

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Smart tourist destinations, a new conceptual contribution for local development in Ecuador. Case “Portoviejo UNESCO Creative City”

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ABSTRACT

The tourism activity is becoming more competitive every day, the exponential growth of technology makes possible the improvement of communications between businesses and end customers, the emergence of new applications makes it easier for tourists to acquire services in an easier way. For this and many other reasons, the public administration in tourism developed countries such as Spain is committed to the certification of Smart Tourism Destinations (STD) with criteria related to accessibility, sustainability, governance, technology and innovation. This literature review uses basic tools of content analysis to classify information from documents, manuals and specialized articles in various databases, which seek to lay the foundations that serve as a reference for new tourism studies focused on this area, new for Ecuador, but not so much around the world. Portoviejo is a city recently declared Creative City by UNESCO, the same seeks to promote a new model of tourism management, which makes use of its cultural heritage, led by the gastronomic diversity, and in turn be able to enhance this development with the evolution towards an intelligent destination.

Keywords: destination management; gastronomy; creative cities; smart destinations; Portoviejo

1. Introduction

The accelerated development of technology has generated drastic changes in all sectors of society, consumerism and the emerging demand for mobility, have given way to different proposals such as Smart Cities [smart cities]^[1], which according to Buhalis and Amaranggana^[2] have given rise to the concept of Smart Tourism Destination, where information and

communication technologies (ICT) play a very important role in the creation and strengthening of competitiveness^[3,4]; and ensure sustainable development, efficiency of available resources in addition to improving the quality of life of its population.

Tourism is one of the sectors with the greatest direction towards digitalization; technologies such as big data, social networks, chatbots, nanotechnology, virtual reality, the IoT (Internet of Things) are strongly impacting the habits of consumers and the

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experiences generated^[5]; the volume of reservations through the web by booking.com and Expedia, monopolized 70% over Tour Operators^[6]; which evidences the impact it has on the sector; this digitization that has allowed travelers to have more control over the selection of their trips; with greater bargaining power, is more selective and demanding, has left aside the organized packages and has prioritized personalized programs in which it seeks to live experiences; in fact, the tourism sector is among the five with the highest digital maturity, ahead of finance and commerce^[7].

This phenomenon of digital transformation has led to the development of increasingly sophisticated electronic devices, which in technological terms seek to improve the user experience and, in the tourism, context allow providing a better experience to tourists during their visit. In this sense, mobile technology has taken special connotation in recent years and has become an important channel for contracting tourism products and services^[8]. For this reason, the dependence of a smart tourism destination (ITD) on the advances of mobile technology is becoming stronger, and the need to know its applicability, more imperative. Kim and Kim^[9] highlight three relevant expectations of mobile technology: creating innovative experiences for consumers, fostering sustainable competitive advantage for tourism destinations and related suppliers, and building sustainability competencies for smart tourism.

From the quarantine generated by the COVID 19 pandemic, tourism activity worldwide stopped, according to the UNWTO in the 2018 mobilized 1,400 million tourists, which represented an increase of 5% over the previous year, and was the ninth year of sustained growth with revenues close to 1.7 trillion dollars, being one of the main generators of economic growth and development^[10], and according to the first data the reduction in the first quarter 2020 is already 57% representing approximately 80. Billion dollars of losses for the sector, affecting not only the survival of people, but also society in all its 2 dimensions^[11].

In these circumstances, technology has become an ally that offers countless options to adapt to the physical distancing caused by the pandemic; thus, we find that social networks have played a preponderant role during the pandemic; in Spain, they were used to detect the number of infected people based on a Web-Service that allows sharing data from any territory to be analyzed in real time^[12]. In fact, one of the main references to technological innovation in tourism is Spain, where the State Mercantile Society for the Management of Innovation and Tourism Technologies, S.A. was created in 2002. SEGITTUR, a body dependent on the Ministry of the Secretary of State for Tourism, responsible for promoting innovation (R+D+i) in the Spanish tourism sector, both in the public sector (new models and channels for promotion, management and creation of smart destinations, etc.) and in the private sector (support for entrepreneurs, new models of sustainable and more competitive management, export of Spanish technology)^[13], has 4 defined lines of action, innovation, internationalization, entrepreneurs and promotion .

