

EVALUATION OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPONENT AND PARTICIPATION LEVEL IN LATIN AMERICAN TOURIST BEACH CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

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The tourism beaches are coastal resources of great environmental and economic importance. The beach tourism certification schemes have been created to protect those resources, at the same time promoting high level of tourism quality. However, the Latin American beaches are often the principal source of income for coastal communities that for the right to use the public mean should be considered in the management. This work has an objective to evaluate the socio-cultural component and level of community participation in Latin American beach certifications through two level analyses. First, through socio-cultural and participative objectives of Integrated Coastal Management, the levels of participation and inclusion of socio-cultural aspects were defined in the nine beach certifications. Second, under the approach of public policies, the types of participation in each certification scheme were analyzed. In conclusion, the Latin American beach certification schemes are characterized by strong top-down approach. The certifications are little participative, focusing mainly on environmental and tourism quality issues. The weaknesses in the subject of socio-cultural aspects and community participation are evident, which puts in question the effectiveness of beach certifications as a tool for sustainable management.

KEY WORDS: *beach tourism, beach certification, community participation, sustainable tourism.*