



The Governance System of Rural Tourism in the Guanentá Province, Santander: Cultural and Political Transformations*

El sistema de gobernanza del turismo rural en la provincia de Guanentá, Santander: Transformaciones culturales y políticas

Título en francés

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Abstract

Rural tourism impacts more than just the political and socio-economic dimensions of rural regions. Introduced into the Guanentá Province in Colombia, rural tourism is a new function of the region that can be understood as resulting from planning efforts, put forth by the system of governance and taken up by the regional culture, in a long-term and cumulative process. This dynamic leads to a set of transformations for its implementation and consolidation, which reconfigure the spatial structure in the region. Our understanding of this process helps to explain the dynamics of regional construction over the course of the last decade.

Keywords: Region, rural tourism, culture, governance

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Resumen

El turismo rural impacta no solamente la dimensión socioeconómica y política de las regiones. Como nueva función de la región, introducida en el territorio de la provincia de Guantánamo, Colombia, el turismo rural puede entenderse como el resultado de la gestión llevada a cabo por el sistema de gobernanza y acogida por la cultura regional, en un proceso acumulativo y de largo plazo. Esta dinámica desencadena una serie de transformaciones para su implementación y consolidación, generando así un proceso de cambio y reordenamiento de la estructura espacial regional. Este proceso coadyuva a la explicación de la dinámica de construcción de esta región durante la última década.

Palabras clave: región, turismo rural, cultura, gobernanza

Résumé

Résumé

Mots-clés: Mots-clés

Introduction

Studies on the dynamics of regional formation in Colombia emphasize a mono-disciplinary description of the role played by the different regions' economic evolution (For example, Moncayo, 2004; Cuervo, 2006; Madrigal, 2007) or development, as a result of socio-political dynamics (Schneider, 2009; Fals Borda, 1975). In the same sense, the reconfiguration of regions—including the dynamics of violence, uncontrolled extraction of natural resources, and the homogenization of the rural landscape resulting from the evolving nature of agro-industrial production—tends to be explained from the perspective of deterritorialization (For example Texeira, 2012; Osorio & Herrera, 2012).

At the same time, the growing recognition of the spatial dimension in geography and planning suggests an ever more integrated and complex understanding of the idea of the region. This is an approach taken to an increasing extent by academics and policymakers. It stems from a post-structuralist understanding of globalized rurality and increasing interplay between the spatial (territorial) and temporal (historical) dimensions of social and economic action (Massey, 2005; Schneider, 2009; Warf & Arias, 2009).

In this sense, Appadurai argues that “regions as defined on current maps are not permanent geographical fixtures [...] Regions are general contexts for phenomena that generate varied geographies, not static geographies defined by pre-established phenomena” (2000, p. 7). Likewise, the study of regional formation teaches us that this process is influenced by multiple factors. In addition, says Katzenstein, “geographical designations are not “real”, “natural,” or “essential”, but are “socially constructed and politically challenged; thus they are subject to change” (2002, p. 7). As Kadosh (2005, p. 6) states, regions are consciously and intentionally produced; they are initiated and developed by social groups, and carry out their functions with the participation of multiple actors. In this sense, regions are not necessarily delimited spaces. They are not defined by their geographical particularities alone, nor are they predetermined by the political-administrative system that formalizes their boundaries. As forms of socio-spatial organization, they are historical social constructions that evolve continually as a result of both exogenous and endogenous factors, including factors and political instrumentalities that emerge from their own internal structures (Elden, 2010).

With these ideas in mind, and for the purposes of this article, a “rural region” is understood as a space subject to complex relations between nature and society, resulting from the interaction of at least five key components: a) a territory, defined by its formal delimitation and as a source of natural resources; the geographical basis for certain economic activities and a scenario for the flow of multiple resources, forms of capital, and ideas; b) a place where an expanding or contracting population shares a particular cultural domain, with livelihoods related to natural resources and the urban environment; c) a network of settlements that develop relations among themselves and with extraterritorial entities through diverse forms of exchange; d) public, private, and mixed actors that determine the governance structure of the region through varied interactions; and e) formal and informal institutions that provide a regulatory framework for the functioning of the system as a whole (Massey, 2005; Schneider, 2009; Warf & Arias, 2009; Elden, 2010; Ortiz-Guerrero, 2013).