Despite the strong impact of the pandemic in Spain, its tourism sector is one of the first to be reactivated with a very promising future demand, leading the world ranking of tourist reservations made in the last seven days for the coming months with 31.83% of the total as of June 9^[14]. All this is the result of a process of appropriate use of innovation and technology, which has allowed them to mitigate the socio-economic impact and accelerate their recovery process; according to Enrique Martínez, president of SEGITTUR, "Technology helps to improve decision-making, prioritize measures and anticipate. All this with the aim of achieving a smarter and more sustainable tourism^[15].

According to Ángeles Rubio, an expert from Hostaltur, Spain will have to redirect tourist flows through the use of tools such as Smart Tourism, E-commerce and Big Data, which will allow it to improve the integration of booking platforms; to this must be added the application of strict sanitary protocols, which will ensure comprehensive safety processes for all passengers; all this shows that the 18

years of betting on technological innovation, allows Spain to recover in the medium term, a large percentage of its international tourism demand.

According to UNWTO projections, between July and September of this year, domestic demand will begin to reactivate, while in the fourth quarter and mainly in 2021 international demand will begin to reactivate^[16], with innovation and digitization of the sector being the main opportunity, since the pandemic accelerated the generation and use of technological tools such as Zoom, Meet and apps; the use of cell phones has increased as the potential of social networks as an instrument for consumer inclusion in the development of new experiences and products has become evident^[17].

Another opportunity is the renewal of sustainable business models, leaving aside those that generate tourism-phobia product of the massification of destinations and touristification, a term that links tourism as one of the great axes of globalization and the consequent wide movement of people, goods and capital that has generated the destruction of several resources and tourist attractions in the world.

Also a priority is the sustainability and reorientation of activities towards the segments that will be generated with proximity tourism, understood as the antithesis of mass tourism, being the development of tourist activities within the geographical limits between which an individual moves in his regular routine of life, where the tourist experience is prioritized^[18]. This variant implies the application of new social norms and a greater emphasis on endogenous development, with the local population being active agents of their own development^[18].

It is also necessary to take advantage of the de-escalation based on the “new normality” which is leading to the generation of a diversity of protocols that seek to reduce fears of traveling, adapting to the requirements and needs of customers, whose greater caution when deciding how much, where and how to travel can also be temporary (circumstantial) or installed with a vocation of permanence (struc-

tural)^[19]; being important to remember that the tourism sector in recent decades has faced numerous epidemiological crises, MERS (2012-2015), H1N1 (2009) or SARS (2003), the latter being the one that has had the greatest impact on international tourism, before COVID 19^[20]; but each of these have driven the increase of coordinated measures between the UNWTO and the World Health Organization (WHO), through decision making, and control measures.

The adaptation of tourism companies and destinations to the new social and business paradigms that have been generated as a result of the pandemic, where the technification of society through ICTs, motivates substantial changes in the functional structure of the tourism system, starting from public management policies and their impact on each of the elements of tourist destinations^[21].

In the case of Ecuador, the effects caused by COVID 19, have been considerable, the drop in tourism revenues is around 70%, which has generated a massive escalation of layoffs in different tourism companies, such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies^[22], all this product of the cancellations of reservations of hundreds of domestic and foreign tourists, being impossible to hide the reality: all businesses (of all sizes) in all sectors of the economy are feeling the impact of COVID-19^[23], which has also had an impact on social, family and labor structures, generating a duality of positive and negative effects, product of the forced confinement, which has forced many to close businesses, remain unemployed or take advantage of the opportunity to develop ventures, generating new work schemes using the internet or communication platforms^[24].

The reactivation is a process that has slowly begun in Ecuador, since March 17, the government ordered cafeterias and restaurants to operate only through home delivery service, increasing the use of the Delivery service, through: Ubereats, DeliveryEc, Glovo, Rappi, Tipti, Mercadito, etc.; Faced with the emergency orders have increased by 1300% in the three cities where Tipti is present (Quito, Guayaquil

and Cuenca)^[25], in several of these aseptis standards are applied, such as the use of mask, glove, gel.

