

## Are There Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism in the Province of Manabí - Ecuador after COVID-19? The Case Study of Puerto Lopez



Menéndez Delgado Erick Rodolfo<sup>1</sup>, Díaz Ortega María Del Rosario<sup>2</sup>, López Sánchez José Antonio<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, km 1,5 vía Circunvalación, Manta 131407, Ecuador

<sup>2</sup>Instituto Universitario de Investigación para el Desarrollo Social Sostenible - Universidad de Cádiz, Avenida de la Universidad 4 Jerez, Cádiz 11406, Spain

Corresponding Author Email: [joseantonio.lopez@uca.es](mailto:joseantonio.lopez@uca.es)

<https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.160802>

### ABSTRACT

**Received:** 7 March 2021

**Accepted:** 6 December 2021

**Keywords:**

*sustainable tourism, post COVID-19, development, Manabí-Ecuador, tourism perception*

In recent years, tourism in Ecuador has increased exponentially. The city of Puerto Lopez has shown unusual growth. This study is based on a comparison of the situation of the Ecuadorian town before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this primary objective, three specific goals were set out: 1) To analyze the perception that tourists have of the Canton of Puerto Lopez. 2) To examine the influence that tourism has on the local economy. 3) To study the impact of the pandemic on tourism development in the region. To achieve these objectives, quantitative research was carried out based on two surveys on perceptions of tourism activity. One was carried out before the arrival of Covid and the other after the pandemic. They are complemented by the collection of data from official statistics and stakeholder interviews. The main results also reveal opportunities for the tourism sector of Puerto López if we relate it to the SDGs\_2030, as there is room for improvement in its current tourism model, and it can be made more sustainable from a social, economic and environmental point of view.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's society is increasingly concerned about the impacts of human actions on the environment. Therefore, the current challenge is to continue to grow in economic terms while being environmentally sustainable and, at the same time, to improve the capacity of ecosystem resources to generate wealth in the future.

This economic-environmental background prompted a summit of developed countries more than 20 years ago that culminated in signing an agreement to mitigate environmental pollution at the Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. The agreement document has evolved over the years, especially concerning reducing carbon emissions [1]. Since the Conference on Sustainable Development took place, other issues have been added. The accelerated growth of the world population, combined with technological development, is a challenge for the appropriate use of natural resources. This current world dichotomy urges us to take into consideration accurate measures to achieve sustainable economic growth.

To the background presented in the paragraph above, we have to add the negatives impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for the touristic sector, one of the world's most affected economic sectors. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) 100% of the international destinations remain travel restrictions, and 72% have closed the boundaries and completely stopped international tourism [2]. These restrictions have originated a decrease of 22% the international tourist arrivals during the first trimester of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Some statistics predict a global

annual reduction of tourist arrivals between 60%-80% in 2020 compared with 2019, compromising millions of people's job incomes and advancing toward the Sustainable Development Goal [3].

Even the pandemic has affected all the touristic activities in economic terms; it is evident that the lack of visitors has reduced fuel consumption and human pressure's natural resources, reducing the negative environmental impacts. Since the middle of the last century was suddenly stopped due to the prevention measures determined by international organizations [4]. When this paper was written, it remains an uncertain scenario, which makes us reflect on the future of world tourism. Although the environment has improved its initial conditions, the current circumstances present a new challenge: economic recovery.

Ecuador is not far from the world's tourist reality. Due to the pandemic restrictions, tourist activities are currently stopped. The scenario before the COVID-19 pandemic presented a value chain partially developed and a good tourist perception about the infrastructure available for the development of this activity. Due to the pandemic, the current scenario has changed since the signing and publication of governmental decree 1017 that returned the national roads circulation the entries of international flights, among others measures determined in this document [5]. The challenge, in this case, is being accurate in making decisions for recovering tourist trust in the sector and trying to return to normality in the future.

Therefore, the following research questions emerged as the basis for developing the objectives of the paper. Q1. How does

tourism affect the local economy, and to what extent has its importance been highlighted since the COVID-19 crisis? And, on the other hand, Q2. Is the perception that tourists have of the Manabí destination the same before and after the Pandemic?

