

THE CONTRADICTION OF TOURISM ON THE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN GALÁPAGOS, ECUADOR

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An analysis of the current tourism situation in the Galapagos Biosphere Reserve and its main implications to the conservation and development is presented. Biosphere reserves are a UNESCO category granted to areas of exceptional natural and cultural value, where conservation and development should be reconciled. Tourism is considered as a key strategy to foster both aspects. Galapagos, like many other insular ecosystems has few economic possibilities and tourism is one of the “inescapable” options for local development. Tourism has been growing rapidly since the 1980s, with an important increase from 18,000 visitors in 1980 to 41,000 in 1990. In the last decade more than 100,000 tourists arrived yearly. For the year 2013 more than 200,000 tourists visited Galapagos and this increasing trend remains. The increase of tourists is related with population growth and to the introduction of exotic species, which ultimately imply a risk for conservation. The main tourism modalities are cruise ship tourism and land-based tourism. Until recently, the first one was the modality with the higher number of tourists. However during the last years, land-based tourism overcomes in number the cruise ship tourism. There is a big pressure from the local communities to increase the stay of the tourists in the populated islands with the main goal of promoting local socio-economic development.

KEY WORDS: *biosphere reserves, conservation, development, sustainable tourism, Galapagos, residents, qualitative methodology.*