

Collective Identity, Empowerment and Gastronomy in Manabí – Ecuador

Identidad Colectiva, Empoderamiento y Gastronomía en Manabí – Ecuador

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Abstract

This study examines the potential relationships between creating a collective identity around the appreciation of intangible cultural heritage and the subsequent increase in empowerment; recognizing that some authors have proposed a connection between these constructs, our research endeavors to shed light on the nature and significance of these relationships. This study aims to answer the research questions by collecting data in October 2022, specifically in the cities of Manta, Portoviejo, and Chone in the region of Manabí. Although the results contribute to understanding the empowerment processes through the enhancement of intangible cultural resources and collective identity, it is essential to point out that caution must be exercised when generalizing to other populations with different demographic and cultural characteristics.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural resources, gastronomy, typical gastronomy, cultural identity.

Resumen

Este estudio examina las posibles relaciones entre la creación de una identidad colectiva en torno a la valorización del patrimonio cultural inmaterial y el posterior aumento del empoderamiento; Reconociendo que algunos autores han propuesto una conexión entre estos constructos, nuestra investigación se esfuerza por arrojar luz sobre la naturaleza y el significado de estas relaciones. Este estudio tiene como objetivo responder las preguntas de investigación mediante la recolección de datos en octubre de 2022, específicamente en las ciudades de Manta, Portoviejo y Chone en la región de Manabí. Si bien los resultados contribuyen a comprender los procesos de empoderamiento a través de la puesta en valor de los recursos culturales intangibles y la identidad colectiva, es fundamental señalar que se debe tener cautela al generalizar a otras poblaciones con características demográficas y culturales diferentes.

Palabras clave: Patrimonio cultural, recursos culturales, gastronomía típica, identidad cultural.

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Introduction

The identity construct is one of the most studied in the sociopsychological field; It has also become one of the most complex due to the wide variety of definitions and approaches to identity (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). According to Brewer & Gardner (1996), and Strybe & Burke (2000), there are three different uses of the word identity (1) to refer to the preferences and culture of the person at the individual level, (2) to refer to a shared identity with a group from which the individual feel like a member, and (3) to define the particularities of a person based on their roles.

The concept of collective identity adopts a multidimensional perspective in which cognitive aspects (of content), as well as social aspects (of structure) and cultural aspects (of processes), intervene (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). Identity is an ideology that the individual develops in the face of encountering the culture that surrounds them as a construct that unites the person with continuous social processes (Melucci, 1995; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Strybe & Burke, 2000; David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011; La Torre, Di Tullio, Tamburro, Massaro, & Rea, 2021). Therefore, collective identity is the group's identity that is developed at a micro-level (linked to the individual in the process of self-identification) and at a macro level with the application of collective meaning (David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011).

Collective identity is a sociopsychological phenomenon that allows people to self-identify as members of a collective or social category that usually has some connotation or meaning for the individuals belonging to said group (Stryke & Burke, 2000; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Self-identify as part of a social group helps create ties within this group and increase the sense of belonging, which motivates one to be part of the decision process that binds that group, leading to empowerment and effectuation (Strauß et al., 2020). According to Molina et al. (2016), intangible and living heritage are the foundation of collective identity, power, and authority in society. Thus, ICH, such as gastronomy, are cultural aspects that shape the collective identity (Schluter, 2012).

Serpe and Stryker (2011) proposed that identity has three levels (1) the individual level, (2) the relational level, and (3) the collective level. The individual level focuses on self-identifying personal values (goals, beliefs, religion, etc.). The relational level refers to the person's roles concerning other human beings and how the individual assumes these roles as part of their identity (being a father, being a son, being a wife, etc.). Finally, the collective level refers to the person's identification with a group and their self-categorization of belonging to the group, and the meanings (positive or negative) that the individual assigns to said group (being Latino, being American, being Jewish, etc.). Unquestionably, an individual can have different identities along the different levels mentioned. For example, a woman can consider herself a Christian, a mother, a professional, and a Latina at the same time.

