

**Natural heritage and tourism in a higher education institution in South Mexico**

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Received July 19, 2017; Accepted December 27, 2017

**Abstract**

The objective was: Synthetisize the content of the Learning Unit (UA) Natural Heritage and Tourism into the Master Science: Sustainable Tourism Development at Autonomous University of Guerrero (UAGro). The method used was sustained in the documentary material checking: archives, books, magazines, Web pages on Internet, printed statistic data consulting, digital data bases and that included the direct observation, exploratory routes, photographic interviews with members of non-governmental organizations. It was developed according to the geographical approach which involved the spotting of the state of Guerrero in the national territory, the reading of printed and digital information about that Master's Degree, as well as the relationship between local economic and social characteristics; all of this enriched with the social and formative approach. In this sense, the approach is multimodal or mixed since the qualitative and quantitative points of view through and they define the reach of this investigation with explanatory character. The results were: a compilation of works which appeared in the book "Sustainable Management of Tourism" was cited. The book was published in 2014 by PRAXIS publishing house as a reference book for students who are masters. It has to do with the natural heritage-tourism relationship. At the beginning of 2016 the proposal of contents of the homonymous Learning Unit for the Master's level supported on the Competencies-Based Approach (EBC: Enfoque Basado en Competencias) was developed. To conclude, I can say that: 1) the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism contributes in a solid way to the growth of graduate students with competencies which allow them to make innovative proposals about situations society demands; 2) the topic natural heritage and tourism means an educational process of systematized character, involving facilitators, students and the information they handle and 3) education based on competencies and learning and teaching the natural heritage-tourism relationship are important to understand the world around us, every time more globalized.

**Natural Heritage, Tourism, Higher Education Institution, Guerrero, South Mexico**

**Citation:** NIÑO, Naú. Natural heritage and tourism in a higher education institution in South Mexico. ECORFAN Journal-Mexico 2017, 8-19: 28-38.

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## Introduction

Mexico has great physical-biological wealth that generates environmental goods and services through its biodiversity and wild spaces. It has motivated the adoption of a conservational attitude to save the natural patrimony of the country, since the FPAM are an alternative to maintain the integrity of the ecosystems. At the moment, the declaration, handling and administration of these areas are in charge of CONANP (*Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas*, which means National Commission of Natural Protected Areas) whose policy tends to favor processes of supporting development in which diverse sectors of the national society, and the restraining and reverting of the degradation that hits the atmosphere and its natural resources are implicit (Conanp, 2016). Therefore, to preserve habitats in their natural state demands to maintain some areas in the margin of the anarchical human intervention (Niño, 2015b).

First of all, we would like to refer to the definition that was proposed in the 90's of the last century about the Protected Natural Areas and the own characteristics of each category that were united in the LGEEPA (*Ley General del Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente*, which means: General Law of the Ecological Balance and the Atmosphere Protection).

LGEEPA defined the zones of the national territory and those on which the Nation exercises its sovereignty and jurisdiction as ANP in which the original atmospheres have not been strongly altered by the activity of man and have been subject to the protection regime (Porrúa, 1991:2-3).

The actual competitive environment which surrounds educational organizations and institutions has allowed working on the creation of new pedagogical actions (Tobón, Pimienta & García, 2016). Here is where the educational research and action favor the changes in teaching practice (as part of the pedagogical act), and at the same time allows the creation of new didactic strategies in order to exploit the learning process of the students (Tobón, 2014).

The general purposes of analyzing the issues related to natural heritage are due to the fact that the great variety of terrestrial and marine sights for tourist purposes have been degraded one way or the other. That is why the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública), the National Council of Science and Technology (Conacyt: Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología) and the members of postgraduate programs registered in the National Register of Postgraduate Quality (PNPC: Padrón Nacional de Posgrados de Calidad) have undertaken the immediate educational policy goal of evaluating the learning actions between students and facilitators through the orientation on the creation of case studies and the integration of the Portfolio of evidence which must contain the work of grade realized during the two and a half years of study by the Master's Degree students.

An example of how to succeed in setting into practice the strategy of the promotion of basic and applied research in natural heritage and tourism of tourism can be achieved through: a) the review of theoretical referents, b) theories, c) methods, d) quantitative and qualitative technics, e) classroom exercises and f) field practice in hotels, all of which can be realized solo or in teams, in the classroom or outside of it. The work, as a sketch, and completed, must be in a personalized Portfolio of evidence.