In this article we highlight the inadequate level of continuity in the analysis of regional formation, especially at the micro level, and in particular due to the process of change that rural regions of Colombia are experiencing. We do so from an integrated perspective and take into account an amalgam of endogenous and exogenous factors. In particular, we stress the need to improve our understanding of how properties arising from social structure and ecosystems come to stimulate the process of change and the construction of rural regions, one example being the role played by culture and the governance system. We reflect on relations among governance, culture, and region by examining how tourism, as an economic function developing in the region, influences these categories and, through them, influences the process of transformation and change of the region's structure.

To that end, we applied a qualitative and participative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that included a detailed analysis of policy documents; a literature review to connect the governance, culture, and rural tourism dimensions. We also developed 5 workshops with selected tourism stakeholders and government officials—where a qualitative network analysis was conducted—as well as 6 focus groups with key informants, and 5 interviews with recognized tourism actors. Additionally, we applied a survey with a sample consisting of 56 actors, from a total of 316 actors, connected with rural tourism activities (confidence level = 90% and error = 10%). Focusing on centrality measures, the obtained data from workshops and the survey was processed with the software UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002), and it was interpreted using Social Network Analysis (Wasserman & Faust; 1994; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Polanco, 2011).

Rural tourism, culture, and governance

Rural tourism and culture

The growing recognition of space as a container of concrete regions emerging from processes of sociocultural construction, allows us to see places, towns, landscapes, and ecosystems considered to be tourist attractions as spaces through which “[...] power, identity, meaning, and behavior are constructed, negotiated, and renegotiated according to socio-cultural dynamics” (Aitchison & Reeves, cited in Pritchard & Morgan 2001, p. 167). It is through these processes that relations are established among culture, region, the regional identity assigned to the place by inhabitants, and the form in which it is promoted as a tourist attraction. As a result, the characteristic manner of describing the historical, political, cultural, and environmental features of the Guantán Province influences the way in which social groups and places within the province are marketed in the context of tourism. The descriptions of the province also reflect the form and orientation of the governance system, not only to regulate tourism, but also to direct the process of regional construction. In this sense, rural tourism can be seen as a “cultural arena” that reflects the dynamics of power in a region that actively participates in the construction of towns and places (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000, p. 167). Nevertheless, the influence of tourism in its cultural dimension is usually analyzed from two opposing perspectives. The first—negative—perspective holds that tourism erodes local culture and negatively impacts ecosystems and social relations. The second—and opposite—point of view maintains that tourist activity can have a positive socioeconomic effect by reviving local interest in traditional cultural forms, thereby strengthening the social fabric and expanding income opportunities for local inhabitants (Hughes, 2002; Shepherd, 2002, p. 184, UNWTO, 2014). This discussion does not consider how the influence of tourism on the local culture affects the process of territorial construction, by reorienting or strengthening any particular feature of the process of construction in relation to inhabited space.

Rural tourism is an alternative modality of tourism that offers unconventional tourist products associated with subcategories such as agro-tourism, eco-tourism, and adventure tourism (Crosby & Moreda, 1996; Ivars, 2000; Barrera, 2006). These activities call for a wide range of public and private resources, both natural and cultural (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008). From a spatial point of view, rural tourism is located and carried out in rural spaces (Ivars, 2000; Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas, 1997).

From a functional point of view, rural tourism reflects the complex relationship between the rural environment, the society that inhabits it, its economy, and its culture (Lane, 2005). Given the contact that rural tourism provides with both natural space and cultural manifestations, it does not only provide an alternative form of leisure activity, but also it is additionally geared toward the protection of biodiversity and cultural authenticity. This is done by means of the integration with the local population to preserve natural resources as well as traditional and ancestral cultural features and expressions (Ciruela, 2008). These resources are managed with the conscious goal of assuring their optimization and long-term survival (Crosby & Moreda, cited in Ciruela, 2008).

