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## POTENTIALITIES FOR RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE COM-MUNITY OF EL CHURO, PEDERNALES

Potencialidades para el desarrollo turístico rural en la comunidad El Churo,

Pedernales

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### **SUMMARY**

The objective was to diagnose the physical, natural, social and cultural conditions of the El Churo community with the purpose of proposing the development of rural tourism, where the natural and cultural potential is included through tourism activities. Methodologically, it is within the positivist paradigm with a quantitative approach, with an exploratory scope or level, documentary type, together with the field design. In terms of tourism, a SWOT matrix was made in order to understand the context and plan. As a result, this community has geographic, natural and social characteristics with certain cultural particularities that make it potentially touristic; to this is added that the geographic location allows the practice of aquatic sports as well as sport fishing, as well as contact with the mangrove and species such as the concha prieta (black conch), used for local consumption and commerce.

**Key words:** Tourism, rural, culture, community.

#### RESUMEN

El objetivo consistió en diagnosticar las condiciones físicas, naturales, sociales y culturales de la comunidad El Churo con el propósito de proponer el desarrollo del turismo rural, donde se incluye el potencial natural y cultural a través de actividades turísticas. En lo metodológico se encuentra dentro del paradigma positivista con el enfoque cuantitativo, con un alcance o nivel exploratorio, de tipo documental, junto con el diseño de campo. Desde lo turístico, se realizó una matriz FODA con la finalidad de comprender el contexto y planificar. Como resultado se tiene que esta comunidad posee características geográficas, naturales y sociales con ciertas particularidades culturales que la hacen potencialmente turística: a esto se le suma que la ubicación geográfica permite la práctica de deportes acuáticos además de pesca deportiva, así como el contacto del manglar y especies como la concha prieta (negra), aprovechada para el consumo local y el comercio.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo, rural, cultura, comunidad.

#### INTRODUCTION

The research work is attached to the International Network of Researchers in Tourism (INVETUR), belonging to the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM), specifically in the institutional project of the Pedernales Extension called: Natural and cultural tourism in the canton Pedernales: A proposal of community tourism for local sustainable development, whose objective was to diagnose the physical, natural, social and cultural conditions of the El Churo community with the purpose of proposing the development of rural tourism, where the natural and cultural potential is included through tourism activities.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, (2015) in the project "Ecuador Touristic Potency ", which covers the tourism reality of the country in a broad manner, describes the natural and cultural resources and resolves that Ecuador is worthy of the title of "The most megadiverse country per square kilometer" and the communities belonging to the Ecuadorian coast, specifically in the Pedernales Canton, possess diverse characteristics, among which the diversity of species in the ecosystem stands out, which allows the existence of ecosystemic service processes corresponding to the structure of the geographic space. Given this, Medina et al., (2016) defines it as:

> (The ecosystems formed by one or more basic communities with the physical environment that surrounds them in a given area, presents a structure of functioning and self-regulation, as a result of the multiple reciprocal ac

tions between all its components that are instituted in a dynamic complex of communities of plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms, and the non-living environment linked to it, which makes it an ecological unit.

Being one of the most important on the planet, the marine-coastal type ecosystem, which Rodríguez et al, (2019), quoted from the United Nations (UN) (2007), points out that "about 75% of commercially exploited species spend part of their life cycle in mangrove ecosystems or depend on the habitat for their food", a situation that identifies mangroves as ecosystems of importance due to the production of matter and the generation of ecosystem services, so the words of Sosa et., al (2009) highlight that:

> Mangrove forests have a high productivity of organic matter associated with the biodegradation of plant biomass from trees and halophyte vegetation found there, which is carried out by heterotrophic microorganisms with hydrolytic activity (proteolytic or cellulolytic).

All of the above, allows the absorption of high volumes of carbon dioxide, reduces soil degradation and decreases erosion processes. Therefore, it functions as a habitat for different species, which combats climate change, a topic of universal interest due to the consequences in all areas and that generates concern in institutions, professionals and the community in general, a situation that is desired to mitigate at all times. In view of this, Bastidas and Hernández (2019) emphasize presenting the reality of climate change as follows:

> ...to show relevant aspects of climate change in a summarized, plausible, coherent and internally consistent



way, to facilitate decision making by professionals and official authorities on environmental management in mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts.

