents the results of four establishments analysed in the municipality of Gualeguaychú, Entre Ríos province, Argentina.

2. METHODOLOGY AND SELECTED CASE STUDIES

First, a survey of secondary sources was carried out to reinforce the theoretical framework of the project. For the identification of the instrument for assessing the sustainability of tourism, a review of documents prepared by international organizations and / or cooperation bodies was carried out, in which instruments or tools were presented to measure the sustainability of a touristic place. In this framework, the form proposed by the Global Council for Sustainable Tourism called “Global Criteria of Sustainable Tourism for Tourist Destinations” was selected and adapted (GCST, 2013a).

At the same time, a series of touristic sites were identified and selected, both in Argentina and Brazil, which were located in rural areas and / or in natural areas, close to participating universities. In the case of the Argentine sites, it was also considered that the establishments had in common the development of tourist, recreational and didactic activities linked to farm or field tasks, and/or the exploration of protected natural areas.

In particular, the study sites in the province of Entre Ríos, municipality of Gualeguaychú, Argentina, were the following:

- Itapeby, a country house oriented mainly to rural tourism and in addition to educational visits;
- La Serena del Gualeayán, a rural establishment with farm characteristics, which also has a recycling center and a nature reserve;
- the Senderos del Monte Nature Reserve, a site dedicated entirely to preserving native flora and fauna, which offers educational and recreational visits; and
- Termas del Guaychú, a thermal tourist complex, with the particularity of having a protected natural reserve.

3. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work has been to study sustainability in its different dimensions (Management, Socioeconomic, Cultural and Environmental Heritage) in touristic sites located in rural and natural areas of Argentina and Brazil.

In particular, this article has focused on showing the case studies of four sites identified in Gualeguaychú, Entre Ríos province, Argentina.

From the elaboration of a specific instrument and its respective application, some recommendations emerged which were transferred to the managers of the establishments, as well as to the local managers related with the development of tourism at the municipal level.

The most relevant suggestions for establishments in Argentina have been:

- Regarding the **Management dimension**, it is suggested to systematically evaluate the satisfaction of visitors, and if it is necessary, implement adjustment / correction actions based on these surveys.
- Regarding the **Socioeconomic dimension**, it would be important to offer more products based on natural resources and the culture of the place/region, both from own production and from other local producers or handicraftsman, such as food, beverages, handicrafts, etc. Also, have a profitability report that allows adopting specific initiatives in those stages of the year that diminish or increase the benefits.
- Regarding the **Cultural Heritage dimension**, it is considered relevant to contribute to the protection and preservation of the intangible cultural heritage, for example, through the rescue of oral tradition, myths and legends, stories associated with rural life or natural areas, since this could give a content or added value to the establishments visited.
- Regarding the **Environmental dimension**, although some of the sites are already being implemented, some actions listed below are:
 - Establish criteria for the use and purchase of products that are not harmful to the environment, reusable, returnable or recyclable.
 - To carry out effective actions aimed at the responsible consumption of water and energy, as well as the use of renewable energies (solar water heaters, wind energy, biogas).
 - Implement actions to protect and conserve native species (flora / fauna), while taking measures to prevent the introduction of exotic species.

Finally, it is important to consider that tourism currently promotes the development of many territories and every year the number of tourists grows. Because of that, improvements in the planning and management of the sector must be the main point for this activity to generate benefits for the communities where it is developed. Therefore, we must be increasingly aware of implementing actions and tools, both from the public and private tourism areas, that allow to maintain sustainability of the destinations.