From an anthropological point of view, human beings need to develop a sense of belonging to a larger group as part of their social nature and with the aim of ensuring the species' survival (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Connectivity and a sense of belonging are born from alliances and affiliations at the intra-personal level and through comparing differences and similarities within a group and how these are adopted through personal self-evaluation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; David & Bar-Tal, 2009). Thus, collective identities do not necessarily require personal relationships but reflect the internalization of the groups' norms, characteristics, and dogmas with which the individual identifies (Melucci, 1995; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Strybe & Burke, 2000; David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011).

Collective identity concerns the social group, the set of social interactions that arise when individuals recognize that they are part of a bigger whole (David & Bar-Tal, 2009), and has its theoretical foundations in the theory of social identity.

Cultural heritage is a document driver of collective identity, since helps to create the sense of the self and connect it to a bigger whole. In the field of tangible cultural heritage, UNESCO has established the parameters for its protection and preservation and established mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of iconic resources of universal value for their use and enjoyment for future generations. However, when talking about intangible or intangible heritage, the picture is different, and the concern to protect it is much more recent (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Munjeri, 2004; Smith & Akagawa, 2009). This is how in 1989 the first mention about intangible heritage was made by UNESCO (by Miguel Molina et al., 2016) and it was latter defined as the set of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills possessed by communities, groups and individuals that are recognized as part of the collective heritage and that are transmitted from generation to generation producing a sense of identity through a process of collective recreation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

The relationship between heritage and tourism is widely documented (Timothy, 2011; Lopez & Sanchez Canizares, 2012; Timothy, 2014; Richards, 2014; Galvez et al., 2020; Félix et al, 2021), tourism activity is nourished by the tangible and intangible resources provided by cultural heritage for the creation of the added value of the tourist offer and tourism products with commercial potential. Within the framework of heritage gastronomy, the relationship is not different since ancestral gastronomy gives way to gastronomic tourism (Molina et al., 2016). Matta (2016) also establishes the relationship as an inseparable link in which the concepts of food, culture, and identity are immersed, which gives rise to the emergence of tourism. Moreover, culinary specialties have become carriers of cultural harmony because they are configured as identifying elements of peoples and regions (Felix et al., 2021).

This study examines the potential relationships between creating a collective identity around the appreciation of intangible cultural heritage and the subsequent increase in empowerment; recognizing that some authors have proposed a connection between these constructs, our research endeavors to shed light on the nature and significance of these relationships. By exploring the interplay between collective identity, the appreciation of intangible cultural heritage, and empowerment, we seek to enhance our understanding of how these factors contribute to individual and community well-being.

- *RQ 1: What are the levels of appreciation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) gastronomy among individuals in Manabí?*
- *RQ 2: To what extent does tourism contribute to empowerment in Manabí?*
- *RQ 3: How do individuals in Manabí perceive and identify with collective identity about intangible cultural heritage?*
- *RQ 4: To what extent can the variance in tourism empowerment be explained by intangible heritage appreciation and collective identity levels in Manabí?*

Tourism Empowerment

Empowerment has been highlighted as an essential attribute for the success of destination management. It is not to inform the community but to transfer control and power through meaningful participation (Boley and McGehee, 2014). It is well known that tourism affects the meaning of a place, the connections residents have with others, and the resources within the destination (Strzelecta et al., 2017). The awareness of tourism benefits adds to the realization of destination value through the increase in visitation (if they visit, it must be valuable), which leads to increased place attachment and subsequently increased empowerment (Strzelecta et al., 2017). Resident empowerment is a central tenet of sustainable tourism development, but it is difficult to define and measure (Boley and McGehee, 2014). Empowerment, as a definition, is built from previous education, planning and development concepts, and psychology fields (Boley and McGehee, 2014). Empowerment is vital in tourism management because it influences the active participation of the community in the planning process and is a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development (Joo et al., 2020). Empowerment is a desirable attribute that starts at an individual level and can evolve to become collective and reach its full manifestation when people have the authority to act on behalf of an issue (Boley & McGehee, 2014).

