



Organizational model for community tourism enterprises in the central zone of Manabí

Modelo organizativo en los emprendimientos de turismo comunitario en la zona centro de Manabí

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to characterize the tourism supply and demand in the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo, in the central zone of Manabí, and to analyze their potential for the development of community-based tourism. A comparative analysis of the tourism infrastructure was carried out, identifying differences in the supply of lodging, restaurants, leisure, and cultural and natural attractions between the two cantons. In addition, tourism demand was evaluated, noting that most visitors come from nearby areas, with a predominance of cultural and nature tourism. A SWOT analysis was also applied to identify strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats affecting the tourism enterprises. The results indicate that Manta stands out in sun and beach tourism, with a more consolidated infrastructure, while Portoviejo has great potential in cultural tourism. Both cantons face common challenges such as lack of financing and training, but present opportunities for improvement through strategic alliances and the strengthening of their organizational structure. In short, to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism enterprises, it is necessary to strengthen training, innovation in services, and interinstitutional cooperation.

Keywords: community organization; competitiveness; diversification; sustainability

RESUMEN

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo caracterizar la oferta y demanda turística de los cantones de Manta y Portoviejo, en la zona centro de Manabí, y analizar su potencial en el desarrollo del turismo comunitario. Se realizó un análisis comparativo de la infraestructura turística, identificando diferencias en la oferta de alojamiento, restauración, ocio y atractivos culturales y naturales entre ambos cantones. Además, se evaluó la demanda turística, observando que la mayoría de los visitantes provienen de zonas cercanas, con un predominio de turismo cultural y de naturaleza. También se aplicó un análisis FODA para identificar fortalezas, oportunidades, debilidades y amenazas que afectan a los emprendimientos turísticos. Los resultados indican que Manta destaca en turismo de sol y playa, con una infraestructura más consolidada, mientras que Portoviejo tiene un gran potencial en turismo cultural. Ambos cantones enfrentan desafíos comunes como la falta de financiamiento y capacitación, pero presentan oportunidades para mejorar mediante alianzas estratégicas y el fortalecimiento de su estructura organizativa. En suma, para potenciar la sostenibilidad y competitividad de los emprendimientos turísticos, es necesario fortalecer la capacitación, la innovación en los servicios y la cooperación interinstitucional.

Palabras clave: organización comunitaria; competitividad; diversificación; sostenibilidad



1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism in Ecuador has gained prominence in recent decades, establishing itself as an option for sustainable development in rural and ethnic communities, particularly in provinces such as Manabí. Despite its potential, this type of tourism faces significant challenges. Limited institutional support, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of incentives have hindered its expansion and sustainability (Fernández Llor & Ganchozo Lucas, 2019). These factors, together with limited awareness and training in sustainable practices, create an unfavorable environment for the growth of community-based tourism enterprises, which often lack the financial and organizational resources needed to compete with larger and more established tourism operators (Zambrano & Salvatierra, 2021).

Community-based tourism enterprises are characterized as initiatives managed and operated directly by local communities, which seek to generate economic and social benefits through the use of their natural and cultural resources. These enterprises not only provide an alternative to mass tourism but also promote the preservation of traditions, biodiversity, and respect for the environment (Cobena et al., 2022). Within this context, various types of enterprises can be identified, including rural accommodations, ecotours, and cultural and gastronomic activities, among others, allowing tourists to experience a more authentic and closer connection with the communities they visit (Díaz & Meléndez, 2021).

Regarding the organization of community-based tourism enterprises, cooperative structures and associations predominate, where decisions are made collectively and benefits are distributed among community members. These organizations are generally based on principles of equity and participation, enabling them to strengthen social cohesion and foster local development (Navarro, 2022). However, a lack of professionalization and challenges in administrative and financial management may limit their capacity for growth and consolidation within the tourism market (Burga, 2023).

Sustainable tourism, as an approach, seeks to balance economic development with the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Several studies highlight its capacity to generate employment, improve community infrastructure, and promote environmental conservation (Terán & Arizaga, 2021). However, these opportunities are not always fully realized due to the limited integration of local communities into tourism planning and management, which affects the quality of the tourism services and products offered (Núñez et al., 2022).

The province of Manabí, in particular, faces structural problems that limit the success of community-based tourism. Despite possessing valuable natural and cultural resources, its tourism development has been fragmented and poorly planned. In key cities such as Manta and Portoviejo, community-based tourism enterprises struggle to compete due to the lack of a clear strategy, institutional support, and financial resources (Cedeño et al., 2022). Furthermore, insecurity and community disorganization have hindered a steady flow of visitors and investors, affecting the competitiveness of the destination and the well-being of its inhabitants (Fienco et al., 2023).

