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ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INDICATORS OF THE ALTERNATIVE TOURISM IN PORTUGAL AND MEXICO. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.

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Abstract

Quality is an economic-administrative concept that arises having as main objective the satisfaction. Newly way and thanks to socially and environmentally responsible practices, there is a proposal for environmental quality. This proposal includes environmental, social, cultural and economic characteristics that are beyond the sustainable development towards sustainability that it might seem unattainable. In case of environmental quality applied to alternative tourism, to develop its three variables (adventure tourism, ecotourism and community tourism), which usually takes place in the countryside, where they are based on their community sustainability, this is a space where someone can create a process that counteracts degradation (Zimmerman, 2011). From this, it is proposed to integrate the relationships circle: (ecological productivity & participation) and (community - cultural creativity), integrating a more adequately the economic-environmental-social factors previously contemplated the sustainable development ideal. Based on this relationships circle, we consider the making of indicators that show from this perspective, a balance between the opposing poles of development and sustainability. Analyzing the criteria of tourism quality in alternative tourism, Mexico and Portugal are characterized by a huge variety of tourist destinations of the three types that includes the alternative tourism. There are regulatory and standardization organizations that regulates the activities in Mexico (SECTUR) and Portugal (Turismo de Portugal); however, each tourist service provider designs its own norms and standards according to the expectations of their users (C. Morillo, 2011). Since that there are some tests for quality in tourism, there are no items that establishes criteria of environmental quality in alternative tourism and comparing the situation in two countries from different continents, could provide globally applicable indicators.

Keywords: Quality, Environment, Alternative Tourism

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

According to the company of sustainable investment (Robecosam, 2013), both Portugal and Mexico are intermediately in a prominent location within the countries with the highest sustainability in the places 32 and 30 respectively. The situation of alternative tourism is mainly in rural communities in each country, with a situation of relationship between development (under tourism) and sustainability (communities). Most tourist destinations in both countries are characterized by beautiful natural landscapes and cultural elements, are optimal for activities involving alternative tourism.

Moreover tourism, being a business activity, requires certain standards to achieve competitiveness, from the creation of quality standards in products and services. After the environmental initiatives of the 90's, the first was published in 1996, the ISO 14000 Standard, the first rule that authorities certify that met certain standards of environmental quality. However, there is a big difference between the general aspects that it certifies and they could be successful and to qualify specific environmental quality in alternative tourism.

Some tourism destinations are certified as sustainable destination by Earthcheck, which has certain criteria for evaluation, but its main objective is the positioning of the tourist destination for sustainable tourism visitors interested in this characteristics. However, the efficiency and monitoring of these certifications could open the door to new opportunities of study.

There are certain organizations that certify tourism destinations under certain criteria, as in the case of CDI (Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico), with an index of ecotourism destinations operated by indigenous communities. Despite the existence of certification bodies and assessment of environmental quality, to date there is no defined criteria or index of indicators to assess quantitatively and / or qualitatively, the environmental quality of alternative tourism projects. Given that there are currently no research papers targeting the areas identified, the study focused on environmental quality in alternative tourism.

First, the literature review is presented by integrating the background of quality, environmental criteria for certification services and previous studies available with a similar sense to subsequently run the analysis of the concept of environmental quality and integration of joint indicators used to assess tourism services and environmental protection features. In the Methodology section characteristics of the sample, the operational definition of the variables, the procedure for designing the interview, its application and data analysis are included. In the results section tables are used to facilitate the understanding and summarizing of data, then its summary explanation. The findings allowed us to compare the results with the stated objective and observe the results according to each country, showing the relevance of this study to understand the factors of environmental quality as a factor for the proper exercise of alternative tourism in Portugal and Mexico.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Recatalá Boix, 2009) the objective of environmental quality is to develop a useful tool to guide decision making towards sustainable development. This objective from the perspective of quality is merely aimed at the business sector of products and services,

characterized by a large majority to be pollutants tourism initiatives. Some authors define it as the Conventional Tourism Industry, by the scale of their operations, their influence on the economies and even for their environmental impact. But recently a tourism sector has inclined their preferences for alternative tourism. As explained (Muñoz Piña, 2011) These are people whose preference is for a hotel operating under higher standards of environmental and social care, instead of a more comfortable and elegant option; or that given the same quality would be willing to pay more for staying at an hotel that care more for the environment. There some background of environmental standards as have been the ISO 14000 standards, which set a certification after an evaluation of pollutant emissions, damages to the environment, competing for the care and management policies for environmental welfare that a company or product may have . This standard includes key indicators to assess the contaminant level of the operations carried out by a company or the environmental implications that a product or a service may have.

