

## **Tourism Cluster: Proposal of a Conceptual Model of Regional Competitiveness**

### **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is characterized for being a sector that has been highlighted as one of the activities with greatest potential for expansion on a global scale. For its growth potential and for being a product that can only be consumed *in loco*, tourism accepts the prominence role of being a strategy for local development. In this context the search for competitiveness is one of the key concerns of companies around the world. As clusters being a competent tool in companies' performance, in regional development and in countries' competitiveness, it is important to analyze its potential in tourism. This research aims to propose a conceptual model to analyze how a tourism cluster encourages its regional competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Cluster, Tourism, Regional Development and Competitiveness.

### **Introduction**

Tourism is an economic growth engine with particular focus at regional level, but its national impact is also significant (Sharpley, 2002; Jackson *et al.*, 2005). But, if tourism importance is significant at a national level, at a regional level this sector is presented as an essential tool in regional development and economic growth, believing to be one of the weapons to avoid desertification and regions economic stagnation, namely in the inner regions (Opperman, 1993).

Given the great unanimity that clusters increase the competitiveness of a regional industry (Porter, 2002; Rocha, 2004) and given that tourism is a powerful instrument for regional development (Engelstoft *et al.*, 2006) is relevant and crucial to discuss the role of clusters in tourism. The discussion of tourism clusters is still in an embryonic phase (Rosenfeld, 1997; Nordin, 2003; Capone, 2004), explaining the low number of researches that approach this problem. That is why this research aims to propose a conceptual model to analyze how a tourism cluster encourages its regional competitiveness.

This research is structured as follows: it is carrying out a literature review that allows clarifying a number of concepts related to the clusters, in particular of tourism, according to several researchers' vision. Then it presents some evidences about regional