



Research Article

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Tourism Hospitality as a Key Competence for Professionals in the Rural Communities of the Province of Chimborazo-Ecuador

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Abstract

Tourism hospitality refers to the ability of tourism professionals to treat tourists in a friendly, courteous, and respectful manner. This includes the ability to understand the needs and wishes of tourists and to offer personalized solutions tailored to their requirements. The objective of this work was to analyze tourism hospitality as a key competence in professionals from rural communities in the province of Chimborazo, Ecuador, using an interpretative, descriptive, and analytical methodology. The results of the study obtained show the need for the communities to organize themselves in the community parishes of the province of Chimborazo to raise hospitality as a selfless virtue in the attention to tourists, establishing a social and normative commitment that allows the strengthening of the communities.

Keywords: Hospitality, Ethics, Tourism Management, Rural communities, Ecuador

1. Introduction

The World Tourism Organization (2019) maintains that tourism is a source that generates income, but also technical knowledge, spreading rapidly among countries through the emergence of international organizations and associations in this sector, which has highlighted the preponderant nature of this sector for the world.

In this way, it has been evident for decades that tourism is part of the world's economies because it is an economic sector of major growth, generating employment opportunities and growth

for the regions. In this way, this condition makes it possible to prevail what is established by the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (2001) when it states that communities will be directly associated with tourism activities with the sole purpose of achieving economic, social and cultural benefits, especially in providing sources of employment, giving opportunities to the staff of the region and the search for quality of life. However, because of the conditions that prevailed due to the COVID 19 pandemic, there was no growth of tourists in the Latin American region. Therefore, with the United States of America being the main source market for many tourist destinations in the Caribbean and Central America, the problems caused by the pandemic generated great challenges for the tourist communities.

From these perspectives, the UNWTO (2017) alludes to considering tourism from the ethical hospitality dimension in tourism services, i.e. it is evident that there is a lack of philosophical, racial, intercultural and professional knowledge that prevents involvement in studies that focus on and/or address the potential of tourist attractions, gastronomic culture, natural beauty such as flora and fauna, among other services and opportunities offered by rural tourism communities.

Therefore, in compliance with one of the purposes of the UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics (2020), article 4 mentions that "Host communities, on the one hand, and local professionals, on the other, should learn to know and respect the tourists who visit them and inform themselves about their way of life, their tastes and their expectations. Education and training for professionals will contribute to a hospitable welcome. In effect, article 8 generates the strategic importance of communities in tourism development, as the convention states that "Local populations should be associated with tourism activities and have an equitable share in the economic, social and cultural benefits derived therefrom, and especially in the direct and indirect creation of employment to which they give rise".

2. Theoretical Foundation

From an epistemic standpoint, hospitality originates from the Latin term 'hospitalities', traditionally associated with providing aid to pilgrims and extending a warm welcome to those in need, whether they be local or foreign visitors. According to Baum (2022), hospitality is seen as a philosophy and practice of human interaction that centers around the experience of the relationship between hosts and guests. It is an interactive process which involves the establishment, maintenance, and strengthening of a trustful, respectful, and caring relationship between hosts and guests. The goal is to create a satisfying and memorable experience for all parties involved. Therefore, it necessitates a range of technical skills that those offering hospitality should possess, including empathy, understanding, flexibility, creativity, and collaboration.

This specialist highlights a deserved attention to this aspect understanding that it is a strategic approach that determines in the framework of business management how to apply hospitality in different sectors, such as hospitality, tourism, retail and services. According to Paraskevas and Arendell (2014), tourism hospitality refers to the ability of tourism service providers to offer a personalized treatment and a satisfactory customer experience, while preserving cultural values and the quality of the natural environment. It is therefore not only about providing a good service, but also about creating an atmosphere of comfort and well-being for the tourist, based on empathy, friendliness and efficiency. In the context of understanding the tourism sector, for García (2011), hospitality implies the way of becoming one and the other in the world without losing one's own peculiarity, without violently homologating the different other, but unveiling the relations of unity in one's own singularity. In this sense, for the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (2020), tourism has characteristics and identities that are synthesized in different ways in the social, cultural, economic and political context, but they are the reflection of a population, which possesses a determined potential, whether natural, cultural or those that are part of the autonomy of the populations themselves, thus generating a motivation for the displacement that the tourist dynamic implies.

