

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND
THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACTS OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN INDIGENOUS
CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF THE CHAKRA ROUTE IN NAPO, ECUADOR

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By

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Abstract

In my dissertation, my concern is the lack of agency of Indigenous people in the development of tourism in their territories and the need for frameworks that guide this development in a more sustainable and Indigenous-led way. Agency signifies peoples' power to influence their own lives. Indeed, tourism is often discussed as a desirable development strategy for Indigenous communities, but it is also seen to have a poor track record regarding its impacts on Indigenous livelihoods and their ecosystems. This dissertation offers an alternative perspective on tourism development, specifically focusing on locals' food sovereignty. I contest the assumption that increasing local income through tourism is, on its own, enough for improving food security and other food-related outcomes for locals. I use the concept of food sovereignty to show the complexities and multidimensional impacts of tourism in Indigenous host communities.

I apply qualitative and collaborative research to explore the potential of food sovereignty in tourism studies. A case study research design facilitated this exploration. The setting is the Chakra Route, a tourist destination in the Amazonia of Ecuador, which overlaps Kichwa Napo Runa people's ancestral land. The Chakra Route's contextual conditions offer a window to explore the relationship between tourism and food sovereignty in Indigenous contexts. I explore there the multiple interpretations of food sovereignty among participants, the development of tourism, the impacts locals perceived on their food sovereignty as a result of tourism development, and my own research practices. By doing that I was able to i) identify the elements that a food sovereignty framework should include to inform more sustainable and Indigenous-led tourism practices; ii) examine how tourism alters the food sovereignty of Kichwa Napo Runa

people and how these alterations affect their wellbeing; and iii) reflect on how this research praxis contributes to increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism research and democratizing knowledge and ways of knowing for food sovereignty efforts. Overall, this research contributes to knowledge in Indigenous tourism and supports the application of food sovereignty in multiple contexts and fields.

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I would like to acknowledge that I wrote this dissertation primarily on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis.

Lessons from the field came from my interactions with Kichwa Napo Runa people and their land in the Amazonia of Ecuador.

Dedication

Dedicated to the girl who survived the darkness and was transformed by Arutam. Her strength, resilience, wisdom, and compassion keep inspiring generations. This work is also dedicated to Kelly, the beautiful soul who loves this girl unconditionally.

- Nunkui-

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List of Abbreviations

ALBASUD	Catalan Association for Research and Communication for Development
CBT	Community Based Tourism
CCN-51	Colección Castro Naranjal 51
EAR	Amazonia Region of Ecuador
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FECD	Fondo Ecuatoriano para la conservación y Desarrollo
GAD NAPO	Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado del Napo
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
INEC	National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador
RICANCIE	Network of Kichwa communities of the Alto Napo
ST-EP	Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WINTA	World Indigenous Tourism Alliance

CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Background

This dissertation explores the potential that the concept of food sovereignty has to inform more sustainable and Indigenous-led practices in Indigenous tourism, through the examination of an Indigenous-led tourism case study in the Amazonia region of Ecuador. Several authors have argued that although Indigenous peoples' land, culture, and workforce have been crucial in the development of the tourism industry worldwide, this development has had more negative than positive impacts for Indigenous peoples and their lands (e.g., Johnston, 2006; Williams & Gonzalez, 2017). The debates on how to improve this situation often highlight that increasing Indigenous peoples' participation and agency in the development of tourism in their territories will make the industry more just and sustainable (Carr et al., 2016; Jamal, 2019; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). The term "agency" refers to peoples' ability to realize their goals by freely making choices that affect the world around them; the choices they make, whether positive or negative, are, in fact, purposive (Sen 1987; 1999; Petray, 2012). In other words, agency signifies peoples' power to influence their own lives. According to Whitford and Ruhanen (2016), in order to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism development, it is necessary to integrate their values and knowledge in the process of development.

I argue that food sovereignty is a progressive framing that facilitates the integration of Indigenous peoples' values, and thus provides a strong framework by which to promote Indigenous agency in tourism. Food sovereignty has been defined as "the right of peoples to

healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyeleni, 2007). Since the 1990s, food sovereignty has been a highly political concept promoted by Indigenous people, food workers, consumers and citizens organizations around the world to increase the agency of these groups in local and global food system governance (Desmarais, 2008; Edelman et al., 2014; Patel, 2009; Wittman et al., 2010). Furthermore, food sovereignty principles encourage communities to design their food systems based on their own values and priorities (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Patel, 2015; Schiavoni, 2017). Historically, the concept of food sovereignty was primarily studied in agrarian and food studies. However, there is a growing body of scholarship that explores the potential to apply this concept in other fields and in multiple contexts (Edelman et al., 2014). Although several authors have commented on the need to include food sovereignty in tourism development studies (e.g., Gascón & Cañada; Grey & Newman, 2018), there are no empirical studies on Indigenous tourism which apply it as research framework. By applying the concept of food sovereignty in Indigenous tourism studies, this research contributes to the body of knowledge regarding strategies to make Indigenous tourism more sustainable and just for Indigenous people. Furthermore, this research supports the applicability of food sovereignty in multiple contexts and fields.

This chapter includes three sections. The first section describes the complex relationships between Indigenous people and tourism, and how previous scholars who have studied this relationship have not prioritized Indigenous peoples’ agency in their work. This section also briefly describes how the concept of food sovereignty can inject Indigenous peoples’ agency into the development of tourism, while also providing a more holistic approach to understanding the various positive and negative impacts of tourism on Indigenous peoples' lives. The second section

describes the case of the Cacao and Chocolate Cultural Route (hereafter Chakra Route) in Ecuador and highlights the features that make it a powerful argument in favor of using the concept of food sovereignty to guide the development of Indigenous tourism. The third section describes the research design and methodological strategies to develop research that is consistent with the principles of food sovereignty.

The Spaces of Interaction Between Indigenous People and Tourism

Butler and Hinch (2007) define Indigenous tourism as a type of tourism where Indigenous people are directly involved either through control of the tourism business, by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction, or both (p.5). Although this concept is commonly used to describe Indigenous peoples' interactions with the tourism industry, there are some types of interactions that fall outside of this concept. Figure 1.1 shows a matrix adapted from the work of Butler and Hinch (2007) which divides the interactions between Indigenous people and tourism into four different quadrants. This matrix combines the range of control or agency that Indigenous people have in tourism activities with the degree that these activities depend on the culture of Indigenous people. Quadrants one, two, and four fall within the sphere of what Butler and Hinch (2007) define as Indigenous tourism.

Quadrant 1, titled "culture dispossessed," implies that Indigenous people have little control over tourism activities, although their culture is a hot commodity in the tourism business. A case in this quadrant include tours to ancestral palaces in Hawaii (Williams & Gonzalez, 2017). Quadrant number 2, "culture controlled," implies that Indigenous people have control over the tourism business and that their culture is also a valuable commodity in the market. One instance listed in this quadrant is an Indigenous, community-based tourism project which operates in Machu Picchu (Wright & Marti, 2012). Quadrant number 4 is labeled "diversified Indigenous"

tourism. This quadrant references a type of tourism involving a high level of control by Indigenous people and low use of Indigenous culture in the attraction being marketed. Examples that fall in this quadrant include a First Nations-owned casino in Canada and a sports tourism enterprise owned by Mapuche people in Chile (Miniconi & Guyot, 2010).

Although Butler’s and Hinch’s (2007) matrix leaves quadrant three, “non-Indigenous tourism,” outside of the focus of Indigenous tourism, this does not necessarily mean that Indigenous people are absent from this quadrant. One could argue that this quadrant includes the most common type of interaction between Indigenous peoples and the tourism industry. For example, many popular tourist destinations are in areas inhabited by Indigenous people, such as the Mayan Riviera or safari destinations in Africa. Furthermore, interactions in quadrant three are most likely to be shaped by unequal conditions for Indigenous people (Akama, 2004; Britton, 1982; Johnston, 2006). For instance, Akama (2004) noted that during the initial stage of tourism development in Africa, there were minimal interactions between Western travelers and Indigenous hosts; the only form of interaction this author described was a “master-servant”.

Figure 1. 1

The Spaces of Interaction between Indigenous People and Tourism

		Indigenous control	
		Low	High
Indigenous theme	Present	1 Culture dispossessed	2 Culture controlled
	Absent	3 Non-Indigenous tourism	4 Diversified indigenous

Note. Adapted from Butler & Hinch, 2007

Frameworks for Tourism Development in Indigenous Contexts

The main goal of this research is to explore the potential of food sovereignty as a framework to create more sustainable and Indigenous-led practices in the development of Indigenous tourism; this involves creating a conceptual framework for food sovereignty in Indigenous tourism and applying it to a case study. Forsberg et al., (2005) define a framework as “a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality” (p. 11). This section provides a brief overview of the most popular frameworks that scholars apply to the development and research of tourism in Indigenous contexts and highlights some of the issues connected to Indigenous peoples’ agency.

Cultural Change and Authenticity

Cultural change and authenticity have been popular framing concepts in scholarship on Indigenous tourism since the 1970s (Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007; MacCannell, 1973). The focus on authenticity is based on a Western cultural notion associated with the past “primitive Other” (Cole, 2007). It also involves debates as to what is authentic (premodern) or inauthentic (modern) in the tourism experience (Olsen, 2002). Critics of this framework have argued that focusing on how tourism changes “authentic” cultures ignores more essential questions – such as inequality and discrimination – that negatively affect the lives of Indigenous people (Cole, 2007; Johnston, 2006). Focusing on the “authentic” features of Indigenous groups might cause Indigenous people to reinterpret poverty and inequality as “cultural diversity,” which then becomes a straitjacket for Indigenous communities trying to overcome these situations (Cole, 2007).

Currently, there is a growing interest in connecting cultural and authenticity frameworks to the agency of locals. For instance, several authors have argued that linking authenticity to the

agency of locals gives tourism researchers and practitioners a more community-informed perspective on the impacts that tourism has on the wellbeing of host communities (e.g., Cole, 2007; Croes et al., 2013; Olsen, 2002). According to Cole (2007), incorporating agency into cultural studies means shifting research questions from measuring how authentic something is towards inquiring who has the power to define authenticity, and how that definition of authenticity affects Indigenous peoples' rights.

Pro-poor Tourism

The “pro-poor” tourism framework focuses primarily on the economic benefits that the tourism industry generates for the poor, the majority of whom in the Global South are members of Indigenous and rural communities (Ashley et al., 2001; Croes & Rivera, 2017; Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). There are two primary approaches under a pro-poor tourism framework. The first approach asserts that as long as tourism creates incomes that reaches the poor (no matter how it does so and the amount), tourism must be considered to be “pro-poor”. The second approach links the economic growth from tourism to processes of inequality reduction (Croes & Rivera, 2017). Most of the pro-poor programs that promote tourism in the Global South base their performance indicators on the first approach and focus primarily on the contribution of tourism to a country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Harrison, 2008). Since the early 2000s, donors, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), conservation organizations, and tourism bodies, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), have promoted this framework in their developmental agendas (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). For instance, during the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the UNWTO launched the Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) initiative, which aimed to reduce poverty and promote sustainability through tourism in developing countries. By 2017, the UWNTO

reported that there were 120 ST-EP projects in 45 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East (UNWTO, 2017).

Although popular, several scholars have criticized the pro-poor tourism framework, who have observed three primary issues with this framework (e.g., Gascón, 2015; Hall, 2007; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). The first issue is that this framework prioritizes an absolute definition of poverty that is based on net income, and usually measures tourism impacts using macro-economic indicators such as GDP (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). From this perspective, any tourism initiative that generates economic income in a particular destination could be considered “pro-poor,” even though the income the poor earn may be marginal (Gascón, 2015) and may increase inequality in the region (Croes & Rivera, 2017; Vanegas, 2014).

The second issue is related to the “leakage effect” of tourism, especially in the context of the Global South (Belisle, 1983; Britton, 1982; Hall, 2007; Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Telfer & Sharpley, 2016). The leakage effect refers to the percentage of tourism revenues that leave a destination through imports or expatriated profits, or revenues never reach a destination due to the involvement of foreign (mostly northern-based) intermediaries (e.g., Meyer, 2007). This issue is primarily related to revenue from transport and accommodation expenses, although it also includes food expenses. Indeed, some observers have argued that although it is simpler to retain revenue from food expenses within rural destinations, the high level of dependency on imported food by the tourism industry promotes this leakage (Bélisle, 1983; Torres & Momsen, 2004).

The third issue is related to the unfavorable working conditions for poor employees of the tourism industry (Telfer & Sharpley, 2016). In many destinations in the Global South, the expansion of the tourism industry in rural areas has created job opportunities for Indigenous

people, especially women. However, these jobs are often low-paid, seasonal, and lack any job benefits. Furthermore, workers are occasionally exposed to hazards and violence on the job (Alarcón & Cañada, 2018; OXFAM Canada, 2017). According to Vanegas (2014), where inequality influences the development of tourism, it is less likely that pro-poor tourism frameworks will succeed.

Overall, these issues demonstrate that under the pro-poor framework, there is a risk to hide inequality issues under economic growth arguments.

Sustainable Tourism

In addition to the pro-poor tourism framework, sustainable tourism has been another popular framework among international development agencies and the tourism industry in the Global South (Ferguson, 2007; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2015; Moscardo, 2015). Sustainable tourism refers to "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities" (The United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] & UN World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2005, p.12). Despite its popularity, authors have criticized this framework, arguing that it is not enough to simply make the tourism industry more sustainable for Indigenous and rural communities in the Global South (e.g., Saarinen, 2014; Sharpley, 2000).

Several authors have argued that sustainable tourism is not possible due to the business nature of tourism (e.g., Moscardo, 2015; Saarinen, 2014; Sharpley, 2000). According to these authors, business imperatives make it challenging to balance the three dimensions of sustainability – social, economic, and ecological- in the tourism industry. Furthermore, some studies show that focusing on the economic dimensions of sustainability as a precondition to achieving goals relating to social and environmental dimensions of sustainability could

jeopardize the wellbeing of locals, their environments, and the resources that drew tourists to that destination in the first place (Gössling et al., 2012; UNEP & UNWTO, 2011). For instance, Gössling et al. (2012) report that mass tourism has negatively affected the water rights of host communities living on small islands and in coastal areas of the Global South. According to these authors, tourism flows, especially those from the Global North, are concentrated in the coastal and small island regions of the Global South, where water is already scarce. The demand for water that tourism creates spurs conflict over water access between locals – who often require it for drinking water and traditional agriculture – and the tourism industry, which regularly uses the water to maintain golf courses and fill swimming pools (Gössling et al., 2012).

Other critics point out that the design of sustainable tourism practices is often based on market logic and do not incorporate host communities' perspectives on sustainability. For instance, Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) argue that although sustainability has been a popular framework in Indigenous tourism studies, these studies have primarily been shaped by non-Indigenous perspectives and overlook the diversity of meanings that sustainability may have in Indigenous contexts.

Community-based Tourism

Community-based tourism (CBT) emerged in the 1990s as a response to a lack of participation in tourism among Indigenous people and marginalized rural communities. Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) connect the emergence of CBT to an increase in Indigenous people's participation and agency in global and sectorial governance bodies. For example, Indigenous organizations from 16 different countries convened to launch the Larrakia Declaration in 2012, which adopted six critical principles from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to guide the development of Indigenous tourism. The World

Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA), a global network made up of over 170 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations in 40 countries, was established in the same year.

Community-based tourism is a model of tourism governance that focuses on community development, local participation, sustainable livelihoods, and poverty alleviation (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Renkert, 2019; Ruiz Ballesteros & Hernandez, 2010). Several studies have shown that CBT contributes positively to critical issues affecting the wellbeing of Indigenous communities, such as socio-ecological resilience (Ruiz Ballesteros, 2011), community empowerment and leadership (Scheyvens, 2003; Zapata et al., 2011), and the maintenance of ancestral land (Coca Pérez, 2009). However, other authors have argued that non-CBT entrepreneurial endeavors can perform better than CBT ones with respect to several indicators, including the number of jobs created, the number of visitors attracted, and tourism spending at the attraction (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Harrison & Schipani, 2007). Moreover, several authors note that poor market access, internal conflicts, and high levels of dependency on external funding are factors which diminish the success of CBTs (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Knight & Cottrell, 2016; Tasci et al., 2014).

Justice and Self-determination

Political ecology (Blaikie, 2008; Escobar, 2011; Bebbington, 2012; Leff, 2012), an area of critical scholarship that emphasizes systems of power, marginalization, and injustice, has influenced an emerging wave of studies existing at the intersection between Indigenous people and tourism; this area of scholarship highlights issues related to justice and self-determination (e.g., Chassagne & Everingham, 2019; Nepal & Saarinen, 2016; Whyte, 2010). For example, justice has become a crucial element in the study of the impacts of tourism on Indigenous and rural communities (Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Jamal, 2019). According to Jamal (2019), the

concept of justice in Indigenous contexts is not limited to increased incomes and distributive justice; it is also related to recognition and representation. In other words, justice is not only about establishing fair prices or ensuring adequate economic distribution of wealth from tourism. It is also about ensuring that the voices of Indigenous people influence the situations that affect their lives. Several authors (e.g., Devine & Ojeda, 2017; Johnston, 2006; Williams & Gonzalez, 2017) have claimed that the commodification of Indigenous peoples' land and cultures has created violence and restricted their self-determination. Moreover, Johnston (2006) argues that where Indigenous peoples lack agency in the development of tourism in their territories, tourism becomes a "Hobson's choice"¹ for them.

Connecting Indigenous tourism to self-determination has promoted Indigenous peoples' voices in the study and practice of tourism and aided in the development of more collaborative research processes (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012). Kuokkanen (2019) writes that self-determination in Indigenous contexts is focused on relationships. In academic contexts, self-determination involves the recognition of the power structures that shape the relationships between academia and Indigenous people; it also denotes the need to create respectful relationships and spaces of collaboration and solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Common Themes

¹ A Hobson's choice is a free choice in which only one thing is offered. Because a person may refuse to accept what is offered, the two options are taking it or taking nothing. In other words, one may "take it or leave it".

There is a common theme throughout all of the above discussion: a lack of agency among Indigenous people in determining the goals that drive tourism in their lands. A second common thread is a narrative that describes Indigenous people as poor and marginalized and the tourism industry as either the savior or the tyrant. Taken together, the above analysis of the frameworks in research on Indigenous tourism demonstrates the need increase Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism development and research while responding to the demands of the tourism industry. In other words, it is necessary to develop frameworks that promote mutually beneficial outcomes for both Indigenous people and the tourism industry.

An Alternative: Food Sovereignty

In rural agrarian and food scholarship, there is a growing interest in the concept of food sovereignty, especially among authors who are concerned about justice and sustainability issues (Edelman et al., 2014; Grey & Newman, 2018; Whyte, 2018; Wittman et al., 2010). In this section, I will introduce some of the arguments to support the application of food sovereignty in the study of Indigenous tourism.

First, food sovereignty provides a more holistic and democratic approach to understanding the relationship between traditional food systems and tourism by highlighting the value of agroecology, biocultural diversity, and democratic ways of knowing (Pimbert, 2018). Agroecology focuses on ecological relationships in farming systems, seeking to understand the dynamics of these relationships (Altieri & Toledo, 2011; Pimbert, 2018). Biocultural diversity refers to the intimate linkages between biological and cultural diversity (Maffi, 2001). Democratic ways of knowing relates to the creation of technical and policy-related knowledge that is actively shaped by food producers and citizen-consumers, rather than through top-down

research based on the hegemony of scientism, the privatization of research, and the commodification of knowledge (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Pimbert, 2018).

Although frameworks that connect Indigenous foods and tourism have a long history in tourism scholarship, food sovereignty provides an approach that focuses on the rights of food producers. Several authors have argued that linking tourism to Indigenous food systems will improve quality of life in Indigenous communities because traditional food practices are crucial in Indigenous peoples' livelihoods (Ambelu et al., 2018; Giampiccoli & Hayward, 2012; Torres, 2003; Torres & Momsen, 2004). Frameworks such as agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010), agroecological tourism (Addinsall et al., 2017), and food tourism (Hall et al., 2003) are some of varieties of tourism that involve connections between Indigenous food and tourism development. However, these frameworks have generally approached Indigenous food systems² as commodities for purchase and sale in the tourism market. In contrast, these frameworks ignore the food needs of those who produce and distribute the food (Grey & Newman, 2018; Leatherman & Goodman, 2005). Furthermore, none of these frameworks question the structural factors, such as land and water grabbing, that push Indigenous and rural communities towards food insecurity in the first place (Devine & Ojeda, 2017; Rosenberg, 2018). Food sovereignty is

² According to Ericksen (2007), a food system is made up of the interactions between and within biogeophysical and human environments, which determine a set of activities (from production through to consumption), the outcomes of the activities (contributions to food security, environmental security, and social welfare), and other determinants of food security, which are related to the primary interaction in this system.

an alternative to these previous frameworks in a way that it promotes the rights of the people who produce, distribute, and consume food over the rights of corporative interests (Nyeleni, 2007). Moreover, food sovereignty involves advocating for increasing peoples' agency in the governance of their local and global food systems (Desmarais, 2008; Wittman et al., 2010).

Food sovereignty is a highly contextual concept (Patel, 2009; Schiavoni, 2017). It empowers each community, region, and nation to determine what food sovereignty means for them, according to their unique contexts (Schiavoni, 2017). Indigenous organizations around the world have used this contextual feature of food sovereignty to further the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty as a policy and development approach to decolonize their diets and the entirety of their food systems (Esquibel & Calvo, 2013; Grey & Patel, 2015). Furthermore, several authors have emphasized that Indigenous peoples' understanding of food sovereignty goes beyond a rights-based discourse relating to access to food; instead, it focuses on their right to self-determination (e.g., Cote, 2016; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Morrison, 2011; Settee & Shailesh, 2020; Whyte, 2018).

Indigenous peoples view food sovereignty as an opportunity to focus on relationships and restorative practices. Indigenous food sovereignty challenges principles within modern capitalist societies that have disrupted the relationships between Indigenous peoples and their foods, lands, and other peoples (Cote, 2016; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Patel, 2015; Tait Neufeld & Richmond, 2017). Within this demand for improved social relationships, gender equity has emerged as a crucial element in food sovereignty projects. Several authors have argued that it is impossible to discuss hunger and injustice in food systems without connecting these issues to women's disempowerment (Desmarais, 2003; Patel, 2012; Tait Neufeld & Richmond, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). Women represent 60% of all undernourished people in the world, and

comprise, on average, 43%³ of the agricultural labor force in the Global South; however, less than 20% of women farmers own farmland (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2020).

Food sovereignty also involves the decolonization of research practices and advocates for more collaborative research. Several authors and organizations have promoted methodological frameworks to guide research processes on food sovereignty (e.g., Martens et al., 2016; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Levkoe et al., 2019). La Via Campesina promotes *diálogo de saberes* (dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing), which advances applications of local and experiential knowledge in the development of knowledge about food systems (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). Levkoe et al. (2019) advocate for the people-power-change framework, which focuses on researcher reflexivity and collaborative research in the study of food sovereignty.

Far from being a concept that only benefits Indigenous people, food sovereignty can also inform guidelines to develop win-win scenarios in food-related businesses such as tourism. For instance, there are cases where Indigenous food sovereignty supports the wellbeing of Indigenous people while improving practices in food businesses (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Grey & Patel, 2015). Given that food is crucial to the tourism experience (Quan & Wang, 2004; UNWTO, 2012) and there is a growing demand among tourists for food experiences that are more ethical,

3 Of those women in the least developed countries who report being economically active, 79% report agriculture as their primary source of livelihood (48% of economically active women worldwide).

Source: <http://www.fao.org/gender/resources/infographics/the-female-face-of-farming/en/>

local, and sustainable (Ellis et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2012), tourism could also benefit from guidelines emerging from food sovereignty research.

Previous frameworks that have been applied in Indigenous tourism (i.e., cultural tourism, pro-poor tourism, sustainable tourism, and community-based tourism) have not increased the level of agency Indigenous peoples' have in the development of tourism in their territories (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016) and illustrate the impacts of tourism in traditional Indigenous food systems (Rosenberg, 2018; Leatherman et al., 2010). An emerging movement in tourism studies, which is particularly informed by political ecology, demands that scholars pay attention to these issues in future research. Food sovereignty can contribute to addressing these problems because it creates spaces for integral, pluralistic, contextual, and collaborative approaches in tourism development. In this way, this concept provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to influence how the tourism industry meets their needs and demands, instead of the opposite.

Food First, also known as the Institute for Food and Development Policy, and the Catalan Association for Research and Communication for Development (ALBASUD) have introduced the concept of food sovereignty in tourism studies (Brimm et al., 2014; Gascón & Cañada, 2012). Although these contributions have created awareness of the benefits of a focus on food sovereignty in tourism development, they have not yet applied this concept empirically nor used it in Indigenous contexts. My research advances the application of food sovereignty in tourism (specifically in Indigenous tourism) by developing a food sovereignty framework and applying it to a case study in the Amazonia region of Ecuador.

Research Setting

Overview of Ecuador

Ecuador's total population is 17.3 million. Since 2000, Ecuador's has used the US dollar as its currency. Ecuador's GDP is heavily dependent on its petroleum resources, which account for about one third of the country's export earnings. Ecuador also obtains export revenues from agricultural commodities such as bananas, shrimp, coffee, cacao, roses, and fish. Tourism's contribution to Ecuador's GDP was only 6% in 2018.

With regard to poverty and inequality in Ecuador, the most recent report on the topics was released by the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador (INEC) in December 2019. This report details the status of poverty and inequality in Ecuador, based on several approaches. According to the income poverty approach, an Ecuadorian citizen is considered poor if they have a per capita household income of \$84.82 USD per month. If a citizen's income is below \$47.80 USD per month, they are considered to be extremely poor. By December 2019, Ecuador's national poverty rate was 25.0% while the extreme poverty rate was 8.9%. The poverty and extreme poverty rates among urban Ecuadorians were 17.2% and 4.3%, respectively. The INEC report also shows that, with respect to rural Ecuadorians, 41.8% experience poverty and 18.7% experience extreme poverty (INEC, 2019). Following an inequality approach, the Gini coefficient for the whole of Ecuador was 0.473 in 2019; in the urban settings, the Gini coefficient was 0.454, while in the rural context it was 0.444 (INEC, 2019). According to the Multidimensional Poverty

Index (MPI),⁴ the poverty level in Ecuador was 38.1% nationally, 22.7% in cities, and 71.1% in the rural context in 2019 (INEC, 2019). This data shows that poverty and inequality in Ecuador affect the rural population most dramatically. The rural population of Ecuador is primarily comprised of Indigenous people and African descendants, whose primary subsistence activities center on small-scale or family farming (Chiriboga & Wallis, 2010; Carrion & Herrera, 2012).

Agriculture and aquaculture are crucial for the wellbeing of citizens in Ecuador. Agribusiness and the production of export-focused products contribute to the country's GDP, while small scale farming⁵ contributes directly to the improvement of food security and poverty in both rural and urban populations. Ecuador ranks 51st out of 117 qualifying countries on the 2019 Global Hunger Index. Ecuador's score of 11.3 indicates that the country suffers from a moderate level of hunger. According to FAO (n.d.), family farming constitutes about 60% of the basic food basket in Ecuador. Several authors have noted that family farming has been crucial to maintaining the food security of Ecuadorians during economic crises and natural disasters (Martinez Valle, 2017; Perreault, 2005). Carrion and Herrera (2012) point out that, although

⁴ The MPI looks beyond income to understand how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways. It identifies how people are being left behind across three key dimensions: health, education and standard of living, comprising 10 indicators. People who experience deprivation in at least one third of these weighted indicators fall into the category of multidimensionally poor.

⁵ According to FAO (2017), small scale farming or family farming "is a form of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture and grazing, which is owned and family-operated and, above all, dependent on family labor, both women and men". Small scale farmers or campesinos in Ecuador are highly represented by Indigenous people living in the rural areas of the country.

