

Editorial

## **Small-scale Sustainable Local Tourism. New ways and perspectives for its promotion in Cuba post-Covid-19**



### **Turismo Local Sostenible a pequeña escala. Nuevas vías y perspectivas para su fomento en Cuba pos-Covid-19**

### **Turismo Local Sustentável em Pequena Escala. Novas formas e perspectivas para a sua promoção em Cuba pós-Covid-19**

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One of the most striking phenomena is how changes in all dimensions on the planet are occurring at a dizzying pace, as they spread very quickly throughout the geography of the common home of humans. A sad example is the Covid-19 pandemic, with its fulminating impact on all countries, which made millions of people aware that their global village was no longer the same and, even worse, that it was very vulnerable.

Among the lessons learned from the epidemic is the way in which tourism should evolve in the future, after going through the worst crisis in its history as an activity. It cannot be ruled out to start talking about tourism before and after Covid-19, that is, a turning point to reorient the steps to follow, if it is taken as a starting point the fact that it is the sector that requires, in its dynamics, the flow of travel between sending and receiving markets, as well as human relations, increasingly demanded as tourist experiences, but at the same time, prohibited by health protocols worldwide until very recently.

The evolution of the pandemic and its impact on tourism were marked by three interrelated aspects (Mantecón, 2020, p. 19) "[...] the evolution of the pandemic, the management of mobility restrictions and the financial availability of potential tourists [...]". With these elements, it is clear the need to

reorient the logics of action and, above all, tourism management along paths that have not been evaluated so far (Palomo Ortega et al., 2020).

Cuba, which economy depends to a great extent on tourist revenues, felt the effects of the pandemic severely, when it was forced as a destination to close its international borders and prohibit the movement of the domestic market. At present, as it happens to the rest of the tourist destinations in the world, it is forced to recover, in a progressive way, the tourist flow from abroad, to the same extent that it stimulates the domestic market. But... one thing is clear to tourism service providers and that is the fact that it will be necessary to introduce substantial changes in all areas of tourism management.

In the midst of this situation, the Cuban State has taken strategic steps in legislative matters. The Policy for Territorial Development in Cuba appears as a novelty, accompanied by Decree 33 for the Strategic Management of Territorial Development, with its implementing resolutions (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, 2021). This legal framework provides the possibility of promoting, among other types of projects, Small-scale Local Sustainable Tourism (TlSpe in Spanish) (Ramírez Pérez et al., 2020), which, from their conception, take into account the conditioning factors established by a global phenomenon such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The TlSpe is based on the new concept contained in the Cuban economic-social development model which, starting from municipal autonomy, leads to the evaluation of the local tourism potential and channels it through the Municipal Development Strategies, which, in turn, define Local Sustainable Tourism programs to finally implement them through local development projects in a specific TlSpe manner.

Thus, for the first time, the figure of the TlSpe appears in the Cuban tourism panorama, called to contribute to and strengthen local economies, stimulate employment with a gender and generational approach, raise the quality of life of host communities, help retain rural residents and complement the Cuban tourism product. In this scenario, Nature Tourism (Pazos Otón et al., 2020), Rural Tourism (Santos Lacueva, 2020) and Wellness Tourism (Rojas Rieckhof, 2020) among others, managed in small groups, are outlined as the main modalities to be promoted in Cuban localities.

These modalities have been the fastest growing in the market for years. The success of these modalities has been linked to the fact that they have stimulated the rural environment, as well as

the design of tourism products based on local natural and cultural resources, in close relation to authentic and quality associated services and facilities in open spaces.

On the other hand, the service plant of the new tourist products to be designed must take into account the scale to go from large to small facilities, both for lodging and catering. This does not prevent Cuba, as a tourist destination, from seeing limited growth in tourist arrivals. The idea is to deconcentrate the large crowds lodged in huge facilities to establish them in small service units, appropriately multiplied in Cuba's geography. The epidemic showed that the higher the concentration of people, the higher the risk of contagion and spread of viruses.

Countries such as Costa Rica, which has opted for a tourism management model of small tourist facilities, have demonstrated that from their low investment capital, to their low maintenance costs, to their much more personalized services, they have proven to be a success.

Cuba faces, from the perspective of future tourism development, the challenges posed by the new situation in the world and in Cuba in particular. These challenges demand actions that require the participation of all actors in society, without distinction. This is not a sectoral responsibility, but rather a shared commitment, based on multilevel cooperation networks (supra-state, state, provincial and municipal). Otherwise, Cuban tourism development will miss opportunities and will avoid the imperative actions to reorient tourism towards socially and environmentally fairer directions, as required by the commitments of the 2030 Agenda, through the Sustainable Development Goals (Azcárate Díaz de Losada, 2020).