In this sense, hospitality is assumed as a fact, where culture is incubated and developed, expressed in gastronomy, music as a universal language, art, literature and thought. The work entitled "Hospitality and World Politics" by Ingram, J (2016) considers how hospitality is fundamental to the construction of culture and interpersonal relations. Ingram argues that hospitality is a fundamental social practice that allows us to better connect and understand each other. Furthermore, it is argued within the framework of hospitality that it is not only an individual virtue, but can also be a political tool that can promote cooperation and understanding between different groups and cultures; thus as they rightly state the study of tourism is of great relevance (Timmermann & Korstanje, 2022; Kirilenko, A.P. and Stepchenkova, S. 2018) it should also be noted that hospitality responds to the characteristics of the fundamental ethical experiences that weave the lives of human beings, thus being a category and / or dimension that allows us to interpret the general situation of man in the world, thus generating a framework of openness in ethics, as a discipline of philosophy that studies the behavior of human beings on moral precepts, duty, welfare and collective happiness.

Within the context of hospitality, there are various approaches and theories that can be utilized. As you astutely noted, one of the most significant theories is that of Tomillo (2013), who emphasizes the various forms of hospitality that exist, depending on the demand and the circumstances in which they arise. As such, one can encounter different types of hospitality, including tourist hospitality, migratory hospitality, and business hospitality, among others. This perspective contrasts starkly with the Kantian approach, based on moral duty and the enactment of the ethical imperative, as noted by Pérez, C. E., & Reyes, A. E. (2020). According to this view, hospitality should not be a response conditioned by demand or circumstance, but rather an ethical way of life—a practice of virtues and a demonstration of respect for others as human beings. This defines its scope and boundaries. Consequently, hospitality is the outcome of treating others—the guests—well, respecting one's own dignity and that of others, being attentive, caring, and so forth. Therefore, he emphasizes (Chapernel, 2011), it is a maxim that conforms to the categorical imperative and guides towards virtue. According to Kantian ethics, the categorical imperative is a moral principle that demands actions to be universal, i.e., applicable to any person in any situation, however in the case of hospitality, this means that we should treat others with respect and consideration, no matter who they are or what their situation is. Furthermore, hospitality should not be seen as an act conditioned by demand or circumstance, but as a way of being virtuous, showing generosity and expressing respect for others. Therefore, this specialist on the subject stresses the importance of hospitality as a fundamental value for interpersonal relations and the construction of a fairer and more caring society (Vega et al 2019).

According to (González & Moya, 2017), these characteristics of hospitality, in current sources, confer on the virtues of courtesy and kindness the character of techniques to increase the flow of tourists. From this perspective the contributions of Yong, A. (2018) highlights the importance of hospitality as a fundamental virtue, which is based on love for others and concern for the other as a human being, Yong, hospitality should not be seen as a set of techniques or strategies to increase the flow of tourists, but to cultivate human virtue and natural behavior. Rather than focusing on hospitality characteristics derived from current sources, as Gonzalez and Moya (2017) suggest, Yong proposes an approach centered on love, generosity and concern for the other. The approach outlined by Gonzalez and Moya (2017) makes it difficult to cultivate human virtue and its natural behavior by identifying virtue as technicality and business procedure.

Professional preparation is not enough, as a primary requirement of tourism hospitality, given that there are other types of aspects to consider that form part of the professional profile that alludes to quality service in hospitality, in effect, as stated by (Moya, 2018), the ethical practice of the tourism professional is a determining factor in the quality of the innovative hotel service and to that extent contributes to its sustainability over time, given that tourism hospitality can be used to develop and strengthen the skills and abilities necessary for the management of hospitality in the tourism sector by this professional in the tourism area.

