

THE ROLES OF GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT IN BRAZILIAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Os Papéis da Governança e da Gestão Participativa no Desenvolvimento do Turismo Brasileiro
Los Roles de la Gobernanza y la Gestión Participativa en el Desarrollo del Turismo Brasileño

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Abstract

Purpose - This work aims to demonstrate the significant contribution of governance and participatory management, along with their associated benefits, to the tourism development of Urubici, a city in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, during the years 2021 and 2022.

Design/methodology/approach - The research adopts a qualitative, bibliographical approach involving the review of scientific papers and books that discuss governance and participatory management. The research is documentary, exploratory and empirical, drawn from secondary data, collected from minutes of meetings of the Municipal Tourism Council (COMTUR) and activity reports issued by the Secretariat for Industry, Commerce and Tourism (SETUR), the Municipal Tourism Plan (2021), the Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan of Urubici (PLATS, 2013-2023), and participatory observation.

Findings - The original contribution of this article is in the role of articulation and mobilization played by the actors involved in the municipality's tourism development. Many of these stakeholders represent various public and private entities, exerting influence on communities and thereby making collaborative decision-making a complex endeavor.

Practical implications - Practical implications have emerged with the implementation of active tourism governance in Urubici, which has facilitated an innovative and participatory management approach that supports local entrepreneurship and promotes professional training in the sector.

Originality/value - The main findings of this work reveal that the actions implemented through participatory management are aligned with both the Municipal Tourism Plan and the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan, highlighting the role of participatory management in creating the governance model. The conclusions of the study are context-specific.

Research limitations – The limitations of the research are the small volume of up-to-date information available in the municipality. This is a common challenge in small municipalities and hinders the expansion of governance initiatives. It is worth considering that the plans focus mainly on short-term forecasts, but it is recommended that studies be conducted involving state-level plans and incorporating long-term projections and regular reassessments.

Keywords: Tourist governance, participatory management, integrated planning, public policy, Brazil.

Resumo

Objetivo - Este trabalho tem como objetivo demonstrar a contribuição significativa da governança e da gestão participativa, juntamente com seus benefícios associados, para o desenvolvimento turístico de Urubici, uma cidade em Santa Catarina, Brasil, durante os anos de 2021 e 2022.

Desenho/metodologia/abordagem - A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, bibliográfica, envolvendo a revisão de artigos científicos e livros que discutem governança e gestão participativa. A pesquisa é documental, exploratória e empírica, extraída de dados secundários, coletados de atas de reuniões do Conselho Municipal de Turismo (COMTUR) e relatórios de atividades emitidos pela Secretaria de Indústria, Comércio e Turismo (SETUR), o Plano Municipal de Turismo (2021) e o Plano de Iniciativa de Turismo Sustentável de Urubici (PLATS, 2013-2023) e observação participativa.

Resultados - A contribuição original deste artigo reside no papel de articulação e mobilização desempenhado pelos atores envolvidos no desenvolvimento turístico do município. Esses *stakeholders* representam várias entidades públicas e privadas, exercendo influência sobre as comunidades, tornando a tomada de decisão colaborativa um esforço complexo.

Implicações práticas - As implicações práticas ocorreram com a implementação da governança ativa do turismo em Urubici, facilitando uma abordagem de gestão inovadora e participativa que apoia o empreendedorismo local e promove a capacitação profissional no setor.

Originalidade/valor - Os principais achados revelam que as ações implementadas por meio da gestão participativa se alinham tanto ao Plano Municipal de Turismo quanto ao Plano da Iniciativa de Turismo Sustentável de Urubici, destacando o papel da gestão participativa na criação do modelo de governança. As conclusões do estudo são específicas do contexto.

Limitações da pesquisa - As limitações da pesquisa são a quantidade limitada de informações atualizadas, disponíveis no município. Trata-se de um desafio comum em municípios pequenos que dificulta a expansão de iniciativas de governança. Vale considerar que os planos focam principalmente em previsões de curto prazo, mas seria ideal conduzir estudos envolvendo planos estaduais que incorporem projeções de longo prazo e reavaliações regulares.

Palavras-chave: governança turística, gestão participativa, planejamento integrado, política pública, Brasil.

Resumen

Objetivo - Este trabajo tiene como objetivo demostrar una contribución significativa a la gobernanza y la gestión participativa, juntamente con sus beneficios asociados, para el desarrollo turístico de Urubici, una ciudad en Santa Catarina, Brasil, durante los años de 2021 y 2022.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque - La investigación adopta un abordaje cualitativo, bibliográfico, envolviendo la revisión de artículos científicos y libros que discuten la gobernanza y la gestión participativa. La investigación es documental, exploratoria y empírica, extraída de datos secundarios, colectados de actas de reuniones del Consejo Municipal de Turismo (COMTUR) e informes de actividades emitidas por la Secretaria de Industria, Comercio y Turismo (SETUR), el Plan Municipal de Turismo (2021) y el Plan de Iniciativa de Turismo Sostenible de Urubici (PLATS, 2013-2023) y observación participativa.

Hallazgos - La contribución original de este artículo reside en el papel de articulación y movilización desempeñado por los actores involucrados en el desarrollo turístico del municipio. Estos *stakeholders* representan varias entidades públicas y privadas, ejerciendo influencia sobre las comunidades, haciendo de la toma de decisión colaborativa un esfuerzo complejo.

Implicaciones prácticas - Las implicaciones prácticas ocurren con la implementación de la Gobernanza activa del turismo en Urubici facilitando un abordaje de gestión innovadora y participativa que apoya el emprendedorismo local y promueve la capacitación profesional en el sector.

Originalidad/valor - Los principales resultados demuestran que las acciones implementadas por medio de la gestión participativa se alinean tanto al Plan Municipal de Turismo como al Plan de la Iniciativa de Turismo Sostenible de Urubici, destacando el papel de la gestión participativa en la creación del modelo de gobernanza. Como conclusiones del estudio son específicos del contexto.

Limitaciones de la investigación – Las limitaciones de la investigación son cantidades limitadas de información actualizadas disponibles en el municipio. Se trata de un desafío común en los municipios pequeños y dificulta la expansión de las iniciativas de gobernanza. Vale considerar que los programas se enfocan principalmente en previsiones de corto plazo, pero sería ideal conducir estudios envolviendo programas estatales que incorporan proyectos de largo plazo y reevaluaciones regulares.

Palabras clave: gobernanza turística, gestión participativa, planificación integrada, políticas públicas, Brasil.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism represents a social phenomenon characterized by spatial displacement and interactions among diverse individuals and locations. Its structure revolves around the utilization of cultural, natural, and social resources, which are pivotal for fostering its development (Paiva, 2012). Despite its tendency to concentrate in more developed areas, tourism can yield substantial economic benefits in less developed regions, contributing to the amelioration of socio-economic disparities (Falcão & Gómez, 2012). However, the challenge faced by public management lies in the quest for adaptable and entrepreneurial frameworks capable of guiding the management and planning of local and regional tourism development (Fratucci, 2008). Achieving efficiency and enhancing the quality of public services requires the adoption of advanced management standards, such as strategic planning. This becomes particularly critical during periods of fluctuations and crises, where capitalizing on new opportunities is paramount (Fenner et al., 2019; Heyer, 2010).

In this context, Urubici, a city in the state Santa Catarina situated in the southern region of Brazil, stands out as an exemplary municipality that has gained recognition due to its noteworthy tourism potential, marked by distinctive attractions (SANTUR, 2022). The city has implemented flexible and entrepreneurial strategies in the Serra Catarinense region, as evidenced by its leading position in terms of the number and diversity of attractions and enterprises registered in the Register of Tourist Service Providers (CADASTUR) compared to other municipalities in the same Tourist Region (Almanaque Turismo, 2021/2022). Furthermore, Urubici has established public-private partnerships for investments in infrastructure (Urubici, 2021). Presently, the city boasts approximately four hundred registered accommodation establishments, offering a total of five thousand available beds, showcasing its capacity to accommodate visitors and adapt to tourist demand (Brasil, 2023).