In response to the challenges imposed by the country's economic situation in the last decades and the State's mandate, the Cuban tourism sector has managed to largely sustain its financial requirements in the face of a fierce blockade and the imponderables of the world market. This has led the tourism management model to be based, essentially, on the modality of Sun and Beach Tourism, of low added value and requested by medium-low income clients, with a price-sensitive profile (Mantecón, 2020).

As a result, the projection of the destination's image worldwide has been focused on the so-called mass tourism, that is, on attracting large volumes of tourists, with which to obtain greater income in the shortest possible time. This has brought with it the need for investments in large urban units of basic services, which occupy significant extensions of land, with the consequent and inevitable loss of natural values. Something similar has happened with the components of the cultural heritage,

where some traditions are trivialized through their spectacularization, in products aimed at consumption in scenarios with a high concentration of tourists.

In the same way, tourism of large concentrations causes an increase in pollution, as it contributes greater volumes of waste, especially plastics, high consumption of conventional energy, destruction of ecosystems and the landscape, among others. On the contrary, the situation imposed by Covid-19 showed that by significantly reducing the volume of tourists, it contributed to reducing the burning of fossil fuels, improved air quality, cleaned up the ozone layer and reduced the flow of wastewater.

Given the current global and national scenario, it is necessary for the prospective development of tourism in Cuba to seek new proposals that allow it to be in line with the trends of tourism activity, including: tourism products that generate greater added value, while preserving the natural resources and cultural identity of tourist destinations; tourism scenarios that enable relations between visitors and residents, in a context of reciprocal respect; use of new technologies that improve the quality of the tourist experience (Domínguez Herrera & González Morales, 2020).

Local governments, for their part, have the possibility of stimulating tourism on this scale, as mentioned above, through their Municipal Development Strategy. They can economically stimulate, through their budgets for local development, tourism initiatives, both from state and private entrepreneurs, linked to the tourism potential and vocation of their territory. To the same extent, they assume the responsibility of organizing tourism activity to prevent damage to natural and cultural resources. To this end, regulations will be established to prevent the practice of mass tourism activities, and on the contrary, they will stimulate the promotion of alternative tourism modalities to the conventional tourism model.

This analysis could not fail to include the need to establish safe tourism management in the localities, in particular, to guarantee the necessary inputs for their sustainability (Padrón Fumero & Hernández Martín, 2020; Suárez Rosa & Fumero González, 2020). To this end, the necessary productive linkages must be established, both internally and externally, with emphasis on the localities where it is located; thereby ensuring the consumption of fresh food nearby. In these local destinations, the convenience of eliminating plastics and using low or zero-emission vehicles, among other measures, will be evaluated. Beneficially, all local stakeholders will be involved in the protection of natural and cultural resources and the conservation of biodiversity. To this end, they must be consistent with the precepts of the circular economy and regenerative tourism.

Faced with the different risks assumed by Local Sustainable Tourism destinations, it is necessary to project them in a resilient manner (Pitarch Garrido, 2020), which will give them greater possibilities of recovering and adapting more quickly. The most resilient places are those that establish their contingency plan, as well as those attached to local development from a multidimensional vision and with sustainable bases. That is, "[...] those territories that opt for high-risk growth models, excessively specialized in the economic, polarized in the social and unsustainable in the environmental, will be more vulnerable" (Méndez Gutiérrez del Valle, 2017, p. 13).

In the projection towards the market of the new Local Sustainable Tourism products, it is necessary to take into account other issues that are necessary in the current scenario. In the first place, the cause of tourism belongs to everyone, as already stated; so that, from the conception of the idea of a local tourism product, the participation of local inhabitants in its co-design cannot be absent (Vargas Sánchez, 2020).

Regarding the marketing of the tourism product, it is not only the job of the person responsible for the task, but of everyone, whatever their role within the tourism system. It requires everyone's help to sell in a context where competition and tourist flows are not favorable.

Similarly, the application of science and innovation are necessary to improve tourism products, raise the level of quality of tourist experiences and optimize management. This should trigger a grassroots movement with the participation of academic actors to support the promotion of Local Sustainable Tourism. To this end, municipal university centers and science, culture and sports institutions in the country's municipalities have a crucial role to play.

In the management of small-scale Local Sustainable Tourism, local host communities are, to the same extent, beneficiaries and providers of goods and services to visitors (Gutiérrez Taño et al., 2020). Therefore, they must be aware and willing to continue to receive in a hospitable manner those who decide to visit that destination.

With everything expressed in this editorial, a substantial change can be achieved in the image of tourist destination Cuba, a kind of renovation and adaptation to the most recent trends of a dynamic sector that can and should help communities that are vulnerable but, to the same extent, sensitive to change.

Finally, in this issue 2 of volume 10 of 2022 of Cooperativismo y Desarrollo, several articles are dedicated to tourism, at a time when this sector needs it most. Science and innovation can contribute much to the changes that tourism activity requires, in a process of necessary transformation, in close relationship between academia, tourism service providers, local governments and host communities.

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