Collective empowerment can change people's behavior, as such communal well-being and collective identity can prevail against personal benefits (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Joo et al., 2020). The concept of empowerment explains the internal processes through which individuals actively participate in community decision-making (Cole, 2006; Boley & McGehee, 2014). Therefore, real empowerment goes beyond participation in political decisions but is the sum of the community's psychological, social, and political actions regarding issues they consider essential (Page & Czuba, 1999; Cole, 2006). Tourism community empowerment is generally conceptualized as the community's power over destination development, planning, and decision-making (Timothy, 2014). The empowerment of residents is a central principle for sustainable tourism development and one of the main non-economic benefits of tourism (Timothy & Ron, 2013). Still, being a reasonably abstract concept, its quantification is complex (Boley & McGehee, 2014).

According to Cole (2006), empowerment contemplates four dimensions: (1) the economic dimension, which is the realization of economic benefits or costs; (2) the psychological, which is linked to collective identity and the processes of increasing the sense of pride, esteem and sense of belonging; (3) the social dimension focuses on understanding how community bonds are created; and (4) politics, which is participation in political processes, decision-making processes, and citizen participation. In contrast, for Boley & McGehee (2014), empowerment

establishes three dimensions (1) psychological empowerment, which includes the sense of belonging, the perception of community pride, and the esteem generated by belonging to the community (membership). (2) social empowerment is defined as levels of community cohesion and participation in collaborative actions, and (3) political empowerment is participation in decision-making processes. Empowerment is, therefore, a multidimensional construct that occurs at the community level. Thus, also for Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka (2017), tourism empowerment includes four critical dimensions: (1) psychological dimension, (2) social dimension, (3) political dimension, and (4) economic dimension. The psychological dimension is conceptualized as the perception of the importance of tourist activity as an influential factor in the sense of pride and collective identity. The social dimension explores the relationship between tourism development, increased social relationships, and community cohesion. The political dimension describes community participation in decision-making bodies such as tourism departments and destination management organizations.

Finally, economic empowerment explores the community's perception of the importance of tourism in the local economy. Despite the differences when identifying the dimensions that empowerment encompasses, researchers generally agree that empowerment is a multidimensional construct that unites individual strengths with social systems for community benefit, seeking to improve the quality of life of community members (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Page & Czuba, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000; Timothy & Ron, 2013; Strzelecka et al., 2017). In the tourism planning of heritage destinations, empowerment plays a key role as it stimulates the participation of the community in the preservation of the cultural resources of the destinations (Khalid, Ahmad, Ramayah, Hwang & Kim, 2019) and contributes to the alleviation of poverty, especially in rural communities (Gohori & VanderMerwe, 2021). In these cases, empowerment begins with the recognition of the value of cultural resources that can occur through formal educational processes or the enhancement by third parties (awards, certification, etc.) (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Strzelecka et al., 2017; Khalid et al., 2019; Gohori & VanderMerwe, 2021). Thus, the transfer of ownership of cultural legacies passes to the community through a four-phase process (1) access to information, (2) inclusion and inclusive participation and especially of minority groups that contribute with local knowledge, (3) accountability, and (4) formal organization and the ability to work as a team (Gohori & VanderMerwe, 2021).

Methods

This study aims to answer the research questions by collecting data in October 2022, specifically in the cities of Manta, Portoviejo, and Chone in the region of Manabí. A total of 450 surveys were collected during the data collection phase, and after conducting data cleaning procedures, 376 surveys were included in the final analysis. Surveys were administered using the Qualtrics platform, ensuring standardized data collection procedures and efficient data management. The study utilized a cross-sectional quantitative approach to explore the levels of appreciation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) gastronomy, tourism empowerment, and collective identity in the context of Manabí.

