

## SERVICE QUALITY IN TOURIST ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE MONTÚFAR CANTON

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### Abstract

The objective of the research is to assess the quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar. The study employs the SERVQUAL model, using a quantitative approach and a descriptive and correlational research design. The essential dimensions of reliability, safety, empathy, responsiveness, and tangible elements, as outlined in the model, are analyzed. A total of 384 surveys were conducted, with 64 of them administered to tourists. The results indicated deficiencies in the areas of personalized attention, problem-solving skills, and tangible elements. The study indicates that the enhancement of service quality leads to notable benefits, including increased competitiveness, visitor loyalty, and economic development in the canton. Additionally, the results indicate a substantial negative discrepancy between tourists' expectations and their perceptions of service quality, particularly in the areas of empathy and responsiveness, which emerged as the most negative dimensions. It is recommended that strategies be implemented to manage complaints, administer satisfaction surveys, and establish stricter quality standards. In conclusion, the research indicates that the implementation of continuous improvement processes will enhance the tourist image of Montúfar, increase customer satisfaction, and promote sustainable development in the sector. The implementation of a plan based on the PHVA Deming (Plan, Do, Verify, Act) cycle is proposed as a strategy. This strategy will focus on the following areas: Capacity to serve personnel, implementation of customer service protocols, proper maintenance of facilities, and modernization of services.

**Keywords:** Tourism and Sustainable Development

### Resumen

La investigación busca explicar la calidad del servicio en los establecimientos turísticos del cantón Montúfar mediante la aplicación del modelo SERVQUAL, desde un enfoque cuantitativo y un tipo de investigación descriptiva y correlacional. Se analizan las dimensiones esenciales de fiabilidad, seguridad, empatía, capacidad de respuesta y elementos tangibles, previstas en el modelo. A partir de 384 encuestas estratificadas por establecimientos logrando 64 encuestas realizadas a turistas, se detectaron falencias en la atención personalizada, la resolución de problemas y los elementos tangibles. El estudio indica que el incremento de los valores en los indicadores de calidad en el servicio genera beneficios como el fortalecimiento de la competitividad, la fidelización de visitantes y el incremento del desarrollo económico del cantón. Además, los resultados revelan una brecha negativa significativa entre las expectativas y percepciones de los turistas en la calidad del servicio, particularmente en los aspectos de empatía y capacidad de respuesta como las dimensiones más negativas. Se propone incorporar estrategias para gestionar quejas, aplicar encuestas de satisfacción y establecer estándares de calidad más estrictos. En conclusión, la investigación sostiene que la adopción de procesos de mejora continua

contribuirá a reforzar la imagen turística del cantón Montúfar, aumentar la satisfacción de los clientes y promover un desarrollo sostenible en el sector. Como estrategia se propone la implementación de un plan basado en el ciclo PHVA Deming (Planificar, Hacer, Verificar, Actuar), enfocado en la capacidad de atención al personal, la implementación de protocolos de atención al cliente, el mantenimiento adecuado de las instalaciones y la modernización de servicios.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo y Desarrollo sostenible.

## **Introduction**

In Ecuador, the tourism sector has seen a notable advancement in its understanding of service quality in recent years. The initial efforts to implement quality standards commenced in 2009. However, it was not until 2015 that the initiative received a significant boost, leading to the declaration of that year as "the year of tourism quality." Since then, the country has sought to improve the competitiveness of the sector by permitting quality labels, although to date, only a small percentage of establishments have been recognized for complying with the required standards (MINTUR, 2015). This suggests a potential challenge in integrating quality into national tourism management. The canton of Montúfar, located in the province of Carchi, is an example of a destination with great tourist potential, managing to define profiles of cultural, religious, and natural tourists. However, despite the growth in the supply of tourist services, tourist establishments face difficulties in guaranteeing quality service that meets the expectations of tourists. This situation is due, in part, to the lack of information on the perception of tourists regarding the services received, which prevents managers from implementing effective improvement strategies.

Cuazapaz and Rueda (2024) state that, while certain establishments have shown progress, it is crucial to reinforce fundamental elements such as staff training, customer service, and the management of the tourist experience. In the highly competitive tourism sector, it is essential to offer services that not only meet but exceed customer expectations to ensure their satisfaction and loyalty. To achieve this objective, it is essential to implement quality management tools and adhere to best practices that promote ongoing enhancement.

The objective of the research is to assess the quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar. This analysis will help determine a diagnosis, which will then be used to improve and progress the destination and ensure visitor satisfaction. This will contribute to the promotion and enhancement of the canton's tourism sector over time.

### **1. Theoretical framework.**

The quality of tourism services is defined as the gap between what the customer expects and what they perceive after consuming the service. This discrepancy can be attributed to the Expectation-Confirmation Theory, as Oliver (1980) explains. Satisfaction is typically achieved when the expected outcome is met or exceeded. Additionally, the theory of perceived value posits that the decision to repurchase is based on a comparison of the value received (functional and emotional) against the cost incurred (Zeithaml, 1988). To assess this gap, the SERVQUAL model is adopted, which has converted the discrepancy, known as Gap 5, into five dimensions: tangible, reliability, responsiveness, security, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Recent academic research in Latin America indicates that deficiencies in each analytical dimension correlate with direct repercussions on consumer satisfaction. Silva and Alves (2021) state that the credibility of the image of some Brazilian hotels is compromised due to the degradation of their tangible infrastructure. Reliability, understood as the fulfillment of promises, represents the most significant gap in the Ecuadorian hotel