One of the main gaps identified in the literature is the lack of associativity and the weak organizational structure of community-based enterprises, which reduces their capacity to manage tourism projects efficiently. Without a solid governance framework and public policies that promote community-based tourism, these initiatives face considerable difficulties in sustaining themselves over the long term (Huaraca, 2021). This is compounded by the need for training in market research and tourism innovation, areas in which many communities lack sufficient knowledge to identify market niches and develop competitive products (Chaves, 2024).

At the theoretical level, community-based tourism is grounded in the principles of sustainable development, which emphasize active community participation, social equity, and environmental preservation. Social capital theory also plays a fundamental role, as it highlights the importance of

community networks and mutual trust in the success of collective enterprises. However, weak social capital in many communities in Manabí has limited collaboration and associativity, resulting in a low economic and social impact of community-based tourism.

Despite the evidence regarding the benefits of community-based tourism, there is a research gap in the identification of effective organizational models that promote the sustainability of these enterprises in contexts such as Manabí. Most research focuses on the general challenges of sustainable tourism without providing solutions tailored to the needs and specific characteristics of local communities.

The purpose of this research is to design an organizational model for community-based tourism enterprises in the central zone of Manabí, specifically in the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo. The proposed model will seek to encourage active community participation, improve the competitiveness of these enterprises, and enhance the utilization of the territory's natural and cultural resources. Through this study, it is expected to contribute to the sustainable development of local communities and strengthen their capacity to manage tourism effectively and responsibly.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the central zone of Manabí Province, specifically in the cantons of Portoviejo and Manta, over a 14-week period. These cantons were selected because of their high population density and economic relevance within the tourism context. The study was applied in nature and employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research was exploratory in scope and used analytical and synthetic methods, which made it possible to describe the problem in its fundamental components and subsequently integrate the information obtained to formulate comprehensive conclusions.

The methodology was developed in several phases. In the first, diagnostic phase, the needs and expectations of both the local community and tourists in the study area were identified. To this end, the study area and tourism supply and demand were characterized, using SWOT analysis as an additional tool to assess the sector's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The techniques applied during this phase included a literature review and direct observation, complemented by surveys administered to 212 tourists. This sample was obtained by applying the formula for an unknown population. Surveys were also administered to members of the host community (entrepreneurs) in the cantons of Portoviejo and Manta to determine their perceptions of their organizational structure, while ensuring voluntary participation at all times and avoiding any bias or influence on their responses.

The second phase focused on defining an optimal organizational structure for community-based tourism enterprises. Existing organizational models were reviewed through documentary and comparative analysis, complemented by a stratified analysis of 10 interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in the organizational management of community-based enterprises, including tourism-sector officials from both cantons.

Finally, during the organizational model design phase, a specific model for community-based tourism enterprises was developed. The model was subsequently subjected to a validation process involving 10 experts in the field, who assessed its feasibility and suitability for local conditions. During this stage, techniques such as brainstorming were used to obtain a diverse range of ideas and perspectives, together with expert judgment through specific questionnaires designed for validation. The instrument used during this phase was a questionnaire specifically developed to capture the experts' assessments.

For the statistical analysis of the data, SPSS Statistics 21 software was used, a tool widely employed in social and scientific research. This software enabled detailed descriptive statistical analyses, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and dispersion (standard deviation and range), as well as the examination of frequencies and distributions. In addition, it was used to identify significant trends,

patterns, and relationships in the collected data, providing a solid basis for interpreting the results and supporting the conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characterization of the Study Area

The study area comprised the central zone of Manabí Province, with the cantons of Portoviejo and Manta serving as the territories of interest for the research. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses [INEC] (2022), these are the most populated cantons in Manabí. Portoviejo covers an area of 957 km², while Manta covers 290 km². Figure 1 shows the specific location of these cantons within Manabí Province, highlighting their geographical distribution and relationship with neighboring cantons.