The fields of learning which form the curriculum of the Master's Degree in Science: Sustainable Management of Tourism (MCGST: Maestría en Ciencias: Gestión Sustentable del Turismo) in the Autonomous University of Guerrero (UAGro) stimulate the development of generic competencies in students. They were expressed in the following categories: self-determination, self-care, expression and communication, critical and reflective thinking, self-learning, cooperative working and participation being responsible to society. All the aforementioned will get the student a reflective, critical, creative and cooperative profile with integral education.

The idea of contributing on the conservation of the earth's natural heritage from academy has become strong for the last sixty years. Man has realized that natural resources are not in exhaustible and it is impossible to survive without them. That is why during these sixteen years of the XXI century it is necessary for the Higher Education Institutions (IES: Instituciones de Educación Superior), in Mexico and worldwide, to include in their Curricula (PE: Planes de Estudio) Learning Units that have to deal with the growth and exercise of a quality and social integration education oriented to the conservation of the natural heritage and the responsible exercise of tourism, even in the natural heritage (Niño, 2014).

In the case of UAGro, such an issue is remedied, as much as possible, in the Learning Unit (UA: Unidad de Aprendizaje) Natural Heritage and Tourism for the MCGST where theory and practice are joined through the Competencies- Based Approach (EBC: Enfoque Basado en Competencias, Cruz & Niño, 2013). That is why the *goal* was to synthesize the contents of such Learning Unit.

The Learning Unit (UA) Natural Heritage and Tourism was created in the first half of 2016, so in this essay the new version of such Learning Unit (UA) corresponding to the second semester of the curriculum of the MCGST of the Learning Unit in Acapulco, Guerrero is presented. According to such curricula every week there are three hours of theory, two hours of practice and one hour of research, a total of six hours a week, times sixteen sessions, it equals 96 hours per semester, which are worth six credits with status in the Learning Unit (Niño, Almazán, Saldaña & Tobón, 2016). The main *goal* of the Learning Unit (UA) is to make students develop competitive skills focused on basic and applied research toward natural heritage and tourism, whose significant learning allows students to propose real solutions to concrete problems about protected natural scenery, even green areas of hotels in Tecpan, Acapulco and Taxco (in the state of Guerrero), as well as hotels in Guadalajara (in the state of Jalisco).

One of the two Lines of Creation and Application of Knowledge (LGAC: Líneas de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento) of the MCGST is called Sustainable Environment and Tourism, which relates to environmental and economic aspects, where the territory is the support of the interactions between natural heritage and tourism, which are supposed to enable the achievement of sustainable development in specific sites that contribute to the global ecological balance.

Research problem. At the level of Master's Degree, there are many examples of schooled and semi-schooled studies in Mexico, even on line. Then it is convenient to know which the strategies that were applied in those studies that are part of PNPC-Conacyt are, and especially of the MCGST in UAGro.

Goals of research. They meant to display the actions that were realized in the MCGST whose antecedent was the Master's Degree in Tourist Development (1988-2011) at UAGro, in Acapulco. On the other hand, in the particular goals, the updated historical antecedents were synthesized, as well as the structure of the UA. Both, among other things, brought about the inclusion of the MCGST in the PNPC with a status of Newly Created Master's Degree on September 13, 2013, and the change of status to Developing Master's Degree, before Conacyt on July 13, 2016. A positive outcome on the matter is expected to be official on September 13, 2016.

The purpose of the essay is to increment the interest in the flora and fauna elements of the Mexican natural resources. It is important the planning of resources accompanied for better environmental management has resulted in maximal preservation of the national territory and to get the ecological equilibrium. This act increase the esthetic of the nature reserve and the environmental educational potential, the cultural knowledge and human welfare of the Natural Protected Areas. The flora and fauna provides the visitors with a place to recuperate physically, mentally and spiritually.

Research question: How is the UA formed?

The hypothesis was that if the positive actions developed and implemented by facilitators of the Basic Academic Nucleus (NAB: Núcleo Académico Básico) of the MCGST have been positive to explain the relationship between natural heritage and tourism, then they can be adapted to other Master's Degrees in different geographical enclaves around the world (Niño, 2015a).

