

**COVID-19 in the San Juan del Río, Qro. restaurant sector, effects and Outlook****COVID-19 en el sector restaurantero de San Juan del Río, Qro., afectaciones y perspectivas**

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**Abstract**

COVID-19 burst in the whole world and put Mexico in challenging situations in several areas, in the State of Queretaro the government in turn implemented a series of measures decreed and suggested at national and international level to preserve the health of its citizens, among these measures was the temporary closure of various establishments where there was contact and coexistence of people, including local restaurants, which faced great challenges such as: dismissal of staff, emergent adaptation with survival strategies and sales, among others. The objective of this work is to find the impact of COVID 19 on the restaurant sector of San Juan del Río, Qro., as well as the future perspectives on the part of the businessmen, emphasizing the effects on the workers. The need to collaborate on the part of the local government in the total reactivation of the sector included in the program for the activation of tourism in the city is what summarizes the justification for this research. The synthetic analytical method was used, descriptive, mixed type, using an instrument with quantitative and qualitative elements to detect the impact of COVID 19 in the restaurant sector of the city, the perception of future perspectives and affectations in its human capital; 76 establishments were surveyed out of a total of 955 recognized and with denomination according to the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (DENUE) and by the representative of the Queretaro Council of restaurateurs AC, although a tourist blog in the country, reports that there are 124 main ones. The main meetings: the variation in income, number of workers, salaries, priority activities, investment in pre and post COVID items, the future prospects of the sector and information on human losses and worker capacities by COVID-19.

**COVID-19, Restaurant Sector, Workers****Resumen**

COVID-19 irrumpió en el mundo entero y puso a México en situaciones desafiantes en diversas áreas, en el Estado de Querétaro el gobierno en turno puso en marcha toda serie de medidas decretadas y sugeridas a nivel nacional e internacional para poder preservar la salud de sus ciudadanos, dentro de estas medidas estaba al cierre temporal de diversos establecimientos en donde existía el contacto y la convivencia de gente, incluyendo los restaurantes locales, mismos que enfrentaron grandes retos como: despido de personal, adaptación emergente con estrategias de supervivencia y de ventas, entre otras. El objetivo del presente trabajo, encontrar el impacto del COVID 19 en el sector restaurantero de San Juan del Río, Qro., así como las perspectivas futuras por parte de los empresarios, haciendo énfasis en las afectaciones a los trabajadores. La necesidad de colaborar por parte del gobierno local en la reactivación total del sector que se incluye en el programa de activación del turismo en la ciudad es lo que resume la justificación de esta investigación. Se utilizó el método analítico sintético, tipo descriptivo, mixto, utilizando un instrumento con elementos cuantitativos y cualitativos para detectar el impacto del COVID 19 en el sector restaurantero de la ciudad, la percepción de perspectivas futuras y afectaciones en su capital humano; se encuestaron 76 establecimientos de un total de 955 reconocidos y con denominación de acuerdo al Directorio Estadístico Nacional de Unidades Económicas (DENUE) y por el representante del Consejo Queretano de restauranteros AC, aunque un blog turístico en el país, informa que son 124 los principales. Los principales encuentros: la variación en ingresos, número de trabajadores, salarios, actividades prioritarias, inversión en rubros pre y post COVID, las perspectivas a futuro del sector e información de pérdidas humanas y capacidades de trabajadores por COVID-19.

