

Touristic Sustainability in Rural and Natural Spaces

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This article aims to give the reader an overview of the development of nature tourism and its importance for the sustainability of rural and natural areas involving special protection. Once you have seen the end of mass tourism, tourism demand is much more heterogeneous and attends a difference of purposes for which such demand is diversified, representing a particularly important tourism and leisure activities that take place now in natural areas, thus giving rise to different types of leisure and tourism, such as Rural tourism, Ecotourism, Agrotourism, Nature and Adventures tourism, Sports tourism in natural areas, etc. What is important for the sustainability of these areas, that are subject to this type of tourism is getting some positive impacts maintaining sustainability and combating the negative impact, that such activities may have on certain protected areas or special conservation. From this point of view, we believe it is important to develop responsible tourism and committed to environmental conservation and for that the local population must be trained in order to achieve development of the territory without the activities that are the fruit of these typologies tourism and leisure pose a danger. Also, the tourist population must be more aware about what constitutes such practices of leisure and tourism for conservation of the environment and, at the same time, the development of the most depressed areas.

Keywords: Natural Tourism, development, Sustainable Tourism, agrotourism, positive and negative impacts, rural and natural spaces

Introduction

Natural tourism is a type of tourism closely related to development and sustainable tourism. Its field of action is circumscribed to the natural habitats and its biodiversity. Some elements that must be pointed out for their special importance are natural parks, protected reserves, ecotourism, rural habitat, agrotourism, and the local population's commitment of a particular area of implantation. The dominating element around which these activities and recreations are developed is sustainability, and for that reason special attention is paid to sustainable tourism for its contribution to the environment. This requires certain knowledge of the reasons to develop it in all the rural and natural spaces.

Therefore, the consequences and repercussions of leisure-related activities in the environment are here observed, and thus we approach both the positive and negative impacts of leisure and tourism in nature, as well as some recommendations for sustainability of leisure-related tourism activities. Finally, leisure and tourism in nature reflect the general sphere of the territory, in which nature tourism is going to be implemented, which

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entails the central typology in the interaction between Rural Tourism and Active Tourism, and at a minor scale Agrotourism, Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Adventure Tourism, and Sport Tourism.

Nature Tourism in Sustainability: Positive and Negative Impacts

Touristic activity in natural spaces acquired great importance since the late 20th century, until the first decade of the 21st. It currently represents a touristic typology in sustainability which is being developed more intensely in the last years. (Ballesteros & Pérez Adán, 1997; Blanco & Fernández, 2007; Pérez Rubio, 2007; Blázquez, 2010; Aranda, Delgado, & De Juan 2010; García y Blanco, 2011; Martínez, 2011). This kind of tourism is different from conventional tourism for its motivations and the tourists' conduct and for its singularity of the utilized resources, which are of high value for its landscapes and ecology, and which on many occasions suppose spaces which are subject to protection by the environmental laws. As stated by Martínez (2009), it is a modality which is closely related to development and sustainable tourism and its field of action is circumscribed to natural habitats and its biodiversity. The most important elements are natural parks, protected reserves, ecotourism, rural habitat, agrotourism, and the local population's commitment of a particular area of implantation.

In the year 1999, the United Nations Commission of Sustainable Development met in New York and approved *the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* and asked the WTO to seek further contribution from the private sector, NGO's and trade unions. They received written observations about the Code from more than 70 member nations of the WTO and other entities. *The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* is therefore the culmination of a complete process of consulting. It is composed by 10 articles which were approved by unanimous decision in the General Assembly of the WTO in Santiago de Chile, in October 1999. Article number 3 in its sections 4 and 5 reflects clearly and succinctly the importance of the typology of nature tourism and its integration in sustainable development as a contributing factor:

Article 3. TOURISM, FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 4) Tourism infrastructure should be designed and tourism activities programmed in such a way as to protect the natural heritage composed of ecosystems and biodiversity and to preserve end angered species of wildlife; the stake holders in tourism development, and especially professionals, should agree to the imposition of limitations or constraints on their activities when these are exercised in particularly sensitive areas: desert, polar or high mountain regions, coastalareas, tropical forests or wetlands, propitious to the creation of nature reserves or protected areas. 5) Nature tourism and ecotourism are recognized as being particularly conducive to enriching and enhancing the standing of tourism, provided they respect the natural heritage and local populations and are in keeping with the carrying capacity of the sites (Code of Global Ethics for Tourism, WTO, 2001).

