



## **National Policy of Environmental Education and Ecotourism: Possible Intersections and Connections with the Sustainable Development Goals**

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#### **SUMMARY**

Ecotourism is correlated, among other aspects, with the National Policy of Environmental Education and consequently, with Environmental Education; equally, it also aligns with the statement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This trio of aspects relates in terms of similarity of intentions, and the interactivity among the elements of this triad allows all these identified parts to mutually reinforce and, thus, be better achieved in the impacts related to the planning and organization of tourist activities and services. The aim of this essay was to demonstrate, through a comparative study as a methodological procedure, the possible intersections and articulations of intentions in the proposed triad. However, by listening to this set of statements that compose its objectives and constitutions, they further highlight a desire, as to how a hegemonic Western thought acts to reduce tensions and ensure good governance, rather than the timid expression of reality, especially regarding the contexts of Latin American nations; this is because their practical implementation depends on the goodwill of each leader and hardly reduces regional asymmetries in the context of various and different inequalities. Therefore, concerning ecotourism activities, for the desired "sustainable tourism" to be achieved, it is necessary to consider the presence of Environmental Education in tourism projects and, by extension, to have the materialization of the Sustainable Development Goals as the scope of actions, emphasizing the participation of culturally diverse communities in the forefront of this process for the possible development of more effective public policies.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecotourism. Environmental Education. Sustainable Development Goals.

#### **1 INTRODUCTION: ECOTOURISM**

Ecotourism (ecological tourism) is a segment of tourist activity that sustainably utilizes natural and cultural heritage, encouraging their conservation and aiming to foster environmental awareness through environmental interpretation, promoting the well-being of populations (BRASIL, 2010). By specifically exploiting natural and cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible) in a sustainable manner, it prioritizes their preservation and conservation, contributing to the maintenance of ecological balance (LEFF, 2001).

Therefore, it is a contributive activity in the sense of favouring the continuity of the biosphere and, consequently, life, including human life. This ideology alone reveals the significance of ecological tourism as one of the promoters of environmental stability (SWARBROOKE, 2000).

#### **2. OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this essay was to demonstrate, through a comparative study as a methodological procedure, the possible intersections and articulations of intentions in the proposed triad; Environmental Education (EE), Ecotourism, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative investigation (AMADO, 2017) through a comparative study (FERRER, 2002) as a methodological procedure, where a bibliographic review (BARDIN, 2002) was conducted on reliable sources related to the fields of knowledge directly involved in the

central body of this study. This includes governmental websites, United Nations (UN) sources, and electronic pages of Ecotourism organizations, among other relevant digital platforms, to gather information for this research.

#### **4. RESULTS**

For the effectiveness of this comparative study, a structured progression of investigations through a literature review is necessary. This ensures that the logical development of considerations is effective, resulting in valuable final insights for the undertaken study. For the aforementioned reasons, this results chapter is divided into four topics: 1. Intersections between Ecotourism and the National Policy of Environmental Education; 2. From Ecotourism to Environmental Education and the Sustainable Development Goals; 3. Synergies between Ecotourism, the National Policy of Environmental Education, and the Sustainable Development Goals; 4. Ecotourism, Sustainable Development Goals, Environmental Education, Greenwashing, and the emergence of listening to other statements.

##### **4.1 Intersections between Ecotourism and the National Policy of Environmental Education**

Given that ecological tourism has the bias of maintaining natural and human ecosystems (PEDRINI, 2007), it constitutes itself as one of the alternatives for Environmental Education. In other words, it belongs to the educational dimension that values and demonstrates the need for balance in environmental conditions for the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems. Environmental Education (EE) is defined by the processes through which social values, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies are built to conserve the environment, a common good for people and essential for a healthy quality of life and sustainability (BRASIL, 1999).

