


Accessibility in rural tourist destinations: An investigation on barriers and perspectives in communities of the Las Tunas tourist destination

La accesibilidad en destinos turísticos rurales: Una investigación sobre barreras y perspectivas en comunidades del destino turístico Las Tunas

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ABSTRACT

Accessibility for people with disabilities in rural tourism destinations has been an underestimated and under-researched topic. The objective is to investigate accessibility in rural tourism destinations for people with disabilities. The methodology consists of a descriptive quantitative study through surveys. The results show moderate accessibility in general in the tourist destination studied, although variability was identified in the quality of accessibility, especially in adapted facilities. Likewise, a moderate impact of inclusive tourism on local economic development and on the perception of rural communities as accessible tourism destinations was observed. Collaboration between local governments, non-profit organizations, tourism businesses and local communities was considered moderate. The conclusions are directed to the necessary improvement in the uniformity and quality of adapted facilities to ensure a positive and equitable experience for all people. In addition, the potential of inclusive tourism to generate sustainable economic benefits and promote local economic development is highlighted.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Tourist Accessibility, Visitor Experience, Social Inclusion, Sustainable Development, Accessibility Policies

RESUMEN

La accesibilidad para personas con discapacidad en destinos turísticos rurales ha sido un tema subestimado y poco investigado. El objetivo es investigar la accesibilidad en destinos turísticos rurales para personas con discapacidades. La metodología consiste en un estudio cuantitativo descriptivo mediante encuestas. Los resultados muestran una accesibilidad moderada en general en el destino turístico estudiado, aunque se identificó variabilidad en la calidad de la accesibilidad, especialmente en las instalaciones adaptadas. Asimismo, se observó un impacto moderado del turismo inclusivo en el desarrollo económico local y en la percepción de las comunidades rurales como destinos turísticos accesibles. La colaboración entre gobiernos locales, organizaciones sin fines de lucro, empresas turísticas y comunidades locales se consideró moderada. Las conclusiones son dirigidas a la necesaria mejora de la uniformidad y calidad de las instalaciones adaptadas para garantizar una experiencia positiva y equitativa para todas las personas. Además, se destaca el potencial del turismo inclusivo para generar beneficios económicos sostenibles y promover el desarrollo económico local.

Palabras clave: Turismo rural, Accesibilidad turística, Experiencia del visitante, Inclusión social, Desarrollo sostenible, Políticas de accesibilidad

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has experienced significant growth, and more and more people are seeking authentic and enriching experiences in rural environments. However, despite this increase in demand for rural tourism, accessibility for people with disabilities in these destinations has been an underestimated and under-researched issue. Lack of attention to accessibility can limit the full participation and enjoyment of all people, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

The main objective of this manuscript is to analyze the current situation of accessibility in selected rural tourist destinations, in order to identify the barriers that exist in these communities. In addition, it seeks to understand the perspectives and experiences of local people in relation to accessibility in rural tourism.

The results obtained from the application of the questionnaire and the analysis of the data collected will provide a clear and precise vision of the existing barriers in terms of accessibility in the rural tourist destination studied. It will also identify opportunities for improvement and possible solutions to promote accessibility and ensure an inclusive tourism experience in these communities.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide a solid framework for decision-making and the implementation of concrete policies and actions aimed at improving accessibility in rural tourism. This study will contribute to existing knowledge in the field of tourism accessibility and to raise awareness of the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for all people, regardless of their abilities, in the context of rural tourism.

In the following sections, the detailed results of the analysis of each of the variables will be presented, followed by a discussion of the findings and practical implications. Finally, the conclusions will be presented and recommendations for future research and actions aimed at improving accessibility in rural tourism will be proposed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural tourism plays a crucial role in the economic, social and environmental development of rural communities (Kumar et al., 2022). It contributes significantly to income generation, job creation, and the strengthening of local infrastructure (Díaz-Pompa et al., 2020; Jurado-Almonte,

2014). In addition, it promotes the conservation of cultural and natural heritage, while encouraging economic diversification and the revitalization of rural areas, (del Espino Hidalgo et al., 2022).

The interaction between tourists and local residents has a positive impact on promoting intercultural understanding and sharing knowledge and experiences (Kumar et al., 2022). In this sense, tourism in rural areas not only represents a source of income, but also an opportunity to preserve cultural identity, promote sustainability and improve the quality of life of rural communities (Castañeda Torres et al., 2020).

The drive towards inclusive and accessible tourism in rural settings is vital to ensure that all people, regardless of their physical or mental abilities, have the opportunity to enjoy tourism experiences (Ladu et al., 2023). The challenge of accessibility in rural tourism not only complies with the principles of equity and social justice, but also expands the potential customer base and strengthens the long-term sustainability of tourism in rural areas, (Castellano Montesdeoca, 2020).

