

# Reflections on the protection of the cultural heritage from community tourism

## Abstract

This article analyzes the concept of community tourism as a strategy for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of a rural-urban locality; through the systematization of the experience of the Cultural Organization Xiuhtecuhli, as the managing agency of the Community Museum of San Juan Xiutetelco, Pue; created under the principle of protection and protection of the cultural heritage of the town. This experience is located as a local social movement for defense, which will create social networks for heritage conservation through tourism; this characteristic will make it possible to create value chains in terms of the formation of a tourism product.

**Keywords:** community tourism, patrimonial protection, patrimonial safeguard, value chains

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## Introduction

The so-called alternative or responsible tourism has been developed for three decades as a priority as an economic and environmental policy in countries of the North Cone and the Southern Cone, because from a utopian perspective it encompasses three indispensable spheres in an integral human development: the economic, the ecological and sociocultural.<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, alternative tourism (in its aspect of ecotourism) began to be promoted by government agencies and international organizations in the nineties of the last century, in protected natural areas and ecological reserve areas inhabited mainly by indigenous groups. In this sense, 230 ecotourism companies were registered for the year 2000, and this figure reached 3163 for 2013.<sup>2</sup> However, ecotourism has been strongly criticized as a model of community development because a large number of companies have failed economically, ecologically and socioculturally; first, because tourism is a global activity, in such a way, the economic income remains in the hands of international tourist intermediaries: travel agencies, tour operators and transportation agencies (areas and land). Second, in addition to the above, the indigenous companies do not mature as a business because they are not very profitable: Lack of knowledge about the tourism market (...) to conduct market studies or impact evaluations; lack of organization and self-management generating internal conflicts; dependence on external agents and lack of appropriation of the project by the local group; lack of definition of the business model; of the tourist product and the value of the product for the visitor, of the target audience (based on the logic that if tourists build); lack of quality in its execution; and inadequacy and inefficiency of the promotion activity.<sup>2</sup>

The ecotourism companies to be launched have received financial support from various government agencies such as CDI,<sup>3</sup> Sectur,<sup>4</sup> Hilario,<sup>5</sup> Liceaga,<sup>6</sup> that is, they have had the necessary investment to successfully start the company, but profitability, as discussed in the previous paragraph, is directly determined by the variable human factor: organization, self-management, market studies, evaluation and appropriation; in other words, generally, the managers of these projects are external advisors who design the project, present it in

the institution and once approved, they practically leave it to the peasant and indigenous groups, without having defined a definition of the project, Business model on the part of the new service providers. The definition of the business model in turn depends on the logic of production and traditional reproduction of these rural sectors, because true empowerment will depend on their social imaginaries for structure its local economy through its ancestral forms of organization and daily culture. In this way, critics of the ecotourism model intend to solve the lack of such model by using the category of community tourism: "...a form of ecotourism in which the local community has substantial control, and involvement in its development and management and a significant proportion of the benefits remain within the community."<sup>7</sup>

With the addition of a new surname to tourism, now community, the issue of compliance with the dimensions of sustainability seems to be solved by the implications of its use and application; In this sense, in this article, I intend to make a critical analysis of the concept of community tourism as a strategy for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of a rural-urban locality; through the systematization of the experience of the Cultural Organization Xiuhtecuhli, as the managing agency of the Community Museum of San Juan Xiutetelco, Pue; created under the principle of protection and protection of the cultural heritage of the town. The process began more than 36 years ago at the initiative of a teacher López.<sup>8</sup>

## What heritage is protected from community tourism

The heritage of a people is defined culturally and historically, each society gives its different cultural manifestations (tangible and intangible) the patrimonial value. If we start from the etymological meaning of the word patrimony this is synonymous with protection; therefore, the protection of the patrimony is a pleonasm because the word derives from the Latin patronus, whose meaning is defender or protector. However, another meaning leads to consider the term as inheritance; that is, the generational transfer of goods for the enjoyment of an individual or social group. Thus, knowledge, cultural expressions, natural and biological resources are the heritage of the peoples<sup>3</sup> because their transcendence is due to a historical process of passive or active defense, on the part of the indigenous and peasants.

