

# Tourism indicators and their impact on the management of emerging destinations

## Indicadores turísticos y su impacto en la gestión de destinos emergentes

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**Abstract** | Tourism indicator systems are tools to know the real situation of destinations and constitute a reference to promote public policies focused on sustainable development. In destination management, the indicator system helps direct and indirect actors in decision-making. In this context, we present the research done in the city of Loja-Ecuador, whose objective is to analyze the perception that local actors have on the tourism indicator system for its management. To achieve this aim, a panel of experts was held considering the tourist actors, representatives of public and private institutions in the sector. A questionnaire to collect information was used based on three aspects: the system of indicators, multi-sectoral organization and associativity. To sum up, there are positives perceptions of the actors related to the indicators system in the destination to establish strategies and improve management. In addition, the actors state that an organizational structure of the sector will contribute to the strengthening of companies, to local development and will bring them business and business- to-business profits.

**Keywords** | Indicators, associativity, tourism management, emerging destinations

**Resumen** | Los sistemas de indicadores turísticos son herramientas que permiten conocer la situación real de los destinos y constituyen un referente para impulsar políticas públicas enfocadas al desarrollo sostenible. En la gestión de destinos, el sistema de indicadores ayuda a los actores directos e indirectos en la toma de decisiones. En este contexto, presentamos la investigación realizada en la ciudad de Loja-Ecuador, cuyo objetivo es analizar la percepción que tienen los actores locales sobre el sistema de indicadores turísticos para su gestión. Para lograr este objetivo, se realizó un panel de expertos teniendo en cuenta a los actores turísticos, representantes de instituciones públicas y privadas del sector. El cuestionario para recolectar información se utilizó en base a tres aspectos: el sistema de indicadores, la

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organización multisectorial y la asociatividad. En resumen, existen percepciones positivas de los actores relacionados con el sistema de indicadores en el destino para establecer estrategias y mejorar la gestión. Además, los actores afirman que una estructura organizativa del sector contribuirá al fortalecimiento de las empresas, al desarrollo local y les reportará beneficios empresariales y de empresa a empresa.

**Palabras clave** | Indicadores, asociatividad, gestión turística, destinos emergentes

## 1. Introduction

Indicator systems help to determine the impact and sustainability of the management policies and actions developed in the territory (Ferrandis, 2016). In this sense, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2005), defines indicators as "formally selected information sets that are used regularly in the measurement of relevant changes for the development of tourism management tourism"(p.20). (Camacho et al., 2016; Ferrandis, 2016; Pérez & Barreiro, 2019) considered a system of indicators as a fundamental means to establish a dialogue between the actors responsible for the development of destinations and continuously establish sustainable practices.

For its part, in Loja- Ecuador through the tourism observatory of the Private Technical University of Loja generate tourism indicators since 2019. The main objective of this observatory is continuous improvement through the generation of tourist indicators. Based on this, the research focuses on analyzing the perception that tourism actors have of the indicator system and how it impacts inter-company and inter-sector collaborative work in the destination. Knowing the level of importance, usability, and expectations of the tourist actors about the system of indicators in Loja, will provide a measure of the current situation and will allow establishing effective processes of strengthening and implementation of new indicators.

To achieve this purpose, the work had the following aspects: First, the theoretical framework. Second, the methodology used, in this case, a pa-

nel of experts to know the opinion of the representatives of the academy and public and private organizations of the tourism sector in Loja. It also refers to the questionnaire used to collect information. Finally, the results obtained from the panel of experts.

Finally, the main limitations of the work were presented by the health emergency caused by COVID-19. Due to mobility restrictions, closed tourist establishments and organizations, and the biosafety protocols established in Loja, meetings with the selected group could not be held in person. The two planned rounds could not be developed either. The selected group was focused on establishing strategies that would help them mitigate the problems of COVID-19 in their establishments and organizations, so their participation in the second round was not possible. However, the analysis carried out found consistent responses, similar, and without extreme evaluations that distort the results. Another limitation, which can be seen reflected in the results, is possibly the little experience of some members of the selected group in the management of tourism indicators. The system of indicators was established in 2019. As an opportunity, the predisposition of the sector to continue working around the system of indicators and strengthen the relations between company - company, and company - public and private organizations is evident.

## 2. Theoretical contextualization

### 2.1. Tourist indicator system

Tourism is one of the fastest growing activities worldwide. Its contribution to economic development and the generation of direct and indirect jobs in destinations is undeniable (Lemos et al., 2020; Linares & Garrido, 2014). It is therefore crucial to ensure its long-term sustainability. In this sense, the UNWTO and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in 2005 define sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). From here, destination managers have the challenge of promoting tourism development based on economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity (Tudorache et al., 2017), fundamental principles of sustainability (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005).

In this way, some tourist indicators have emerged that allow evaluating the objectives set in the planning and sustainable management of the destination (Cavalcanti & Ataíde, 2016; Cordero, 2017; Palomeque et al., 2018). Miller (2001) suggested that indicators are helpful for measuring and framing management objectives in quantitative terms and for specifying appropriate levels or acceptable limits for tourism's impacts. While Nesticó and Maselli (2019) suggested the indicators are those variables that make the phenomenon of interest perceptible, summarizing or simplifying the most important information related to it.

