

p://ax.aoi.org/10.11606/issn.1984-4867.v2811p19-38

Articles and essays

### Work-leisure Relation and Attitude before the Contemporary Environmental Issues: challenges for the professional performance with ecotourism

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### Abstract

This article aims at discussing the performance of professionals that work with ecotourism in the surrounding area of Belo Horizonte and render services in four leisure activities: mountain biking, rock climbing, wildlife viewing and trekking. The investigation was impelled by the following questions: how the work-leisure relation is configured in these professionals' performance? Which aspects are approached in their discourses and professional performance in relation to the environmental consciousness and environment degradation? The methodology of this qualitative investigation involved bibliographic and field research, in which the data were collected through participant observation and semistructured interviews with fifteen professionals. The results evidenced that the interviewed professionals approach nature-based activities due to family influence and, over the years, what was considered leisure turns into profession. Later, a better technical improvement is sought in order to obtain the professionalization in the area. The search for "risk" influences the preference of leisure experiences in natural environment and, in this aspect, nature comes second. Although they are also subject to criticism, the professionals that work with activities as wildlife viewing and trekking evidenced a greater sensibility regarding ecological questions and greater influence on the environmental education of the practitioners.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Leisure; Professional Performance.

### Resumo

### Relação lazer/trabalho e atitude diante das problemáticas ambientais contemporâneas: desafios para a atuação profissional com o ecoturismo

O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a atuação de profissionais que trabalham com ecoturismo no entorno de Belo Horizonte e prestam serviços em quatro ramos de atividades de lazer: mountain bike, escalada, observação de vida selvagem e trekking de longa duração. A investigação foi impulsionada pelas seguintes indagações: de que maneira a relação trabalho/lazer é configurada na atuação desses profissionais? Quais aspectos são abordados em seus discursos e práticas profissionais quando se pensa na consciência ambiental e na degradação do meio ambiente? A metodologia desta investigação qualitativa envolveu pesquisa bibliográfica e de campo, na qual os dados

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foram coletados por meio da observação participante e entrevistas semiestruturadas com quinze profissionais. Os resultados evidenciaram que os profissionais entrevistados iniciam uma aproximação com atividades na natureza por meio da influência familiar, e que, ao longo do tempo, aquilo que outrora era considerado lazer torna-se profissão. Posteriormente, um melhor aprimoramento técnico é buscado a fim de que se obtenha a profissionalização da área. A busca pelo "risco" exerce influência na preferência pelas experiências de lazer em meios naturais e, nesse aspecto, a natureza é relegada a um segundo plano. Embora também sejam passíveis de críticas, os profissionais que atuam em atividades como a observação de vida selvagem e trekking de longa duração evidenciaram uma maior sensibilidade quanto às questões ecológicas e maior influência na educação ambiental dos praticantes.

Palavras-chave: Ecoturismo; Lazer; Atuação profissional.

### Resumen

### Relación ocio/trabajo y la actitud ante a los problemas ambientales contemporáneos: desafíos para la actuación profesional en el ecoturismo

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar el trabajo de los profesionales que actúan con el ecoturismo en los alrededores de la ciudad de Belo Horizonte y que prestan servicios en cuarto ramas de actividades de ocio: ciclismo de montaña, escalada, observación de la fauna y trekking de larga duración. Las preguntas que guiaron esta investigación fueron: ¿Cómo se establece la relación de trabajo/ocio en el desempeño de estos profesionales? ¿Cuáles son los aspectos sobre la conciencia ambiental presentes en el discurso y en las prácticas de estos profesionales? La metodología aplicada en este estudio se basa en un enfoque cualitativo. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de observación participante y entrevistas, involucrando a quince profesionales. Los resultados mostraron que los profesionales que trabajan en las actividades de turismo en la naturaleza empiezan un acercamiento a estas experiencias a través de la influencia de la familia. Con el transcurso del tiempo, lo que antes era considerado ocio se convierte en profesión. Más tarde, buscan mejorar técnicamente para perfeccionar la práctica profesional. La búsqueda del "riesgo" parece tener influencia en la preferencia por experiencias de ocio en la naturaleza y, muchas veces, la naturaleza se ve relegada a un segundo plano. A pesar de que también están abiertos a la crítica, los profesionales que trabajan en actividades como la observación de la fauna y trekking de larga duración mostraron mayor sensibilidad en temáticas relativas al medioambiente y una mayor influencia en la educación ambiental de los practicantes.

Palabras clave: Ecoturismo; Ocio; Desempeño Profesional.

### INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS: GROUNDING THE SUBJECT RESEARCHED

Despite the specificities of tourism and leisure in terms of theoretical-conceptual development, policies, market and interventions, both areas present interfaces and are intimately related. Some authors, such as Camargo (2001), Moesch (2002) and Rejowski (2010), for instance, consider that tourism and leisure are multidisciplinary areas with tenuous borders, being relevant to systematize knowledge and research articulations between them, overcoming isolated, partial and dichotomous approaches.

However, this kind of concern is still incipient in the academic context because, generally, the leisure is little discussed in both undergraduate and graduate Tourism courses (BERNARDINO; ISAYAMA, 2006; FARIA, 2012; GOMES et al., 2008; SOUZA, 2011; TAVEIRA; GONÇALVES, 2012), and the theoretical-practical advances are scarce in this scope.