Thus, tourism has emerged as the primary economic activity in the local area, offering revenue-generation opportunities and fostering the establishment of new businesses in recent years (Castro Junior, 2019). According to data from the Tourism Development Agency of Santa Catarina (SANTUR), the city of Urubici has seen a substantial increase in the collection of the Tax on the Circulation of Goods and Services (ICMS) related to tourism in 2020, 2021 and 2022, compared to previous years. This significant growth is due to a high influx of tourists, even during the critical period of the Covid-19 pandemic (Almanaque, 2023). These statistics reflect the active involvement of local residents, as well as a considerable rise in foreign investments, particularly over the past five years.

Despite the emergence of tourism as the primary economic activity at the local level, challenges have arisen due to the haphazard expansion of unregulated accommodation options. Many of these establishments currently operate without proper registration (i.e. without the due operating permit), which hampers their access to resources from federal and state entities. Furthermore, there remains a lack of up-to-date research to assist in managing future tourism investments, such as the creation of a tourism inventory or a historical profile of tourism demand.

Tourism development in Urubici has been advancing rapidly, contributing to economic growth (Castro Junior, 2019). However, this accelerated expansion also raises concerns about potential overexploitation, which could negatively impact overall sustainability. These effects include the transformation of urban spaces and shifts in social dynamics, whether directly or indirectly (Oliveira, 2016). Moreover, the city faces growing challenges in relation to waste management, and there is a notable lack of studies assessing the municipality's carrying capacity—particularly in areas with high tourist traffic—to support sustainable tourism practices.

Sustainability is increasingly regarded as a competitive advantage for Brazilian destinations, playing a critical role in attracting tourists, conserving the environment, and safeguarding cultural heritage (Maracajá & Pinheiro, 2020). As Vignati (2008, p. 40) asserts, “Sustainability encompasses well-considered actions, the responsible use of spaces, and the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. It serves as the

fundamental principle guiding the development process.” It aims to promote social equity, economic advancement, cultural diversity, and the protection and preservation of the environment (Faxina et al., 2021).

Typically, the development of tourism has far-reaching effects on means, processes, and urban spaces, resulting in a complex and paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, it generates numerous benefits, while on the other hand, it can exacerbate segregation processes and socio-spatial exclusion (Cornelia et al., 2023). In Urubici, the expansion of tourism activities has led to a migration of people to rural areas, where they engage in multiple functions, such as tourism and agriculture, thereby shaping the relationship between the countryside and the city. Indeed, “tourism has reshaped the rural and urban environment, fostering a new culture and guiding new ways of life in Urubici” (Oliveira, 2016, p. 112).

Against this backdrop, an analysis of the existing literature and empirical observations reveal a knowledge gap in the area of governance and participatory management of tourist destinations, and this is particularly in the case of Urubici. This gap also extends to the absence of current data and regulations concerning accommodation facilities.

This study investigates how the governance model has supported participatory management and collaboration among various stakeholders in the tourism development of Urubici. It aims to address a gap in the literature, by emphasizing the central role of governance and local participatory management in shaping tourism development policies in the city. The rationale behind the research stems from the need to better understand the complexity stakeholders face within a collaborative decision-making context, as well as the value of innovative strategies to promote local entrepreneurship and professional development.

To achieve this goal, the study employs a qualitative, bibliographic methodology of an exploratory and empirical character. Secondary data—including reports issued by the Secretariat of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, the Municipal Tourism Plan, and the Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan of Urubici—were collected for the years 2021 and 2022, subject to availability, and these were supplemented by participant observation. The data were analyzed using techniques of content analysis.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Governance in tourism

The term “governance” and its conceptualization gained recognition at the close of the 20th century, acknowledged by the United Nations. The term encompasses diverse interactions among public authorities, the market, representatives of civil society, and non-governmental bodies. The concept of governance emerged as a crucial ally in orchestrating the administration of public policies, leveraging the involvement of citizens and corporate sectors that stand to be affected by the outcomes (Pires, 2016). The term is broader than “government” and entails reduced governmental control, a lack of hierarchy, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders—including the public and private sectors, as well as formal and informal agencies. In this sense, governance is regarded as a highly pluralistic approach to policymaking, characterized by the extensive participation of various state and non-state actors (Farsari, 2023).

The conceptualization of governance depends on the context in which it is implemented. Various models exist, which can be categorized as follows: hierarchical (based on democratic administration between public and private actors), community (characterized by participatory and autonomous management), network (involving interaction between public and private entities), and market (involving collaboration with private actors). Governance plays a vital role in problem-solving, emphasizing cooperation among organizations that transcends existing political boundaries and creating new public values through interactions among these actors (Kim & Lee, 2022).

For governance to be effective, it is imperative to enhance the managerial proficiency of the actors and institutional relationships involved. In this context, the efficacy of public policy hinges, among various factors,

on the roles assumed by these actors and the operational capacity of the governance structure (Endres & Pakman, 2019; Trentin & Fonseca Filho, 2020). In tourism, governance plays a crucial role in “facilitating innovation and dynamization of public policy formulation in the sector” (Velasco, 2016; Oliveira, Tomazzoni & Panosso Netto, 2022, p. 3). These authors emphasize the importance of participatory and collective management in destinations. The contemporary concept of governance emerged in the 1980s within the realm of social sciences and has now become widely used across various disciplines (Forje, Awazi & Kimengsi, 2022; Oliveira, Tomazzoni & Panosso Netto, 2022).

Governance is closely intertwined with the management of tourist destinations, which is rooted in the decentralization of decision-making processes, enabling local residents to participate in the affairs relevant to their locality (Anjos & Kennel, 2019). In this context, the active involvement of the local population in the participatory management of goods and services becomes a central element in the governance process.

According to Adebayo & Butcher (2022), considering the participation of the local community in decision-making regarding tourism activities in their area of residence is essential, as they directly benefit from the outcomes of such interactions. Collaborative governance, which can be seen as synonymous with participatory governance, is established to promote actions or objectives that cannot be achieved in isolation. To be effective, it must introduce new mechanisms for collective action (Kismartini & Pujiyono, 2020; Ma & Zheng, 2021).

The concept of governance has come to embody new reflective possibilities by incorporating the interests of society and the private sector (Forje et al., 2022; Whitehead, 2003). This collaboration emerges through network structures—whether collaborative or intra-organizational—that influence the configuration of public policies (Zapata, Campos & Hall, 2019) and define how interactions between autonomous yet interdependent public and private actors contribute by cooperating toward shared objectives (Costa, 2005). In light of this, Wagenseil, Wyss, and Huck (2022) emphasize that stakeholders in commerce, civil society, and public policy must adopt proactive and tangible measures to promote sustainable tourism development. According to Barreto and Silva (2023), policies that foster sustainable practices—preserving natural resources and respecting local cultures—are essential components in building responsible tourism..

The implementation of active governance in tourism in Urubici has facilitated the adoption of an innovative and participatory management approach, promoting local entrepreneurship and facilitating professional training in the sector (Castro Junior, 2019). This inclusive approach involves integrating various stakeholders in the decision-making process and tourism management, which are crucial elements for integrated planning and sustainable tourism development. The next section will provide a detailed explanation of this approach. Given the complexity of the tourism sector, it is essential to adopt a model of cooperation and governance that fosters coordination among different levels of government (federal, state, and municipal) and across the various sectors involved (public, private, and civil society). This model aims to ensure integrated and participatory management, with a focus on local development and sustainability (Trentin & da Silva Fonseca Filho, 2020; Wan et al., 2022). This integrated and participatory planning approach has served as a means mitigating the negative impacts associated with tourism, with the cooperation and involvement of the community playing a vital role in its effective management.

