

## **The teaching of social history as a contribution to tourism development in the province of Esmeraldas**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The insufficient use of the teaching of social history as a contribution to tourism and territorial development in the province of Esmeraldas, limits social relevance to being part of the training process at the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University. Accordingly, this article aims to propose teaching activities, as part of the teaching of social history, to contribute to the knowledge of the tourist potentialities that the people of Esmeraldas have. Methods such as analysis-synthesis, content analysis and document review were used. The results serve as a premise for a more socially relevant university education.

**Keywords:** History; Social history; Tourism product; Territorial development; Esmeraldas

### **Introduction**

An ideal scenario for Ecuador towards 2030 includes among its formulations that of a “...sufficient, pertinent, efficient and quality academic offer of higher education”. (National Planning Secretariat, 2021, p. 22). To this end, it is necessary that the educational institutions of the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, among which the

Technical University “Luis Vargas Torres” (UTLVTE) stands out, be integrated into the process of territorial articulation to take advantage of local potentialities, which is the third guideline of the National Territorial Strategy set out in the Plan for the Creation of Opportunities 2021-2025.

This Plan aspires, among other purposes, to strengthen local capacities, improve production, diversify it and achieve insertion in the international market (National Secretariat of Planning, 2021, p. 40), also “...it is necessary to revalue ancestral cultures and knowledge, as well as the rescue of community cultural heritage and social memory, considering alternatives that adjust to the territorial characteristics (National Secretariat of Planning, 2021, p. 72).

In this sense, the tourism and territorial development of the province of Esmeraldas should be based on actions that the University can undertake in its curricular design process, to make the academic offer more relevant, such as improving the teaching of History in Social Sciences careers, whose future professionals can become promoters of tourism potential and managers of socio-cultural research projects that contribute to territorial development, which is currently an aspiration.

To this end, the UTLVTE promotes the increase of the link with its environment, so that its professors and students participate in collaborative research, to further systematize learning as one of the many methodological traditions that can be used so that the teaching of social history can be added to initiatives that contribute to territorial tourism development. (National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training, 2021, p. 3).

A premise so that the methodological work, around the curricular design, tends more and more to the social relevance in the training of professionals, is that it should be directed to identify and take more advantage of the teaching of social history, by incorporating the knowledge of the advantages of Emerald tourism products, among its learning contents, as a contribution to territorial development, so it was identified as a **problem**: the insufficient use of the teaching of social history as a contribution to tourism and territorial development of the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, limits the social relevance of the training process at the Technical University “Luis Vargas Torres”.

In this sense, the **objective** of this article is to propose a set of teaching activities, as part of the teaching of social history, to contribute to the knowledge of the tourist potentialities

that the people of Esmeraldas possess, as a background for their promotion and development, in function of a more socially opportune formation, at the "Luis Vargas Torres" Technical University of Esmeraldas, Ecuador.

In line with the objective of the article, materials were identified that address the background of the object of research related to the teaching of social history and the identification of tourism products in this region, as a premise for the use of documentary review and the theoretical methods of analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction and content analysis.

## **Development**

A conceptual analysis of the teaching of social history and its contribution to tourism and territorial development in the province of Esmeraldas requires the definition of more general categories, from the formal logic, which are associated with the object of research of this work, such as: the teaching of social history and its contextualization, the tourism product and the territorial development of Esmeraldas. Of the works that were consulted for the systematization of these categories, the following are significant: Almendras and Jara (2024); Cerdá and Mera (2024); Chávez (2024); Jara *et al.* (2024); Martínez-Labarga (1997); Mérida (2020); Minda (2011) and; Pérez *et al.* (2024).

The assumptions made and the deepening of some of the proposals made it possible to identify the main tourism products of the province of Esmeraldas, as well as a proposal for teaching activities that will help to make the teaching of social history more relevant as a contribution to tourism and territorial development.

### **The teaching of social history and its curricular contextualization.**

For Jara *et al.* (2024) "...history plays a fundamental role in the treatment of contemporary problems or conflicts, since any current social problem has a historical root that must be known if it is to be addressed and solved." (p. 318). Furthermore, its study implies the necessary curricular contextualization to be approached didactically, in a pertinent manner. According to these authors, we are all protagonists of history.

