

# *La Universidad ante el impacto del turismo en la comercialización de las comidas afro-esmeraldeñas*

## *The University and the Impact of Tourism on the Marketing of Afro-Emerald Foods*

**Segundo Rufino Arroyo Lajones****Luis Alberto Tovar Jaén**

Universidad Técnica “Luis Vargas Torres” Esmeraldas. Ecuador

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0686-6504><https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5419-9408>**Correo electrónico(s):**

segundo.arroyo@utelvt.edu.ec

luis.tovar.jaen@utelvt.edu.ec

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**RESUMEN:** La escasa intervención de la Universidad Técnica Luis Vargas Torres de Esmeraldas, en la aplicación de procesos que permitan minimizar el impacto negativo del turismo en la comercialización de las comidas afro-esmeraldeñas, limita su pertinencia social. En consonancia, este artículo tiene como objetivo determinar un conjunto de actividades en la carrera de licenciatura en Turismo, para contribuir a minimizar dicho impacto en la economía familiar y el medio ambiente, en función de una mayor pertinencia social. Se utilizaron métodos como el análisis-síntesis, análisis de contenido, revisión de documentos y entrevistas. Las acciones coadyuvaban a una formación universitaria más pertinente socialmente.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo; Impacto; Comercialización; Comidas afro-esmeraldeñas; Esmeraldas

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**ABSTRACT:** The limited involvement of the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University of Esmeraldas in implementing processes to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the marketing of Afro-Esmeraldas foods limits its social relevance. Accordingly, this article aims to identify a set of activities in the bachelor's degree program in Tourism to contribute to minimizing this impact on the family economy and the environment, thereby achieving greater social relevance. Methods such as analysis-synthesis, content analysis, document review, and interviews were used. These actions contribute to more socially relevant university education.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Impact; Marketing; Afro-Esmeraldian food; Esmeraldas

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## **Introduction**

The Ecuadorian vision, with a view to 2030, implies imagining that higher education should develop academic services that are articulated with the needs and aspirations of society (National Planning Secretariat, 2021, p. 22). Similarly, the State considers the need to protect the environment, through conservation policies that manage to recover “...spaces for afforestation and reforestation and the recovery of ecosystems, the provision of environmental services and the increase of the protected natural area” (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación, 2021, p. 23).

Thus, in the case of the province of Esmeraldas, famous for its Afro-Esmeraldean foods, it is being subjected to irrational consumption of its resources for tourism, which has endangered valuable animal species, affecting the economy and the livelihoods of many families who live from fishing, gathering and hunting many of these natural resources. This province, located in northwestern Ecuador, “is populated by 534 092 inhabitants, of which, according to the last population census of 2010, 239 511 (or 45% of the population) were defined as Afro-Ecuadorians or Afro-descendants” (Minda, 2011, p. 58).

It is also noteworthy that a study of the economic impact of tourism in the canton Esmeraldas from 2018 to 2022 revealed “a marked decrease in businesses dedicated to the food and beverage segment, in 2019 there were 107 premises registered with MINTUR compared to 2022 when 64 premises are registered, which represents a 40% decrease in this type of tourism offer” (Farías, 2022, p. 26).

Tourism is an economic activity that “...has gained increasing relevance in the world, especially in developing countries such as Ecuador. It is an important source of income for many communities and regions, and can have a significant impact on economic growth” (Zambonino, 2023, p. 98). However, the dynamics of this sector must be conducive to the care of the environment and the protection of ecosystems.

As an example of what environmental destruction means, according to García (2011), in the northern territories of Esmeraldas “...where life once flourished, we see people dying of thirst by the river, rivers that have no water, water that is not water because it has no life...” (p. 64). And in reference to the link between water and people, he emphasizes that “...a hamlet is not born if it does not have its river, and if it is born without a river it cannot grow...” (García, 2011, p. 64).

