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Socioeconomic and environmental strategies against COVID-19 for the strengthening of trade in the city of Pamplona*

Estrategias socioeconómicas y ambientales frente al COVID-19 para el fortalecimiento del comercio de la ciudad de Pamplona

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Abstract

The present research has as its fundamental basis to identify theoretical aspects of the affectations produced by COVID-19 in the local socioeconomic development of municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants, to analyze the impact of the pandemic in the commercial dynamics of the city of Pamplona, and to generate strategies oriented to mitigate such affectations. The study focuses on the commerce sector as a fundamental axis of the local economy at the municipal and supramunicipal level, in the period between March 2020 and April 2021, and allows evidencing the economic implications of COVID-19 in Pamplona and the subregion, as well as the scarcity of governmental support and mechanisms oriented to

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strengthen the economic development of the city. As a result, the formulation of strategies to promote trade as an engine of local development in the face of the pandemic or future massive contagions is achieved.

Keywords: COVID-19, Economic and Social Development, Pandemic

Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación tiene como base fundamental identificar aspectos teóricos de las afectaciones producidas por el COVID-19 en el desarrollo socioeconómico local de municipios con menos de 100.00 habitantes, analizar el impacto de la pandemia en las dinámicas comerciales de la ciudad de Pamplona, y generar estrategias orientadas a mitigar dichas afectaciones. El estudio se centra en el sector comercio como eje fundamental de la economía local en el ámbito municipal y supramunicipal, en el periodo comprendido entre marzo de 2020 y abril de 2021, y permite evidenciar las implicaciones económicas del COVID-19 en Pamplona y la subregión, así como escasez de apoyo gubernamental y de mecanismos orientados a fortalecer el desarrollo económico de la ciudad. Como resultado, se logra la formulación de estrategias para impulsar en el comercio como motor de desarrollo local frente a la pandemia ocurrida o a futuros contagios masivos.

Palabras Clave: COVID-19, Desarrollo Económico y Social, Pandemia

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION. - RESOLUTION SCHEME. - I. Research problem. - II. Methodology. - III. Writing plan. - 1. Coronavirus and its impact on the economy. - IV. Research results. - CONCLUSIONS. - REFERENCES.

Introduction

Colombia, through its economy, faced and is facing one of the most complex times due to COVID-19 and the fall in the international price of oil, leaving negative effects at a general and local level (Bonet-Morón et al., 2020). Small and medium-sized Colombian companies represent 36.00% of the industrial added value, corresponding to 92.00% of the commercial establishments and 40.00% of the country's total production, demonstrating its importance and great potential for growth (Avila & Melgarejo, 2016). However, considering that the economy is most affected by COVID-19 and that many people live from commerce, some were forced to liquidate their businesses due to this pandemic and the quarantine (colombia.as.com, 2020).

For this reason, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC or CEPAL by its Spanish initials), the Coronavirus expanded at an exponential rate, significantly affected the economy and had an impact on unemployment, inflation, companies' profits, and public spending (CEPAL, 2020a, 2020b; CEPAL, 2021).

Based on the above, Gutierrez (2020) states that for the International Monetary Fund, the growth prospects for 2020 and 2021 entered a recession that was as serious or worse than the one in 2009. Likewise, Alicia Bárcena expressed that the COVID-19 crisis will go down in history for its impact on supply and demand, interruption in production, and income generation logistics in the commercial sector. In the same way, Portillo (2020) complemented that the confinement and the commercial and border closure measures generated negative trade records from mid-2017 to the beginning of 2020 and predicted their worsening in the second quarter of 2020. During 2020, the pandemic caused a 3.00% drop in international trade values, and the slowdown in the second quarter was expected to reach 27.00% (UN.ORG, 2020). The added social distancing, confinement and quarantines implied a reduction in production and

consumption activities, the closure of companies, and unemployment for many citizens (PNUD, 2020).

Like with some cities, the city of Pamplona was not immune to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic; most of the trade experienced the crisis directly and indirectly due to the permanent and temporary closure of some sectors, with the added absence of the education sector as a result of social isolation measures. It is the product of low government support to counteract the negative effects of the closure of establishments and the social isolation of the citizens. As a consequence, commercial dynamics are interrupted, unemployment and poverty are generated, and the living conditions of the population decrease (Pinzon, 2018).