The above quote recommends that the environmental reality must be demonstrated in order to understand, expose and act to mitigate this reality, through a horizontal, democratic, fair governance that is directed towards the sustainable development of communities.

Specifically, the ecological risk to the mangrove ecosystem is increasingly intense, due to different causes that deteriorate natural spaces and biodiversity; in that sense, Rodríguez et., (2016) mention the following: "Many industries and companies in the world have turned out to be toxic and harmful to the environment". a reality that has as a consequence the decrease of natural resources, and therefore, affects the community's own potentialities, which brings as a primary need, the organization, care, protection and sustainable use of natural resources, from the implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures to climate change and ecological risks, in this specific case, through the control and monitoring of mangrove under custody, restoration, reforestation, establishment of rest periods, also known as closed seasons. Also proposed is the production of mollusk larvae and the implementation of other sustainable measures such as rural tourism.

This last economic activity belonging to the tertiary sector, within the Ecuadorian territory, has gained a significant space within the local development. Figures indicate that before the COVID-19 crisis, in 2019 nearly 2.4 million tourists arrived in the country, which translated into dollars would represent approximately 2,287.5 million. With the presence of 24,257 tourism establishments including A&B, lodging, community tourism centers, travel agencies and transportation (Ministry of Tourism, 2020).

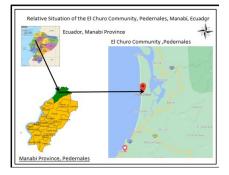
However, during the health crisis, tourism activity found mechanisms that allowed it to sustain itself, as evidenced in a study developed by the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) (2020a) reflecting that in the new normality, most domestic travelers selected the coastal region as a destination, this statement is the result of the selection of 48% of respondents who said they visited sun and beach destinations, while 10% went to protected areas. This situation allows us to propose the community of El Churo as a possible tourist destination, due to its geographic, environmental, natural and cultural reality in the northern part of Manabí.

The community of El Churo belongs to the canton of Pedernales and is located 19 kilometers from the cantonal capital, within the jurisdiction of the rural parish of Cojimíes, specifically on the shores of an arm of the estuary of the river of the same name. According to the last population and housing census, it is estimated that there are approximately 10 families living in the area, with a total of approximately 500 inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), 2010), most of



whom are engaged in fishing activities, which complement and diversify with the marketing of these products and another good part that is used for the preparation of gastronomic dishes typical of the region. To get to the community of El Churo you can go by land, from Pedernales, arriving to Cañaveral, the trip is 19Kms with total pavement. The stretch from Cañaveral to El Churo has a distance of 10 km and has no asphalt, however, it is also possible to enter by sea, through the estuary of the Cojimíes River.]

Figure 1: Map of the community El Churo



Source: Prepared by the authors.3

El Churo, like many of the communities that make up the rural parish of Cojimíes, experienced what several authors call "the shrimp boom" between the 1980s and 1990s, precisely because of its location on the banks of the Cojimíes River estuary, a scenario that lends excellent conditions for the cultivation of this crustacean, however, this boom not only consisted of shrimp production, but also in the capture and reproduction of shrimp in laboratories (Romero, 2014, p.60).

To this reality, Pedernales Canton is a national reference and is denoted in the Development and Land Management Plan 2014-2019 (Decentralized Autonomous Government of Pedernales Canton, 2014), which states that the shrimp sector:

> ...is the one that economically has been contributing significantly to the canton of Pedernales, just remember that shrimp production began in 1970 and by the nineties had the structure of 12,000 hectares of shrimp farms located in the estuary of the Cojimíes River. In 1999, Ecuador became the second largest shrimp supplier to the United States and the first to Italy, France and Spain, bringing important economic income to Pedernales (p. 58). (p. 58).

Although shrimp production represented important contributions to the development of the canton of Pedernales, including communities such as El Churo, between 1990 and 2000, the white spot virus reduced the production and export of crustaceans, causing the closure of operations in several national and foreign companies. This crisis affected the Ecuadorian economy and gave way to the "reinvention" of Pedernales, not as a shrimp or fishing producer, but as an emerging tourist destination characterized by a sun and beach offer (Alcívar & Cedeño, 2021, p.8).