A priori, the touristic supply in nature tourism must have a low environmental impact. It is presumably a type of tourism which is cautious with nature and the local population. When there appears a conscience of the threats and risks of touristic activities for ecosystems, becoming evident by means of negative impacts at ecological, social and cultural levels, nature tourism begins to acquire a significant relevance. As Martínez stated, "currently the totality of the implicated agents in tourism have assumed and recognized that the touristic diversity can have negative impacts on the environment and that its different impacts can be controlled" (Martínez, 2009, pp. 278-279).

Not all the actions linked to tourism and leisure contribute exclusively to the destruction of the environment, as it has been demonstrated that touristic activity has positively contributed in many areas to the

sustainability and conservation of the environment. We present in our feedback model (Figure 1) that many of the main motivations for travelling and for many leisure activities consist of the recreation of the different species of fauna and flora, and the contemplation of nature in general, which have managed to reach the category of ecosystems that are protected, conserved and in permanent supervision. Thus, they can be enjoyed by all the people who visit them and admire them.

This feedback manages to conserve and maintain certain ecosystem liberating them from physical, social and cultural deterioration by means of the benefits provided by a touristic activity, which is controlled and motivated by the wellbeing of the environment and the population of the destination areas.

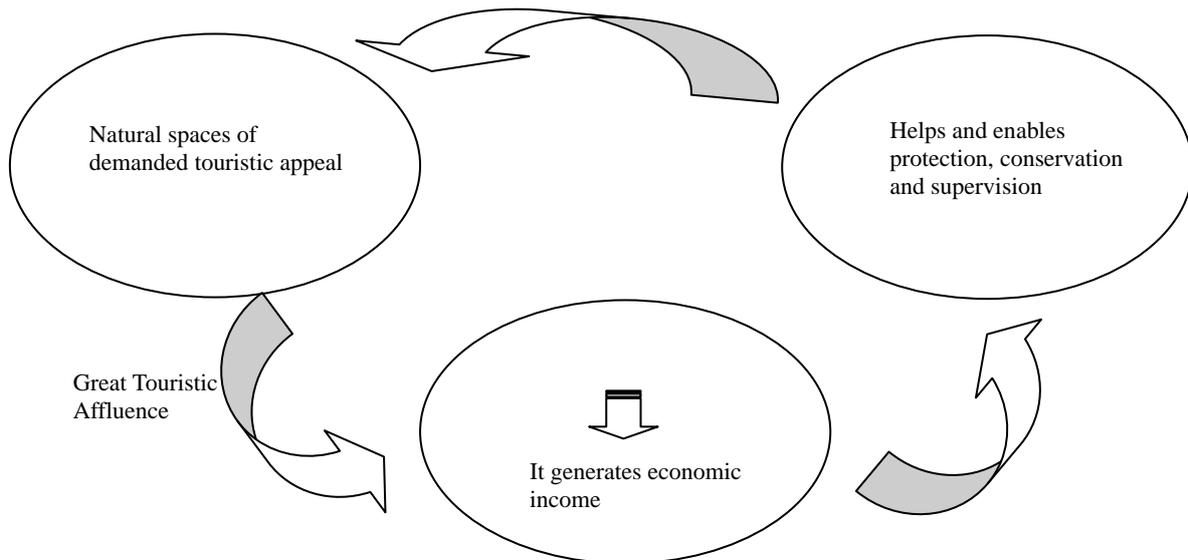


Figure 1. Feedback system of a natural space of touristic interest through nature tourism.

Source: Own Elaboration.

Generally, in nature tourism, we find a touristic supply which seems quite depolarized in terms of space. There is not a concentration of all the touristic equipment in the same town or city, but rather a dispersed disposition. It is an active tourism which attempts to unveil the reality in which it is inserted, both cultural and natural. Its practice is carried out in areas that have barely been disrupted by man. For this reason it is very common to promote leisure, spot and educational activities, as well as those which promote cultural understanding and awareness.

Natural spaces tourism could represent the best model of sustainable development in the touristic sector, as it conserves and protects natural resources, it values the local cultural manifestations and it integrates the population into the supply. It promotes awareness about the protection of the environment and it tends to improve the quality of life of the local population of the destination. Nevertheless, it is a typology which represents a very specialized segment of the market, still a minority in terms of arrivals and profit, despite the fact that nature tourists spend more money than the average tourists. In spite of this, there exist different opinions on this, like that of Drumm, A. and Moore, A. (2002), who sustain that nature tourism is simply a type of tourism based on the visit to natural resources and it is closely related to ecotourism, but it doesn't necessarily involve conservation or sustainability.