Alternative Tourism is divided into ecotourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism (SEMARNAT, 2002); although each segment has a focus on environmental care and sustainability, they differ in accordance with the services they offer and their activities. That is why the approach arises from the particular characteristics of each to integrate environmental quality indicators in alternative tourism covering the three axes that make it up and achieving optimal range.

Moreover according to the Boards of Environmental Quality (Puerto Rico Government, 2011), which have a group of environmental incidents for making complaints, same that could be considered when proposing indicators, but not meeting the target of this research. Within these incidents that are listed the pollutant discharges into bodies of water, the burning of organic or inorganic matter or noise brought about by an activity among others.

According to (Grossman & Krueger, 1991) in their study regarding to the environmental implications of NAFTA project in Mexico it proposes three basic mechanisms for economic growth relationship - means involvement environment, which are the size of the effects, the composition of the same and the techniques used in production.

Many authors refer to environmental quality as the reservation of the "natural resources" or reduction of impact on production, showing a clear trend towards economic or business interests. Recently it is referred as Natural Capital to comprehensive set of factors enabling the quality of life. As mentioned (Sukhdev, 2013), the order to manage the risks and opportunities of environmental degradation allow for a better future for all.

There are also indicators of sustainability as outlined in Chapter 40 of Agenda 21, which proposes boosting environmental or sustainability indicators in order to promote analysis and integration of the economic, social and environmental components. There are also the indicators proposed by (Velazquez-Sanchez, Vasquez Solana, & Gomez-Velazquez, 2013) that seek to identify the elements that allow communities to sustainability in ecotourism.

Paper Hypothesis

Formulation: The problem lies in the situation of alternative tourism projects. The situation is among tourism development and environment care. Most of the alternative tourism destinations are embedded in communities that are characterized by beautiful natural landscapes and singular

cultural elements (Gómez-Velázquez, 2013). However, there is a big difference between the prospect of “environmental care” in tourism projects and “environmental quality” in alternative tourism, so we rose as research question: What are the aspects of "environmental care" that could integrate a concept of “environmental quality” in the alternative tourism projects of Portugal and Mexico?

Hypothesis.: The aspects of “environmental care” present in alternative tourism activities in Portugal and Mexico allowing to integrate an environmental care criteria.

Project Objective: Analyze the environment care factors that may develop an “environmental quality” criterion for alternative tourism projects in Portugal and Mexico.

Specific Objectives:

- Analyze the environmental characteristics of alternative tourism projects in Portugal and Mexico to propose indicators of environmental quality.
- Analyze the guest’s perspective to proofread (complement) the previous criteria.
- Analyze "Commonality" factors that influence the permanence of ecotourism projects in the Northern Highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico.

Currently the environmental care in alternative tourism is considered as a matter of vital importance in the development of this kind of projects around the world. According to Roche Centeno (1992), the first step to gain knowledge on tourism is to observe and examine the phenomenon (social) to describe and capture its essential and general characteristics. Starting from this methodological principle applied to the study of tourism, began with a descriptive study - practical, allowing finding the elements that lead to the environmental quality of alternative tourism practices.

This descriptive analysis is the base to develop the questionnaire and the factorial analysis in the second stage of this research, because of the long time and the financial needs that it has.

3. METODOLOGY

A sample of five projects of alternative tourism services in each country is analyzed, designing a semi-structured interview with questions aimed at checking the features that define tourism practices available to identify the focus of alternative tourism (adventure tourism, rural tourism or ecotourism) available in the project, which will be applied to visitors and will include a feedback section to enrich qualitatively the proposal pursuant to suggestions that the respondent expressed. At the same time we apply a structured interview to identify points of correlation between current care practices and to propose draft elements of environmental quality oriented alternative tourism, obtaining quantitative results; this second interview will be applied to service providers or locals who have connection with the project or destination.

From this it is determined appoint five subjects in Portugal and five in Mexico, so that from their field study, we can make an outgoing proposal from two perspectives of conceptualization of alternative tourism (or nature tourism).}

Table 1: Presentation of the subjects of analysis to develop a proposal for indicators of environmental quality in alternative tourism, based on the study projects of ecotourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism in Portugal and Mexico.