In this sense, rural tourism is characterized by the relation between the rural environment, society, and culture. The characteristics of this relationship are transmitted to the local population and have an impact on their identity (Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas, 1997, 1990). In addition, it is made up of activities that entail the alternative use of cultural and natural resources, including the cultural patrimony, as well as services particular to the rural environment. Thus rural tourism is a strategy intended to improve social and economic conditions by contributing to the health of the physical and institutional environment as well as by increasing the productivity of economic activities, and contributing to local development and the diversification of the regional economy (Yadghar, 2004; Van Duynen & Carré, 2005; Schneider & Verardi, 2000; Riveros & Blanco, 2003; Baum, 2011).

The relation between rural tourism and culture allows for the channeling of varied social, economic, cultural, and natural resources in the areas where it is practiced. In pursuing this activity, participants engage in cooperative and mutually beneficial activities, establish institutions to coordinate them, and arrive at and share common visions about how to attract visitors (Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007). These activities require a complex web of relations that facilitates access to resources and information, and allows for the mobilization and sharing of social, cultural, economic, and environmental resources among all participants (Jenkins & Oliver, cited in Saxena *et al.*, 2007; Alipour *et al.*, 2011). This relational dynamic developed by actors directly and indirectly involved in rural tourism reflects a particular form of relation between society and nature that emerges as a result of governance activities related to rural tourism. The nature of these governance activities is defined in the next section.

Rural tourism and governance

Rural regions are a mosaic of physical features, political forces, social structures, and socio-ecological dynamics that require a response that is sometimes beyond the capacity of government institutions to provide (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2006; Eversole & Martin, 2005). At the same time, formal and informal institutions conform a societal system for controlling social relations. These relations take on different organizational forms that also act as social networks, allowing for their symbiotic evolution and a fluidity of interests, capital, and knowledge. In turn, this fluidity brings together diverse actors (individual and collective, public, private, and mixed) that occupy varying niches of power and differing relations with the region (Crona & Hubacek, 2010; Bodin & Prell, 2011; Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Lu, 2011; Zhao & Timothy, 2015). Systems of governance link these entities and make possible networks and institutions through the confluence of actions among actors, whether coordinated or not. These networks and institutions constitute another form of governing the regions, one in which the development process becomes collaborative in reference to the region itself and to the different economic activities pursued within it. In these structures decision making becomes collective (OECD, 2006; Eversole & Martin, 2005) and an equilibrium is reached between decentralized and polycentric control of the regional development process, on the one hand, and centralized control of the process on the other (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Folke, Hahn, Olsson, & Norberg, 2005). Each region has a system of governance that includes a number of different subsystems to direct the development of different economic sectors. Within this complex system, rural tourism is directed by a particular system of governance, subject to the regional context and the relation between rural tourism and culture, as defined in the previous section. In this context, governance is a concept increasingly associated with public policies fostering and regulating rural tourism (Hall, 2011; Lu & Jacobs, 2013).

It is within this framework that a set of relations develops between public, private, and mixed actors that allows for the establishment of a concrete set of norms to inform relations between them, regulate rural tourism, and implement ways of putting decentralized government policies into practice (Göymen, 2000; Lu & Jacobs, 2013). This entails establishing new kinds of interactions between State and society and the use of new tools for co-management and collaborative planning at the local, regional, and national levels (Kooiman, 2005; Davies, 2011).

In this way, the governance of rural tourism forms part of the process of regional construction, which emerges from the social structure; not from any absolute characteristic of a place, but as a result of internal and external relations (Hultman & Hall, 2011). The participation of interdependent actors in decision making and in the management of tourist activity is expressed through stable patterns of social relations and interactions through governing networks (Yüksel *et al*, 2005; Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). This network structure demonstrates the reality of different modes of public-private associations and the participation of the community in the development and management of the region.

Guanentá Province

The case study in this research project is in the region of Guanentá Province, located in southeastern Santander Department, in the eastern range, or *cordillera*, of the Colombian Andes. The province has a total area of about 3,800 square kilometers and includes 18 municipalities (a political-administrative subdivision similar to US counties), including Aratoaca, Barichara, Cabrera, Cepita, Coromoro, Curití, Charalá, Encino, Jordán Sube, Mogotes, Ocamonte, Onzaga, Páramo, Pinchote, San Gil (capital of the province and declared to be the tourism capital of the Department of Santander), San Joaquín, Valle of San José, and Villanueva (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Map and location of the Guanentá Province - Colombia

Source: Prospective Plan, Province of Guanenta 2025 (p.13)

The province has about 142,000 inhabitants, of whom 51% live in rural areas and 49% in urban areas. The population density is about 43 inhabitants per square kilometer (Gobernación de Santander, 2005).

