

Corporate Social Responsibility in times of the pandemic, a comparative study: Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and Málaga, Spain.

Sandra Luz Zepeda Hernández, Fabíola Cristina Costa de Carvalho, Germán Ortega Palomo

Abstract

This chapter aims to compare the business practices related to Corporate Social Responsibility, especially the environmental and social dimensions adopted by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that make up the tourism cluster in two tourist destinations of sun and beach, Puerto Vallarta (Mexico) and Malaga (Spain), as a form to deal with the health and economic crisis caused by COVID19. Practices related to saving energy and the use of alternative energies were particularly studied, as well as water consumption, recycling materials and promoting local economies. Methodologically, the study was based on qualitative and quantitative techniques. Various key stakeholders representing the tourism sector were interviewed and a questionnaire was applied to managers and heads of SMEs in the polygons that comprise the tourist influx areas in both study *locus*. According to the findings, it was observed in Mexico the development of a marked orientation towards the control and saving of water, while in Spain the main practice observed was the recycling or reuse of materials, coinciding with municipal policies and regulations for the operation of business in Malaga downtown city. On the other hand, similarities were identified in energy saving and control practices, as well as responsible purchasing practices to promote local economies.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Pandemic, Sustainability, management practices.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Carolina Foundation for financing the research project from which this article emerges.

We also thank the Tourism Intelligence and Innovation Research Institute of the University of Malaga for supporting this research project¹.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has affected companies of all sectors, that had to adapt their internal operations (management) and external procedures (contact with clients, suppliers and promotion mechanisms) to survive. In tourism field, that is basically composed by face-to-face services, the fourth most important sectors – hospitality (accommodation and gastronomy), intermediation (tourism agencies), entertainment and transports –, among others were drastically affected. Each of them, with their particularities, had to adapt to the challenges of the health crisis.

In this sense, the aim of this research was to analyse the Social Responsibility practices implemented by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that integrate the

¹ The research in Spain was possible thanks to the support of Tourism Intelligence and Innovation Research Institute of the University of Malaga and the project “Overtourism in Spanish coastal destinations. Tourism degrowth strategies. An approach from the social dimension” (RTI2018-094844-B-C33) financed by Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (National Plan for R+D+i) the Spanish State Research Agency and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

cluster of the tourist regions of Puerto Vallarta (Mexico) and Malaga (Spain), to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. More specifically, it compares the business practices in the environmental and social dimensions related to saving energy and the use of alternative energies, as well as water consumption practices, recycling materials and promoting local economies.

The choice of comparing these tourism destinations responds to a parallel situation where they share several elements in common. For example, both are mature destinations, pioneers of tourism development in their respective countries; both require intense investment in the sustainability measures listed above; and both have developed a mass tourism model focused on the sun and beach, golf, and cruise segments.

Social Responsibility has become an important issue around the globe, mostly among large companies which desire to list on the stock market. In fact, certifications and distinctions have been developed in many countries to respond to the need of companies to demonstrate that they act in an ethical and responsible manner, such as ESR Distinction² adopted in Mexico through *Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, A.C.*, a Civil Society Organization (CSO). In the case of Spain, it can be awarded through a process in the regional governments. Furthermore, international certifications are usually conferred by private entities such as GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), the SA8000 (Corporate Social Responsibility Norm – Accountability International), or the SGE21 (Ethical and Socially Responsible Management System), mostly obtained by large-size enterprises. On the other hand, SMEs³ are usually needed of help in managing their social responsibility policies and getting them implemented, additionally to their own financial issues they must manage.

This chapter analyses in one side, the role of the public policies, concerning the existing actions that helped the adaptation of Small and Medium Enterprises to deal with the COVID19 global health crisis. On the other side, it was observed the social responsibility actions of the enterprises during the period of March 2020 to March 2021. The main question that guided this research was: *How the pandemic influenced changes in the management practices related to environmental and social sustainability?*

Literature review

Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility

The classic concept of sustainability can be extracted from the Brundtland report, carried out by the United Nations in 1987. This consists of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Based on this, the World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as one that meets the needs of current tourists and destination regions, while protecting and guaranteeing the activity for the future (Marchena et al, 1999).

In the search for alternatives that allow a better balance between the market forces derived primarily from the capitalist system and its relationship with nature and the societies where it develops, a new theoretical discussion arises from the second half of the 20th century aimed at rethinking the way to integrate various elements that intervene in our social and environmental reality.

Sustainable development emerges from globalization expressed in the different conventions that were carried out starting in the 1970s to identify a more viable alternative to the old predatory model of post-war economic development. Thus, a new model arises

² ESR stands for *Empresa Socialmente Responsable* (Social Responsible Enterprise).

³ This acronym is used throughout the document to include micro-enterprises with less than 10 employees.

that criticizes the hegemonic model of development oriented towards the economic growth of capital. In the new model, sustainable development represents a vision that reconsiders the nature-man relationship (César and Arnaiz, 2004).

Thus, during the seventies the environmental crisis is presented as a true apocalyptic tragedy, which leads ecologists to opt for a subjective model, which is hiding the true causes of the environmental problem: it is not generated by the vast majority of the population but by the unbridled consumption of a privileged minority on the planet (César and Arnaiz, 2014).

In this historical context, the most informed consumers have developed an awareness of consumption that translates into specific demands towards the business sector. In December 2018, a consumer report released the results of a global survey of almost 30,000 consumers in 35 countries, which indicates that 62% of those interviewed prefer to buy from companies that maintain a clear position on issues of sustainability, transparency, and fair employment practices (Accenture Strategy, 2018).

