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Community Tourism in Ecuador: Management and Perception in the Province of Chimborazo

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Abstract

Tourism in Ecuador is a crucial economic activity driven by its biodiversity and cultural richness. Despite a drop in tourism in 2020 due to the economic crisis and pandemic, the sector recovered in 2021, contributing significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product. Community-based tourism has emerged as a way to generate income in rural areas, prioritizing the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. This model has been widely studied in several countries, including Ecuador, where it has become a prominent practice. Students from the University of Azuay visited the province of Chimborazo to study the management of community tourism. Their perception of the tourism services offered in the province was positive, highlighting the quality of the food, facilities and activities offered by the local communities. The students also evaluated various tourism activities, such as museum visits, city tours, and experiences in nature reserves, highlighting the diversity and quality of tourism offerings in Chimborazo province.

Keywords: *Tourism, Ecuador, Community, Management, Perception.*

Development

Tourism in Ecuador is a very important economic activity, attracting thousands of visitors every year. Biodiversity and cultural richness are the drivers of Ecuadorian tourism activity. The Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (2021) reported that for the year 2019, 2,043,993 tourists entered Ecuador, while in 2020 the figure was 468,894 tourists, with a significant drop in tourist arrivals due to situations such as the economic crisis and COVID-19. The importance of tourism activity in the Ecuadorian economy is evident, taking into account that in the five years prior to 2020, tourism ranked third in non-oil revenues, after bananas and shrimp. This is contrasted with the information issued by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (2022), which recorded that in 2021 590,006 tourists arrived in Ecuador, which represents 25.8% more than the previous year. This generated a contribution of 1.3% to the Gross National Domestic Product, which means 1,361 million dollars of income for Ecuador.

According to Loor et al. (2021), "The dynamic nature of this sector makes it a significant source of income and jobs. Its multiple links with the rest of the economic activities favor the creation of productive chains, since it demands a wide variety of goods and services" (p. 266). This reflects the change brought about by globalization, which allows tourism to transfer

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foreign currency and empower the regions of the world, generating growth through the profits left by this activity and using the potential that the territories have to boost the economy through the generation of jobs and entrepreneurship. As stated by Casas et al. (2012), "The tourism sector has been immersed in an intense process of enhancing the participation of local communities in developing countries, which materializes in community-based tourism initiatives" (p. 12). One of the variants of tourism that offers rural populations the opportunity to earn income is community-based tourism, which, according to Dodds et al. (2018), has been widely identified for its ability to improve local economies, and has been introduced in many countries. This activity arises in Africa, but at the same time, its development is minimal; while, in Latin America, it is characterized by being a form of management based on the active participation of communities, which are organized to generate new forms of recreation in order to attract tourists, seeking the equitable distribution of benefits.

prioritizing the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. It is important to mention research related to community tourism in different countries: "Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Namibia and Great Britain present case studies and conceptual approaches related to this management model" (Cabanilla, 2018, p. 3). In this context, there is a growing development of research on community-based tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as: Moraes et al. (2013); Emmendoerfer et al. (2016) and Bernardes and De Castro (2018) in Brazil, while in Chile, research such as Cruz (2012) and Pilquimán (2016) stands out, and in Peru authors such as Zorn & Farthing (2007) and Miranda (2020). In Colombia, there are the studies of Rodríguez (2018) and Ferrari (2021); in Bolivia Maldonado (2007) and Machaca (2021); and in the Dominican Republic, the investigations of Orgaz and Moral (2016) and Cañero (2018). The aforementioned studies are not far from the reality of Ecuador, which, at the Latin American level, is seen as a pioneer in the practice of community tourism activity with multiple cases highlighted by authors, among them: Solís (2007); Ruiz et al. (2008); Cabanilla (2014; 2016); Cabanilla (2018) and García and Doumet (2017); studies that highlight and analyze the bases and importance of community tourism in Ecuador. Bojórquez et al. (2018) express their opinion on local participation in community tourism, emphasizing the importance of self-management and control of communities to develop tourism activities. Cejas et al. (2020) state that it is necessary to reconcile rural tourism development in a sustainable way, understood as making optimal use of the environmental resources that characterize it, maintaining ecological processes, helping to conserve natural resources and biological diversity, in addition to respecting the socio-cultural identity of communities, conserving their cultural assets and their heritage values. In this context, community participation can provide certain development advantages when it gives them control over land, tourism and natural resources, independence in decision-making, participatory management and a wider distribution of benefits (Zielinski et al. 2021). Ruiz et al. (2008) state that the first nuances of community tourism in Ecuador emerged from the 70s of the twentieth century, with indigenous communities being pioneers, with several factors predominating, among them: the conservation of natural resources, income generation, and the struggle for their right to territory. In this genesis of community tourism, some external agents such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) had active participation. From this position, the consolidation of community tourism in Ecuador is largely due to the indigenous and peasant communities of the country under the guidelines of the Ministry of Tourism based on its regulations and fundamentally to the support of several projects led by Non-Governmental Organizations. According to the Community Tourism Regulations of Ecuador, issued by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (MINTUR, 2010): Community tourism is a