**COVID-19, Sector restaurantero, Trabajadores**

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## Introduction

With the appearance of the SARS VOC 2 virus there was a revolution or a disruptive social event, which changed the way of doing things, a great number of paradigms were broken, not only in Mexico, but in the whole world, in the State of Querétaro the government in turn put in place a series of measures decreed and suggested at national and international level to combat this pandemic, within these measures the temporary closure of various establishments where there was contact and coexistence of people was forced, including restaurants, economic entities that are part of the service or tourism sector, This is how we can find research such as that of Caldearte, Gifra and Akhmedova (2021), whose objective was to gauge the opinion of business leaders in this industry in Spain on the impact of COVID-19 on the food and beverage sector and its companies, and to find out their vision of the future in the face of the previous challenges and the new ones posed as a result of the pandemic; This research helped to identify the key factors in the sector that were in force in the pre-COVID-19 scenario, which are still relevant and which are no longer relevant, as well as the new priorities and urgencies that the post-pandemic world presents to the sector; Other research that can be mentioned are those of La industria restaurantera frente al Covid-19 by Martínez Lomelí (2020) and Montecinos (n.d.), which, because they refer to similar but not the same topics as our own, are discussed in the corresponding section; however, on the tourism sector in San Juan del Río, Qro. , only two research studies are detected, one by Pérez Bravo (2017) and the other by Pérez Guzmán (2021), the first on competitiveness and knowledge management in SMEs in the restaurant sector and the second on an analysis of the promotion of cultural tourism in the municipality of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, both theses, In other words, they are not current and do not provide information about the effects on the post-COVID 19 sector in the locality, which, as mentioned above, was affected by the temporary closures and thus the decrease in sales and the dismissal of employees, and in some cases the definitive closure of the sector. Therefore, the main objective of this research was to find out the impact of COVID 19 on the restaurant sector in San Juan del Río, Qro., as well as the future prospects for entrepreneurs, with an emphasis on the effects on workers.

## Theories

### *COVID-19*

COVID-19 or novel coronavirus as a pandemic in the words of Castro, (2020), began in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province in China and was declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 according to Zigiang Xin (2020) although the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed it for the first time as a public health emergency of international concern in January 2020, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) which agrees with what was stated by Lizaroso, both in the same year 2020.

As stated by the WHO (2020), Coronavirus belongs to a large family of viruses that can cause disease in both animals and humans, and is known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as middle and acute respiratory syndrome. On the other hand, another author who adds to this definition is Bachelet (2020) who stated that the disease is infectious, caused by the coronavirus which was discovered later in the pandemic. The aforementioned virus is mainly characterised by mild symptoms such as sore throat, cough and fever and can be more severe in some people and cause pneumonia or respiratory difficulties Gómez (2020) and was mainly spread by direct contact with infected people or by contact with surfaces with respiratory droplets (saliva or nasal secretions).

### **Restaurant sector**

As indicated by Sallés (2018), it is said that the restaurant sector has its beginnings in Egypt in 512 BC. c it is said that there is evidence that there was a public dining room in which dishes were served with a limited menu, the concept as a restaurant was already used in Paris France, as shared by Garduño (2007), where there was a place opened in 1765 where it served dishes accompanied by wine making it known as the first restaurant, over time there has been a continuous growth of this sector with a number of businesses as referred by Banner (2015), 515,059 establishments engaged exclusively in the preparation of food and beverages.

This restaurant sector is a set of establishments that are dedicated to the preparation of food and beverages instantly, Lopez (2015) the gastronomy industry has a permanent interaction with other economic areas, making the production chain of food preparation extends to sectors such as agriculture, livestock, fisheries and rural development, among others. Ferrari (2018) commented that the national restaurant sector has become an engine of the economy and one of the main generators of employment, with more than 428 thousand establishments, of which 96 per cent are micro, small and medium-sized businesses, representing a way for many Mexicans to develop their entrepreneurial spirit and start a business, Torruco (2015), for his part, argues that the restaurant sector has been essential in the country's tourism development, allowing Mexico to position itself in a privileged place in the world, by having a varied gastronomy, and a quality service at the height of the best in the world, it is assured that the restaurant industry in the country represents 2% of the national GDP and 15.3% of the tourist GDP.