It is important to emphasize that the World Tourism Organization (WTO) understands the importance of rurality in the practice of tourism and has taken the right decisions in favor of rural tourism, such as declaring



2020 as the year of "Tourism and Rural Development", an initiative aimed at ensuring that all actions taken by this organization, which governs tourism in the world together with allied countries, are directed precisely at improving the quality of life through the practice of tourism in rural areas, as in the case of the community under study.

Rural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a broad spectrum of products linked to nature activities, agriculture, rural lifestyles and cultures, angling and sightseeing (Santos, 2021), with the possibility of tourism development based on traditional activities (Inostroza, 2008).

In this sense, the implementation of rural tourism in the community can represent a series of opportunities for community development through a new work modality that involves the active participation of different actors, where nature is used through its natural resources, culture for the creation of tourist programs and packages, and gastronomy as an experiential experience, that is, after fishing or gathering sea products, these are prepared and served to the visitor, which translates into a more meaningful experience.

In addition, these combined elements could lead to the need for tourism investment for the development of lodging and A&B establishments, in order to respond to a growing tourism demand. This last statement would be consistent with the canton's strategic planning, which seeks to lay the groundwork for tourism investment through economic incentives (Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Pedernales canton, 2020).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research is within the positivist paradigm with the quantitative approach, with an exploratory scope or level, documentary type, along with field design, (Hernández et., al 2018). The techniques used were documentary analysis, participant and non-participant observation, written survey and semi-structured interview. through an instrument called guestionnaire of mixed questions (Arias, 2012). A SWOT matrix was used to understand the context and plan the following processes through the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in addition to the use of three cards for the tourism characterization of communities detailed in the Manual for local tourism diagnosis, a guide for planners (Ricaurte, 2009).

### **DEVELOPMENT**

The community of El Churo has geographical, natural and social characteristics with certain cultural particularities that make it a potential tourist destination; This is complemented by the existence of natural resources such as mangroves and species typical of these ecosystems, some of them the case of the black conch, exploited for local consumption and trade derived from this, but also by the same cultural process of capture inherited from generation to generation, which allows the develo-

> pment of tourism products in order to take advantage of social processes within the rural tourism activity.

> Although the community has a very attractive tourism potential, like most of Ecuador's rural areas, it faces several challenges: on the one hand, insertion into a highly competitive and organized market (Cabanilla, 2015), which requires a well-founded local development strategy to respond to the growing demands of the tourism market. On the other hand, what entities such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2008) have called "the paradox of poverty" that affects many communities: being potentially rich in attractions, these have not been able to be transformed into resources and business assets to be valued through the market".

> Particular case of the community of El Churo, which despite the common characteristics of rural areas, has positioned itself as a tourist destination of gastronomic interest (Bravo, 2018, p.10), due to the fact that during the month of August the "Festival de la concha" is developed, which attracts locals and strangers, in the referred event a series of typical dishes of the place are prepared, which highlights the ceviche de concha, arroz colorado de concha, among others, in addition to the culinary activities there are artistic presentations of singing, dancing and theater, also the queen of the festival and the largest concha prieta are chosen, elements that conjugated arouse the interest of the tourist (Municipality of Pedernales, 2019). It is worth noting that

only during this event is the transit of tourists in the community observed, which reflects that tourism activity is minimal throughout the year, so that inhabitants must engage in other economic activities, or suffer from unemployment; the latter group is dominated by single mothers, young people and older adults.

Another activity developed in the community is artisanal and sport fishing; this is confirmed by the "Management Plan of the El Churo community" (Sana Ambiente, 2019, p.21), when mentioning that the locality has an organizational structure represented by the Association of Artisanal Fishing Production El Churo (ASOPROPECHU), it is formed by a legal representative, a president and secretary, and the Association is formally recognized by the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy, as well as by the Transparency and Social Control Function of the Ecuadorian state.

