

OMEYOCAN: FORMAL AND INFORMAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND MANAGEMENT PLANNING IN URBAN SPACES

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ABSTRACT

The Omeyocan Ecological Education Center A.C. is located on the east side of Monte Alto, a mountain in the volcanic mountain range of Mexico. Its area consists of ten hectares of evergreen oaks and underbrush enclosed within the Atizapán-Valle Escondido Park. This presentation discusses the origin, objectives and goals and subsequent development of the Center since its inception in 1992. It identifies the main academic and environmental management problems associated with the Center and discusses how some of these problems have been solved through a well-integrated association between University professors, the Rotary Club Atizapán and the Mexican government. The Center proposes to develop organizational and strategic plans to create zones on the fringes of urban areas where environmental education programs and cultural activities can be carried on and local or native knowledge and traditions can be taught.

RÉSUMÉ

Le Centre de formation écologique de Omeyocan A.C. est situé sur le versant est du Monte Alto dans la chaîne volcanique du Mexique. Il consiste en une forêt de chênes verts et de sous-bois s'étendant sur 10 hectares à l'intérieur du parc Atizapán-Valle Escondido. Cette communication présente les origines, les objectifs, les buts, les progrès et les transformations du site depuis 1992. Nous avons indiqué les enjeux

principaux et la façon dont les aspects de la gestion ont été résolus grâce à la participation d'universitaires, de membres du Rotary Club Atizapán et du gouvernement du Mexique. L'organisation et le développement stratégique du Centre peuvent servir d'option dans la création de sites, en marge des centres urbains, où les programmes éducatifs sur l'environnement, les activités culturelles, et la remise en valeur du savoir et des traditions locales ou indigènes, pourraient se réaliser.

INTRODUCTION

The OMEYOCAN Ecological Education Center occupies the extreme southern section of the 'Parque de los Ciervos' in the 'Zona Esmeralda', Municipality of Atizapán, in the State of Mexico. It consists of ten enclosed hectares, one third of which is covered with evergreen oaks, a stream, a camping area, an exhibition room, a thatch-covered area, a service area and car parking space.

The Center offers a permanent space for recreational activities as well as for environmental awareness, education, training and research, with the academic and services infrastructure provided by UNAM Campus Iztacala and the Atizapán Rotary Club, who are the two founding institutions of the Civil Association **OMEYOCAN Ecological Education Center**.

The Omeyocan Center was created with the following objectives:

- a) To collaborate in environmental awareness training and education of groups of all ages: elementary, secondary and high school students, parents, business people, workers and people with special needs.
- b) To disseminate, at the level of ordinary people, scientific knowledge about mexican species, with the purpose of promoting their care and rational use, which is the basis of sustainable development.
- c) To show visitors ecological technology or eco-techniques that complement, or substitute for, the usual ones.
- d) To participate in the environmental training of young students who will collaborate with the research carried out at the Center.

- e) To create a recreational area, the natural environment of which will be recognized and protected with the advice of university specialists and the participation of members of the community.

In order to reach these objectives in the Omeyocan Center, ten lines of research have been designed in the fields of Biological Sciences and Environmental Health and Education.

In the field of Biological Sciences the following have been considered: Fauna and Flora Studies, Nurseries of Evergreen Oaks, Reforestation and Botanical Garden, Micro-climatic Changes and Regional Micro-climate, Interpretation, Education and Training, Free Time, Recreation and Culture.

The field of Environmental Health and Education includes: Education and Sciences, Psychology and Education, Health, Family and Work.

The intention is to incorporate, from these different fields, teachers, members and collaborators from the community in general, in order to enable the area to be used as a space for teaching, research and recreation.

In the field of research in Biological Sciences, the program of Interpretation and Environmental Education has been designed: various research activities will be approached, directed and supervised by researchers from the University under a general scheme that approaches knowledge about air, water, soil, flora and fauna, concepts of ecology, antipollution techniques, use and conservation of our resources, as well as environmental training and health.

This scheme arises as a result of the analysis of the natural zones of the area carried out by researchers from Campus Iztacala; by means of an ecological path designed through the woods, these zones provide the Center with the opportunity of promoting the knowledge and conservation of the flora and fauna of the State of Mexico. The Center also seeks to promote environmental awareness and education among the visitors through the dissemination of basic information about natural resources, the causes and processes of environmental problems, and possible practical solutions through specific action at family, social and industrial levels.