In addition, Esmeraldas is a province with great biodiversity of species and natural resources; however, “...it faces serious economic, social and environmental problems. One of the most threatened ecosystems in this province is the mangrove; (...) large extensions have disappeared in recent years” (Villota *et al.*, 2022, p. 116).

According to several researchers, the Esmeraldas region and its productive sector “...have problems due to the disadvantageous relationship between production and commercialization, which, in many cases, affects the producer who cannot receive fair prices for his product and, therefore, improve his social conditions” (Villota *et al.*, 2022, p. 116).

Therefore, it is essential that community and government institutions foster policies that promote greater awareness of the rational use of resources, while stimulating economic and social development for the welfare of their communities. All this for the sake of sustainable development in Ecuador, understood as “...the improvement of the quality of human life without exceeding the carrying capacity of ecosystems” (Executive Decree No. 59, 2021, as cited in Secretaría Nacional de Planificación, 2021, p. 36).

One of the educational institutions in the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, that can be a protagonist in this sense, is the Technical University “Luis Vargas Torres” (UTLVTE), from whose careers, such as the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, can play a fundamental role and increase its social relevance in this sense, taking advantage of teaching, research and the link with society, which are its substantive processes.

To this end, UTLVTE promotes, from its educational model by competencies with a constructivist-investigative-intercultural approach, an identity that is expressed in its transforming action located in the integral professional formation of the students who identify with it and in turn “... transcends in their lives by building their identity, which channels the recognition of the Esmeraldas community from which it comes and in which it is rooted by being the bearer of the construction of the dreams of its citizens” (Universidad Técnica Luis Vargas Torres de Esmeraldas UTLVTE, 2023, p. 7).

A premise for the training process of future tourism professionals to be increasingly socially relevant, is that it should be directed to identify the negative impacts caused by the indiscriminate commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods and take more advantage of their teaching, research and links with society in order to minimize them and achieve a rational use of these foods for the economic development of families and society as a whole and the consequent care of the environment, so it was identified as a **problem**: The insufficient action of the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods.

In this sense, the **objective** of this article is to propose a set of activities, as part of the training process in the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, to contribute to minimize the negative impact of the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods on the family economy and the environment, in

function of a greater social relevance of the Universidad Técnica Luis Vargas Torres de Esmeraldas, Ecuador.

In line with the objective of the article, materials were identified that address background information on the object of research related to the negative impact of tourism on the commercialization of Afro-Emeraldean foods and the role that the University can play in minimizing these effects, as a premise for the use of documentary review and the theoretical methods of analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction and content analysis. In addition, the interview technique was applied, with semi-structured questions to 25 families, 20 owners of restaurants, canteens or tents dedicated to the sale of cooked or finished food in various sectors of the city and 10 tourism professionals residing in the canton of Esmeraldas were also interviewed.

Regarding the observation technique, it was applied in the different sectors where food is sold, finished food and in the food markets, as well as in the sectors and/or spaces where tourism activity is practiced, which allowed the authors of this article to analyze the problem posed in the research.

## **Development**

A conceptual analysis of the impact of the commercialization of Afro-Emeraldean foods in the province of Esmeraldas requires the definition of more general categories, from the formal logic, which are associated with the object of research of this work, such as: impact and Afro-Emeraldean foods. Of the works that were the object of consultation, for the systematization of these categories, those of Farías (2022), Garcés (2021), Intriago (2021), Mérida (2020), Minda (2011), Obombo *et al.* (2018), Villagómez *et al.* (2019) and Villota *et al.* (2022) are significant.

The definitions assumed and their analysis in terms of the solution of the identified problem helped to specify a set of actions that can strengthen the comprehensive training process of students of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, in order to achieve greater action on the causes that generate the negative impacts of tourism in the indiscriminate commercialization of Afro-Emeraldean foods for the economy of families in this province and promote their territorial development.