The development of rural tourism from an inclusive and accessible approach benefits people with disabilities. It improves the tourism experience for all visitors and promotes safer, welcoming, and friendlier environments (Ladu et al., 2023). By adopting measures to ensure accessibility in rural tourism, the active participation of all people in the cultural, social and economic life of rural communities is encouraged, which contributes to a more equitable and sustainable development (Castañeda Torres et al., 2020).

Accessible tourism is defined as the practice of ensuring that tourist destinations, facilities, and services are accessible to all people, including those with physical, cognitive, or other disabilities (Gaona Suarez et al., 2020). This involves the removal of architectural barriers, the provision of clear and understandable information, and the training of staff to address the specific needs of visitors with disabilities, (Campozano-Figueroa, 2023).

The study of accessibility in rural environments is of utmost importance due to several factors. First, rural settings are often tourist destinations that offer unique cultural, natural and historical wealth, and it is important to

ensure that all people, including those with disabilities, can access and enjoy these experiences on an equal footing, (Chin et al., 2022).

In addition, rural tourism plays a significant role in the economic and social development of rural communities, and the promotion of accessibility contributes to broadening the potential visitor base, thereby strengthening the long-term sustainability of tourism in these areas, (Du et al., 2023). Therefore, the study of accessibility in rural environments makes it possible to identify existing barriers and develop effective strategies to promote inclusion and equal opportunities, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of life of rural communities as a whole.

The interest of academics and researchers in the topic of accessibility has been increasing due to the growing awareness of the importance of ensuring inclusion and equal opportunities in tourism, (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020). The diversity of perspectives and needs present in society has generated widespread recognition of the importance of studying and addressing accessibility in rural tourist destinations. This interest is reflected in a modest increase in research and academic publications addressing issues related to accessibility in rural tourism, including studies on adapted infrastructures (Gunawijaya & Pratiwi, 2016), inclusive services (Мантас & Айсте Барбора, 2020), economic and social impact of accessible tourism (Castanho et al., 2021), as well as strategies to promote collaboration between key actors in promoting accessibility (Ibanescu et al., 2020), among others. The analysis of this research allows us to better understand current challenges, best practices and areas of opportunity to improve accessibility in rural settings and promote inclusive and equitable tourism.

For example, the quality of road infrastructure is one of the barriers affecting access to different rural tourism products and services. The study by Orjuela Yusty (2020) analyzes road access to the different coffee tourist routes in Colombia. The findings reveal that having tourist routes with quality road infrastructure results in better accessibility and has a positive impact on the economic indicators of rural communities.

Additive, del Espino Hidalgo et al. (2022) propose a tool based on Geographic Information Systems applications for measuring the accessibility to heritage resources of a

rural or vulnerable territory. Through the combined analysis of various factors, it contributes to the sustainable management of its cultural heritage. Among the main results, the need for articulation of the different actors in order to achieve greater accessibility to the heritage found in rural communities, as well as digital accessibility, stand out.

The lack of accessible infrastructure has been identified as a significant barrier to the participation of persons with disabilities in rural tourism. Studies show that the lack of ramps, handrails, and adapted restrooms are common physical obstacles that limit access and mobility in these destinations (Granda Maldonado et al., 2021). These physical constraints make it difficult to explore the natural and cultural environments that rural destinations have to offer.

Other studies reveal that the absence of appropriate signage and the existence of uneven terrain can create additional challenges for people with disabilities (Granda Maldonado et al., 2021). This underlines the importance of addressing physical accessibility and other aspects of the environment that can affect the experience of all visitors, ensuring that rural tourism is inclusive for all.

Lack of accessible information and inadequate communication have also been identified as key barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in rural tourism. The limited availability of accessible tourism promotion materials and the lack of detailed information on the accessibility of rural destinations make it difficult for people with disabilities to make informed decisions (Gaona Suarez et al., 2020; Gunawijaya & Pratiwi, 2016). This lack of information makes it difficult to plan trips and select suitable destinations. In addition, poor communication between visitors and tourism staff can lead to frustration and limit the positive experience of tourists with disabilities, (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020).

On the other hand, numerous studies have emphasized the initiatives and solutions implemented to enhance accessibility in rural tourist destinations. The collaboration between local stakeholders, including governments, tourism businesses, and non-profit organizations, has played a crucial role in the development of accessibility measures. These initiatives encompass the adaptation of infrastructures, such as the construction of ramps and the installation of elevators, along with the provision of training for

tourism staff on accessibility issues (Galarza Justillo, 2021). Furthermore, sensitization and awareness programs have been put in place to promote inclusion and foster understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities, (Ladu et al., 2023). These efforts reflect a concerted approach towards improving accessibility in rural tourist destinations, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all individuals.