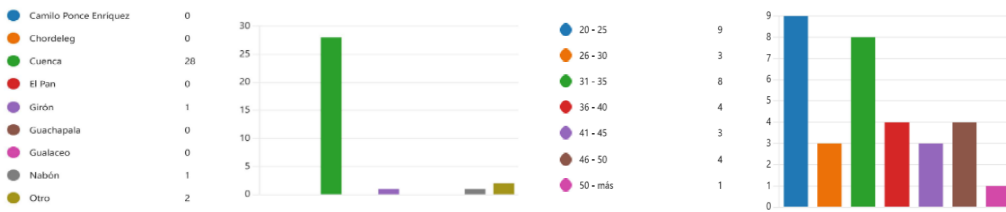
management model where the local community takes advantage of the natural and/or cultural heritage of the region in which it is located to develop and offer a tourism service characterized by active community participation in the planning and execution of actions leading to enhance the sustainable development of the population through the reinvestment of the profits derived from tourism activity. (p. 1).

The students of Universidad del Azuay visit the province of Chimborazo in the month of October 2023, as a complementary activity in their curricular network academic tour to visit the different attractions that the province has and as a main objective to carry out a study of the management of community tourism in the sector. To this end, the following aspects were considered in this case study:

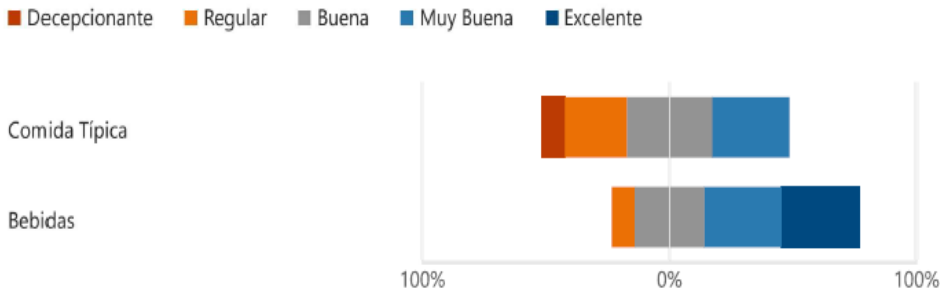
There were 32 people who made the visit to the province of Chimborazo, most of them from the city of Cuenca.

In the first instance, the services they received in the city during their tour were analyzed, and in a second instance, the activity of community tourism according to each of the particularities that the center has, and the training provided.

The students who visited the province of Chimborazo according to the age range of 20 to 50 years.

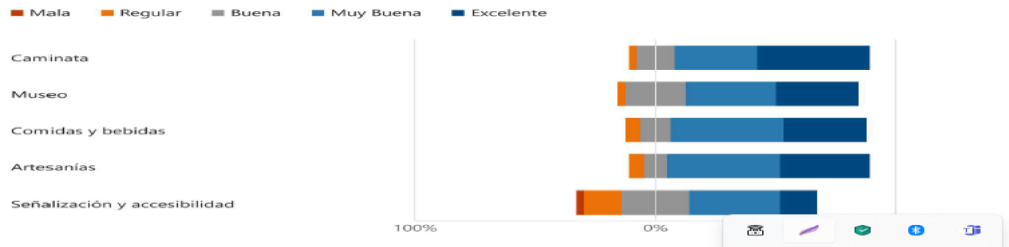


What was the perception about the food and beverages consumed in the "La Merced" market in the city of Riobamba, the response was very good and excellent.

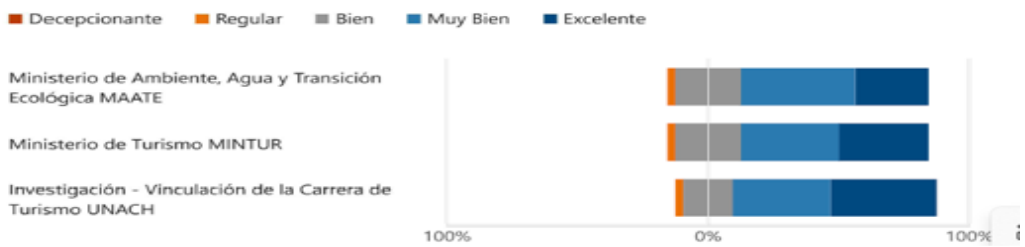


A tour of the facilities of the community of "Palacio Real" was carried out in which they were able to make their perception of the services, activities and tourist facilities, in which walking, museum, food and drinks, handicrafts, signage and accessibility stand out.

