SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT FOR THE PROGRAM OF MAGICAL TOWNS – 4 WORLDS ECUADOR

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Abstract
Sustainable tourism management for the Magical Towns - 4 Mundos Ecuador understands the particularities that cover social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability; The essence of this model lies in the search for tangible benefits for the localities that enter and remain in the development of the tourism management model. An exhaustive bibliographical review of the program, management models already proposed, and strategic approaches were used with the purpose of accessing relevant information to determine the objective of developing a long-term sustainable tourism management model for the localities of the 4 Worlds of Ecuador that are classified as magical towns. This model constitutes a dynamic and versatile system that allows identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and conflicts of operation to make decisions focused on the sustainable development of the locality, preserving natural resources, and above all cultural ones such as gastronomy, customs, traditions, architecture, arts, clothing, and archaeological heritage.
Keywords: management model, sustainability, Magic Towns

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Ecuador has been considered a transcendental factor to promote the transformation of the productive matrix, therefore in objective No. 10 of the National Plan for

Good Living 2013-2017, in the Plan Toda una Vida 2017 – 2021 and currently in the Plan for the Creation of Opportunities 2021 – 2025.

Sustainability is first addressed in the document entitled Our Common Future, prepared in 1987 by the then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland. This document defines sustainable as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

According to this view, society should indeed be able to meet its needs in the present while respecting the natural environment of its actions and without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. From there, the basic principles of what began to be called sustainable development were formulated. (Fernandez, 2011)

Thus, sustainability is a conscious balancing act, emphasizing that the planet is not an inexhaustible source of resources and that its protection and rational use is necessary, through the three axes mentioned above such as environmental protection, social development and economic growth.

The purpose of sustainability is to promote social development to achieve satisfactory levels in the quality of life of human beings, it is to promote equitable growth for all, in this scenario companies play a fundamental role.

According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism is one that aims to meet the needs of tourists, as well as tourist destinations, protecting and increasing the opportunities of the future.

That is, it seeks to "manage" resources so that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be met while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life systems. (Pérez de las Heras, 2004)

Sustainable tourism management focuses on the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development where a balance is established in the three dimensions to guarantee its long-term permanence, respecting and involving the population as the main conservationist and preservationist actor.

Therefore, (UNWTO, 2022) mentions that sustainable tourism must be:

a. Give optimal use to environmental resources, which are a fundamental element of tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biological diversity.
b. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, preserve their cultural and architectural assets and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
c. Ensure long-term viable economic activities that bring well-distributed socio-economic benefits to all actors, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services for host communities, and that contribute to poverty reduction.

It is important to mention that sustainable tourism is not a sector of the tourism industry, but it is a purpose to which all forms of tourism must tend, as well as related sectors such as accommodation, transport, travel agencies, food and beverage establishments, etc.

Therefore, (Pérez de las Heras, 2004) emphasizes that sustainable tourism is a model of economic development that has been designed to:

a. Improve the quality of the local population, the people who work and live in the tourist destination
b. Provide higher quality of experience for the visitor.
c. Maintain the quality of the environment on which both local people and visitors depend.
d. The achievement of higher levels of economic profitability of tourism activity for local residents.
e. Ensure the obtaining of benefits by entrepreneurs.

In the context of tourism, sustainability involves the responsible management of natural and cultural resources, the promotion of local participation and the protection of cultural and natural heritage (UNWTO, 2017).

It is a tourism initiative of the Mexican government created in 2001, which currently has 130 locations, this program seeks to promote and develop tourism leveraged on cultural, historical and natural value.

(SECTUR, 2014) defines that a Magical Town is

[...] A people that through time and in the face of modernity, has preserved its value and cultural historical heritage and manifests it in various expressions through its tangible and intangible heritage. A Magical Town is a town that has unique, symbolic attributes, authentic stories, transcendent facts, everyday life, which means a great opportunity for tourist use according to the motivations and needs of travelers[...]