The foregoing, added to the technological revolution, has generated more informed consumers and the certifications or distinctions that guarantee processes or good corporate practices play a relevant role in the consumption decision.

When it comes to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it refers to a very broad concept; however, whatever definition is adopted, all agree on the need to promote good business practices by assuming, on the part of the company, responsibility for the impacts generated by the productive activity to which it is engaged (Núñez, 2003).

The adoption of CSR criteria allows companies to resolve conflicts and distribute the value created among the different interest groups (stakeholders), in addition to assuming that socially responsible behaviours induce long-term positive effects that contribute to increased performance and value of companies, thus demonstrated from global studies whose results indicate since 2000 the growing social awareness in the consumer and, consequently, demand products and services that respond to demands of social responsibility, such as protecting the health and safety of employees, ensure respect for human rights and offer permanent and stable jobs (Nieto and Fernández, 2004).

CSR has gone from being an activity strictly associated with philanthropy to a central element of a business strategy aimed at building a new corporate culture. One of the guiding principles of CSR is the United Nations (UN) Initiative “Global Compact”, which sets out the plans of action: Human Rights, Labour Rights, and Environmental Rights. The first two are generally subject to compliance with internationally accepted standards such as the UN International Declaration of Human Rights and the four fundamental principles of the ILO and the Right to Work of 1998. On the other hand, the environmental level refers specifically to the responsibility that is the responsibility of companies on their externalities generated by their productive activity, that is, the administration of natural resources, pollution control, waste management, and the product cycle (Núñez, 2003).

The empirical evidence has corroborated the existence of a positive relationship between financial profitability and the development of good CSR practices (Margolis and Walsh, 2001; Orlitzky et al., 2003). For Nieto and Fernández (2004), the fact that there is a positive relationship between CSR and financial profitability has been justified through different arguments: i) companies that adopt CSR criteria reduce the possibility of receiving fines or other financial sanctions; ii) the use of CSR practices indicates quality in management and has policies that contribute to improving the reputation of companies; and iii) companies that practice CSR appear more attractive to potential employees and therefore have a superior capacity to attract and retain the most competent human resources.

Thus, CSR is identified as a new form of productive development aimed at promoting economic growth within a framework of sustainability and guiding companies to fulfil a role in society that transcends mere economic interest, which means assuming the impacts generated by its value chain (Núñez, 2003).

Tourism is one of the activities hardest hit by the health crisis caused by COVID19 and the response to this global crisis has been fully supported by the tourism sector to help prevent the spread of the virus.

The pandemic exposed the massive destruction and precariousness of the workforce, with the tertiary sector being one of those affected, especially commerce and tourism (César et al., 2021). In this sense, some scholars point out that this effect on mass tourism has been seen as an agent of change that can lead to a deep reflection on the impact of tourism since *“over-tourism has resulted not only in tourism over-capacity and environmental damage but also in socio-economic danger to local populations”* (Koščak and O'Rourke, 2021: 55).

To summarise, in the professional literature, there is an important discussion that concerns the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility as a central part of business management, and how the pandemic would encourage improved social and responsible practices in local enterprises as part of the tourism global industry.

Methodology

In this chapter the analysis of the SMEs performing during the pandemic in sustainable and corporate social responsibility practices in Mexico and Spain is the result of the outcomes of a quantitative survey carried out among 459 local managers in Puerto Vallarta and Malaga. With this sample, results can be obtained with a confidence interval of 95% and a sampling error of 5%. A total of 253 questionnaires were applied in Puerto Vallarta and 206 in Malaga. The survey was conducted from May to June 2021, using face-to-face questionnaires and online questionnaires.

The target sample was managerial level or decision-maker in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises among the tourism cluster located in the tourist area of both study sites. The questionnaire contained questions related to identifying the social responsibility actions taken during the pandemic to continue operating due to the health restrictions and their impact on the organization.

Also, a qualitative study was carried out. Semi-structured interviews were applied to key stakeholders in the tourism sector among social representatives and representatives of the business sector. The objective was to identify the global perception of the sectors regarding the conditioned changes due to the pandemic.

The table 1 lists the key actors interviewed by each application site.

Table 1. Key actors interviewed in Puerto Vallarta and Malaga.

Sector	Puerto Vallarta	Malaga
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Riviera Nayarit Hotels Association ➤ Puerto Vallarta Hotels Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Malaga Hotel and Catering Association
Bars, Coffee shops, Restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CANIRAC - National Chamber of Restaurant and Spiced Food Industry 	
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ OCV - Riviera Nayarit Visitors and Convention Office 	--
Operators and Travel Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Puerto Vallarta Travel Agency Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ AEDAV - Associated Travel Agencies of Andalucía

<p>Other business tourism sectors (part of the tourism chain supply)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ AEBBA - Puerto Vallarta and Bahía de Banderas Business Association ➤ CANACOPE - National Chamber of Commerce in Small Services and Tourism of Puerto Vallarta ➤ Trust for Tourism Promotion – Bahía de Banderas zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tourism and Planning of the Costa del Sol - OPD Government office
<p>Academic sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integral Tourist Observatory and University of Guadalajara 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Malaga

On the other hand, direct observation in both tourist sites and documentary analysis was conducted. Finally, it was applied descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

Main findings and discussion

Public policy actions in the framework of the Covid-19 health crisis and implications for tourism.

The European economy had a deep recession in the first half of 2020. In accordance with the Presidency of the Government of Spain (2020), the economic impact has been intense since mid-March 2020, mostly because of the containment measures adopted and the influence of the sectors directly affected.