This standpoint aligns with Ignarra’s assertion (2003, p. 26) that “effective tourism plans require the involvement of all stakeholders.” The author emphasizes the importance of integrated management, whereby each actor fulfills their roles with commitment, while public management assumes responsibility for operational factors such as attracting investment capital, allocating public resources, and enhancing infrastructure. Furthermore, the public administration must engage in strategic actions, including planning tourism activities and formulating effective policies that strengthen the tourism sector and promote its sustainable management (Brasil, 2009). Integrated and participatory planning encompasses all sectors of society and individuals, acknowledging the capacities and interests specific to local and regional contexts. Regional planning, by incorporating the distinct characteristics of each locality, promotes integrated

development aligned with the principles of sustainable development (Nogueira, 2022). Currently, the National Tourism Plan (PNT) 2024–2027 addresses issues such as sustainable development and integration with global cooperation policies and climate action. Its framework includes an analysis of global and national tourism trends, guidelines, objectives, targets, and a management model focused on the decentralization and regionalization of tourism.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Tourism Regionalization Program is as a significant strategy for participatory management and integrated planning, facilitating a more comprehensive approach to managing tourist destinations and promoting the establishment of local governance structures.

Bichler and Lösch (2019, p. 02) highlight that “good governance encompasses various dimensions, including participation, legitimacy, transparency, and efficiency, and can be achieved when all actors collaborate and share power, expertise, and resources between public and private entities.” In participatory management, the collaboration between actors is of paramount importance, as the tourism industry consists of multiple fragmented stakeholders who collectively provide tourism services.

Participatory and collaborative management is grounded in shared interests among diverse stakeholders, utilizing their knowledge and resource capacities to enhance overall management (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Emphasizing equality and democracy aspects in decision-making processes strengthens win-win relationships. Research on collaborative governance in tourism pertains to tourism planning and policy, as well as sustainable and participatory tourism development (Zapata, Campos & Hall, 2012; Kismartyni & Pujiyono, 2020). “It is necessary to formally bring together various stakeholders to interact and achieve sustainable tourism development, contributing to poverty reduction. Tourism encompasses three significant aspects: economic, social, and environmental” (Kismartyni & Pujiyono, 2020, p. 870).

In this context, effective stakeholder management becomes a crucial element in ensuring the legitimacy and acceptance of collaborative governance.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, bibliographical approach involving the review of scientific papers and books that discuss governance and participatory management. Secondary data, along with participatory observation, are employed. The documentary research is exploratory and empirical, drawing from secondary data collected from minutes of meetings of the Municipal Council of Tourism (COMTUR) and activity reports issued by the Secretariat of Industry, Trade, and Tourism (SETUR) during the year 2021 and 2022. The Municipal Tourism Plan (2021) and the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS, 2013-2023) were also used.

It is crucial to note that within the scope of the methodological procedures aimed at achieving the study objective, this research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on bibliographic studies and official documents. The option to use a qualitative approach stems from its inherent openness, flexibility, and its ability to observe and engage with relevant social actors during data collection (Cardoso, 1988). Furthermore, it facilitates the creation, expansion, and updating of theories, enables the monitoring of ongoing transformations, and supports the understanding of the processes associated with them (Cunha & Rego, 2019). Exploratory research allows for the gathering of preliminary information about the object of study, enabling its delimitation and contributing to the researcher's approximation to the reality being investigated (Severino, 2016). The data collection process included a literature review on governance and participatory management, together with participant and systematic observation at Municipal Tourism Council meetings. Observation enables the collection of data that, although subjective in nature, allows for a more accurate assessment of the reliability of information obtained from other sources (Minayo, 2000). Empirical research—also referred to as field research—can be understood as an approach that requires practical validation of findings, particularly through experiments or observation within a specific context to gather data directly from the field (Flick,

2009). The data recording was undertaken by one of the authors actively involved in the local governance context. Additionally, the application of the technique of content analysis (Bardin, 2011) involved three phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment of the results, including inference and interpretation.

Throughout the stages of the research (Figure 1), the analysis criteria considered information that met the following premises: (i) pre-analysis: selection and systematization of information; (ii) exploration: examination of available data; and (iii) content and results analysis: treatment of results and their applicability in planning and tourism management.

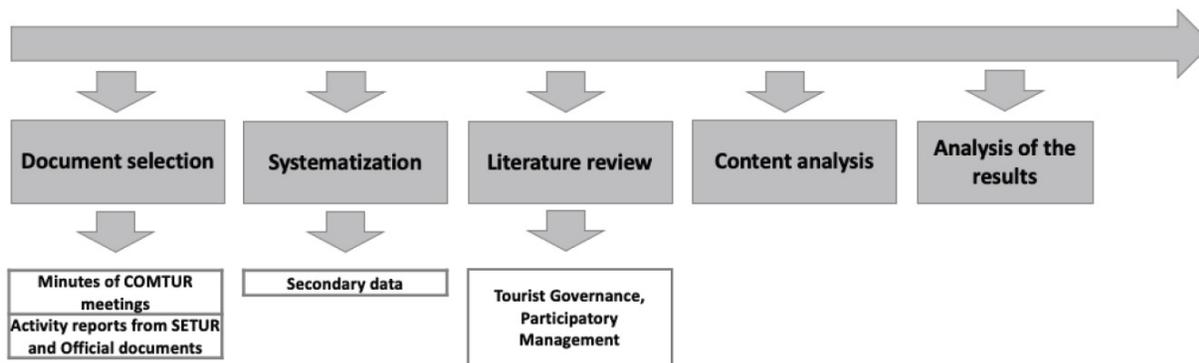


Figure 1

Diagram of research steps.
Source: Research data, 2023.

The diagram outlining the research steps (Figure 1), developed between February and May 2023, was designed to support the analysis of information and underscore its relevance within the framework of integrated planning. It also highlights the critical role of participatory management involving local stakeholders. To ensure methodological rigor, the following analytical categories were established: (i) the representativeness of the composition of the Municipal Tourism Council; (ii) the collective actions documented in COMTUR meeting minutes; and (iii) the availability of activity reports from the Secretariat of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism (SETUR), in conjunction with the Municipal Tourism Plan and other planning and operational documents related to tourism in the municipality. The selected time frame for analysis spans from January 2021 to December 2022.

The stages of data collection and analysis are systematically outlined below (Frame 1):

Research stages	Activity
Pre-analysis: selection and systematization of information.	Participant observation and selection of official documents.
Exploration: examination of available data.	Minutes of meetings of the Municipal Council of Tourism (COMTUR) and activity reports issued by the Secretariat of Industry, Trade, and Tourism (SETUR) during the year 2021 and 2022. Additionally, the Municipal Tourism Plan (2021) and the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS, 2013-2023) are utilized.
Content and results analysis: treatment of results and their applicability in planning and tourism management.	Cross-referencing and analysis of secondary data with bibliographic review.

