

THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
OF THE ELDERLY THROUGH
ECOTOURISM IN THE LOCALITY
OF FOMENTO, VILLA CLARA, CUBA
WITH THE USE OF AUDIO-VISUAL
MATERIAL

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To quote this article:

Coca Bernal , N., García Iglesias, M. de la C., Alpizar Ortueta, C., Alonso García, M. D., Gody Morffi , D., & Hernández Heredia, D. de la C. (2020). La educación ambiental a través del turismo ecológico en adultos mayores en la localidad de Fomento, Villa Clara, Cuba con el uso de material audiovisual. *ESPACIO I+D, INNOVACIÓN MÁS DESARROLLO*, 9(24). <https://doi.org/10.31644/IMASD.24.2020.a01>

— Abstract —

The research was applied in the municipality of Promotion, Villa Clara, Cuba for a year to construct through a participatory action research, an Educative Strategy of ecotourism with the use of audio-visual material in the elderly for a healthy lifestyle. Investigation-action-participation techniques were used: the participant observation, triangulation of sources, researcher's journal, focal groups of discussion, and study of the case. Some of the results of the Educative Strategy with the ecotourism, were the reduction in a considerable percentage of the levels of stress generated in the elderly, and the stability of chronic diseases. In addition, it changed their perception of tourism, since the use of the Environmental Education disabilities and potentialities of these ages can be adapted. Also, they recognized the importance of the ingestion of fruits and vegetables. This experience allowed for the socialization of the elderly and an approach to its relatives, and in the main groups of discussion, it was demonstrated how their sexual lives are part of their past, present, and future. With all their experiences audio-visual materials were made.

Keywords

Ecological tourism, environmental, adult education greater, and audio-visual materials.

The elderly are an age group ranging from 60 years old and up. "Cuba, with a 15% of the population aged 60 or over, is a country where everyone who reaches and exceeds 60 years of age is considered an elderly" (GalbánI, Soberats, & Díaz-Canel, 2006). Thanks to advances in science and technology, people are living longer, but not with the quality of life that is desired.

The vast majority of the elderly do not adapt to the aging process, physical and mental capacities tend to decrease, but, according to their physical and mental condition, some people can perform multiple activities. Depression, lack of physical exercise, and suicide are common at this stage of life. "Depression in the elderly has a systemic effect and depressed elderly people seem to have a greater susceptibility to diseases since this pathology causes neurological, hormonal and immunological changes...in emotions, it is accompanied by complex neuroendocrine modifications with a sequence of physiopathological events" (Aguilar-Navarro & Ávila-Funesa, 2007).

The data indicate that Cuba is an aging country, which is why the national health system has prepared itself for the most frequent diseases in these ages. From the psychological point of view, it is difficult to reach each person, even when food, consultations, and free medicine are provided to those with low income, the emotional-motivational sphere is not attended to in the same way. "The approach to aging implies the enforcement of public policies and programs for the integral attention of the elderly. Cuba's challenge is to improve the well-being and quality of life of this group, that is why population aging is included as a thematic axis on which all Cuban organs and institutions are devoted to working" (Mercedes, Sánchez, Somonte, & Cabrera, 2014).

This group of people voluntarily gives up social gatherings, isolate themselves and their lives become meaningless. They were excellent workers, espouses, children, but they no longer perform these tasks, nor do they occupy their time in a healthy and didactic way. On the other hand, people around them look down on them, seek support and advice from younger people, even if they are less skilled than the elderly. "Increasing longevity has its demands that cannot be ignored, and one must ensure that the high cost of growing old is compensated by a good quality of life" (Vera, 2007).

In the town of Fomento, in the province of Villa Clara, it was possible to verify through different methods and techniques that:

- This group has a low purchasing power, due to the lack of employment options according to their age.
- They present chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and emotional disorders, among others.
- Post-traumatic stress due to becoming widows.

- Accident and suicide risks.
- They do not have a healthy hobby because the culture and recreation are mainly aimed at the 15-40 age group. Music and dancing are not appropriate to their tastes and motivations.
- This population presents a high cultural level but they are outdated in their fields of study.
- Fashion designers work mostly for young people and do not take into account advanced ages; the design of clothes and shoes does not respond to their tastes and the needs arising from the diseases typical of this age.
- As for sexuality, they do not speak freely and without prejudice about their sexuality, they have lost their partner, it is difficult to seek a new relationship and express their love and empathy for the opposite sex.
- They show discouragement, apathy, feeling of helplessness concerning their families and the population in general.
- They do not exercise according to their age, so they have problems with weight, obesity, or low weight.
- They do not healthily use their free time.
- They do not know the tourist potential of their city.

