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**TURISMO EM CUBA: UMA MUDANÇA DE PARADIGMA EM DIREÇÃO
À SUSTENTABILIDADE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the factors that influenced the implementation of sustainability as a policy in the tourism sector in Cuba. The analysis focused on identifying the policies and strategies that have privileged the sustainable development of tourism in recent decades, as well as the future challenges of the sustainability paradigm in Cuban tourism. Through research methods and procedures that included document analysis and semi-structured interviews, research has shown that the development of the national tourism industry based on the sustainability of the activity is a priority. Among the new dynamics of tourism management that have marked the paradigm shift are the supply diversification, extension of intervention territory, change agents, the authenticity of experience and political management.

Keywords: tourism; sustainability; development; Cuba.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho apresenta os fatores que influenciaram na implementação da sustentabilidade como uma política no setor turístico em Cuba. A análise centrou-se em identificar as políticas e estratégias que privilegiaram o desenvolvimento sustentável do turismo nas últimas décadas, bem como os desafios futuros do paradigma da sustentabilidade no turismo cubano. Por meio de métodos e procedimentos de pesquisa que incluíram uma análise documental e entrevistas semiestruturadas, a pesquisa demonstrou que o desenvolvimento da indústria turística nacional com base na sustentabilidade da atividade constitui uma prioridade. Entre as novas dinâmicas da gestão turística que marcaram a mudança de paradigma estão a diversificação da oferta, a ampliação do território de intervenção, os agentes de mudança, a autenticidade da experiência e a gestão política.

Palavras-chave: turismo; sustentabilidade; desenvolvimento; Cuba.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is now a disputed term (Oftedal, 2021). The concept encourages academic, philosophical, political, and technological reflections on the current development process, generating new perspectives and approaches (Dyllick and Rost, 2017; Ozili, 2022; Tordera *et al.*, 2020). The growing concern and appreciation of issues related to social and ecological problems, the promotion of environmental awareness, respect for natural resources and cultural uniqueness, criticism of consumerism, and social polarization have led to the discussion and proposal of what is known as “sustainable development” (Ozili, 2022). The guiding principles of this concept represent a significant challenge for the various knowledge areas to implement undertakings and actions that simultaneously generate prominent social equity, a high level of environmental conservation, and greater economic rationality (Emina, 2021; Szymańska, 2021).

For Sachs (1986), sustainable development is a style of development that insists on solutions to the specific problems of each region, guided by the search for autonomy and the priority satisfaction of the basic needs of the populations involved. He considers it vital to efficiently plan the development pattern anchored in five dimensions of sustainability: ecological, social, economic, spatial, and cultural. This transdisciplinary approach proposes that the current development model should gradually be replaced by one economically viable, environmentally sound, spatially balanced, socially just, and culturally diverse. In this sense, it will be necessary to tackle the high production and consumption patterns of the rich countries, improve the quality of life indicators of the poor, and build new forms of governance, encouraging participation and taking advantage of the endogenous roots of each ecosystem (Sarpong and Bein, 2021; Singh, Issac and Naraya Nan, 2019).

The issue of sustainability has a long tradition in the field of resource management and has finally become an acceptable term in tourism (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Farmaki *et al.*, 2015; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2020; Wu, 2009). The World Tourism Organization (2003) defines sustainable tourism as that which “meets the needs of today’s tourists and the receiving regions while protecting and expanding opportunities for the future” (UNWTO, 2003, p. 24). Archer and Cooper (1994) argue that sustainability is central to re-evaluating the role of tourism in society, as it demands a long-term vision of the activity. As a result, they point to the need to question the imperative of continuous economic growth and



ensure that the destination does not exceed its capacity to receive future tourists.

This aspect is also commented on by Krippendorf (2002), who makes a critical analysis of the reorientation of the tourism industry towards ecological and more socially responsible tourism. The author argues that coherent, responsible, and equal cooperation between all stakeholders, including local communities, indigenous peoples, political authorities, the tourism industry, travelers, and civil society, is indispensable for shaping the necessary policies at all levels.

Therefore, it will be crucial for the efforts of governments and representatives of the tourism industry to be directed toward the creation of public policies, innovative and diversified products and services, and the preservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources, to minimize the environmental impact and maximize the integration of tourism with communities, expanding its advantages widely throughout society (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez and Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020; Ruhanen, 2013; Barros and Rambo, 2023; Siakwah, Musavengane and Leonard, 2020; Trupp and Dolezal, 2020).