Taking the UNWTO premises on the reactivation of the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (MINTUR) has set as one of its priorities the recovery of domestic tourism, starting from rural destinations near the cities^[26], to subsequently enable combined products with Peru and Colombia. Similarly, as of May 22, it presented the biosecurity protocols for the reopening of tourist lodging establishments, which outline the protocols for the arrival of clients, the measures for lodging, cleaning and disinfection, as well as the protection measures to be followed by the personnel.

Unfortunately in Ecuador, technological innovation has not been able to take off, despite having a National System of Science, Technology and Innovation, it has not yet made the "leap", according to experts, towards the third phase of scientific-technological development^[27].

The new socio-economic environment produced by COVID 19, found a public tourism sector with serious financing problems, for promotion and international dissemination; and a private sector, with problems of cash flow, financing, planning; these limitations has generated that the country has a dramatic decline in the ranking of global tourism competitiveness, going from 57th to 70th place^[28].

Portoviejo, capital of the province of Manabí, is the sixth most populated city in Ecuador, after the earthquake of April 2016, the city began a process of reconstruction, in different areas and sectors of the city. As of October 30, 2019, it was declared a creative city by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the field of gastronomy, in recognition of the traditional culinary diversity, underpinned by the declaration of traditional Manabí cuisine as intangible cultural heritage of Ecuador.

The cantonal Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD), has emphasized within its planning to road, productive support, electricity and security,

as post-earthquake priorities, since despite the launch of the Agenda Portoviejo digital city 2015-2019, which sought to reduce exclusion and the digital divide, where smart dimensions were prioritized in the so-called digital territory model prioritizing infrastructure, the government in line with thematic and productive axes^[29], it has not been possible its implementation.

New trends based on technology facilitate the management of tourism activities, allowing the public sector to know trends, needs and expectations of tourists and to adequately apply market intelligence, facilitating management, integration, control and decision making; but the limitations that Portoviejo has are based on the poor technological infrastructure and the limited application of information technologies in the tourism sector in its management.

Innovation has generated new models of tourism business management based on 2.0 environments and linked to the professionalization of distribution tools, based on the so-called collaborative tourism (sharing economy), examples of which are Airbnb, Kayak, among others; in addition, the new tourism segments are characterized by demanding flexible and more personalized products and services, aimed at improving their competitiveness; But the tourism sector of Portoviejo, maintains an infrastructure, which, despite being renovated after the earthquake of 2016, its management is not adapted to the needs of this new demand; Portoviejo like many cities in the country, promotes services that in many cases are isolated, there are very few tourism products that have been developed based on the needs of actual and potential demand, this due to the absence of data, which facilitates the understanding and generation of new offerings.

In addition, the new trends of digital tourism marketing, based on the creation of new experiences (experiential tourism), based on the needs of the tourist (emotional marketing) to connect with their customers, where automation is maximized, leaving aside the CRM [Customer relationship management] that allowed to manage the commercial, marketing

and after-sales, for tools based on artificial intelligence; which are able to manage a greater amount of customer data, facilitating a greater and better segmentation and customer loyalty; supported by social networks, which allow a more direct and closer communication with customers, through which you can communicate promotions, discounts.

2. Methodology

The present review work is qualitative in nature due to the fact that said method allows giving an interpretation of the case study by the researcher with his opinions based on the evidence obtained in this case, from the extensive bibliographic material consulted^[30]. Likewise, the type of exploratory research is taken as a basis from the knowledge of the object of study, due to the approach made to a new topic for the area of sciences surrounding tourism and of high incidence worldwide. The methods used are related to the analysis and synthesis of the processed information (analytical-synthetic). A review of specialized literature, case studies based on non-conventional research methodologies, environments and analytical approaches was carried out.

The activities have been focused in the first place, to carry out a systematic review and synthesis of the existing literature, with this an approach to the state of the art has been made, related to the central theme, in this case the ITD and its conceptual components. For this work we have taken as a reference in the first instance various studies that contemplate the relationship between tourism and technological innovation, the effects of the pandemic on tourism, smart destinations and tourism development initiatives in the city of Portoviqjo, among other works that helped to direct the review.