So, if heritage itself implies protection or defense, but also the inheritance of a social group, for methodological and theoretical purposes I return to the following definition, heritage is: ... "to the set of creations and ways of being inherited from the past and the latent legacy of capacities and ways of being of the living populations, (therefore), the cultural heritage is the sum and interaction of the material and immaterial cultural goods, ( that due to their special historical, artistic, scientific, technical and traditional importance they identify a cultural group. Another term to debate, to see its relevance as a category of analysis, is the safeguarding of heritage, because this is within the legal framework established by the Mexican government and international organizations, therefore it includes a set of norms and instruments, which are they are mainly registered in: ILO Convention 169, 1991, art. Fifteen; the Declaration of the United Nations signed in September 2007 regarding the protection of the heritage of Indigenous Peoples, art. 10; the Convention on Biological Diversity of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1993, arts. 8 and 15; and the Nagoya Protocol, 2011, arts. 2 and 12; likewise, Mexico as a member country of the United Nations has signed agreements in: the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1994; Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003; and in the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 2001.<sup>3</sup> Then the safeguard, implies the shelter of the laws, whose breach implies a sanction.

The existence of said legal framework expressed in the previous paragraph, for both natural and cultural heritage, is mainly due to the valuation granted by the members of a society or social group to its tangible and intangible assets; who, in turn, through social movements, have sought official recognition of their heritage. In this sense, both the peasants and the indigenous are the ones who define the importance of their goods based on the intersubjectivity of shared symbols. Therefore, a wild flower or a small piece of pottery, constitute its patrimony: the coa, the hat, the yunta, the comal, the dance, the sones, the flute, the first typewriter arriving in town; to the mounds of pyramidal bases, the monoliths carved in stones, the polychrome vessels, the skeletal remains, the cave paintings, their native language, their appreciation of the world, to mention a few examples. As well as its coffee plantation, the milpa, the waterfall, the cavern where they perform rites, among others. Each culture shapes its heritage due to its historical process, which gives it its fair value for its symbolism and meaning, and not in a sense of value, which we understand as the monetary value assigned by the market to a good. The set of assets that shape the heritage of a people, therefore, carry historical significance in terms of their own social imaginaries, as they would say colloquially: Maldonado<sup>9</sup> "what is not sold and defends" by providing identity, ties of coexistence and roots. However, in tourist terms, these cultural and natural goods are the most sought after by national and foreign visitors because they are not part of their daily life, so tourists demand to experience other forms of life; In fact, the tourist product is the experience of life recorded in the memory of the traveler and the enjoyment of it.

So how to sell the patrimony of a people?, the answer is in the own logic of reproduction of the peasants and indigenous, or of their generations, I explain myself: the economic model based on primary activities has tended to a loss in the profitability of small farmers from the application of economic development based on industry; however, the peasants have not stopped producing their small plots and have

supplemented their income with the production of backyard animals, vegetables, masonry and domestic service, among others; as an example of the diversification of activities, within which is the tourism sector. Under their sense of host, peasants and indigenous, they share, but they do not cede their goods with the visitor; the attitude taken by the social actors in this field is understood under the categories of analysis of the new rurality or the approach of the rural territory; which is defined, from said epistemological position, as a biophysical and symbolic space of multifunctional use. Then, sharing the heritage with the visitor entails giving an added value to this and hence its difficult business or business appreciation on the part of the peasants and indigenous people. For a peasant and indigenous it is difficult to value (give a price) valued goods (symbolic value) culturally and socially; However, tourism companies have been a strategy not only economic, but also patrimonial because through them it has been possible to protect and safeguard the natural and cultural resources of a people, let's see how this affirmation is possible in the facts.