Frame 1:

Stages of data collection and analysis
Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

The procedures complemented each other effectively: participant observation yielded detailed observational data, while content analysis facilitated the organization and interpretation of the collected results. It is

important to highlight that one of the authors played a strategic role by serving on the Municipal Tourism Council during the years 2021 and 2022, thus corroborating the exploratory and empirical nature of the research. In the results processing phase, the data were interpreted using a systematic method, and inferences were drawn based on observations and evidence collected through the established categories, which, in turn, were grounded in secondary documents. Participant observation proved to be a vital tool for data collection, as it allowed the observer—being part of the observed context—to establish face-to-face interaction with the subjects involved. This study focuses on the municipality of Urubici, situated at the base of the Serra Geral, within the Campos de Lages Microregion in the southern region of the Santa Catarina Plateau (IBGE, 2019), encompassing a total area of 1,019.236 km² (IBGE, 2010). Specifically, Urubici is located within the Tourist Region of Serra Catarinense (Figure 2), approximately 167 km from the state capital, Florianópolis. Its boundaries are shared with the municipalities of Bom Retiro to the north, Bom Jardim da Serra, Orleans, and São Joaquim to the south, Anitápolis, Santa Rosa de Lima, Rio Fortuna, and Grão Pará to the east, and Rio Rufino and Urupema to the west (Hanashiro, 2015). Alongside eighteen other municipalities, Urubici is part of the Tourist Region of Serra Catarinense (Municipal Tourism Plan, Urubici, 2021). The geomorphological features of Urubici delineate its landscape and facilitate the observation of social interactions typical in regions concentrating economic and tourist activities (Mottiar & Tucker, 2007).

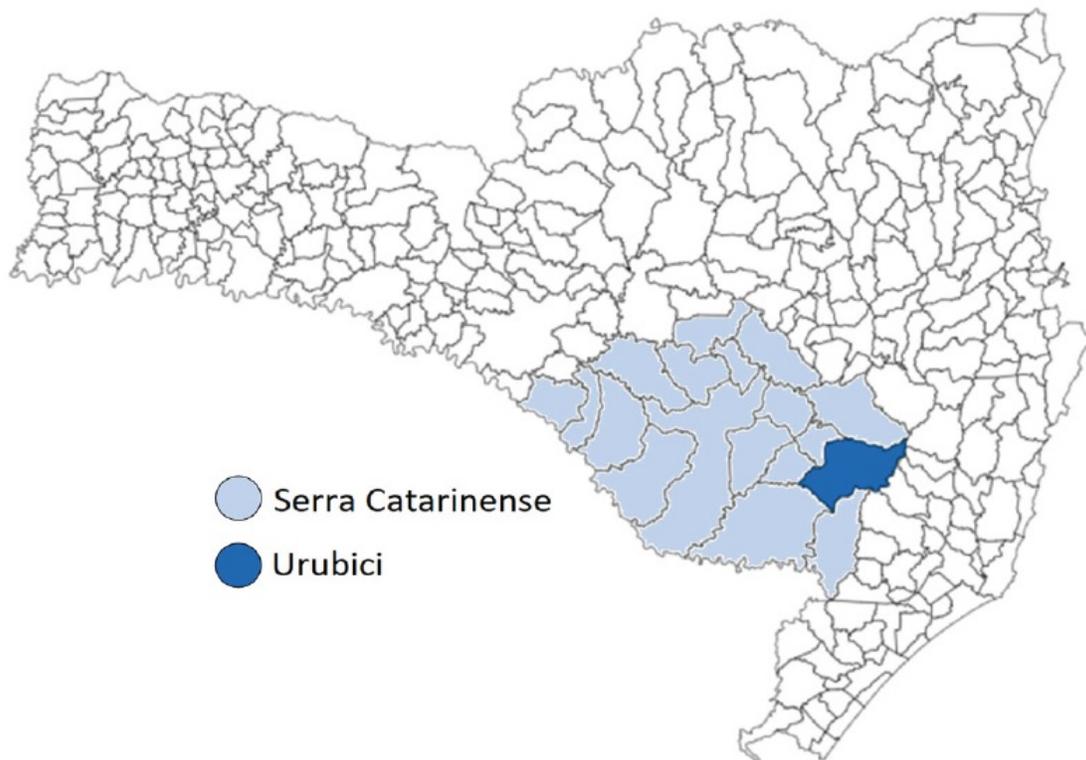


Figure 2

Location of the Serra Catarinense (Santa Catarina Mountains) region.

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

The municipality's primary economic activities consist of livestock and agriculture, with a focus on vegetable production (IBGE, 2019). In recent years, tourism has emerged as the second main economic activity, driven by its substantial revenue potential and the establishment of various enterprises.

The municipality offers diverse tourist products and routes that are categorized into segments such as rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, and nature tourism. These segments showcase the region's natural and cultural attractions. Notably, the town is home to ancient stone inscriptions dating back at least four

thousand years, comparable to inscriptions found along the Santa Catarina coast. The natural features of the area are also remarkable, featuring a climate and topography characterized by the highest altitudes in the state and low temperatures, with frequent frosts in winter and snow in higher areas. Urubici is a member of the Acolhida na Colônia Agrotourism Association, and has been recognized as a Reference Destination for Rural Tourism since 2007 (Comerlato, 2005; Buratto et al., 2010; PLATS-URUBICI, 2013/2023).

Urubici is situated within the São Joaquim National Park, established on July 2, 1961, by Decree No. 50,922. The park is currently managed by the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio). Prominent tourist attractions in the area include Morro da Igreja (“Church Hill”) and Pedra Furada (“Rock with a Hole”), which are highly visited and renowned within the state. The geological formation of Serra Catarinense serves as the city’s main attraction, showcasing sandstone and basalt formations sculpted by nature over thousands of years. Pedra Furada, an iconic landmark and the city’s main postcard, houses the Cindacta II air traffic control center, which falls under the command of Aeronautics. Additionally, Urubici boasts canyons, valleys, and two of the highest points in the state: Morro da Boa Vista, ranking first, and Morro da Igreja, ranking third (PLATS-URUBICI, 2013/2023).

The municipality serves as the entrance to the Guarani Aquifer, the largest underground freshwater reservoir in the world. This aquifer spans Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay and is recognized as a transboundary aquifer (Buratto et al., 2010). Among the notable attractions in the municipality (Figure 3), visitors can explore the Avencal waterfall, rock inscriptions, Baiano waterfall, Véu da Noiva waterfall, Caverna and Cascata dos Bugres, Igreja Matriz, Gruta Nossa Senhora de Lourdes, Pedra da Águia, Serra do Corvo Branco, Morro do Campestre, Altos do Corvo Branco, Papuã waterfall, Cânion do Espriado, and the Brunken Museum, among other attractions (PLATS-URUBICI, 2013/2023).

