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Resumen

La investigación describe el proceso de envejecimiento demográfico de las localidades rurales en el IV Distrito de Tamaulipas, una de las regiones con mayor índice de marginación de México y Latinoamérica. Asimismo, se propone el turismo rural como alternativa de desarrollo regional a través de la implicación de las personas mayores en la planeación y desarrollo del espacio turístico. La metodología parte de una amplia revisión bibliográfica, el análisis de bases de datos y un trabajo de campo basado en encuestas personales que permitió percibir la situación de las personas mayores de estos municipios y conocer su predisposición a colaborar en alternativas de turismo rural basadas en su conocimiento del medio natural.

Palabras clave: envejecimiento demográfico, planeación, turismo rural, desarrollo regional, localidades rurales, Tamaulipas, México.

Abstract

Elderly people in the planning of the rural tourist space in Tamaulipas

This research describes the demographic aging process of the rural communities in Tamaulipas' IV District, one of the regions with the greatest marginalization index in Mexico and Latin America. Likewise, rural tourism is proposed as an alternative of regional development through the implication of aged people in the planning and development of the tourist space. The methodology starts from a comprehensive bibliographic revision, analysis of databases and fieldwork based on personal surveys that allowed perceiving the situation of these municipalities' elderly people as well as learning their predisposition to collaborate with alternatives of rural tourism based on their knowledge of the natural environment.

Key words: demographic aging, planning, rural tourism, regional development, rural communities, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

Introduction

The ageing phenomenon in the population has been analyzed from the particularities of the fertility, mortality and migration tendencies. In many studies one can specially observe the changes in the demographic transition and they emphasize the need to discuss the future demographic sceneries related to the economic and social development projects of Mexico and Latin America (Ordorica, 2004: 13-25). Most of the research that has been done affirms that the behavior of the demographic ageing is not surprising. Nevertheless,

they show concern with regard to the uncertainty that the socioeconomic, political and cultural changes that the growth the population of older adults entail (Cabrera Acevedo, 1998; Ortiz *et al.*, 2003: 107-124). Increase in poverty and problems of the growing elderly population sector force to create a real comprehensive social policy, which is absent in Mexico and Latin America.

Demographic ageing in the northern border of the country, especially in Tamaulipas, has a significant incidence in the rural sphere. It is favored by the emigration of the young population to the United States of America and the accelerated process of urbanization that it has experienced in recent decades. Different studies have detected low levels and modalities of equipment, economic activities and availability of services for the adult population in rural areas (Unikel, 1976; Sánchez, 2002). The demographic and socioeconomic scenery forces to design social policies based on the planning of the space which tend to promote a sustainable development based on the increase of the participation of the people in the task of planning the economic activities and ordering the territory.

In developed countries, demographic ageing has made it possible for an important segment of the population to become one of the driving forces of stationary tourism and ecotourism (INSERSO, 1990; Betty, 1997; Rodríguez, 1999), a fact that has obliged tourism companies to plan their activity in relation to the demands of the population. Also, the advance of population ageing in the developing countries, such as Mexico, forces tourism companies to know the demographic forecasts and to establish strategies aimed to offer new products for the ageing population.

The significant increase of the number of older people in this country and in other cities of Latin America makes this group an attractive sector for the touristic companies. Special emphasis has been made on the *senior* tourism for years, that is, that tourism aimed at establishing strategies to gain the market of the older people. Among those strategies one finds the improvement of the quality of tourism of the older people and the planning of recreational sports services for adults as well as health tourism. From the Second International Conference on Senior Tourism, held in Recife (Brazil), in 1996 one observes the huge potential of the travel market for elderly.

Our study is aimed at strengthen the concept of sustainable development (Ahmad *et al.*, 1989; Gilpin, 2003: 89-112) through the use of the knowledge and experience that older people have of their valuable natural environments (Sánchez, 2005). Elderly people are consummate experts in the cultural patrimony

and of the natural resources that exist on the land, reason why they can help to foster the local touristic activity.

Rural tourism is a social phenomenon that is closely linked to the socioeconomic structures from their origin (Osorio and Novo, 2004). The use of the knowledge and experience of the long-lived people can contribute to the regional development of excluded environments, such as the municipalities of the region of the District IV of Tamaulipas, known as the Semiarid Zone, as well as to favor the social integration and the improvement of the quality of life of these people.

This research starts with an analysis based on a comprehensive bibliographic and statistical revision of the different demographic and socioeconomic indicators of the IV District of Tamaulipas. Afterwards we observe – from a fieldwork based on personal interviews – the predisposition of the elderly to collaborate in ecotourism alternatives applying their knowledge of the natural environment and the perception that the elderly inhabitants have of their environment. Based on the results observed, a model of development is proposed. It includes the set in motion of productive strategies that benefit the touristic activity in the zone and the quality of life of the people.

Objectives and methodology

Planning in the touristic sector forces the inclusion of new theoretical-methodological approaches that look for different demographic, socioeconomic and political sceneries to elaborate comprehensive plans of touristic development (Osorio and Novo, 2004: 10). Despite this, most of the studies tend to be limited to only describing the reality, and do not study further its short and middle-term evolution.

This piece of work starts with a reflection on the conceptualization and the methodology of the tourism, especially in relation to the need of finding new alternatives in this economic sector. The main objective of the research is to describe the social situation of the population that is 60 or more years in the municipalities of the IV District of Tamaulipas and to survey their interest in taking part in alternatives of rural tourism.

The demographic ageing phenomenon helps us as starting point to contextualize the population that is older than 60 in the region of Tamaulipas. In the same tenor, our goal is to approach the social reality of this marginal collective and perform an approach to the perception they have of their natural environment and its possible use in the touristic activity of the zone.

The study is part of the following projects: Diagnosis of the Ecotouristic Potential of the Semiarid Zone of Tamaulipas, of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas and the Local Urban Ordering Plan of Three Microregions of Tamaulipas, a project of the Secretariat of Social Development and the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas. From this study, we have discovered the impact that poverty and migration still have on the communities in these essentially rural municipalities.

The methodology used starts with a comprehensive bibliographic revision that allowed us to approach to the reality of the Semiarid Zone of Tamaulipas. In this work we used and analyzed different statistical data obtained from official institutions such as the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing, the National Council of Population, the National Institute for the Federalism and Municipal Development, and the Secretariat of Social Development and the government of Tamaulipas, among others. We also performed fieldwork; it was carried out from January 2005 to February 2007. It was based on communitarian workshops and personal interviews with 60-year-old or older subjects, residents in the five municipalities of the IV District, whose information has allowed us to comprehend the situation of the older people in these municipalities and their predisposition to collaborate in alternatives of rural tourism based on their knowledge and respect for the natural environment (Chávez de la Peña, 2005). These methodological instruments have been used successfully in previous studies focused on this collective (Escobar Martínez, 1991; Bosque Sendra and Salado García, 1993; Sánchez González, 2000: 321-344;). As it is the case in previous items of work (Sánchez González, 1998: 253-265), in the present article we defend the huge social and human capital the collective of older adults means, so that we consider the contribution of the older adults a social asset they can still provide society and their environment with.

The survey was performed between July and September 2006, and applied to 60-year-old or older people who were distributed according to sex, age and rural locality. The definitive sample was constituted by 361 questionnaires validated with a reliability level of 1.96 percent for a 95 percent level of significance and a maximum error of five percent (García Ferrando, 1999; Rojas Soriano, 2002: 298-303). The kind of interview was personal, carried out at the household and with a questionnaire previously validated by means of a *pretest*. In order to perform the interview, random routes were planned using the municipal street mapping of the nuclei under study and 10 interviewers were employed. They received previous training to apply the questionnaires.

