

Rural Tourism Products and Environmental Management

Lisbet Eunice Pérez Anzardo¹, Migdely Barbarita Ochoa Avila², Irina Reyes Martínez³, Rodolfo González Ortega⁴, Eduardo Estrabao Morales⁵

^{1,3,4,5}Teaching Department of the Municipal University Branch Calixto García, University of Holguín, Holguín, Cuba

²Teaching Department of Tourism of University of Holguín, Holguín, Cuba

lepereza@uho.edu.cu, migdely@uho.edu.cu, ireyesm@uho.edu.cu, rgonzalezo@uho.edu.cu

eestrabaom@uho.edu.cu

Abstract

Rural tourism generates a set of human relationships resulting from the visit of tourists to peasant communities that take advantage of and enjoy the environment, natural, cultural, patrimonial and socio-productive values. The negative impacts that conventional tourism generates on the ecosystem has motivated the management of tourist destinations in such a way that responsibility and sustainability prevail, so that tourists can accumulate experiences in open air and in direct contact with the environment without damaging it encouraging localities to achieve prospective development. The commitment of the country and tourism has been to preserve the environment, but their management has not been enough to guarantee sustainability and comprehensiveness from a local perspective. The general objective of this research is to expose the theoretical foundation of environmental management in Cuba, and propose good practices in the implementation of rural tourism products; that guarantee sustainable natural and cultural heritage. Various theoretical methods were used such as analysis and synthesis, historical-logical, systemic structural; and some empirical ones such as scientific observation, interview, and study of the normative documents of the tourist process, among others. Statistical methods were also used for information processing, as well as the triangulation of sources and methods. As a result, the bases were laid for the theoretical-practical deepening of the research and actions are proposed to contribute to the conservation of the environment through the promotion of rural tourism products. but their management has not been enough to guarantee sustainability and comprehensiveness from a local perspective.

Keywords

rural tourism;
environmental step;
tourist rural products



I. Introduction

The current tourist markets coincide with the main issuers of nature tourism at an international level; This requires the design of an offer adapted to the new needs of exchange with the environment and local cultures. The lengthening of rural tourism, for its part [2, 6, 11, 13, 15], increases the demand of these markets since it is considered a by-product of nature tourism.

Rural tourism has emerged in several countries as an economic alternative to generate greater and better income to those localities mainly dedicated to economic activities related to agriculture and livestock. It constitutes an activity of great growth and projection within the tourist activity, and does not exempt it from generating impacts on

the environment in which it takes place. The biggest difference in terms of sustainability, between the different tourist modalities, lies in the very conception of rural tourism as an integrating sector of economic, social and environmental aspects.

It should be considered that natural and cultural resources are not only tourist attractions because their essential function is to form part of the heritage and collective wealth of the country, which are key elements of national and local identity. From this perspective, it is essential to consider that sustainable development aims to conserve natural resources and cultural heritage; composed of valuable and scarce goods, whose loss is irrecoverable. These resources are the basis of tourism and must be valued through social appropriation since their conservation basically depends on the importance the community assigns to them.

Cuba is among the Caribbean countries, recognized by the United Nations, which advocates the implementation of a sustainable model related to the tourism industry. It has biosphere reserves, national parks, protected areas and cultural landscapes recognized by Unesco, which are part of ecotourism modalities which are very well received as part of nature tourism. All of them safeguard the cultural integrity associated with them, the essential ecological processes and biological diversity.

There is a close relationship between the conservation of the receiving environment and the growth of tourist activity, for which the economic development has been achieved in recent years and has generated the intensive occupation of spaces where the most favorable conditions for tourism are concentrated for the tourism investment in its different modalities. In addition, after carrying out the content analysis as expressed by various authors [8,11,13,15] it was found that the conceptual theoretical elements have been insufficiently applied to tourism organizations. There has been a little relevance and scope of environmental management as a strategic process to enjoy natural resources in a sustainable way; both in the business sector and in the tourism sector.

These elements define the essence that justifies this research related to the conservation of the environment in rural tourism products; Therefore, actions or good practices are proposed that will contribute to environmental management, which will make it possible to take advantage of the natural heritage from the satisfaction of customers through responsible alternative tourism, and a gradual improvement of the environmental sustainability indicators.

