

## **Contributions of the combative traditions of the Cuban people to the Movement of Pioneer Explorers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The origin and evolution of the Pioneer Scout Movement finds diverse criteria among scholars and practitioners; some associate it to the Boy Scouts or the explorers; others, to the contribution of the combative traditions and the struggle of the Cuban people for their national independence. To demonstrate this last affirmation is the objective of the present work, for which the analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive methods and analysis of documents of the history of Cuba, campaign diaries, books and diverse materials of the socio-cultural heritage were used that, in their fertile and substantial examination, confirmed the evidential elements that originated this investigation.

**Keywords:** Combative traditions; Pioneer explorers movement; Exploration; Hiking; Cuban people

### **Introduction**

Regarding the origin and evolution of the Pioneer Explorers Movement, hereinafter (MPE), there are different positions among guides, instructors, researchers and scholars of the

subject. On the one hand, there are those who claim that it has its origin in Boy Scouts<sup>1</sup> and, on the other hand, those who explain its birth and development from the experience accumulated by the Cuban people in their struggles for national and social liberation.

In the study of the scientific production on the MPE, we analyzed the works of outstanding researchers, significant for this inquiry, which are detailed below, as well as the methodological documents of the José Martí Pioneers Organization (2005-2024), where they conceive it from the sociological, patriotic, or as a valuable instrument for environmental education and the integral formation of students from the activities that are developed in it, aimed at the consolidation of values, standards of conduct and modes of action; but they do not recognize, in general, the contribution of the Cuban independence struggle to its origin, development and historical evolution.

In the practice of the MPE, there are limitations among the guides, instructors and researchers of the subject, associated to the lack of knowledge about its background and historical evolution; the linking of the contents with the experiences of the Cuban independence deeds and the struggle of the people to survive in the face of the limitations imposed by the imperial encirclement, as well as the existence of divergent criteria about its patriotic and sociocultural origin. In correspondence, it is proposed as a problem to be solved, how to demonstrate that the Pioneer Scout Movement is based on the contributions inherited from the struggles of the Cuban people for their national and social liberation and not exclusively from the Boy Scouts?

It is the purpose of the authors of this research to demonstrate<sup>2</sup> that the roots of the MPE are found in the experiences accumulated by the Cuban people in their struggle for national independence, sovereignty and social justice. For this purpose, the analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction and documentary analysis methods were used, which provided the evidential elements for the solution of the stated scientific problem.

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<sup>1</sup>**Boy Scouts.** It is a children's and youth movement created in the early twentieth century by the Englishman Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell, seeking the physical, spiritual and mental development of young people by combining military and outdoor life, based on values and games in nature, as a method of non-formal education. Depending on the country, the meaning "scout" or "explorer" is used, from which "scouting" derives. Scouting in Cuba began to be practiced in 1914. In 1927 the Scout Cuba Association was founded and became a member of the World Organization of the Scout Movement the same year. It was suspended from WOSM membership in 1961, because, supposedly, it no longer responded to the interests of that organization.

<sup>2</sup>**To demonstrate:** is the logical operation in which from a set of true judgments the veracity of the initial judgment whose veracity we wish to know is revealed. In any demonstration, the judgment whose veracity is to be revealed is identified as thesis and each of the judgments whose veracity has been previously established and with the help of which the true character of the thesis is revealed as arguments" -Integrating concept of the scientific foundation of creative thought from the epistemological and logical point of view in the educational teaching process in the light of the materialist dialectic -Center of Educational Studies. UCP "EJV", 2003.--Digitized material.-p. 46.

## **Development**

The conviction that there is a close relationship between the national and social liberating struggle of the Cuban people, and the origin, development and consolidation of the MPE at present, emanates from the knowledge of the history of Cuba and the study of the work of José Martí and Fidel Castro, exposed in campaign diaries, historical documents, speeches, images and testimonies expressed in various reliable documentary sources.

The content of the MPE has been analyzed from its scope, real dimension in Cuban society, and its contribution to the patriotic, environmental, solidarity, revolutionary and integral formation of students, by the researchers, Trelles (1985); Labarrere and Valdivia (1988); Turner (1994); Bonet (2001); Domínguez (2003); Acosta, Pérez, Toledo & Águila (2019). For their part, Mosquera (2005), Martínez (2011); Fernández and Guzmán (2016), also consider it as the ideal means to channel the concerns of the pioneers, related to exploration and camping, knowledge of nature, walking, observation, physical preparation and survival, oriented to the preparation of its members for life in the field.

