Sustainable local tourism in forest areas: a theoretical approach

Turismo local sostenible en áreas forestales: una aproximación teórica



Turismo local sustentável em áreas florestais: uma abordagem teórica

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ABSTRACT

As part of the implementation of the new Cuban economic and social model, local development emerges as a necessary alternative, while capacities are mobilized at that scale, which helps to alleviate the burden of the State. Within this conception, Sustainable Local Tourism (SLT) is born as an opportunity. This activity is considered one of the most important in the world economy, so the local tourist use, in particular of the forests and their full potential, can stimulate people to move from their places of residence to the chosen site. The objective of this work is to establish the theoreticalmethodological foundations, associated with the management of SLT in forest areas. On this basis, the main result is to define as theoretical contribution the concept of SLT in forest areas. It can be concluded that this issue constitutes an opportunity for institutions and authorities related to the SLT, and the modalities associated with each space where it is planned, in order to establish from the theory, spaces that allow a differentiated tourism development not only within areas protected, but also in the field of unprotected natural areas, among which are forest areas, where the conservation of resources is ensured, economic-financial efficiency is guaranteed and benefits are obtained that are invested in forest management and local population.

Keywords: local development; sustainable tourism; nature tourism; forest areas

RESUMEN

Como parte de la implementación del nuevo modelo económico y social cubano, el desarrollo local surge como una alternativa necesaria, mientras que las capacidades se movilizan a esa escala, lo que contribuye a aliviar la carga del Estado. Dentro de esta concepción, el Turismo Local Sostenible (TLS) nace como una oportunidad. Esta actividad se considera una de las más importantes en la economía mundial, por lo que el uso turístico local, en particular de los bosques y todo su potencial, puede estimular a las personas a trasladarse de sus lugares de residencia al sitio elegido. El objetivo de este trabajo es establecer los fundamentos teóricos-metodológicos, asociados con el manejo del TLS en áreas forestales. Sobre esta base, el resultado principal es definir como contribución teórica el concepto de TLS en áreas forestales. Se puede concluir que este tema constituye una oportunidad para las instituciones y autoridades relacionadas con el TLS y las modalidades asociadas a cada espacio donde se planifica, a fin de establecer, desde la teoría, espacios que permitan un desarrollo turístico diferenciado, no solo dentro de áreas protegidas, sino también en el campo de áreas naturales no protegidas, entre las cuales se encuentran áreas forestales, donde se asegura la conservación de los recursos, se garantiza la eficiencia económico-financiera y se obtienen beneficios que se invierten en el manejo forestal y la población local.

Palabras clave: desarrollo local;turismo sostenible; turismo de naturaleza; áreas forestales

RESUMO

Como parte da implementação do novo modelo econômico e social cubano, o desenvolvimento local surge como uma alternativa necessária, enquanto se mobilizam capacidades nessa escala, o que contribui para aliviar a carga do Estado. Dentro desta concepção, o Turismo Local Sustentável (TLS) nasce como uma oportunidade. Esta atividade é considerada uma das mais importantes da economia mundial, pelo que o uso do turismo local, particularmente das florestas e do seu pleno potencial, pode encorajar as pessoas a mudarem-se do seu local de residência para o local escolhido. O objetivo deste trabalho é estabelecer os fundamentos teórico-metodológicos associados ao manejo do TLS em áreas florestais. Nesta base, o principal resultado é definir o conceito de TLS em áreas florestais como uma contribuição teórica. Pode-se concluir que este tema constitui uma oportunidade para as instituições e autoridades relacionadas com o TLS e as modalidades associadas a cada espaço onde é planeado, a fim de estabelecer, a partir da teoria, espacos que permitam um desenvolvimento turístico diferenciado, não só dentro das áreas protegidas, mas também no campo das áreas naturais desprotegidas, entre as quais se encontram as áreas florestais, onde a conservação dos recursos é assegurada, a eficiência econômico-financeira é garantida e se obtêm benefícios que são investidos no manejo florestal e na população local.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento local; turismo sustentável; turismo de natureza; áreas florestais

INTRODUCTION

The Cuban government has recently ratified: "tourism is a priority for the development of the country, having become one of the activities that generates the most income for the economy of the island" and, "the relationship that each organization has with tourism is important to be able to satisfy the high demands and needs of the so-called industry without a chimney" (Díaz-Canel, 2018).