The main objective of the program is to promote the sustainable development of localities possessing attributes of uniqueness, character and authenticity through the enhancement of their attractions, represented by a brand of exclusivity and prestige taking as reference the motivations and needs of the current traveler. (SECTUR, 2014)

So that the localities strengthen and optimize the use of their resources, natural and cultural attractions, their infrastructure, the quality of services, innovation and development of their tourism products, among others; in itself actions that contribute to detonate the growth of the tourism market. The Magical Towns that currently make up the program are 130.

The program promotes the sustainable development of localities, encouraging responsible tourism and environmentally friendly practices in the provision of tourism services, contributing to the conservation of natural resources.

2. METHODOLOGY

Of a qualitative nature in order to effectively elucidate the conditions of the place where the study is intended to be carried out. Hernández Sampieri (2014) indicates that he uses the collection and analysis of data to reveal the questions in the research process, which is why the qualitative researcher starts from the premise that the social world is "relative" and can only be understood from the point of view of the actors studied.

Descriptive type being necessary to study the interrelation of the variables as a model of management, sustainability and Magical Towns. Hernández Sampieri, (2014) states that, "[...] Descriptive studies seek to specify important properties and characteristics of any phenomenon being analyzed. It describes trends in a group or population [...]" and "[...] The researcher is limited to measuring the presence, characteristics or distribution of a phenomenon in a population at a cut-off moment in time, such would be the case of studies that describe the presence of a certain factor [...]". (Veiga, De la Fuente, & Zimmermann, 2008)

An in-depth search, selection and organization of information sources was carried out, after which the analysis, interpretation and classification according to the degree of quality, importance and hierarchy of the knowledge collected was used.

3. DEVELOPMENT

Magical towns in Ecuador

The Program of Development of Localities Magical Towns of Ecuador 4 worlds, arises through the strategic alliance between the Secretary of Tourism SECTUR of Mexico and the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador, under the ideological precepts of the program seek mainly the enhancement of the localities that have tourism potential as historical attributes, Unique cultural and natural activities, that is, they meet the conditions to develop sustainable tourism activities that promote competitiveness and development in local economies, with the purpose of strengthening public and private invasion.

The program of magical towns is considered according to "a model that promotes tourism activity through identity and the revaluation of heritage."(Molina, Villagrán, Guerrero, & Villarreal, 2021)

This program champions competitiveness and the implementation of actions to strengthen the tourism field, supported mainly by promotional strategies.

In this context, the Tourism Cooperation Program was signed in August 2018 for the transfer of methodology and processes of the Magical Towns Program, by Minister Enrique Ponce de León, in order to ensure that with the exchange of procedures, experiences, methodology and good practices of the successful program in Mexico. (Alcivar, 22018)

Magical Towns Ecuador is oriented to the identification and enhancement of populations that have tourism potential, that is, they meet the basic necessary conditions for the development of this activity, for this reason it becomes a program that promotes competitiveness and facilitates the implementation of strengthening actions in the tourism field, whereas compliance with these basic conditions strengthens public and private investment initiatives. (MINTUR, 2020)

Being, the purpose is to promote the tourism development of populations that have unique cultural and natural attributes that meet the basic conditions necessary for the development of tourism activity, through a strengthening program that facilitates the implementation of local tourism development.(MINTUR, 2020)

The public organization has proposed a Strengthening Plan with four lines of action. The idea is to address product development, gastronomic identity, revaluation of heritage and promotion. (Diario El Comercio, 2021)

21 destinations have been recognized in the Sierra regions. Coast, Amazon and Galapagos; specifically the towns of Patate, Alausí, Cotacachi, Zaruma, San Gabriel, Guano, San Antonio de Ibarra, Portoviejo, Rumiñahui, Azogues, Chordeleg, Agua Blanca, Sushufindi, Lago Agrio, Pimampiro, Isla Floreana, Cayambe, El Chaco, Esmeraldas, Calvas and Saraguro. This initiative began in 2018 until 2021 year where the most recent towns were named.