The search for information has been developed through the main databases of journals and digital repositories, both national and international, some of which are listed below: Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct, Scielo, Redalyc, Latindex, Google Académico or Dialnet, among others, in which a se-

ries of articles published with anonymous peer review have been generated^[31]; to which consultations in web pages related to the gastronomic tourism theme have been added.

For the classification of the information, the multi-step methodology proposed in Avraham^[32,33] was used. This methodology proposes a thorough review of specialized literature, news reports from official agencies and a mapping of actors in the territory, to collect first-hand information, in this case the first part has been used. These experiences have been organized in structured files with a homogeneous format, to facilitate their analysis and comparison of contents.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The technological innovation

Under a generalized perspective of study, technological innovation (TI) appears as a complex system^[34]. Innovation is defined under four classifications: product, process, organizational and marketing innovation; the first type of innovation refers to significant changes in product or service characteristics, the second to new production and distribution methods, the third to the implementation of new organizational methods and the fourth to new marketing methods^[35]. Innovation involves not only what to do but also how to do it to achieve materialization from ideas to business^[36]. In this sense, it should be considered that not all innovators have a clear idea of innovation in different sectors, for this reason its implementation has not had the expected results^[37].

The Oslo Manual^[36] collects the most general criteria for the measurement of innovation from a national perspective, and introduces two types of innovations: radical (based on the total change or introduction of a new method in any of the dimensions exposed) and incremental (consists of improving methods in any of the dimensions without completely replacing the existing technology), determined the measurement indicators under the nature of its impact, expenses and diffusion. However, the

growth of innovation has been polarized under the nature of technology development.

In Latin America, IT should be measured by its technological capabilities; in the Bogota Manual, Jaramillo et al.^[38] point out that "there is a body of ideas of relatively wide diffusion, which assumes that technological innovation activities are concentrated in developed countries (DCs) and their result is the creation of technologies incorporated in production capacity. The speed at which the technological process is evolving makes innovations obsolete in a short period of time^[39]. According to BAI (innovation agency) "the globalization of markets and the development of the digital network have definitively transformed the value that companies attribute to information, today more strategic than ever, given their need to make coherent, accurate and differentiated

proposals". This has made IT support essential for business competitiveness management.

3.2. Technological innovation in intelligent tourist destinations

Innovation must be promoted from each of the sectors, as indicated in the management model of technological innovation for the development of tourism in a territory, proposed by Vera et al.^[37] (see **Figure 1**), which considers the result of tourism management from an intelligent perspective. This model gathers the four dimensions (product, process, organization and marketing) proposed in the Oslo Manual^[40] and contrasts its management dynamics from the public, private and community spheres, based on the interaction with the demand before, during and after the visit.

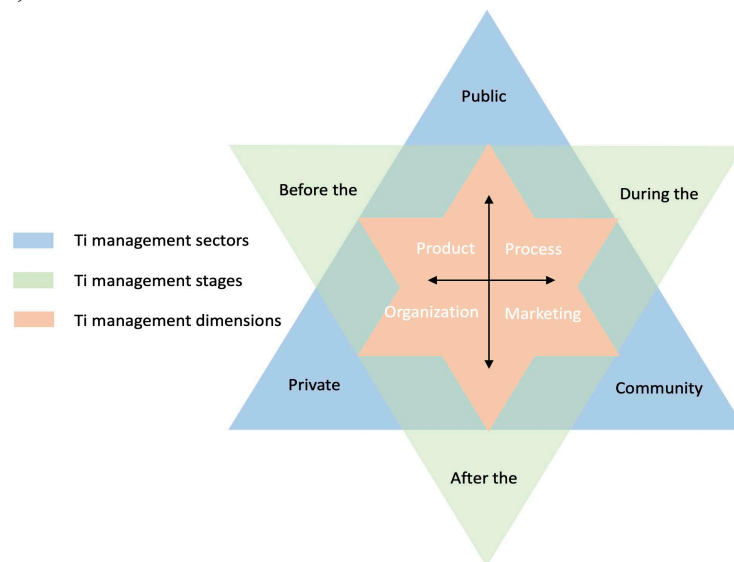


Figure 1. Star model for IT management.

