

## ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN CUBA: AN ANALYSIS OF SELF-EMPLOYED ROOM LESSORS SPECIALIZED IN FOREIGN TOURISM

*Lourdes Sánchez-Oramas\**

Universidad de la Havana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5275-9180>

*Seida Barrera-Rodríguez\**

Universidad de la Havana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1529-9936>

*Manuel Ángel Fernández-Gómez\*\**

Universidad de Málaga

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1033-3784>

*José Ramón Sánchez-Serrano\*\**

Universidad de Málaga

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9461-7268>

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the Cuban self-employed room lessor sector specialized in foreign tourism in the town of Playa, Havana City, as well as the effect on ratings issued by international customers. The data come from an entrepreneurial sample of 100 Cuban self-employed room lessors (SRL) and a non-probabilistic sampling of 184 international clients. The conclusions of the study show that these self-employed Cubans constitute a source of competition for State tourism facilities. Likewise, it should be mentioned that the entrepreneurial intention of these lessors comes from their self-perception as professionals and is not conditioned by socio-demographic or cultural elements.

**Keywords:** Tourist lease; entrepreneurship; self-employed; international customers; Cuba.

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\* Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana. Universidad de la Havana. Esquina de 9na y 41, #707, Miramar, Playa. LA HABANA (Cuba), Código postal 11300. E-mail: [lourdes.sanchez.oramas@gmail.com](mailto:lourdes.sanchez.oramas@gmail.com), [seidabarrerarodriguez@gmail.com](mailto:seidabarrerarodriguez@gmail.com)

\*\* Departamento de Finanzas y Contabilidad. Universidad de Málaga. Campus El Ejido s/n. 29071 Málaga (España). E-mail: [mangel@uma.es](mailto:mangel@uma.es), [joseramonsanchez@uma.es](mailto:joseramonsanchez@uma.es)

## **Intención emprendedora en Cuba: un análisis de los profesionales autónomos especializados en arrendamiento de habitaciones para turistas extranjeros**

### **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo analiza el sector del alquiler turístico a extranjeros que efectúan personas físicas en el municipio de Playa de La Habana (Cuba), así como el efecto del mismo en las valoraciones emitidas por los clientes internacionales. Los datos provienen de una muestra de 100 emprendedores y de un muestreo no probabilístico para 184 clientes internacionales. Las conclusiones del trabajo muestran que estos arrendadores pueden considerarse emprendedores y que constituyen una fuente de competencia para las instalaciones turísticas estatales. Así mismo, se debe destacar que la intención emprendedora de estos arrendadores viene dictaminada por la percepción que este sujeto tiene de sí mismo como profesional, y que no está condicionada por otros elementos sociodemográficos o culturales.

**Palabras clave:** Arrendamiento turístico; emprendimiento; autónomos; clientes internacionales; Cuba.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The entrepreneur is that person with innovative ideas that develops, buys and sells in the market, who perceives an opportunity and creates a new business (Kuratko, 2008). An entrepreneurial orientation is necessary in the economic and social development of a region (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin and Frese, 2009; Bierwerth, Schwens, Isidor and Kabst, 2015). Because entrepreneurship provides an extensive set of employment and innovation opportunities, the discussion on how to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit has gained relevance (Kuratko, Hornsby and Hayton, 2015). Due to this question, topics such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes required in the formation of entrepreneurs are also gaining increasing attention among scholars, researchers and political agendas, both in developed economies as in emerging economies (Kuratko, 2005).

The first studies on entrepreneurship were focused on the socio-demographic and psychological characteristics of the entrepreneur (Fuentes, 2008). In addition, it has also been detected that variables such as professional experience and education are key factors in the ability to create a business (Ruiz, Sanz and Fuentes, 2015; Morris, Webb, Fu and Singal, 2013; Catley and Hamilton, 1998).

Although the literature on entrepreneurship is profuse, there are few empirical studies that illustrate entrepreneurial activity in Latin America (Buitelaar, 2010). Latin American entrepreneurs share a host of common characteristics and comprise a heterogeneous universe that spans from small companies of subsistence up to medium-sized enterprises with export capacity (Buitelaar, 2010). The case of Colombia is a regional example, showing how the intervention of the government can encourage an increase in entrepreneurial activity (Tarapuez, Osorio and Botero, 2013) and enhance the entrepreneurial capacity of the population in their essential economic axis (Leyden, Albert and Donald, 2014).

