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Cultural Dimensions of Territorial Development: A Plan to Safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Guano's Knotted Carpet Weaving Tradition, Chimborazo, Ecuador

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Abstract: The current research article focuses on safeguarding the knotted carpet weaving tradition in Guano, an endangered intangible cultural heritage (ICH) threatened by globalisation and a lack of intergenerational transmission. The research aims to revitalise this artisanal technique through a comprehensive safeguarding plan, using a participatory action research approach. Activities included in-depth interviews, workshops, and the documentation of seven key cultural practises related to the weaving, such as spinning, natural dyeing, and design. The study found that 86% of these practises are highly vulnerable. To address this, the research developed strategies to promote generational transmission, strengthen local collaboration, and connect the craft to territorial identity and sustainable tourism. Proposed actions include intergenerational education programmes, tourism initiatives, and local fairs to boost carpet marketing. The study contributes to the field of ICH by highlighting the role of cultural tourism in preserving at-risk artisanal techniques and community identity. It emphasizes the need for collaborative approaches to safeguard living heritage in a globalized world. The research findings underscore the importance of integrating traditional practices into modern contexts to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage; social use; safeguarding; tourist use; carpets; Guano; Ecuador

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1. Introduction

The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become a highly relevant process within all territories due to an accelerated increase in acculturation and globalisation processes that threaten the continuity of local traditions [1–4]. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of ICH, there is still a significant gap in understanding how to address the challenges associated with the preservation of traditional craft techniques in rapidly changing socio-economic contexts. These challenges include the weakening of intergenerational knowledge transmission, the undervaluation of manual practises in contemporary markets, and the lack of integration of these traditions into sustainable development frameworks. Such limitations hinder the effective safeguarding of cultural practises

and highlight the need for targeted interventions that go beyond mere documentation to actively engage communities in revitalisation efforts. In this framework, the artisanal technique of knotted carpet weaving in Guano, located in the Guano canton, Chimborazo province, Ecuador, represents not only a significant cultural legacy, but also a challenge to the cultural erosion of ancestral knowledge. This research focuses on implementing a safeguarding plan that arose from the need to revitalise and enhance the value of this textile practice, which has been gradually relegated to the background in the face of more visible and tangible cultural manifestations.

This research work combines three key aspects in order to emphasise the dynamic nature of the ICH, considering both its conservation and its adaptation to new realities, thus ensuring its long-term sustainability. Firstly, the participatory diagnosis, through workshops and interviews, aims to identify the cultural manifestations associated with carpet weaving and their degree of vulnerability. On the other hand, communicative action integrates the active collaboration of artisans and local actors with the aim of designing safeguarding strategies that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. And thirdly, interdisciplinary integration, in the sense that technical, cultural and social knowledge is combined, is employed to develop a comprehensive plan that not only preserves craft techniques but also promotes their inclusion in sustainable tourism and territorial development.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research integrates elements of stakeholder theory, cultural ethnography, and historical approaches. The stakeholder theory approach will identify the key actors involved in the preservation and revitalisation of the craft technique, including artisans, local communities, government institutions, and tourists. Interaction and collaboration between these stakeholders is essential to ensure the sustainability of the ICH and its integration into the economic and cultural development of the region. The documentation of traditional practises was also based on ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and collaborative workshops. This approach allowed for capturing the narratives and knowledge of the knowledge bearers, ensuring that safeguarding strategies reflect local perspectives and needs. Finally, the reconstruction of the history of carpet weaving in Guano was supported by primary and secondary sources, providing a context for understanding the evolution of this practice and its cultural importance. This historical component facilitates the valorisation of traditional techniques as an integral part of the territorial identity. Following this approach will make it possible to approach the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage from an interdisciplinary perspective.

To achieve the proposed objective of documenting, safeguarding, and revitalising the artisanal technique of knotted carpet weaving in Guano, Ecuador, a participatory action research approach was adopted with the knowledge bearers. This has made it possible to document and strengthen the practises related to carpet weaving, creating a space where traditional techniques are revalued and their intergenerational transmission is promoted. However, the study also raises critical questions about the broader implications of these safeguarding efforts: How can these traditional practises be adapted to modern economic and cultural contexts without compromising their authenticity? What mechanisms can effectively counteract the pressures of cultural homogenisation while fostering innovation and economic viability for artisans? Addressing these questions is essential for developing safeguarding strategies that are not only inclusive but also responsive to the evolving needs of the community. This approach not only seeks to preserve the art of weaving but also to integrate it into the social and economic fabric of the community through cultural tourism and creative industries.

The importance of ICH for building local identities is fundamental, as it allows communities to reaffirm their sense of belonging and resistance to cultural homogenisation [5–8].

The methodology was designed in alignment with the guidelines of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC). In the first stage, cultural manifestations were recorded through in-depth interviews, participatory workshops, and ethnographic observation to document the processes and knowledge associated with the technique of carpet weaving. For this purpose, tools such as diagnostic matrices and record cards were used, which allowed for the collection of exhaustive information on seven key cultural manifestations, such as spinning, scale design, and knotting technique. In a second stage, a vulnerability diagnosis was carried out. Workshops were held with knowledge bearers, and assessment matrices were applied that considered categories such as memory, identity, and heritage. In the last phase, the safeguarding plan was formulated.

This research aims to contribute to the discussion on ICH safeguarding. Although studies have been carried out on ICH, these have focused on social uses, rituals, and festive events, but not on traditional craft techniques. In this sense, this research differs significantly from existing research by focusing on the documentation and revitalisation of a specific craft technique. It offers a unique perspective that directly addresses the challenges associated with traditional manual practises, such as intergenerational transmission, economic sustainability, and cultural integration in contemporary contexts. By problematising these dimensions, this study aims to provide insights into the broader systemic barriers that undermine the sustainability of traditional crafts, such as the lack of institutional support, limited market access, and the undervaluation of traditional knowledge in modern development paradigms. For all these reasons, this study highlights the need for inclusive strategies that recognise the dynamics of cultural heritage as a living process. In this regard, the article provides a detailed analysis of the historical, social, and cultural context surrounding the knotted carpet weaving technique, as well as the methodologies implemented for its safeguarding and revitalisation. The interrelation between intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development becomes a core axis to promote not only the preservation of traditions but also the economic and social welfare of the communities involved [2,9,10].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Safeguarding

The study of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) focuses on safeguarding the non-physical aspects of culture. According to Lixinski [11], preservation generally refers to and focuses on physical artefacts, while safeguarding recognises the dynamic and living nature of intangible heritage, emphasising that it requires community participation and respect for cultural contexts. Therefore, the term safeguarding is inherent to the intangible because it provides a holistic approach by considering legal, social, and cultural dimensions, with the objective of empowering communities and ensuring the continuity of their cultural practises.

Safeguarding focuses on numerous actions, which enable identification, protection, conservation, revitalisation, and transmission to future generations [1–3,12,13]. As pointed out by UNESCO, it corresponds to actions applied to traditions, practises, and expressions, which are essential for maintaining the identity and cultural diversity of the social groups that own the territories, and even more for fostering sustainable development.

At this point it should be noted that ICH was linked to heritage management strategies at the turn of the new millennium, initially categorised as “poor heritage”. Through this expression, it sought to reflect the challenges and complexities associated with the recognition, appreciation, and safeguarding of cultural expressions due to their reduced permanence and visibility as opposed to tangible assets [14,15].

Despite this incipient beginning, the study of ICH has evolved significantly since 2001, following the first UNESCO Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The proclamation recognises that the cultural manifestations of

territories are full of dynamic and living aspects of culture, highlighting the importance of this for local communities, while redefining heritage as an active and participatory process rather than a static collection of artefacts [5]. This has also led to generating a legal and institutional framework that allows for the holistic protection and management of cultural heritage, including both tangible and intangible elements.