The importance of thinking about regional or local development in tourism has increased since the emergence of economic globalization (Barros and Rambo, 2023). For Scherer and Allebrandt (2023), tourism should not be seen as an end but as one of the levers that can boost regional development. In the view of Dallabrida (2017), the process of regional development comprises the growing effort of local societies to formulate public and territorial policies to discuss central issues of contemporary complexity. This argument makes the region the subject of its development process, and tourism is an additional option in the pursuit of this development (Scherer and Allebrandt, 2023).

In this context, this paper seeks to present the factors that have influenced the implementation of sustainability as a policy in Cuba's tourism sector. Through research methods and procedures that included a documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, the study focused on fulfilling the following objectives: (1) identifying the policies and strategies that have favored the sustainable development of tourism in recent decades (2002-2018), and (2) identifying the future challenges of the sustainability paradigm in Cuban tourism.



The first section of this article discusses some theoretical reflections on tourism, sustainability, and the sustainable development of tourism. It also presents some trends in scientific research in recent years, highlighting aspects related to the change in the tourism management paradigm. This section is followed by an overview of tourism development in Cuba and the public policies implemented in the sector. Finally, tourism management's new dynamics in the Cuban destination and its future challenges are discussed. The final considerations briefly reflect on the paradigm shift identified in the tourism management process towards sustainability.

TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Cunha (2013) points out that tourism is a strategic factor in any country's economic and social development process, as it offers a set of conditions that favor it: its adaptability, the fact that it is a labor-intensive activity that gives economic value to local resources and activities, as well as its ability to transfer wealth from wealthy to poorer regions. If tourism is to be incorporated into a country's development plan, Cooper *et al.* (2007) state that it must be organized and developed according to a strategy built on solid foundations. As such, destinations need to manage the sector based on concrete objectives that offer a good welcome and a rich experience to the visitor, as well as guarantee protection for the tourist resource (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Farmaki *et al.*, 2015).

If we consider that in tourism, space is its primary object of consumption and that it is concrete, legacy, and historically and socially constructed (Beni, 2006), the planning process must be considered by a public policy and by the programs and projects that derive from it (Reimondo Barrios, 2017). However, public policies for tourism must manage, organize, and establish objectives, goals, guidelines, and strategies for the sector in a given territory (Aguinis *et al.*, 2023). In this sense, to achieve this development factor in tourism, it is necessary for policies to be geared towards sustainability, a fundamental basis for the paradigm shift in tourism management (Aguinis *et al.*, 2023; Ozili, 2022).

The tourism literature on public policies recognizes that the way they are processed depends on the broader social environment, the negotiating power of the parties, and the dynamics related to local, regional, and national contexts, including informal rules, as well as the culture of leadership in governance (Hall and Jenkins, 2004; Aguinis *et al.*, 2023). The main objective of public management is



to foster and develop tourism responsibly and to mitigate or eliminate the problems it may generate with a collective perspective (CNC, 2022). Some research (Byrd, Cárdenas and Greenwood, 2008; Erkuş-Öabztürk and Eraydin, 2010; Lee and King, 2008) has shown that some collaborative and participatory actions have become the basis of governance networks and an indispensable source for decision-making, contributing to the sustainable development of territories. Byrd, Cárdenas, and Greenwood (2008) point out that the participation of stakeholders in the management of public policies is central to the sustainable development of tourism.

Taking into account the criteria of Sachs (1993, 2002), when recognizing the positive effects of tourism on the development process, it must be ensured that its **economic viability** allows the receiving community for the activity to thrive, integrates local companies and businesses into the tourism production chain, stimulates entrepreneurship, generates jobs and offers benefits for the entire community in the long term (Farmaki *et al.*, 2015, Ozili, 2022). As such, tourism can play a decisive role in local/national/regional development, where there are no alternatives to achieve this goal (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

Sachs (1993) suggests that to achieve **spatial sustainability**, criteria should be established based on the balance of the rural-urban configuration to overcome inter-regional disparities and on the conservation of biodiversity through environmentally appropriate strategies. In this regard, Beni (2006) points out that tourism planning should consider a more efficient spatial distribution of resources and the activities that derive from them, as well as helping to minimize their impact.

The environment, whether natural or built, is the fundamental ingredient of the tourism product (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Cooper *et al.*, 2007); however, it will always be exploited. Tourism cannot be developed without environmental impacts, both positive and negative (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez and Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020; Barros and Rambo, 2023). This argument is why the activity must be well conducted and planned considering the **environmental dimension**, emphasizing a commitment to the long-term continuity of natural processes and guaranteeing the availability of natural resources for future generations (Beni, 2006; Reimondo Barrios, 2017).