Research has highlighted the economic and social benefits derived from the promotion of accessibility in rural tourism. Accessible tourism can generate additional income for rural communities, foster local economic development and job creation, (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020). In addition, it can improve the image and reputation of rural destinations, attracting a wider segment of visitors, (Benedetto, 2023). It has also been observed that it can contribute to the reduction of discrimination and social exclusion by promoting the full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

A review of the scientific literature reveals the existence of few specific studies on accessibility in rural tourist destinations, and even fewer in the Cuban context. Despite the importance of rural tourism in Las Tunas, as an emerging tourist destination. Attention to accessibility in this context has been limited. This gap in research highlights the need to further explore the issue of accessibility in rural tourist destinations, focusing specifically on the Cuban context and the Las Tunas tourist destination. The present study proposes to address this research gap and contribute to the existing knowledge on accessibility in rural tourism, with the aim of identifying current barriers, evaluating existing practices and proposing strategies to promote inclusive and accessible tourism in Las Tunas, Cuba.

These findings provide a solid basis for the present research, which aims to deepen the analysis of accessibility in rural tourist destinations and explore the perspectives and experiences of local people in relation to this topic. Through data collection and analysis, it is expected to contribute to existing knowledge and provide practical recommendations to improve accessibility and promote inclusive tourism in rural areas.

METHODOLOGY

This research is quantitative and descriptive. The survey was selected as the data collection instrument as it allows

for flexible and rapid data collection from a larger population. It made it possible to collect quantifiable data on the perception of different key actors in relation to accessibility in rural tourism.

The sample consisted of 259 actors (government, public sector, private sector, community) randomly selected in the rural tourist destination El Cornito. The aim was to obtain a representative sample that reflects the demographic and socioeconomic diversity of the population of this community.

The instrument was designed based on aspects related to tourist accessibility in rural tourism. The main elements addressed were the quality of the infrastructure, the availability of adapted services, accessible information and communication, and general satisfaction with the accessibility of the destination.

The questionnaire was structured in three parts. The first part offered an introductory summary with the objective of the study, instructions for filling out the questionnaire and information to respondents about voluntary participation, as a guarantee of anonymity and compliance with ethical aspects. The second part was aimed at obtaining the socio-demographic data of the sample (age, gender, educational level, among others). The third section includes the related items according to the dimensions under study.

The first version of the questionnaire consisted of 34 items, extracted from the bibliographic consultation carried out in order to evaluate the perceptions of key actors regarding accessibility in rural tourism. It included a Likert scale that considers 5 levels: 1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree nor disagree, 4- Agree and 5- Strongly agree to measure the perceptions and attitudes of the participants.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient allowed to assess the stability of the rating of the scale used in the instrument, the SPSS program in its version 26 was used for its calculation, resulting in a value of 0.933, with a total of 25 items, which indicates that it is highly reliable.

Based on the results of the surveys, a database was created in the SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistical techniques were used for the analysis of quantitative data. This made it possible to obtain an overview of the perception of accessibility in rural tourist destinations.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured, assigning them unique identifiers instead of using their real names in data records and analysis. In addition, informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their inclusion in the study, assuring them that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Sample characterization

The sociodemographic distribution of the sample in terms of gender, age, educational level, and sector to which the participants in the study belong behaves as follows. In terms of gender, it is observed that 47.88% of the participants identified as female, while 52.12% are male.

Taking into account the age of the participants, the most representative group in the sample was 26 to 40 years old, with 38.9% of the total. In descending order, the 41-60 age group continues with 27.8%, the 18-25 age group with 22.4% and the 61-80 age group with 10.8%. When examining the cumulative percentage, it can be observed that 89.6% of the participants are between 18 and 60 years old. As age increases, the proportion of participants gradually decreases.

RESULTS

Characterization of El Cornito

El Cornito, located 9 km west of the city of Las Tunas, is a historical, natural and cultural site recognized as a Local Monument since 1993 (figure 1). This place was home to Juan Cristóbal Nápoles Fajardo, known as "El Cucalambé", for many years. The site was mainly promoted as a cultural or event tourist destination (Bravo Sánchez et al., 2009). In this scenario, various activities of great value are carried out, such as the Ibero-American Festival of the Tenth, a theoretical event that encourages the exchange of the décima and improvised verse between Spanish-speaking countries (Posada, 2003), as well as peasant festivities (Figure 2).

It offers a variety of tourist services, including accommodation, food, and recreation. In addition, it has infrastructure that includes roads, certain facilities and basic services (Partido Santanach et al., 2009).