In order to guarantee the sustainable use of the environment, it is essential to carry out balanced planning and continue to improve the management of tourism activity, taking into account the legislative framework in which it takes place. With this proposal, the environmental awareness of the communities is intensified based on the interest of visitors for conservation. In addition, it attracts tourists who practice responsible tourism. It contributes to the reinforcement of the local identity and institutionality related to the benefits of the knowledge produced by specialized research (biology, anthropology, rural sociology, archeology) to value the cultural and natural heritage; which is an incentive for the recovery and conservation of the environment, traditional architecture and its engineering.

II. Research Methods

For the development of the research, the use of theoretical and empirical research methods were combined, among the first, analysis and synthesis, abstraction and conrection, induction and deduction stand out. Among the empirical methods are the

techniques for collecting information (interviews and group work). On the other hand, statistical methods were also applied to establish statistical correlation of the information obtained by the different scientific methods used during the research process and to reach conclusions.

III. Discussion

Development

a. Environmental Management and Its Relationship with Rural Tourism (Concept and Background in Cuba)

The environment has been impacted during the development and progress of modern life and by the different forms of tourism. The loss of biological diversity, the destruction of habitats, their over-exploitation and the discharge of harmful substances that cause irreversible losses of resources have become evident [1, 4, 7, 9, 14].

Environmental management is the set of proceedings leading to the comprehensive management of the environmental system. In other words, and including the concept of sustainable development, it is the strategy by which human activities that affect the environment are organized, in order to achieve an adequate quality of life, preventing or mitigating potential or current environmental problems. [10]

Environmental management responds to "how to do" in order to achieve what is proposed for sustainable development, that is, to achieve an adequate balance for economic development, population growth, rational use of resources and protection and conservation of the environment. It encompasses an integrating concept superior to that of environmental management: in this way, not only are the actions to be carried out by the operational part, but also the guidelines, guidelines and policies formulated by the governing bodies, which end up mediating the implementation. [4]

Environmental Management Systems represent a new management concept that allows to integrate, in an effective way, the environmental variable in the correct functioning of the tourist activity [2, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15].

From the consolidation of what has been called the New Era of Tourism (NET), where the motivation to participate in recreational experiences linked to the environment predominates, and when quality is a determining factor in the assessment assigned to tourism products, it can be affirmed that the objective of achieving sustainable development will not only have a positive effect in the ecological and socio-cultural sphere, but that in many areas, and mainly in the rural environment, it will be a basic condition to ensure the presence of the tourism as an economic activity. [6]

Tourism is the third largest economic activity in the world, by the value of its exports, behind oil and the chemical products industry; generates around 10% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), produces 1 out of every 11 jobs and represents 30% of the total value of exports from the service sector. In more than 60 countries, tourism is the main exporting economic activity. R represents the largest source of foreign exchange for a third of developing economies and for half of countries considered less developed. [9]

Sustainable tourism is recognized today as a viable and affordable option to achieve harmonious and inclusive development that benefits the most vulnerable groups through income generation, job creation, education, provision of goods and services to local communities and tourists, the management of small businesses and community enterprises, as well as participating in the revitalization of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. [14]

Between environmental management and tourism policy for sustainable development, there must be a harmonious relationship based on strategies and lines of action that take into account the evaluation of their impacts, as well as the design and

implementation of more innovative tourism products; emphasizing responsible tourism that is aware of the fragility of the environment [2, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15].

Rural tourism is a definition that has been much debated and questioned, and it is included in a tourist activity that takes place in rural areas, whose main motivation is the search for tourist attractions associated with rest, landscape, traditional culture and flight from overcrowding. [fifteen]

Agrotourism is a variant linked to the Nature Tourism modality and its aim is to satisfy certain environmentally committed market segments, with an interest focused on the knowledge of rural culture and promoting new forms of coexistence in the regional contexts of tourism from maintaining environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. [8]

Several authors [2,6,8,11,13,15] agree that the rural tourism product is fundamentally based on environmental, cultural and social quality, and if the sector is not managed in a sustainable way, it runs the risk of deteriorating or even depleting its own income-generating resource base. At the same time, the host communities must share in the benefits since one of the principles of sustainability is to improve the living and working conditions of the inhabitants of rural areas who have the possibility of receiving visitors. For this reason, tourism development is required to be sustained and sustained within an ethical framework and with full ecological awareness.