Epler's views (2002) expose the birth of ecotourism as a consequence of the practice of nature tourism, which contributes positively to the conservation of the environment in the country where the touristic

destination is, and also in the particular municipality. Also, it consists of travelling to natural, virgin environments, interiorizing the experience that is obtained from having been to purely natural environments and in contact with people and cultures that are still in isolation and that are not well known. It also consists of boosting the preservation of natural resources with which a sustainable future can be guaranteed, and carrying out an educative function which entails the comprehension of the cultural and environmental values of the visited locations.

With respect to the positive impacts, touristic activity in general can contribute positively to the improvement of the environmental terrain, its preservation and a higher appraisal of it, since currently there exists a higher level of environmental awareness in both population and public authorities, as well as a higher interest in the regeneration of natural, rural and urban spaces, preserving natural habitats, buildings, historical locations, with the establishment of protected areas (protected spaces, natural parks, etc.) and a more effective fight against contamination.

First of all, it must be pointed out that tourism can serve as the necessary stimulus for adopting measures of improvement and preservation of the environment. It is widely known that in many touristic areas, public administrations have attempted to implement touristic planning measures, which arrive too late, once the environment has already been damaged and will struggle to recuperate. Secondly, as an economic activity with high levels of dynamism in the global markets, tourism and leisure activities produce an increment in economic profit, allowing higher investments in the preservation of natural spaces. Tourism generates directly or indirectly an increase of economic activities in the visited locations, especially due to the demands of goods, and services which must be produced and offered. In order to make this point clearer, as an example, the global tourism industry reckoned 935 million tourists in 2010, 6.7% more tourists than in 2009. That percentage means 58 million tourists more in comparison with 2009, and 22 millions in comparison with 2008, a year in which 913 million people travelled, what became a record at the time. These numbers can shed light on the levels of income generated by such moves in 2010, which surpassed 693,000 million euros, which means an increase of 5% in comparison with the previous year.

According to the data published by the WTO (World Tourism Organization), the income generated from international tourism registered a lower increase (2 points) compared to the increase in the number arrivals, which was of 7%, which demonstrates the close relationship between both indicators (number of tourists and income), and it confirms that, in years of economic recovery, arrivals tend to increase more than income. Despite the fact that most destinations in the world presented positive data last year, the recovery came at two different speeds, being minor in advanced economies (5%) and faster in the emerging ones (8%). In this scenario and according to the levels of income, Spain is in the second position right after the United States. Spain is the fourth country in terms of tourists' arrivals (WTO, 2011).

Other positive aspects arise for the local population in the areas of touristic destinations, as the tourism and tourism-related activities serve to enrich the social, cultural and economic levels of the areas due to the commercialization of local products, the exchange of ideas, customs and lifestyles. Similarly, touristic activity helps the touristic population to be more aware of the environmental issue by carrying out good practices and also to convince the local population to protect their environment and establish areas of special protection, like natural parks for the protection of the environment.

Moreover, it must be pointed out that just like other touristic typologies, regardless of where they are practiced, tourism will generate employment among the residents of the touristic areas and it will avoid the

rural exodus to more developed areas in the search for employment. Tourism is one of the few intensive sectors of employment with a wide range of jobs, from highly qualified jobs to more basic ones. It is also one of the few alternatives to employment destruction, which has been incremented due to the process of globalization, the advance of technology and communications and the reduction of the working hours. This is a sector which harbors large multinational companies, SMEs and small family businesses. The touristic sector provides employment to around 10% of the active population of the world, not only direct employment but also indirect.

Finally, the negative impacts show activities which have to do with tourism and leisure in natural areas transform the physical aspect of the touristic areas, producing irreversible changes in the environment, generating serious ecologic disruptions like the destruction of ecosystems, the decrease of the quality and quantity of water, the impoverishment and contamination of soils, hence contributing to the extinction of multiple local fauna and flora species, fishing depredation, and sea contamination. We can also add to this the processes of erosion and degradation in the environment, caused by such activities. This erosion occurs especially in beaches, forests, lakes, mountains and the general landscape, also affecting the preservation and perpetuation of historic monuments, lifestyles, diverse fauna and a series of innumerable attractions which are part of the geographic space where tourism is developed.