Intangible heritage appreciation was measured using three variables based on the conceptualization of intangible heritage (social practices, rituals, and festive events) proposed by UNESCO. The variables (1) perception that the heritage is part of the culture, (2) perception of being valuable, and (3) willingness to preserve the heritage, all were measured using a 7-points likert scale. The collective identity construct was measured with three items to assess the micro sociopsychological domain (1) self-identification as a member of the culture, (2) perception of being part of the group (manabitan), (3) importance to the self (David and Bar-Tal, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011); and three items to assess the macro sociopsychological domain: (1) sharing system belief at the cognitive level (know how to prepare the heritage cuisine), (2) sharing system belief at the emotional level (experiencing the gastronomy brings a positive connotation), and (3) sharing system beliefs at the behavioral level (prepare manabitan traditional food at least once a month) (David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011); All variables for the collective identity were measured using a 7-point likert scale.

Finally, tourism empowerment was conceptualized as the action of participating in planning (Cole, 2006; Boley & McGehee, 2014), adopting a political empowerment approach and operationalized using a 7-point Likert scale to measure how often the subjects have participated in tourism heritage gastronomy planning for the province (being part of the decision process through interviews, surveys, etc.), considering there were more than 2000 opportunities for participation in gastronomy and tourism planning from 2017 to 2022 in the province of Manabí, according to the Ministry of Tourism, and all DMOs across the province had at least three sessions to discuss planning in tourism open to the community per year. SPSS® Statistics version 26 was used for all data cleaning, processing, and statistical analyses. A hierarchical 3-step multiple regression was run to test the influence of the independent variables "appreciation for ICH" and "collective identity" on "political tourism empowerment

Results and discussion

RQ 1, 2 & 3: *Levels of ICH gastronomy appreciation, Tourism Empowerment in Manabí, and Collective Identity in Manabí?*

A total of 376 responses were included in the analysis; 58% of the participants reported their gender as female, 41.2% as male, and 0.8% as other. The gender distribution of the sample has a slight overrepresentation of women compared with the population of interest (8.3%), where, according to INEC, 50.3% are male and 49.7% female. The average age of the participants was 32.17 years, with a standard deviation of 11.96.

Concerning the highest level of education achieved, 10% responded that they have a graduate degree, 27.9% have an undergraduate degree, 11.7% have technical studies, 41.15% have a high school diploma, and 8.2% refrained from answering. As for their marital status, 59% reported being single, 10.9% living with a significant other but not married, 22.1% married, 4.8% divorced, 1.3% widowed, and 1.9% refrained from answering. Generally, the sample mirrors the demographic characteristics of the population of interest.

Regarding intangible heritage appreciation, the results show a mean of 6.47 (Sd = 1.180) for the perception that the heritage is part of the culture, a mean of 6.44 (Sd = 1.22) for the perception of being valuable, and a mean of 6.24 (Sd = 1.220) for the willingness to preserve the heritage.

For the collective identity construct, Self-identification as a member of the culture showed a mean of 6.51 (Sd = 1.239), Perception of being part of the group had a mean of 6.36 (Sd = 1.37), Importance to the self 6.32 (Sd = 1.367), Sharing system belief at the cognitive level 6.24 (Sd = 1.541), Sharing system belief at the emotional level 6.44 (Sd = 1.172), and Sharing system beliefs at the behavioral level 6.38 (Sd = 1.317).

Finally, the empowerment levels were above average, with a mean of 5.5236 (Sd = 1.187).

RQ 4: *Variance of tourism empowerment explained by intangible heritage appreciation and collective identity?*

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to analyze the predictability of Intangible heritage appreciation and collective identity on the levels of empowerment. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions. ICH appreciation variables were entered in Step 1, explaining 28.7% of the variance in tourism empowerment $F(3, 376) = 49.17, P < .001$. In the first model the variables "Perception that the heritage is valuable", and "Perception that the heritage is part of the culture" were found statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and their standardized beta coefficients were .136, and .387 respectively. After the entry of the collective identity variables, at Step 2 the model explained 31.8% of the variance in the dependent variable and was found statistically significant $F(11, 376) = 18.94, P < .001$. In the second model, only two variables (sharing system beliefs at the behavioral level and sharing system belief at the cognitive level) found statistically significant. The value of beta for the variables were .135 and .146 respectively ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions

UNESCO (2022) defines ICH as the traditions or living expressions that are inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and practices of nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional handicrafts. Based on this definition, heritage gastronomy could be included in all the categories mentioned above, even more so when it manifests ancestral techniques that have been transmitted since immemorial times, especially in the case of minority groups (Regalado, 2016).