The **social dimension** of tourism in destination planning must consider how the sector contributes to the sustainability and quality of life of the receiving community and its influence on the dynamics of the local population (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Reimondo Barrios, 2017). In countries with high levels of poverty, the revenue obtained from international tourism is considerable in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the total value of the respective exports (UNWTO, 2023).

For Sachs (2007), the **cultural dimension** of development will be achieved if there is a balance between respect for the cultural traditions' continuity and innovation. Cooper *et al.* (2007), regarding the socio-cultural impact of tourism, point out that although it can be considered positive that destinations use cultural heritage as a promotional device to attract an increasing number of tourists, this practice turns culture into a marketable commodity, and poses a greater risk of contamination. This argument translates into the importance of preserving customs, heritage, and endogenous roots while managing the impact of tourism's cultural exchange on local identity and ways of life (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

Based on the sustainable development premises, sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the needs of tourists and host regions while protecting and improving opportunities for the future (UNWTO, 2005). This concept leads to a new way of planning tourism, prioritizing ethical principles and with a concern that its benefits extend to the receiving community (Reis *et al.*, 2022). The UNWTO report (2005) points out that sustainable tourism should have three basic requirements: using environmental resources to maintain ecological processes and conserve biodiversity; respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities so that their traditions and cultural heritage are preserved and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance; and ensuring viable and long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income and social services for host communities (Balaš and Strasdas, 2019).

Several studies (Botezat, 2015; Choo and Jamal, 2009; Moore and Rodger, 2010; Singh, 2008; Ștefănică and Butnaru, 2013) have examined and evaluated the principles, strategies, and indicators of sustainability in tourism development through case studies. Sustainability is taken up in these works as a new approach to tourism management, which consequently implies a high level of tourist satisfaction, a solid commitment to the preservation of natural resources, social responsibility, respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of receiving communities, the constant monitoring of impacts and the integration of



the local population into tourism activities (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

Other studies (Botezat, 2015; Ozili, 2022; Singh, 2008) emphasize that accurately organized and monitored tourism can and must become sustainable. According to Singh (2008), the prerequisites for that transition involve a solid political will, a highly responsible community, and a review of support capacities for new management strategies. On the other hand, Stefănică and Butnaru (2013) and Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2020) highlight the importance of quantifying the sustainable development of destinations using indicators. These are advantageous tools for managers and communities involved in the sector, as they provide information on the qualitative state of tourist attractions, the degree to which visitors' needs are met, their implications for local economic issues (work, income), the destination's carrying capacity, and the impact of the activity on natural resources and the degradation of ecosystems (Rasoolimanesh *et al.* 2020; Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

Another part of the scientific literature in the area has paid particular attention to planning and political decision-making practices that embrace notions of inclusion, participation, and collaboration as a route to sustainable tourism development (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Byrd; Cárdenas and Greenwood, 2008; Dredge, 2006; Zhai and Shi, 2022). These studies have shown that some collaborative and participatory actions have become the basis of governance networks and an indispensable source for decision-making, contributing to the sustainable development of territories.

The fundamental change in the tourism management paradigm is to market tourism not as a leisure product but as an experience that improves the quality of life, not just for the individual participants but for the socio-ecological systems in general, the guests, and the hosts (Reimondo Barrios, 2017). It is no longer a question of promoting "old tourism"¹ with uniform and standardized commercial practices aimed at the short-term economic profitability of investments, characterized by tourist monoculture (reduced or non-existent supply of various tourist products, mainly sun, and beach), strong seasonality, the existence of dominant markets, spatial concentration with excessive exploitation of natural resources, and little attention paid to the personal needs of tourists. It is now a question of stimulating new practices and perspectives in the planning and management of the activity, giving way to the new era of tourism

1 Identified in the state of the art as mass tourism, conventional tourism, traditional tourism, staycation tourism (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).



(Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez and Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020; Barros and Rambo, 2023; Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

The new paradigm is differentiated by how the traveler behaves and relates to the natural, social, and cultural environment (Brito, 2000; Reimondo Barrios, 2017). Food and bed (bed & breakfast) are not enough. There is a growing demand for destinations with policies based on environmental concerns (Farmaki *et al.*, 2015). This is the advent of the “responsible tourist” or “green tourist” who is concerned, interested, and attentive to the social, cultural, and environmental environment, as opposed to the “mass tourist” who is irresponsible, unconcerned, and uninterested (Brito, 2000; Barros and Rambo, 2023). The ecological dimension is undoubtedly one of the most striking trends forcing tourism to be rethought to respond to the new expectations of segments more sensitive to environmental values, cultures, and traditions preservation. This is the age of sustainability, and tourism cannot be left out (Barros and Rambo, 2023; Ferreira, 2012; Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CUBA

To understand the particularities of the Cuban tourism development model, it is necessary to contextualize the phases and changes that have taken place in the sector. In this way, it is crucial to outline its evolution as it can provide important lessons that explain its success as an economic activity and the guidelines that, in some way, have marked the course of the implementation of sustainable tourism development policies in the destination.

The creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Tourism in August 1919 marked the beginning of the tourist industry on the island (Salinas and Mundet, 2000). From then on, attempts were made to organize the activity and increase the construction of facilities. In 1929, the first Tourism Law was passed in Cuba, which was intended to promote investment in the sector, but without conscious and responsible planning. This law led to the construction and operation of hotels, bars, cabarets, casinos, and other facilities with attractions related to gambling and vice, leaving typical, cultural, traditional, and historical attributes to neglect and which could have been used as a basis for tourism development (Maribona, 1959).



In 1952, the Cuban Tourism Institute (ICT) was created. As Villalba (1993) points out, this institution did not drive the industry based on natural, historical, sporting, or cultural attractions. It was responsible for showing visitors the negative aspects of a society dominated by the most perverted vices: gambling, drugs, and prostitution. The hotel investment shaped during this period allowed tourism to occupy second place among the country's economic activities, second only to sugar production. At a national level, tourist facilities were few and far between, with a large concentration in the capital, Varadero tourist hub, which already had 700 hotel rooms, an international airport, and a marina, and Isla de Pinos, with villages and tourist centers.

The deformation of the tourist industry in the 1950s was even more pronounced when it came to domestic tourism. The high unemployment rate and racial discrimination were the main elements exacerbating this imbalance. Only a minority of the population could enjoy the island's tourist attractions. With the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the *Instituto Nacional de la Industria Turística* (INIT) was created, the first organization to specialize in tourism during the revolutionary period. The basis of the sector's policy during this period, according to Rodríguez *et al.* (2013), was to promote endogenous and spatially balanced tourism development, taking full advantage of the territory's potential. Despite these efforts, the flow of tourists in the first three decades of the revolution experienced two opposing movements: one downward, in terms of international tourism, and the other upward, in terms of domestic tourism.

In 1976, the National Tourism Institute (INTUR) was created to develop programs to prioritize tourism as an industry. In the 1980s, INTUR undertook a development plan to expand and increase international tourist reception capacity, making new investments in access routes and hotel infrastructure and services in coastal and island areas of the Cuban archipelago (Varadero, Cayo Coco, Cayo Largo, etc.). In this way, state policies and actions were established to boost Cuba's development as an international tourist destination to capture the traditional tourist market related to the sun and beach products (Diez, 2008).

The so-called "special period" was marked by the fall of the socialist camp in the early 1990s and the intensification of the economic blockade promoted by the United States. Cuba was forced to take immediate political and socio-economic measures to deal with the deep crisis that affected the island's main economic sectors. According to Rodríguez *et al.* (2013), tourism appeared to be the best option,



given its external and internal dynamics, as it would help to generate foreign currency and stimulate the functioning of various productive sectors in the country, which had been paralyzed after the socialist collapse. In 1994, the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) was created with the fundamental mission of designing and managing tourism policy for the sector development based on its competitiveness and sustainability.

Since 2000, Cuba's tourism strategy has been refined in line with the new times; the 21st century demands other ways of carrying out the activity. The central policy for tourism development in Cuba in recent years has been to create a model of self-financing and sustainability for tourism (Lineamentos 255-263 de la Política del Turismo en Cuba). The focus is not only to promote sun and beach tourism as a modality but to vary its promotion beyond the stereotypes of beach and palm trees, stimulating cultural and heritage values and products related to heritage, history, culture, health, and quality of life, which, in all cases, have a lot of potential throughout the national territory (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to identify the policies and strategies that have favored the sustainable development of tourism in recent decades, as well as the future challenges of the sustainability paradigm in Cuban tourism. Given this criterion and from an exploratory and descriptive approach, the research methods and procedures included a document review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. According to Godoy (1995), "documents can be considered a natural source of information since, as they originate in a certain historical, economic and social context, they portray and provide data on that same context" (Godoy, 1995, p. 22). In this study, documentary research aims to complement the theoretical framework and assist the investigative process. The normative documents of the country's tourism management (policies and development plans for the period 2002-2018) were selected as the units of analysis.