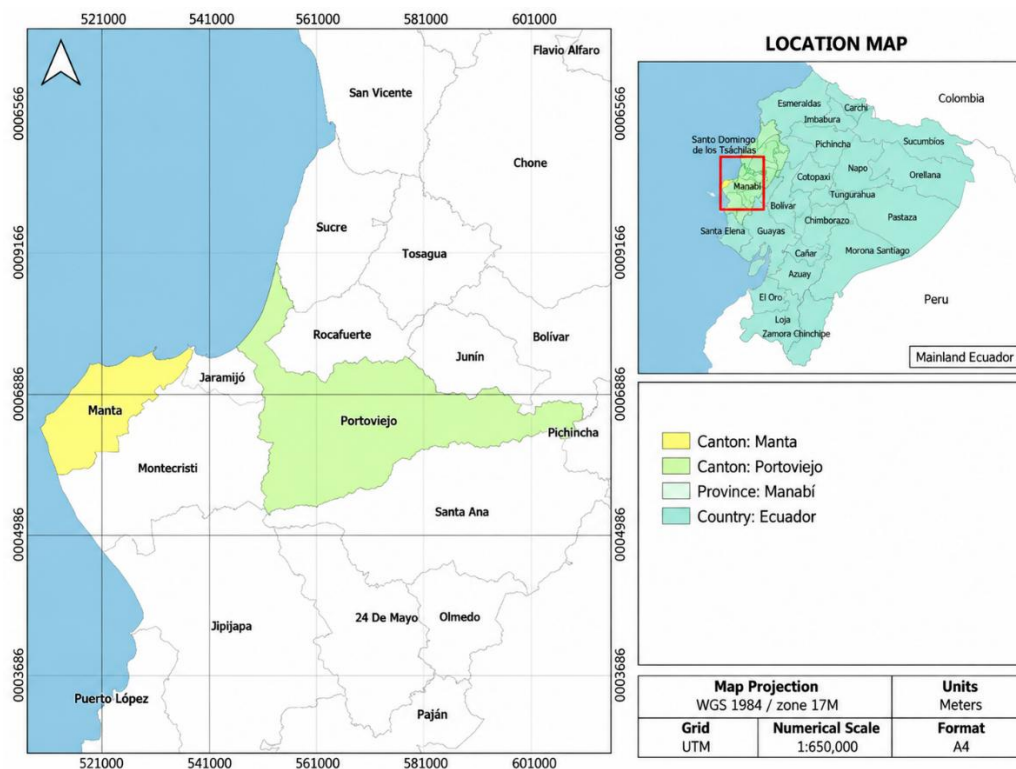


Figure 1. Georeferencing of the study area

According to García and Sánchez (2021), Portoviejo, the capital of Manabí Province, stands out for its growing relevance as a tourism destination due to its strategic accessibility, continuously developing infrastructure, and proximity to major natural and cultural attractions. The city has a diverse territorial configuration, ranging from densely populated urban areas to rural areas with rich agricultural and cultural traditions. Manta, on the other hand, is one of the most prominent cantons in Manabí due to its important seaport and recognized tourism potential, particularly in sun-and-beach tourism. Manta is not only a major center for commercial activities but has also experienced significant growth in tourism, driven by its natural attractions, such as its beaches, and tourism infrastructure oriented toward this sector.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the tourism situation in the study areas, an analysis was conducted to characterize tourism supply and demand, focusing on identifying the main tourist attractions, available services, and visitor profiles.

Characterization of Tourism Supply and Demand

The north-central zone of Manabí, comprising the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo, is a strategic area for tourism in the province, combining cultural, natural, and urban attractions. Characterizing tourism supply

and demand in this area makes it possible to identify the dynamics and trends that shape its tourism activity.

Tourism Supply

To understand the availability and diversity of the tourism supply in the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo, an analysis of the tourism establishments and resources available in each location was conducted. This analysis identified the number and classification of accommodation establishments, restaurants, travel agencies, bars, recreational centers, as well as the presence of cultural and natural attractions in each canton. Table 1 presents the results obtained, highlighting the differences and distinctive characteristics of the tourism supply in both territories.

Table 1. Availability of tourism supply by type of establishment

Type of Supply	Current Situation in Manta	Current Situation in Portoviejo
Accommodation	125 establishments classified into first, second, and third categories.	44 establishments classified into first, second, and third categories.
Food and Beverage Services	237 restaurants classified into first, second, third, and fourth categories.	149 restaurants classified into first, second, third, and fourth categories.
Tour Operations and Intermediation	42 agencies, including 15 international travel agencies and 12 tour operators.	23 agencies, including 10 international travel agencies and 13 dual travel agencies.
Bars and Nightclubs	44 establishments classified into second, third, and fourth categories.	29 establishments classified into third and fourth categories.
Recreation and Leisure	17 recreational centers, most of which are swimming pools.	4 spa and thermal bath centers and 1 community-based tourism center.
Cultural Attractions	13 cultural resources, most of which are churches and museums.	33 cultural resources, including immovable heritage assets and attractions, with museums and historic centers being the most representative.
Natural Attractions	14 natural resources, all of which are beaches, while 2 sites are forest areas.	8 natural resources, including beaches and rivers.

