

## **Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais, Brazil: historical aspects, fragilities and perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims at performing a general analysis of the Tourism Regionalization Program in Minas Gerais, approaching the main historical aspects of the formation of the State Secretariat of Tourism of Minas Gerais (Setur-MG in the Portuguese acronym) and the regionalization policy, as well as proposing a reflection regarding the main fragilities and perspectives of the project. Besides the participant observation, the research involved a bibliographic analysis and interviews conduction with representatives from Setur-MG, from the Federation of Tourist Circuits (Fecitur in the Portuguese acronym), from the State Council of Tourism of Minas Gerais (CET-MG in the Portuguese acronym) and tourist circuits managers from several areas of the state. It was noticed that many fragilities experienced by the tourist circuits already indicated in previous studies have not been overcome, with emphasis on the financial difficulty worsened by the associated municipalities' high delinquency rate and economic and financial crisis in the country. As perspectives, it was verified that there is great expectation regarding the creation of the General Law of Tourism of Minas Gerais, which aims at recognizing the existence of the Tourist Circuits. The necessity of revision of the criteria for qualification in the Tourism ICMS (Tourism Goods and Services Tax) and the increase in the tax collection portion for tourism have been also pointed out as necessary. It is essential that the Setur-MG, as the managing and encouraging body of the program, promotes measures in partnership with the tourist circuits and Fecitur, aiming at the improvement of the capacity of the circuits' management, as well as the strengthening of the institutions in their territories towards an effective empowerment and protagonism of the regions.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Tourist circuits; Regionalization; Governance.

### **Resumo**

#### **O programa de regionalização de Minas Gerais, Brasil: aspectos históricos, fragilidades e perspectivas**

Este artigo tem como objetivo realizar uma análise geral do Programa de Regionalização do Turismo em Minas Gerais, abordando os principais aspectos históricos da formação da Secretaria de Estado de Turismo de Minas Gerais (Setur-MG) e da política de regionalização e propondo uma reflexão acerca das principais fragilidades e perspectivas do projeto. Além da observação participante, a pesquisa envolveu uma análise bibliográfica e aplicação de entrevistas com representantes da Setur-MG, da Federação de Circuitos Turísticos (Fecitur), do CET-MG e gestores de circuitos turísticos de diversas regiões do estado. Percebeu-se que muitas fragilidades vivenciadas pelos circuitos turísticos já apontadas em estudos anteriores não foram superadas, com

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destaque para a dificuldade financeira agravada pela alta inadimplência dos municípios associados e acentuada pela crise econômica e financeira do país. Como perspectivas, constatou-se que há grande expectativa em relação à criação da Lei Geral do Turismo de MG, que pretende reconhecer a existência dos Circuitos Turísticos. A necessidade de revisão dos critérios de habilitação no ICMS Turístico e o aumento da alíquota destinada ao turismo também foram apontados como necessários. É fundamental que a Setur-MG, enquanto órgão gestor e indutor do programa, promova medidas em parceria com os circuitos turísticos e a Fecitur visando a melhoria da capacidade de gerenciamento dos circuitos, assim como um fortalecimento das entidades em seus territórios rumo ao efetivo empoderamento e protagonismo das regiões.

**Palavras-chave:** Turismo; Circuitos turísticos; Regionalização; Governança.

## Resumen

### **El programa de regionalización de Minas Gerais, Brasil: aspectos históricos, debilidades y perspectivas**

El artículo tiene como objetivo realizar un análisis general del Programa de Regionalización del Turismo de Minas Gerais, enfocando los principales aspectos históricos de la formación de la Secretaria de Estado de Turismo de Minas Gerais (Setur-MG) y de la política de regionalización y, proponiendo una reflexión sobre las principales debilidades y perspectivas del proyecto. Además de la observación participante, la investigación consistió en un análisis de la literatura y en la aplicación de entrevistas con representantes de la Setur-MG, de la Federação de Circuitos Turísticos (Fecitur), del Conselho Estadual de Turismo (CET-MG) y gestores de circuitos de turismo de diferentes regiones del estado. Se observó que muchas debilidades ya señaladas en estudios anteriores acerca de los circuitos no fueron superadas, especialmente las dificultades financieras exacerbadas por el alto endeudamiento de los municipios asociados y acentuadas por la crisis económica y financiera en el país. Como perspectiva, se ha descubierto que hay una gran expectativa para la creación de la Ley General de Turismo de MG que, entre otras cosas, pretende reconocer la existencia de los Circuitos Turísticos. La revisión de los criterios de elegibilidad en el ICMS Turístico y el aumento de la tasa destinada al turismo también fueron señalados como necesarios. Es esencial que la Setur-MG, como cuerpo inductor del programa de gobierno, promueva medidas en asociación con los Circuitos Turísticos y Fecitur destinadas a mejorar las capacidades de gestión de los circuitos y a fortalecer las entidades en sus territorios hacia el empoderamiento y efectivo protagonismo de las regiones.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo; Circuitos turísticos; Regionalización; Gobernancia.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Minas Gerais has its origins connected to the hydrothermal resorts, valued for their waters' therapeutic value in the 19th and 20th Centuries, highlighting the luxury casino hotels in the South region of the state (PEREIRA, 1999).

Although initiatives related to tourism public policies have been occurred since the 1940s, the State Secretariat was created only in the 1990s, with exclusive attribution of working on the tourism development of Minas Gerais. It was from the creation of a secretariat that the tourism regionalization process has started in the state, and the Tourist Circuits' beginning was the most notable fact of this trajectory.