The social survey involved interviews with five MINTUR-Cuba officials responsible for national tourism development management. According to May (2004), this technique generates rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, and attitudes. In this case, a semi-structured interview was used because it "allows people to respond more in their terms" (May, 2004, p. 149) and offers room for dialog and understanding of the context and content of the interview.



TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN CUBA (2002-2018): UNDERSTANDING THE NEW DYNAMICS

The main findings are presented below. The data is presented in five thematic blocks that address the new dynamics of tourism management in the Cuban destination: political management, diversification of the offer, area, and territory of intervention, agents of change, and authenticity of the experience.

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT

The importance of the government's efforts to promote the tourism industry from a sustainable approach was highlighted by all the interviewees. "The basic principle is to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the benefits of tourist activity on the social, cultural, economic, and environmental environment throughout the national territory," said respondent E. In this sense, Cuba has the opportunity to promote itself as a green tourist destination, as it has a wide variety of environmental policies, strategies, and legislation that allow it to achieve this. The Constitution of the Republic itself states:

The state protects the environment and the country's natural resources. It recognizes its close link to sustainable economic and social development to make human life more rational and guarantee the survival, well-being, and security of current and future generations. The competent bodies are responsible for implementing this policy. It is the duty of citizens to contribute to the protection of water, the atmosphere, soil conservation, flora, fauna, and all of nature's rich potential. (Article 27, Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1976)

The aim of Law 81 is to create a legal context that "favors the implementation and development of socio-economic activities that are compatible with environmental protection" (Republic of Cuba, Law 81 on the Environment, 1997). This code establishes the principles that guide the efficient management of resources within the country's tourism development programs.

The sustainable development of tourism is based on the harmonious realization between the effective use of the aesthetic, recreational, scientific, and cultural potential of the natural resources that constitute its base, with the protection of these resources and the guarantee that they can offer equal or higher benefits to future generations. It is also based on respect for national culture and its territorial expressions and the integration of local populations in the development of their activities, thus contributing to raising the quality of life of human beings. (Republic of Cuba, Environmental Law, Art. 139, Law 81/1997)



Complementing Law 81, technical standards, decrees, and resolutions have been created to regulate certain environmental aspects of tourism: water consumption, wastewater treatment, solid waste, energy consumption, and space occupation. In line with the requirements of these laws, MINTUR enacted Resolution 40/2007, which aims to reduce water consumption rates and energy carriers, expand the use of renewable energy sources, and recycle waste generated in the provision of tourist services. On this subject, respondent A explains that since the 1970s, the national tourism system has had programs that meet global, regional, and local criteria on the sector's environmental, socio-cultural, and economic management. However, from the beginning of the 21st century, public policies were articulated to favor the sustainable territorial development of national tourism activity. The common denominator of the Cuban tourism development programs consulted (2002-2012 and 2012-2022) is the sector's political, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, and ecologically sustainable vision.

Considering these aspects, the guidelines for Cuban tourism activity stipulate the need to achieve sustainable operational performance in a harmonious combination of all its dimensions. This argument is in line with what respondent C said, who argues that these guidelines suggest that not only should you save money and promote responsible use of resources, invest in ecologically friendly infrastructure, and provide better quality tourist services. It is also necessary for "the sector's development projects to be involved with the communities' projects because the success of one depends on the success of the other" (Respondent C).

OFFER DIVERSIFICATION

According to the Schumpeterian economic development theory, product innovation, and diversification are different and interdependent strategies for growth. While innovation refers to the degree or type of novelty incorporated into the product, diversification refers to product or sector expansion into a new market rather than specializing in a single product (Reimondo Barrios, 2017). Some research (Choo and Jamal, 2009; Moore and Rodger, 2010) argues that diversification strategies lead to more sustainable tourism development by protecting natural resources and value-added products and services and strengthening the links between tourism and other regional industrial sectors.



The Caribbean has the highest proportion of total employment and GDP derived from tourism than any other world region and is notably dependent on this industry (Harrison *et al.*, 2003). Cuba is no exception; no other economic sector on the island is equally prepared to generate such considerable returns. Distinction has become the basis for survival in a highly competitive market. Respondent D states that it is the only activity with solid foundations for expansion and enjoying very favorable market conditions. The Cuban government's National Social Development Plan for 2030 recognizes that tourism plays a significant role in the nation's future, designating it as a strategic sector.