This paper provides knowledge about entrepreneurial intention in Cuba, and more specifically in one of the sectors for which there are no previous studies, which is the SRL sector for international tourists. This paper intends, therefore, to fill in this gap in research with the aim of analyzing both the socio-cognitive characteristics of Cuban SRL and its relationship with their entrepreneurial intention, as well as the perception that customers have of the accommodation and its implications for loyalty and recommendations. To answer this research question, we have formulated the following hypotheses to compare:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). The socio-demographic characteristics of SRL in the accommodation service to foreign visitors are related to their entrepreneurial intention.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). The perception that SRL have of themselves as entrepreneurs in the accommodation service to foreign visitors facilitates their entrepreneurial intention.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). The perception that customers have of the characteristics of the accommodation facilitates their loyalty.

To test the research hypotheses raised, two samples have been selected. The first is from Cuban SRL providing accommodation services for foreign visitors, and the second is from international customers who have used these services. With the data from the aforementioned samples, an ANOVA was conducted and the results from both samples compared. The results showed us the importance of SRL's perceptions of themselves and the factors that influence customer loyalty.

The article has been structured in the following way: after this introduction, an analysis of the economic and legal environment affecting the Cuban SRL is presented. The following segment describes the research methodology and data analysis. Finally, the results are discussed, and conclusions, limitations, and future lines of research are presented.

## **2. CONTEXTUAL SETTING**

Tourist activities in Cuba have been supervised by the Ministry of Tourism since 1982. As of 2014, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security has regulated the lease of houses, rooms and spaces. In August 2017, a revision of Cuban SRL sector was carried out for establishing better control and organization, which led to a temporary suspension of the granting of new licenses in 27 activities, from a total of 231, until December 2018, where new legislation came into force.

Until December 2017, Cuba received 4, 653,559 foreign visitors, coming mainly from Canada, United States, Germany and Italy. The average annual occupancy rate of the state hotel facilities was 56, 9%, not surpassing those of previous years until 2013 (ONEI, 2018). And it is precisely in this context that the SRL has acquired greater prominence. We found that the market share on overnight stays corresponding to the private sector

from year 2011, when the legal regulations were streamlined to promote self-employment, slowly began to grow, except for year 2014 (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**OVERNIGHT STAYS OF FOREIGN TOURISTS AND MARKET SHARE FOR EACH SECTOR**

Year	Total tourists' overnight stays	Overnight stays in State hotels	Market share (%)	Overnight stays in private sector	Market share (%)
2011	23 165 439	17354553	74,92	5 810 886	25,08
2012	24 753 066	18313871	73,99	6 439 195	26,01
2013	25 612 125	18878178	73,71	6 733 947	26,29
2014	25 739 533	19424438	75,47	6 315 095	24,53
2015	29 916 768	21830066	72,97	8 086 702	27,03
2016	33 202 458	24248358	73,04	8 954 100	26,96
2017	33 085 823	22113174	66,84	10 972 649	33,16

Source: Own elaboration from data from ONEI (2018, 2016), Statistical Yearbooks of Cuba (2015, 2017).

From the analyses of Table 1, we can observe that the State Sector has kept its dominant position, but the private sector has slowly increased, except for year 2014, when it grew less than the previous year. Nevertheless, from 2015 the privates experienced a growth of 1,771,607 in overnight stays, probably due to the changes in the United States- Cuba policy, announced on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014 (Obama). This behavior has been consistent with the increase of American visitors to Cuba in 2015, in 70 647 new ones, but also of the total guests in the same year, that went to 526,591. The increasing market share for the SRL until 2017, indicates that tourist's preferences for them has improved.