Although it is common to find classifications that restrict leisure to a tourism segment, and even the motivations for touristic trips may be diversified, Coriolano (2006) emphasizes that the tourism essence is both the trip and the leisure. Thus, in this author's understanding, it would be "redundancy to talk about tourism of leisure" (CORIOLANO, 2006, p. 43).

Panosso Netto (2010, p. 18) disagrees with this kind of interpretation, but highlights that tourism is a diversified sector, "which is closely related to travels, events, leisure, hospitality, lodging, economy, culture, environment, entertainment, recreation, among other areas." For identifying this multiplicity of possibilities and approaches, the author warns that the understanding of the tourism should not occur in an isolated way, vision with which we agree. Thinking according to this integrated vision was one of the main challenges of this research, which tried to contribute to the knowledge production on tourism and leisure in the perspective of professional performance in natural areas.

In relation to the conceptions that ground the subject here investigated, leisure is a social right formally recognized by the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988, it being mentioned in the articles 6, 7, 217 and 227 (GOMES; ISAYAMA, 2015). Leisure is understood as a human need and a culture dimension, characterized by the ludic experience of cultural manifestations in social time/space (GOMES, 2014). This need is characterized in the playfulness and may be satisfied in multiple ways, according to the values and interests of the subject, groups and institutions in different historical, political, sociocultural and environmental contexts. Still according to Gomes (2014), leisure represents the need for enjoying, in a ludic manner, the myriad social practices culturally constituted, among them tourism is highlighted.

Tourism is conceived, in this article, according to the interpretation of Gastal and Moesch (2007): for the authors, tourism refers to the displacement of people in times/places different from the usual ones, what is full of subjectivity and contemplates the detachment from the everyday life, providing the subject an "estrangement" in relation to the lived experience. Through interaction between visitors and local communities, tourism may mobilize the (re) finding of colors, textures, aromas, flavors, senses and meanings in a continuous process of sharing.

One of the possibilities of tourism that has been growing substantially over the last decades is the ecotourism, also called ecological tourism. According to Serrano (1997), this practice has appeared as counterpoint to the massive, standardized and predatory tourism, aiming at defending the proposition of personalized itineraries, minimizing the impacts of the touristic activity and amplifying the environmental consciousness. In this perspective, the ecotourism wants to attend the landscape and ecological interests of involved people, making it possible for them to practice varied leisure nature-based activities. According to Ceballos-Lascurain (1990 apud PELLEGRINI FILHO, 1993, p. 138):

Ecotourism is that tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas. In these terms, the tourism oriented to nature implies a scientific, aesthetic or philosophic collocation [...].The specific point is that the person that practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences.

Serres (2004) considers that the concept of "nature" refers to the world as a whole, exception made to the transformations carried out by the human beings. In this sense, such conception includes the universe, the natural phenomena, the forests and other environments, plants and living beings. The human being, as a living being, is equally embedded in this understanding. In this study, one intends to understand the nature through an ample conception, valorizing its singularity and importance in the constitution of the planet. As described by Jamal et al. (2003, p. 3) nature "is as much an ideological marker as it is something real, for understandings about nature are deeply embedded in geopolitical and cultural influences, symbolic meanings, social constructions and historical influences."

In Brazil, a reference document called "Guidelines for a National Ecotourism Policy" explains that ecotourism encompasses "the natural and cultural patrimonies, encourages their conservation and search for formation of an environmental consciousness through the interpretation of the environment" (BRASIL, 1994).

Wearing and Neil (2001) identify four fundamental elements of ecotourism: a) notion of movement or traveling from a place to another; b) nature as basis for the choice of the destination; c) incentive to conservation of the environment, with the inclusion of local population (its culture, needs, identities) and d) educative role, subsidy for the previous topic.

According to Panosso Netto (2010, p. 94):

It is no coincidence that one of the fastest growing segments is the ecotourism, that tourism performed in natural areas with consciousness of the importance of the environment preservation. The search for original – or little modified – landscapes, has been growing at levels never seen before.

One emphasizes, however, the proliferation of ingenuous, idealized and glamorized discourses about ecotourism, since many initiatives do not comply with the defended principles. In those cases, the hedonistic consumption of nature prevails, as if it was scenery propitious to the adventures of the interested people (PIMENTEL, 2009). Besides, mistaken discourses and practices persist, generating discredit regarding the sustainability divulged by the ecotourism. On this question, Seabra (2001, p. 9) affirms that the sociodevelopmental character of ecotourism is pretty highlighted in official projects and political discourses, but it hardly reaches and involves "the traditional communities that live in the conservation unities, and those are swallowed up by an official massification policy, disguised as self sustainable."

Even with these exceptions, ecotourism is an extensive field and, according to Serrano (2000), encompasses a multiplicity of leisure activities experienced in natural areas, among them one can mention: trekking, hiking, rock climbing, rap-

pel, speleology, mountain biking, horseback hiding, diving, rafting, floating, kayaking, sailing, hang gliding, paragliding, ballooning, studies of the environment, photographic safari, fauna and flora viewing, catch-and-release fishing, esoteric tourism and rural tourism, among others.

Taking into account the relevance of deepening knowledge on this subject, one carried out a research that elected as object of study the performance of professionals that work with ecotourism in the surrounding area of Belo Horizonte, providing services in four areas of leisure activities: mountain biking, rock climbing, wildlife viewing and trekking. The investigation was impelled by the following questions: how the work-leisure relation is configured in these professionals' performance? Which aspects are approached in their discourses and professional performances in relation to environmental consciousness and environment degradation?

