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## **AlmaTourism**

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### **Misiones: how to support an approach to sustainable tourism**

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#### **Introduction**

If on one hand tourism represents an undeniable aptitude able to stimulate the economic development of a local system (this is essentially due to its sectorial atwart, its capacity to generate small and medium enterprises that well adapted themselves as a cluster, to the creation of an added value, and furthermore to its multiplying effect), on the other hand it uses rare and limited resources as production factors, on which it exerted a high pressure often leading to their disjointing, until their capacity of perpetration is thrown into crisis. These resources are essentially identified in the territory (that in the tourism, and especially in the mass one, it is subjected to a functional hierarchization; for this reason, decision-making and economic centers are located outside the leisure area, activating dependence processes, subordination and progressive impoverishment), in the landscape (that is deeply altered not only in the intrinsic and perceived quality, but also in its capacity of translation and hand down of a sign complex – therefore of significance - strongly linked to a community and its history), and in the environment (that is put under stress in its physical component by an added human pressure generally handled through an internalization of economies and an externalization of diseconomies, but that probably presents more huge damages in its anthropological component as for the loss of the traditional management relationship between community and place, which cannot be substituted by a coherent system of interactions).

These considerations led to the formulation of the "sustainable tourism" concept as cultural and economic antidote to negative impacts induced by the growth of the one that is rapidly going to be the most important economic sector of the world (exceeding the 10% of global GDP); however, in the dedicated area it often represents a "monoculture" that rejects or adapts any other activity. In 1988 the OMT (Word Organization of Tourism), assuming the "sustainable development" approach defined in the previous year by WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development), proposed a discriminative value that hardly cannot be shared as for its extreme clearness: "Tourist activities are sustainable when develop in order to maintain themselves as vital as possible in a tourist area for a limitless

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period of time, and also when they don't modify the environment and don't obstruct or inhibit the development of other social and economical activities".

To this first definition, many others have followed that have highlighted particular characteristics but, in fact, they have maintained (in spite of different undertones) unchanged the original plant: a good synthesis of the progress reported in this field is represented by the Communication on "Basic Orientation for the sustainability of European tourism" (COM(2003)716), proposed by the Unit for Tourism of the European Commission. The only real novelty has been introduced with the help of the strong nudge given to the globalization and internationalization of tourism phenomena (not only on the flow point of view, but also on that of the economic processes), that means to inflect the social sustainability of tourism with participating processes. The socioeconomic analysis of these processes indicates two essential aspects, that are the sharing of decisions for local community development (that has to maintain a main role in tourist development governance), and the participation to produced wealth (the so called "equalizing principle" that foresees a primary lapse of the benefits on the community/territory that host/generate tourism). On the concrete application to tourist districts, this kind of attention appears to be overshadowed by other components, as they are the macroeconomic or environmental apparatus in a strict meaning, so the analysis made on the tourist systems underestimate the importance for a sustainability in developing tourism (especially in spheres which are fragile or of new introduction in the tourist loop) in the processes of diversification and qualification of endogenous offer, that can lead to a stable network of interrelationship between local stakeholders able to create a social surplus (as well as a financial profit). In other words, we have assisted to a trivialization of the "sustainable tourism" concept, through a reduction process that, on the economic point of view lead to its assimilation as "carrying capacity", while on the environmental point of view lead to the introjection of "compensation" and "mitigation" concepts. To this situation it has to be added an urgent market that has intentionally mixed (blending/muddling) sustainable tourism with concepts as "responsible tourism", "ecotourism", "conscious tourism", etc. that very often present external objectives (justifying the last real estate intervention or the single trip motivation).

In this setting, it falls within the project called "Agrotourism and rural tourism for sustainable development in the province of Misiones – Argentina" (table 1), promoted by ISCOS (Board of Auditors Institute for Cooperation to Development) combined with the ONG COSPE and co-financed by MAE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Liguria and Lombardia Region, that is included in a previous action divided in assessing a study of feasibility of the project in 1998 and in a first intervention during the period 2004-2007, after the economic recovery that follows the 2001 crisis, when came into evidence the role of tourism as one of the driving sectors of the national economy and, in particular, the provincial one. These first initiatives bring to life a network of 37 agricultural farms in 7 municipalities located in the centre of the province and create the "Mesa Coordinadora del Proyecto Agroturismo". The general objective of the project is to promote an integrated and sustainable model of production and sell of agrozootecnic products and services to small and medium familiar farms of Misiones; otherwise, the specific objective is identified in reaching a coordinated type of production and sell of traditional and innovative agrotourist services that comes from familiar farms involved in the project (table 2 and 3). These objectives have been identified as an active response able to contrast the considerable processes of economic and environmental impoverishment that are taking place, caused by agricultural dynamics directly linked to industrial monoculture (environmental impact, reduction of biodiversity, slump in prices, reliance on external market dynamics), that risks to disjoint the social structure especially composed by small tenant farmer, against a high tourist potential (that is the Misiones Forest, big rivers and Jesuit ruins), that is actually exploited by only in the Iguazù waterfalls area (which dynamics of "international tourism" don't permit a direct relapse in the national territory).