Nevertheless, this situation might change in 2018 results, whose statistics are not ready yet, partially because of the tourists perception of the destruction caused by hurricane Irma, in September 2017, although the destination was ready for high season that same November, but also because of the new measures of Trump's government which caused the reduction of Americans arrivals in 40% (Izquierdo, 2018). The trend supports the idea that the already existing competition between sectors will be more fierce, in an economy where SRL holds a key advantage: the exchange rate of 24 Cuban pesos (CUP) for 1 Cuban Convertible peso (CUC) (BCC, 2010; 2019), while the public sector must inject 1 CUC to pay 1 CUP to its workers, among other expenses (BCC, 1994, 2004).

The State considers not only SRL, but all private sector as a complementary element, a wellness facilitator, channeling the productive potentialities for the socioeconomic development of the country (PCC, 2016). There are limitations, for example, SRL are not considered commerce entrepreneurs according to the law (MTSS, 2018), but civilians, because of the scarce economic scale of their business activities (Fraga and Mesa, 2004a). However, the Partido Comunista de Cuba has expressed its desire to recognize them as such in the future (PCC, 2016).

The SRL for international tourists is composed of homeowners who are actively looking for a different lifestyle. In the case of Cuba, these businesses take place in their own homes, and tasks are usually split between family members. The need to understand entrepreneurship in a tourist context was already manifested by Simms (1981) and by Shaw and Williams (2004). It has been argued that tourism entrepreneurs often focus on fulfilling lifestyle and local environment goals rather than maximizing profits (Nilsson, Petersen and Wanhill, 2005; Morrison, Carlsen and Weber, 2008). Despite this, family tourism businesses can be very successful (Morrison, 2006) and have a positive impact on the area where they are located (Benur and Bramwell, 2015).

As part of the economic measures implemented in Cuba since 2011, a support mechanism has been structured for the development of national and international tourism, whose purpose is to improve the economy of the country. That is why self-employed individuals and cooperative members have been granted bank loans for the purchase of supplies necessary to carry out the economic activity on their own.

There are limitations, such as the lack of knowledge of the products and services offered by banks, or the inability to start a business with a line of credit without a self-employed license (Borrás, 2017). However, they can sell their products or services to State enterprises and sign contracts with the State (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2013). Furthermore, and taking into account the dual currency circulation in the country, with the Cuban convertible peso (CUC) on one hand and the Cuban peso (CUP) on the other hand, the only ones entitled to rent foreign tourist accommodations, are SRL enrolled in CUC (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2014).

Along with the above, it should also be noted that a contemporary application that promotes entrepreneurship is the use of social networks as a mechanism for entrepreneurs to discover and exploit new ideas (Leyden et al., 2014). However, this possibility is a limitation for the Cuban SRL because the existing offer for Internet access (using the options of Nauta Home or wireless access points) fails to meet the demand. Therefore, they publish their services through third parties. In the future, however, it is expected that this situation will improve by signing agreements with companies such as SES Networks and the Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba Sociedad Anónima (ETECSA) (Granma, 2018). In addition, other main difficulties that limit entrepreneurial activity are supply procurement, little business training, and technical difficulties in the rooms, such as broken air conditioners or blocked pipes. With respect to inputs (construction materials), the lack of a network aimed at this civil entrepreneurial group promotes the proliferation of alternative markets with products that come from State institutions. It has been identified in all instances of the Partido Comunista de Cuba, and efforts have been made to alleviate it (Ministry of Internal Trade, 2016). Nevertheless, the insufficient offer, partly due to the difficulties to import product through the US blockade and internal organizational problems, hinders its solution in the short term.

### 3. SAMPLES AND DATA

For the contrast of the hypotheses formulated in this paper, two samples were selected, one of SRL from the tourist sector in the town of Playa (Havana province), and another

of the clients of said sector. Playa was chosen for its wide socio-demographic range, representative of various types of tourist rentals (Sanchez, 2017).

To address the study objectives, data were needed on both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the samples, which helped us to describe the profile of the renter of the Playa municipality and their customers (Kinneer and Taylor, 2000). For this purpose, we have considered the different criteria about the variables that determine the individual decision to start a business. First, we researched the explanatory capacity of personality traits or demographic characteristics (Mazzarol, Volery, Doss and Thein, 1999; Rauch and Frese, 2007). Second, we also analysed the so-called entrepreneurial intentions, defined as a history of behaviour that will capture the degree to which people show the factors of motivation and desire to make an effort to undertake something (Autio, Keeley, Klofsten, Parker and Hay, 2001; Liñán, Urbano and Guerrero, 2011; Padilla-Meléndez, Fernández-Gámez and Molina-Gómez). Entrepreneurial intentions relate also to the idea of how much one wants to be a business owner, which has led to that being considered predictive of entrepreneurship, together with other individual variables like attitudes, beliefs, demographic aspects, or personality traits (Fayolle, Liñán and Moriano, 2014; Krueger, Reilly and Carsrud, 2000).