Due to its importance, Environmental Education has a national policy (Law), the National Policy of Environmental Education (BRASIL, 1999). In various passages of this law, there are supportive elements for ecotourism as a mediating educational possibility for Environmental Education processes. Some relevant excerpts from this law that allude to these issues are highlighted below.

Article 8 states that activities linked to the National Policy of Environmental Education (PNEA) must be developed in general education and school education through interrelated lines of action. One of them is the training of human resources. Interpreting this passage in conjunction with ecotourism, it is evident that ecotourism professionals also contribute to the so-called "general education" mentioned in the legal text, as tour guides need to have knowledge of the ecosystem they are presenting to tourists. Therefore, this training of human resources for general education applies to ecological tourism professionals, as they need knowledge related to the places where they will guide ecotourists.

Within the same article of the PNEA, it is clarified that "training of human resources includes the incorporation of the environmental dimension into the training, specialization, and updating of professionals in all areas." Another passage emphasizes the "training, specialization,

and updating of professionals in the environmental field." In these cases, ecotourism professionals also fall into the same category, reinforcing the need for environmental education for these professionals, as addressing environmental issues, especially in terms of preservation and conservation, is intrinsic to ecotourism activities.

Article 10 states that content addressing the environmental ethics of professional activities to be developed must be incorporated into training and technical-professional specialization courses at all levels. This also applies to tourism professionals, who must have socio-environmental knowledge for the effective performance of their activities.

Article 13 explicitly states that actions and educational practices aimed at raising awareness of the community about environmental issues also constitute non-formal Environmental Education. Ecotourism activities are also informal educational practices to enhance the environmental awareness of those involved.

Furthermore, in the same article, ecotourism is explicitly mentioned as one of the possibilities for non-formal Environmental Education.

Considering the above considerations, the connections between ecological tourism and the National Policy of Environmental Education are evident. Therefore, throughout this study, the term "Ecotouristic Environmental Education" may be mentioned, intending to signify "Environmental Education through ecotourism activities."

#### **4.2 From Ecotourism to Environmental Education and the Sustainable Development Goals**

In the previous section of this study, the correspondence between Environmental Education (EA) and ecotourism was highlighted due to intersecting interests in these fields of knowledge. Similarly, in this ongoing investigation, we will analyze the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they correlate with "Ecotouristic Environmental Education," i.e., education that utilizes ecotourism for teaching and learning processes related to socio-environmental issues.

The SDGs were developed within the context of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) and represent an update and detailing of the sustainable development processes proposed in Agenda 21 (UN, 1992). Agenda 21 was formulated at the II UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (UN, 1992). The purpose of this agenda is to guide initiatives and measures to be adopted globally for the achievement of economically viable, socially just, and ecologically balanced human development.

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda was formulated, as previously explained in this section of the article, to promote advancements in Agenda 21. The document resulted in seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) subdivided into 69 targets for their achievement (UN, 2015). These 17 SDGs are: 1-No Poverty; 2-Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture; 3-Good Health and Well-being; 4-Quality Education; 5-Gender Equality; 6-Clean Water and Sanitation; 7-Affordable and Clean Energy; 8-Decent Work and Economic Growth; 9-Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; 10-Reduced Inequality; 11-Sustainable Cities and Communities; 12-Responsible Consumption and Production; 13-Climate Action; 14-Life Below Water; 15-Life on Land; 16-Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; 17-Partnerships for the Goals (UN, 2015).

As stated in this study, the 2030 Agenda is an update of Agenda 21, and therefore, like the latter, it also guides the achievement of economically viable, socially just, and ecologically balanced human development, now with a more effective focus on the SDGs.

Returning to the concept of Environmental Education, understood as education focused on the preservation and conservation of the biosphere (life) through a harmonious relationship between societies and nature, it is clear that the SDGs align with Environmental Education. After all, all the SDGs converge with the goals of Environmental Education, as they promote economic, social, and environmental balances in human communities and, by extension, with the environment, essential for the stability of the quality of life of these communities.