In this sense and following the established line of approach to rural tourism, it should be noted that it promotes sustainable development from the local, social, cultural, environmental and economic point of view, allows the empowerment of the appropriation and conservation of heritage, territory, and generates social and economic benefits in the host communities (Ruiz, 2015). Thus, in the field of interest in this topic, Pérez and Reyes (2020) argue that rural tourism can promote the appropriation and conservation of local heritage and territory, as well as generate social and economic benefits in the host communities considering the professional profile linked to the skills acquired. Furthermore, community-based rural tourism can foster the participation and empowerment of local communities in tourism management and planning through their people and their own competences.

Thus, the benefits of community-based tourism, as stated by Vargas & Brenner (2013), have motivated its inclusion in development policies, associated with community-based tourism considered as the indigenous tourism approach, defined according to (Espeso et al., 2016, p.18), as "tourism initiatives managed by indigenous peoples where culture has a potential competitive advantage and where the values and knowledge of native communities guide the activities and services offered" (p.18).

Cuenca and Viteri (2021) highlight the benefits of community-based tourism and its inclusion in development policies in the country in relation to community-based tourism and cultural identity in Ecuador; therefore community-based tourism is considered as a form of tourism that focuses on local communities, their cultural and natural resources and their people. The indigenous tourism approach that identifies it in the country focuses on tourism initiatives that have been considered by indigenous peoples, where the culture and knowledge of the native communities are a guide for the activities and services offered, therefore community tourism can help to preserve the local culture and heritage, encouraging the active participation of local communities in tourism management and planning.

Given these conditions, it is important to point out that hospitality in the field of tourism involves generating plans and/or training that generate opportunities to educate, train and develop skills in the inhabitants and in the professionals who are available to provide this service to tourists, which will undoubtedly allow for the sustainable development of the regions within the framework of tourist demand. Ulrika & Shuangqi (2021). Finally, in the tourism service, professionals are required to be qualified to perform their functions competently (know-how); customer service (willingness to do), in a moral sense, in an attentive and courteous manner; to be supportive in establishing relations of respect and collaboration with tourists and colleagues (Aldaz et al.; Cejas et al., 2021). In the case of Ecuador and specifically in the province of Chimborazo, characterized by a vast and unequalled natural and cultural wealth, tourism is considered a fundamental activity in the economic, cultural and social life that provides sources of development through the generation of employment for its activities in general. This province has physical and natural attractions, as well as cultural ones, which are considered part of the tourist heritage, constituting an ideal mechanism to incorporate the development of its people and to stimulate a greater balance between them, assuming the great challenge and complexity that nations are experiencing.

According to the point of view of Moreno P., (2014), the characteristics and qualities that a tourist service provider must possess in terms of the hospitality demanded by a tourist - to maintain their full confidence in the service provided and thus achieve their loyalty - are identified in table 1 below.

Table 1: Generic competences of a tourism service provider

Customer orientation	Intention to please and please the customer. The image accompanied by excellent attention is worth much more than you think
Tic	Become familiar with the operation of online travel agencies, online communication and software. Know operating or reservation systems (Opera, Galileo or Amadeus).
Communication skills	To speak in public as is the case of destination representatives, tour guides. 80% will deal with foreign groups.
Languages	Mandatory in this industry.
Learning capacity	It is more linked to attitude than aptitude.

Source: Guerrero et al (2023)

Competencies in the tourism professional is conceived as an effective approach to develop and strengthen the skills and abilities needed for hospitality management in the tourism sector by highlighting the key competencies needed for hospitality management, and how these competencies can be developed and assessed.

3. Methodology

This study developed the scientific method through the modality of qualitative and interpretative research, to this effect the study was framed in the compilation of documentary and informative bases about the object of study, that is to say those specialists who identified through their theoretical contributions the trends, situations and conclusions that determined the deep understanding of the processes indicated in the study through the interpretation of the bibliographic bases consulted were approached Cejas, (2017)

In this research a systematic processing of the data collected was applied through interpretations that were linked to the reality studied. The consultation of bibliographies extracted from the web through first and secondhand sources was applied. The methodology adopted in the development of the study, generating a coherent, objective, and systematic process of grafts around the theories associated with the subject of study. For this, it was possible to articulate interpretations generated to the scientific method through a type of documentary research (Frost and Frost, 2021). However, the dimension of the research allowed us to generate the description as a method that embraces interdisciplinary and systemic approaches, since, from the ethical vision in the hospitality of rural communities, different processes of tourism services are addressed, considering the perception of customers. Such an approach allows the methodological design that is generated through a suitable instrument for diagnosis and intervention and is also oriented towards the search for alternative strategies that guarantee the improvement of community tourism management Barchitec (2017).