The companies and professionals selected for the research provide services in the ecotourism sector and organize travels, excursions or tours<sup>1</sup> for small groups in natural areas in the surrounding area of Belo Horizonte, what involves an incipient touristic structure composed of lodging, transportation, restaurants, programming and leisure activities, guided visits, tours, travel insurance etc. Barreto (2000, p. 21) indicates that touristic services have no reason to be "without a resource that serves as the basis to make them attractive and without tourists that visit them."

Despite the specificities of performance of professionals of the diversified ecotourism field, in this article one has chosen to denominate them broadly as "professionals of leisure nature-based activities" (CASTILHO, 2013). Aiming at contributing to amplify the discussions that approximate tourism and leisure, the research was carried out according to the methodological guidelines detailed as follows:

### METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research, which aim at understanding the internal logic of groups, institutions and actors, has been chosen chosen with the goal of bringing the researchers closer to the relevant interpretations in relation to: "(a) cultural values and representations on history and specific subjects; (b) relations between individuals, institutions and social movements; (c) historical and social processes, as well as processes of implementation of public and social policies" (MINAYO, 2010, p. 23).

Thus, one has combined bibliographic and field researches. According to Laville and Dionne (1999, p. 112), the bibliographic research consists in "revising all works available, aiming at selecting the one that may be useful for your research." Nevertheless, the authors point out that every research has a focus of interest, and, in order to not lose sight of the central question, propose the elaboration of "thematic

<sup>1.</sup> According to Panosso Netto (2010, p. 52), the temporary visitor that stays less than 24 hours in the visited destination is considered an excursionist. The tourist, although is also a visitor, stays more than 24 hours in the destination, with overnight stay in the place. "It is the person that is traveling and that dedicates part of his/her free time in recreation activities, entertainment, leisure, cultural enrichment, among others."

bibliographies." Based on this idea, one highlighted the following topics in the bibliographic grounding: professional performance in leisure, tourism, ecotourism, leisure nature-based activities and studies on the contemporaneity.

Initially, in order to delimit the field to be investigated through observation and interviews, one has carried out a survey of possible companies and/or professionals that had history of performance in ecotourism in Belo Horizonte and surrounding areas. After this selection, the choice of the object investigated has followed the criteria below: (1) to have experience and practice in the area for, at least, five years; (2) to organize travels and excursions for small groups with the objective of experiencing leisure nature-based activities; (3) to concede formal agreement for the research to be carried out; (4) to be settled in Belo Horizonte or surroundings; (5) to work with ecotourism in the state of Minas Gerais.

After the process of selection of companies and professionals of the area, one has selected: a company specialized in mountain biking tours, settled in Belo Horizonte; a rock climbing school that offers activities in all the regions of the state of Minas Gerais; a company specialized in wildlife viewing, settled in Belo Horizonte, which promotes excursions not only in Minas Gerais, but also in several states and countries (mainly in South America); and two local trekking guides that actuate in the Lapinha da Serra village.<sup>2</sup>

According Laville e Dionne (1999, p. 176), the observation can be considered as a "privileged way of contact with the real: it is observing that we situate ourselves, orientate our displacements, recognize the people and judge them." The choice for the participant observation allows greater interaction in a group's life, in order to understand its internal meaning; however, it is known that, in this method, the observer should be even more methodical to not lose important information for his/her research.

Aiming at performing the fieldwork, particularly the participant observation, the following activities of ecotourism with companies and professionals have been practiced: two mountain biking tours in São Gonçalo do Bação<sup>3</sup>, three excursions of outdoor mountain climbing in the region of Lagoa Santa<sup>4</sup>, more precisely at the Sítio do Rod <sup>5</sup>; two trips with focus on birdwatching in the region of the Serra do Cipó (Cipó Sierra)<sup>6</sup> and trekking between Lapinha da Serra and Tabuleiro villages, under guidance of local tourism guides.

The mountain biking tours offered by the researched company occur normally on weekends and have an average duration of ten hours. The activity is very popular in Belo Horizonte and surrounding areas, where relief and nature favor this kind of sport practice. The group was composed of about 15 people

<sup>2.</sup> Lapinha da Serra: village belonging to the district of Santana do Riacho. It is located around two hours from Belo Horizonte.

<sup>3.</sup> São Gonçalo do Bação: municipality located 70 km from Belo Horizonte, in the district of Itabirito.

<sup>4.</sup> Lagoa Santa: Brazilian municipality in the state of Minas Gerais, located in the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region.

<sup>5.</sup> Sítio do Rod: area created 15 years ago, aiming at stimulating and giving support to sports linked to nature, such as sportive mountain climbing, mountain biking, trekking and speleotourism.

<sup>6.</sup> Serra do Cipó: it is located 90 km northeast from Belo Horizonte, in the south region of the Cordilheira do Espinhaço (Espinhaço Mountain Range), between the parallels 19 and 20°S and 43 e 44°W, in the water divider of the hydrographic basins of São Francisco and Doce Rivers. Place of great touristic appeal of the state of Minas Gerais.

and the presence of the researcher was previously informed by the professionals responsible. Two tours with distinct groups were observed, which allowed an ampler professionals performance analysis.