Tourism is a significant phenomenon on an economic and socio-cultural level, which has brought with it new ways of organizing and managing tourism entities, as well as destinations, within a framework of social responsibility and sustainability (Ritchie and Crouch, 1999, 2003; Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2003; Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Hsu, Tsai and Wu, 2009) cited in Martínez (2013)

From this, the locality becomes an opportunity and, at the same time, an agent of social transformation and not simply a physical support for development, going from being a functional space to becoming an active space, which is limited to a defined territorial area (Vázquez Barquero, 2009).

Authors as Manzanal (2000), Llambí (2004), Guzón (2006), Barrios et al. (2007) and Galafassi (2008), quoted in Torres (2016), identify the local as the municipal, pointing out that it is the municipality the key scenario where the local society expects to find answers to its needs and material and spiritual aspirations and is, in addition, the place where the most direct link between the people and the government takes place.

While for authors like Ravenet (2002), Íñiguez and Ravenet (2006), Albuquerque (2007), among others, this conception does not have to coincide with the political-administrative scope. Sometimes, the management of these processes goes beyond these institutional frameworks.

Sustainable tourism, as an area of responsible action in the face of tourism heritage, has been linked to a process and change of trend, where tourists are in search of unique, different practices, according to their new needs and preferences, such as having experiences in natural areas, host communities and in their interrelationship with nature.

In line with this, several generic forms of tourism have taken off, among them nature tourism, whether in conserved or responsibly managed areas. The efficient use of forest resources for nature tourism can provide benefits that contribute to a significant increase in those obtained from traditional uses, with a minimum impact on ecosystems. Its practice has usually been associated with protected areas, where the value of the attractions is more authentic. However, unprotected natural areas, including forest areas, also have values that can be successfully used for tourism development.

According to Fernández (2018), in order to take advantage of the vast potential of tourism, the forestry sector needs to establish objectives and performance goals in related modalities as a conservation strategy, not only in the short term, but also in the medium and long term. To this end, efforts must be directed towards a joint vision and strategy with the relevant sectors, with a strong multisectoral approach, which seeks to promote and monitor the activity simultaneously, together with the participation in the

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Different materials and methods were used in the research, the most important of which are the following:

Materials used: books, scientific articles related to the research topic, websites with information certified by state agencies and official documents that regulate the process of updating the Cuban economic model.

For the development of the research, the historical method was used, which analyzes the concrete trajectory of the theory in the different periods through which tourism has passed. The dialectic-materialist method, which, according to its contributions, allows us to discover the dialectic of tourism development through an objective and concrete analysis of the potentialities and deficiencies that exist today in the forestry sector for its implementation. Once these elements have been addressed, there were used empirical methods, in which documentary analysis is essential, as it allows a first approach to the problem.

As for the primary (group work) and secondary (document review) sources of information, they were used with the aim of determining the background linked to the object of study and its main regularities.

Several group work sessions were held, which allowed for documentary analysis. By generating ideas, the results were conciliated by analyzing the projection on the subject defined in the official documents that regulate the process of updating the Cuban economic model, which is described as very fruitful, since the cooperation of the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agroforestry Enterprises of Pinar del Río, Citma, Flora and Fauna, to the professors of the Center of Forest Studies of the University of Pinar del Río (UPR), Provincial Direction of Planning, Provincial Statistics, workers of the Mintur, Travel Agencies, professors of the Center of Studies of Direction, Local Development, Tourism and Cooperativism (CE-GESTA) of the UPR, was very useful in the identification and evaluation of the conceptual and methodological aspects and in their experiences related to the research.