The principal economic activities engaged in by the economically active population are in the primary sector, mostly agriculture and livestock. (Gobernación de Santander, 2012). Agricultural techniques are generally semi-mechanized and the principal crops are coffee, cane grown for sugar loaf (*panela*), cassava, plantain, corn, tobacco, sisal, papaya, anise, and blackberries. Livestock include cattle and goats. Other economic activities include mining (primarily of gypsum, clay, and materials dredged from river deposits), and the service sector related to tourist activities (Unisangil, 2010).

Given the current realities of globalization, the Department of Santander and especially the Province of Guanéata see tourism as one of the largest and most dynamic extant industries, and as an opportunity for social and economic development (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2011). This assessment is based on the prospective ability to exploit competitive advantages, including a wealth of natural and cultural resources in the area (Unisangil, 2010).

Changes to the system of tourism governance

The governance structure, as a systematic property arising from the relation between social structure and ecosystems, allows for the direction and control of the actions of social and political actors for the management of natural resources and productive activities (Kooiman, 2005; Bridge, cited in Hultman & Hall, 2011). Given the complexity of managing activities in fields involving specific knowledge and action, the governance approach entails an exchange of knowledge held on different spatial scales by multiple actors, under the principle of open participation. This reflects the complexity of managing activities like rural tourism that involve multifarious areas of knowledge and action (Bassols, 2011; Merinero, 2008).

Governance is compatible with the management of rural tourism since, in a broad sense, it suggests the need to integrate relational structures that call for the participation of a significant number of state, market, and civil society actors (Merinero, 2008). These actors design and execute actions in formal and informal contexts to help solve problems or create social opportunity. They operate under a strategy attributable to growing and changing interdependencies and chains of social interaction, which are continually multiplying due to the diversity, complexity, and dynamism of relations among public and private actors. These dynamics often play a role in the management of rural tourism (Kooiman *et al*, 2008; Wang & Bramwell, 2012).

From this perspective, governance is seen as a relational process among actors involved directly or indirectly in rural tourism in a given region; it is mediated by mechanisms of participation through which the relational networks necessary to establish a governing model are conformed. It is institutionally flexible and suited to the complexity that characterizes the regional construction process.

It is notable that the governance of rural tourism entails multiple forms of relationships associated with behavioral patterns, expressed through the regular exchange of resources and the use of norms and institutions that regulate relations among actors (Klijn, 2005; Cerillo, 2005). In this sense governance goes beyond the merely formal and normative and is manifested essentially in informal elements with non-governmental components; thus facilitating the participation and interaction of public and private actors for the pursuit of shared objectives (Rhodes, 1996; Larson, 1992).

The actors' interactions and their interdependence in relation to resource flows illustrate the behavioral patterns within the governance network. They are established and maintained in the understanding that no public or private actor has all the resources required to resolve a problematic situation, nor does any single actor have the overall perspective required to effectively apply the instruments needed for definitive solutions. Interdependence can be interpreted in relation to the functional nature of collective action or to the forms of association among actors (Rhodes, 1996). In governance networks one may observe the practices of exchange and coordination, and the adoption of joint actions and decisions between state and non-state entities that confirm the presence of the latter in mixed public-private networks (Natera, 2004; Mayntz, 1998). These mixed networks provide a way to consolidate the interactions generated through the exchange of resources and the visibilization of the interests of different actors (Cerillo, 2005; Panyik *et al*, 2011).

In the following we will describe the systemic changes in the governance of rural tourism in the Guanéata Province from a network perspective. This is to say, by characterizing the relations among the different actors in order to profile the social structure that guides the development of rural tourism

in the province. This perspective also exposes the distribution of power that underlies the network structure (Prats, 2005).

For the last ten years, the dynamics of development in the Guantán Province have been significantly influenced by rural tourism activities. This function has emerged very recently and is comprised of structured relations among actors (acting as nodes) through the establishment of network connections mediated by formal and informal norms, and resource transfers. This structure has been undergoing transformations that affect relations among actors, resource transfers, and the conformation of new power centers.

