
Collaborative network governance and sustainability. A case study on sport management in natural protected areas

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Synopsis:

This paper shows the results of the analysis of the existing governance in the managing processes of 8 conflict situations generated by sport practice in 4 natural protected areas, and the effects on the dimensions of its development in each case. Results show that a connection exists between the collaborative network index and that of sustainability; indicating that a greater degree of network relationship and the application of collaboration processes among the stakeholders that constitute the network generate a greater degree of sustainability in the development of the territory.

Abstract:

Introduction

Scholars from diverse disciplines are increasingly concerned of the impacts of sports practice in the natural environment (Fyall & Jago, 2009) and, consequently, of the urgent need to properly manage this practice in order to reduce its negative effects towards a more sustainable development (Mallen et al., 2010).

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in the sports use of natural areas resulting in its mass profit (Dienot & Theiller, 1999); this increase was generated by the growing social trend to practice sports outdoors, such as in mountains, rivers, sea, etc. This has consequently led to an increase in the impact of sport practices on the natural conditions of the environment as well as in the effects on the social and economic dimensions of the area where they are developed. It is a very recent phenomenon with a lack of a global answer or solution neither in politics, nor in regulation and management scopes. Thus, the responsibility falls on the decisions of the managers or the people in charge of the control of the territories.

Therefore, an analysis of the factors of governance of natural areas that can determine the achievement of a higher degree of sustainability in their territories is required. That would contribute to the construction of a

management model that offers solutions for the sport managers in natural areas.

Theoretical framework

This work aims to contribute to the analysis of the effects of the mode of governance ((Mayntz, 1998; Rhodes, 1997) in the management of sport practice on the degree of sustainability (WCED, 1987) of the development achieved in natural areas. The article focuses on two of its main factors: the network of relationships (McGuire, 2011) established among the stakeholders involved and the collaborative processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Sharma & Kearins, 2011) used by them in their decision-making. It empirically assesses the effects generated by the relationships established and the collaboration processes used by the stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997) involved on the management of sport practice, on the different dimensions of the development of natural areas: ecological, economic, social and institutional. Its main objective is to determine if a collaborative network governance structure in the management of sport practice in natural areas generates better effects on the degree of sustainability of the development of the area.

Method

This paper shows the results of the analysis of the existing governance in the managing processes of 8 conflict situations generated by sport practice in 4 natural protected areas, and the effects on the dimensions of its development in each case. The information was collected through in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders. Qualitative data was quantified by the definition of indexes of indicators to allow the comparison between cases: a) collaborative network index, based on the following indicators: the number of stakeholders interconnected, the coincidence of their objectives, the degree of consensus reached, the intensity, trust, duration and regularity of their relations; and b) sustainability index, based on the 4 dimensions of the development.

Main results

Analysis of each of the selected cases and the comparison between them has demonstrated that a connection exists between the collaborative network index and that of sustainability; indicating that a greater degree of network relationship and the application of collaboration processes among the stakeholders that constitute the network generate a greater degree of sustainability in the development of the territory. Several previous studies also point out this connection (Geneletti & Van Duren, 2008; Sharma & Kearins, 2011; Antunes et al., 2004, among others).

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