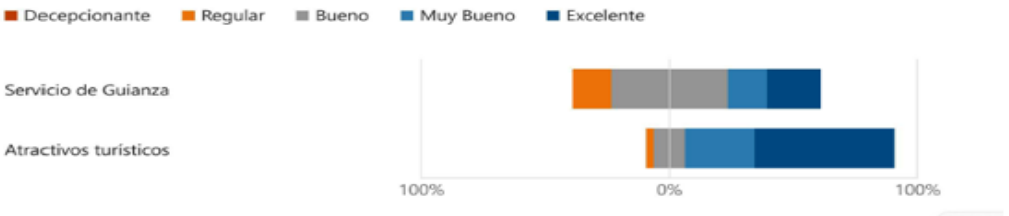
Obtaining as a result of this activity as high indicators, very good and good in all its services.



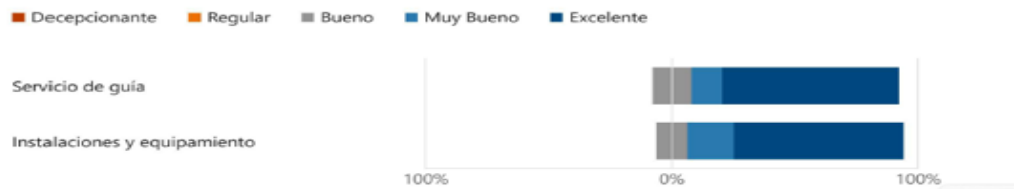
Indicate your perception of the presentations of the discussion "Experience of territorial tourism management in protected, rural and community areas of the province of Chimborazo. According to the representatives



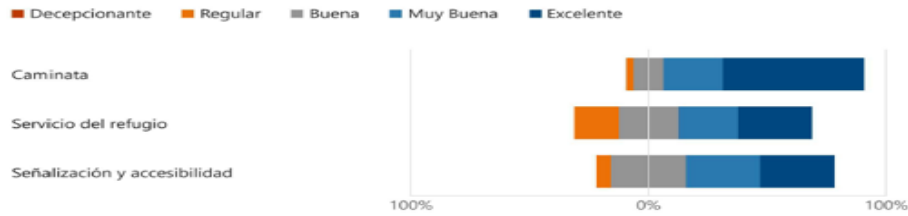
Indicate your perception about the Riobamba city tour, Operated by the Tourism Career National University of Chimborazo (UNACH)



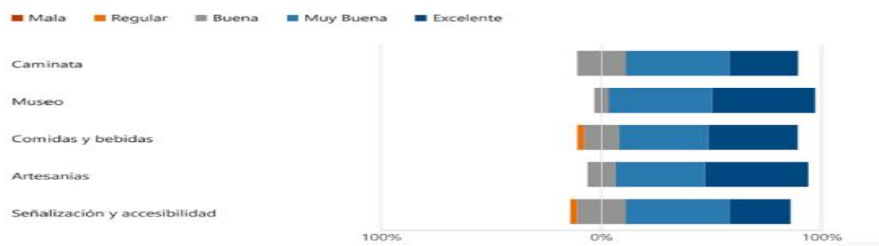
Indicate your perception of the experience at the museum of the conceptual mothers in the city of Riobamba



Indicate your perception of the experience of the Chimborazo Wildlife Production Reserve.



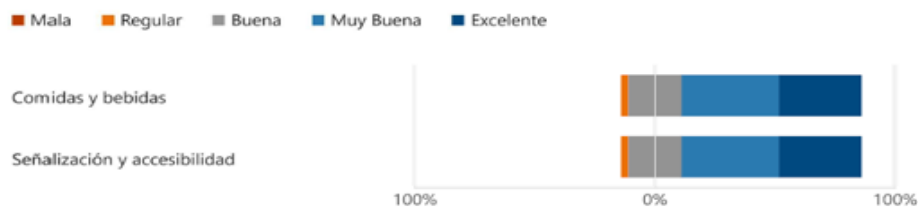
Indicate your perception of the services, activities and tourist facilities of the La Moya community



Indicate your perception of the experience at the "Pachcha Wuayku" center



Indicate the perception of the services, activities and tourist facilities of the "Tolte" community.



Conclusions

1. Tourism in Ecuador has experienced fluctuations due to economic crises and the pandemic, but it has recovered, being an important source of income for the country.
2. Community-based tourism has become an effective strategy to generate income in rural areas, prioritizing the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

3. The province of Chimborazo offers a wide range of tourist activities, and the services offered by local communities have been positively perceived by visitors.
4. Studies conducted by university students have provided a detailed overview of the management of community-based tourism in the province, highlighting its importance for sustainable development and resource conservation.
5. The positive perception of tourism services in the province suggests that community-based tourism in Ecuador has great potential to continue growing and contributing to the well-being of local communities and sustainable tourism in the country.

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