The tourism supply in the north-central zone of Manabí, represented by the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo, shows differences in the distribution of infrastructure and resources. Manta has a larger number of accommodation establishments, restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, reflecting a more developed focus on urban and beach tourism. This predominance of urban tourism supply reinforces the findings of Celdrán et al. (2023), who highlight how coastal cities with well-established infrastructure attract mass tourism, generating economic opportunities but also creating risks of overcrowding if sustainable strategies are not implemented. In contrast, Portoviejo has less tourism infrastructure but stands out for its cultural resources, with 19 attractions, including museums and historic centers, which give it a stronger heritage character. This cultural orientation is consistent with Becerra et al. (2023), who argue that cultural tourism is a key tool for enhancing local identity and stimulating less-developed economies, provided that it is properly managed.

In terms of recreation and leisure, Manta stands out for its recreational centers, whereas Portoviejo offers more limited but diversified options, such as spas and a community-based tourism center. According to recent studies by Elizalde-Holguín and Feijó-Cuenca (2022), this diversity, although smaller in quantity, could represent a competitive advantage if differentiated marketing strategies are implemented to promote unique experiences. Both cantons also share natural resources, although Manta stands out for its

predominance of beaches. This characterization shows that Manta has a more consolidated tourism supply for mass tourism, whereas Portoviejo has significant potential to develop more diversified cultural tourism. However, both cantons face the challenge of balancing tourism growth with the sustainability of their resources.

Tourism Demand

Tourism demand in the north-central zone of Manabí reflects visitors' preferences, motivations, and behaviors, providing a comprehensive overview of the dynamics driving tourism in the area. This analysis made it possible to identify key patterns in terms of visitors' origin, tourism modalities, frequency of visits, and overall satisfaction, providing a solid basis for strategic planning. Table 2 presents the main findings obtained from this characterization.

Table 2. Tourist demand profile

Aspects Evaluated	Responses
Origin	Montecristi (17.1%), Portoviejo (14.1%), Chone (12.6%), Tosagua (12.1%), Manta (11.6%), International [Colombia – Argentina – Mexico] (5.5%).
Travel Motivation	Leisure and recreation (37.2%), Work (32.7%), Visiting relatives (16.1%).
Type of Tourism	Cultural tourism (31.7%), Nature tourism (23.6%), Gastronomic tourism (18.6%), Ecotourism (11.6%), Adventure tourism (10.6%).
Frequency of Visits	Several times a year (72.4%), Once a year (17.1%), First visit (10.1%).
Travel Party	Friends (40.7%), Family (27.6%), Alone (21.1%), Partner (10.6%).
Daily Budget	\$30–\$50 (50.3%), \$15–\$25 (39.7%), \$50–\$75 (10.1%).
Important Services	Tourist information (49.2%), Food and beverage services (25.1%), Transportation (17.1%), Connectivity (8.5%).
Destination Safety	Yes (68.8%), No (31.2%).
Visit Satisfaction	Satisfied (37.2%), Very satisfied (33.2%), Slightly satisfied (26.1%), Dissatisfied (3.5%).

The characterization of tourism demand in the north-central zone of Manabí revealed a predominance of local visitors and limited participation by international tourists, reflecting the regional focus of tourism in the area. This scenario is consistent with the proximity tourism theory proposed by Gil (2023), who argues that regional tourism flows tend to predominate in contexts where infrastructure and international promotion are limited but where there is a rich cultural and natural tourism supply.

Travel is mainly motivated by leisure, work, and family visits, while the different types of tourism, led by cultural tourism, highlight the cultural and natural richness of these territories. According to Ngozi (2020), cultural tourism not only highlights a region's heritage values but can also serve as a driver of local development when tourism experiences are properly managed.