The outdoor rock climbing occurs also on weekends and works as a complement for the training performed at the rock climbing school located in Belo Horizonte The trips are planned by the professionals in regions next to the city and may last up to three days. The number of people varies according to the objectives and the places chosen, but, normally, it does not surpass ten participants.

Regarding the company specialized in "wildlife viewing", there was participation in two trips, taken in the region of Serra do Cipó, which aimed at birdwatching.<sup>7</sup> This kind of observation is the most demanded in the selected company and has foreign tourists as the principal public, mainly North Americans and Europeans. Since birdwatching remains unknown to the most Brazilian population, the demand for this leisure activity is greater among people from other countries.

The trips were taken along with a four-people group and there was previous agreement regarding the presence of the researcher. Birdwatching is a modality directed exclusively to the leisure and, differently from the ornithologists, who search for scientific understanding through approximation to animals, the activity appreciators want only to watch and enjoy the moment, considering it a hobby.

The observation performed in the Lapinha da Serra village occurred by the participation in a trekking experience, which lasts three days and occurs on historical trails between Lapinha da Serra and Tabuleiro villages. The presence of local guides is essential, since the route has several nuances and demands previous knowledge. The group was composed of five tourists and two guides belonging to the local community.

The numbers of interviewees have been defined during the field research, aiming at contemplating all the subjects involved in the activities observed. The parameter used for the dimensioning of the number of interviews followed the saturation criterion, understood as "the researcher's knowledge, formed in the field, that he/she was able to understand the internal logic of the group or community under study" (MINAYO, 2010, p. 197). It is worth mentioning that the fifteen professionals selected have graduation in diverse areas and levels: in terms of schooling, two local guides have basic education level and have taken qualification courses to act as tourism guides; the others have higher formation in different areas of knowledge: Tourism, Physical Education, Biology and Forest Engineering. It is important to highlight that all of them have taken complementary formation in tourism and related topics, aiming at qualifying their insertion and professional performance in the area.

The interview script has been elaborated taking into account the practices of the researched professionals and, essentially, the relationship constituted between them and the visitors during the trip, excursion or tour. The volunteers were aware of the use of voice recorder to collect testimonials. The use of the equipment was adopted according to considerations of Zago (2003),

<sup>7.</sup> Birdwatching is an activity with intention exclusively recreational. It may be performed with the naked eye or through equipment as binoculars or telescope. Many times, the simple listening of the call may be considered birdwatching (MOSS, 2005).

for whom the material recording allows greater freedom to the researcher in the conduction of the questions, in the establishment of the interlocution relation and in the advance of the problematization. Later, all testimonials were transcribed. These records helped the organization and analysis of the results by means of access to a material more complete and that could be re-examined at any time.

The analysis of content was the technique used in the interpretation of the information collected. This information treatment methodological strategy can be characterized as a resource to understand the process of constitution of the perceptions, attitudes and representations of specific groups, with the advantage of allowing a data systematic comparison. Its principle is to break the structure and elements of the studied content to clarify their different characteristics and extract their meaning (LAVILLE; DIONNE, 1999).

Initially, right after the fieldwork, one performed a pre-analysis of all material collected. After material grouping and analysis, the following categories were defined: professionals profile, academic formation, environmental consciousness and environmental degradation related to the modalities researched. From the choice of the analyses category, new readings of the field material were performed and re-grouped according to the theme and the meaning that they expressed. It is in this moment that more judicious analyses start and the dialog with theory becomes essential to ground the discussion.

The activities researched can be grouped into two sub groups, according to the motivation of the individuals: "risk theory" and "insight theory" sub groups (CASTILHO, 2013; WALLE, 1997). Although the two theories do not approach, in an ampler manner, all possibilities that integrate the ecotourism, one has chosen such division because the leisure activities studied have some peculiarities that allow this association.

Regarding the risk theory, one can say that mountain biking and outdoor mountain climbing are similar in relation to the search for an activity related to adventure, speed and challenge against and in nature. It was observed that the visitors that appreciate these activities value the challenges dispute, in abundance in this practice. They are predominantly physical activities and, even when faced in a playful way, encompass some type of competition.

Wildlife viewing and trekking are similar due to the contemplative aspect and search for greater interaction with the natural environment. According to Walle (1997, p. 857), "certain nature-based activities, such as Bird-watching and fly-fishing, are dominated by intuitive or conscious insight and knowledge seeking." This reflection may come out from an intellectual contemplation of nature (EMERSON, 1836) or may be directed to a vulnerable preservation of nature (ARNOULD et al., 1998). The meaning of wildlife viewing is the contemplative leisure, whereas trekking reflects interesting aspects related to ecotourism and sociability.

It is important to emphasize that the data collection was initiated only after the approval of the Research Project and the Free and Informed Consent Form by the National Commission for Research Ethics (Conep) of the Brazilain Ministry of Health and by the Ethics Committee of UFMG. The research is registered with Conep under number 01396612.1.000.5149.

## WORK AND LEISURE IN NATURE: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN?

Although the professional performance has been researched considering the development of distinct leisure nature-based activities, it was possible to identify some common characteristics of the professionals involved.