Country	Region	Subject
Portugal	Azores	Norma Açores
	Oporto	Casas Do Patio
	Óbidos	Casal da Eira Branca
	Gouveia	Quinta do Adamastor
	Proença-a-Nova	Aldeias do Xisto
México	Costa de Oaxaca	Ruta de los Humedales
	Sierra Norte de Oaxaca	Pueblos Mancomunados
	Mixteca	Santiago Apoala
	Querétaro	Ruta del Vino y el Queso
	Guanajuato	Cacomixtle

Source: Own Elaboration

In a second stage, it is intended to conduct a study in depth, quantitative under category index marked on the structured interview, qualitative and semi-structured interview in order to complement the expected to find based on visitor perceptions indicators. In this way we increase the scope of the study and can make a more accurate proposal. First use the tool to identify variables phenomenology not covered and once developed the factor analysis to establish quantitative indicators; we can have a qualitative and quantitative study integrating both perspectives of the provider or of the community, such as the visitor. It is important to mention that the interviews and the factorial analysis should be done in a second step of this study.

Design of the questionnaire

For the design of the questionnaire is intended to build on the categories and indicators shown in Table 2: 14 environmental indicators and “x” indicators for visitor perceptions were included. It was considered for the sample to destinations and tours with environmental care characteristics of its operations and a focus on ecotourism, adventure tourism or rural tourism in its operations. The design of the sample with 25 inhabitants-participants of different alternative tourism projects in three states of Mexico: Oaxaca, Queretaro and Guanajuato, while for Portugal 25 inhabitants-participants from five projects in five different regions.

Operational Definition of the Variables

Environmental Care practices: It was defined on the basis of a numerical variable and quantitative study of the structured interview aimed to coordinators, directors or managers of tourism projects.

Visitor Perceptions: Defined under a descriptive variable and qualitative study of the semi-structured interview aimed at visitors of the tourist project.

Procedure description

Based on the information obtained by the Tourism Secretary (2010) and SEMARNAT (2009), five alternative tourism projects were observed and selected. They are included in Table 1 to be discussed under the headings of Environmental Care Practices and Host Perceptions, its

categories and indicators were also proposed. For the Environmental Care Practices variable four categories were included and for the Host Perceptions variable, looking for new indicators.

Table 2: Proposal of the operational definition of variables Environmental Care Practices and Host Perceptions

VARIABLES	CATEGORIES	INDICATORS
Environmental Care Practices	Internal Proceses	Energy Consumption Water Consumption Raw Materials Consumption Waste Generation Awareness
	Waste-Emisions Management	Solid Waste Management Emissions Reduction Environment Impact
	Eco-efficiency	Revenue/Payback Reduction Techniques Energies Use Reduction
	Coaching/Certification Initiatives	Certification Assesment/tracing Audit
Host Perceptions	To Identify	Feedback based on Qualitative Analysis

Table 2: Categories and indicators of Environmental Care Practices and Host Perceptions are observed. Variables are numeric and included in the analysis of the relationship between categories. Four categories with the 14 indicators of Environmental Care Practices can be observed. And finally, the Host Perceptions to Identify in the qualitative analysis are mentioned. Source: Authors.

4. Results

With the obtained data, the analysis of "Environmental Practices" as factors, the categories are integrated by the fourteen indicators proposed, but mainly the integration of the visitor's perspective variable was integrated. With the information found in the web pages of the alternative tourism projects was observed as a result that the destination does not involve issues of eco-efficiency, but were found some variables in category of "Internal processes".

This, because they only offer cabins, spas, hot springs, extreme sports and sightseeing as alternative tourism activities. Leaving aside the categories of "environment care" unless the mentioned activities could act as awareness factor, which are briefly described. Furthermore, in the section of certification they should have any relationship with any external company that evaluate them or advise them.

With the information obtained from the interviews and observation at the place, we will be able to make sure the proposal, evaluate the hypothesis and perhaps, propose another improved version of the environmental quality proposal for alternative tourism projects, currently are

understood three elements of environmental quality. These are: internal processes, eco-efficiency and emissions management.

The results obtained from the interview, will indicate the presence of these "Environment Care" categories according to "Environmental Quality" in both countries. The presented variables could prove that if manifest implementing measures of environment care, it is possible to further increase the Environmental Quality appreciation from the visitors and thereby increase their positioning as alternative tourism destination; at this point the certifications makes the main paper. The data can be seen in Table 2, the categories and indicators based on the qualitative analysis results are summarized.

Table 3. Environment Care Variables Definition.