Management model

Bastardo, F. (2010) mentions that management "involves a set of procedures that are carried out to resolve an issue, specify a project or manage a company or organization". In turn, Jácome, (2016), specifies that "it is a regulatory mechanism formally anchored for the structuring, direction and development of organizations".

Considering the previous statement, it can be asserted that management consists of the administration of an organization where the path to be traveled must be defined, the objectives to be achieved, the guiding moral axes and above all the concrete actions that are going to be executed, whose purpose is to achieve productivity and optimization of tourist resources in the area of intervention. (Marín, Modelo de gestión de turismo vivencial para el corredor turístico patrimonial noroccidental, que comprende las parroquias rurales de Taquil, Chantaco,Chuquiribamba, Gualel y el Cisne, cantón Loja, 2019)

According to Chorley & Haggett (1967) "A model is a simplified structuring of reality that purports to present supposedly significant factors or relationships in a generalized form."

A management system is a set of activities coordinated by one or more people within the company in order to direct and control its resources to achieve its objectives, establishing policies and methods that will help achieve them efficiently. There are international models and standards that facilitate the design and development of a management system that serves each particular company. In this context, it is valid to assume that all large, medium, small and even micro-enterprises or self-employed entrepreneurs benefit from establishing and implementing their own management system. (Del Pozo, 2023)

Bastardo, (2010) defines that "a management model is a scheme or framework of reference for the administration of an entity". So the management models are structured to be applied in both the public and private sectors, which is why he points out that "governments have a management model on which they are based to develop their policies and actions, and with which they intend to achieve their objectives; while the second is based on obtaining economic gains.

For its part, Jácome, (2016) states that a management model:

[...] It regulates the planning, application and control of organizational processes. It is the way in which the company performs business management associated with quality. It is a tool that, based on the principles of management, allows management to conduct activities in an organized manner, through measurement and control that guarantee the fulfillment of the business mission [...]

A tourism management model is a schematic and simple tool that identifies the strategic variables and interrelationships of a situation to translate them into a sustainable management mechanism. (Muñoz-Jácome, Vaca-Cárdenas, & Ati-Cutiupala, 2022)

(Rendón, 2006) emphasizes the municipal tourism sector where he explains that: "The Municipal Tourism Administration Model will be developed in a planned manner, incorporating interests of the private business sector, the municipality and the community, oriented to the development of an efficient and sustainable management that meets the needs of tourists and visitors "

A tourism management model is a schematic and simple tool that identifies the strategic variables and interrelationships of a situation to translate them into a sustainable management mechanism. (Muñoz, Vaca, & Ati, 2022)

The model is based on the common elements found in the different factors that affect tourism demand raised in the literature, as well as the structure of a tourist destination. It analyzes the tourism environment and the influence of factors on a global scale, such as: economy, politics, science, technology, environment and culture.(Rigol, 2010)

In short, management models are determined by organizations, who identify their structure, operation and determine their administrative model and processes; They also present several forms of management that are based on pre-established schemes. They allow to establish an objective, precise and structured approach of the reality or current situation for the analysis of an organization, and thus establish strategies that allow to meet the objectives established by it.

Model for Magical Towns – 4 worlds of Ecuador

According to the Official Gazette of the Federation (2014) the general guidelines for the incorporation and permanence in the Magical Towns Program, must comply with a management model with the following important axes: a) Sustainability, b) Privilege social participation, c) Seek integral investment, d) Facilitate co-responsibility between the different actors of the localities and f) Promote accountability through indicators. (Muñoz-Jácome, Vaca-Cárdenas, & Ati-Cutiupala, 2022)

Supported by the methodology of the Guide of Incorporation and Permanence of the Magical Towns – 4 Worlds, document issued by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador supported by the Sectur in 2020, for the incorporation the program establishes as conditions for the registration:

- It must have an Administrative Area or Unit dedicated to tourism with decision-making power.
- Have a directory of service providers
- Have an inventory of resources and tourist attractions of the municipality
- Connectivity and communication
- Possess planning and ordering instruments of the current administration.