The International Organization for Standardization (IOS) developed the international standard on environmental management IOS-14001: 2015-Environmental Management System-Requirements with guidance for its use, in order to provide a reference framework to protect the environment and respond to changing environmental conditions, in balance with socio-economic needs. With its implementation, in addition of promoting compliance with existing sectoral and environmental legislation, it contributes to a reduction in costs through an adequate use of its resources and the optimization of the conditions of service provision, which results in an improvement in environmental performance and therefore the economic performance of tourism initiatives.

As part of the international community and as a nation, our country has always been concerned with maintaining a protective relationship with the environment. Specific actions such as reforestation, the creation of natural barriers to mitigate the effects of salinization, as well as the care of flora and fauna (which have received a strong government boost from much earlier) confirm what can be done to preserve the environment [1,3,5].

The "Environmental Law" was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic on July 11, 1997 and constitutes the legal instrument that aims to establish the guiding principles of environmental policy and elementary standards to regulate management environment of the State and the actions of citizens and the whole of society, in order to protect the environment and contribute to achieving the country's sustainable development objectives.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA) is the body of the Central Administration of the State in charge of proposing and directing the execution of environmental policy, as well as coordinating and controlling the country's environmental management.

In 1997 the Cuban government approved the National Environmental Strategy (EAN). As the guiding document of the country's environmental policy, the EAN is a tool that contributes to strengthening the concept of sustainable economic and social development enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba. The document was updated in the 2007 - 2010, 2011 - 2015 and 2016 - 2020 cycles. (Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, National Environmental Strategy, 2011-2015)

In August 2007, Decree No. 281 was approved by the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers "On the continuity and strengthening of the Cuban business management and management system." In the same it constitutes a regulation on the main norms of action and technical procedures of the system of direction and management; and within them the Environmental Management.

In September 2015, it was proclaimed by the 193 Member States of the United Nations, along with a large number of actors from civil society, academia and the private sector; The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and coupled with this interest as a country to preserve our heritage, Cuba continues to work for the commitments acquired with the United Nations [1].

In the "Guidelines of Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution for the period 2016-2021", agreements related to the protection and conservation of the environment are established and Chapter V specifies from 98 to 115 those related to Science Policy, Technology, Innovation and Environment.

With the purpose of promoting tourism and creating, at the same time, a responsible awareness when developing it, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) considered that: "The proclamation by the United Nations of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development is a unique opportunity to expand the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), as well as to increase awareness of the true dimensions of a sector that is often undervalued"[12].

In keeping with the environmental conservation policy, the Cuban government, as one of its strategic priorities, approved in 2017 the State Plan to confront climate change, known as Tarea Vida. The ministries, agencies and state institutions have specific objectives directly related to this task, aimed at counteracting damage in coastal areas and based on a multidisciplinary scientific basis.

Cuba was one of the first countries to include environmental protection in its Constitution. In the one recently approved by the National Assembly of People's Power, in July 2019, principles are established in several of its chapters that are in tune with environmental management.

Chapter II, article 16 promotes the protection and conservation of the environment and the confrontation with climate change, which threatens the survival of the human species, on the basis of the recognition of common but differentiated responsibilities; the establishment of a fairer and more equitable international economic order and the eradication of irrational patterns of production and consumption. In Chapter III, Article 86 it is established that all people have the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment. In addition, that the State protects the environment and the country's natural resources. It recognizes its close link with the sustainable development of the economy and society to make human life more rational and ensure the survival, well-being and security of current and future generations. In article 87, everyone has the right to water, with due remuneration and rational use. The State works to guarantee access to drinking water and sanitation, in correspondence with the economic and social development achieved. [3]

Cuba, as a destination, will continue to provide a sustainable tourism product, based on the principles of hospitality, peace and security that has fascinated visitors to the archipelago since it is one of the preferred destinations for thousands of visitors each year, with an offer marked by diversity and healthy enjoyment of the sun, it has a wide range of peculiarities such as the enormous variety of its flora and fauna, beaches, landscapes and

its climate, which have their origin in the nature of the island itself, in addition to the customs and traditions inherited from colonial times.