The structure of relations within the rural tourism sector in Guantán Province can be characterized in general terms as an extensive and complex network that currently includes 316 nodes made up of public, private, and mixed entities (See figure 2). New actors are integrated into the network on an almost continuous basis as they seek to benefit from the dynamics and growth potential of tourist activities in the region. Thus the network is growing rapidly and continuously, and its structural characteristics are changing permanently.

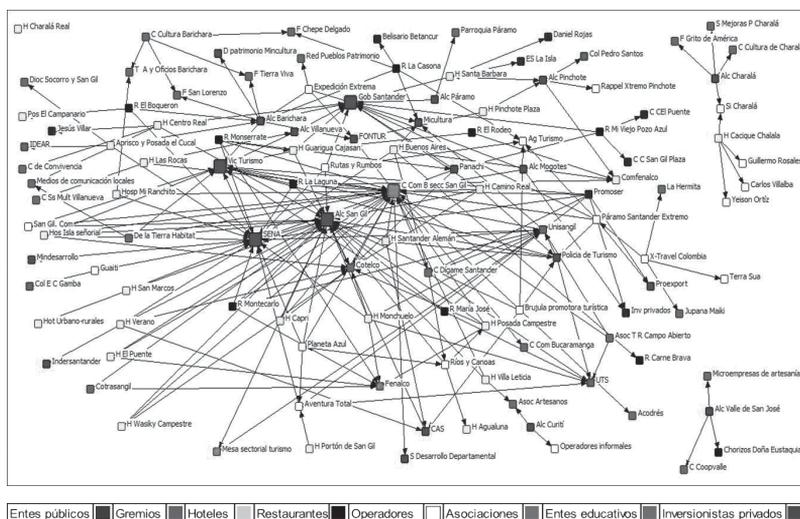


Figure 2. Rural tourism network structure of relationships in the Guantán Province.

Source: Survey applied in 9 municipalities of the Guantán Province (San Gil, Pinchote, Barichara, Villanueva, Curiñ, Valle de San José, Páramo, Charalá, Mogotes).

The overall structure of the network is of low-density and decentralized relations. Power is substantially distributed throughout the structure rather than being concentrated in the hands of any single actor. No actor is most prominent or influential due to a wider set of ties than others. Likewise, no single actor has disproportionate influence due to an intermediary role in the exchange of resources. This analysis is supported by the importance of actors such as the San Gil Section of the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce (Cámara de Comercio de Bucaramanga Seccional San Gil (CCBSS)), the San Gil Municipal Institute of Culture and Tourism (Instituto de Cultura y Turismo de la Alcaldía de San Gil (ICTAS)), and the Agrotourism Center of the National Apprenticeship Service (Centro Agroturístico del Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (Sena)). These are the most representative nodes in every sector of the network, and it is due to their structurally advantageous position that they enjoy greater power. Other actors look to them as exemplars because they have wider connections within the network and greater capacity to mediate among the others.

Relations within the network are characterized by cooperative action to promote mutual assistance among different actors in solving problems that present themselves in the tourism subsector; for example

by supporting promotional events for tourist attractions in the region. Collaborative relations also take the form of establishing educational and training processes in cooperation with educational institutions. The goal of these relationships is to establish alliances for the management of projects that promote the advancement of sustainable tourism. Commercial relations exist alongside entrepreneurial ties, the latter established to carry out transfers of services such as consultation, assistance, and quality processes. These forms of relations are infrequent, generally occurring on an annual, semiannual, or bimonthly basis.

Agreements reached within the governance network are predominantly informal, producing institutions able to generate regulatory mechanisms within the sphere of activities relevant to rural tourism activities in the province. Norms are established to regulate agreements for training processes; alliances are formed to manage initiatives to enhance the competitiveness of the tourism region; pricing structures are agreed upon; and associations are formed to improve infrastructure.