Nevertheless, it is convenient to point out that an excessive urban growth which is not integrated in the landscape contributes to the breakdown of the biological balance of certain areas. Similarly, it contributes to the disintegration of local and traditional economic activities and collaborates in the process of acculturation of the destination areas. It is therefore assumed that there is a loss of traditional values and cultural diversity. Also, it favors migratory processes and it generates phenomena of population growth in both rural and urban areas in a disordered manner.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the accumulation of people in certain areas that have limited loading capacity favors the generation of a quantity of waste which may provoke problems related to the depuration of waste waters and also problems with garbage disposal, as well as the creation of uncontrolled dumping, among others. Nonetheless, due to the seasonality of the touristic demand, particularly touristic activities in natural environments, and therefore, due to the generation of low and high seasons, it is clear that there are periods in which the number of people who concentrate in the destination areas is multiplied, added to the coincidental critical period of many resources (like water) present in natural spaces, they can intensify the environmental erosion.

The issue is, as stated by several authors, besides that the process of growing awareness introduced in society of the environmental catastrophes and the deterioration of the existing natural resources as a consequence of the bad practices in an uncontrolled and unplanned tourism, we must add the fiscal regulation of the activities that have to do with leisure and tourism. Therefore, in order to establish a better planning of the touristic usages and to reduce the negative effects that they generate, it is necessary to augment the taxation on certain resources like the use of combustibles necessary for transportation which facilitate the moving of people and goods, the use of soil for the edification of homes, hotels and malls, as well as leisure-related buildings, etc. and the use of water or the massive generation of waste in times of high touristic concentration.

Sustainable Tourism: Development and Contribution to the Preservation of the Environment

Undoubtedly, the basic nucleus for the development and contribution to the preservation of the

environment is found in the so called Sustainable Tourism, which was imposed in the late 80's, given the important conditions of the impact of leisure-related activities which were started to be detected. As a consequence, it seems critical to implement sustainable tourism and to know its contributions, as well as to know the motivations for its development in areas where leisure-related tourism is found.

Throughout history, human beings have used and exploited the environment in a somewhat abusive way, which has been produced an erosion of the natural and environmental resources of the planet. From different perspectives, it has been attempted to reconstruct the balance with nature, which had been lost. The World Commission on Environment and Development¹ poses the implementation of a sustainable development as "a type of development whose main general principle is the satisfaction of the human necessities in the present without compromising future generations' capacity to satisfy their own". In this regard, the United Nations have been the forerunners in addressing this issue by focusing initially on the study and utilization of natural resources and on the struggle of countries, especially those in development, to have control of their own natural resources. Therefore, for the sustainability of the balanced territory, it is considered eminently necessary to develop the balanced territory, integrated in accordance with its environment.

With the development of society and the increase of standards of living, there are authors like Mc Nelly (1995), who indicated that as the human population grows, the pressures of urban life encourage people to find solitude in nature, and therefore, the number of visitors in parks and in rural and protected areas, is increased. Thus the touristic typologies which use natural spaces as environment are being more and more demanded. Something closely related to sustainable development of tourism is the concept of touristic capacity or the capacity of reception of visitors by a touristic destination (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; McIntyre, 1993; Crosby & Moreda, 1996). This concept refers to the maximum use of an environment without deteriorating its resources or causing dissatisfaction among visitors, or the generation of adverse impacts on the local society, economy and culture.

The new market tendencies indicate that environmental quality and the touristic proposals are progressively being more valued. This has been increasingly received by the authorities, businessmen and local agents of touristic sites themselves, who are starting to get worried about this issue since quality tourism stimulates local economies, creates employment, generates currency exchange and improves the infrastructures which are being utilized in the municipality.

In this regard, the WTO has admitted that tourists are increasingly becoming more aware of environmental aspects. This factor does not only generate a motivational diversification, but it is also a very appreciated value and it is included among the significant tendencies of the current world. For this reason, it can be stated that there is not only an apparition of a new set of specific types of tourism which have nature and natural resources as their basis, but that any touristic activity, nature-oriented or not, has to consider the environmental aspect. From this perspective, we can distinguish four distinct ways in which the environment intervenes in touristic supply, and they are the following:

(1) As exclusive motivation, what has produced the typologies of nature tourism and ecotourism (typology which makes enjoying nature and respecting the environment's balance compatible).