The Tourist Circuits integrate the tourism regionalization policy in the state of Minas Gerais and they are acknowledged through a state decree since

2003 (MINAS GERAIS, 2003a). Such circuits appeared from the guideline of decentralization and adoption of participative measures turned to the regional development, based on the principles of integration and cooperation between the municipalities (TRINDADE, 2009).

In this sense, the formation of the Tourist Circuits sought to stimulate an endogenous process of tourism development, from organization and mobilization of the municipalities themselves. It is worth mentioning that the concept of development is complex, it having been a frequent subject of discussion in the Social Sciences. The understanding regarding the tourism development should go beyond the purely economic vision of growth and modernization theories, also approaching other dimensions. In this sense, the concept of sustainable tourism development appears with the concern of amplifying the economic-based logic for the questions related to cultural, social and environmental dimensions, among others (CORIOLANO; SAMPAIO, 2012; HALL, 2000).

Over the years, the regionalization policy of Minas Gerais has achieved significant advances and accomplishments that still contribute to the tourism development of the state. However, there are still many challenges to its consolidation and the effective empowerment and protagonism of the regions regarding tourism.

In light of this context, this article aims at performing a general analysis of the Tourism Regionalization Program in Minas Gerais, approaching the main historical aspects of the formation of the State Secretariat of Tourism of Minas Gerais (Setur-MG) and of the regionalization policy, as well as proposing a reflection regarding the main fragilities and perspectives of the project. To support this reflection, one performed interviews with managers from Setur, members from the State Council of Tourism (CET-MG), from the Federation of Tourist Circuits (Fecitur), in addition to circuits' managers from several areas of the state.

## **METHODS**

This article is based on a qualitative descriptive exploratory research.

According to Veal (2011), the descriptive research has the function of investigating and presenting/describing the object of study, without necessarily explain it. The qualitative approach seeks the understanding of the behavior of a certain theme and does not normally present numeric data. According to the author, one of the "basic assumptions of qualitative research is that reality is socially and subjectively constructed rather than objectively determined" (VEAL, 2011, p. 264).

The field procedure involved documentary and bibliographic research, in addition to the application of interviews with open questions. The bibliographic research considered articles and publications in periodicals, dissertations, theses and research reports. The research also included laws, rules, decrees, resolutions and official documents from the Setur-MG and the Ministry of Tourism. It was sought to trace the trajectory of the tourism state policy of Minas Gerais, as well as the formation of the Tourist Circuits, in addition to the correlation between the object and approaches linked to the governance.

The interviews were carried out during the months of May and June 2016, with the aim of identifying the fragilities and perspectives related to the Tourism Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais. Such interviews were made with repre-

representatives from Setur-MG (tourism deputy secretary, superintendent and directors of the Superintendence of Tourism Policies), representatives from the Fecitur and State Council of Tourism of Minas Gerais and managers of tourist circuits from most administrative regions of the state. One has submitted 25 questionnaires and 15 answers were obtained, as follows: four from the Setur's managers, one from Fecitur, one from CET-MG and ten from the tourist circuits' managers.

The questions that guided the interviews were related to: (1) difficulties and fragilities still encountered by the Regionalization Program and Tourist Circuits; (2) perspectives of changes in this scenario for the next ten years; (3) interviewees' opinion on the economic and political crisis through which Brazil has been coming and its influence on the direction of the national and state tourism policies; (4) perspective of circuits institutionalization by State Law; and (5) challenges and scenarios for the Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais.

As the author of this article worked in the tourism policies area of Setur-MG from 2008 to 2012, albeit to a lesser extent, the technique of participant observation was used, when the researcher "becomes a participant in the social process being studied" (VEAL, 2011, p. 275).

## **HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FORMATION OF THE TOURISM POLICY OF MINAS GERAIS**

As emphasized, in the second half of the 19th Century, the state of Minas Gerais started attracting the first visitors to the municipalities of thermal/hydromineral tradition. Nevertheless, it is from the 20th Century that this tendency is confirmed, stimulating the construction of glamorous hotels and resorts, in the standards of those existent in Europe at the time (BARBOSA, 2012). Bolson (2006, p. 75) reiterates that, in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, the Federal Government invested in improvements in those locations, it being one of the "first State's actions for the tourism activity of Minas Gerais."

For better contextualization of the tourism public policy in Minas Gerais, it is important to explicit the national context of the sector as well. According to Araújo and Taschner (2012), the first phase of the tourism public policy in Brazil is situated from the 1930s to the issue of the Decree-Law no. 55 of 1966. Such period is marked by the creation, in 1939, of the first tourism official body (the Tourism Division, as part of the Department of Press and Propaganda, linked to the Presidency of the Republic), by the creation of the first legal document that deals exclusively with the tourism in national context (Decree-Law no. 2440/1940) e by the prohibition of gambling, in 1946. The most relevant fact of the period is, however, the issue of the Decree-Law no. 55/1966, which, for the first time, defines a national policy for the sector and creates the National Council of Tourism (CNTur in the Portuguese acronym) and the Brazilian Tourist Board (Embratur in the Portuguese acronym) (ARAÚJO; TASCHNER, 2012).

Still according to Araújo and Taschner (2012), the second phase of national tourism public policy occurs from the issue of the Decree-Law no. 55/1966 and last up to the restructuring of Embratur by Law no. 8181/1991. In this period, the tourism starts being understood as possible tool to reduce the regional differences and contribute to the economic incentive of the territories.