For the incorporation process, the town must have:

- Formally constituted Magic Town Committee.
- Approval of the Municipal Council for admission.

- Letter of support and support from the Provincial GAD to the applicant locality
- Budget allocation for tourism development.
- Projects to be implemented by the government for the coming years.
- Current municipal ordinances.
- Existence of an exceptional tourist attraction that gives uniqueness to the town.
- Public health and safety services.
- Documents that guarantee public and private investment.
- Document of commitment of the Municipal GAD to promote in the locality the productive chains that benefit the tourist activity of the locality.

Proposal

Taking into consideration what was mentioned by the authors cited above, this Sustainable Tourism Management Model for the Magical Towns – 4 Worlds program will be made up of components of the Tourism System such as: tourism infrastructure, actors, attractions and resources, in order to develop strategies aimed at optimizing available resources and promoting the social responsibility of *stakeholders*.
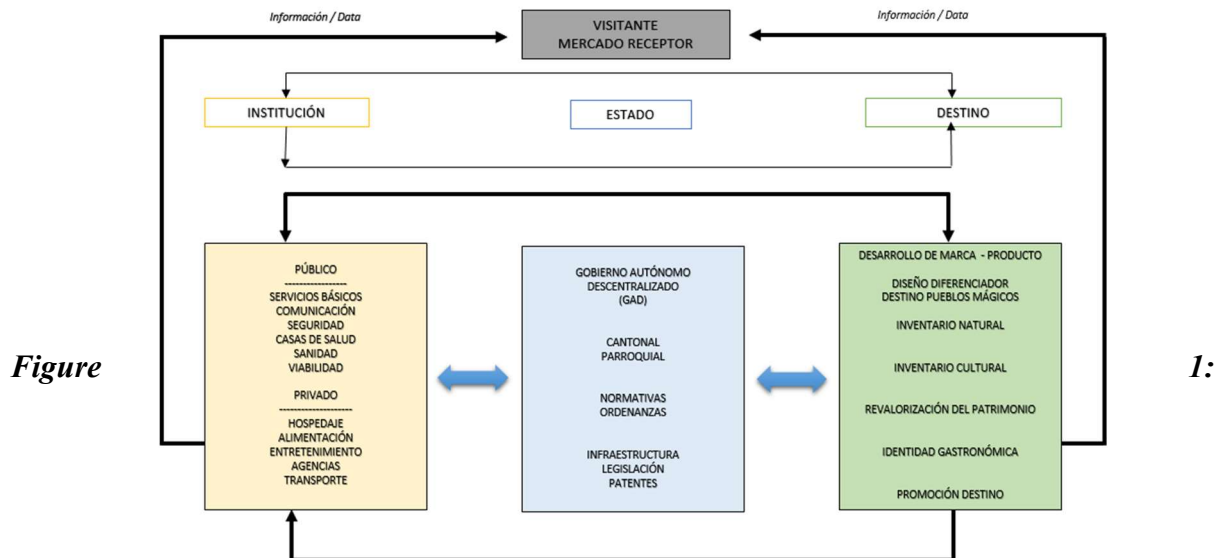

Figure 1:

Integrated Tourism Management System adapted to the Magical Towns Program – 4 Worlds Ecuador
Own adaptation

The present holistic model responds integrally to the interaction of its elements, as well as to the integration of the roles of each *stakeholder* in the public and private sectors. Sustainable tourism management includes any process aimed at a common goal and therefore processes such as planning, decision making, planning and supervision of processes, marketing. The tourism

management proposed in this study seeks to link the operation, administration, finance, the human factor, promotion, growth, the environment, infrastructure and competence training.

