



Post-pandemic comparative analysis between the health crisis and the public policies of the Playas Canton-Ecuador.

Análisis comparativo post pandemia entre la crisis sanitaria y las políticas públicas del Cantón Playas-Ecuador.

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Abstract.

Faced with the crisis triggered by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the global economy faced an unprecedented collapse, affecting both economic and social aspects. In Latin America and the Caribbean, fundamental sectors such as tourism suffered a significant paralysis. According to data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the influx of international tourists worldwide decreased drastically, suggesting a gradual reactivation of the sector. Ecuador, among the most affected countries, experienced an alarming increase in cases of contagion, ranking second in terms of mortality after Brazil. The objective of this research is to analyze the post-pandemic situation, comparing the health crisis with the public policies implemented in the Playas Canton, one of the main tourist destinations in the Province of Guayas, for which the following method was applied: i) Analysis of the socio-economic indicators applied to the national and international tourism sector, ii) Analysis of the case study and application of surveys to tourist centers in the Playas Canton in two moments, and iv) Inferences about affected indicators. The results obtained lead us to reflect on whether the bad situation that the Ecuadorian tourism sector is going through is the result of the pandemic or public policy.

Keywords.

post pandemic, tourism sector, health crisis, public policy.

Resumen.

Frente a la crisis desencadenada por la pandemia del SARS-CoV-2, la economía global enfrentó un colapso sin precedentes, afectando tanto aspectos económicos como sociales. En América Latina y el Caribe, sectores fundamentales como el turismo sufrieron una paralización significativa. Según datos de la Organización Mundial del Turismo (OMT), la afluencia de turistas internacionales a nivel mundial disminuyó drásticamente, lo que sugiere una reactivación gradual del sector. Ecuador, entre los países más afectados, experimentó un aumento alarmante de casos de contagio, ubicándose en el segundo lugar en términos de mortalidad después de Brasil. La presente investigación tiene como objetivo analizar la situación post-pandemia, comparando la crisis sanitaria con las políticas públicas implementadas en el Cantón Playas, uno de los destinos turísticos principales de la Provincia del Guayas, para lo cual se aplicó el siguiente método: i) Análisis de los indicadores socio-económicos aplicados al sector turístico nacional e internacional, ii) Análisis del caso de estudio y aplicación de encuestas a centros turísticos del Cantón Playas en dos momentos, y, iv) Inferencias sobre indicadores afectados. Los resultados obtenidos conllevan a reflexionar si la mala situación que atraviesa el sector turístico ecuatoriano es el resultado de la pandemia o de política pública.

Palabras clave.

post pandemia, sector turístico, crisis sanitaria, política pública.

1. Introduction.

At the end of 2019, Wuhan Municipality in Hubei Province, China, reported several cases of pneumonia with unknown etymology, by January 9, 2020, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention identified a new coronavirus as the cause of this outbreak. On January 30, 2020, with more than 7,700 confirmed cases in China and 82 confirmed cases among 18 countries, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, following the recommendations of the Emergency

Committee of the International Health Regulations. In March 2020, WHO determined SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) to be a global pandemic [1].

SARS-CoV-2, paralyzed several key sectors of the Latin American and Caribbean economy, such as tourism. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the number of international tourists worldwide will decrease between 58% and 78% by 2020 [2]. In this context, the Círculo de Estudios Latinoamericanos (CESLA) points out that Ecuador in May

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showed 579,783 suspended workers and as of July 3 increased to 705,424, that is to say, more than 100,000 inactive people. 37.58% in Pichincha and 30.62% in Guayas [3].

The Playas Canton is the only seaside resort in the Guayas Province, it has an exceptional climate and welcomes national and international tourists all year round, its economy is based on tourism and fishing, about 2,500 families depend on tourism. Playas has 57,817 inhabitants, in mid-March there were 6 deaths per day due to the virus, registering 174 deaths at the peak of the pandemic, previously the average was four deaths per month [4].