In the municipality of Xiutetelco, the natural and cultural heritage is of great diversity and richness, as an example are: the church of San Juan Bautista, pyramidal foundations of the Totonac culture, a community museum, Las Pilas a place located within the head, in where there is a landscape of pine and oak trees including crystal clear water springs; likewise, we can find mesophilic forests and majestic waterfalls in its surroundings. Xiutetelco is located in the northeastern part of the state of Puebla; it borders to the northwest with Teziutlan, to the north with Hueytamalco, to the west with Chignautla, to the southwest with Tepayahualco, to the south with Perote, Ver.; and to the east Jalacingo, Ver. It is located at 1840 meters above sea level. About seventy years ago the population of the municipal seat Ortiz<sup>10</sup> was eminently Nahuatl-speaking indigenous, this is recorded in the first archaeological explorations carried out by the INAH in 1942. Currently, a rural-urban environment is lived and the language is he has totally lost; due to its main economic activity destined to the maquila of clothes for commercial stores of the big cities, likewise, the population is dedicated to the service and educational sector. However, we can still find agricultural producers, artisans and nahubablantes in the surrounding communities belonging to the municipality.

An outstanding heritage asset of the municipality is the archaeological zone, because it has been studied under government auspices since the beginning of the last century, thus: under the government of Porfirio Díaz, Leopoldo Batres<sup>2</sup> made a report on the site in 1909. Years later, in 1931, Lombardo Toledano, catalogs the area as of Totonac origin. In 1942 archaeological surveys are carried out by the INAH. However, it is until 1979 when the archaeologist Daniel Molina belonging to said Institute, places it in the post classic period and confirms it as a legacy of the Totonac culture. Despite the finds and archaeological surveys of the site, because it is located in an urban area (in the center of the municipal capital), the site has suffered looting and depredation, because the houses have been built on top of the mounds and the area of the ceremonial center, from the industrial and urban development of the community. Faced with this situation, Professor Rafael Julián Montiel has decided for 36 years to protect pieces found by him, relatives and friends inside his house; as well as buying the pieces found by the inhabitants (it was the only strategy in the face of the refusal of some residents to donate them) and forming a museum in their private home, which at that time, included 3 rooms, but as it increased over time, the acquisitions, he was forced to look for other spaces in his house.

The advance of the construction of the houses and the destruction of the archaeological zone due to this phenomenon, and the interest of the professor for the prehispanic culture, motivated a group of sixty inhabitants of the municipal head, headed by Rafael, to be constituted as a Civil Association for the defense of the archaeological zone more than twenty years ago, considering it a community heritage; in this way, they are registered under the name of Cultural Organization Xiutecuhli. Although, the archaeological zone already had a governmental valuation, hence the interest to study it, it is the defense group, who will define it as a tangible cultural heritage. How is this assessment given? Faced with the gradual loss of the cultural manifestations of Xiutetelco, and faced with the need for an identity of their own, inhabitants become aware of it and pose their gaze on the past to reconstruct themselves. In this way, the defense of the archaeological zone has become a social movement, because Professor Rafael, with a great sense of leadership, achieved convergences and links between the bases and the groups in power.<sup>11</sup> product the conservation of the patrimony by a conglomerate nourished of members of the community and of many sympathizers (which stay out of direct activism, but support it by attending the museum and participating in its cultural events).

The social movement for the defense of the archaeological zone has publicly demonstrated the theft of the piece and the advance of the urban sprawl; this has not been avoided by the municipal authorities because they do not consider culture as profitable, economically or socially speaking. On September 19, 1994, Professor Rafael, announced at the Universal Puebla-Tlaxcala how during the last five years 1800 pieces of the site had been stolen. At that time, the community museum, located at his home, already had 860 pieces. In his complaint he pointed out how the area covered one kilometer of extension, which has been decreasing; Likewise, he emphasized how the INAH since 1992 allowed the construction of drainage (within which eight pieces were extracted, of these five were looted by a neighbor of Jalacingo, Ver.) and the construction of works on the pyramidal platforms, through the bribe to the INAH staff.