## **The impact of tourism as categories to systematize and its incidence in the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador**

International principles of impact assessment consider that social impacts include all aspects associated with an intervention.

include all aspects associated with a planned intervention, which affect and involve people, directly or indirectly. Specifically, a social impact is something that is experienced or felt, in the perceptual (cognitive) or bodily (physical) sense at all levels; for example, at the level of the person as an individual, economic unit (family/household), social group (circle of friends), workplace (a company or government entity) or more generally in the community/society, almost any event can potentially generate a social impact, as long as it is valued or important to a specific group of people. (Vanclay, as cited in Pino *et al.*, 2019, p. 1742)

For their part, authors who study the perceptions that residents have about tourism recognize that “...it can bring about good changes, but also generate long-term problems that can harm the well-being of residents as well as of the tourist attraction” (Garcés, 2021, p. 8). Likewise, Obombo *et al.* (2018) warn that “community attitudes towards tourism would help tourism planners to select those developments that can minimize negative impacts and maximize positive ones” (p. 506).

Hence, it is important to identify all possible impacts, positive or negative, as a premise for acting accordingly. The work of Garcés (2021) concludes that among the positive impacts caused by tourism in the province of Esmeraldas, based on the perceptions of the students of one of its universities, it can be mentioned that tourism contributes to the preservation and rescue of traditional customs and improves the quality of life of the residents, generates employment and income opportunities, allows the protection and conservation of natural resources and the restoration of historic heritage buildings. (p. 28)

Regarding the negative social and cultural, economic and environmental impacts, tourism “...provides an increase in the cost of living of the people of Esmeraldas, and also facilitates the increase in drug use and prostitution that cause disease, which is a serious problem for tourism development” (Garcés, 2021, p. 28). Similarly, Intriago (2021) concludes in his studies by affirming that it improves the quality of life through economic diversification, but at the same time, it has increased the cost of living of the city's residents, in addition to generating negative effects on the environment. (p. 35)

Products of daily consumption of the communities or territories, whether from the sea, mangrove collection, fishing in rivers or wild game, being in high commercial demand, prices rise, and become complex to be acquired by people who are in states of economic and social vulnerability,

which become a threat to the food processes of the territories and communities, as these have been the means of subsistence of these cultures or ethnic groups.

### **Tourism and the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods**

The province of Esmeraldas has seven cantons: Esmeraldas, San Lorenzo, Eloy Alfaro, Muisne, Quinindé, Atacames and Río Verde. It covers an area of 16,132 km<sup>2</sup> and is located in the northwestern corner of the country. (Villota *et al.*, 2022, p. 116).

According to Alcántara (2017, as cited in Intriago, 2021) the characteristics of tourism today are linked to the “...fragmentation of tourist needs, the importance of protecting the environment, reactivation of the economy in tourism activity and new technological sciences, which will contribute to the development of tourism and other productive sectors in the population” (p. 20).

Tourism “...is one of the largest industries in the world. However, it is necessary to know the factors that affect the population, in order to improve tourism or improve their quality of life” (Orgaz, 2016, as cited in Garcés, 2021, p. 1).

The ambition to connect Esmeraldas with the world “...is not a recent development, but has been the desire of different power groups since the first colonial incursions in the 16th century” (Mérida, 2020, p. 3). This beautiful province has a unique cultural gastronomy, where “...the best typical dishes are tasted such as: ceviches, encocado de pescado, sopa marinera, ensumacao, among others, (...) in such a way that it receives a large number of local, national and international tourists, positioning Esmeraldas as a tourist destination in Ecuador” (Garcés, 2021, p. 3).

One of the areas of the economy that tinges the tourism and culture of this province is the gastronomy, famous nationally and internationally, and ranging from typical dishes such as “Coco Loco”, a drink made with coconut and brandy, to a variety of dishes based on fish and seafood and other exquisite flavors such as guanta, blue crab, river shrimp, conch and all the variety of cooking of the so-called verdes (plantains).