The work has been carried out in an exploratory, descriptive and subsequently explanatory order. This type of research strategy has been selected because it analyzes the phenomenon in the real conditions in which it occurs, which leads to a more solid foundation in terms of theory, which offers a more effective solution to the problem. The analysis is carried out on the basis of a cluster of information, processed in the MINITAB 17.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main result of the research is the theoretical contribution of the concept of LST in forest areas, which was defined after the application of the techniques for obtaining the information; therefore, its analysis and processing are concentrated in a set of particularities that are detailed below:

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Discussion on Local Sustainable Tourism (LST)

Since the popularization of the concept of sustainable development at the end of the last century, sustainable tourism has emerged. In this sense, it must be said that the concept has been the subject of many debates over time, which have not been defined in precise terms, thus leaving ample room for all kinds of interpretations. The evolution of the concept can be seen from the 1990s onwards, when tourism development became a priority for the Community institutions.

Based on the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report, the World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as follows:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of today's tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing future opportunities. It focuses on managing all resources in such a way that all economic, social and aesthetic needs are met, while respecting cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (UNWTO, 1997).

If such a concept were universally linked to a smaller area, it would give as a concept that:

Local Sustainable Development, based on tourism, is the process of transformation of certain localities, founded on a national strategy and policies specifically designed to overcome the factors responsible for spatial, social, economic and institutional imbalances, which prevent full local development and inhibit effective participation of its population in the benefits of the growth process (Ramirez, 2011).

In recent years, the model for the development of tourism activity has been defined as the New Era of Tourism (Fayos-Solá, 1996). Within this new framework, a series of transformations (Pulido & López, 2011), are modifying the planning and management processes, as well as the promotion and marketing strategies, as they increasingly condition the competitive position of any destination.

These transformations involve a change of perspective that places the main focus of attention on the locality, which acquires an active and key role in articulating the processes of tourist development, assuming that this should be framed in more far-reaching approaches, which have to do with its implementation within the so-called local development (Cebrián, 2008; Fernández, 2004; López, 1998; Marchena, 1998; Sáez,

2008; Vera et. al, 1997; Vera and Antón, 1998; among others) cited in Merinero, Pulido and Navarro (2014).

Nowadays, it is increasingly common to talk about local development based on tourism and many territories are involved in processes of economic recovery and expansion, thanks to the extraordinary evolution that this sector is experiencing. Historically, tourism has shown its great flexibility and versatility, has occupied relevant positions in local economies and has been able to satisfy and adapt to the demands of the constant flow that makes the movement of people possible.

The concept of sustainable development in tourism, at a local level, must be based on adapting the basic principles to the specific characteristics of each place. The principles that define sustainable tourism according to the UNWTO (2011), are:

- Natural and cultural resources are conserved for continued use in the future, while providing benefits;
- Tourism development is planned and managed so as not to cause serious environmental or socio-cultural problems;
- Environmental quality is maintained and improved;
- A high level of visitor satisfaction is maintained and the destination retains its prestige and commercial potential; and
- The benefits of tourism are widely shared throughout society.

It is locally that tourism embraces the principles of sustainability. It is the space where social actors exercise their power, cultural identities are forged and ecological potentialities are generated. It is the place where sustainability and tourism activity converge. By its principles, tourism supports a process of social improvement that meets the needs and values of all stakeholders, while maintaining future options and making rational use of natural resources. This can mean the creation of new jobs for the inhabitants of natural areas, an increase in income and a new boost to local traditions and cultural creations.

In this sense, it is understood that the term "local" is not something small, localist, but is the common condition of the population that shares a history of settlement, a daily life, face to face, with different nuances more or less unequal, problematic, with a sense of solidarity of reciprocity, in a territorial space that is connected with other localities, regions, until reaching the national.

The concept of the local acquires, therefore, the connotation of social-territorial element and is now defined as a valid scope of action (Subirats, 2008). Conformed as a development process in course, it is thought, planned, promoted, induced and/or adapted to the reality of a space (Arocena, 1995; Bitar, 2001; Vázquez Barquero, 1988, 2000, 2005). Therefore, when it is spoken of local development, reference is made to development processes that occur in sub-national spaces and that could coincide with regional or municipal territories.