Monitoring tourist activity allows decisions to be made and policies developed that support the sustainable growth of destinations and the improvement of the quality of life of its residents (Zhenhua, 2003; Torres-Delgado & Saarinen 2017). Thus, to monitor this development in 2005 the UNWTO presented the "practical guide to sustainable development indicators for tourist destina-

tions", a tool that allows actors to develop indicators that contribute to mitigating what problems they could have about policies and sustainable management. The guide presents different types of indicators, each one with a specific purpose for decision-makers, and all indicators favour sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2005, p. 14). In addition, Camacho et al. (2016) propose a classification of tourism sustainability indicators, considering only two groups, namely, i.) the basic indicators that allow obtaining key monitoring elements and ii.) complementary indicators related to specific destinations to complete the basic ones and allow the identification of variables or attributes of unique changes for the different types of destinations.

With these references, it is up to the destination's tourist actors to apply indicators that provide them with the basic information necessary to monitor sustainability and it also allows them to manage tourism activity efficiently (European Commission, 2017). Before determining the indicators to be applied, it is necessary to determine if there is a viable mechanism to measure them from a technical and economic perspective (UNWTO, 2005; Ferrandis, 2016; Tudorache et al., 2017). This, considering that the indicators generate impact by having a base of suggestions for the management of the destination. If the indicators are recognized and evaluated appropriately, they will allow obtaining suitable results (Mendola & Volo, 2017), understanding complex phenomena, and transforming them into clear and understandable information to be presented to society (Ferrandis, 2016).

Furthermore, indicators can have a determining influence in three main ways: through the information they generate, the associations they create, and the action they promote (UNWTO, 2005). Likewise, it is crucial to consider the importance of indicators, not only for destination managers but for the tourism business sector, since they can make appropriate decisions based on the information generated by them (UNWTO, 2005).

Being the companies, on many occasions, its primary source. Companies use their management indicators and look for destination indicators to be able to compare and measure the effectiveness of their management and detect opportunities for improvement (Ferrandis, 2016; Orihuel, 2016). Thus, a symbiosis can be generated between the different sectors involved in the application of tourism indicators, becoming a fundamental instrument for improving the management and competitiveness of the destination. A clear example is the ETIS, which measures four categories of indicators, namely destination management, social and cultural impact, economic value, and environmental impact (European Union, 2017).

The indicators to monitor tourism sustainability have been accepted as valid tools to evaluate public policies, measure destination management, define development plans, establish sustainable objectives, and generate suitable spaces for effective communication between stakeholders interested in the analysis of the current and future situation of the territories (European Union, 2017; Ferrandis, 2016; Pérez & Barreiro, 2019).

In this context, the European Commission in 2013 proposed the European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destinations (ETIS) as a system of indicators for the sustainable management of tourism destinations. In this way, the Commission intends to improve the tourism competitiveness of European countries and promote sustainable development through the 67 established indicators (27 basic indicators and 40 additional indicators) (Tudorache et al., 2017). These indicators are grouped into four sections, namely, i). Destination management, four core indicators and five optional indicators; ii). Economic value, five basic indicators and nine optional indicators; iii). Social and cultural impact, seven core indicators and eleven optional indicators; and iv). Impact on the environment, 11 basic indicators and 15 optional indicators (European Commission, 2013).

This set of indicators can be used in its entirety, or independently. They easily adapt to the needs and priorities of the destinations. This flexibility has allowed the ETIS to develop and become stronger in different destinations as a decision-making tool, promote tourism policies, strengthen tourism governance models, identify social and digital gaps, optimize resources, measure tourism trends, generate participatory processes for tourism management (Zabetta et al., 2014; Cannas & Theuma, 2013; Cismaru & Ispas, 2015; Iunius et al., 2015; Public company for the management of tourism and sports in Andalusia, 2020).

The benefits of implementing a system of indicators are many, however, the tourism literature reports few applications in destinations. Countries such as Italy, Spain, Romania, and the United Kingdom have been analyzed by some authors (Zabetta et al., 2014; Cannas & Theuma, 2013; Cismaru & Ispas, 2015; Iunius et al., 2015; Public company for the management of tourism and sports in Andalusia, 2020). From Latin America, no literature has been found that analyzes the implementation of the ETIS. This research aims to help fill this gap by analyzing the challenges and opportunities involved in the implementation of a system of tourism indicators in the management of a destination.

## 2.2. Business associativity

An important part of the actors interested in the situational analysis of the destination is the business sector. Objective and reliable information allows assertive decision-making and efficient management of the resources available in the company. Therefore, to obtain better results in individual strategic planning, inter-business collaboration and interaction with public entities are necessary to strengthen the sector and ensure sustainable development.

According Calderón (2019) "associations are

important spaces that can promote the development and competitiveness of local companies in a territory thanks to collaboration processes, cost savings and knowledge transfer" (p. 203). In organizational learning processes, the integration of public and private actors is crucial. The union of these actors' initiatives allows greater accessibility to training to have more competitive and innovative environments (Perez and Barreiro, 2019). While Perogil (2017) states that organizations will depend on orientation, management and scale given to the destination. For this, companies require a minimum organization that allows planning, executing, and controlling their actions. Therefore, the business organization must consider essential aspects such as the inclusion of key actors with sufficient resources to influence decision-making and the establishment of mechanisms that guarantee the participation of all members in the fundamental collective processes and promote an environment of trust among all associates (Hufty et al., 2006; Montero & Calderón, 2019).