The Afro-Ecuadorian communities and especially those in the north of Ecuador, in the province of Esmeraldas, focus their attention on the ingredients that are used to carry out these family cooking tasks or those applied for the preparation of meals that are exhibited for sale, which are desired by locals and strangers who visit these communities, to enjoy the delicacies offered in their menus, such as: the panda of fish, the encocao of guanta, tatabra, deer, armadillo, guatín, ray, fresh heavy,

fish oreado, salted and smoked fish, encocao of minchilla (river shrimp), broth of Creole hen, tapao among others.

When talking about the Esmeraldeños, their style of eating is based on fishing products, hunting wild animals, seafood and crustaceans, coconut, green banana and ripe banana and the products they use as seasonings in the preparation of food are garlic, chillangua, onion and red onion, kidney tomato, oregano, chiraran and albaca. This tells us about the traditional knowledge that has been transmitted from generation to generation in the towns and communities as a cultural heritage, from where the family, its traditions, recipes, seasonings and culinary experiences in terms of kitchens and stoves are similar.

The indiscriminate exploitation of these natural resources, as part of tourism, is significantly affecting the economy of Esmeraldas and compromising the future of this sector, which is the locomotive of the social economy. In his study Intriago (2021) reports that, when referring to the sociocultural, economic and environmental impact of tourism in Esmeraldas, residents consider that there are positive and negative effects, although according to the results compiled in the research “...they show that there are more negative than positive consequences; therefore, they consider that tourism affects the development and productive growth of the city” (p. 31).

An example of good practices to safeguard some species representative of the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods is the work for the creation of the Blue Crab Presidium in Muisne, province of Esmeraldas, in which

workshops, participation in events outside the intervention territory, focus groups and the gastronomic laboratory were fundamental activities to strengthen the organizations, create links between them and involve young people. The main motive is to ensure generational replacement and the continuity of the capture, fattening, processing and marketing processes. In addition, training the organizations and providing the required infrastructure will allow the development of the various activities in an optimal manner. (Villota *et al.*, 2022, p. 121)

It is worth noting that after implementing the Presidium<sup>1</sup>, the possibility of increasing income went from USD 7.50 for five crabs to USD 25 for a pound of pulp obtained from the same number of animals, which “...represents an increase of 333.3% in the added value of the crabs, as a result

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<sup>1</sup> The Presidium are small projects that have as objective to help to handmade alimentary producers to conserve their culture, their work methods and protocols of traditional and handmade elaboration. (Villota *et al.*, 2022)

of the joint intervention of the different organizations and technification of product processing” (Villota *et al.*, 2022, p. 125).

Similarly, as part of gastronomic tourism, which falls within the proposal of Villagómez *et al.* (2019), from the creation of a gastronomic route integrated by the cantons of Rio Verde, Esmeraldas and Atacames “...can place the Province of Esmeraldas as a gastronomic tourist destination due to the potential of the tourist resources, natural cultural and exquisite gastronomy it has, (...) because the main expenditure is focused on food” (p. 42).

Accordingly, this work identified a set of actions that UTLVTE should develop so that its mission is increasingly relevant and committed to society and improves the training process in careers such as the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, focused on minimizing the negative impacts caused by the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods.

**Proposal of activities that contribute to provide greater social relevance to the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism at UTLVTE in order to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the commercialization of Afro-Esmeraldean foods.**

Among the authors who make proposals on activities in which universities can participate in order to mitigate the negative impacts generated by tourism are the works of Garcés (2021), Intriago (2021), Villagómez *et al.* (2019) and Villota *et al.* (2022).

Among their proposals are: a) to promote training programs for tourism and hotel staff to protect and preserve Esmeraldas' historical customs and traditions, b) to promote tourism investments that provide employment and income opportunities for all citizens, which leads to improving the quality of life, c) to work with all public and private entities in the tourism sector to agree on how to protect the city's natural and cultural resources, and d) to provide support to preserve the historical heritage (Garcés, 2021, p. 29).