At local scale, several studies (Betancourt, Falcon and Urra, 2007; Sarmiento, 2011; De la Uz, Perez, Ramirez and Alvarez, 2012; Collective of authors, 2013; Lloret, Pozas and Valhuerdiz, s. f.Pérez, 2013; Vargas, 2013) cited in Menoya, Torres and Gómez (2012),

have diagnosed dissimilar causes and conditions of problems, such as: insufficient articulation in terms of objectives, interests and goals of local actors, the low perception of these on the importance of tourism for local development and the lack of capacity and key skills to assume the management of tourism from the locality.

In the field of tourism, national and local governments must play a leading role in strengthening tourism capacity. Without this support for the development of tourism activity, it would be impossible to undertake any initiatives to obtain results, so it is essential to have the firm decision of a political will to invest in tourism activity (Flores, 2008).

The sustainability of local tourism development is an unavoidable requirement in the future, where all the agents involved in it will demand local development policies and territorial planning with more determination every day.

There are elements that demonstrate the importance that tourism activity brings to the localities where it is developed, which emphasizes the potential that this industry has in them. According to Lorenzo and Morales (2014), among the elements that condition tourism to act as a factor of local development, there are:

- It is based on environmental quality, that is, what makes tourism activity possible is natural beauty; this implies the need to preserve a good environmental quality in order to maintain it.
- Tourism sells the landscape, offers biodiversity as a tourist attraction, promotes the exclusivity of some sites; in short, tourism is one more user of space, which can and does represent competition with other sectors that use space.
- Tourist activity must always be conceived as a means, rather than an end in itself, which can contribute, together with other economic activities, to achieving higher levels of economic and social development for the local population. The income received, the employment created, the increase in material welfare levels and the professional and business culture, derived from the activity, are some of the effects that can be observed on the positive side of the tourism balance.
- The benefits derived from tourist activity must be passed on to society in general, affecting different concepts and social agents, thus stimulating the local economy.
- It generates employment in the execution of the projects, in the maintenance of the facilities or in the professional services to attend the tourist.
- The communication infrastructures that connect the destination with the tourist markets must be improved. The public equipment, services and basic endowments have to be insured for both tourists and community inhabitants. Supporting local business initiatives and training human resources are other positive aspects that tourism activity can strengthen.

In view of the above, several authors (UNWTO, 2004; Brinckmann, et al. 2010) cited in Lorenzo and Morales (2014), argue that the tourist and sustainable use of a locality should:

• Make optimal use of environmental resources to maintain essential ecological processes, helping to conserve natural resources and biological diversity. Respect

the socio-cultural authenticity of the host communities, conserve their cultural, architectural and living assets and their traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance

- To ensure long-term viable economic activities, bringing well-distributed socioeconomic benefits to all actors. The sustainable development of tourism requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership. It is an ongoing process and requires constant monitoring of impacts, and must provide a high level of satisfaction to tourists in order to promote sustainable tourism practices.
- The multiple uses made of the territory must be clean, not only must they seek to reduce the use of natural and energy resources, but they must also reuse waste, reduce energy costs, promote the use of renewable energies, taking care at all times of biodiversity and the process of normal reproduction of ecosystems and, within them, of human life.
- For the sustainability paradigm (Ayllon, 2001; Flores, 2008), to be translated into practical applications that generate visible and substantial results, it is required the leadership and commitment of local communities, national and local governments and the support of national and international organizations, focused on sustainable tourism.
- Tourism, in any of its modalities, as an alternative for local development, requires the analysis of its forms (practices) and metamorphosis (spatial modeling) that exist and spread in the local, regional and global territory.

As pointed out by Cammarata (2006), the revaluation of landscapes, the strength of places, with natural and cultural resources, generate movements of real and symbolic construction, build new territorialities, new spatial morphologies and new territorial configurations. Hence, the challenge and commitment of scholars, in the face of the challenges presented, consists of understanding the process of sustainable development from the integration and articulation of different factors: social, economic, environmental, cultural, political and ecological.