Figure 1. Declaration of El Cornito as a Local Monument



Figure 2. Peasant festivals
Source: Taken from Ecured



It stands out for its natural resources, has an abundant presence of bamboo, giving visitors the opportunity to enjoy a lush and unique natural environment. Bamboo is an attraction for lovers of botany and gardening (Figure 3). It has a river and dam nearby that offers the possibility of water activities, such as fishing, kayaking or simply enjoying a natural environment with water. The natural environment is home to a diversity of flora and fauna, including endemic and unique species. Visitors can enjoy bird watching, native flora, and the chance to spot wild animals in their natural habitat (figure 4).

From a heritage point of view, there are ruins in the vicinity

of Cornito which offer visitors the opportunity to explore historical vestiges (figure 5), which enriches the tourist experience by providing a glimpse into the region's past. The existence of sculptures (figure 6) in the area adds an artistic and cultural element to the tourist experience, allowing visitors to appreciate local art in a natural environment, (Arada Clavería & Macías Reyes, 2019).

Figure 3. Vegetation of El Cornito



Figure 4. El Cornito Dam



It has a cultural richness, the Jornada Cucalambena is a festivity that encompasses tenets, customs and local history (figure 7), offering visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the cultural traditions of the region (figure 8). This celebration can include folkloric events, traditional music, dances and typical gastronomy, providing an immersive

experience in the local culture, (Orama Gómez, 2014). These natural, heritage and cultural tourist resources become tourist attractions that contribute to enriching the visitor's experience in El Cornito (figure 9). It offers a unique combination of natural beauty, historical heritage and cultural traditions rooted in the region for tourists to enjoy.

Figure 5. Ruins of the house of Juan Cristóbal Nápoles Fajardo



Figure 6. Sculptures in the area of El Cornito



Given the characteristics described, El Cornito is currently marketed for the national market as a rural tourism product, offering a new option within the tourist offer of the tourist destination of Las Tunas. This opportunity makes it possible to provide a different and attractive product for visitors, contributing economically to the

territory and satisfying the travel motivations of tourists. The implementation of various activities can contribute to reviving the site for the development of rural tourism, such as sport fishing, boat rides on the dam, horseback riding, points of sale of local handicrafts (Candó Gámez, 2012), visits to farms, the botanical garden and the zoo, points of sale of tropical fruits, contests of the tenth, roast pork in spikes and placement of handmade hammocks for tourists to rest in a natural environment, among other options.

Figure 7. Animal traction cart of the time



Figure 8. Peasant hut



These activities should not only be aimed at national tourism, but also at international tourists who love nature and are looking for rest, fun and entertainment. With these proposals, El Cornito becomes an attractive and diversified rural tourist destination.

Given the current status of El Cornito as a tourist product,

Figure 9. Vegetation and facilities of El Cornito



which is practically decommercialized and with the loss of its facilities, it is crucial that its recovery is an integral part of the tourism development plan in Las Tunas. The implementation of an investment plan that also seeks to improve its accessibility and inclusion conditions is essential to revitalize this tourist attraction. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the aspects related to accessibility and inclusion, since these elements are essential for the successful conformation of El Cornito as a renewed tourist product. Consideration and enhancement of these aspects not only ensure that the site is accessible to a wide range of visitors, but also contributes to its long-term sustainability and the creation of an enriching and equitable tourism experience for all.

Accessibility is an important aspect to consider in the characterization of El Cornito as a tourist product. The privileged location in the tourist destination of Las Tunas offers some accessibility, as it is located within an environment relatively close to the urban areas and tourist infrastructures of the destination. Therefore, considering accessibility in the development and promotion of this place as a tourism product is essential to ensure that a wide range of visitors can enjoy this wonderful natural and cultural attraction in Las Tunas.

Actors' perception

By analyzing the actors' perception of physical barriers in El Cornito (Figure 10). The results obtained show a moderate perception regarding the existence of accessible infrastructures for people with disabilities (Mean = 3.132, Desv. = 0.7115). In terms of transport, there is a slightly

lower perception (Average = 3.102, Desv. = 0.7165). In relation to adapted facilities, the perception is lower (Mean = 3.09, Desv. = 0.8805), although with greater variability in responses and a perceived need for improvements in this aspect.

Figure 11 shows the variables related to the dimension of information and communication barriers. The data reveal that, on average, tourist information (Average = 4.100, Display = 1.1933) and communication channels (Average = 4.394, Speed = 0.8532) in this destination are accessible, with average scores above 4. However, the standard deviation in both cases is high, which shows a greater variability in the responses regarding accessibility. On the other hand, there is a moderate perception regarding the preparation of tourist staff for the care of people with disabilities (Average = 3.059, Desv. = 0.7885).

