

## Heritage tourism in the Andes: the case of Cuenca, Ecuador

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### ABSTRACT

Heritage tourism has been growing over the last few years, especially in cities that have been declared World Heritage Sites. This paper presents research that investigates the motivations for tourists to visit Cuenca. Fieldwork was used to create a predictive model to determine visitor satisfaction considering the motivations and the attributes of the city. Furthermore, the paper analyses the attributes a heritage site should have if it is to create a sustainable tourist destination which combines culture and economic growth. The results show that although overall satisfaction with visits to the city is high, tourists enjoy other interesting aspects that should be taken into consideration in order to improve the city's image as a cultural destination.

### KEYWORDS

World Heritage Site; heritage tourism; tourist motivations; tourist satisfaction; Ecuador

## Introduction

Each year the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) publishes the list of the places declared World Heritage sites (WHS). The inclusion of a particular place in this list means the recognition of its outstanding universal value, which implies an obligation for both the different public bodies and the local community itself to preserve it. Saipradist and Staiff (2007) argue that the recognition of a specific geographic area or zone as World Heritage guarantees the identification, conservation, and passing on to future generations of places or monuments that have a universal value from the perspective of history or art.

While the objective of the UNESCO WHS list is to preserve and conserve these places, in many cases it also leads to a significant increase in the number of visitors, creating a strong relationship between the World Heritage list and tourism (Breakey, 2012). In this sense, it is paradoxical, and at times even contradictory, that while UNESCO's objective in designating WHS is to promote their protection, some destinations are prioritizing their tourist development (Su & Wall, 2011). Initially, they start by encouraging national tourism and later focus on international tourism (Su & Wall, 2011). Because when carrying out their planning and policy-making, local governments consider World Heritage status more for its economic potential than for its heritage preservation potential (Su & Li, 2012). It

should not be forgotten that the inclusion of a site in the UNESCO list increases public awareness about that site (Breakey, 2012) as a tourist destination.

Although there are some studies dealing with the tourist industry in Latin America and Ecuador (Erskine & Meyer, 2012; Everingham, 2015) and especially tourism and conservation in the Galapagos Islands (Kenchington, 1989; Powell & Ham, 2008), the available literature on tourism and world heritage cities in Latin American countries and in Ecuador is still very scarce, despite their historical richness. The objective of this research is to make a contribution on tourism in WHS cities in Latin America through an analysis of the tourists visiting the city of Cuenca, a city located in the Andes mountain range, in the south of Ecuador, with a historic centre declared a WHS in 1999. Since then, it has become an important cultural destination in Latin America. In this paper, we want to relate the degree of satisfaction with the visit to the city to the motivations that led to the trip being made and the valuation of the attributes of the site, using a predictive model. We think that the results obtained can provide data required to build a more sustainable tourist model, where preservation of the heritage can be linked to the tourist development needed in a developing region.

## Literature review

A significant number of scientific studies have recently analysed the profile of tourists visiting places or attractions related to culture or heritage, identifying five types of tourists: purposeful heritage tourists, sightseeing heritage tourists, casual heritage tourists, incidental heritage tourists, and serendipitous heritage tourists (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). Currently, two principal lines of research exist in heritage tourism (Su & Wall, 2011): firstly, the definition and categorization of the concept of heritage and heritage tourism; secondly, the relationship between the preservation of heritage and tourist development. In addition, following Timothy and Boyd (2003), there are two ways to address the question of what heritage tourism is. Firstly, through the analysis of socio-demographic profiles and the motivations for the visitors in the places where historical monuments are on display or in locations classified as heritage sites; secondly, through the analysis of the tourist perception of the site and in relation to the visitor's own cultural inheritance. However, at times, the designation as WHS is perceived as a brand (Timothy, 2011) or a label (Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010).