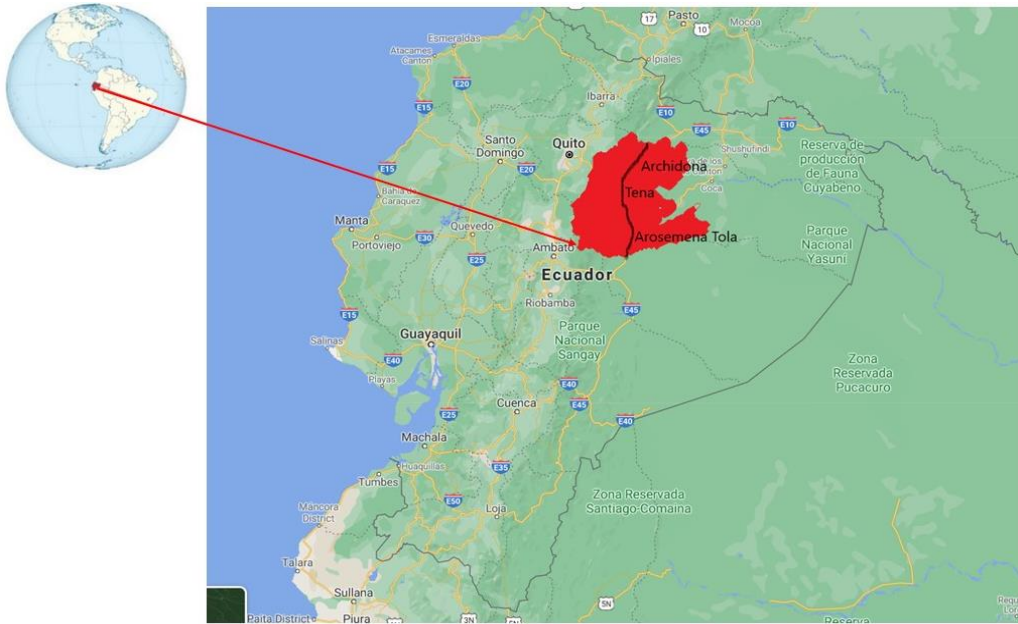
family farming contributes greatly to the economic wellbeing and nutrition of Ecuadorians and has the potential to improve poverty conditions in rural areas, the lack of productive resources and adequate public policies limit its potential.

Ecuador is a multicultural country. Most of its population (82%) self-identifies as *mestizos* (an ethnic mix between Amerindians and European descendants), followed by minorities of Amerindian people (8%) and African descendants (7%). In Ecuador, as in most Latin American countries, the European colonial legacy has influenced social structures that undermine Indigenous peoples' rights (Espinosa Apolo, 2003; Martinez Novo, 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Roitman, 2009). Colonial and postcolonial struggles have motivated Indigenous people in Ecuador to demand radical changes in their position in Ecuadorian society.⁶ In 2008, Indigenous people achieved a significant milestone when Ecuador enshrined Indigenous values in its national constitution (Altmann, 2013; Breton et al., 2014). Ecuador's constitution recognizes that the country is an intercultural state and that individuals have individual and collective rights, including rights to nature and food sovereignty (Acosta, 2011; Gudynas & Acosta, 2011).

⁶ Indigenous movements and demands have a long history during and after the Spanish colonization in Ecuador and Latin America. See more in Quijano (2014).

Figure 1. 2

Research Location



Note. The red area corresponds to the Chakra Route setting. Source: Google Maps.

The Amazonia Region of Ecuador

The Amazonia Region of Ecuador (EAR) is one of four natural geographical zones of Ecuador, including the coast, mountain range, and the Galapagos Islands. The EAR accounts for 48% of Ecuador's total surface, but it is only home to approximately 5.1% of the country's population. Six Amerindian groups have inhabited the EAR for centuries (the Kichwa, Shuar, Achuar, Siona-Secoya, Huaorani, and Cofan). Comprising 55% of the total Indigenous population, the Kichwa people are the largest group in the EAR (Haboub, 2012). Although they live in one of the most biocultural diverse areas in the world (Harmon, 1996), the Indigenous peoples of the Amazonia region of Ecuador have faced several social and environmental struggles, most of which originated externally. For example, in 1964 and 1973, the Ecuadorian government passed land reform laws that declared the Amazon rainforest empty and granted

mestizos from other regions the right to occupy the rainforest and make it “productive.” Once mestizos claimed ownership of the land in the Amazon region, they urbanized the area and cleared large portions of the rainforest for extensive use in farming and livestock production (Breton, 2018; Guerrero, 2017). In addition to these land restrictions, Indigenous people in Ecuador’s Amazonia region have also been affected by the expansion of oil and mining industries in their territories (Breton, 2018; Erazo, 2013; Guerrero, 2017).

Although the policies relating to the above-described events purportedly had underlying rationales of modernization, economic development, and conservation in the region, Amazonia is still the most impoverished region in Ecuador (INEC, 2015). Mena et al. (2006) also found that urbanization has triggered the deforestation of vast swaths of the Amazon rainforest. Furthermore, some authors have reported that land reforms and the urbanization of the Amazonia have created spaces of sociocultural conflict between mestizo settlers and Indigenous people (Tanguila, 2018; Uzendovsky, 2005). This history of colonization and the degradation of their ancestral lands have motivated Indigenous people in this region to demand more sustainable and just development practices (Erazo, 2013).

The Kichwa People and Their Traditional Food Systems

The Kichwa Napo Runa people are traditional inhabitants of the upper basin of Amazonia. For centuries, their livelihood strategies have depended on *shifting agriculture*⁷ and

⁷ Shifting agriculture is a system of cultivation in which a plot of land is cleared and cultivated for a short period of time, then abandoned and allowed to revert to producing its normal vegetation while the cultivator moves on to another plot

resources obtained from the rainforest. However, several external factors have limited access to their ancestral territory and forced them to adapt their lifestyle to more permanent settlements. Kichwa households engage in a variety of activities to earn a livelihood and sustain their communities, such as small-scale subsistence and commercial agriculture, fishing and hunting wild animals, timber harvesting, wage labor, and community-based tourism. The diversity of livelihood strategies they employ will depend primarily on their access to land and a labor force. Overall, the Kichwa people's access to land falls primarily under three distinct land tenure arrangements: 1) global land titles, encompassing a large area and number of communities; 2) community titles; and 3) individual land titles (Bremner & Lu, 2006). According to some authors, communal and private titles are the most common land tenures among Kichwa people (Jarrett et al., 2017; Tanguila, 2018). Tanguila (2018) also notes that even under communal land tenure, Kichwa people tend to manage land access like private property, establishing informal boundaries and use rights. However, Tanguila states further that these informal agreements often cause major conflicts, especially where external actors (e.g., mining companies) promote land privatization to make it easier to purchase land from individuals (Tanguila, 2018).

Kichwa people have described their worldview as being built on a philosophical foundation of *sumak kawsay*, or “good living.” Although popularized during the Citizens’ Revolution government in Ecuador from 2007 to 2017, this philosophy has always been common among Indigenous people in Ecuador (Radcliffe, 2012; Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). According to Coq-Huelva et al. (2018), *sumak kawsay* serves as both a worldview and a political platform for self-determination among Kichwa Napo Runa people. Guzmán (1997) described the Kichwas’ worldview with reference to three key symbols emerging from the interactions between Kichwa people and their environment: *amasanga*, *nunghui*, and *sungui*. *Amasanga* refers to the spirit of

the forest or *sacha*; this spirit is associated with masculine spaces. Nunghui is the spirit of the garden and it only reveals itself to women. The third element is sungui, or the spirit of the water. Kichwa people consider sungui to be the source of life that surrounds both amasanga and nunkui spirits. This worldview explains the Kichwa belief that everything in nature possesses a soul and that there is an energy, or *samai*, that connects everything (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Guzmán, 1997; Uzendovsky, 2005).

There are three levels to the social structure of the Kichwa people: the *huasi* (nuclear family), the *ayllu* or *muntun* (extended family), and *llacta* (community) (Uzedoski, 2005). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Kichwa view animals, plants, ecosystems, and spirits as part of these social structures. In terms of value in Kichwa society, Uzedoski (2005) has identified two modes for the circulation of value in the relationships that Kichwa people establish. One mode is giving and sharing, in which things are given freely without a moral obligation to return those things. People who are unable to produce, or who produce less, have fewer reciprocal commitments; they can receive more than they give. Uzedoski (2005) emphasizes the connections of this mode to group members' productive capabilities. This mode may manifest in, for example, the circulation of values from parents to children or from adults to elderly parents. The second mode of circulation Uzedoski (2005) describes is reciprocity, which implies mutual respect and care. This mode demands ultimate equality of value when one gives and receives. According to this author, this second mode of value circulation occurs in the sphere of relationships outside the muntun or ayllu (Uzedoski, 2005).

The labor and traditional knowledge of Kichwa women are considered crucial for local food systems. However, women are most likely to suffer discrimination and violence in Napo province. According to the Napo government's statistics, 60% of Kichwa women have reported

psychological violence, 47% have reported physical violence, and 25% have reported sexual violence⁸ (Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado del Napo [GAD-Napo], 2018, p. 34). Several authors argue that the high levels of violence that Kichwa women endure make it impossible to study the health of Kichwa food systems without examining the unequal and discriminatory conditions that female members of the community suffer (e.g., Almeida, 2017; Castellon, 2015).

The chakra system. Scholars consider the traditional agroforestry system, *chakra*, to be crucial to the wellbeing of Kichwa peoples. Far from being a simple garden plot for food production, Kichwa people recognize material and symbolic values in their chakra gardens (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017; Perreault, 2005; Uzendoski, 2005). According to Coq-Huelva et al. (2017), the relationship between chakra gardens and the Kichwa people must be understood from a co-evolutionary approach, which holds that people and their environment are interrelated. Food and natural medicine for household consumption and commodities for economic trade are the most common material values that the Kichwa recognize in their chakra gardens (Irvine, 1989; Perreault, 2005). Among the symbolic values, researchers have reported that the gardens serve as a marker of Kichwa cultural identity, female empowerment, traditional knowledge conservation, and community building (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Guzmán, 1997; Muratorio, 1998; Perreault, 2005). One might describe the persistence of the chakra system as an act of subaltern resistance and resilience in a society shaped by inequality and uncertainty. In a recent study, Coq-Huelva et al. (2018) argues that 70% of the gross energy outputs of chakra gardens are directed towards

⁸ This document notes that it is possible that the statistics of sexual violence could be bigger due to women being afraid to denounce their aggressors.

self-consumption or to altruistic exchanges with relatives and other members of the Kichwa community. Moreover, Perreault (2005) reported that during periods of financial hardship in Ecuador, the maintenance of chakra gardens helped Kichwa people to strengthen and ensure food security.

By integrating forestry and food crops, the chakra system achieves a form of sustainable agriculture that is compatible with the conservation of the Amazon rainforest. The Kichwa people place their chakras mainly in primary and secondary forests, which explains the high level of species biodiversity (including plants, animals, and fungi) reported in these gardens (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017; GIZ, 2013; Torres et al., 2014). In typical chakras, cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) and bananas take up most of the land space, which are the primary staples in Kichwa diets. These crops are grown with complementary crops like with cacao, coffee, and guayusa (*Ilex guayusa*), which are primarily used for trading at market. The average size of a chakra is an estimated 16.7 hectares. As noted above, Kichwa farmers reserve 70% of the surface area in chakras for the forest (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017).

One can develop a deeper understanding of the symbolic value of chakras by examining the Kichwa's cultural practices in the chakras. Coq-Huelva et al. (2017) argue that the design of the chakra gardens and the rejection of certain agroindustry practices within them demonstrates that the Kichwa people respect the spirits that they believe live in their gardens. Moreover, chakra gardens serve as spaces of empowerment and cultural identity for Kichwa women (Castellon, 2015; Guzmán, 1997; Uzedonski, 2005). According to the Kichwa worldview, only women can connect with *nunghui*, the spirit of the garden, and receive its blessing to maintain the garden. Women who maintain a healthy and productive chakra are known as *chakra mama* (the mother of the chakra). Uzedonski (2005) argues that because of this connection, the Kichwa people believe

that chakra gardens are life creators because, like women, the gardens both produce and nourish life. Chakras are also the place where the elderly and younger generations learn and share traditional knowledge. Coq-Huelva et al. (2017) argue that some aesthetic practices in the chakras could be interpreted as efforts by Kichwa women to create spaces that are for educating younger generations about cultivation work and to build their food and farming skills.

Although Kichwa peoples have successfully maintained their traditional food systems, especially the chakra system, some authors have identified potential hazards for their survival, including issues with labor availability, agrobiodiversity maintenance, land access, and the transformation of chakra gardens into cash crop spaces (Almeida, 2017; Castellon, 2015; Oldekop et al., 2012). When discussing sustainable livelihoods in their communities, market integration is one of the most controversial topics among the Kichwa people. Although from an economic perspective, increasing cash crop activities among Kichwa people is generally recognized as a positive development, Houck et al. (2013) offer evidence that increased market integration has negative effects on the health of the Kichwa people, leading them to become overly dependent on lower-quality market foods.

During the last decade, several initiatives have been developed in Napo to preserve the biocultural diversity of the region while supporting the local economy (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2014). One of these initiatives is a package of chakra legislation, passed by the Napo provincial government in 2017 (GAD Napo, 2017). The goal of this legislation is to position the chakra system as the reference point for food security in the region by promoting not only the production, but also the consumption, of the products produced in this food system.

The societal values underlying the chakra system are not limited to ensuring the wellbeing of the Kichwa people. Some studies report that the system has environmental and economic

benefits at both the local and global scale. Coq-Huelva et al. (2018) argue that crops such as cacao, produced under chakra system values, could be sold in markets where consumers demand quality as well as environmental and social responsibility. Torres et al. (2014) claim that chakras support the food security of both Kichwa and non-Kichwa people living in the province. Scholars have also described chakra as an efficient system to adapt to climate change, because it involves increased levels of carbon sequestration and tree diversity in comparison to other forms of land use in Amazonia (Jadan et al., 2015; Torres et al., 2014).

The Kichwa People's Food Practices. Thus far, this chapter has described the relationship between the social dynamics of the Kichwa people and the production, consumption, and circulation of food in their community. Uzendoski (2005) commented that Kichwa people rarely eat and drink alone because they believe that these are inherently communal acts. Although the Kichwa people are increasingly integrating into Western society, three practices persist in their food traditions: the *guayusa upina* tea ceremony, consumption of the *chicha* fermented drink, and *maitos*.

Guayusa upina is a morning ritual where Kichwa people gather together to drink guayusa tea and share their thoughts with elders. *Ilex guayusa* is a perennial, native tree from the Amazon rainforest. The Kichwa have long recognized the medicinal and spiritual properties of this plant. According to Weissmann (2014), Kichwa consider guayusa to be an energizing beverage, because it contains levels of caffeine and antioxidants similar to those of green tea. Kichwa people believe that drinking guayusa before beginning their daily activities provides them with strength and clarity to perform their work.

Chicha or *asua* is a fermented beverage that is often made with cassava. Kichwa people consider cassava chicha to be a life-giving food, because it mimics the nourishing function of

breast milk for babies; they believe that drinking a bowl of cassava chicha is a whole meal unto itself (Uzedonski, 2005). The large allotment of space in chakra gardens for cassava is reflective of the importance of cassava chicha in the food traditions of the Kichwa people (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018).

Maitos, a term that translates to “wrapped,” is an ancestrally practiced cooking technique of the Kichwa people. It consists of wrapping any type of protein, fish, or game meat in banana leaves and grilling this wrap on a fire.

Not only are guayusa upina, chicha, and maitos daily staples, but they are also the most important foods for sharing at Kichwa special events and community gatherings. These foods have also become a food tourism attraction and a central element of celebrations in the region (Sidali et al., 2016; Uzedonski, 2005).

The Chakra Route and Kichwa Peoples’ Entrepreneurship

The Chakra Route integrates tourism and traditional agriculture, which are the two primary economic activities among Kichwa people in the province of Napo. The route is managed under a participatory model of governance, which involves a consortium of government agencies, NGOs, academics, Kichwa farmers, and Kichwa and non-Kichwa tourism entrepreneurs. Geographically, this route connects three counties of the Napo province – Archidona, Tena, and Arosemena Tola – which are located along the main highway in the Amazon region of Ecuador (See Figure 3). These counties are also home to the majority of the Kichwa population in the province. Although the route was initially branded as the Cacao Route, which promoted the cacao-growing identity of the region, the brand was later changed to the “Chakra: Chocolate and Tourism Route” in an attempt to connect the brand with the traditions of

Indigenous peoples. The following paragraphs describe the context through which this route emerged.

Many consider cacao (*Theobroma cacao L.*), the primary ingredient in chocolate, to be the food product that is most emblematic of Ecuador. For many years, Mesoamerica was believed to be cacao's place of origin. However, recent genomic research shows that the earliest known cacao domestication occurred in the Amazon region of Ecuador (Zarrillo et al., 2018). Moreover, the period of Ecuador's economic history during the 19th and 20th centuries is commonly known as the "Cacao Boom," because Ecuador was one of world's major cacao exporters at the time. This period of economic prosperity ended when plant diseases destroyed most of the crops in the region, and new centers of mass production of cacao developed in Africa and Central America. During Ecuador's Cacao Boom, the heirloom cacao known as Arriba Nacional was the primary cacao variety in the Ecuadorian fields. Archeological studies show that Arriba Nacional is the direct descent of the earliest known cacao trees (Solórzano et al., 2012). Later, increasing quantitative demand for cacao in the global chocolate business (with little regard for quality) drove the introduction of the Colección Castro Naranjal 51 (CCN-51) hybrid and high yield cacao varieties to Ecuadorian fields, displacing the heirloom Arriba Nacional in the fields where it used to grow (Solórzano et al., 2012).

During the last two decades, there has been increasing demand for heirloom cacao grown using fair trade and environmentally sustainable practices⁹ in the cacao market (Recanati et al., 2018). Consumers once again demanded the heirloom Arriba Nacional cacao, which had almost been lost in the 20th century. In 2008, the Ecuadorian government founded a national program to restore and protect this heirloom seed. This program included environmental, cultural, and marketing strategies to position Arriba Nacional as the most desirable and high-quality cacao in the international market. Additionally, Ecuador's government carried out the "Ecuador: Land of Chocolate" project, which promotes the market for cacao beans, chocolate, and chocolate-related tourism (VisitEcuador, 2015).

In 2003, Kichwa cacao farmers, government agencies, and several NGOs created the Cacao Roundtable, which advocates for heirloom cacao conservation and fair-trade practices in the province of Napo. During 2010 and 2011, this organization, with the support of international funding, developed a proposal for a tourist route. Termed the "Ancestral Cacao Route," the goal was to promote agritourism at its members' cacao farms. This proposal also included community-based tourism projects and other tourism actors in the area. In 2016, the Fondo Ecuatoriano para la Conservacion y Desarrollo (FECD) took over leadership of the route and formally launched the project. In 2018, the FECD changed the route's original name from the Ancestral Cacao Route to

⁹ In 2001, it created the Cacao Protocol, which is an international agreement aimed at ending the worst forms of child labor. This protocol was created as a response to several cases of child slavery reported in cacao farms in Africa.

“*Chakra*: Chocolate and Tourism” in order to differentiate the route from other Ecuadorian chocolate-focused tourism routes that were competing for the same market.

Although cacao farming has become an essential source of income for Kichwa farmers, it has not replaced tourism businesses in which Kichwa people have been engaged for almost three decades (Coca Pérez, 2009; Erazo, 2013). Most of these tourism businesses have been developed under community-led models of governance. Coca Pérez (2009) has highlighted that Kichwa organizations have been the pioneers and inspiration for the development of Indigenous and community-based tourism in all Ecuador. Furthermore, Coca Pérez (2016) and Renkert (2019) have argued that Kichwa people have engaged in community-led tourism for political, conservationist, and cultural reasons that go beyond economic benefits.

The Network of Kichwa Communities of the Alto Napo (RICANCIE) is a pioneer organization of Indigenous tourism governance in Ecuador. Coca Pérez (2016) report that RICANCIE initiated CBT projects as a strategy to prevent the expansion of extractive industries in their ancestral territories and to improve participation by Kichwa people in the development of tourism in the region (Coca Pérez, 2016).

Overall, the broader context in which the Chakra Route is situated provides key elements that make it an ideal case study for this research. The route is located in a country where food sovereignty is enshrined in the constitution, the route integrates Indigenous food systems and tourism, and Indigenous people (i.e., the Kichwa) play a key role in the development of this tourism destination.

Research purpose

The goal of this research is to contribute to the development of Indigenous tourism practices that are more sustainable and led by Indigenous people. Specifically, I propose food

sovereignty as a conceptual framework in the study of Indigenous tourism and apply this framework in a case study. This dissertation's empirical insights come from the case study in the Chakra Route, a touristic setting located in Ecuador's Amazonia region, where Indigenous people endeavour to integrate and reconcile tourism with their traditional food systems. I develop this dissertation according to the three following objectives:

Objective 1: Identify the elements that a food sovereignty framework should include to inform more sustainable and participatory practices in Indigenous tourism.

Objective 2: Examine how tourism alters the food sovereignty of the Kichwa people working in the tourism industry along the Chakra Route and how these alterations affect their wellbeing.

Objective 3: Reflect on how this research praxis contributes to increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism research and democratizing knowledge and ways of knowing for food sovereignty efforts.

Rationale

This research contributes to the growing demand for knowledge in the field of Indigenous tourism that is holistic and shaped by the perspectives of Indigenous people (Carr et al., 2016; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) have argued that increasing Indigenous peoples' contributions to academic research can increase the applicability and use of their knowledge in non-academic spaces, especially among Indigenous practitioners. Moreover, this study aims to contribute to the Chakra Route's goals, which include the promotion of sustainable economies, biocultural diversity conservation, Indigenous women's empowerment, and community building.

Research design

Due to the economic nature of tourism, a large portion of the scholarship on Indigenous tourism uses a quantitative methodology (Withford & Ruhanen, 2016). In this research, however, I followed a qualitative approach in an attempt to understand the *how* and the *why* of the intersections between food sovereignty and Indigenous tourism. Qualitative research involves a holistic and situated approach that emphasizes the subjective meaning of a research problem and its context and involves collaboration between a researcher and participants in constructing and understanding knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012). Some authors have highlighted that qualitative approaches in Indigenous tourism research facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Indigenous people and tourism, and the integration of Indigenous peoples' voices in the research process and outcomes (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Considering that one of my research goals is to increase the agency of Indigenous participants in the research process, a qualitative approach is preferable to a quantitative one for this purpose.

Research paradigm and tradition

In addition to using a qualitative methodology, I also followed critical theory and decolonial approaches. Stemming from the work of the academics of the Frankfurt School, critical theory provides a framework for researchers to understand a phenomenon through various subjective lenses and to contribute to social and political changes to improve participants' lives (Patton, 2002; Hays & Singh, 2012). The decolonial approach of my research follows the work of the Latin American coloniality and feminist school in developmental studies (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Escobar, 2011; Fals-Borda, 2013; Freire, 1970; Leff, 2004; De Sousa Santos, 2010;

Quijano, 2000) and Indigenous studies from Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Kovach, 2009; Settee, 2011; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

According to Hays and Singh (2012), applying a critical theory approach influences the five research design levels (i.e., ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological). At the ontological level, critical theory emphasizes that reality is subjective and could be influenced by oppressive experiences. At the epistemological level, it recognizes that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participants. Critical theory highlights that the researcher's values are instrumental in acknowledging social injustice and promoting change at the axiological level. At the rhetorical level, it acknowledges that participants' voices are central to the process of reporting findings. Finally, at the methodological level, a critical theory approach aims to minimize exploitive practices between researchers and participants by applying appropriate data collection methods and considering how the results may affect participants' social experiences. Overall, critical theory is an opportunity for researchers to be aware of dominant practices in research that might diminish participants' voices in the research process and undertake changes in the process to equalize their relationship with participants.

Several authors have recommended that research projects that aim to shift the invisible role that Indigenous people and their knowledge often play in Indigenous tourism research should follow critical and decolonial approaches (Johnston, 2006; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Williams & Gonzalez, 2017; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Whyte, 2010). In accordance with these recommendations, I engaged in collaborative research with the goal of learning new information and obtaining perspectives that have not yet been shared in the literature on Indigenous tourism studies. As part of this collaborative research process, I explored the Kichwa people's experience with their traditional food systems and how tourism development in their land influences these

experiences. I was intrigued by how the Kichwa people have connected their tourism and agri-food businesses to the political agendas of self-determination and empowerment, although oppressive social structures nonetheless diminish their participation in tourism development in the region (Coca Pérez, 2016; Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Sidali et al., 2016). My goal was to highlight decolonial ways of studying and practicing tourism in Indigenous contexts according to critical Indigenous tourism approaches. This research used an in-depth case study to explore the relationship between tourism and food sovereignty in Indigenous settings. When the research goal, such as the one in this study, is to understand a real-life phenomenon and the contextual conditions that make this phenomenon unique and meaningful, Yin (2009) recommends a case study methodology. As a case study, the Chakra Route is a “revelatory” analytical opportunity, meaning that it offers a window into an otherwise unexplored phenomenon.

Methods

Data collection took place during two field trips to Ecuador in the summer of 2018 and the spring of 2019. During the first field trip, I focused on the first objective of this research, which involved identifying the elements that a food sovereignty framework should include based on research participants’ priorities concerning food sovereignty and tourism development. For the second field trip, I focused my efforts on the second and third objectives: analyzing the impacts of tourism on the Kichwa people’s food sovereignty and reflecting on how the research design contributes to increasing Indigenous peoples’ agency in the research process and outcomes.

The primary data collection tools I used were individual and group interviews. Purposive recruitment of participants was done with the assistance of a local research collaborator. Furthermore, I asked each interviewee for suggestions for additional persons to contact. As secondary research tools, I utilized observations, analysis of restaurant menus, and reflexive

journaling. By employing a combination of data collection tools, I ensured the inclusion of a diversity of voices and perspectives in the research and strengthen the trustworthiness of the results. The collaborative approach in this researched required a dynamic and flexible data collection process, because the process evolved according to participants’ recommendations and circumstances during fieldwork. For instance, a number of aspects were adapted during the fieldwork phase, including the criteria to include participants, the dynamics of the group meetings, and the concepts and languages used to interact with participants. Table 1.1 summarizes the data collection tools applied in this research.

Table 1. 1

Data Collection Overview

Data collection tool	#	Brief description
Semi-structured interviews	41	Twenty-four interviews during the first field trip; 17 interviews during the second field trip. Diversity of voices: academia, community-based tourism actors, entrepreneurs, health experts, NGOs, and policymakers. Most of the participants were women, and people self-identified as Kichwa people.
Focus groups	2	Twenty-four people participated in the workshops (23 of them were Kichwa people and belonged to a community-based tourism project)
Direct Observation	15	Observation memos after visiting touristic projects along the route that promote Kichwa traditional food, and by attending events that were related to tourism and traditional food.
Menu analysis	20	Menus of 20 restaurants located in the most touristic spots along the route. The focus of this analysis was to identify the use of Kichwa foods.
Field Journal	1	This field journal combines descriptions and reflections of experiences during and after the field trips that could influence the interpretation and reporting of the data.

Data analysis

The raw data underlying this study is comprised of transcripts of all 41 individual interviews with participants, memos of group interviews and field observations, reports detailing my analysis of the restaurant's menus, and entries in my field journal. Digital images of the meetings, events, and material created during the group meetings were also included as data sources. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis and NVIVO software (version 12). I followed Braun and Clarke (2006)'s six phases of thematic analysis (i.e., familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing the report) to ensure a trustworthy interpretation and representation of the data.