Turning to the idea of Ecotouristic Environmental Education (Environmental Education through ecotourism activities), it is evident that the SDGs align with the interests of environmental preservation and conservation. Therefore, they complement each other, as Ecotouristic Environmental Education promotes Environmental Education through ecotourism, and this Ecotouristic Environmental Education also potentially promotes the SDGs. In other words, the SDGs are directed towards actions that promote Environmental Education, and one way to environmentally educate is through Ecotouristic Environmental Education.

In effect, tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all SDGs (UNWTO, 2019).

#### **4.3 Synergies between Ecotourism, the National Policy of Environmental Education and the Sustainable Development Goals**

Given the fundamental principles of the scope of Ecotourism, the National Policy of Environmental Education (PNEA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is evident that these initiatives converge on various aspects. Therefore, for the realization of a world grounded in Sustainable Development (SD), ecotourism emerges as one of the economic activities that prioritizes SD.

Ecotourism enables the achievement of various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in several ways. As an example, one can speculate on the following possibilities, considering each of the 17 SDGs in conjunction with elements of ecotourism:

The first SDG focuses on poverty eradication. This can be illustrated with economically deprived communities situated in areas with natural beauty that can be transformed into organized ecotourism activities, providing economic returns, social inclusion for community members, and ecological balance.

For instance, areas with speleological heritage can be developed for tourism while preserving the caves (MARRA, 2001). The preservation interest arises from the economic revitalization of the local community through speleological tours, emphasizing local education for the preservation and conservation of these heritages. Additionally, this approach can incorporate various tourist attractions for visitors, such as local cuisine, wildlife observation, historical landmarks related to the area, local ceremonies (religious, folklore, and others), and recreational water activities if available, like rowing, fishing, river baths, etc.

It's noteworthy that this array of activities, stemming from speleological heritage, can

create a network of economic opportunities for local populations, strengthening the local economy and contributing to the preservation of natural and cultural environments. In this example, these aspects become tourist attractions. All of this supports Environmental Education (hence, also fulfilling the requirements of the National Environmental Education Policy - PNEA) for both local residents and visitors (tourists), promoting ecotourism, and explicitly addressing the first SDG (poverty eradication).

The second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focuses on eliminating hunger through sustainable agriculture. Here, potential synergies between ecotourism, the National Environmental Education Policy (PNEA), and the SDGs can also be envisaged.

As an example, agrotourism is cited here, a branch of ecotourism that emphasizes tourist activities related to agriculture, and by conceptual extension, to farming and rural environments (SCHNEIDER, 2003). The influx of tourists to a region with family farming has the potential to improve the economic conditions of the area by expanding the supply of products from sustainable agriculture for tourists. This, in itself, becomes a tourist attraction that promotes the continuity of sustainable agriculture and generates income for small producers. This socio-environmental economic development can further enhance the value of enterprises through the local processing of these products from sustainable agro-pastoral activities, such as rural gastronomy services and the sale of "local" products (colonial cafes, rural restaurants, etc.). Thus, another convergent combination of actions is presented here that simultaneously addresses ecotourism, environmental education (EA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focuses on health and well-being. This is also achieved through ecotourism, as a recreational and health-promoting activity that provides opportunities for recreation that can enhance physical and mental health, which is also an objective of Environmental Education (as health and well-being depend on the environment).

By way of illustration, the activity of walking in natural environments can relax the mind and exercise the body (SCHWARTZ, 2004), creating an intersection between ecotourism activities and environmental education while simultaneously addressing one of the SDGs.

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focuses on Quality Education. Quality education cannot overlook Environmental Education, as the environmental dimension is inherent in educational processes (GUIMARÃES, 2009), even if tacitly. In other words, it means explicitly stating that environmental issues are always present in teaching and learning processes, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Since Quality Education includes Environmental Education, ecotourism can serve as an interdisciplinary platform for Quality Education, encompassing Environmental Education and facilitating its discussion in an interdisciplinary context with content from various fields of knowledge, as all areas of knowledge can involve interactions with environmental studies (LEFF, 2015).