The third phase of the Brazilian tourism policy starts in 1991 and continues to this day. This period is marked by the restructuring of Embratur (through Law no. 8181/1991), which turns into an independent body and incorporates the attribution of formulating, coordinating and executing the national tourism policy; by the issue, in 1992, of the National Tourism Plan (Plantur in the Portuguese acronym), whose programs have not been effectively implemented, and by the creations of the National Program of Municipalization of Tourism (PNMT in the Portuguese acronym), in 1994, of the Ministry of Tourism, in 2003, and of the Tourism Regionalization Program (PRT in the Portuguese acronym), in 2004 (ARAÚJO; TASCHNER, 2012). Such programs (PNMT and PRT) were important bases of the national policy in the sector. According to Trentin and Fratucci (2011, p. 841), the PNMT involved an “inversion in the decision-making processes of the national tourism management,” moving from the federal sphere to the local logic. The PRT, in turn, focused on the tourism regions instead of on the municipalities, having as one of the goals the strengthening of the regional tourism management, having been influenced by Minas Gerais’ policy.

Turning back to the state of Minas Gerais, the first mention to tourism happened in the 1940s, from the State Department of Press and Propaganda (thus, following the national logic), where the advertising, marketing and tourism were under the scope of the Broadcasting Division (BOLSON, 2006).

In 1960, *Hidrominas – Águas Minerais de Minas Gerais S/A* was created through State Law no. 2268. It was a mixed economy enterprise intended to the use and industrialization of the mineral resources and to the development of the tourism (MINAS GERAIS, 1960), which had incorporated to its capital some important hotels, facilities and resorts of Minas Gerais, such as the *Araxá’s Grande Hotel*, the *Parque das Águas de Caxambu* (Caxambu’s Water Park) and the *Poços de Caldas’ Palace Hotel*, among others (GOMES, 2006).

In the 1970s (thus, after the definition of a tourism national policy for the first time in national scope), the tourism was contemplated in the First and Second Plans of Economic and Social Development of Minas Gerais (PMDES in the Portuguese acronym), elaborated in 1971 and in 1975, respectively. Nevertheless, such documents contributed little to the tourism development in the state, since there was not either an executive body with the function of stimulating the development of the sector or financial resources available for investment. (PEREIRA, 1999)

In the later 1970s, one created the Agency for Tourism Development of Minas Gerais (Adetur-MG in the Portuguese acronym) aiming at implementing the first Program of Tourism of Minas Gerais (Promitur in the Portuguese acronym) However, according to Trindade (2009), the body was not able to reach the goals proposed in its creation due to, among other reasons, not having administrative and financial agility.

The *Empresa Mineira de Turismo – Turminas* was created in 1979 through Federal Law no. 7658 (MINAS GERAIS, 1979), replacing Adetur, extinct at the time. Turminas was a publicly owned company governed by private law, which had, among its attributions, the “operationalization of programs and projects of support and incentive to tourism” (MINAS GERAIS, 1979, art. 2).

In the 1980s, the municipality of Ouro Preto received the title of Humanity’s Cultural Heritage from UNESCO, what, according to Gomes (2006), should have given emphasis to the preservations and restoration of Minas Gerais’ cultural heritage.

In 1983, one created the Operational System of Sports, Leisure and Tourism and the State Secretariat of Leisure, Sports and Tourism (Selt-MG in the Portuguese Acronym), regulated by State Decree no.23373 of 1984, which established the State Council of Tourism as collective body of the Secretariat. Turminas and Hidrominas started being institutions linked to the Selt-MG, as well as the Administration of Stadiums of the State of Minas Gerais (ADEMIG in the Portuguese acronym) and the Company of Promotions of Minas Gerais (Prominas in the Portuguese acronym), created in 1981 with the purpose of acting in the captation and development of business tourism. (MINAS GERAIS, 1984).

According to Bolson (2006), in the later 1980s, Turminas takes the responsibility for the registration and inspection of the companies linked to the tourism sector in the state, while Hidrominas starts the process of privatization of its assets.

In 1989, the tourism is contemplated with a whole section in the Constitution of the State of Minas Gerais (chapter 2, Economic Order), which established as the State's duty the support and incentive to tourism as economic activity, recognizing the value of the sector for social and cultural development and determining the creation of a state tourism policy. In this document, it is noticed a mention to the regional tourism, regarding its divulgation. (MINAS GERAIS, 2017).

It is only in 1994 that a plan that defines the state tourism policy is effectively established: it is the Integrated Plan for the Development of Tourism in Minas Gerais (Planitur-MG in the Portuguese acronym), instituted by State Law no. 11483, after the issue of the Plantur in national scope (occurred in 1992). In this law, it was established that the State would be responsible for the "preservation of the tourism product," stimulating "its exploration, within the principles of rationality and efficiency, favoring the amplification of the tourism demand" (MINAS GERAIS, 1994, art. 3).

The Law of Planitur-MG was revoked two years later, due to the establishment of the Tourism Plan of Minas Gerais, aligned to the Plan for Integrated Development of Minas Gerais (PMDI in the Portuguese acronym), whose principles were the valorization and preservation of the historic and natural heritage, the integration and the economic development of the regions of the state, the promotion abroad and the development of the internal tourism (MINAS GERAIS, 1996). However, according to Trindade (2009, p. 27), the "plan has never been used to define guidelines for any action already performed by the Setur." This period coincides with the implementation of the PNMT in national scope.