**Methodology**

In this article we used the synthetic analytical method, descriptive type, the methodology applied focuses on the mixed research technique, using the survey through the questionnaire instrument consisting of two sections: general company data and questions on the Likert rating scale, in an instrument with quantitative and qualitative elements to detect the impact of COVID 19 on the city's restaurant sector. The information sought was related to the perception of the future of the sector after COVID 19, the impact of the crisis on the companies themselves, effects on human capital and future prospects, as well as personal reflections of the entrepreneurs; 76 establishments were surveyed out of a total of 955 (8%), recognised and named according to the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (DENUE) and by the local representative of the Queretaro Council of restaurateurs AC, among which were also those mentioned in a tourism blog in the country which stated that there are 124 main restaurants.

**Results**

General data on the economic units:

Of those surveyed, 59.2% were owners, 19.7% directors or managers, 13.2% partners and the remaining 7.9% hold other positions; regarding the type of business 89% are local, 7.9% national and 3.1% foreign.

The income of these economic units that in 2019 were below 50,000 pesos per month was represented by 46.1%, those in the range of between 51,000.00 and 100,000.00 pesos per month were 28.9%, from 101,000.00 to 200,000.00 were 10.5% and more than 200,000.00 were 14.5%.



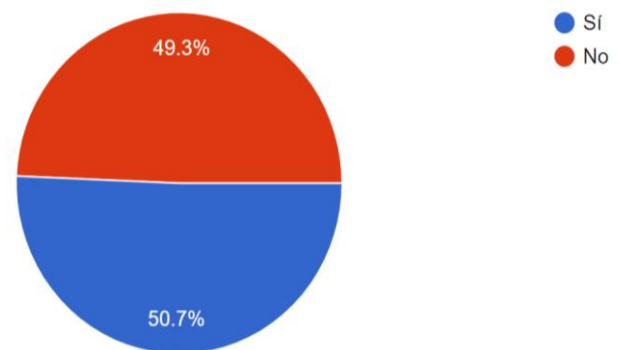
**Graphic 1** Segments of the restaurant sector in which respondents operate

Source: Own elaboration

Workers	2019	2023	Increment
Less than 10	71.1%	64.5	-6.6
11 to 50	26.3	30.3	4%
51 to 100	0	0	0
More than 100	2.6	2.6	0

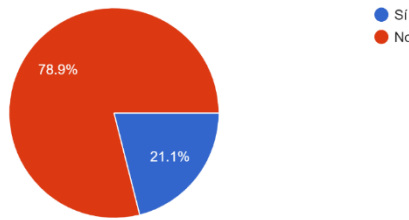
**Table 1** number of workers in economic units before the pandemic and nowadays

Source: Own elaboration



**Graphic 2** Respondents who lost a family member or worker to COVID-19 due to death

Source: Own elaboration



**Graphic 3** Workers who lost skills due to sequelae by COVID 19

Source: Own elaboration

Options	Number of respondents who strongly agree	Percentage of total
Sales will tend to start a growth process	21	27%
Alliances between restaurateurs will increase	36	47%
Home delivery sales will increase	21	27%
Local restaurants will gain market share	24	31.5%
There will be more innovation in the products and services offered	19	25%
Health preservation measures will continue	19	25%
Local restaurants will gain specific weight in sector decision making.	28	37.80%
Government involvement and support will grow	40	52.60%

**Table 2** Respondents' opinion on possible future developments in the local restaurant sector.

Source: Own elaboration

Indicator	Most cited indicator	Percentage of respondents citing the indicator
Invoicing for on-premises consumption	Decreased by 20%.	29%
Invoicing for door-to-door sales	Increased by more than 20%.	35.5%
Number of employees	Change insignificantly	33%
Variation in employee salaries	Changed significantly	39.5%

**Table 3** Changes in companies due to COVID 19

Source: Own elaboration

Indicator	Most cited indicator	Porcentaje de encuestados que citaron el indicador
Planned capital investments against 2019	Fallen by 10 to 20%.	39.5%
Investments in digital transformation projects	Increased by 5-10%.	42%
Investments in new product development vs. 2019	Grew by 5-10%.	35.5%
Investments in staff training vs. 2019	Increased by 5-10% Growth	42%

**Table 4** Changes in the companies in terms of investment volume as a consequence of COVID-19

Source: Own elaboration

In the open-ended questions, respondents expressed what they considered to be their main lessons learned from the crisis that began in March 2020.