With the opportunity offered by the natural Evergreen Oak woods and a framework of voluntary gathering and participation, the program of Use and Recovery of Natural Areas is intended to develop attitudes and actions that favor a decrease in the pollution of the natural environment, a search for solutions to improve our quality of life and a fostering of human values and respect for wildlife. It is hoped that through A Living Museums and Nurseries, visitors will get to know some of the native species, understand the importance of their conservation and collaborate with urban, suburban and rural reforestation.

Included in this program is a sub-program called Integral Regional Botanical Garden which oversees both the one located in the Omeyocan Center and the one at the University Campus.

For students and the community in general, the Free Time, Recreation and Culture program will organize, for both training and educational purposes, scientific workshops, conferences, courses and conventions on topics related to the environment with the aim of promoting sustainable development.

The Administrative Management program includes Management, Operation, Infrastructure and Surveillance programs which will assume responsibility for financial promotion, administration and management to maintain and operate the Association, to optimize the infrastructure, as well as to oversee the technical supervision, operation and surveillance of the OMEYOCAN Ecological Education Center.

Given that the OMEYOCAN Ecological Education Center is a Civil Association, constituted through public deed by UNAM Campus Iztacala and the Atizapán Rotary Club, the Center will be supported by tax-deductible donations from the members and those people, companies, associations and institutions who sympathize with its objectives and programs.

1. CONDITIONS OF OMEYOCAN

The main dilemmas identified during the development of the Center can be divided into two types: academic direction and environmental management.

2. ACADEMIC DILEMMAS

These are directly related to the recognition of environmental education as an inter- and intraprofessional area.

I. To convince professionals, still teaching in the traditional manner in the fields of biology, psychology and social sciences, to increase, in their curriculum, the amount of environmental education (natural, physical and social environment), using material from their daily immediate environment, such as the home, school, parks, offices, hospitals and industries.

- a) To motivate the academic community to accept environmental education as a valid research line and the Omeyocan Center as an institutional project with academic status in environmental education.
- b) To give to environmental education and research the same status which other scientific research possesses.
- c) To integrate teaching and research in environmental education into the social sciences, psychology and biology, through daily practices.
- d) To resolve conflicts of professional integration among administrative, industrial, social and other academic sectors.
- e) To articulate the environmental education perspectives of different disciplines and of the larger world in such a way as to create an active and responsible environmental program.

II. To allow the formation of interdisciplinary, interprofessional and interinstitutional working groups in a democratic and participatory context at a location belonging to the Iztacala Campus.

- a) To motivate the authorities, academic staff, biology students and

professors to organize and collaborate in a complex suburban multidisciplinary project that does not have the attractive options found in natural areas of high biodiversity.

- b) To motivate the authorities in the Department of Psychology to work with other disciplines and develop programs for preschool, primary and secondary school students which will transform attitudes, behaviour and moral values.
- c) To resolve the difficulty of changing the still-feudal approach of professionals in all kinds of disciplines so that individuals will be able to work with other professionals on complex multireference problems.
- d) To resolve the problem of the lack of training for group work and for participation in interdisciplinary projects.

3. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT DILEMMAS

To reach an equilibrium between the importance of establishing an identity for the OMEYOCAN CENTER and recognizing the identities of the Rotary Club and the University, and to address itself to the necessity of maintaining economic support and financial resources for the program.

- a) To convince the Atizapán Rotary club involved in the development of the Center to support academic projects, and not just recreational and free time programs which raise money.
- b) To work against the insertion of staff who are not really interested in the Center and who are of no benefit to it.
- c) To reconcile internal conflicts between the university and Rotary Club members who have been participating since the start of the project and who remain important to its success.
- d) To prevent administrators (from both the university and the Rotary Club) from using the project to further their own political careers.
- e) To convince the Atizapán Rotary Club presidents, who are newly

elected each year, of the importance of the project and of the impact of negative statements on fund-raising.

- f) To persuade the authorities of the Municipality of Atizapán and of the government of the State of Mexico to support the project in a continuous fashion.

CONCLUSIONS

The following goals are fundamental:

1. To learn how to identify and resolve internal conflicts which are generated in the Center and to focus on the goal of the Center, which is daily solving of environmental problems.
2. To emphasize the richness of the different professions associated with the Center.
3. To make sure the objectives of the authorities, professionals, and community are the same: the focus on the biological, psychological and social aspects associated with environmental problems.
4. To maintain an open mind, allowing debate and the acceptance of different views which can improve the Center, step by step.
5. To accept that environmental education in an emergent field and educational practices and research are experimental, continuously changing in relation to the needs of the people.
6. To implement workshops focused on training for group work in participatory-action-research schemes.
7. To develop organizational and strategic plans to create green spaces around or within big cities where environmental education programs and cultural activities can be carried on and local or native knowledge and traditions can be taught.

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