Gender equality, SDG number 5, can also be promoted by ecotourism. This is exemplified with traditional communities where women and men play relevant roles in customs and culture, working together for the common good of these communities (DUARTE and PEREIRA, 2018). This can be experienced in ecotourism when the tour guide emphasizes, in explanations and on-site demonstrations, the contributions of both men and women to



community maintenance activities.

For instance, in communities living in coastal regions, one might observe societies where men are involved in fishing, and women are engaged in preparing seafood. In other communities, women gather vegetables (roots, tubers, fruits, leaves, etc.) for food preparation. In folk dances and other cultural manifestations, women and men respectively play roles in the socio-cultural representations within their communities. Local economies can also be boosted by ecotourism, valuing gender roles and showcasing the various socio-cultural and environmental aspects involved in these communities. The income generated from ecotourism contributes to the livelihoods of all genders in these communities, primarily women and men.

Access to clean water and sanitation, the sixth goal among the SDGs, can be positively influenced by ecotourism and Environmental Education, advocated by the PNEA.

Many ecotourism ventures are aquatic and situated in freshwater environments (CRUZ, 2003). Therefore, through ecotourism with an Environmental Education perspective, inherent in the dialogues of tour guides during interactions with tourists, one can learn about issues related to clean water and sanitation. The dynamics of ecotourism activities in these locations can prioritize learning about the aforementioned issues. This learning experience is derived not only from the explanations provided by tour guides and site managers but also from the observations made by ecotourists regarding how water resources are treated for conservation and, consequently, for the sustainability of the tourist enterprise.

In this way, ecotourism emphasizes Environmental Education focused on the challenges of conserving water resources, essential for maintaining ecosystems in a healthy and balanced manner (DAJOZ, 2005).

Clean and accessible energy is the seventh goal outlined in the SDGs, and many ecotourism ventures can contribute to this objective. This is because ecotourism environments often naturally lend themselves to the production of clean and renewable alternative energies, such as solar, wind, hydraulic, biomass, among others (BRAGA et al, 2005).

Along these lines, such ventures serve Environmental Education (advocated by the PNEA) directed at ecotourists, allowing them to become familiar with and learn about these possibilities for energy generation. Thus, we have another synergistic situation involving the triad of ecotourism, PNEA, and SDGs.

The eighth SDG, Decent Work and Economic Growth, like the other Sustainable Development Goals, can be achieved through ecotourism activities. Since ecotourism relies on the preservation and conservation of the natural environments used for its inherent tourism activities, one way to promote the necessary conditions for preservation and conservation depends directly on the inclusion of surrounding societies (MIELKE, 2009).

Through this means of socioeconomic inclusion (enabling the services, i.e., the work of individuals from local communities), the goal of providing decent work and, consequently, economic growth for these communities is achieved. Environmental Education, as in any other sustainable development goal, will always be present, as members of these communities who become ecotourism workers will be environmentally educated. Moreover, as they pass on socio-environmental information to visitors, they will also disseminate this social and environmental knowledge in a virtuous circle of socio-environmental knowledge exchange (RODRIGUES, 2000).

The ninth SDG focuses on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. Sustainable

development can also be favored by tourist infrastructure, benefiting the (services) industry of ecotourism, which inherently meets the premises of the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA) by enabling ecotouristic Environmental Education through ecological tourism activities (RUSCHMANN, 2002).

The tenth Sustainable Development Goal highlights the reduction of inequalities as its scope. Community-based ecotourism can promote social processes for reducing inequalities by enabling the growth of local economies through ecological tourism. The workers in these community-based initiatives need to be educated, including environmentally, and through their activities in the ecotourism industry, they will convey socio-environmental knowledge (Environmental Education, therefore) to ecotourists visiting the tourist attraction (DIAS, 2012).