According to the report of the cantonal Emergency Operations Center (COE) and after the results obtained by performing rapid tests in the population of Playas Canton at the end of May, 86% of the population was not infected with the virus (49,020 people), while the remaining 14% equivalent to 7,980 people were carriers of the virus; of these, 31% (2,474 people) were asymptomatic patients [5].

The objective of this research is to carry out a comparative post-pandemic analysis between the health crisis and public policies in Playas Canton, Ecuador. To achieve this objective, qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional research design, the type of research is descriptive, which will help to analyze the social and economic effects in Playas Canton, using data collection instruments such as a survey, semi-structured interviews, observation sheets and photographic record of the area.

The results obtained lead to infer that, in the year 2022, the factors that had the greatest impact on the economic aspect were those related to income and unemployment, barely different with one digit from the pandemic year, what we can deduce with this item is that before the pandemic and after the pandemic, the economic situation has not improved. In the social aspect were health and education, what can be highlighted is that although it is true that the opening to social contact was opened, the health issue did not improve, but the situation of education had a better projection.

1.1 Literature review.

In order to carry out the post-pandemic comparative analysis between the health crisis and public policies, it is necessary to address the issue of "local development" which, among other elements, is the set of relationships and productive, commercial and employment links relevant to explain the productive efficiency and competitiveness of the economic base of a given territory, which does not necessarily coincide with the administrative boundaries of a municipality or province. Local development has a territorial perspective and has an upward "bottom-up" trend; it requires the participation of public authorities (municipal,

provincial and national) that simplify the success of territorial development objectives and strategies [6].

Local development is not limited exclusively to local economic development; it is an integrated approach in which the environmental, cultural, socio-institutional, labor and human development aspects of the respective territorial area must also be considered [6, 5].

On the other hand, socioeconomic development factors are those that measure the progress of a population, its level of equality and the cohesion that exists among its inhabitants. These factors are indicators that make it possible to make proposals for decision making, mainly in economic and social aspects, which allows the integral development of the population to be favored. Figure 1 shows the dimensions considered for the research, which were obtained from the databases of the National Institute of Statistics and Census [7]. Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion [8].

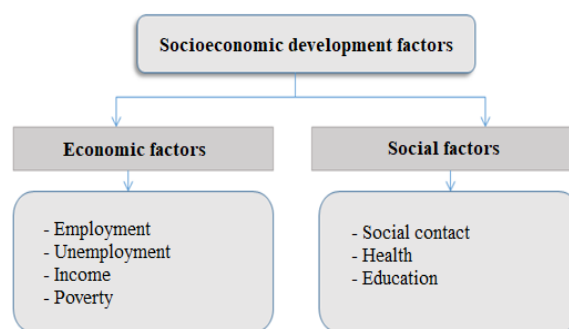


Figure 1. Factors that measure Socioeconomic Development

Economic development is a predominant factor in the satisfaction levels of a country or region, as it is closely linked to improving stability indices and human development. Economists have discovered that the determining factors of economic development are based on four axes: human resources, natural resources, capital, and technology [9].

Human capital, currently referred to as human resources, comprises a cornerstone in economic development and requires priority attention to maintain an optimal level of efficiency. Investments in human capital are a source of growth and well-being, substantially contributing to economic growth and the productivity of the economy as a complement to contributions from fixed capital investment [10]. This way, we can understand the importance of human resources in a country's economic development.

On the other hand, human capital is considered a conditioning factor for the development and success of an economy. In other words, an economy that intends to progress must adequately attend to human capital by providing health, security, and quality education [11].



Natural resources are materials existing in the natural environment that are scarce and economically useful in production or consumption, either in raw form or after having undergone minimal processing [9]. The following are the factors that were considered to analyze the economic situation of the sector:

First, we have "employment," which according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the generation of productive jobs is key to promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and increasing social cohesion. Employment is the main tool for fighting poverty and dignifying human beings by providing a decent source of income. A person will be able to foster the country's economic growth and increase their personal quality of life, accessing better life opportunities such as education, health, housing, and thus increase their level of satisfaction and personal improvement, which will be reflected in human development indices [12].