industry, affecting the intention to use the service again (Silador Utrera et al., 2022). In the context of Colombian travel agencies, the absence of consistent customer service has been identified as a significant source of dissatisfaction (Gómez & Rojas, 2023). In the context of tourist transport services, safety and empathy are critical factors in the overall evaluation (Velasategui-Hernández et al., 2024). This evidence supports the continued use of the original 22 items of the SERVQUAL model, which employs a 5-point Likert scale to assess deficiencies in lodging, agencies, and transportation in the canton of Montúfar. To facilitate the transfer of diagnostic knowledge to a continuous improvement framework, the PHVA (plan, do, verify, act) cycle proposed by Deming is used. During the planning phase, the results derived from the SERVQUAL model are used to establish a hierarchy of actions. These actions include improving infrastructure components (tangible assets), complying with compliance protocols (reliability), implementing agile care flow systems (responsiveness), acquiring security certifications (security), and providing training focused on the intercultural awareness of the personnel (empathy). In the Do phase, these actions are implemented. In the Verification phase, the SERVQUAL model is applied again to confirm the reduction of Gap 5. In the Act phase, processes and external messaging are adjusted so that there are no over-promises and under-compliance. Recent empirical studies demonstrate a positive correlation between the two SERVQUAL-PHVA models and key performance indicators such as consumer satisfaction and operational efficiency in service entities in developing economies (Rahman and Senathirajah, 2023).

From a critical sociological perspective, gaps are manifestations of the inequalities in power relations and resource constraints that exist in particular parts of the world. These issues extend beyond mere technological shortcomings. The study employs principles of participatory action research, engaging providers, authorities, and tourists in collaborative problem-solving to develop solutions that address operational needs while fostering local empowerment. In this case, the quantitative data is analyzed in terms of group dynamics, with the objective of effecting a transformation of the territory.

The SERVQUAL model delineates the requisite metrics, while the theories of Expectation-Confirmation and Perceived Value examine the underlying reasons and consequences of service gaps. The PHVA cycle defines the operational methodology, and the socio-critical approach and action research endow the process with a social and autonomous dimension. This integration is poised to boost tourism in the canton of Montúfar. By enhancing the systematic diagnosis and improving the understanding and enhancement of services, it is expected to lead to enhanced visitor satisfaction and the sustainable growth of the destination.

## **2. Broadening and strengthening the theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Recent studies on the quality of the tourist service**

The quality of service in tourism has been recognized as a key driver for economic growth. Recent research has identified critical issues such as tourist satisfaction, sustainability in tourism, the value of service quality for customers, service quality in restaurants, and the influence of service quality on customer behavior.

### **2.2. Comparison between SERVQUAL, SERVPERF and HOLSERV**

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), is based on the comparison between the client's expectations and their actual perceptions of the service received. This model has been widely used to measure the quality of service in various sectors, including tourism.

However, there are alternative models that have also been applied in the tourism field:

- **SERVPERF:** Proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992), this model focuses solely on customer perceptions, eliminating the measurement of expectations. Some studies have found that SERVPERF may be more efficient in certain contexts.
- **HOLSERV:** Specifically designed for the hotel sector, this model adapts the dimensions of SERVQUAL to the particularities of hotel services.

The choice of SERVQUAL is justified by its ability to identify gaps between expectations and perceptions, which allows the design of specific improvement strategies and can fit in with the various services in which the model was applied

### 2.3. Integration of complementary conceptual frameworks

In addition to SERVQUAL, it is relevant to consider other conceptual frameworks that enrich the understanding of service quality in tourism:

- **Customer experience management:** Focused on creating memorable experiences that exceed customer expectations, promoting loyalty and satisfaction.
- **Loyalty:** Strategies aimed at maintaining and strengthening the relationship with customers, increasing their frequency of visits and recommendations.
- **Relationship marketing:** Focused on building lasting relationships with customers, based on mutual trust and satisfaction.

The integration of these approaches provides a more holistic view of service quality, making it possible to address not only immediate satisfaction, but also the building of long-term relationships with customers.

### 3. Materials and methods

The study employs a quantitative approach, enabling an objective assessment of the quality of service in Montúfar's tourist establishments. A descriptive research approach was employed to identify and analyze the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model in the context of local tourism. The methodology entailed fieldwork, wherein information was collected directly from tourists who utilized tourist services in hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and tourist transport companies. The methodology also incorporated documentary research, which provided a theoretical and contextual foundation. The design was non-experimental and cross-sectional, since the data were collected at a single time point without intervening in the study variables (Hernández et al., 2014).

The study population included tourists who visited Montúfar canton and utilized tourist services during the harvest period. A random stratified sampling was applied, considering the different types of participating establishments as strata: three hotels, a restaurant, a tour operator, and a tourist transport company. A total of 385 surveys were collected and subsequently analyzed using a formula for infinite population, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. The instrument used was a structured survey based on the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), adapted to the tourism sector. This instrument measures the five dimensions of business excellence: tangible elements, reliability, responsiveness, security, and empathy. Although the model has been validated in multiple international contexts, an internal reliability analysis was carried out for this study using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This analysis yielded a value of  $\alpha = [\text{value}]$ , which reflects acceptable consistency for the analysis (George & Mallery, 2003).

