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Review article

## Traditional games and sports declared as Intangible Cultural Heritage: a legitimate alternative in the case of the Amazonian Peoples of Ecuador

Los juegos y deportes tradicionales declarados como Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial: alternativa legítima en el caso de los pueblos amazónicos del Ecuador

Jogos Tradicionais e Desportos declarados como Património Cultural Imaterial: uma alternativa legítima no caso dos Povos Amazónicos do Equador

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, the practice of traditional games and sports has been losing prominence in society. Therefore, one of the strategies is to convert them into National Intangible Cultural Heritage. The objective of this work was to reflect on the importance of the diverse antecedents on the declaration of Traditional Games and Sports as Intangible Cultural Heritage as a valid alternative to be applicable to the case of the Amazonian peoples of Ecuador. A review of the scientific literature was carried out by means of a bibliographic search of the literature, selection criteria and evaluation of the quality of the selected articles. Traditional games and sports considered intangible cultural heritage contribute to the identity and sense of belonging of the community, region or country.

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They also have an impact on the tourism sector through the exhibition of recreational and sporting practices. Several countries consider a traditional sport as Intangible Cultural Heritage, as is the case of field hockey in Canada, palín in Chile, pelota in Mexico and Guatemala, Canary Island wrestling, Basque pelota, Valencian pelota and the Aragonese bar toss in Spain, and the fish race in France. In the Ecuadorian context, there are studies that are limited to addressing the concept of traditional games and sports and their typology by region. So far, sporting events have been held at the national level with the aim of promoting the practice of recreational and sporting activities.

**Keywords:** Customs and traditions; Cultural identity; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Traditional games; Traditional sports.

## RESUMEN

En los últimos años, la práctica de los juegos y deportes tradicionales han ido perdiendo protagonismo en la sociedad. Por lo que una de las estrategias es convertirlos en Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial Nacional. El trabajo tuvo por objetivo reflexionar sobre la importancia de los diversos antecedentes sobre la declaratoria de Juegos y Deportes Tradicionales como Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial como alternativa válida para ser aplicable al caso de los pueblos amazónicos del Ecuador. Se realizó la revisión de la literatura científica mediante la búsqueda bibliográfica de la literatura, criterios de selección y evaluación de la calidad de los artículos seleccionados. Los juegos y deportes tradicionales considerados patrimonio cultural inmaterial contribuyen con la identidad y sentido de pertenencia que posee la comunidad, región o país. Además, inciden en el sector turístico a través de la exhibición de las prácticas lúdicas y deportivas. Diversos países contemplan un deporte tradicional como Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial como es el caso de: el hockey en Canadá, el palín en Chile, el juego de pelota en México y Guatemala, la lucha canaria, pelota vasca, pelota valenciana y lanzamiento de la barra aragonesa en España y carrera de pescado en Francia. En el contexto ecuatoriano, existen estudios que se limitan a abordar el concepto de juegos y deportes tradicionales y su tipología por regiones. Hasta el momento, se han realizado eventos deportivos a nivel nacional con la finalidad de promover la práctica de las actividades lúdicas y deportivas.

**Palabras clave:** Costumbres y tradiciones; Identidad cultural; Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial; Juegos tradicionales; Deportes tradicionales.

## RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, a prática de jogos e desportos tradicionais tem vindo a perder proeminência na sociedade. Por conseguinte, uma das estratégias é transformá-los em Património Cultural Intangível nacional. O objectivo deste trabalho é reflectir sobre a importância dos diversos antecedentes na declaração dos Jogos Tradicionais e Desportivos como Património Cultural Intangível como alternativa válida a ser aplicável ao caso dos Povos Amazónicos do Equador. A revisão da literatura científica foi realizada através da pesquisa bibliográfica da literatura, critérios de selecção, avaliação da qualidade dos artigos seleccionados. Os Jogos Tradicionais e Desportos considerados património cultural imaterial contribuem para a identidade e sentimento de pertença da comunidade, região ou país. Além disso, têm impacto no sector do turismo através da exposição de práticas recreativas e desportivas. Vários países consideram um desporto tradicional como Património Cultural Imaterial, como é o caso do: hóquei no Canadá,



palín no Chile, pelota no México e Guatemala, luta livre canária, pelota basco, pelota valenciano e o atirador de bar aragonês em Espanha, e a corrida aos peixes em França. No contexto equatoriano, existem estudos que se limitam a abordar o conceito de Jogos Tradicionais e Desportos e a sua tipologia por região. Até agora, têm sido realizados eventos desportivos a nível nacional com o objectivo de promover a prática de actividades recreativas e desportivas.

**Palavras-chave:** Costumes e tradições; Identidade cultural; Património cultural intangível; Jogos tradicionais; Desportos tradicionais.

## INTRODUCTION

A large part of traditional games and sports belong to the national, regional or world cultural heritage, so it is necessary to promote their recognition (UNESCO, 2005, p.8). It is increasingly difficult to ignore those traditional games and sports are losing their prominence in society, despite the fact that some of them constitute national cultural heritage. Therefore, several authors at the national and international level have addressed this issue in order to show how recreational and sports activities, being cultural heritage, contribute to promote identity, belonging and value system to the communities or ethnic groups of a country.

In the international context, authors such as: Alonzo and Medina (2017; 2019 and 2020) refer to the relationship between traditional, ethnic or autochthonous sports-tourism-heritage in their research. Panqueba (2012), Abdul et al., (2013) agree that traditional games are part of the culture of the peoples and these practices that identify the community should be rescued. The authors suggest that the practice of traditional games can and has been rescued through cultural tourism. Hinch (2006); Pégard and Pruneau (2002) and Terry (2020) discuss how traditional sports considered cultural heritage promote local tourism through the demonstration of these activities.

