

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTANGIBLE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE: ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE SYMBOLISM OF COCOA FOR THE BRIBRI PEOPLE (TALAMANCA, COSTA RICA)

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Our world is being hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The economy and tourism sectors are collapsing, and our way of life is undergoing great changes. At this moment, it becomes even more urgent that we listen the indigenous peoples demands – given that they have been suffering for a long time me the onslaught of globalisation and the coloniality of power as the permanent structure of the civilising process of modernity (Quijano, 2000).

The history of indigenous tourism is linked to the struggles of the peoples for liberation, both in the colonial era and in the subsequent stages of economic conquest by world capitalism. In the long history of struggle and domination that precedes the start and subsequent development of tourism among indigenous peoples, we must add the recent process of touristification. As part of this process, traditional ‘ancestral’ cultural communities, some of them recognised by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites, become part of an ‘authenticity economy’ (Heinich, 2009; Oehmichen and De la Maza, 2019).

The main aim of the article is to make a preliminary diagnosis of the intangible cultural heritage of the indigenous Bribri community of Talamanca (Costa Rica). We focus primarily on the method of cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) production with the aim of proposing a tourism product based on their intangible heritage for enhancing and empowering the community. To achieve this objective, a methodological review of the literature on matriarchy and patriarchy in the Americas is made, as well as a geo-historical review of the importance of cocoa in Costa Rica.

For an analysis of the symbolism of cocoa, its traditional method of cultivation, and its relationship with tourism, reference is made to the ethnographic work of David Arias Hidalgo (2009-2014) during a local indigenous tourist guide training programme (Arias and Solano, 2009), and the period of his doctoral research fieldwork (2018-2019). The main research techniques of the fieldwork were centred on participatory observation and

in-depth interviews with indigenous tourist guide students, local guides, representatives of tourist businesses, *kekepa* (elderly people), and *awapa* (traditional doctors).

This article arises as one of the proposals for tourism products based on indigenous intangible cultural heritage for the ADSIDEO 2020 research project call of the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) entitled: 'Improving the tourism product of the indigenous Bribri community (Talamanca, Costa Rica) by emphasising their intangible cultural heritage'. The researchers are from the UPV and the Technological Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR) and are working in collaboration with the indigenous Bribri community of Talamanca.

The first part of the study makes a brief conceptual review of matriarchy and indigenous societies with matrilineal kinship in the Americas, as well as evidence regarding a historical indigenous patriarchy combined with colonial patriarchy (Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2013) that contrasts with the absence of gender category for indigenous peoples before European colonisation. Examples in Central America, and particularly through a case study of the matrilineal Bribri structure, reveal multiple realities and contexts that suggest that there is generally no single patriarchal and matrilineal system that applies to these indigenous societies.

The second part of the article refers to the work carried out in recent decades by various international organisations on initiatives and proposals for the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups – including indigenous peoples. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005) must be highlighted among the fundamental documents.

Despite declarations and documents for the enhancement of the indigenous movement and tourism at the international level (with instruments that present proposals for models of indigenous community self-government, as well as legal measures to encourage tourism), indigenous communities continue to be generally excluded from the cultural control and profits of tourism (Coronado, 2014; Valcuende, 2017). The management of tourism businesses by indigenous communities is limited by a lack of professional experience, lack of training, as well as by the unequal distribution of profits between tour operators and communities (Fuller *et al.*, 2005 and 2007; Bennett *et al.*, 2012; Withford and Ruhanen, 2014; Pastor and Espeso, 2015).

Authors such as Pereiro (2015) remark that indigenous tourism is still an open scientific field, and emphasise that studies by various authors from the 1990s onwards reveal that it is more a question of a product offer than a form of tourism. Culture is the essence of the attraction in indigenous tourism, unlike, for example, ethnic tourism, which does not necessarily include indigenous groups. It is chiefly a 'way of doing' tourism – in which the indigenous people are the central agents of empowerment (Grünewald, 2003; Yang and Wall, 2009; Pereiro, 2015).

The social vulnerability of Costa Rican indigenous peoples and the arrival of tourism in the Bribri communities of Talamanca is then addressed. In recent decades, small-scale tourism in the Bribri Indigenous Territory of Talamanca has enabled many Bribri families (who are highly dependent on selling farmed products such as cocoa) to diversify their income.

The final part analyses the potential for the production and symbolism of cocoa to enhance the tourist offer of the Bribri communities. The historical importance of cocoa

cultivation is highlighted at a local, regional, and national level. Although cocoa continues to be important for local producers, the limited capacity to add value to the final product is identified. In addition, profits do not necessarily remain in indigenous hands.

Another interesting aspect is how the emergence of tourism in the Bribri Indigenous Territory is linked to the arrival of the monilia fungus – a disease that damages cocoa fruit and has had a serious effect on the plantations of the South Caribbean and Talamanca. The difficulties caused by monilia was one of the main reasons why the women of Yorkín sought to diversify their income away from a reliance on cocoa production. It is shown that organised groups of Bribri women actively lead tourism businesses associated with cocoa and that this could be hypothetically linked to their ancestral matrilineal social structure.

Cocoa (tsirú in Bribri) is associated with social exchanges, hospitality, and reciprocal relations for the Bribri people (Bozzoli, 1980). It also represents femininity for the Bribri and Cabécar peoples, and as one of the most symbolic elements in their culture it is well represented in their rich oral tradition (the best example being the history of the origin of cocoa – the cocoa woman). Another traditional responsibility is related to funeral rites – the Tsirú Okom is the individual responsible for making a special chocolate for funeral rites and this very respected post is only open to women. There is a significant cultural heritage around the symbolism of cocoa and this heritage continues thanks to the protection given by the elderly – but there is a risk it may disappear due to the accelerated process of acculturation in these communities.

Local indigenous guides play a leading role in the transmission and revitalisation of intangible cultural heritage. Studies by Weiler and Ham (2001, 2002) point to the importance of the processes of training guides in the interpretation of heritage in Latin American countries. In the case of the Bribri communities, the Association of Indigenous Bribri Guides of Talamanca (AGITUBRIT) is identified as a key actor in the training process for rescuing oral traditions linked to the symbolism of cocoa. For this to be viable, guides must first consult traditional authorities about which elements can be shared with tourists, and about how they can participate as guardians of the culture. Training processes are needed to update knowledge on how to interpret the heritage; and interested tourism firms should be involved in the whole process.

In conclusion, tourism businesses linked to cocoa in Talamanca reveals an active participation by indigenous women's groups. The symbolism associated with this type of cultivation shows a close relationship with femininity; however, even more interesting is the leadership role assumed by the Bribri women – which breaks with more than 500 years of gender coloniality. This suggests that the historical matrilineal Bribri system can be understood beyond the historical patriarchy.

Due to the potential of cocoa and its symbolism as an intangible cultural heritage, in addition to being a quality product that is often produced with minimal environmental impact, it would be worthwhile exploring the opportunities proposed in this work. The aim of such an exploration should be to respond to the needs of the Bribri indigenous community to enhance its tourism product and highlight the unique signs of identity involved in cocoa production, while diversifying the tourism offer and adding to the community's income.