The action plans with economic and social measures were implemented since March 2020 and a “shock plan” was deployed. Then, in June, a Reactivation Plan was ongoing to accompany the recovery in the second half of 2020. These plans incorporated measures of liquidity support, adaptation of working hours and teleworking, flexibility of working hours and public support for maintaining employment through the Records of Temporary Employment Regulation (ERTE) and support of family income, “*with special attention to the self-employed and groups especially affected by the pandemic*” (Presidency of the Government, 2020: 6).

The impact of the emergency was projected as negative, this meant that they foresaw a worsening of the economic situation and important imbalances that the Spanish economy had already been weighing down for decades, such as high unemployment, job insecurity, strong and growing social inequalities, high level of debt and public deficit, low level of investment in innovation and continuous training, as well as a mature industrial and services sector little adapted to new technologies (Ibid).

Derived from the wide deployment of fibre optic networks in Spain, the spread of the digitization process would have important effects on productivity, growth, and job creation. According to the report of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2018), in the countries that make up the OECD - Mexico and Spain included -, an increase of 1% in the intensity of digitization of the country represents an increase in GDP per capita of 0.14%; the generalization of teleworking imposed by the COVID-19 crisis represents a starting point towards digitization (Ibid).

The Recovery Plan proposed by the Government of Spain incorporates a vision of digitalization or inclusive and sustainable digital transformation, based on infrastructures and services that place people at the centre, open up new opportunities for companies, reduce digital gaps and refer that the digital transformation of society and the economy is the bridge between innovation, productivity, and sustainability. Specifically, the support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is traced in its impulse through lever policies (Ibid., 43), namely:

- a. A digitization plan for SMEs with investment in equipment, capacities, platforms, and networks.
- b. Reform of financing instruments for internationalization and diversification towards new markets.
- c. Strategy Spain Entrepreneurial Nation and promote the creation, growth, and development of networks and the adaptation of the productive fabric.
- d. Start-ups ecosystem support plan.

Particularly in the Province of Andalusia, Decree Law 25/2020 creates and regulates the “Tourist Bonus” whose objective is to encourage the trips that Andalusians make through the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, thus promoting inland tourism. The Voucher helps defray the expenses derived from overnight stays for up to 25% of the accommodation bill and up to 300 euros and whose validity is from October 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021 (Junta de Andalucía, 2020).

For the United Nations, the roadmap to transform tourism includes the Promotion of Innovation and the Digitalization of the tourism ecosystem (United Nations, 2020). In congruence with this, the guidelines proposed by the World Tourism Organization incorporate seven priorities for the recovery of the sector (UNWTO, 2020):

1. Provide liquidity and protect employment;
2. Re-establish trust by offering security;
3. Take advantage of public-private collaboration for an efficient reopening;
4. Open borders responsibly;
5. Harmonize and coordinate protocols and procedures;
6. Create jobs with added value thanks to new technologies;
7. Make innovation and sustainability the new normal.

In this sense, it is evident that priority number 7 has the greatest attention when attending to the main topic of this work. According to the Official State Gazette of Spain (BOA, 2021), the Law was issued that establishes prevention, containment, and coordination measures to face the pandemic, in whose articles 12 and 13 establish the guidelines to be followed by hotels and tourist’s accommodation, as well as hotel and restaurant activities.

In table 2 we summarize the political measures the Mexican and Spanish government have implemented to deal with the pandemic.

Table 2. Main containment measures implemented by central governments in Mexico and Spain with an economic impact on SMEs, 2020-2021.

Mexico	Spain
National Healthy Distance Day	Border control
Suspension of work, school, and social activities	State of Alarm Decree
Limitation to essential activities and application of a traffic light system ⁴	Mobility restrictions (curfew)
Capacity limit allowed in public and private spaces	Subnational mobility restriction (between autonomous communities)
Implementation of health protocols in	Capacity limit allowed

⁴ The essential activities are those related to the health system and its supply chain, service and supply, public safety, victim care, state legislative activities, financial services, distribution and sale of energy, generation and distribution of drinking water and basic utilities, food and beverage industry, food supply plants and stores, courier services, mechanical repairs and funeral services.

establishments	
Use of mask	Mandatory use of mask ⁵
	Suspension of classroom teaching activities
	Implementation of health protocols in establishments

Source: Own elaboration based on information from the Government of Mexico (2020) and Government of Spain (n.a.)

According to the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE, 2020), micro and small businesses in Mexico group 68.6% of the employed population – in non-agricultural sectors. Based on this, according to the statements of the Mexican Federal Government the support actions were focused on financing micro and small companies, mainly with microcredits of 25,000 and 51,000 pesos at preferential rates of 0% to 6.5% per year. The objective was to promote the permanence of this business sector, applicable to economic units of commercialization, production of goods and, or provision of services. Table 3 presents the actions that supported specifically MSMEs.

Table 3. Public policy actions in support of MSMEs in tourism sector.

Mexico	Spain
<i>Tandas</i> ⁶ for the wellbeing	Temporary Employment Adjustment File (ERTE)
Credit to the word	Digitalization and Financing Plan for Internationalization
Solidarity support based on the word	Andalusian Tourist Voucher (consumption support)
Loans zero rate in Jalisco	

Source: Own elaboration, based on the Ministry of Economy of Mexico (2021) and Junta de Andalucía (2020).

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability in Mexico and Spain

Regarding sustainability, attention to regulations and certifications and practices for sustainability predate the pandemic. In the same way, attention to the laws related to Social Responsibility are a factor considered by companies since before the beginning of the restrictions.