The present work has, as a fundamental base, to identify the theoretical aspects and the state of the art related to COVID-19 regarding the socioeconomic development of municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants. With this as support, the procedure was to analyze the situation of the municipality of Pamplona related to the permanent or temporary closure of commerce, which made it possible to formulate strategies to mitigate the impact on the city's commerce generated by COVID-19. In addition, the research had a mixed methodological approach that combined qualitative and quantitative aspects regarding the management of information on theoretical references and socioeconomic effects associated with COVID-19 in the last two years.

Resolution scheme

1. Research problem

How can strategies be formulated to minimize the impact of COVID-19 in the commercial sector of the city of Pamplona?

2. Methodology

This research, of an exploratory (Collado & Lucio, 2017, p. 9) and descriptive (Arias, 2012, p. 37) type, was developed through a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) study. The sample consisted of 60 business and 92 commercial administrators and managers, identified using a non-probabilistic criterion for convenience. As a data collection instrument, a survey with closed questions was used, which allowed for establishing the perception of merchants about the economic impact of the pandemic during the year 2021, in aspects such as closure of establishments, suspension of suppliers, dismissal of employees and income reduction.

3. Writing plan

3.1 The coronavirus and its impact on the economy

Development is related to progress and economic and social growth as aspects that are part of discussions in the national and international order (Ortiz, 2020). For its part, COVID-19 is classified as a virus that generates Acute Respiratory Infection, generally called the flu, which can go unnoticed with mild symptoms or become complicated and progress to much more complex medical problems. The Coronavirus has been described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a public health calamity (Colombia, Ministerio de Salud, 2020), the

first case of which was reported in Colombia at the beginning of March 2020 (coronaviruscolombia.gov.co, 2020).

Coronaviruses can cause illnesses in both animals and humans. In humans, it causes respiratory infections that can lead to the flu or a more serious disease such as the Middle East respiratory syndrome, commonly called (MERS) and (SARS) (OMS, 2020). For their part, the containment measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus greatly impacted the main international markets, specifically showing a decrease in exports in 2020 with a year-on-year contraction of 3.40%.

In the February-March period of the same year, the data for Latin America showed a negative impact for most countries (except Costa Rica and El Salvador), while, between January and March, exports in Brazil contracted by 6.90% compared to the same period in 2019, in Chile by 6.60% and in Colombia by 8.00%. (BID, 2020). The preceding required sanitary and economic measures to reduce its effects, protect vulnerable communities and strengthen government capabilities for prevention and care (Banco Mundial, 2020a, 2020b; ONU, 2020; Castillo, 2020).

In Colombia, the initial cases of coronavirus came from Spain and the United States, countries that host a greater number of Colombian migrants and are represented by a large number of people travelling to Colombia, which turned the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic into a great challenge for the mobilization of so many people (Pinzón, 2020). In this regard, although there was no short-term threat to world supplies of basic foods, there was a danger associated with food supply logistics being affected by the absence of workers for harvesting key crops due to logistical problems and also sanitary and phytosanitary measures (Datasur, 2020). In this way, the economic dynamics of developing countries suffered a local and national deterioration due to the pandemic generated by COVID-19, with a direct impact on production and interruption of supply chains (Procolombia, 2020).

In addition, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the forced confinement of millions of people to stop its spread (CCCE, 2021) produced a decrease in the world economy by 0.5%, while for Colombia, the price rise of the dollar above 3,800 pesos and the fall of the stock market, were clear indicators of the economic repercussion generated by COVID-19 (Galán, 2020). Everything mentioned before also affected the population's quality of life (Banco de la República, 2020; Universidad Nacional et al., 2020; Mejía, 2020; Ocampo, 2020).

According to Mora (2006), quoted by Dinero magazine, the Colombian economy has a high margin of informality and underemployment, which has generated instability in economic development, corruption, absence of strong institutions, and urban and rural insecurity (Dinero, 2020). In addition to the above, the problems related to COVID-19, such as the closure of companies, further aggravate the situation in the country (Argote, 2021) and confirm the correspondence presented between municipal vulnerability and the lethality of COVID-19 (Escallón et al., 2020; Fernández, 2020); it is why economic strategies that can be taken to minimize these problems are of the utmost importance (Cano, 2020).

According to Fedesarrollo (2020), the containment, temporary closure, and social distancing measures taken to minimize contagion had higher economic costs in contact activities, such as those corresponding to the commerce and tourism sectors. Concomitant with the above and one year after the pandemic started, the economic burden of the crisis generated by the expansion of COVID-19 in Colombia led to the loss of more than half a million micro-businesses dedicated to commercial, agricultural and manufacturing activities (Fonseca, 2021). It also caused a drop in the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), never seen

before in the country's history (-6.80%) and greater than the highest seen in 1999, which generated more than 3.75 million unemployed people (La República, 2021) (figure 1).