The International Labour Organization (ILO) points out that improving access to quality jobs can result in increased income and contribute to achieving more cohesive and equitable societies. Creating better quality jobs is essential to achieve the world we desire. The cohesion of societies is one of the fundamental tasks of governments, which is achieved through correct legislation and public policies that help the population to obtain decent employment, which dignifies the human being, increasing their level of satisfaction and therefore their production, thus creating a more powerful economic engine in which both the state and the population benefit [13].

On the other hand, "unemployment" is a limiting condition in a country's development, as high unemployment rates prevent providing the population with dignified living conditions and raising social welfare. This is one of the most concerning economic phenomena as it causes slow growth, decreased employment rates, and economic recession, affecting the most vulnerable economic sectors of the economy [14].

Maintaining low unemployment rates is important for a government as it allows for providing more stability to the population, which represents a lower fiscal burden for the government since there will not be a high demand for social services from the population. In the current conditions, fighting unemployment represents a real battle for governments around the world, especially for Latin American ones, as the current health crisis caused by COVID-19, plus the social restrictions imposed to contain the virus, undermines the conditions for safe and stable employment.

In the last 10 months, labor markets in Latin America and the Caribbean have regressed at least 10 years, and the crisis is far from over. We arrive in 2021 with employment in

intensive care, and with the difficult but unavoidable mission of laying the foundations for a new and better normality [13]. In Ecuador, unemployment significantly affects the country, as when there are no job opportunities, people opt to employ themselves by carrying out informal activities that do not represent dignified conditions or adequate social benefits [14].

The National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) places adequate employment at 30.8%; underemployment at 22.7%; unpaid employment at 12.2%; other non-full employment at 28.4%; and unemployment at 5%. These statistics show that unemployment in Ecuador has been increasing since 2019, and the underemployment rate has likewise increased, revealing that Ecuador currently does not provide adequate conditions for decent employment, allowing inadequate living conditions to be established in the country [7].

In this same sense, "income" is a means that allows achieving valuable achievements for human development; considering the interpersonal variations of the individual, determined by their capacity to convert these means into acceptably expected results [15]. Income inequality creates gaps between populations; it is the duty of governments and their Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GADs) to create policies so that these gaps are not so prominent. This could be shortened by providing the most vulnerable population with the necessary tools to be able to have the capacity to fight for similar incomes regardless of their economic condition.

High levels of inequality are undesirable due to the effects they have on society: restrictions on development and economic growth, problems of crime and violence, greater polarization, and less social cohesion [16]. The greater the income inequality in a country, the more visible the social gaps that manifest in that society will be. For this reason, governments or municipalities must issue laws and norms that guarantee providing the most needy with the necessary tools so that they, with education, health, and work, can shorten these gaps and thus contribute to the country's growth.

Another factor to consider is "poverty." In the context of development, this implies the need to eliminate deprivations of freedom, including poverty itself. Poverty is not only related to low income but also to the lack of opportunities. It not only indicates that a person lacks sufficient purchasing power, but it also acts as an anchor that keeps countries in underdevelopment and prevents them from achieving full development. A country with high levels of poverty cannot be considered developed [17].

The effects of poverty on those who suffer from it and on the societies that endure it affect people's lives and health, their well-being, and their security. The poor often see their



most basic rights affected and usually do not have an audible voice in the political arena. Hence, their interests are often not taken into account even in a democratic context. The fight against poverty is also a fight against social exclusion in favor of the meaning of democracy, which is to listen to the people's needs and give them the tools they need to move forward because as long as this doesn't happen, poverty will continue to devour societies, plunging them into misery and social decline [18].

On the other hand, social development seeks the participation of citizens within a society in which they can develop, acquire skills, and flow in synergy with their peers. Social development promotes the inclusion of the poor and vulnerable by empowering people, creating cohesive and resilient societies, and improving the accessibility and accountability of institutions to citizens. Thus, we can understand that social development seeks the inclusion and well-being of society [19].