Likewise, it is recognized as a specialized social organization of massive participation that prepares its members for life in campaign from the multiple activities they carry out, channeled to enrich the patriotic feelings linked to the combative and fighting traditions of the Cuban people, (Ávalos & Martínez, 2014). It is also valued as the Movement that brings together pioneers from first to ninth grades to carry out activities in direct contact with nature, focused on the preparation for life in coastal areas and the sea, to contribute to the formation of ethical, moral, patriotic and anti-imperialist values (Acosta, 2022).

The above criteria corroborate the consensus among researchers, in recognizing that the MPE favors the knowledge of the combative and fighting traditions of the Cuban people, an aspect that has been little investigated, and that it is a source of values, the basis of patriotic work, environmental education, as well as the preparation of pioneers for life in the campaign. The theoretical study carried out by the authors and their results as researchers, together with the experience of the main author during 33 years in the MPE, member of its Advisory Council and its historian at the National level, have allowed the elaboration of a more integrating definition adjusted to the current transformations.

In this regard, the MPE is considered as the movement of the José Martí Pioneers Organization that groups, on a voluntary and massive basis, Cuban children and adolescents from first to ninth grade, who, authorized by their parents and led by guides and instructors, prepare themselves for life in campaign conditions, through the realization of multiple land and marine activities in direct contact with the socio-natural environment, aimed at consolidating their patriotic, environmental, revolutionary, solidarity and integral formation, to meet the expectations of learning about camping, hiking, exploration and survival, linked to the combative and fighting traditions of the Cuban people.

The MPE is social by its nature; its contents come from the experiences contributed by the Cuban independence struggle, in the countryside, both by the mambises and the rebels, and the peasants, enriched in the incessant battle of the people to creatively resist the current economic hardships; This should be transmitted to the pioneers and guides during the process of categorization or training in direct contact with nature, so that they know how to take advantage of the conditions of the environment for the exploration of unknown places, survival, cunning, camouflage, cooking without utensils, marching by night and day as our combatants did in the libertarian battles, which allows the fulfillment of its main law “Love nature, the socialist homeland and prepare for life in campaign” (Suárez, Acosta, Almaguer, 2020, p. 74).

The first contribution made by Cuban history to the MPE, is found in the primitive community, where activities, ways of life and objects made by its ancient inhabitants are observed, which constitute essences in the actions of explorers today, among them, the construction of rustic instruments for hunting and food (spear, stone axes, clay pots, fishing canoes, etc.); masking, masking and masking, the use of the objects, and the use of the objects in the community as a way of life.); the masking, the hidden and silent displacements; the construction of fires to cook food or protect themselves from the cold; the making of fishing gear; the emission of sounds to communicate; the games, dances and rites; the coexistence in caneyes, bohíos or caves; the solidarity in the face of the adversities of the natural environment; the use of various materials from nature to make pictographs and drawings as a means of communication with other members of the tribe (makeup, decorating their bodies with earrings, necklaces, bracelets, tree leaves); the construction of hammocks using lianas or vines; among other examples.

In the struggle of the Cubans against Spanish colonialism, in their creative capacity to face the economic difficulties, suffering and calamities to which they were subjected, there are

important contributions to the MPE that materialize from the construction of field camps that -in the opinion of the researchers- constitute a forerunner of the camping areas created by the pioneer explorers today, with the same technical, organizational and functional principles, in correspondence with the physical-geographical characteristics of each place.

The explorers selected the place where the camp was to be erected, according to the plans of the chiefdom. The ideal place to camp was near a water source, in an intricate area and easy to defend in case of attack. (Padrón, 1985, p. 56)

In José Martí's *Diario de Campaña*, editions annotated by Beatriz (2019), there is evidence of the significant contribution he makes to the MPE, by showing some experiences learned in the heat of the struggle for independence together with the mambises in the eastern mountains, which constitute rules of daily action of the explorers, among which stand out the arrangement of the place to sleep using natural resources; the solidarity and unity to act in difficult situations; the realization of rustic constructions to protect themselves from the rains, the serene or the cold; the following of traces or tracks to orient themselves, to find the enemy or to disorient them; the selection of places to camp, among others, which are indicated below:

“Mambí Day. Rest in the camp. The first thing was to pick up yaguas, spread them on the ground. Gómez with the machete cuts and brings leaves, for him and for me. Guerra makes his rancho; four pitchforks: hanging branches: yaguas on top” (p. 68). “...to work, at a neighboring height, where they erect the new camp: log huts, tied with liana, roofed with palm” (Martí, 1991, p. 232).