Private interests have prevailed in the defense of this heritage by the local municipal authorities and the state INAH, according to Professor Rafael's complaint; even so, their struggle had a first achievement because for 1994, the INAH delimits the archaeological zone to avoid the construction of houses. In 1995, through official no. 401-1 0309, the INAH recognizes the Organization as an auxiliary body in the care and preservation, rescue and protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Nation; however, the constructions carried out at that time still continue and are still inhabited. A year ago, during the management of Dr. Corona Salazar Álvarez as municipal president of Xiutetelco, is when the greatest achievement of this social movement occurred because the doctor, when visiting the community museum, positively assesses the great heritage represented in the pieces Protected by the organization. With political will, decides to start the management to donate a dilapidated building located in front of the main square of the municipal seat, which was used as a garbage dump, at some remote time it was a bakery. Currently, the organization is composed of thirty-six members, of which ten are active members.

This building was restored in its entirety and enabled with lights and appropriate cabinets for the conservation and classification of the pieces. Likewise, these were studied and dated by specialist archaeologists in the matter, in such a way; they can affirm their Olmec, Totonac and Mexica origin. The enclosure has a lobby at the

entrance, corridor for temporary exhibition, the office of the museum authorities, two rooms for permanent exhibition (one of which was removed by the municipality to install the offices of attention to the popular insurance), a basement, which works as an audiovisual room. On the first level, there are three permanent exhibition halls (one for each of the cultures already mentioned) and a large warehouse. And on the second level, it is a large room for pictographic exhibitions. The current site of the museum, has claimed the struggle carried out by the management group and also the patrimonial value of the pieces. However, the change of government of the municipal presidency was a year ago, and the political situation had a setback in patrimonial matters. The economic interests determine the internal policy of protection because the municipal presidents belong to the groups of industrialists and merchants, who are not very sensitive to the importance of culture. This vision puts the movement carried out by the organization at constant risk, in such a way, now they want to take away the building because in the previous administration it was not possible to formalize the delivery of deeds on loan from the site to the group.

The Museum, since its change of address, has not only preserved tangible heritage, it has also been given the task of promoting dances, music, handicrafts and the natural heritage in the municipal seat (here the tourism proposal will focus on the first time due to its accessibility through land transport and its level of urbanization) are: Las Pilas, where there is a landscape of pine and oak trees including births of crystalline water. As for the cultural resources, they will be retaken for the conformation of the tourist product: the church of San Juan Bautista of the XVII century, the pyramidal foundations, the community museum, the elaboration of masks for traditional and ornamental dances, dances of santiagos, negritos, toreadores, flying, quetzales, the celebration of Todos Santos, its local gastronomy (xole, chilahuates, pintos, enameled acaletes, atole sour, to mention a few examples), the pyrotechnic fires and its two fairs (June 24 and February 10 and 11); patron fairs (San Juan Bautista and the Virgin of Guadalupe); and the ritual of washing in the piles. With regard to equipment and infrastructure, the municipal capital has roads and streets in optimal conditions, such as the Teziutlán-Perote federal highway; this allows an efficient accessibility to the places of interest, which are close and shortens distances even more. You will reach the capital by public transport (buses ADO and AU line, and taxis from Teziutlán to Xiutetelco) and private. The travel time from Teziutlán to Xiutetelco is 25 minutes by public transport and fifteen minutes in particular. Also with stores located at strategic points such as: fifteen clothing stores, forty-five grocery stores, five flower shops and three shoe stores; and a store of a recognized chain of furniture, clothing, shoes and electronics. Also with an extensive network of drinking water and electricity, internet for four companies, open television and cable television; in terms of health services, it has: the IMSS clinic and 39 health centers throughout the municipality, Farmacias de Similares and Farmacia Super.