However, although most visitors report recurring visits and a moderate budget, satisfaction levels reveal areas for improvement, as a significant percentage of tourists report experiences that could be enhanced. This reinforces the findings of Barreiro et al. (2024) regarding the importance of tourism competitiveness, in which factors such as service quality and perceived safety are essential for fostering tourist satisfaction and loyalty. These data highlight the need to strengthen key aspects such as connectivity and perceived safety in order to consolidate these destinations as more competitive and attractive tourism options.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis enabled a comprehensive assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by tourism enterprises in the north-central zone of Manabí. This analysis provided a clear overview of the key factors influencing the development and sustainability of the sector, providing crucial information for strategic decision-making. The results are presented below:

Table 3. Internal and external factors of the study area

Strengths		Opportunities	
-	Potential cultural and natural resources.	-	Partnerships with tour operators.
-	Entrepreneurial culture.	-	Willingness of academic institutions to collaborate.
-	Entrepreneurs' interest in receiving training and participating in educational processes.	-	Integration of technology into promotional activities.
-	Development of tourism infrastructure.	-	Investment financing projects.
-	Strategic location.	-	Incentives for innovation.
Weaknesses		Threats	
-	Lack of experience in organizational management.	-	Economic instability in the country.
-	Internal conflicts within enterprises.	-	Competition from other destinations.
-	Economic dependence.	-	Insecurity in the country.
-	Lack of adequate regulation and supervision of enterprises.	-	Natural disasters or phenomena.
-	Limited promotion and visibility.	-	Negative impacts of mass tourism.

Entrepreneurs' Perceptions of Their Organizational Structure

To analyze various aspects related to community-based tourism enterprises, a survey was conducted among key stakeholders in the sector. The study made it possible to identify the objectives of the enterprises, their organizational structure, decision-making mechanisms, and the degree of involvement in management and operations. Table 4 summarizes the main results obtained from the surveys.

Table 4. Summary of survey results

Aspects Evaluated	Responses
Objectives of tourism enterprises	Preserve local culture (45.7%), Generate income for the community (28.6%), Promote sustainable development (12.1%).
Organizational structure	Defined roles (38.2%), Committees (23.6%), General assembly (22.6%).
Collective decision-making	Development projects (37.7%), Resource allocation (21.6%), Activity planning (20.6%), Marketing and promotion (20.1%).
Involvement in management and operations	Hiring local staff (43.7%), Volunteer work (20.6%), Participation in assemblies (18.6%), Consultations and surveys (17.1%).
Challenges faced by enterprises	Lack of funding (39.7%), Difficulties in decision-making (27.6%), Internal conflicts (20.6%), Lack of training (12.1%).
Support from external organizations	Funding (41.2%), Training (24.6%), Technical assistance (24.1%), Promotion and marketing (10.1%).
Measurement of economic and social impact	Sustainability reports (30.7%), Financial indicators (29.1%), Surveys and interviews (23.1%), External evaluations (17.1%).
Strategies for sustainability	Continuous training programs (35.7%), Strategic analyses (32.2%), Service diversification (32.2%).
Communication	Social media (43.7%), Regular meetings (22.1%), Digital platforms (19.6%), Newsletters (14.6%).

According to the surveys conducted, entrepreneurs' perceptions of their organizational structure in the tourism area reflected a priority focus on preserving local culture and generating income for the community, although sustainable development has not yet been fully integrated as a key objective. The organizational structure is based on defined roles, committees, and assemblies, which promotes a certain degree of formality. However, challenges such as lack of funding, internal conflicts, and difficulties in decision-making limit its effectiveness. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Toselli et al. (2020), which indicate that the management of tourism enterprises in rural areas tends to focus on cultural preservation and social inclusion, although the emphasis on sustainability is often only partial.

The hiring of local staff and volunteer work stand out as key components of management, although involvement through assemblies or consultations is less frequent. While external support, particularly in

terms of funding and training, plays a fundamental role, marketing and the measurement of economic and social impacts need to be strengthened to ensure sustainable outcomes. These findings are consistent with the research by Noboa (2022), who argues that community-based tourism enterprises often rely heavily on unpaid local or volunteer work, which may limit professionalization and sustainability. It should be noted that current strategies, such as training and service diversification, together with the use of social media for communication, demonstrate positive efforts. However, a more comprehensive and strategic approach is needed to overcome existing challenges and consolidate the organizational structure.

Evaluation of Management and Organizational Models

The following section presents various organizational models for the management of community-based tourism enterprises. The models analyzed vary in their approaches, but all emphasize the importance of active community participation in the decision-making process. In addition, these models address aspects such as local economic development, environmental conservation, and cooperation among local and external stakeholders. The results of the evaluation of these models according to their characteristics and orientation are presented below.