Despite the fact that most of the interviews were performed at the homes of the elderly people, the special circumstances of the land and idiosyncrasy of rural life that is most of the times close to continual agricultural work, favored the sample to be completed with some interviews performed in public spaces (streets, squares) and working places (farms, farming or grazing areas).

The interviewers noticed specific differences between the rural and urban environments. In the small rural towns or ejidos, the interviewees showed more inclination to answer the questions than those of the urban nuclei where people were more reluctant to take part. The planned sample was reduced in certain urban spaces given the illiteracy of certain sectors of the elderly urban population and the fear and distrust caused by insecurity.

The region of the IV District: the Tamaulipas plateau

The IV District of Tamaulipas consists of five municipalities that were selected given the importance of its subsistence farming surface, natural resources that are significant to promote the touristic activity, high elderly population and very high marginalization: Bustamante, Jaumave, Miquihuana, Palmillas and Tula.

The Tamaulipas plateau, better known as the IV District, is located in the Southwest part of Tamaulipas, set in the mountainous region constituted by the foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental, located between 23° north latitude and 100° west latitude. The region comprises five rural municipalities characterized by the demographic dispersion of its small towns (map I). All the municipalities have serious deficiencies in terms of infrastructure and basic urban services (housing, health, education, paving, lighting and electricity, drinking water, cleaning and draining), a series of problems that become acuter in minor towns. The main economic activity in the municipalities is farming; the employed population is mainly hired as a day laborer, self employed and non-paid familial work. In the case of Tula, services are the second economic activity. Touristic spaces are incipient and the tourism services are in the hands of people with more economic and social power.

The IV District of Tamaulipas has landscapes that allow considering it as a region with touristic vocation, nevertheless, the zone lacks planning and development of the touristic space. Among the main touristic resources of the municipalities we highlight its natural landscapes, such as La Marcela and Aserradero (Miquihuana) forests, the highest summits of Tamaulipas, such as La Peña Nevada (3 644 MASL) and Cerro del Borrado (3 533 MASL), just as

Salto de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Palmillas) waterfall. In terms of flora and fauna, we highlight the Tamaulipas black bear, the white-tailed deer and the monarch butterfly (Miquihuana), macaws (Jaumave), hawks (Palmillas) and the largest ferrocactus in the world (Bustamante). In this space it is possible to perform ecotouristic activities, such as hiking, mountain biking and horse riding, as well as rappel. In cultural visits we find towns with lengthy historical, cultural and craft tradition, such as the Church of Palmillas (1745), where we find a beautiful baroque XVIII-century altarpiece, the Virgin of the Contadero and the archeological collection of Cué (Tula), the rich and assorted craftsmanship (leather and pottery) and gastronomy of the region. It is also possible to visit water places with healing waters, such as Los Nogales, and places to have steam baths.

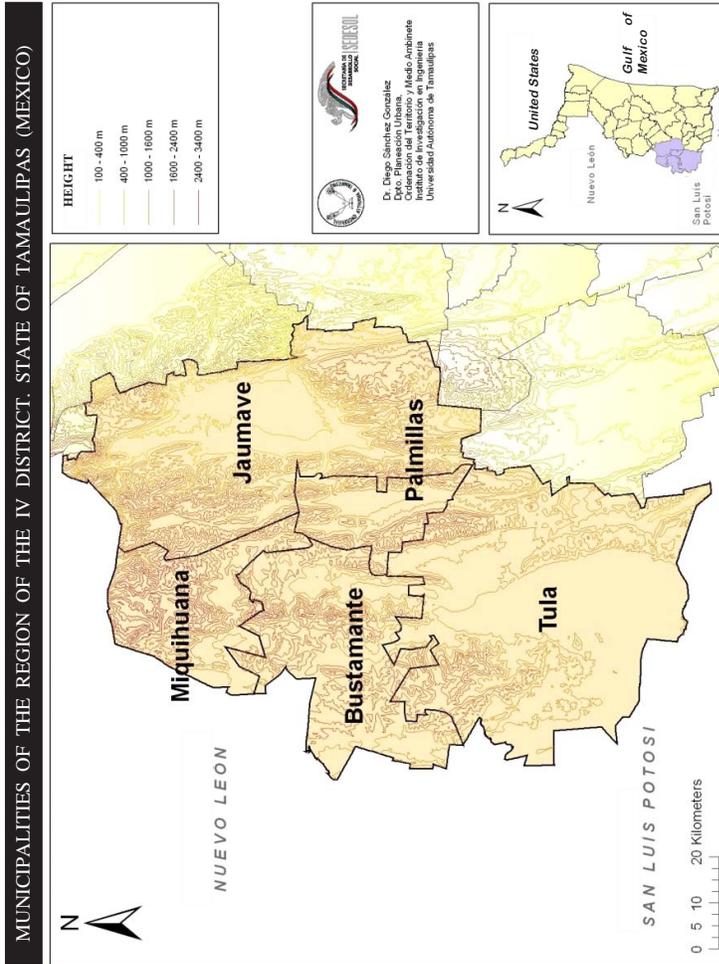
The process of demographic ageing

The process of demographic ageing and the set of problems of the elderly in Mexico and Latin America are current topics, both, officially and in terms of the daily personal experience of the people. Current research tackles different aspects of the problems that elderly population has to confront, but most of it concurs in highlighting the need of an increasing number of social policies, that are frequently linked to a stereotyped and partial vision of the problem, so often centered on the retirement pensions.

The understanding of demographic ageing is critical in all the planning and development of the touristic space of a region and it acquires a priority character in rural outlying spaces, where unemployment, emigration, lack of services, lack of infrastructure and poverty are present. There is no doubt that employers and official institutions related to the touristic services, as driving forces of development, must adapt their products to the prevailing demographic and socioeconomic reality in a territory.

Throughout the XX century, the population of Mexico and Latin America experienced important socioeconomic, political, cultural and demographic transformations. Precisely, Mexico and Tamaulipas are experiencing an accelerated demographic transition that started in the 30's with the decrease of the mortality and that became more pronounced from 1975 with the fall of the fertility. The changes in the demographic factors (fertility, mortality and emigration) have implied deep transformations in the age structure of the population, gradually increasing the relative weight of the 60 or older population, whereas that of children has decreased.

MAPI



Source: INEGI, 2005. Own calculations and elaboration.

According to the most recent census, in Mexico there are 97.5 inhabitants (INEGI, 2000), from which 3.2 million are older people, whereas in Tamaulipas there 2.7 inhabitants and from them 205,674 are 60 years or older. The relative weight of the elderly population is slightly higher in Tamaulipas (7.5 percent) than the national level (7.1 percent). On its side, the region of the IV District has a population of 52,730 inhabitants, with a population of 6,107 people that are 60 or more years old, which is equivalent to 11.58 percent.

Below, we approach to the evolution and factors of the ageing process of the municipalities in the region of the IV District of Tamaulipas, such as the decrease of the fertility and mortality, but above all, the migration phenomenon.

The decrease in the fertility has been the main factor to reduce the demographic growth as from the 1960's decade. It was motivated by the rural emigration and urbanization, schooling, the progressive incorporation of women into the labor market and the use of contraceptive methods. The decrease of fertility in this marginal region is not explained by the success of family planning, as much as it is by the emigration of the young adult population who looks for employment in other urban zones of the country or in the U.S. Between 1970 and 2000, this index has changed from 6.8 to 2.7 children per woman. Tamaulipas and the region of the IV District had fertility indexes of 2.6 and 3.2 children respectively in 2000.

