South American Publishing

SAP Multidisciplinary Open. 2024; 2:103
doi: 10.62486/mo2024103

ORIGINAL

Ethnic ecotourism: an alternative for the environmental sustainability of the Rancheria River delta, La Guajira

Ecoturismo étnico: una alternativa para la sostenibilidad ambiental del delta del Rio Rancheria, La Guajira

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Cite as
Muñoz Estrada MR, Muñoz Estrada ES. Ethnic ecotourism: an alternative for the environmental sustainability of the Rancheria River delta, La Guajira. SAP *Multidisciplinary Open*. 2024; 2:103. https://doi.org/10.62486/mo2024103

Publication History
Submitted: 25-12-2023
Revised: 02-04-2024
Accepted: 31-07-2024
Published: 01-08-2024

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ABSTRACT

This study examined sustainable eco-ethno-tourism in the Ranchería River Delta Integrated Management District (DMI) as an environmental management tool to conserve and protect environmental and cultural aspects of the protected area. A mixed methodological strategy was implemented, combining documentary and descriptive research. On the other hand, the descriptive research involved unstructured interviews with experts to understand the conceptions and concepts related to the empowerment of eco-ethno-tourism for the sustainability of the Ranchería river delta, La Guajira. Aspects such as the characteristics of the Wayuu people, their social organization, ancestral history, governance, clans, myths, legends, customs, social fabric and fishing were addressed. The results obtained could serve as a tool for the management and planning of eco-etnotourism projects, thus strengthening conservation actions, sustainable use and management of mangroves and the adaptive capacity of coastal communities.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Sustainability; Ethnic Groups and Wayuu Community.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examinó el eco-etnoturismo sostenible en el Distrito de Manejo Integrado (DMI) del delta del río Ranchería, como una herramienta de gestión ambiental para conservar y proteger aspectos ambientales y culturales del área protegida. Se implementó una estrategia metodológica mixta, combinando investigación documental y descriptiva. Por otro lado, la investigación descriptiva involucró entrevistas no estructuradas con expertos para comprender las concepciones y conceptos relacionados con el empoderamiento del eco-etnoturismo para la sostenibilidad del delta del río Ranchería, La Guajira. Se abordaron aspectos como las características del pueblo wayuu, su organización social, historia ancestral, gobernabilidad, clanes, mitos, leyendas, costumbres, tejido social y pesca. Los resultados obtenidos podrían servir como una herramienta para la gestión y planificación de proyectos eco-etnoturísticos; fortaleciendo así las acciones de conservación, uso y manejo sostenible de los manglares y la capacidad adaptativa de las comunidades costeras.

Palabras clave: Ecoturismo; Sostenibilidad; Etnias y Comunidad Wayuu.

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INTRODUCTION

The region of La Guajira is a mosaic of ethnic diversity and biodiversity, offering a favorable setting for the experience of ecotourism and ethnic tourism, two specialized forms of tourism that converge in a shared environment. In this context, eco and ethno aspects are intertwined in this department's unique ecosystems.

In particular, the Rancheria River Delta emerges as a focus of development for eco-ethno-tourism activity, with a clear focus on environmental management for the preservation of this important ecosystem. Beyond its attractive landscapes, according to Corpoguajira (2013), these habitats play a fundamental role in stabilizing and protecting coastal landscapes and maintaining water quality and marine biodiversity.

Figure 1. Rancheria River Delta

However, this ecosystem is threatened by human activities due to the need for interinstitutional coordination in the planning and execution of projects. This situation undoubtedly affects the conservation of this valuable ecosystem and directly affects coastal communities, especially in fishing and aquaculture activities.

From this perspective, the proposal for sustainable ecotourism in the Ranchería River Delta Integrated Management District (DMI) arises as an integral environmental management strategy. Its objective is to contribute to the conservation and protection of the environmental and cultural aspects of the protected area while improving the living conditions of the local indigenous populations. This approach is based on a participatory diagnosis that covers the area's environmental and sociocultural aspects, aiming to propose specific sustainability indicators to guide conservation actions and promote the responsible use of biodiversity.

Figure 2. Rancheria river delta area, modified from Google earth. April 2015

METHOD

In order to approach the analysis of eco-ecotourism as a sustainability strategy in the Ranchería river delta, La Guajira, a mixed methodological strategy was used, combining documentary and descriptive research regarding the documentary research, knowledge was structured in the context of eco-ecotourism; the geographic location of the Ranchería river delta, relevant environmental research, the international panorama of eco-ecotourism, as well as the theoretical foundations, legal instruments and historical background of

eco-ecotourism in Colombia. The sources consulted included works by Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2010), Arregoces, J., Epiayu, M., Iguarán, M., Lubo, Y. and Ortiz, L. (2003), Sánchez Carrión (1995) and Sánchez (2002).

Likewise, the descriptive research was applied through unstructured interviews to explore the conceptions and approaches aimed at strengthening eco-ecotourism in search of the sustainability of the Ranchería river delta, La Guajira. During these interviews, various aspects related to the Wayuu people were addressed, including their sociocultural characteristics, their ancestral history, the legal system that governs their society, governance, customs, and socioeconomic activities.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the application of the participatory workshops revealed that active participation in policies, plans, programs, and actions is important for improving the environment and the sustainable development of eco-ecotourism.