The relevance that ICH has taken on at international level has provided opportunities for economic development and social cohesion through the use of the cultural resources of each locality. Unfortunately, as Stefano et al. [15] point out, one of the main challenges to safeguarding ICH is based on its inherent vulnerability and the risk it faces, as it is gradually undervalued and minimised in public management. This statement is corroborated by Aikawa-Faure [3], Deacon et al. [16], and Lenzarini [10]. The concept of cultural erosion is particularly relevant in this context, as it refers to the gradual loss or dilution of ancestral knowledge due to external pressures such as globalisation, acculturation, migration, and the lack of intergenerational transmission [17,18]. Cultural erosion occurs when traditional practises are displaced by more dominant or homogenised cultural expressions, often perceived as modern or economically advantageous [18–20]. This process not only weakens the continuity of intangible heritage but also disconnects communities from their cultural roots, leading to a loss of identity and a diminished sense of belonging [18,19,21,22].

The evolution of the relationship between ICH and safeguarding is shown below in a timeline (Figure 1).

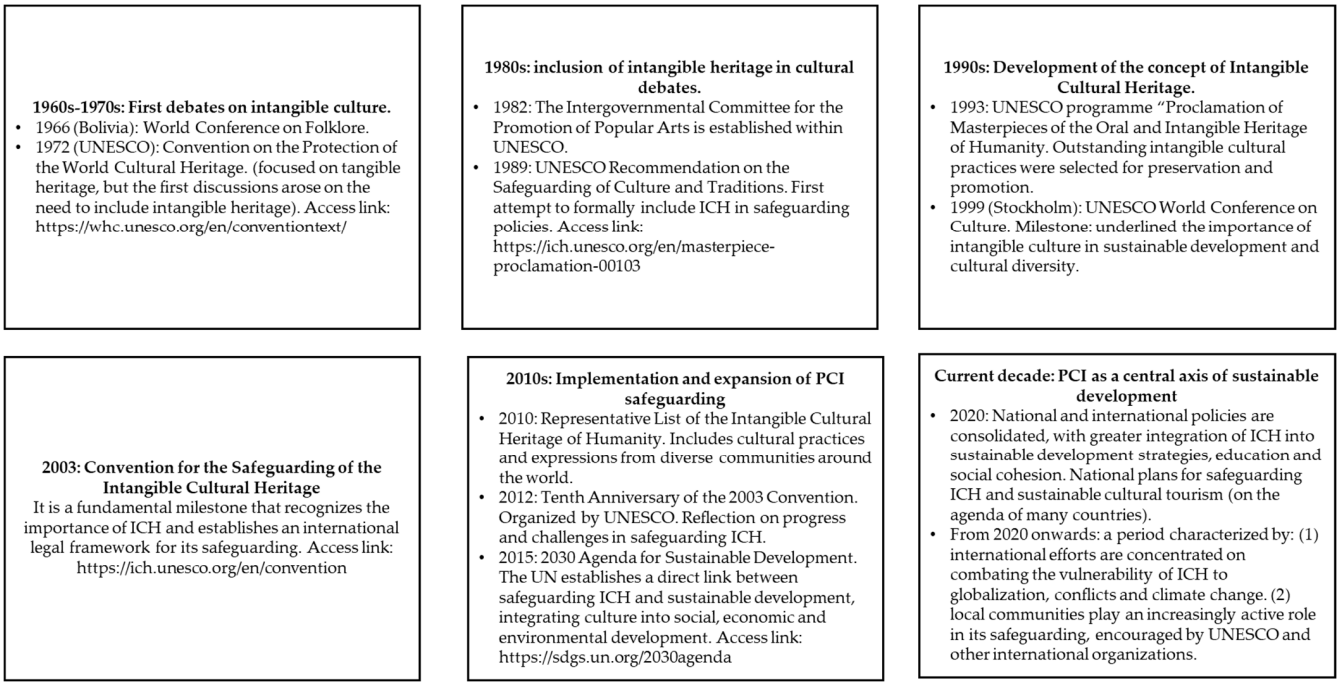


Figure 1. Evolution of the relationship between ICH and safeguarding. Source: own elaboration.

2.2. Importance of ICH for Building Local Identities

ICH, which comprises oral traditions, knowledge, customs, social practises, and crafts, is a vital element for the cultural identity of communities and allows communities to reaffirm their identity in today's globalised world [1]. In this regard, it plays a crucial role in building and understanding how communities perceive themselves, as well as how they are perceived by others, addressing organisational, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Goode [23] further argues that communities have managed to build identities (discourses) that reflect their cultural background by means of ICH. This is an element which enables the identification, promotion, and dissemination of distinctive characteristics, where ter-

ritories can increase their attractiveness to target markets through tourist products that take advantage of these characteristics [24], with the aim of preventing urban development from producing a loss of distinctiveness [25].

ICH is also strongly linked to community cohesion, social organisation, and the system of representations of the human group, since it generates a sense of belonging, i.e., the cultural representations and manifestations generated by communities are reflected through it [26,27].

However, the erosion of cultural knowledge poses a serious threat to this cohesion as it fragments the transmission chain of traditions and weakens the symbolic meaning behind cultural practises [18]. This erosion is often exacerbated by the prioritisation of globalised cultural patterns, the migration of younger generations to urban areas, and the lack of institutional mechanisms to protect and revitalise traditional knowledge. Consequently, the disconnection between communities and their cultural heritage can lead to a sense of alienation and reduced community resilience [28,29].

Nevertheless, it should be clear that all this development is not exempt from external influences such as acculturation, globalisation, and technological advances, which are elements that can reinforce and challenge traditional notions of locality, giving rise to dynamic and evolving identities.

2.3. Strategies for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

The main strategies to achieve the safeguarding of ICH are detailed as follows: (1) identification, documentation, and recording [10,30], (2) intergenerational transmission (educational programmes and learning by doing) [2], (3) promotion, visibility, and enhancement (media, cultural festivals, and public events) [7], (4) legal and political support (notably the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH [1], which provides a framework for international cooperation in the protection of ICH) [31], (5) community participation and social use (empowerment of communities and inclusive approach) [32,33], (6) fostering sustainable cultural tourism [34,35], (7) innovation [36,37], (8) financing, and institutional support (funds and grants, and international cooperation) [38], and (9) research and education on ICH [30,39], among others. These are derived from the principles established by UNESCO and other relevant legal frameworks at the international level.

These actions take into consideration the entire process required to achieve an adequate understanding of cultural manifestations, highlighting that the active participation of local communities is essential for achieving this [13,40]. It begins with identification and documentation, which are not possible to achieve without the community because they require the use of information gathering techniques, such as participant observation, ethnographic records, cultural mapping, or backgrounds that allow for obtaining comprehensive data to sustain cultural manifestations over time [41].

An additional strategy to strengthen the safeguarding of ICH is the application of stakeholder theory, which highlights the roles and interactions of key actors in preserving and revitalising cultural practises. Developed initially in the context of corporate governance, stakeholder theory has evolved into a versatile conceptual tool applicable across disciplines, including cultural heritage management [42]. This theory posits that the sustainability and success of any initiative depend on identifying and addressing the needs and expectations of all stakeholders involved [43]. In the safeguarding of ICH, stakeholders include a wide array of actors: (1) local communities, who are the bearers and practitioners of the cultural traditions; (2) artisans and practitioners, who ensure the continuity and authenticity of these practises; (3) governmental institutions, responsible for formulating policies and allocating resources; (4) cultural associations and NGOs, which often play a bridging role between communities and policymakers; and (5) tourists and the private sector, whose engagement can provide visibility and economic sustainability

for ICH [42–46]. Recognising the interdependence of these groups is critical to creating inclusive and effective safeguarding strategies.