On a personal level, they considered that they now value their work and their health as well as the people around them; they have learned about themselves in the face of adversity; they want to prepare and take better care of themselves, seek immediate medical attention for health problems, learn to save and make improvements in their habits, help their fellow human beings, etc.

In their company they consider that they learned to keep more controls to keep the business afloat, to work as a team and on sanitary measures; they learned to organise their time and not to take for granted that every year will be favourable, to prepare workers for innovation, to study the market and detect needs in order to implement efficient solutions, to learn to save. To have a better administration, to be attentive to strong changes, to take care of the capital of the business, to look for competitive prices and to be always at the forefront, offering quality products and services to continue positioning themselves, to take care of the personnel by providing them with the adequate training to give special attention to the client and also to elaborate the products with the corresponding hygiene, to keep a better control of expenses, to be resilient to future changes;

it is very important to use technology and platforms or applications to distribute their services at home; to learn how to make decisions under uncertainty; to keep the business as healthy as possible in terms of fiscal or financial debts and debts to suppliers.

At the sector level, they learned to comply with more regulations such as the preventive ones before COVID-19, about the opportunities to innovate and to seek the comfort of the diner, they learned about the strengths of their companies, that it is a vulnerable sector, that they must be resilient to unforeseen situations and adapt, be open to probable expansions to new markets.

This coincides with the responses of the respondents when asked to mention other aspects that they consider important and related to the future of the sector in the locality, highlighting that they consider it necessary to use social networks to expand their market share, use more technology and applications for home delivery of products, anticipate innovation because the market is always changing, emphasise hygiene and safety for diners, savings, be resilient, set competitive prices, attract tourism, request government support in terms of logistics, simplify procedures and financial support, and join development programmes for the restaurant sector, vary and innovate in the food offered.

## Discussion

After finding out about the variation in income, number of workers, salaries, priority activities, investment in pre and post COVID items, the future prospects of the sector and information on human losses and worker capacities by COVID-19 and analysing studies by other authors in this regard, it is realised that the study carried out in San Juan del Río, Qro, agrees in part with some of the research, for example, with the findings of Caldart Adrian, Gifra Júlia and Akhmedova Ana, (2021) where it was stated that the economic units studied in the food and beverage sector, They also find that the European Union (EU) is helping many sectors to recover and is boosting support for tourism, culture and the arts across the Union and making them more digital and sustainable.

Another research that agrees with the results is called gastronomic tourism vs. COVID-19 by the doctor in tourism Antonio Montecinos (n/d) in the magazine CEDOC in its special COVID-19, where he mentions that COVID would have many effects on gastronomic tourism and that it was necessary to contribute to the resilience, recovery and regeneration of the sector; He highlights here as an important finding that resilience in gastronomy and gastronomic tourism is required for its recovery, a sustainable and competitive regeneration with a profound social and spiritual transmutation, good governance and a sustainable, innovative and intelligent food system, as well as the production and consumption of regional products with quality labels and the prioritisation of endemic ingredients. This is consistent with the comments made by respondents to the local research that there is a need to be resilient in the face of the challenges currently being faced by the changes demanded by the pandemic, as well as the consumption of regional or endemic products.