This study has been designed using the descriptive method, with the objective of establishing a causal transversal relationship among the variables studied (Kinneer and Taylor, 2000). The use of this type of conclusive research is justified due to the limited information found on the enterprising Cubans in the tourism sector. In spite of this, it allows one to describe the characteristics of the lessors of the sample and their main clients (age, sex, educational level, attributes of their offerings and other necessary information).

The sample design for the lessors is based on a simple random probability sampling, as opposed to the sampling for customers, which has a non-probability design approach for convenience (Kinneer and Taylor, 2000). In the latter, ignorance of the exact number of guests accommodated in rental houses during the study means that this number is defined as an infinite population. So, to determine the size of the sample, the formulas for finite and infinite populations (Kinneer and Taylor, 2000) are used, in correspondence with a numerical value of 0.5 equivalent to 50%, to the p indicator (probability of occurrence) and q indicator (probability of non-occurrence), and a reliability factor Z of 90%, which is equivalent to 1.645 in decimal expression. Using the statistical factors mentioned, a sample was selected of 90 SRL registered in CUC as accommodation providers in the town of Playa and 184 international clients who visited these businesses during the time the research lasted (4 months).

Secondary sources of information include official documents of the National Bureau of Statistics (ONEI, in Spanish), the Directorate of Immigration and Foreign Residency, as well as various legal regulations (Kinneer and Taylor, 2000).

Exploratory research was carried out through questionnaires to lessors (Figure 1), aimed at getting information on entrepreneurs' demographic characteristics, their service skills, and the characteristics of their enterprises. In addition, data were collected on interesting topics such as training to provide service, promotion, additional services, loyalty through client stimulation, possible improvements, and self-assessment of the service. Items and scales used are based on surveys that are authorized by the Ministry of Tourism

for studies of this nature. There were restrictions about questions of control (monthly income, price, and variable costs), as well as a resistance by lessors to offer information that could later affect them, in particular with regard to the payment of taxes.

**Figure 1**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LESSORS**

Mark your answer.

1. Languages:

English\_ French \_ Italian \_

German \_ other \_ none \_

2. Do you provide other services besides?

Gastronomy\_ laundry\_ transport\_ information tour guide \_ translator \_ none \_

3. Which services are the most demanded by the customers? Food \_laundry \_ transport \_ information \_ tourist guide \_ translator \_ none \_

4. How do you promote your service? Internet \_ Business cards \_ Repeat customers \_ Face to face \_Third parties \_No promotion is done \_

5. Taking into account your attitude in regards to the management of your business, do you have the characteristics that are listed below? Creative \_ Good Communicator \_ Enthusiastic \_ Dynamic \_ Positive attitude \_ Competitive \_ Generator of employment \_

6. How do you rate your service according to the parameters of the table?

Parameters	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Speed	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiency	1	2	3	4	5
Quality	1	2	3	4	5
Courtesy	1	2	3	4	5
Ambience	1	2	3	4	5
Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5

7. What are the main difficulties that affect the service?

Technical issues \_ provision of supplies \_ little training \_ none \_

Age: Between 16 and 26 \_ Between 27 and 45 \_ Between 46 and 60 \_ More than 60 \_

Sex: F \_ M \_ Profession: \_\_\_\_\_ Other occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

In the study of international clients, their behaviors and preferences were analysed, as well as their level of satisfaction with the service (Figure 2). Dichotomous questions, multiple choice and a Likert scale (Sampieri, Fernandez and Baptista, 2003) were used. These in-person interviews with the international customers were conducted in their respective rooms.

## Figure 2 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CUSTOMERS

Mark your answer.