The first common aspect identified in the interviewees' testimonies is the proximity with nature awakened since childhood. The narratives converge in relation to an important influence from the family regarding the first contacts with the modalities of leisure nature-based activities, with taste for travels in the region of Belo Horizonte (mainly to the Serra do Cipó) and with the creation of a brand new connection between work and leisure in adulthood. In this sense, more than a change regardi ng time and/or space, the discussion comes closer to a transmutation of behavior, a new relation with the profession.

In the excerpts described below, it is clear how the relation with the natural environment solidified over the lifetime of each interviewee:

My contact with this kind of activity has started due to my family. [...] My grandparents lived in the countryside, and on weekends we went to my grandfather's house. My father is from Aimorés, almost Espírito Santo, and my mother is from Vertentes, next to Congonhas. And, in this place there were always activities, such as horseback riding, trekking to some place; my father has always stimulated biking, since childhood, and we took our bikes there. Thus, I got used to this contact with nature. When I was eight years old my uncle also started to take me to go camping at the Serra do Cipó; there were still open areas, there was no camping area. (Interviewee 4)

I lived in Nova Lima [Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region] and have always had a very close relation with the environment. I lived in a condominium, with a lot of woods nearby, and I liked it very much. My first contact with photography was through my father. Soon I have had access to a camera and started taking pictures of animals, plants, landscapes and, then, I have developed this hobby professionally. (Interviewee 2)

In some moments, throughout the fieldwork, it was difficult to define to which extension the professionals were talking about their own works and performances, and to which extension they were talking about some ludic activity for which they have strong affinity, that is, their own hobby. Although they have responsibilities and concerns similar to other professionals' ones (for instance, control of risk and emotions), one verified the absence of a rigid border between work and leisure, as emphasized by Stebbins (2014).

A primary characteristic is the distinct relation with the time established by these subjects, when the contemporary citizen is the reference. The trips organized by these professionals have different durations, and can be characterized as not linear, that is, no trip is similar to another. Besides, as reported in the interviews, during the vacancy period, they practice the same activities with which they work professionally or any other that includes the leisure in nature.

People that are part of this business in general are practitioners of the activity. I am a practitioner, my partner as well. [...] Let's say we like the woods. We are practi-

tioners of the activity in our free time. It is not a coincidence that we have chosen a profession related to tourism. (Interviewee 1)

I have always practiced rock climbing, trekking, hiking; I have gone camping several times along my lifetime; since 1993, when I bought my first bike, I've been practicing mountain biking. I've always been an outdoor activities enthusiast. (Interviewee 3)

The analysis of these professionals' performance allows new theoretical definitions that confront the former dichotomy between work and leisure present in the studies on the theme, mainly in the second half of the 20th century. Although the contemporaneity is already characterized by new work configurations – in relation both to time and to space –, there are still dualist visions within the society and in the researches that approach the contemporary leisure.

The precursor studies of Veblen (1899), published at the end of the 20th century, and Dumazedier (1967), for instance, are categoric in relation to the division of two distinct period of time: time to work and time for leisure, the latter known as free time. This apparent freedom was seen as a conquest of the citizen of that time, who glimpsed a deserved rest from the labor activities. According to the explanations of Veblen (1899), the more the societies became sophisticated and modern, the shorter the time available for the complex consumption activities. Thus, the society development would allow a longer time to the citizens, especially to the ones that were capital holders. Nevertheless, as described by Schor (1992) and Gershuny (2000), the working time, opposite to the prediction, has grown substantially in the last fifty years, as the productivity has been increased unprecedentedly.

In the actual context, it is impossible to overcome the work-leisure dichotomy analyzing the phenomenon from the possibility of having a profession in which both merge. According to the studies of Beatty and Torbert (2003), focused on the tourism guides performance, work and leisure are related and can be experienced at the same time; besides, this experience becomes a skill that needs to be developed and cultivated as an indicator of personal development. According to the authors, it is essential that some activities are considered work and leisure, and the problem is not related only to time (long time spent working) or to the activity (leisure options); more than that, the greatest problem is in the professional's attitude regarding his/her activity.

Stebbins (2014, p. 43) collaborates with this discussion when clarifies that "work and leisure, unlike the conventional knowledge, are neither totally separated nor mutually antagonistic spheres of modern life."

Duncan (2009) presents a case study in which the temporary workers spare no efforts regarding mobility, work and leisure, so that they not to distance themselves from the experiences that are seen as priority in their lives. Thus, they adapt all the parameters of their lives in order not to move away from the leisure activities that stimulate this passion. In addition, Duncan (2009) suggests that the relationship between leisure, work and travel is more complex nowadays than in other times, because the addition of the travel element amplifies this equation.

All leisure activities that integrate the ecotourism sector may make it viable a "escape" from urban centers, since the natural spaces in those concrete environments are scarce (CARNICELLI-FILHO, 2010; LIMA, 2016). Plus, some authors (BRUHNS, 2010; BRUHNS; MARINHO, 2012; TELES, 2011) call attention to other relevant aspects in this context, such as the desire to establish a closer relation with nature, many times idealized, as well as search for experiences with controlled risk. Therefore, for these researches, work, leisure and traveling are together and do not have defined borders. On this theme, some excerpts of the interviews point to the same direction:

When I've started working with tourism, my "trip" was traveling for free. My father has always traveled a lot and we always were along with him. Certainly I have inherited this trait from him. I've always wanted to travel, I was always the person responsible for the organization of the travels with my friends. We went almost all weekends to the Serra do Cipó. And, most of times, I organized everything, bought everything and then we divided the bills. (Interviewee 2)

As a rock climber, I've visited many countries and known several people. One of the most interesting aspects of this profession, besides the practice of a modality, is the possibility of traveling and knowing new people. I've just arrived from Patagonia; we've stayed for almost two months in the Fitz Roy area (mountain in the region). (Interviewee 4)

Complementing the previous ideas, Carnicelli-Filho (2010) performed a study with rafting guides that, in spite of having their obligations and responsibilities well defined by the company they represent, are able to combine leisure, work, friendship, commitments and hierarchy in a same environment where, in general, their personalities are reflected. This study reveals interesting implications on the complexity existent between leisure, work and life style.