Figure 1 shows the Evolution of Strategic Policies for Environmental Management in Cuba

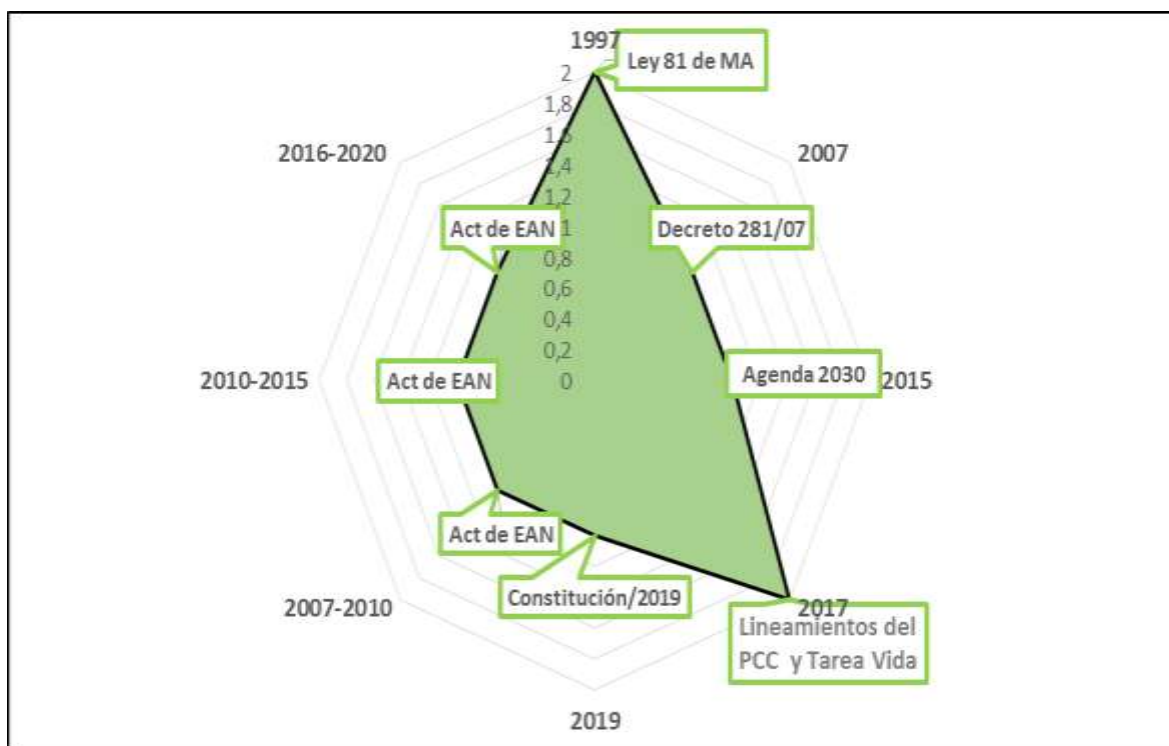


Figure 1. Environmental Conservation Strategies in Cuba

The participation of society and the collaboration between agents are totally necessary, and they must be informed, sensitized and made aware of the principles and values of the environment, as well as the problems to be faced, and know the repercussions of the activities on the environment. means of minimizing impact and preventing negative effects.

The Calixto García municipality is the westernmost of the Holguin municipalities and has particular characteristics in terms of agricultural and tourist development, due to its location and proximity to the road network (Main Road of Cuba), through which national tourists go continuously and foreigners with physiological, anthropological and landscape needs in their relationship with nature and the municipal agricultural environment, so they are not alien to the context being addressed.

For some time, the Municipality University Branch “Calixto García” has been developing projects sponsored by the government’s management aimed at protecting the Cauto River basin as the La Rioja tributary and other natural places of national interest are found. The development of horse riding and rodeo has reached high levels of satisfaction on the part of the population. The fighting cock breeders’ club and other species of fauna have been established, which guarantee the conservation of the breeds.