## Tourism and motivation

Tourists decide to travel because they have different types of motivation (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2013). As proposed by Crompton (1979), there are pull factors (culture, heritage, museums, scenery, shopping, and business) that affect the choice of destination and are related to the tangible attributes of the site, culture being one of the main motivations (Kim & Lee, 2002; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015; Yoo & Uysal, 2005). On the other hand, so-called push factors are related to intangible and intrinsic factors and the personal preferences of tourists (relaxation, entertainment, escaping routine, adventure, and sports). Therefore, these push factors are not related to the attributes of the place and the satisfaction that can be achieved through its different elements and services (Romão, Neuts, Nijkamp, & van Leeuwen, 2015).

The identification of their motivations, behaviour, perceptions, and experiences is a basic element in the enhanced management of destinations and in defining strategies for public and private managers (Laing, Wheeler, Reeves, & Frost, 2014). Motivations have also been used to identify tourism sub-groups, and to distinguish between different groups of tourists (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003; Timothy & Boyd, 2003), since in this case, heritage-motivated tourists will be more likely to visit the heritage site than their counterparts (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2004). As such, Vong and Ung (2012), cite four factors related to heritage tourism. Firstly, history and culture; secondly, the facilities and services at the cultural sites; thirdly, the interpretation of the heritage; and fourthly, the heritage attractions.

### **Rating of the attributes of a destination**

The attributes of a destination are formed by the set of elements that attract the visitor (Lew, 1987), and the attraction for tourists will depend on the perceived ability to provide individual benefits. As a result, the attributes of the destination become key components of the experience at the site, it being fundamental to offer the visitor a memorable tourist experience (Kim, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In order to provide a good experience in a destination there must be a combination of attributes, such as heritage, cultural exchange, infrastructure, public safety, and shopping or gastronomy opportunities, among others (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). These good experiences provide satisfaction to the traveller, loyalty to the destination, and promotion (Ozdemir et al., 2012), but not all attributes confer a competitive advantage to the same extent (Prayag, 2008).

There has been an attempt in the literature to identify the attributes needed to evaluate a destination, and to identify the key constructs that summarize the areas of concern for tourists (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008; Crouch, 2011; Driscoll, Lawson, & Niven, 1994; Kim, 2014, among others) and how these can contribute to their satisfaction and to the creation of a destination image.

### **Tourist satisfaction**

Satisfaction can be defined as the customer's assessment of the service received compared to the service expected (Oliver, 1980). This definition considers the cognitive component of satisfaction but it is important to note that this variable also has an emotional component (Cronin et al., 2000; Bosque & Martín, 2008) because satisfaction is not only based on experience, but on whether this experience has been at least as good as it was expected to be (Hunt, 1983), meeting or exceeding expectations.

All tourist destinations must adopt, among other elements, systematic monitoring of the satisfaction levels and use these as part of their assessment criteria (Bigné, Font, & Andreu, 2000). Tourist satisfaction is important for many reasons. One such reason is that it allows us to identify the extent to which the attributes and components of the destination are perceived. Another notable reason is the fact that it is one of the most important antecedents of future behaviour or loyalty of the visitor, as evidenced by numerous studies (Chi & Qu, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010, among others).

According to Oliver (1993), it is necessary to differentiate between overall satisfaction, which is configured as a function of the ratings at the attribute level, and satisfaction with each of the attributes. Consequently, there is a conceptual difference, although there is a causal relationship between the two concepts (Kim & Brown, 2012), with overall satisfaction and satisfaction with attributes being different but related constructs.

### **Methodology**

The research results presented in this article are based on fieldwork, "survey leading to collection of information outside of a laboratory" (Hall, 2010, p. 11), carried out in the city of Cuenca in order to test the relationship between tourist satisfaction and, firstly, the attributes of the destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Eusébio & Vieira, 2011; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, & Leistriz, 2013) and, secondly, motivations as construct elements (Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011; Nowacki, 2009; Zhou, Zhang, & Edelman, 2013).