Finally, in 1999, the Setur-MG is created by means of the State Law no.13341 (MINAS GERAIS, 1999), it being the first secretariat to deal exclusively with tourism in the state. The existence of an executive body to deal specifically with tourism occurs before the creation of the equivalent in the federal sphere – the Ministry of Tourism (MTur in the Portuguese acronym), created only in 2003. Turminas started being connected to the Setur-MG up to its incorporation by the Company for Economic Development of Minas Gerais (Codemig in the Portuguese acronym) in 2003 (MINAS GERAIS, 2003b).

The Setur-MG was born with the goal of "planning, coordinating, supporting and inspecting tourism, aiming at the improvement of the quality of life of the communities, the generation of employment and the divulgation of the State's tourism potential" (MINAS GERAIS, 1999, art. 19).

In the words of Bolson (2006, p. 79):

The creation of the Setur has started the construction of a tourism public policy based on the decentralization and regionalization, with the active participation of society for definition of the priorities necessary for the development of tourism. One established a methodology of induction or incentive so that the communities located in determined geographic spaces became involved consciously and actively in the formation of Tourist Circuits. The integration of the communities and the integrated management of the resources to promote and develop tourism were the bases for the development of an innovative methodology to stimulate the formation of Tourist Circuits in Minas Gerais.

From the creation of the Setur-MG, the policy of the Tourist Circuits appears, whose formation started in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it being detailed in the following section.

Some other posterior facts in the trajectory of the tourism policy of Minas Gerais deserve to be highlighted. The first of them refers to the creation of the Tourism State Forum, in 2003, later turned into State Council of Tourism, whose composition was regulated by Decree no. 45072 of March 2009 and, since then, is active. In spite of there being a Council formally instituted in 1993, it was only from FET-MG, and in special from CET-MG, that a collective body with a more effective performance was formed, recognized by the Setur-MG. (MINAS GERAIS, 2009b).

Due to its pioneering activity, it is worth highlighting the creation, in 2006, of the Federation of the Tourist Circuits, institution representative of the Associations of the Tourist Circuits.

Besides, one emphasizes the inclusion of the tourism criterion in the state law that establishes the distribution of the ICMS's (Tax on Goods and Services) collection portion to the municipalities of Minas Gerais, a major step towards encouraging tourism management in the cities of the state.

Finally, it is important to mention the management shakeup occurred in the state in 2013, which culminated with the union between the tourism and sports portfolios, forming the State Secretariat of Tourism and Sports (Setes-MG in the Portuguese acronym), which had a sub secretariat for each one of the areas (MINAS GERAIS, 2013). In 2016, however, the secretariats were separated again, and the Setur-MG returned to have an exclusive portfolio.

## **THE TOURIST CIRCUITS: PROCESS OF FORMATION AND CERTIFICATION**

According to Gomes (2006), the state of Minas Gerais has created the policy to stimulate the formation of Tourist Circuits in the late 1990s and early 2000s, that is, before the creation of the Tourism Regionalization Program – Brazil's Itineraries, instituted in federal scope in 2004. As previously mentioned, before this period, the national tourism policy was focused on the PNMT, whose basis stimulated the decentralization and the participative management, relevant aspects considered in the formation of the regionalization policy (ARAÚJO; CÉSAR, 2012).

Getting back to the state of Minas Gerais, Bolson and Álvares (2005) highlighted that the decision of regionalizing and decentralizing the tourism management in the state occurred due to two main reasons: (1) great territorial extension of the state and (2) great number of municipalities: Minas Gerais is composed of 853 municipalities. Moreover, the regionalization would allow diversification of the tourism activity in the state (very focused on the historic cities), stimulating the appearing of new integrated destinations and increasing the tourist's stay average time.

Aiming at stimulating the regionalization discussion as instrument of tourism development, the Setur-MG (1999-2003 management) organized participative workshops in the several macro regions of the state, involving the participation of actors from the public power, private initiative and local community, as emphasized by Emmerndoerfer (2008). The author highlights that the general purpose of the activities was the awareness-raising for the organization of tourism, and the workshops counted on the direct participation of the then State Secretary of Tourism, Manoel Costa, idealizer of the process, which assured credibility to the proposal.

Emmerndoerfer (2008) emphasizes that 54 workshops were performed, lasting two days, having been reached around 400 municipalities, and more than three thousand people indirectly. According to Trindade (2009), this process stimulated, up to the end of 2003, the formation of 47 circuits, encompassing about 450 municipalities.

The acknowledgment of this policy occurred in 2003 through State Decree no. 43321, which set forth that the Tourist Circuit is

the group of municipalities of a same region, with cultural, social and economic affinities that come together to organize and develop tourism regional activities in a sustainable way, through the continuous integration of the municipalities, consolidating a regional activity. (MINAS GERAIS, 2003a, art. 1, § 1)

The decree still establishes that the Setur-MG is responsible for defining, by means of resolution, the criteria necessary for the acknowledgment and for issuing the Certificate of Acknowledgment of the Tourist Circuits. Thus, it is considered a Tourist Circuit the one that meets the criteria defined and receives such a certificate.

According to Gomes (2006), the Setur-MG recommended that, for formation of a Circuit, besides the cultural, social and economic affinities set forth in the decree, the municipalities were located in a 100km-radius and adopted nomenclatures proper to their regional identity.