It is important to consider that these certifications issued by the government and different organizations are considered as an instrument of market positioning, for the promotion of companies as socially responsible and friendly to the environment, which is used as a distinction towards competitiveness. Likewise, in Mexico also the profile of the responsible consumer is a niche that is sought, and for this reason, an external stimulus to the changes in companies is observed, in the same way.

“... We are adapting perfectly to everything that is requiring us to have, actions that are... actions that are even regulating us at every moment that we are complying with all the official provisions”. (Canirac)

“There have even been changes in the operating rules for our sector, such as the same need and what the new consumer requires”. (Canirac)

“Apart and being responsible in our activity, they force us to go looking for actions that are healthy both for the environment and for the whole truth ... Well, yes, it is an

⁵ Implemented as a coercive measure established in the Law, published in the Official Gazette of the State. March, 30th, 2021.

⁶ It consists of a very common saving method in Mexico, a group of people are organized to contribute the same amount of money in previously established terms, in this case, organized by the government.

environmental issue, the issue of social responsibility and we must give it coverage to everything, and we continue working on ourselves to adapt to those social responsibility needs". (Canirac)

"We already have an extra expense to include other products, but we are always looking for them to be products, even in the packaging of our food, even in those that are for hygiene, we are using them, they are products certified and for what we can use them both for human consumption and do the general cleaning of our establishments, using everything that is natural products, biodegradable products, that do not affect or more than our governments themselves are suggesting through their secretariats". (Canirac)

However, there is the notion about the regression to this issue, mainly due to the need to implement health protocols.

"The pandemic of the last year has taken ... a few steps back to sustainability due to hygiene and sanitation needs, since the truth is that the use of plastics grew, the use of ... disposables increased. Now, before, maybe the glasses were all for washing. Now a lot of plastics are in the trash. So, I think that the last year, in sustainability, even took some steps backward. Where progress is seen it is not because of... it is not thanks to humanity. It is because they were closed, locked up or people in their houses for four months, well then those people are not driving, others are not using fuel, etc., then the planet in general improved its ozone and all this stuff". (OCV and Riviera Nayarit Hotel Association)

"The consequence is that more species are seen. You see more species, why? Because there is a lot less traffic and a lot fewer people". (Observatory)

"... right now, you give a hotel that yes, that the issue of sustainability and it says you did not talk to me about that. Right now, I need to do business because I lost a lot of money. Tell me about that later, when I am back to normal". (OCV and Riviera Nayarit Hotel Association)

Environmental Issues

There is sufficient empirical evidence indicating that tourism brings with it impacts on the nature in which it develops, hence the importance of revaluing the natural environment of tourist destinations and their care, in which the business sector, as key agents in society, plays a leading role.

During the confinement and social distancing, there was a general concern to rethink care for the environment and reinforce measures to minimize the negative impact of humans on the planet. It was noted that over-tourism destinations like Venice were seen for the first time in a long time with clean water and fish in their canals. In this sense, some sectors identify environmental care as a primary issue during the pandemic. Sustainable practices developed in companies in Spain:

"In that we are also quite well advanced, we try to eliminate everything that is paper, practically, my company, for example, everything is saved in a pdf document and every time an airline ticket is issued, coupons are generated for the airline, it is generated a coupon for the travel agency, all of this is automatically generated in pdf and everything that is train tickets is the same, everything remains in pdf unless the client requests it on paper to be printed and in general another type of document about, we practically do not use. Sometimes I talk to printing friends who do all the things to me and they tell me that obviously, companies have it worse and worse, because each time the work is less, I do not know about another type of work but what is office has fallen a lot to make paper or use paper". (AEDAV Andalusia)

At the same time, it is recognized that despite the efforts of the sector, they depend on other sectors to minimize their impact on the carbon footprint.

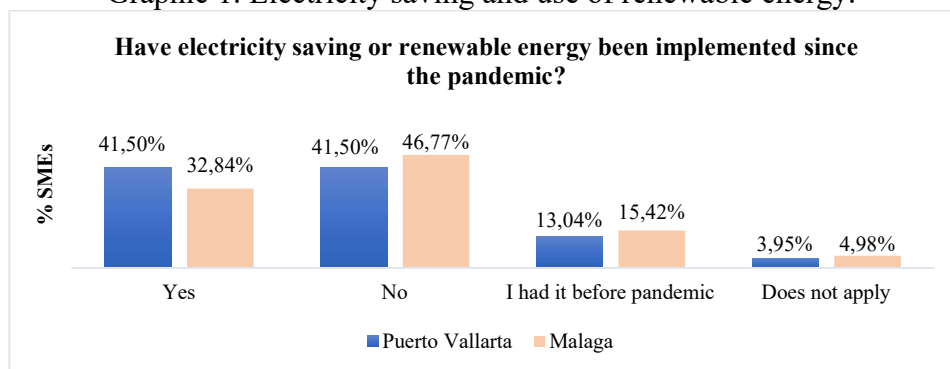
“Our sector, the tour operators, generate fewer and fewer brochures, that is, we look at everything, let's say, on their website, the quotes or travel information that they ask to be sent to the client in pdf that they can see perfectly on their computer. No, they have to print it. That is, we are quite advanced in that sense, then there is the clean energy issue, we need electricity, we have, let's say, the consumption, we have it with companies that we understand are doing everything possible to generate less carbon, let's say, for generating cleaner energies, but that does not depend on us, but that does not depend on us, it depends on our suppliers”. (AEDAV Andalusia)

Electricity saving and renewable energy

The issue of electrical energy has been much discussed in 2021 since in Mexico the debate at the national level continues the strengthening of the national electricity industry, through an electrical reform that allows maintaining constant prices and strengthening hydroelectric plants and the greater generation of clean energy by individuals all over the country. In the case of Spain, given the rise in energy costs during 2021, the economic factor can play an important role in the responses.