There is also a local development project based on the implementation of an integrated agro-tourism product, approved by the CAM by agreement No. 492 dated November 27, 2019. All of which would allow to be part of the environmental culture that as a policy of the country recognizes in the conceptualization of the Cuban economic model.

b. Actions to Contribute to the Conservation of the Environment by Promoting Rural Tourism Products. Good Environmental Practices

- Implementing environmental actions in rural tourism products will guarantee a harmonious and sustainable development between tourism activity and the preservation of natural resources.
- Each of them must be defined by area of environmental impact, reflecting a specific action in favor of the environment [7]; therefore, the following good practices are proposed:
- Reduce energy consumption and progressively replace the most polluting energy sources, as well as water consumption.
- Request the water supply entity and the health authority responsible for its surveillance, the quality data of the same during the current year to evaluate if the quality requirements for the different uses are met. Flow charts are created with the water inlets and outlets at each point of the process and the water balance of the installation.
- Control the hygiene and cleaning schedules of the water tanks.
- Reduce the production of waste and have a separation system that includes at least batteries, glass and paper.
- Garbage will be stored in a closed and invisible place until it is collected and transported to the place of disposal.
- Avoid the use of harmful or aggressive products for the natural environment.
- Include measures aimed at environmental education and awareness of both employees and customers in all aspects related to caring for the environment and its natural resources.
- An informative brochure will be available with a series of basic recommendations for both employees and clients aimed at conserving and respecting the environment. (will be provided to customers upon arrival at the establishment)
- The establishment will be located at a sufficient distance, or conveniently isolated, from possible sources of noise pollution (emission of noise and vibrations) such as factories, roads, train tracks so as not to disturb the sense of tranquility of customers.
- Excessively loud, repetitive noises, etc., will be specially controlled. whatever its origin. If they come from the main economic activity of the owners of the establishment, the client will be notified before the formalization of the reservation.
- The necessary measures will be taken to eliminate all bad odors that do not come from the establishment's own agricultural activity, in any case the applicable regulations in force will be followed. If they come from the main economic activity of the owners of the establishment, the client will be notified before the formalization of the reservation.
- The necessary measures will be taken to maintain the cleanliness and care of the environment of the establishment, avoiding the accumulation of waste and / or plant or animal remains in areas belonging to or close to the establishment's facilities.
- For the washing of lingerie, dishes and other utensils, detergents with low phosphate content and cleaning products that are biodegradable will be used.
- As long as there is no connection to the municipal sanitation network, wastewater and other discharges from the facilities will be properly treated through appropriate individual systems with periodic removal of waste.
- The progressive use of those fuels that pollute less and are ecologically cleaner will be promoted and the recycling of materials (briquettes from agroforestry waste, etc.) or the use of renewable energies (solar energy, etc.) will be promoted.

- Each worker knows the environmental impacts that it causes in their job and their responsibilities in this matter.
- Existence of collaboration or exchange agreements with institutions of the territory, schools, nursery schools, health institutions.
- National, international, territorial or sector recognition for its environmental performance.
- Proper operation of the storm drainage system for buildings and outdoor areas.
- A defined policy will be applied with regard to the acquisition of environmentally friendly products and technologies.
- Solid waste management systems will be applied and monitored, depending on whether they are recoverable or not.
- Existence of an efficient liquid waste treatment system.
- The physical-chemical and microbiological quality of the water is characterized and monitored periodically.
- There are gas extraction or ventilation systems in workplaces that require it.
- Promote research on the identification and improvement of the environmental impacts generated in the facilities, mainly those that are visible to customers and damage the image of the service.
- Know the requirements of specialized institutions in environmental research that grant environmental endorsements.
- Carry out concrete actions to guarantee compliance with all the parameters identified as objectives in achieving environmental certification.
- Verify compliance with the storage regulations for products and supplies, as well as reorganize the storage areas by product families.

IV. Conclusion

With the present investigation it has been possible to verify that, despite of the existence as a state policy of sustainable development based on the conservation and protection of the environment, it has not yet been identified as a culture of the total quality of the product that is offered for satisfy customers in rural areas. In addition, rural tourism is based on the knowledge, exploration and promotion of natural and built heritage, helping its preservation and development, placing emphasis on the living culture of the territories and allowing tourists to learn more about the customs and traditions of the population. On the other hand, the proposed actions or good environmental practices allow responsible use of resources, adapting to changes in the environment that guarantee the sustainability of the rural tourism product. Rural tourism products are a modality that is gaining more and more followers and for which Cuba has ample development potential.

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