

Experience in sociocultural management for local development at the People's Council level

Experiencia de gestión sociocultural para el desarrollo local a nivel de Consejo Popular

Experiência de gestão sociocultural para o desenvolvimento local no âmbito do Conselho Popular

Silfredo Rodríguez Basso¹; Jorge Freddy Ramírez Pérez²; Iverilys Pérez Hernández³

¹ Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermandos Saíz Montes de Oca". Facultad de Ciencias Económicas. Centro de Estudios de Dirección, Desarrollo Local, Turismo y Cooperativismo. Pinar del Río, Cuba.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6737-4080>

 antropol@upr.edu.cu

² Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermandos Saíz Montes de Oca". Facultad de Ciencias Económicas. Centro de Estudios de Dirección, Desarrollo Local, Turismo y Cooperativismo. Pinar del Río, Cuba.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7891-2016>

 freddy@upr.edu.cu

³ Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermandos Saíz Montes de Oca". Facultad de Ciencias Económicas. Centro de Estudios de Dirección, Desarrollo Local, Turismo y Cooperativismo. Pinar del Río, Cuba.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2124-0962>

 iverilys@upr.edu.cu

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ABSTRACT

The management of the socio-cultural dimension at the People's Council level in the province of Pinar del Río is a recurrent topic in local development. This article aims to demonstrate experiences at this level, related to the generic modality of Rural Tourism, with emphasis on the sub-modality of Community Tourism. The type of research offered is adjusted to the qualitative methodology. The theoretical methods of analysis, synthesis and historical-logical are used. The empirical methods were based on the collection and analysis of secondary sources, with the support of the structured interview together with the questionnaire. In addition, sensitization and self-management workshops with key actors of the People's Council were used. The result with the greatest impact was the enhancement of local culture as an attraction and product, based on the incorporation of the socio-cultural potentials existing in the People's Council. Among the most significant conclusions, the importance of participation for the effective management of these initiatives and tourism projects in all their stages and the importance of becoming a reference of how the People's Councils can be inserted into local development is highlighted.

Keywords: rural tourism; community tourism; local development; participation; community; culture

RESUMEN

La gestión de la dimensión sociocultural a nivel de Consejo Popular en la provincia de Pinar del Río es un tema recurrente en materia de desarrollo local. El presente artículo persigue demostrar experiencias a este nivel, relacionadas con la modalidad genérica de Turismo Rural, con énfasis en la submodalidad de Turismo Comunitario. El tipo de investigación que se ofrece se ajusta a la metodología cualitativa. Se utilizan los métodos teóricos de análisis, síntesis y el histórico-lógico. Los empíricos se sustentaron en el de recopilación y análisis de fuentes secundarias, con el apoyo de la entrevista estructurada junto al cuestionario. Se utilizaron, además, los talleres de sensibilización y autogestión con actores claves del Consejo Popular. El resultado de mayor impacto radicó en la puesta en valor de la cultura local como atractivo y producto, a partir de la incorporación

de los potenciales socioculturales existentes en el Consejo Popular. Entre las conclusiones de mayor significado, se destaca la importancia de la participación para la gestión eficaz de estas iniciativas y proyectos turísticos en todas sus etapas y el de convertirse en referente de cómo pueden ser insertados los consejos populares al desarrollo local.

Palabras clave: turismo rural; turismo comunitario; desarrollo local; participación; comunidad; cultura

RESUMO

A gestão da dimensão sociocultural a nível do Conselho Popular da província de Pinar del Río é um tema recorrente no desenvolvimento local. Este artigo busca demonstrar experiências neste nível, relacionadas à modalidade genérica de Turismo Rural, com ênfase na submodalidade de Turismo Comunitário. O tipo de pesquisa oferecida está de acordo com a metodologia qualitativa. São utilizados métodos teóricos de análise, síntese e histórico-lógico. Os empíricos basearam-se na compilação e análise de fontes secundárias, com o apoio da entrevista estruturada juntamente com o questionário. Além disso, foram realizadas oficinas de conscientização e autogestão com as principais partes interessadas do Conselho Popular. O resultado de maior impacto foi a valorização da cultura local como atratividade e produto, a partir da incorporação das potencialidades socioculturais existentes no Conselho Popular. Entre as conclusões mais significativas, destaca-se a importância da participação para a gestão eficaz dessas iniciativas e projetos turísticos em todas as suas etapas e de se tornar uma referência de como os conselhos populares podem se inserir no desenvolvimento local.