Resources are exchanged in virtue of the relations described above, and the frequency of the exchange process acts as an indicator of the level of interdependence and the rate of interactions among actors. The resources most often exchanged within the network are financial in nature, in demand by more than half of all network nodes. Trainings and consultations are also of particular importance, as measured by the volume of resources transferred. In the former case transfers most frequently involve training programs sponsored by educational institutions, such as the National Learning Service (Sena) and regional universities. The latter category entails sharing advice and consultancy services for the design and management of tourist products in order to increase supply. These resources are mostly provided by local organizations, including municipal agencies such as institutes of culture and tourism; by organizations that bring together tourism service providers such as the CCBSS; by educational institutions (principally the Sena); and by banks that operate in different municipalities within the province. Regional and national entities also offer resources, albeit to a lesser extent.

These different kinds of network relationships involving public and private actors complement each other and interact in seeking to consolidate the supply of tourism services as a viable alternative for regional development (Whittingham, 2002). Private sector participation is also important in the network. Private entities are motivated to participate in governance by policies and incentives put forward by public entities for planning, financing, and executing plans, programs, and projects to promote tourism activities.

The effects of changes in the governance network within the region of the Guanentá Province are primarily in the social, economic, and political dimensions. New power centers have come into being, evidenced by the appearance of a new business elite operating primarily in the areas of lodging, physical restoration, and adventure sports. The operators of these businesses are now recognized by public, private, and civil society entities as the principal driving forces of the regional economy. Local, regional, and national business, trade, and professional associations also play a role in the network, along with government entities in the form of municipal agencies that specialize in the management of culture and tourism.

The type of relations present in the structure of rural tourism, as described in the previous paragraphs, illustrates the transformations that have been taking place in the governance system of the Guanentá Province. These transformations are relevant to the consolidation of new power centers, the nature of formal and informal ties among multiple actors, and resource flows within the network. In turn, these changes produce transformations in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic dimensions of the region. It is on the basis of these structural changes that the governance system continues to develop and consolidate itself as an alternative for the management of rural tourism activities in the province.

Changes in the regional culture

As defined above, culture is understood in this text as the mechanism by which the rural societies interact with the environment, by managing a system of governance in the field of rural tourism. In this section we will describe the cultural mechanism through the analysis of the relation between rural

tourism and culture and the discussion of the forms in which rural tourism affects natural ecosystems, agricultural systems, and urban spaces (González, 1995, 2006; Magistro & Roncoli, 2001; Milton, 1997) (see figure 3).

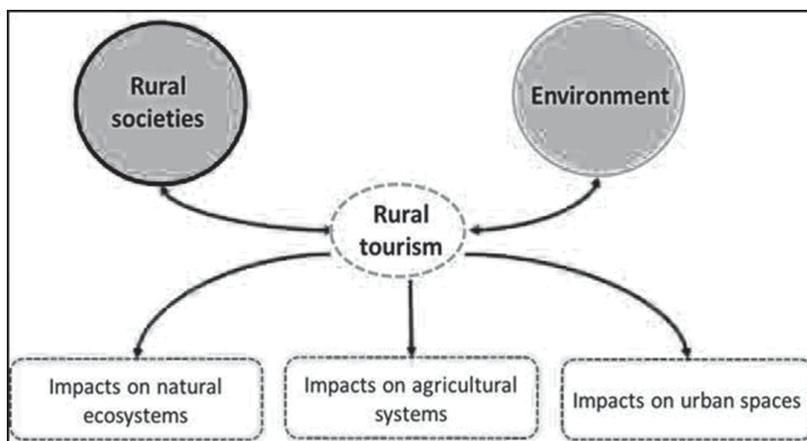


Figure 3. Implications of rural tourism for the regional culture

The impact of rural tourism on ecosystems can be observed in the following four concrete areas: water resources, fragile natural ecosystems, agricultural ecosystems, and urban ecosystems (Rubiano, 2012). The negative impacts on these ecosystems result from the development of rural tourism without an adequate system for controlling the influx of tourists, in accordance with a defined carrying capacity, and for locating services in specific areas of the region. This planning requires that decisions be made based on a solid knowledge of land use parameters and the characteristics of natural and agricultural ecosystems.

The Guantán Province is characterized by fragile ecosystems and a limited supply of water. These weaknesses have led to the development of very particular kinds of agricultural ecosystems and urban environments that depend on them. The uncontrolled influx of tourists in the region seeking to participate in activities such as canoeing, spelunking, or hiking generates a number of impacts that municipal environmental authorities have not come close to bring under control.