The focus is on tourism and its diversification, such as marina and nautical tourism, golf and real estate, nature, agricultural, cruises, historical, cultural, and heritage tourism, conventions, congresses and fairs, and, in particular, health and quality of life tourism; with an emphasis on its contribution to strengthening the internal integration of the economy. (National Social Development Plan until 2030, Communist Party of Cuba 2016).

From 2000 onwards, Cuba's tourism strategy improved in line with the new times. All the respondents confirmed that diversifying tourism on the island is a priority and that strategies are being implemented to achieve this. "Diversification of the tourism product means, from the point of view of supply, making the most of the geographical, economic, social, and cultural possibilities of the national territory, making it the main beneficiary of the activity," said respondent E.

The success of sustainable tourism depends on using diversification and specialization policies wisely. Tourism markets are highly fragile and risky, forcing businesses to diversify their products and services. Thus, sector diversification is crucial to promoting a destination's competitive advantage (Reimondo Barrios, 2017). In recent years, modalities such as agro-tourism, ecotourism, nautical tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and events have received increasing attention in Cuban destinations. The principles of the sustainable approach, based on Sachs's (1993) views, for tourism development in natural areas, have a solid concern related to ecological preservation, learning, economic, social, and cultural well-being, as well as community participation in the provision of tourism services. "These activities offer education and recreation through interactive and interpretive programs with visitors," indicated respondent A. This argument is similar to what Choo and Jamal (2009) expressed about how historical ties to the land and traditional, local, and cultural knowledge enable sustainable practices.



AREA AND TERRITORY OF INTERVENTION

Sachs (1993) suggests establishing criteria to achieve sustainability based on balancing the rural-urban configuration to seek to overcome inter-regional disparities and conserve biodiversity through environmentally appropriate strategies. In this regard, Beni (2006) points out that the tourist destination must be organized so that attractions are preserved, services are available, and the quality of the landscape is maintained. Therefore, this argument implies looking at the territorial dimension of sustainability from how tourism interferes with occupied and built spaces (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

On this subject, the Cuban Tourism Development Plan (2012-2030) states that tourism, in its spatial dimension, must be based on a balanced geographical distribution of tourist settlements to avoid exceeding their carrying capacity. For respondent B, “There can be no sustainability in tourism if there is no territorial balance, which is why MINTUR’s strategy aims to take advantage of all the territorial potential”.

To evenly distribute the tourist space, avoid exceeding its carrying capacity, and overcome territorial disparities, Cuba’s new tourism policy has sought - and is still seeking - tourism planning its resources and activities with a more efficient spatial distribution. In line with this criterion, the sector’s work is currently divided into eight prioritized tourist regions: La Habana, Varadero, the Central South Coast, *Jardines del Rey*, the north coast of *Camagüey*, the north coast of *Holguín*, *Santiago de Cuba*, and the Canarreos Archipelago, all of which add up to more than 50 tourist hubs at national level (MINTUR, 2016). In this sense, the new strategies seek to develop specialized and diversified tourism in each region: ecotourism, cruises, scientific, cultural, religious, incentives, events, health, etc.

From this perspective, the new strategy seeks to make efficient use of the resources and attributes of each territory, improve the quality of life of the population, conserve cultural heritage and authenticity, promote local endogenous development and territorial balance, and stimulate coordination between local, regional and national authorities (MINTUR, 2016). Respondent C said: “We have geographically isolated areas with a rich traditional culture, environmentally sustainable and with local production systems, which makes them authentic and with great tourist potential.” Cigar growing in *Pinar del Río*, coffee growing in the *Sierra Maestra*, handicrafts in *Trinidad*, indigenous rituals in *Chorro de Maíta*, and African and French traditional music and dance in *Guantánamo* are



examples of how tourism fits into the dynamics of community economies and traditions. All these locations are part of tourist routes. However, according to respondent E, “the main challenge is to preserve the social dynamics that differentiate these territories while opening them up to show their ways of life”.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

The Agenda 21 program (UNWTO, 1997) indicates that one of the objectives of tourism should be to improve the decision-making process to create or restructure mechanisms that facilitate the participation of interested individuals, groups, and organizations. Therefore, the participation of local agents with public and private institutions in the tourism industry in destination planning is a fundamental condition for the sector’s sustainable development process. According to respondent D, the sector needs to look for new ways of facilitating the participation of the players involved because “all those involved in tourism are agents of change and are a factor in competitiveness”.