In general, the business organization allows associating several entities to improve the skills of the associates and strengthen the destination. Furthermore, some principles consider the character ethical and to guide the behaviour to achieve optimal human life conditions (Moreno, 2017). It depends on the end or purpose to which the partners and actors involved are directed.

The International Cooperative Alliance - ICA - (2018) points out the following cooperative principles: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; economic participation of the partners; autonomy and independence; education, training and information, cooperation between co-operatives and feeling of community. While that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development -OECD- (2004) states, cooperative principles based on four axes:

- (i) Interests
- (ii) Business ethics

(iii) Environment

(iv) People involved in the long term.

Applying these principles is intended to promote collaborative business work, promote employment, and maintain good financial practices for the benefit of the community and the organizations' positive image. The expected result is the improvement of the companies' competitiveness and success (OECD, 2004).

But not only the principles are considered because of companies also seek to develop collaborative work, envisioning the benefits that this collaboration provides. Community development, the generation of an environment of trust and respect for each member part of the association, are significant social and personal benefits for the organizations (Narváez et al., 2008; Quillagana, 2020). Likewise, better, and greater production, innovation, market expansion, administrative and management tools, and competitiveness are benefits that the business organization can obtain (Narváez et al., 2008; Vasquez et al., 2016).

Other benefits considered from the field of co-operation, and that are related to business organization, are: combating poverty and creating food security, providing affordable financing, building local experience and profits, international cooperation, creating decent jobs, and empowerment of women (European Cooperatives & ACI, 2019).

### 2.3. Local development

Local development represents development in a part of the territory. Boisier (2009) suggests that local development "refers to a certain form of development that can take shape in territories of various sizes, but not all, given the intrinsic complexity of the development process" (p. 30). Also, the local development is a participatory process that addresses and solves the social and economic

problems that arise in a territory considered a minimal unit (García et al., 2015).

These processes must adopt sustainability criteria to link social, economic, technological, environmental, and cultural problems with the territory's policies and strategies. Likewise, they must promote endogenous development and improve the population's quality of life (Grosjean & Maillat, 1998; Narváez et al., 2008; Mora & Martínez, 2018). Thus, the regions can promote a local dynamic based on the territorial accumulation of the specific resources necessary to develop their productive economic system and institutional environment (Narváez et al., 2008).

The fundamental pillars of local development are the broad and active participation of the community, the rescue of the necessary productive levels, and the identification of available resources for effective management and administration (García et al., 2015); Perogil, 2017). Therefore, local development must constitute a process that guarantees the promotion and construction of social and political citizenship, which allows each person to have the capacity to develop fully (García et al., 2015). A timely way to promote local development is through associations, for which it is necessary to take into consideration that:

The relationship between associativity and local development depends on the degree of trust and social capital existing in a territory, but the capacity of this associativity to generate inclusion processes will also depend on the existence of inclusive leadership, that is, that local leaders are representative of the demographic diversity of their territories. (Montero and Calderón 2019, p.203)

From the perspective of local development, the business associativity process stimulates the configuration of business systems. They seek the formation of competitive and innovative environments by taking advantage of certain externalities derived

from their grouping. Also, they explore the benefits associated with the territory's business tradition, commercial relations, and cooperation to compete linked to proximity. It is crucial to establish a system of solid working relationships and connection that becomes a social culture among the companies of a region or locality. In this construction process, companies must assume a proactive role and perceive that they are in the right environment to develop their strategies and achieve their objectives (Narváez et al., 2008). In this sense, it is also important to consider the collaborative work that must be developed between business organizations and public organizations. This integration directly affects local development because, by uniting wills, initiatives, and resources, better results are achieved around common objectives (Perez & Barreiro, 2019).

### 3. Methodology

The objective of this work was to know the challenges and opportunities that the implementation of a system of tourism indicators in the sector has generated. To achieve this, two stages were developed. In the first stage, a review of previous research was carried out: Narváez et al. (2008), Fernández & Narváez (2011), Pulido (2014), Pulido & López (2016), Perojil (2017), Melo et al. (2017).

In the second stage, a panel of experts was convened. In this case, the panel of experts was made up of representatives of the academy and public and private organizations of the tourism sector of Loja. This technique allowed obtaining a consensus opinion on the subject under study (Bogdan & Taylor 1975; Berg 2001; Sancho 2001). According to the instructions given, the opinions of the evaluated group could refer to the importance of the indicator system and the effects on all or part of the evaluated subjects. Table 1 shows the summary of the methodological aspects.

**Table 1** | Methodological aspects

Type of study	Participants	Date of empirical work
Expert Panel	20 people	September 29 to November 15, 2020

Source: Own elaboration

The selection of the experts who would participate was one of the crucial challenges, since the basic information on which the work is considered is given by the opinions expressed by the selected experts. Furthermore, depending on how the group is chosen, biases that are later impossible to eliminate from the results may be included (Berg, 2001; Sancho, 2001).