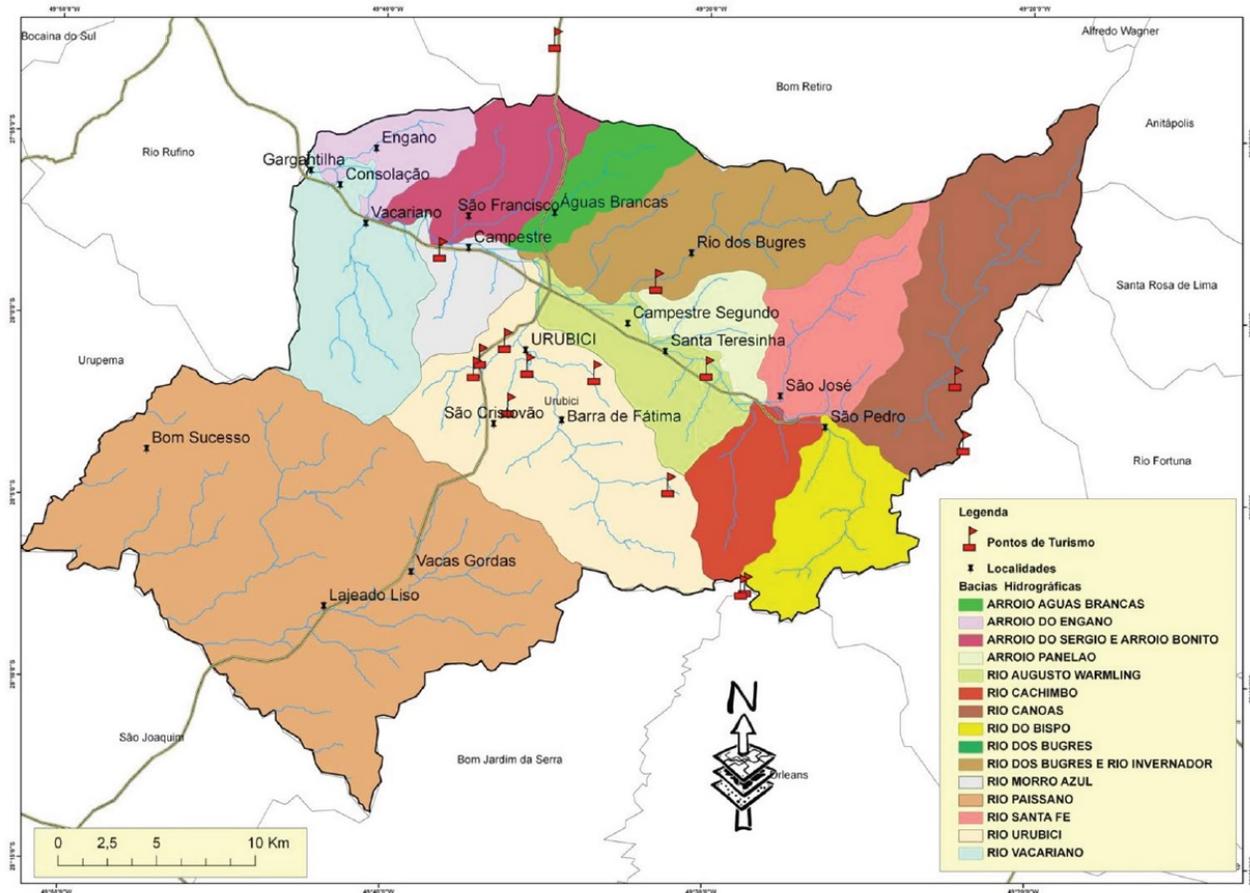


Figure 3

Map of the river basins and tourism attractions of Urubici.

Source: PLATS-URUBICI, 2013/2023.

According to the Fecomércio survey (2021), ecotourism has emerged as a prominent tourism segment throughout the Serra Catarinense region. Notably, activities such as hiking, waterfall and canyon visits, trekking, zip-lining, and paragliding showcase the ecological potential of the entire area.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in the way the State intervenes across various sectors, including tourism. This transformation calls for the pursuit of partnerships aimed at supporting management strategies through the generation of relevant information. Governments must facilitate public-private partnerships to ensure mutual understanding and cooperation among different sectors, with the goal of offering new and innovative tourism products that respond to evolving market demands (Sentanu et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2022). Tourism is a multifaceted industry that is continuously evolving and incorporating emerging trends. To support states in managing tourism destinations through innovative approaches, Tourism Observatories have been established. These observatories may operate at the municipal, regional (tourist spots or destinations), state, national, or academic level—typically in affiliation with educational institutions. Indeed, they play a crucial role in generating valuable information, including inventories, diagnoses, demand surveys, and other qualitative or quantitative data (Beni, 2000; Brasil, 2009).

It is important to note that “policies are formulated by the public sector and should be shaped by the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of society, as well as the formal structures of government and the political system” (Hall, 2011, p. 23). In addition, the effectiveness of public tourism policies is intrinsically tied to the capacity to engage and qualify local communities (Pinheiro et al., 2020).

In Urubici, participatory governance has been implemented through the adoption of a public policy aligned with the Municipal Tourism Plan and the guidelines outlined in the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan, aiming to regulate the growth process. In the municipality, rural and urban elements are intertwined, establishing a complementary relationship. Tourism has contributed to this dynamic as more individuals seek solace and rejuvenation in rural and countryside areas. This has led to the establishment of numerous tourist ventures, many equipped with modern technology and urban amenities amidst the rural landscape. The municipality boasts a wide range of waterfalls, plateaus, and distinctive geological formations that attract tourists annually (Hanashiro, 2015; Buratto et al., 2010). It is evident that tourism is intrinsically connected to the municipal space, and its planning must translate the community’s expectations into principles and guidelines. Therefore, the involvement of the government, private sector, and the population is essential to create a harmonious environment that enables all parties to overcome existing challenges while considering the economic, social, environmental, and cultural potentials involved (Teixeira & Vacovski, 2017).

Urubici is home to over twenty natural tourist attractions, and within a span of fewer than ten years, the number of formal and informal accommodation establishments has grown rapidly, outpacing the corresponding infrastructure development in the city. As a result, issues of overcrowding have emerged, with limited dining options on weekends, power outages, and intermittent internet connectivity (Oliveira, 2016). The municipality also faces difficulties in attracting and training local workforce. Figure 4 presents data collected on registered ventures in the tax sector, as well as data from platforms like Airbnb, Booking, and Trivago for the years 2021 and 2022.

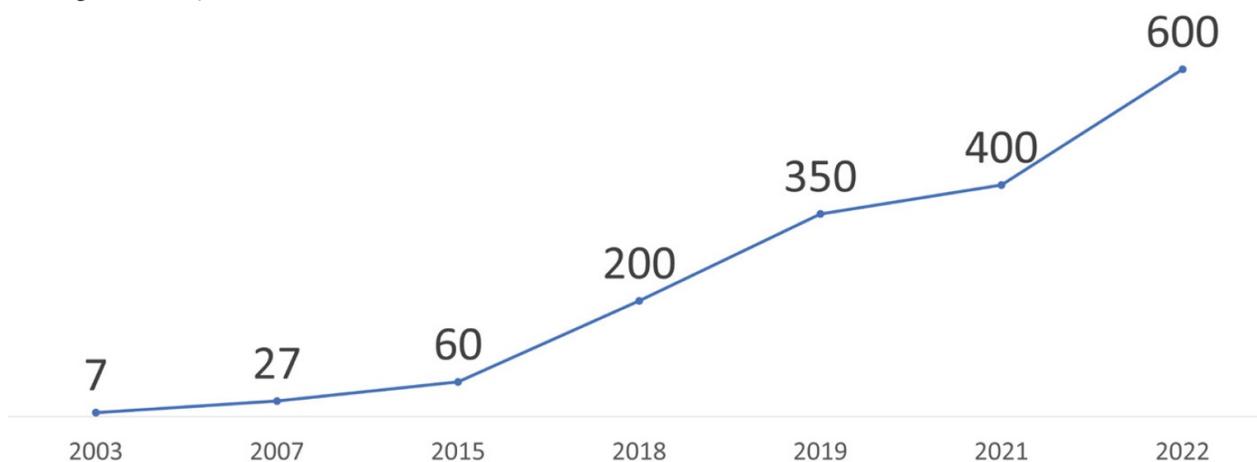


Figure 4
Evolution of Urubici’s lodging and accommodation options.
Source: Prepared by the authors, 2022.

Another aspect to consider is the limited impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the municipality, as the number of investments in the lodging sector has continued to grow in recent years. Official data from Morro da Igreja, which is Urubici’s iconic attraction and part of the São Joaquim National Park managed by ICMBio, indicate that the municipality received 99,463 visitors from January to December 2021 and over 143,000 visitors in the same period in 2022 (Almanaque, 2023).