Cuban tourism management in the analyzed period recognizes the benefits of collaborative planning, especially in promoting collective learning, training, and discussion, considering these issues essential for tourism’s sustainable development. In this sense, education plays a fundamental role in the management process. “It’s not just an essential tool in the sector sustainable development. We should see it as a mechanism for building citizenship,” said respondent A. Similarly, respondent D argues that education enables a collective awareness of the need to respect and conserve culture, history, traditions, and identities, stimulating a commitment to balance and the preservation of the planet. For respondent C, tourism policies reflect how much it has been learned: “Before, they were characterized by ambitious competitiveness, and now, by the harmonious relationship between man and nature”.

However, the formation of human capital is not a static process. Learning is continuous and must be anchored in the effective participation of the communities involved, whatever their socio-cultural characteristics or geographical location. There must be a balance of benefits and responsibilities between the actors involved in the process, thus generating an atmosphere of community partnership in tourism development (Reimondo Barrios, 2017). “They should feel part of something that doesn’t affect their way of life, that enables inclusive and environmentally respectful economic and social



growth,” argues respondent C.

As part of the new tourism management paradigm, MINTUR seeks to develop tourism activities in specific destinations from a community-based approach. This strategy is the case of *Las Terrazas*, a sustainable tourist community located in the *Sierra del Rosario* and declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The natural richness of the landscape has favored the scenario for its tourism development, whose policy aims at community participation and integration for the sustainable management of local resources, local economic development, control of environmental impacts, access to drinking water, conservation, and protection of the territory’s natural and cultural heritage.

Another example of sustainable community tourism is the historic center of La Habana (a World Heritage Site). Tourism here plays a dynamic and resource-generating role based on the area’s attractiveness recognition. In this sense, efforts are directed towards the historical, artistic, architectural, and cultural heritage restoration and the participation of the local population - who give the area its own identity - in tourism activities. The mission is to organize communities as an attractive product integrated with the local economy, which favors the expansion of sources of employment and income, incorporates various services and infrastructure, and enhances the community’s cultural and spiritual life.

AUTHENTICITY OF EXPERIENCE

Authenticity in tourism should be seen as a motivating and attractive factor. Tourists are both motivated to experience authenticity and attracted to it. Tourism managers must take authenticity as an essential factor in destination strategic planning, strengthening their competitiveness. Marketing and advertising communication are primarily responsible for making this possible (Reimondo Barrios, 2017).

As a result of the changes in the sector in the early 2000s, defining a basis for building a coherent and renewed image of Cuba as a destination was a priority. According to MINTUR’s Communication Policy, advertising communication must be “integrated into the strategic development plans of the Tourism System” (Resolution 186, MINTUR Communication Policy 2014, p. 8). “Since 2002, great efforts have been made to promote the country internationally in a coordinated manner, based on a communication policy,” said respondent C. For respondent B, the basic strategy focuses on “creating memorable tourism campaigns that promote the consolidation of Cuba’s image, distinguish its identity,



and support the sustainable marketing of the destination.”

Statements recorded in interviews with MINTUR representatives indicate that Cuba’s advertising communication strategy over the last few decades has been governed by the basic principle of showing the country’s reality and what sets it apart. Respondent C argues that tourism advertising for the Caribbean islands doesn’t differ much conceptually, as they all exploit nature as their most valuable resource, which motivates relaxation on stunning beaches. “The natural environment is the same for everyone, so we project what is legitimate, unique, real, undeniable, and profoundly Cuban. That’s what makes us authentic.”

Regarding the image projected of Cuba as a tourist destination in recent years, Reimondo Barrios (2017) points out that “there has been an evolving effort to diversify the promotion of regional destinations between campaigns, avoiding the obvious and marked coastalization of Cuban and Caribbean tourism advertising in general”. Respondent A argues that this is due to two factors: firstly, the sector’s guiding principle of taking advantage of all the territorial potential for tourist activity. This argument is why other territories are starting to appear in destination advertising. Secondly, the diversification strategy undertaken by MINTUR makes cultural attractions the anchor of the island’s tourism advertising. In this sense, the findings have helped conclude that the destination’s communication and marketing strategies have sought to support the new tourism management paradigm by expanding the country’s image, showing that Cuba is more than just the sun and beach.

TOURISM IN CUBA: A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The results of this research indicate, in general, that in recent years, MINTUR has pursued a tourism policy that is economically viable, environmentally correct, socially just, spatially balanced, and culturally diverse, in line with a sustainable development agenda. This finding is due to the re-evaluation of the role of tourism as a fundamental economic activity - especially after the socialist collapse and with the political and socio-economic changes of recent years - which has demanded the acceptance of a long-term vision of the activity. As a result, the imperatives of economic growth have been questioned to adopt broader, more integrative, conscious, and responsible tourism policies. Sustainable tourism has become a priority.