Figure 10. Physical barriers

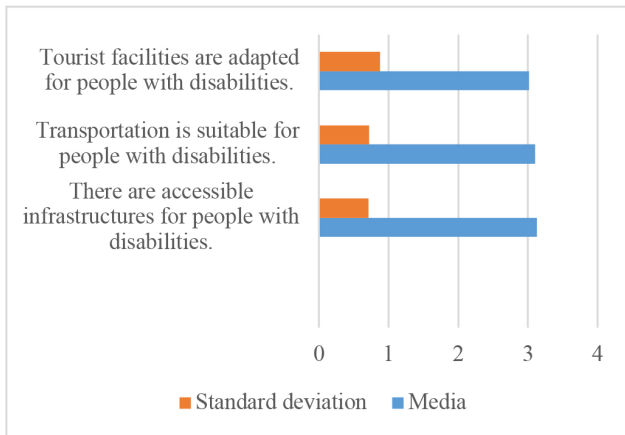


Figure 11. Information and communication

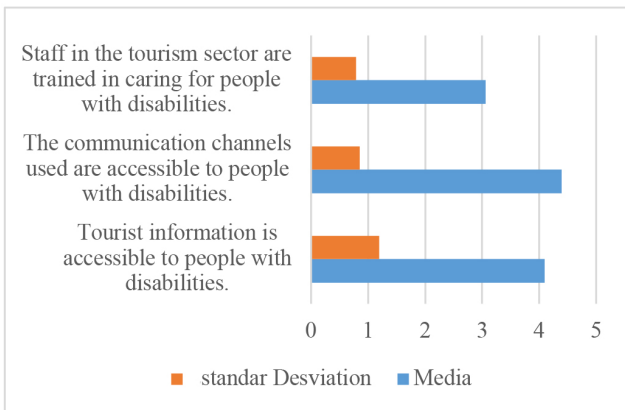
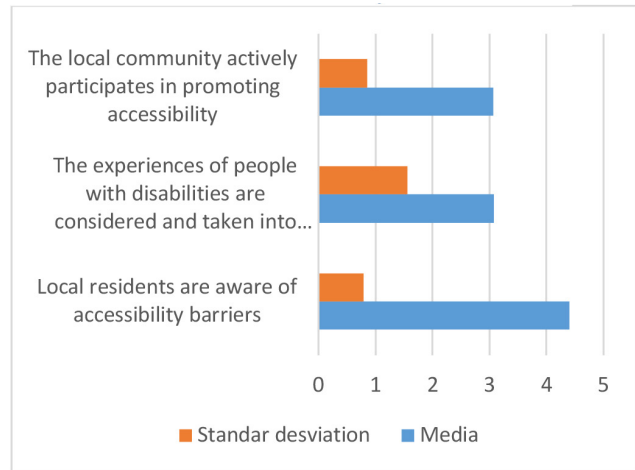


Figure 12 shows the variables related to the dimension of perception and experience of local people on accessibility. The results of the figure indicate that local residents are aware of the barriers that affect accessibility, with an average of more than 4. However, perceptions about the inclusion of the experiences of people with disabilities in tourism management receive a low score (Mean = 3.081, Desv. = 1.5618). Similarly, the value given to the active participation of the community in the promotion of accessible tourism is lower than the rest of the variables in this dimension (Mean = 3.062, Desv. = 0.8546).

Figure 12. Perception and experience of local people about accessibility



Regarding the dimension of accessibility support resources and services in rural tourist destinations (Figure 13), it can be observed that the assessment given by the respondents is moderate. In general, support services are perceived to be inadequate (Average = 3.092, Desv. = 0.8462), accommodation is not adapted (Average = 3.033, Desv. = 0.8069) and transport is not fully accessible for people with disabilities (Mean = 3.089, Desv. = 1.0077). However, the higher standard deviation in the variable on transport in rural destinations indicates a greater variability in respondents' perception compared to the other two variables.

