Tourists' and locals' satisfaction regarding ecotourism in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico

Satisfação de turistas e locais com o ecoturismo em San Carlos, Sonora, México

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RESUMO
O ecoturismo é um produto turístico, uma atividade econômica que, como todas as outras, depende da satisfação dos consumidores. Assim, medir a satisfação do usuário constitui um componente básico do turismo de qualidade. Para analisar a satisfação dos turistas e moradores com o ecoturismo em San Carlos, foram aplicados questionários digitalmente verdadeiros do google, e pessoalmente na avenida principal, e nos locais de ecoturismo para turistas (ecoturistas e turistas tradicionais) e locais (mexicanos que moram na cidade em tempo integral, turistas de segunda residência (SRT) e passageiros). Uma amostra de 436 questionários foi validada. Os Habitantes atribuídos conferem uma média superior em quase todas as dimensões, e apresentam diferenças significativas com maior frequência. No entanto, para a dimensão SanCarlosQuality, eles conferiram a pontuação mais baixa. Por outro lado, os Ecoturistas forneceram avaliações mais positivas do que os Turistas Tradicionais nas dimensões EcoturismoQualidade e Guias. Observou-se alta taxa de "não saber" em todos os casos; mas os habitantes eram os mais familiarizados com as atividades de ecoturismo e as avaliavam melhor. Pelo contrário, são os Turistas Tradicionais que

expressam menos conhecimento sobre estas atividades e as avaliam menos. Os ecoturistas, considerando seu interesse por essas atividades, manifestaram uma porcentagem muito alta de não ter muita informação sobre elas. Sugere-se, portanto, estratégias de promoção e melhoria das políticas de conservação.

Palavras-chave: Ecoturismo, Avaliação, San Carlos-Sonora-México, Satisfação, Turistas e Locais.

ABSTRACT
Ecotourism is a tourism product, an economic activity that, like all others, depends on consumers' satisfaction. Thus, measuring user satisfaction constitutes a basic component of quality tourism. To analyze tourists' and locals' satisfaction with ecotourism in San Carlos**,** questionnaires were applied digitally true google forms, and personally on the main avenue, and at the ecotourism places to tourists (ecotourists and traditional tourists) and locals (Mexicans who lived in town full-time, second-residence tourists (SRT), and commuters). A sample of 436 questionnaires was validated. The Inhabitants assigned grant a higher average in almost every dimensions, and presented significant differences with greater frequency. However, for the SanCarlosQuality dimension, they conferred the poorest score. On the other hand, the Ecotourists provided more positive evaluations than the Traditional Tourists of the EcotourismQuality and Guides dimensions. A high "not knowing" rate was observed for all cases; but Inhabitants were the most familiar with ecotourism activities and rate them the highest. On the contrary, Traditional Tourists are the ones who express less knowledge on these activities and rate them lower. Ecotourists —considering their interest in these activities— manifested a very high percentage of not having much information about them. Promotion strategies and conservation policies improvement therefore is suggested.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Evaluation, San Carlos-Sonora-Mexico, Satisfaction, Tourists and Locals.

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism activity is one of the main economic industries worldwide. Between 2009 and 2019 (before the pandemic), real income from tourism exceeded world GDP growth by 10%, reaching —in its tenth year of continuous growth— a cumulative 54% (UNWTO, 2020).

Ecotourism, besides being the fastest-growing tourism modality worldwide (Camacho-Ruiz et al., 2016; Carvache-Franco, Carrascosa-López, & Carvache-Franco, 2020; El Economista, 2017; Hultman, Kazeminia, & Ghasemi, 2015) is also the modality with the greatest potential to achieve sustainable regional development. It´s an activity that, carried out according to its principles, produces a minimal impact on nature, promotes conservation, understanding, and appreciation for environments and cultures; and, generates income for conservation and the receiving communities (Camacho-Ruiz et al., 2016).

A transition from mass forms of tourism to alternative types based on environmental protection and local cultural knowledge and enjoyment has begun, and society is becoming increasingly aware of the urgency of changing habits and caring for nature. Traditional tourist enclaves must adapt to the new interests of their users; commercializing activities outside hotels that contribute to natural improvement, enjoyment, cultural appreciation, and hospitality within the local community (OMT, 2002; Orgaz & Cañero, 2015). According to Carvache-Franco et al. (2020), tourist destinations are increasingly receiving a new tourist profile interested in being in contact with pristine nature, learning about its biodiversity, and

following the necessary to protect the natural area. Following other studies on perceived value, the authors underline the importance of understanding the trip attributes to which tourists assign a higher value. In this sense, Salido-Araiza (2009, p. 6) states that:

> "A successful tourism industry is fundamentally based on visitor satisfaction; Failure to meet or even exceed the expectations of tourists has a direct impact on the reduction of the tourist flow and, consequently, on the expected economic impact of this activity. Thus, measuring visitor satisfaction and experience should become a continuous task, consistent with quality tourism."