Source: Vera et al.^[37]

Although this model offers a clear perspective of the elements involved in tourism management with a focus on innovation, there could be gaps, in terms of their interaction dynamics, or of technological elements that are indispensable for their operation. Hjalager^[41] points out that tourism has been an activity characterized by its immersion in the field of innovation. From this perspective, Cosma et al. add that technological innovation in tourism should be analyzed as a permanent and dynamic process.

This raises the need to analyze potential tourism territories under the perspective of ITDs, in order to better understand what IT consists of in the framework of tourism with a smart approach. In this context, an ITD is an innovative space consolidated based on the territory and a cutting-edge technological infrastructure^[42]. For Luque et al.^[43], smart tourism destinations should promote smart territorial development. In this framework, Celdrán Bernabéu, Mazón López, and Giner Sánchez highlights the importance of the internet and the rapid

evolution of ICTs for information management in ITDs, and the planification and management of smart cities and destinations in the 21st century.

Advances in connectivity, the irruption of web 2.0, the growing use of mobile devices and social networks has led to an enormous impact on tourism, being one of the sectors that has changed most profoundly. According to the UNWTO (as cited in Vera & Rodney^[44]) the opportunities for sustainable development, converge with technological advances. In this context, Vera and Rodney^[44] point out that “at present the closest thing to building a technological innovation system within a tourism destination, is partially reflected in the technological characteristics of smart tourism destinations (ITD)”.

3.3. The covid-19 pandemic and its impact on tourism.

The coronavirus disease started in 2019 (COVID-19) is a virus that originated in China in the city of Wuhan at the end of 2019, evidenced by the appearance of patients with respiratory infection. Cases were increasing rapidly in the epicenter city of the new Coronavirus, spreading throughout the province of Hubei and in some localities of the Asian country of China. As the days passed, the virus began to have a global reach, being declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020^[45].

The degree of connotation and lack of control of the disease worldwide occurred because most countries saw in the appearance of the new Coronavirus a disease that would be positioned only in China, which caused many nations not to take the corresponding measures to carry out sanitary and biosecurity controls in their ports, airports and border crossings, which led to thousands of infected and dead people not only in China but worldwide. The virus moved from continent to continent, starting in Asia and Oceania, passing through Europe, then America and finally cases were reported in African countries.

As in June 13, 2020, the coronavirus had infected more than 7.7 million people, of which the number of deaths from the virus reached 429,000 worldwide. The United States is the country with the highest number of infected people and more than 115,000 deaths, followed by Brazil with 850,000 infected people and more than 42,000 deaths. In third place is Russia with more than half a million infected. The other countries on the list with the highest number of infected people are India, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Peru, Germany, Iran, Turkey, France, Chile, Mexico, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia^[46]. The rate of infected and dead varies from country to country depending on the degree of restrictions and confinement to which it has subjected its population, the hospital capacity and medical services, the early or late measures taken to close border crossings and ports, the amount of COVID-19 testing to which it has subjected its residents, among other factors.

The pandemic has brought accelerated changes in various aspects of people globally, including those related to economic activities. There has been evidence of a precipitous entry into force of changes in habits and that, in the conditions of social isolation and confinement, has led to an unexpected acceleration. One such change has been the shift from analog to digital processes, which changes the landscape of economic and social reality. The financial system of several countries is being tested after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and as a result of the paralysis of most economic activities, there is a high unemployment rate and a wave of companies that begin to go bankrupt, evidenced in many of the people and companies unpaid debts that begin to accumulate for several months^[47]. The uncertainty in the economic and financial sector in all countries has led to a decrease in trade, given the sanitary restrictions on the loading and unloading of goods in ports around the world. Another indicator of the serious world crisis is the decrease in the economies of the main nations of the world, mainly in Latin America. Due to the large number of people who have suffered from the loss of their jobs, governments have been forced to provide social assistance, which has led to cuts in budgetary expenditures, with public investment

suffering the greatest consequences, in order to redirect them to health care.

Tourism is one of the economic sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced airports to close their facilities, grounding planes, and consequently resulting in hotel closures and travel restrictions to practically all countries in the world. The UNWTO details in its executive summary of the barometer as of May 2020, a decrease of 67 million international tourist arrivals and resulting in losses of around USD 80 billion. Likewise, it is estimated that between 100 and 120 million jobs are at risk^[16]. Most of the job losses are due to the closure and bankruptcy of airlines, travel agencies, tour operators and tourist accommodations, which have been affected by the closure of airports and mobility restrictions.

