

EVALUATION OF NATURAL ATTRACTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTURISM IN THE HUASTECA REGION, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ, MÉXICO

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The objective of this document is to evaluate the natural attractions apt for the development of the ecotourism in the Huasteca region in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, area that presents one of the greatest potential to carry out this activity.

The research is based in the classification of the natural resources, the concepts presented by different authors like Strauss (1972), García (1970), Gallardo (1976) and Gutiérrez (1986), and in the evaluation of natural elements such as the relief, its relation to nature and the specific tourist attractions distinctive of this region. Afterwards environmental elements are considered and evaluated independently from which the amount and the type of existing natural resources for tourism differentiate five levels of territorial units.

In the final considerations, some elements are introduced for discussion that, in the matter of governmental issues, are due to take into account at the time of implementing communitarian projects of eco-touristic in areas where there is a high presence of natural resources apt for this activity, and whose municipalities denoted remarkable socioeconomic imbalances, an index of heterogeneous human development and ethnic composition, context in which such actions will have to be executed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Mexico is known as one of the economic activities of great importance for the dynamism that it demonstrates. In 2007 more than 21 million tourists arrived to the country, number that places Mexico as the eighth international tourist destination. In correspondence, during the same period it generated an income of more than 12900 million dollars (OMT, 2008), number that places this activity as the third source of income national, single after originating currencies of the petroleum sale and of the shipments of remittances towards the families of mexican on the part of the workers who reside in the United States of America.

The traditional affluence of national and international visitors to the main tropicales centers in the Mexican coasts, like Acapulco, Cancun, Puerto Vallarta and Los Cabos,

among others, has extended towards other sites that offer attractive alternative to the regular sun-sea-sand trio (Sanchez-Crispín, A. 2001).

Spaces that have won preference of tourism demand include those distant beaches, encouraging the incursion of visitors to the knowledge of the Mexico diverse, heterogeneous and equipped with an ancient cultural heritage sites recognized the State of San Luis Potosí. Its unique geographical position in the convergent boundary of the tropical region and nearctic confer the “potosino” territory diversity landscapes and natural resources suitable for leveraging tourist purposes. Similarly, here see change region that what some researchers have called Arid-america and Mesoamerica, showing features specific region but within a common cultural tradition (Lopez, A. and Lopez, L., 2001: 58-79).

In this context, the governmental touristic program of San Luis Potosí, which is part of the State Plan of development 2003-2009, considers that to reduce the socio-economic marginalization conditions, tourism should promote to territories where is viable, necessary and appropriate to support the socio-economic development (Government of the State of San Luis Potosí, 2003). These policies of promotion proposed, in particular, to the Huasteca and Altiplano, two regions that show greater socio-economic potential in the State. Described within the touristic program, the Government of San Luis Potosi must also encourage the development of environmental studies in the territory that are enabling decision-making in tourism results-oriented.

This work reveals that governmental procedures in tourism in the State of San Luis Potosí are far from a correspondence between the objectives and strategies that are stated in the guiding document —the upgrade version of the Tourism Program— and put into practice of concrete measures directed to encourage actions that help in the conservation of the environment, especially if it is considered that many of the areas with important touristic attractions within our region of study show conditions of environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalization in important levels.

Additionally, many of the sites that meet the characteristics of natural attractions in the region are not use for tourist purposes, either by the problems that implies its management, or simple ignorance. In correspondence, many of these sites do not have comprehensive plans that help to define clear policies where problems social, environmental and territorial organization activities could be considered within a comprehensive ecological zoning plan.

By virtue of the foregoing, each actor or sector involved carries out its activities individually, fragmented and even opposed to the form of long-term use or sustainable manner. There are no collective strategies made by municipal or state governments neither by local population where measures for the conservation of natural areas are proposed, this includes those which are already in use as well as others that could be incorporated to eco-tourism proposal at local, regional and State level.

However, the investigation also reveals that there is interest of an important sector of local population and individuals to stimulate strategies or projects, which are directed to use the natural resources to try to improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, the interest must lean in the coordination between the instances involved. As an example, we can point out that is highly recommendable the existence of training programs and collective

supervision towards the eco-touristic projects, where the governmental authorities of different levels interact, as well as the local population and the private industry, in a given case.

It is also considered advisable that training were offered to the people of the community to elaborate its own projects for many of them are of interest, but they are not presented like formal proposals that would allow to coordinate a synergy among the different actors involved with the tourist development in the different levels, reason why the possibilities of supporting projects of communitarian tourist and eco-tourism development are reduced.

In the broadly context, it is necessary to regulate touristic activities from a local level, where the local actors play a part in the task of elaborating their own rules and that considers aspects such as identity of the indigenous population; these regulations would agreed with which the tradition stands, and that emphasizes, especially, in respecting their own organization and their customs. In this sense, the simple fact to count with a place or “to obtain” economic resources is not the only option to stimulate tourism, it is important to count on the communitarian endorsement and that is only obtained at the moment in which communities are involved and taken in account.

In correspondence, the government civil employees will have to promote the approach to the communities that take advantage of the touristic resources and follow closely the tourist projects that are being carried out. Also, requires of a greater coordination among the different levels of political-administrative entities of the state and the municipalities, because normally in these last ones they show little or null support obtained by the state authorities and, especially, the ones of the federal instances that even ignore completely the conditions and problems associated with the tourist development on this scale of manifestation.

A suitable territorial organization of the practice of the eco-tourism through recognition of the natural and socio-economics conditions of the territory in San Luis Potosí will allow the planning of areas where the amounts and intensity of the activity could be carried out based on the environmental carrying capacity of the sites detected as capable to support the concurrence of visitors. On the other hand, it will favor the diversification of sites where activities of low ecological impact by means of the intervention of the communities as well as the presence of other natural and the cultural attractions in the state.