The research identified that efficient planning and coordination are sustainable tourism management facilitators. The documentary analysis showed that a long-term vision development, based on sustainability principles and deep environmental awareness, is actively addressed in the policies, legislation, and strategies that guide and regulate the sector. In addition, the documents analyzed made it possible to identify an open predominance of environmental protection as one of the principles guiding the efficient management of resources within tourism development plans. This dominance stems from the tendency to implement programs that comply with global, regional, and local criteria on the sector's environmental, socio-cultural, and economic management.

Among the new dynamics of tourism management in the Cuban destination, the ones with the emphasis are the diversification of the offer and the expansion of the territory of intervention. The following results support this assertion. Firstly, strategies that favor the development of heritage tourism products, ecotourism, adventure, and cruises, which respond to the constant quest to diversify Cuba's tourism products based on its natural and cultural resources and social incentives. Secondly, the promotion of other regions with high potential for tourist attraction, taking advantage of the entire national territory, boosting local economies, stimulating improvements in the quality of life of recipient communities, and mitigating regional imbalances.

In addition, the partnerships in the Cuban tourism sector played a significant role, where community tourism is a fundamental basis. Diversity of interests, due to the multiple parties involved in tourism, creates a collaborative environment where inclusive governance and local participation in the use of resources and decision-making dominate. Organizations and companies in the sector and host communities promote conscious management of the care and preservation of natural, cultural, historical, and heritage resources, encouraging the construction of self-sustaining infrastructures. This context generates employment and income for the local economy, incorporates various services and infrastructure, and enhances the cultural and spiritual life of the communities.

Respect for traditional ways of life is one of the significant challenges to sustainability in Cuba's tourism sector. The existence of geographically isolated areas with a rich traditional culture, which are environmentally sustainable and have local production systems, gives the territories enormous tourism potential. Cigar cultivation in *Pinar del Río*, coffee growing in the *Sierra Maestra*,



handicrafts in *Trinidad*, indigenous rituals in *Chorro de Maíta*, and African and French music and dance in Guantánamo are examples of how tourism fits into the dynamics of community economies and traditions. All these locations are part of tourist routes, but the main challenge is to preserve the social dynamics that differentiate these territories while opening them up to show their ways of life.

Based on the analysis procedures applied in this study, the common denominator of Cuba's tourism development plans is related to three main factors:

a) The conservation, protection, and respect for the territories' resources and natural, historical, and cultural heritage fostered by the local government structures and the regional representations of MINTUR.

b) The creation of legislation, indicators, and requirements for zoning and protected areas in the design and development of tourist infrastructure and hotel accommodation based on locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction.

c) The development of community-based tourism, with a supportive and sustainable approach based on collaborative planning between stakeholders, which preserves biodiversity and carrying capacity of each territory, generates income and employment for the receiving community, and favors traditional ways of life.

Taking the above aspects as a point of reference, the guidelines for Cuban tourism correspond to a change in the management paradigm in search of sustainability. The sustainability approach here adopts a holistic and integrated view of tourism, considering social equity, environmental protection, cultural diversity, spatial balance, and the economic viability of the activity.

CONCLUSIONS

The central focus of this article was on analyzing the factors that have influenced the implementation of sustainability as a policy in Cuba's tourism sector in recent decades. The approach to the topic and the choice of Cuba as a tourist destination for the study is interesting, considering the country is trying to join this new reality of global processes. In this sense, its involvement in well-structured proposals development for sustainable management and planning is remarkable, generating a positive and solid image that can promote the destination and impact national and regional development.

To this end, and through research methods and procedures that included a documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, it can be concluded that the development of the national tourism industry based on the sustainability of the activity is a priority. Its ongoing success will depend on the continuity of such policies. The basic principle of the sector aims to minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits for the receiving communities, preserving the carrying capacity of each territory and conserving natural, cultural, and historical-patrimonial resources. Citizen participation and respect for traditional ways of life are the primary challenges facing the tourism sector in Cuba. Recognizing these elements and understanding the need to work towards them means encouraging public awareness of the issue.

The limitations of this research are that, given the need to circumscribe the study period, the conclusions are restricted to the time considered, and relevant changes or issues may not have been analyzed. Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that future research should carry out a comparative study between competing tourist destinations.



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