The method. It was developed according to the geographical approach which involved the spotting of the state of Guerrero in the national territory, the reading of printed and digital information about that Master's Degree, as well as the relationship between local economic and social characteristics; all of this enriched with the social and formative approach.

The working method was based on the theoretical concepts of the social and formative approach, which allows the analysis and relationship between physical and geographical elements with social and economic aspects. The theoretical-methodical elements of the social and formative approach "had a great vogue due to the paradoxical increase of environmental and tourist issues worldwide" (erosion, lack of food and water, pollution, deforestation, etc.; Niño, 2015b:23).

In the first place, it comprised the consultation of printed and digital literature. Later, a sketch of the contents of the UA through an academic analysis was realized. Finally, the contents of the UA were definitely elaborated and were included in the curriculum of the MCGST of UAGro.

The development of the social and formative approach involved office work, which included the consultation of specialized literature about topics related to social and formative approach, complex problems, project working, curricular design, and learning guides. All this work was done in different libraries and map libraries in Mexico City, or in situ via internet. The information was processed at the building where the MCGST is taught. Other activities realized there were: data processing and its display in charts, explanatory texts and final editing of the text.

Among the results, a compilation of works which appeared in the book “Sustainable Management of Tourism” was cited. The book was published in 2014 by PRAXIS publishing house as a reference book for students who are masters (Treviño & Niño, 2014). It has to do with the natural heritage-tourism relationship. At the beginning of 2016 the proposal of contents of the homonymous Learning Unit for the Master’s level supported on the Competencies-Based Approach (EBC: Enfoque Basado en Competencias) was developed.

There are six sections that integrate this essay, these sections are: introduction, objective, methodology, results, conclusions and references.

### Objective

To synthetize the content of the Learning Unit (UA) Natural Heritage and Tourism into the Master Science: Sustainable Tourism Development at Autonomous University of Guerrero (UAGro).

### Methodology

Firstly, an office work was carried out through consultation of digital and printed literature of topics as the competitiveness of the flora and fauna in Alicante, España (Niño & Segrelles, 2014); Guanajuato (Niño & Saldaña, 2014a & 2014b), Guerrero (Niño, 2014 and Ruíz & Niño, 2014) and Michoacán, México (Correa, Niño & Segrelles, 2013).

The field work included the direct observation, exploratory routes, photographic interviews with members of non-governmental organizations, photography and videos. In this sense, the approach is multimodal or mixed since the qualitative and quantitative points of view through the Geographical Focus.

### Results

The teaching-learning methodology in the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism comprises: facilitator and student presentations, individual and collaborative work, use and application of the territorial approach of tourism to cases of study, which are analyzed through the dynamics of a workshop in a classroom where the six students who were admitted in the Line of Management and Application of Knowledge (LGAC: Línea de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento) of the UA Environment and Tourism, fourth generation, 2016-2018 of the MCGST, are working. At the beginning of the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism they will take a diagnostic test, and during that UA they will do a test at the middle of the term and one at the end of the term.

Relief, geology, slope, soil, hydrography and climate are very important elements of the geographic space which modify and catalyze the landscape and tourism processes (Niño, 2014).

It is important to take this into account in order to pay close attention to the problematic field of graduate studies in Tourist Sciences since tourism is a matter of multifactorial origin which leads to the fact that its diagnostic and treatment involve the gathering of several disciplines whose sensible and suitable results generate new ways to manage the natural heritage with a vision to taking advantage of tourism in order to benefit the population and their vital needs.

The general purpose of the UA is to trigger the building of meaningful learning that permits the examination and interpretation of the origin and development of the natural Mexican heritage, particularly the one of the State of Guerrero, with a tourist sustainable vision, as well as the analysis of theoretical and applied studies, in Mexico and abroad.

The generic competencies (capacities, skills, dexterities, and values) which are to be strengthened are: creating a research project while applying the recommended methodology for the type of proposed study, and coordinating the learning of a Master's Degree students, either in a classroom or in the field. Next is the educational model by competencies (Tobón, 2013), focused on the student, to contribute on the formation of teachers with the necessary competencies to practice their grade with efficiency, responsibility, and honesty, as well as to follow the ethical codes which rule their occupation.