The data processing was carried out using Microsoft Excel, through which the respondents' responses were organized and analyzed. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to interpret the perception of tourists about the quality of service in the different types of tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar. These techniques

included the calculation of absolute frequencies, percentages, and graphic representation of the results. These results allow us to identify areas for improvement and strengthen quality management from the customer's perspective.

### 3.1. Validation or reliability of the instrument

To ensure the internal consistency of the measurement instrument used in this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. This coefficient, based on the SERVQUAL model, took into account both perception and expectation in the service. This model incorporates a total of 22 items for each dimension, which are distributed as follows: tangible elements, reliability, responsiveness, security, and empathy.

Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was calculated using the following formula (Cronbach, 1951):

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left( 1 - \frac{\sum \sigma_{\sigma_i}^2}{\sigma_{\sigma}^2} \right)$$

where  $k$  represents the number of items, corresponds to the sum of the individual variances of each item, and is the total variance of the sum of the items.  $\sum \sigma_{\sigma_i}^2$

In this study, the calculations yielded a coefficient of  $\alpha=0.976$  for perception, which indicates excellent internal consistency; while for expectation  $\alpha=0.858$  was obtained, which represents a very good internal consistency. These values are interpreted according to the criteria of George and Mallery (2003), who establish that a Cronbach's alpha greater than or equal to 0.9 reflects excellent reliability, and values between 0.8 and 0.9 represent good reliability.

These results support the robustness of the instrument used to evaluate the quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar, guaranteeing the robustness of the data collected for subsequent statistical analysis.

## 4. Results and discussion

### Population and sample

The population is made up of tourists who visit the tourist establishments of the Montúfar canton. Due to the lack of precise data on the exact number of these visitors, the formula for infinite population was applied.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 PQ}{e^2}$$

Where:

N: Sample Size

Z: Confidence level squared 95% = 1.96

P: Probability of occurrence: 0.50

Q: Probability of non-occurrence: 0.50

E: Sample Error: 0.05

$$n = \frac{1,96^2 * 0,50 * 0,50}{0,05^2} = 385$$

65 surveys were applied in establishments registered in the Tourism Services Registry of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (2024). Some businesses were excluded for refusing to participate or failing to provide information. The establishments included in the study mentioned in Table 4.

**Table 1.**  
*Establishments included in the investigation*

**Instrument for the collection of information**

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**TOURIST ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE CANTON OF MONTÚFAR**

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ESTABLISHMENT	CATEGORY	WEIGHTING
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>		
SAN MARTIN	HOTEL	2 stars
SAN FRANCISCO	HOTEL	2 stars
BLACK HOUSE	HOSTEL	3 stars
<b>FOOD AND BEVERAGES</b>		
HOUSE OF THE MYRTLE TREE	RESTAURANT	2 forks
<b>TOURIST GROUND TRANSPORTATION</b>		
SERVICIOS TURISTICOS TUFITOURS S.A.	TOURIST GROUND TRANSPORTATION	Unique
<b>TRAVEL AGENCIES</b>		
SG ECOTUR CIA. LTDA.		Tour Operator

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To evaluate the quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar, the following instrument was used.

**Survey**

A survey was conducted based on the SERVQUAL Model, proposed by Parasuraman and Berry, which allows measuring the quality of service through five fundamental dimensions:

- Reliability
- Safety
- Responsiveness
- Tangible elements
- Empathy

The survey consists of **22 items**, rated on a **Likert-type** scale from 1 to 5:

- **1** = Strongly disagree
- **5** = Agree

The quality of service is determined by comparing the **difference between the customer's expectations and perceptions**, which allows the existing gap to be identified and areas for improvement to be targeted.

The study adopts the method to examine the standard of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar, using the SERVQUAL model to measure the quality of service. For this, visitors who perceived in the services of the tourist establishments that are part of the cadastre of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador. The information collected was ordered and managed, calculating in general and particular for each of the five dimensions established by the SERVQUAL model: Reliability, Security, Responsiveness, Tangible Elements and Empathy (Figure 1).

**Table 2.**  
*Data by dimensions of the quality of the service.*

ESTABLISHMENT	RELIABILITY	SAFETY	C.ANSWER	E.TANGIBLES	EMPATHY
SAN MARTIN	0.56	0.55	0.54	0.54	0.52
SAN FRANCISCO	0.44	0.42	0.42	0.41	0.40
BLACK HOUSE	-1.15	-0.63	-1.22	-1.08	-1.17
THEY ATTACK	-0.99	-0.95	-0.92	-0.89	-0.85
TUFITOURS	0.26	0.27	0.25	0.25	0.24
AGENCY	0.44	0.42	0.40	0.39	0.37

findings reveal a discrepancy between anticipated and actual service experiences, indicating a general shortcoming in service quality. The San Martin and San Francisco accommodations receive favorable reviews in terms of reliability and safety, indicating that tourists have confidence in the establishments and perceive satisfactory service compliance. Despite this, the empathy dimension received the lowest score in almost all establishments, indicating a need to implement strategies for personalized attention and customer relations.