Trustworthiness

The validity or trustworthiness of this research conforms with traditional (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and critical perspectives in qualitative inquiry (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kovach, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. However, critical approaches in collaborative research, especially in Indigenous contexts, have refuted the idea that a qualitative research process will be valid as long as it parallels the quantitative approach (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Instead, some authors recommend an expanded view of validity that includes an analysis of how the research addresses power and social change in the process and the outcomes (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Martens et al., 2016). In Indigenous studies literature, several authors argue that scholars should include the concept of relational accountability as part of a trustworthiness strategy because this concept helps researchers reflect on their positionality in the research context and address practices that undermine equal and respectful relationships with research participants (Martens et al., 2016;

Wilson, 2008). This dissertation includes an entire chapter (fourth) describing how my research process addressed power and social change.

Credibility. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), credibility refers to the extent to which a research account is believable and appropriate, with particular reference to the level of agreement between participants and the researcher. I employed prolonged engagement and persistent observation, data collection triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing as techniques to achieve credibility in my research (Hays & Singh, 2012). The two field trips to Ecuador in summer 2018 and spring 2019 afforded me time to work in the field to gather an understanding of the context and build relationships with participants. Three factors were crucial to achieving the research objectives in the Chakra Route: a) I had worked in the area before in projects related to tourism and agroecology; b) I spoke the same language and shared similar cultural values with participants; and c) I gained the support of local leaders for this research. The flexible format of the semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask increasingly refined and detailed questions about food sovereignty and the impacts tourism has had on it.

I used two forms of triangulation: triangulation of data sources and triangulation of data collection tools. Triangulation of data sources indicated the inclusion of several participant perspectives, which helped me recognize variations in the data according to the gender, stakeholder type, and cultural background of the participants. The triangulation of data collection helped to illustrate similarities or inconsistencies among the data collected with different tools.

Member checking involves receiving feedback from participants throughout multiple stages in the research, from data collection to analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews before the initial coding. I also met with local leaders during the second field trip (spring 2019) and online after the fieldwork to share my

preliminary results and obtain feedback on the emerging themes. These ongoing interactions increased the trustworthiness of my results by ensuring that participants' understandings and interpretations fully informed my results. Finally, I engaged in peer debriefing (Patton, 2002) by consulting with my supervisor, which helped me to clarify my interpretation of the themes emerging from my research. The information in my reflexive journal was used as the basis for these consultations.

Transferability. The criterion of transferability is often characterized as the degree to which a study's findings may be generalizable to an outside population or setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). However, in qualitative research, several authors have argued that transferability does not necessarily follow this logic (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). Hays and Singh (2012) recommend that researchers should address transferability by providing sufficiently detailed descriptions of their research processes, including details about the participants, contexts, and timeframes; this allows readers to make decisions about the degree to which any findings are replicable to the settings where they work. In this research, I followed these authors' recommendations and provided detailed descriptions about the current state of Indigenous tourism research, the context in which the Chakra Route is set, the situations of Kichwa people and their food systems, and the research process. In this case study, I attempt to transcend the empirical context by following a theory-elaboration mode (Ketoviki & Choi, 2014). This mode involves using existing literature on Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism development and research to explore the Chakra Route case. Later in my dissertation, in response to my empirical findings, I introduce the concept of food sovereignty (relating to the *chakra* system) as a novel concept to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism development and research.

Dependability. This criterion refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which a researcher documents his or her procedures, thus allowing a reader to follow the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hays & Singh, 2012). My research addresses this criterion by following the six phases of thematic data analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend. This paper discusses these phases in the data analysis section. Furthermore, this research also addresses the dependability criterion as I submitted permanent reports to my supervisor and the academic committee in advance of the data collection and analysis.

Confirmability. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability refers to the degree to which a study's findings are genuine reflections of the participants. To achieve goals related to this criterion, I provided precise translation from Spanish to English of the participants' quotes that were coded during the data analysis. Furthermore, through the research process, I maintained notes detailing the rationale behind my theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices.

In response to scholars' call for alternative criteria to assure trustworthiness in food sovereignty and Indigenous tourism studies (Martens et al., 2016; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016), I devoted one chapter (Chapter 4) to describing how my research addresses participants' agency and my reflexivity.

Researcher Standpoint

I was born and raised in the Andes region of Ecuador. I acknowledge my Indigenous Kichwa and campesino ancestry. Thanks to my parents, ancestors, and Elders' teachings, I have experienced and practiced our traditional knowledge and cultural values. Our traditional knowledge is based on our connection to the land, the plants, and especially our food. For us,

food is medicine. We celebrate and dance to thank Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) for providing food and medicine every solstice and equinox. I was the first member of my family to access university education, learn a new language, and travel abroad. I have been an entrepreneur my whole life. During my childhood, my mom had a convenience store, where I started my first entrepreneurship, selling fruits and vegetables on a small table at the age of 7. Sadly, my first profit was eaten by mice that found the secret spot where I saved my money. That was a life lesson because I decided not to hide my savings but instead invest in my education.

While I was studying my bachelor's degree in Tourism Management, I realized two things: First, tourism was being promoted as the panacea for development among Indigenous and campesino communities in Ecuador and very few people thought that tourism could create a negative impact. Second, I realized that the authors of almost all of the books and documents used in my program were not written by authors affiliated with Ecuadorian institutions. Most of these publications used tourism development models from Europe and North America as cases to promote the tourism industry in Ecuador.

That was when I decided to be a researcher and write about tourism development more contextually to Ecuador. I took a master's degree in social and Environmental Studies from the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, which is a well-known academic institution that promotes a Latin American based and decolonized scholarship. In this institution, I learned about Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Arturo Escobar, Paulo Freire, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, among others. Parallel to my academic advance, being a member of several grassroots and rural women organizations shaped my critical perspectives on how I see development, wellbeing, and community building. I believe that cultural and community values make Indigenous and rural communities resilient.

I moved to Canada in Fall 2014 to enrol in English as a Second Language and a Ph.D. program at the University of Saskatchewan. There, thanks to my supervisor and Advisory Committee members, I was able to overcome knowledge gaps, language, and funding barriers to complete my Ph.D. research. The need for funding to complete my program encouraged me to start a small business in Canada. I make and sell chocolate using heirloom cacao beans from Ecuador. This business has also allowed me to share Ecuadorian Indigenous cacao farmers' resiliency and innovation stories with the people in Canada.

Besides a grassroots and entrepreneurship background, I had the opportunity to participate in global and local policymaking projects during the last two years. I am an alumna of the Bucerius Summer School of Global Governance, which has helped me to learn more about the situation of Indigenous and rural communities in other countries. In 2020, I worked as a development advisor for Community Futures in Alberta, Canada, specifically in a project aiming to diversify the economies of coal affected communities by promoting tourism and alternative energy-related businesses.

I must acknowledge that my life and professional background might influence the design and research process. A detailed analysis of this influence is presented in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Research Ethics

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board approved this research on July 2018. The Board strictly followed ethical guidelines set out by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Furthermore, I introduced the research project to local leaders in Ecuador before beginning the data collection process. Once they

agreed, and I had obtained ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan, I began meetings with the rest of the participants. It was necessary to convene several meetings with participants to explain the research goals and process, and to receive their support and consent to work in the area. I obtained participants' consent to include direct quotations and conversations in research publications and presentations related to this research. Moreover, I have maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants by replacing the participants' names with pseudonyms. The original copies of all data (audio-visual and text) will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years and subsequently destroyed.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is presented as a “dissertation by manuscript,” following the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies parameters. It consists of five chapters, including a general introduction (this chapter) and a general conclusion (Chapter 5), which bookend three published or publishable manuscripts (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). The first manuscript (Chapter 2) is published in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. Chapters 3 and 4 will be submitted for publication in Fall 2020. The following are the proper citations for the manuscripts, including co-authorship with my supervisor, Dr. Philip Loring. For each paper, I led the conceptualization, conducted data collection and analysis, and took the leadership role in writing.

- Santafe Troncoso, V. & Loring P. A. (2020). Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Tourism: The Chakra Route in the Amazon Region of Ecuador. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1770769>
- Santafe Troncoso, V. & Loring P. A. (2020). Traditional food or biocultural threat? Concerns about the use of tilapia fish in food tourism along a touristic route in the Amazon region of Ecuador. *Planned for People and Nature*

- Santafe Troncoso, V. (2020). Reflexivity in collaborative research with Indigenous people: A journey inspired by food sovereignty and diálogo de saberes. Planned for Journal of Peasant Studies.

Chapter 2, entitled “Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Tourism: The Chakra Route in the Amazon Region of Ecuador” develops a conceptual framework for the studying of tourism in Indigenous contexts by exploring the meanings of food sovereignty in a case study located in the Amazon region of Ecuador and identifying the multiples ways on how tourism influences the food sovereignty of Indigenous people in the region.

Chapter 3, entitled Traditional food or biocultural threat? Concerns about the use of tilapia fish in food tourism along a touristic route in the Amazon region of Ecuador, applies the concepts of biocultural diversity, which is a key concept in the studies of food sovereignty to explore the promotion of tilapia fish (*Oreochromis niloticus*), an alien species, in the food tourism along the Chakra Route.

Chapter 4, entitled Reflexivity in collaborative research with Indigenous people: a journey inspired by food sovereignty and diálogo de saberes, explores the important role of the researcher's reflexivity in collaborative research with Indigenous peoples. It also suggests that food sovereignty is a useful, ethical framing that can increase participants' agency and researchers' reflexivity in collaborative research.

The final chapter highlights the findings that support this research proposal to apply the concept of food sovereignty as a framework that leads more sustainable and Indigenous informed practices in Indigenous tourism. Furthermore, it highlights the case of the Chakra Route as an instance of tourism development that contributes positively to Indigenous host communities' food sovereignty.

CHAPTER 2. Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Tourism: The Chakra Route in the Amazon Region of Ecuador¹⁰

Abstract

This research applies the concept of food sovereignty as a framework to explore the impacts of tourism on Indigenous food systems in the Chakra Chocolate and Tourism Route (referred to as the “Chakra Route” in the paper), a tourist destination in the Amazon region of Ecuador that aims to improve the livelihoods of Kichwa people. Using a qualitative and collaborative research approach, we examine how Kichwa and non-Kichwa people in this destination area understand food sovereignty, particularly concerning tourism development. Findings show that chakra gardens, a traditional agroforestry method, offer a symbolic and practical embodiment of food sovereignty for local people. Participants expressed a variety of values and concerns regarding tourism and *chakra*, including on destination branding; the role Indigenous women and their traditional knowledge play in tourism; the food choices promoted to tourists; self-determination and the level of participation of Indigenous people in governance of the route. Overall, our research contributes to a pluralistic notion of justice in Indigenous tourism and illustrates how the study of food sovereignty in this Amazonia destination can serve as a

¹⁰This chapter is derived in part from an article published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Jun 01, 2020, copyright Taylor Francis, available online <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1770769>

holistic and collaborative frame for exploring the multidimensional impacts of tourism on communal well-being, food security, and biodiversity and cultural conservation.

Key words: Ecuador, Amazon, self-determination, Indigenous tourism, Indigenous women, food sovereignty

Introduction

Tourism is often discussed as a desirable development strategy for Indigenous communities but is also seen to have a generally poor track record when it comes to its impacts on local communities and ecosystems (e.g., Devine, 2017; Gascón, 2015; Johnston, 2006). This study offers an alternative perspective on tourism and development in Indigenous contexts, specifically through a focus on tourism's relationship with food sovereignty. We contest the common assumption that increasing local income through tourism is, on its own, sufficient for improving food security and other food-related outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Ambelu et al., 2018; Ashley et al., 2001; Richardson, 2010). We use the concept of food sovereignty to draw attention to the complexities of development and ways that tourism can undermine or improve local livelihoods and ecosystems. Our study focuses on a tourist route in the Amazon region of Ecuador called the Chakra Route, where we undertook extensive qualitative research in close collaboration with Indigenous Kichwa people who have deep traditional relationships with Amazonia. Ethnographic research was done by the first author over two field seasons with people associated with the Chakra Route, which was co-developed with participants to elicit local values and concerns regarding tourism's positive and negative impacts on local food systems and food sovereignty.

Food plays a critical role in tourism (Henderson, 2009; Quan & Wang, 2004), and tourism is a growing industry in Indigenous territories worldwide (World Tourism Organization

[UNWTO], 2019; Weaver, 2010; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). However, research exploring the nexus between Indigenous food, tourism, and food sovereignty is rare. Of the studies that have been done in this area, many have focused on the commodity value of Indigenous foods, but overlooked essential cultural, political, and environmental elements of food and food security (Du Rand et al., 2003; Rogerson, 2012), such as impacts on the availability of traditional food and the continuance of traditional food practices (Loring & Gerlach, 2009).

We focus below on two related research questions: 1) How do Kichwa participants in the Chakra Route understand food sovereignty (this concept is addressed in Kichwa terms in our interviews and workshops) and 2) How does the Chakra Route as a tourism destination affect the food sovereignty of local Kichwa people? The paper is structured as follows. First, we review key concepts in the literature on Indigenous tourism as they relate to food systems and sovereignty, then describe the collaborative process by which we developed the methodology and implemented this research. This is followed by the findings and discussion of how this research expands our understanding of Indigenous food sovereignty and the usefulness of food sovereignty as a ‘boundary concept’ for collaborating with Indigenous people on tourism as a sustainable and just development strategy (c.f. Brand & Jax, 2007). Directions for future research are included in the concluding section.

Indigenous Food Systems

There are approximately 370 million Indigenous people residing in over ninety countries worldwide. Historically, these Indigenous peoples have maintained close biocultural connections with their traditional territories, stewarding biodiversity through subsistence and other environmental management activities (e.g., Balée, 2013; Berkes, 2008). According to the World Bank (2019), Indigenous people are presently the stewards of 80% of the world’s remaining

biodiversity. However, over the last few centuries, Indigenous people and their lands have been (and continue to be) threatened by violent colonization, land dispossession, and the advance of extractive industries in their territories (Chellaney, 2019; Tait Neufeld & Richmond, 2017, 2020; Ulloa, 2014). From the Arctic to the Amazon, similar patterns have been witnessed by Indigenous people living under the oppression of colonialism, including the criminalization of traditional food systems practices (Padoch & Pinedo-Vazquez, 2010; Trosper, 2002), a nutrition transition from traditional to western diets (Popkin & Gordon, 2004; Leatherman & Goodman, 2005), and loss of languages and cultural expertise (Maffi, 2001; Regan, 2010).

Despite these tragic impacts, traditional food systems continue to be essential to the overall health, well-being and cultural continuity of Indigenous People worldwide, and especially embody their biophysical, spiritual, and cultural connections to their land (Loring & Gerlach, 2009; Tait Neufeld & Richmond, 2020; Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008). Following the approach used by Kuhnlein and Receveur (1996), we define Indigenous food systems as encompassing all food and food practices valued by Indigenous people. This includes not only material elements such as land, water, animals, or seeds, but also the knowledge and practices that Indigenous people have ancestrally developed about their food (Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008).

Tourism and Indigenous Food Systems

To date, studies done at the intersection of Indigenous food and tourism have primarily focused on the economic potential that Indigenous food has in the tourism market, essentially as a commodified object of cultural experience for tourists (Du Rand et al., 2003; Rogerson, 2012). Traditional foods and food practices contribute to the health and well-being of many Indigenous peoples around the world and often in ways that extend beyond their nutritional and commodity

values (Kuhnlein, et al., 2009; Loring & Gerlach, 2009). It is therefore essential that research in this area expand its focus to include the nuanced nutritional, cultural, and spiritual values of Indigenous food and foodways, as well as the complex social circumstances that make many Indigenous peoples food insecure (Loring, 2017). Tourism development add further complexity and challenges to food security on Indigenous lands.

A few key revelatory studies exist that highlight the problematic social and ecological complexities at the nexus of Indigenous food systems and tourism (e.g., Leatherman et al., 2010; Rosenberg, 2018; Torres, 2003). For instance, a long-term study in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico shows that although the tourism industry has provided jobs and incomes for Mayan people, it has also negatively impacted their traditional food systems and nutritional health, by shifting diets from traditional to imported foods and driving increased malnutrition, diabetes, and obesity among Mayan people (Leatherman & Goodman, 2005; Leatherman et al., 2010). Likewise, Rosenberg (2018) reports cases of water and land grabs associated with tourism development in Bali, Indonesia, which has negatively impacted people's food sovereignty. While the details vary from place to place, a clear pattern is evident: tourism has a mixed track record at best when it comes to supporting Indigenous livelihoods and food systems.

Increasingly, scholars working with Indigenous communities to understand the impacts of tourism are also raising concerns regarding social and environmental justice (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Jamal, 2019; Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Whyte, 2010), and self-determination (Johnston, 2006; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Williams & Vicuña, 2017). Some critical scholars argue that tourism development cannot escape the broader historical patterns of colonization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and results in contributing further to such entrenched injustices (Johnston, 2006; Devine, 2017; Williams & Vicuña, 2017;

Whyte, 2010). By contrast, others argue that Indigenous foods can be central to a new community-driven, rights-centred paradigm for a 'just' tourism that sheds colonial trappings and empowers Indigenous people to reclaim autonomy and self-determination, and restore their relationships with their lands, kin, spirituality, and others (Grey & Newman, 2018; Grey & Patel, 2015; Lee, 2018). Our work seeks to contribute directly to this ongoing debate, specifically with respect to whether food sovereignty as a framework or guidepost for tourism development can help Indigenous peoples realize such resurgence and paradigm shift towards justice and well-being.

Food Sovereignty for Just Tourism

Several authors argue that to make tourism both just and sustainable for Indigenous host communities, it is necessary to complement economic goals with a pluralistic and participatory approach to identifying goals, visions, and benchmarks for development (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Whyte, 2010). Jamal (2019) argues that a justice approach in tourism is pluralistic but also sensitive to the particular situation—it is integrated (tourism as part of a broader socio-ecological and political system), contextual (situated in place, time and identities), and relational (recognizing the relationships among material and symbolic factors)—.A fair and just approach to tourism also attends to conservation of ecological, social and cultural goods for sustainability, and to the well-being of its human and non-human inhabitants. Following this, we argue that the concept of food sovereignty, which is often included in the political and justice agendas of Indigenous people worldwide (Grey & Patel, 2015; Whyte, 2018), offers a poignant framework for pursuing “just sustainability” in the development of tourism in Indigenous contexts (Agyeman, 2008).

A landmark report from the Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty (2007) defines food sovereignty as “people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (p. 9). We use this definition as a starting point, recognizing that the concept is evolving as people engaged in struggles around the world grapple with what it means to them (Edelman et al., 2014). In other words, food sovereignty takes on important place-based meanings that reflect the histories, politics, ecologies, and cultures of a region as well as the struggles in which people are presently mired (Schiavoni, 2017). With these nuances in mind, the Nyéléni report sets out a framework for food sovereignty known as the Six Pillars Framework. This framework describes food sovereignty as involving six core features: 1) a focus on food for people; 2) valuing food providers; 3) localizing food systems; 4) placing control locally; 5) building knowledge and skills; and 6) working with nature (Nyéléni, 2007). Far from being a rigid checklist, these pillars are intended as guidelines that signify how food sovereignty is not only about food production and farmers’ struggles, but also about justice and connections among all the varied actors and elements in a food system. The principles presented in the Nyéléni report’s Six Pillars Framework became a crucial reference during the data analysis of our research below.

Many proponents of food sovereignty also consider it to be a vehicle for pursuing self-determination and participatory governance, and for building international solidarity (Edelman et al., 2014; Grey & Patel, 2015). It is in the latter sense that food sovereignty was first promoted and popularized by La Via Campesina, a transnational social movement of peasants, small-scale farmers, Indigenous people, conscious consumers, and others affected by industrial agrobusiness and free trade. La Via Campesina advocated for a focus on food sovereignty during the 1996

World Food Summit in Rome as an alternative to neoliberal strategies for addressing food insecurity and poverty.

Many Indigenous communities similarly see food sovereignty not just as a matter of food and diet, but as a holistic vision for autonomy and self-determination: a pathway to reverse, on their own terms, the varied impacts of colonization and heal their connections to themselves, the land, and others (Coté, 2016; Whyte, 2018). In other words, many communities are wielding the language of food sovereignty as a conceptual reclaiming of cultural authority and governance around all aspects of Indigenous livelihoods, from spirituality to natural resource management, commerce, and even international trade (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018; Grey & Patel, 2015; Whyte, 2018). Despite varied interpretations and definitions, food sovereignty has gained adherents among diverse social movements, as well as scholars, policymakers, and multinational governing agencies from both the Global South and the Global North. Though much of the scholarship around food sovereignty has been in the field of agrarian and rural studies, growing interest from scholars in other fields in enrichening this subject, ranging from studies related to gender (Patel, 2012) and health equity (Weiler et al., 2015). With respect to tourism, the issue of food sovereignty has received limited attention both in research and application. Gascón and Cañada (2012) argue that food sovereignty should guide the future development of tourism in the rural areas of the Global South, where past tourism development has largely undermined the ability of rural peoples to access to land, water, and fair wages (Devine, 2017; Gascón, 2015; Hall, 2007). Our research study below aims to contribute towards filling this gap.

Methods

Case Study: The Chakra Route in the Amazonia of Ecuador

This research used an in-depth qualitative, case study approach to explore the relationship between tourism and food sovereignty in Indigenous contexts. Yin (2009) recommends the case study methodology when the goal of the research is to understand real-life phenomena and the contextual conditions that make this phenomenon unique, meaningful, or otherwise important. We selected as our case a tourist route in the upper basin of the Amazonia, in the Ecuadorian province of Napo, as a single, ‘revelatory’ case for analysis—meaning that it offers a window into otherwise unexplored phenomena (Yin, 2009). As we discuss below, this route is unique in bringing together indigenous food systems and tourism and giving the Indigenous Kichwa people a platform to revitalize traditional practices and to contest dominant narratives about food security, poverty, and economic development. The high level of interest demonstrated by the local Kichwa representatives of the route when we discussed the research idea was a determining factor in developing this research, and close collaboration on developing and implementing the study was immediately established. Community leaders argued that the participatory dynamic of this research could create positive changes as the project evolved and the inclusion of policymakers in the study could influence local policies for tourism development. The methodology reflects sensitivity to decolonizing research such as advocated by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith, 2012), though we developed our own particular way to undertake this with the Kichwa participants as described further below.

Setting and Background

The Chakra Route was officially launched in 2017 under the name of the ‘Cacao Route’. Its antecedents go back to 2010 when the Cacao Roundtable, a group of local actors engaged in cacao farming, created a project proposal for this route. The primary goals of this route were to diversify the local economy and extend the participation of Kichwa communities in the value

chains of cacao farming and tourism. Although this route initially focused only on Kichwa entrepreneurs engaged in cacao farming or tourism, it has expanded its focus over the years, by including non-Kichwa local entrepreneurs and enlarging its focus from cacao cultivation to the entire Indigenous system of chakra gardening. In 2018, members of the route changed the name of the route from “The Cacao and Chocolate Cultural Route” to “Chakra: Chocolate & Tourism” to reflect this expanded focus. Chakra is a traditional agroforestry system that Kichwa people have used for centuries, primarily for subsistence but more recently for cultivating high quality cacao to support local livelihoods and families (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018). It refers to a form of local agroecological farming that uses traditional knowledge passed down over generations to grow crops and use its plants in a way that maintains biodiversity and forest health (Irvine, 1989; Coq-huelva et al., 2017; Perreault, 2005). Kichwa women farmers, also known as Chakra Mamas, are bearers of this ancient knowledge and lead the sustainable agroecological practices in the chakra gardens (Castellon, 2015; Coq-Huelva et al., 2017).

The Chakra Route is governed under a collaborative system facilitated by the Fondo Ecuatoriano de Cooperacion para el Desarrollo (FECD). Members of this collaborative group include several Kichwa organizations, government agencies, NGOs, educational centres, and non-Kichwa entrepreneurs. Four Kichwa cacao farming cooperatives and ten Kichwa community-based tourism associations (CBTs) are the primary stakeholders in this route (See Table 2.1). Altogether the membership comprises nearly 1,500 people (FECD, 2017).

Table 2. 1*Kichwa Organizations that are Members of the Chakra Route.*

Member Organization	Primary activities
Wiñak	Cacao and Guayusa (<i>Ilex guayusa</i>) farming and exporting Chocolate production “Bean to bar” tourism
Kallari	Cacao farming and exporting Chocolate production “Bean to bar” tourism
Tsatsayaku	Cacao farming Chocolate production “Bean to bar” tourism
Amanecer Campesino	Cacao farming “Bean to bar” tourism
CBT Sinchi Warmi	Chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, Guayusa tea ceremonies, chocolate spa, artisanal chocolate making
CBT Shiripuno	Chakra tours, artisanal chocolate making, traditional dances
Kamak Maki	Chakra tours, handcrafts, environmental education
CBT Shandia	Chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, biking, artisanal chocolate making
CBT Cotundo	Archaeological tourism
CBT Cavernas	Chakra tours, hiking
Templo de Ceremonia	
CBT Santa Rita	Chakra tours, artisanal chocolate making, traditional dances and music
CBT AMUPAKIN	Traditional medicine, chakra tours, lodging, traditional cuisine, environmental education
CBT Tamia Yura	Cave tours, chakra tours, environmental education
CBT Sacha Waysa	Birdwatching, chakra tours, handcrafts, artisanal chocolate making.

Source: FECD 2017. CBT=Community-based Tourism.

Cacao cooperatives include tourism as a complementary activity to their cacao business by providing tours of their farms and engaging visitors in a “bean to bar” experience where they learn the process of making chocolate. The CBTs are comprised of Kichwa members and their

families, who work together to control the development of tourism in their territories and governed their entrepreneurship in a communitarian ethos. They are led primarily by the Kichwa women, who are further innovating their services by providing tours in the chakra gardens guided by chakra mamas and incorporating wellness and food experiences exhibiting their cultural values (see Figure 2. 1). Non-Kichwa entrepreneurs also participate in the route in a variety of ways; restaurateurs, for example, are integrating products from the chakra gardens into their menus and tour guide operations are complementing their own offerings with field trips to CBT chakras.

Figure 2. 1

Chakra Tours



Note. Chakra mamas describing and interpreting their chakra gardens to visitors at Amupakin in Archidona, Ecuador. Photo Credit: Veronica Santafe (Summer 2018).

One critical aspect of the Chakra Route’s heritage is that it overlaps with the ancestral territory of the Kichwa Napo Runa people, a cultural group described as the embodiment of

resistance, resilience, and entrepreneurship (Coca Pérez, 2016; Coq-Huelva et al., 2017; Perreault, 2005). Chakra, the traditional method of agroforestry among the Napo Runa, has long been a key component of local food security and household economic diversity. In the last decade, however, high demand for organic cacao and other crops has led some of the local people to reduce or abandon chakra practices (Coq-Huelva et al., 2018). Another aspect is that the Kichwa were pioneers in developing communitarian models of business in the chocolate and tourism sectors in Ecuador (Coca Pérez, 2016; Coq-Huelva et al., 2018). However, Houck et al. (2013) offered evidence that increased market integration is negatively affecting the health of Kichwa people by leading them to become overly dependent on lower-quality market foods.

Another important feature of this case is that at a national level Ecuador recognized food sovereignty as a key principle in their 2008 constitution. Likewise, at the provincial level, the government of Napo recently introduced legislation that promotes the chakra garden as a food sovereignty strategy.

Lastly, this tourism route is part of the Amazon, which is a hugely important biome from a global perspective for ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, capacity for slowing climate change, and biodiversity (Foley et al., 2007; Malhi, et al., 2008). The Amazon rainforest is the home of numerous Indigenous groups, all of which adapted their ways of life to this ecosystem over centuries (Balée, 2013; Coq-Huelva et al., 2017). However, Amazonia, particularly the Ecuadorian Amazon Region, have been subject to intense ecological and political pressures from extractive industries and urbanization (Rudel et al., 2002). Indigenous people worldwide share experiences of globalization and industrialization (Adams & Hutton, 2007), thus our case study has relevance for Indigenous tourism and food sovereignty initiatives around the world.