Palavras-chave: turismo rural; turismo comunitário; desenvolvimento local; participação; comunidade; cultura

INTRODUCTION

Analyses of the sociocultural dimension and its relationship with development generally lean towards an integrative conception when it comes to designing strategies, programs and projects. As an alternative, cultural sciences such as sociocultural anthropology, sociology of culture and social history have fertilized the referential bases of these proposals based on the concepts of culture, social development, community, identity, tradition and heritage.

Some authors such as Schulmaister (2008), Alcántara (2011) and Juliá (2016), share the need to direct studies on the sociocultural towards those resources, inputs, capacities and potentialities not restricted to what is considered as "cultural", with emphasis on the local, a territorial space where certain actors are found, who in the economic sphere treasure ideas, knowledge, values, skills and experiences which benefits have materialized in the generation of jobs, social inclusion or import substitution. An example of this has been the creative industries in the knowledge economy and the cultural industry.

The theoretical discourse on the transversality of culture in development processes currently advocates that any transformation of the territory should be carried out from an integrated view of the municipality where identity, heritage, participation and governance are dimensions present in sectors such as socio-productive, gender, aging or traditional popular culture.

In this sense, a management model at the community, Popular Council, municipal or provincial level imposes the exclusion of a specific area of knowledge, which can be overcome when an integrating and multidisciplinary approach is adopted in order to achieve specific objectives of strategic scope on the basis of consensus between the government and the citizenry, the university and the enterprise or between the public and private sectors.

In line with this principle, Planas and Soler (2009), in examining sociocultural management, propose that it should be carried out in environments that foster daily

interactions among the institutional actors present in the territories. The municipality constitutes, in the case of Cuba, this ideal space.

During the design of Municipal Development Strategies (MDS), the creation of working subgroups for the sociocultural line or workshops for diagnosis with a cultural perspective reflects the will to promote initiatives for an efficient strategic management of this planning tool based on the participation of the population. Contributions through the construction of concertation spaces among actors involved in local development (González Pérez, 2020), training actions in terms of university social responsibility (Rojas Valdés et al., 2020) or a proposal from culture to improve the design of the EDM of San Cristóbal municipality, Artemisa province, (Rodríguez Basso et al., 2020) constitute innovative solutions aimed at consolidating the community as a key actor from leadership, commitment and responsibility for the sustainability of community or institutional municipal development.

Beyond the affiliation to any definition of local development, this must be approached on the basis of the application of a management concept, impossible to achieve: [...] apart from human actions that, in the context of the locality, are capable of reaching the proposed levels of development through productive, social, cultural and environmental transformations, which allow reaching the new step in the projected development and which contribute to improve the quality of life and social welfare of the community (Araujo González, 2018).

According to the above fragment, local development should be based on the principle of conscious and committed participation of the different actors involved in this process in which a resource is identified at the local level, an ideal space for interaction and social concertation where governance is enhanced in terms of identifying and solving the daily problems of the community, the neighborhood, the block, through a political body: the People's Council.

