

CONNECTIVITY, LAND OPENING AND CREATION OF A NATURE TOURIST DESTINATION

The case of Aysen (Chilean Patagonia)

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This article analyzes the development of the Aysen tourist destination in the Chilean Patagonia, considering its close relationship with the Carretera Austral (Southern Highway), the region's first and foremost over-land route. According to the research based on surveys, interviews and participative workshops, the highway construction revealed beautiful, unique landscapes, encouraging the arrival of visitors in Aysen. The existing services underwent spontaneous adaptation leading to regional tourism, which developed driven by intercultural visitor-resident dynamics, the creation of new services and government support. Mainly, it was found that, given its intermediate evolutionary stage, the Aysen tourist destination is vulnerable to territorial and social changes generated by better connectivity and the advancing highway construction. Hydroelectric projects intending to take advantage of the new accessibility of Aysen's rivers, essential resources for regional tourism, constitute another critical factor. Thus, it is concluded that a sustainable development for the Aysen tourist destinations is feasible through the conservation of nature and local cultures, as these are the bases of tourism and of the identity of Aysen.

KEY WORDS: Chilean Patagonia, nature tourism, Aysen tourist destination, Carretera Austral.