The decrease in the mortality, above all that of children, is one of the most significant social achievements of Tamaulipas and, in general, of Mexico. The increase in the coverage of the health programs and services, focused on prevention and control of infectious and parasitic illnesses, has contributed to increase the life expectancy at the moment of birth and at 60 years of age (Cárdenas, 1998: 10-11). Despite this, the behavior of the mortality is still a factor contrary to development and it is explained by the hard conditions of life of the population of the region, such as the lack of services and basic equipment, the existence of fragile self-constructed houses and the lack of hygienic-sanitary measures in the population. In fact, the sanity coverage continues being unsatisfactory, since only 27.3 percent of the population of the IV District (INEGI, 2000) has access to a public health institution. During 2004, life expectancy in Tamaulipas was higher than the national average, 74.8 compared to 74.5 years, respectively. Nevertheless, life expectancy in the municipalities of the IV District is considerably inferior to the previous ones, 67.9 years, a rate that is located beneath the average of the Latin American countries (71.5 years).

The migratory movements, mainly emigration in the outlying rural regions such as the IV District, have modified the age structure of the population and their distribution in the territory. Tamaulipas is a destiny and transit state for national and Latin American migration, since it shares one of the widest and most dynamic borders of the world with the U.S. In the region of study, this phenomenon has had important changes in recent decades, for new migratory flows towards the medium national cities (Tampico, Ciudad Victoria and Reynosa, Tamaulipas) and international (Laredo and Houston, Texas) have been proved. It is also important that more women than men migrate now, that is, 107 women per 100 men. Emigrants are mostly youths and young adults who look for better employment opportunities and try to abandon the marginalization of their rural towns of origin. The process is favoring the depopulation and accelerating the ageing process in the municipalities of the IV District; however the same occurs in the rural sphere of Mexico and Latin America. Also, it has been proven that the emigration of this region was of temporal character up to the end of the 80's, that is, laborers worked temporarily in industry and agriculture in other regions of the country, as well as in the U. S. in order to return later to their towns of origin. As from 1990, the migratory tendency in the IV District indicates that migration has started to be definitive in other regions of the State and in the U.S.; this involves the workers and their families. In our research we found out that the main reason of emigration is labor, above all in terms of wage, since a worker might earn between seven and ten times more per working day in the recipient place. Therefore, employment policies must favor stable employment and better payment to guarantee an adequate quality of life of the population in the rural towns.

Official estimations show that around 14.23 percent of the population of Tamaulipas is emigrant, a rate that we consider insufficient if we take into account that the illegal emigrant population towards the U.S. is more than the registered and hard to calculate. The foreign emigration phenomenon is causing an increase in the lack of formal help (the family) to the older dependant adults, new abandonment situations and an increase of the problem of loneliness in the IV District. In the following decades, the Mexican illegally-emigrated population to the U.S. is going to favor the increase in the rate of ageing in that country and, possibly, the care and attention of those older people is going to raise a serious social, health and welfare problem that will force to a common understanding between both neighboring countries.

Mexico and Tamaulipas have a strong urban growth, promoted by the industrialization process that took place in this country between 1940 and 1970, and to the rural emigration, which came with said process, and that is still suffered in the rural towns. Between 1950 and 2000, the rate of urban population of Tamaulipas changed from 42.6 to 74.6 percent, while the rural population rate was reduced to a half, changing from 57.4 percent to 25.4 percent. The result of it is a country and states demographically urban. Tamaulipas, like Mexico, has a polarized pattern of concentration in three regions: the border (Reynosa, Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo), the capital city (Ciudad Victoria) and the South Metropolitan Zone of Tamaulipas (Tampico, Madero and Altamira). Also, one can observe a stressed dispersion of the population in the three western regions (IV Distrito, Serrana and Cañera). Nowadays, more than 83 percent of the Tamaulipas population lives in the cities and the tendency points to a higher concentration of the population in the urban and metropolitan areas, whereas in rural towns depopulation and the demographic ageing will continue. Therefore, it is urgent to develop social policies to make the rural towns of the IV District more dynamic and avoid the migratory outflow.

The current dynamics of the population of the IV District reveal a clear tendency towards demographic decrease. From 1990 to 2005, the population of the region has experienced a decrease of 7.53 percent, changing from 53,903 to 50,129 inhabitants. We observe that between 1990 and 2000 the pace of annual growth was negative (-0.2 percent), whereas from 2000 to 2005 the tendency deteriorates even more (-0.5 percent). Nowadays, this zone represents only 1.7 percent of the total demographic weight of the state. At a municipality level, one observes that except from Jaumave, the rest of the municipalities of Tamaulipas show a loss of population that would be related mainly to the migratory factor. This detail reveals us a negative demographic dynamic, since the migratory outflow continues and each year more than 250 people, mostly young, leave the region permanently. Our forecast for the year 2050 indicate that if the current tendency continues, the population of the IV District could be reduced considerably (-35.6 percent), being slightly more than 32,000 inhabitants. The population projections are subject to variations, for said reason a change of activity, such as the creation of companies of rural tourism, might promote employment and reduce migration, which would be translated into a substantial change of our middle-term forecasts. This indicator would allow us to recognize the possible of public services, infrastructure, education, employment, health, housing, as well as to adapt the touristic offer to the needs of the expected elderly population.

The demographic structure according to age and sex between 1990 and 2000 shows a progressive ageing of the population of the municipalities of the IV District. A faster growth pace of the 60-years-and-older people is observed, in both absolute and relative terms. In 1990, this group had 4,602 older adults, for 2000 it increased to 6,107 individuals, increasing its relative weight from 8.54 to 11.58 percent in said period of time. Also, we observe a growth in the 75-years-and-older group, that is, the collective register a higher dependency and demand from informal help (family), and it represents today 3.15 percent (INEGI, 2000).

Our forecast indicate a remarkable demographic ageing of the IV District in the next decades, since it is estimated that for the year 2020 the proportion of older adults will be 25.4 percent, whereas the forecast for Mexico indicate that one out of six inhabitants will be 60 or older 2020 (Conapo, 1999b). Forecasts point to important changes in the demographic structures that can modify some macroeconomic indicators (Myers, 1990), whose socioeconomic consequences are still to be determined. Our forecasts point that the 60-year-and-older group will show an important increase in this region, being higher at a state level, which will determine the structure by ages and will cause a feminization of the population.

The changes in the demographic structure affect unevenly both sexes, the higher life expectancy of women, altogether with masculine overmortality, derives to a progressive feminization of the population, which is stressed with the cohorts of advanced age, for instance, in Tamaulipas there are 90 men per 100 older adult women. Nonetheless, in the IV District one observes the opposite phenomenon, since the relationship is 110 men per 100 women of 60 years of age and older, a supremacy that is still kept even in the 85-year-and-older cohort. This demographic singularity and regional disparity, in principle, would be justified by the high feminine emigration of the past decades in the IV District. We decided to corroborate the data with our fieldwork and we have discovered significant differences in regard to INEGI data, since we found a superiority of women over men of 75 years in all the municipalities, as well as remarkable differences in regard to the socioeconomic and housing characteristics.

Although our data are the product of a probabilistic sample and were taken five years later than the INEGI Census (2000), workshops, personal interviews, (authorities, medical staff, police and population) and the surveys carried out during the study indicate that, if our results are confirmed, we would be pointing to significant failures in the data provided by INEGI on elderly people in the IV District. Some researchers are noting down the theory of the probable lack of

reliability of the INEGI data in the outlying rural areas, a mistake that increases in the socio-demographic, economic and housing data. It is necessary for researchers to have more reliable databases of the population and housing for the rural and outlying areas, since nowadays INEGI continues being the mainstay whereupon the majority of the research carried out in Mexico is founded.