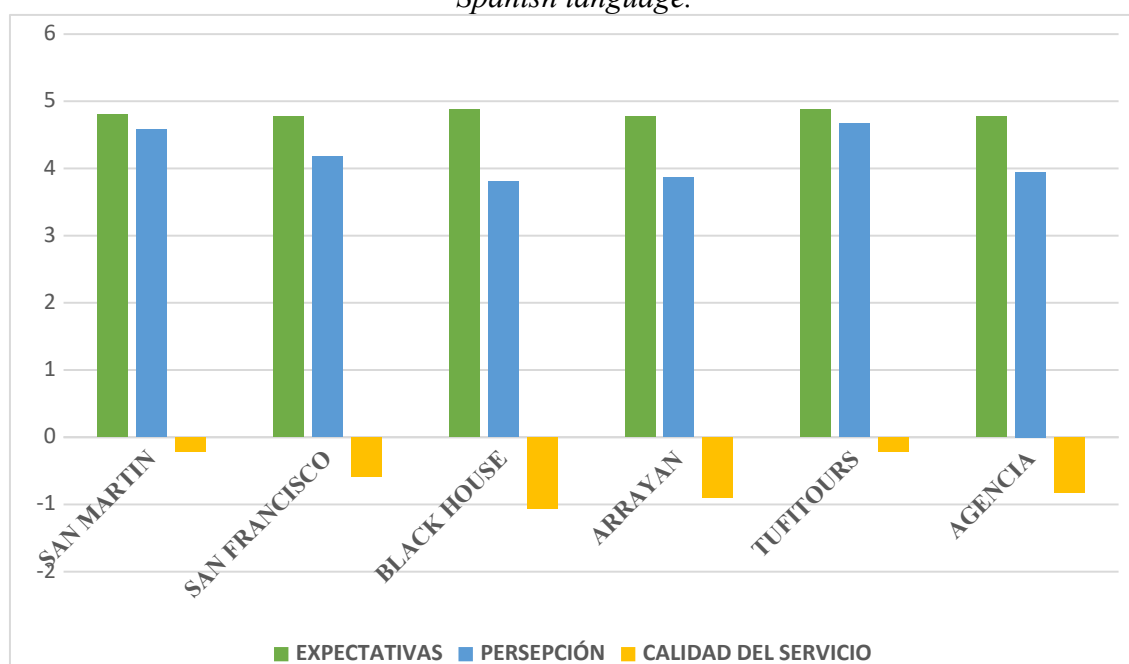
**Table 3.**

*Quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar*

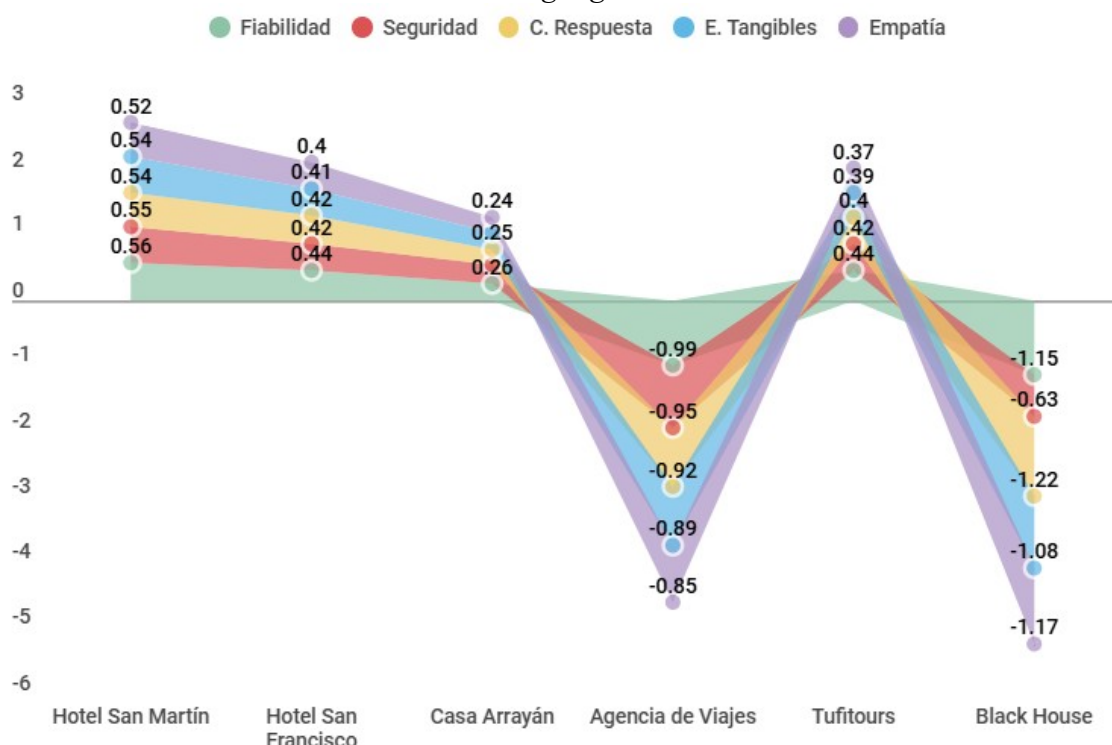
ESTABLISHMENT	EXPECTATIONS	INSIGHT	QUALITY OF SERVICE
SAN MARTIN	4.8	4.58	-0.22
SAN FRANCISCO	4.77	4.18	-0.59
BLACK HOUSE	4.88	3.81	-1.07
THEY ATTACK	4.77	3.87	-0.90
TUFITOURS	4.88	4.67	-0.21
AGENCY	4.77	3.95	-0.82