All of us have a historical experience, whether it is that of our own family or of our ancestors, whether through personal or local history or through the sources and testimonies of the protagonists of history, which we can access through education or the mass media. Whoever studies history also appropriates the past and can generate emotions of identification or rejection. (Jara *et al.* 2024, p. 320).

The use of the concept of curricular contextualization is related to the idea that "... the curriculum must be appropriate to the context in which it is developed, in particular to the interests, expectations and characteristics of the student body." (Zabalza, 2021 as cited in Almendras and Jara, 2024, p. 121). From this perspective, it is understood as "...a possibility of adapting the national curriculum to local contexts, which allows the construction of knowledge that adjusts the curricular prescription with the experience and needs of the student body and the local culture." (Almendras and Jara, 2024, p. 121 and 122).

One of the subjects that enable such contextualization is social history, which has as its object of study, the knowledge of the lives, experiences and social structures of people in the past, not only of great events or prominent figures, but of understanding how ordinary people lived and how social, economic and cultural dynamics affected their daily lives.

A first and great responsibility of teachers is "...the vindication of a democratic memory, which gathers all the voices of the past and makes visible all the invisible people and identities that played a role in the construction of history." (Jara *et al.*, 2024, p. 321)

Hence, curricular changes in the teaching of social history must promote among its contents: (a) family and gender structures (how families were organized and what was the role of men, women and children at different times); (b) labor conditions (forms of work, working conditions, and the evolution of the working class); (c) social movements (the study of popular movements, such as unions and protests, and how they have influenced social and political changes); (d) daily life (aspects such as housing, food, education, health and religion) and; (e) social inequalities (analysis of how inequalities of class, race, gender and other categories have shaped societies).

An example of these contents is related to the fact that, in the province of Esmeraldas, the population of African origin is predominant, reaching 80% (Martínez-Labarga, 1997, p. 129),

although several of these men and women may have formed couples among themselves and prolonged the pure black lineage a few more generations, it is evident that most of the males had to mix with Indian women, so that a new population had proliferated, composed of direct descendants of blacks and of the miscegenation with the Indians, which gave rise, in the province of Esmeraldas, to “the Republic of the Zambos”, being the “zambo” the son of a black and an Indian or of an Indian and a black woman. (Martínez-Labarga, 1997, p. 131)

Cerdá and Mera (2024) make a strong statement that forces us to rethink the meaning of teaching History, when they state that it is quite frequent to meet with teaching colleagues who say they do not feel prepared for the challenging task of teaching History to children and young people in the XXI century, “...with students who do not find meaning in learning facts and processes that they represent as distant in time and space, as well as not very significant to understand their own world” (p. 215 and 216). These points to the need to combine in a balanced way the knowledge of universal and national history with local history, especially that which situates the historical, cultural and identity facts of the socio-community environment.

In order to achieve this appropriation of the didactics necessary for working with social history, the following assumptions, derived from the analysis of the work of Cerdá and Mera (2024), must be assumed as part of the methodological work of teachers:

- Knowing a discipline is a sufficient condition to be able to teach it. Thus, “knowing social history” would enable, almost intuitively, the possibilities of transmitting that discipline, which refers to the need for the appropriation of the contents associated with this subject.
- The idea that disciplinary knowledge is “interesting in itself” and that “everything must be taught in that order” (first antiquity, then the Middle Ages, then modern history, and so on, until reaching the domain of local history and how it is related spatiotemporally with broader histories) for students to understand contemporary events or processes.
- To take advantage of the “extensionist practices” or “supervised professional practices” as an alternative modality of Final Work. This experience is interesting for many reasons, among which we will highlight two: on the one hand, by articulating the Bachelor's Degree with practical instances; on the other hand, because they offer new spaces such as museums, community workshops, clubs, trade unions for

practice, which broaden the classroom space as the only possible horizon for intervention. This form of evaluation makes it possible to assess the learning of social history without the need to appeal as the only option to the “classroom written tests” so often rejected by students.

Another of the potentialities of teaching social history is that it can contribute to banish one of the criticisms found in various investigations, which state that history teaching is limited to a memoristic and factual teaching, as Chávez (2024) states, with few opportunities for the development of meaningful experiences that lead to the development of historical thinking.