Figure 13. Resources and services to support accessibility

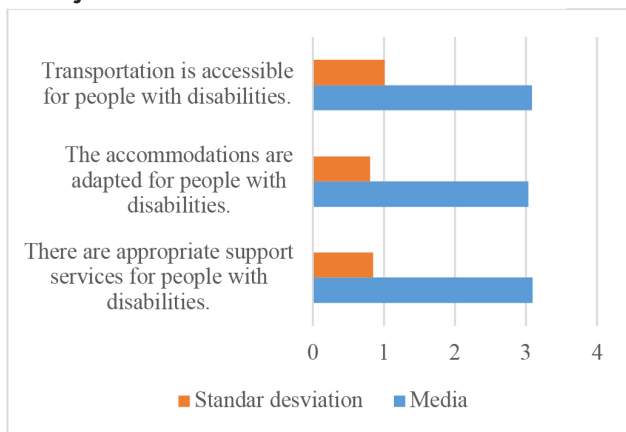
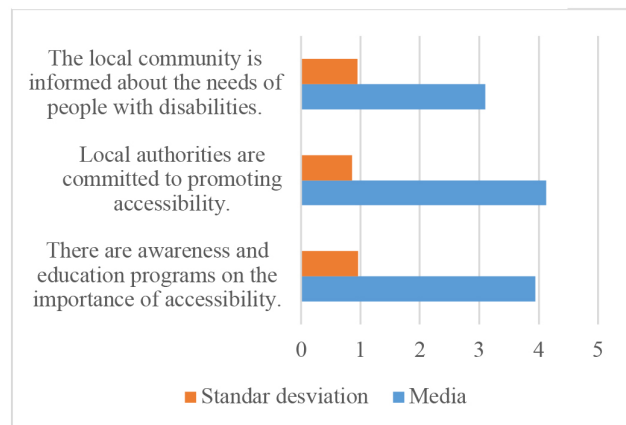


Figure 14 shows the evaluations of the variables related to the dimension of accessibility awareness and education. The highest score was given to the commitment of local authorities to promoting the development of accessible tourism (Mean = 4.124, Desv. = 0.8553). Likewise, there is evidence of the existence of programs aimed at raising awareness and educating in aspects related to accessibility and the development of a more inclusive and accessible tourism (Mean = 3.939, Desv. = 0.9584). However, the lowest score was given to the degree of information provided to the local community about the needs of persons with disabilities (Mean = 3.100, Desv. = 0.9451) for the design of products and services for this market segment. In general, it is observed that efforts are being made to raise awareness and educate about the importance of accessibility, that local authorities are committed to promoting accessibility, and that the local community requires more information about the needs of persons with disabilities for the design of products and services for this market segment in rural tourism.

Figure 14. Accessibility Awareness and Education



Regarding the dimension of collaboration and coordination between actors to promote accessibility. Figure 15 shows a moderate assessment by the sample studied. The variable related to the coordination between the different actors to improve accessibility receives a higher score (Mean = 3.247, Desv. = 1.0495). Community involvement in tourism planning and development receives a lower score (Mean = 3.045, Desv. = 1.1962) and collaboration between different actors receives a lower score (Mean = 3.019, Desv. = 1.1893). However, the standard deviation is high in each of the variables, indicating a greater variability in the respondents' perception of the variables in this dimension.

Figure 16 shows the variables related to the dimension of the accessibility quality assessment. In this case, the score given to each of the variables is moderate. It is perceived that tourist infrastructures do not fully comply with accessibility standards (Mean = 3.020, Speed Off = 0.9158), nor the quality of services and resources available (Average = 3.156, Speed Up = 0.8941), and visitors with disabilities perceive a moderate quality of accessibility in rural tourist destinations (Average = 3.149, Speed Off = 0.6132).