Table 5. Most influential models in the research

Models	Characteristics	Orientation
Management model for rural community-based tourism. Empowerment and sustainable local development in central Mexico (González-Domínguez et al., 2024)	This model integrates the economic, political, social, and psychological dimensions of empowerment, promoting local participation and self-management in tourism initiatives.	Empowerment
Management model for tourism enterprises in the rural sector of Carchi Province (López Ortega, 2023)	The model is characterized by its adaptability to local contexts and its practical approach to facilitating implementation in small rural enterprises, seeking long-term sustainability.	Sustainability
Management model and procedure for the development of the Quinta Lucía tourism project (Caluña Palacios & Vega Falcón, 2022)	The main characteristic of the model is its comprehensive and participatory approach, which promotes coordination among the community, private sector, and municipality for tourism development.	Sustainability
Sustainable tourism development model for rural communities in Bolívar Canton (Mero & Palma de la Cruz, 2021)	The model promotes sustainability as the central pillar of community-based tourism and seeks environmental conservation alongside local economic development.	Sustainability
Strategic model to strengthen associativity among community-based tourism enterprises in Manabí Province (Fernández Llor & Ganchozo Lucas, 2019)	This model is based on cooperation among local stakeholders and territorial planning, adapting to the tourism context of the area and promoting long-term sustainability.	Sustainability
Community-based tourism management model oriented toward the sustainable development of the Ligüiqui community in Manta, Ecuador (Alcívar Vera & Mendoza Mejía, 2020)	This model emphasizes the active participation of residents in tourism management, seeking to strengthen cultural identity and environmental protection.	Sustainability
Organizational model for tourism management in the San Pedro community, Santa Elena Canton, from 2015 onward (Aquino Suárez, 2015)	The model is characterized by its community-based approach to tourism management, emphasizing local participation and the strengthening of tourism services.	Participatory

According to the table, most of the models share an approach centered on sustainability and local participation, emphasizing cooperation among local stakeholders, environmental conservation, and sustainable economic development, all of which are fundamental elements for tourism enterprises in rural areas. This approach has been widely supported in the literature, as noted by Aranda (2024), who highlights the importance of cooperation and the active participation of local communities in the management of tourism resources.

The model considered most applicable to this research was that proposed by Fernández Loor and Ganchozo Lucas (2019). This model was well suited to the regional context because it focuses on cooperation among local stakeholders and territorial planning, which are key elements for tourism enterprises in the central zone of Manabí, where an approach that considers both local conditions and existing challenges is required. Furthermore, the model promotes the integration of local stakeholders into decision-making, which is essential in a community-based context. This emphasis on integrating local stakeholders is consistent with the proposals of authors such as Guananga and Santiago (2020), who argue that community participation in tourism planning and management is crucial for long-term sustainability.

Stratified Analysis of Organizational Management in the Central Zone of Manabí

Organizational management in community-based enterprises in the central zone of Manabí, particularly in the cantons of Manta and Portoviejo, is a key element in strengthening community-based tourism and local socioeconomic development. This analysis seeks to identify the organizational models implemented, common challenges, existing policies and strategies, as well as opportunities for training and partnerships with other organizations. Through this comparative approach, the aim is to understand the organizational dynamics in each canton and highlight priority areas for intervention to foster the sustainability and growth of these enterprises.

Table 6. Stratified and comparative analysis of the interviews

Questions	Manta	Portoviejo
Are you aware of or familiar with any organizational model aimed at community-based tourism enterprises in the canton?	Several organizational models are known, including cooperatives, associations, and business networks, which seek to integrate local stakeholders into the development and economic growth of the community.	Internal organization is not optimal; on some occasions, part of the roles and responsibilities of a support group structured among members have been lost. However, there is a general willingness to improve and advance in this regard.
What organizational challenges do community-based tourism enterprises face?	Community-based enterprises often face challenges such as a lack of financial resources, limited business management training, low market visibility, and the need for greater organization and internal coordination.	Among the main challenges are limited financial resources, insufficient technical and business knowledge, and communication problems that affect the planning and implementation of joint initiatives.
Are there specific policies or programs that promote the organizational development of community-based tourism enterprises?	There are policies at the local and national levels that promote the development of community-based enterprises, although their implementation may vary. Programs supporting entrepreneurship and NGOs are often available, but their scope may be limited.	There are policies and programs that can benefit community-based enterprises, but they are not always sufficiently known or disseminated among them. Informing responsible entities could improve the dissemination of these opportunities.
What strategies have been implemented to improve the sustainability and growth of community-based enterprises?	Strategies such as product and service diversification, the promotion of local culture, and the use of digital platforms to improve visibility and access to new markets have been implemented.	We have organized fairs and events that enable entrepreneurs to showcase their products. These activities have helped improve visibility, although they also contribute to strengthening community-