At the same time, social exchange theory maintains that the local community's support for tourism depends on its satisfaction with the activity costs/benefits. This support is of the utmost importance, since success and sustainability of ecotourism depend on the interactions between tourists and locals. For this reason, it is important —especially for politicians and businessmen— to acknowledge the locals' perceptions and the factors that influence (Orgaz & Cañero, 2015).

Regarding ecotourism, many studies have focused on the perceptions (of activities impacts), but few studies analyze users' satisfaction. According to Salido-Araiza (2009), having reliable information regarding the form or extent to which the local/regional tourism industry is satisfying users' expectations is a very useful instrument for businesses and governments at all levels, as; it allows them to establish priorities and engage in continuous improvement actions. This, in turn, is expected to contribute to increasing positive return rates.

In this vein, this article, results of a study conducted at the Center for Research in Food and Development (CIAD, for its acronym in Spanish) aims to analyze tourists' and locals' satisfaction regarding ecotourism in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico. To achieve this objective, this article has been divided into seven sections. After this introduction, the second section presents a review of the literature. The third contextualizes the characteristics of the location of this study. The fourth one describes the research methodology used. The fifth section, presents the study results. The sixth discusses the conclusions. And, finally, the seventh section, shows the bibliographical references. The theoretical and empirical findings can be useful to improve ecotourism management in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist recreational activities have been considered since the creation of the first national parks more than a century ago. At first, were largely a domestic phenomenon, but today, there has been a change in the profile of visitors, they seek more active, intellectually enriching experiences that favor the conservation of nature, and international borders are not a limitation for them. These changes have been so prevalent, that the term "ecotourism" —originally from Costa Rica— was first coined, registered as a brand, and promoted by the Tikal-Tours International Agency; now, it is used to characterize ecological tourism (Marchena, 1993).

There are dozens of definitions of the concept of ecotourism; for the purposes of this study, the one that is going to be used is from the International Ecotourism Organization (TIES, April 29, 2021), which postulates that ecotourism is:

> Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of local people and involves interpretation and education. Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.
> Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement, participate in and market ecotourism activities should adopt the following principles:
> ❖ Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
> ❖ Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
> ❖ Provide positive experiences for visitors and hosts.
> ❖ Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
> ❖ Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
> ❖ Deliver memorable interpretive experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries´ political, environmental, and social climates.
> ❖ Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
> ❖ Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of Indigenous Peoples in their community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

Ecotourism should be seen as an environmentally and socially responsible strategy, focused on improving the living conditions of host communities, and respecting natural and cultural resources while reducing inequality gaps (Rivera et al., 2012). The positive economic, social, and environmental impacts generated in any ecotourism destination, as long as the activity is properly planned, are (Orgaz, 2014, B):

• Economic: job generation, new companies, economic incomes in diverse sectors.

• Social: improvement in residents' and tourists' quality of life and education.

• Ecological: promotes nature natural resources conservation by merchandizing them.

As for the components that constitute ecotourism activity, Orgaz & Cañero (2015) underline:

1. The demand. – Ecotourists.

2. The activities. - Such as mountain biking, diving, kayaking, bird watching, horseback riding, rappelling, climbing, sandboarding, hiking, snorkeling, and so forth.

3. Ecotourism destinations. - Natural areas.

4. Ecotourism infrastructure. - As recreational areas, visitor centers, scenic lookouts, trails, and observatories, among others.

5. The guides. - Responsible for explaining the area's natural and cultural aspects.

6. Stakeholders. – All those actors that can affect and be affected by ecotourism activities.

Ecotourism is a product, a set of services made up of a mixture or combination of elements that seek to satisfy ecotourists' needs. Therefore, it´s necessary to develop tourism products not only appropriate to the territory's vocation but also appropriate to customer demand (Robles & García, 2016).