The group of experts that participated in this research consisted of 20 people (Table 2). They maintain a close relationship with the subject under study. As a condition to be part of the group of experts, they should have participated, at least once, in the informational meetings and workshops developed around the system of tourism indicators established in 2019 and have shown a predisposition for multisectoral work. This condition positively influenced the results.

**Table 2** | Group of tourism actors representing public and private institutions

Number	Institution	Representatives
2	Tourism Unit - Municipality of Loja	Representative of the Headquarters of Tourism Unit Technician
1	Provincial Chamber of Tourism of Loja (CAPTUR)	CAPTUR representative
2	Loja Technical Office - Ministry of Tourism	Registration and control specialist. Zonal Promotion Specialist
1	Chamber of Commerce of Loja	Representative of the Chamber of Commerce of Loja.
2	Travel agencies and tour operators	Representative of travel agencies. Manager of a travel agency
1	Aeroregional REGAIR CIA. LTDA.	Manager of the Loja de Aeroregional agency.
1	Academy	Professor at the National University of Loja.
2	5-star hotel	Representative of the Loja Hoteliers Association. Hotel manager.
1	4-star hotel	Hotel manager
4	3-star hotel	Hotels managers.
1	2-star hotel	Hotel manager.
1	1 star hostel	Hotel manager
1	Citizenship	Tourism communication and marketing manager.

Source: Own elaboration

The final number of experts is adequate despite being small; however, they have enough knowledge to reliably respond to the extensive questionnaires sent.

### 3.1. Information gathering questionnaire

The questionnaire used has three blocks. The first (questions 1 to 4) refers to the perception of indicators system in managing tourist destinations. The second (questions 5 to 14) refers to the intersectoral organisation. Finally, the third (questions from 15 to 17) questions the actors regarding associativity.

Questions 3, 4, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16 and 17 of the questionnaires are formulated in several sections, which contain items with an answer on a graduation scale, scored from one to nine, in which the expert had to assign the score to the considered element. The Likert scale was used, which allowed the expert to show their degree of importance, where one is "not very important" to nine "very important". With this, we seek a faster answer to the questionnaire and have a greater facility to analyze the results obtained.

Prior to the general dispatch, the questionnaire is validated by sending it to a small group of participants. In this way, it was verified that the questions are clear, understandable and that they do not influence the opinions of the respondents. Subsequently, the invitation was made to each of the experts selected to participate in the research. Once the invitation was accepted, the questionnaire was sent via email.

To follow up on this process, personalized telephone calls were made, it should be noted that the response from all participants lasted during the months of October and November 2020.

### 3.2. Information processing

For the information analysis the statistical program SPSS was used. As measures of concentration of the actors' responses, the arithmetic mean was used. And to evaluate the statistical significance of the agreement of the participants, the Pearson coefficient of variation was used  $Vx=s/x$  which is obtained from the quotient between the standard deviation and the arithmetic mean. The higher  $Vx$ , the greater the heterogeneity of the opinions of the participants. Therefore, it is considered that consensus is achieved when the level of agreement on the mean is statistically significant, that is,  $Vx \leq 0.3$  (Pulido, 2014).

## 4. Result analysis

### 4.1. Generalities

This section refers to basic aspects about the perception of the system of tourist indicators in the management of tourist destinations.

100% of the participants believe that it is correct to consider a system of tourist indicators for

the management of the destination, as well as to determine the reality from which it is based for the establishment of strategies and objectives to be followed in the destination and / or tourist establishment.

The aspect related to whether it is considered that the tourist actors of the Loja canton have indicators for the corresponding decision-making, there are divided opinions. On the one hand, 50% consider affirmative this aspect, in this sense, the experts indicated which indicators they know and the level of importance they have for the management of the destination and / or establishment, as indicated in Table 3.

First, in the hotel industry section of table 3, there is agreement among the experts on the indicators: occupancy percentage (mean of 8), number of national and international guests staying in hotels (mean of 7,90), average stay (mean of 7,8), average rate (mean of 7,5), and number of rooms and places available (mean of 7,20). Furthermore, these indicators have a  $Vx$  between 0.22 (indicator 1) and 0.30 (indicator 5). However, for the indicator Revenue per Available Room -RevPar- there is not sufficient consensus; this indicator has a mean of 6 and  $Vx$  of 0.60.

**Table 3 | Indicators for the management of the destination and / or establishment**

Indicator	Mean	Vx
Hotel industry		
1. Occupancy rate	8,00	0,24
2. Number of national and international guests staying in hotels	7,90	0,22
3. Average length of stay	7,80	0,24
4. Average rate	7,50	0,25
5. Number of rooms and places available	7,20	0,30
6. Revenue per Available Room	6,00	0,60
Destination		
7. Level of visitor satisfaction	8,50	0,19
8. Most visited tourist attractions	8,40	0,19
9. Percentage of tourists returning to the destination	8,10	0,21
10. Type of accommodation used by the visitor	8,10	0,20
11. Travel motivation	7,80	0,21
12. Number of passengers arriving by air	7,70	0,24
13. Tourism expenditure	7,60	0,25

Source: Own elaboration



Second, in the destination indicators section of Table 3, it is observed that there is agreement among the experts on the indicators: visitor satisfaction level (mean of 8,5), most visited tourist attractions (mean of 8,4), percentage of tourists who return to the destination and type of accommodation used by the visitor (mean of 8,10), trip motivation (mean of 7,80), number of passengers arriving by air (mean of 7,70) and tourist spending (mean of 7,60). These indicators have a Vx between 0.19 (indicator 7 and 8) and 0.25 (indicator 13). This shows that the indicators currently presented are relevant and should continue to be monitored.