Figure 1. Gross Domestic Product 1985-2020



Source: La República (2021).

As stated earlier, and according to Farné (2016), the reactivation of productive processes and labour reintegration is a slow process within which unemployment rates will gradually balance out. However, additional measures must be taken, and emergency employment programs should be created to facilitate an increase in labour income. Therefore, for Weller (2020), based on the expectations related to current problems, it can be assumed that promoting and supporting gradual labour reintegration can be an opportunity to generate sustainable solutions in many work processes and to achieve employment security in pandemic situations. In this sense, it is convenient to take advantage of most companies' reorganization processes (Romo, Cruz, & Torres, 2020; Portafolio, 21 de Febrero de 2021).

4. Research results

The department of Norte de Santander has 59,973 companies registered among the three (3) existing chambers of commerce. In the Chamber of Commerce of Cúcuta, 85.00% of the department's business fabric is registered, that is, 51,464 companies currently operating, while the Chamber of Commerce of Pamplona represents 5.70% of all companies in Norte de Santander, which translates into 3,422 productive units (Cámara de Comercio de Pamplona, 2016).

The analysis of the commercial sector of the city of Pamplona made it possible to verify not only its role as the capital of the municipality that bears the same name and which is located in the department of Norte de Santander but also its supra municipal role as the centre of the northwestern subregión, better known as the province of Pamplona, characterized by the diversity in commercial dynamics that support educational, cultural and political-administrative activities (Alcaldía del Municipio de Pamplona, 2015; Alcaldía de Pamplona, 2020). The results obtained from a survey of merchants in the centre of Pamplona are listed below.

Table 1. Merchants' perception of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Pamplona

ASPECTS	ANSWERS				
Closure of the during the pandemic.	Yes	%	Not	%	Total
	61	67%	31	33%	92
Closure time	2-3 months	3-6 months	6-10 months	11-12 months	
	30%	50%	20%	0%	100%
Economic losses	Heavily affected	Moderately affected	Slightly affected	Haven't been affected	
	42%	25%	21%	12%	100%
Supplier suspension	Yes	%	Not	%	100%
	78	83%	14	17%	92
Paying rent during business closure	64	70%	28	30%	92
Alternatives used to pay rent	Bank loan	Borrow from individuals	Sale of goods	Personal savings	
	50%	17%	3%	30%	100%
Dismissal of employees by closure of establishments	Yes	%	Not	%	
	30	33%	62	67%	92
Reduction of income	10%	30%	40%	70%	100%
	10 establishments	7 establishments	17 establishments	58 establishments	92
Alternatives to reduce the economic impact	Other products and services	Sublease	Temporary closure	Definitive closure	Others
	65%	5%	22%	8%	100%
Difficulty of access to suppliers	Occasionally	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	
	12%	5%	67%	16%	100%
Decrease in products or services	Yes	%	Not	%	
	69	75%	23	25%	100%
Affecting employees with disability	Yes	%	Not	%	
	7	8%	85	92%	
Liquidation of the business if the pandemic continues	Yes	%	Not	%	
	21	23%	71	77%	100%

Source: adapted from Zuleta (2022).

As can be seen in Table 1, the impact generated by the COVID-19 pandemic on the commerce sector is relevant. It requires various measures that contribute to generating adequate financial, organizational and labour stability conditions.

In this way, the contributions of various authors such as Santoyo, López, Fernández (2021) and the situational analysis carried out with the help of statistical data and field work allowed establishing, through variable correlation matrices, a series of potentialities. Moreover,

economic, social and environmental conflicts were the basis for formulating strategic objectives and intervention strategies.

The proposed objectives are the following. The economic strategic objective aimed at avoiding contagions that impact the closure of the city's commerce and improve the competitiveness of the local economy; the social strategic objective seeks to include aspects related to equity and inclusion in access to opportunities and improve civic culture and security. Lastly, the environmental strategic objective is aimed at restructuring and increasing the density of green areas and public spaces of pedestrian nature to contribute to the regulation of the area's microclimate, the aesthetics of the sector and the scarcity of adequate spaces for social relationships healthily and inclusively.