Finally, according to the inventories carried out, the tourism infrastructure is still incipient and needs to be developed because there is no important activity in the municipal seat, so that it has: a hotel (of twelve rooms, which requires remodeling, better equipment) and advertising), the market (with insufficient supply), restaurants (four restaurants: three for seafood and one for run food, whose service is generally good, but with little capacity to serve large numbers of diners), and coffee shops (five with good service without great capacity to attend diners). The second step is the SWOT analysis,



based on the data thrown by the inventory, we will summarize this analysis in the following: as greater strength is the natural and especially cultural diversity of the municipal seat; likewise having an organization in struggle for heritage, this ensures an empowerment in the tourism proposal because it will function as a local tour operator. The diversity allows to offer to the tourism, an enjoyment of the patrimony in general during minimum a weekend to be able to include each point of reference; In this way, a tourist route is proposed within the municipal seat, which will consist of: visit to the community museum (incorporation of craft workshops for masks, escobetas, pyrotechnic fires and embossing), visit to the archaeological zone, visit to the Church of San Juan, to end in the Pilas (in this one it is tried to recreate the legends of the place with nocturnal walks and the lavatory during the day). Likewise, offer cultural packages per season: equinoxes, festivities and fairs, and without a doubt its gastronomic variety. As weaknesses we have a low professional development in terms of the provision of services (they do not have a tourist culture); therefore they require staff training and expand their menus because they do not incorporate all the great variety and richness of local and regional cuisine; this will be solved, first, by achieving a greater tourist movement, whose income can be reinvested in equipment and facilities; Likewise, if the number of visitors increases as expected, the accommodation capacity of the hotel will be insufficient, but it is proposed, not to build more hotels but to enable large houses or typical houses to provide this service, which is fundamental within community tourism. And second, the UIEP will provide training and awareness-raising workshops for service providers.

Likewise, other weaknesses are: the poor state of conservation of historical monuments and pyramidal foundations (this is only resolved through the INAH programs). The same happens with the Las Pilas site, but because it is more for community use and has been benefited with the Mexico program, we want you clean, it will be restored with internal social mechanisms such as raffles, community cooperations, hand back, job, among others. Among the opportunities are accessibility in land transportation, communications and public services to support tourism. Also, the lack of competition in the tourism sector in terms of community tourism, would be the first to implement this proposal. One of the greatest threats will continue to be the political will for the application of the safeguarding of cultural heritage, but also for the regulation of tourist activity (without a development plan based on responsibility or sustainability) which, not only considers the economic as development; and not so social and environmental; hence the advantage of community tourism. Likewise, the positioning of Xiutetelco's tourism product in the market. Just as we saw at the beginning of this writing, the business and marketing factor has made community tourism proposals unprofitable, causing their gradual abandonment by the management group manager. The empowerment of the management group is solved with a training model adapted to the logic of peasant economic reproduction and to the valuation of its heritage, which is also being developed by the UIEP (Intercultural University of the State of Puebla); This ensures the professionalization of the service personnel and as for the economic issue has begun to visualize the management of municipal tourism through the formation of networks of service providers, the theoretical term of this phenomenon is the value chain, economic concept introduced by Porter.<sup>2</sup> This is used as an analytical tool of the competitive advantages of a company by dividing it into relevant strategic activities to develop the value of the organization (purchase of supplies, manufacturing, distribution and marketing) (Table 1).

The value chain differs from the production chain because, although they are based on the same activities as a productive process, in the second the economic actors or entrepreneurs compete with each other to optimize their benefits. In opposition, in a value chain individual goals (of each company) are not reached, therefore, they seek cooperation, communication and coordination between the different social actors involved in an economic activity.<sup>2</sup> A value chain, following Leopoldo e Silva<sup>2</sup> from the tourism point of view, is made up of:

- a) Tourism product development
- b) Marketing and promotion
- c) Marketing
- d) Logistics
- e) Destination service
- f) After sales

In this chain, therefore, government policies, the consumer market and support services are interconnected and in all of them the co-responsibility of a well-planned tourist activity is assumed. Each of the links in the chain involves the participation of more than one small company and organization to be carried out. For example, if a first route within the Cabecera to offer as a tourist product was: Museo Comunitario-Iglesia de San Juan-Las Pilas archaeological zone.