The distribution of the population is found in the urban areas, such as Tula (27,049 inhabitants) that constitutes 51.3 percent of the regional total. Jaumave (13,184 inhabitants) with 25 percent, and Bustamante (7,520 inhabitants) with 14.3 percent. Whereas the municipalities of Palmillas (1,821 inhabitants) and Miquihuana (3,176 inhabitants) have 9.5 percent of the regional population.

The heterogeneity of the territory is noticed in the different changes and in the unequal advance of the demographic ageing. Between 1990 and 2000, the municipalities that had a higher increase in their ageing rate were Bustamante and Miquihuana, both register a number above the average (25 percent), while Palmillas and, above all, Tula, registered the lowest increase (tables 1 and 2). In the early XXI century, the municipalities with the highest relative weight of older adults are Palmillas (14.4 percent) and Miquihuana (14.4 percent), in contrast to them, Tula (10.8, percent) and Bustamante (11.3 percent) are the ones with the lowest rate (map 2).

In the 90's an important loss of relative weight occurs in the region in the 0 to 14 years groups (-7.5 percent) changing from 42 to 34.5 percent, while in Tamaulipas the fall is less notorious (from 34.9 to 31.3 percent), both related to the fall in fertility and emigration (Juárez *et al.*, 1989). Precisely Bustamante and Palmillas are the regions that register more prominent drops (-8.3 and -8.2) the other way round, Tula and Miquihuana would be the less affected by this fall (-6.5 and -6.7).

The adult population (between 15 and 59 years) of the IV District has 27,162 individuals, that is, 51.4 percent of the total (INEGI, 2000). Likewise, the highest rates of population are registered in Palmillas (57.4 percent) and Jaumave (53 percent), in contrast to Miquihuana (48.9 percent) and Bustamante (50.7 percent). Data show a gradual ageing of the economically active population, as well as the loss of young active population of the studied municipalities and it undercores the weakness of the local agricultural and livestock companies with regard to employment creation.

The labor precariousness and the widespread unemployment are reflected on the contributions to social security and in the future retirement subsistence pensions for retired people, which worsens the deficient situation of the retirement and pension systems in this country (Farrel, 1999: 173-190).

At present, social security in Mexico only protects a third of the employed population, those who are salaried and normally reside in urban spheres and only 24 percent of the people who are 60 years and older receive a pension that, in most of the cases, is below the subsistence levels (Ham, 2003: 46). Unfortunately, in the rural and outlying municipalities of the IV District a high vulnerability is detected in broad sectors of the employed population and the group of people who are 60 years and older.

The reality explains that a great part of the workers in advanced ages in these municipalities tries to remain active, even at the expense of a worsening of their health, in face of the lack or inadequacy of the pensions (Pedrero, 2000: 99-130), be it through an extension of the labor life or by obtaining other sources of complementary income for their weak economies through informal occupation (days of work in farms, selling food and agriculture products, small domestic arrangements). Our study reveals that the economic issues are the main reason for the elderly population of the IV District to take part actively in enterprises of rural tourism, either as guides, companions or waiters.

By observing the population pyramid by age and sex in the 2000 year (graph 1), one notices the advance of the demographic transition in the IV District. The base of the graph became narrower, in other words, young population has lost relative weight throughout the years, as a consequence of the decrease in the levels of fertility. In the center of the pyramid two phenomena can be observed, a decrease of the members under 30 years, a result of the emigration of young active population towards other regions, and an increase in the superior cohorts of the adult population, which is explained by an increase in life expectancy and the average age in the adult active population. Likewise, a relative and absolute increase is observed in the group of population that is 60 or more years old, which undoubtedly determines the structure of the population for the next decades. A feminization of the ageing is also noticed, this caused by the higher life expectancy of women, who have more unfavorable socioeconomic and health conditions than men (Andreani, 1982).

In the towns with less than 2,500 inhabitants, the loss of population in productive ages, combined with the fall of the fertility and mortality, favors the advance of the demographic dependency of the older adults in the IV District,

TABLE I
EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION OF 60 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER.
IV DISTRICT AND STATE OF TAMAULIPAS,
YEARS 1990-2000 (INCREMENT RATE)

Municipality	1990		2000		1990-2000 Increment of the population of 60 years and older (%)
	Total population (N)	60 years and older (N)	Total population (N)	60 years and older (N)	
Bustamante	8 011	657	7 520	851	29.0
Jaumave	12 463	1 172	13 184	1 605	22.8
Miquihuana	3 437	352	3 176	457	27.0
Palmillas	1 981	238	1 821	283	23.0
Tula	28 011	2 183	27 049	2 911	15.9
IV District Region	53 903	4 602	52 750	6 107	25.0
Tamaulipas	2 249 581	145 978	2 753 222	205 674	24.6

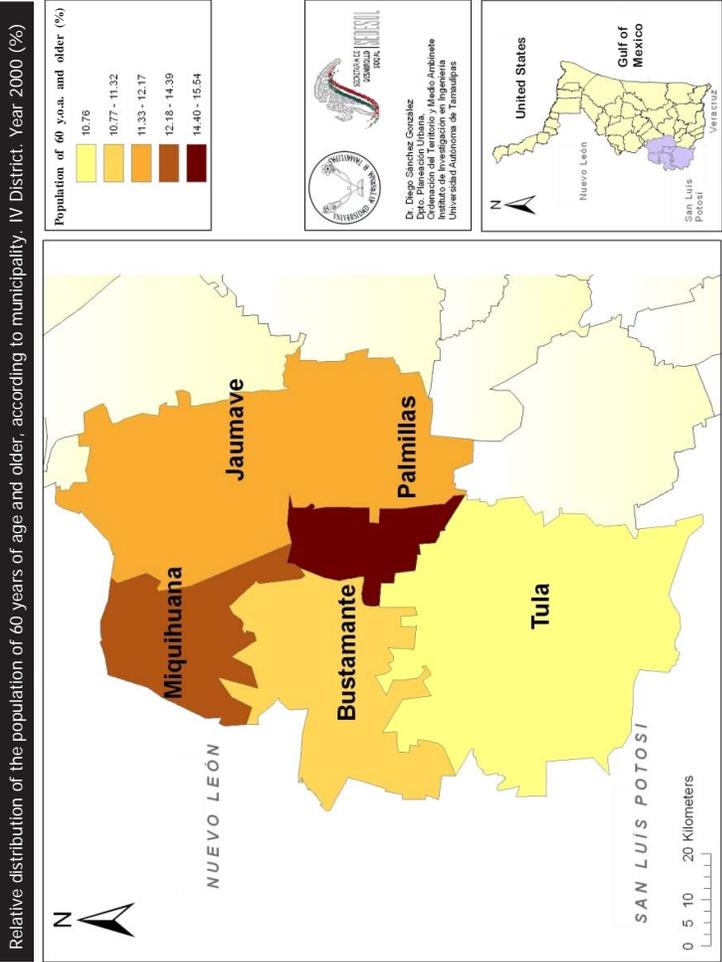
Source: INEGI, 1990-2000. Own calculations and elaboration.