For its part, strategies were formulated within the framework of the strategic objectives defined for each structuring aspect. It aimed to take advantage of the potential to reverse the identified conflicts. The strategies were complemented with the respective responsible entities (table 2). The economic, social and environmental results are presented in tables 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 2. Strategies for Economic Intervention

POTENTIALITIES	CONFLICTS	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE
EP1. Existence of technical rules of food hygiene in food processing and manufacturing	EC1. Lack of knowledge of biosecurity practices in food provision and preparation services	ES1. Conduct training and follow-up to premises and restaurants that provide the service of selling prepared food to avoid contagion by the use of kitchen utensils (forks, knives, spoons, glasses) and also avoid the spread of the virus	Municipal government. Secretary of the Government. National Police
EP2. Existence of the national vaccination plan against COVID-19	EC2. Agglomerations in public places	ES2. Design protocols at the entrance of establishments and public and private entities for attendees to present a vaccination card	Municipal government
EP3. The existence of general principles of food hygiene in food processing and manufacturing facilities	EC3. Insufficient initiatives for proper management in food preparation	ES3. Reinforcement for campaigns of proper management in food preparation	Secretary of the Government. National Police
EP4. The existence of protocols for pandemic care	EC4. Low implementation of existing protocols	ES4. Virtual client attention or implementation of controlled booths in public entities	Municipal government
	EC5. The low number of entrepreneurship initiatives supported by funding sources	ES5. Generation of incentives for the creation of virtual enterprises	Chamber of commerce
EP5. Existence of financing sources for entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurship Fund)	EC6. Companies with limited technological means	ES6. Equipping small businesses with technology to boost online sales	Municipal government. Chamber of commerce
	EC7. Companies with few IT tools	ES7. Public management for the provision of IT tools	Municipal government. Chamber of commerce
EP8. Existence of activities managed by the Chamber of Commerce of Pamplona	EC8. Low awareness from the community on what the business has to offer	ES8. Implementation of fairs for traders in a controlled manner (Biosecurity) to make the products known to the customers	Chamber of commerce

Note: EP: Economic Potentialities; EC: Economic Conflicts; ES: Economic Strategies

Source: adapted from Zuleta (2022).

Table 3. Strategies for Social Intervention

POTENTIALITIES	CONFLICTS	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE
SP1. Existence of protocols and health guidelines created with municipal health in mind	SC1. Ignorance of the correct way of using face masks	SS1. Conducting awareness campaigns for the proper use of face masks	Municipal health secretary
SP2. Existence of decrees and resolutions to control agglomerations in public places	SC2. Agglomerations in public places	SS2. Continued determination of "peak and cedula" for the procurement of goods and services in trade	Municipal government

Socioeconomic and environmental strategies against COVID-19 for the strengthening of trade in the city of Pamplona

SP3. Existence of decrees and resolutions for the mandatory use of face masks to mitigate COVID-19	SC3. Very low availability of resources for personal protection (biosecurity)	SS3. Support for the purchase of face masks and alcohol for low-income and homeless people	Municipal health secretary
SP4. Protocols designed by the Secretary of Health and Government to raise awareness on the issue of controlled distancing for commercial establishments	SC4. Lack of protocol knowledge	SS4. Design of ongoing activities to raise awareness about controlled social distancing	Municipal health secretary San Juan de Dios Hospital
SP5. Existence of lineaments and guidelines for controlling the entry to public sites and commerce in general	SC5. Lack of protocol knowledge	SS5. Follow-up of public and private institutions to review and assure proper social distancing, as well as biosecurity measures carried out to control COVID-19	Government of Norte de Santander. Municipal health secretary Policía Nacional
SP6. Existence of campaigns to improve lifestyle (Health entities)	SC6. Lack of healthy practices knowledge	SS6. Promoting healthy lifestyles (Diet) to prevent physical and mental illness	Departmental Secretary of Health San Juan de Dios Hospital
	SC7. Lack of healthy practices knowledge	SS7. Promoting sports and exercise for improving quality of life	Municipal secretary of sport San Juan de Dios Hospital
SP8. Institutional guidelines to control virus spread	SC8. Lack of awareness on protection measures	SS8. Inclusion of care awareness programs in face-to-face classes in schools to prevent COVID-19 infections at home	Departmental Secretary of Education
SP9. Decree 1109 of 2020 to detect people with COVID-19 symptoms	SC9. Lack of knowledge and low appropriation of the decree by citizens	SS9. Increase in epidemiological visits to homes to detect people with COVID-19 symptoms	Municipal health secretary

Note: EP: Social Potentialities; EC: Social Conflicts; ES: Social Strategies

Source: adapted from Zuleta (2022).