Based on these questions, the general objective of this article is to compare the situation of the tourism sector in the province of Manabí between the scenario before and after the Pandemic.

Based on this cognitive evidence, the following specific objectives were formulated:

1. To analyse the perception that tourists have of the Canton of Puerto Lopez.

2. To examine the influence of tourism on the local economy before COVID-19.

3. To study the impact of the Pandemic on tourism development in the region.

The article is structured as follows. This first section introduces the topic and presents the background to the problem and the objectives. Secondly, a systematic review of the literature will be conducted, followed by the methodology applied to obtain the results. Thirdly, it will contextualise the province of Manabí within the Ecuadorian territory and the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Manabí and the tourism sector in Ecuador, showing the study results. Finally, the article synthesises the main conclusions of the review and reflects on possible future research.

Finally, specific objectives 3 raised what potential perception visitors to Manabí have about the destination and how the health pandemic affects tourism and the resident population's socioeconomic aspects.

The first section introduces the topic and presents the background to the problem. Section two will outline the methodology applied to obtain results. In section three, we will contextualize the province of Manabí within the Ecuadorian territory and the Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic in Manabí and Ecuador's touristic sector. Finally, section four deals with the conclusions derived from the study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization changes the relation between two concepts in the international economic context: the efficient use of natural resources and the production systems for generating financial benefits. This new perspective has affected all economic activities developed by people and industries. It is why tourism appears to be an effective means of achieving a symbiosis of production and income. This inference is sustained by the rapid growth of tourism in the last two decades [6] since its origins in the middle of the previous century [7]. This historical background has allowed tourism and touristic activities to be the second activity in international economic importance, surpassed only by the oil industry and its derivatives [8]. According to the WTO statistics, international tourism has been increasing since the middle of the last century, growing 4% on average per year in the previous eight years [4]. The accelerated growth of tourism has been assessed in previous studies and used as a starting point for separate problem analyses by other authors [9-12].

Tourism, as a sustainable activity, has been evaluated and measured in studies presented by different authors from different perspectives: economic [13-15]; social [16-20]; cultural [21, 22] and environmental [21-24], among others.

Members of a community can obtain multiple benefits from sustainable tourism. They can use the benefits to strengthen and satisfy the different needs of the residents [25], making the best use of the natural resources linked with the economic activity [26, 27], and giving relevance to the support that the community can offer to strengthen its development [28-30].

In this sense, Ecuador has a legal structure set out in the 2008 Constitution of the country in which it seeks to develop touristic activities in harmony with the environment. This document focuses on highlighting the benefits (economic, cultural, and environmental) in the community where the tourist activity takes place and the effects that the COVID-19 crisis has produced on tourism. The aftermaths of the health and economics crisis may be an opportunity to implement a new model of sustainable tourism as a channel for the social and cultural development of local communities supported by their territorial resources [31].

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 The questionnaire design

The study was carried out in two phases; for that reason, we developed two surveys. The first questionnaire used for this study tried to assess visitors' perception of various cities in the province, such as Manta, Portoviejo, Rocafuerte, Jipijapa, Chone, El Carmen, Pichincha, Montecristi, and Jaramijó. The questions were designed to elicit information about the features of a touristic profile of the city of Puerto López, as one of the tourist attractions in Manabí.

For this purpose, other surveys carried out for the same goal in different territories and were already contrasted were used as a basis. The survey questions consisted of six sections differentiated by the contextualisation and content of the questions. The third section dealt with elements related to establishing personal relationships and the devices used for communication. The following section measured the associative capacity of the respondents. The fifth section sought to identify respondents' use of leisure time at the destination. The last part of the survey looked at visitors' perceptions of Puerto López of the features related to tourism and visitors' satisfaction with the services provided. It is essential to highlight that, for the survey's application, the participation of a group of students from the Faculties of Tourism and Economics of the Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí University was required. The students were trained to pose the questions and to ensure the quality of the answers.

The second questionnaire applied in the present research tried to gather the future of tourism in the province of Manabí during the COVID-19 health crisis. People from Manta and Portoviejo were surveyed in this second phase. Its answers were used to compare the situation before the pandemic (through the first questionnaire) and tourist perception about the future in the second questionnaire.