In the tourism field, positive or negative satisfaction results when the emotions that contain expectations join feelings about consumption experiences (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Kim & Thapa,

2018). Satisfaction strongly and positively influences destination loyalty, intentions to visit again, and/or recommend it (Salido-Araiza, 2009). Therefore, all the elements that participate in positive experiences configuration for tourists influence cognition and affect, contributing to the increase in value. This means that experience value increase when factors allow a person-environment-satisfaction interaction (Carvache-Franco, et al., 2020)

3 SAN CARLOS, SONORA, MEXICO

Guaymas is the county with the greatest ecotourism resources in Sonora State (Robles & García, 2016). San Carlos is the tourist area of Guaymas, it's located in southwestern Sonora on the shore of Cortez Sea, 117 km south of Hermosillo the capital city, and 416 km from the border with the United States. Reddish hills covered with desert vegetation, sea warm waters, an abundance of desertic and sea fauna, and of course, its incomparable sunsets are just some of San Carlos's main charms.

Taking Garcia's words (2011, p. 62) (see figure 1) north Guaymas…

"There is the Soldier estuary and the long San Francisco beach that currently borders state highway 17. In the background, emerging from the Sea of Cortez waters stands the Tetakawi hill, which with its two peaks is the symbol of the San Carlos, Guaymas, and the entire state of Sonora. The cliffs that dramatically surround this complex rock formation give rise to some small beaches on its slopes, and in its surroundings is the small Puerto de San Carlos. On the north side of the Tetakawi colossus, is Algodones Beach with its large dunes, which, due to the length of its cove, has served for the establishment of a couple of hotels and residential areas destined for tourism".

Figure 1. - San Carlos Geographical Location

The bay, before the Spanish invasion, gave place to Yaquis and Guaimas[1] indigenous settlements. Years later was known as "El Baviso de Navarro", owned by Cayetano Navarro, a Mexican civil hero, who divided the property into four ranches. Rafael T. Caballero acquired three of the ranches in 1958 with the vision of creating a tourist enclave. In 1963 San Carlos was formally founded (Grupo Caballero, 2008).

Currently, the bay is considered the state's "Great Tourist Jewel", in which locals, commuters,

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[1] Comcaac ethnic group settlement, also known as Seris (Grupo Caballero, 2008).

second-residence tourists (SRT), traditional tourists, and recently, some ecotourists cohabit. For them, San Carlos has natural protected areas, cliffs, sundials, canyons, hills, bays, estuaries, islands, scenic lookouts, water eyes, beaches, and ranches. Where 15 different ecotourism activities can be carried out (mountain biking, diving, kayaks, bird watching, horse trips, ATV rides, yacht tours, sport fishing, hanging bridges, rappelling, climbing, sandboarding, hiking, snorkeling, zip line, sailboat). Prices vary, from $3 US dollars (a hiking activity) to $500 US dollars (a diving certification, for example) (Aldecoa-León, 2018).

According to Vázquez (2018), ecotourism development in the San Carlos region is feasible, since the community has sufficient infrastructure, natural attractions, and a mostly national market interested in carrying out this type of activity; although, it´s important to work in public safety, medical services, first aid training and to have appropriate protective equipment for each activity. The price that 57% of tourists are willing to pay is between $11 and $28mxn, 23% would be willing to pay less than $18mxn, and the other 20% would be willing to pay between $28 and $56mxn for participating in activities. Tourists also indicated as an important aspect that the guides should have adequate training to avoid accidents or react appropriately in case one occurs.

Once recognized the state of the art of studies that contribute to ecotourism elements; also, after having contextualized the scenario where the tourist activity takes place, the objective of analyzing tourists' and locals' satisfaction regarding ecotourism in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico was established. Thus, the hypothesis is that the level of tourists' and locals' satisfaction regarding ecotourism in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico will depend on the type of user.

4 METHOD

Design & Participants

The present study is quantitative at a comparative level, cross-sectional with convenience sampling collected through surveys technique. 436 questionnaires conform the sample: 330 tourists (30.05% ecotourists and 45.64% traditional tourists) and 106 locals (5.046% Mexicans who live in the town full-time, 7.569% second-residence tourists (SRT) and 11.7% commuters).

Instruments

To carry out this study an instrument originally from Salido-Araiza (2009) was adapted and applied; it was considered appropriate, —in addition to its precision to solve the empirical part— due to the potential that the results will have to be compared with other investigations carried out in the same locality and throughout the country.

Destination evaluation. Are questions related to users' satisfaction in areas such as ecotourism activities; experience; originality; access and mobility; security, equipment, and infrastructure; services quality; money value ratio; items quality and availability (QAI); and tour guides. With 6 response options:

excellent, good, satisfactory, poor, very poor, I don't know.