It is in this perspective, according to which work and leisure mix and blend at every moment, that the field analyses were performed. An unmistakable relationship between professionals that have participated of the study and the leisure activities offered by them was detected, as emphasized in the testimonials. This characteristic of love and affinity for the profession could be something more ordinary in the Brazilian society, which still favors performance sectors seen as "well-regarded" or "better-paid". The prerequisite for a profession choice should not superpose the passion and, when possible, should be very close to the leisure of each one.

In short, one verified that the limits between work and leisure are tenuous for the professionals researched, which is according to contemporary studies on this theme (GOMES, 2014). Although the research subjects assume professional responsibilities, the work performed is directly related to the leisure. Thus, it was not possible to identify to which extension the experiences performed in nature are work or leisure, because the playfulness is very present and crosses these tourism guides' professional performance, revealing the border relations between the two fields. It does not mean that there is lack of responsibility, disengagement or spontaneity: on the contrary, one observed the professionalism on several occasions, especially regarding safety and infrastructure.

# PROFESSIONALS' DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES ON ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

As mentioned, the professionals that have participated of the study have different formations and, unanimously, have criticized the non inclusion of basic precepts throughout courses offered for a better performance in the leisure experiences in nature. They have emphasized that the search for greater knowledge of the area, or even for a first contact, has happened "outside the college walls". Undergraduate courses in Tourism, Physical Education and Biology, for instance, should explore the contents that approached critically this knowledge, in order to collaborate in this scope.

The practitioners' safety is a primordial knowledge for these professionals, since the risk is a characteristic inseparable from these modalities. According to Buckely and Uvinha (2011), the risk management measures may be divided into six groups: commercial, legal, medical, operational, physical and social. It is an ample knowledge that demands complete formation of these professionals.

In the same direction, Carnicelli-Filho (2010, p. 285) highlights that "all these activities require specialized guides whose job it is to try to minimize the risk factors that are inherent in the nature of the activity." In addition to the specific knowledge of leisure dominance, the professionals need to know instructions on first aid and possible venomous animal attacks.

The attraction that the natural environment exercises on the people was perceptible throughout the field research and it is necessary to make some considerations regarding the characteristics of the liquid human being, as discussed by Bauman (2001; 2008). The "search for nature" that in old times was associated to discovering, and, at the same time, to the possibility of finding treasure, currently seems to involve, besides these aspects, an attempt to legitimate the own existence. Many times, one does not find comfort and pleasure in the everyday life; the search for "risk" in leisure nature-based experiences becomes a game against death, or, in the words of Le Breton (2009, p. 162), "one assumes the risk to perish by putting himself/herself and the own life on one of the scale plates."

Professionals that work with leisure nature-based activities, besides using this attraction for risk as a sort of marketing, were also subjects to this attraction and are still in contact with such activities for the same reason: whether in mountain biking practice or in rock climbing, the challenge of putting himself/ herself at risk was the main component for the work choice and, in this aspect, the interviewees generally end up disregarding other important questionings that surround the practices.

During the research, one verified a strong relationship between leisure nature-based activities experiences that need extra equipment (for instance, bicycles, jeeps, mountaineering tools, among others) and the search for risk. These high cost equipment proportionate a controlled safety in several practices and, at the same time, make it possible to achieve great speeds and "extreme" sensations. When a practitioner comes to nature loaded with instruments, it seems to be not an interaction with the environment, but a sort of confrontation, challenge, combat.

Professionals that act in this field and that, at the same time, are attracted by this kind of emotion, need to reflect critically on these aspects. When the envi-

ronment is faced as adversary, one gets "speed" and "adrenaline"; on the other hand, other possibilities of interaction with nature are lost, mainly regarding the awakening of the environmental consciousness. In the field observation of mountain biking and rock climbing, these characteristics seem to be evident. In this sense, the professionals that intend to engage with environmental education gain importance. Much more than simple "trails companions", such professionals may have an important role on the awakening of the practitioners' environmental consciousness.

Experiences of leisure in nature, as well as in other environments, happened to incorporate the characteristics inherent to large urban centers, such as: competitiveness, speeding, ephemerality, individualism, consumerism, among others. The natural environment that allegedly could be an invitation to silence, to the contemplation and preservation, has been used as prolongation of the "concrete jungle", reproducing a frenetic pace of life ruled by fear. Although there is a movement of return to nature, mainly as leisure option, not always this return is synonymous of environmental education or awakening of new sensibilities. (PEREIRA; MYKLETUN, 2012). New obstacles to be overcome and beaten are aimed frequently and, as consequence, the logic of "the higher and faster, the better" becomes the objective of the practices.