1. How often do you stay in a rental house? First time \_ More than 2 times \_ Each visit to Cuba \_
2. How did you hear about this rental property? Internet \_ guide book \_ friend or acquaintance\_ promotions \_
3. Do you prefer the food service? In the house \_ In another place \_
4. With respect to the following parameters of the service, how would you rate the:

Parameters	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Speed	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiency	1	2	3	4	5
Quality	1	2	3	4	5
Courtesy	1	2	3	4	5
Ambience	1	2	3	4	5
Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5

5. Would you stay here again in the future? Yes \_ No \_
  6. Would you recommend to someone this particular house? Yes \_ No \_
- Sex: F\_ M \_ Occupation: \_ Country \_
- Age: Between 16 and 26 \_ Between 27 and 45 \_ Between 46 and 60 \_ More than 60 \_

Finally, a pre-test was performed to verify the effectiveness of the questionnaires and the tabulation of the data was performed through statistical analysis software, SPSS version 11.5.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results of the demographics of the sample of lessors. The average age is between 47 and 60 years old. This means that they have previous work experience. It was also observed that more than half of the lessors are women (64.4%), and that 56.7% of the sample are professionals.

**Table 2**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE OF LESSORS**

Features	%
<i>Age (years)</i>	
Between 16 and 26	10.0
Between 27 and 45	31.1
Between 46 and 60	45.6
Over 60	13.3
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	64.4
Male	35.6
<i>Profession</i>	
Student	0.0
Technician	22.2
Professional	56.7
Retired	4.4
None	16.7

To test hypotheses H1 and H2, an ANOVA analysis was performed (Table 3). For this purpose, the entrepreneurial characteristics of the lessors were evaluated, showing that they possess five out of seven main entrepreneurial characteristics evaluated, predominately creativity, competitiveness, dynamism, communication skills and job creation. All the evaluated characteristics occurs in more than 80% of respondents, so the sampled s perceive that they have entrepreneurial characteristics. Along with the above, it was also confirmed that the activities of entrepreneurs in the sample are not limited to the leasing of rooms, but that they also provide laundry, transportation, tour guide, translator, and information services, with gastronomy being the most sought-after service. This analysis indicates that H1 is rejected, because the socio-demographic traits do not influence the entrepreneurial intention of s. However, H2 has been accepted because their perceptions of being self-employed and of the professionalism of their services have had a significant effect on their entrepreneurial intention.

**Table 3**  
**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PERCEPTION OF LESSOR SAMPLE**

F Significance		
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>		
Age	0.805	0.525
Profession	1.764	0.144
Gender	0.738	0.569
<i>Cognitive variables</i>		
Perception of their entrepreneurial characteristics	4.462	0.003***
Perception of the professionalism of their services	2.969	0.024**

\*\*\* p <0.01; \*\* p <0.05

On the other hand, the analysis of the client sample revealed that the male gender prevails (57%), with an average age between 27 and 45 years old. In addition, 49% of the sample is professional and 21% are pensioners (Table 4). Additionally, the sample showed that most tourists come from Italy, France, Canada, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom and Russia (in order of importance), and that 60% of them received information about this type of accommodation through friends or acquaintances, while only 33% did so through the Internet.

**Table 4**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CUSTOMER SAMPLE**

Features	%
<i>Age (years)</i>	
Between 16 and 26	14.3
Between 27 and 45	40.5
Between 46 and 60	31.0
Over 60	31.0
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	43.0
Male	57.0
<i>Profession</i>	
Student	8.3
Technician	13.0
Professional	49.0
Retired	21.4
None	8.3

To test hypothesis H3, another ANOVA analysis was performed (Table 5). The results confirm that 89% of the clients of the sample would stay in this type of accommodation and recommend it to third parties. However, differences in the valued attributes were detected on whether to repeat accommodation or to recommend it. In the first case, the most valued variables are quality and efficiency. In the case of the recommendation, all are valued positively, but with greater emphasis on speed, efficiency, quality and professionalism. For these reasons, we consider H3 to be validated.