		based tourism and attracting greater interest from visitors.
Are there training or education programs for members of community-based enterprises?	Training and education programs are available, generally offered by government institutions and NGOs, aimed at improving management, administration, and customer service skills.	Yes, training programs are available, but more regular workshops should be organized to address relevant topics and experiences. Having a physical space for our activities would be very helpful in strengthening cohesion and teamwork.
How are community-based tourism enterprises involved in decision-making processes related to tourism development?	Community-based tourism enterprises usually participate in decision-making processes through their organizations, although the effectiveness of this participation may depend on the organizational structure and available institutional support.	Through joint meetings, which make it possible to share resources, experiences, and knowledge. This collaborative approach increases organizational capacity to address challenges and strengthen the community-based enterprise.
Are there collaborations or partnerships with other institutions or organizations to strengthen community-based tourism enterprises?	There are partnerships with other institutions, such as universities, NGOs, and government entities, which seek to strengthen enterprises through technical resources, training, and joint promotion.	Although some collaborations with other institutions have been mentioned, not all reach entrepreneurs or are well understood. Strengthening these partnerships and ensuring greater inclusion in projects would be a key step toward the development of community-based tourism.

According to Table 6, organizational management in Manta and Portoviejo reveals significant differences in the implementation and effectiveness of community-based organizational models. While Manta stands out for its knowledge and application of various organizational models, such as cooperatives and associations, internal organization in Portoviejo faces challenges such as a lack of structure and regular meetings. These results are consistent with previous studies by Arratia and Palmas (2024), which indicate that a solid organizational structure and clearly defined roles are fundamental to the success of community-based tourism enterprises.

Common challenges include limited training, scarce financial resources, and internal communication problems. Although support policies and programs are available, their dissemination is insufficient in both locations. These challenges are also reflected in the literature by Chávez et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of continuous training and efficient resource management in tourism enterprises, particularly those that are community-based. It should be emphasized that Manta shows greater progress in sustainability strategies, such as diversification and digital promotion, whereas Portoviejo relies primarily on local fairs and events. Furthermore, institutional collaboration is evidently more effective in Manta, although both cantons need to strengthen partnerships and ensure greater access to these opportunities.

Organizational Model for Community-Based Tourism Enterprises in the Central Zone of Manabí

The organizational model was presented as a strategic tool that integrates several key dimensions to foster the sustainable development of the sector. This model seeks to strengthen the organizational structure, diversify services, improve human capacities, incorporate technology, ensure financial sustainability, promote social cohesion, and guarantee environmentally responsible practices. Each dimension includes specific objectives, key components, strategic actions, and expected outcomes designed to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of community-based tourism in the area.

Table 7. Proposed organizational model for community-based tourism enterprises

Dimensions	Objective	Key Components	Strategic Actions	Expected Outcomes
Organizational Dimension	Strengthen the organizational structure and decision-making.	- Clearly defined roles. - Participatory leadership.	- Establish clear roles within the organization. - Encourage collective decision-making in key projects.	- Improved internal organization. - Greater participation in decision-making processes.
Strategic Dimension	Diversify tourism services and products to increase competitiveness.	- Service diversification. - Innovation in tourism products.	- Implement new tourism products. - Create tourism packages that combine different modalities.	- Increased number of tourists. - Greater competitiveness compared with other tourism destinations.
Training Dimension	Improve the tourism management capabilities of the human resources.	- Continuous training. - Training in marketing, management, and customer service.	- Implement continuous training programs. - Organize practical workshops on tourism marketing and customer service.	- Improved quality of tourism services. - Increased tourist satisfaction.
Technological Dimension	Promote the use of technology in tourism management.	- Use of digital platforms. - Tourism promotion technologies.	- Develop websites and social media channels to promote enterprises. - Implement booking and promotional applications.	- Increased visibility of enterprises. - Improved communication with tourists through digital platforms.
Economic Dimension	Ensure the financial sustainability of the enterprises..	- Sources of financing. - Efficient resource management.	- Seek partnerships with government entities, NGOs, and private companies to finance tourism projects. - Provide training in financial management.	- Generation of stable income for the community. - Long-term financial sustainability.
Social Dimension	Improve cohesion and collaboration among local stakeholders.	- Effective communication. - Collaboration among local and external stakeholders.	- Encourage the creation of networks and associations. - Promote participation in assemblies and regular meetings.	- Increased internal and external cooperation. - Improved internal organization of the enterprises.
Environmental Dimension	Ensure sustainable tourism and the conservation of natural resources.	- Responsible use of natural resources.	- Develop and promote environmentally responsible tourism activities.	- Conservation of local natural resources.