Data Collection

In the Summer of 2018 and the Spring of 2019, Author 1, who is originally from Ecuador, conducted 28 semi-structured interviews and two workshops with locals associated with the Chakra Route. In total, Author 1 spent 24 weeks in the field, 16 weeks in the first year, and eight weeks in the second. Our approach to the research and analysis is primarily interpretivist in philosophy (Moon & Blackman, 2014) as we are seeking to learn from how a specific set of people understand and value food sovereignty, especially with respect to the challenges and opportunities that they see in their participation in the Chakra Route. As described below, we collaborated with Kichwa leaders to define specifics regarding participant recruitment and our research activities.

Spanish was the primary language of communication between Author 1 and the participants. In total 52 participants, including members of community-based tourism, policymakers, entrepreneurs, health experts, NGOs' officers, and academics, collaborated in this research. Thirty-three participants were female and the rest male; 37 self-identify as Kichwa, (here the term 'Kichwa' includes people who identify as Kichwas, Amazonian Kichwas, or Napo Runas) and 15 as non-Kichwa. Among non-Kichwa participants, 12 self-identify as mestizos, and three as foreigners. The term mestizo describes a mixed ethnicity in Latin American society of both Spanish and Indigenous descent.

Purposive recruitment of participants was done with the aid of a local research coordinator and then asking each interviewee for additional suggestions for whom to contact. Our goal was to foreground cultural diversity and pursue a meaningfully collaborative research approach; as such, Author 1 engaged Kichwa community leaders in conversations to identify key participants; the best locales to hold workshops and interviews; the most appropriate activities to

be incorporated as part of the workshops; and the best ways to translate the results to the community. Most of the encounters between Author 1 and participants were held in community spaces along the route.

Following the recommendations of Kichwa leaders, the 15 non-Kichwa participants were invited to participate because they play key roles in connecting Kichwa food systems and tourism along the route. Kichwa leaders also helped in planning the data collection meetings to allow Kichwa participants multiple culturally appropriate ways to express their ideas. For instance, traditional food was shared during the meetings for this research, which recognized the importance of ceremony in research with Indigenous people (Wilson, 2008).

The data collection process was done in two stages. The first stage involved 20 interviews and a workshop session with ten participants to collect information related to local people's values regarding food sovereignty and the concerns that participants have about their traditional food system. For the second stage, there were eight additional interviews and a second workshop with 14 participants was held to explore how tourism influences food sovereignty in the area. Table 2.2 shows the main research focus (see research questions in the Introduction section) and the kinds of guiding questions used during conversations with participants.

Table 2. 2

Research Focus and Guiding Questions

Research Focus	Guiding questions for interview guides and workshops
1. Food sovereignty from a Kichwa perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does food sovereignty mean to you?• Why are <i>chakras</i> central to the tourist route?• What is “healthy” food?• What are the hazards of development, including tourism, on traditional food?
2. Impacts of tourism on the food sovereignty of Kichwa people along the Chakra Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are local people producing and consuming traditional foods?• What is the role of women in the Chakra Route?• Are traditional foods being marketed outside of tourism?• What is the role of traditional knowledge in the Chakra Route?• How does the Chakra Route affect or contribute to intercultural relationships and community building?• What are the environmental concerns related to the impacts of the Chakra Route?

Data Analysis

Recordings and other materials (e.g. drawings) collected during the two field trips were transcribed and then analysed using a thematic analysis and the NVIVO program (version 12). For the first research topic, Author 1 coded transcripts inductively; the Six Pillars Framework noted earlier provided a helpful guide to understand and situate emergent themes as they arose. For the second research topic, Author 1 used inductive data analysis too. Inductive thematic analysis followed the procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), whereby codes are first generated from the text then organized into emergent themes. Emergent themes were discussed with participants (i.e. member checking, see below). Author 2 also performed code-checking. Both authors discussed the codes and coding scheme as it developed.

Trustworthiness

Thematic analysis in interpretivist research does not simply rely on the frequency of occurrence of themes in transcripts, notes, and other “texts” as an indicator of conceptual importance or centrality; because these texts are necessarily disembodied from the intersubjective research engagement between the researcher and participants that produced them (Agar, 2013; Clifford, 1983). Instead, we identified and validated key themes through a set of activities for achieving trustworthy analysis in qualitative research, including member checking, journaling, and triangulation of research methods (Amankwaa, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking involves receiving feedback from participants at multiple stages in the research from data collection to analysis. Participants had the opportunity to check the transcripts of the interviews before our initial coding and Author 1 also met with Kichwa leaders and other key participants to share preliminary results, obtain feedback on the emerging themes, and discuss saturation (whether sufficient interviews had been completed). These ongoing interactions increase the trustworthiness of the results by ensuring that our findings are fully informed by the understandings and interpretations of the participants.

Journaling was a supportive research method in this study (Amankwaa, 2016). As a woman descendant of Kichwa people of Cotopaxi and a long-time participant in grassroots organizations, Author 1 has extensive experience with the challenges faced by people in these communities. Author 1 kept a research journal to acknowledge and account for her standpoint and empathy in this regard (Lee, 2018; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This journal provided the basis for dialogue and code checking with Author 2 on decisions about data collection, analysis, identification of emergent themes in the data, and the preparation of this manuscript.

Finally, triangulation describes the use of multiple forms of research data to improve overall understanding, not for corroboration or validation of the data per se, but to ensure that our account is “rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed” (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 122). Here, Author 1 triangulated among interview transcripts, the outcomes of workshops, feedback received from member checking, and the material captured in her journal entries.

Results

Our findings follow two primary narratives: the first explores how Kichwa people understand food sovereignty, the concerns that people presently have regarding food sovereignty, and how these meanings and concerns related to the Six Pillars Framework described earlier. Going back and forth between the themes that emerged from our coding and the Six Pillars Framework helped us to more fully appreciate and investigate the chakra gardens as an embodiment of food sovereignty for the Kichwa people. The second narrative explores how the inclusion of chakra gardens and other Kichwa food traditions in the Chakra Route influences the food sovereignty of Kichwa people. This influence includes symbolic and social benefits as well as emerging concerns that people raised about how tourism has developed in the route thus far. As a matter of style, we offer direct quotes as exemplars of key emergent themes and, on occasion, note parenthetically the demographic details of participants who offered a particularly informative perspective that we opt to summarize.

Kichwa Perspectives on Food Sovereignty

We started this project with an assumption that many participants would be familiar with the concept of food sovereignty because food sovereignty features centrally in the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 and also features heavily in the platforms of Indigenous and peasants’ organizations in Latin America (Grey & Patel, 2015). However, in the first phase of this research,

we quickly learned from Kichwa leaders that, while food sovereignty is a term Indigenous leaders and policymakers use, it is not commonly discussed by Kichwa people in general. In its place, we found that participants often spoke of their chakra garden or “chakra system” to capture and communicate their diverse values and concerns regarding Indigenous food and food systems. As we show below, participant narratives regarding the chakra system corroborate and inform the Six Pillars Framework well.

When discussing chakra, Kichwa participants discussed material and non-material values and benefits: material includes traditional food, income, and income diversity, while non-material includes identity, empowerment, and culture. In addition to these social and economic values, people also raised ecological values, such as biodiversity conservation (Figure 2.2). Among these diverse values, however, the most heavily emphasized by participants was the strong connection between Kichwa women and their chakra gardens. As noted earlier, Kichwa women who manage chakra are known as chakra mamas, a symbolic title which, according to Uzendoski (2005), signifies these women hold traditional wisdom received from their ancestors on how to ask *Nunkui*, the spirit of the chakras, to bless and provide food in their *chakras*. Many people spoke at length about the importance of chakra mamas. One participant described this important spiritual and ancestral connection between women, chakra, and Kichwa culture as follows:

Chakra is more than crops. It is the place where Kichwa women learn from the land and restore their energy...We do not see our chakras as a task, instead our chakra is the place where we restore and heal ourselves. (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018)

This quote illustrates the strong multifaceted connection between Kichwa women and their chakras that we observed, and many people discussed. It also exemplifies a sentiment expressed by many interviewees: among Kichwa people, chakra gardens represent more than just a piece of land useful for growing food. Indeed, the chakra gardens emerged as a powerful symbolic embodiment of food sovereignty; they are a source of a diversity of foods, and a platform for agency, building community, teaching traditional knowledge, expressing cultural identity, empowering women, stewarding the environment, and maintaining spiritual wellness. Interestingly, many of these values for chakra came up in discussions with participants about threats to or worries for their chakra and traditional culture (see Table 2.3), which we describe in more detail in the following sections.

Figure 2. 2

Kichwa Women describing the meanings of their Chakra Gardens.



Note. Kichwa women from Tzawata (Aso. Tsatsayaku) describing a poster that they created during a workshop to explain what chakra means for them. Values listed are Kichwa women identity, variety of products, culture, unity, and empowerment, sharing, community development, and biodiversity conservation. Photo Credit: Veronica Santafe (Summer 2018).

Chakra and Relationships. Participants raised multiple concerns related to their chakras (Table 2.3). The most heavily emphasized concerns were about Kichwa people's relationships both with their traditional food and land and with non-Kichwa people. For example, one of the participants described the problem of hunger as a relational challenge rather than the result of a lack of food:

As Kichwas, we learn from our ancestors that the forest is abundant. Kichwa people that leave the land and move to urban areas are the ones who are starving and in need of food because they lose their connection to the land and to the people that live in the land. In the city, those connections are replaced by money. There, if you do not have money, you will starve. (CBT4, Male, Kichwa, July 30, 2018)

Thus, in this and other interviews, it was clear that relationships and connections, not food, are at the core of the chakra system's importance to local people. Similarly, one Chakra Mama explained that the disappearance of chakra gardens would have significant impacts on the sense of community and solidarity among Kichwa people, because seeding and harvesting are both important social activities, and the food grown in chakras is shared widely among members of the family and the community (CBT25, Female, Kichwa, August 05, 2018).

Several Kichwa and non-Kichwa participants also raised issues of colonialism as a threat to their relationships by explaining the legacy of discrimination against Kichwa people as well as a continuing social stigma around Indigeneity, is keeping both non-Kichwa and younger Kichwa people from embracing chakra and chakra products. One of the non-Kichwa participants described her experience as follows:

We were raised with the idea that consuming products from the chakra gardens was a symbol of poverty... So, most of the mestizo families prefer to buy their food from El TIA [local supermarket]. (Policymaker07, Female, Mestizo, April 25, 2019).

Finally, participants raised building relationships among groups historically separated as a key factor for the governance of the local food system. One of the policymakers argued that building relationships among Kichwa and non-Kichwa people living in Napo is essential to achieving a sustainable local food system that is desirable for both groups (Policymaker04, Female, Kichwa, April 29, 2019). Table 2.3 summarizes the main concerns that emerged during the conversations and echo the Six Pillars of food sovereignty. The number of occurrences of each theme and the number of respondents raising each theme are listed here for reference but should not be interpreted as an indicator of relative significance.

Table 2. 3 Main Concerns of the Kichwa People Regarding the Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty.

Main Concerns of the Kichwa People Regarding the Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty.

Food Sovereignty Pillar	Sub-theme (Inductive coding)	# of Occurrences *	# of Respondents *	Example Quote
1. Focuses on food for people	Chakras are becoming spaces of tensions between cash-crop farming vs. subsistence farming	17	10	“Our chakras used to be exclusively for producing our food. We had lots of products to eat and to share with the birds and other animals that used to come to our chakras. Now, cacao is taking over the space in the chakras” (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018).
	Changing foodways	25	14	“I know some Kichwa people that prefer to sell the food from their chakras and buy food from the supermarket instead. It is like buying stuff from outside gives them value as a person” (NGO05, Female, Foreigner, April 25, 2019).

2. Values food providers	Chakra Mamas' suffer discrimination when they bring their chakra products to urban areas	17	10	“Chakra Mamas sell their products on the sidewalks, without any shelters. (...) The customers in the city do not want to pay a fair price for these products” (Policymaker04, Female, Kichwa, April 29, 2019).
	Violence and gender inequalities affect the wellbeing of Kichwa women	13	5	“Being an entrepreneur is not easy for Kichwa women. When we started Sinchi Warmi, some of us suffered violence from our own husbands. Men in the community felt threatened by the idea that women could make more money than them (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).
3. Localizes food systems	Chakra products are not valued in local markets; instead, markets import food from other regions.	17	10	“The local authorities discriminate against our Chakra Mamas, because they do not give them adequate spaces to sell their products”. (CBT09, Male, Kichwa, August 05, 2018).
	Non-Kichwa people lack interest in chakra products and the overall Kichwa gastronomy.	13	11	“If you walk in El Tena or El Coca [main cities in the upper Amazon region of Ecuador], you will find lots of fast food places, but restaurants offering Amazon cuisine will be rare” (Academia01, Male, Mestizo, August 21, 2018).
4. Democratic control over the food system	Access to arable land for Kichwa people is declining	21	9	“Collective land tenure has been our [Kichwa people] way to secure land access. But mining and oil companies have been pushing the government to let them enter to our territories.” (CBT13, Male, Kichwa, August 05, 2018).
	Lack of legal protection of traditional knowledge related to food systems.	3	3	“Our traditional knowledge is not privatized or patented; it is common to all Kichwa people. I feel that this common condition makes it easier for outsiders to profit from our knowledge” (Entrepreneur03, Male, Kichwa, April 24, 2019).
5. Builds knowledge and skills	Traditional knowledge should inform development projects in the area	11	6	“During a project of sustainable agriculture, we realized that it is crucial to include Chakra Mamas as facilitators because they are the ones that have the knowledge of traditional agriculture” (Policymaker04, Female, Kichwa, April 29, 2019).
	Youth interests in traditional knowledge and food practices	14	7	“My mom brought me to the chakra when I was a little girl. She taught me how to take care of our chakra. I compare my experience with my youngest son's experience; he does not know how to work in the chakra” (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).
6. Works with nature	Biodiversity loss	19	14	“When I was a little girl, I remember eating different species of fruits, bugs, mushrooms, and fish. Now, it is almost impossible to find these foods here. I do not know the reason, maybe it is deforestation or the climate change” (CBT07, Female, Kichwa, July 27, 2018).

Invasive species	21	21	“Tilapia is not native from the Amazonia. I think that tilapias are the cause of the disappearance of our native fish” (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018).
Inadequate waste management practices	12	10	“Some communities recycle materials such as plastic bottles, but the local government does not have a recycling program to pick up these materials from the communities” (NGO1, Female, Mestizo, August 13, 2018).

***Number of occurrences of each theme, and the number of respondents raising each theme, are listed here for reference, but should not be interpreted as an indicator of relative significance.**

Impacts of Tourism on Chakra / Food Sovereignty

In our second phase of research, we explored with participants the positive and negative impacts they are observing of Chakra Route tourism on food sovereignty in the area. Four themes emerged from this analysis: destination branding; the role of Kichwa women and their traditional knowledge; the place of Kichwa foods in tourism offerings; and the route’s model of participatory governance.

Destination Branding. As noted above, the name of the route recently changed from “Cacao Route” to “Chakra: Chocolate and Tourism”. Regarding the new name, participants who were involved in choosing it noted that neither the route itself, nor the goals of the route, had changed. Instead, the new name was chosen to signify their explicit desire to support not just a certain kind of cropping but the entire cultural system. The “Cacao Route” brand, many explained, put cacao and chocolate at the center of tourism development; the “Chakra: Chocolate and Tourism” brand centered the whole chakra system, which is a much more holistic representation of the Kichwa cultural and environmental values they want tourists to experience. One of the Kichwa leaders explained, “the Chakra Route restores the production and

consumption of products that have ancestrally been part of our diets” (CBT10 Male, Kichwa, April 23, 2019).

Indeed, several participants discussed how the new brand better accounts for their values regarding agrobiodiversity and traditional food consumption. It was a concern among many—as noted in Table 2.3 under Pillar 1—that chakras were becoming a site of tension between traditional and cash-crop activities. One participant explained the new brand helped to address this concern, especially among Chakra Mamas, that the emphasis on cacao might drive Kichwa farmers further away from chakra in favor of export markets (NGO6, Female, Mestizo, April 29, 2019).

Gender Empowerment and Traditional Knowledge. Several participants discussed how the Chakra Route is an opportunity for Kichwa women in general and Chakra Mamas specifically to bring additional income to their communities and, in so doing, to reduce the chances of discrimination and violence that they face when leaving their communities to sell their products or look for jobs in urban areas. One participant explained that the Chakra Route is inspiring Kichwa women to become entrepreneurs because they can create a tourism business in their own community using the assets (their chakra gardens and traditional knowledge) they already have (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018). Several participants identified Sinchi Warmi as an emblematic case of gender empowerment in the area. One of the NGO officers described Sinchi Warmi as “a project that is inspiring other Kichwa women to come together and create opportunities to improve their quality of life, while staying close to their families and chakras” (NGO6, Female, Mestizo, April 29, 2019). Many Chakra Mamas are also using their encounters with tourists to promote respect for the traditional knowledge of Kichwa people.

Chakra mamas, generally, are the people who guide any tourism activities on the route related to chakra gardens and traditional food. They are using this opportunity to make their traditional knowledge and practices more visible to both youths in their community and tourists. Chakra Mamas make a ritual of educating visitors on how they must behave when entering and interacting with their chakra gardens. As an example, during Author 1's visit to a chakra garden, the Chakra Mama painted Author 1's face with a mixture made from achiote seeds (*Bixa orellana*) before entering the chakra garden (see Figure 2.3). She explained that this protocol is an act of respect for the spirits that live in the chakra gardens and that it serves to protect the visitor from snakes and other dangers while in the forest.

Figure 2. 3

The Ritual of Face Painting Before Entering into a Chakra Garden.



Note. Author 1 stands with a Chakra Mama after having her face painted, and before entering the chakra garden of the Tamia Yura community-based tourism project in Tena, Ecuador. Photo credit: Andres Santafe (Summer 2018).

Several participants lamented a general lack of interest among restaurants in urban areas in *chakra* products, which they see as a barrier to further developing tourism that supports local and sustainable foods. Some participants argued this situation is specifically the result of cultural barriers between Kichwa and non-Kichwa people. One government officer responsible for tourism in the province explained it this way:

Most of the chefs in the urban areas do not know how to create menus that really feature local foods. It is crazy to see that almost all the restaurants in El Malecon only offer fast food. I think that these chefs assumed that all foreigners only eat fast food (Policymaker02, Male, Mestizo, August 13, 2018).

Generally, however, many people commented on how the agrobiodiversity of the *chakra* gardens is an opportunity to make restaurant menus sustainable and representative of local culture. For instance, some Kichwa restaurants are using mushrooms and other vegetables in place of tilapia fish, a common ingredient which, despite its popularity, is a concern for many participants because tilapia is an invasive species. This was an important point of contestation for many regarding the sustainability of food choices in the route: tilapia is an efficient and inexpensive species for aquaculture and can be easily incorporated into traditional dishes. In an informal survey of the menus of 20 restaurants located in the most touristic spots along the route, we found tilapia fish included in 11 of the menus. Several people expressed concern, which research (Silva et al., 2014) supports, regarding the impacts of tilapia aquaculture on native fish and ecosystems. A policymaker, for example, commented:

Although the introduction of tilapia in the region is promoted as a strategy for food security, many Kichwa communities are requesting projects to restore native fish that

they think are being vanished by the invasion of tilapias in the rivers (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018).

Further evidence of this concern is a project to replace tilapia fish on menus by restoring native fish in ponds located close to their chakra gardens started in 2019 by the Sinchi Warmi organization.

Participatory Governance and Food Sovereignty Legislation. Another finding that we report here because we feel it warrants more research relates to how people talked about governance and legislation. As crucial to the success of the Chakra Route, some participants highlighted the diversity of groups involved in the effort (Table 2.1), as well as the support of provincial and national food sovereignty legislation. Leaders explained that the Chakra Route's participatory governance model creates an opportunity to connect diverse actors and empower them in broader work related to food sovereignty. One leader, for example, specifically pointed to the inclusion of non-Kichwa entrepreneurs as bringing together Kichwa and non-Kichwa people to talk about the importance of the *chakra* system for the food sovereignty of all people living in the region (Policymaker04, Female, Kichwa, April 29, 2019). Two of the policymakers involved in this project also acknowledged that an explicit goal of the Chakra Route is to contribute to the food sovereignty in the Napo province (Policymaker04, Female, Kichwa, April 29, 2019; NGO1, Female, Mestizo, August 13, 2018). In this way, the Chakra Route is contributing positively to food sovereignty by promoting more democratic control over the food system (Table 2.3, Pillar 4).

Discussion

Following the premise that food sovereignty is the right that people have to define their own food and agriculture systems (Nyéléni, 2007), we started this research asking Kichwa people

about their own understanding of food sovereignty in the context of Kichwa-led tourism.

Chakra gardens emerged as a symbolic embodiment of food sovereignty for the Kichwa, which is a distinct cultural system with an ethic that closely echoes with the Six Pillars Framework. Far from being just a piece of land where food is produced, Kichwa people see chakra gardens as having a mix of social, economic, and ecological benefits. They are a locus for practicing and teaching culture, for building relationships, for addressing the deep historical legacies of colonialism, and for realizing a diverse mix of material as well as non-material outcomes. As such, the *chakra* provides an important counterpoint to the dominant global discourse on agriculture, which tends to focus only on export market value and the productive capability of agricultural systems to feed the world (Reganold & Wachter, 2016). For the same reasons, chakra gardens are also noteworthy in the context of tourism, an industry that historically has a complex relationship with commodification, poverty, and environmental degradation in Indigenous contexts (Devine, 2017; Gascón, 2015; Jamal, 2019; Whyte, 2010).

Chakra, as a concrete embodiment of the abstract notion of food sovereignty, provides locals with a constant touchstone by which they can define and design how tourism will unfold in their communities. In this sense, Kichwa people are exercising their right to self-determination, and promoting justice as recognition in their territories (Jamal, 2019; Whyte, 2010). Several authors have noted that too-narrow a focus on the distributional outcomes of tourism can undermine tourism's potential contributions to improving a more pluralistic approach to justice, sustainability and well-being for Indigenous communities (Jamal, 2019; Weaver, 2010; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Here, we have tangible examples of how the mere inclusion of elements from Indigenous food systems in the tourism industry is not enough to claim that tourism is contributing positively to the well-being of host communities. On its own, cacao-oriented tourism

had the potential to provide economic benefits to farmers, but early on, locals realized it was also pushing farmers to move away from growing subsistence crops. By reorienting tourism around the centerpiece of the entire traditional food system, participants in the route believe that they can now use tourism as a way to build their communities without sacrificing their traditional foods, values, and identity.

The Chakra Route also shows how connecting tourism to food sovereignty promotes empowerment and representation of Indigenous people in the governance of tourism in their territories. In this way, Indigenous people can overcome a role in the tourism industry that often renders them invisible aside from as objects of cultural difference (Jamal, 2019; Whyte, 2010; Wilson & Nielsen, 2012). The Chakra Route provides Kichwa women with opportunities to guide the development of tourism in their territories in a way that is respectful to them and their culture. This finding is similar to Lee's (2018) report on how traditional food systems make tourism work for the cultural safety and wellbeing of Basque women fishers. Therefore, food sovereignty in Indigenous tourism is also an opportunity to empower Indigenous women.

The Chakra Route is building relationships among Kichwa and non-Kichwa by promoting the inclusion of non-Kichwa entrepreneurs and encouraging them to use *chakra* products and develop business partnerships with Kichwa entrepreneurs. Some of the participants in this research believe that these actions are helping to overcome legacies of racism and colonialism and to break down cultural and discriminatory barriers between Kichwa and non-Kichwa people in the province of Napo. As such, the Chakra Route may also be serving as a cross-cultural platform to promote reconciliation, solidarity, and coexistence of peoples whose histories are mired in conflict (Edelman et al., 2014; Loring, 2016).

Finally, our research evoked interesting preliminary findings regarding the role of state-based policy for food sovereignty, and how this policy can be a powerful tool for achieving sustainable and just tourism development in Indigenous and rural contexts. In the Chakra Route, participants explained that national and provincial legislation for food sovereignty provides important guidelines for how to develop tourism in the absence of tourism-specific legislation. Several studies argue that the Ecuadorian state has failed to effectively implement its food sovereignty legislation (Clark, 2016; Giunta, 2014), but what we see in our case may be an important example of non-state actors (Indigenous organizations) strategically leveraging food sovereignty legislation to promote sustainable and just tourism that promotes reconciliation. This has been seen elsewhere, as scholars observed how the *Buen Vivir* (“good living”) ethos, which shapes the legislation of countries like Ecuador and Nicaragua, has similarly inspired communities to develop tourism projects that are more socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019; Fisher, 2019). Future research could explore in greater detail how food sovereignty statutes justify and become mobilized in local tourism development even without explicit intervention or regulation from the state.

Conclusion

Our research started with the oft-made observation that tourism, generally, has not been an effective form of development for Indigenous people. In the Amazon region of Ecuador, however, innovation in Indigenous-led tourism appears to be countering this trend. We show concrete examples of both positive and negative impacts Indigenous-led tourism on the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of traditional food systems. We also see evidence of how Kichwa people, by linking tourism with their food sovereignty or *chakra* system, are working to mitigate negative impacts and promote positive ones. While time must pass before the long-term

benefits and impacts of the Chakra Route can be assessed, our study suggests that tourism and Indigenous values can be reconciled constructively to facilitate Kichwa well-being, self-determination, and autonomy, and contribute to the conservation of biocultural diversity in Amazonia.

Overall, our research also suggests that the concept of food sovereignty can be a useful boundary concept for engaging multiple actors in a collaborative discussion of justice, livelihoods, well-being, and sustainability. Boundary concepts are generally those concepts that can facilitate cross-cultural collaboration and exchange despite not having clear cut definitions. The collaborative process we engaged in with locals to explore the contextual aspects of food sovereignty was essential for building our relationships and also developing the shared understanding necessary to fully explore the symbolic and practical aspects of *chakra* in local livelihoods and culture.

The primary limitation of our research is that it focuses only on the perspectives of people in the host communities and does not explore the perspectives and values of tourists. Future research from the perspectives of the visitors will provide more insights on how to make tourism sustainable for all the actors in the tourism experience. We also encourage future research to explore the dynamics of tourism and traditional food systems in other countries where food sovereignty is recognized as a critical element of their legislation.

CHAPTER 3. Authentic Food or Biocultural Threat? Concerns About the Use Of Tilapia Fish In Food Tourism Along a Touristic Route in the Amazonia of Ecuador

Abstract

This article contributes to the discussion on how to develop food tourism in destinations characterized by a rich cultural and biological diversity. Specifically, it argues for a biocultural and Indigenous-led approach to developing tourism practices that commodify Indigenous cuisine. To support this argument, this study explores the use of tilapia fish (*Oreochromis niloticus*), considered by many to be an invasive species, in Indigenous food tourism in the Amazonia region of Ecuador. This qualitative research used semi-structured interviews, participant observations, workshops, and the analysis of restaurant menus to understand the concerns raised by locals about the promotion of an invasive species in food tourism in the region. The results highlight the factors motivating people to promote tilapia as an authentic food in the region, which contrast with the perceived impacts of this promotion among locals and the strategies that locals propose to mitigate the uncertainty of using this fish in the region. This case also offers an opportunity to revisit authenticity in Indigenous tourism and increase Indigenous peoples' agency in its definition. Here, a biocultural approach highlights the holistic, dynamic, and Indigenous-led nuances that understandings of authenticity must entail. Participants, in this case, redefine authenticity based on their values and goals rather than on the tourism markets' needs. We conclude by arguing that including a biocultural and Indigenous-led approach in the development

of Indigenous food tourism can enhance more sustainable and decolonized practices in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Biocultural diversity, Authenticity, Indigenous tourism, Indigenous foods, Food tourism, Tilapia fish

Introduction

Over a third of tourist spending worldwide is devoted to food (Quan & Wang, 2004) and the relationship between tourism and food is regularly identified as one of the most essential experiences tourists enjoy when visiting a destination. As such, so-called "food tourism" has emerged in recent years, a trend that Hall and Sharples (2003) define as visits to a destination for the specific purposes of experiencing food-related activities that allow visitors to interact with primary and secondary food producers. Demand is increasing for food tourism experiences that are perceived as being authentic, ethical, and sustainable (Ellis et al., 2018; United Nations-World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2019). This demand, in part, is behind the recent emergence of Indigenous food tourism¹¹, though many have expressed concerns that this new trend will drive a commodification of Indigenous food traditions, especially in settings with rich cultural and environmental diversity (de la Barre & Brouder, 2013; Grey & Newman, 2018; Sidali et al., 2016).