During the management of the Secretariat of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism in 2021 and 2022, numerous collaborative actions were implemented in partnership with COMTUR. This participatory

approach to management yielded several benefits for the municipality of Urubici, including the generation and sharing of data and information, the creation of jobs and new tourism products, and the technical training and qualification of the local workforce. A notable aspect was the introduction of a tourism-trained professional into the management team, with the role of strengthening and empowering the various actors involved in the tourism process.

Bichler and Lösch (2019) highlight that leadership figures, such as local entrepreneurs and trade representatives, exert considerable influence on service delivery, strategies, and innovation capacity, and play a pivotal role in facilitating interactions among tourists, entrepreneurs, public agencies, and the community.

The Secretary of Tourism plays a crucial role in decision-making processes and is responsible for establishing the Municipal Tourism Council (COMTUR), comprising representatives from various sectors within the locality, including the public, private, and third sectors. It is important to note that COMTUR operates independently of the existence of a Tourism Secretariat and the political affiliations of the mayor and councilors. This ensures the continuity of tourism development initiatives in the municipality (Brasil, 2009). Furthermore, recognizing the institutional links forged among the most central players promotes avenues for participation (Endres & Pakman, 2019).

The Municipal Council of Tourism of Urubici, established by Law 1.147/2007, consists of representatives from the following sectors: SETUR, Secretary of Education, Commercial Association (ACIUR), Chamber of Store Managers (CDL), Accommodation Providers, Acolhida na Colônia, Bars, Restaurants, and Similar Establishments, Travel Agencies and Tour Operators, Tourist Attractions, Adventure Equipment Providers, Artisans, Secretary of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Research and Rural Extension Company of Santa Catarina (EPAGRI).

The effectiveness of a council is directly linked to understanding the scope of its functions. It must have focus, in the sense of planting the seeds of cooperation, which are the core of the participatory process. The council should be constituted mostly of local entrepreneurs, in order to give dynamism to the public power and increase the suitability of the decisions. In this way, a direct communication channel is created between the organized civil society and the public administration. For effective performance, it is necessary to generate a good flow of communication with the City Council and the other municipal secretaries of interest, such as the Attorney's Office and Treasury, Planning, and Government secretariats. This communication must be deliberative in nature, and there must be a system where the councilors themselves elect the governing body, without the influence of the mayor (Mielke, 2018). In the author's view, it is important to incorporate the vision of the business environment, which becomes the foundation of the operation of any tourism council, giving it greater legitimacy and autonomy. The presence of institutions such as Commercial and Representative Associations, Chambers of Store Managers, and Unions is also of vital importance (Mielke, 2018).

It is necessary to understand the role of collaboration within a stakeholder engagement process aimed at deepening collaborative governance in tourism, ultimately resulting in concrete policies, models, and actions. Indeed, the self-organization of inter-organizational networks fosters greater interdependence, exchange, and autonomy in relation to the State (Sentanu et al., 2023).

The municipal tourism councils (COMTURs) are responsible for assuming a long-term vision and elaborating and sustaining a continuous policy, besides assuming the role of interlocutor with the other instances of governance (the region and the state). Their attributions include improving the competitiveness of destinations through cooperation based on their organizational structure, in order to generate the technical and political means to achieve the objectives (Brasil, 2009). The composition of COMTURs must be planned according to their organizational structure, aiming to improve competitiveness through cooperation. The participation of the council should be effective in the entire decision-making process in all the management of the destination (Mielke, 2018). The aforementioned structure is part of Brazil's current Tourism

Regionalization Policy, and public policies shape how stakeholders participate in and benefit from the sector (Viana & Fratucci, 2023).

The primary actions undertaken through participatory management between SETUR and COMTUR during the period from 2021 to 2022, based on the established data selection criteria, are as follows:

- a) Updating of legislation: Enactment of Special Tourism Services Tax Law No. 2.270/2021; Implementation of Ordinance No. 713/2021 to form the Municipal Council of Tourism; Enactment of Law No. 2,447/2022, which amends Law No. 890/2003 that establishes the Municipal Tourism Fund and other provisions; Enactment of Law No. 2,604/2022, which amends Law No. 11,471/2007 that establishes the Municipal Council of Tourism of Urubici and grants it advisory and deliberative powers.
- b) Updating of the Tourism Map: Maintaining the current categorization as “Category B.”
- c) Cooperation with the State: Acquisition of investments totaling more than R\$ 11.5 million for the revitalization of the main avenue, paving of the SC 370 highway and Serra do Corvo Branco, and follow-up of the architectural project.
- d) Follow-up of the revitalization works of the Tourist Assistance Center (CAT) and Rua Coberta.
- e) Follow-up of the square revitalization works (project and execution).
- f) Expansion of network governance: National level (seeking legal support), state level, and municipal level (Municipal Governance Instances, IGR).
- g) Expansion of partnerships with IGR: Implementation of the Serra Sustentável (“Sustainable Sierra”) Seal.
- h) Expansion and strengthening of sporting events (national and international).
- i) Creation of the identity and strengthening of Ecotourism as a key segment (outdoor activities, promotional materials such as ecological bags and cups).
- j) Qualification of the tourist trade (governance, customer service, reservation systems, among others).
- k) Updating and implementation of actions under the Municipal Tourism Plan.
- l) Updating the database of tourism enterprises.
- m) Campaign to increase the number of registered enterprises in CADASTUR (National Register of Tourist Service Providers).
- n) Establishment of partnerships to implement technologies for data collection and management.
- o) Development of the Tourism Enterprise Regularization Booklet.
- p) Creation of virtual and interactive catalogs featuring the enterprises registered at SETUR.
- q) Inclusion of data in FECAM’s Tourism Portal and updates to the website and social media channels.
- r) Stimulus and organization of leisure events: Hiring of an ice rink and July Folk Festival.
- s) Participation in Tourism Fairs and online lectures.
- t) Implementation of an Organic and Handicraft Fair aimed at strengthening rural tourism.

In addition to the aforementioned actions, it is important to highlight the transparent approach taken by the management in handling the data by publicly sharing the amounts collected through the Special Tourism Services Tax Law No. 2.270/2021, which was published on SETUR’s social media platforms. According to Bassani (2017, p. 6), “fees are generally due for the provision of an essential service, of collective interest, which is compulsory and subject to specific and measurable criteria.”

Regarding the research problem, which identified the growth of tourist activities and the presence of irregular enterprises, the main actions were focused on the development of the Tourism Enterprise Regularization Booklet. This booklet was created through a collaboration among various agencies and entities such as the Fire Department, Tax Sector, Health Surveillance, Civil Police, SETUR, COMTUR, trade representatives, and accounting firms. It provides a step-by-step guide to assist small entrepreneurs, and contains information and advice to streamline the regularization process. To address the challenge of finding available information, partnerships were established with Startup Smart Tour Brasil and the company Dygi. These collaborations aimed to monitor the number of visitors at key tourist sites by collecting data indirectly.

In turn, the Municipal Tourism Plan (2021) was developed through joint efforts between the Association of Municipalities of the Mountain Region (AMURES), Santa Catarina Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE), and the City of Urubici. The plan outlines several guidelines and action plans, with the main ones being:

a) Basic services and infrastructure: Facilitating institutional coordination to expedite concessions and regional infrastructure projects; Paving tourism corridors in the Serra Catarinense region; Implementing Urubici's cycling route and supporting the development and implementation of the cycling route for the entire Serra Catarinense region; Developing basic infrastructure and support facilities for tourism; Paving Antonio Francisco Ghizoni Avenue; Promoting and supporting the creation of a Risk Management Plan specifically for the tourism sector in the Serra Catarinense region; Assisting in the establishment and institutionalization of the Tourist Protection Service in the Serra Catarinense region; Revitalizing the Tourist Service Center (CAT) to transform it into an Intelligent Center for Tourist Assistance (CIAT); Renovating the Event Center and revitalizing the Exhibition Park in Urubici; Developing a Permanent Calendar of Events to boost tourism; Enhancing public security and tourist protection services.

b) Tourism marketing: Creating and implementing a Communication and Marketing Plan tailored to each priority tourism segment; Establishing a stronger digital presence for the municipality's tourism on the internet.

c) Socio-environmental sustainability: Promoting environmental sustainability in tourism; Ensuring accessibility in tourism; Implementing a program to raise environmental awareness among the local population, tourists, and the Municipal Government.

d) Strengthening the institutional framework: Establishing and implementing a Tourism Monitoring System within the municipality; strengthening governance structures.