In this order of ideas, the research was carried out during health prevention measures associated with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, where new ways of social interaction, isolation regimes, new regulations in the behavior of tourist hospitality and the effects that this brought in rural communities in the province of Chimborazo are evidenced. It is highlighted that rural communities had their own hospitality norms in the province of Chimborazo, and the applicability of the pandemic norms was generated according to the perception and sustainability perceived by the community entities. In the meantime, not all rural tourist communities in the province of Chimborazo had the option of receiving tourists with their infrastructure, as there was no single criterion on the norms established by institutional bodies. Thus, the field instrument was applied to the communities of Cantón San Pablo, Riobamba; Pulinguí Centro, Cantón Guano and Nizag in Cantón Alausí, which is why it was necessary to analyse the dimension of hospitality. Five traits or

variables were selected for study, namely, signage, manuals and competencies.

Table 2: study variables

Study	Range utility
Signage	The existence of signs associated with standards of conduct, preventive measures, warnings and environmental care;
Manual	Responds to the existence in the community of a protocol, manuscript, code or manual related to hospital ethics and standards to be observed by community participants.
Competences	Adduces to the evidence on labor competencies, the teaching of hospital ethics standards.
Knowledge	Indicates the degree of knowledge of the community tourism worker on hospital ethics.
Standards	It is related to the existence of regulations of behavioral duties and community norms associated with hospital ethics.

Source: Own Elaboration (2023)

Table 3: The following scale of values was adopted for the purpose of diagnosis.

Values	10	20	30	40
Scope of values.	Nonexistence and ignorance of the variable.	Non-existence plus recognition of the presence of the variable in tourism management.	Indicates the existence or presence of the variable in a formal and hardly perceived way. Presupposes	Existence and implementation of the variable.

Source: Own Elaboration (2023)

The methodology then used was the application of a grey scale map, the determination of which was part of the diagnosis, where the intensity of grey indicates the deterioration of the study variable examined. Table 4 shows the shade of the grey scale map.

Table 4: Grayscale map, application of the observation instrument.

						Grayscale legend
						Less critical
	Signs	Handbook	Competence	Knowledge	Norms	Critical
Study Community I	20	10	10	10	20	Very critical
Study Community II	10	10	10	20	30	
Study Community III	20	10	10	10		

Source: Own Elaboration (2022)

Therefore, the problem identified in this research is the lack of knowledge of the perception of tourists regarding the meaning of the hospitality dimension in rural tourist communities in the province of Chimborazo in Ecuador, which is why the need to promote and strengthen rural/community tourism activity makes it possible to respond to the dialectic contradictions that exist in the context of tourism at the time of highlighting the upturn that this type of tourism has had in the height of the pandemic, consequently, the presence in the province of tourist communities providing services and the different perceptions as well as criteria of services perceived by tourists, shows the great challenge in the improvement of the hospitality service by the tourism professional, where the competences demonstrated are key in the activity developed with the understanding that when tourists receive good tourist hospitality through tourism professionals, respect for the

environment, the promotion of local culture and cultural heritage will be promoted. In addition, tourists who are treated with hospitality have a positive experience and are more likely to return to tourist destinations in the future, thus promoting sustainable tourism and employment generation in the sector (Cejas et al 2022).