TABLE 2
ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF 60 YEARS
OF AGE AND OLDER. IV DISTRICT AND STATE OF TAMAULIPAS, YEAR 2000
(ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE)

Municipality	Total population 2000 (N)	Group of 60 years and older (N)	Group of 60 years and older (%)
Bustamante	7 520	851	11.32
Jaumave	13 184	1 605	12.17
Miquihuana	3 176	457	14.39
Palmillas	1 821	283	15.54
Tula	27 049	2 911	10.76
IV District Region	52 750	6 107	11.58
Tamaulipas	2 753 222	205 674	7.47

Source: INEGI, 1990-2000. Own calculation and elaboration.

MAP II



Source: INEGI, 1990-2000. Own calculations and elaboration.

22.5 older adults per 100 people in working age, which is almost twice as much as the average of Tamaulipas (12.4). At a local level, Miquihuana (29.4) and Palmillas (29.1) have the highest rates, whereas Tula (21) and Bustamante (22.3) register the lowest ones.

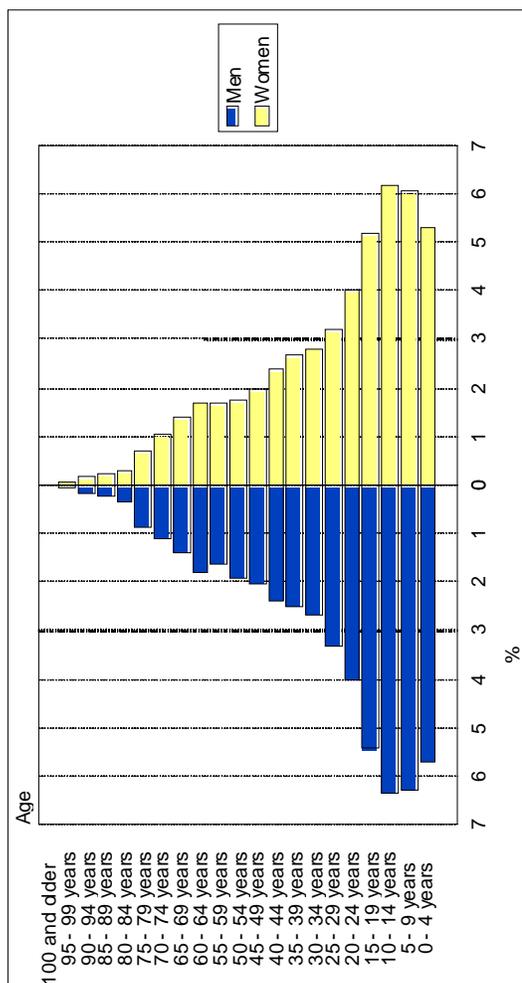
In all the nuclei there is a lack of public systems of social, health and welfare support for the elderly population. The fragility in terms of health of the advanced age people, the prevalence of chronic illnesses and dependency, the clamorous lack of formal and institutional support to the dependant people, the weakness of spaces and leisure and free time activities organized for the older adults confirm the high vulnerability of the people that reach old age in the studied zone and, by extension, in all the State. It is necessary for the companies of rural tourism that are to be based in the region to propose leisure and free time activities designed for this collective, a fact that will favor the integration of these people and will minimize the health problems related to loneliness.

Our studies (Sánchez, 2005) indicate that people in advanced age tend to show a progressive worsening of their health state. This makes this group of population a great consumer of medicine and health resources. It is necessary to achieve a satisfactory health coverage according to the increasing needs of the elderly population in these municipalities, not in order to add more years to life, but, above all, more quality to the those years in the old age. Likewise, a general improvement of the health conditions of the elderly population would favor an increase of the participation of these people in the tourist activities that are planned for the region.

The decrease of mortality is leading to an increase of life expectancy, that is, people of the IV District are increasingly living longer in advanced ages. This new circumstance is causing an increase of the septuagenarian and octogenarian elderly population, whose touristIC needs are different from those of the younger cohorts which incorporate to the retirement age.

The increase of the longevity will cause an increase of the dependant elderly population and the need of greater social, welfare and health expenditure, a situation that overstretches the social response capacity of the municipalities. In view of the new demographic ageing phenomenon it is necessary to open a broad social, economic and political debate, in which all social agents take part; the elderly themselves, the families and professionals, and where a higher coordination among the different governments, municipalities, states and the national government will be essential.

GRAPH I
POPULATION PYRAMID ACCORDING TO AGE AND GENDER. IV DISTRICT.
YEAR 2000 (%)



Source: own elaboration based on data from INEGI, 2001.

Data confirm a clear advance of demographic ageing in the region for the next decades, mainly favored by the high migration level of the young population, which shall facilitate a change in the distribution of the existent social and health resources and their adaptation to the new demands of the elderly population. The tourist planning shall be made accordant with the existing demographic reality and planned for the short and middle terms. It must include the design of activities that favor the participation and integration of this sector of the population that is increasing in number.

It is important for the future agenda of the tourist research in the region to include as a priority factor the study of the absolute and relative population that is 60 or older, since demographic ageing in the following years will be essential in order to understand, design and plan different strategies aimed at reaching an adequate development of the regional and local tourism sector.

We consider that rural tourism can contribute to the regional development of the municipalities of the IV District, generating wealth and employment and reducing the high level of emigration of the young population. It can also favor an improvement in the quality of life of the older people, avoiding the dismembering of the family because of emigration, which in turn favors informal help and minimizes loneliness and abandonment problems in the older adult.

Outlook of Mexico's rural tourism

In recent decades, the society of consumption and globalization has made a new culture of leisure and free time possible, which has promoted the tourism explosion. This activity has become a significant economic sector for many economies at different levels: national, regional and local. An example: during 2003, tourism contributed with 7.9 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Mexico (Sectur, 2004).

The tourist activity adapts constantly to the social changes and the demands of the market. The tourism sector has changed significantly throughout the last decades. Market globalization, the quest for new employment sources and the production based on quality have caused significant changes for the competition of the tourist companies (Hill and Garenth, 1999). A way to make tourism is being set on the new tourist supply, in it, leisure and free time and the protection of the environment are combined (Casanueva *et al.*, 2000). Thus, in recent years, different destinies and tourist activities have arisen; they are in constant dialogue with ecology and sustainability, examples of these are rural and ecotourism (Boo, 1990).

From 1975, rural tourism has undergone different stages in Mexico: Nevertheless, the lack of planning has prevented its development. Throughout the 90's, the National Fund to Support Social Companies (Fonaes) has subsidized the development of 30 rural tourism projects in outlying rural areas of 11 states (Torre, 1999). At present, the Secretariat of Tourism of Mexico considers the development of rural tourism a priority, and this fact has been translated into federal and state programs to promote this sector through the improvement of infrastructures and equipment, the restoration of old estates and the creation of rural houses (Sectur, 2001). Despite the fact that programs have been developed, we consider that national rural tourism continues being primary and marginal, since it receives scant economic support. The profitability of rural tourism in Mexico can be analyzed under macroeconomic parameters, just as it is done with sun-and-beach tourism. But its real strength lies in its social transcendence, since it favors the development of rural outlying communities and the preservation of natural spaces. In this regard, in some international forums (Regional Commission for the Americas of the World Tourism Organization, 2003) the socioeconomic importance and potential that rural tourism has in countries such as Mexico has started to be expressed.

Some researchers (Lustig, 1997) state that poverty in Mexico has decreased progressively in recent decades. Nevertheless, far from decreasing, in the rural sphere moderate and extreme poverty have increased in some distant regions of the South of Mexico (Chiapas and Oaxaca). At present, the different social programs (*Oportunidades*, *Seguridad Alimentaria*) try to fight poverty in the rural world, strengthening basic issues such as food provision, education and health of the rural outlying population.