The resolution in force (MINAS GERAIS, 2014) determines that, to request the Certificate of Acknowledgment, the circuit must meet at least three requisites: (1) have, at least, a one-year formal existence; (2) be constituted for, at least, five municipalities of a same region and (3) be a non-profit entity, with the purpose of promotion and sustainable development. All circuits have, thus, legal personality, varying between associations (the most common), organizations of public interest of the civil society (Oscip in the Portuguese acronym) and development agencies. The municipal governments and other members pay a monthly fee to the Circuit, it being that each entity determines its rules, such as values and ways



In 2006 the Federation of Tourist Circuits was created, which congregates the Associations of Tourist Circuits, an important initiative regarding the circuits' participation extension in the targeting of the state public policies. The Fecitur has legal personality and is a non-profit legal entity under private law. The Federation represents the tourist circuits in the State Council of Tourism (CET-MG) and the participation in the federation is optional. Thus, the Fecitur does not congregate the totality of the associations of Tourist Circuits (FECITUR, 2016).

Lima (2011) highlights that, since the creation of the Tourist Circuits, the Setur-MG has promoted a number of actions aiming at structuring and qualifying the entities, such as awareness-raising actions, mobilization, promotion and routing, diverse qualifications, in addition to the voluntary resource transfers (covenants) directly to the associations for physical structuralization of headquarters, creation of web sites etc.

It is noticed that the process of creation of the Tourist Circuits in Minas Gerais counts on experiences that may be considered positive, such as the support to its structuralization from a participative method, the stimulus to endogenous development of tourism (evidenced by the voluntary adhesion to the process), the freedom for organization or agglutination of municipalities into tourism regions and the acknowledgment of the circuits by a state decree. It is still worth noticing the existence of criteria for their certification and acknowledgment, what involves the requirement of a minimum of institutional formalization and tourism planning.

In 2009, there was an important advance related to Minas Gerais' tourism public policy and to the Regionalization Program: the so-called Tourism ICMS, as mentioned before. It is the inclusion of the tourism criterion in State Law no. 18039/2009 (MINAS GERAIS, 2009a), which sets forth the distribution of an ICMS's collection portion to the municipalities. To be qualified to participate of the tourism criterion of the referred law, the municipality must, at least: (1) participate of the Tourism Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais, that is, must integrate a tourist circuit formally; (2) elaborate a municipal tourism policy; and (3) constitute and maintain the Council and the Municipal Fund of Tourism in regular operation (MINAS GERAIS, 2009a).

The Tourism ICMS percentage to be transferred is defined based on the index of investment in tourism of the municipality and on the sum of the indexes of investment in tourism of all municipalities qualified to receive the incentive. The calculation is made from mathematical formula established by Law no. 18039/2009. Thus, the number of municipalities qualified influences directly the value that each one receives individually (the more municipalities are qualified, the more diluted the values to be transferred). For the Setur-MG (MINAS GERAIS, 2014, p. 46):

After the implementation of the planning and tools of municipal management for tourism, the municipality shall be able to request the Tourism ICMS. The inclusion of the "tourism" criterion in the distribution of State ICMS's collection portion was an important conquest of the municipalities, since it excels for the tourism municipal organization and the development of the local tourism. For the first time in the history of Brazilian economy, municipalities started receiving resources from ICMS to work on their tourism management.

It is worth emphasizing that, on the occasion of the inclusion of the tourism criterion in the referred law, the Fecitur had an important role of articulation before both the Setur-MG and the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais. (FECITUR, 2016)

## **THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE TOURIST CIRCUITS AND THE GOVERNANCE**

According to Barbosa (2012), the process of decentralization is an essential factor for the development of tourism based on local protagonism and shared power. This can happen, as highlighted by the author, within municipal, regional or state context, by means of councils, forums, committees and associations.

The decentralization here approached has direct relation with the concepts linked to the social participation and governance. Camargo (2003, p. 307) emphasized that governance has to do with “activities supported in common and shared objectives,” encompassing from government institutions to those of non-governmental character. He highlights, however, that governance works when is accepted “by the main actors of a certain process.”

Barbosa (2012) still emphasizes that the concept of governance is ampler than the concept of government, which is represented by a formal authority, with political power and attributions connected to the conduction and implementation of public policies.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that governance may be an instrumental aspect of governableness, as considered by Araújo and César (2012). Arturi (2003, p. 80), in turn, exposes that governance is understood as:

a set of processes, institutions and practices, through which the citizens and different social groups – local, national and international – articulate their interesting and positions, forming a complex system of elaborations of policies and decision-making processes ampler than the state arena.

For Tomazzoni (2015, p. 1), the governance in tourism has an intimate relation with the participative management for the development of the sector and should be based on the planning.

Even so, it is worth highlighting that, although complementary, governance and participative management are different concepts:

Governance refers to the political and institutional environment in which the dispute of interests and the conflicts are processed, and to the process of coordination able to assure a democratic management, participation of different actors, sharing responsibilities with private sector and organized civil society, whereas the participative management refers more to decision-making processes and instruments and actions implementation. They are different but complementary. (ARNS, 2009, p. 89)

González (2014) emphasizes that governance in tourism is related to the citizen demand of seeking more collective decisions, allowing a greater participation and protagonism to the different social actors. In this sense, the tourism governance would be the search for the decentralization of the decision-making

process, mainly on subjects that involve conflicts of interest that impel process of social innovation.

For the Ministry of Tourism, the governance is connected to the capacity to govern, but presupposes a “participative administration that involves the local populations in the participation, monitoring and, in some cases, execution of public policies” (BRASIL, 2007, p. 16). The entities (formal or not) that actuate in the scope of governance shared in tourism are called governance spheres by Mtur.