In the context of the carpet weaving technique in Guano, the stakeholders include artisans, local communities, governmental institutions, cultural associations, and tourists. Stakeholder collaboration is fundamental for ensuring the sustainability of ICH, as it aligns the interests and actions of these groups toward common goals, such as intergenerational transmission, economic development through cultural tourism, and the preservation of identity.

The stakeholder theory provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of these interactions, emphasising that effective safeguarding requires inclusive and participatory approaches. For instance, artisans contribute their technical expertise and cultural knowledge, while communities and institutions provide the support needed to integrate these practises into broader cultural and economic systems. Tourists, as external stakeholders, can also play a role in valuing and promoting the unique aspects of ICH, fostering its appreciation and financial sustainability.

Research and preservation are the product of the first two actions, which play an important role because they enable the permanence of manifestations over time. Furthermore, currently, technology integration, as pointed out by Deng and Mo [47], has improved access to information on cultural expressions, but above all, innovative ways to preserve and promote ICH are provided, enabling its value to be transmitted to all age groups.

The promotion, appreciation, transmission, and revitalisation of ICH are the product of all the above actions, and several studies have established that they can be achieved through tourism, which contributes to the economic development of territories, particularly in rural areas. In this regard, Liu and Qi [48] point out that tourism in China has succeeded in promoting rural revitalisation, contributing to economic growth and cultural preservation.

In addition to this, there is the development of creative industries from which heritage interpretation is achieved, and these can easily be integrated into tourism by using modern storytelling techniques and involving visitors through participatory experiences, while cultural manifestations can enhance their attractiveness and economic viability [49].

Finally, social use is approached as a way to integrate ICH into everyday life, fostering a sense of identity and belonging, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of cultural practises [40].

While all of the previously outlined strategies provide a comprehensive approach to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, the dynamic nature of cultural heritage must be considered in any process, i.e., it is not static, it transforms with society, and thus, safeguarding efforts must be adaptive and inclusive to address diverse perspectives.

Finally, safeguarding ICH, as documented in recent studies, requires a multidisciplinary approach that not only addresses the preservation of artisanal techniques, but also considers the education and empowerment of local communities [50]. For example, the implementation of educational initiatives that promote the intergenerational transmission of knowledge is encouraged, which constitute fundamental processes to ensure the continuity of these practises [6]. Furthermore, within the legal framework and cultural policies, it is promoted that these be adapted to protect the rights of indigenous and mestizo communities in the face of globalisation and the exploitation to which they are exposed [38]. This study not only documents the carpet weaving technique but also proposes a revitalization model that integrates the social use of PCI into tourism development. Referring to successful examples in other regions, such as the strategies implemented in Indonesia to preserve songket, how community participation and institutional support are key to facing current challenges has been highlighted [51]. In this sense, it is crucial to go back and forth between the findings of the present study and existing theories, creating a dialogue that not only validates local practises but also offers new perspectives on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

3. Methodology

This study corresponds to a work based on participatory action research with the holders of knowledge and practises related to ICH linked to the technique of knotted carpet weaving in Guano, Chimborazo, Ecuador, with the purpose of enhancing the value of this intangible cultural heritage. The methodological process follows the path outlined by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage through the Ministerial Agreement NO. DM-2018-126 [52] and the base guidelines established in the Methodological Guide for the safeguarding of ICH of the INPC [53], which state that in order to achieve clear actions in the process of safeguarding ICH, three key stages must be achieved (Figure 2), as follows.

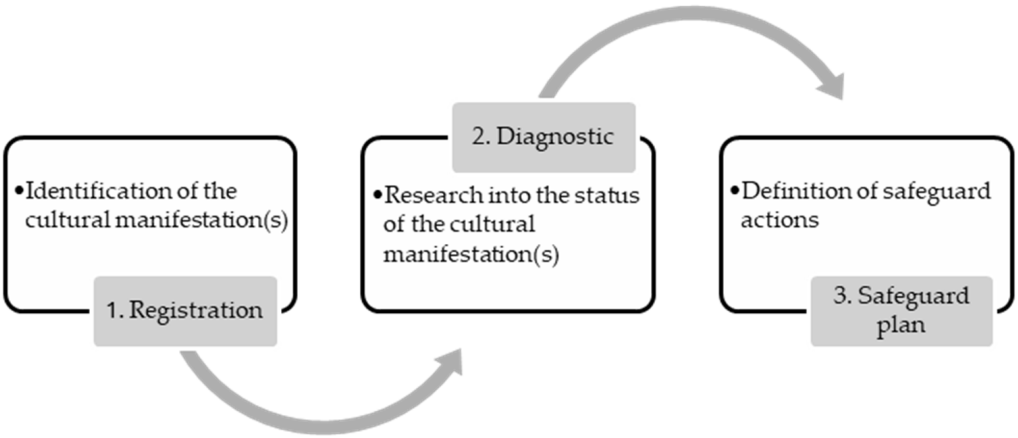


Figure 2. Work methodology proposed by the INPC. Source: [51].

The first stage, which corresponds to the recording of cultural manifestations linked to the Guano knotted carpet weaving technique, requires the completion of 4 work stages, which are detailed in Figure 3. The aim of this stage is to document traditional practises related to carpet weaving, from spinning and natural dyeing to scaled designs and knotting technique. Three tools will be used: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with knowledge bearers to capture technical, historical, and narrative details; (2) participatory workshops bringing together artisans, community members, and local experts to share knowledge, identify problems, and propose solutions; (3) ethnographic observation to produce detailed records of the processes in the artisan workshops through field notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings.

The methodological process was rooted in a collaborative and participatory approach, which allowed for the systematic organisation and analysis of data. Initially, data collection was designed to involve artisans and other stakeholders in multiple stages of the research, ensuring their perspectives shaped both the collection and interpretation of the information. The interviews, workshops, and ethnographic observations were analysed using qualitative methods, where data were coded and organised into categories that reflected key themes such as generational transmission, cultural relevance, and market challenges. During the workshops, preliminary findings were presented back to the community for validation, enabling a feedback loop that enhanced the accuracy and reliability of the results. This iterative process ensured that the voices of the knowledge bearers were integrated throughout the research and provided a foundation for co-creating solutions.

