

SICSS2011 ABSTRACT

A sustainable tourism in the Azores implies the environmental awareness of both stakeholders and tourists

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A set of nine "Islands' Parks" has been created throughout the Azorean archipelago, an outmost region of the EU located in the North Atlantic Ocean. Within these parks we find the areas delimited by Natura 2000, a network based on 2 EU Directives: Habitats and Birds directives. Since these regions aim to protect Europe's remaining natural areas, in remote and isolated islands like the Azores, this is a critical issue for they are much more susceptible to all sorts of environmental degradation (e.g. introduction of exotic species, habitat loss, pollution). At the same time they are devoted to the practice of nature based tourist activities, and nature based tourism is in Portugal among the top ten products on touristy offer, as defined in the Strategic National Plan for Tourism (SNPT).

In the last two decades, Azores has registered an increase in the number of tourists that come in search of a natural experience. This is putting a growing pressure on the local ecosystems, in terms of environmental impacts resulting from the tourist activities practiced in these protected areas, both terrestrial and underwater.

In order to evaluate, prevent and minimize the impacts resultant from the tourist activity in the Azores, a research project financed by FCT has been launched in the beginning of 2010 named, "Application of a model of sustainable tourism to areas of Natura 2000 in the Azores". The project uses two islands as a case-study, S. Miguel and Flores, which differ in terms of area, population density and tourist demand. So far the preliminary surveys conducted on the environmental perception of both tourists and nature based tourism enterprises, show that some work has to be done on both sides in terms of environmental education, to prevent future environmental degradation that may compromise the fate of this kind of economic income.

We intend to present our goals in terms of environmental education actions that are being prepared for 2011/12, to be held next to local tourist entrepreneurs.