There is a consensus between different authors (Carner, 2001; Solari & Pérez, 2005; Coria, 2007; Brinckmann & Mueller, 2010; Lorenzo, Sánchez & Betancourt, 2013) cited in Lorenzo, Betancourt & Falcón (2019), on the elements that favour tourism to be manifested in terms of local development, stating that this occurs when:

- the influence of tourism development on localities responds to the principles of sustainability;
- tourism occupies a relevant and strategic space in the design of local policies and promotes coordination and cooperation between public administrations and the private sector;
- it contributes to strengthening the indigenous values of a locality, reaffirming local culture and providing added value to a territory;
- the municipal government, where the tourist destination is located, is the managing body for sustainable tourism development to act in accordance with local development.

Therefore, achieving tourism development, based on local development, goes beyond the management and competences of the tourism sector and is only possible when it is

conceived as a broader strategic objective, which is managed with the broad participation of all the actors involved, including, indispensably, the local population.

Forest areas and their sustainable management

The term forest, from Old French, which can be translated as "forest", came to Lower Latin as *forestalis*. This word became *forestal* in Spanish (Pérez & Gardey, 2017). The adjective forest is used to refer to that which is linked to forests. These ecosystems serve as habitats for numerous species and fulfil very important functions in the preservation of biodiversity and the environment.

In Cuba, it is defined in Article 2 of the Forestry Act No. 85 (1998): For the purposes of this Act and its complementary regulations, the following shall be understood:

- Forest: natural (natural forests) or artificial (plantations) formations made up of trees, shrubs and other species of upper and lower plants and animals, which constitute an ecosystem of economic and social relevance due to the functions it performs.
- Protected areas: specific parts of the national territory, declared in accordance with the legislation in force, of ecological, social or historical-cultural relevance to the nation and, in some cases, of international relevance, especially devoted, through effective management, to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and associated natural, historical and cultural resources, in order to achieve specific conservation objectives.
- Non-forestry area: areas within the forest and on land destined for forestry activity that are not suitable for forest growth, such as pastures, swamps, rivers, streams, reservoirs, rocky outcrops, roads, nurseries, areas destined for selfsupply, animal husbandry and facilities.

In Article 3 of the Forest Law No. 85, reference is made to:

- The forest heritage consists of natural and artificial forests, land used for this activity, deforested areas with conditions for forestry activity, as well as trees of forest species that are developed in isolation or in groups, regardless of their location and tenure.
- Non-forestry areas are also part of the forest heritage. The Ministry of Agriculture exercises the powers granted to it by law in these areas, except in cases where they fall within the competence of other bodies.

Sustainable forest management, or SFM, is the management of forests in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, which must maintain a balance between the three main pillars: ecological, economic and socio-cultural. Achieving SFM provides integrated benefits for all, ranging from safeguarding livelihoods, to protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, reducing rural poverty and mitigating some of the effects of climate change.

The "Forest Principles", adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, established what is internationally considered to be sustainable forest management (SFM). Several sets of criteria and

indicators for sustainable forest management have since been developed to assess achievement at global, continental, national and local levels.

All were attempts to develop the regulations and provide an independent assessment of the extent to which the wider objectives are being achieved in practice. In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. This instrument was the first of its kind and reflected the strong international commitment to promote SFM through a new approach that brings together all actors.

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Juszczak et al, 2004), (MCPFE, also called the Helsinki Process and, since 2009, FOREST EUROPE) established the following definition of sustainable forest management, which has since been adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): The stewardship and use of forests and forest land in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, their important ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national and global levels, without damaging other ecosystems.

The concept can be described as achieving a balance between society's growing demands for forest products and the preservation of forest health and diversity. This balance is critical to the survival of forests and the prosperity of forest-dependent populations.

For forest managers, managing a specific forest sustainably means determining, in a tangible way, how to use it today to ensure similar benefits, health and productivity in the future. According to Evans, De Jong and Cronkleton (2008), forest managers have to assess and integrate a wide variety of factors, sometimes conflicting commercial, non-commercial, environmental, local needs, even global impacts to produce sound forest plans.

In most cases, forest managers develop their plans through consultation with citizens, businesses, organizations and other stakeholders, both in the area where the specific forest they manage is located and in the surrounding areas. Management tools and visualization have been improving recently and allow for better administration.

FAO, at the request of its member countries, developed and launched in 2014 the Sustainable Forest Management Toolkit, an online collection of tools, good practices and examples of their application to support countries seeking to implement SFM.