In this sense, the grey scale matrix (Table 1) indicates the need to intervene in the hospitality service as a basis for tourism development and promotion in rural communities. The belief in the sense that hospitality is synonymous with kindness and in the community's ethical appreciation of tourism performance. The community actors confess that they have not received the treatment of tourists from this approach but agree that it is necessary to professionalize community work as an instrument for customer loyalty and, consequently, for the valuation of community tourism. In the case of this research, non-probabilistic sampling is assumed in the absence of data on visits to these tourist communities, in addition to the pandemic state and social measures, purposive sampling is assumed with 30 tourists without distinguishing whether they were national or international, applying an instrument that was exposed to three experts with a result of validity and reliability of 0.95%. The instrument was designed with statements that responded to the Likert scale. The mathematical statistical method of the SPSS 23 software was used.

The development of the instrument was based on the procedure or algorithm of execution, which was expressed in stages or steps to measure the degree of ethical dimensions of hospitality on the scales mentioned above.

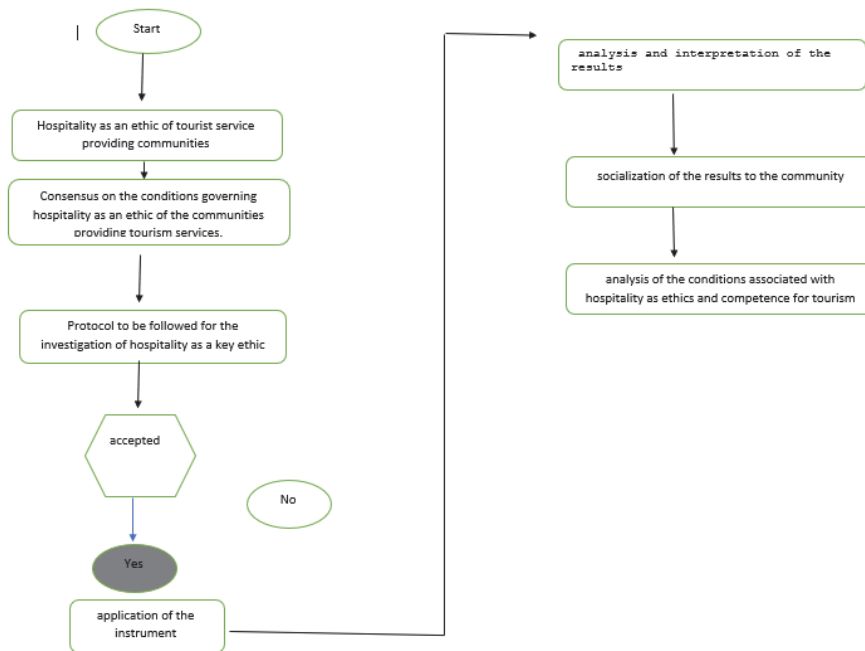


Figure 1: Implementation procedure or algorithm applied in the research.

Source: Guerrero et al. (2023)

In this sense, the good practices associated with hospitality were contextualized in different contexts of tourism service providers in the study communities, with the aim of developing the community hospitality ethics pillars, which are the basis for behavior, interaction and communication with the visiting tourist. These pillars are valid for training, design of community regulations where the

hospitality approach is present.

Next, we proceeded - see figure 2 - to support the approaches or pillars of hospitality, by operationalizing them in simple and understandable language for the members of the communities; therefore, the pillar "personal or self-openness" indicates the vocation to share friendship, to provide individualized attention to each tourist with familiarity and professionalism; the pillar "altruism" is the moral disposition to seek and do good to others, where honesty, generosity, patience and receptiveness are revealed; the pillar "solidarity" is a sign of help, affection, commitment and protection. On the other hand, the pillar "affability" encompasses the personological traits of extroversion, politeness, courtesy, gentleness, gentleness in treatment and language, being gentle and calm, pleasant, cordial, tender, conciliatory, kind and good-natured. Respect for others" is the recognition of diversity, decorum of behavior, deference, humility, tolerance, care and security.



Figure 2. Architecture of community hospital pillars

The methodological criterion applied, gives account of the systematicity of the content derived from the competences (six in total) being the same: 1) the perception of hospitality 2) affability 3) respect for the other 4) empathy 5) personal openness 6) altruism and 7) solidarity. In measuring these competencies, emphasis was placed on the conditions governing rural and community-based tourism practice.