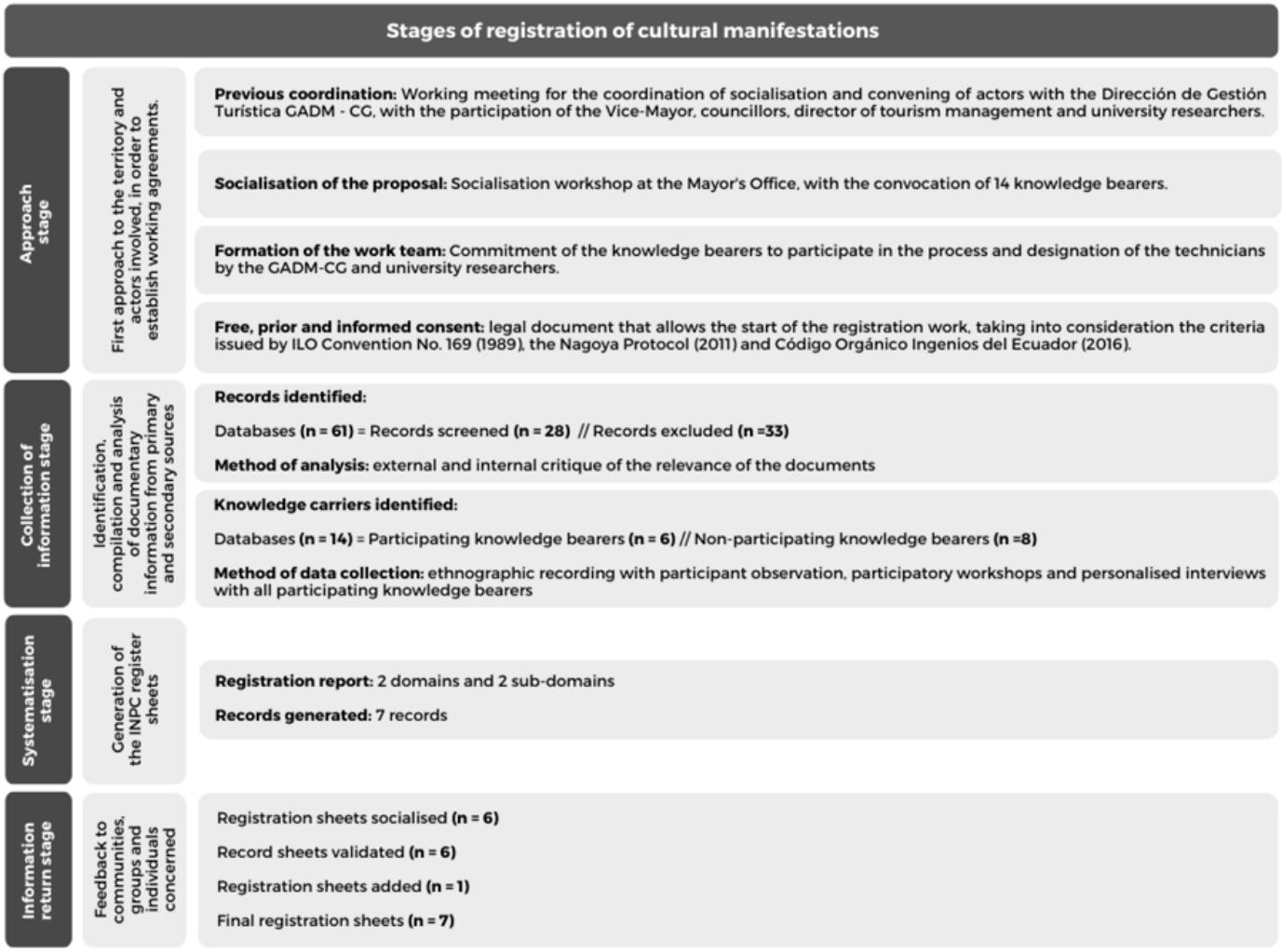


Figure 3. Stages performed at the time of recording events.

The systematisation process also involved creating detailed technical files for each cultural manifestation, incorporating narratives, photographic records, and audiovisual documentation. These files were structured using the guidelines provided by the INPC and were validated collaboratively with the participants. The triangulation of data from multiple sources—including interviews, observations, and workshop discussions—helped to cross-check and refine the findings, ensuring consistency and depth in the analysis. This participatory methodology reflects a commitment to empowering the community while producing results that are both rigorous and culturally sensitive.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify that the universe of study was defined from the 14 carriers registered by the Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Municipality of Canton Guano (GADM-CG), taking into consideration that this sectional government is the one that has motivated the process of certification of the cultural manifestation as part of the Cultural Heritage of Ecuador. The work group was made up of both men and women who work as carpet weavers or who carry out some of the steps in the production of carpets, who reside in the urban parish of La Matriz and El Rosario, and who are the last to continue with the practice of this weaving technique. A call was issued to the entire identified universe, but in the end only 6 knowledge bearers participated voluntarily, who were the ones who have a workshop in operation. The rest indicated their refusal to participate in the process because they no longer practice it all the time. The information collection was carried out through personalised interviews and participatory workshops after signing the

Free, Prior and Informed Consent required to safeguard the protection of rights. During this information collection process, the carpet weaving process was exhaustively obtained and the PCI registration forms established by the INPC were completed.

The second stage corresponded to the diagnosis of the recorded ICH, for which a participatory workshop was held with the holders, in which a double-entry assessment matrix was applied to the recorded manifestations. It was structured by taking into consideration the three categories for the identification and management of ICH, proposed in the Methodological Guide of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage [53]: Heritage, Memory, and Identity (Figure 4). The objective at this stage was to assess the current state of cultural manifestations in terms of preservation, transmission, and community relevance.

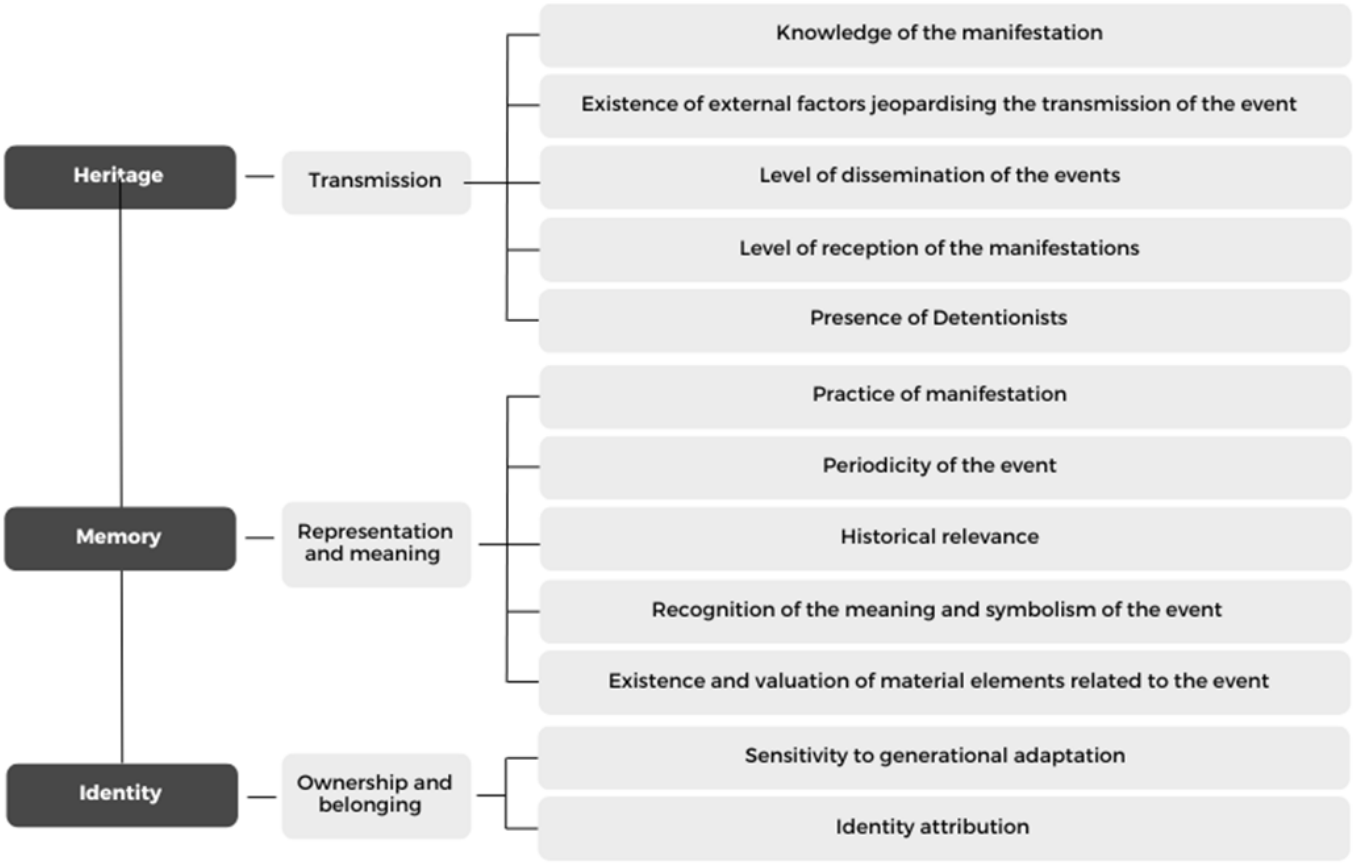


Figure 4. Categories, variables, and criteria considered at the time of diagnosis of the manifestations.