Although the inclusion of Indigenous foods in tourism is considered positive for Indigenous communities' economies, (Giampiccoli & Hayward, 2012; Hall & Sharples, 2003;

¹¹ Grey and Newman (2018) use the term gastronomic multiculturalism to analyze the commodification of Indigenous food traditions in the tourism industry.

Timothy & Ron, 2013; UNWTO, 2019), some authors have expressed concerns over the way Indigenous food tourism is developed (Grey & Newman, 2018; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Sidali et al., 2016). Some of these concerns are related to the pressures created by tourism that can interfere with the complex and nuanced relationships that Indigenous peoples have with their traditional foods and with their environment through these foods and traditions (Grey & Newman, 2018). Indigenous foods are simultaneously a symbol of Indigenous connection to the land, a practice, and a mode of both traditional knowledge transmission and decolonization (Cote, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Kuhnlein et al., 2009). Furthermore, as Grey and Newman (2018) argue, the development of Indigenous food tourism has the potential to undermine Indigenous peoples' rights over their lands and to self-determination. To address this complexity, several authors suggest the need to include holistic and Indigenous-led approaches in the development of Indigenous food tourism, especially in areas with high biodiversity and strong colonial legacies (e.g., Grey & Newman, 2018; Sidali et al., 2016).

This study explores this complex tension between tourism, Indigenous foods, and biocultural diversity in the Chakra Route, a tourism destination located in the Amazonia region of Ecuador. There, tilapia, an invasive fish species commonly used in aquaculture (Attayde et al., 2011; Silva et al., 2014), is currently being marketed as part of Indigenous cuisine in multiple restaurants and food-related businesses. Certainly, tilapia fish could easily pass as a sustainable food option on the menus as it is: (a) locally grown; (b) described as being part of the local Indigenous cuisine; (c) primarily cooked and served in a traditional manner using *bijao* leaves (*Calathea latifolia*), which reduces the use of single-use plastic in the area; and (d) is promoted as an affordable alternative to meat protein among low-income populations in the region. However, during the development of our broader research analyzing the impacts of tourism on

the food sovereignty of Indigenous people in the Chakra Route, locals frequently identified tilapia as a significant threat to their food sovereignty. Specifically, they expressed concern and uncertainty about the potential impacts of tilapia on local ecosystems and food traditions. Considering that peoples' awareness of the consequences of their food choices is considered crucial to their nutritional health (Engler-Stringer, 2010) and food sovereignty (Cidro et al., 2016; Wittman et al., 2011), we adjusted our study to explore this case in more detail and address our research participants' concerns and priorities.

Below, we present the results of our qualitative research exploring people's concerns regarding, and solutions to, the perceived tilapia problem. We apply a biocultural lens to this research, which focuses on linkages and interactions between biological and cultural diversity (Hanspach et al., 2019; Maffi, 2001; Nabhan, 2003; Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008). This holistic approach attends directly to the complexities of how tilapia is emerging as a contested and perhaps pseudo-traditional food in the contexts of food tourism. A biocultural lens also provides us with an opportunity to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in analysing the goals and impacts of tourism on their livelihoods and territories (Hanspach et al., 2019; Pimbert, 2018): for example, by allowing participants to unpack and revisit the complexities of authenticity in tourism. We conclude with a discussion of how a biocultural framing of authenticity in tourism would follow Grey and Newman's (2018) call to move Indigenous food tourism away from practices that undermine Indigenous peoples' rights and towards practices that are holistic and Indigenous-led.

Biocultural Diversity

Biocultural diversity is a theoretical framing of relationships among people and nature, one that recognizes the potential for biological and cultural diversity to be not only connected but

also mutually constitutive. Maffi (2001) defines biocultural diversity as "the diversity of life in all its manifestations: biological, cultural, and linguistic, which are interrelated (and possibly coevolved) within a complex socio-ecological adaptive system" (p. 269). This concept challenges environmentalist approaches that see humans separated from nature and that advocate for reducing human-nature interactions to preserve the environment. As such, biocultural diversity as an analytical approach offers new ways to understand the complex ways humans and their culture shape and are shaped by their environments (Hanspach et al., 2019; Nabhan, 2003; Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008). A crucial part of the preservation of biocultural diversity is linguistic diversity. This connection is derived from Harmon (1996), who performed a global cross-mapping of the distribution of biological and linguistic diversities and found significant geographic overlap between these two forms of diversities, especially in the tropics. Similar work was also done by Nabhan (2012), who, following the work of renowned botanist Nicolay Vavilov, found worldwide correlations among linguistic diversity, wild biodiversity, and agroecological diversity.

This paper applies a biocultural approach to understanding concerns and debates over tilapia, intending to highlight how tourism and the associated processes of commodification can intersect in complex ways with local initiatives for development and sovereignty. In the best of cases, local environments sustain Indigenous people, and in turn, Indigenous people sustain and steward the local environment through the traditional knowledge, values, and practices embedded in their cultures and languages (Loring et al., 2016). In contrast, legacies and ongoing impacts of colonialism have drastically impacted these deep systemic relations between people and place in nearly all regions of the world. Importantly, a biocultural approach recognizes that traditions, cultures, and relationships with the natural world are neither static nor fixed in the past but are

constantly dynamic and evolving through agency and learning (Berkes, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2019). This is especially important given that people's understandings of what constitutes “nature” and “natural” are rapidly evolving as they come to terms with the new realities of the Anthropocene (e.g., Harrison et al., 2019). Additionally, our use of a biocultural lens is matched with local people's agendas for promoting food sovereignty (Cote, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Grey & Newman, 2018; Pimbert, 2018; Wittman et al., 2010).

Authenticity in Indigenous Food Tourism

Authenticity is a topic that generates significant debate in cultural and Indigenous tourism studies (Cole, 2007; Croes et al., 2013; Paolisso, 2007; Theodossopoulos, 2013; Xie et al., 2012). Often, outsiders (e.g., tourists) define authenticity through a Western cultural lens that conflates authentic with premodern and inauthentic or "spoiled" with modern (Cole, 2007). Based on this assumption, debates about authenticity in tourism have primarily focused on what qualifies as authentic or not. Some authors have criticized this focus and propose to examine how authenticity in tourism is articulated, by whom, and for what purposes (Cole, 2007; Croes et al., 2013; Grey & Newman, 2018; Xie et al., 2012).

Critical scholars argue that adapting Indigenous peoples' culture to satisfy outsiders' expectations of an authentic tourism experience undermines Indigenous peoples' sovereignty and self-determination (Grey & Newman, 2018). Often, mainstream tourism marketing promotes a premodern image of authenticity as a feature (Cole, 2007). This premodern idea is fed by modernist and hence essentialist cultural interpretations, which perceive culture as static and bounded. According to Cole (2007), this idea can influence Indigenous people to reinterpret poverty and inequality as being authentic, which becomes a straitjacket for Indigenous communities trying to overcome these situations. In the specific case of Indigenous food tourism,

Grey and Newman (2018) argue that developing gastronomy experiences based on non-Indigenous actors' expectations does not support Indigenous peoples' food sovereignty because it is the continuation of the colonial process that diminishes Indigenous peoples' rights over their food systems.

Moreover, when Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledge are absent in the development of Indigenous food tourism, adverse environmental outcomes can result, as food ingredients become a staple in increasing production (Grey & Newman, 2018). Similar debates have also been central to research on commodification and authenticity in tourist art (e.g., Shiner, 1994). Using the nuances of a biocultural approach -particularly the recognition that authentic relationships among nature and culture are dynamic and ever-changing- this research aims to understand the outcomes of articulating authenticity in Indigenous food tourism both with and without the participation of Indigenous people.

Invasive Species and Biocultural Diversity

As noted, this paper specifically explores the marketing of tilapia, an introduced and invasive species, as an authentic ingredient to Indigenous cuisine in the Amazonia region of Ecuador. Introduced species, also referred to as “exotic” or “alien”, are animals, plants, or other organisms not native to a specific location that are introduced there, deliberately or accidentally, by human activity (International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2017). Although all invasive species are introduced, only a portion of introduced species become invasive (Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). Furthermore, how an introduced species' invasiveness is defined, and by whom, is itself a question of who has power in this definition (Stromberg et al., 2009; Harrison et al., 2019).

Invasive species can affect biological and cultural diversities and the connections between these two diversities (Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). From a biological standpoint, invasive species generally threaten native biodiversity. Indeed, the IUCN (2017) describes invasive species as one of the most significant causes of biodiversity loss. Invasive species are ecologically advantaged by several factors such as genetic adaptability, strong reproductive capacity, and lack of historically associated predators in their new habitats (Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). These factors enable them to displace and extirpate native species *in situ*, eventually changing community assemblages and altering ecosystem processes in aquatic and terrestrial habitats (Canónico et al., 2005; IUCN, 2017).

Unlike biological systems, where the effects of invasive species are primarily negative, several authors argue that invasive species' impacts on cultural systems span a range of effects (e.g., Hanley & Roberts, 2019; Nuñez et al., 2011; Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Some scientists have noted that the notion of invasive species is inherently normative and does not necessarily agree with the often negative treatment that invasive species tend to receive. For instance, Colautti and MacIsaac (2004) describe the difficulties with the invasive paradigm as follows:

Definitions of invasive [emphasis added] vary dramatically, describing both species with aesthetically displeasing effects ... and those that are vectors for serious human diseases... species may be considered a nuisance (or weedy, invasive, etc.) in areas where they have little or no impact simply because they were identified as a nuisance elsewhere.... Thus, the term 'invasive' has been used as a taxonomic description rather than to describe an ecological phenomenon. Finally, a particular species can have both beneficial and detrimental effects ... *The term* [emphasis added] may have

more to do with human perception than with any inherent ecological characteristics (p. 136).

Likewise, Stromberg et al. (2009), in talking about invasive salt-cedar in the U.S. Southwest, show how the invasive categorization of species introduces a bias that can undermine scientists' ability to interpret or provide quality control for research on an invasive species' actual ecological impact. Overall, research suggests that the normative and subjective perceptions of the impacts of invasive species require a deep understanding of the cultural context of these impacts (Colautti & MacIsaac, 2004; Hanley & Roberts, 2019; Nuñez et al., 2011; Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). This understanding could lead to more holistic and effective ways to manage biological invasions and their impact on people's livelihoods.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative, in-depth case study approach. Yin (2009) recommends a case study approach when the goal of the research is to understand real-life phenomena and the contextual conditions that make this phenomenon unique, meaningful, or otherwise significant. The case for this study is the promotion of tilapia fish in local cuisine and food tourism along the Chakra Route, a tourism destination in the upper basin of the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador. This route features Indigenous food-related experiences and nature-based tourism as the main attractions. The tourism promotion of an alien species in Amazonia, an area identified as hotspot of biocultural diversity (Loh & Harmon, 2005), is a case which can offer a window into otherwise unexplored phenomena in the intersection between food tourism and biocultural diversity (Yin, 2009). The primary objective of this article is to demonstrate the need to include a biocultural approach in the development of Indigenous food tourism. We use this approach in the analysis of the abovementioned case study. To understand 'locals' concerns, complex

relationships, and possible ways to make more sustainable the development of Indigenous food tourism in the area, we use the three following questions to guide our research:

- How has tilapia fish become an iconic ingredient in the local cuisine and food tourism in the Chakra Route?
- How do locals perceive the impacts of using tilapia fish as part of Indigenous food tourism on this route?
- What solutions do locals propose to address the concerns and uncertainty created by using tilapia fish in Indigenous food tourism?

Chakra Route

The Chakra Route project started in 2010 when several government agencies, non-governmental organization (NGOs), and Indigenous organizations gathered to diversify the local economy and improve the quality of life of Indigenous people and small-scale farmers in the region. This route promotes food tourism-related activities that highlight the biodiversity of the area and the culture of Kichwa Napo Runa people (hereafter Kichwa people). They are the largest Indigenous group in the Amazonia region of Ecuador. The name *chakra* comes from the most iconic element of their food systems, chakra gardens, which is a traditional agroforestry system that Kichwa people have used for centuries (Perreault, 2005). Growing food in their chakra gardens and catching wild fish are the primary strategies for food subsistence among Kichwa people (Perreault, 2005; Torres et al., 2018; Uzendoski, 2005).

The relationship that Kichwa people have developed with the Amazon rainforest has been the focus of much research (Coq-huelva et al., 2017; Houck et al., 2013; Perreault, 2005; Santafe-Troncoso & Loring, 2020; Torres et al., 2018). Some authors have found that Kichwa people have ancestrally developed livelihood strategies that have a much lower environmental impact

than the livelihoods of non-Kichwa people living in the Amazonian region (Coq-huelva et al., 2017; Torres et al., 2018). Although the abundance of biodiversity is considered a critical factor in Kichwa people's livelihoods, some authors argue that Kichwa people's traditional ecological knowledge is also a factor that allows them to use this abundance for their subsistence in a sustainable way (Perreault, 2005; Coq-Huelva et al., 2017; Uzendoski, 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that the maintenance of cultural values around food systems is how the Kichwa people have maintained resilience to challenges like economic crises (Perreault, 2005) and changing environmental conditions (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017; Torres et al., 2018).

Nile Tilapia

The common name “tilapia” refers to a group of tropical freshwater fish of the family *Cichlidae* that are native to Africa and the south-western Middle East. Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) is the most common tilapia species in Ecuador and other countries in Amazonia. Since 1930, tilapia fish have been introduced in most tropical and subtropical regions of the world to improve inland fisheries and aquaculture (Canonico et al., 2005). To date, tilapia, after carp, have been the second most widely farmed fish in the world (Wang & Lu, 2016). The popularity of tilapia in aquaculture comes from the species’ fast-growing rates, high-yield source of protein, affordability, and easy adaptation to a range of environments, from subsistence or “backyard” units to intensive fish hatcheries (Canonico et al., 2005).

Although tilapia fish farming has multiple benefits in many contexts around the world, particularly from a food security perspective (Bickerton, 2017; Fitzsimmons et al., 2011), several studies reported negative environmental impacts from the introduction of tilapia, whether deliberately or accidentally, into sensitive ecosystems. For instance, Silva et al. (2014) have reported that an invasion of tilapia fish was negatively affecting the populations of native

Cichlidae species from the hydrographic basin of the Igarapé Fortaleza, a tributary of the Amazonas River. Furthermore, the cultural impacts of the introduction of tilapia fish into the diets of societies that have shaped their food traditions based on native fish species are still unknown.

According to Erazo (2013), tilapia was introduced in the diets of people living in the Amazonia region of Ecuador around 1970 as part of food security projects. People use it as a protein source in their meals. *Tilapia maitos* is the most popular way that tilapia is presented in the menus of local restaurants. Maito or maitu is a traditional way of cooking in Kichwa cuisine that consists of preparing meals wrapped in *bijao* (*Calathea lutea*) leaves that are cooked over a grill. Wild fish, game meat, palm-tree caterpillars, and other vegetables collected from their chakras gardens are the primary ingredients that Kichwa people use for making maitos.

Methods

Data for this study were obtained by conducting 21 semi-structured interviews, recording participant observations, facilitating one workshop with 14 participants, and analyzing the menus of 20 restaurants along the Chakra Route. Author 1 collected these data in the field during two trips to the area in the Summer of 2018 and the Spring of 2019. Spanish was the primary language of communication between Author 1 and the participants. In total, 35 participants collaborated in this research, including community-based tourism organizations, policymakers, restaurant owners, local chefs, NGO officers, and academics. Twenty participants were female, and the rest were male; 20 self-identified as Kichwa (the term “Kichwa” here, refers to people who identify themselves as Kichwas, Amazonian Kichwas, or Napo Runas) and 15 as non-Kichwa. Among non-Kichwa participants, 12 self-identified as mestizos, and three as foreigners.

The term *mestizo* in Latin American society describes a mixed ethnicity of both Spanish and Indigenous descent.

Purposive recruitment of participants was done with a local research coordinator: we first identified key informants and then asked each interviewee for additional suggestions for whom to contact. The goal was to foreground cultural diversity and pursue a meaningfully collaborative research approach; thus, Author 1 engaged Kichwa community leaders in conversations to identify key participants, the ideal locales in which to hold the workshop and interviews, and the most appropriate activities to be incorporated in the workshop. These workshop activities included talking circles, participation in rituals such as face painting, and sharing traditional Kichwa foods during all conversations.

In addition to interviews, Author 1 collected 20 restaurant menus from establishments along the route, to be analysed for content, focusing specifically on how tilapia is prepared and presented.

Collected data were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis and the NVIVO program (version 12). To answer the research questions, Author 1 coded transcripts inductively and identified the key themes that arose from participants' answers. Inductive thematic analysis followed the procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), whereby codes are first generated from the text and then organized into emergent themes. Emergent themes were discussed with participants and Author 2, who also performed code-checking. Both authors discussed and refined the codes and coding scheme as it developed.

Results

This section presents the factors behind the promotion of tilapia fish in the local cuisine and food tourism in the studied area, the locals' perceptions of the impacts of this promotion, and their proposals to mitigate the impacts of promoting tilapia fish in the local food tourism.

How Has Tilapia Fish Become an Iconic Ingredient in the Local Cuisine and Food Tourism in the Chakra Route?

The analysis of the menus of 20 restaurants in the Chakra Route showed that tilapia is indeed being widely sold and marketed as an iconic ingredient and component of traditional Kichwa cuisine (See Figure 3.1).

Figure 3. 1

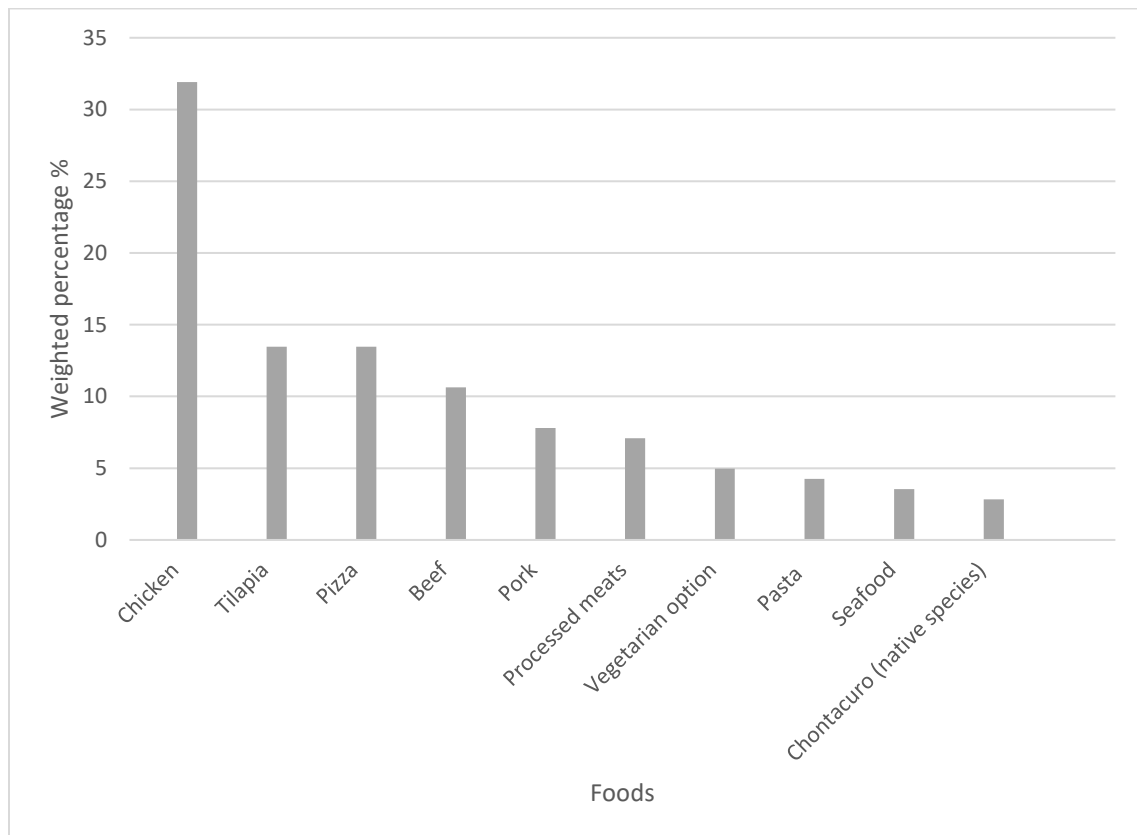
A typical Restaurant Menu in the Chakra Route.



Tilapia fish was explicitly identified on the menus of 11 of the 20 restaurants, in many cases, it was the most popular ingredient on the menu. Based on word frequency, tilapia follows only chicken as the most commonly occurring ingredient in these 11 restaurants (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3. 2

The Most Common Foods in the Restaurant Menus of the Chakra Route.



Note. The most common words (food ingredients) identified using a word frequency count query in NVIVO (Version 12).

When asked about how tilapia had become so ubiquitous in the local food system, people generally responded with one or more of three categories of answers: availability, accessibility, and preference for this fish by non-Kichwa consumers.

Availability. Restaurant owners on the Chakra Route were asked why they use tilapia fish when featuring Indigenous and local cuisine in their menus instead of using native fish species. They all explained that tilapia fish was the most available fish and overall meat protein in the local markets. One of the participants commented that the high presence of tilapia in the menus was because it can be produced locally and does not require significant investments or technical skills from the producers (NGO04, Female, Mestizo, April 29, 2019). One of the participants highlighted that tilapia fish was usually a fresher option than other meat sources, which are transported long distances before becoming accessible in the local market (Restaurant03, Female, Mestizo, April 25, 2019). Other participants also highlighted that tilapia fish adapts better and grows faster than native fish (Policymaker09, Male, Mestizo, April 24, 2019). Overall, tilapia fish is widely available for purchase everywhere, from the farmers' markets and supermarkets to convenience stores and houses' backyards (See Figure 3.3). It is noteworthy that several other participants argued that the high availability of tilapia in the area relates to the low availability of native fish because tilapia is becoming invasive in the natural water sources where native fish used to reproduce (a matter that is analysed below).

Figure 3. 3

Tilapia Shop in El Tena.



Note. Photo Credit: Veronica Santafe (Spring 2019).

Affordability. The second reason that many interviewees offered to justify the high presence of tilapia fish was related to its affordability. One of the participants explained that tilapia fish was generally more affordable than other meat sources in the local markets (Restaurant01, Male, Kichwa, August 16, 2018). During the visit to one of the farmers' markets in El Tena, Author 1 found that a pound of tilapia in the markets cost roughly 3.00 dollars per pound, while ocean fish was upwards of 6.00 dollars per pound.

Preference Among Non-Kichwa Consumers. The third explanation offered by several participants was that it was a preferred option among non-Kichwa consumers. They explained that many non-Kichwa people (i.e. tourists and locals) find tilapia fish easier to prepare and eat than the native fish species. One of the interviewed chefs explained:

Tilapia fish makes life easier for us [chefs] and the consumers.... I think the big issue with native fish is how difficult it is to make filets with them. They have too many bones. In the local market, tilapia is the only fish that does not have that many bones, and that is why we prefer to use them (Chefteacher08, Female, Mestizo, July 30, 2018).

Additionally, several participants noted that settler mestizos, especially those that moved from the coast of Ecuador to the Amazonia, demand tilapia because eating fish is part of their culture. However, they struggle to eat native fish because of the number of bones in it. Kichwa people were asked why the amount of bones in the native fish does not concern them. One of the participants answered that the reason was that eating native fish is part of the Kichwa culture:

If you are complaining about how difficult it is to eat native fish, it might be that you are not a Kichwa. My grandkids know how to eat native fish. They never get a bone stuck in their throats. We eat together. The adults show the little ones how to eat the fish. We teach them that eating fish needs patience and put all the senses in this act; otherwise, you can get hurt (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).

Overall, participants found that eating native fish requires certain degree of cooking and eating skills that Kichwa people were more experienced in.

How Do Locals Perceive the Impacts of Using Tilapia Fish as Part of Indigenous Food

Tourism in this Route?

When asked about the perceived impacts of tilapia, six of the 21 interview participants commented that they do not perceive or are not aware of any negative impacts, while the other 15

identified environmental, cultural, and human health impacts. Table 3.1 summarizes the perceptions of all the 21 interviewees.

Table 3. 1

Locals' Perception of the Impacts

Perceptions of impacts	Summary	Number of Respondents	Stakeholder types expressing this concern	Example Quote
Positive / Neutral	Tilapia facilitates the promotion of Kichwa cuisine in tourism	6	Restaurant/ Kichwa (1)	"If you visit Napo, you have to try authentic food such as the tilapia maito" (Restaurant03, Female, Mestizo, April 25, 2019).
			Restaurant/ Mestizo (2)	
			Polycymaker/Mestizo (1)	"I know that tilapia is not native to the region, but tilapia is the perfect alternative to wild fish when we want to prepare native dishes" (Chefteacher08, Female, Mestizo, July 30, 2018).
			Culinary school/Mestizo (2)	
	Scepticism about invasiveness	3	Restaurant/ Kichwa (1)	"I do not know any scientific study showing that tilapia is bad for the environment. Contrarily, I think that tilapia could help to protect the environment because it discourages native people from getting wildlife meat from the rainforest" (Polycymaker, Male, Mestizo, April 04, 2019).
			Restaurant/ Mestizo (1)	
			Polycymaker/Mestizo (1)	
Negative	Biodiversity loss	15	Academia/Mestizo (1)	"Tilapia fish has become a real problem for our rivers and native fish" (Polycymaker02, Male, Mestizo, August 13, 2018).
			CBT/Kichwa (4)	
			Restaurant/Kichwa (1)	"We used to believe that our native fish was being vanished from the rivers due to water contamination. However, now we think that tilapia fish is a big problem too. When we go fishing, we catch more tilapias in the river than our native fish. I think tilapias eat native fish in the river." (CBT05, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018)
			Restaurant/ Mestizo (1)	
			Polycymaker/Mestizo (3)	
Polycymaker/Kichwa (1)				
NGO/Mestizo (3)				
NGO/ Foreigner (1)				

The decline of traditional practices	6	CBT/Kichwa (4) Restaurant/Kichwa (1) Policymaker/Kichwa (1)	"Kichwas do not want to go fishing in the river anymore; they prefer to grow tilapias in their backyards instead" (CBT09, Male, Kichwa, April 23, 2019). "Kichwas that prefer to buy tilapias from the store will forget their connection to the river" (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).
Human health	5	CBT/Kichwa (4) Policymaker/Kichwa (1)	"I think the way how tilapias are grown is not good for human health. People grow tilapia like chickens, thousands of them in a tiny place. We do not know how they feed them. I have seen on the internet that growing animals in that way is not good for our health." (CBT05, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018)

Note. CBT= Community-based tourism; NGO = non-governmental organization

Six of the respondents, including three restaurateurs, two culinary school chefs, and one policymaker, identified the benefits of promoting tilapia in food tourism. Specifically, they noted that tilapia fish facilitates the promotion of Kichwa cuisine in tourism. A restaurant owner explained that thanks to the high availability of tilapia fish in the market, he can offer the traditional fish maito, which is often requested by tourists. He further explained that using tilapia fish instead of native fish makes it easier for tourists to taste Kichwa cuisine because it does not have too many bones, in contrast to the native ones (Restaurant01, Male, Kichwa, August 16, 2018). Three participants were also sceptical about possible ecological impacts, explaining that they were unaware of any scientific study confirming the adverse effects of tilapia fish in the area. All but one was non-Kichwa and worked in the tourism industry or as policymakers who support the tourism industry.

