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# **Ethnobotanical knowledge as a strategy for socio-economic development through tourism: the case of 'Loeselia involucrata' (Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, Mexico)**

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## ARTICLE SECTION

### **Ethnobotanical knowledge as a strategy for socio-economic development through tourism: the case of 'Loeselia involucrata' (Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, Mexico)**

*Abstract:* This ethnobotanical research presents the case of the *Loeselia involucrata* plant, better known as “guichichila” and which is distinguished for its medicinal properties in rural communities of Los Cabos, Baja California Sur (B.C.S.). Currently, this municipality of Mexico is recognized for the development of traditional tourism, but without consolidating the offer of the alternative modality. The objective of this paper is to generate a proposal for the transmission of traditional knowledge in rural communities of Los Cabos, in search of the valuation, dissemination and sustainable use of native plants through tourism and visitor management. For this, the study area was delimited through geolocation in places where the plant was observed, a qualitative methodology was used to identify the background of the subject and to obtain information on the use and knowledge in the study area; in addition, quantitative for the calculation of the frequency of use. Finally, a proposal for sustainable and tourist use based on the data obtained was integrated. The main results showed that this plant is identified and used, likewise, there is interest in incorporating it into tourism projects with an alternative and sustainable approach.

*Key words:* Ethnobotany, *Loeselia involucrata*, sustainable tourism, Baja California Sur, México.

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## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tendencias del turismo revelan el interés de los viajeros por experiencias que prioricen el contacto con las comunidades locales.</li><li>2. El turismo rural sustentable puede significar una vía de divulgación de saberes tradicionales y una estrategia de generación económica.</li><li>3. En los parques etnobotánicos de plantas nativas, se puede aprender y enseñar sobre la salud humana y la conservación.</li><li>4. Es muy importante la participación y organización formal de la comunidad, para el desarrollo de proyectos turísticos sustentables.</li><li>5. El desarrollo de turismo rural o comunitario, fortalece la oferta turística regional y beneficia a pobladores rurales.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tourism trends reveal the interest of travelers for experiences that prioritize contact with local communities.</li><li>2. Sustainable rural tourism can mean a way to disseminate traditional knowledge and an economic generation strategy.</li><li>3. At ethnobotanical parks of native plants, it is possible to learn and teach about human health and conservation.</li><li>4. The participation and formal organization of the community is very important for the development of sustainable tourism projects.</li><li>5. The development of rural or community tourism, strengthens the regional tourism offer and benefits rural residents.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tendències del turisme revelen l'interés dels viatgers per experiències que prioritzen el contacte amb les comunitats locals.</li><li>2. El turisme rural sustentable pot significar una via de divulgació de sabers tradicionals i una estratègia de generació econòmica.</li><li>3. Als parcs etnobotànics de plantes natives, es pot aprendre i ensenyar sobre la salut humana i la conservació.</li><li>4. És molt important la participació i organització formal de la comunitat, per al desenvolupament de projectes turístics sustentables.</li><li>5. El desenvolupament de turisme rural o comunitari, enforteix l'oferta turística regional i beneficia a pobladors rurals.</li></ol> |
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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

This ethnobotanical research presents the case of the plant *Loeselia involucrata*, better known as “guichichila” and which is distinguished by its medicinal properties in rural communities of B.C.S. It was developed in the community of Miraflores, which has a population of 1352 inhabitants and is one of the most important villages of the rural zone of the municipality of Los Cabos. This community is noted for its natural attractions, surrounded by bodies of water that attract visitors and, above all, residents of the municipality during the rainy season. The agricultural activities with export quality that its inhabitants develop, are part of its history, culture and gastronomy. This series of elements together, it is considered that they can be of great utility for the development of sustainable projects that mean an opportunity of diversification of the traditional activities and improvement of the quality of life of its inhabitants.

International trends in tourism indicate that the development of local or domestic tourism has become one of the most viable options to reactivate this sector and generate local economies. Recent studies reveal that the most popular travel motivators for tourists are related to brands that prioritize support for local communities. These travelers want to visit places where they can immerse themselves in the local culture and that the money they spend goes to the local people. This is why the theoretical framework is based on the development of community-based tourism and sustainable development as an alternative to improve the social and economic disparities suffered by rural populations, as well as a way for communities seeking to generate other income within their daily economic activities, with the use of cultural, natural and local resources in a particular region.