The local research findings also agree with data from the research study La industria restaurantera frente al Covid-19 by Martínez Lomelí (2020), where he stated that in the midst of the pandemic, the industry was forced to reconvert in order to offer its takeaway food services and in the organisation of staff for food preparation; they highlight the importance of the restaurant industry in the life of society and its experiences as essential places in everyday life for socialising, in the generation of employment and in its contribution to national economies. Martínez Lomelí (2020) stated how chefs predicted and speculated that it would be very likely that, at the end of the pandemic, hygiene control regulation measures in public places would change and become stricter in relation to the maximum seating capacity of restaurants, the minimum compulsory distance allowed between diners, the provision of toilets at the entrance or the compulsory use of mouth covers. This information is consistent with what was also stated by local respondents that the sanitary measures put in place in and during the pandemic have remained part of the new order forever, such as the use of the washbasin at the entrance, the use of gel and the ventilation of the premises.

## Conclusions

After surveying 76 establishments out of a total of 955 (8%), recognised and named according to the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (DENUE) and by the local representative of the Queretaro Council of restaurateurs AC, of which the data was obtained that of these 59. 7 were owners and 19.5% were managers, and 89.6% were local businesses, mainly restaurants with food preparation, a la carte or set meals 32.5% and preparation of pizzas, hamburgers, hot-dogs and rotisserie chicken to take away 19.5% and antojitos 19.5%. It was found that the number of workers in companies with less than 10 workers decreased by 6.6% from 2019 to 2023 and in companies with between 11 and 50 workers this number increased by 4%; it was also found that 51.3% of respondents lost a family member or worker to COVID 19 due to death and that 20.8% of employers stated that workers had sequelae due to COVID 19 that affected their capacities although not in a relevant way such as to affect their work activities.

Regarding possible future developments in the local restaurant sector, it was found that, optimistically, it is believed that alliances between restaurateurs will be maintained 47%, that there will be support and participation from the government 52.60%, that there will be a process of growth and participation in the market, that door-to-door sales and sanitary measures will be maintained, and that there will be 'more innovation in products and services that will be offered'.

On the other hand, changes were observed in the companies due to COVID 19, such as a decrease in sales by on-site consumption and an increase in door-to-door sales in terms of the number of employees and the variation in their salaries were insignificant. Although planned capital investments decreased, investments in digital technology development, new product development and staff training increased.

It could also be noted that, on a personal level, there was personal and/or spiritual growth, since there was a great deal of learning, as the respondents stated that they value their work and their health, as well as the people around them; they learned about themselves in the face of adversity; they want to prepare themselves and take better care of themselves, as well as improve their habits and help their fellow human beings. At the company level, they also learned about the urgent need to keep health, financial and administrative controls, especially to know how to plan time, activities and investments, to work as a team, to know how to make decisions in uncertain conditions and to be attentive and resilient to emerging changes, to improve and innovate in their products, to take care of their staff and to use technology to the benefit of the company. At the sector level, they learned to work as a team as they united in the face of uncertainty, to comply with more regulations such as the preventive ones before COVID 19, to use the opportunity to innovate in the threat and to take care of the diner and the worker.

As for future expectations for the sector, they visualise it with optimism and growth, they highlighted the importance of continuing to use what they have learned during the pandemic, such as technology and social networks, although they also visualise the need to request government support in terms of logistics, simplification of procedures and financial support, as well as access to development programmes for the restaurant sector.

As the restaurant industry is an important pillar of the local economy and job creation, as well as a support for tourism, and as it is still overcoming the negative effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is necessary for local and state governments to establish agendas and programmes to support or rescue the sector, It is also important to promote among them the consumption of regional products, as well as to maintain the sanitary measures established during the pandemic regarding the care of production, transportation, handling, preparation, consumption of food, workers' equipment, and in general what has been learnt about good hygiene practices for the hygienic handling of food throughout the production process.



Unfortunately, there were losses in families and workers in the restaurant sector, the number of workers and their salaries in businesses of less than ten, i.e. in micro-businesses, and entrepreneurs were under financial pressure, but this was a great personal, business and sectoral learning experience that they will know how to use to their advantage in any situation, after all, as the representative of the sector in the locality stated, "after COVID 19 nothing is the same anymore".

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