When referring to social development, we also refer to the fact of seeking to increase the level of personal satisfaction of a group of people in relation to the environment in which they live. This is a fundamental duty of the State or Municipality that governs them, which must provide the necessary conditions for this to be fulfilled through laws, campaigns, social programs, and even the provision of fundamental services such as quality basic services that can guarantee the adequate living of the population.

One of the factors that has been considered to measure social development is "social contact," which consists of moving away from crowded and restricted places, limiting interaction between people by taking a certain physical distance or avoiding direct contact between them [20].

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that social distancing is one of the everyday preventive measures that should be taken together to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which include wearing masks [21]. Global, regional, and national health organizations have found social distancing to be their most effective measure to fight against this condition. Reducing social contact helps to improve contagion rates, keeping the epidemiological curve more controlled.

Another indicator considered in the research is "health," considered as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" [22] in health, not only the physical well-being of the individual is sought, but also their mental and social well-being in order to affirm that that person possesses a full state of health. Public Health is defined as a very important governmental and social activity, of a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature, that extends to almost all aspects of society [23].

Public health is one of the most important governmental activities of the state since by guaranteeing complete physical, mental, and social well-being of the population, it increases levels of social stability and economic production. According to Cardona [24], public health is the science and art of preventing illnesses and disabilities, prolonging life, and promoting physical and mental health and efficiency through organized community efforts to sanitize the environment, control infectious and non-infectious diseases.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) expresses that "education" is one of the main rights that the population should enjoy as it will allow their personal development, both emotional and moral, in which they will be able to access better life opportunities through the development of their intellectual capacities. In this same sense, it is affirmed that "Education is a human right for all, throughout life, and that access to instruction must be accompanied by quality" [25]. Reinforcing this idea, the United Nations (UN) states that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms [26].

2. Materials and methods.

The pandemic generates significant effects on the economic growth and social development of countries, causing greater inequality and vulnerability that are observed in the growing trends of poverty and extreme poverty. The research is characterized as exploratory and descriptive, as it describes the causes of the problem and analyzes its possible effects without arriving at causal inferences or association of variables.

The literature exploration was carried out in different databases, highlighting information from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [27], CEPAL [2], and applying the socio-economic variables of INEC [7], and the general statistical indicators of the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) [8], as well as extensive literature from reliable sources such as scientific articles and publications that allowed us to create a timeline regarding the intervening variables, placing special emphasis on the social and economic impact of the sector under analysis.

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In seeking to achieve the stated objective, the following method was applied: i) Analysis of socioeconomic indicators applied to the national and international tourism sector, ii) Analysis of the case study and application of surveys to tourist centers in Cantón Playas in two periods, and, iv) Inferences on affected indicators.

For the analysis of tourism indicators, the UNWTO database was used, where the tourism situation for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 was compared at a global level (see Table 1), and for the Americas and the Caribbean (see Table 2); as well as at the national level (see Table 3). The socio-economic analysis of Cantón Playas was carried out in two periods; the first in 2020, through a non-probabilistic sample selected at the researcher's convenience, choosing five establishments (two hotels and three restaurants) and applying surveys to 85 owners of small tourism businesses. In a second period, in 2022, the questionnaires (semi-structured interviews) were reapplied to the five tourist establishments surveyed in 2020; and surveys were applied to 70 owners of small tourism businesses at the researcher's convenience.

Among the research techniques used, we have the observation sheet, which was related to the description of the social and economic situation of small tourism businesses. Subsequently, a questionnaire was applied, which was previously validated in the 2020 research and subjected to analysis by expert teachers from the University of Guayaquil. For the analysis of results, the SPSS statistical tool was used, which allowed inferences to be made from the information collected.

3. Analysis and Interpretation of Results.

Latin America and the Caribbean face the pandemic from a more difficult position compared to the rest of the world, prior to the pandemic. ECLAC predicted that the region would grow a maximum of 1.3% in 2020. However, the effects of the pandemic have caused this forecast to change, and during the pandemic period, a fall in GDP of around 1.8% is predicted. The final economic impact would be the result of measures taken at national, regional, and global levels [2].