By world regions, Asia and the Pacific, has been the first region to suffer the impact of the pandemic, registering a 35% decline in arrivals during the first quarter of 2020, followed by Europe with a 19% decline, followed by the Americas with 15%, Africa with 12% and finally the Middle East with 11% decline^[16]. The order of the appearance of the virus in the different regions of the world is similar to the different percentages in terms of the drop in tourist arrivals, with the first countries to suffer the effect of the pandemic having to close their airports and ports in the first instance, while in the countries that did not report having been infected, tourist operations continued without major complications.

In view of this, the UNWTO points to various scenarios caused by the pandemic. One of them is that domestic demand will recover faster than international demand, due to flight restrictions to destinations outside the borders of each country, changes in visa issuance policies, the request for documents proving the absence of COVID-19, among others. International demand is expected to recover in the fourth quarter and especially in 2021^[16]. In view of this scenario, many countries have focused their advertising campaigns on encouraging domestic or local tourism so that their fellow citizens can visit the

tourist attractions in each of their countries, and tourism development plans have had to be refocused so that they can be aligned with the new normality resulting from the pandemic.

The future scenarios depend on the reopening of the borders, taking into account that if they are reopened at the beginning of July the interannual variation will conclude with a 58% decline with respect to 2019, if it is done at the beginning of September, the panorama will end with a 70% decline and if a third scenario is taken into account in which the borders are reopened in the first days of December the decline will end in 78%^[16]. In spite of what the UNWTO has described, different airlines supported by governmental entities have carried out return flights for their fellow citizens, thus allowing a respite in the economy of many of the airlines, and also, for the month of June the first domestic flights are reported in several countries due to the slowdown in the rate of contagion.

Summarizing the potential impacts in 2020, it is foreseen that there will be losses of between 910,000 and 1.2 trillion USD in tourism export revenues and finally between 100 and 120 million direct tourism jobs will be threatened^[16]. The data presented above oblige the different tourism stakeholders to generate proposals, methodologies and solutions that can be applied in the short, medium and long term so that millions of people can continue in the activity and tourism destinations can recover from the sharp declines that have occurred.

As part of the proposals for the recovery of tourism activity, experts, businessmen, academics and people related to the tourism sector have proposed solutions to be addressed in order to reactivate this economic activity, which is reflected in the portal of the Inter-University Network of Graduate Studies in Tourism, which shows a compilation of studies and forums where different aspects and solutions for tourism are discussed worldwide^[48].

3.4. Economic effects caused by COVID-19 in Ecuador

Ecuador is one of the countries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America, with a total of 46,356 confirmed cases and 3,874 deaths reported as of April 13, 2020^[49]. The province of Guayas is the province with the highest number of infections with 14,626 confirmed cases, followed by the province of Pichincha with 5,185 infected and the third province with the third highest number of confirmed cases, Manabí, with 3,248 infected persons^[49]. At the beginning of April, Ecuador was the epicenter of the world news when the large number of infected people became known, especially in the province of Guayas, having its epicenter in the city of Guayaquil, where international media reported the number of people who could not receive medical attention due to the saturation of hospitals, as well as many more who died in the streets and homes without being picked up by municipal or state forensic entities.

The arrival of the pandemic in Ecuador further deepened the serious economic crisis that the country had been experiencing since October 2019, finding a country in debt and without sufficient resources to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic, which added to the mandatory confinement, the stagnation of production and insufficient e-commerce, plus the fall of oil, resulted in a considerable number of people losing their jobs, forcing the Ecuadorian State to assist the population that had no resources to subsist. Despite state efforts to encourage companies not to lay off their workers, many employers relied on the legal figure of “force majeure dismissal” or declared bankruptcy. As of May 4, 2020, 508,000 people were reported to have requested unemployment insurance due to the closure of companies because they found themselves, after several days of low commercial activity, without cash flow to pay their employees. Several companies have reduced their workers’ salaries by 25 to 50%, these measures being a palliative to avoid closing services. In total, Ecuador’s productive sector has lost close to 10 billion USD, being the trigger for companies to declare bankruptcy and lay off people^[50].