Following the diagnosis of the manifestations, the score achieved in this assessment made it possible to determine the registration category as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Registration categories according to the INPC.

Registration Category	Description	Score
C1: Existing	Manifestations with low level of sensitivity and vulnerability to change	21–30
C2: Vulnerable	Manifestations with medium level of vulnerability due to threats in the transmission of knowledge and unfavourable conditions	11–20
C3: Highly vulnerable	Manifestations highly vulnerable to change and risk	0–10

Source: [37].

Finally, in phase 3, with the objective of designing comprehensive strategies for the preservation, revitalisation, and sustainability of traditional practises, the strategic approach of the safeguarding plan was formulated through a SWOT analysis, followed by the prioritisation of critical nodes and key success factors. Based on the prioritisation of critical nodes and key success factors, strategic objectives and strategies were formulated to guide the development of programmes and projects for the safeguarding of the community's cultural manifestations.

Thus, the methodological process of safeguarding ICH sought to develop actions aimed at the stimulation, revitalisation, transmission, communication, dissemination, promotion, enhancement, and protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The data processing tools applied to achieve the objective were qualitative analysis (coding and analysing the narratives obtained in interviews and workshops), triangulation, which allowed cross-checking the data from the interviews, observations, and workshops to guarantee the validity and reliability of the results, and the technical files through which each cultural manifestation identified was recorded, including technical descriptions, cultural narratives, photographs, and audiovisual records.

4. Results

4.1. Historiography of Guano Carpets

Within the process of recording information, it was consolidated into two components within the bibliographic review. It was possible to establish a historiography in the subsystems proposed by Clarke [54], as shown in Figure 5.

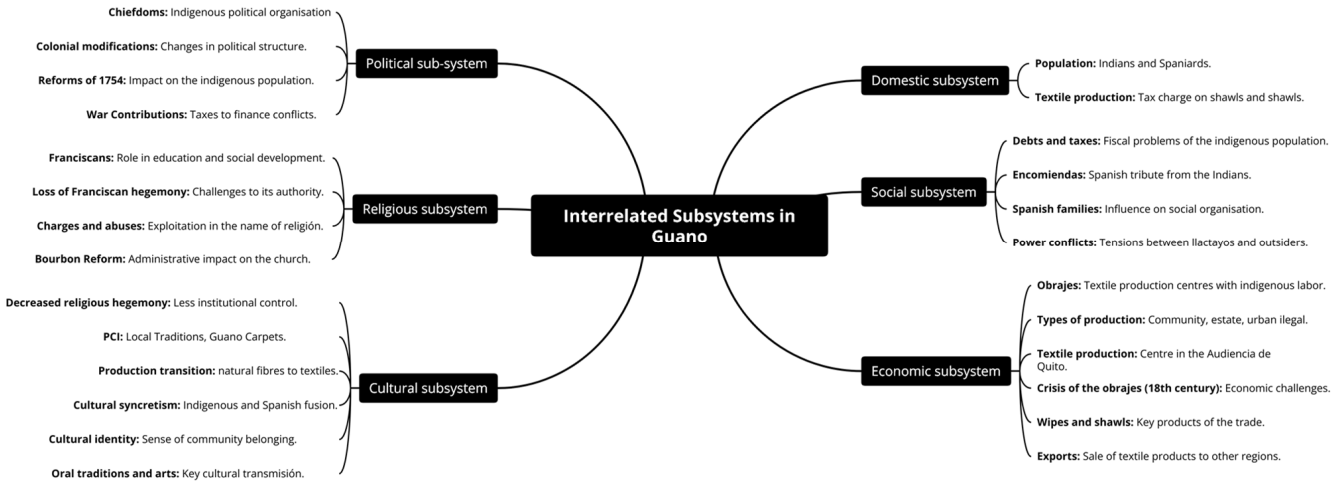


Figure 5. Inter-related sub-systems within Guano according to Clarke [39].

The predominant subsystems within the space were economic and religious due to the representativeness of the obrajes (textile plants) and textile production in the area, with much of this production being generated through the indoctrination process by the Franciscan Order. Guano was characterised for being home to one of the three most important obrajes of Riobamba due to the large number of indigenous labourers [55], a labour force that was the basis of textile production registered by the Audience of Quito. Historical data indicate that about 50% of the labour force in this area came from Riobamba and adjacent areas such as Guano [56].

The level of presence of obrajes was representative, with small obrajes called chorrillos [57], which were considered unfair competition. The most prominent obrajes that withstood the crisis of the obrajes in the mid-18th century were those linked to the haciendas, including Guano.

A unique detail is pointed out by Villavicencio [58], who highlights how the textile quality of the area was recognised by the quality of the fine woven cloth, as well as embroidered blankets, carpets, ponchos, and saddle blankets, which were commercialised in areas such as Nueva Granada. The representativeness of its production meant that during the Independence period, Guano was positioned in the market, even registering specifications in the shipping guides as "rebozos de Guano", which was unusual for that time [59].

Humboldt [60] mentions that by 1802 in "Guano, Riobamba. . .there is not even a single miserable Indian hut, where you can see a loom or cotton cloth in dye", i.e., production was now linked to "modest mestizos and Indians" with the extinction of large obrajeros [56]. Finally, from 1840 to 1870, Guano was classified as one of the manufacturing centres that most resisted European competition and smuggling.

In the religious sphere, the strong influence of Christianity, ecclesiastical organisation, and conflicts arising from the clergy's secularisation were recognised up until the Bourbon reforms that sought to reduce religious hegemony, especially that of the Franciscans, and the charges and abuses committed by doctrine-makers [55,61].

In the domestic sphere, the population's dedication to textile production is mentioned as a characteristic of the population, which is a condition that provokes changes within the territory, as mentioned by Coronel Feijóo [56], who points out that "obrajes and haciendas, together with a modified indigenous landscape" led to the practice of extensive and intensive grazing in areas populated by forests and native shrubs in high altitude areas, as well as the integration of monoculture practises in haciendas, thus "breaking the ancestral balance of the use of ecological lands".

The social subsystem highlights the condition of bulk labour that the indigenous population represented for the obrajes, which was to a large extent retained due to problems of debts and taxes they owed to the Crown and the Church, in addition to pointing out social disputes during the processes of interaction between indigenous and foreign communities. Within the political sphere, the implementation of colonial modifications and the justice system that modified the dynamics of the territory are highlighted.

Finally, in the cultural subsystem, it is seen that Guano carpets have their origin in the guarlapas, which correspond to rectangular pieces or small rugs, which were used between the horse and the saddle. They served to protect the animal by avoiding damage to its skin. This product was developed in family production obrajeros [62]. In the 20th century, there was a boom in carpet production, especially between 1925 and 1930 in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood of the Guano canton. The positioning of this carpet resulted in it reaching different latitudes of the national and Latin American territory. Over time, improvements have been evident in the quality of the raw material and in the production processes. However, production was affected by the Ambato earthquake in 1949, which caused migration processes of carpet artisans [63].