We are in a turning point where rural outlying regions have entered into an aggressive process of environmental degradation and exhaustion of the natural resources that is not promoting any dynamism to local agriculture. It is necessary to change the strategy and to create policies that favor the sustainable development of rural communities, improving production and marketing without disregarding the conservation of the environment. In this respect, rural tourism might be an important complement for the weak local economies and a determining factor of regional development that stimulates other sectors, such as the primary so that, at the same time, it improves the life conditions of its inhabitants. It is important that social policies are aimed at favoring self-employment and avoiding subsidizing.

Rural tourism in the IV District region

We now describe the current context of the tourism sector in the semiarid region of Tamaulipas, an agricultural sphere that accurately reproduces the socioeconomic marginalization in which all the municipalities that constitute this region live.

There is a lack of reliable databases to establish an adequate diagnosis that supports the planning and the later development of the rural space of the IV District. Although we turned to different state and local institutions looking for information on the number of tourists that visit the region, the contradiction between the different official sources and the lack of objectivity in the numbers provided made us wary of the sources and data. Once we are in this stage, it is necessary to have official sources to measure a vital variable in the planning of this sector.

With regard to the infrastructure and the tourist services of the municipalities, there is none travel agency or subagency, nor car leasing companies. Likewise, only Tula municipality has five food preparation businesses, while there are not drinking business in the whole zone (INEGI, 2001: 482). In the municipalities, the agricultural and livestock activity is determining and the rest of the economic activities, including services, have a second place in the economy of the families.

The IV District is located among the last regions of the State with regard to hotel infrastructure, since only four places in this zone offer accommodation services, this supposes 0.98 percent of the total of Tamaulipas (407 business) (table 3). Also, the accommodation category is very low, that is, 50 percent is 1-star and 25 percent is 2-star, only the remaining 25 percent is 3-star. We didn't find 4 or 5 star accommodation services in these municipalities, so that one can not expect middle and high income tourists. Also, low category and scarce hotel supply are a reflection of the low investment and interest that the middle and big tourist developers have in the region.

The kind of accommodation places that we find in the municipalities are mainly owned by families and register a shortage in the number of rooms. Half of the supply is located in Tula (two restaurants), the main demographic administrative and economic center of the IV District, as well as in Jaumave and Miquihuana, while we did not find any accommodation providers in Bustamante and Palmillas. Likewise, the hotel sector has a limited amount of rooms (57 rooms), they represent only 0.38 percent of the total availability of the State

(15,060 rooms). Most of the accommodation in the IV District is located in Tula (40 rooms) and Jaumave (11 rooms). This low availability of hotel rooms and beds negatively affects the touristic sector and puts a damper on the development expectations in the zone.

The results are devastating and force to reflect the need to increase the tourist infrastructure in the zone, by raising the presence of travel agencies, car leasing companies, the supply and category of accommodation, as well as business related to food and drinks, selling handicrafts and supply touristic activities in the region in the development of the rural tourism is a priority to have enough and good quality tourist infrastructure, in order to achieve it, the different social agents shall be involved and private enterprises should be favored by providing aid to this sector. We shall be conscious about the fact that making the region national and international tourist destiny depends on the local options that are generated in the zone. Speaking on good quality tourism in the municipalities implies to implement programs for the promotion of companies of the sector at a local level that are strengthened by means of institutional support and private investment of regional and national kind.

Perception and participation of the older adults in the rural tourism.

Tourism perspectives of rural tourism can provide methodological strategies for an environmentally planned tourism (Chávez de la Peña, 2005) and appropriate to the needs of the population that grows old in the IV District. Different studies (World Tourism Organization, 1996; Sánchez, 2005) have proved the economic and social advantages obtained from the tourism programs aimed at the elderly population, given the fact that they favor the economy by creating positions and improving the quality of life of the older people.

Some tourism options are presented below; they are designed for the elderly population of these municipalities, whose responses have been obtained through our fieldwork. Any planning of touristic activities shall take into consideration the perception of the needs of the population in advanced ages.

This study is focused on the possibility of promoting rural tourism in outlying rural zones with local older adult people. Working on that principle, we did research with regard to the interest of the 60-year-old and older people of the municipalities of the IV District. We researched their interest in taking part in

touristic activities to learn their motivations and aim to establish touristic options that support the planning and development of the touristic space of the Tamaulipas plateau. Some researchers (Dachary, 2005: 9-21) state that if rural tourism is not planned, the risk exists that tourism may change from a low intensity category to massive and untenable state.

With regard to the socio-demographic characteristics of the elderly population, we observe a high presence of settlers born in the region (72 percent), without finding any interviewee who speaks an indigenous language. Despite the fact that the group of older adults has a high rate of married people (58 percent), the relative weight of the widowed people is significant (33 percent), above all 75 years or older women.

In Mexico illiteracy affects the most vulnerable groups, such as the older adults and the indigenous. In the IV District, elderly population has a high educative backwardness, since 39 percent of the surveyed people is illiterate, a rate that increases among women and people of 75 years or older. Thus, among the 85-year-old and older population, the illiteracy rate for men is of 53 and 64 percent for women. The low education level reached by the past cohorts in the region gives an idea of the great difficulty of the population to access education in decades previous to 1940.

In Mexico, the retirement age is set at 60 and 65, nevertheless, when said age is reached there are people who continue working, be it based on a personal decision or on an economic need. Low pensions and scarce coverage of Social Security force many older adults to continue working in outlying rural areas, such as the IV District (41 percent). From that elderly people, 58 percent is male and takes part in an economic activity, mainly agricultural, although in some cases formal employment is also the economic activity. As a result of this, only 16 percent of the older people have a kind of pension and could use health services and other social security benefits.

As age increases it becomes harder to remain in the labor market, therefore, in the 80 or older cohort only two out of 10 people work. The surveyed people with lower education level and higher age are precisely those who have lower average income (1,200 MXN a month). The analysis shows that women older than 75 and widows are those who receive less money (the amount of a minimum wage). And with regard to the municipalities, Bustamante and Miquihuana (60 percent) have a higher rate of older adults with an average monthly income of two minimum wages.

TABLE 3
 DISTRIBUTION OF LODGING ESTABLISHMENTS, ACCORDING TO CATEGORY
 BY MUNICIPALITY. IV DISTRICT, YEAR 2000
 (ABSOLUTE DATA)

Municipality	Total	Five stars	Four stars	Three stars	Two stars	One star	no category
Bustamante	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jaumave	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Miquihuana	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Pamillias	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tula	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
IV District	4	0	0	1	1	2	0
Tamaulipas	407	6	47	100	88	73	93

Source: own elaboration based on data from INEGI, 2001, p. 477.

Health is one of the main concerns of the 60 or more years old population of the municipalities of the study, in fact, 23 percent acknowledges being sick. In contrast to this, 58.8 percent of the elderly, the poorest and sickest, find a specific problem in the public medical and hospital services (the health centers are far from their homes, there is a shortage of staff and medicine in them).

Dependency is another problem that affects the elderly of the Tamaulipas plateau. Circa 2,100 older adults need help, that is, more than a third of them. The profile of the poor person is that of a widow that is 75 years old or older with low socio-economic level. In the face of this reality, the different public authorities are not responding adequately. A dreadful datum verifies it: only in the region there more than 400 people who declare requiring help and not receiving it. They are immersed in abandonment.