4. Discussion and Results

Based on the measurement of the competencies - 1) ethical hospitality perception 2) affability 3) respect for others 4) empathy 5) personal openness 6) altruism and 7) solidarity - it is determined that there is a high range that indicates the need for training, intervention in the quality and warmth of the tourist service, interpreting the rural/community hospitality ethics dimension. Similarly, it is identified that there is a predominant perception of indifference in terms of affability among the collaborators of the tourist community, indicating that this competence requires training in the component variables of Affability, how and when to reveal it to the tourist, in terms of respect for others, it is determined that it is relative, as it is perceived that how the relationship is perceived with respect to the other or visitor among the collaborators and those responsible for the community

tourist service, learning different levels of community perception (Cejas et al, 2021). Therefore, this aspect responds to an indicator of the disparity of social interaction between community tourism workers. The same that identifies the indifference of the treatment and respect in quality of the visitor who pays for a dignified service and who requires respect both for his conditions as a tourist and possibly for his actions. Regarding Empathy, it was determined that there is a need to create group workshops, exercises in the practice of empathy, therefore, tasty gastronomy and trips to the attractions are not enough, but also empathic interaction which must be learned and exercised. Personal openness as another condition analyzed reveals that in the field of indigenes it is difficult, as one of the traits of the race is introversion and suspicion of new acquaintances (Cejas et al 2020). Altruism requires assuming a community organizational culture, traits inherent to the service culture, in context with the community approach to minimize this tendency. Finally, about Solidarity, the results reflect the need to generate practical theoretical learning among collaborators in the tourist communities in Chimborazo. The same tendency is repeated where the values between Indifference and Low interaction predominate. Another evidence of the need for educational intervention.

Figure 3 shows the results and the trend in the improvement of hospitality in the framework of the study of all the factors and competences associated with this dimension.



Figure 3: Ethical dimension of Hospitality
Source: Guerrero et. al (2023)

Within the framework of the literature review and fieldwork, it is worth highlighting in this study that the key competences of the tourism professional in the hospitality activity include the ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, in different languages, which is essential in an increasingly globalized world. Interpersonal skills such as empathy and the ability to listen and understand the needs of customers are also important; the ability to work in a team and collaborate with others is another important competence, as many tasks in the hospitality industry involve working with colleagues and customers from different cultures and backgrounds. In addition, the ability to adapt to different situations and circumstances, and to be creative and find innovative solutions to problems, is crucial in the hospitality industry.

It is essential to have a sound knowledge of the products and services offered, as well as the

technical and operational aspects of the industry. This includes knowledge of marketing and sales, human resource management and finance, as well as leadership and decision-making skills, noting that these skills, knowledge and attitudes are not only important for customer satisfaction, but are also essential for the growth and sustainability of businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the research work that refers to Hospitality as a key competence in tourism in rural communities in the province of Chimborazo Ecuador, in a broad sense, allows us to allude to the fact that hospitality has a double dialectic in tourism management, in that in the first place hospitality to a tourist represents an act that combines a series of competences - solidarity, empathy, affability, among others - which translates into trust in the service received by the receiver in a given tourist community and the demonstration of those competences that the tourism professional identifies, especially in the case of rural communities in the province of Chimborazo Ecuador, empathy, affability, among others - which translates into trust in the service received by the receiver in a given tourist community and the demonstration of those competencies identified by the tourism professional, especially in the case of rural communities in the province of Chimborazo. The study shows the need to implement training and improvement plans to positively broaden the perceptions of the tourist in terms of the ethics of hospitality, as well as the need to socialize the rest of the communities in the province of Chimborazo regarding the preponderant character of this dimension, thereby promoting tourism and the development of the regions, without overlooking the great challenge of articulating the training of the tourism professional with the demands of the tourism sector, particularly with regard to good hospitality.

Tourism hospitality is a key competence in the professional profile of those working in the tourism sector, as it is essential to provide a quality experience to tourists and to promote responsible and sustainable tourism. Tourism professionals who demonstrate tourism hospitality are more likely to promote the conservation of the environment, local culture, and cultural heritage, and to generate social and economic benefits in tourism host communities.

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