The second questionnaire was composed of five questions related to the tourist perception about the future of tourism. In that sense, were surveyed problems such as the health risk for the touristic population cities, the economic contribution of tourism, possible new tourism models, a period of time to reach the normality in the sector, and the possible government support measures the enterprises of the touristic industry.

Finally, these questionnaires were complemented by two focus groups carried out with staff from the University of

Manta and local tourism authorities to find out their opinions on tourism in Manabí, on the tourism policies being developed, on actions to improve the destination and thus achieve sustainable tourism development after the pandemic.

### 3.2 The methodological process

The methodological process combined a quantitative approach with qualitative analysis, a method considered to be the most accurate in providing a holistic vision of planning territorial tourism's complexity. The process began with exploratory research on secondary sources that served as a conceptual basis for determining objectives and the problems to be studied. Therefore, a bibliographic search of the studies published by national organizations, such as the Ministry of Tourism, Instituto Oceanográfico de la Armada of Ecuador, was undertaken. Extensive searches of International Institutions such as FAO, UNESCO, and the World Tourism Organization took place ...also consulted monographs and tourism magazines such as *Tourism Management*, *Paper of Tourism*, *PASOS* (specializing in tourism and cultural heritage), and *Cuadernos de Turismo*.

This first part of the process was complemented by collecting information from primary sources in two phases surveyed a total of 868 people. It sample was calculated using the equation for infinite populations, which determined the application of 868 surveys with an error of 4% and a confidence level of 98%. The surveys were applied between Manta and Puerto López. The qualitative variables in the analysis were scored on a Likert scale, which allowed for quantifying the assessment of the people surveyed and the subsequent statistical analyses.

The first collecting information phase was a field survey of tourism in Puerto López with analysis based on systematic observation. During three visits to the territory, this process was accomplished to see the geographic space and interview some of the main political agents, indigenous community leaders, and administration officials. This phase allowed us to learn the main contributions to tourism in the development of the territory and reach a global vision about the sector. In this phase, 610 people were surveyed using a questionnaire with structured questions [32]. The questionnaire sought to analyze tourists' perceptions of Puerto López and the Manabí province's main touristic features. People surveyed were from other countries or other Ecuadorian cities, mainly in the Manabí province, such as Manta, Chone, El Carmen, Pichincha, Jaramijó, Jipijapa, Montecristi, Portoviejo, and Rocafuerte. The questionnaire was designed in Spanish and consisted of 16 questions organized into six sections that allowed the measurement of a set of variables: sociodemographic, socioeconomic, interpersonal relationships, associative, leisure and free time, and tourism features.

The 610 surveys were conducted between May and July 2018 by members of the research team of the University Institute of Research for Sustainable Social Development (INDESS) of the University of Cádiz - Spain (UCA) and by students of the Laica Eloy Alfaro University Manabí - Ecuador (ULEAM), who had previously been trained to perform this task. The respondents were people over 18 years old who had used the tourist services of the province.

In these surveys, 97 interviews were conducted with international tourists visiting the canton of Puerto López and who were interviewed in-depth.

The second collecting information phase was an electronic

survey related to tourist perception about the future of tourism in Manabí. In this process, a total of 258 teachers and students of ULEAM University were surveyed. This phase allowed us to know what people believe about the touristic sector's future once the COVID-19 pandemic had been overtaken. To achieve the purpose of this second phase of data collection, we send a survey through the google form's electronic platform and, thus, be able, later, to analyze the responses. In addition to this, two focus groups were carried out with authorities from the sector and prominent university staff whose line of research is tourism. The first focus group was made up of members of the University: Miguel Camino, Rector of the ULEAM University; Iliana Fernández, Vice Rector; Diego Guzman, head of the Tourism Department; Leydy Cevallo, Professor of Tourism; M<sup>a</sup> Fernanda Ugalde, Archaeologist; Pedro Montalbán, Professor of Tourism and the second focus group was made up of managers from the tourism sector: Irene Peláez, Tourism Office; Yuri Cedeno, Tourism Area; José Luis Mendoza, Delegate Machalilla National Park; José Mito, Councillor of Fisheries; Patricia M. Mariano Zambrano, Manabí Prefecture; Isidro Rodríguez, Director of Tourism of Manta.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Importance of tourism in Manabí