### **The province of Misiones**

The province of Misiones is located in the north-east of Argentine Republic. With the provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes it creates the so called Mesopotamian region, as it is characterized by the richness of water courses (nourished by a sub-tropical climate that doesn't present a dry season, but presents rainfalls that swing between 1600 and 2000 mm), and in particular of the rivers Pepirí Guazú, Uruguay and Paraná: along their flows they create large waterfalls. On the geologic point of view, Misiones belongs to the crystalline massif of Brasilia, which is of Precambrian origins, and is covered of basaltic volcanic rocks from which degeneration comes the intense red color of the ground (ferric oxide) that characterized the province.

The stratified subtropical forest (the so called "Selva Misionera") covers a great part of the centre and of the north of the province, whilst in the southern part overbears the Mesopotamian park (or "field zone") characterized by herbaceous vegetation interchanged with vegetate forest and "as a gallery" woods that follow the river flow. Fauna is very rich and it is possible to find the characteristic toucans, the yaguareté and the yacaré.

In its 29.701 km<sup>2</sup> there are about one million inhabitants (about 4.500 persons are of Guaraní origins, the remaining is of Brazilian, Paraguayan and European origins, but just a few are of Italian and Spanish origins); the medium age is very low (24 years): it especially represents the great social discomfort, characterized by the major childish mortality rate of the whole land (30‰), a low rate of activity (37,8%), a high unemployment rate (7,5%) and underemployment rate (12%). As stated by data published in August 2003, the 69,8% of the North-East population is facing great poverty problems. Therefore Misiones is one of the poorest province of the land together with Corrientes, Chaco, Formosa, Jujuy and Santiago del Estero: in fact more than 50% of the population gain less than 140\$ per month. Misiones is also one of the province that has the major number of rural population in the whole country, with a percentage of 45%; the 27,43% of the working population is still involved in the primary sector, while only the 14,34% is employed in the so called sector "Commerce, restaurant and hotel". Small farms (which dimensions are till 25 ha.) represent about 54% of the total number of active units, but cover only 10,7% of the total agricultural production; it is significant indeed the presence of great properties: 81 enterprises, which have a surface of more than 2.500 ha. (equal to 0,3% of the total number), manage about 40% of the total surface. As said before, the major part of the income comes from industrial cultures (tobacco, tea, yerba mate, tung oil, cellulose paste), together with cultures linked to self-consumption and small breeding, but the enterprises surface maintained as forest is widespread and cover a considerable part of the plane.

There is a lack of data on Misiones tourism: surveys done at ex Jesuit missions of San Ignacio give as results 160.000 visitors per year, whilst 500.000 visitors per year are appealed by the Iguazú waterfalls, where international tourism increases constantly, even though the domestic component still appears as predominant. Anyway the perspectives seem to be good: the special geographic position in which stands out Misiones causes that 80% of its frontiers are international, acting as a bridge and a cultural union with the so close Brazil and Paraguay, and for this the province is transformed in a transitional area between South American countries included in MERCOSUR.

There are no official data on rural tourism. Anyway, a great part of the 727 enterprises that work in the sector are "estancias", located in Pamapas and Patagonia regions.

Also thanks to the previous step of the project, in Misiones there is a rural-tourist structuring, even though it still remains marginal on the actual presence point of view; this data appears to be particularly evident and paradoxical, especially if taken into consideration the

installation typology and the natural environment characteristics, apart from the tourist potential of the territory.

### **The activated dynamics**

As for the enterprises conditions, the socioeconomic problems and the environmental resources, to choose to implement a multifunctional type of farm in the territory (it means that only a part of the production is strictly agricultural) appears to be a strategy able to face (even if only partially) the situation of widespread discomfort. As consequence (wanted and expected) of the multipurpose there is the approach to a cultural diversification, that lead to a reduction of the weigh on the balance sheet of industrial monoculture that contribute to prime negative processes, that are:

- Reduction of biodiversity that still characterizes provincial natural environment;
- Destruction of natural landscape which beautifulness characterizes the entire province (vanishing of natural tropical wood, and in particular of the Araucaria Paranensis natural woods), leading to an impoverishment of the large tourist vocation of Misiones;
- Use of agricultural techniques (especially for tobacco culture) that entails the systematic employment of pesticides and herbicides that have a great impact on human health and generally on the environment;
- Unjust distribution of the production value (the major part of the added value remains to middlemen).