With the creation of the Tourism Regionalization Program – Brazil’s Itineraries, in 2004, the creation of such regional governance spheres in tourism was stimulated, as part of the strategy of decentralization, cooperation and social empowerment, motivating the regions’ protagonism. In the words of Mtur (BRASIL, 2007, p. 16):

When considering the guidelines and principles of integration, coordinated management, participation and decentralization of the (Regionalization) Program, the Regional Governance Spheres start being responsible for the definition of priorities, coordination of the decisions to make, planning and execution of the process of development of tourism in the tourism region. They also must participate in the political, economic and social decisions in regional scope.

From the concepts presented, one can consider the Tourist Circuits of Minas Gerais as regional governance spheres.

At least in theory (since not always it occurs in all cases), the tourist circuits congregate the main actors connected to the tourism in the regions (public power, business community, civil society) and are responsible for the discussion, union of different interests and decision-making process regarding the planning of actions for the tourism development in regional scope.

For the Mtur (BRASIL, 2007), the governance spheres have as purposes the creation of a regional communication, mobilization of the actors connected to tourism, coordination of the process of regionalization, support to decentralization, planning, monitoring and assessment of actions linked to the tourism development, among others.

Despite the pioneering activity of Minas Gerais and the positive aspects regarding the public policy and governance, some studies still indicate some difficulties and fragilities in this process of tourism regionalization.

One of these studies, one research conducted by Lima (2011) and performed by researches from the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV in the Portuguese acronym), had as objective to evaluate the implementation of the policy of Tourist Circuits of Minas Gerais from secondary analyses and interviews with directors of 37 tourist circuits, in addition to managers from Setur-MG. Such research indicates, as positive aspects of the policy, a greater organization of the tourism activity in the state, decentralization, creation of the Fecitur, distribution of prizes by the Ministry of Tourism in the scope of the Regionalization Program – Brazil’s Itineraries, integration of the municipalities for the development of the region, municipalities that were not used to considering the activity as strategic awakening to the tourism, and

the possibility of discussing the tourism policy before the state government (LIMA, 2011).

Among the fragilities indicated, we can find great dependence of the tourist circuits in relation to the Setur-MG, difficulty of financial sustainability of the circuits in view of the associated members' high delinquency rate and the limitation of resources collection; difficulty of positioning the tourism as priority to the mayors, discontinuity of municipal governments' policies in management changes, as well as lack of formal mechanisms or tools for evaluation, by the Setur-MG, of the results of the state policy of tourism regionalization. (LIMA, 2011).

In addition to the questions already listed, Sette, Valle and Coutinho (2014) highlight that, although great part of the tourist circuits' managers recognize the regionalization policy of the state as an important initiative and have consciousness of their role as tourism regional governance spheres, some observation should be done, as follows: the managers have difficulty in the development of actions that have short-term results, what makes the municipal governments' perception of the tourism activity benefits and of the circuits' performance to be fragile; it is necessary to create a state law that disposes on the tourist circuits, nowadays recognized only by decree; the Setur-MG has the fundamental role as inductor of the regionalization process and, many times, successive changes of management and technical team resulted in discontinuity; and, finally, there is certain dimness regarding the guidelines of the policy in state scope.

## **RESULTS: DIFFICULTIES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE ADVANCE OF THE REGIONALIZATION POLICY OF MINAS GERAIS**

Firstly, the interviewees for this research were questioned on the difficulties and fragilities of the Regionalization Policy of Minas Gerais, considering primarily the aspects listed by Lima (2011), mentioned before, such as the tourist circuits' dependency in relation to the Setur-MG, problem of financial sustainability, difficulty of positioning the tourism as priority and the political discontinuity of the municipal governments. In the interviews, it was possible to realize that such difficulties were not overcome yet. The budgetary question and the high delinquency rate, currently added to the financial and political crisis by which Brazil has been coming through (what makes the municipalities to be in more fragile situation) are a reality. The tourism is still not seen as priority by great part of the municipal public managers, even though the Tourism ICMS, according to the interviewees, has contributed to a minimal organization in municipal scope and to the increase, even if small, of the mayors' interest in tourism.

When questioned whether the interviewees believed that, in a 10-year horizon, there would be changes in relation to the difficulties faced by the tourist circuits, the greater occurrence of answers was "partly." The changes, according to some interviewees, could occur in case there was more support and attention from the public bodies and private initiative. Managers from the Setur-MG believe that there is perspective of improvement according as the policy con-

solidates, but the “changes are gradual and slow” (INTERVIEWEE 7). One of the interviewees from Setur-MG indicated that it is essential to create mechanisms and conditions for a better management of the tourist circuits and, only in this situation, the difficulties would be overcome.

Those that have answered “yes,” there will be changes, have alleged that the progresses will occur in function of a perspective of improvement in the Tourism ICMS, with possibility of increase of the portion intended to the sector. Moreover, such interviewees say to realize a “greater effort from the associations to create projects without participation of the Setur, decreasing the dependency” (INTERVIEWEE 1).

It was already emphasized that:

This difficulties and obstacles were already identified by the state bodies that implemented public policies in the state of Minas Gerais. In the meetings and gatherings with the circuits’ secretaries and managers, this theme has been debated in the search for the solution of problems. I believe that in a 10-year horizon there will be improvements in this scenario. (INTERVIEWEE 9 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

The need for improvement of the Tourism ICMS was indicated by several interviewees: some affirm that the criteria established are fragile and insufficient to privilege those that really invest in tourism as strategy of development. Many interviewees affirm that some municipalities present documentation without legitimacy with the restrict purpose of being qualified to receive the resources. It makes that an increasingly number of municipalities accredited and, as highlighted before, the more municipalities are enabled, the less each one receives individually.