The experiences explained about the camping areas, their preparation and selection norms, constitute a model of action for the Cuban pioneer explorers, to which they add other contributions from the socio-cultural experiences and from the peasants, such as locating in slightly high places to avoid flooding in case of rain, close to sources of drinking water, with trees to hang the hammocks and with spaces to locate the tents, close to an assistance center or houses, creating conditions to throw solid waste, among other aspects.

The pioneer explorers, in the process of categorization as mambí, rebel or of the victory, learn techniques of exploration and camping very useful for the daily life and in campaign, contributed by the revolutionary combatants, among them, the rustic constructions, the confection of huts *varaentierras* or shacks, chairs, tables, stove, bench, table, rustic bed, among others. Martí reflects this in his campaign diary:

We arrived at the mountain. Estanislao Cruzart, a good mountain man, (...) cuts two trees by the foot, nails two forks to the front of each one, and others to support the trunk, and crosses, and rods along the length, and the bench is ready. (Beatriz, 2019, p. 84)

Other elements bequeathed by José Martí to the explorers in his campaign diary, are found in the recognition of timber, fruit, ornamental, medicinal and edible wild plants in campaign conditions, to feed themselves, to heal wounds, insect bites and some diseases that life in campaign imposed on them.

In this respect, he mentions more than 100 arboreal species that the pioneer explorers know and use frequently or in the making of nurseries for the “Bosques martianos” that they create in the camps, pioneer facilities or school institutions, among which are cedar, mahogany, majagua, güira cimarrona, ferns, cimarrón coffee, mango, caimito, ateje, guásima, ocuje, jiquí, dagame, fustete, carob, orange (sweet and sour), yagruma, almácigo, jobo, yamagua, itamorreal, yaya, royal palm, copey (cupey), lechero, coconut, tibisí, yarey, plantain, malanga, cinnamon, anise, sweet potato (buniato), pomarrosas, cane, tomato, coriander (cimarrón and castilla), oregano, cotton, tobacco, ebony, paguá (bagá or pajuá), palm (of prickly leaves “corojo”), cocoa, lemon, flor de muerto (copetúa), malva, jatía, guizazo, tuna, fern, cotton, pine, caracolillo, medlar, mahogany, curujey, guanábana, ginger, ceiba, dagame, caguairán, júcaro, jagua, jigüe, jubabán, quiebrahacha, caimitillo, picapica, zarza, higuera, onion, garlic, potato, fig, among others.

Likewise, Martí describes how many of them were used in the redeeming manigua, to cure the wounds of the Mambi fighters, to contain the hemorrhage or to fight colds, skin eruptions or stomach ailments, which are practiced by the explorers, sustained in the experiences inherited from the combative traditions that prepare them for the daily life and in campaign. Here are some examples: “She comes and goes lightly - Caridad Perez- (...) from every turn she brings something, more coffee, culantro de castilla, so that, “when they have a stomach ache on those roads, chew a gram and drink water on top”: she brings lemon” (p. 72). “I saw today the yamagua, the phenic leaf that stagnates the blood, and with its mere shade benefits the wounded: crush the leaves well, and put them in the wound, that the blood dries” (p. 75). “Cesar is given water of soursop leaves, which is good for the chest and a pleasant decoction”, (p. 90). “Artigas, when we go to bed, puts pork fat without salt on a tomato leaf; and he covers my mouth” (p. 107).

An important tribute to the emergence, development and consolidation of the MPE was provided by Fidel Castro Ruz, fundamental architect of its creation in 1977, who since his childhood, felt great attraction for exploration and hiking activities, which influenced the formation of his character, his discipline, his physical endurance, his creativity in conditions of campaign life during the struggle in the Sierra Maestra, his patriotism and his love for nature; transmitted to the explorers in various physical exchanges and memorable speeches after the revolutionary triumph.

In my case,” he says, “I liked sports, hiking, trekking, climbing mountains, everything was very attractive to me (...) I didn't imagine that I was preparing myself as a guerrilla fighter, but when I saw a mountain it seemed almost a challenge to me. The idea of climbing that mountain, of reaching the top, took hold of me. (Betto, 1985, p. 130)

The knowledge acquired by Fidel in his continuous hiking experiences led him to gain the respect and prestige of his classmates, who appointed him general of the scouts at the Jesuit College after climbing the mountains of Pinar del Río, aspects that serve as a role model for scouts today.