These incipencies and behaviors were taken from the population group of elderly, from the locality of Fomento, province of Villa Clara; which incited to investigate the construction of an Educational Strategy, from a participatory action research. These needs were detected with the following methods:

METHODS

The research used participatory action research techniques described in Kemmis' research strategy (1988) which, "is based on the notion of a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. It expresses a commitment to improving practices and is collaborative".

The *analysis of documents* was applied to evaluate aspects of the ecotourism content, as well as the existing bibliography. *Participatory observation*, throughout the research in the stages of diagnosis, planning, execution, control, and evaluation of the Educational Strategy. It was used to collect data on the stage, with the elderly, family, and specialists.

The *triangulation of sources* was used to determine the contents of each of the subsystems from the bibliography, results of studies of this science, historical records of the study of ecotourism and the elderly.

The *researcher's diary* was used to collect detailed qualitative data in each of the stages of the Educational Strategy, facilitating its subsequent

analysis. Record in an orderly, chronological way, allowing hyperlinks to documents, videos, and photos collected in 5 DVDs of graphic evidence.

Informal discussion groups, collect qualitative data from the construction of the Educational Strategy. It also helped to provide methodological training to the elderly regarding the contents of ecotourism. Approach them affectively with the objectives, missions and actions proposed, taking into account their experiences; to determine weaknesses, strengths, give suggestions. It allowed them to remember anecdotes of their past lives, their longings, and frustrations, as well as to create action plans for ecotourism.

The *case study*, was used to evaluate the Educational Strategy, allows to evidence the acquired knowledge, the affective-motivational sphere, the physical and mental health. Different authors refer to scientific results in research: Castellanos, (1998); R. A. González, Yll, & Curiel, (2003); Kemmis, (1988); Ruiz (1999), (2000), (2009); Sampier, (2006); Silva, (2007); Valle, (2007); Rodríguez, Gil, & García, (1996), however, Llanes (2012) says that "The Educational Strategy is a set of research procedures applicable to any science, it is the way to reach an objective with a certain procedure to order the activity, it allows the conscious reproduction of the studied object. The Educational Strategy is indissolubly linked to the theory".

The Educational Strategy, as a scientific result that came from the pedagogical practice, agrees with the studied subjects, for which, the following general objective is defined: Build through a participatory action-research, an Educational Strategy for ecotourism for the elderly, to encourage healthy lifestyles.

The population ranges from 60 to 75 years of age: 35 retirees from the municipality of Fomento; the selection was made intentionally and not probabilistically because the Educational Strategy responds to the particularities of the personality of these ages, their tastes, and motivations.

DEVELOPMENT

Fomento is located in the province of Sancti Spíritus, bordering on the north with the municipality of Placetas, on the east with Cabaiguán, on the south with Sancti Spíritus and Trinidad, and the west with Manicaragua in the province of Villa Clara, in Cuba. The rivers of Agabama, Mabujina, Cangrejo, and several streams cross through Fomento. It currently has several villages within which they are located: El Pedrero, Agabama, La Guanábana, La Hormiga, and Gavilanes. The main activity of the region was the sugar industry and the cultivation of sugar cane, but with the modifications in this industry, it became necessary to expand towards others.

The town has a total of 335,765 inhabitants (Cuba, 2015), of whom 17,123 are men and 16,453 women. According to data from this Population and Housing Census (2015), 18.3% of Cuba's population is 60 years and

older, and the territories with the highest degree of aging are Villa Clara, with 21.9%; Havana, 19.9% and Sancti Spiritus, 19.7%. (Cuba, 2015)

The most common diseases (see table 1) of the elderly in the municipality of Fomento, are recorded similar to the country's average: asthma, hypertension, and kidney failure, with high rates of morbidity and disability. Ecological tourism offers a possible solution to compensate for the limitations of these diseases, as well as the affective-motivational sphere of the elderly (Fomento, 2017).

Table 1
Most common diseases in the municipality of Fomento

Diseases	60-64 years		65 years and more		Total
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	
Diabetes mellitus type I	17	16	16	25	74
Diabetes mellitus type II	5	5	16	26	52
Hypertension	109	256	687	1352	2404
Asthma	625	952	3096	4606	9279
Chronic renal failure	116	217	456	746	1535
Hypercholesterolemia	71	150	237	527	985
Cerebrovascular disease	16	9	113	101	239
Physical and motor impairment	109	256	687	1352	2404
Hearing-impaired	625	952	3096	4606	9279
Cancer	116	217	456	746	1535
Prostate cancer	71	150	237	527	985
Colon cancer	36	21	209	236	502
Breast cancer	2	15	3	103	123
Obesity	32	50	193	271	546
Sedentarism	48	53	106	250	457
The risk of alcohol consumption	45	69	152	345	611
Smoking	153	17	339	23	532

Source: Fomento (2017) Informe de Dispensarización de la población por zona y consultorio médico. Unpublished material.