The integral purpose of this model is to contribute to the sustainable tourism development of the localities that make up the Magical Towns Program – 4 worlds, in a way that guarantees sustainability with inclusive benefits of the *stakeholders* involved.

Table 1. *Specific objectives of the proposal of the Sustainable Tourism Management Model for the Magical Towns – 4 Worlds Program*

AREA	OBJECTIVE
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT	Develop innovative services that generate differentiation in order to promote the permanence and progress of the magical town.
FINANCIAL	Establish procedures that generate economic benefits, in order to obtain sufficient profitability margins to maintain the operation in the long term
HUMAN FACTOR	Promote an inclusive work environment that constitutes an incentive for employees, through meritorious profiles and continuous training.
PROCESSES AND OPERATIONS	Create inclusive, concrete and practical strategies to achieve an information supply network for the benefit of the implementers.
PROMOTION	Execute promotional campaigns through the use of TACs, nationally and internationally.
GROWTH	Increase the volume of visits, through strategic alliances with public and private companies.
ENVIRONMENT	Operate with environmentally friendly processes, preserving the integrity of the natural heritage and promoting the conservation of natural resources.
INFRASTRUCTURE	Develop projects for the care and preservation of architectural resources, as well as the promotion of private investment, promoting quality and satisfaction in visitors.

Prepared by the authors

Strategic implementation

The proposed strategies will determine the lines of action to achieve concrete actions aimed at the fulfillment of the specific objectives and therefore the global objective. This implementation process is aimed at determining: those responsible, the intervening area, the temporality and the way of how it will be carried out. Seeking to instill in all *stakeholders*.

Table 2. *Strategic approach to objectives*

PERSPECTIVE / AREA	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT	Develop innovative services that generate differentiation in order to promote the permanence and progress of the magical town.	Implement a program of access road improvements to provide comfort and reduce travel times.
		Design a portfolio of products that meet business requirements and customer needs
		Promote the conservation of a good natural environment by making optimal use of land especially for agricultural crops.
		Execute training programs and implement tourist facilities that are aimed at improving the visitor's stay.
		Generating strategies and policies focused on investment in tourism will be essential for the inhabitants of the corridor to invest in tourism.
FINANCIAL	Establish procedures that generate economic benefits, in order to obtain sufficient profitability margins to maintain the operation in the long term	Obtain adequate financial indicators (profitability) by strengthening ventures related to the industry, through existing organic agricultural production and sustainable leverage.
		Promote the conservation of the natural environment by making optimal use of land especially for agricultural crops, obtaining resource efficiency to avoid tangible economic losses.
		Execute training programs aimed at optimizing resources and implement tourist facilities that are aimed at improving the visitor's stay that have a quality-price correlation.
		Form working committees that manage economic resources for the planning and execution of tourism projects aimed at an equitable redistribution of capital in those involved.

|		Generating strategies and policies focused on investment in tourism will be essential for the inhabitants of the corridor to invest in tourism as a financial productive factor.
HUMAN FACTOR	Promote an inclusive work environment that constitutes an incentive for employees, through meritorious profiles.	Strengthen the ventures related to gastronomy, taking advantage of the existing organic agricultural production through the direction of specialized collaborators and their direct induction on the executor of the productive activity.
		Execute training programs and implement tourist facilities that are aimed at improving the visitor's stay as well as the improvement of the skills in the collaborators.
		Form working committees made up of collaborators and people from the community, who manage economic resources for the planning and execution of tourism projects.
		Develop labor compliance regulations that generate confidence and job stability
		Develop professional profiles for each job based on activities, functions and responsibilities
PROCESSES AND OPERATIONS	Create inclusive, concrete and practical strategies to achieve an information supply network for the benefit of the implementers.	Take advantage of the natural and cultural resources existing in the localities, as an opportunity for the tourist development of the Corridor through orderly circuits and coordinated activities compliance with planned operation processes.
		Implement techniques and methods of information collection, to use them as indicators in each of the processes.
PROMOTION	Execute promotional campaigns through the use of TACs, nationally and internationally.	Conduct a study and market analysis to determine promotion and advertising strategies.
		Develop an annual promotion and advertising plan with the respective scope.
		Use ICTs that fit the potential market of visitors in product / service