In any case, the responses can guide us towards an idea of the actions taken in both study areas, which can be seen in Graphic 1.

Graphic 1. Electricity saving and use of renewable energy.



Source: Authors

It is noteworthy that despite the high recorded costs of electricity in Spain, however, the percentage of the implementation of measures for energy saving in Mexico is higher.

Also, a higher percentage of SMEs already declared to have energy saving measures in Spain. Even so, in the general balance and comparison, according to the responses a higher percentage in Mexico (54.54%) has implemented actions of saving of electrical energy or the use of alternative energies, regarding Spain despite the rise in the electric energy prices of recent years (48.26%).

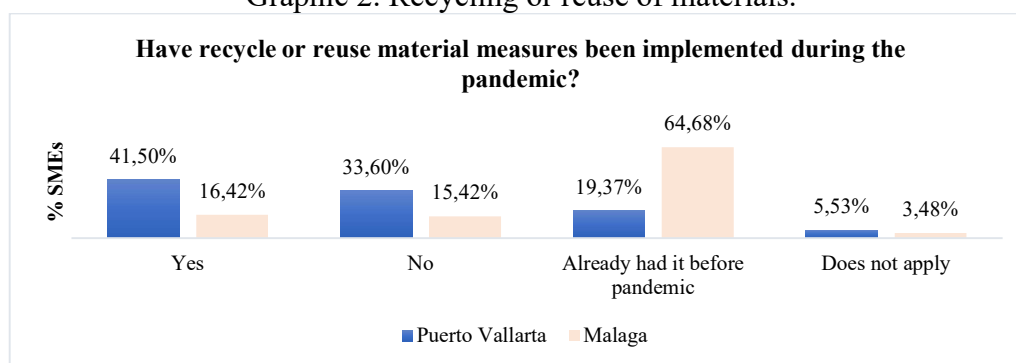
Recycling or reuse of materials

According to the Hospitality Federation, the Malaga City Council was doing well and making use of the Recycling program implemented for the municipality government and points out that most businesses in downtown use the containers, so it is an inducted practice, as they mention that:

“Now I can talk here about how the historic centre of Malaga works. Hey, if it's true, that's good, we've even set up the employers' associations to organize recycling. We want to observe you and practically most businesses in the centre make use of it, among other things because they take away having to go to throw away a large amount of paperboard or glass”. (Hospitality Federation)

In congruence with the above, the findings of the research indicate a significant differentiation in the number of SMEs that already had implemented recycling practices in Spain, compared to Mexico, but it is notorious the incorporation towards these good practices by companies in Mexico as from the pandemic (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2. Recycling or reuse of materials.



Source: Authors

Also, it was mentioned that there is no stimulus for the small business to incorporate these responsible practices, only the proximity of the paper recycling containers.

“The only problem, well, many times is that if this is not done regularly daily, that nothing is happening if everything is done daily in recycling. The problem is the storage capacity if this is not done. Because they are usually small and of course, there is not much place to store the cardboard or glass that is going to be consumed, in general terms if it is done daily. I think it's working; people are making use of it”. (Hospitality Federation)

In words of Tourism Planning Office in La Costa del Sol (Malaga), when it is asked about the recycling practices, they say it has been a policy applied before pandemic, as they point out that:

“(…) it has already been working from the European Union for at least five or six years. Let's say that priority points of the policy, although it does not have a European tourism policy, at a general level of economic policy and circular economy, and in fact, following all the criteria that the Ministry of Tourism follows with the promotion of the network, an intelligent tourist destination that also leads from SIGTUR. Everything leads to a circular economy. You call it a circular economy, which most of the destination is working on”. (Tourism Planning Costa del Sol Málaga)

Also, concerning the issues of "sustainability" and "social responsibility" in Spain, there were already selective collection projects carried out by the Malaga city council in the case of the region studied, which is mentioned by various interviewees. Everyone agrees with the success of these practices.

“Yes, it can always be improved, and much progress is being made, progress is being made in the right direction. Are we talking now at the recycling level? I am convinced that it is, but I insist, there is still a long way to go. In principle, I don't think there is any refusal from small businessmen, I don't think there is. What we do say is that facilities are required at the level of services and infrastructure for this recycling. Here we have the white collection points and what is asked is that the collection points are not located 10 km from my business. Therefore, no, I do not think there is any contrary view by the entrepreneurs, there is a favourable view, they only ask that the recycling infrastructure recycling services be user-friendly”. (Planning Costa Sol2)

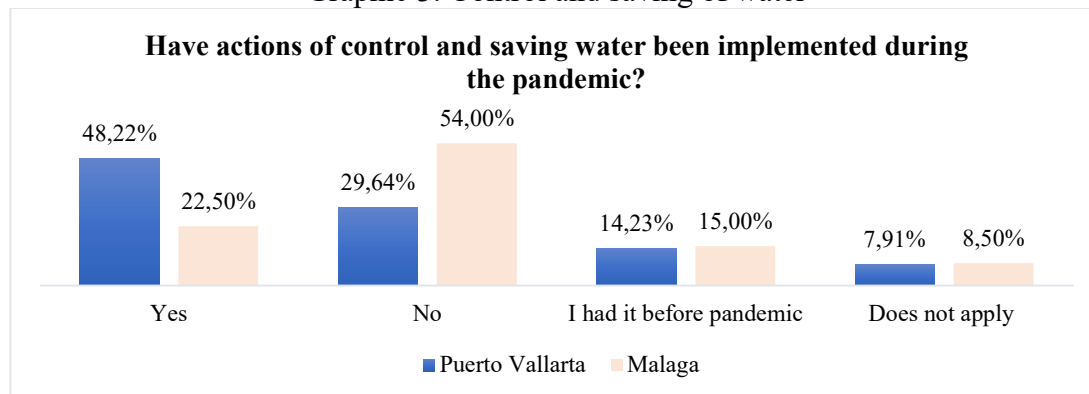
Control and saving of water

The observed changes to sustainability are also stimulated by the need to reduce business costs. This is the case of the actions implemented to control and save water.