The province of Manabí is one of the 24 provinces that make up the Republic of Ecuador, located in the country's west. It stands out not only for its demographic and socioeconomic characteristics but also for its product diversity, which is closely related to its geographic location, which allows us to find within its boundary both beaches on its western side and vast prairies and fields in its central area irrigated by rivers that come from the mountains located in the east and that connect with the leading site in the highlands region of the country. This means that the province of Manabí has many tourist resources (350 km. of beaches, rainforests, National Parks such as Machalilla, indigenous culture, unique gastronomy, colonial haciendas).

The province of Manabí is made up of 22 cantons, including the cities of: Portoviejo, Manta, Calceta, Chone, Bahía de Caráquez, Montecristi, Jipijapa, El Carmen, Pedernales, San Vicente. One of the cantons found in the province of Manabí is the Canton of Puerto López, which is the focus of our study. This Canton has an area of 420 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population is 20,451 inhabitants in 2019, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) [33], with the cantonal capital being the city of Puerto López. The earthquake that occurred in the Pacific in 2016 particularly affected the coastal area of Ecuador, mainly the province of Manabí. The Canton of Puerto López was one of the most affected. One of the most outstanding economic activities is related to artisanal and industrial fishing. In addition, the Canton has particular popularity within the international tourism sector for whale watching among other tourist attractions.

An analysis of the accommodation sector shows the companies' sustained growth dedicated to this activity and an increase in the number of people employed and the sales generated. However, when making a detailed study of the data, we found slight differences between the numbers for each variable and the values referring to the provincial or national context.

**Table 1.** Accommodation sector data 2012-2017 (Source: Own elaboration from Laboratorio empresarial data [34])

Year	Companies			People employed			Sales (\$)		
	Manabí	National	%	Manabí	National	%	Manabí	National	%
2012	994	17,357	5.73%	4,241	99,498	4.26%	41,452,805	1,703,468,693	2.43%
2013	1,157	19,544	5.92%	4,744	109,791	4.32%	46,266,413	2,002,131,904	2.31%
2014	1,345	21,114	6.37%	5,12	117,543	4.36%	66,168,534	2,215,249,108	2.99%
2015	1,436	22,003	6.53%	5,338	121,18	4.41%	72,795,203	2,226,967,816	3.27%
2016	1,589	22,325	7.12%	5,012	116,14	4.32%	69,537,420	2,024,873,912	3.43%
2017	1,464	22,538	6.50%	4,993	114,861	4.35%	82,982,976	2,218,046,177	3.74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,985</b>	<b>124,881</b>	<b>6.39%</b>	<b>29,448</b>	<b>679,013</b>	<b>4.34%</b>	<b>379,203,351</b>	<b>12,390,737,610</b>	<b>3.06%</b>

Regarding the number of companies, Table 1 reveals an average growth of 94 units/year between 2012 and 2017, which represents an average annual increase of 8%, the most significant increase occurring between 2013 and 2014 when there were 188 new companies, while between 2016 and 2017 there was a decrease of 125 business units.

The same trend is shown at the national level, where the number of companies dedicated to this activity grew an average of 5% each year, reporting the highest growth between 2012 and 2013, the difference being that there were no decreases at the national level. It is also essential to indicate that the accommodation companies in Manabí represent an average of 6.4% of the total number of companies nationwide.

Analyzing the employment generated by the housing activity, Table 1 reveals an increase in the analysis period between 2012 and 2017, both in Manabí and nationally. On the province level, employment grew an average of 4% in these six years, registering the most significant increase, 12%, between 2012 and 2013, decreasing 6% between 2015 and 2016. The incremental employment trend in housing activity is similar at a national level, where the average growth between 2012 and 2017 was 3%, reporting the highest increase, 10%, between 2012 and 2013, and a slight decrease of 4% between 2015 and 2016. Additionally, it is important to stress that the number of people employed in this activity in Manabí represents, on average, 4.34% of the total number of people working at a national level.