On the other hand, the other 50% do not consider that the tourist actors of the Loja canton have indicators for the corresponding decision-making, since for some experts there is no planning in the sector, lack of organization of the actors, research and construction of indicators is limited, and the results obtained should be adequately disseminated.

Finally, in the last aspect of this first block, 100% of the experts believe that the implementation of other tourist indicators in the city of Loja is necessary, in this way, the management of the destination and / or establishments could be improved.

**Table 4 | Indicators that should be implemented**

Indicator	Mean	Vx
1. Private investment in the tourism sector	8,20	0,22
2. Public investment in the tourism sector	7,95	0,25
3. Perception of price-quality relationship in the destination	7,90	0,19
4. Solid waste management	7,40	0,29
5. Energy management	7,35	0,29
6. Quality of drinking water	7,35	0,30
7. Number of jobs in the tourism sector	7,30	0,30
8. Wastewater management	7,25	0,30
9. Water used: total volume consumed by tourist	6,55	0,37
10. Water savings (saved, recovered, and recycled water)	6,35	0,41
11. Place of origin	-	-

Source: Own elaboration

According to the literature review and viability in the destination, 10 indicators were proposed that should be implemented to improve the sustainable management of the destination, as shown in Table 4. However, not all these indicators reached consensus by the experts. Indicators 9 (water used: total volume consumed by tourist) and 10 water saving (saved, recovered, and recycled) were outside the acceptance range.

Likewise, the results show that 5 indicators are at the acceptance limit threshold, that is, indicators with a Vx of 0.29 (indicators, 4: solid waste management, and 5: energy management) and Vx of 0.30 (indicators, 6: quality of drinking water, 7: number of jobs in the tourism sector, and 8:

wastewater management).

Finally, the last indicator listed in Table 4, marked in red "place of origin", has been included by one of the experts at the time of answering the questionnaire sent.

## 4.2. Multisectoral organization

The second block of the questionnaire has the following aspects. First, 55% of the experts consider that all tourism actors have the same opportunities to get involved in the construction of indicators that support planning for tourism destination management. Some experts mention that

there must be union and contribution from both the public and private sectors, to have information on the tourism sector from different areas. And others, affirm that the appropriate management and involvement in the construction of indicators benefit the sector and help in making strategic decisions for companies.

The remaining 45% believe that tourism actors do not have the same opportunities to get involved in the construction of indicators. In this sense, for some there is no organization or inclusion, lack of responsibility and interest of tourism stakeholders, there is little importance to tourism development, lack of support from competent entities and knowledge of the importance of indicators for the sector, it is carried out inadequate recording of information, lack of technical training, lack of planning, lack of economic resources and technological inputs. For these reasons, they consider it essential that the private sector have more participation, since without real data, investment is still high risk. These results show the need for a better organization and government leadership in the destination, which is more inclusive, and calls the private sector to work in coordination in favour of tourism management.

100% of the experts consider it appropriate to establish common objectives for all the actors who are going to intervene in the construction of indicators to start from these and establish planning strategies for the destination.

Regarding the involvement of tourism actors for the construction of indicators, there was a division of opinions as shown in Table 5, which shows the actions in which the various actors can get involved in the process of construction of indicators and planning in destination management. First, with the action: contribution of opinions, stand out tourists (75%), residents (68.40%), social partners (63.20%), non-tourist businessmen (61.10%) and intermediaries' tourist (60%).

Second, in action: contribution of knowledge, stand out the universities, research, and advisory organizations (85%), providers of tourism products and services (63.20%), tourism intermediaries (60%) and other actors (66.70%).

Third, in action: decision-making, the public bodies stand out (60%). Fourth, in action: involvement in the execution of the actions to be carried out, the public bodies stand out (60%). Finally, in the action: financing contributions, public bodies are considered with 70% (See Table 5).

**Table 5 | Actors and actions**

ACTORS	ACTIONS				
	Contribution of opinions	Knowledge contribution	Decision making	Involvement in the execution of the actions to be carried out	Financing contributions
Tourists	75,00%	30,00%	10,00%	20,00%	15,00%
Social partners	63,20%	47,40%	15,80%	31,60%	10,50%
Tourism product and service providers	52,60%	63,20%	52,60%	52,60%	52,60%
Universities, research and advisory bodies	50,00%	85,00%	25,00%	45,00%	15,00%
Residents	68,40%	47,40%	31,60%	36,80%	15,80%
Tourism intermediaries	60,00%	60,00%	40,00%	50,00%	35,00%
Non-tourist businessmen	61,10%	50,00%	22,20%	33,30%	38,90%
Public organisms	40,00%	40,00%	60,00%	60,00%	70,00%
Other actors	46,70%	66,70%	33,30%	33,30%	26,70%

Source: Own elaboration

In other aspect, 75% of the experts consider that, in the city of Loja, the participation of all the actors in the process of construction of indicators and tourism planning for the management of the destination is not evident. In this sense, the actors consider that there is a lack of union and/or organization of the actors, lack of support for the tourism sector, lack of inclusion and interest in participating in all sectors related or not to tourism, considering that tourism encompasses an entire system flattering as an instrument for commercial activation.