Demonstrating experiences related to the generic modality of Rural Tourism, with emphasis on the sub-modality of Community Tourism, constitutes the fundamental objective of this article, as it becomes a reference of how these local bodies can be

inserted for the effective management of local development, with a participatory and sustainable approach.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The type of research offered is adjusted to the qualitative methodology. Theoretical methods of analysis and synthesis are used to assume a definition of Popular Council, the historical-logical for the study of its evolution through the alliance with the local government and the entrepreneurial system in tourism; the empirical methods were based on the compilation and analysis of secondary sources with the support of the structured interview together with the questionnaire, with the purpose of analyzing the insufficiencies related to the sociocultural management in the Popular Councils, through the collection of information for the detection of its main regularities. The sensitization and self-management workshops with key actors at this level made it possible to build, systematize and socialize the results of the experience among the beneficiaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Popular Council. Expression of cultural diversity

Established on an experimental basis in 1988, the People's Councils are consolidated by being extended throughout the country since 1991 and which validity is endorsed in 2020 during the Fourth Ordinary Period of Sessions of the Ninth Legislature. In Article 186.1 of Law 132 (2019), the People's Council is defined as: [...] a local body of the People's Power of a representative nature, vested with the highest authority for the performance of its functions and, without constituting an intermediate instance for the purposes of political-administrative division, it is organized in cities, towns, neighborhoods, villages and rural areas.

Thus, under Article 187, any initiative or management proposal emanating from this government institution was defined in its area of action, the local area, without the "intermediate instance" including that established by the municipality, but by its area of action (city, town, neighborhood, village, rural area), the hard core of cultural diversity

within the municipality, which expresses a resource of inestimable value for development.

The province of Pinar del Río, with its 97 Popular Councils, distributed in the eleven municipalities that comprise it, constitutes the result of the experience derived from the political-administrative division of 1976, a space where the socio-cultural is re-signified without being deprived of diverse tensions, as it constitutes the smallest political-administrative scale, facilitating the management of the territory in the urban and rural areas.

Experience of socio-cultural management for local development at the People's Council level in the field of tourism.

At the end of the last century, local development, the alliance with the government at that level and the entrepreneurial system in the field of tourism were introduced in the projection of Cuban universities. The result of this endeavor generated some impacts in terms of knowledge and technologies in the province of Pinar del Río such as the analysis of the current situation of Rural Tourism, in correspondence with a qualitative study of its costs and benefits (Cardoso Carreño et al., 2019) as well as the theoretical-methodological foundations of sustainable local tourism, related to its management in forest areas, its contribution to the conservation of this resource, the economic-financial efficiency and the effects of its investment in the local population (Rodríguez Martínez et al., 2020).

However, in general, there are still some insufficiencies related to management from the sociocultural dimension of local development at the level of Popular Councils. Through the compilation and analysis of secondary sources on local spaces in Cuba (Ortega González & Torres Santana, 2012), the systematization of an experience in a Popular Council (Moya Torres, 2020) and the support of the structured interview together with the questionnaire applied to a sample of key actors in the municipality of Pinar del Río made it possible to raise some regularities. The main ones reside in:

- The promotion of development is still conceived in a centralized manner, without giving significant weight to the participation of the People's Council

- The conformation of most of the Popular Councils does not respond to the roots, history and identity of each community, ignoring the original neighborhoods, villages and toponyms
- Creation of the People's Councils without sufficient elements of judgment based on experience and scientific culture
- The gaps between state structures and the life of each People's Council are still extensive
- Predominant focus of socio-cultural projects on the artistic-literary profile of development, which fragments the use of the potential of each People's Council
- The concept of sociocultural as a dimension of development that encompasses structures, institutions and contexts, not exclusive to the strictly "cultural" ones, is not articulated in a holistic manner
- Little use of local capacities that can be generated from the socio-cultural dimension at the People's Council level, especially in the management of development projects related to gender equity, population aging, social economy, social responsibility, natural and cultural heritage, sense of belonging and local identity, among others.
- No network articulation of the management processes of the sociocultural dimension from the participation of the People's Council in local development at the municipal, provincial and national levels
- Insufficient use of information and communication resources as a means of interaction and feedback with the population, in order to improve the management of the People's Council in local development

The solution to these problems, through the alliance between the People's Councils with national institutions such as the Community Initiative Exchange and Reference Center (Cieric in Spanish), Martin Luther King Center (CMNK in Spanish), Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Flacso in Spanish), or provincial institutions such as the Center for Education and Promotion for Sustainable Development (Ceprodeso in Spanish) and the University of Pinar del Río itself, has been a strength that has materialized in the exchange and dialogue of knowledge between academia and the population as a feedback mechanism for the updating and improvement of the MDEs.