Among the 15 participants that identified negative impacts, their primary arguments

related to the loss of the native fish biodiversity, effects on the food-related traditions of Kichwa people, and concerns about human health. Native fish biodiversity loss was raised by all 15 participants, who used such terms as “invasive”, “plague”, and “destructive” when describing the presence of tilapia fish in the region. One of the participants described his perception of the environmental impacts of tilapia as follows:

Tilapia fish has become a real problem for our rivers and native fish. Tilapia fish is a non-native fish in the region, and it is also invasive. If you go to the Tena riverbanks, you will see lots of tilapia fishponds. When the rainy season comes, all these ponds flood, and the tilapias escape to the nearby rivers. Once there, tilapia fish destroy the native fish habitat, and they also eat the eggs of the native fish... I am concerned because I see more and more people that start tilapia farms in very sensitive areas in the Amazon rainforest (Policymaker02, Male, Mestizo, August 13, 2018)

Several participants argued that consuming tilapia is harmful to the environment because of the context in which this promotion takes place, Amazonia, which is one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. Although these participants recognized that other factors such as contamination from extractive industries operations are also damaging Amazonia, they still thought that tilapia was causing significant damage.

While both Kichwa and non-Kichwa raised environmental concerns, only Kichwa participants found culture and human health to be a source of concern. Six Kichwa participants, for example, argued that tilapia fish consumption and promotion in tourism was affecting certain areas of the food-related traditions of Kichwa people. One of the participants disagreed with the idea of featuring tilapia fish in Kichwa cuisine because he thought that a dish prepared with

tilapia was not as "authentic" as a dish made with native fish or wild game meat (CBT09, Male, Kichwa, April 23, 2019). This participant's perspective is in contrast with the abovementioned opinions that argue the use of tilapia could facilitate the promotion of Kichwa cuisine because the fish is more available and easier to consume for non-Kichwa people.

Besides authenticity, other Kichwa participants argued that tilapia fish affects the sense of community and the relationship that Kichwa people have with their land. One of the participants commented that before the tilapia boom in the region, the situation was different concerning how Kichwa people obtained their fish:

When I was little, my mom used to bring me with her to the river. After a heavy rain, all the community used to go to the river to catch carachamas, nachi, ishingos, shikitu [wild fish] because the river for sure will have lots of fish. My mom taught me how to make my shigra [a woven net] for fishing. She also taught me how to sing and pray to the spirit of the river.... I learned to be grateful for the spirit because if you just take the fish without saying thanks to him, he will get mad. People say that when he gets mad, he becomes an anaconda and will capture them.... My mom also taught me that I must share the fish with my Elders and other people in the community.... Now everything is changing; Kichwas are becoming more individualist. They do not want to go to the river anymore because they said they do not have time, or because it is easier for them to buy tilapia fish from the store (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).

Regarding human health, five of the participants argued that tilapia fish grown in ponds are not suitable for human health. All these participants were Kichwa. They argued that the fish

food used in these ponds is not good for the fish and the people that eat its meat. To explain their reasons, they compared tilapia with chickens grown on farms. They said that farmed chickens or fish are raised with food that is harmful to animals and humans. One of the participants described her concerns over the impact of tilapia fish consumption for human health as follows:

In the tilapia farms, they use food to make tilapias grow faster and bigger like the food used in chicken farms. My mom and aunties got diagnosed with high blood pressure and cholesterol, and they think it is because they used to eat a lot of tilapia fish. We realized that the meat of tilapias that we buy from the store is full of fat. So, we decided not to eat tilapia anymore. Instead, we are growing free-range chicken in our chakra garden. Eating these chickens is better and healthier for us because we feed them with organic leaves and grains (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018).

Notably, while all raised these environmental concerns, many did so with some uncertainty, using phrasings such as "I am not sure.". Overall, uncertainty was commonly expressed by both groups of participants that either did or did not support tilapia as part of the local cuisine. Though there is not a sufficient sample size to generalize, this research identified that perceptions about tilapia seemed to vary along cultural lines. Those who supported the use of tilapia were mostly-non Kichwa. Among the participants concerned with the consumption of tilapia, non-Kichwa people identified negative environmental impacts only, while Kichwa people identified impacts on their environment, culture, and health.

What Solutions Do Locals Propose to Address the Concerns and Uncertainty Created by Using Tilapia Fish in Indigenous Food Tourism?

Many respondents had ideas for addressing concerns and challenges created by the extensive reliance on tilapia in tourism. Interestingly, many did not merely suggest getting rid of tilapia fish from the menus; instead, they proposed innovative solutions. They suggested strategies that they believed were more pragmatic to answer tourist demands and promote cultural and natural conservation.

Restoring native fish species. Actively restoring native species, for example, was encouraged by several of the participants, both Kichwa and non-Kichwa. Some conservationist projects in the area are promoting the restoration of native fish such as *cachama* (*Colossoma macropomum*) and *bocachico* (*Prochilodus reticulatus*) in artificial ponds. These projects aim to restore the fish biodiversity while creating incomes for Kichwa families, who are the primary participants in this project. According to one of the Kichwa participants, restoring native fish in ponds is also an opportunity for Kichwa people to restore traditional knowledge about native fish and return them to local menus (CBT08, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018). An NGO officer likewise explained that Indigenous-owned tourism businesses are often the most enthusiastic participants in native fish restoration projects because they include native fish tasting and fishing as part of their tourism services (NGO04, Female, Mestizo, April 29, 2019). One of these initiatives is led by Sinchi Warmi Lodge, a community-based tourism project in the area. This lodge offers an educational tour for tourists that want to know more about native fish. The lodge also has a fishpond where tourists can catch some cachama fish for their meals.

Some of the participants pointed out that economic factors could be an issue in the success of native species restoration because tilapia grows faster than native fish and provides a greater yield, which makes it more profitable. For this reason, participants suggested finding a way to raise the profile of native fish so that tourists would be willing to pay more. During the

workshop, a group of Kichwa participants created a menu using native fish (See Figure 3.4). They priced this menu at 15 U.S. dollars, which is two times more expensive than a menu using tilapia. One of the members of this group argued that this price is fair because this menu is unique and made with organic products (CBT09, Male, Kichwa, April 23, 2019).

Figure 3. 4

Native Fish in a Menu



Note. Menu created by participants during a workshop/English translation

Improving Tilapia Fish Farming. Some of the participants also explained that replacing tilapia fish with native fish outright would be difficult, both because of the economic factor and because tilapia is quickly becoming part of the food culture in the area. These participants instead suggested efforts to improve farming methods as well as the nutrition of the fish. One participant, for example, shared a strategy used in her community, where people were avoiding building tilapia ponds in low-lying areas to reduce the possibility of tilapias escaping during the rainy

season. She also explained that her family members were feeding tilapias with cassava and other vegetables from their chakras to improve the quality of the meat and reduce human health concerns (CBT05, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).

Innovating the Menus. Kichwa participants from community-based tourism businesses highlighted that increasing demand for plant-based menus reduces the dependence on tilapia fish. During the interviews, more than one participant suggested that vegan maitos could be more sustainable and authentic than tilapia maitos. They said that exploring plant-based alternatives had encouraged them to restore their traditional ways of producing and cooking food. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that in her community, youth are asking elders to teach them how to collect and prepare wild ingredients, such as mushrooms (CBT05, Female, Kichwa, July 29, 2018).

During the workshop, a group created a plant-based menu, which includes several ingredients that are native to Amazonia (See Figure 3.5). The members of this group wrote at the end of their menu, "Come and enjoy our sustainable and organic cuisine". According to one of the members of this group, this phrase demonstrates the group's goal to promote food that is sustainable for the environment and respectful to the group's culture (CBT03, Female, Kichwa, August 04, 2018).

Figure 3. 5

Vegetarian Menu



Vegetarian Menu Price: \$8

Entrée
White cacao (*Theobroma bicolor*) with piton (*Talisia esculenta*) sauce

Main dish
Deep fried mushrooms covered with basil sauce.
Chakra salad: piton, papaya, green beans, and achojcha (*Cyclanthera pedata*)

Dessert
Morete (*Mauritia flexuosa*) covered with chocolate

Beverage
Chucula (Banana drink with cinnamon).

"Come and enjoy our sustainable and organic cuisine"

Note. Menu created during a workshop / English translation

Improve Communication Among Actors. Improving the interaction between individuals engaged in food tourism in the area was also identified by several of the participants as a critical strategy for preventing adverse impacts of tilapia. Moreover, Kichwa traditional knowledge was featured as a foundation in this communication strategy. The director of an NGO, who works in sustainable farming, argued that non-Kichwa settlers looking to start a fish farming project must talk and learn from Kichwa people, who have lived in the area for centuries (NGO06, Male, Foreigner, April 24, 2019). However, a policymaker noted concern along these same lines that communication between Kichwa and non-Kichwa people is complicated because of the colonial legacy of discrimination that reduces Kichwa people's agency in developing tourism in this region (Policymaker01, Female, Kichwa, August 09, 2018). To that end, using

cross-cultural communication to bridge ways of knowing was another strategy mentioned by participants who were chefs, researchers, and policymakers. Several argued that scientists researching topics related to fish conservation in this region should provide their results in a way that is accessible for everybody involved and helps them make decisions. One of the most suggested collaborations by the participants was the one between biologists and chefs. One of the chefs said that "it will be great that a scientific study reveals the real impacts of tilapia in the area because so far we only have uncertainty but not facts" (Chefteacher04, Male, Mestizo, August 21, 2018).

Discussion

This study emerged as a response to concerns and uncertainty raised by locals about promoting an alien and invasive species on food tourism in Amazonia of Ecuador. This study explored these concerns and described a case to argue the need for a biocultural and Indigenous-led approach in the development of Indigenous food tourism. Furthermore, this case study also showed alternative ways of articulating authenticity in food tourism to empower Indigenous people in the management of their food systems and tourism entrepreneurship.

Tilapia is undoubtedly a significant aspect of cuisine along the Chakra Route, second only to chicken as the principal source of protein for main dishes. Unlike chicken, however, which was introduced to South America by Polynesian visitors during pre-Columbian times (Storey et al., 2007), tilapia is a modern introduction that presents legitimate ecological risks to the region. By applying a biocultural approach, this study unwrapped the varied and often contradictory perceptions that people along the Chakra Route had concerning the use of tilapia in local food tourism. Participants commented that tilapia fish were negatively affecting local cultural (e.g., traditional foodways), and biological diversity (e.g., as an invasive species). Some participants

were also concerned with nutritional impacts of consuming this fish. However, people also identified an opportunity for tilapia to coexist with traditional culture and native biodiversity. The key to this balance, in their minds, appears to be another central aspect of biocultural diversity — traditional knowledge (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Sidali et al., 2016; Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008).

Kichwa participants often used their traditional knowledge to argue for the negative impacts of the consumption of tilapia that they perceive and to support their proposals to minimize these impacts. These actions can be interpreted as instances of Kichwa people exercising their food sovereignty right concerning their food choices (Cidro et al., 2016; Cote, 2016; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Newman, 2018). Furthermore, Kichwa people's level of awareness of the impacts that their food choices can bring to their cultures and environment can also be a step forward nutritional health and food security (Engler -Stringer, 2010).

Kichwa people also used their traditional knowledge to inform the goals and values that they expect in the development of Indigenous food tourism in their territories. Among these values, authenticity became the most discussed one. Our findings contribute to critical approaches to authenticity in Indigenous tourism and food tourism that call to revisit the concept and focus on how authenticity is articulated, by whom, and for what purposes (Cole, 2007; Croes et al., 2013; Theodossopoulos, 2013). Some participants, especially non-Kichwa, argued that the tourism demand for authentic dishes motivated chefs in the area to create menus that mimic Kichwa dishes, such as fish maitos (which often include native fish). However, the low availability of native fish and the lack of experience in preparing and eating native fish led non-Kichwa chefs to use tilapia fish, which is considered more accessible and easier to consume.

From the non-Kichwa participants' perspective, tilapia fish is positive for Kichwa cuisine because it facilitates the preparation and consumption of Kichwa dishes. Several Kichwa participants disagreed with this idea. They argued that tilapia maitos could not be considered an authentic Kichwa dish or positive for their culture because it does not include native fish. Indeed, some of the Kichwa participants argued that the invasion of tilapia fish in the local ecosystems diminishes their possibilities of practicing cultural traditions associated with catching and consuming native fish from the rivers. Kichwa people proposed an alternative approach to authenticity and management of the impact of invasive species in the region. They proposed combining traditional knowledge and innovation in their proposals for plant-based menus, improved tilapia farming, and restoring native fish. In Chesapeake Bay, Paolisso (2007) observed similar dynamics in how authenticity in food tourism is revisited and articulated according to the needs of the market and the availability of food resources. Although this case showed that authenticity in tourism is socially constructed and therefore negotiable, when Indigenous traditions are included in tourism experiences, Indigenous people should be the ones informing this development.

The application of a biocultural approach to this case also contributes to recognizing dynamism, adaptability, and creativity in Indigenous peoples' knowledge rooted in their relationships to local biological diversity (Loring and Gerlach, 2010; Rodriguez & Davidson-Hunt, 2018). Loring and Gerlach (2010) argue, for example, that traditional and customary practices are not restricted to those in the past but are more characterized by flexibility and adaptation guided by traditional values. Based on resilience thinking, Rodriguez and Davidson-Hunt (2018) argue that richness in bioculturally diverse environments does not only depend on the number of species in a region; richness can also be connected to the ways that Indigenous people use what is available to them in their territory (Rodriguez & Davidson-Hunt, 2018).

Therefore, innovative proposals to mitigate the risk of consuming tilapia can be understood as an instance of Kichwa people's strategies to respond in creative and culturally informed manners to disruptions within their environment, instead of an instance of losing their traditions.

Although the tourism industry was not directly responsible for introducing the invasive tilapia into the studied area, it supports the species' invasion by promoting its consumption among tourists. From a biocultural perspective, this promotion could become problematic because it supports a market for an invasive species in an area with high biocultural diversity. Some authors argue that promoting invasive species as an economic resource could motivate locals to protect these species; this protection could interfere with actions aiming to control the expansion of invasive species and mitigate their impacts (Hanley & Roberts, 2019; Nuñez et al., 2011; Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). Therefore, if food tourism entrepreneurs aim to contribute to the wellbeing of Indigenous people and their land, they need to observe the multidimensional outcomes of development and include Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledge in this development.

Finally, this research shows that using a biocultural perspective in Indigenous food tourism is an opportunity to reconnect not only people and the environment but also people to other people. Promoting spaces that bring people together around food, which is a topic that matters to everybody, is an opportunity for reconciliation (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). These spaces are particularly needed in multicultural contexts, where colonial legacies of marginalization and discrimination against Indigenous people reduce the opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together (Mohammed et al., 2018; Walker, 2013). Following Grey and Newman (2018), Indigenous food tourism aiming to contribute to Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination needs to promote solidarity and empathy

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In this case, several participants remarked on the lack of communication among actors as a critical factor influencing the uncertainty in using tilapia in food tourism in the studied area. According to these participants, this lack of communication occurs among people from different cultural backgrounds (i.e., Kichwa and non-Kichwa people) and professionals from different disciplines (e.g., chefs and biologists). Valuing and using Kichwa people's knowledge to inform Indigenous food tourism in the region seems to be an opportunity to empower Kichwa people and upgrade their role in the development of the region. When planning in multicultural contexts, several authors argue that including Indigenous knowledge and promoting collaborative actions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are crucial to develop more sustainable and just communities (Mohammed et al., 2018; Patrick et al., 2019; Walker, 2013). Therefore, we were pleased to learn that some of the locals' ideas for minimizing the risk and uncertainty in food tourism included holistic and collaborative initiatives. These initiatives recognize the links between cultural and biological diversity (restoring native fish species), highlight adaptive strategies that care for the wellbeing of people and their environment (improving tilapia fish farming), and propose innovative ways to perceive authenticity in food tourism (plant-based menus using local ingredients).

Conclusion

By including tilapia fish in the promotion of Indigenous cuisine, the question arises of whether the tourism industry is promoting an authentic food or a biocultural threat in the Amazonia region of Ecuador? After exploring the dynamics of this case, the answer to this question is that tourism in its attempts to promote authentic Indigenous foods, is promoting a threat to both biological diversity and the cultural values associated with this diversity. Previous research showed that tilapia fish is threatening the biological diversity in the Amazonia rivers

(Attayde et al., 2011; Silva et al., 2014). Following Maffi (2001), a biocultural approach informs that these negative impacts will affect the livelihoods of people that depend on this biological diversity, in this case, Kichwa people. Therefore, this case is a clear demonstration that the development of food tourism in areas characterized by high cultural and biological diversity requires a holistic and Indigenous-led approach. Using such an approach is not only positive for Kichwa peoples' food sovereignty and self-determination; it is also positive for the competitiveness of the tourism industry in the region. If the tourism industry continues to use Indigenous peoples' land and cultures without considering the interconnections between people and their environments and while neglecting Indigenous peoples' participation, it will undermine the sustainability of tourism in the long term.

CHAPTER 4. Reflexivity in Collaborative Research with Indigenous People: A Journey

Inspired by Food Sovereignty and *Diálogo de Saberes*

Abstract

In this article, I explore the important role that a researcher's reflexivity plays in collaborative research with Indigenous people. I argue that constant and systematic reflexivity influences the researcher's awareness of the power dynamics shaping the research process and creates opportunities to improve these dynamics. To support these arguments, I draw from my experience of doing collaborative work with Kichwa people in Ecuador while exploring the impacts of tourism in their food sovereignty. I examine the practice of my reflexivity in two aspects of my work: 1) research journaling to keep track of my perceptions of the space, relationships, and own practice in the research process; and, 2) use of this journal's content to develop a reflexive analysis of how my research practice contributes to food sovereignty calls for democratizing knowledge and promoting diálogo de saberes (dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing). Overall, my experiences suggest that food sovereignty is a useful, ethical framing that can increase participants' agency and researchers' reflexivity in collaborative research for three reasons: it focuses on research topics that matter for Indigenous people, it increases the centrality of their voices in research outcomes, and it facilitates an equal relationship between Indigenous participants and researchers. Moreover, this paper contributes to the growing literature on practices implementing food sovereignty in different fields and contexts.

Keywords: researcher reflexivity, Indigenous agency, food sovereignty, collaborative research, reflexive journaling, Indigenous tourism

Introduction

In this chapter, I recount my experiences pursuing reflexivity as a core component of my research methodology and discuss how this pursuit is an opportunity to increase the agency of my research partners. Agency refers to agents (individuals or communities) who have a voice on the issues that affect their lives and who exercise their ability and freedom to affect their circumstances (Petray, 2012; Sen, 1999). Specifically, I recount my work exploring local perceptions and understandings of food sovereignty as it intersects with Indigenous tourism along the Chakra Route of Napo, Ecuador. My project was designed to be collaborative in nature and, as such, I built in many practices to the research plan and methodology that sought to enable local Kichwa partners to influence the work's direction. Below, I provide both personal reflections and a content analysis of data from my research journal and use them to explore how constant attention to reflexivity and a “diálogo de saberes” approach to knowledge co-creation can be effective for elevating agency in research affecting the lives and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Tourism Research and Indigenous Peoples' Agency

This research is relevant as Indigenous peoples worldwide face many limits to their agency because of colonialism, violence, and poverty, which is especially true in the area of tourism (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Petray, 2012; Smith, 2012). Historically, Indigenous peoples have been passive actors in tourism development, which has instead been driven by outsiders with little to no regard for Indigenous peoples' needs, values, and concerns (Johnston, 2006; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012). Even in cases where tourism is touted and implemented as a strategy

for community and economic development, this work has primarily been designed and implemented by outsiders with little input from local Indigenous people (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Williams & Gonzalez, 2017).

The concept of Indigenous tourism has emerged as a strategy to give Indigenous people more control in the tourism industry. Butler and Hinch (2007) define it as "tourism activities in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction" (p. 5). Although Indigenous tourism has provided possibilities for more active roles for Indigenous people in the tourism industry, their voices and knowledge are still invisible in the academic research of Indigenous tourism. Indeed, Indigenous peoples' roles in Indigenous tourism research (or lack thereof) has become one of the most commented topics in this field of studies (Carr et al., 2016; Koster et al., 2012; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016).

The invisible or passive role that Indigenous people play in Indigenous tourism research has implications depending on who leads the research; and is also connected to decisions made on the topics, methods, and sharing of results (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Research on Indigenous tourism has largely focused on the priorities of the tourism market and development agents (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Likewise, the language and frameworks guiding this research have been in terms of these actors and not Indigenous people. For instance, Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) emphasize that Indigenous peoples' perspectives on competitiveness or sustainability in tourism have been neglected. Likewise, concerning methodological approaches, they point out that Indigenous tourism research has been largely driven by positivist and quantitative approaches, which tend to minimize both researchers' and participants' voices (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). The result, in effect, is the erasure of the

voices, priorities, and agency of Indigenous peoples, and Nielsen and Wilson (2012) further this conclusion as Indigenous tourism research has been largely produced for the consumption of non-Indigenous academics and government or policy audiences. Likewise, Santafe et al. (2019) report that research on Indigenous tourism in Latin America is often inaccessible to Indigenous people and local leaders due to language and journal subscription barriers.

Following several contributions that have applied the concept of agency in tourism development studies (e.g., Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013; Kubickova et al., 2017), I propose here that agency can be an important framing device for facilitating more active and visible roles taken up by Indigenous peoples in Indigenous tourism research. According to Giddens (1984), agents act within social structures that influence their level of agency, but at the same time, agents can also influence those structures. This means that, by triggering Indigenous peoples' agency in academic research on tourism, the possibility of contributing towards both Indigenous peoples' goals and Indigenous tourism studies that look for more democratic research practices increases.

Specifically, Indigenous tourism has the potential to be an important platform for what Ortner (2006) calls "project agency". Ortner proposes two modes by which individuals and communities facing oppression can express agency: resistance agency and project agency. Resistance agency is often through protest, but it can take many other forms such as activism, passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception. The second mode, project agency, focuses on people's ability to enact and lead initiatives that seek to bring about change. Ortner (2006) argues that project agency is more proactive than resistance agency because, rather than being anchored to the mainstream, it sidesteps the mainstream entirely and instead creates small-scale versions of their ideal outcomes (Ortner, 2006). Some authors have argued that Indigenous-led research is a remarkable example of project agency (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Although there have been important advances in increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in academic research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), Indigenous tourism research is far behind these advances (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016).

Researchers' Reflexivity and Participants' Agency

Several authors agree that a commitment to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in research demands participatory and collaborative methodologies (Koster et al., 2012; Patrick et al., 2017; Walker, 2013). One essential prerequisite to participatory and collaborative research is the researcher's reflexivity (Datta, 2018; Nicholls, 2009; Watt, 2007): their active self-reflection on their research process and their positionality within it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Reflexivity requires an active examination of how one's own beliefs, judgment, and practices may influence the research process and unintentionally eclipse or marginalize the perceptions, values, and goals of partner communities (Datta, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Nicholls, 2009; Wilson, 2008). In research with Indigenous peoples, the researcher's reflexivity is also connected to the principle of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). This principle encourages researchers to develop practices that respond to the community's context and demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to the material and symbolic values in the community. Although reflexivity has become a benchmark in social sciences and qualitative research, several authors argue that putting it into action is still a challenge for many researchers (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ortlipp, 2008).

In the sections below, I discuss how my commitment to equalizing relationships in the production of knowledge required attentive reflexivity as a researcher and, consequently, awareness of developing strategies to promote participants' agency in the research. By sharing these experiences, I aim to contribute to the growing literature on practices implementing

collaborative research with Indigenous peoples in different fields and contexts and how researchers' reflexivity can be essential to the success of this work (Levkoe et al., 2019; Espeso-Molinero et al., 2016).

'Diálogo de Saberes' and the Democratization of Knowledge

Democratizing knowledge and ways of knowing is an essential foundation for movements that seek to enhance local agency, self-reliance, and sovereignty (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Pimbert, 2018). This democratization calls for challenging institutions and research practices that have devalued Indigenous and other local or traditional knowledge to position Western scientific knowledge as the only avenue to understanding food systems (Pimbert, 2018). Furthermore, it demands that this local or traditional knowledge become valued and applied, and not just described in scientific knowledge (Berkes, 2009; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). Following alternative education (Freire, 1970) and participatory research approaches (Fals-Borda, 2013), the concept of *diálogo de saberes* (directly translated as 'wisdom dialogues' or roughly, the equivalent of dialogue between ways of knowing) has emerged in much work with communities in Latin America and elsewhere as an alternative mode of knowledge co-creation and community-engaged scholarship (Mann, 2019; Meek et al., 2019; Pimbert, 2006). *Diálogo de saberes* is defined as

A collective construction of emergent meaning based on dialog between people with different historically specific experiences, cosmovisions, and ways of knowing, particularly when faced with new collective challenges in a changing world. Such dialog is based on exchange among differences and on collective reflection, often leading to emergent re-contextualization and re-signification of knowledges and meanings related to histories, traditions, territorialities, experiences, processes and

actions. The new collective understandings, meanings and knowledges may form the basis for collective actions of resistance and construction of new processes.

(Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014, p. 982)

An emerging body of studies, especially in Latin America, has adopted the concept of diálogo de saberes to propose more democratized, contextualized, and action-oriented research practices in fields such as economic development, education, agrarian studies, and health (Anderson et al., 2019; Barkin, 2012; De Sousa Santos, 2010; Escobar, 2020; Krainer et al., 2017; Leff, 2011; Mann, 2019; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Rosset et al., 2020). Mann (2019) reports on how the application of diálogo de saberes has positively impacted community building, sustainability, and the resilience capacity of Indigenous people and peasants in Latin America. Likewise, Anderson et al. (2019) report that diálogo de saberes inspires more equality- and solidarity-based relationships among food producers, between food producers and other actors in the food systems, and between food producers and academic institutions in Europe.

Several researchers argue that reflexivity is essential in research processes committed to diálogo de saberes (Levkoe et al., 2019; Martens et al., 2016; Pimbert, 2006). To facilitate this reflexivity, Levkoe et al. (2019) propose the People, Power, and Change (PPC) framework, designed to assist researchers in reflexive praxis. The first pillar in the PPC framework focuses on peoples' interconnections and the degree to which researchers can overcome traditional notions of objective research relationships that can be alienating for both researchers and participants. The second pillar is about power relationships. It focuses on the importance of researchers' critical reflexivity to ensure that participants are not simply objects of study, but autonomous subjects with agency in shaping the research process and outcomes. The third pillar

focuses on change and examines how the research process and outcomes help address broader social issues such as inequality.

The purpose of this paper is to build on the above literature to show how my reflexivity during the research process, supported by a reflexive journal, had concrete effects on the research design of this collaborative research with Kichwa people. This article describes how my self-reflection and positionality awareness facilitated practices that increased participants' agency, and thus aided in developing truly collaborative research and *diálogo de saberes* in Indigenous tourism research. My analysis implements Levkoe et al.'s (2019) framework to explore these effects and contributions of my research towards Indigenous participants' priorities—in this case, their food sovereignty.

Methodology

As previously noted, my doctoral research focuses on Kichwa people's experiences with their traditional food systems and how the development of tourism affects these experiences. The primary research methods that I applied were interviews (individual and group), participant observation, and direct observation. I also used reflexive journaling as a complementary method (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this section, I will discuss how I incorporated the concept of *diálogo de saberes* to increase Indigenous participants' agency and my reflexivity in the research process. This includes my standpoint, the case study description, and reflexive journaling as the method that supported my reflexivity in this research.