Figure 15. Collaboration and coordination between actors

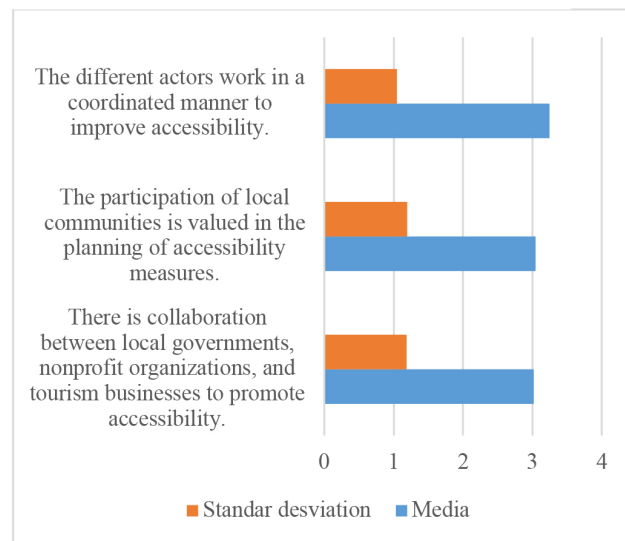
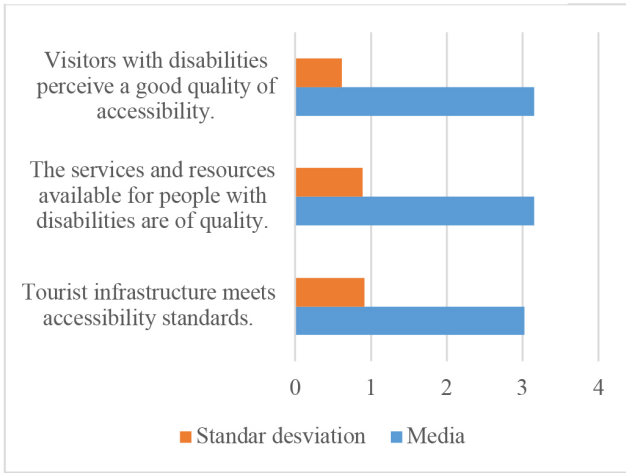
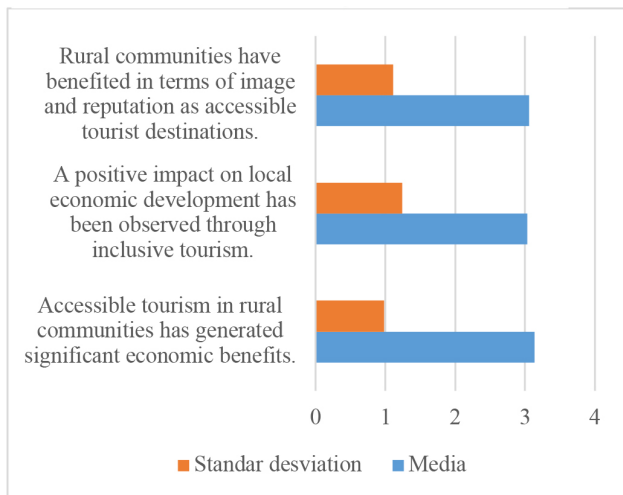


Figure 16. Accessibility Quality Assessment



Finally, Figure 17 shows the variables related to the dimension of economic and social benefits in local economic development. The variables analysed receive a score close to 3, which shows that the benefits generated by the promotion of accessible and inclusive tourism have not been fully perceived. Regarding the economic benefits generated by accessible tourism (Mean = 3.132, Desv. = 0.9793). Similarly, there is variability in the impact on the economic development of the locality (Mean = 3.045, Desv. = 1.1962) and in the benefit that communities receive from showing an image and having a reputation as an accessible tourist destination (Mean = 3.045, Desv. = 1.1962). High standard deviations in these variables indicate a perception with some variability in the perceived impact.

Figure 17. Economic and social benefits in local economic development



DISCUSSIONS

Cuba is a tourist destination with many potentials for the development of rural tourism. However, it requires the design and development of these initiatives by the territories (Díaz-Pompa et al., 2020). In this sense, Las Tunas as a tourist destination has an inventory with potential for the development of this type of tourism. For example, El Cornito is a tourist destination with significant potential to become a rural tourism product for the national and international market. The diversity of attractions and natural, cultural, heritage and environmental resources give it a particular stamp (Partido Santanach et al., 2009). Especially if it is developed from an inclusive and accessible approach that benefits people with disabilities and the local community.

The main findings reveal the existence of physical barriers that limit people with disabilities from enjoying products and services and living meaningful experiences. Therefore, for the development of accessible rural tourism, it is necessary to eliminate them. These results are consistent with those of Orjuela Yusty (2020), who in his research reveals that the lack of quality of road access to different tourism products and services affects the tourist experience and the economic development of rural communities. In this sense, Granda Maldonado et al. (2021) and Barrientos Guzmán and Sandoval Hormazabal (2019) show in their studies that the absence of ramps, handrails, bathrooms and different spaces adapted to people with disabilities constitute obstacles that limit access and mobility within tourist destinations. Therefore, it is crucial to improve accessibility in rural tourism facilities with the removal of physical barriers to ensure a positive experience for all people, regardless of their physical or mental abilities. This analysis highlights the importance of working towards creating more inclusive and accessible tourism environments for all.

Access to information and adequate communication are essential to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in rural tourist destinations. The results of this research reveal a positive perception regarding access to information and the channels used for its dissemination, however, there is a low perception regarding the preparation of staff for the care of people with disabilities. These findings contrast with those of Gaona Suarez et al. (2020) who find that the lack of information and availability of tourism promotion materials aimed at people with disa-

bilities affects decision-making by people with disabilities. Similarly, Fuente-Robles et al. (2020) reveal that poor communication between tourists and tourist destination staff generates negative experiences in tourists with disabilities. Also del Espino Hidalgo et al. (2022) find that limited access to information through digital media is a factor that affects tourists. These results highlight the importance of ensuring that tourism information, communication channels, and tourism staff in rural destinations are adequately trained to provide an inclusive experience to all people, regardless of their abilities.