(2) Taking into account the environment as main factor, but not the only one. Here we can point out rural

¹ This definition was used for the first time in 1987 in the World Commission on Environment and Development of the UN, created in 1983.

tourism, including in this case the environmental conception from the basis of anthropology.

(3) When the environmental aspect has a complementary character. Here, the environment becomes a spectacle, with temporal and spatial limitations (theme parks, zoos, botanic gardens, aquariums, etc.).

(4) When the preservation of the environment forms part, in any way, of the concrete touristic products and services: non-contaminating transportation, alternative energy hotels, restaurants with ecologic products, etc.

Sustainable tourism can be defined as the kind of tourism that does not compromise the preservation of the natural and cultural resources on which it is sustained and therefore, it recognizes explicitly the necessity for the protection of the environment. It includes all forms and destinations, rural and urban areas, mass tourism, individual visitors, or in small groups. It is basically a type of tourism which openly and cohesively integrates the capacity for the development of the receptor among all the interlocutors under a version of balanced increment. In this regard, Martínez Quintana (2009) explains that sustainable tourism from the perspective of the concept of sustainability is profoundly focused on the environmental factor, and therefore, it is necessary to carry out an optimal utilization of the environmental resources with an absolute respect for the authenticity of the hosting communities and committing to the long-term viability of its economic activities. For the development of the touristic activity in a sustainable way the four elements of social responsibility in businesses are required: economic, legal, ethical responsibilities, as well as one of altruism and commitment to society (Martínez, 2009, p. 273).

This set of ideas is sustained on a wide collection of documents which have been elaborated with the passing of years by the most significant figures that coordinate tourism at a global level. Thus,

the responsibility and sustainability of tourism has its origins in the European Charter on sustainable tourism (World Conference on Sustainable Tourism held in Lanzarote, Canary Islands, in 1995), which was founded on the official documents of Manila, Sofia, The Hague, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of Rio on the Environment and Development, whose fundamental principles placed touristic development in sustainability, from an integral point of view which incorporates in all of its cycle and in a long-term manner the ecologic and economic viability, as well as the social and ethical equity of the local communities. (Íbidem, 2009, p. 273)

Nevertheless, as we can extract from the declarations given by the former Director of Sustainable Development of the WTO², there is frequent confusion with respect to the concept of sustainability when applied to tourism. Some authors and, especially some touristic enterprises tend to equate the concept of sustainable tourism to ecotourism, which is incorrect. In this regard, some misconceptions are detected as the concept of ecotourism is associated to sustainable tourism, and in fact, this typology is more global and general and it generates and comprises innumerable touristic typologies. Similarly, it has been frequently confused with nature tourisms. This comparison is also wrong as this type of tourism is based on “choosing principally nature, which is constituted as the principal motivation for the enjoyment of leisure and free time” (Íbidem, 2009, p. 277). Thus, as stated by Yunis (2004), the concept of sustainability and the principles which it implies must be applied to all types of tourism, regardless of the types of tourism, the motivation for the trip, the type of destination or the activities that the tourist performs in such destination. This author indicates that in order to achieve a sustainable development of the touristic activity, it is normally required to meet a series of criteria which signify the balance between environmental, economic and sociocultural dimensions.

² Eugenio YunisAhués, Director of Sustainable Development, World Tourism Organization from 1997 to 2007.

As stated by the WTO (Yunis Ahúes E., 2004), the main challenge that the sector of tourism is facing all around the world in the pursuit of achieving a higher level of sustainability, is to intensify the implementation of the existent knowledge on the real planning, on the development of touristic destinations by the public administrations and on the daily functioning of touristic enterprises. There are authors who have pointed out the tremendous importance of implementing concrete methods and techniques on indicators of environmental quality in sustainable touristic areas, in order to ensure competitiveness meeting the sustainability principles. Thus, Boyra Amposta classifies the basic and specific indicators for touristic destinations, which have been elaborated on the basis of the work of Ayuso and Fullana (2001), which can be summarized in the following ten principles:

Protection of the place. Measurement: Category of protection of a place according to the indicator of the (IUCN) International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Pressure. Number of tourists who visit the place (by year and month).

Intensity of use. High season (people/hectares).

Social impact. Proportion of tourists with respect to the local residents (high season).

Developmental control. Existence of proceedings of environmental revision or official controls of the development of a place and intensity of use.