“Among other reasons, because it is a way to save costs in a situation where you have little income and many fixed costs. I am convinced that they do for survival.” (Tourism planning Costa del Sol1)

In Mexico almost half of the SMEs mentioned to have implemented actions to control and save water in consequence of the pandemic influences in their business. In contrast in Spain more than half of the responses were that no action had been taken. On the other side, in both countries the number of enterprises that implemented such actions before the pandemic restrictions is almost similar (Graphic 3).

Graphic 3. Control and saving of water



Source: Authors

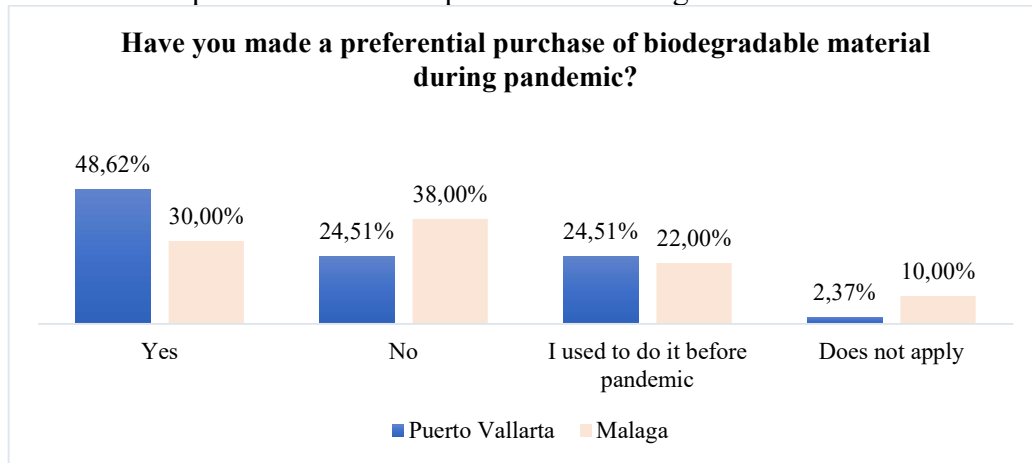
Preferential purchase of biodegradable materials

However, it is noteworthy that some changes identified are the result of larger social transformations, in which the tourist itself, particularly the one with a growing profile, prioritizes responsible consumption. This seems to have affected the decisions of companies to stay competitive before the 2020 crisis:

“And the average tourist is increasingly sensitive to the environment, does not want bottles ... And if your tourism segment is being covered by accommodation, with that we are not going to change anything. So, the model is not going to change, it is going to change the obsolete hotel because it is going to close... on top of that, the demand is going to decrease”. (Malaga University)

In this scenario, the adoption of biodegradable material in Puerto Vallarta represented almost half of the sample, while in Malaga it emerged in 38% of the responses. Nevertheless, like the sustainable use of water, the use of biodegradable material was already implemented by a similar average of SMEs in both destinations (Graphic 4).

Graphic 4. Preferential purchase of biodegradable materials



Source: Authors

Community development

a. Community Support

In Mexico as a custom practice, at the beginning of the crisis, when the businesses had to close abruptly, many associations of enterprises, religion groups and civil society in general organized in their communities the distribution of food and basic materials to people that could not go to their jobs. Here is important to mention that in most of the cases employees did not receive any kind of sponsor or salary during the period the firms were closed. One of the actions was "Jalisco without hunger", in which the efforts of businessmen, the government and organized civil society were combined to bring food to the families most affected by the loss of their jobs or who live in a vulnerable situation (Toral, 2020).

In Spain, some companies reoriented their production to help minimize the shortage of supplies in hospitals, as well as civil society organizations, Food Banks, and neighbourhood associations, who contributed to the establishment of food donation centres in the autonomous communities. In 2020, free food was granted to thousands of vulnerable families whose income was reduced or who became unemployed due to the crisis (El Confidencial , 2020).

b. Local economy support

In Mexico, local consumption was encouraged before the Pandemic among small companies, and during the 2020-2021 period, it has been taken as a strategy for its presence in the market, according to the interviewees:

“What we do is: we encourage local consumption a lot... we invite society to come and consume the producer, the 100 percent Vallarta artisan, that is a reasonable consumption ... as chambers, we strongly encourage this part... We had a very favourable result because the call that... we were in social networks, dispreading everything with even reasonable consumption of Canacope, which was replicated. And that same genre as in all social networks, in groups that also send “Puerto Vallarta”, all this synergy will be generated, to survive the pandemic situation, the money needed to be turned into locally”. (Canacope)

For the national chamber of small businesses, the social responsibility regarding environmental and social issues is a very important part of their daily activities, as they mention that:

“We have an area that is specific or that specializes only in this area, which is to be doing awareness campaigns, separating garbage, making brigades for cleaning as far as this is concerned. But we also have teams where we... as a matter of social responsibility. What we do is to encourage the local consumption”. (Canacope)

In general, being asked about to which extent local consumption was implemented after the pandemic restrictions, in a scale from 1 to 7 (table 4) it was noted that in Mexico 49.69% of the SMEs increased very much the consumption with local products, while in Spain it reached 53.54%.