From the 1960s to the 1990s, production was taken up again as a family trade, employing between 10 and 15 workers per workshop. In 1969, the first carpet shop was opened in Guano, which contributed to artisanal production becoming one of the pillars of the canton's economy and an important component of its cultural identity. In 2019, the carpet weavers of Guano were certified as intangible cultural heritage of Ecuador [64].

4.2. Recording of the Cultural Events Linked to Guano Knotted Carpets

Over the course of 3 days of personalised interviews, seven record cards were consolidated between the initial recording process and the knowledge return stage. Table 2 shows that 71.42% (5) of the manifestations correspond to the area of traditional craft techniques, while 28.58% (2) correspond to the area of oral traditions and expressions.

Table 2. Recorded cultural manifestations.

No.	Manifestation	Scope	Subscope	Description
1	History of the Guano Carpet	Traditions and oral expressions	Local memory linked to historical events reinterpreted by communities	The first rug called guarlapa is described in detail: "in colonial times, the people of Guano worked with hand-knotted rugs, which were rustic and used as a blanket for the horse's saddle, called guarlapas". Between 1925 and 1930, the production of rugs for rooms began, the main material being cotton. In 1949, production declined due to an earthquake, causing the migration of a large number of artisans. In the years 1960, 1985, and 1990, rug making took off, and most families in the canton engaged in this activity because it was well paid. Rugs were not only sold within the country but were also exported to Colombia. However, nowadays rugs are imported from Colombia and Peru. The decline in the production of Guano carpets is due to factors such as the crisis experienced in Ecuador in 1999 and the ease of entry of Chinese carpets into Ecuador. Currently, Guano carpets are made of 50% wool and 50% cotton and are hand-spun.
2	Narration of the traditional square El Rosario	Traditions and oral expressions	Local memory linked to historical events reinterpreted by communities	This public space was where farmers came to sell only wool or lamb's wool yarn, which at that time were spun by hand using sigse, the raw material used for making carpets, and at that time, wool was also dyed with natural products. Sales began to decline due to the emergence of spinning mills, which left behind those people who spun by hand, and the people who sold wool went to the spinning mills and no longer to the square; thus, the sales and the name of the place disappeared. Today, it is a place where crafts, sweaters, carpets, and shoes are sold. They are sold by the "20 de diciembre" artisans' association.
3	Traditional spinning process	Traditional craft techniques	Traditional craft techniques	Hand spinning is an activity that has been part of the artisan culture of Guano for over 60 years and has been passed down from parents to children. The yarns produced were given to carpet makers, or these in turn could be purchased at the Plaza Roja del Rosario. "People (...) came from Llapo, San Isidro, San Andrés or from the Igualata moor", where they could buy wool or sisal yarns. In some cases, sheep wool was acquired together with leather. Then, they were separated and the wool was used for the traditional spinning process, while the leather was taken to the tannery in Ambato. In the past, wool was washed in streams and sisal was used as a natural detergent, but with the passage of time, it started being washed in hot water and with Alex soap to remove grease. After washing it, it is left to dry for a day or two depending on the climate. Then, the wool is placed in a jute sack, and with the help of a sigse and the artisan's hand, the wool is pulled and twisted little by little to obtain three types of yarn: thick, which required less time; fine, which was more desirable because it lasted longer; and finer, used for the production of blankets and ponchos. To deliver the yarns, they must be skeined with a wooden tool with the same name (skein) and which is composed of a vertical stick in the centre and two sticks placed horizontally at each end, in which the threads are passed in a 'V' shape. This process is performed in order to have already weighed what is going to be delivered, and 18 balls of thread are needed to obtain a 3-pound weft. After this process, the artisan carpet maker can leave the threads in white or can dye them. It is important to mention that nowadays not only woollen yarn is used but it also mixed with acrylic.

Table 2. *Cont.*

No.	Manifestation	Scope	Subscope	Description
4	Technique to scale of the Guano carpet design	Traditional craft techniques	Traditional craft techniques	The design technique on the carpet is made by means of a photo that the customer provides. Previously, the designs were made on the basis of dots, but with time, they changed to squared paper, taking into account the scale and dimension that the carpet will have. An important fact is that each square on the paper represents a knot, i.e., in 10 cm, 50 dots or knots were made. Mañay, Juan Pozo, and Gerardo Llambay were in charge of making the grid drawings. In addition, the designs were previously made by another artisan. However, the process used to have some complications and depending on the complication, it increased the price and time, so deliveries were delayed. This prompted carpet makers to learn this technique and, currently, the same family members of the artisans do it. Some designs have a higher level of difficulty, usually shading or face profiles. As for flowers, figures, or other types of designs, they are not usually so complex, as they have learned the technique of making them over time. In addition, lately, the most common designs are landscapes and animals. They also use the skin of Amazonian animals such as snakes, zebra, and military camouflage, among others. Also, they usually enhance designs with images of political figures.
5	Natural dyeing technique on lamb's wool	Traditional craft techniques	Traditional craft techniques	Obtaining natural dyes is based on the direct observation of plants or insects that produce strong and permanent colours in lamb's wool, which is a technique that has been used for 80 years. Segundo Colcha says that in order to obtain the natural dye, "the plants are placed with boiling water in a bronze pot, after a few minutes the spun wool is placed in the pot and left to cook for two hours until it achieves a colour, it is left to dry and then sheared". Among the species used for the extraction of natural dyes are the following: - Walnut (Juglans neotropica), where a range of brown colours is obtained. - Rumi beard (Tillandsia landbeckii subsp.), used as a natural medicine and as a dye from which a cream colour is obtained. - Moss (Thamniopsis sp.), from which a grey colour is obtained. - Capuli: (Prunus serotin), from which a stronger shade of brown is obtained. In the 1950s and 1960s, artificial dyes were used, but they did not last very long, so they opted to use German and Swiss dyes, the latter being the best quality. Nowadays, this technique is no longer used, as artisans prefer to go and buy the yarn of the colour they need. The thread they buy is acrylic thread, which allows for better colour fixation.
6	Guano carpet knotting technique	Traditional craft techniques	Traditional craft techniques	The process that is applied for this technique begins by placing the warp on the loom. Depending on the size of the carpet, it will be divided into quarters to distribute the fabric and so that the carpet is even. Then, the thread is passed through the middle of the rows that form the warp and the first base knots are started. To make the knots, two rounds must be made. The first one is made at the top and the second one at the bottom, giving the shape of a round knot, and the excess is cut off, thus making the whole row. It is worth mentioning that if this step is not performed carefully, it could cause a serious injury, as the tool used is very sharp. Once the row of knots is finished, a strip of mine is passed over the recently finished row. To ensure that this mine is adjusted with the knots, a striker, which exerts pressure, is used. This process requires practice, as the carpet depends on this to have the same level. The time it takes to tie the knots will depend on the technique and speed with which the official in charge works.

Table 2. *Cont.*

No.	Manifestation	Scope	Subscope	Description
7	Guano Carpet Shearing Technique	Traditional craft techniques	Traditional craft techniques	The process of finishing a carpet requires extra knowledge "la trasquilada" (shearing). Formerly, this process was very tiring because it was performed only with heavy tin scissors, which tired the craftsman's hands and, therefore, carpet makers chose to pay someone to do the job, people who were called shearers. However, the person in charge had to have some skills to outline, align, and determine the final details so that the drawing was shown as it is. Over the years, this process became much easier with the acquisition of industrial tailor's scissors, and finally machines arrived, which were the same ones used for sheep shearing and were better. Nevertheless, scissors are still used on the edges, i.e., both materials complement each other.