The influence from the search for risk, excitation and adrenaline is so strong that even the academic concepts that try to define those experiences tend to the use of these terms. One tries to characterize these activities by emotions that they can proportionate and, in general, ends up encompassing all the modalities in a single definition. It may be necessary to differentiate those that are more associated to the risk and those that may refer to contemplation and interaction with the environment.

Although the most commercialized leisure nature-based experiences are those that present "danger" as background, other possibilities have been gaining space as well. In the field research one analyzed the experiences of birdwatching and trekking and, unlike the others, these two activities indicate valorization of slower pace, suggesting a more interesting interaction between human being and nature, without necessity of extra equipment for their development.

Professionals involved in these leisure experiences evidence greater sensibility in relation both to the environment degradation and to the use of those experiences as amplifier of environmental consciousness. In the case of the professionals that work with birdwatching, one has realized concern regarding the number of visitors, how the approximation with the animals occurs and, mainly, the future of this leisure activity before extreme climatic changes. In the case of the tourism guides that work with trekking in the Lapinha da Serra village, this concern was also perceived, providing other questionings, such as: practitioners' conduct, right use of the rivers waters, valorization of the local inhabitants, among others.

When one thinks about environmental consciousness and behavior changes, certainly these aspects are not enough. However, by comparing the professional performance, on one side, in birdwatching and trekking, on the other, in mountain biking and rock climbing, a great difference was observed. The professionals from these two last leisure nature-based experiences, although having emphasized in their discourses and practices some "ecologically right" behaviors, have

not put such questions as priority. Thus, the environmental aspects come second, and technical and competitive aspects are more valued by the practitioners of these activities.

In this aspect, such observations have some similarities with the research performed by Pereira and Mykletun (2012), with tourism guides of the Amazon rainforest. According to the authors, these professionals' performance comes down to accompanying the practitioners on the trails, and a local ecological interpretation is not perceived.

Experiences that demand greater sensibility and that, in some aspects, are developed slowly and contemplatively seem to be against the current logic, based on the control of variables and on time optimization. As well as the so-called cultural industry privileges leisures that, in general, demand little critical reflection, several leisure nature-based experiences may follow this same direction. Experiences as bungee jumping, base jumping and skydiving, among others, proportionate a great emotional discharge in a relatively minimal time and, simultaneously, demand substantial expenses to be performed. Most imes these experiences happen in beautiful natural landscapes, where nature, again, is only a luxury "stage". In this aspect, Park (2006) expresses severe criticism by naming New Zealand, the current Disneyland of radical sports, "theatre country".

In the field research, the difficult of the practitioners coming from the urban centers to observe, feel and decipher the environment signs was perceptible. However, the excerpt below evidences how being in touch with the natural environment may transform:

Most visitors return other times to Lapinha da Serra. After the first visit, people normally begin to respect nature more, not to throw garbage on the streets and even make less noise. When we observe anyone throwing garbage or entering the city in swimming suit, we talk to them immediately. There are people that respect it already, but there are others that come for the first time and do not care about anything. (Interviewee 10)

Leisure nature-based experiences mediated by professionals should increasingly challenge the dualist vision between nature and culture that has been installed, mainly in the Western part of the globe. In the current positioning of people in relation to nature (that is, out of it), little progress can be made in the discussions on the environment. One verifies, thus, a detachment from the simplifier paradigms of the past, of the disjunction between human being and nature, as well as the reduction of the environment in relation to the subject him/herself.

In the attempt of not exceeding to a utopian romanticism, it is known that almost all actions directed to the diminution of this detachment end up failing. Thus, it is expected that new forms and sensibilities in relation to nature may be constructed through the awakening of senses, incorporations and sensuality that still have to be explored. Beyond the pure "risk", there are other perspectives that could be present in the formation, in the performance of the subjects of the leisure nature-based experiences and in the texts of those that intend to contribute to the academic discussions of the area.

Another interesting aspect, directly linked to the environmental degradation, is the mining practice in the state of Minas Gerais, which is, mainly, in the surrounding area where the research was performed. Given the direct relation between mining and environment degradation, mentions regarding the theme during the leisure nature-based experiences should have been done, leading the participants to questionings related to the use of nature, the growing number of participants in ecotourism activities, territorial conflicts, etc. In great part of the experiences analyzed, however, it has not occurred, what may be an evidence of normalization of practices pernicious to the environment.

It was observed, in the fieldwork, the direct influence of the questions related to mining on the lives of the citizens from the studied villages. Although the discussion on mining is present in these people's lives, a more critical vision of such economic activity – whether in the dialog with dwellers or in the discourse of the professionals of leisure nature-based activities – is still incipient. Both the local dwellers and the professionals that work in these regions should provoke some questionings on the theme, what has not been detected in the informal talks or in the leisure nature-based activities performed.

Throughout the field observation of mountain biking, rock climbing and trekking, the experiences occurred in the mining surrounding areas, and little was discussed on the theme. Professionals that work with the mountain biking experiences have mentioned the question timely and demonstrated concern regarding the development of mining, calling attention mainly on the diminution of propitious environments for the performance of the modality that they practice. On the other hand, the professionals that work with rock climbing and the trekking guides in the Lapinha region have not approached the question. The tourism guides, in turn, have demonstrated certain satisfaction with the mining development, since the growing number of participants of these experiences could be linked to the mineral exploration of the region.