The effects of the pandemic on the Ecuadorian

economy are also felt by tourism activity, which, according to data presented by the Minister of Tourism Rosi Prado de Holguín, in the month of March the sector’s losses exceeded 250 million USD, taken by the actual billing data of the Internal Revenue Service (SRI). In contrast, Holbach Muñetón, president of the National Federation of Ecuadorian Chambers of Tourism, estimates that losses in the tourism sector exceed USD 640 million^[51]. It is also estimated that 2020 will have a reduction in income of around 70% compared to 2019 in the tourism sector. On the other hand, the National Federation of Provincial Chambers of Ecuador (Fenacaptur) estimates that tourism activity in Ecuador will begin its recovery from March 2021, when the fears of the pandemic begin to dissipate and there is a greater desire to travel^[22]. For now, in the third week of June, the first domestic flights are being scheduled to help reactivate domestic tourism, in addition to the fact that the country’s land terminals are offering the opening of routes between cities that have more flexible restrictions given the decrease in reported cases in each of the cantons.

The panorama of lodging and catering establishments in Ecuador is critical, with the common denominator being the reduction of workers, in the case of hotels that were left with 80 of the 500 employees they had before the pandemic. In other cases, such as in the catering industry, they had to reduce the number of employees on their payroll because home deliveries did not compensate for the sales they had before the arrival of COVID-19 in Ecuador^[22]. An alternative to reduce economic losses for some of the lodging establishments has been the link to the program proposed by MINTUR, allowing Ecuadorians returning from abroad to perform the Mandatory Preventive Isolation (APO) in their rooms^[52].

Restaurants and nightlife centers registered a 63% drop in March and April compared to the same period of 2019^[52]. In view of this, restaurants have taken alternatives to reduce economic losses through home delivery of food and beverages either through telephone communication, social networks or through mobile applications. Likewise, many food

companies have been able to leverage delivery companies such as Globo, Uber Eats, Rappi, among others. On the contrary, nightlife centers have not had the opportunity to recover economically due to mobility restrictions which prevented citizens from concentrating especially at night or in groups of more than 10 people.

Tourism professionals have been most impacted by the effects of the pandemic on their jobs. A study conducted by the Central University of Ecuador together with the Network of Tourism Professionals of Pichincha^[53], shows that the impact suffered is significant given that 7 out of 10 professionals surveyed stated that they do not have a permanent job in tourism, either due to suspension of work activity or due to termination of employment or unemployment.

The crisis caused by COVID-19 in Ecuador has generated debates of opinion and research which have been taken to the MINTUR working groups for the economic reactivation of the sector. The topics addressed by each of the roundtables were: quantification of the economic and labor impact; tax and credit areas; competitiveness; promotion and cooperation; and territorial development. These working groups were made up of MINTUR technicians and representatives of the different trade associations^[54]. As a result of the work carried out in the specialized roundtables, biosafety protocols have been developed for food and beverage establishments^[55], as well as for tourist lodging establishments^[56]. Similarly, a publicity campaign has been developed to encourage Ecuadorians to revisit their tourist attractions after the end of the health emergency, in order to reactivate domestic tourism and boost local economies^[57].

At the same time, academic institutions have developed proposals for the reactivation of the tourism sector as presented in the document 150 proposals for action for destinations, companies and professionals with a view to the regeneration of tourism in times of crisis, which proposes guidelines before, during and after events that seriously impact the

activity. Among the proposals to be considered post-event, emphasis is given to sustainability, marketing, governance and public policy, community, consumers, rationalization and opportunities, and the development or revision of crisis management plans. On the other hand^[58] identify a series of codes related to strategies oriented to the recovery of tourism income, oriented on the one hand to the authorities and on the other hand to the entrepreneurs of the sector.