GROWTH	Increase the volume of visits, through strategic alliances with public and private companies.	Take advantage of the natural and cultural resources, as well as the short distance that exists in the town.
		Orient in economic resources for the good maintenance of the roads especially in high season.
		Promote commercial areas with points of sale to the consumer with products that reflect the cultural identity of the area
		Develop an annual growth plan with quantitative indicators.
ENVIRONMENT	Operate with environmentally friendly processes, preserving the integrity of the natural heritage and promoting the conservation of natural resources.	Train employees on issues of preservation and proper management of waste in destination areas
		Supply tools, supplies and materials that facilitate compliance with environmental standards
		Comply with regulations required by public bodies, to preserve the integrity of visitors as well as the introduction of foreign agents to destinations
INFRASTRUCTURE	Develop projects for the care and preservation of architectural resources, as well as the promotion of private investment, promoting quality and satisfaction in visitors.	Develop alternative models using existing resources in order to promote commercial activities in host communities.
		Implement shared management business models public - private company - community
		Generate income or credits with characteristics differentiated from conventional ones aimed at ventures
		Ensure the presence of communication infrastructure in the places of views and accommodation (communication, internet, telephone signal, etc.)

Adapted from (Marin, 2019)
Prepared by the authors

Decision making process and feedback

The analysis and evaluation of the diagnostic situations of the study area "Pueblo Mágico", and the strategies developed provide a more objective view of the position in the current market. This model is dynamic because it promotes actions aimed at the success and sustainability of the destination, this falls on strategic objectives clearly raised with the participation of public and private actors.
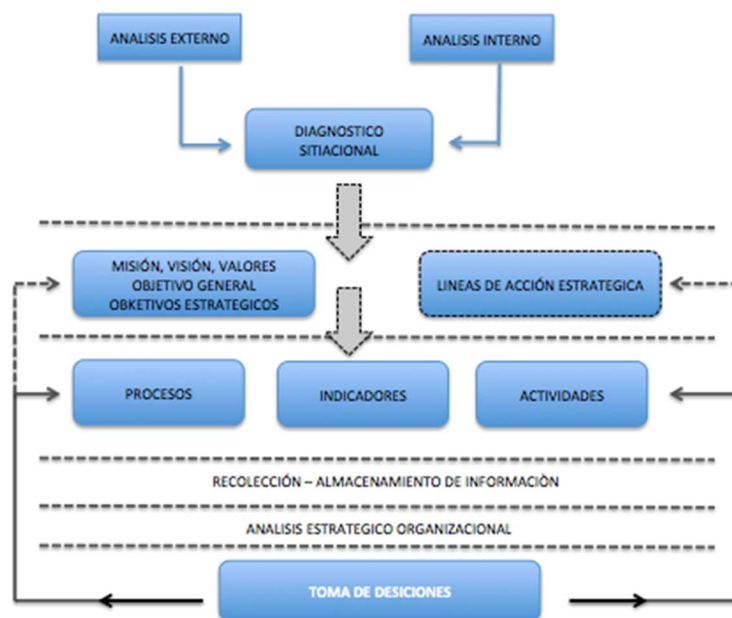
Figure 2. Decision making process and feedback to the management process.
Source: Marín, 2019

The monitoring of the established indicators will allow decision-making based on comparisons between initial and final states, that is, according to the identified impact.