The impact related to the number of practitioners of leisure nature-based activities was constant subject throughout the interviews carried out in the fieldwork. The professionals that have participated in the research, with exception of wildlife viewing, talked about how difficult it is to survive on nature tourism. If, on the one hand, it was observed that there is concern in relation to the growing number of participants in every tour, on the other hand, a greater number of participants make it possible a greater profitability.

In mountain biking, rock climbing and trekking, a group must be composed of, at least, three people, with a maximum of twelve. However, one knows that the greater the number of participants, the less the interaction with the environment could be and the greater the necessity of hiring of new professionals. In the case of wildlife viewing, there is a maximum number that must not surpass five people, and the tours are always performed by at least two guides. The priority of these professionals is to allow a greater interaction between human being, flora and fauna; for this purpose, limiting the number of people is essential. However, it is possible to charge a higher price to the practitioners because, as it was observed in the fieldwork, most times they have a greater purchasing power than the practitioners of other modalities.<sup>8</sup>

Taking into account the analyses obtained in this study, the world trend is that the experiences specialized in nature-based activities have an increasing cost. In

<sup>8.</sup> Information obtained throughout the field research (Fieldwork Notebook Notes)

Brazil, this can be observed in locations as Bonito9 and Fernando de Noronha10, in which the traveling costs may exceed the cost of a travel abroad. However, when one thinks of less commercial experiences, as trekking, observed in this research, or rock climbing and mountain biking, the cost is still low and may attract a greater segment of the population. Nevertheless, some rules must be followed regarding the number of clients and possible conducts that generate environmental degradation.

Considering some activities' final objective of awakening sensibility in those who have experiences in nature, it is common the idea that a deep interaction between human being and nature would only be possible in paradisiacal environments. However, the environment is not responsible for this sensibility change, but the individual him/herself. Even living in great urban centers, this ecological consciousness becomes essential in the contact with the exterior environment, with other people, in the use of water, in the treatment of the garbage, in the use of energy, in the change of behavior as a whole. In this aspect, the presence of qualified professionals is crucial when we note an environmental concern in their discourses. "Such professionals may proportionate a single approach between the practitioners and the aspects related to ecology", as it is emphasized by Lima (2016, p. 18).

In this context, there must be greater valorization of changes that allow less consumerist habits and behaviors. As several economic sectors, nature-based tourism has also prioritized commercial and little educational experiences. It is necessary to explore economically all Earth's natural environments, from the driest desert to the highest mountain. What is evident is the unbridled passion for the "unexplored", which is always outside and, on the other hand, the difficult in "exploring" human values, so necessary currently.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research on professional performance in ecotourism context evidenced that the professionals investigated have some characteristics in common. All of them, in same way, have established in childhood, and from the coexistence with the parents, a "passion" for nature and, as consequence, for the proximity to natural environments. They have developed sensibility over the adolescence (organizing campings, taking leisure trips, "running away" from the great urban centers) and cultivated it throughout lifetime.

Although a number of difficulties permeate this professional performance field, the interviewees still act with these experiences, whether at work or leisure, and all this involvement has a single explanation: zest for the profession and for the proximity to nature. Even being subject to criticism and stimulating reflections, these aspects were constant in the development of this research.

It was also verified the care of the professionals that work with ecotourism in establishing a less dichotomous view when in relation with the practitioners. This

<sup>9.</sup> Brazilian municipality in the Midwest region, located in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

<sup>10.</sup> Brazilian archipelago located in the state of Pernambuco, formed by twenty one islands.

is relevant, since several times, in this sector, the values that strengthen and perpetuate the distinction between the human being and nature are valued, for instance.

Nowadays, we verify that both the ecotourism and other leisure nature-based activities are blocked by the myth of pristine nature. Protected areas favor the visit of urban populations for the practice of these "adventures", without guaranties of return and improvement for the local populations,

mostly illiterate, geographically isolated, without political power, but that for centuries, due to their way of life, are responsible for the conservation of the so-called "natural world". This is more serious when it is known that the permanence of this traditional population in its habitats may conduce, in a more appropriate way, to the conservation of biodiversity. (DIEGUES, 1996, p. 68)

An extremist vision may reinforce the belief that the people interested in leisure nature-based activities are visitors ingenuous, pure and apart from that context. This abyssal separation may reaffirm the general thought that the function of nature is simply to provide natural resources, without consciousness of the finitude of this richness and, mainly, of the need of preservation.

The professional performance with leisure nature-based activities is equally exposed to conditions of social reproduction, once the more comprehensive movement of ecotourism is permeated by productive and mercantile relations. Therefore, such a return movement is ideological and may act on behalf of both the environmental conservation and social transformation and the depredation or alienation.

Thus, a better understanding of the dynamics between professionals, fieldwork and practitioners could assist in the development of a critical view resulting from the experiences of environmental education provided by ecotourism. Understanding that may generate improvements in the quality of the work in several modalities of ecological tourism.

Concluding, when sharing the work with nature experiences, tourism and leisure need new researches and deepening to be performed, encompassing the daily routine of the professionals that work with ecotourism, contributing to improve the knowledge on this field. It is expected, thus, that the investigation performed represents a starting point for other studies on the theme, instigating new points of view on tourism and on leisure nature-based activities.

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> Received on: 5/5/2016 Approved on: 12/18/2016