A psychometric process was carried out to test the *destination evaluation* structure, out through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with 100% of the sample since some adjustments were made to the items of the dimension; a Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA) was applied. Finally, obtaining a 7-dimensional structure (Total Explained Variance=63.196%; factor loadings=.36 to .87; CMIN/df= 2.615; CFI=.903; RMSEA=.061; SRMR=.006).

The ecotourism activities are grouped into 3 dimensions: *WithPotential*, which refers to 5 places that are privatized or have never received government support for their development and promotion; *Consolidated*, is integrated for 4 attractions which are the main ecotourism attractions; And, *Ecotourism? 2 a*ctivities that, due to their negative impacts on the ecology, it is in doubt whether they could or should be considered ecotouristics.

The other 4 dimensions are *SanCarlosQuality,* which includes issues related to basic services quality in the town (facilities for people with special needs/disabilities, public transport service, state of the roads, signage, San Carlos image, cleanliness of destiny, feeling of security and safety in general, application of covid-19 protocols, availability and condition of public rest rooms, quality in general, information received pre-arrival, signs and information points, quality and hygiene in restaurants and bars, quality of taxi services, relation value for money); *EcotourismQuality,* which is the set of indicators related to ecotourism activities (time of transportation to ecotourism places, access costs, infrastructure and equipment in ecotourism places, first aid in ecotourism places, cleanliness of ecotourism places, availability of information to carry out ecotourism activities, and value for money in relation with ecotourism activities); *Items Quality and Availability (QAI)* such as souvenirs, handicrafts, equipment for ecotourism activities, etc.; And, touristic *Guides*, which integrates 3 items (training and skills, knowledge of local and regional context, and promotion of environmental ethics and sustainability).

The internal consistency for each dimension and the total construct was obtained by McDonald's omega (WithPotential ω=.92; QualitySanCarlos ω=.91; QAI ω=.94; QualityEcotourism ω=.88; Consolidated ω=.86; Guides ω= .98; Ecotourism? ω=.83; total ω=.94).

Process

The data were obtained between September 2021 and March 2022. For the application of tourists' questionnaires (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) first, a digital effort was made; the questionnaire was prepared on the Google Forms platform and shared through WhatsApp with the author's contacts and contacts of the author's contacts; invitations were also sent by email in personal databases and by the Center for Research in Food and Development databases; 337 responses were obtained. In February and March 2022 (without ending the pandemic, but with already two rounds of vaccines against COVID-19), 80 questionnaires were applied in the main ecotourism points of San Carlos: 29 questionnaires in Tetakawi

hill, 34 in Nacapule canyon, 17 in Estuary el Soldado, making a total of 417 questionnaires.

It was necessary to dismiss questionnaires due to inconsistencies in the content, because they did not know the place, or because they had not been in the locality in the last 5 years. In the end, it was validated a 330 questionnaires sample.

The local population, as has already been mentioned, are considered Mexicans who live in the town full-time, second-residence tourists, and commuters. The population that inhabits San Carlos is 2,508 (INEGI, 2020), but the data regarding the number of tourists and jobs generated in the town are not possible to obtain accurately. Therefore, the sample was determined at convenience (OMT, 2001), setting more than a surveys number a schedule to collect data; Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9 am to 12 pm, February and March 2022, the author dedicated herself exclusively to filling out this survey.

To collect San Carlos inhabitants and commuters' samples in the first weeks the strategy was to go business by business on the main street, leaving the surveys and then returning to collect them, after several days the strategy was rejected. On one hand, because of the high number of discarded surveys due to filling errors, and on the other hand, to the difficulty in finding people again. A process that was perhaps slower but guaranteed surveys correct filling was applied; along the same main street, the surveys were delivered business by business, once completed they were reviewed in the respondent's presence and irregularities were corrected. This way on a good day 6 to 7 questionnaires were applied but on some slow days, only 1 could be achieved.

To collect the Second-residence Tourist sample, the issue got a little more complicated. First, an attempt to apply the questionnaires outside a supermarket recognized for being visited mostly by North Americans was made, but the response was almost null, after several days only one questionnaire was complete. So, an attempt to fill out the surveys in restaurants was made (several restaurants were visited and the situation was mostly the same). Although the acceptance for filling out the questionnaire was higher, the fulfillment was not; the questionnaires were delivered mostly incomplete, and the attitude, the food arrival, or the time to leave impeded this evaluation and fulfillment that was achieved with San Carlos inhabitants and commuters. Also, authorization for accessing and applying the questionnaires and/or support for sending them to the communities digitally was sought in several residentials, with a negative or null response in all cases. Finally, it was possible to share the questionnaire in a Facebook group mainly aimed to San Carlos American residents. 170 questionnaires were applied but validated just 106: 22 inhabitants, 33 second-residence tourists, and 51 commuters.