Situating Myself

I am a Latinx woman, born and raised in the Andes of Ecuador and I acknowledge my Indigenous Kichwa ancestry and strong connection to the land. Thanks to the efforts of my parents and community Elders, I have maintained my cultural values, despite being raised in a

society where Indigenous people have been the focus of discrimination and violent colonization (Espinosa Apolo, 2003; Martinez Novo, 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Roitman, 2009). For centuries, Indigenous people in Ecuador were under the control of Spanish settlers and big landowners. When they finally became free of this control, they had to give up their Indigenous identity for access to a small piece of farmland. They became campesinos (small-scale farmers) (Espinosa Apolo, 2003). Later, the advancement of the agroindustry and extractive industries (e.g., mining) destroyed their lands and forced them to migrate to cities. Once there, Indigenous people or campesinos lost their agrarian traditions and became cheap labor for the development of these cities (Brassel et al., 2008; McMichael, 2012). Indigenous and campesino identities in the cities were integrated into the mestizo identity project (Espinosa Apolo, 2003). The term mestizo describes a mixed ethnicity in the Latin American society of both Spanish and Indigenous descent. Some authors describe the mestizo identity in Latin America as a colonial project that aims to homogenize cultural diversity and erases any sign of Indigeneity, which, under this colonial project, is considered poor and underdeveloped (Espinosa Apolo, 2003; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020).

I understand food as something far greater than just calories and nutrients; it is part of my cultural identity. Although my family and I lived in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, every weekend, we would return to my parents' community to work on the land. After finishing our tasks, we would sit in the field and share food while enjoying my grandparents' stories. These stories were about food preparation, food ceremonies, traditional medicine, and why we had certain seeds in the region. I remember that, on our way back to the city, our truck was always full of the foodstuffs we had produced. I share these reflections here as they provide some essential

background on my positionality in this work and on the ongoing practice of reflexivity that is critical to the elevation of local agency in my research practice.

The Chakra Route Case Study

The broad focus of my research is the intersection of tourism and Indigenous food sovereignty. My specific goals are, first, to collaboratively understand the meanings of food sovereignty for participants and, second, to work with these participants to identify the impacts of tourism on Indigenous peoples' wellbeing. This project was collaboratively designed in partnership with the members of the Chakra Route: Chocolate and Tourism Route (hereafter, the Chakra Route) in the Amazon region of Ecuador.

The primary participants in this research were the Kichwa Napo Runa people, also known as Kichwas. Kichwa people are the largest Indigenous group that live in the Amazon region of Ecuador (National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador [INEC], 2010). Their livelihoods are mainly based on traditional agriculture, wild fishing, logging, and community-based tourism. Several authors have recognized the strong political agenda of self-determination and sustainability that the Kichwa people carry out in the Ecuadorian context (Coq-Huelva, 2018; Erazo, 2013; Uzendoski, 2018). In the context of Indigenous tourism research, Kichwa people are often referred to as the pioneers of community-based tourism in Ecuador, and the promoters of Indigenous-led tourism as a way to resist the expansion of extractive industries on their land (Coca Pérez, 2016; Renkert, 2019).

During the last decade, the production of heirloom cacao, the primary ingredient in chocolate products, has become popular among many Kichwa people. Cacao trees are cultivated as part of Kichwa chakra gardens, a traditional agroforestry system (Coq-Huelva et al., 2017). Since 2010, Kichwa people, with the support of non-profit organizations and local government

agencies, have brought forward the Chakra Route project. This project aims to diversify the Kichwa economy by expanding their participation in the value chains of both tourism and chocolate industries.

A “Diálogo de Saberes” Between Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems

Although this research was designed with Western knowledge protocols, I had the opportunity to experience Kichwa traditional knowledge values and practices during fieldwork. Acknowledging the presence of different *saberes* (knowledges) or ways of knowing made me realize the need to use different strategies to understand them. This section describes how I experienced these knowledge systems and the principles and strategies that I used to interact and foster a dialogue among them in my research.

This study generally followed the theories and methods that I learned during my doctoral studies in Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. Although most of the authors reviewed for this research were affiliated with institutions in the Global North, I also include authors affiliated with Global South institutions, especially in Latin America. Understanding the relationship between Indigenous tourism and traditional food systems through different narratives made me aware of several commonalities among authors from the North and South. For instance, *diálogo de saberes*, a concept promoted among critical authors in Latin America, shares similar goals to the concept of transdisciplinarity, which is promoted among critical authors in the Global North (Barkin, 2012).

Kichwa traditional knowledge is connected to the values and practices that Kichwa people have ancestrally developed with their land and food resources (Uzendoski, 2005). I recognized and experienced this knowledge by connecting with the Kichwa people, who invited me to learn it in their learning spaces, such as chakra gardens and Guayusa Upina ceremonies (drinking

guayusa tea first thing in the morning). The experts who shared this knowledge with me were chakra mamas, Kichwa women who are trusted and respected in their communities for being the knowledge keepers of Kichwa traditional food systems (see Figure 4.1). Chakra mamas shared their knowledge about their chakra gardens, food traditions, and the values that guide their community-based projects.

Figure 4. 1

Chakra Mamas Sharing their Knowledge along the Chakra Route



Note. Chakra mamas and their multiple ways to share their traditional knowledge (Traditional ways to cook (upper left picture), storytelling and theatre at Amupakin (upper right picture), preparing and selling traditional medicine (bottom-left picture), and growing food in their chakra gardens (bottom right picture). Photo credit: Veronica Santafe (Summer 2018).

It is important to highlight that, during the fieldwork, I witnessed the many ways in which Kichwa traditional knowledge has a strong influence on how tourism is developed in the region (Sidali et al., 2016). For example, traditional knowledge has motivated tourism-related training

institutions to create educational and training certifications that combine tourism management knowledge with Indigenous knowledge. I was invited to attend the graduation of 70 Kichwa students at a local college, some of whom had completed their certifications in Native Cuisine and the positions of Tour Guide and Forest Ranger. Figure 4.2 shows me with a chakra mama and her son during his graduation as a Chef in Native Cuisine.

Figure 4. 2

Chakra Mama and Her Son During His Graduation



Note. This picture is me (left) with a chakra mama (right) and her son (middle) during his graduation as Chef in Native cuisine in Misahualli, Ecuador. Photo credit: Andres Santafe (Summer 2018).

Reflexive Journaling

The remainder of this chapter is based primarily on entries I wrote in a reflexive journal kept during and after the two field seasons I spent in the Chakra Route. I started my reflexive journal in July of 2018 and closed it in February of 2020. A reflexive journal is a key research

tool that enables researchers to promote transparency in their research process and enlighten reflexivity by keeping track of and reflecting on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings along the research's tenure (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ortlipp, 2008; Watt, 2007). Indeed, keeping a reflexive journal also helped me keep track of and organize rich information from outside the scheduled data collection moments and reflect on how this information influenced some of my decisions during the research process.

Considering that Indigenous knowledge is primarily oral and experiential (Kovach, 2009; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; 2020; Wilson, 2008), I found that semi-structured interviews (individuals and groups) and observations did not give me the opportunity to include other rich information that came from outside these data collection methods. Furthermore, it became difficult to describe my experiences with Kichwa knowledge in a memo or report format because Kichwa knowledge emerged in a diversity of formats, such as songs, food, and storytelling. To capture my experiences better, I include words, images, and videos in my journal (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). My writing focused primarily on relationships (e.g., between myself and the participants, food, and land) and how I perceived and attempted to apply Kichwa knowledge in the research process. Overall, the journaling process supported my self-reflection and also provided material for dialogue with my Ph.D. supervisor.

Journal Process and Formats. The events and thoughts emerging during the research process were tracked as soon as possible in my paper notebook or on my Evernote app. Evernote is a note-taking tool that allows for the storage of traditional and multimedia content, such as written notes, pictures, videos, and sound recordings (Beddall-Hill et al., 2011). I installed this app on my cell phone. Every day, after working in the field, I took the time to go through my daily notes and create a log in my reflexive journal. This journal was created in a Word

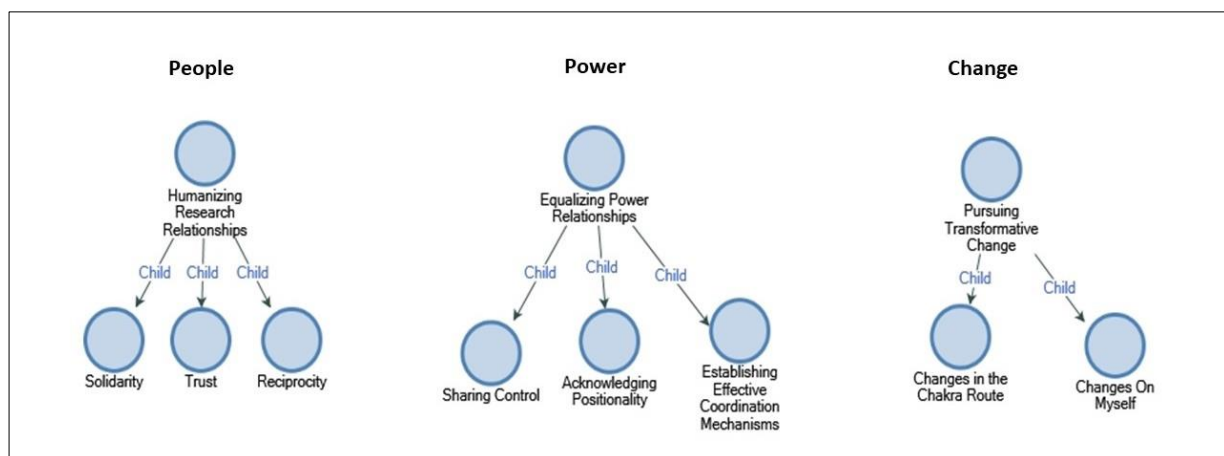
document. Each log included the data recorded in Evernote or my notebook, along with a written reflection concerning this data. After closing my journal, I uploaded this Word document into NVIVO 12 to analyze the journal's content. I used a deductive coding strategy (Hays & Singh, 2012) to analyze this content deductively, looking for the themes outlined in the PPC framework as suggested by Levkoe et al. (2019).

Results and Discussion

As I discuss below, the Levkoe et al. (2019) framework proved to be particularly useful for identifying key narratives and instances on how my reflexivity practice facilitated Kichwa people's agency in the research process and contributed to their diálogo de saberes and food sovereignty goals. While Levkoe et al.'s (2019) framework is designed to focus on narratives of how researchers impact the research process and communities, I also identified certain details in the opposite direction: where participants impacted me and the research process itself. Figure 4.3 shows the coding process.

Figure 4. 3

Code Map



Note. Code map was created following Levkoe et al. (2019)'s framework: People, power, and change.

Humanizing Research Relations

Rooted in food sovereignty's relational ethos (Masioli & Nicholson, 2010; Schiavoni, 2017; Wittman et al., 2010), Levkoe et al. (2019) propose humanizing research relationships as the first pillar of a research praxis that contributes to food sovereignty. This pillar involves overcoming the notion of instrumentation in research relationships, which can be alienating for both participants and researchers—but instead, this pillar advocates for relationships of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity. I identified several instances in my journal during which my research engaged with these three elements.

Trust. Trust was not easy to achieve. Indeed, I had to develop some strategies to increase trust in the relationship between myself and the participants. Although trust is promoted from a Western research context by following ethical guidelines, it was not that simple. I followed the Behavioral Research Ethics guidelines from the University of Saskatchewan in the design and data collection processes, but these ethics protocols were new for most participants. For instance, some of them were reluctant to sign the consent forms because they thought that they would be giving away their lands by signing these documents.

In today's meeting, I mentioned to community leaders that their signed consent is required to participate in this research. One of the leaders did not seem happy with this request. He said that he does not trust signing anything for a Canadian institution. This community's leaders told me that they have a longstanding conflict with a Canadian mining company that wants to develop mineral mining in their ancestral land. I feel that being a student from a Canadian university creates some doubts in this community. I might need to organize some meetings to explain the ethics and academic protocols required in my

research. I need to clarify that the consent form's main purpose is to allow them to decide how they want to participate in the research. I am also thinking of asking Aymé [a close friend and Kichwa leader in the region] to come with me to the next meetings so she can put in a good word for me with the communities. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 5)

To reduce these uncertain feelings among participants, I organized meetings to explain to the participants the reasons behind ethical guidelines and the goals of the research. Several leaders mentioned that these extra meetings helped the participants better understand the ethics protocols and increase their trust in me as the researcher and my research goals.

The second strategy to develop trust in the research was inviting a close friend, a leader in the region, to participate as a gatekeeper in this research (Lavrakas, 2008). Although several leaders in the Chakra Route supported this research and its goals, I found it necessary to identify somebody in the region who could vouch for my values and commitment to working with Indigenous communities. Furthermore, I needed somebody who could guide me on interacting with Kichwa people and their land.

But trust was not only about participants trusting in me and the research. An episode recorded in my journal helped to look at trust from a different perspective as follows:

The other day, I felt sick. Lupe, a Chakra Mama who knows traditional medicine well, offered me a cup of a dark beverage. Before drinking it, I asked what she put in this medicine. Instead of answering my question, she said, "Veronica, you do not trust in my medicine and knowledge, but you want that I trust your university knowledge." After hearing these words, I decided to accept her medicine, which indeed made me feel better. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 13)

This episode made me reflect on the need to see trust as reciprocal. Since then, I decided to include participants requesting my trust in my journaling experiences in explicit and implicit ways. Overall, I found that trust in collaborative research needs to go both ways, from researcher to participants and vice versa.

Reciprocity. According to Levkoe et al. (2019), to fulfill reciprocity in research practice, researchers and participants must understand each other's needs and expectations and recognize that they may not always match up and seek ways to contribute towards each other's work. Based on my research experience, I found that the first meetings are crucial to understand each other's needs and develop reciprocity actions.

During these first meetings, participants and I sat in a circle and talked about our needs. At this point, I feel that most of the leaders were aware that my primary goal in this research is theoretical. Aware of my goals, they have agreed to contribute to this research by providing their time, attending to meetings, referring more participants, discussing, and giving feedback during the research process. Community leaders have also expressed their expectations and ideas as to how I can contribute to their needs. They requested that I facilitate some workshops in tourism-related topics to be reciprocal of their support. They also requested that the methodology in these workshops must be connected to their traditional knowledge and local needs. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 20)

These initial meetings provided information on the topics and concepts important for them (e.g., acknowledging and applying their traditional knowledge). I understood that I had to incorporate some critical pedagogy approaches in our group meetings and workshops. A training

opportunity in research praxis for sustainable food systems¹² in the summer of 2018 provided me with several tools that facilitated the incorporation of Kichwa knowledge in the research process. For instance, during the workshops, some participants proposed tourism activities that combined innovation and traditional knowledge, such as theatre, storytelling, painting using seeds from their chakra gardens, etc. (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4. 4

Kichwa Participants Sharing their Ideas to Innovate in Indigenous Tourism



Note. Members of RICANCIE (Kichwa Ecotourism Network of Napo) show their posters with ideas on how to apply their traditional knowledge in tourism development. Photo credit: Veronica Santafe (Spring 2019).

¹² The summer-school was organized and facilitated by researchers associated to the Centre of Agroecology, Water and Resilience of the Coventry University and the University of VIC.

Solidarity. Levkoe et al. (2019) argue that solidarity is connected to identifying common spaces and empathy between researchers and participants in their work towards food sovereignty. This approach to solidarity is connected to Habermas' (1990) description of solidarity, which goes beyond the asymmetrical idea of charity and highlights the idea of common experiences. Following Ritchie and Rigano (2007), solidarity in a truly collaborative research practice makes researchers and participants think more about our common experiences rather than their experiences.

The awareness that food sovereignty and diálogo de saberes look for when equalizing relationships made me open my mind to experience different approaches to solidarity during my fieldwork. Firstly, I had to question my own understanding of solidarity, which I used to perceive as charity, and learn to think about it in another light. Then, I had to be critical in the process of identifying some commonalities between the participants and myself. For instance, I found that being from the same country and sharing cultural values were not enough to justify solidarity between myself and the participants.

During my initial introduction to the community leaders, I introduced myself as an Ecuadorian woman who is a graduate student at a Canadian university. Every time I mentioned the term "Canadian university," I feel that participants changed their attitude towards me. I feel that before mentioning this detail, they treated me as an "insider," and once I mentioned that I study in Canada, they see me as an "outsider." Is there any way to change this outsider perception? (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 15)

River of Life ¹³ (Moussa, 2009), one of the tools that I learned at the summer school in 2018, became an excellent source to develop solidarity in my research. This tool encourages participants and facilitators to use the symbol of a river's journey to reflect on the personal experiences and influences that have motivated them in their personal and professional life. I used this tool to introduce myself and the research project to the participants and to identify commonalities. Using this tool at the beginning of the meetings also increased participation and rapport with participants. For instance, during meeting breaks, participants often approached me to talk further about some of the elements of my River of Life. I remember some Kichwa farmers asked me about the farming methods that my family uses in Ecuador's highlands.

Equalizing Power Relations

This pillar in the Levkoe et al. (2019) framework focuses on critical reflexivity to trigger participants' agency and more equal power relations. According to Brem-Wilson and Nicholson (2017), a collaborative research process in the context of food sovereignty requires participants to be more than merely objects of study, but also subjects that have agency in shaping the research process. Levkoe et al. (2019) suggest three areas to reflect on how the research process promotes equal relationships. These areas are sharing of control over the research process and outcomes, acknowledging positionality, and establishing effective coordination mechanisms.

Sharing Control. Although this research's primary outcomes contribute to the scientific knowledge of Indigenous tourism and traditional food systems, by developing collaborative

¹³ I learned about this tool through the Summer School on Research Praxis for Food System Transformation.

research, I was also able to learn participants' priorities and insights into how this research can deliver practical outcomes. Overall, participants provided valuable insights into how this research could increase their agency concerning what, who, and how of this project.

When talking about food sovereignty, the Kichwa people recommended using the term *chakra* or *chakra gardens*. These concepts make more sense for participants than food sovereignty. I had planned to help them understand the concept of food sovereignty through a framework I had brought to our meetings, but they asked me to adapt this framework to their context, in this case, the *chakra gardens*. When deciding who would participate in the research, Kichwa leaders wanted to play an active role in making these selections. In the beginning, I had proposed involving only Kichwa people, but Kichwa leaders also wanted to include key non-Kichwa stakeholders for a good reason: They thought that this research could bring together Kichwa and non-Kichwa stakeholders to talk about sustainable tourism policies in the region.

Regarding the methods in which the research was carried out, Kichwa leaders recommended the inclusion of Kichwa values and protocols in the research process. For instance, before starting the formal data collection process, *chakra mamas* recommended I participate in a *Guayusa Upina* (sharing *guayusa* tea) ritual (see Figure 4.5). In Kichwa tradition, drinking *guayusa* tea before sunrise helps a person cleanse their spirit and have a clear mind for the rest of the day's activities.

During the *Guayusa Upina*, *chakra mamas* of Amupakin gave me some medicine to cleanse my spirit. During this ceremony, they told me that I have to be respectful of their *chakras* and their food traditions during the research process. They said that food is a teacher and, for this reason, it is important to always have *guayusa* tea and food in the meetings and activities of this research. They also emphasized that their traditional

knowledge should be useful. They said, "not come to *capacitarnos* (training us) because we are *capaces* (capable)." From what I have seen so far, Kichwa people have a strong awareness of the validity and importance of their traditional knowledge. Definitely, I have to promote its application in this research. (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 09)

Figure 4. 5 Guayusa Upina Ritual Led by Chakra Mamas

Guayusa Upina Ritual Led by Chakra Mamas



Note. This picture shows me (white t-shirt) participating in a *Guayusa Upina* ritual. Chakra mamas from Amupakin are leading this ritual. Photo credit: Andres Santafe (Summer, 2018).

To answer chakra mamas' and other leaders' recommendations about integrating their traditional knowledge in the research, I asked Kichwa people to reflect on how their traditional

knowledge can be integrated into the solutions to some of the issues that affect the development of tourism on the Chakra Route. During the workshops and group meetings, for instance, participants created menus, tourism itineraries, songs, or art pieces to reflect the application of their traditional knowledge.

Concerning where the results end after finishing the research, participants suggested that the research outcomes should guide action and be shared in an accessible and understandable format for all the participants. Local leaders and I decided that the research advances will be shared in community meetings during the fieldwork in Ecuador, and the final results will be posted in my research blog in Spanish (www.co-creativetourism.com), which is accessible to everybody.

Acknowledging Positionality. According to Levkoe et al. (2019), a commitment to equalizing power relations requires reflexive consideration of the researcher's positionality. Hays and Singh (2012) argue that being aware of who researchers are and where they come from helps them recognize that their own identity (e.g., class, race, gender) could influence the research process and outcomes.

In the beginning, I erroneously believed that being from the same country, speaking the same language, and sharing Indigenous ancestry could be a path to equalize my relationship with Kichwa participants. This was brought about by an event that made me reflect on my real position in this research.

I am having conflicting feelings on my position and role in this community. In the afternoon, the community had a celebration, and I was not invited. Welli [one of the community members] said that this celebration was only for family members. Three girls from another town were working in the community lodge. Although they were not

technically part of the family-community, they were invited to this celebration. All of the foreign visitors (tourists, volunteers, and me) were not invited. Does my status of being a doctoral student in Canada create barriers with the participants? (Reflexive journal, 2018, August 16)

These reflections made me realize the need to acknowledge my position in the research. I understood that my role as a researcher was shaped by some features that the participants considered to be privileges. For instance, having access to postgraduate education in Canada and speaking a foreign language are privileges for most of the study's participants. Being aware of this position encouraged me to give myself time to leave my researcher's hat aside and use a learner's hat instead. I asked the Chakra Mamas to teach me how to grow cassava and make fermented cassava beverages. By doing these activities, I encouraged myself and the participants to experience activities that destabilize traditional power differentials in research, where I was the learner, and they were the facilitators.

Establishing Effective Coordination Mechanisms. This task emphasizes the necessity to develop mechanisms that facilitate active participants roles in the research (Levkoe et al., 2019). At the beginning of the research, the two most representative organizations in the Cacao Route and I developed and signed a research agreement. This document included an overview of the research, my role as a researcher, and the participants' expected contributions in this research. Furthermore, the organizations' leaders included some suggestions about how to enable participation, especially among women and youth. One of the primary requests of these organizations was that the interviews and meetings take place in their communities, in spaces that represent them. For instance, one of the Kichwa communities felt more comfortable meeting in a rustic tent in their community, rather than in a meeting room managed by a government agency.

Through the research, I found that women and youth participation increased when the meetings took place in spaces belonging to their communities. Some women expressed that meeting in their communities makes it easier for them to attend because they can bring their children to the meetings and they do not have to spend money on a bus ticket.

Pursuing Transformative Orientation.

The last pillar of the framework proposed by Levkoe et al. (2019) focuses on reflecting on how the research contributes to the transformative work of progressive social movements and social change in the studied area. Although the Levkoe et al. (2019) framework focuses on reflections of the changes that the research brought for the participants, I complemented this section by reflecting on how I perceived the research has changed me.

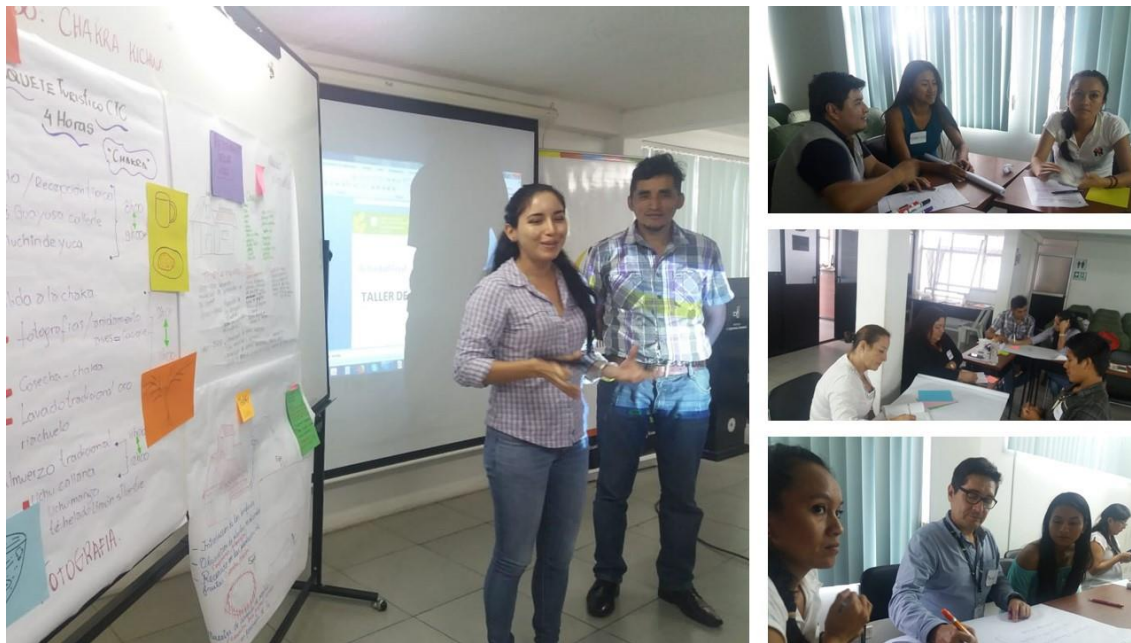
Overall, I identified two primary changes in the Chakra Route project during the research process: one related to the governance of the route, and the other one related to the goal of tourism development in the area.

At the beginning of the research, I noticed that Kichwa and non-Kichwa participants did not find common topics of interest when talking about tourism and traditional food systems. According to some of the participants, this separation comes from a colonial legacy of discrimination that affects the Kichwa people and creates barriers between these two groups. To motivate spaces of collaboration between them, I pursued group gatherings where Kichwa and non-Kichwa people came together to identify common issues and develop win-win scenarios (see Figure 4.6). During these meetings, I noticed that participants often used the word 'solidarity' as a critical value to promote in the relationships between Kichwa and non-Kichwa people in the region and in the governance of the Chakra Route. In the second year of fieldwork, I saw that more non-Kichwa were engaged in activities related to the Chakra Route. According

to the leaders of the route, before non-Kichwa were distant from the Chakra Route project because they thought this project was created just to benefit Kichwa people. After being aware of this perception, leaders of the project have promoted that any business (Kichwa or non-Kichwa owned) can be part of the route if they include elements of Kichwa people's food traditions in their businesses, such as including chakra garden products in their menus or visits to the chakra gardens in their tourism itineraries.

Figure 4.6

Kichwa and Non-Kichwa Participants Collaborating



Note. Kichwa and non-Kichwa participants explored areas of collaboration in the Chakra Route during a workshop organized by the researcher. Photo Credit: Veronica Santafe (Spring 2019).

The second change that I identified during the research process was the shift in the focus of tourism development in the route. This shift translated into the change of the name of the route, from the Cacao Route to the Chakra Route. Several of the participants argued that the original name indirectly promoted a mono-crop model of agriculture that does not follow the

Kichwa tradition of the chakra gardens. Key actors in the route mentioned that this research process made actors in the route think about the values that they wanted to promote in a touristic brand. For this reason, they choose Chakra Route as the new name, which is more representative of their local values. The change of the name occurred in the interval between my two field trips. So only when I arrived the second time, did I find out about the change in name. During the second field trip, I observed that the new brand name was influencing diversification and creativity in the tourism business along the route. Some of the communities that participated in the research have since created food- and chakra garden-related experiences that go beyond the act of simply eating, such as spa experiences with plants from their chakra gardens, and art activities using colors from the plants of their chakra gardens as well.

To finalize this reflexivity exercise, I want to share how this research process changed me. First, the stories of resilience and hard work that I learned from Kichwa women have become my inspiration during difficult times in my personal and professional life. Second, I found that several of the experiences and learnings in my journal highlighted narratives that represent Kichwa people's strengths rather than weaknesses. I thought that this tendency created a bias in my way of perceiving Kichwa people's roles in the development of tourism in the area. However, by connecting with Indigenous scholars and participating in talking circles with Elders after my fieldwork, I understood that my own Indigenous roots were influencing how I saw Kichwa women and that this positive narrative was not a shortcoming (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020; Settee, 2011). Indeed, I also found that reflexivity was crucial while interpreting the data. According to Hays and Singh (2012), being transparent with the reader about the researcher's values and experiences that might influence the research outcomes contributes to trustworthiness in the research.