The University of Pinar del Río has been a decisive actor in this process at the territorial level. Through the Articulated Platform for Integral Territorial Development (Padit in Spanish), the Local Development Support Center (Cadel in Spanish) was created, a project of the Center for Management, Local Development, Tourism and Cooperativism Studies (Ce-Gesta in Spanish), attached, in turn, to the Center for Strategic Management of Local Development (Gedel), where installed capacities for the sociocultural management of development are positioned, such as the Office of the Historian of the City of Pinar del Río and the Technical Advisory Group.

In its role of advising and accompanying other stakeholders, including the Cadel enterprise system, it relies on the government-university strategic alliance, a key factor in the design and initial implementation of local development projects as part of the MDS and PDS (Provincial Development Strategy). A good precedent in these endeavors is the Tobacco Route Project.

This product has been preserved under the concept of sustainable tourism so that the development of this activity has had a positive impact on society, the economy and culture.

Among the current trends of the world tourism product is the design of routes, a tourist scenario or geographic area that allows direct contact and knowledge of the values and attractions located in its trajectory, based on activities and services conceived. These constitute products or macro-products that have their own specific characteristics that differentiate them from others of their type. They constitute an offer organized and elaborated from an integral conception that can function in an autonomous way. They include activities, facilities and related services. In its design, special care has been taken to ensure that it is a credible and strong product in the market, suggestive and coherent, that maintains unity and complementarity among its components, as well as an identity image based on local culture.

The objective of the routes is to favor the mobility of tourists, so that they move from one place to another along them and according to the established itinerary. Consequently, their components (attractions, services, facilities, events) should not be self-sufficient, but complementary in order to take advantage of the synergies produced.

The routes must respond to the interests of the various stakeholders involved in tourism, but fundamentally to their target market, travel agents, associated service providers and local communities. Based on this, the forms of association should be organized to determine the forms of management and coordination that allow the consolidation, commercialization and operation of the offer.

The objectives of the link established should be the enhancement of the tourism heritage, the adequate provision of the required facilities and services, the coordination of other stakeholders involved (local governments, institutions, artisans, service providers, etc.) and the marketing of the incorporated offer, leaving its members and associates responsible for the operation of the products and services offered to visitors.

The Tobacco Route is a tourist product based on a local tradition that has become, over the centuries, a stage of international reference and, in the opinion of producers, manufacturers and consumers, a productive area where the best tobacco on the planet is produced. This, although it is a strength, is not yet used in terms of tourism management of Pinar del Río destination and, much less, with the participation of the peasant population linked to this culture, to which is added the social and cultural capital treasured by its bearers.

In the Vivero Popular Council, municipality of San Juan y Martínez, (Fig. 1), according to data obtained from the 2012 census, in the Provincial Physical Planning office, there were 303 dwellings classified in the "rural" typology.

Economic and social

- The traditional tobacco-growing region of Pinar del Río has consolidated its insertion in the tourism market by taking advantage of local initiatives promoted by young farmers distinguished as "hombre habano"
- The economic stimulus received has been part of the financing of some initiatives and development projects
- The population has been benefited from the increase in jobs and salaries in tourism-related activities
- The tourist facilities within the area have expanded their range of services in terms of accommodation and products related to the cultural traditions of the territory
- Productive and value chains have been consolidated with local service and support providers
- Increase of goods and services demand with the consequent stimulation of trades related to tobacco culture
- Growth and improvement of housing infrastructure in rural communities
- Stimulation of local development projects that contribute to the good performance of tourism management