3.5. Portoviejo and its declaration as a UNESCO Creative City (Gastronomy)

The development of gastronomic tourism in Ecuador is reflected in the scientific literature mostly through studies of tourist satisfaction with the tourism product, so there is not enough information resulting from the analysis of the gastronomy-tourism interrelationship^[59]. For Sánchez & López^[60] Ecuadorian gastronomy has been enriched by the multiculturalism, the diversity of climates, as well as the variety of spices and products that exist in the country. Despite this, there are very few value-added tourism products related to gastronomy that can promote organized visits to the territory on their own. The gastronomic potential lies in the internal tourist that fluctuates between various regions of the country in their periods of rest, the climatic diversity and the small territorial extension of the country play a preponderant role for the existence of a gastronomic variety little exploited. Thanks to this, throughout the country we find very well-known gastronomic zones, which in the present work are called gastronomic corridors, due to their physical characteristics and socio-productive environment. This concept is becoming more and more important for the promotion of these gastronomic resources in favor of tourism.

In Manabí - Ecuador, the productive activity remains well below the basic levels for the sustenance of their families, as well as for the generation of additional resources, due to the little added value in agriculture, since it is a purely agricultural province. Consequently, the food service sector experiences the same lack of innovation as the production, com-

mercialization and marketing processes, despite having a good image at the national level, which promotes it as the best cuisine in the country. According to Basurto, after their study focused on the capital of the province of Manabí, by analyzing the situation of rural parishes, it was possible to determine that they are in capacity and have the potential to be part of specialized tourism products in gastronomy, taking advantage of their condition to combine with natural and scenic resources.

Portovijó's gastronomy made this city and capital of Manabí enter the list of Creative Cities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization^[61]. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network was created in 2004 to promote cooperation towards and among cities that identify creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development^[62]. This important declaration is related to the great potential developed around its gastronomic resources. To consolidate its tourism development, the initiative is carried out to strengthen the tourist destination using technology and innovation, what better way than based on a model of intelligent tourism management, Portovijó UNESCO Creative City and Intelligent Tourism Destination (ITD).

4. Conclusion

The review of the scientific literature showed that there is a very generalized and complex perspective on IT that implies not only the action of doing, but also how to do it (know-how). However, there is a widespread concept in the field of IT research, which establishes it as an essential element in the management of companies' competitiveness.

TI in tourism, is defined as a permanent and dynamic process that must be managed from each of the sectors (public, private and community) that intervene on a territory, taking as areas of measurement the tourism product, the production process of tourism services, organization and marketing, which must be evaluated in three basic stages: before, during and after the visit as proposed by Vera, et al^[37].

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely hit the

world economy, and has brought with it accelerated changes in processes, which have even modified even the way in which human beings relate to their social environment for the purpose of mandatory confinement, one of these changes is observed in the transformation from analog to digital processes, changing the panorama of the economic and social reality of countries. In this sense, the UNWTO points to tourism as one of the most affected by the ravages caused by the pandemic and predicts domestic tourism as the one that will have the earliest resilience. In Ecuador, the COVID-19, further evidenced the deep crisis that the country was experiencing, without sufficient resources to cope with the pandemic that caused the stagnation of production, coupled with insufficient e-commerce and the fall of oil, and that in the context of tourism resulted in the closure of establishments and massive job losses.

It is necessary to strengthen tourism initiatives from the territory, therefore the declaration of Portovijó as a UNESCO creative city (gastronomy) entails several changes so that it can be optimally exploited by local authorities. The ITDs offer the appropriate tools for the evolution of the destination, whatever the concept or guiding principle, in this case gastronomy. Joint work between academia and local government promotes interaction between public and private actors, initiating roundtable dialogues that contribute to the creation of solid structures that facilitate data collection and consensual decision making, resulting in the business development of the destination, the creation of new tourism products, access to data and new flows of visitors.

It is necessary to deepen in the obtaining of results from the theories consulted, intelligent tourist destinations are a development strategy, not only for the tourist activity, but also for the local society where it is developed. There are several methodologies and a long list of indicators that must be evaluated in the field to obtain an initial diagnosis of the territory, in this case the Creative City of Portoviejo, these indicators are framed in the five basic pillars of the ITD such as governance, technology, accessibility, innovation and sustainability. From here, inter-

institutional strategies for implementation in the territory should be proposed that will allow for the evaluation over time of the evolution of these indicators and therefore of the ITD.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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