Local food is part of the cultural resources intimately linked with the peoples' traditions, history, and culture (Park, Muangasame, & Kim, 2021). Therefore, food acts as a bridge between people, their collective identity, community appreciation, and the development of ties with the destination (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Park et al., 2021). The collective identity that is based on the appreciation of the local gastronomy (food identity) tends to have an impact on the pride of the regions in a way that supports the development of community empowerment at a social, psychological, economic, and political level (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Golcalves et al., 2022).

The results show a high appreciation of the gastronomic ICH in the province of Manabí (6.47 out of 7), which was to be expected since the local cuisine is declared as a heritage of Ecuador. In the same way, the perception of the gastronomy of Manabí as part of the local culture showed values well above the average (6.47 out of 7), and it was evidenced that the inhabitants are willing to be part of the protection processes that ICH (6.44 out of 7). Concerning

the gastronomic heritage, the levels of collective identity in Manabí are also high, demonstrating the gastronomic ICH's importance in the collective identity of the destinations. The magnitude that gastronomy plays in the construction of the identity and the empowerment of the destinations of Manabí is irrefutable. The results of this study show a strong relationship between the appreciation of the ICH and the levels of collective identity as predictors of political empowerment. The appreciation of the ICH explained 28.7% of the variance of the model, while collective identity contributed 3.1%. If intangible heritage is considered essential to protect, community members will be more likely to participate in planning processes that allow for the preservation of resources. Although collective identity contributes a smaller percentage to the variation in the levels of empowerment, it is evident that the relationship exists and is directly proportional.

Although it could be evident that people tend to act and become more involved in the planning processes that they perceive as valuable, the magnitude of the relationship between appreciation of the ICH and collective identity has yet to be reported. This study contributes to the literature by quantifying the said relationship and how much the perception of importance and collective identity contribute to empowerment. The reported values of the relationship between the variables are highly significant, evidencing the importance of enhancing cultural resources and collective identity to increase the participation of communities in planning processes.

Thus, based on the results, Destination managers need to be aware of the nuances of the collective community identity and be willing to invest in awareness campaigns to promote the cultural values of the destination's resources if they aim to increase tourism empowerment.

These results show the importance of collaborative work between the actors of the tourism sector, the cultural sector, and the community in the search for the protection of the ICH. In addition, the results of the present study allow us to quantitatively demonstrate the importance of processes that allow the appreciation of the ICH in the destinations in the levels of active empowerment of the members of the community in general, and not only of the members of the private sector and the DMOs. Specifically, in the gastronomic context, the results show the importance of the culinary heritage legacy in processes of local empowerment, which calls for the need to interpret the gastronomic ICH of the destination for visitors and locals.

Tourism empowerment processes are essential to ensure socially and environmentally responsible tourism that benefits communities and makes them managers of their own future. The campaigns that allow the enhancement of the gastronomic ICH could contribute to the empowerment of the community and therefore are evidenced as a critical resource in tourism planning.

Although the results contribute to understanding the empowerment processes through the enhancement of intangible cultural resources and collective identity, it is essential to point out that caution must be exercised when generalizing to other populations with different demographic and cultural characteristics. In the same way, the study showed a slight overrepresentation of women since it would be necessary to confirm the influence of gender in the processes of tourist empowerment. Finally, an overrepresentation of young and single people was evidenced, which could be due to the fact that the places chosen for the sampling were open spaces with a lot of pedestrian movement and which could be little frequented by older community members. It would be advisable for future studies to consider other sampling locations.

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