A great part of the previous phases are dedicated to the objectives sharing, the analysis of resources and local tourist potentialities, as well as the study of developing models in other geographic areas. If the strategy of the project (to include the small farm producer in the internal dynamics of socioeconomic development through a diversification of the production and also including the selling of innovative goods and services for rural tourism, involving especially young people and women) seemed to be easily definable, more complex appears to define the set of actions that need to be activated. As for the conditions that stands around (lack of training for producers and operators in the sector, lack of competences and knowledge in regard of associated types of organizations, narrow diversification of the offer that is of insufficient quality, lack of access to tourist market and the difficulty to integrate agrotourism into traditional tourist offers), an "integral" approach has been shared with local stakeholders, that means it will take into consideration all factors of the transformation process, that are:

- Business making aware and insemination;
- Training (producing the concerning materials);
- Planning (market placement, strategic plan, business plan, communication plan, etc.)
- Management of credit access;
- Organizational assistance;
- Technical assistance.

The first and maybe the most significant result has been the creation of a network at provincial level (with knots at zonal level), that can be self-managed from an organizational and promotional point of view of zones that already enjoy of their tourist potential, permitting the small producer (that owns enterprises with natural and cultural sources of great interest) to market its own product through a sustainable organizational structure. The sustainability is helped by the fact that the network is composed of the same type of partners, skills and abilities, and it is managed in a participative manner. In this way it is to limit the difficulty for the small farmer to access into tourist dynamics (that still remain of a

traditional type) and that has set out since only a few time to include rural tourism as a new category of "service".

The most relevant problem that has been faced is that of the overtaking of "traditional" cultural and economical behaviors, to which people who are living in conditions of great physic/functional isolation inside the territory are deeply related: practically it means to transform the operator from "farmer" to "entrepreneur". In changing processes, the existence of strengthened traditions, even though it often represents a restraint, could sometimes be a strong point. For example, the Ferie Franche (that means the implementation of farmer market in the territory, direct sell of agricultural produce where possible, even if they have been transformed with craftsmanship) has represented a valid model: in fact, even though they have withstand a mentality conversion due to their change of direction towards the commercial field, it has been possible to take up small niches of market that since now have never been exploited, highlighting nourishing and cookery traditions that come directly from their respective countries of origin; it has also been possible to implement these changes using the added value of "how to do it" and the local culture.

As it is possible to understand, the proposed scenarios are ambitious not only from a contents point of view, but also from a quantitative point of view (table 4), directly involving 114 enterprises to which will probably be added other 176 that have expressed their attention and willingness. The takeover of new agricultural firms in the network will be gradual, following a path (that starts from training and goes till promotion) managed by a unit composed of the enterprises that have been promoters of the network, that defines the mechanisms of coordination and admission according to precise standards of production, quality and supply of the proposed services. The lack of national or provincial legislation in this sector, the processes of accompaniment and service have been disadvantaged, but paradoxically on one hand it has increased the self-analysis level of (institutional or not) subjects of the processes that have been set, whilst on the other hand it has permitted the creation of a positive and subsidiary role in the network.

**TABLE 1: PROJECT SCHEDULE**

<b>Title Of The Project</b>	<b>AGROTOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROVINCE OF MISIONES</b>
<b>Country of intervention</b>	Province of Misiones, Argentina
<b>Foreseen project span</b>	2008-2011
<b>Financing institution</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Italia, Liguria Region, Lombardia Region
<b>Co-financing institutions</b>	ISCOS, joint with the ONG COSPE (Cooperation for Emerging Countries).
<b>Local Partner</b>	ONG UNEFAM (Unión de las Escuelas Familias Agrícolas de Misiones)
<b>Other Institutions involved</b>	San Pedro Municipality, San Vicente, A. Guacurarí commander, El Soberbio e Capioví – labour agreement and convention for tourist promotion of farms
	National Institute for Agropecuaria Technology (INTA) belonging to the national Ministry of Agriculture, University of Buenos Aires – Agronomy Faculty, National University of Misiones – technical assistance in training activities
	Instituto Superior de Profesorado en Ciencias Agrarias y Protección Ambiental di Capioví – gives collaboration in preparing training activities
	Cooperativa di Consumo para minifundistas e tabacaleros “Río Paraná”
	Ministry of Education of the Province of Misiones
	Movimiento Agrario de Misiones
	FUCEMA (Fundación para la conservación de especies y el medio ambiente)