### Final considerations

Defining the tourist activity within the rural or rural-urban area (as in the case of Xiutetelco) or ascribing it as rural tourism or community tourism, as we have seen, depends more on the human factor, that is, on the socio-cultural factor; or in other words, the interaction established between the different actors involved. This article has a special emphasis on community self-management within tourism for the defense of heritage, because it has placed the leading role of the grassroots organization, in this case, the Xiutecutli association. The management of heritage depends on the organization; and this defines the course and the strategies to follow. The decision to use tourism as a tool for the conservation of cultural resources, as we have seen, if it has a social foundation, will ensure the permanence of the pro-defense movement. If the tourist activity is carried out for purely economic purposes, it will not work for this case. For the understanding of the reality of study in applied research, from a responsible and ethical perspective with the culture of origin from tourism, it is necessary to take the community as a category of analysis, and therefore, refer to a community tourism; because precisely, this is defined based on the interaction established between the social actors involved, not only for the motivation of the trip. Tourism is based on the community because the owners of cultural and natural heritage determine the type of tourism product to be offered based on their collective interests.

Community tourism to be used as a category of analysis in the case of Mexico, should not be conceptualized from the motivations of visitors, because we fall into an epistemological reductionism when considering one of the actors involved in the activity, ie only the tourist, where hedonism marks the trend and economic interests of the service provider; therefore, if we intend to make a contribution to the concept, tourism should be defined from who, how and for what offer the product, which leads to a process of valuation and valorization; basically from the service provider.

**Table I** It shows the value chain would be formed as follows

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Tourist product</b>         | Interconnected actors: cultural organization (workshops and guides), stewardship, organization of settlers, municipal presidency and service providers   |
| <b>Marketing and promotion</b> | Cultural organization as a domestic operator: Website, link with domestic operators in Puebla, sale of school packages at the primary, secondary, upper and higher levels, participation in forums and tourism fairs and selection of consumers and external partners. |
| <b>Commercialization</b>       | Assignment of product prices: provision of the service by the museum (tour operator; guide service and recreation of myths and legends); lodging (hotel); food (local service providers); payment to workshops and materials for workshops.                            |
| <b>Logistics</b>               | Based on the organization of the community museum and traditional organizations; as well as the conformation of a tourist culture in the providers of services as for lodging and food.  |
| <b>Destination service</b>     | A hotel, a market, four restaurants and five cafés.  |
| <b>After sales</b>             | Cultural organization: evaluation of the process within the value chain, consumer opinion surveys, follow-up to staff training, official conformation of the network of service providers.   |

As we have seen, the product is mainly defined by the natural and cultural attractions because it is Xiutetelco's heritage assets, plus the infrastructure of services and the tourism support infrastructure (municipal services); but the human resource is extremely important to make it really salable as a patrimonial and safeguard strategy in the case of Xiutetelco. Those who offer the product and provide the service are the actors involved in the tourism activity, then, call it community, effectively depend on the degree of co-responsibility assumed by each member of the municipal head of Xiutetelco, i.e., the municipality, the cultural organization Xiutecuhli, the service providers, the owners of the factories, the artisans, the workshop workers, the guides, the dancers, the tourists and without hesitation the community as a whole (inhabitants of the locality) as a host community aware of a responsible tourist activity. The responsibility consists in valuing the heritage to be able to share it with the tourist, to value it under the principle of defense and safeguard, for the conservation of future generations; but fundamentally, work in a coordinated way without individual competences, but based on the common good as an equitable form of the economic spillover generated by the service sector. Therefore, as we see in the case of Xiutetelco, the defense of heritage through community tourism allows achieving safeguarding it by involving the different economic and local power spheres without individual competencies through the value chain.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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