The loss of confidence in the authorities or representatives of the tourism sector, the lack of economic resources, the lack of territorial tourism planning, and the lack of knowledge are also mentioned. They consider that, to date, before and after the Municipal Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) assumes the powers of tourism, no tourism development plan for the city of Loja has been presented, convened, or socialized. In addition, it is mentioned that the National Agency for Health Regulation, Control and Surveillance (ARCSA) is an institution that could also contribute.

Regarding whether the policies and/or incentives have been put in place to promote private sector participation in the construction of indicators and destination management, 55% of experts indicate affirmative this aspect. The remaining 45% consider the opposite, mentioning the following reasons: lack of knowledge on the part of the actors, lack of budget for the sector, lack of interest, and political problems that do not allow the sector to develop, lack of tourism planning from the territory, lack of involvement and participation of all stakeholders. Although they also indicate that there is an initiative to build indicators on the part of the Ecuador South Region Tourism Observatory (OBTUR).

In the aspect related to the existence of leadership of a public entity with the capacity to summon the commitment of all the actors in the

process of construction of indicators and tourist management of the destination, 50% of the experts consider this position affirmative. In this sense, they indicate that the institution that assumes this leadership is the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (MINTUR) as the governing body of tourism activity. They consider that this Ministry should maintain lines of work on development, development and investment, promotion, accreditation, and control issues; and that within the development axis the analysis of tourism indicators for decision-making is carried out. In addition, he is the one who leads the articulated work between the public and private sectors to act on issues of training, promotion, and data collection, mainly on holidays. Although it was not the only institution named by the experts since they also named the Chamber of Tourism, the Association of Hoteliers, and the Municipality of Loja.

The other 50% of experts do not consider that in the city of Loja there is a leadership of a public entity with the capacity to summon the commitment of all the actors in the process of construction of indicators and tourism management of the destination, indicating that there is evidence of a distancing among the entities at the forefront of tourism. They mention that, currently, it is the academy that leads this commitment, and they consider that the institution in charge should be the MINTUR, although they also suggest the cantonal and provincial government, the private sector through a tourism cluster, and even consider that it should be a shared responsibility of both the public and private sector.

On the other hand, and contributing to the previous results, 95% of the experts consider necessary the intervention of experts who advise and serve as support to the different actors in the process of construction of indicators and tourism management of the destination.

In this sense, Table 6 lists characteristics that these experts should have. The characteristics that had a great consensus are: having an exhaustive

knowledge of the reality of the destination (mean of 8.28 and Vx of 0.23), having knowledge in the management of tourist destinations (mean of 8.22 and Vx of 0.23), capacity for teamwork and organizational capacity (both characteristics with an mean of 8.17 and Vx of 0.25), knowledge of tourism policy (mean of 8.11 and Vx of 0.25), impar-

tiality (mean of 8 and Vx of 0.25) and communication skills and social relations (mean of 7.67 and Vx of 0.29). While the characteristic that had the least consensus corresponds to item 8 (negotiating skills) and 4 more characteristics considered by the experts have been added (see Table 6).

Table 6 | Expert characteristics

Characteristics	Mean	Vx
1. Have an exhaustive knowledge of the reality of the destination	8,28	0,23
2. Have knowledge in the management of tourist destinations	8,22	0,23
3. Capacity for teamwork	8,17	0,25
4. Ability to organize	8,17	0,25
5. Knowledge of tourism policy	8,11	0,25
6. Impartiality	8,00	0,25
7. Communication and social skills	7,67	0,29
8. Skills as negotiators	7,61	0,31
9. Knowledge in Tourist Legislation, Knowledge in Tourist Decentralization	-	-
10. Lived experience (not book memorial)	-	-
11. Knowledge of the sector, and territory in general.	-	-
12. Experience in the private tourism sector	-	-

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the work structure, 95% of the experts consider it appropriate to establish a formal structure for the participation of all the actors that would intervene in the construction of indicators and tourism management of the destination in the city of Loja. While 5% indicate the opposite, men-

tioning the lack of knowledge.

Likewise, 95% of the experts consider that all the actors of the destination should have clear and concise information on indicators and processes of tourism management that are going to be carried out.