Socio-cultural

- Increase of belonging and identity sense of the tobacco community, based on the reevaluation of its identity values
- Research, rehabilitation and preservation of historical sites and cultural values linked to the Route
- Revitalization of traditional music, plastic arts, local handicrafts, among others
- Restoration of cultural facilities, in particular the specialized tobacco rooms in the museums of the municipalities of San Juan and San Luis
- Creation of a didactic room on the tobacco process at the San Juan y Martínez Visitor Center
- Establishment of a specialized tobacco library at the San Juan y Martínez Visitor Center

- Cultural exchange between the tobacco community and visitors

The Tobacco Route is a tourist product that is inserted within the generic modality of Rural Tourism and, in turn, within this, the specific sub-modality of Agrotourism, which is based on this activity with a strong agricultural and manufacturing component, from the seedbed to the tasting of cigars, to which is added the knowledge and enjoyment of agricultural practices, livestock, food and lodging, which provides additional income to the farmer. An example of this is the "Quemado de Rubí" farm, owned by Héctor Luis Prieto, winner of the 2008 Habano Award (Fig. 2), whose uniqueness lies in the technique he uses to ensure the quality of his production: cultivation under cover and in the sun, on six hectares of land where more than 250,000 tobacco plants are grown every year. To this, he adds a tour for the observation of the tobacco planting process, sharing with his family and lodging in rooms of peasant typology.



Fig. 2 - "Quemado de Rubí" farm, a local sustainable tourism project

Source: Image taken by Dr.C Jorge Freddy Ramírez Pérez

The scenario where the Tobacco Route is developed has involved the communities that are within its area of influence, which contributes a participatory component under the principle of the common identity that characterizes them, whose customs and traditions are in line with an ancestral socio-productive model.

In this way, its persistence has been ensured by employing, as part of project readjustment, workshops for self-management and evaluation of impact indicators in articulation with local government structures, institutions and other social actors. This gives the community an active role in contributing ideas during decision-making. For its development, not only the existing resources are important, but also the action and will of the resident population for its promotion and sustainability over time, without the intrusive intervention of an external actor.

One of the most significant characteristics of the communities that inhabit the area covered by the Route lies in the sense of belonging that, for more than half a century, the cultivation, processing and tasting of the product by successive generations have turned tobacco into one of the attributes of the *vueltabajera* culture in western Cuba. This experience has created the basis for its extension to other municipalities in the province.

The Local and Community Development Program (PDLC in Spanish), coordinated by Cieric, in the implementation phase starting in 2019, in the municipality of La Palma, has promoted, among other purposes, the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage through rural tourism in the community modality through a Local Tourism Center (CTL in Spanish).

In the La Jagua Popular Council, for the pilot construction of the Guacamaya CTL, peasant building traditions, based on the use of indigenous materials, were used according to the bioclimatic criteria of its facilities. In addition, in order to ensure linkages with other local productions, the presence of activities related to coffee, tobacco and honey have been identified, with their consequent benefit in terms of import substitution, source of employment and economic income for the population, with a focus on gender and equity that favors the participation and leadership of young people.

The revitalization of jobs associated with popular and traditional culture that have lost their primary intentionality, such as blacksmithing, saddlery, carpentry, shoemaking, sweets, weaving with natural and industrial fibers, doll making, traditional and utilitarian sewing, among others, constitute opportunities for the development of other tourism initiatives and projects.

In conclusion, the experiences discussed here, related to the generic modality of Rural Tourism, with emphasis on the sub-modality of Community Tourism, constitute an expression of management on a participatory basis, which demonstrates the validity of the tools available to the socio-cultural dimension for social transformation in terms of raising the quality of life of the population, as a reference of how the People's Councils can be inserted as an innovative body and equipment that makes sustainable local development feasible.

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Conflict of interest:

Authors declare not to have any conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution:

Silfredo Rodríguez Basso, Jorge Freddy Ramírez Pérez and Iverilys Hernández Pérez designed the study, analyzed the data and prepared the draft.

Silfredo Rodríguez Basso and Jorge Freddy Ramírez Pérez were involved in data collection.

All authors reviewed the writing of the manuscript and approve the version finally submitted.



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