Waste management. Percentages of waste water which is under management (other elements which can be considered as indicators are the structural limits of other infrastructural capacities of the place, like, for instance, water supply, garbage, etc.).

Planning process. Existence of a regional plan which is organized by the region where the touristic destination is.

Critical ecosystems. Number of infrequent species or species in danger of extinction.

The consumer's satisfaction. Degree of satisfaction of the visitors (based on a questionnaire).

Satisfaction of the local population. Degree of satisfaction of the local population (based on a questionnaire).

Besides this, it has to be mentioned that the development of policies which favor a sustainable tourism which is responsible and respectful with the environmental issue has not been a temporary matter, but rather the contrary. It continues to develop and there are continuous initiatives for the continuity of this dynamic which is also intensifying with the passing of time. Skepticism on the repercussions of tourism in the environment has disappeared and it seems to be very visible. It is something that progressively preoccupies the planet. As an indication of the continuity of work done in this regard, for the sake of decreasing the deterioration of the environment related to touristic and leisure activities, we must mention the recent creation of the *Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism* in early 2011. With it, sustainable tourism has received a great boost and a new process of unification has occurred, an unification of all the people related to the industry in order to influence on policies, participate in projects of development and provide a platform of global communication.

The preoccupation about sustainability in tourism arose the very moment that there was a clear conscience of the impacts that this activity generates in the environment. Its close contact with nature leads to an interlocking of the environment and tourism. According to Merino, J. and Nieto, C. (in Ballesteros and Pérez Adán, 1997, p. 363), there exist a series of economic and social activities which deteriorate the environment and have a close connection with tourism (See Table 1).

Table 1

Economic and Social Activities Which Deteriorate the Environment

Social and Economic Activities	Relationship with Tourism and Leisure	Contribution to the Deterioration of the Environment
Hunting and fishing	Enhancement of touristic activities in certain areas	Loss of biological diversity
Energy production and consumption	Enhancement of the use of different means of transport	Air pollution Greenhouse gases Destruction of the Ozone layer
Water consumption for human activities	Enhancement of the consumption of scarce resources during touristic season	Water shortage
Use of soil and environmental restructuration	Construction of infrastructures: roads, hotels, parks, etc.	Loss of biological diversity. Soil erosion
Movement and concentration of people for different activities	Enhancement of the number of people in touristic areas who originate a larger amount of waste	Contamination of land, sea and air

Source: Ballesteros, J. and Pérez Adán, J. (1997). *Sociedad y medioambiente*, Trotta, Madrid.

The Worldwatch Institute (Zoe Chafe, 2005) distinguishes eight different modalities of tourism which have similarities although also nuances. They are connected to sustainability and the environment: adventure tourism, ecotourism, geotourism, massive tourism, nature-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism, and sustainable tourism. Beyond these, the preservation of the environment is to be considered as a value in itself.

Rural and Natural Spaces: Rural Tourism and Active Tourism

The rural and natural spaces constitute the basic territory of implementation of leisure and tourism, where locality acquires an important role, for being the protagonist in these spaces. We are therefore in the territorial basis of the touristic product in which it is produced and consumed at the same time, and it branches in the form of a typology of tourisms with social and economic effects.

In their analysis, specialists like Blázquez (2010) manifest the importance that tourism has acquired in the first decade of the 20th century, having become one of the most profitable service activities, which becomes relevant in rural and natural spaces. However, the introduction in the rural area is not free from difficulties and obstacles, given the negative vision which has been patent in rural areas with regard to its implementation (overpopulation, traffic jams, contamination, including noise, dirtiness).

The difficulties in the development of tourism in the rural and natural spaces come from the inevitable transformation which it originates, which can be eased by means of the changes that are being produced in the past few years in the productive structures of the countryside. If we approach the European ambit, we find several factors which undermine the development, like for instance the peculiarities which a natural physical environment can present, not favorable for a competitive agriculture, the difficulties to be integrated in the secondary and tertiary systems of activities, or deficient communications which put them in isolating conditions, all these circumstances are given in areas in which the specialization relies on agriculture and traditional livestock production. These activities have greatly benefited the maintenance of European countries.

Blázquez (2010) put together the elements which intervene in the majority of the rural areas in development from the seminary "Situation et perspectives de l'Europe rurale":

"Decline in employment of the agricultural sector and economic importance relative to food production.
Globalization of the key elements of the economy.