Because forests and societies are constantly changing, the desired outcome of SFM is not fixed. What constitutes a sustainably managed forest will change over time, as people's values change.

Concept of Local Sustainable Tourism (LST) in Forest Areas

According to Fernández (2018), tourism development in Cuba has been based on sun and beach. It wasn't until the 1970s, along with the preliminary proposal of a group of protected areas and the embryo for the creation of the National System of Protected Areas (Snap), that the issue began to be discussed and a working group was created to develop the activity, made up of the National Institute of Development and Forest Use (Indaf), the National Institute of Tourism (Intur), the Institute of Botany (IB) and the Institute of Physical Planning (IPF). With the development of this group's work, the possibilities and potential of protected areas to develop nature tourism began to be considered for the first time in the country.

Therefore, nature tourism has developed, since its emergence, in protected natural areas, because they contain extraordinary values and attractions of their natural, historical and cultural resources. However, unprotected natural areas, including forest areas, also have values that can be successfully used for tourism development (Fernández, 2018).

Several are the concepts that have been issued on Nature Tourism until today; In this sense, the authors Ramírez and Pérez (2014) recognize the need to make certain adjustments in order to respond to the tourism nomenclature and its content, and based on this, Nature Tourism is considered a Generic Tourism Modality, made up of specific sub-modalities, whose main motivation is the study and admiration of natural values and associated cultural components, as well as the realization of recreational, physical and risk activities that use the natural environment, conserved or managed, responsibly, where the safety of the tourist is guaranteed, without degrading or exhausting the resources, for the benefit of nature and local communities.

Worldwide, only 12.7 % of the land surface is protected and in Cuba 20.2 % of its national territory is covered by protected areas, including the island platform (Luben, 2018). With respect to the island platform, the country has 24.96 % of the total, represented by protected areas, and 17.16 % of the land surface is covered. This means that most of the forest resources are located in unprotected areas, which means that with respect to tourism use, significant aspects such as the physical and real carrying capacity, as well as the effective and management capacity, cannot be controlled, so the real and potential impact of tourism on the ecosystem is not known.

In short, tourism activity can be established as a viable socio-economic and spatial activity in many places to enhance the value of forest resources, even more so than the exploitation of their wood. In developing countries and emerging economies, it is much more important, given the commercial and financial opportunities it can generate for the production, protection and conservation of forest resources.

Based on the discussion about the LST, which was carried out previously, and the analysis of the concept proposed by Ramírez (2011), which states that

The LST is the activity practiced by individuals in a sustainable manner in local destinations that admit of maintaining a balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, providing an optimal and responsible use of the local tourist heritage, respecting traditional values through adequate relations with the host communities, ensuring a viable economic activity that provides socio-economic benefits distributed in an equitable manner among the local actors involved. Given the absence of a definition for LST in forest areas, it is considered to define as a concept:

LST in forest areas is the activity where goods and services are generated to satisfy the needs and expectations of tourists, developed at a local level in forest areas, with the objective of favoring agroforestry companies, the local economy and the host community, managing the resources of the tourist heritage from different modalities in correspondence with the vocation of each locality, respecting the natural and cultural values, at the same time promoting opportunities for the future, from an adequate management and monitoring that achieves the minimization of the negative impacts and its sustainability.

With this conceptualization, tourist activity in forest areas can be managed in a way that achieves a harmonious and integral development where man and nature are founded on mutual benefit. In a way to coexist and develop at the same time conserving the planet and guaranteeing life for future generations.

From the theoretical analysis of the different conceptual areas the main result is to define as a theoretical contribution the concept of Local Sustainable Tourism in forest areas. This constitutes an opportunity for institutions and authorities related to Local Sustainable Tourism, and the modalities associated with each space where it is planned, in order to establish from the theory, spaces that allow a differentiated tourism development not only within protected areas, but also in the field of unprotected natural areas, among which are forest areas, where the conservation of resources is guaranteed, economic-financial efficiency is ensured and benefits are obtained that are invested in forest management and the local population.

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The authors have participated in the writing of the paper and the analysis of the documents.



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