**Figure 1**

*Quality of service by tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



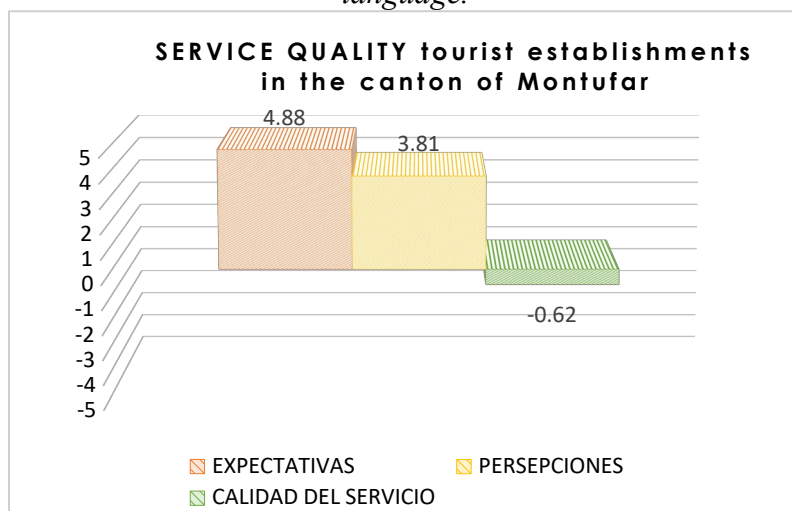
**Figure 2.**  
*Dimensions of tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



The restaurant and hostel exhibit more pronounced deficiencies, particularly with regard to responsiveness and tangible elements. This suggests that in many cases, the service delivery speed and efficiency may not meet tourists' expectations, and the physical condition of the facilities may not be up to standard. In contrast, some tourism businesses, such as travel agencies, demonstrated more balanced results, showcasing strengths in reliability and safety, while also indicating opportunities for improvement in areas such as customer service and empathy.

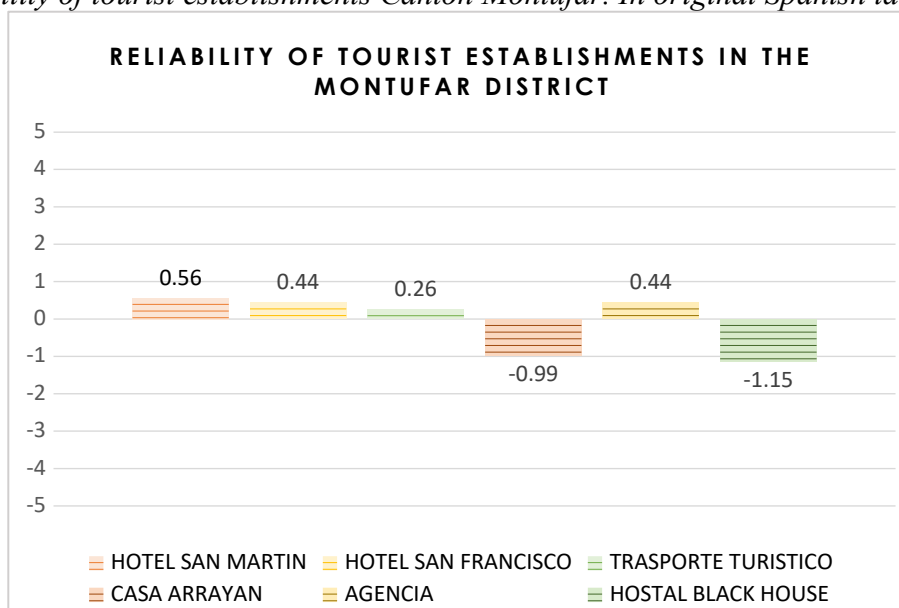
When comparing these findings with previous studies in other locations, it has been observed that the perception of service quality is not fixed but varies according to different contextual factors. Research conducted in the province of El Oro indicates that customer satisfaction can evolve over time, necessitating businesses to adapt to new expectations in a continuous manner. Studies in the mobile phone sector in Carchi have shown that perceptions of quality are influenced by specific factors, including customer service and reliability. An analysis of public transportation in San Gabriel finally revealed the importance of evaluating the quality of service from various perspectives, including infrastructure, safety, and user experience.

**Figure 3.**  
*Quality of service in tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



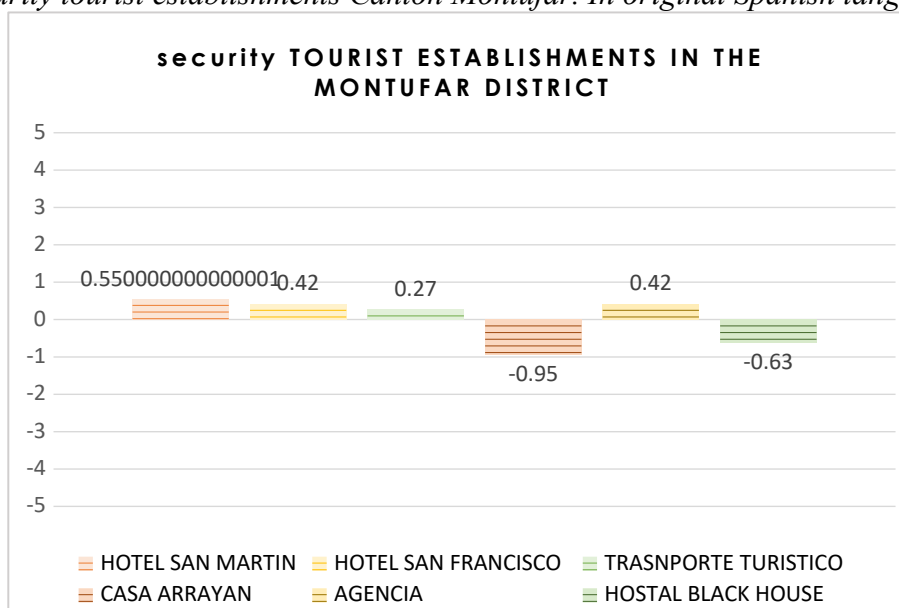
An analysis of all the tourist establishments in Montúfar reveals a discrepancy between visitors' expectations and their actual experiences. Despite their high expectations, the service they receive falls short of their expectations. This has a negative impact on the perception of the quality of the service provided.