The case of sales at the national level is analyzed. A growing trend is observed between 2012 and 2017, both at the provincial and federal levels. The average increase that was registered was 16% in six years. The most significant increase occurred between 2013 and 2014 with a rise of 43%, producing a decrease between 2015 and 2016 of 4%. Manabí's sales for the accommodation sector represent 3.06% of the total national sales (Table 1).

#### 4.2 Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic in the touristic sector in Manabí and Ecuador

According to the Ecuadorian Touristic Minister, the touristic sector received more than 2.4 million visitors in 2018, registering an increase of 51% compared with 2017 [35]. The total number of tourists represented more than \$1.8 million in incomes, generating 45.8% compared with 2017. In 2018 the Ecuadorian touristic sector employed 6.5% of the total economically active population (EAP), placing this activity between the five economic industries of the more significant contribution to the national employment.

The year 2018 was a good year for the Ecuadorian touristic sector. Compared with 2019, the industry showed a decrease in its figures and a negative trend (Figure 2). The total numbers of visitors decrease in 2019 to more than 400 thousand in comparison with 2018. This decrease represented 15% fewer

visitors in 2019 than in 2018. The reduction of tourists directly impacted this activity's total incomes, registering a decline of 12.7% in 2019 compared with 2018.



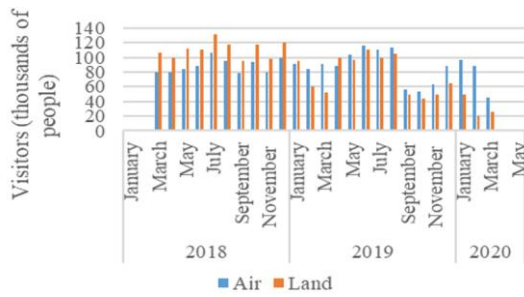
**Figure 1.** Total number of visitors 2018, 2019, and January - May 2020 (Source: Own elaboration from MINTUR [35])

Figure 1 shows a negative trend for the 2019 number of visitors to Ecuadorian tourism. The situation in 2020 will be more difficult for the Ecuadorian touristic sector due to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that have caused the closure of all touristic services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only the tourism sector but the Ecuadorian health system. According to the Ecuadorian Public Health Minister [36], until June 21st Ecuador has registered 50,640 people of confirmed cases (0.3% of Ecuadorian population) and 4,223 deaths, provoked the health system collapse. The labor measures implemented by the Ecuadorian Government have increased the unemployment level, affected in a higher proportion to the touristic sector.

Another essential feature of Ecuadorian tourism is the way in how the visitors arrive in Ecuador. The tourist statistics show that the country's most considerable proportion comes to the country by plane and land transport. Ecuador received the 96% of the tourist on average [35]. Statistics have shown a positive trend in 2018 and a negative trend in 2019 in the number of people that indicates a decrease in the numbers of visitors comparing 2018 - 2019 (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows the numbers of visitors received in Ecuador by these two means of transport (air, land), and it is evident the same difference in trend between 2018 and 2019. The figures reflect that the decrease in the numbers of visitors and incomes started in 2019. It means that the pandemic of COVID-19 can cause a collapse in the touristic sector in 2020 due to the restriction of mobilization approved by governmental decree number 1017 issued in march 2020 [5]. Furthermore, this health crisis will contribute to not achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to poverty, hunger, health and well-being, work and economic growth, and inequalities reduction.



**Figure 2.** January -May 2020 using transport (thousands of people) (Source: Own elaboration from MINTUR [35])

The touristic sector's initial negative impacts have been demonstrated through the figures presented in graphic 1 and 2. Still, though, the COVID-19 will know the effects in the medium term. The following section will show the tourist perception of the touristic resources of Manabí province. For comparison, tourism perceptions before and after the pandemic are analysed. The results reveal differences in the way of thinking of the tourism about the sector situation in two moments: before the pandemic and during the crisis evaluating the future stage of this important economic activity.