After a series of scouting activities, I think by the end of the year, I was appointed scoutmaster of the school. I really liked to climb mountains, cross rivers, explore nature, go through the fields, organize the camp where the night would take us, eat what we could and spend several days in the forest. (Castro, 1983, p. 4)

**Source:** Fidel Soldado de las Ideas site:  
<http://www.fidelcastroruz.name/de/node/84635?width=600&height=600>



**Figure 1.** Fidel shares with the pioneer explorers some of the experiences learned in the independence campaigns, during the inauguration of the Ramón Paz Borroto, Granma and Comandante Pinares, Pinar del Río explorers centers.

Special significance for the pioneer explorers, constituted the speech in the central act for the children's day, celebrated in the Botanical Garden of the “Lenin” Park, where he calls on them to express their revolutionary vocation, love for nature and to be worthy successors of the current generation, inspired by the naturalist vocation of the Cuban people throughout history, preparing for life in campaign. (Figure 1). In this order he recognizes:

Our people lived in the mountains, in the plains, absolutely identified with nature; for 10 years in our first war of independence, they had to live doing many of the things that pioneer explorers do: sleeping in hammocks, preparing food in very rudimentary conditions, enduring the rain, enduring the heat, enduring the war, enduring illness, enduring privations of all kinds. (Castro, 1983, p. 8)

In his own speech he emphasizes the contribution of the combatants of the libertarian struggles to the forging of his character, his personality, his patriotism, his spirit of resistance, sacrifice and love for nature, which he knew how to bequeath to the pioneer explorers with the creation of more than 70 centers and camps of explorers throughout Cuba, in function that these learn to take advantage of what nature provides to subsist in difficult environmental conditions, in the same way that the revolutionary combatants innovated. In this regard, he expresses:

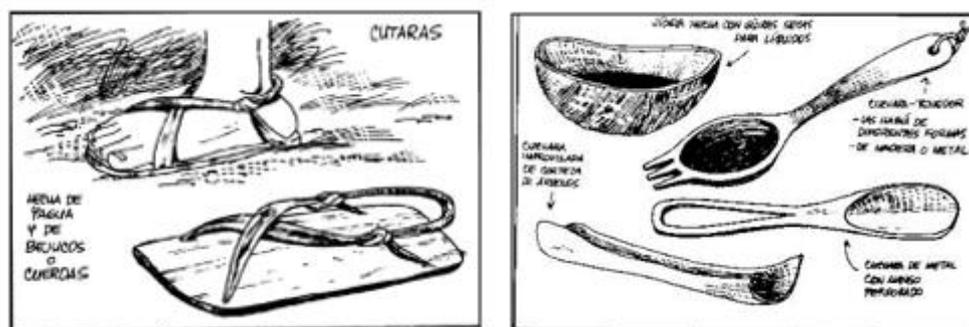
... that contact with nature, with the mountains, those experiences, helped me to think about the guerrilla struggle, to use the terrain, just as our mambises had done, in the struggle against tyranny. And those experiences I had as an explorer helped me a lot; I think they had a notable influence on the conception of the tactics of our last struggle. (Castro, 1983, p. 5)

During the inauguration of the “Ramón Paz Borroto” explorers' center in Granma province (1981), he points out the difficulties they had to face as guerrilla fighters due to the lack of preparation in exploration and hiking activities, the lack of resources and of instructors or guides to teach them. Likewise, he evokes the importance and need for interaction of the pioneer explorers with nature, to learn from it and use it for their enjoyment and systematic learning, just as the revolutionary combatants did.

So that possibility of sleeping in the forest, of cooking in the forest, of adapting ourselves to the forest, was a decisive thing without which we would not have been able to make war (...) If we should find ourselves in the need to fight again defending the homeland, if we should find ourselves in the need to use again the mountains and the forests, then how much will it not be worth to have first learned to live in the forests, in the mountains, in the fields, and to orient ourselves, to find any point and to know a map. There are few greater pleasures than what nature can offer man. (Castro, 1981, p. 19, 20)

There are other elements that prove the indissoluble link of the combative and fighting traditions of the Cuban people with the MPE. Among them, the making and use of rustic objects taking advantage of the natural environment (catauros, güiras pans, jars, spoons, flip-flops or cutaras de yaguas, benches, chairs and objects to store water and other products in the campaign) that the explorers recognize as the elaboration of rustic objects for survival during life in the campaign. (Figure 2).