4.3. Vulnerability of Recorded Intangible Cultural Heritage

During the information return workshop, the analysis of the state of vulnerability of each of the previously recorded cultural manifestations was presented and validated. The scores assigned to each criterion were adjusted according to the opinions provided by the knowledge holders, and it was determined that 86% of the manifestations are in a highly vulnerable category and only 14% are in a current state (Table 3).

Table 3. Community intangible cultural heritage vulnerability matrix.

No.	Manifestations	Heritage					Memory					Identity		Total	State of Preservation		
		Knowledge	External Factors that Put Transmission at Risk	Level of Diffusion	Reception Level	Presence of Holders	Practice of Manifestation	Periodicity of the Manifestation	Historical Relevance	Recognition of Meaning and Symbolism	Existence and Valuation of Related Material Elements	Sensitivity to GenerationalAdaptation	Identity Attribution		Highly Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Current
1	History of the Guano Carpet	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10	X		
2	Narration of the traditional square El Rosario	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	10	X		
3	Traditional spinning process	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	9	X		
4	Technique to scale of the Guano carpet design	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	10	X		
5	Natural dyeing technique on lamb's wool	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	9	X		
6	Guano carpet knotting technique	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	22			X
7	Guano carpet shearing technique	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10	X		
Total															6	0	1
Total (%)															86%	0%	14%

Highly vulnerable	0–10
Vulnerable	11–20
Current	21–30

4.4. Strategic Approach

A SWOT analysis with knowledge holders and stakeholders of the territory was used as the starting point for building this approach, followed by the identification of internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) present in the territory, which were combined for an assessment process that determined seven critical nodes based on weaknesses and threats, and five key success factors based on strengths and opportunities.

To develop a strategic planning adjusted to the reality of the territory, it was necessary to establish the stakeholders involved within the territory. During this process, three types of organisational power figures were identified: (a) social base is made up of the population of the Guano canton and is represented by a yellow circle; (b) associative fabric is made up of the Association of Carpet Makers, ESPOCH, and UNACH, which are represented by a purple rectangle; and (c) power images, which possess high power, can make decisions and invest resources within the territory, which are represented by an orange octagon and are formed by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage of Ecuador, National Institute of Cultural Heritage of Ecuador (INPC), Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador, GADM-CG, Directorate of Tourism Management of GADM-CG, Permanent Committee of Guano Festivities, and Citizen Committee of Guano Magical Town.

Figure 6 shows the relationships that the stakeholders involved have and the relationships that exist between them. There is a strong presence of strong relationships of dependence and collaboration between the images of power, established to a large extent by the national legal framework that regulates cultural development and management at the national level through the public policy designed for this purpose. With regard to the associative fabric, ESPOCH maintains collaborative relationships with the Directorate of Tourism Management of GADM-CG due to an agreement between the two institutions, which seeks the development of tourism in the canton, as well as safeguarding its ICH and conserving its tangible cultural heritage. In addition to this, ESPOCH collaborates with the INPC and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage due to the support for the consolidation of the safeguarding plan and other collaboration processes that are maintained between the institutions.

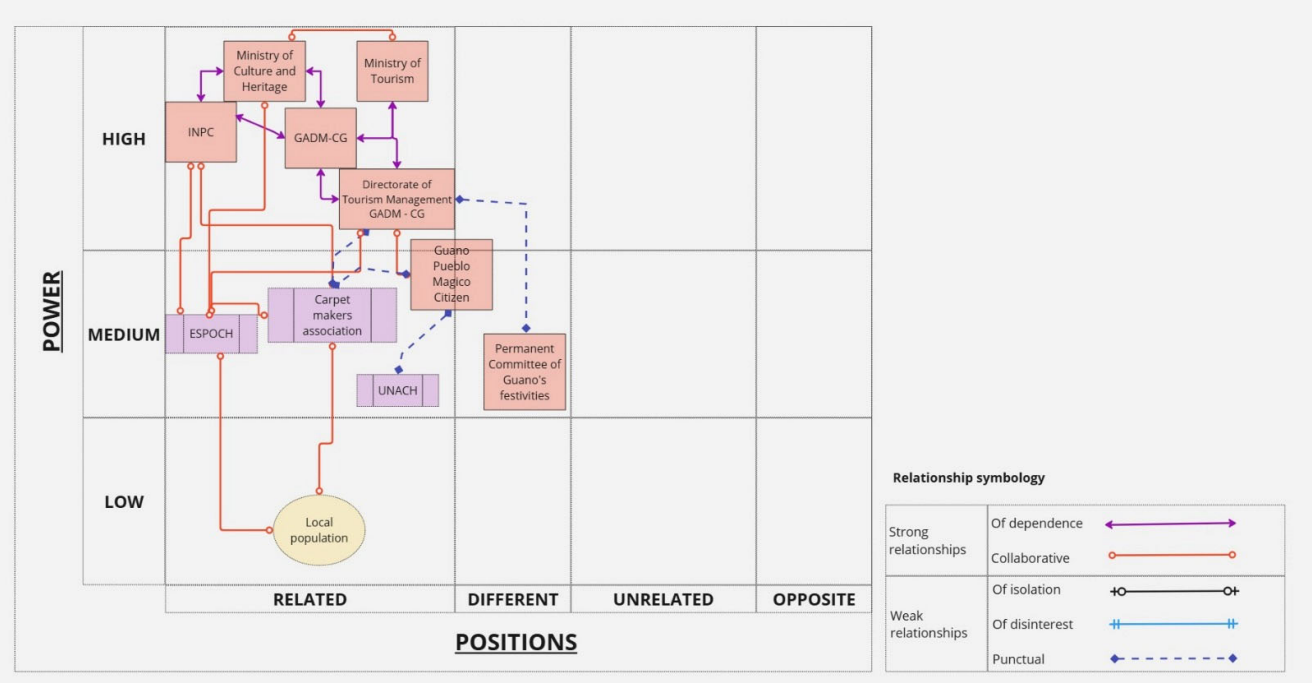


Figure 6. Mapping of stakeholder networks.

Among the weak or specific relationships are the images of power and the associative fabric, mainly between the Association of Carpet Makers and the Directorate of Tourist Management of GADM-CG, which have worked together in specific processes to keep the practice of Guano Carpet making alive. On the one hand, they have achieved certification as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and on the other hand, coordination of a cultural tourism experience in which the craft technique is exhibited, complemented by the Citizen Committee of Guano Pueblo Mágico because the latter uses this tourist product to reinforce the reaccreditation process of the territory as a magical town.

After identifying the stakeholders that can contribute to strategic planning, as well as the 12 prioritised elements, the definition of programmes and projects began with all the information gathered and the ideas provided by the GADM-CG, knowledge holders, and stakeholders linked to the Association of Carpet Makers.

It is necessary to specify that the safeguarding process implies a multifaceted approach involving a set of actions such as the application of legal frameworks, identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, revitalisation, community participation, and the integration of cultural resource exploitation for their social use; taking into consideration the spaces for dialogue on knowledge, it was possible to establish three strategic objectives focused on the following points:

- Strengthening generational links through the transmission of knowledge by holders, through formal and non-formal education.
- Developing alliances between stakeholders interested in artisanal production and the dissemination of carpets and cultural issues.
- Establishing integrative and participatory actions for the strengthening and revitalisation of the craft activity.

Based on these three objectives, three programmes and six inter-related work projects were derived, focused on promoting the preservation of craft techniques while at the same time revitalising and strengthening the cultural identity of the territory (Table 4).

Table 4. Formulation of programmes and projects.