On the other side, the SMEs that bought nothing, or very little, of their supply in local markets in Mexico and Spain represented, respectively, 10.56% and 9,45%. In overall, the restaurants and souvenirs shops are the ones that most had local supply.

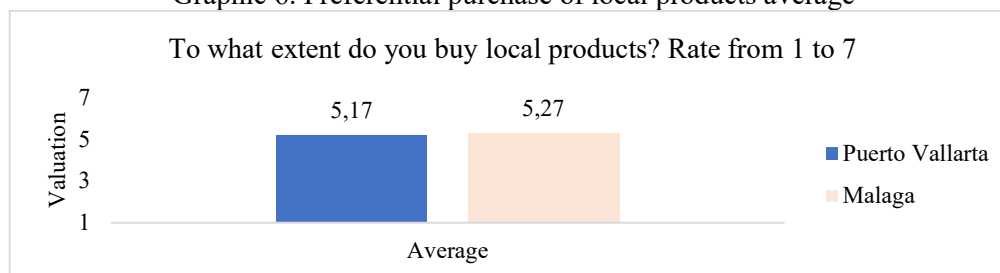
Table 4. Preferential purchase of local products

Valuation	Puerto Vallarta	Malaga
1	6.83%	3.94%
2	3.73%	5.51%
3	6.83%	3.94%
4	9.94%	13.39%
5	22.98%	19.69%
6	20.50%	26.77%
7	29.19%	26.77%

Source: Authors

Yet, the average number of expenditures in local products was very close between both countries as represented in Graphic 6.

Graphic 6. Preferential purchase of local products average



Source: Authors

Working practices in the companies

In Mexico, the notion of maintaining employment in the sector has been observed in some regions, such as in the locus of this study. It is a necessity in this context, remembering that job insecurity is a structural problem in the country. In this context, the academic segment highlights that the general strategy to maintain companies during the crisis is linked to precarious work.

“... Mass unemployment has become another security problem for already desperate people”. (OCV and Riviera Nayarit Hotel Association)

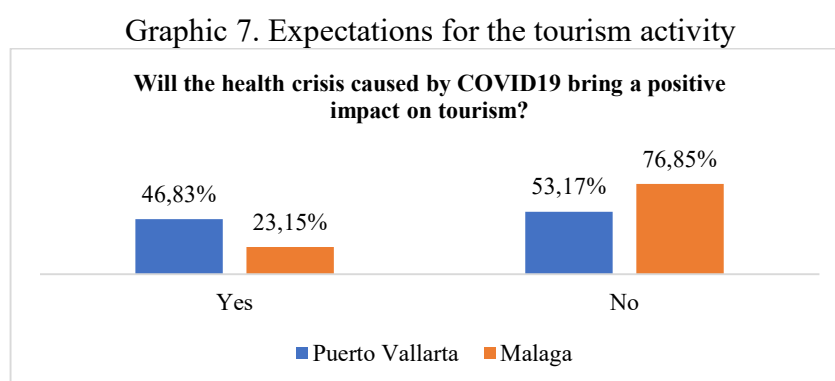
“I believe that the best incentive that ... could, or that a collaborator can have, is to know that his salary is full and that his position is secure”. (AEBBA)

“So, what they are doing is negotiating down. In other words, reduction of employment to maintain certain levels of employment”. (Observatory)

The practice called “solidary job” was taken into action in Puerto Vallarta. That means that many employees in the private sector had their salary reduced, and most of them that did not go to work, because it was closed or working with less employees, did not receive remuneration for the days they did not work. Moreover, in tourism services much of the earnings are based on tips, that vanished during the months the business remained closed and maintained in little scale during the hole year of 2020.

Expectation and future perspective

Finally, the SMEs were asked about their future perspectives concerning the tourism activity and it calls the attention that while in Mexico 46,83% had a positive perspective, in Spain the majority of 76,85% declared to have negative expectation of the recuperation and the next steps the tourism should undergo (Graphic 7).



Source: Authors

The question "Why" was asked after the question above. According to the responses in both study sites, the positive comments were oriented towards a "new reality" with better practices in tourism and reflecting on the impact of humans on nature, leaving mass tourism behind and increasing quality levels in biosafety for the local population.

Conclusion

The pandemic influenced some changes in terms of sustainability and social responsibility, but it is uncertain if such a movement will become permanent. In general, the result obtained for Puerto Vallarta points towards a vision of the pandemic as a restart of tourist activity, unlike Malaga where the actors have not understood the Covid crisis as a true factor of change.

Specifically, in Malaga, it is noteworthy that 65% of companies recycled or reused materials before the pandemic, and another 16% incorporated this practice as of 2020. However, of those surveyed, 30% said they buy preferably biodegradable materials, 23% have saved water, 33% adopted measures to save energy, all of them, very low percentages.

In Puerto Vallarta, among the companies that have adopted measures during the pandemic, such as energy control, recycling, water control, and the purchase of biodegradable materials, it is greater than in the case of Malaga; however, in matters such as the recycling or reuse of materials, there were already a good number of companies that had adopted this activity before the pandemic (65% of the companies). In this destination, such actions are part of the public policy of the locus study and are the reason why it was already an institutionalized action before the pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, the new context has worked as a stimulus to other agents (SMEs) that had not incorporated the mentioned practices.