**Source:** El libro del Mambí, Juan Padrón



**Figure 2.** Some examples of the contribution of the mambises to the Pioneer Scout Movement.

In addition to the above, the making of sketches, of rustic bow and arrows, of traps for hunting; the correct use of the machete and knife; masking with resources of the environment; filtering water; using fire to protect oneself from the cold, rain and insects; knowing and preparing wild edible and medicinal plants; orienting oneself by natural and artificial means; estimating distances and heights of objects in nature; use signs to enter the forest; use knots and moorings in rustic constructions; perform first aid and care for wounds or insect bites, identify animal tracks; make rustic objects for life in the field, among other aspects, which are included in the requirements of the categories and levels of training for pioneer explorers, guides and instructors.

In the campaign diary of Ernesto Che Guevara and Raúl Castro Ruz, “The Conquest of Hope”, other elements are shown that coincide with the activity of construction in the campaign that the explorers carry out daily, taking advantage of the natural resources of the environment. Raul refers that, with Fidel and Ché, they made a hut that rained more inside than outside and that his squad made the best hut with palm stalks some yaguas and rice straws as a mattress to sleep on (Che Guevara and Castro, 1996).

Similarly, Acebedo (2020) in the book “Descamisados” reveals another important contribution to the MPE linked to the creativity and use of natural resources to survive in direct contact with nature, aspects that coincide with the current activities carried out by the pioneer explorers. In this order, Alfonso realizes that they have no camping equipment, looks for two sacks of sugar, weaves majagua rope and gives it to them, the rest they have to do on their own. He slips headfirst into the sack and sleeps, at midnight he hears a noise, it is Rogelio rolling down the hill, and he lacked skill in weaving the hem so he has to play on the ground next to him.

The intensification of the imperialist siege against Cuba, which deprives the pioneer explorers of financing and material resources directed to the purchase of campaign means to develop their activities as explorers, finds support in the ingenuity and creativity of pioneers, guides and instructors, which are the fruit of the inventiveness and the protagonism of the revolutionary combatants in the independence campaigns, among them: the manufacture of hammocks and tents of sack, nylon, guano stalks, etc. The making of jolongo mambí (of sackcloth, bejucos or yaguas of palms) in substitution of backpacks; the construction of canteens of bamboo cane, güiras or dry coconuts, the making of spoons, plates and glasses using yagua or wood, as well as the weaving of hats with natural fibers, among other identity elements of the sociocultural heritage.

In the final stage of the revolutionary war in the Sierra Maestra, vibrant guerrilla actions are accumulated that confirm the unity of the people, the support of the peasantry and all sectors of society that contributed to the triumph, which serve as practical support to the activities of orientation by natural and artificial means carried out by the explorers. Thus Che Guevara (2005) highlights in his book “Pasajes de la Guerra Revolucionaria” (Passages of the Revolutionary War). “At night we went for a walk. I established which was the polar star, according to my knowledge on the matter, and for a couple of days we walked guided by it towards the east and reached the Sierra Maestra” (p. 15-16). He also

admits that, finding himself lost, he took the compass and guided himself by it for a day and a half until he realized that he was getting more and more lost.

All of the above demonstrates the creativity and innovation of the Cuban people and the revolutionary combatants to subsist in the face of the shortages caused by the war, the imperialist siege and the scarcities of everyday life, which constitute practical experiences transmitted to the pioneer explorers today; This translates into a patriotic conception, authentic and unequalled, aimed at rationally using the resources of nature to feed themselves, take care of their health, protect themselves from the cold, quench their thirst, make their way through the mangrove, learn to find their way through various ways and means, develop patriotism, solidarity, companionship in the face of difficulties, among other elements, ultimately, riches that the explorers make their own in their daily activities, the result of the socio-cultural heritage and the contribution of the libertarian struggles of Cubans to survive as a free and independent nation.

## **Conclusions**

There is a system of judgments and arguments proving that the Pioneer Explorers Movement is heir to the best of the struggles developed by the people of Cuba in the redemptive mangrove, which comes from the aborigines, transits through the revolutionary action of the Mambises and the Rebel Army, including the Diary of José Martí in campaign, of Che Guevara and Raúl Castro, the experiences of Fidel Castro from his formation to his action in the Sierra Maestra and the incessant battle of the Cubans to survive in the face of the imperialist harassment and the existing economic difficulties.

The main and most significant elements that demonstrate the contribution of the combative and fighting traditions of the Cuban people to the MPE are the identification and preparation of camping and excursions, the making of objects and rustic constructions, the orientation by natural and artificial means, the provision of first aid, the use of medicinal and edible wild plants in campaign conditions, in the activities of excursionism and exploration in nature, as well as in the solidarity that is manifested in the face of difficulties and limitations.