The sectors most affected by social distancing measures and quarantines are service sectors, which depend on interpersonal contact. Among the sectors that suffered the greatest contraction are: commerce, transport, business

services, and social services, which provide 64% of formal employment. Similarly, 53% of employment in the region occurs in informal activities, which were significantly affected [2].

Likewise, the global economy is experiencing an unprecedented economic and social crisis. Many key sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean were paralyzed, such as the tourism sector. The UNWTO considers that the influx of international tourists worldwide decreased between 58% and 78% in 2020 [2], which suggested that the reactivation of the sector would be progressive from 2021. However, as we can observe in Table 1, the recovery of the sector has been very slow and in some cases, such as in Asia and the Pacific, almost non-existent.

Table 1. World Tourism Results

	África	Americas	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Middle East
2020	-75%	-67%	-80%	-66%	-73%
2021	-74%	-62%	-94%	-59%	-71%
2022	-40%	-35%	-86%	-26%	-24%

Source: Own elaboration based on [27]

The regions that have had a significant recovery since 2020 are the Americas, which went from -67% in 2020 to -35% in 2022, and similarly, Europe from -66% in 2020 to -26% in 2022, which confirms the hypothesis that everything would depend mainly on health policy decisions for this sector.

The situation in the Americas and the Caribbean is irregular, as certain regions show a significant recovery, such as Central America, which recovers from -72% in 2020 to -20% in tourist arrivals. The opposite case is South America, which recovers from -66% in 2020 to only -54% in 2022. Even in 2021, as can be observed in Table 2, there is a sharp decline in arrivals of -85%, possibly related to a resurgence in COVID-19 infections.

Table 2. Tourism Results in the Americas and the Caribbean

	North America	The Caribbean	Central America	South America	Regional Total
2020	-68%	-60%	-72%	-66%	-67%
2021	-61%	-35%	-55%	-85%	-62%
2022	-35%	-18%	-20%	-54%	-35%

Source: Own elaboration based on [27]



One of the countries that experienced an uncontrolled and progressive increase in SARS-CoV-2 infections was Ecuador. El Universo newspaper reported that the number of deaths exceeded ten per day, with the highest peak reaching 96 deaths (33 confirmed and 63 probable) on March 30 [28]. The affected parishes were Tarqui 47%, Febres Cordero 20.99%, and Ximena 14.36%. On June 29, Ecuador reached 55,255 positive SARS-CoV-2 cases, according to a report by the Ministry of Public Health, taking data from February 22 to June 28, 2020, with Guayaquil accounting for 18.06% of these (9,981) [28, 29].

Under this scenario, Ecuador in general and the tourism sector, in particular, were significantly affected. As shown in Table 3, in 2020 this sector saw a -76% decline in tourist arrivals, representing a -66% reduction in spending and a -69% drop in income. In the following years, 2021 and 2022, a not very significant recovery was observed, with a -52% decrease in tourist arrivals and a -42% drop in income. It is noteworthy that in 2021, a policy to boost the tourism sector was adopted, which had almost no effect due to the resurgence of the pandemic.

Table 3. Tourism results in Ecuador

	Arrivals	Spending	Income
2020	-76%	-66%	-69%
2021	-68%	2%	-54%
2022	-52%	-20%	-42%

Source: Own elaboration based on [27]

To measure the post-pandemic impact on the Ecuadorian tourism sector, a questionnaire was applied in two periods, in 2020 and in 2022, to one of the sectors with the most projection and tourism growth, such as Cantón Playas in the Province of Guayas-Ecuador.

4. Discussion.

To carry out this research, in 2020 a structured questionnaire was administered, designed to collect data on social and economic variables, to a sample of 85 employees in the tourism sector. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the owners of five tourist establishments, including restaurants and hotels, in order to obtain a deeper and qualitative perspective. This mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, allowed for a comprehensive assessment of labor and economic dynamics in the field of tourism.