### 4.3 Perception of tourism services in Puerto Lopez

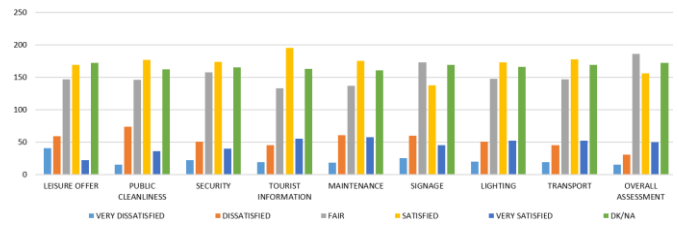
The frequency and percentage results obtained from the tabulation of the survey show that the highest percentage of the sample corresponded to women, with 56.39%, leaving men with 43.61%. Regarding the respondents' age, a more significant portion of people aged 18-30 participated, representing 70.66%, followed by those aged 31-45 years at 18.69%, 46-65 years at 9.02%, and those over 65 who had the lowest participation at 1.64%. Regarding the studies' level, the highest percentage was for university-educated respondents at 43.93%, followed by those who have completed high school at 41.8%. Those who have primary education represent 7.21%, and the remaining 1.15% do not have any education. As for residence, the most significant number of respondents were from Manta, representing 86.39%, followed by Montecristi with 4.59%, Jaramijó with 3.93%, and smaller numbers of people from other cities such as Portoviejo, Rocafuerte, Chone, and El Carmen. Also, 76.72% of the people surveyed did not work in tourism; 21.31% worked in tourism; 1.97% did not answer.

The last section of the questionnaire consisted of the evaluation of the touristic features of Puerto López. The results are reported in Figure 3 and reveal that touristic information is the best-evaluated touristic feature, with an average mark of 3.56, followed by the global city evaluation with an average of 3.45.

In the following figure, we can see that, in general, the respondents are satisfied with most of the items analysed.

As can be seen in the figure above, public transport appears in third place with a moderate impact of 3.45. Other touristic features appear reporting lower average marks, namely:

electricity supply at 3.43, general road maintenance at 3.43, security at 3.35, public cleaning at 3.28, signposting at 3.28, and recreation at 3.17 has the lowest mark. Finally, we evaluated the perception of the quality of beaches in the city of Puerto López.



**Figure 3.** Tourists' satisfaction with the Canton of Puerto Lopez before the health crisis (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

Its results are reported in Table 2 and reveal that the services offered are the best-evaluated feature of the beaches with an average mark of 3.54, followed by accessibility with an average of 3.52. Cleaning and maintenance are in third place, with a moderate impact of 3.46. The water's cleanliness is in fourth place with an average mark of 3.40, and signposting is in last place with an average effect of 3.29.

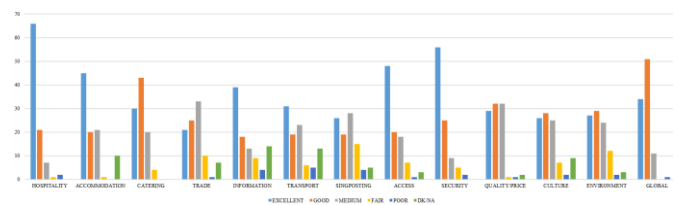
In addition to the data from the previous survey, which refers to surveys, an interview was conducted with 97 international tourists in Puerto Lopez to find out their motivation for travelling to this locality and their degree of satisfaction. This group comprises 39 men and 58 women, and the most extensive age range is between 25 and 44 years old. In Table 3, we can see the primary motivation for the trip.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of perception of the Puerto López beaches. (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

Feature	Mean	SD	No.
Accessibility	3.52	0.99	2
Services	3.54	0.90	1
Cleaning and maintenance	3.46	0.93	3
Water cleanliness	3.40	0.95	4
Signposting	3.29	0.98	5

The main reason for the trip was the beaches, followed by the natural areas and whale watching.

To achieve one of our objectives, we also asked them about their satisfaction with the destination.



**Figure 4.** Tourist Satisfaction with the Canton of Puerto López (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

**Table 3.** Reasons for tourists travelling to Puerto López (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

	Natural Spaces	Beaches	Whales	Cruise ships	Cultural Heritage	Visit friends	Shopping	Others
Man	21	27	12	3	5	10	2	7
Woman	29	47	28	5	8	11	4	16
Total	50	74	40	8	13	21	6	23



The degree of satisfaction was very high, especially those aspects related to hospitality and safety. In general, for all the parameters analysed, as shown in Figure 4, the degree of satisfaction of the tourists was good.