Convenience sampling was carried out, this being commonly used in this type of research where survey respondents are available to be interviewed in a given place and time (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Finn, Elliott-White, & Walton, 2000). The interviewers randomly selected different points (locations) in the historic and monumental centre of the city as survey sites. The first question the interviewers asked the selected persons, those who were willing to respond, was whether their habitual residence was in the city of Cuenca. The questionnaire was stopped if they answered yes. Respondents were not stratified by any variable (gender, country of origin, etc.) since there were no prior investigations

that would allow their stratification, although attempts were made to make the sample as random as possible. Surveys were conducted from October 2014 to February 2015 and given in two languages (Spanish and English). Participants completed the survey with complete independence, although the interviewers were present in case they had any problems. The survey was completely anonymous. The collection of the responses was carried out at two different times. Initially, a pre-test was given to 16 tourists to check the questionnaire, detecting that some questions were not easily understood by the respondents. These were corrected before the survey was then carried out with the definitive questionnaire.

A total of 723 surveys were carried out, although the final number of questionnaires considered valid, once checked, was 572. About 54.4% of the interviewees were men and 45.6% women. By nationality, 23% were Ecuadorian and the rest were foreigners, mainly: Americans, 28.1% of the total, Colombians (6.5%), Canadians (6.2%), and Argentines (5.6%). There have been no significant differences in the rate of surveys conducted or in the refusals of tourists to be surveyed throughout the duration of the fieldwork. The initial population under study was the 200,000 visitors who visited the city in 2013.

Several similar investigations were reviewed before writing the questionnaire (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Castaño, Moreno, García, & Crego, 2003; Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010; López-Guzmán & Sánchez Cañizares, 2012). The questionnaire was divided into different sections that analysed the motivation for the visitor, the rating of the attributes of the destination and the overall satisfaction with their stay in the city of Cuenca. The tabulation of the data was carried out using the SPSS software.

The theoretical model was constructed on the basis of the causal relationships that exist in the literature between the level of satisfaction of the tourist that visits a city and a series of variables related to the motivation for going to a destination and the perception regarding the most important attributes of the tourist destination. A two-step process was followed to obtain this model. The first step consisted of carrying out a factorial analysis (Ozdemir et al., 2012) to reduce the variables for motivation and tourist perception, explaining the correlations between these directly observed variables through a smaller number of unobserved variables, called factors. The second step was to obtain an explanatory model through a multiple linear regression analysis based on the factors extracted from the variables related to the motivation and perception of certain aspects of the visit to the destination (Devesa & Palacios, 2005; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Mechinda, Serirat, Anuwichanont, & Gulid, 2010).

As explanatory variables, 28 ratings have been taken on questions relating to the motivation for the trip and satisfaction with some aspects of the city (Devesa & Palacios, 2005; Schroeder, Sjoquist, & Stephan, 1990), which were rated by the respondents on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. These variables have been treated as numerical. In the same way, four questions relating to tourist satisfaction with the city were proposed as endogenous variables.

## Results

The initial number of variables has been reduced through the factor analysis procedure and the relationships between them have been identified, grouping them by the value of these relationships and also searching for a lack of covariance between the components (Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2015). Table 1 shows the questions asked. These have been classified into three groups of factors: motivation for the visit, rating of various attributes of the city and tourist satisfaction, with the descriptive statistics of the mean ratings and standard deviation.

Initially, a reliability, validity and internal consistency analysis was performed on the variables in the questionnaire using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, resulting in a value of 0.792 which indicates good internal consistency between the elements of the scale. Subsequently, an exploratory/confirmatory factor analysis of the two groups of variables considered exogenous was carried out using the varimax orthogonal rotation method (Kaiser, 1958), with the aim of reducing the number of variables. The results of the factor analysis of the variables considered to relate to motivation are shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Assessment of the motivation of the tourist and the attributes of the destination.