The information was analyzed using the statistical tool (SPSS), where the following could be observed in general terms: i) More than 50% of the respondents are male, ranging between 41-50 years old, having a secondary education level and living in the Cantonal Capital, ii) Their

household is made up of between 2 and 4 people, with the majority of cases having no young children, iii) Most of the respondents have not had close contact with a person infected with SARS-CoV-2. iv) In households where there are young children, their care is in charge of a relative between 21 and 30 years old who does not live in the same household, v) It is emphasized that the respondents have had to leave their homes to work, vi) It is interesting to know that 92.2% are independent employees who are mostly dedicated to tourist service activities including accommodation and food services; bars, entertainment and recreation as well as dining rooms, followed by beach activities such as renting tents, parasols, hammocks and selling crafts, vii) These independent employees belong to associations of tourism service providers who have spent the months of pandemic with their savings, decreased their income and had no monthly income in the last six months, before the pandemic the monthly income was 1–500 dollars, viii) The impact in terms of work/business was very significant, they consider that to date they have not fully recovered. As indicated in Figure 2, for the second period (year 2022), the results were as follows:



Figure 2. Socio-economic impact in Cantón Playas

We can observe that the variables used to determine the post-pandemic social and economic impact in the tourism sector were: for economic analysis: employment, unemployment, income, and poverty; and for social analysis: social contact, health, and education. The reference years are 2020 and 2022. A scale of 1 to 10 was used for the graph representation, where 1 is the least impact.

In 2020, the factors that had the most impact on the economic aspect were income level (9) and unemployment (6), while in the social aspect, they were social contact (10) and health (9). As can be seen, during the pandemic, the factor that most influenced the tourism sector was social contact, followed by health-related aspects.



In 2022, the factors with the most impact on the economic aspect are those related to income (8) and unemployment, barely different by one digit from the pandemic year, which we can infer from this item that before and after the pandemic, the economic situation has not improved. In the social aspect, they were health (8) and education (5), which can be inferred that although it is true that the opening to social contact opened up, the health issue did not improve, but the education situation had a better projection. The results obtained lead us to reflect on whether the situation facing the Ecuadorian tourism sector is the result of the pandemic or of the deficient or poor application of public policy.

5. Conclusions.

The crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented event worldwide; in addition to the collapse of world trade, economic and social inequality increased exponentially; manifested in high unemployment rates, considerable decrease in income, high levels of poverty, low educational performance, and problems in public health systems. Ecuador was not exempt from these problems as the pandemic undoubtedly increased these variables and therefore the gap between social classes. In this sense, the present research aimed to analyze the social and economic impact faced by Cantón Playas, one of the main tourist places in the Province of Guayas.

The tourism sector was significantly affected, as demonstrated in the research carried out in the database of [27] where in 2020 this sector decreased by -76% in tourist arrivals, representing -66% in expenses and -69% in income. In the following years 2021 and 2022, there was a not very significant recovery, reaching -52% of tourist arrivals and -42% of income. It is noteworthy that in 2021 a policy to boost the tourism sector was adopted, which had almost no effect due to the rebound of the pandemic.

Taking into account the aforementioned variables, in 2020 the research showed that the factors that had the most impact on the economic aspect were income level and unemployment, while in the social aspect they were social contact and health. In particular, the factor that most influenced the tourism sector was social contact, followed by health-related aspects.

In 2022, the predominant economic factors continued to be income and unemployment, showing only a slight variation compared to the pandemic year, suggesting that the economic situation has not significantly improved before and after the pandemic. Regarding the social aspect, the most important factors were health and education. This indicates that, although social contact has increased, the health situation has not improved, while education has shown a better projection.

This research leads us to consider whether the current situation of the tourism sector in Ecuador is due to the pandemic or to the poor implementation of public policies. It is crucial to continue conducting studies that demonstrate that this variable is the most important for evaluating any uncontrollable event that impacts the country.

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