Table 4. Strategies for Environmental Intervention

POTENTIALITIES	CONFLICTS	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE
EP1. Existence of national and departmental protocols	EC1. Lack of protocol knowledge	ES1. Strategic placement in crowded places of a sink equipped with antibacterial soap for washing hands	Municipal government EMPOPAMPLONA S.A E.S.P.
EP2. Existence of a National Climate Change Policy, a Regional Climate Change Node in Norte de Santander, pollution studies carried out by CORPONOR and master's degree projects in environmental engineering associated with air quality in Pamplona	EC2. Air pollution and reduced air quality	ES2. Monitoring and controlling the air quality of the city, (Automobiles and industries) to prevent pulmonary and infectious diseases	CORPONOR Municipal government
EP3. Regional pollution studies carried out by CORPONOR and master's degree projects in environmental engineering associated with air quality in Pamplona	EC3. Release of polluting particles into the atmosphere	ES3. Monitoring and controlling waste burning to improve air quality	CORPONOR Municipal government
EP4. Existence of a Regional Climate Change Node in Norte de Santander, guidelines created by EMPOPAMPLONA, and the environmental management plan	EC4. Decreased air quality and increased climate variability	ES4. Mass reforestation to improve air quality in the city	EMPOPAMPLONA S.A E.S.P.
EP5. Ten-year health plan, municipal health plan and incorporation of special measures for the disposal of waste. Implementation of the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan (PGIRS)	EC5. Lack of hygiene and health knowledge	ES5. Provision of special cans or containers for biological waste or for disposing face masks	EMPOPAMPLONA S.A. E.SP.
EP6. Implementation of the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan (PGIRS)	EC6. Lack of hygiene and health knowledge	ES6. Design and implementation of training and socialization programs in homes, for the proper disposal of biological waste. (Caps and sanitary napkins, among others)	EMPOPAMPLONA S.A E.S.P.
	EC7. Lack of protocol knowledge	ES7. Design of infographics and use of the media for biological material disposal protocols, carried out by patient with COVID-19 inside their house, and also the correct behavior to avoid contagion to other family member	Municipal government EMPOPAMPLONA S.A E.S.P.

Note: EP: Environmental Potentialities; EC: Environmental Conflicts; ES: Environmental Strategies
Source: adapted from Zuleta (2022).

Conclusions

The theoretical contributions that exist so far about COVID-19 are innumerable and had great growth in 2021, in addition to being complimented in terms of statistical data, experiences and cases. It demonstrates the great economic and social impact caused by the temporary and definitive closure of many businesses and companies, high unemployment rates, and psychological and physical effects on the health of all the inhabitants, with consequences that until now have not been able to be rectified.

The characterization of commerce in the city of Pamplona allowed us to conclude that the tertiary sector, corresponding to the sale of goods and provision of services, accounts for 42.80% of the total companies in its jurisdiction that belong to the commerce sector, followed by 14.70% that is industrial and 9.80% accommodation and food services.

The results highlight the serious economic problem suffered by merchants as a result of the temporary and permanent closures of many businesses. A problem linked to student absenteeism at the multiple public and private institutions, and, above all, of the University of Pamplona as the main promoter of the local economy. It contributed to the decrease in sales of necessities and the provision of services, to the decrease in income and the quality of life of the population associated with the commerce sector.

During the study period, a large percentage of the merchants surveyed had difficulties related to the economic income generated by the provision of services and product sales, a decrease in merchandise due to low purchasing levels of customers, delays in orders, and a decrease in suppliers. At the same time, another of the factors that generated negative economic effects on merchants corresponded to the decrease in rental payments. For these reasons, many merchants could not continue carrying out their activities and were forced to assume bank loans and use savings to maintain their establishments, based on the optimistic forecasts of the pandemic not lasting more than 6 months. Subsequently, some were forced to close their businesses permanently.

Lastly, it was possible to demonstrate the existence and implementation of mechanisms to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and learn to live with situations caused by pandemics. In this sense, the economic, social and environmental objectives and strategies formulated were aimed at strengthening the dynamics of the tertiary sector and urged to strictly follow existing and future biosafety mechanisms and protocols so that businesses can continue to provide their services and selling products in an effective, prudent and safe way, in pandemic situations.

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