This researcher states that

the traditional teaching of history is still predominant in many classrooms, it has a nationalist slant and an excessive emphasis on the recounting of dates and events; it is a history that is presented as a finished truth, (...) where the stories follow a chronological and linear order in which the teachers are the ones who present the content and the students receive it passively (...) This type of teaching is what limits the development of historical thinking. (Chávez, 2024, p. 112)

### **Main tourism products of the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador.**

According to Mérida (2020) “...the ambition to connect Esmeraldas with the world is not a recent development, but has been the desire of different power groups since the first colonial incursions in the sixteenth century” (p. 3). And the reason is not unfounded, because this beautiful province offers a variety of tourist products that enhance its natural, cultural and gastronomic richness. Among them are the following:

First of all, beautiful beaches such as Atacames, Tonsupa, Súa and Mompiche are distinguished in this region, ideal for water sports, boat rides, and humpback whale watching during the summer months. No less important is Portete Island, which is a popular destination for nature and surf lovers, with its clean beach and calm waves.

There are also nature reserves such as the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, which is a popular destination for ecotourism, offering hiking, bird watching and the opportunity to interact with indigenous communities. Also, its excellent handicrafts are a unique expression of the local culture, coral jewelry, decorative items and tagua products are made. As part of this culture, traditional festivities and dances also stand out.

Gastronomy is perhaps one of its most coveted attractions, including typical dishes such as “Coco Loco”, a drink made with coconut and brandy, and a variety of dishes based on fish and seafood. Similarly, nature tourism adds to these tourist products, because, in addition to the beaches, the province has mangroves, rivers and estuaries that offer opportunities for activities such as kayaking, snorkeling and wildlife watching.

On the other hand, cultural tourism is very profitable because visiting indigenous communities and learning about their traditions, customs and ways of life is an enriching experience for tourists. These tourism products not only become an attraction for visitors, they also promote economic development and cultural preservation in the region.

**Proposal for teaching activities that helps to make the teaching of social history more relevant as a contribution to tourism and territorial development in the province of Esmeraldas.**

Teaching activities that can help students better understand the social history of Esmeraldas and how it relates to its tourism products include: a) local research projects, b) handicraft workshops, c) educational excursions, d) oral history projects, e) creation of thematic tourism routes, f) tourism impact analysis, and g) multimedia projects.

Didactic strategy for the implementation of activities

- a) **Local research projects:** For the development of this activity, students should be encouraged to conduct research on local communities, their histories and how they have influenced the configuration of current tourism products. This could include interviews with residents, visits to local museums and analysis of historical documents. Once the field work has been carried out, oral presentations will be organized, with proposals of the main events of the local communities investigated, as well as their most famous characters and a set of suggestions to make up thematic brochures for tourist use, where these attractions are promoted and the identity values of these communities are highlighted.
- b) **Craft workshops:** Organize workshops where students learn to create traditional crafts and where, in addition to acquiring practical skills, they can research the history and cultural significance of these crafts.
- c) **Educational excursions:** Excursions to key tourist sites, such as beaches, nature reserves and indigenous and Afro communities can be planned in conjunction with

local authorities. During these visits, students can participate in guided activities that explain the social history of each site.

- d) **Oral history projects:** There are many stories that are passed down from generation to generation and are not recorded in writing, so it is a good opportunity to involve students in collecting these stories through discussions with community leaders and oral recorders. These stories can provide a deep insight into daily life and the social changes that have occurred over time.

Orality condenses that broad field of experience of peoples, to whom official history has not dedicated, at most, a footnote in its treatises, marginalizing them from history and ignoring their contributions, their visions of life, of the world, of the evolution of societies. It is then when orality becomes history, a memory that treasures the past, to transmit it to future generations (Minda, 2011, p. 58)

- e) **The creation of thematic tourist routes:** Students can design tourist routes based on specific historical themes, such as the evolution of Afro-Ecuadorian communities or the history of handicraft production. These routes can include maps, guides and interactive activities.
- f) **Tourism impact analysis:** Teachers and students can jointly investigate and discuss the impact of tourism on the community and the environment through meetings with community members, which can include specific case studies and the evaluation of sustainable tourism policies that encourage and promote visits to the communities.
- g) **Multimedia projects:** Create documentaries, podcasts or blogs that explore the social history of Esmeraldas and its relationship with tourism. These projects can be presented online or in scientific and cultural events of the University itself or managed by the authorities of the province.