The results of the analysis carried out show that the *ad doc* sustainable actions taken in Puerto Vallarta are not sure to become a practice. In this destination, public policies and regulations are not well established in terms of sustainable practices. The recent regulations to implement social responsibility practices in the private sector are in process of implementation and will take time to generate solid results. From the moment on, the identified good practices seem to be incorporated as single actions by each enterprise.

Yet, it was noticeable that most of the interviewees reproduced the political expected discourse that concerns sustainability. The critical visions of the issue were mostly mentioned by people that take part in the academic sector, having little exceptions in the private sector.

As a final conclusion, we can affirm that the pandemic has not led to this process of change in the way of understanding tourism, promoting a more sustainable activity in terms of Social Responsibility. If in any of the two analyzed destinations some change has been generated, it has been in Puerto Vallarta more than in Malaga.

Reflections

- Sustainability and social responsibility practices have changed during the crisis
- Social and institutional previous practices influenced the way key actors understood the pandemic.
- It is uncertain what changes concerning sustainability and social responsibility will become permanent in SMEs management.

Questions

From the results of this research the critical issues considered to have more deep reflections can be summarized with the questions:

- What did the business sector learn about the pandemic crisis?
- Did the sustainable practices helped the SMEs to undergo the crisis?
- How responsible corporative practices could have helped the resilience of enterprises?

Further Reading

OCDE (2021). SME and the entrepreneurship performance in times of COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/6039c015-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/6039c015-en#abstract-d1e1172>

Gokarna, P., & Krishnamoorthy, B. (2021). Corporate social responsibility in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: An exploratory study of developing country corporates. *Corporate Governance and Sustainability Review*, 5(3), 73–80.

References

- Accenture Strategy. (December de 2018). *From me to we: The rise of the purpose-led brand*. Obtenido de <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/strategy/brand-purpose>
- Boletín Oficial del Estado*. (2021). Obtenido de Gobierno de España: <https://www.boe.es/>
- César Dachary, A., & Arnaiz Burne, S. (2014). *Ecologismo ¿la estrategia fracasada del capitalismo?* Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos.
- César Dachary, A., & Arnaiz Burne, S. M. (2004). Globalización y Turismo. ¿Dos caras de una misma moneda? *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*, 303-314. Obtenido de <https://www.estudiosenturismo.com.ar/search/PDF/v13n3-4a07.pdf>
- César Dachary, A., César Arnaiz, F., & Arnaiz Burne, S. (2021). *Pandemia, Cambio Climático y Nueva Sociedad*. Puerto Vallarta: Universidad de Guadalajara.
- El Confidencial . (2020). *Versión online*. Obtenido de https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2020-05-18/mapa-despensas-solitarias-covid-madrid_2596671/
- Gobierno de España. (s.f.). *Gabinete de prensa*. Obtenido de <https://www.mscbs.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa.do?id=4816>
- INEGI. (2020). *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo*. Obtenido de ENOE: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/enoe/15ymas/>
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2018). *The UN specialized agency for ICTs*. Obtenido de <https://www.itu.int/hub/>
- Junta de Andalucía. (29 de septiembre de 2020). *Boletín Oficial de la Junta de Andalucía (BOJA)*. Obtenido de https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/boja/2020/559/BOJA20-559-00017-11144-01_00178445.pdf
- Košćak , M., & O'Rourke, T. (2021). *Post-Pandemic Sustainable Tourism Management. The new reality of managing ethical and responsible tourism*. New York: Fraylor & Francis Group.
- López Bonilla, J. M., & López Bonilla, L. M. (2008). La capacidad de carga turística: Revisión crítica de un instrumento de medida de sostenibilidad. *El Periplo Sustentable*, 123-150.
- Marchena, M., Vera, F., Fernández, A., & Santos, E. (1999). *Agenda para planificadores locales: turismo sostenible y gestión municipal*. Madrid: Organización Mundial del Turismo.

- Margolis, J., y Walsh, P. (2001). *People and profits? : the search for link between a company's social and financial performance*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Nieto Antolín, M., & Fernández Gago, R. (2004). Responsabilidad Social Corporativa: la última innovación en Management. *Universia Business Review*, 28-39.
- Núñez, G. (2003). *La responsabilidad social corporativa en un marco de desarrollo sostenible*. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.
- Organización de las Naciones Unidas. (agosto de 2020). *Informe de Políticas: La COVID-19 y la transformación del turismo*. Obtenido de https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_covid-19_and_transforming_tourism_spanish.pdf
- Organización Mundial del Turismo (UNWTO). (28 de mayo de 2020). *Directrices Globales de la OMT para reiniciar el Turismo*. Obtenido de <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-06/200606%20-%20UNWTO%20Global%20Guidelines%20to%20Restart%20Tourism%20ES.pdf>
- Orlitzky, M., Schmidt, F., y Rynes, S. (2003). Corporate social and financial performance. *Organization Studies*, 403-433.
- UNWTO – World Tourism Organization (2020). *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*. 7(18), December 2020. Retrieved from HYPERLINK "<https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/wtobarometereng.2020.18.1.7>"
- Presidencia del Gobierno. (octubre de 2020). *Plan de recuperación, transformación y resiliencia España Puede*. Obtenido de https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Documents/2020/07102020_PlanRecuperacion.pdf
- Secretaría de Economía. (2021). *Gobierno de México*. Obtenido de <https://www.gob.mx/se/>
- Toral, J. (13 de 06 de 2020). *Programa Líder Informativo 91.9 F.M*. Obtenido de <https://lider919.com/entregan-4-mil-despensas-en-puerto-vallarta-de-jalisco-sin-hambre-2-mil-500-seran-distribuidas-en-parroquias>