Data Analysis

To carry out this research, first, descriptive statistical analysis was carried out to recognize different variables' behaviors. Subsequently, mean comparison analyzes were performed through ANOVA to observe the differences between study subjects and dimensions. To carry out the analysis, the

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and its extension AMOS version 23 were used. Was use

5 RESULTS

First, descriptive analyzes were performed to observe, by dimension, the tourists' and locals' satisfaction levels (see table 5).

Table 5. – Destination evaluation descriptives by dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	"I Don´t Know" Frequency
WithPotential	2.74	1.4	-.04	-1.18	247
Consolidated	3.73	1.11	-1.35	1.84	125
Ecotourism?	3.19	1.55	-.65	-.67	199
QualitySanCarlos	2.98	.93	.30	-.55	1
QualityEcotourism	3.02	1.06	-.17	-.16	7
QAI	3.21	1.15	-.55	-.19	20
Guides	2.58	1.91	-.33	-1.48	224

Own elaboration
Minimum=1 y Máximo=5 para cada dimensión.

The descriptive statistics showed that all the dimensions are close to a normal distribution since skewness and kurtosis aren´t outside ±3 and ±7 respectively (Hancock et al. 2019; Kim H.-Y., 2013). Also, it was observed that Guides and WithPotential were the dimensions that exhibit the poorest evaluations with means less than 3, on the other hand, the dimension with the best evaluation was Consolidated (the one that is integrated for the most well-known and representative tourist spaces).

After carrying out the descriptive analysis, a comparative analysis was carried carry out to observe differences between the different user types who answered the survey (Ecotourist, Traditional Tourist, Inhabitant, SRT, and Commuters). The comparisons were made through ANOVA with post hoc analysis to detect where statistically significant differences were found (see Table 6).

Table 6. Means comparison by ANOVA for each user in destination evaluation dimensions.

	1		2		3		4		5		
Dimension	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F
WithPotential	.6	1.13	.38	1.01	2.81	1.56	1.52	1.07	1.78	1.38	37.85***
Consolidated	2.23	1.55	1.13	1.14	4.17	1.07	3.35	1.24	3.39	1.12	52.49***
Ecotourism?	1.68	1.80	.99	1.56	3.64	1.45	1.71	1.43	2.98	1.57	24.95***
SanCarlosQuality	3.09	.86	2.95	.88	2.63	.78	2.72	.67	2.82	.73	2.63**
EcotourismQuality	3.18	.99	2.61	1.3	2.97	.94	2.51	.87	2.92	.89	5.97***
QAI	2.9	1.29	2.81	1.39	3.5	.99	2.77	.77	3.24	1.05	2.43**
Guides	2.13	2.09	1.48	1.95	2.39	2	1.82	1.91	2.18	1.95	3.08**

Own elaboration
1=Ecotourist; 2=Traditional tourist; 3=Inhabitant; 4=SRT; 5= Commuters
***p<.001
**p<.05

The ANOVA test showed users' satisfaction significant differences exist. For the dimensions "WithPotential", "Consolidated", "Ecotourism?" and "EcotourismQuality" the difference had a greater significance (p<.001), than the dimensions "SanCarlosQuality", "QAI" and "Guides" which reached a relevant statistical significance to verify differences in the evaluation according to the subject (p <.05).

In addition to the ANOVA test, multiple post hoc comparisons were made to recognize where these differences lie. For the WithPotential dimension, significant differences were found between Ecotourist V.S. Inhabitant, SRT and Commuters (p<.05); Traditional tourist V.S. Inhabitant, SRT and Commuters (p<.05); Inhabitant V.S. Ecotourist, Traditional Tourist, SRT and Commuters (p<.05). Ecotourist and Traditional Tourist did not present significant differences, either as SRT with Commuters.

For the consolidated dimension, the post hoc test showed significant differences between Ecotourist V.S. Traditional Tourist, Inhabitant, SRT and Commuters (p<.05); Traditional tourist V.S. Ecotourist, Inhabitant, SRT and Commuters (p<.05). The Inhabitants, SRT and Commuters subjects did not present significant differences.