**Figure 4.**  
*Reliability of tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



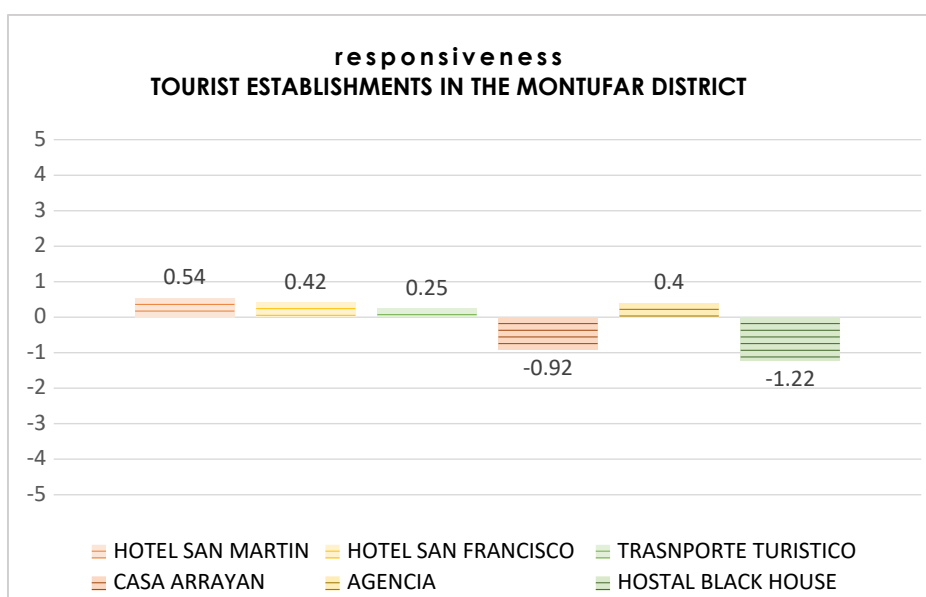
The analysis of Reliability in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar indicates that the Hotel San Martín presents the best value 0.56, followed by the Hotel San Francisco and tourist transport (0.44).

**Figure 5.**  
*Security tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



Analyzing the security in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar shows that the Hotel San Martín has a value of 0.55. In contrast to Casa Arrayán -0.95 and Hostal Black House -0.63 register greater problems,

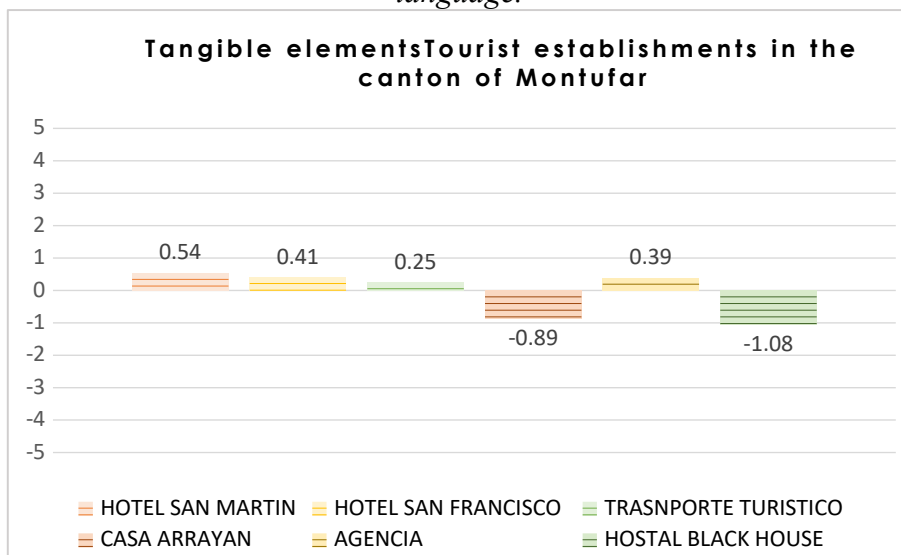
**Figure 6.**  
*Responsiveness of tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



The analysis of the Response Capacity in the tourist establishments of the Montúfar canton shows that the Hotel San Martín with a 0.54 is the best valued, which would mean