These negative impacts include the generation of refuse, the pollution of water supplies, the deterioration of hiking trails and waterfalls, and conflicts between tourists and rural and urban inhabitants. There have also been negative social effects such as increasing social problems related to drug use and personal security. These problems result from clashes between local culture and the culture represented by visitors. At the same time, there have been positive effects such as the recovery of the traditional ecological knowledge related to the use of local materials for housing construction, the rehabilitation of a network of stone-surfaced roads that facilitates communication among rural inhabitants, and a new appreciation for local food.

The impacts of rural tourism on agricultural systems are especially evident in the diversification of agricultural activities in rural areas, going beyond the strictly traditional. Given the influx of tourists, the agricultural calendar and food consumption patterns have been reconfigured, leading to the modification of natural, cultural, and infrastructural elements for engaging in these activities (Renting *et al.*, 2009). In this process, the tourism sector has become an alternative market for agricultural products with great potential to stimulate the rural economy, add value to cultural expressions, and offer the rural population new alternatives for work and income (Chenghua, 2007; Hernández, Muñoz, & Santos, 2007). These new conditions in the rural environment may lead to the loss of land area and labor power dedicated to agricultural activities. In this way, though, production is reoriented to occupations less exposed to the crisis of traditional agriculture.

At the same time, the presence of tourism supports local activities such as agriculture, livestock, secondary agricultural industries, and artisanry, especially in rural areas. These pursuits benefit from increased recognition as complements to tourism services and provide an opportunity, not only for material production and consumption, but also for symbols and expressions characteristic of the cultural heritage to be commoditized and consumed as an element of the tourist product (Kneafsey, cited in Su, 2011).

Increasingly frequent relations between the urban and rural dimensions increase the urban influence over rural dynamics, amplifying the relationship between these two dimensions, and in general, among all the spaces that make up a region (Dematteis, 1998; Rueda *et al.*, 2009). Elements of this relationship also help to explain the impacts of rural tourism on urban spaces. In the case of Guantán, these impacts are principally reflected in urban expansion, which is to say, the spreading of more densely populated areas into rural spaces as characteristically urban activities, such as new construction and commercial facilities, expand into nearby rural areas. This expansion is primarily seen in the construction of tourism infrastructure and new housing, and in the movement of the rural population towards the periphery of cities. There they form outlying urban zones where productive activities are highly diversified and the practice of tourism activities is intensified. In another aspect of these transformations, there is a notable effect on architecture in urban centers, where on the one hand modern construction styles are introduced and on the other traditional architecture is rehabilitated, preserving an important component of local identity as an element of the tourism product on offer.

Finally, the intensification of tourism activities leads to urban growth, associated in turn with a growth in secondary activities and especially a significant increase in commerce, which is a strong indicator of the generally greater economic dynamism in the region. Unfortunately, this growth also has negative effects such as drastically increased land prices, traffic, pollution, and a larger floating population.

As has been noted, the consolidation of rural tourism generates various positive and negative changes in the culture of the province. These transformations are reflected in changes to the characteristics and dimensions of the regional space. This dynamic leads in turn to a new process of decision making by local actors, channeled through the structure of governance and oriented to reorganizing the region in order to promote the consolidation of new economic activities and reposition them as alternative means to generate income and employment.

Discussion: The Guantán Province, a region in construction

Regions are constructed spaces, as is the case in Guantán Province. Far from being static, they are in a permanent state of change, and they form the basis for the reproduction of all human activities (Santos, 2004a, 2004b). The development of any economic function, including rural tourism, is part of this process. It is expressed in relation to the region and leaves its mark there. The phenomenon has been studied in terms of the effects of tourism on the structural elements that make up the region at multiple levels: local, regional, and national; in different dimensions: social, economic, and environmental; and regarding different dynamics: institutional, demographic, and ecological, among others (Pearce, 2003; Piñero, 2005). Together, these analytical categories determine the logic of its functioning and influence the behavior of regional actors and the nature of relations among them.

From this point of view, rural tourism as an economic activity and a social phenomenon has the capacity to reconfigure a region by transforming the dimensions and characteristics of the regional space. For this reason it is considered a process that consumes and transforms that space (Santana & Azevedo, 2005; Lopez, 2002).