Table 7 | Indicator communication medium

Media	Mean	Vx
1. Use of new technologies: website, social networks, others	8,63	0,09
2. Joint meetings with all the actors to promote a rapprochement between them, if it does not yet exist	8,11	0,15
3. Referral of reports to the different actors	7,74	0,20
4. Local media	7,74	0,22
5. Any other means available to the destination	7,50	0,27
6. Concrete and individual meetings with each of the actors to raise the situation and resolve doubts	7,47	0,32
7. Online surveys	-	-
8. National and international media	-	-
9. End the month and immediately have the result	-	-

Source: Own elaboration

To publicize the tourist indicators, different means of communication were proposed, these are detailed in Table 7. There was consensus on the items that reached an mean of 8.63 (item 1, use of new technologies: website, social networks, others.), a mean of 8.11 (item 2, joint meetings with all stakeholders in order to promote a rapprochement between them, if it does not yet exist), mean of 7.74 (item 3, submission of reports to the different actors and item 4, local media) and mean of 7.5 (item 5, any other means available to the destination), these items have a  $V_x$  between 0.09

(item 1) and 0.27 (item 5). The last item, item 6 related to holding specific and individual meetings with each of the actors to raise the situation and resolve doubts, does not present sufficient consensus ( $V_x$  of 0.32). Additionally, aspects that were added by the experts are indicated and are in red at the end of Table 7.

Regarding the aspect related to the processes of construction of indicators, planning and management of the destination, being evaluated periodically, 100% of the experts agree.

Table 8 | Topics for evaluation

TOPICS FOR EVALUATION	Mean	$V_x$
1. Evaluation meetings. Measurement of the joint work process between all actors through indicators	8,2	0,12
2. Establishment of future actions	8,16	0,17
3.Extraction of results and creation of documentary support reflecting the practice of the joint work process between all the actors	8,15	0,16
4.Choice of indicators to be analysed by all the actors participating in the management of the destination	7,95	0,18

Source: Own elaboration

In this sense, the issues that should be considered in this evaluation phase are those that have been widely accepted according to the opinion of the experts (See Table 8). That is, those topics that reached a mean of 8.2 (item 1, evaluation meetings. Measurement of the joint work process between all actors through indicators), mean of 8.16 (item 2, establishment of future actions), mean of 8.15 (item 3, extraction of results and creation of documentary support reflecting the practice of the joint work process between all actors) and mean of 7.95 (item 4, choice of indicators to be analyzed by all actors participating in the management of the destination). These items have a  $V_x$  from 0.12 (item 1) to  $V_x$  of 0.18 (item 4).

These results also indicate that there would be an indication towards the governance process since, as mentioned by Fierro (2018), public and private actors associate and ally for the development of the destination, making decisions regar-

ding competitiveness and promotion for the benefit of the two parts.

#### 4.3. Associativity

The third block has been structured in three questions (questions 15 to 17). In the first place, 60% consider that the system of tourist indicators that are presented in the city of Loja has contributed to organizing the sector, indicating that the sector has been sensitized about the importance of statistical information, which has allowed the construction of spaces common for the analysis of the results and other problems of the sector and thus boost your organization.

In addition, they indicate that it is important to know the dynamics of the market, which will allow decision-making in actions to improve services, planning and development strategies; and that th-

rough the indicators presented by the UTPL it has allowed us to observe from a better perspective the situation of Loja and what is needed to have a clearer idea as a tourist destination. Although, they also consider that the results of the indicators for local tourism planning are still being taken in an incipient manner.

While the remaining 40% of the experts consider that the system of tourist indicators presented in the city of Loja has not contributed to organizing the sector, for the following reasons: the existing information is not used in planning the destination, there is ignorance and the decisions taken by the governing bodies have been insufficient. In addition, they consider that the existing indicators do not reflect the reality of the destination, in this sense; they mention that it is necessary to make the actors aware to be able to measure the indicators accurately. They also mention that beyond the OBTUR there are no statistical data on tourism and that the sector is disorganized and biased. However, they also indicate that there is a rapprochement in the accommodation sector, but that it is still lacking in the other subsectors of

tourism.

Regarding the benefits of associativity, 100% of the experts agree that the organization of the tourism sector could contribute to the strengthening of companies, as well as local development.

Table 9 shows the principles that should be considered to generate an organization/associativity process, the following having a great consensus: with a mean of 8.68 (principle 1, build trust among entrepreneurs), of 8.47 (principle 2, promote integration with other local organizations), 8.42 (principle 3, identify common interests, purposes, objectives and goals), 8.37 (principle 4, intervene with local agents (government, companies and universities), 8.26 (principle 5, promote teamwork) and 8.16 (principle 6, promote changes in organizational culture). These principles have a  $V_x$  from 0.07 (item 1) to  $V_x$  of 0.18 (item 5) for which it has been considered that all the items have been widely accepted (See Table 9). In addition, four additional aspects marked in red by the experts have been added at the end of Table 9.

Table 9 | Principles to generate an organization / associativity process

Principles	Mean	$V_x$
1.Build trust among entrepreneurs	8,68	0,07
2.Promote integration with other local organizations	8,47	0,14
3.Identify common interests, purposes, objectives and goals	8,42	0,16
4.Intervene with local agents (government, companies and universities)	8,37	0,17
5.Promote teamwork	8,26	0,18
6.Promote changes in the organizational culture	8,16	0,17
7. Support private institutions with their leadership	-	-
8. Know the real dynamics of hotel occupancy	-	-
9. Encourage the tourism company to act based on its business name.	-	-
10. Train and engage stakeholders	-	-

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, 100% of the experts consider that being part of a formal organization / association in the tourism field would bring the actors benefits. Table 10 shows the benefits that could be achieved

by being part of an organization / association according to the information collected where three aspects were considered: financial, organizations and marketing.