The following key aspects of participation were also identified:

- It is a fundamental right of people.
- It is both an individual and a collective duty.
- It is recognized as a political and social dimension that promotes equality for all inhabitants.
- It serves as a strategy for the planned organization and management of activities.
- It acts as a communication tool that promotes listening and expressing opinions.
- It facilitates dialogue, decision-making, decentralization, and equitable power distribution.
- Contributes to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Promotes community self-management and empowerment of local communities.

According to the findings, there is tourism potential in the Rancheria River delta; it is clear that eco-ecotourism has all the potential with a vision of building a sustainable tourism activity for the local economy, as shown in the following graphs; however, it is necessary to have clear planning, articulation, and management of the tourism space; which leads to the environmental sustainability of this mangrove ecosystem of great importance, both for the locals and for the tourists who visit the place.

Figure 3. Economic Activity

Figure 4. Importance of eco-ethno-tourism activity

The eco-ethno-tourism research process in the Ranchería La Guajira River Delta Integrated Management District has been fundamental for learning and knowledge appropriation. Through the description and analysis of the information gathered, it was possible to obtain concrete results that led to a participatory diagnosis and the identification of sustainability indicators.

This clear focus allowed the research to be designed effectively, which generated a significant result. By carrying out this process,

it was determined that the eco-ethno-tourism potential of the Rancheria River Delta has reflected the importance of sustainable environmental management in this area.

In discussing these results, it is important to highlight the important role of community participation in identifying strategies for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. In addition, consideration should be given to how these findings can influence the planning and implementation of future eco-ethno-tourism projects with an integrated approach involving all stakeholders. Ultimately, this research process allowed me to acquire knowledge and contribute significantly to sustainable environmental management in the Rancheria River Delta.

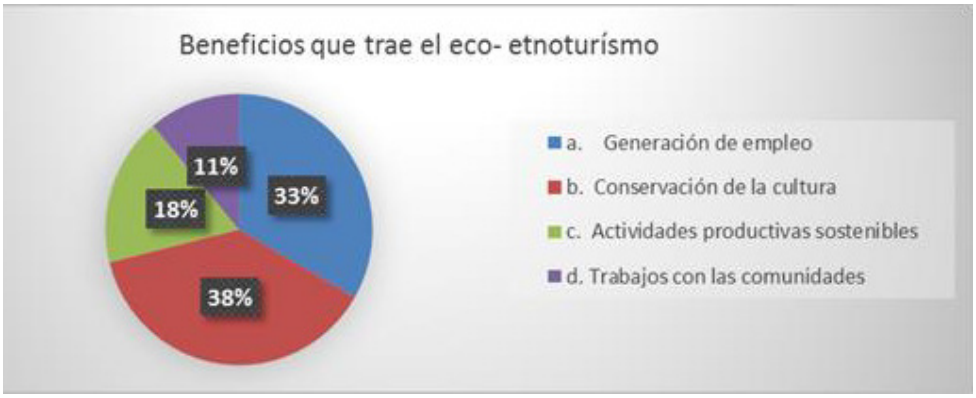

Figure 5. Benefits of eco-etnotourism

CONCLUSIONS

Once the research process was carried out in the Ranchería River Delta Integrated Management District, in the territory of La Guajira, and considering the duality of specialized tourism from the eco and ethno perspectives, the following conclusions were reached:

Protecting the lower Ranchería River Basin through the Integrated Management District (IMD) is important to preserve the mangrove forest and guarantee the ecosystem services necessary for the livelihood of local communities, thus avoiding socio-environmental and socio-economic deterioration.

Activities that exert pressure on the ecosystem include urban expansion, illegal occupation of mangrove areas, and deforestation caused by frequent burning in the delta.

The living conditions of the Ranchería River delta communities require attention from state institutions to improve their quality of life and promote ecosystem preservation.

The growing tourism activity in La Guajira, especially in the upper Guajira region, presents an ecotourism potential in the Ranchería River delta that can be used as an environmental management strategy to contribute to its conservation.

Illegal occupation of the riverbank generates socio-environmental and security problems that require intervention by the authorities to recover the eco-ethno-tourism trail and guarantee the area's security.

There needs to be more coordination between institutions and the community, resulting in a lack of continuity in ecosystem management and preservation plans and programs and a lack of effective community participation.

Local communities, such as Villa Fatima, Cangrejito, and El Pasito, expressed the need to organize and articulate government programs and plans that promote environmental and cultural processes to improve their quality of life.

These conclusions highlight the importance of integrated and participatory environmental management involving government entities, local authorities, and communities in the conservation and preservation of the Ranchería River delta in La Guajira.

FINANCING

There is no funding for this work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Miriam Rosiris Muñoz Estrada, Emérita Sofia Muñoz Estrada.
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Writing-revision and editing: Miriam Rosiris Muñoz Estrada, Emérita Sofia Muñoz Estrada.

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