In the tourism sector, the attention given to tourists is essential, therefore, tourism companies must work on the training of their workers so that they do not have a discriminatory attitude towards this segment, which in many cases is the result of lack of knowledge and insecurity about how to meet the needs of these customers. (Castellano Montesdeoca, 2020).

According to Díaz-Pompa et al. (2020), the success of tourism activity in the rural context depends, to a large extent, on the degree of participation and involvement of the different actors. In the case of accessible rural tourism, the active participation of the local community in promoting accessibility in rural tourism is imperative to ensure that the needs of all people, including those with disabilities, are taken into account and effectively addressed. The evidence of the present research regarding the collaboration and coordination between the different actors shows its reservations. These results are similar to Galarza Justillo (2021) who reveals in his research the lack of articulation and participation of the main actors in the development of accessible rural tourism activity. Mainly the role of the government as the main actor in rural communities. In this sense, we agree with Porto and Rucci (2019) that the direct or indirect participation of each member of the community is a fundamental aspect to generate meaningful experiences for people with disabilities. This must occur through a process that ensures the active participation of all the actors involved, under political leadership that contributes to strengthening collaboration (del Espino Hidalgo et al., 2022).

Adapting infrastructures and services to the needs of people with disabilities is essential to provide quality experiences to this important segment (Galarza Justillo, 2021). In this sense, the evidence of the present research shows that there is a moderate perception regarding these ele-

ments. Since support services are not ensured, accommodation and transport are not fully adapted to the needs of tourists with disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to improve and guarantee the availability and quality of support services, the adaptation of accommodations and the accessibility of transport to ensure a positive and equitable experience for all people who visit the destination.

According to Barrientos Guzmán and Sandoval Hormazabal (2019), developing more accessible rural tourism should focus on training, sensitization and awareness of the different actors, in such a way that it allows the generation of new and better tourist experiences, improves the quality of services, associated with equipment, infrastructure and fundamentally human capital. In the context of the study, positive results can be seen in terms of the existence of accessibility education programmes together with the commitment of local authorities. These findings are the result of extensive work at the national level to care for people with disabilities from each of the localities, established as a government policy. However, there is limited awareness of the needs of this important market segment by the community to provide products and services tailored to their needs. These findings are similar to those of Ladu et al. (2023) who in their research find that a greater understanding of the needs of people with disabilities is required, with personalized products and services based on the implementation of training and awareness programs.

Finally, the positive impact of inclusive tourism on local economic development and the perception of rural communities as accessible tourist destinations is highlighted. This result highlights the potential of inclusive tourism to generate sustainable economic benefits and promote local economic development in rural communities (del Espino Hidalgo et al., 2022). This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the potential of inclusive tourism to generate income and employment in rural communities, as well as to promote sustainable development (Campozano-Figueroa, 2023; Jurado-Almonte, 2014). It is essential to continue incentivizing accessible tourism in rural communities to continue generating significant economic benefits, promoting sustainable local economic development (Leyva Fernández et al., 2017) and strengthening the reputation of these communities as inclusive tourism destinations.

CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights the potential of El Cornito for the development of rural tourism in Las Tunas. The variety of attractions, natural, cultural, heritage and environmental resources provide the possibility of renewing it from a more inclusive and accessible approach for the national and international market. Consequently, it benefits the wider market and the local community.

The survey of the potentialities of accessible rural tourism in El Cornito from the perception of the different actors reveals that there are potentialities such as accessibility to information and communication. There is evidence of accessibility education programmes and the commitment of local authorities. In addition, the impact of inclusive tourism on local economic development and the perception of rural communities as accessible tourist destinations is weighed.

On the other hand, there are aspects in which special attention should be paid. In this sense, there are physical barriers, the preparation of tourism staff for the care of people with disabilities, the collaboration and coordination between the different actors from an active participation, the adaptation of infrastructures and services to the needs of people with disabilities and the quality of services.

This study contributes to the existing literature on tourism and accessibility by focusing specifically on rural tourist destinations. The conclusions support the importance of considering accessibility as a fundamental factor in the planning and development of tourist destinations, and highlight the need to include specific measures to ensure accessibility in rural environments.

The study has significant implications for rural tourism practice and planning. Stakeholders, such as local governments, tourism authorities and entrepreneurs, must take concrete steps to improve accessibility in rural tourist destinations. This involves financial investments and coordinated efforts to adapt existing infrastructure, provide adapted services, and ensure accessibility in information and communication.

Among the main limitations of this study are that the sample is not representative of all rural tourist destinations, which implies caution when generalizing the results. In addition, while the perception of different local actors was

explored, it is also necessary to consider the actual experience of visitors with disabilities. These limitations highlight the need for future research to address these issues and expand knowledge related to accessibility in rural tourist destinations.

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