**Table 5**  
**INTENTIONS TO RECOMMEND, LOYALTY, AND PERCEPTION OF THE ACCOMMODATION CHARACTERISTICS**

	Recommendation		Loyalty	
	F	Significance	F	Significance
Service perception				
Speed	10.962	0.001***	0.277	0.600
Efficiency	6.466	0.013*	2.343	0.130
Quality	7.716	0.007**	2.988	0.088*
Courtesy	3.334	0.072*	1.501	0.224
Ambience	2.879	0.094*	0.310	0.579
Professionalism	6.319	0.014**	1.197	0.277

p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05; \* p < 0.10

Finally, to compare the results obtained for lessor and tenant samples, a hierarchical analysis process (AHP) was completed, which is specially designed to solve complex problems with multiple criteria (Saaty, 1980). The result of the AHP is a hierarchy with priorities that shows preference for each of the decision alternatives. Table 6 shows the results of the paired comparisons of the different criteria used in the calculation of the value perceived by offerors and customers alike. Attributes such as courtesy and professionalism are the only ones in which the perception of the client on the service differs, so that the latter can be assessed as according to the perception of the client, with a positive level of satisfaction.

These results suggest that entrepreneurial lessors of rooms assign low values to the attributes of their products. However, customers do not see it as such. This undervaluation could create negative circumstances if actions are not taken to improve it. This result is a reflection of how lessors do not feel satisfied with the service they provide; however, the fact that they want to look for new ways to improve constitutes traits of entrepreneurship in and of itself. The significance of this result is that both perceptions are below or very close to the average of the observed perception, which turned out to be 2.16 points, so that is enrolled in CUC are challenged to increase their service levels to raise customer perception, mainly in terms of courtesy.

**Table 6**  
**SAATY MATRIX**

	Speed	Effici.	Quality	Court.	Amb.	Profess.	Speed	Effici.	Quality	Court.	Amb.	Profess.	Weight
Speed	1	5	0.2	1	1	3	0.12	0.39	0.02	0.09	0.09	0.54	0.21
Efficiency	0.2	1	1	3	3	0.2	0.02	0.08	0.11	0.26	0.26	0.04	0.13
Quality	5	1	1	0.33	0.33	1	0.59	0.08	0.11	0.03	0.03	0.18	0.17
Courtesy	1	0.33	3	1	1	0.2	0.12	0.03	0.33	0.09	0.09	0.04	0.11
Ambiance	1	0.33	3	1	1	0.2	0.12	0.03	0.33	0.09	0.09	0.04	0.11
Professionalism	0.33	5	1	5	5	1	0.04	0.39	0.11	0.44	0.44	0.18	0.27
Total	8.53	12.66	9.2	11.33	11.33	5.6							1

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our research has focused on first studying the socio-cognitive characteristics of Cubans and its relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Secondly, we focused on clients' perception of accommodation characteristics and their implications for loyalty and recommendation. Our results show that socio-demographic traits do not influence the entrepreneurial intention of SRL, but instead their perceptions as self-employed have had a significant effect on its entrepreneurial intention. In addition, customers' perception of accommodation characteristics facilitates their loyalty.

These results allowed us to determine, therefore, that the accommodation service offered by CUC lessors (SRL) directly affects the quality and image of the tourist destination. They can also explain the evolution of accommodation preferences of international tourists in Cuba, in particular, the increase in the room rentals sector in comparison with other types of accommodation.

Since its inception, the Cuban tourism industry has been closely linked to the economic and social life of the country. Accommodation services offered by CUC lessors directly affects the quality and image of tourist destination because it is among the main international tourist accommodation preferences. However, economic opportunities can greatly encourage formal enterprises (Thai and Turkana, 2014). Therefore, the possibility of having one's own business and being declared self-employed materialized as part of a government policy and improved the economic prospects of families with entrepreneurial intentions.

Also, it has been very interesting to learn that lessors who offer personalized service and family environments are offering favourable conditions for international customer loyalty. International customers tend to stay in the same houses and feel connected to their hosts, which corresponds to one of the main attributes defined by MINTUR, with regard to tourism offered in the destination. Data shows that entrepreneurs have become more competitive with the State sector, leading to the exchange of best practices with each other, and to the upgrading of general entrepreneurial orientation. The idea would be to apply a continuous improvement process that allows the elimination of present deficiencies offered by self-employed workers in the tourist service in Cuba.

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