Third, practicing reflexivity in this research by keeping a journal became a liberating act during the research process. My mother tongue is Spanish with an influence of Kichwa. I learned English just before starting my doctoral program. Several times, I found that trying to express my ideas in English was frustrating, and I could not express certain concepts and words. Writing, drawing, or creating collages in my journal was an opportunity to express my ideas and reflections freely, sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish or Kichwa, and, several times, in Spanglish (Martinez, 2010). Using alternative formats to express my thoughts also helped me get close to the critical approach that I follow in this research. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) argues that among critical scholars, alternative formats to academic writing (e.g., visual and oral formats) are forms of political resistance and empowerment. During my research process, I found that numbers can talk about the experiences of Indigenous peoples easily and quickly, but that the narratives behind these numbers inform us of powerful ways to improve their lives. Now, I would like to share a collage (see Figure 4.7) I prepared during an academic writing workshop led by Louise Halfe¹⁴ at the University of Saskatchewan. Although it is in a graphic format, this collage exercise was a way for me to express my values while interpreting the data and writing its results.

¹⁴ Louise Halfe is a Cree poet and writer, Elder and teacher at the University of Saskatchewan.

Figure 4. 7

A Collage that Inspired my Academic Writing



Note. I created this collage during an academic writing workshop led by Elder Louise Halfe at the University of Saskatchewan (Fall, 2019).

Finally, attending university as a full-time student in Saskatchewan, Canada, and doing my fieldwork in Napo, Ecuador, allowed me to identify commonalities between the stories of Indigenous people from Ecuador and Canada, and between the research traditions from the Global North and South. Being aware of these commonalities gave me a new perspective on collaborative work; instead of focusing on what separates us, I now seek to explore opportunities to integrate us.

Conclusion

As the demands for more active inclusion of Indigenous people in Indigenous tourism research grow, there is an equivalent, compensatory need to revisit researchers' roles and explore strategies that promote more equal, respectful, and transformative research practices. In this article, I have attempted to provide guidance on how a researcher can apply self-reflection as a tool to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in the research process. Furthermore, I described how progressive frameworks, such as food sovereignty and diálogo de saberes, can encourage this reflexivity in Indigenous tourism research. My own research experience doing collaborative work with Kichwa people in Ecuador, while exploring the impacts of tourism on their food sovereignty, provided a case to connect reflexivity, agency, and food sovereignty.

This article was also an opportunity to show the benefits of using reflexive journaling in collaborative research with Indigenous people. This journal facilitated my reflexivity praxis and made me consciously acknowledge how my own experiences influenced the research dynamics and relationships. Journaling helped me realize how research practices affected participants' agency in the research (e.g., how I introduced myself and the project, ethics protocols, terminology). By being aware of these issues during the fieldwork, I could change some of these practices and answer participants' needs and goals. To organize and present the information collected in this reflexive journal, I use the PPC framework (Levkoe et al., 2019), which proposes a set of reflexivity guidelines for researchers working in food sovereignty. The PPC framework made me aware that although Indigenous tourism research is primarily influenced by economic rationalities and social structures that tend to undermine Indigenous peoples' agency, researchers' reflexivity can be that leverage point that increases Indigenous participants' agency. According to Meadows (1999) a leverage point is a place within a complex system where a small shift in one

thing can produce significant changes in everything. Increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in the research process also contributed to truly collaborative research, where Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledge are critical elements in the production of knowledge (Datta, 2018; Patrick et al., 2017; Walker, 2013). Inspired by the concept of diálogo de saberes, the narratives described in this paper showed that Indigenous knowledge is a valid resource in developing Indigenous tourism research. Overall, this research contributes to knowledge about Indigenous peoples' agency, in the mode of "agency as a project." This agency mode is an alternative path to modes of resisting by protesting the mainstream; instead, agency as project sidesteps the system and creates small-scale versions of their ideal outcomes (Ortner, 2006). Indigenous research methods (Datta, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) and Indigenous entrepreneurship (Cole, 2007; Chassagne & Everingham, 2019; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012) are considered explicit instances of Indigenous peoples' agency. This research described experiences in the Chakra Route that support both Indigenous research methods and entrepreneurship.

Besides the benefits that constant and systematic reflection can bring for equalizing researcher-participant relationships, I found that journaling can be an empowerment tool for researchers researching their non-native language and in different cultural contexts. Personally, keeping this journal helped me to express my experiences and thoughts during the research process with more confidence.

This paper's primary limitation is that it focused on researchers' reflexivity and participants' agency only. Future research will benefit from analyzing the other side (i.e. participants' reflexivity and researchers' agency). Overall, more cases on integrating Indigenous knowledge in Indigenous tourism research and development will support more democratic and sustainable ways of developing tourism.

CHAPTER 5. Conclusions

Synopsis

This final chapter includes a reflection on how each manuscript assisted in achieving my research goals, the contributions this research makes to scholarship on Indigenous tourism and food sovereignty, and a discussion of the challenges and limitations of my findings.

This qualitative and collaborative research explored the potential of food sovereignty as a framework to create more sustainable and Indigenous-led practices in Indigenous tourism. My goal was to understand this potential using a case study, the Chakra Route, a tourist destination located in the Amazonia of Ecuador. In this project, I explored the multiple interpretations of food sovereignty among participants in this setting, the development of tourism in the studied area, the impacts locals perceived on their food sovereignty as a result of tourism development, and my own research practices.

I applied a transdisciplinary approach, *diálogo de saberes*, or dialogue among different knowledges and ways of knowing (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014), to understand the relationship between tourism and food sovereignty in the Chakra Route. This approach is critical to integrating diverse knowledge into research design and data collection, and also assists in the interpretation of findings. The literature review examined scholarly work in Indigenous studies, tourism management, rural development, community health, and social and ecological studies. Furthermore, I consulted literature in Indigenous and critical research methodologies (Fals Borda, 2013; Freire, 1970; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) to inform my approach to Kichwa

traditional knowledge during the research process. I also aimed to recognize Indigenous knowledge and apply it during the research process.

By analyzing the development of tourism in the Chakra Route from the perspective of local participants and reflecting on my own research experience, I was able to i) identify the elements that a food sovereignty framework should include to inform more sustainable and participatory practices in Indigenous tourism; ii) examine how tourism alters the food sovereignty of Kichwa people working in tourism along the Chakra Route and how these alterations affect their wellbeing; and iii) reflect on how this research praxis contributes to increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in tourism research and democratizing knowledge and ways of knowing for food sovereignty efforts.

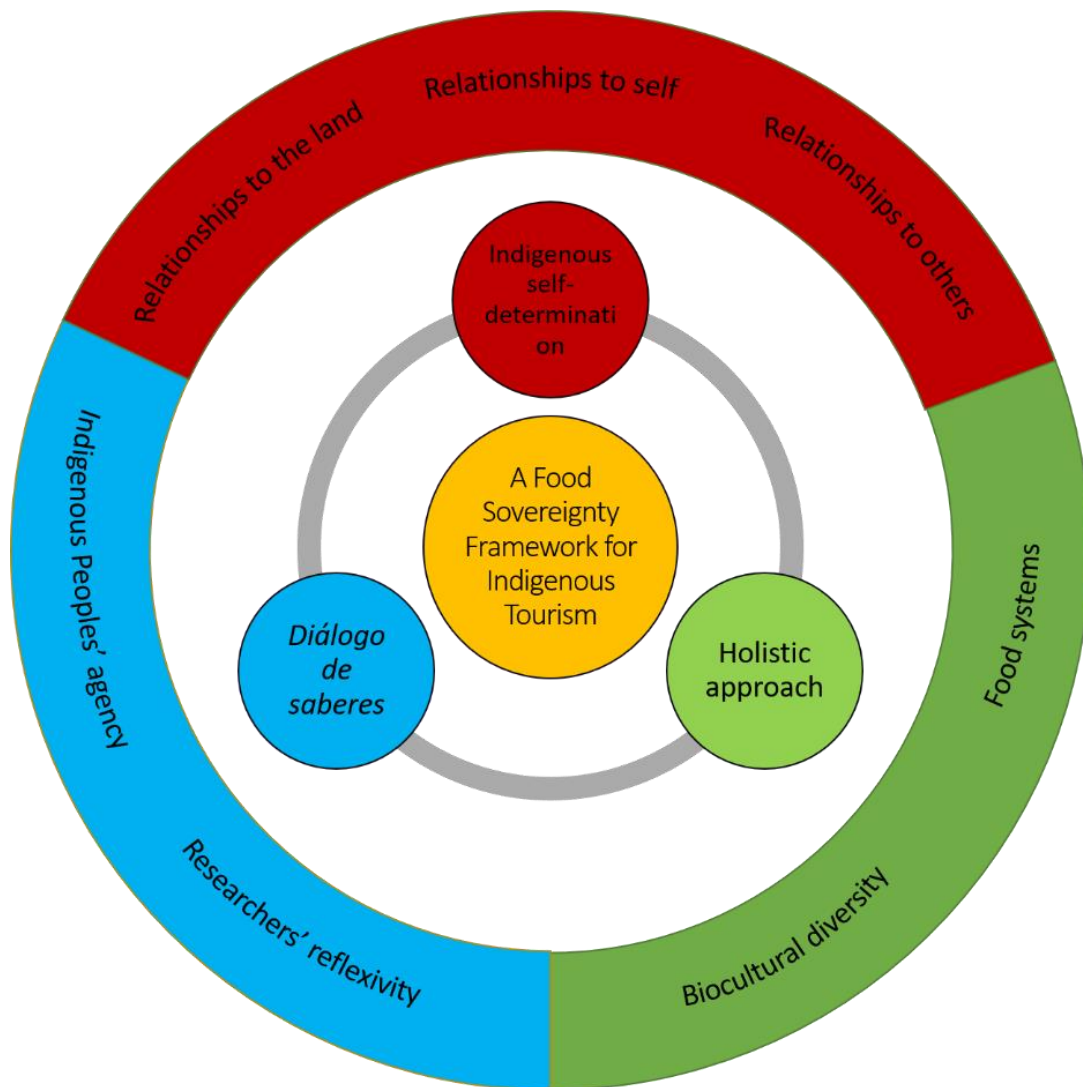
Elements of a Food Sovereignty Framework for Indigenous Tourism

In Chapter 1, I analyzed some of the frameworks that scholars commonly apply to the study of tourism development in Indigenous contexts, such as pro-poor tourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable tourism. This analysis showed a common theme in these frameworks; they all fail to take a holistic approach and neglect to incorporate the agency of Indigenous peoples to define what those people want from tourism development in their territories and how that development is to proceed (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). I proposed food sovereignty as a framework that provides this much needed holistic and democratic approach to Indigenous tourism. Using a framework connected to food is sensible because food plays a key role in the tourism experience (Quan & Wang, 2004) and food sovereignty is a key theme in the political agendas of Indigenous people (Grey & Patel, 2015). Recent literature on general tourism development (Gascón & Cañada, 2012), and more specific literature on food tourism (Grey &

Newman, 2018), call for the inclusion of food sovereignty as a framework that guides more sustainable and just practices in Indigenous contexts. However, researchers had not yet defined this framework’s core elements. Based on the case study of the Chakra Route in this paper, I identified three key elements and sub-elements that must be considered when assessing the impacts of Indigenous tourism (See Figure 5.1).

Figure 5. 1

A Food Sovereignty Framework for Indigenous Tourism



The first element of this framework is Indigenous self-determination. Food sovereignty in Indigenous contexts cannot be separated from Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination (Cote, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Whyte, 2018). Following Kuokkanen (2019), self-determination in Indigenous contexts is about the quality of relationships that Indigenous people develop with the land, other people, and themselves. When self-determination is connected to Indigenous food sovereignty, it involves the right of Indigenous peoples to define their food ways (Cote, 2016; Grey & Newman, 2018; Morrison, 2011; Settee & Shailesh, 2020; Whyte, 2018). My research acknowledged this right by promoting a contextual understanding of food sovereignty with reference to the Chakra Route case (Schiavoni, 2017). Instead of defining food sovereignty in terms that are external to the reality of the communities that compose the Chakra Route, I developed a food sovereignty framework shaped by local participants. Chapter 2 describes this contextual understanding. This research found that chakra gardens, a traditional agroforestry method, offer a symbolic and practical embodiment of food sovereignty for local people along the Chakra Route. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 discussed several food-related traditions that Kichwa people described as their identity markers.

The second element of this framework is a holistic approach that uses a biocultural and food systems lens when analyzing the outcomes of the relationships between Indigenous foods and tourism. A biocultural approach recognizes that biological and cultural diversity are interconnected; thus, humans and their cultures shape, and are shaped by, their environments (Maffi, 2001; Loring & Gerlach, 2009; Nabhan, 2003; Toledo & Barrera-Bassols, 2008). Chapter 3 clearly demonstrates the need for a biocultural approach, which addressed the uncertainty and concerns locals expressed about using an invasive fish species as a component of food tourism in the region. A food systems approach goes beyond a productivity approach that only focuses on

food products and food consumers. Instead, a food systems approach observes all the elements in the system (i.e., biogeophysical and human environment elements), as well as activities (from production through consumption) and the outcomes of these activities (i.e., food security; Ericksen, 2007). The need for a food systems approach emerged from an examination of the issues that participants identified with their traditional foods and food security. In Chapter 2, rather than arguing about food scarcity, participants described issues connected to production (e.g., land access), distribution (e.g., support for chakra mamas selling chakra foods in urban areas), and consumption (e.g., lack of interest by younger generations and non-Kichwa people in consuming chakra foods). Including a holistic approach in a food sovereignty framework is crucial for tourism initiatives that commodify Indigenous food traditions. A holistic approach focuses on the environmental and cultural impacts of this commodification and the responsibilities and rights that hosts and tourists have in these impacts and across the entire food system, from production to consumption.

The third element in my proposed food sovereignty framework is a collaborative and participatory approach, which can further Indigenous peoples' agency (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Agency refers to the power of groups of people to influence their own lives (Sen, 1999; Petray, 2012). One of the most commonly discussed issues in Indigenous tourism literature has been the lack of agency that Indigenous people have in the development of Indigenous tourism (Carr et al., 2016; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Whyte, 2010). This lack of agency is also reflected in the passive role of Indigenous people in much Indigenous tourism research (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012). Researchers can support Indigenous peoples' agency by actively attending to their own personal reflexivity as an outsider. This reflexivity requires the researcher's recognition of the power structures that frame research relationships, such as

between researchers and participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and women and men. Chapter 4 used the Levkoe et al. (2019) framework to assess, in a reflexive way, how the entire research process in the Chakra Route case study contributed to the principles of food sovereignty by privileging participants' needs, equalizing power relationships, and creating social transformations. Chapter 4 also described instances where the Kichwa people's knowledge was crucial to inform the research process.

How Tourism Alters the Food Sovereignty of Kichwa People

By obtaining an understanding of the different meanings of food sovereignty for locals along the Chakra Route, I was able to identify how tourism affects their food sovereignty. Chapter 2 described this effect at a destination level (that is, the Chakra Route), while Chapter 3 described the effect with specific reference to promoting tilapia fish products in food tourism.

At the destination level, this research showed that the Chakra Route contributes positively to the food sovereignty of the Kichwa people. Three key topics explain this positive outcome. The first topic relates to the route's brand, the Chakra Route, which promotes a traditional agroforestry system and its accordant values. The original names of this route were the Cacao and Chocolate Route, which participants found had promoted a model of agriculture that was oriented to external markets and was negatively affecting the production of traditional staples in Kichwa people's diets. In contrast, the Chakra Route brand promotes agrobiodiversity conservation, local food consumption, and solidarity between producers and consumers. Furthermore, this project has created opportunities for locals and visitors to learn more about the origin of the foods that they consume and the effects of their food choices on their wellbeing. Scholars argue that these learning opportunities are positive for peoples' food sovereignty (Cidro et al., 2016; Wittman et al., 2010) and nutritional health (Engler-Stringer, 2010).

The second topic is the gender empowerment and traditional knowledge application opportunities that the Chakra Route project has created. Several participants discussed how the Chakra Route has served as an opportunity for Kichwa women to obtain additional income for their communities without the violence and discrimination that they had faced in the past when working for income outside of their communities. Furthermore, the route promotes the restoration and application of Kichwa traditional knowledge connected to their traditional food systems, which are mostly maintained by Kichwa women.

The final topic relates to the positive impact that the Chakra Route's participatory governance model has had in connecting diverse actors and empowering them in broader work related to the region's food sovereignty. Several participants emphasized that the Chakra Route brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the region to discuss local food sovereignty. In this way, the Chakra Route project challenges the legacy of cultural barriers and discrimination in the area that primarily affect the Kichwa people. Furthermore, this route promotes the active role of Kichwa women in spaces of political and economic development that have historically been reserved for Kichwa men and non-Kichwa people.

With regard to Indigenous food tourism, Chapter 3 described how the *tilapia maito*, the most iconic dish offered to tourists in the Chakra Route, has been negatively affecting the food sovereignty of Kichwa people. This chapter argued that offering *tilapia maito* to tourists creates a biocultural hazard in the region because it promotes the flourishing of an invasive fish species that has negatively affected biological diversity in the region (e.g., diminishing native fish species; Attayde et al., 2011; Silva et al., 2014). This invasive fish also affects cultural values and activities associated with this biocultural diversity (e.g., traditional fishing; Pfeiffer & Voeks, 2008). However, the local participants offered several solutions to these threats, including some

solutions — such as aquaculture practices informed by Indigenous knowledge — that could reduce the risk posed by tilapia rather than eliminating the fish from the local food system altogether.

The Contribution of this Research to Increasing Indigenous Peoples' Agency in Indigenous Tourism Research

Scholars consider the lack of agency of Indigenous peoples in the research process a key barrier to achieving justice and sustainability in Indigenous tourism (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Several authors argue that food sovereignty can further Indigenous peoples' role in the research praxis because it promotes collaboration as crucial in a food sovereignty project (Levkoe et al., 2019; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Martens et al., 2016; Pimbert, 2018). Indeed, one of the six pillars of food sovereignty in the Nyeleni report (2007) provides that food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers. Following this pillar, my research involved the development of strategies to engage Kichwa knowledge keepers in the research process and apply Kichwa traditional knowledge to food sovereignty issues.

Levkoe et al. (2019) argue that research on food sovereignty should contribute to the humanization of relationships between researchers and participants, and create solidarity among them, by being aware of and challenging unequal power relationships that shape their interactions. According to these authors, establishing a permanent reflexive practice through the research process will facilitate alternative knowledge creation practices and democratize ways of knowing (Levkoe et al., 2019). Chapter 4 described how embracing reflexivity as a researcher (including a willingness to be flexible), adapting research methodology as appropriate, and paying attention to the three principals proposed by Levkoe and others (i.e., people, power, and change) enabled me to increase the agency of Kichwa peoples in the research process. I often evaluated how my research practice

demonstrated respect for, and reciprocity and responsibility with participants and their land (Martens et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008).

Research Contributions

This research primarily contributes to knowledge in Indigenous tourism, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food tourism.

Contributions to Indigenous Tourism

The academic literature on Indigenous tourism consistently highlights the need for more holistic and Indigenous-led research into the relationship between Indigenous people and tourism and, specifically, research that considers the interests and values of Indigenous host communities (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). My research serves to address this need through the use of food sovereignty as a conceptual framework to guide research in Indigenous tourism. By following the principles of food sovereignty, my research provides Indigenous people in the Chakra Route with the opportunity to define their goals and priorities when tourism is developed in their territories. The Kichwa people's goals and values in tourism development involve more than simply increasing financial income for their community. They have also considered the conservation of material and symbolic values associated with their chakra system, including by growing a diverse range of native seeds, engaging in community farming, sharing food with others, and valuing the role of chakra mamas — female Kichwa farmers — in their wellbeing.

The Chakra Route case study also reported positive practices that have contributed to food sovereignty, sustainability, and economic diversification in Indigenous contexts. Overall, the route shows that using Indigenous peoples' values in tourism development is a positive development for host communities, the environment, and the tourism industry. When discussing

alternative development in Indigenous contexts, Hibbard and Adkins (2013) ask, “[d]o Indigenous peoples have to give up their own cultures, values, and goals to create and maintain healthy local economies and communities?” The Chakra Route experience suggests that the answer to this question is no, because Kichwa people do indeed use their cultural values to inform sustainable practices and economic diversification in their lands. Furthermore, the inclusion of these values empowers Kichwa people to expand their control or agency over their livelihoods and food security.

The inclusion of food sovereignty in the development of Indigenous tourism redefines the role that tourism plays in locals' wellbeing and their environments. Critics of economic-driven tourism models have consistently highlighted that tourism should be considered a tool, not a goal, in community development (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019; Moscardo & Murphy, 2014). Treating tourism as a goal occurs when tourism development focuses primarily on increasing tourism revenues in a destination without supporting other key areas for the wellbeing of locals in that destination, such as local agriculture.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the tourism industry and its foundations, as well as the development goals in host destinations. The World Tourism Organization estimates that the COVID-19 crisis could lead to an annual decline of 60%-80% compared with 2019 figures (UNWTO, 2020). These numbers would be disastrous, especially in destinations that depend on tourism for their economic wellbeing. Furthermore, Gössling et al. (2020) argue that tourism has contributed directly and indirectly to the propagation of this pandemic. Tourism has done so directly, because tourism involves movement and transport, whereby humans act as a vector for the distribution of pathogens. When discussing the indirect impacts of the pandemic, these authors argue that a large portion of tourism businesses support industrialized and unsustainable

food production by sourcing their food primarily from global markets (Gössling et al., 2020). In this uncertain scenario, visitors and host communities are currently redefining their priorities. At the same time, tourists are searching for safer and more local and sustainable tourism destinations (Gössling et al., 2020). Host communities are rethinking the goals that led to tourism development in their territories in the first place (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Overall, food sovereignty has become one of the most discussed topics in communities' re-examination of their development goals in the context of COVID-19 (Forbes, 2020; La Via Campesina, 2020; O'Connell, 2020). One of the key questions that host communities should ask in this process is how tourism can contribute to host communities' food sovereignty and, therefore, to their resilience.

Contributions to Food Sovereignty

This research contributes to the “second generation” of food sovereignty research (Edelman et al., 2014), because I have connected the concept of food sovereignty to new a field (tourism) with a focus on a specific case study (food sovereignty in Kichwa terms). Although previous papers have recognized the need to include food sovereignty in tourism studies (Brimm et al., 2014; Gascón & Cañada, 2012; Grey & Newman, 2018), this research appears to be the first attempt to apply it as a conceptual framework in an empirical case. The research design followed methodological recommendations for scholarship involving the application of a food sovereignty framework in culturally diverse contexts (Levkoe et al., 2019; Martens et al., 2016). In performing this research, I paid special consideration to the concept of diálogo de saberes and the guidelines it provides for applying traditional and local knowledge in the research process (Leff, 2004; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). The research results also support Pimbert's (2018)

argument that a food sovereignty framework should be connected to agroecology (Chapter 2), biocultural diversity (Chapter 3), and democratic ways of knowing (Chapter 4).

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the fragilities, risks, and inequalities in the global food system into sharp relief (Devereux et al., 2020). In this context, topics such as food sovereignty, agroecology, and local food systems are of increasing importance in food policy formulation worldwide (Forbes, 2020; Locker and Francis, 2020; O’Connell, 2020). For many Ecuadorians, Indigenous and *campesino* (small scale farmers) organizations, inspired by food sovereignty principles, became the only hope for the country when the state failed to manage the crisis effectively (O’Connell, 2020). By communicating online with some leaders of the Chakra Route, I learned that some of the communities who participated in this research took part in initiatives that secure access to food and medicine from the chakra gardens for the most vulnerable communities in Napo. Including food sovereignty in tourism thus contributes to more democratic and sustainable practices in the industry and makes host communities more resilient during uncertain times.

Previous studies in Indigenous food sovereignty have emphasized the need to connect this concept to Indigenous peoples’ right of self-determination (Cote, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015; Morrison, 2011; Settee & Shailesh, 2020; Whyte, 2018). This research emphasized this connection by showing how self-determination relating to food and sustenance operates for Kichwa people in the Amazon region of Ecuador. In my discussions with Kichwa people, they explained that promoting the chakra gardens and other food-related traditions in tourism development has had positive effects on their cultural identity, the conservation of the environment (the Amazon rainforest), the empowerment of Kichwa women, and the connection of Kichwa and non-Kichwa persons (e.g., stakeholders and tourists).

Contributions to Indigenous Food Tourism

The demand for authentic and sustainable food experiences is pushing the food tourism industry towards Indigenous cuisines. Although using Indigenous foods in tourism generates economic activity, Grey and Newman (2018) argue that omitting Indigenous peoples' voices in this development reduces the positive impacts of tourism for Indigenous people. According to these authors, the omission of Indigenous peoples' voices in food tourism development can exacerbate discriminatory practices against Indigenous people and put their environments and cultural heritage at risk. The results of this research support Grey and Newman's (2018) argument, as my work catalogues two scenarios where Indigenous foods are used in tourism both with and without Indigenous peoples' participation. Chapter 2 describes a scenario where the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the development of a touristic route has empowered Indigenous people in both tourism development and their food systems. Furthermore, Chapter 3 describes a scenario in which the development of a menu that features Indigenous cuisine does not include Indigenous peoples' participation. The omission of the Kichwa people's perspectives in the creation of so-called traditional menus has resulted in non-Indigenous food businesses promoting a non-native and invasive fish species rather than traditional food; this has, in turn, created serious biological hazards in the region and undermined the cultural traditions associated with this diversity.

Facilitating Kichwa people's agency in setting goals and values in the development of tourism in their territory also provided evidence in support of redefining authenticity in Indigenous food tourism. Instead of recreating a food product that tourists and the market perceive to be "authentic," this research shows that Indigenous people should actively inform

authenticity in food tourism in a way that supports their values and goals. Kichwa people in the Chakra Route define authenticity in food tourism based on their values. Their menu proposals did not necessarily involve the recreation of foods from the past; instead, they proposed innovative dishes that incorporated and furthered their goals of promoting Kichwa culture and conserving the Amazon rainforest.

Challenges and Limitations of the Findings

Given that this research proceeded using a case study methodology, my findings are not necessarily generalizable in the same sense as studies by natural scientists. However, in qualitative research, generalizability can also involve applying a case in other contexts or to broader issues, some term this process transferability. This study contributed transferrable insights to critical studies in Indigenous tourism that aim to increase Indigenous peoples' agency in research and development underlying Indigenous tourism.

The primary challenges for this research were related to the goals of ensuring the study was pluralistic and incorporated multiple fields, knowledges, and research traditions. This research involved frequent translation of literature and data from English to Spanish and vice versa. It also required an understanding of terms in the Kichwa language and translating them into Spanish and English. The volume of translation required to develop this research necessitated significant time and resources. The inclusion of Kichwa knowledge in the research was particularly challenging because it required a major time investment to understand and practice some of the protocols to interact with Kichwa knowledge recommended by chakra mamas.

The scholarship on Indigenous and sustainability studies at the University of Saskatchewan was a tremendous support in the process of completing this dissertation. However,

the lack of research and academic events on Indigenous tourism at this institution served somewhat as a barrier to expanding my academic network.

This research's primary limitation is that it explores the relationship between food sovereignty and Indigenous tourism from the hosts' perspectives. Future research that incorporates tourists' perspectives will strengthen food sovereignty as a framework applicable to the entire tourism system.

I started this research journey by looking for a topic that could trigger more sustainable and just relationships between Indigenous host communities and the tourism industry. The literature review and conversations with colleagues and Indigenous leaders pointed me towards food sovereignty. Furthermore, critical scholars in Indigenous and sustainable tourism recommend that upcoming research should focus on increasing Indigenous peoples' agency in the tourism industry. Understanding the connection between food sovereignty and Indigenous tourism would not have been possible without expanding my academic knowledge, primarily in the tourism area, towards other fields such as community health, agroecology, political ecology, rural development, and Indigenous studies. I was fortunate to have a multidisciplinary Advisory Committee guiding my research and a highly engaged participant group who did not hesitate to give their time and share their experiences with me. I hope this research inspires more scholars in tourism to engage in more collaborative and transdisciplinary research experiences.

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