Factors	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Motivation for the visit $N = 572$	1. Historical and heritage wealth	3.65	1.248
	2. Attending cultural events	3.13	1.364
	3. Gastronomy	3.67	1.235
	4. Visiting family or friends	2.89	1.635
	5. Desire to discover new places	4.13	1.074
	6. Disconnect from everyday life	3.82	1.242
	7. Purchase of handicrafts and tourist products	3.35	1.281
	8. Proximity to the place of residence	2.59	1.533
	9. Tourist fame and reputation of city	3.56	1.272
	10. Work or business trip	2.44	1.612
	11. One of the various destinations on my tour	3.18	1.469
	12. Affordable tourist destination	3.67	1.314
2. Rating of the attributes of the city $N = 572$	1. Historical and heritage wealth	4.04	1.064
	2. Preservation of the monumental and artistic heritage	4.03	0.931
	3. The beauty of the city	4.41	0.844
	4. Accessibility of buildings and monuments	3.90	0.958
	5. Tourist information	3.63	1.109
	6. Good service and high quality of tourist accommodation.	3.81	1.017
	7. Good service and high quality of restaurants and bars	3.83	0.977
	8. Good service and high quality of the tour guides	3.74	1.035
	9. Diversity and quality of the gastronomy	3.96	1.014
	10. Shopping for crafts and traditional food	3.93	1.053
	11. Complimentary leisure offer	3.67	1.061
	12. Public safety	3.79	1.096
	13. Clean and well cared for city	4.09	0.972
	14. Hospitality of residents	4.04	1.002
	15. Public transport service	3.54	1.179
	16. Value for money of the city	3.83	1.045
3. Tourist satisfaction $N = 572$	1. The selection of the city was right	4.44	0.884
	2. I enjoyed the visit	4.52	0.764
	3. I would recommend visiting Cuenca if asked for advice	4.51	0.768
	4. I will encourage family and friends to visit Cuenca	4.50	0.777

Source: Own elaboration.

The 12 motivation items have been reduced to three factors. The first factor of the matrix of rotated components relates to the discovery of new places, focusing on the cultural aspect. Thus, this factor (F1) has been called *tourist and cultural motivation*, and explains 32.6% of the total variance. Important positive correlations have been observed between the items for historical and heritage wealth, gastronomy, attending cultural events, purchase of handicrafts and tourist products, fame and tourist reputation of the city, and the desire to discover new places. The second factor observed (F2) refers to reasons relating to visiting family or friends and travelling for work. This factor also includes the motivation of the proximity of the city to the place of residence. This factor explains about 15% of the total variance and has been called *circumstantial motivation*. The third factor in the matrix of rotated components (F3) has an explained variance of about 8% of the total variance and includes motivations such as being an affordable tourist destination, one of the various destinations on my tour and disconnecting from everyday life. This third factor has been called *alternative motivations*.

Table 3 presents the result of the factor analysis of the variables relating to the rating of various aspects of the destination in order to obtain a new set of factors, uncorrelated to each other, that explain as far as possible the variability in the responses on the items proposed for this concept.

**Table 2.** Matrix of Rotated Components: Motivation for the visit variables.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1. Historical and heritage wealth	0.778		
3. Gastronomy	0.675		
2. Attending cultural events	0.661		
7. Purchase of handicrafts and tourist products	0.651		
9. Tourist fame and reputation of city	0.558		
5. Desire to discover new places	0.461		
10. Work or business trip		0.758	
8. Proximity to the place of residence		0.737	
4. Visiting family or friends		0.730	
12. Affordable tourist destination			0.812
11. One of the various destinations on my tour			0.671
6. Disconnect from everyday life			0.476
Eigenvalues	3.919	1.808	1.005
% Variance	32.655	15.070	7.955
% Accumulated variance	32.655	47.726	55.681
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO): 0.841			
Bartlett's sphericity test: $\chi^2 = 1755.257$ ; gl: 66; Sig.: 0.000			
Source: Own development.			