The specific competencies to be strengthened are: A) identifying the problems related to the sustainable exploitation of the natural heritage in the State of Guerrero with a sustainable tourist vision, from local to global confines, in order to elaborate feasible proposals for the study, solution and prevention of those problems with a critical sense and B) facilitating the development of competencies with efficiency, responsibility and honesty in the Learning Units in the field of tourism sciences by following the educational model focused on the student in order to contribute to the formation of highly critical masters.

A competency unit refers to: examining, interpreting and formulating hypotheses about the origin and evolution of the sustainable exploitation of natural heritage in order to project the best way to manage nature for the benefit of society as we know it today.

In the structure of the plan, specific competencies are made of one group of learning units which are mandatory. A second group is made of elective and free learning units. The seminars correspond to integration-association, such as integration seminars and the corresponding mention. The credits obtained by the student from attending those seminars are added in order to get those 122 that are required in the MCGST.

It is also important to emphasize the coordinated participation of the three sectors of government: Federal, State and Municipal, as well as the participation of the local population, taking into consideration the natural, social, cultural, economic and politic contexts where the aim is to reduce or check the negative impact of traditional tourism and conserve the natural heritage through highly planned tourism.

Nowadays the relationship between natural heritage and tourism is a topic widely discussed due to the fact that the balance between the rational exploitation of natural resources and the environment conservation is to be achieved. In order to get that, education plays an important role in all of its levels to seek global competitiveness supported on logical and regional strategies thanks to the study of specific cases in this UA, as in the case of the MCGST. "This suggests that the formative process of every (student) dialectically conjugates and harmonizes general issues of university education" (Alonso, Álvarez & Castillo, 2016: 144).

Society is an open system since it is related to the environment, and it permanently influences society. That is why the best actual approach to investigate the relationship between society and nature is its analysis under the concept of system, enriched by the social and formative approach.

Quality offers competitive advantages in two ways: the first one is in the short run and implies offering quality education, which allows increasing benefits through increasing the number of masters in the MCGST; whereas the second one refers to improved quality, which is the most effective way for public enterprises, such as UAGro, and even private enterprises, to grow. Quality has an impact in two ways, one is the territorial expansion of the market, and the other is the increase of mercantile participation.

Quality affords true students and loyal graduates to the graduate studies incorporated to the PNPC, since they feel comfortable when choosing a Master's Degree to study and to perform as a career in a professional way. This becomes a recommendation toward other people who wish to study the MCGST, or others offered by UAGro.

Some considerations derived from this work are: 1) nowadays it is important to talk about quality education through economic and functional diversification of the graduate studies included in the PNPC. This idea is the origin of its initiatives in favor of exploiting educational competitiveness, i.e. the exploitation of each one of the possibilities offered by public and private educational facilities. And 2) thus, it is important to get new income sources which could be a complement, but not a substitute, of the income for which the members of the Basic Academic Nucleus (NAB: Núcleo Académico Básico) of the MCGST apply.

This is not about, as selfishly and wrongly it has sometimes been claimed, promoting Master's Degrees as an educational monoculture, but getting worthy and attractive life conditions for the facilitators and masters, exploiting through investment and imagination a quality education with social inclusion, and at the same time sustainable, which will ease the preservation of the environment as well as the essential functions of education in this superior case. Moreover, many of its possibilities will come from ecological respect and preservation of the environment when practicing tourism in a responsible way.

Therefore, the four pillars of Competencies-Based Education (EBC: Educación Basada en Competencias) focused on complex learning, i.e. "competencies on which a person must structure his/her continuous education, are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to get along with others" (Tobón, 2013:121). Thus, those four pillars rescue the value of the human being (students and facilitators) as participants in the changes, as individuals or as a group, in an environmental and tourist space where their contribution offers innovations, modifications and/or development.

Solving a problem in a suitable way starts with the interest of doing things right, achieving the determined goals, getting valuable products in the cultural context and working cooperatively with others (knowing to be). It requires knowing the environment and understanding the problem starting with concepts and categories previously built (knowing to know) which lead the way to face it.

On this basis, a person sets into action specific procedures to find a solution to the problem, taking into consideration the context and possible changes.

The contents of the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism are synthesized in the Table 1.