Table 2. Sustainable Tourism Management Indicators

SOCIAL EQUITY	INITIAL	FINAL	CURRENT STATUS
Employment	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Housing	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Quality of life	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Public participation	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation

Respect cultural values	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Respect for social values	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY	**INITIAL**	**FINAL**	**CURRENT STATUS**
Improvements in the tourist infrastructure destination	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Host purchasing power	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Resource optimization	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Meeting demand	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION	**INITIAL**	**FINAL**	**CURRENT STATUS**
Biodiversity protection	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Use of natural resources	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Environmental services	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation
Preservation of natural resources	Value 1 - 10	Value 1 - 10	Ascent / Relegation

The monitoring of the established indicators will allow decision-making based on comparisons between initial and final states, that is, according to the identified impact.

Figure 3. Management charts of sustainability indicators
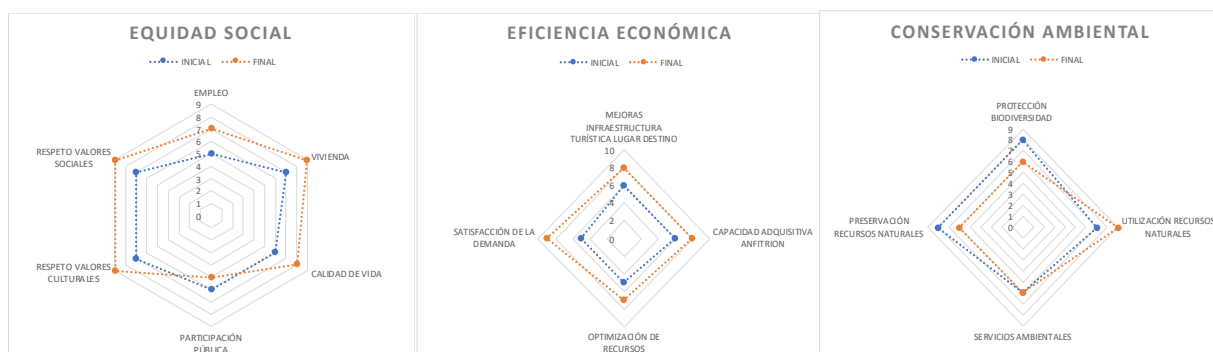
Adapted from: Márquez, L. E., Viteri, M. J., Useche, L. M., and Cuétara, L. M. (2021) and Vera, J. (2001)
Prepared by the authors

This model integrates direct and effective communication processes, so that the results are aligned to the general objective with the active participation of *stakeholders* in order to achieve a single global purpose sustainability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Magical Towns program is considered a success story for the tourism development of mainly rural locations that have cultural and natural wealth. Belonging to this initiative provides a series of benefits aimed at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of that place. The main benefits are the promotion and dissemination at national and international level, generating a significant increase in visits and therefore foreign exchange income if it is foreign tourism and redistribution of capital in the case of domestic tourists. Another important benefit is the improvement of tourist infrastructure such as signage, tourist interpretation centers, restoration projects and preservation of historical architectural attractions, construction of accommodation and food and beverage service plants. All this contributing to improve the quality of service and a unique experience for visitors. In addition, this program offers the opportunity to preserve and promote local culture, promoting heritage conservation contributing to the preservation and transmission of knowledge to new generations, access to financial and technical resources for the implementation of tourism projects, training and advice. All this aimed at improving the quality of life of local inhabitants.

The elaboration of the proposed model promotes an exhaustive analysis in all phases and their respective tasks, enabling the optimal performance of the areas of Research, Finance, Human Factor, Processes and Operations, Promotion, Growth, Environment and Infrastructure.

The indicators in each phase are the means of verification and monitoring of performance and effectiveness in the processes, they will allow corrective or preventive and timely decisions in order to avoid wasting resources. This dynamic incentivizes responsible compliance by making supervision a mandatory requirement.

The success of the management model proposed for the Magical Towns – 4 Worlds Ecuador, lies largely in the collaboration and joint actions of the *stakeholders* of the political, social and economic environment. It is considered essential the formation of an organization of technical specialists from the localities, who would be the main responsible for the implementation of the proposed model and therefore the generation of the necessary resources to improve the quality of life of the magical town.

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