It has an internal regulation, which mainly regulates, controls and supervises the extraction, consumption and participation of people in the capture of natural resources of the community, in addition to stipulating the respective sanctions for those who violate the internal regulations. It is worth mentioning that the board of directors and all its members have the obligation to protect, regulate and sustain the mangrove, supported by the Ministry of the Environment (MAE) through ongoing environmental education training, regulation of the size of the catch of species in the area, mangrove pro-



tection tours, among other activities. Likewise, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as GIZ (German Cooperation), provide support through programs and projects aimed at training the community in their potential and organizing the association for sustainable development. In addition, the Pastoral Social Organization Caritas provides training in crochet sewing, which reaches the community periodically in order to instruct interested people, especially women in the community, in this art (Sana Ambiente, 2019, p.21).

According to Jaramillo (2015, p.23), the economic system of the Cojimíes Parish is characterized by agricultural production, livestock, handicrafts, tourism, aquaculture and fishing, which reflects that the main livelihood of the population is based on the extraction of natural resources of the area, case in point, One of them is the conch shell, which is extracted along with guariche and occasionally blue crab, and the people who catch both species are known as "cangrejeros" (crabbers). Within the geographic area of the community there are at least two species of black conch (concha negra (prieta), the Anadara tuberculosa and Anadara similis) (Sana Ambiente, 2019). Both species are characterized by inhabiting estuarine zones (estuaries) or mangrove areas, in muddy, clayey or silty-clay substrates, known as ñanga, which receive daily tidal flooding.

The shells are found in the muddy sediments between the roots of trees, especially the red mangrove (Rhizophora mangle), which grows along the edges of the lagoons (Lazarich et al., 2009, p.4). For a better understanding of the reader, we take the words of Gutiérrez (2005) where he exposes this reality of the conch:

> They feed by filtering organic matter, mainly detritus deformed by the fragmentation of decomposed mangrove leaves. Among the main characteristics of the life cycle of the species of the genus Anadara, the following stand out: sedentary habit, slow growth rate, external fertilization with short-lived planktonic larvae, which are then fixed to the substrate or on adult shells, and spawning almost all year round. In studies carried out in different points of the Nicaraguan Pacific, spawning was observed between May and September. Sexual maturity is reached in individuals of 21 mm for Anadara similis and 23 mm total length in Anadara tuberculosa.

In addition to the aforementioned species, it is common to find other types of mollusks such as Mytella strigata (Chorga) and Crassostrea rhizophorae (Mangrove oyster), which are also used for sale and local consumption.

In the interview conducted on July 9, 2021 with Doña Olives Mirella (2021), she indicated that she has been collecting conch for more than 20 years, she said that previously there were not so many houses in the area, and that this activity was simpler, since it was just a matter of putting on clothes, gloves, boots, getting out of the house and collecting the resource, However, according to her, the shrimp farming sector has cut down a large part of the mangrove forest, so this resource is now scarce in the vicinity of the community and collecting conch involves taking a "fiber" boat to travel about 30 minutes

> to capture sites such as El Morro, Juananu, El Toro and Chamanguita. He also emphasizes that around 90 people are involved in this work, most of them women, who are careful to collect only those permitted by the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources. (2008):

> > Art. 1.- A permanent prohibition is established for the concha prieta in the species Anadara tuberculosa and Anadara similis on its minimum size. It is only allowed the extraction, transport, possession, processing and commercialization of the concha prieta, in all the national territory, whose size is 4.5 cm, or more, measured from the front side to the back side of the shells.

All of this, with the purpose of guaranteeing the sustainability of the resource, and empowering the communities to care for it, especially single women, youth and older adults, and to ensure the protection of the territory. Figure 2 shows the process of shell collection by the inhabitants of the community, and the experience they wish to offer as a tourist experience typical of the Ecuadorian coast (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Shell collection in the community of EL Churo





Artisanal fishing is another of the most common activities in this town, and the inhabitants have developed it in such a way that there are different fishing methods, ranging from the use of nets of different sizes and dimensions depending on the type of fish or shrimp to be caught. Another modality is fishing with hooks, which is less efficient than the first, due to the volume of catch, but more sustainable in the timeline because it is less aggressive. The use of "spinel" is also used, which in Anglo-Saxon terms is known as "long line" and consists of placing several hooks with bait on a larger line; in general, it is a clean and selective fishing (Cortés and González, 2015).