#### 4.4 Perception of the future of tourism in Manabí

This section assesses the perception of the future of tourism in the province of Manabí through two procedures. The first consisted of conducting new surveys after COVID-19, and the second consisted of two focus groups with different actors related to the tourism sector.

The first was based on the survey carried out on a sample population of 258 tourists after the pandemic. Several issues were discussed, such as the health risk, the economic contribution of tourism, new tourism models, new normality, and the need to find government support for this sector. Tables 4 and 5 detail the items analysed.

The following table (Table 4) shows in detail the risk perception of the citizens of the Manabí region regarding tourist visits in tourist cities, the importance of tourism activity after the pandemic and the opinion on a possible change of tourism model.

The results reveal that society thinks that tourism activity could pose a risk to the health of the population in tourist cities. This can be deduced from the fact that the most significant proportion of the surveyed population responded positively to this question (44% maybe and 41% yes). The features of the first question contrast with the results of the second question, where people recognise the economic importance of tourism activity after the pandemic (73% of respondents answered positively to this question). At the same time, 80% of respondents recognised the importance of changing the tourism model for the future after the COVID-19 pandemic through the third question asked in the survey.

Regarding the respondents' opinion on how long it will take to return to normality within the tourism sector, 79% responded that they would reach "normality" in tourism during 2021.

In Table 5, the government's proposals for measures to help the sector to grow are detailed.

**Table 4.** Evaluation of the perception about the future of tourism (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

	Risk visits		Tourism activity		Touristic model	
<b>Yes</b>	106	41%	189	73%	207	80%
<b>No</b>	39	15%	21	8%	14	5%
<b>Maybe</b>	113	44%	48	19%	37	14%
<b>Total</b>	258		258		258	

**Table 5.** Suggested government measures (Source: Own elaboration from survey data [37])

<b>Soft loans</b>	54	21%
<b>Eliminate duties</b>	47	18%
<b>Economics supports</b>	37	14%
<b>Deferred taxation</b>	29	11%
<b>Increase the public investment</b>	25	10%
<b>Jobs economics supports</b>	19	7%
<b>Tax incentives</b>	18	7%

From this analysis, it is clear that government support to the tourism sector will be required to get out of the crisis. This support can be oriented, according to the respondents, through

a series of government measures, such as soft loans (21%), the non-imposition of tariffs (18%), and economic support regulations (14%).

The second procedure to understand the future of tourism activity in Puerto López consisted of two focus groups with six authorities in the sector and eight university research professors whose line of research was tourism.

The information obtained in these focus groups has validated and endorsed the approaches reached in the previous surveys.

In fact, from these interviews, we can highlight that the tourism authorities of the area consider that sustainable tourism development of the territory is necessary, as it is currently very deficient. They also believe that the great potential of Puerto López should be based mainly on the natural resources and the local gastronomy. The local authorities are very concerned about the inadequate exploitation of these resources. They also consider it necessary to achieve sustainable development, raise the awareness of the indigenous population, promote associations, and strengthen training and better promote the area. The authorities mentioned hospitality, friendliness, security and the landscape as strengths. All agreed that there was a coordination problem between local, provincial and national authorities to achieve a sustainable tourism model.

The focus group was carried out with university professors, and researchers also agreed on the above points. Still, they also stated that for the post-Covid era, it would be necessary to carry out global and integral planning of provincial tourism and, consequently, a tourism plan adapted to the new reality. In this sense, they considered that the university should lead this strategy in collaboration with all the agents involved in the tourism sector.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to find out how the socioeconomic aspects of the population of Manabí were affected during the state of emergency. Current situation of paralysis of the Ecuadorian economy, those most affected are, on the one hand, the self-employed who have seen a significant decrease in their income and, on the other hand, those who engaged in the service sector (tourism). These results align with what was expected and found in other similar studies since the distancing measures, and the stay-at-home order to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly affected economic activity in general [38].