Date/Session	Thematic contents	Learning results (Sub-competencies or competency elements)	Bibliography/ Reading Passages	Professor
1	<b>1 Natural Heritage</b>	Realizing the issues the Mexican natural heritage faces	Correa <i>et al</i> , 2013: 23-42	Dr. Naú Niño
2	<b>2 Conservation of the natural heritage</b> ° Use ° Abuse ° Planning	Explaining the causes and effects from lack of strategy to conserve natural heritage	Valencia <i>et al</i> , 2013: 43-66	Dr. Naú Niño
4-6	<b>3 Alternative Tourism in the natural heritage</b> ° Rural community ° Material Flows ° Energy ° Information	Examining and identifying the environmental benefits alternative tourism brings	González <i>et al</i> , 2013: 67-93	Dr. Naú Niño
7	<b>4 Methodology for the study of natural heritage</b>	Realizing the importance of the elaboration and application of a geo-touristic methodology.	Niño and Saldaña: 25-31	Dr. Naú Niño
8	<b>5 Geo-touristic planning in natural heritage</b>	Knowing the importance of sustainable geo-touristic planning and its application on a concrete case	Correa and Correa: 95-103	Dr. Naú Niño

9	<b>6 Natural Heritage in the state of Guerrero.</b>	Examining the role of the environment, man's appropriation of nature and projecting the carrying out of SOWT (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats) methodology. (FODA: Fortalezas, Oportunidades, Debilidades y Amenazas)	Avilés: 121-128	Dr. Naú Niño
10	<b>7 Case study: Cántora, Guanajuato</b>	Realizing the touristic-environmental issues in Cántora, Guanajuato and possible solutions	Niño and Saldaña: 19-29	Dr. Naú Niño
11	<b>8 Partial examination</b>	Evaluating the most important concepts applied to the exploitation of Mexican natural heritage	Written examination	Dr. Naú Niño
12	<b>9 Elaboration of a study of a local case</b>	Elaborating a study case chosen in an equalized way about a site in the State of Guerrero	Collaborative work	Dr. Naú Niño
13	<b>10 Follow-through of the case study</b>	Examining and applying sustainable touristic methodology applied to natural heritage proposed by Niño (2012)	Progress in the group case study	Dr. Naú Niño
14	<b>11 Follow-through of the case study</b>	Examining and applying sustainable touristic methodology applied to natural heritage proposed by Niño (2012)	Progress in the group case study	Dr. Naú Niño



15	12 Follow-through of the case study	Examining and applying sustainable touristic methodology applied to natural heritage proposed by Niño (2012).	Progress in the group case study	Dr. Naú Niño
16	13 Follow-through of the case study	Examining and applying sustainable touristic methodology applied to natural heritage proposed by Niño (2012)	Progress in the group case study	Dr. Naú Niño
17	14 Follow-through of the case study	Examining and applying sustainable touristic methodology applied to natural heritage proposed by Niño (2012)	Progress in the group case study	Dr. Naú Niño
18	15 Ending of the case study	Synthesis of results in the analyzed case study	Collaborative work	Dr. Naú Niño
19	16 Handing in term paper and final examination	Application of methodology to the study case and evaluation of the most important ideas about natural heritage planning	Individual work	Dr. Naú Niño
20	17 Final evaluation	Summary final evaluation	Individual	Dr. Naú Niño

**Table 1** Contents of the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism  
Source: Own elaboration

Some of the admission requirements to this UA were: competencies for oral and written communication, attitude to work in a group and skill to search for information on the internet. The previous knowledge the student must have before this unit is about having taken and passed the subject Evolution and Development of the Touristic System; conceptional bases of sustainable development, fundamentals and analysis of management and methodology of research (qualitative and quantitative).

“Is to observe how some cooperative activities make students acquire the main principles of cooperative learning (...) at the same time that they contribute to the development of social competences in a language classroom” (Martínez, 2016:43).

## Conclusions

According to the established goal and the results that were achieved, it can be inferred that: 1) the UA Natural Heritage and Tourism contributes in a solid way to the growth of graduate students with competencies which allow them to make innovative proposals about situations society demands and, as much as possible, to manage ecological balance; 2) the topic natural heritage and tourism means an educational process of systematized character, involving facilitators, students and the information they handle, which converge in one place to interact, communicate and learn on each other, as well as build new knowledge and 3) education based on competencies and learning and teaching the natural heritage-tourism relationship are important to understand the world around us, every time more globalized.

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