Another interesting testimony is provided by Mirella's father, in the interview conducted on July 9, 2021 with Don Olives Jacinto (2021), a citizen who has been fishing for more than 30 years and comments that the most common fish species in the area are snook, sea bass, sea bream, snapper, cabezona, mullet and curruco; and like the conch, most of these re-



sources are used for their own sustenance and on a smaller scale for commerce. This is evidence of the culture in the community, the transmission of knowledge and customs from generation to generation, which generates a characteristic contribution to the community and to each family. (See figure 3)

Figure 3: Inhabitants in their daily fishing activities



Regarding the results of the applied instrument of tourist characterization card of communities proposed by (Ricaurte, 2009), it was possible to identify that the community has electricity services, there is no telephone signal, there is an educational institution named Monica Nazareno, which training from levels: nursery 1 and 2, initial, basic education and high school. (Sana Ambiente, 2019). Given this, below is a video in QR code, where the reader can view it by scanning with the use of your smartphone (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Tour of the community El Churo



Source: Delgado (Video Creation and Editing). (2021).

The community is dominated by the following mangrove species: Avicennia germinans (Black Mangrove), Rhizophora harrisonii (Red Mangrove) and Laguncularia racemosa (White Mangrove) and birds such as: Ardea alba, Ardea cocoi, Coragyps atratus Gallinazo, Megaceryle torquata, Crotophaga sulcirostris, Elanoides forficatus,

Furnarius cinnamomeus, Quiscalus mexicanus, Pelecanus occidentalis, Phalacrocorax brasilianus. As for fish species, the following are present: Catfish pinnimaculatus, Selene peruviana, Brycon henni, Dormitator latifrons, Lutjanus guttatus, Lutjanus

argentiventris, Centropomus viridis, Mugil cephalus, Brotula clarkae, Argyrosumus regius, Cynoscion phoxocephalus, Epinephelus analogus, Peprilus medius, Sphoeroides annulatus (Sana Ambiente, 2019). In terms of tourism infrastructure, the community has an artisanal fishing pier with basic conditions, in addition to a small boardwalk as a stage for local recreation and leisure. However, the community lacks lodging establishments; however, there are lodging services nearby in the communities of Cañaveral, Pedernales, and Cojimíes. The situation is the same with respect to food and beverage (A&B) establishments.

In terms of cultural manifestations, the canton of Pedernales celebrates its cantonization dates through festivities on March 31 of each year (Farfan, 2016, p.55), while the parish of Cojimíes to which the El Churo community belongs, celebrates its parochialization every December 14 (Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado de la parroquia Cojimíes, 2019). Similarly, in August, the month of culture and tourism is celebrated in Pedernales and the El Churo community is the organizer of the Festival de la Concha. However, due to the reality generated by COVID-19, during 2021 it was held during the month of October, specifically on the 30th.

According to the Manual of tourist attractions prepared by the Ministry of Tourism (2018), this festival is of the Type: Scheduled events, subtype: Gastronomic events, Description: Competitions, championships, meetings, of gastronomic type. In this sense, it is stated that the community has a series of cultural manifestations to achieve the development of tourism activities of rural type, however, the starting point is the generation of tourism products and trainings to the community, to achieve that involvement in a market as competitive as tourism is.

In this sense, a SWOT matrix is presented below in order to understand the reality, plan and act in the face of favorable and adverse situations.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul> <li>Community organization.</li> <li>Presence of natural resources.</li> <li>Presence of a cultural manifestations (Festival de La concha).</li> <li>Access roads in good condition.</li> <li>Educational institution with levels: kindergarten, elementary and high school.</li> <li>Management pain for the area destined for shell capture.</li> <li>Volunteer team for community cleaning.</li> </ul>	There are no lodging facilities.     There are no A&B services.     Relatively low level of education.     Inabilatans not trained in the tourism     area     Unemployment.     Lack of fourist signage.     Poor tourism promotion.     There is no telephone or internet signal
Oportunities	Threats
<ul> <li>ULEAM technical support for the development or trund areas.</li> <li>Support from state portfolios.</li> <li>NGO intervention.</li> <li>Modus vivendi of the inhabitants.</li> <li>Modus vivendi of the inhabitants.</li> <li>New market niches interested in experiential tourism.</li> <li>Declaring the Cojimige setuary Protected Tourism Area (ATP). Constitution as a community tourism center.</li> </ul>	Oreation of new magical lowns by the MINTUR.     Orearist seasonality of the canton. Logging of the magneyore ecosystem.     Oreadual disappearance of marine resources.     Migration (rural exodus). Acculturation.     National economic recession.