These activities will not only facilitate active and contextualized learning, but will also promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the rich social history of Esmeraldas. To this end, it is also necessary to **identify its main tourism products and design some ideas for their incorporation into the study of social history.**

Among the most outstanding tourism products are beaches such as Atacames and Mompiche, which offer white sands, crystal clear waters, and a variety of water sports. Atacames is known for its nightlife and festive atmosphere. Beach tourism development can be analyzed in relation to changes in recreational and economic practices in the

region. In addition, it is possible to study how tourism infrastructure has impacted the environment and local communities over time.

Similarly, there are nature reserves that are real attractions, such as the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, ideal for hiking, bird watching and interaction with indigenous communities. A historical study can include the interaction between the indigenous communities and their environment, as well as the evolution of biodiversity conservation. The impact of colonization and environmental policies in these areas can also be examined. The case of Isla Portete, popularly visited for surfing and nature observation, with quiet beaches and rich in biodiversity, should also be highlighted, where the history of the island can be studied in terms of tourism development, conservation and interaction with local communities.

Local crafts and culture are also identified, as their production, such as coral jewelry and tagua articles, along with traditional dances; reflect the cultural identity of Esmeraldas. The history of craft practices can be explored in terms of their origin, evolution and preservation. How these traditions have resisted or adapted to economic and social changes can be analyzed.

No less attractive and perhaps one of the most recognized tourist products is the food (Gastronomy), dishes such as encocao and various preparations based on fish, seafood, wild animal meats such as guanta and deer, in addition, the river shrimp also known as minchiha, are essential in the cuisine of the region. The historical study can cover the evolution of the local cuisine, influenced by migrations, trade and the culinary traditions of the Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous communities.

Nature tourism joins these offerings, with attractions such as mangrove swamps, rivers and estuaries, which offer activities such as kayaking, snorkeling and wildlife observation. The history of these ecosystems can include their traditional use by local communities, as well as the impact of conservation policies and the exploitation of natural resources.

Finally, cultural tourism is identified, with attractions such as visiting afro and indigenous communities and learning about their traditions and customs, which is a unique experience. A detailed study of the social and cultural history of these communities, their struggles to preserve their identity and their adaptation to social and economic changes may be of interest here.

A representative example where the Afro Esmeraldeños have stood out, besides the décima “...is the music performed with the marimba. Such is its mastery that two of its performers, Petita Plama and Guillermo Ayoví, Papá Roncón, have deserved the Eugenio Espejo Award, the highest award offered by the national government in science, art and culture.” (Minda, 2011, p. 61)

This proposal for the treatment of contents of the social history of the province of Esmeraldas as a contribution to the promotion of the tourism product is also supported by the fact that the development of capacities is required for the use and production of research in relation to “...the analyses of the background of regional and local historical studies of the priority problems of socioeconomic, political and cultural development that serve for decision-making by the provincial (...) governances.” (Perez *et al.*, 2024, p. 62)

## **Conclusions**

Higher education institutions have an indisputable mission in the establishment and promotion of the values defended by the society to which they respond, which is possible to achieve through an increasingly comprehensive and relevant training of their professionals. A fundamental role in this purpose is played by the teaching of social history, which, in the province of Esmeraldas, can stand as a real contribution to tourism and territorial development, which is a debt to large sectors of its population, historically marginalized.

The teaching of social history and tourism and territorial development have an intimate connection. The former provides a deep and human context to places, which helps tourists and residents to better understand the cultural richness and transformations of the region. Similarly, integrating history education into tourism development not only enriches the visitor experience, but also fosters a deeper and more respectful appreciation of local cultures. In addition, it can help to promote a more sustainable and historically and culturally conscious tourism. Higher education institutions have an indisputable mission in the establishment and promotion of the values upheld by the society to which they respond, which can be achieved through an increasingly comprehensive and relevant training of their professionals. A fundamental role in this purpose is played by the

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