Introduction and spread of the new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, as well as biotechnology.

The demographic changes lead to aging of the population and the enhancement of dependency relationships.

Growing personal mobility, throughout common migrations, permanent migrations, tourism and leisure activities.

The emergence of a new utilization of rural space, new social demands regarding the use of soil and landscapes.

The emergence of new winners and losers as a consequence of the processes of change.

The emergence of the environment as a powerful political and ethical force.

The establishment of a new world order or ideology of “free market”.

The search of new forms of management, based on the participation of the whole of the population although maintaining a strong participation of the administrative authorities.”

The tourism typologies in these spaces branch to the following: Rural Tourism, Agrotourism, Nature Tourism, Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Active Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Sport Tourism. And among the activities which can be found in this mixture, this specialist classifies then according to the typology of tourism, localization, characteristics and activities, as follows:

Rural Tourism: Localization: Rural spaces. **Characteristics:** Prevalence of the accommodation sector; very heterogeneous supply; activities with strong cultural motivation (ethnography, history, architecture, local gastronomy); different degrees of tourists participation in the activities, from low (passive leisure) to very high (active leisure); diversity in the autonomic legislations. **Activities:** Housing, catering; visits to museums/interpretation centers; workshops (elaboration of cheese, soap, honey, essences, etc.); participation in agricultural activities; visits to bathing areas; rest/relax.

Nature Tourism of a Specific Interest: Localization: Natural areas, especially protected natural spaces. **Characteristics:** The knowledge of nature and the interpretation of the patrimony are their main motivations; heterogeneous supply with strong presence of public administrations; combination of touristic and educational activities; difficulties to find products exclusively related to nature tourism; diversity: ecotourism, fauna observation tourism, green tourism, etc.; lack of legislation which clarifies the framework of action of the sector’s enterprises; strong interest by foreign tourists in the Spanish supply. **Activities:** Guided visits; observation of nature (observation of birds, cetaceans); nature photography; scientific ecotourism; activities of environmental education.

Active Tourism: Localization: Natural spaces (on many occasions in protected natural areas if the legislation allows it)/Rural areas. **Characteristics:** Very heterogeneous supply; sport activities in rural environments; active participation by the tourist (active leisure); different degree of risk sense depending on the chosen activity; diversity in the autonomic legislations; lack of a legislative framework in several autonomous regions. Strong territorial specialization in accordance to the available resources; continuous apparition of new enterprises and activities; complex relationship between activities and environmental legislation. **Activities:** Given the great variety of activities they are usually grouped depending on the element in which they are performed: Ground, snow, water and air. The most extended activities are distributed practically all over the Spanish territory and they are (in order) hiking, mountain biking and horse riding routes. In the section dedicated to Active Tourism, we find a list with the most representative ones.

Within this new concept of doing a more diversified tourism in rural and natural areas, the most consistent ones are Rural Tourism, Nature Tourism and Active Tourism, whereas the remaining ones appear in a collateral and complementary manner with regard to these three variants, and they interact and combine according to the motivations of the tourists and travellers, the supply, and equipment of the selected territory. Therefore, in the modality of other types of tourism in nature, we can find Agrotourism, Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Adventures Tourism and Sport Tourism (See Figure 2).

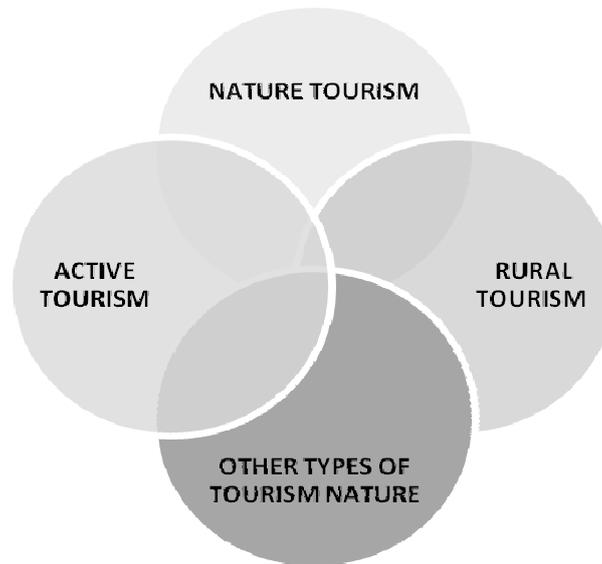


Figure 2. Interaction of tourisms in Rural and Natural areas.