We assume that the phases and stages declared by Rodríguez, G., Gil, J., & García, E. (1996); preparatory phase, fieldwork, analytical and informative, are the most appropriate phases to approach the study of the object, given its nature, the characteristics and particularities of the subjects that have served to develop the research, gathering of the main results, the background in studies of this type, and the possibilities of the empirical methods used.

The studied sample gave the following results: 10 people with heart problems, 12 hypertensive, 7 diabetic, 2 with physical and motor limitations,

1 with hearing loss, 3 with circulatory disorders, 1 with a psychiatric disorder, 5 obese, 3 underweight. It was found that 7 older adults suffered from more than one disease; in turn, there are 3 of them without any ailment.

To carry out this research, the qualitative approach was applied, which has stages that occurred during practice without a defined temporal border. The preparation of the research did not culminate in the construction of the Educational Strategy of ecotourism for the elderly; nor did the elaboration of instruments based on the needs that arose from the practice and the diagnosis (access to the field), but it was enriched during the very observation and execution of the ecotourism planned. As Taylor (1987) states, "the best way for the researcher to add informants to his research is to collaborate with them, to listen to their suggestions and experiences".

Participant's observation: It allowed to determine in the elderly capacities such as:

- A high cultural level
- The training they have in terms of Heritage Education of the municipality.

As needs:

- They show a high level of stress due to uncertainty and fear of the proximity of death.
- They are sad and unmotivated in everyday activities.
- They present a group of chronic diseases that hinder their mobility.
- They do not systematically perform physical exercises.
- Ignorance of environmental and heritage education.
- Food with high-calorie consumption or insufficient intake of healthy food.
- Low perception of risk.
- Distancing from family and neighbors.
- They do not express their sexuality healthily.

DESIGN STAGE

The Declaration of Human Rights states that men have the right to life, liberty, and safety. The health system takes care of the elderly, as well as their social welfare when they have a low income. The elderly have the right to recognition before their group, family, and the society where they live. At these ages, one feels a sense of helplessness in the face of diminished capacities. They have the right to be heard by their voice or through spokespersons representing them. There can be no arbitrary interference in their

private life. Families tend to perceive that the sexual life of the elderly is not relevant, as the reproductive life of men and women ends, those around them belittle their sexuality. Senior citizens have the right to move freely and to choose their residence in the territory. When their paid work ends, they lose or stop acquiring property, families look down on them because of their lack of income or do not consider them when making decisions, but everyone has the property right, individually and collectively. Cultural meetings tend to prefer young people, the elderly are not excluded, but they do not attend because their cultural tastes are not the same.

Excursions were carried out with a monthly frequency to ecotourism sites of the municipality, a total of four excursions in a year. They were long walks dosed in short stretches in a slow march, to stimulate the circulatory system of the elderly. Toasts were made with medicinal and aromatic plants, and fruits were tasted, which had repercussions on the healthy diet of the group. They had the opportunity to have feedback with a focus on ecotourism, with a healthy environment, in contact with nature, which allowed them to decrease stress levels.

We took into account that the Environmental Education of the elderly "forms an individual; starting from the knowledge, of which values and interests are required, what can be done (capacities) and what should be done (responsibilities), taking as a reference their particular problem of the environment, resulting from the relationships that are established between the dynamics of the components of society and nature" (Ricardo, 2006)

The cultural events, with the use of peasant music: the music of the Cuban fields has a long tradition that is cultivated mostly by elderly, peasants who have musical skills, play instruments, sing and dance. It has been proved that performing rhythmic movements synchronized with music stimulates gross motor, fine motor, and kinaesthetic. The culture and idiosyncrasy of the town of Fomento have an emphasis on local development (Pérez, A., 2010). The traditional Cuban music is a soft and repetitive sound, the dancer accompanies the sound with cadenced movements of his hips, it is possible to dance as a couple in a very elegant way or in solitary; the dancers take advantage of the occasion to dress in gala suits, to use guayaberas, a traditional Cuban garment. Women use fans; all of this creates an atmosphere of gallantry and seduction that reminds the elderly of their younger years. The *décima Cubana* includes improvised poetry by the singers; the creation of the tenth stimulates the active and passive vocabulary of the elderly, stimulates memory, and stimulates the phonemic ear and the muscles involved in the articulation of sound.