Discussions regarding the implementation of the Cycle Tourism Route in Serra Catarinense began in the second semester of 2022 and involved the participation and route definition (Urubici circuit), which was approved by COMTUR members.

The Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS 2013-2023) was developed by the State Secretariat of Tourism, Culture, and Sports in collaboration with the municipal government of Urubici. Its objective was to guide and facilitate the planning and implementation of actions through the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS 2013-2023). The document highlights the guidelines and strategies to be pursued across the following areas and programs:

a) Organization, planning, and management: Fostering intersectoral relationships; Encouraging and supporting private initiatives; Undertaking projects and securing funding; Promoting innovation and technology; Establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

b) Tourism awareness and sensitization: Raising awareness among the population.

c) Tourist infrastructure: Implementing tourist signage; Enhancing the Tourist Assistance Center; Developing the Events Center and Cultural Center; Establishing a producer's market; Improving access to attractions; Creating a touristic gateway.

d) Tourism studies and information: Establishing a tourism statistics system; Conducting tourism studies and research.

e) Qualification of tourism services and facilities: Enhancing tourism services and equipment; Supporting local commerce; Facilitating CADASTUR registration and compliance with the legislation.

f) Promotion and marketing support: Developing a destination marketing plan and information dissemination strategies; Promoting and advertising the destination.

g) Sustainability: Addressing cultural, environmental, economic, and social aspects.

h) Basic and tourism support infrastructure: Improving basic sanitation; Urbanization; Public cleanliness and solid waste management; Access, public health, energy, and transportation systems; Public safety and tourist protection services; Communication and banking networks.

During the years 2021 and 2022, SETUR successfully carried out the following key responsibilities outlined in the tourism development plan:

- 1- Propose and coordinate the municipal tourism policy, the Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS), and other related plans, programs, and projects that support and promote tourism.
- 2- Develop the municipality’s event calendar and establish connections with the broader region and the state.
- 3- Define a strategy for implementing the municipal tourism policy in collaboration with other sectors involved in economic development.
- 4- Promote and raise awareness of the tourism products offered by the municipality.
- 5- Propose regulations aimed at stimulating and fostering tourism within the scope of its jurisdiction.

The intersection of these actions and their corresponding documents, as listed above, is illustrated in Figure 5. This figure summarizes the COMTUR meeting minutes and their relationship with the Tourism Plans and the PLATS 2013–2023.

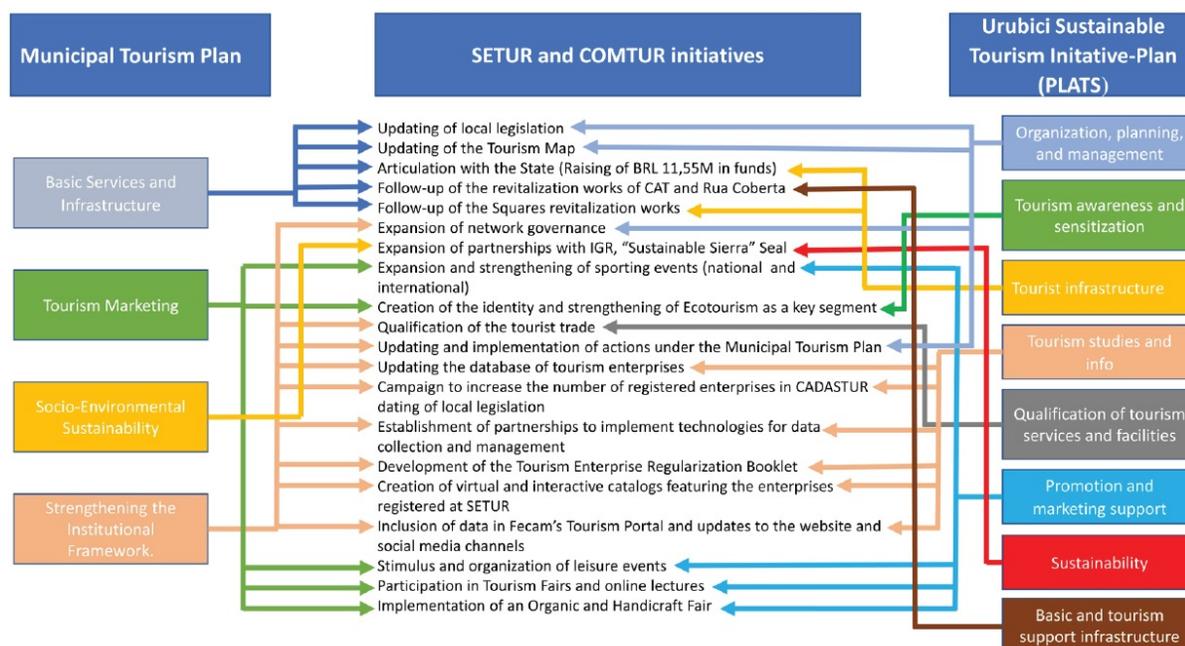


Figure 5
 Cross-referencing of the initiatives carried out by SETUR and COMTUR.
 Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

It is worth noting that in addition to the collaborative management with COMTUR members, there was significant interaction with the legislative branch during the years 2021 and 2022, resulting in the approval of all projects proposed by SETUR.

Figure 5 provides evidence that the actions implemented during the years 2021 and 2022 are aligned with the analyzed documents (Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan – PLATS 2013-2023 – and the Municipal Tourism Plan). This highlights the pivotal role of participatory management, which, through integrated planning, established a governance model that effectively addressed the municipality’s needs. Moreover, the identification of institutional links forged among key stakeholders enhances opportunities for participation (Endres & Pakman, 2019).

Regarding social participation in Tourism Governance Bodies, the lack of stakeholder representativeness and diversity (a reality present in several municipalities in Brazil) negatively affects tourism management. As Nascimento et al. (2016) point out, decision-making tends to be influenced solely by tourism agents, limiting

broader participation in territorial development and public policy formulation. In this context, it is necessary to strengthen Municipal Tourism Councils to promote territorial development and diversify the tourism offer, particularly in small and medium-sized municipalities across Brazil (Trentin & da Silva Fonseca Filho, 2020).

The collaborative governance process unfolded with the active engagement of all COMTUR members, who collectively occupied thirteen seats in decision-making. This participation is clearly documented in the council meeting minutes, where COMTUR operates in both a deliberative and consultative capacity. Effective decentralized governance, grounded in institutional arrangements, is established through the involvement of diverse segments of society, enabling participatory management (Endres & Pakman, 2019). The initiatives outlined in Figure 5 are funded by both public and private sources, highlighting the support and collaboration of various sectors involved in tourism. The structure represented also allows for the integration of new information, supporting the generation of alternative scenarios and fostering a more inclusive and sustainable management approach. In this sense, collaborative governance forms a governance arrangement in which one or more public agencies come together around shared interests in a collective decision-making process (Sentanu et al., 2023; Farsari, 2023).