Moreover, it was mentioned that the maturation of the performance and positioning of the Municipal Councils of Tourism may contribute for further improvements in the Regionalization Program, since consolidated municipal governances tend to contribute to the strengthening of the regional management. The creation of the State Law of Tourism and, consequently, the regulation of the circuits by law were also mentioned as productive.

This law will deal with subjects and decisions of extreme importance for the management and survival of the tourism activity and circuits. One of them is to respect the regionalization bases and make the municipalities to respect this question, essential to the regional tourism development. Mayor in, mayor out, and they exchange the circuit just like this, “this circuit does not praise me and I replace it for another,” or “my friend who is mayor is director of the other circuit, then I will associate with that circuit for friendship or private matters.” These are fundamental understanding questions from a serious manager, compromised with the development of his municipality and region. (INTERVIEWEE 6 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

Those that have answered that there is no perspective of changes have a more pessimistic vision on the future of the Regionalization Program. One of them (INTERVIEWEE 3 – Tourist Circuit Manager) affirmed that great part of the circuits have financial collection extremely low and the state “plays” tourism regionalization. This interviewee affirmed that next year many circuits may finish activities due to the financial difficulty.

Other interviewee affirms:

I do not observe movement or behavior changes in the state, municipalities and mainly in the productive chain of tourism business community. Sincerely, and unfortunately, I have the sensation that the regionalization is good for those that are in an unfavorable position in relation to the region in which they belong to or in relation to the size of the tourism attractiveness of their location. Otherwise, I see a few efforts in direction to the growth and better performance of tourism regionalization. (INTERVIEWEE 5 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

The interviewees were also questioned on the impact of the economic and political crisis which Brazil is coming through (what generates certain instability with relation to the perspectives for the tourism national policy) on the advance of the Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais. Great part of the interviewees believe that the crisis has been aggravating the difficulties: the instabilities reflect inevitably on state and municipal scope and, as consequence, on the regionalization policy. The interviewee 6 highlighted that the lack of credibility regarding the public bodies and their managers in face of the actual scenario contributes to a certain disbelief and disunion of the local populations, making mobilization and articulation more difficult.

Others believe that the crisis does not impact directly on Minas Gerais' program, since it is a policy previous to national guideline, and independent:

The tourism regionalization program in Minas Gerais has been always independent from the federal policy. The scenario of the federal program has been always very stable, considering that great part of the projects of the entity have not had continuity. Thus, I believe that it will last even without force in federal scope. (INTERVIEWEE 1 – Setur-MG)

The Regionalization Program in Minas follows the National Policy; on the other hand, the state of Minas Gerais has started its regionalization process through the creation of the Tourist Circuits even before Mtur having implemented the program. I think even there being changes in the national scenario, Minas Gerais, according to the course of the state's tourism policy, shall tend to maintain the regionalization always considering the territory integration. (INTERVIEWEE 9 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

Then, the interviewees were questioned on the importance of the regulation of the Tourist Circuits under law, since the program is recognized only by decree. Most interviewees consider that it would be an important and necessary advance to the Regionalization Program. The interviewees from Setur-MG affirmed that the draft of the State Law of Tourism (that shall also deal with the Regionalization Program) has already been elaborated and is under analysis by the State Secretariat of the Governor's Chief of Staff Office and Institutional Relations (Seccri-MG in the Portuguese acronym) and later shall be submitted to the ALMG. Although some believe that the registration of the Circuits under law is only a formality, there was unanimity in emphasizing the relevance of the measure, because, according an interviewee from Setur-MG, the law gives "DNA, it gives pedigree" (INTERVIEWEE 10 – Setur-MG). However, one interviewee highlighted that

the creation of the law helps, but does not assure the maintenance of the program, there being need of greater investments in the qualification of the Circuits.

The last question approached dealt with the future of the Regionalization Program in a broader way. In this question, it was noticed that the vision of the managers from Setur-MG is somehow optimistic, it being highlighted that the basis of the policy is well grounded and the program shall proceed:

I believe that the basis of the policy is consolidated, there not being much room for structural changes in the future, such as, for instance, the replacement of municipalities and the low participation of the private initiative. But I believe in the strengthening of the program and consolidation and diversification of more tourist destinations in the state. (INTERVIEWEE 1 – Setur-MG)

I believe that the program will be improved, contributing better to direct the performance and investments of public bodies and companies in the tourism regions. Through grouping of municipalities and regions in different categories, process started recently at state and federal levels, the projects shall be better directed, according to the needs and possibilities of each region, optimizing the application of investments in the sector. (INTERVIEWEE 7 – Setur-MG)

One of the interviewees stressed that, in the future, there might be a “natural selection” in relation to the number of the municipalities constituting the Regionalization Program, but it would not be negative:

I believe that there will be a selection where only the institutions more organized and with tourist flow and clear tourist targeting will prevail, there being, then, a reduction in the quantity of circuits and municipalities that compound the regionalization state map. (INTERVIEWEE 8 – Setur-MG)

Among the circuits’ managers, some pointed a promising future, having as main challenge the qualification and financial sustainability, in addition to the strengthening of the spheres. One more time, the regulation of law of the Tourist Circuits, the increase of the tax collection portion and changes in the criteria for qualification regarding the Tourism ICMS have been mentioned as necessary for the advance of the program.