In the cultural events the families of the elderly participated, and students of special schools; which allowed a better approach or a dynamic of inter-

personal relations. "Man learns through the senses since this is the gateway to all information" (Nico, 2016)

Senior citizen's unpublished stories were filmed in the exchanges where they told their life stories. These stories are unreliable, they were fabricated and reconstructed. The stories were told again in meetings. Simple videos were made with the use of audiovisual material. "The creation and narration are activities that allow... the individual to show social experiences... it facilitates the motivation of the outer stimuli" Coca, N., Martínez, P., & Álvarez, M. (2016).

Audiovisual material for environmental education and ecological tourism

In the creation and use of audiovisual materials, the culture and identity of the locality, native animals and plants were taken into account, because "The images are motivating, raise awareness and stimulate people's interest in a particular topic. They facilitate the instruction, complementing verbal explanations with a concrete image of easy comprehension, that contribute to the fixation of the contents. They can also present abstract graphic elements. They require global processing of the information they contain and can produce an emotional impact that generates feelings and attitudes", Chou, O. (2008).

Acts, storytelling, and traditional music were supported digitally. The participants were involved in its creation. We used modest resources, and music according to the motivations and interests of their age. This project began with a group of young lovers of hiking and environmental education, sharing their hobbies with adults was a challenge. "Music, besides being an artistic resource, can be used as a pedagogical tool that favors intellectual, motor, and language development, through the strengthening of basic learning devices such as memory, attention, perception, and motivation" Díaz, M. L., Morales, R., & Díaz, W. (2014).

The implementation of audiovisual media in the formation and development of feelings of love and care for the resources provided by nature is a priority for education and self-education of the personality and interests of society, which is essential. A whole ecotourism project was established covering a wide range of objectives. To verify this, the transferability of this research in similar populations is required to:

- To encourage what would be the promotion and tourist attraction of a place.
- To let the tourist know the options that exist.
- To capture events of relevance to the area.

- Encourage the involvement of all professionals related to tourism to promote it and attract more visitors.

RESULTS OBTAINED FROM ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION THROUGH ECOTOURISM FOR THE ELDERLY IN THE TOWN OF FOMENTO WITH THE USE OF AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL.

It was found that ecotourism in this population reduced the levels of stress generated in the elderly by a considerable percentage. Healthy recreation, as well as the use of leisure time in sustainable agricultural techniques, facilitated this. It is important to participate in these types of activities because "it promotes participation, people relax, learn new things, share with others, some activities have a therapeutic effect that contributes to health care". (Arevalo & Yañez, 2016)

Manifestations of sadness and apathy, before the realization of daily tasks, diminished. The Elderly carried out their work in the institution and at home in a pleasant way and with a new meaning for their lives. Chronic diseases remained stable, the risk of accidents was reduced and the performance of moderate physical exercises allowed the development of elasticity.

The perception of the elderly, who felt that tourism was not appropriate for their age, changed when they realized that Environmental Education can be adapted to the disabilities and potentialities of their age. They did not change their eating habits, but recognized the importance of fruit and vegetable intake and incorporated it into the food routine.

The elderly in the sample, who had weight problems, were able to show a gradual tendency to balance their ideal weight, feeling stronger and more vigorous with physical exercises.

They considered expressing their sexuality to be embarrassing, and the focus group discussions showed how their past, present, and future sexual lives manifested. "Sexuality, like aging, is a cultural and social construction, where a gender and rights perspective must be considered for analysis." Pedraza, T. (2014).

Ecotourism allowed the socialization of the senior citizens who do not have work ties nor a closeness with their families. "Through an environmental action plan in a short, medium and long term" (Hernández, Y. (2012).

Motor skills were developed, with outdoor walks. Occupational therapy with plants derives its usefulness from the basis of the human being as part of nature; it requires the person to perform within an open environment and to connect with another living being in a context that provides diverse natural sensory stimuli, textures, colors, smells, sounds, and even taste, it requires flexibility to assume diverse roles, plan and deploy motor skills. It is also a creative experience.

CONCLUSIONS

In the background and research analysis, it was appreciated how ecotourism still suffers from limitations and unresolved challenges, in regards to the transformations and perspectives of Environmental Education and the elderly.

The study revealed that ecotourism in the elderly develops motor skills, reduces stress levels, decreases sadness and apathy, stimulates thinking, stabilizes body weight, allows manifestations of sexuality, socialization, and develops fine motor skills, stabilizes chronic diseases with the use of exercises, resulting in a higher quality of life for the elderly.

The results of the studies, carried out in the field, in the town of Fomento, as well as the collective actions of reflection, allowed the construction of an Educational Strategy of ecotourism that transforms the quality of life of the elderly.

COLLEAGUES

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ANNEXED



Photography 1. Cultural activities



Photography 2. Writing short stories