**Table 3.** Matrix of Rotated Components: Variables rating the attributes of the destination.

	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
6. Good service and high quality of restaurants and bars	0.758		
7. Good service and high quality of the tour guides	0.753		
5. Good service and high quality of accommodation	0.742		
8. Diversity and quality of the gastronomy	0.657		
9. Shopping for crafts and traditional food	0.506		
14. Public transport service		0.780	
13. Hospitality of residents		0.666	
11. Public safety		0.658	
12. Clean and well cared for city		0.606	
15. Value for money of the city		0.546	
10. Complimentary leisure offer		0.532	
1. Historical and heritage wealth			0.825
2. Preservation of the monumental and artistic heritage			0.789
3. The beauty of the city			0.711
4. Accessibility of buildings and monuments			0.447
Eigenvalues	6.249	1.443	1.253
% Variance	39.057	9.021	7.829
% Accumulated variance	39.057	48.078	55.907
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO): 0.905			
Bartlett's sphericity test: $\chi^2 = 3514.232$ ; gl: 120; Sig.: 0.000			
Source: Own elaboration.			

The 15 variables rating the attributes of the destination have been reduced to three factors -tourist information is not significant-. The first of the factors (F4) groups the items relating to the good service and high quality of the restaurants and bars, accommodation and tour guides, as well as the diversity and quality of the gastronomy and the opportunities to shop for crafts and traditional food. This factor accounts for 39% of the total variance and has been called *satisfaction with services and shopping*. A second factor (F5) accounts for 9% of the variation of the total variance and is related to public transport, hospitality of the residents, public safety, a clean and well cared for city and, to a lesser extent, the value for money of the city and the complementary leisure offer. This factor was called *infrastructures and human component*. Factor (F6), which accounts for 7.8% of the total variance, brings together heritage-related variables such as historical and heritage wealth, preservation of the

monumental and artistic heritage, the beauty of the city, and, to a lesser extent, the accessibility of buildings and monuments. This factor was called *historic attractions*.

The appropriateness of evaluating the four satisfaction variables constituted by the questions that appear in Table 1 was also considered. In order to simplify the model, a new factorial adjustment was made. The sample adequacy measure KMO (0.824) and Bartlett's sphericity test: ( $\chi^2 = 1395.059$ ;  $p$ : 0.000) showed the factorization capacity of the sample data. As in the previous cases, the varimax orthogonal rotation method was used. A single factor was extracted that explains 73.02% of the differences found in the responses. The four variables evaluated had factor loadings of above 0.6.

As we mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this research is to construct a model that can explain which motivation and rating of the attributes of the city variables most influence the overall satisfaction of the tourists from a set of a series of variables related to the motivation for going to a destination, and the perception of the most important attributes of the tourist destination. Thus, through the factorial analysis the 27 variables initially suggested in relation to motivation and the perception of the attributes of the destination have been grouped into six factors that are the explanatory variables in the tourist satisfaction model being tested. Similarly, the four tourist satisfaction variables were also grouped into a single factor, which has been treated as a dependent variable in order to test the goodness of fit of the model. Subsequently, modelling work was undertaken to check the relationship between the factors of the exogenous variables and the overall satisfaction factor. After testing different models, a multiple regression adjusted using ordinary least squares (OLS) was chosen and this is shown in Table 4.

In terms of the overall statistical significance of the model, the Snedecor F coefficient has a value of  $P (F > 62.731) = 0.000$ , so it can be affirmed that the motivation and satisfaction factors together explain the level of satisfaction of the tourist. The persistence of multicollinearity has been verified and in terms of the associations between errors from the classic Durbin–Watson model of the non-existence of autocorrelation, this has a value of 1.751. This model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.585.