In this context of reference, this research article is born to bring to the academic table the convenience of reviewing the state of tourism before and after the pandemic, in this case in Manabí, a notable destination within a medium-sized economy that is highly dependent on tourism activity. For this reason, we think it is necessary to analyze the goal of Manabí to see how it will behave after the pandemic. Despite the health and economic crisis in which we are immersed, the new tourism reality that is emerging could be an opportunity, being aware of the limitations of tourism in Ecuador if the authorities make a firm commitment to Manabí as a sustainable destination. For this reason, three actions are proposed that could encourage development based on what has been analyzed in this article. Firstly, a long-term measure, with a commitment to a greater professionalization of the educational center's sector. Secondly, based on the tourism sector's current reality in the

province of Manabí, the tourism industry should be promoted and protected by the institutions, supported by direct economic aid. Also, related to the previous point, it should provide the information to facilitate the implementation of policies and actions to promote an entrepreneurial culture within the Ecuadorian tourism sector [39].

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals the current situation of tourism in Ecuador and, more specifically, in Puerto López. The data presented show an evolution in this economic activity. However, it should improve some aspects to ensure a sustainable result in the future. The improvements could make a positive contribution to the economic growth of the city and its population.

For this reason, and based on the research questions we posed in the introduction to the article, which was based on how tourism affected the local economy and to what extent it has been affected since the COVID-19 crisis, we can conclude that in the short term, the Ecuadorian economy has been affected by the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We can conclude that the Ecuadorian economy has been affected by the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in a short time. The restrictions have led to an increase in unemployment overall. The particular incidence in the tourism sector caused a loss of employment of more than six percent of the working-age population. According to the people's perception, the tourism sector will be positively determined if there is direct economic aid from the government, which will allow a quick recovery. The level of Ecuadorian employment depends mostly on the tourism sector. In these months in the Equator and more specifically in the province of Manabí mobility, it is perhaps the key elements among the measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, apart from the sanitary standards themselves. It is restriction movements of people become central instrument authorities of all countries have resorted to implement the policies of isolation of the population and thus fight against the spread of the virus. It has caused a drop in tourism and a collapse of the country's economy.

We were also interested to know how tourists perceived the Manabí destination before and after the pandemic. The first thing that this study has shown is the importance of tourism for Puerto López and its significant dependence on visitors. It has also served to recognise the opportunities for improvement for tourism in Puerto Lopez based on the perceptions of its visitors, especially after the health crisis. All the actors are aware of the importance and the possibility of betting on the development of sustainable tourism in the future, combining its current relevance for the economic growth of Puerto López and its inhabitants with the need to improve some city characteristics and its beaches.

Therefore, it is vital to bear in mind the significant dependence on tourism and to emphasise that the study was carried out, among other things, to measure the perception of visitors to Puerto López and to find out how they perceive the city after the health crisis. We cannot forget that although there are many positive indicators (safety, transport, hospitality), most of those surveyed have a pessimistic view of the economic recovery of the tourism sector in Manabí in the coming years.

By way of conclusion, it should be noted that this article is

intended to provide a theoretical-practical frame of reference for analysing a specific aspect of the economy of Manabí (tourism). It should be emphasised that sustainable tourism based on heritage (natural, cultural and ethnographic) can become one of the pillars for developing the canton of Puerto López. It should not be forgotten that the great concern about sustainability shown by both the focus group actors and the tourists themselves may be due to the growing awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG\_2030) promoted by the United Nations since 2015. The balance of interrelationships between physical, symbolic, economic and political factors has been extensively addressed in the 17 SDGs\_2030. All of this, framed within a health crisis that could be an opportunity for the population of Manabí if it manages to build governance strategies based on sustainable growth and solidarity. For this reason, a line of research is opened up in the field of analysis to gather information on the situation of tourism once the health crisis is over and to be able to establish parameters for comparison.

In this sense, a proposal for improving the tourism value of the Province of Manabí, specifically for the Canton of Puerto López as a strategic point, would be the creation of an eco-museum of artisanal fishing where its resources are displayed. The sector is democratised through participatory management by the different communities of Manabí, although this will be a topic for future studies. In this case, it proposes the conservation and responsible use of heritage resources with environmental, historical, archaeological, ethnographic and landscape value, in line with the SDG\_2030 to make the destination more sustainable.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work is supported by “La Junta de Andalucía”.

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