Only two interviewees, both of them tourist circuits’ managers, cited more negative perspectives, considering that in case the program is not better attended by the state, may walk toward its end:

I do not see much future ahead and he who sees it does not know the actual reality of the circuits. (INTERVIEWEE 3 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

If it (the program) is well supported, well maintained by the state, Setur-MG and municipal governments, the program will be more grounded, otherwise, we are afraid of its closing. (INTERVIEWEE 4 – Tourist Circuit Manager)

Below, one presents a summary table with the main results verified in the research:

**Table 1** – Summary of the main results of the research

Item	Aspects researched	Detailing
Difficulties and fragilities of the tourism regionalization policy of MG	Dependence	Tourist Circuits' great dependence in relation to Setur-MG
	Financial sustainability	Difficulty of financial sustainability of tourist circuits associated to the delinquency rate and difficulty of mobilization and commitment from municipalities.
	Political discontinuity	Changes of management in the municipal governments implicate in discontinuity of the tourism policy, which is not seen as priority.
Impact of the economic and political crisis in Brazil on the policy of regionalization of MG	Reflection of the crisis on local and regional scopes	Instabilities reflect on municipal and state scopes and, consequently, on the regionalization policy
Creation of a State Law to regulate the Tourist Circuits	Regulation	Creation of the General Law of Tourism of the state: advance important and necessary for the Regionalization Program
Challenges	Tourist Circuits Management	Qualification and financial sustainability of the municipalities.
		Creation of mechanisms and conditions for a better management of tourist circuits
	Tourism ICMS	Increase of the Tourism ICMS' collection portion, as well as revision of regulation criteria for the municipalities
Regionalization Policy	Strengthening and improvement of the Regionalization Policy	
	Need of more support and attention from public bodies and private initiative	
Perspectives	Positive	The policy basis is well grounded and needs to be strengthened and improved
		"Natural selection" regarding the number of circuits and municipalities that participate of the Regionalization Program, what is positive
		The maturation of the performance of the Municipal Councils of Tourism shall contribute positively, since the consolidated municipal governances collaborate for the strengthening of the regional management
	Negative	Some circuits may finish their activities due to financial difficulty.
It is possible the closing of the Regionalization Program in case it is not better attended by the State Government.		

**Source** – Elaborated by the author

From the results presented, it can be noticed that the Tourism Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais has a number of challenges for its effective consolidation.

## CONCLUSION

The Tourism Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais is often cited as reference in discussions regarding the models of tourism development, mainly in function of its bottom up characteristic, that is, focused on both the endogenous development and the strengthening and protagonism of the regions, with low direct intervention from the state public bodies in the constitution of the spheres of regional governances, the tourist circuits.

Minas Gerais' pioneering activities regarding the regionalization is unquestionable. In spite of that, the research pointed out that the program has still lots of fragilities that difficult its effective consolidation.

Previous studies indicated difficulties experienced by the tourist circuits that are still far from being overcome. The main and most mentioned question was that related to financial sustainability of the associations, worsened by the associated municipalities' high delinquency rate, which are in even more fragile situation due to the crisis in the federal government. Great part of the municipalities are highly dependent on the transfer of federal resources, and the present economic and political scenario influences directly the capacity of investment of municipal governments. In addition to that, there is the decrease of tax collection of the state of Minas Gerais, result of the economic instability. The lack of resources for investments in areas that are generally priority as health, education and safety makes the financial and technical resources available for investment in tourism in municipal scope even scarcer.

The financial difficulty of the tourist circuits represents an alarming fragility, which may even collaborate to the closing of the activities of the most affected entities, as mentioned by some authors. Despite the advances with the so-called Tourism ICMS, tourism is not seen yet as priority by great part of the mayors, and the political discontinuity is constant.

As perspective for the next years, one has realized that there is great expectation in relation to the creation of the General Law of Tourism of Minas Gerais, whose draft is under analysis by Seccri-MG. Such law shall recognize the existence of the Tourist Circuits (that nowadays is done only by Decree) and of the Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais. Although the law does not assure, by itself, the sustainability of the program, it is a relevant aspect that may contribute to its greater credibility before both the regional actors and the State Government.

The necessity of revision of the regulation criteria for the Tourism ICMS and the increase of the tax collection portion intended to tourism were also indicated as necessary, in order to make the incentive more robust and directed to the municipalities that really invest and believe in tourism as strategy of development.

Some interviewees believe that, in the next ten years, the Regionalization Program of Minas Gerais will advance and be improved. The evolution may signify a decrease of the number of participant circuits and municipalities, what should not be necessarily understood as negative. The reduction may contribute to a perfor-

mance more focused on those regions where the tourism is effectively a factor of economic development and promoter of improvement of social well-being.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the fact that the tourism is a complex phenomenon and its development depends on several factors, many of them external to the destination, state and the country itself. There are not standardized formulas that generate granted success or defeats. Actually, there is a set of practices and processes that are more or less proper to the reality of each destination. In this sense, establishing unique strategies of tourism development in a state so large and diverse as Minas Gerais is, with no doubt, a huge challenge. The tourism regionalization has been appeared as an interesting policy, which generated important and recognized achievements. However, it can be noticed that there are fragility and difficulties that keep on existing or having been aggravated over the years. Promoting the improvement of the capacity of management and qualification of the tourist circuits, as well as the strengthening of the institutions in face of the territories is essential for the advance of the program. It is essential that the Setur-MG, as body that induces and manages the program, promotes measures in partnership with the tourist circuits and Fecitur, aiming at the improvement of the capacity of the management of the circuits, as well as strengthening of the institutions in their territories, towards an effective empowerment and protagonism of the regions.

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