Source: Own elaboration in accordance with the interaction of the different types of natural and rural tourism with sustainability.

Therefore, Agrotourism is a modality which is based on rural housing. Usually, visitors and tourists take part in agricultural activities, handicrafts, breeding, workshop activities, etc.. These facilities include farms, corrals, vegetable gardens, etc.; combining the fun of the typical recreational agricultural and handcraft activities with relaxation, the enjoyment of nature and the participation as volunteers in any activities of their preference. In Spain, the first establishment of this kind of tourism was founded in the Basque Country in 1988, although its percentage representation is still low. This does not happen in other countries like France, or those of Central America and South America, which have achieved a good representation in this modality.

Ecotourism originally was circumscribed to those natural spaces which were under protection. As they were developing, there was an extension of its denomination and any activity which had to do with enjoyment and contemplation of the natural and cultural resources of a specific territory came to be known as ecotourism. Eventually, a new philosophy was incorporated. This philosophy accounts for the model of tourism management and the repercussions which it may have, not only for the contemplation and enjoyment of the natural environment, but also for the hosting population and visitors themselves. Here, ecotourism, sustainable tourism and environmentally responsible tourism are aligned, as they share the same goal, which consists of representing modalities of leisure-related tourism which are not predatory or extractive, where the local people have an active role, not only a “decorative” one.

With regard to Sustainable Tourism, it refers to the impacts that the rural or natural territory takes, and its aim is to reduce such impact in order to make it sustainable. It can be any sort of tourism which creates its

products without a negative repercussion not only on the environment, but also in the local population who live and subsist in this habitat. It is a type of tourism which satisfies the needs of the tourists and the touristic regions, while at the same time, it protects them and makes future opportunities grow.

Responsible Tourism is a typology which attempts to obtain the maximum benefit for the local communities, minimizing the negative social and environmental impacts, and helping the local people to preserve the fragile cultures, its inhabitants and the species that live there. The natural, sociocultural, economic and political contexts of a leisure-related touristic location are taken into account in a holistic way in order to minimize the negative impact and increment benefit as much as possible. The innovation that this modality entails is the fact that both the tourist and the traveller take part in the process, as they must get involved and act by means of a social conduct. The elements which intervene in the formation of responsible tourism are mainly four: Social equity, respect for the culture, respect for the environment, and economic viability. Thus, it is a complete kind of tourism, and it includes more intervention elements than the previous ones, since they include practically all of the social actors and the totality of either the natural infrastructures, or the elaborated by the technicians of this sector.

Finally, Adventure Tourism includes all the products which deal with active tourism activities, or constitute part of a program in a location whose leisure activities and tourism as categorized as exotic. The boundary between one type of tourism and another is not perceived in locations of Central America and South American, which include them all in the same typology. Also, Sport Tourism can be considered both as adventure or active tourism, as the three of them are quite similar. The only difference is the participation of the subjects in the practice of those which are only mere spectators and do not intervene in the corresponding activities. All of them as a whole contribute to the development and maintenance of tourism in sustainability.

Conclusion

Throughout the different researches carried out at a global level, it seems clear that touristic activities generally contribute to the deterioration of the environment and it has a negative impact on sociocultural and economic problems of the different affected areas. Especially, we must point out the negative practices of sport, and leisure activities in general which are performed in weak areas, or especially protected. Such activities lead to an uncontrolled consumption of natural resources and to the excess of a loading capacity in certain times of the year, which degrade and erode the most sensitive spaces.

In the presented feedback model, the objective of completely preserving and maintaining natural ecosystems is strengthened, with the development of nature tourism or tourism developed in natural spaces. Consequently, tourism applied to these natural areas by means of this model represents a suitable model for the development of sustainable factors, so that the positive impacts counteract the effects of the negative impacts, for they contribute to the strengthening of sustainability by means of preserving the environment and integrating the local population in harmony with the seasonal visitors.

In conclusion, a sustainable use of the resources of a particular area provides a series of competitive advantages which are summarized in the following elements within the feedback model: It facilitates compliance with the current regulation. It allows an economic improvement. It generates employment. It improves the image of the municipality's trademark by means of ecologic marketing, which is taken advantage of, and reintroduced in the supply. It promotes a process, although a slow one, of environmental education, of awareness, both for residents and visitors (feedback is produced).

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