

Sports management strategies: governance and stakeholders in Garraf Park (Catalonia)

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Introduction and aim of paper

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in the sports use of natural areas –the sports habits surveys in the last years in Catalonia and Spain proves this fact–. The great growth of the sports practice in the natural environment has led to difficulties to their managers. This new development is occurring in the practice, both in its supply and demand towards new emotions and experiences; but it is also building a new management development to make compatible this practice with the sustainable development of the area. People responsible for this management have tried to find new strategies with the aim of bringing together the different interests of all the stakeholders involved: from the economic exploitation of the area to the preservation of its environmental conditions. They have moved to the governance for the sustainable development, not only of its territory, but also of their inhabitants and users. By this research, we want to solve this managers' problem and propose some key strategies for the governance of the sports practice in natural areas.

Research questions and theoretical background

The research questions of the investigation are the following. And we present them mentioning the most important theories that has helped us to answer them:

1. Which have been the management strategies of the sports practice used in natural areas to achieve a more sustainable development since the beginning of its sports use?
 - We have used the concept of strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1997) and the different typologies of management strategies (Heinemann, 2003).
2. Which are the different forms of governance in which these strategies are produced and which are the factors of this governance that affect them and generate a higher or lesser degree of sustainability of its development?
 - We have used the stakeholders theory (Mitchel et al., 1997), the social network

theory (Prell et al., 2008) and the collaboration theory (Gray, 1985).

3. Which have been the consequences of the diverse strategies of management identified on the degree of sustainability of the development of the natural areas?
 - We have used the theory of sustainable development extracted from the Report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development.

Methodology and research design

This presentation aims to show the real situation of the Garraf Park, a protected natural area in Catalonia, one of the cases of study of the whole research. The methods used to collect the necessary data have been, firstly, the content analysis of the existing internal and external documentation, and finally, in depth interview to all the key agents involved in the analyzed situations.

The desing of the research is based in the analysis of two sports modalities that has generated to a conflict situation at any moment in the past and has led to a process of negotiation involving different stakeholders in order to achieve a sustainable solution concerning all their different interests.

Results, discussion and implications

This results show that in both conflict situations analyzed (hang-gliding practice and climbing) the Park managers has leaded some meetings with the different stakeholders involved and the solution has been, initially, a verbal agreement, and after a process of formal meetings with technical and scientific support, it has ended with a written regulation reached by consensus. During the years of negotiation, strong relationships have been created between the practitioners of both modalities, the federation that represents them, and the Park managers and workers.

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