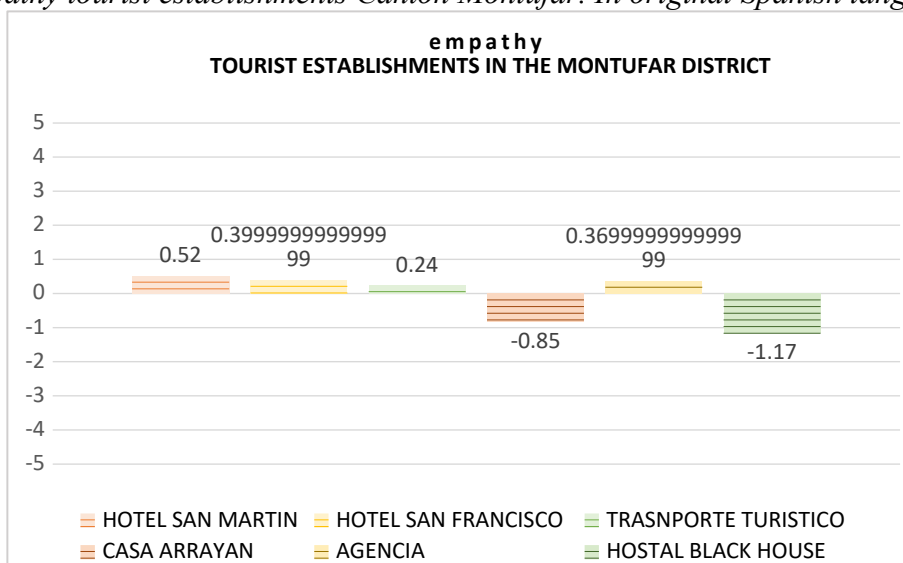
that the establishment has a high level of capacity to respond to the needs and expectations of its customers.

**Figure 7.**  
*Tangible elements tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



As for the analysis of the tangible elements of the tourist establishments of the Montúfar canton, the difference in the quality of their facilities is significant, since the Hotel San Martín reaches a 0.54.

**Figure 8.**  
*Empathy tourist establishments Canton Montúfar. In original Spanish language.*



The dimension of empathy in the tourist establishments of the Montúfar canton indicates a difference in the quality of customer service provided. The Hotel San Martín 0.52 is the best rated in terms of empathy.

**6. Discussion**

Several studies support the findings on the quality of service in tourist establishments in Montúfar. Izquierdo, Lazo, and Andrade (2018) demonstrated in El Oro that perceptions of the service can vary depending on the context, something that is also observed in Montúfar, where negative gaps in empathy and responsiveness were identified. Pusedá and Cevallos (2020) pointed out that aspects such as personalized attention are essential for customer satisfaction, which reinforces the need to improve in Montúfar in areas such as reliability and empathy. Aza (2023) highlighted in San Gabriel the importance of evaluating the tangible aspects and attention in transport, coinciding with the deficiencies that have been observed in tourist transport in Montúfar, Narváez (2020) stressed that applying the PHVA Cycle significantly improves the perceived quality, which would be useful for Montúfar's establishments. Finally, Gutiérrez and Rubio (2009) recalled that tourism competitiveness depends on the quality of service and loyalty, areas where Montúfar still faces challenges, especially in establishments such as Hostal Black House and Casa Arrayán.

### **Study Contributions**

The study provides us with a comprehensive analysis of the quality of service in tourist establishments in the canton of Montúfar through the application of the SERVQUAL model and Deming's PHVA cycle, allowing not only to identify the existing gaps, but also to propose a structured and replicable continuous improvement plan. Unlike previous studies that have focused on evaluating only the perceptions of the service, this research integrates a methodology of diagnosis and action that facilitates its adaptation to other cantons with similar tourist characteristics. It also provides a practical framework for managers, authorities and tour operators to implement sustainable improvements that strengthen competitiveness and the visitor experience

### **Annex 1**

#### **Plan for the Improvement of the Quality of Service through the Deming Cycle and the SERVQUAL Model in the Tourist Establishments of the Montúfar Canton**

Quality management in tourist services in the canton of Montúfar represents an essential element to guarantee customer satisfaction and promote the continuous improvement of establishments in the sector. In our opinion, the Deming Cycle (PHVA), which can be applied together with the SERVQUAL Model, is in fact the most appropriate alternative to achieve indices of excellence in the provision of the service.

The Deming Cycle, which establishes the phases of Plan, Do, Verify, Act, provides a methodological structure for the continuous improvement of organizations. In the context of the tourism sector in Montúfar, this type of tool makes it possible to identify weaknesses in the service, formulate action plans, implement solutions, evaluate results and adopt corrective measures.

The SERVQUAL Model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), is the model that has achieved the greatest diffusion to measure the quality of service based on five dimensions:

- Reliability: delivering what was promised as promised.
- Responsiveness: being willing and quick to help the customer.
- Security: transmitting knowledge, attention and confidence to the user.
- Empathy: paying personalized attention and knowing the customer's needs.
- The tangible elements: the state of the infrastructure, the machines and the presentation of the personnel.