Nonetheless, the introduction of tourism into a region does not occur in isolation and its effects are not limited to the changes generated by the nature, behavior, and tendencies of demand, or even to changes in supply when the provision of services and infrastructure is transformed (Pearce, 2003).

The case of the Guanentá Province provides evidence that tourism, as one more of the varied functions provided by the system of governance that steers the process of regional development, also generates other transformations in the structure of the region that are less obvious than physical and economic transformations. These other changes have limited visibility due to their cumulative nature and the longer time periods over which they operate. Guanentá is a region under construction that reflects these dynamics in the following ways:

- Changes in the structure of the region do not primarily result from the dynamics of supply and demand. They are part of a process influenced and directed by the cultural characteristics, values, and interests of the social actors participating in the regional system of governance at a particular historical moment.
- Several changes taking place in the region result from the development of the tourism industry and its impacts on the cultural and socio-political structure. These changes are accompanied by complementary activities to provide the goods and services necessary for the consolidation of tourism, generating additional functions complementary to the core tourism function and leading to the establishment of hierarchies among other urban and rural functions.
- Changes to the political structure of the region's governance provide a positive environment for consolidating the tourism function. The structure of governance is reconfigured to strengthen those policies and services that favor tourism, and traditional cultural domains are transformed by the impact of tourism. The reconfigured governance structure determines first the direction and then the continuity of the transformative process.

In this sense, tourist activity not only promotes the development of new road infrastructure and services that support the tourism function, directly altering urban ecosystems and settlements; it also transforms the relations between these elements. In the long term, it generates cumulative effects in local cultural domains and in the region's system of governance. Thus, the consolidation of tourist activity in the region intensifies these interdependencies and leads to the construction of new socio-cultural and political structures.

As a new function introduced into the region as a result of development proposals, put forth by the governance system and subsequently embraced by the regional culture, the implementation and consolidation of tourism requires a number of transformations that reconfigure the regional space. For this reason it can be said that the introduction of new economic functions in the region generates not only spatial changes, but also profound structural transformations. These transformations may be visible as in the case of urban settlements and infrastructure, but may also reflect changes in the relation between society and nature. Thus it can be said that tourism is a transformative agent in relation not only to physical space in the region (Pearce, 2003; Piñero, 2005), but also in relation to the region's political and sociocultural structure.

Conclusions

- The debates sketched out in this article suggest the need for researchers to find a balance between structure and process and to examine rural regions as open systems from a holistic, interdisciplinary, and multidimensional perspective. Said perspective has to recognize the role of factors such as culture and governance in the process of transformation and regional change.
- If we can reach an understanding of the complex interrelation between the causative factors and the effects of tourism, by integrating our ideas about tourism and its regional and cultural context, we will be better positioned to work with this interrelation in new scenarios and configurations that may arise in the future. In a more concrete sense, understanding the cultural and governance dimensions in the process when new economic initiatives such as

tourism arise at a regional level, will provide guidelines for dealing on a local level with the resulting changes and their impacts on rural societies.

- The influence of rural tourism in the regional construction process is the result, not only of its particularities as an economic function, but also of the various changes in the structure of the relationships amongst the actors involved, as well as the emergence of a new governance structure. Thus, the construction process of a region involves political and cultural transformations. Rural tourism, for instance, involves a new power structure; transformations in the ties between actors and the flow of resources, capital and ideas, as well as positive and negative changes in the structural components of the territory and its various activities developing in the region.
- The analysis presented here shows the importance of improving connectivity and cooperation among actors in the Guanenta Province, the need to improve connections between existing support services and tourism actors, and more importantly, the need for a common strategy to sketch out an alternative approach to future proposals for planning and development in the tourism sector.
- There is a need to broaden the research approach taken in Colombia in order to better study the relations between tourism, culture, and governance. The goal should be to clarify the role played by culture as a regulating factor in the development of economic activities rather than understanding it as a passive element of the region that is merely affected by those activities. It is along these lines that studies on tourism and its relation to rural regions should take on a broader approach, in order to take into consideration the many contexts in which tourism activities are practiced. In this way we will be better able to analyze the phenomenon of rural tourism and its implications in the field of rural development.

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