For this, the proposal is based on rural tourism trends and the development of ethnobotany, where traditional medicine and knowledge are promoted, as well as a diversity of activities that promote and disseminate the culture, values and identity of the local population, in addition to complementing the traditional economic activities of a given rural population. The practice of tourism services in rural communities has demonstrated the validity of the value of traditional knowledge and transcended into an identity committed to the environment, culture, identity, natural organization, spirituality, history, language, production and technologies, to become a current testimony of its contribution to environmental sustainability, in addition to developing complex dynamics that promote training and educational processes, shaping alternatives to the recovery of the environment.

Particularly, Los Cabos has in the rural area, an important agricultural activity with great potential for tourism development due to its ecosystemic characteristics and although currently, this municipality of México, is recognized for the development of traditional tourism, it has not yet managed to consolidate the offer of the alternative modality. Therefore, the objective of this work is to generate a proposal for the transmission of traditional knowledge in rural communities of Los Cabos, in search of the valorization, dissemination and sustainable use of native plants through tourism and visitor management. With a documentary design at first, different sources of information were used to constitute the theoretical-conceptual framework of the present study; a descriptive design since it provided information to characterize values, interpretations, behaviors, culture of the subject of study and the understanding of the problem being addressed, besides helping others to understand it and allowing the generation of information on the why and how of

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<sup>1</sup> Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

the research. The study area was delimited through geolocation in places where the plant was observed; a qualitative methodology was used to identify the background of the subject and to obtain information on the use and knowledge in the study area; and a quantitative methodology was used to calculate the frequency of use. Finally, a proposal for sustainable use and tourism was integrated based on the data obtained.

A project such as the one proposed in this paper, could provide the young inhabitants of Miraflores with the possibility of returning to their community to reduce migration and strengthen the diversification of the economy, through activities related to the transmission of knowledge and reception of visitors and tourists, since, in this delegation of the municipality, basic services are available mainly in the population centers, but not in the ranches that make up the territory, in addition to having a basic educational offer and constantly its inhabitants migrate temporarily from the community to pursue their professional studies mainly to other cities and most of these people, do not return to live in the community. This proposal would offer to Los Cabos as a tourist destination, the diversification of products related to the Southern Californian culture and to the residents and visitors, the opportunity to become socioecologically literate in the territory and to the community to transmit their knowledge and increase their economy.

The community of Miraflores, which has a productive agricultural vocation, knows, uses and considers viable the cultivation of *Loeselia involucreta* or Guichichila for its commercialization and dissemination of its use, this can provide the opportunity to implement the same proposal with other medicinal plants used in the region. For this, the proposal is to formally organize the community through committees or cooperatives to implement the business model idea, highlighting sustainable use for the direct economic and cultural benefit of the villagers. Additionally, tourism and visitor management in the communities that implement it, can be a means to rescue the culture of a people and their knowledge; through respect for the knowledge about the plants and participation in educational activities and events. In addition, the possibility of becoming a sustainable strategy of economic generation in alternation to other crops that already generate employment for the rural inhabitants of the study area; in the same way, it can be replicable to other communities with this interest inside and outside the state of B.C.S. and México.

It is considered important to emphasize the involvement and participation of public and private actors, academia and civil society organizations, for financing, training and support to the community in the search for the development of this type of projects that contribute to the generation and diversification of local economies, as well as, to the contribution in the research of medicinal plants with collaborations at national and international level. This project also has the possibility of exploring spaces of convergence and knowledge throughout the state, to show communities in other municipalities what can be achieved with the application of traditional knowledge through native plants and that other communities in this same state, find in these activities, the opportunity to market handicrafts, food and beverages through exhibitions and traveling fairs.

The prevailing traditional tourism that has expanded throughout the coast of Los Cabos, currently does not have an identity, but a mixture of the culture of different states of this country and the world, and that in addition, it is far from reflecting the sociocultural aspects and offering traditional handicraft supplies of B.C.S. territory. The advantage of the above mentioned, is that they maintain an important number of visitors in affluence that can mean that a percentage, according to the tendencies of the world-wide tourism, have interest in visiting these rural communities, in search of this type of spaces that reflect the nature and where they can be in direct contact with the culture of their original settlers.