The union of the PHVA Cycle with the SERVQUAL Model allows for the orderly and effective management of tourism services; The process is developed in this regard as follows:

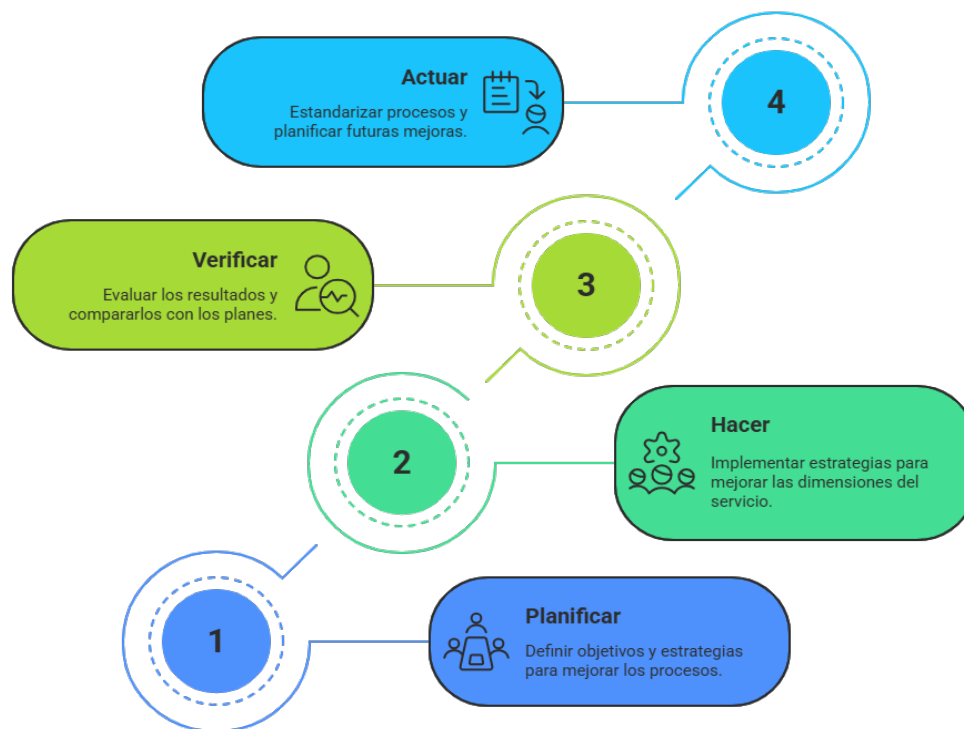
Plan: Identify deficiencies in the provision of the service based on the SERVQUAL diagnosis, defining strategies for improvement.

- Do: Implement corrective and preventive strategies based on the initial analysis.
- Verify: Evaluate the impact of the strategies implemented through satisfaction surveys and other performance indicators.
- Act: Make adjustments and improvements based on the results, consolidating the process of continuous improvement.

The unification of these methodologies contributes to maximizing the quality of attention or service, which also contributes to the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists. This, while improving the standards of service, also acts as a reinforcement for the competitiveness of tourist establishments with the months or years that pass.

**Figure 9.**

*Deming Cycle Model (PHVA) and SERVQUAL Model. In original Spanish language.*



7. After the relevant analysis, the planning stage focused on defining the desired objectives to be achieved, the strategies to achieve them and the resources needed to intervene in each of the aforementioned dimensions. Consequently, a set of specific actions has been established: firstly, a Preventive Maintenance Plan and the acquisition of innovative equipment, thus recognising the importance of tangible elements and guaranteeing adequate facilities; and, secondly, a Rapid Response Protocol in the event of operational unforeseen events, which translates into an improvement in the reaction capacity of work teams. At the same time, an intensive training program for staff in customer service was implemented, focused on communication skills, friendliness and personalization of service, with the aim of enhancing the dimension of empathy. For the reliability dimension, an Action Plan was proposed whose objective was to ensure compliance with the commitments made to its customers, in order to strengthen the trust and credibility of the services offered.

The execution phase involved the materialisation of all these strategies and, as a final culmination, the preparation of a Manual of Functions and Responsibilities that has made it possible to precisely define the tasks and functions of the staff, reducing polyfunctionality and improving the internal organisation of the establishments. Subsequently, in the Verification phase, the results were systematically evaluated, through the comparison between the established objectives and the results obtained, as well as the advances and deviations, or areas for improvement. In the Act phase, feedback and process adjustment processes were implemented, procedures that were considered effective were standardized, and new improvement strategies were developed to reinforce the areas that required more attention, thus ensuring the sustainability of the continuous improvement process. In this way, the methodological combination implemented not only made it possible to implement one-way solutions to the problematic situation, but also allowed for continuous improvement.

## 7. Conclusions

- The evaluation made to the tourist establishments of the Montúfar canton indicates a negative gap of -0.62. This shows that while visitors expect high-quality service, the experience they receive does not meet their expectations, leading to dissatisfaction and reducing the chances that they will recommend this destination.
- There is a significant difference in the level of quality of service available in the different tourist establishments. While some businesses such as the Hotel San Martín offer an excellent quality of service, others such as the Hostal Black House and the Casa Arrayán Restaurant have significant deficiencies in key dimensions such as reliability, and the state of their facilities. This scenario shows the need to standardize and improve the quality of service in all businesses in the sector, with the aim of offering a uniform tourist and competitive experience.

## 8. Recommendations

- It is proposed to implement an Action Plan based on the PHVA cycle (Plan, Do, Verify, Act) and the SERVQUAL model, in order to identify and correct the deficiencies detected in the different dimensions evaluated. The plan must be analyzed in detail to achieve the level of quality of service that is required.
- It is recommended to promote the continuous training of the personnel who work in the tourist establishments of the Montufar canton, and to incorporate protocols and technologies that improve the ability to face requirements or problems on the part of customers. To ensure continuous improvement, permanent vigilance must be maintained through satisfaction surveys and suggestion boxes.
- Finally, it is suggested that the tourism technicians of the GAD of the canton of Montúfar carry out periodic verifications of the quality of the service in tourist establishments, reviews in monthly, annual or semi-annual terms, according to the need and size of the resources.

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