**TABLE 2: THE OBJECTIVES SYSTEM**

<b>General objectives</b>	To promote an integrated and sustainable model for production and sell of agrozootecnic products and services to family small and medium farms of Misiones.
<b>Specific objective</b>	Family farm involved in the project and linked to Schools of Famiglia Agrícola of Misiones (EFAs) and the Rio Paraná cooperative will be able to product and sell in a coordinated way traditional and innovative agrotourist services
<b>Attended results</b>	1. Already created and organized agrotourism network that integrates the family farm for the promotion of agrotourism and rural tourism in province of Misiones
	2. Tourist services supplied by small producers as integral part of the diversification strategy for production and for the farm improvement;
	3. Agrotouristic and of rural tourism package sold at agencies and private or public organisations – at local, national and international level – created in a coordinated way with the network producers
	4. Suitable infrastructure inside the farms able to receive tourists and elaborate handmade products
	5. Collaboration agreement undersigned by Agrotourism network with other local development institution for the promotion of agritourism and rural tourism in general in the province of Misiones
	6. New training paths activated in secondary schools and at para-univerisitary level

**TABLE 3: THE ACTIONS SYSTEM**

<b>Result 1</b>	1.1 Creation of the equipe that will conduce and manage the project
	1.2 Creation of professional internships in Italy
	1.3 Creation of the project Board of Directors
	1.4 Creation and management of Agrotouristic network
	1.5 Building of the network head office
<b>Result 2</b>	2.1 Carrying out of a study on the potential market at local, national and international level
	2.2 Collection of data of the offer regarding host services already existing in loco
	2.3 Carrying out of a survey of the tourist offer in the involved farm
	2.4 Creation and planning of customized projects (business plan) of farms
	2.5 Survey of the training necessities of the involved enterprises
	2.6 Preparation and put into action of training paths
	2.7 Producers realize study tours
	2.8 Technical on-going assistance
<b>Result 3</b>	3.1 Definition of the strategic development plan of the Agrotouristic network
	3.2 Holiday packages processing
	3.3 Census of tourist agencies, national and international specialized institutions and undersign collaboration agreements
	3.4 Undersign agreements with local agencies in order to promote and sell Agrotourism and Rural Tourism packages as integral part of the tourist offer
	3.5 Elaboration of a marketing plan for Agrotouristic network
	3.6 Publication of promotional materials
	3.7 Creation of a web site
<b>Result 4</b>	4.1 Survey of the implementation necessities for infrastructures and equipments
	4.2 Definition of the action plan for the implementation of the infrastructure and assignment criteria of subsidies and helping credits
	4.3 Assignment of subsidies and credits and realization of infrastructure implementation and equipment purchase
<b>Result 5</b>	5.1 Undersign agreements with Municipalities in order to promote Agrotourism and Rural Tourism as integral part of the tourist offer
	5.2 Undersign agreements with the Government of the province and the House of Misiones that is located in the Capital city in order to promote Agrotourism and Rural Tourism as integral part of the tourist offer
	5.3 Undersign agreements with foreign agencies in order to sell holiday packages in Europe
	5.4 Realization of an international congress on Agrotourism
<b>Result 6</b>	6.1 Realization of a specializing training path on Rural Tourism for the secondary school students
	6.2 Activation of a para-universitary course on "Agrotourism and Rural Tourism promoters"

TAB.4: THE FIRMS SYSTEM								
Department	Municipality	EFA	Farms involved	Farms potentially involve	Direct beneficiaries (people)	Indirect beneficiaries (people)	Eligible beneficiaries	
I YEAR	San Pedro	San Pedro	San Pedro	12	2	60	40	50
	Guaraní	San Vicente	San Vicente	10	6	50	30	100
		El Soberbio	Espíritu Santo	10	6	50	30	50
	Gral. M. Belgrano	Comandante A. Guacurari, Andresito	Santa María Goretti – Almirante Brown	6	10	30	60	50
	Cainguas	Dos de Mayo,	Dos de Mayo	6	5	30	25	50
		Campo Grande, A. Del Valle	Aristóbulo del Valle	7	13	35	20	75
Montecarlo	Caraguataí	EFA Caragatay	7	14	35	30	75	
II YEAR	San Ignacio	San Ignacio Gob. Roca,	San Ignacio,	4	10	20	30	50
	Leandro Alee	Leandro Alee, San Javier	Leandro Alee	12	15	60	20	75
	Oberá	Los Helechos, Ameghino, Panambí, Campo Viera	Oberá	12	20	60	100	100
	25 de Mayo	Santa Rita, 25 de Mayo, Alba Posse, Colonia Aurora	25 de Mayo, Santa Rita, Colonia Aurora	5	12	25	30	60
III YEAR	Libertador San Martin	Capioví, Ruiz de Montoya, Puerto Rico	Profesorado en Ciencias Agrarias	6	30	30	30	150
	El Dorado	El Dorado	EFA 9 de Julio	10	15	50	40	75
	Iguazú	Puerto Esperanza	EFA Esperanza	5	12	25	30	60
	Capital	Fachinal, Posadas	Era Fachinal	2	6	10	20	30
			<b>114</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>1050</b>	



5: THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