Programmes	Projects	Scope
P1: Transmission and revitalisation programme on the historical and cultural value of the Guano carpet	Generational transmission of handmade carpet weaving	To ensure that the knowledge of the knotted carpet weaving technique is passed on to new generations. It is highlighted that generational transmission is a fundamental pillar in the conservation of ICH, as it allows ancestral skills and knowledge to not only be maintained but also to be adapted to modern times. The implementation of intergenerational workshops, where experienced artisans teach young people, will foster a sense of belonging and cultural pride. Moreover, this approach will contribute to the creation of an active community committed to its heritage.
P2: Programme for the dissemination of the cultural identity of the textile art of carpet making called "The best carpets are in Guano"	Tourist dissemination project "The best carpets are in Guano"	To work on the positioning of Guano as an attractive tourist destination supported by the Magical Towns of Ecuador Programme, highlighting the uniqueness and quality of its knotted carpets. Developing an interpretative space that can exhibit not only carpets but also tools, techniques, and stories related to their making so that visitors can understand the historical and cultural context of carpet weaving better, as well as the implementation of effective communication strategies, is an essential element to increase the visibility of Guano's textile art. This includes the use of social media, digital platforms, and local media to tell stories about artisans and their creations. By generating appealing content that highlights not only the aesthetic beauty but also the cultural importance of weaving, a powerful narrative can be created that connects with the public emotionally, from which both national and international tourists interested in authentic cultural experiences can be attracted.
	Project for the creation of an interpretative space on knotted carpets in the Museum of Guano	
	Project for the implementation of communication strategies for the enhancement of the value of handmade weaving of Guano carpets	
P3: Marketing programme for artisanal participation and stakeholder involvement	Project for the institutionalisation of the local fair called "Marketing what is ours"	It provides an excellent opportunity for artisans to show and sell their products directly to the public, as well as creating a space in which they can diversify their sources of income and attract tourists interested in acquiring more personalised and tangible souvenirs of their visit.
	Project for the production and marketing of souvenirs related to Guano carpets	

This proposal has sought to achieve a comprehensive and multidimensional strategic planning, addressing mainly actions of the transmission and preservation of traditional knowledge, and promotion and revitalisation of the manifestation within the local so-

cial and economic fabric. This strategy seeks to ensure that knotted carpets remain a vibrant symbol of Guano's cultural heritage, contributing to sustainable development and strengthening the identity of its community.

The information gathered during the participatory action research process shows that these cultural practises are still relevant and valued by the local community. Through in-depth interviews and participatory workshops with the knowledge bearers, a notable increase in the exchange of knowledge and a revitalization of interest in traditional weaving techniques has been observed. This not only reflects a commitment to cultural preservation but also highlights how this manifestation is fundamental to local identity and the sense of belonging to the Artisanal Capital of Ecuador, as Guano is called.

Finally, it is established that the link between tourism and the safeguarding of ICH is fundamental for the preservation of both artisanal techniques and local cultural identities. The literature has highlighted that tourism can act as a catalyst for cultural revitalization, providing economic resources and visibility to traditions that might otherwise be relegated in the collective memory. In this sense, it was crucial to develop operational strategies that integrate sustainable tourism into the safeguarding plan for Guano knotted carpet weaving. For example, actions such as the creation of tourist workshops where visitors participate in the weaving process have been implemented, which not only provides information about the technique but also generates income for the artisans. In addition, it has been suggested to organise cultural events that celebrate this tradition, attracting both tourists and locals and fostering a sense of community and belonging. These initiatives would not only contribute to the economic sustainability of artisans but would also help to reinforce the importance of ICH in the construction of local identities and territorial development. By strengthening this link between tourism and heritage, an active and dynamic preservation is ensured that benefits the local community and promotes an enriching cultural exchange and encounter.

5. Conclusions

The processes of safeguarding the living heritage linked to the knotted Guano carpet have been shown to involve several actions, but these have not achieved clear results for its sustainability over time. The situation of ICH is increasingly critical because a large percentage of the related manifestations are in a state of high vulnerability of sensitivity to change. Although carpet makers have worked for a process of vindication and positioning of their technique in the local and national market, the transmission processes are becoming less effective, aggravated by the globalisation of spaces and by the lack of respect for the value of traditional craft techniques.

The research process made it possible to record the entire Guano knotted carpet making process, generating a total of seven cultural manifestations associated with the production technique. Based on the records, the following were identified as the main limitations of the manifestation under study:

- Knowledge holders belong to a high age group.
- The vulnerability ranking, as presented, is based on the opinions of a limited number of six knowledge bearers, which may introduce significant biases in the interpretation of the data, but unfortunately there are no more knowledge bearers who continue to practice carpet weaving. To strengthen this section, it is proposed to broaden the scope of the study by including family members of each of the knowledge bearers, thereby strengthening the sample, while at the same time making it possible to consider a more holistic and less biassed view of the vulnerabilities faced by the knotted carpet weaving technique. Furthermore, it is crucial that the results be interpreted in a critical

framework that considers not only individual opinions but also the broader social and cultural context in which this cultural manifestation takes place.

- There is a low generational transmission of knowledge, as the holders' children know the process, but younger generations no longer perform the technique nor continue with re-enacting the technique. This result is corroborated by Sun [65], who found that active transmission mechanisms such as storytelling and parental modelling are essential for preserving cultural values across generations. In the absence of such mechanisms, cultural knowledge becomes fragmented and risks extinction.
- The commercialization has strong limitations for foreigners, in relation to the weight and size of the carpet, making it difficult to be acquired during their visits to the territory.
- The dissemination of the carpets has been concentrated in Guano, limiting their visibility in other cities of the country.
- The local market does not have the purchasing power to cover the costs that knotted Guano carpets represent.
- Guano carpets are not interpreted within the territorial space. Residents, visitors, and tourists do not have information that allows them to know the identity value that this traditional artisan technique has for the social group of Guano.
- The link established between this cultural manifestation and cultural tourism has allowed the creation of tourism products that not only promote the weaving technique but also contribute to its economic sustainability. The implementation of strategies such as workshops where visitors can learn about the weaving process has proven to be effective in validating and revaluing living heritage in practice. These actions not only ensure the continuity of ancestral knowledge but also strengthen social and cultural cohesion within the local community. This finding is consistent with research by Tao [66], who highlights how community-driven tourism initiatives can mitigate cultural erosion by fostering economic incentives and a sense of identity among local participants.

Regarding the term "local communities", it refers to groups of individuals who live and participate actively in the sociocultural dynamics of a specific geographic region, sharing common traditions, values, and practises. In this study, the term is applied to describe the residents of Guano who are directly or indirectly linked to the production, preservation, and promotion of the knotted carpet weaving technique. This includes not only the artisans themselves but also other members of the community who play a role in supporting and sustaining this intangible cultural heritage. By emphasising the role of local communities, the study aligns with the UNESCO [1] definition of community participation as a critical element in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

The broader implications of these findings suggest that the challenges faced by the Guano knotted carpet weaving technique are emblematic of global patterns in the loss of intangible cultural heritage. Zhang and Mace [67] warn that the erosion of cultural diversity, including the potential extinction of 90% of the world's languages by the end of the century, reflects an urgent need for proactive preservation strategies. Similarly, the case of the Guano carpet underscores the necessity of addressing both generational disconnection and socioeconomic barriers to sustainability.

Therefore, it is necessary to link the traditional hand-weaving technique of the knotted carpets of Guano to the identity processes of the magical town of Guano. This is because the manifestation requires a process of social use, where tourism is conceived as a privileged area to carry out measures to safeguard intangible cultural heritage and therefore helps local and regional development. The aim of all this is to preserve traditional knowledge in a more lasting way than its simple oral dissemination. By connecting these findings with existing empirical evidence, it is clear that successful safeguarding strategies require a combination of community-based initiatives, market accessibility, and innovative approaches

to intergenerational knowledge transfer. This study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasising the need for adaptive and inclusive approaches to ICH preservation.

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