Internal Processes	Waste Emissions- Management	Eco-efficiency	Coaching/Certification Initiatives
<p>Energy Consumption Criteria based on the levels/cost/indicators of energy in the consumption basis.</p> <p>Water Consumption Criteria based on the water needs and the efficient use.</p> <p>Raw Materials Consumption Origin of the raw materials and its efficient use.</p> <p>Waste Generation Volume of waste generated every week/month.</p> <p>Awareness Criteria based on the awareness shared in the tourism practices to persuade in the environment care.</p>	<p>Solid Waste Management Evaluation of solid waste, if is reusable or wasted.</p> <p>Emissions Reduction Actions to reduce the atmospherical emissions.</p> <p>Environment Impact General valuation of the project and how it impacts on the regional ecosystem.</p>	<p>Revenue/Payback Payback by the implementation of environmental projects or protocols and expressed in the financial feasibility.</p> <p>Reduction Techniques Based on the resources management to look for the efficiency.</p> <p>Alternative Energies And how they reduce the economic cost.</p>	<p>Certification Certificates of any international/national organization that guarantee the environmental practices of the tourism destinations.</p> <p>Assesment/tracing Tracing activities for the tourism business and environment care coexistence.</p> <p>Audit Later analysis of the effectiveness of the environmental practiced developed in certain periods.</p>

Source: Own elaboration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results point to dwell the environment care indicators from alternative tourism perspective towards the implementation of an environment quality criteria. They regard it as economic, which until now has defined an eco-efficiency concept to generate revenue and payback through environmental initiatives. Alternative tourism activities should be oriented to environmental awareness to impact in the visitor's worldview, as well as in the internal processes (cleaning, management, tourism activities). In other sense it will help to preserve the environment and generate the main objective of alternative tourism: "to provide experiences with direct involvement with the environment to aware conservation". The arrival of tourism activity must include infrastructure elements, then obviously it should have a consequence in regional natural environment, but including environmental quality matches, it will decrease its impact. Thus it is feared that at this rate the environment care of alternative tourism activities is observed in projects of both countries, and although there are some certifiers companies/organizations, it is complicated to establish an standard because there is no a criteria directed to this kind of projects/initiatives/enterprises, since apparently the pace of development is seen in terms of ecotourism venture with particular benefits as an economic initiative with certain points of appreciation/care for environment. The main characteristics based on the documental research developed, raised the next for each project:

Norma Açores: A consultancy and certifier organization that looks for quality end efficiency in enterprises of Azores Islands with different certifications, some of them with environmental focus.

Casas Do Patio: House with apartments for tourists, as guesthouse with some characteristics of environment care, but not exactly as alternative tourism concept.

Casal da Eira Branca: Tourism project in an innovative architectonical structure with sustainable processes in a cultural tourism attractive "Caldas da Rainha".

Quinta do Adamastor: Rural Hotel with sustainable cabins with ecotourism and adventure tourism activities, integrating some of the three segments of alternative tourism, matching as a great subject for this study.

Aldeias do Xisto: Project designed for environmental and cultural involvement within the statement of being unique in its type in Portugal. This relationship between the culture, environment, communities and activities can be seen in most of the alternative projects in Mexico, but hardly ever in Portugal.

Ruta de los Humedales: Tourism route with different ecotourism destination in indigenous communities of the Pacific Coast region of Oaxaca.

Pueblos Mancomunados: Tourism circuit integrated by a group of indigenous communities in the northern highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico, related to the three segments of alternative tourism.

Santiago Apoala: Ecotourism destination in the Mixtec Region of Oaxaca within a plan of sustainable development based on the tourism activity for the community, which is so far from the urban zones.

Ruta del Vino y el Queso: Recently raise initiative based on a cultural route related to traditional cheese and wine made in this communities of Querétaro, Mexico with the relation to rural tourism route.

Cacomixtle: Alternative tourism route integrating projects of ecotourism and adventure tourism, located in the Mexican shallows.

The results obtained in this study allowed to answer the research question. The inclusion of elements of environment care in alternative tourism activities in duality with the worldview of the visitors lets achieve an environmental quality criteria and then a high value as an being an alternative tourism project with this important characteristics; but in the visitors' opinion, there may be new issues previously raised. The results contribute to the body of literature with a methodology to assess the relevance of alternative tourism projects in Portugal and Mexico. Assessing the importance of matching elements for the environment care and the perspectives of the visitor allows observing the advantage that represents in the segment of environmentalist tourists. It also contributes to the knowledge of the strategy of the adequacy of environment practices and needs of the visitors in the previously raised situation.

Limits

Within the limitations of this study are considered the characteristics appreciated from the tourist perspective. The time in which the study was developed not allowed to develop this segment of the study, but we have planned a second stage of the same trying to develop indicators based on this literature and the field research. Alternative Tourism projects evaluated, since they can conduct studies in other regions or countries and other periods of visitation.

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