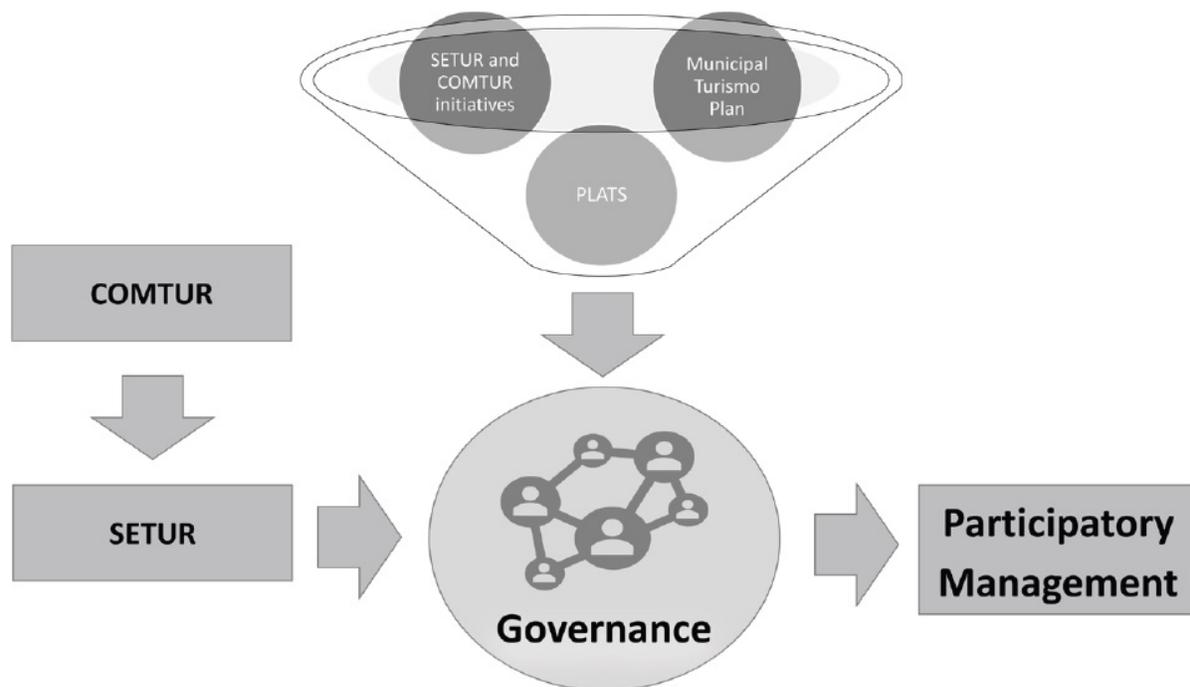


Figure 6
Participatory Management Framework.
Source: Research data, 2023

Figure 5 presents the outcomes of the discussions in a simplified format, facilitating the cross-referencing of initiatives undertaken by SETUR and COMTUR and highlighting the governance elements that guide the decision-making process toward participatory management. Active participation is a cornerstone of democracy, and participatory, decentralized practices—understood as rationalized myths—enhance the legitimacy of the organizations involved (Blasco, Guia & Prats, 2014; Endres & Pakman, 2019).

This participatory management model requires both oversight and collaboration among stakeholders. Such interconnection contributes to a deeper understanding of the tourism landscape (Sentanu et al., 2023) and promotes inclusive decision-making and sustainable outcomes by leveraging the strengths of each group. It also demands transparent communication, mutual trust, and effective conflict-resolution mechanisms (Frost & Laing, 2018; Sarhan et al., 2024).

The composition of COMTUR members reflects the diverse interests of the community and both the public and private sectors. The invitation for each individual to occupy a seat on the Council in Urubici was approved collectively, to ensure greater balance (representativeness), dialogue, and transparency in the decision-making process. Each member was responsible for disseminating information and maintaining dialogue with the groups they represent. This structure highlights the stakeholders' maturity and their shared vision for long-term planning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the aforementioned information, it is possible to observe the process of strengthening participatory management in Urubici, Santa Catarina, Brazil. The aim of this study was to highlight the role of governance and participatory management and their benefits for tourism development in the municipality of Urubici during the years 2021 and 2022. The documentary research conducted in this study was based on secondary data collected from COMTUR meeting minutes and SETUR activity reports from the referenced period, in addition to participant observation. The findings demonstrate alignment with the strategies, guidelines, and action plan established in the Municipal Tourism Plan (2021) and the Urubici Sustainable Tourism Initiative Plan (PLATS, 2013–2023), as illustrated in Figure 5. Furthermore, they address the research question by showing—through cross-referencing with official documents—the active role of each stakeholder in the decision-making process and in the development of actions aimed at advancing tourism in Urubici.

The original contribution of this article lies in the proposed framework illustrated in Figure 5, which intricately combines participatory management with integrated planning, presenting an innovative approach alongside the representative bodies responsible for decision-making, constituting a potential model of collaborative governance. This framework provides an evaluative model that can be further studied, proposed, and scrutinized in future research, utilizing a method that illustrates the representativeness of the actors engaged in the process. The distinguishing factor resides in the role of articulation and mobilization played by the actors involved in the municipality's tourism development. Many of these stakeholders represent various public and private entities, exerting influence on communities, and thereby making collaborative decision-making a complex endeavor. Consequently, it becomes evident from the literature review, and the results obtained, that the integration of participation, management, and communication is pivotal. Figure 5 visually demonstrates the process of participatory management and collaborative governance.

It is important to note that governance is an area requiring improvement in municipalities, to ensure effective management of tourism activities. The process of governance should start with raising awareness among the local population and representatives from various sectors about the importance of tourism. Integrated planning and governance are vital for overcoming challenges and promoting effective management and organization of tourism activities, ultimately leading to the sustainable positioning of the sector (Chornelia, 2023).

This study presents certain limitations, including the limited availability and infrequent updating of relevant information within the municipality. This challenge is common in small municipalities, and hinders the expansion of governance initiatives. It is also important to note that the existing plans are primarily oriented toward short-term projections. Ideally, future research should consider state-level planning that incorporates long-term forecasts and periodic reassessment.

Based on the data presented, it is important to highlight that Urubici has established itself as an anchor destination in the Serra Catarinense region, driving tourism development in neighboring municipalities. Nevertheless, challenges related to representativeness and diversity within governance bodies—such as the Municipal Tourism Council—still persist. Strengthening coordination and cooperation mechanisms across different levels of government and among stakeholders in the tourism sector remains essential. Broader integration can support the effective implementation of public tourism policies and help maximize the socio-economic and environmental benefits of tourism. Promoting greater synergy and collaboration among diverse actors is fundamental to ensuring a more holistic and comprehensive approach to tourism management. Persistent gaps still need to be addressed, and further research is needed to assess impacts, propose monitoring indicators, and evaluate the effectiveness of participatory management and governance strengthening at all levels—ultimately contributing to the development of sound public tourism policies in Urubici.

The conclusions of this study are context-specific, tailored to a specific destination and country, and may not be applicable to other settings due to the broad national perspective adopted in perceiving the destination. Other destinations may have additional factors that contribute to their competitiveness and identity at national level, and these may have explanatory significance. Replicating this research in other emerging tourist destinations with different environmental, economic, socio-cultural, and political contexts, would facilitate comparisons between studies.

In conclusion, we recommend that future research explore the collective discussions between COMTUR members and representatives from the executive and legislative branches, which guide public policies at the state and national levels, focusing on tourism governance and its impact on participatory management.

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Lara Brunelle Almeida Freitas: Conceptualization and data analysis.
Leonilo Alves de Abreu: Conceptualization.

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