**Table 10** | Benefits of being part of an organization / association

BENEFITS	Mean	Vx
Financial benefits		
1.Access to financing	7,83	0,25
2.Joint purchases	7,72	0,15
3.Joint investment	7,50	0,28
Organizational benefits		
4. Joint training of Human Resources	8,47	0,08
5.Implementation of strategic plans	8,32	0,14
6.Application of new forms of administration	8,22	0,14
7.Improve operational processes	8,21	0,15
8.Exchange of productive and technological information	8,16	0,12
Marketing benefits		
9. Promotion and commercialization of the service	8,50	0,08
11. Market research	8,42	0,11
10.Opening of new markets	8,33	0,10
12. Development of new services	8,05	0,16
13.Exchange of commercial information	7,74	0,23

Source: Own elaboration

First, benefits in the financial aspect (See Table 10), with an average of 7.83 (item 1, access to financing), 7.72 (item 2, joint purchases) and 7.50 (item 3, investment joint). Having a Vx of 0.15 (item 2), 0.25 (item 1) and 0.28 (item 3).

Second, in the organizational aspect of Table 10, all the items are important: joint training of Human Resources (mean of 8.47 and Vx of 0.08), implementation of strategic plans (mean of 8.32 and Vx of 0.14), application of new forms of administration (mean of 8.22 and Vx of 0.14), improve operational processes (mean of 8.21 and Vx of 0.15) and information exchange (mean of 8.16 and Vx of 0.12) see table 10.

Finally, in the third marketing aspect of Table 10, the benefits are considered with an average of 8.50 (item 9, promotion, and marketing of the service), of 8.42 (item 10, market research), of 8.33 (item 11, opening of new markets), 8.05 (item 12, development of new services) and 7.74 (item 13, exchange of commercial information). These items have a Vx from 0.08 (item 9) to Vx of 0.23 (item 13).

## 5. Conclusion

This research has allowed us to analyze the challenges and opportunities that the implementation of a system of tourism indicators has in the management of a destination. The literature review, as well as the experts examined in the research, consider that a system of tourism indicators is appropriate for destination management. Currently, the destination under study has a system of indicators established in 2019, which was sufficiently accepted by the group of experts, who consider it pertinent and that its monitoring must continue. Of the 13 indicators evaluated, there is one that was outside the acceptance range, namely the Revenue per Available Room (RevPar), thus disagreeing with the generality in other destinations. In other words, this is the most important indicator, because it is the one that best approximates the profitability of the sector.

For the experts, there is no doubt that tourism indicators help to determine the reality from which they start to establish strategies and objectives to follow, for which they consider it necessary to implement other indicators to improve management. However, from the block of 10 proposed indicators, which were based on the literature review, two indicators were outside the acceptance range: i.) Water used: total volume consumed per tourist, ii.) Water savings (saved, recovered, and recycled). Instead, they proposed an indicator to be implemented: the place of origin of tourists. Likewise, it is important to highlight that five indicators are at the maximum acceptance threshold: i.) Solid waste management, ii.) Energy management, iii.) Drinking water quality, iv.) the number of jobs in the tourism sector, v.) Wastewater management. Therefore, for the selection of future indicators, the needs and priorities of the destination must be considered. Likewise, the construction process must be flexible and consider the existence and periodicity of the information, as well as the participation of local stakeholders.

The tourism sector is predisposed to get involved in joint actions for the sake of local tourism development according to the experts consulted. They consider that the multisectoral organization is opportune, considering the establishment of common objectives, as well as the participation of the actors in different actions. They point out that, for the contributions of opinions, tourists should be considered; in contributing knowledge, universities and research and advisory organizations would be of great help; for decision-making and involvement in the execution of the activities to be developed, public organizations and providers of tourist products and services must participate to a large extent; and, for financial contributions, public organizations must be directly involved. This is an opportunity to strengthen the destination through the approach of joint actions that allow the sustainable development of the destination.

For the experts consulted, there is no defined leadership of a public entity to convene the commitment of the actors and direct coordinated organization and management processes, so they consider appropriate the help of experts with certain characteristics to start with said processes. Likewise, they find it opportune to establish a formal participation structure that allows for clear information on the indicators and tourism management process that is developed in the destination. This information should be disseminated using new technologies, joint meetings with all stakeholders, submission of reports and local media. In addition, periodic evaluations of the processes of construction of indicators, planning and management of the destination must be incorporated.

Finally, associativity is important for the experts consulted, since the organization of the tourism sector would contribute to the strengthening of companies, as well as local development. This, with the establishment of principles that lead to the construction of trust among businessmen. In addition, they recognize that being associated would bring benefits to the sector. In this sense,

within the three areas consulted, the following stand out: in the financial field: joint purchases; at the organizational level: i.) joint training of human resources; and ii.) exchange of productive and technological information. In the field of marketing, we have three aspects: i.) promotion and commercialization of the service; ii.) opening of new markets; and iii.) market research.

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