## Source: Prepared by the authors

As has been observed, the community of El Churo has a series of geographic and natural characteristics that would allow the development of tourism activities in various modalities; sun and beach tourism, nature tourism, sports tourism, cultural tourism, among others, as long as there is the will to accompany and develop tourism products and services, since the locality is open to this new modality of work.

In addition, the same traditional economic dynamics (fishing, collecting and catching shells and crabs)



can be used to establish experiential tourism activities, since it is understood that the construction of the tourist experience is not only visual, but also tactile, olfactory, tasting and auditory.

It is a sine qua non requirement to understand human talent as the most important resource in tourism, since tourism is a social phenomenon that involves the interaction of people, i.e., it is the people who make the activity possible and ensure quality services, hence the importance of constant education and training of local tourism stakeholders.

It should also be pointed out that tourism activity should be seen as part of the framework of local economic activities and not as a whole, tourism should be considered within the different work modalities, taking care that traditional activities are not abandoned, as these would form part of the same local tourism offer.

Finally, from the research project in its future phases, the commitment to accompany the community in at least three moments is maintained: the development of tourism products and services (routes, tourist packages, programs, activities, etc.), since at the moment there are none. The establishment of a promotional strategy that allows the positioning of the community in the target market and finally, once the community is constituted as a CTC, support in the process of marketing and selling their products. Another interesting aspect of the community is that it is located very close to shrimp farms. Previous

research has shown that before being a threat, the shrimp production process has been seen as an opportunity for the creation of tourism programs, products and services (Guzmán & Encarnación, 2020) that allow visitors to become involved in the process, thus generating a diversification of the local tourism offer.

# CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is also important to recognize some of the possible challenges that the community will have to face in order to consolidate rural tourism development. On the one hand, there is the challenge of becoming a Community Tourism Center (CTC), so that, once the recreational spaces and activities have been developed, the community will acquire the skills to implement tourism activities related to: lodging, A&B, transportation, operation, organization of events, congresses and conventions.

It is necessary for the community to implement a local development strategy to promote rural tourism, since the market segment interested in this type of tourism has greater demands that are linked, for example, to the care of natural resources, since it is understood that they are the main attraction that the tourist wants to know and the transcendental motivation to make the trip.

On the other hand, the same strategy should consider the correct application of biosecurity protocols, both for people dedicated to tourism activities and for visitors, as well as articulating the accompaniment of more and new state portfolios, as

> well as the private sector, in such a way as to generate interest in investing in the locality, as long as the active participation of local human talent is ensured in any modality of work, as a response to a true process of community development, without generating paternalism.

> The development of tourism products and services is another challenge that requires fine-tuning, since they must be generated based on the existing resources in the locality and the recognized demand at the cantonal level, so that there is coherence between what the community has and what can be converted into a tourism product, which is why it is important to coordinate with the academy.

> Similarly, once tourism products and services have been developed, promotional mechanisms and marketing channels must be implemented. The challenge here would be linked to Internet access, since, in line with current trends, it is seen as one of the most appropriate means to promote tourism destinations, both through social networks and websites, which are used as marketing and sales channels.

> The planning of the tourist area or territory is another challenge that requires special attention, considering that it is necessary to define which areas or places are the most favorable for developing tourist activities (sports, lodging, etc.), so as not to compromise vulnerable areas and species that may be slow to recover.

> Finally, as a major challenge, the longed-for sustainable development

appears, that is to say that tourism activity should be seen as a mechanism to achieve social organization, but that, in addition, it should allow the management of economic resources in an equitable, responsible and supportive manner, thus ensuring collective benefits, which intrinsically evoke the correct use of natural resources and their preservation, achieving their permanence in the timeline.

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