Cities and sustainable communities constitute the eleventh topic within the SDGs. Among the examples of sustainable communities are those that have, among other initiatives focused on the local economy, ecotourism. Sustainable communities, in themselves, are pragmatic examples of applied Environmental Education because if they are sustainable, it means asserting that they coexist harmoniously with the surrounding ecosystems on which such communities depend (CARVALHO, 2008). Thus, we have here another example of the intersecting triad "Ecotourism, SDGs, and Environmental Education."

Responsible consumption and production represent the twelfth SDG. Agrotourism (SCHNEIDER, 2003) is one of the opportunities for ecological tourism activities, fostering sustainable consumption and production of food with socio-environmental responsibility. In this way, it aligns ecotourism with the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA) through socio-environmental responsibility.

Action against global climate change is prompted by the thirteenth sustainable development goal, and ecotourism contributes to this as it relies on the sustainability of environmental conservation areas for its activities (VEIGA, 2005). Conversations about climate change and the preservation of green areas can be stimulated during ecological tourism actions, as visitors are eager for environmental information about the places they appreciate. Thus, there is another alternative for ecotourism-related environmental education in line with this sustainable development goal.

The 14th and 15th SDGs respectively refer to life below water and life on land. Considering that ecotourism enterprises are located in natural ecosystems, the appeal of ecological tourism includes living beings, both in freshwater and saltwater, as well as on land. Thus, ecotourism stimulates the conservation of biodiversity in all environments (freshwaters, oceans, and terrestrial ecosystems) that serve as habitats for various forms of life (FENNELL, 2002). Therefore, the promotion of education for biological diversity (BARBIERI, 2013) is achieved through ecotourism-related environmental education.

The sixteenth SDG focuses on peace, justice, and effective institutions. Peace is directly related to social equity (a matter of justice), as the conditions that provide a quality of life for the inhabitants of a given region are necessary for peace to exist (GUIMARÃES, 2005). This social equity, in turn, depends on a more just distribution of natural resources to meet basic human needs satisfactorily, including food, security, health, access to environmental resources, etc.

In other words, for there to be peace, social and environmental justice is necessary, which is one of the objectives of the PNEA (Environmental Education for achieving social and



environmental justice). Undoubtedly, one of the ways to achieve social and environmental justice is through community-based tourism, enabling community members to work with dignity for their livelihoods, thus improving their quality of life. Therefore, ecotourism enterprises contribute to peace in terms of social and environmental justice, given their potential to enhance the living conditions of the communities involved, fostering the local economy (ACSELRAD; CAMPELLO; BEZERRA, 2009).

Finally, there is the seventeenth SDG, partnerships, and means of implementation. This refers to all previous sustainable development goals. As all the preceding goals are enhanced by ecotourism and interconnected with Environmental Education, it follows that all 17 SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals are associated with ecotourism and ecotouristic Environmental Education, resulting in a synergistic relationship in the "SDGs, Ecotourism, and PNEA" triad, where each of these concepts reinforces the others.

#### **4.4 Ecotourism, Sustainable Development Goals, Environmental Education, Greenwashing, and the emergence of listening to other statements**

Undoubtedly, the synergistic triad of "Ecotourism, SDGs, Environmental Education" is positive for all parties involved, concerning ecotourism processes and the achievement of the goals of the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, there are also potential problems regarding the distorted use of these concepts if the focus is solely on immediate profit in an ecotourism venture, at the expense of socio-environmental aspects. One such potential issue is Greenwashing (SANTILL, 2005).

Greenwashing is a term used to designate any organizations, whether public or private, that promote good environmental practices when, in reality, they act contrary to environmental or socio-environmental interests. It involves the use of environmental ideas to build a public image of being environmentally friendly, which does not align with the actual negative environmental management causing degradation (FREITAS, 2016).