Therefore, from the results presented in Table 4, it can be argued that the satisfaction of the tourist visiting the city of Cuenca depends positively on three factors which, in order of importance, are the following: first, the historical attractions of the city (F6); second, that related to the infrastructures and human experience of the visitor in the city (F5); and third, satisfaction with the services received and purchases made (F4). Only one motivational factor has been found to be involved in visitor satisfaction, namely circumstantial motivation, and this negatively influences the satisfaction of the tourist. The rest of the motivational factors are insignificant.

Although there has not been found a signification in the motivational variables related to heritage, it has been acknowledged a positive correlation between the motivation to visit the historical and heritage wealth and the appraisal of the variables of attributes of the city: historical and heritage wealth,

**Table 4.** Adjusted multiple regression model.

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Standard error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance.	FIV <sup>(*)</sup>
Constant	0.013	0.036		0.362	0.718		
(F2) Circumstantial or short-distance motivation	-0.090	0.037	-0.093	-2.438	0.015	0.935	1.070
(F4) Satisfaction with services and shopping	0.266	0.037	0.270	7.222	0.000	0.975	1.025
(F5) Infrastructures and human factor	0.305	0.036	0.312	8.408	0.000	0.993	1.007
(F6) Historic attractions	0.389	0.036	0.405	10.769	0.000	0.964	1.038

Source: Own elaboration.

<sup>(\*)</sup>Variance Inflation Factor.

preservation of the monumental and artistic heritage. Likewise, it has been found a mild positive correlation between the gastronomic motivation and the virtues of diversity and gastronomy's quality, also in the motivation of purchasing handicrafts and tourist products as in the attribute of shopping for crafts and traditional food.

## 5 **Conclusions and implications**

Recognition of the city of Cuenca as a WHS has created, in addition to cultural recognition, an important tourist attraction for a developing region. However, research is needed to understand what factors attract the tourists visiting these heritage sites, to aid the tourist planning of both public and private tourism managers. This paper contains research relating to the analysis of the overall satisfaction of tourists taking into account the motivations that have led to them travelling and the rating of the destination's attributes.

As a conclusion, we can affirm that the overall satisfaction of tourists visiting the city depends positively on three factors: historic attractions (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013); the factor formed by the attributes of hospitality, security, caring for the city and value for money enjoyed by the visitor (Barroso, Martín, & Martín, 2007; Kim et al., 2012), and the satisfaction with the services received and the purchases made (Prayag, 2009). As a result, this suggests that in terms of the overall satisfaction of tourists, in addition to historic attractions, which is a pull factor for visiting the city, it is necessary for the traveller to also perceive good services in the hotel and restaurant industry and in the attributes of the city in general. So the simple declaration of a site as a WHS does not guarantee the satisfaction of the tourist. In addition, tourist satisfaction is an important factor for loyalty to the destination (Kim & Brown, 2012).

Albeit in a limited way, it has been found that when the objective of the tourist's visit is not due to the pleasure of travelling, but rather to circumstantial reasons such as work or visiting relatives, this motivation can even have a negative effect on the satisfaction of the interviewee.

We consider that the main practical application of this research is to contribute to the understanding of the characteristics that determine the satisfaction of tourists in a WHS destination with the purpose of designing tourist and cultural products that better meet the needs of tourists and that, at the same time, are compatible with the sustainable management of this material heritage. In this sense, the public administrations, companies, tourism professionals, and even the host population must make a coordinated effort and each must accept responsibility for tourist satisfaction – an essential element in the success of any destination.

Like all research, this study also has a number of limitations. Among these we can highlight, fundamentally, the date of conducting the tourist surveys, conducted during the fourth quarter of 2014 and the first two months of 2015, that is, during the months when there was no special event in the city that could attract tourists.

As future lines of research, we propose taking a more in-depth look at the study of heritage tourism by carrying out similar studies in other cities in Latin America declared UNESCO World Heritage Cities, with the aim of being able to identify common links and distinguishing features between visitors. [AQ11](#)

## **Disclosure statement**

40 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. [AQ12](#)

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