Most of the older adults live in their own houses (86 percent), and only in the urban center of Tula there is more presence of rental regime, especially of old houses. In these rural municipalities one frequently finds self-constructed houses with natural and precarious materials (walls, ceiling, floors) and scarce coverage of basic services. This reality affects older adults significantly, who live in houses that, sometimes, have problems, such as walls with precarious materials (32

percent), ceilings made out of asbestos, metal, wood and carton (37 percent) and lack cement floor (17 percent). Only 18 percent of the surveyed people have piped water inside their house, 71 percent of the households lacks drainage and 15 percent only has a septic tank. It is necessary to favor the improvement of the housing of the elderly population, both, to promote a higher quality of life and to favor the possibility that the elderly can provide accommodation in the future to the tourists. Also, 91 percent of the interviewees prefer to become old and receive attention, should it be required, in their own address. Nevertheless, it is essential to reorganize and increase the familial, social and welfare network of the municipalities.

One of the most significant results of the study shows that 68.7 percent of the older adults would like to take part in a touristic activity (organized trips, sociocultural activities), especially those under 70 years that have certain education level (complete primary and secondary education), and that are still in the labor market, as well as residents in most urban and populated administrative centers, especially Tula, Jaumave and Bustamante (table 4). From the remaining 31.3 percent that does not consider this option, the 75-year-old and older people stand out as they have a lower education level, lower monthly income and reside in minor towns (Palmillas and Miquihuana). The planning of touristic projects should be aimed at promoting the social integration of the older adults through their participation in touristic, leisure and free time activities.

In the municipalities we studied, 54 percent of the older adult population is willing to work in tourist activities (table 4) mainly preparing food, as tours guides, and providing accommodation to tourists. There is a higher participation of the men under 70 with certain education level (complete primary and secondary education) who have a low income, are unemployed, married, and who are residents in more urban and populated administrative centers, especially Tula and Jaumave. In contrast to this, we find lower interest to work in the touristic activities among women older than 75, with low education level (illiterate), low monthly income, that are widows and residents in minor towns, especially in Miquihuana (48.1 percent).

Within the group of interviewed people that would take part in touristic activities, 78.6 percent stated that they would like to take part in a rural tourism project in an organized manner. Graph 2 shows that the increase in the interest to work in touristic activities is correlated ($r = 0.596$) with the increase of the proportion of those who would take part in touristic activities in the municipalities, where Tula and Jaumave stand out, and in contrast to them, Miquihuana and

Palmillas would have lower rates. The result is not surprising in the case of Tula, whose urban center has started to be a touristic destination since it has some hotel infrastructure (two hotels). Nevertheless, the response of the older adult inhabitants in Palmillas and Miquihuana is surprising. Those are municipalities that have significant tourist appeal, and that are controlled by local and foreign power groups, a situation that has kept local country people separated from the touristic activities. In the rural zones of Mexico, tourism has been a marginal activity controlled by power groups for decades. The planning of tourist projects shall favor the democratization of the touristic activities and the social participation and labor integration of the local population, providing special attention to older adults.

With regard to the ownership of land, 79 percent of the surveyed population owns, at least, half a hectare where they grow basic products (corn, beans) for their self-supply. One of the questions in the questionnaire asked older adults about the economic profitability of their farming labor. The response was definite, 84.2 percent think that farming (farming and livestock) is not a profitable business to keep their economies; nonetheless, many times those activities are their only source of economic and food resources.

The similar socioeconomic characteristics of the interested and non-interested people in taking part in touristic activities – small extensions of land, single-crop system, low mechanization and lack of marketing – explain the fact that the agricultural activity of the interviewed people is not enough to guarantee the basic and essential needs of the family.

The conservative position of the interviewed is observable in the fact that few farming older adults think of leaving this activity, in fact 93 percent would combine their farming labor with the labor in the tourism sector. In this respect it is recommended that the economic support from the government favors the improvement and marketing of the agricultural products, through the creation of agricultural cooperatives, mechanization, training of staff and the cultivation of ecologic products.

The lack of private capital appeared as the main cause that restrain the participation of the older adults in the touristic activities, since only 17.2 percent would agree to invest their money to provide accommodation (building facilities, house remodeling). In this case, 32.3 percent is willing to invest if aid is obtained from the government, especially in the regions of Tula and Palmillas. The main reason that older adults put forward to invest money on tourism was to create assets for their children and families (85 percent).

In tourism, human-resource training is an essential part. In this section, the surveyed population showed much interest in becoming trained (61 percent), even among those who, at the beginning, were not interested in the touristic activities (21 percent).

At the moment of measuring the level of knowledge of touristic values of the IV District in the surveyed population, 27.3 percent of the older adults stated that the main tourist appeal of the region are their natural landscapes (waterfalls, rivers, forests and mountains), 25 percent their history and customs (traditional festivities, churches, architectural collection, watering places), 24.4 percent their gastronomy and handicrafts, and 12.8 percent, ecotouristic activities (hiking, mountaineering, rappel), their flora and fauna (bear, white-tailed deer, Monarch butterfly, macaw, ferocatus) (7.5 percent), and other (three percent).

With regard to the best time of the year to visit the region, four out of five older adults stated that it is spring. Elderly population has a thorough knowledge of the climate of the zone; therefore they discourage visiting it during summer given the abundant rains. Winter is not recommended given its low temperatures and low intensity rainfalls. This climatic circumstance would favor the high season nature in the tourism planned for the region. It is necessary to promote different tourist products aimed at adventure tourism and familial weekend rural tourism and they shall be adjusted to the different seasons of the year. It is also necessary to capitalize and spread the tourist appeal of these natural spaces, by creating tourist routes through the municipalities, and making more efforts to attract investment and tourists from the most important urban centers of the State of Tamaulipas, (Tampico, Mante, Ciudad Victoria and Reynosa), San Luís Potosí (Ciudad Valles), and Nuevo León (Monterrey), as well as that from Laredo, McAllen and Brownsville in Texas, U.S. It is important to promote the tourism that comes from the neighboring country, especially tourists that have Mexican forefathers and relatives, since they are the main source of tourists to Mexico, with 88.2 percent (Sector, 2004). It is urgent to improve the communication routes both, rural roads and secondary state and federal highways.

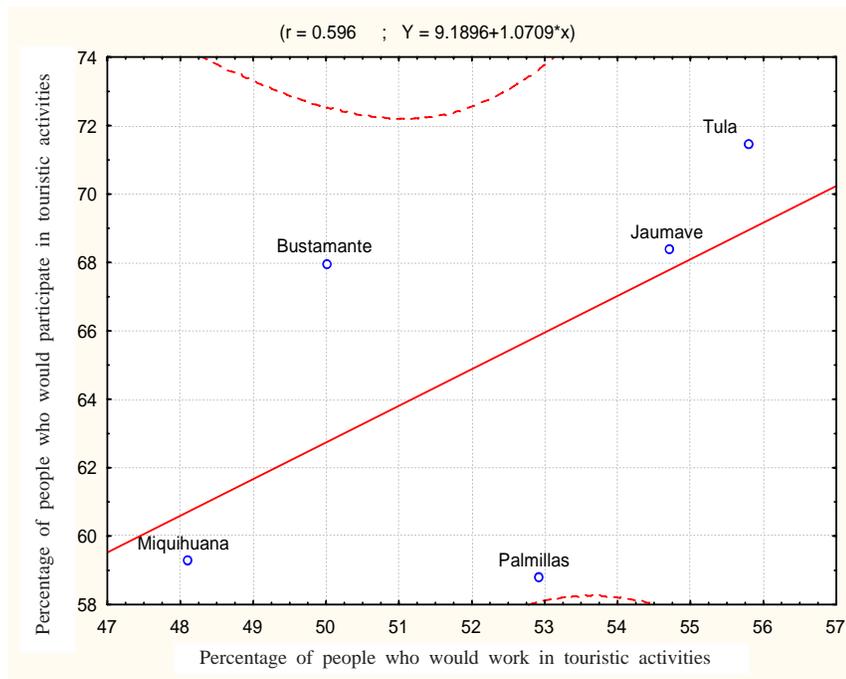
The development of rural tourist projects can improve the conditions of life of the older adults, by creating employment and income that complete the traditional economic activity in the rural environment, which would also reduce migration of young population and, with it, loneliness and abandonment of the elderly that depend on their families.