The action of greenwashing has been a harmful management practice widely adopted by businesses in various economic sectors. This concept should not be confused with green marketing. However, several examples of environmental marketing (or green marketing) can be characterized as greenwashing since they involve deceptive advertising based on false environmental premises. To clarify the differences, green marketing (also known as environmental marketing, ecological marketing, or eco-marketing) is advertising that emphasizes positive environmental aspects of a product or service. If this marketing is falsified, concealing environmentally harmful aspects, it becomes greenwashing. In other words, greenwashing is false green marketing, meaning environmentally friendly marketing that lacks support in reality (DAHLSTROM, 2011).

In ecotourism, greenwashing is sometimes employed to deceive tourists. Indeed, many choose tourist destinations believing that these are establishments with environmental management and would, therefore, be socially and environmentally sustainable, respecting nature and local cultural values. However, in reality, they may be causing ecosystem degradation (ABRAMOVAY, 2012).

It is essential to have a genuine understanding of what ecotourism entails, particularly for entrepreneurs, regulatory bodies, and citizens (potential ecotourists). If a specific ecotourism venture is poorly designed, there is a risk of losing its tourism potential, leading to the ruin of tourist attractions (HINTZE, 2013).

In 2002, designated by the UN as the "International Year of Ecotourism," the "Quebec Declaration" was formulated after discussions among representatives from 132 countries forming the Summit of Ecotourism Experts. The Quebec Declaration recognizes that ecotourism encompasses the principles of sustainable tourism and adheres to the principles of active contribution to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, including indigenous communities in its planning and development, contributing to their well-being, and interpreting the natural and cultural heritage of the destination for visitors. Thus, ecotourism provides sustainable employment and income to local communities (COSTA, 2013).

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Undoubtedly, based on the study conducted in this essay, synergistic effects are observed in the intentionalities between ecotourism, the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where each part of the mentioned triad reinforces each other in a virtuous circle. However, as in any processes, it is evident that some statements still remain on the fringes of this responsible ecotourism thinking process, showing the marginalized space of various actors in the production of knowledge, practices, and wisdom. In this endeavor, dialogue, understanding, and listening from all social actors are indispensable for planning tourism practices.

During this interim, the following question arises: "What kind of development are we seeking?"

As suggestions for future studies, this essay can lead to works in the form of "case studies" that exemplify, in ecotourism, real demonstrations of correlations between ecotourism, the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These studies should consider, above all, proposals and/or models of more regional, inclusive development that establish relevance to various aspects beyond the economic and environmental, such as social, cultural, and political dimensions. Additionally, it is necessary to consider the perception of new subjects with rights in struggle, such as traditional peoples, making it essential to observe established rights and respect the fundamental right of participation of these culturally differentiated communities. This contributes to the development of territories and, therefore, to poverty reduction, in synergy with the SDGs agenda.

Furthermore, as part of management, tourism can be understood as a factor in community development. Tourism can play a key role in a more horizontal management vision, integrating various networks and sectors, from the participation of local communities and strengthening existing infrastructures and technologies to the empowerment of women and the elderly. Additionally, improving data for a better assessment of impacts can contribute to creating more sustainable and resilient tourism governance and development.

Analyzing case studies would also illustrate real situations that denote green marketing, i.e., examples of ecotourism conveniently designed and, therefore, more successful, as opposed to counterexamples of ecotourism activities that present themselves as sustainable when, in reality, they are nothing more than greenwashing (in other words, "ecotourism" actions that cause environmental degradation through negative socio-environmental impacts).

Finally, considering what Quijano (2005) pointed out, we live in a system of social domination, a product of a historical process of destroying the Other and the basis for the new pattern of power forming, supported by the naturalization of social relations of European superiority and American inferiority. It is crucial to rethink, signify, and reconsider different statements as fundamental actions for achieving real and sustainable community development, highlighting a complex and diverse composition that integrates a more dignified and just human life.

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