Intriago (2021) recommends promoting, through different recreational activities with residents, awareness of the importance of environmental care and establishing adequate planning by the municipality so that the income generated by tourism is invested mostly in the needs of the province, in order to improve the quality of life of residents and fully satisfy tourist demand. (p. 36)

The analysis and discussion with the groups of teachers and students of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism and a study of the proposals of authors such as those mentioned above, make it possible

to determine a set of training activities (training), research and links with society that contribute to the UTLVTE to play a more leading role in the negative impact of tourism on the marketing of Afro-Esmeraldean foods, namely:

### **Training actions**

- 1) Offer courses and workshops on the importance of Afro-Esmeraldean gastronomy and how tourism can affect it.
- 2) Offer training to local communities in tourism and gastronomic management, so that they can benefit economically without losing their traditions.
- 3) Design of online platforms, as a means of teaching-learning, where information on Afro-Esmeraldean gastronomy can be accessed, including recipes, stories and authentic places to visit.

### **Research actions**

- 1) Conduct a study on the perceptions of foreign visitors about tourism in the city of Esmeraldas and in this way, identify and plan strategies that help to offer tourist services, and thus provide an excellent stay for tourists. (Garcés, 2021, p.29)
- 2) Development of studies that reveal how tourism is affecting culinary traditions and propose evidence-based solutions.
- 3) Research to document Afro-Esmeraldean culinary traditions, including recipes, preparation techniques, and the cultural meanings behind the dishes.
- 4) Execution of scientific events and culinary competitions that reward authenticity and tradition-based innovation.
- 5) Promotion of academic exchanges that foster new ideas and practices that can be adapted to the local reality.

### **Actions to link with society**

- 1) Development of campaigns to educate both tourists and locals about the importance of preserving these culinary traditions.
- 2) Advice and joint work with the local government to develop policies that regulate tourism and protect culinary traditions.
- 3) Creation of certifications for restaurants and establishments that respect and promote authentic Afro-Esmeraldean cuisine and that use these resources rationally.

- 4) Collaboration with sector authorities for the development of guides for tourists and tour operators on how to enjoy local gastronomy in a responsible manner.
- 5) Linking students of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism in tourist circuits that include visits to local communities where they can learn about and experience authentic Afro-Esmeraldean cuisine, as a resource for the teaching-learning process and the formation of indigenous values.
- 6) Creation of community development projects to support local entrepreneurs who wish to preserve and promote traditional cuisine.
- 7) Organization of events that promote Afro-Esmeraldean gastronomy, attracting both tourists and locals, and the consequent promotion of the consumption of traditional dishes.
- 8) Establishment of alliances with other universities, non-governmental organizations and international organizations working in cultural preservation and sustainable tourism.

Use of social networks to promote traditional gastronomy and raise awareness of its importance.

## Conclusions

The University of Esmeraldas has the social imperative to contribute with its efforts in the formative order, research and link with society, which is its fundamental processes, to preserve and promote Afro-Esmeraldas gastronomy in the face of growing tourism. Through science, education, appropriate policies and support to local communities, this university can ensure, along with other community institutions that these culinary traditions not only survive, but also thrive in the future.

Likewise, it has an indisputable mission in the rooting and promotion of the culinary values upheld by the people of Esmeraldas, especially those of the most vulnerable communities, and this is an achievable goal based on an increasingly comprehensive and relevant training of its professionals. Among the careers that can do more in this regard, emphasis is placed on the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism.

The results of the exchange with teachers and students point to affirm that the commercialization of products derived from fishing in the sea, the collection of mangrove products, the hunting of wild animals and the products of fishing in the rivers, significantly affect the communities and identities, all this under the pretext of promoting tourism in the territories or communities, as a measure to promote the development of these towns where multiple tourism activities are practiced in the canton of Esmeraldas.

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