The differences detected in the dimension Ecotourism? Were between Ecotourist V.S. Traditional Tourist, Inhabitant and Commuters (p<.05); Traditional tourist V.S. Ecotourist, Inhabitant and Commuters (p<.05); Inhabitant V.S. RRT (p<.05); SRT V.S. Commuters (p<.05).

For both, EcotourismQuality and Guides, there were significant differences only between the Ecotourist and the Traditional Tourist (p<.05). For the other user types, no differences were found. The SanCarlosQuality dimension did not obtain significant differences between user types.

It's highlighted that in the comparison of mean by ANOVA, and in the post hoc multiple comparisons, the user type categorized as Inhabitants is the one with the highest mean in almost all dimensions and is the one that showed significant differences most frequently. However, in the SanCarlosQuality dimension, although the differences were not significant, the Inhabitants gave the poorest score.

On the other hand, as expected, the Ecotourists gave a better evaluation than the traditional Tourist did in the EcotourismQuality and Guides dimensions.

6 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMENDATION

The research objective was to compare tourists' and locals' satisfaction regarding ecotourism at San Carlos; It´s resolved that San Carlos has numerous ecotourism potentialities. For all dimensions, the users´ satisfaction levels range from "satisfactory" to "good". The three dimensions related to ecotourism attractions (WithPotential, Consolidated, and ¿Ecotourism?) and Guides present a high "not knowing" rate; Inhabitants are the ones who best known ecotourism activities and best rate them. On the contrary, Traditional Tourists are the ones who less know and less rate them. And, Ecotourists —considering their interest in this type of activity— manifest a very high percentage of not knowing.

This is attributed to the lack of support (incentives, promotion, publicity, public policies, training, etc.) found at all government levels for ecotourism in San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico. Thus far, Marketing role as an instrument to encourage sustainable tourism development is well recognized, so developing products and promotion strategies with appropriate marketing/advertising should be considered as an approach for raising the numbers of domestic and international tourists in the attractions and in San Carlos. This conclusion is consistent with the work of Zamani-Farahani (2016)

Above all, ecotourism activities promotion has the potential to generate economic income that would remain locally; fostering new business, employment, opportunities, education and awareness for both, tourists and locals. Zamani-Farahani (2016, pág. 26) agreed and states that "Strong positive attitudes to current and future tourism development are connected to the belief that tourism is a major contributing factor to the development of the region, and offers opportunities to generate economic growth and earn income". Though, almost contrary Seraphin et al. (2019) postulates that, for locals economic impacts are less significant than own happiness, and that failure to consider happiness as a metric can lead to tourismphobia and anti-tourism movements; also, the authors conclude that dissatisfaction with tourism can be mitigated if locals are able to derive satisfaction from tourism events. Notably, the differences above, accordingly to Maslow Pyramid, surely are related to society's development levels (Maslow, 1943).

Additionally, to develop proper conservation strategies and policies, having ecotourism activities as the main tool local communities need educational programs, training programs, and consultancy services in the technical, legal and operation fields given by tourism public and private experts related to the most significant challenges facing the ecotourism industry: governance and planning, political, socio-economic, cultural; legal aspects; infrastructure; community awareness and knowledge; and environmental challenges. Like previous findings also sustained. (Makian & Hanifezadeh, 2021; Zamani-Farahani, 2016).

In summary, among the practical implications, this research can be useful so that people related to ecotourism development become acquainted of users' satisfaction which is an increasing factor of intentions to return and recommend. Previous similar observations can be found in the works of (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Cetin, et al., 2017; Kim & Thapa, 2018; Salido-Araiza, 2009). It is emphasized that the most recurrent answer was "not to know" guides and activities. Therefore, it´s highly recommended to improve communication strategies for San Carlos as an ecotourism place and for each attraction, hence satisfaction and loyalty will increase, bringing benefits to the destination and the community, thus contributing to environmental conservation and destiny sustainability; as the concept of ecotourism implies.

This research opens the way to future studies based on the contribution it makes to the state of the art since the results obtained would make it possible to propose hypotheses with an explanatory scope and

generate different research questions that would help deepen this study. Thus, providing the necessary knowledge for the development and application of strategies. On the other hand, some limitations can be outlined. The results obtained can´t be generalized to the population since, in part, it was information obtained through an online survey (convenience sample). Another limitation to take into consideration was that the data was obtained during pandemic times, which could cause a bias in respondents' evaluations, since it was difficult for the tourist sites to offer their services as they commonly did, affecting how the quality of these could be perceived.

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