Validation of the Organizational Model for Community-Based Tourism Enterprises

The organizational model for community-based tourism enterprises was validated with the participation of 10 experts, most of whom were professionals in the tourism sector. These experts evaluated the proposed structure, contributing their knowledge and experience to ensure that the model was feasible and efficient and aligned with best practices in the sector. The comments and suggestions received made it possible to refine and strengthen the key elements of the model, ensuring its suitability for the needs of community-based tourism enterprises.

Table 8. Validation of the dimensions of the organizational model for community-based tourism enterprises

Dimension	Proposal	Yes	No
Organizational	Strengthen the organizational structure and decision-making through clearly defined roles, participatory leadership, and the implementation of efficient internal organization that promotes clarity regarding roles and encourages collective decision-making, thereby increasing participation in decision-making processes.	10	0
Strategic	Diversify tourism services and products through the diversification and innovation of tourism offerings, implementing new proposals and creating packages that integrate different modalities, with the aim of increasing tourist arrivals and improving the destination's competitiveness compared with other markets.	9	1
Training	Improve the tourism management capabilities of human resources through continuous training programs, with an emphasis on marketing, management, and customer service, by organizing practical workshops that optimize the quality of tourism services and increase tourist satisfaction.	10	0
Technological	Promote the use of technology in tourism management through the implementation of digital platforms and promotional technologies, developing websites and social media channels for promoting enterprises, as well as booking and promotional applications, thereby increasing business visibility and improving effective communication with tourists.	10	0
Economic	Ensure the financial sustainability of tourism enterprises through access to various sources of financing, efficient resource management, and the promotion of strategic partnerships with government entities, NGOs, and private companies. In addition, prioritize financial management training to foster stable income generation within the community and ensure long-term financial sustainability.	10	0
Social	Improve cohesion and collaboration among local stakeholders through effective communication that encourages the creation of networks and associations and promotes active participation in assemblies and regular meetings. This strategy will not only increase internal and external cooperation but will also improve the internal organization of enterprises, consolidating a collaborative and efficient working environment.	10	0
Environmental	Ensure sustainable tourism through the responsible use of natural resources, promoting the adoption of environmentally responsible tourism practices. In addition, focus on conserving local natural resources and raising awareness of the importance of preserving them to maintain ecological balance and ensure the long-term continuity of tourism activities.	9	1

The validation of the organizational model for community-based tourism enterprises revealed a predominantly positive response across all the aspects evaluated. The vast majority of experts agreed on the relevance and feasibility of the proposed dimensions, demonstrating broad support for the model as a whole. In particular, consensus was evident in key areas such as organizational structuring, human resource training, and the incorporation of digital technologies. Overall, the proposal was perceived as fundamental to improving the competitiveness and operation of community-based tourism enterprises and ensuring their long-term success.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the relevance of the north-central zone of Manabí, particularly Manta and Portoviejo, as tourism destinations with significant development potential. Both cantons have differentiated tourism offerings, with Manta standing out for sun-and-beach tourism and Portoviejo for cultural tourism, thereby enabling diversification of the tourism supply. However, common challenges were identified, including

limited training in organizational management and the need to improve the promotion and visibility of tourism resources.

It is crucial to strengthen sustainability strategies through continuous training, service diversification, and improved collaboration among local and external stakeholders. In addition, community-based tourism enterprises should focus on strengthening their organizational structures and involving communities in decision-making processes. Future research should further examine the impact of implementing participatory and sustainable organizational models, as well as strengthening institutional partnerships. The results obtained provide a solid foundation for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of the area, enabling more effective management and better utilization of its tourism resources.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter of this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Writing – original draft, Investigation, Writing – review and editing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data collection, and Data curation: Cedeño-Zambrano, Y. J., and Gende-Espinoza, M. L.

Supervision and review, Validation, Conceptualization, Project administration, and Investigation: Bravo-Macias, C. C.

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