TABLE 4
 DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION ACCORDING TO INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE IN TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES,
 INTENTION TO WORK IN TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES AND MUNICIPALITY, IV DISTRICT OF TAMAULIPAS,
 YEAR 2006 (FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE)

Municipality	60 years and older		Interviews		¿Would you like to participate in touristic activities?			¿Would you like to work in touristic activities?		
	Total	(%)	(N)	(%)	Yes(%)	No (%)	Dk/Na. (%)	Yes(%)	No (%)	Dk/Na. (%)
Bustamante	851	13.9	50	100	68.0	28.0	4.0	50.0	46.0	4.0
Jaumave	1605	26.3	95	100	68.4	29.5	2.1	54.7	43.2	2.1
Miquihuana	457	7.5	27	100	59.3	37.0	3.7	48.1	48.1	3.7
Palmillas	283	4.6	17	100	58.8	35.3	5.9	52.9	47.1	0.0
Tula	2911	47.7	172	100	71.5	25.6	2.9	55.8	41.3	2.9
District IV Region	6107	100	361	100	68.7	28.3	3.0	54.0	43.2	2.8

Source: Own elaboration based on Sánchez, 2006.

GRAPH2
 REGRESSION OF THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD PARTICIPATE IN
 TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES OVER THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD
 WORK IN TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES. MUNICIPALITIES OF THE IV DISTRICT OF
 TAMAULIPAS. YEAR 2006 (PERCENTAGE)



Source: Own elaboration based on Sánchez, 2006.

In the study it is demonstrated that native older adult people have spent most of their life living in their towns and dedicated to the agricultural and livestock sector. These elderly people have a high knowledge of the natural resources, the spaces and more outstanding landscapes, as well as the endemic fauna and flora of the zone.

The active participation of the 60 or more years old people would comprise different activities aimed at locating places with charm (forests, valleys), to accompany travelers through different routes and pathways, to meet the

gastronomic (food and water sale) and cultural needs of the visitors (selling traditional products, pottery), to provide services such as hiring donkeys, which are abundant in the zone, and horses, hire rural houses and cover the leisure needs of the tourists (fishing, dancing and meetings). The practice of most of these touristic activities could be aimed at a broad variety of people, in which older adults would not be excluded. We have considered that previous organization of the touristic activities would be necessary in each municipality. So that it would be compulsory to establish a minimum necessary infrastructure for the sale of food, as well as parking and grilling areas and routes to ride donkeys and horses. Likewise, the development of ecological tourism activities in the IV District requires setting restoration measures in tourist and landscape centers as well as in flora and fauna pathways, houses and rural hostels, and open-air activities: This investment shall come from public capital and can be accompanied of economic and fiscal aid to the private investment.

It is necessary to reflect on the role that rural tourism shall play as driving force of the local and regional development of the IV District. There's no doubt that the touristic activity that is environmentally sustainable and designed for the older population is going to acquire significance in the next decades. In face of this view, it is necessary for the touristic activity to be planned, designed, directed and evaluated by professionals of the sector, at the same time, collaborate closely with the local councils and private companies.

In the next decades, tourism and its tendencies can be one of the alternatives for the development in outlying regions, such as the IV District: environmental and cultural heritage protection and the use of technology with regard to tourism. The challenge lies in using efficiently the strength of the tourism sector to fight poverty (OMT, 2001: 7).

Tourism can represent an alternative capable of being resized to create investment and incorporate the rural communities as services providers (González, 2002), since the municipalities of the IV District are conducive to develop a variety of productive activities given its natural, biotic and abiotic resources.

Here we are in favor of tourism policy that is linked to the local and regional development that provides a response to the demands of a farming society through the participation of the different social agents: entrepreneurs, workers, agents, politicians and citizens. It is necessary to develop sustainable tourism projects that take into account the natural and cultural resources located in their municipalities, proposing new ways to create income to improve the well-being of the native population, as well as the respect to the existing natural resources.

Conclusions

Tourism activity requires a constant adaptation to the social changes and the own demands of the globalized market. In the same way as it happens in developed countries, in Mexico the increase of the relative weight of the elderly population is favoring the creation of different specific touristic products, which has become a social and economic benefit. Therefore, tourism requires learning the evolution and future perspectives of the adult population to adapt its supply and to know the demand of tourism products.

The current ageing process of the population in the IV District of Tamaulipas is explained by a decrease of the fertility, a fall of the mortality and, above all, by the migratory movements. This phenomenon is still slight in most of the municipalities, nevertheless, the forecasts point to a considerable increase of the ageing rate for the year 2030. If high emigration of the young population towards other urban and developed zones of Mexico and especially to the U.S. is not reduced, the demographic tendency of the IV District is directed to population stagnation, this would become a change in the age structure of the population and an increase in the average age of the adult population. The increase of the life expectancy is going to provide, among other factors (fertility and emigration), an increase of the relative weight of the 60 or more years old group. A fact that will favor an overageing (progressive presence of octogenarians) and a feminization of the population. This new demographic reality is going to bring about unquestionable social changes and the increasing demand for social, medical and welfare services, for which the municipalities are not ready. Also, this population group will continue requesting employment and new leisure and free time activities that can have their response in rural tourism.

In the IV District we found scarce development of the touristic sector, which is a response to the situation of socioeconomic marginalization the zone experiences and the inadequate investment which has limited the possibilities of development locally. Nowadays, these municipalities have an exiguous tourism infrastructure (accommodation businesses, travel agencies, food and beverages businesses, car leasing companies) that push for the setting of alternatives directed to promote development programs of rural tourism and to promote integration strategies of the older population through the practice of tourism activities.

The complex problems of the municipalities require public and private intervention at the moment of introducing different alternatives of local development that favor the tourism development of the zone, as well as to help to improve the quality of life of the 60-year and older population. Ecotourism would then facilitate both, the practice of leisure and free time activities on the side of the elderly and the active participation in labor enterprises of tourism companies of the municipalities on the other. The precarious socioeconomic situation of the older adults would explain partially the great interest shown by this sector of the population in the tourism activities. In fact, the use of the knowledge and experience of the older people allows the local economic development, improves the quality of the tourism supply, favors the social integration of the elderly and helps the weak survival economies of the older adults of the outlying municipalities.

The exercise of the tourism planning shall consider the advantages that the municipalities in study provide in terms of availability or territorial reserve in order to consider the regional imbalances in a diagnosis that allows measuring with certainty the state in which a specific zone is. For example, the population, poverty, migration or well-being characteristics and the quality of life to consider them within the development strategies, so that they are of a high social impact.

The perspectives of the rural tourism for the older adult people shall be considered as a permanent exercise that guides the practices and actions. These actions allow creating sceneries induced by the own needs of the region, in which the organized civil society and the public and private sectors are the most important actors of the regional planning process that becomes an essential condition to achieve the balance and equity of sustainability.

The touristic environment of a town, derived from the formation and the individual social participation of the individuals, will be based on the special atmosphere of cordial hospitality, quality and competitiveness, and is directed to have fully satisfied adult tourists.

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