In the Ecuadorian context, several authors have addressed the subject, including Guapi, Moreno, and Cherrez (2020); Lara, Carretero and Fuentes (2020); Pilatasig (2019) and Sailema and Sailema (2018), who have focused on conceptualizing traditional games and sports, identifying the types of games that exist in certain provinces and classifying them by region. Galeno (2020) and (2021) approach ecuavó, law as a traditional sport in Ecuador, from the educational, cultural and historical perspective. Authors such as Mendoza, Analuiza and Lara (2009); Sailema, Sailema, Amores, Navas, Mallquí and Romero (2017) and Ponce (2016) conduct research on traditional games in Physical Education classes in primary education. On the other hand, so far, there is no evidence of studies that address traditional games or sports as National Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Eastern region of Ecuador. Based on these antecedents, the objective of the research was to reflect on the importance of the diverse antecedents on the declaration of traditional games and sports as Intangible Cultural Heritage, as a valid alternative to be applicable to the case of the Amazonian peoples of Ecuador.

To develop the research, the methods considered by Vera, (2009) were used, the bibliographic search that allowed the selection of 35 documents between scientific articles and digital books. As selection criteria, no bibliography was discriminated; articles in indexed journals and digital books were considered. The evaluation of the quality of the selected articles was whether they belonged to databases such as Scielo, Dialnet, Lilacs, Scopus. Google Scholar and VHL Regional Portal.



## DEVELOPMENT

### Traditional Games and Sports as a cultural manifestation

When carrying out the bibliographical revision and the existing reality in the Ecuadorian Amazonian communities, it is inferred that the practices of traditional games and traditional sports are carried out in festivities, as well as in traditional sports championships. Therefore, in order to develop this section, both typologies are used indistinctly. But it is necessary to define them, in the first instance, traditional games are "...those games that, since a long time ago, continue to endure, passing from generation to generation, being transmitted from grandparents to parents and from parents to children and so on, perhaps undergoing some changes, but maintaining their essence". (Öfele, 1999, p.2). On the other hand, it is assumed as traditional sport "...that which, coming from a traditional game, goes through a process of institutionalization in which it is endowed with a competitive system and a firm regulation" (Suari, 2006, p.1).

Traditional games have always been present as part of the culture since the beginning of time, through ritual activities associated with the fertility of the land. Evidence can be traced back through monuments carved in high stones by the indigenous Mayan generations that preceded them. One of the first ancestral games for which there is evidence is the ball game, which has been rescued by indigenous peoples, specifically in Mexico and Guatemala. At present, it no longer has the objective for which it was practiced, but is now practiced as a sporting discipline, also as an exotic attraction for national and international tourism (Panqueba, 2012).

However, the real challenge of re-signification of ancestral and traditional games is to aim at the cultural matrix (Panqueba, 2010). In order to re-signify traditional games in the community, it is necessary to go back to the past. It is necessary to know what their beliefs are the games they used to play and make known to the ethnic groups or groups of people all this existing cultural manifestation, as well as the benefits at the social, economic and environmental level (Abdul, et al., 2013).

At the beginning of the 21st century, traditional sport is being used as a tourism medium; in this sense, Hinch (2006) demonstrates how the sport of field hockey has been a determining factor in Canadian popular culture and is being actively used to position Canada as a tourist destination, reflected in four indicators that have led to this fact: the first, by coming to consider ice hockey as Canada's heritage; the second, by taking into account the social function of field hockey reflected in the national territorial union; the third, related to the sporting successes that have been achieved, highlighting the victory over the Soviet Union in the 1972 field hockey games; and the fourth, the identity that has been achieved from the sport's sporting heroes.

For their part, Poblete and Panqueba (2015) highlight what is understood as traditional in relation to cultural practices in Latin America, concepts that highlight ideas about heritage and corporeality, where the ancestral practices of native peoples have been everyday acts within communities, with greater and lesser difficulties depending on the national socio-political contexts.

Turning traditional sports into cultural heritage is a step towards keeping and promoting the culture of a nation alive. In the bibliography consulted, there is evidence of various traditional sports that have become cultural heritage, as is the case in Chile with the practice of palín, of the Mapuche people. In Colombia, montucuy is found, and although in the study the authors do not specify whether it is currently considered a national



sport, it is a ludic and dance practice of the Zenú indigenous people, which contains the material and immaterial elements that today make up the jocular ethos of the identities of the Colombian Atlantic Coast. In Mexico and Guatemala, with the ball game, which was known as chajchaay (hip version in Guatemala), chaaj (forearm version) or ulama (hip version practiced in Mexico) (Poblete and Panqueba, 2015).

In the Canary Islands, through Canarian wrestling as an ethnic or traditional sport, quality tourism is promoted to recover its culture, where tourists cease to be mere spectators, going on to have unique experiences during visits to the different tourist areas. This establishes the connection between local sports, culture and tourism and of the different strategies deployed (Alonso and Medina, 2017). On the island of Fuerteventura, indigenous, ethnic or traditional sports: pelota vasca, pelota valenciana or de carrer, Canarian wrestling and the Aragonese or Pyrenean bar toss are practiced with the aim of promoting tourism which occupies a privileged place in a mature destination such as the Canary Islands. In this context, the intertwining of politics and identities arises when considering Canarian wrestling as an instrument for the generation of social and political discourses at different levels: local, insular, regional (Alonso and Medina, 2019).

Culture and heritage are fundamental pillars of the cultural tourism that a country, region and community possesses, understanding the Intangible Cultural Heritage as the traditions or expressions lived from our ancestors to our descendants. But cultural goods cannot be part of the cultural tourism offer if they are not transformed into heritage resources. And for that, they have to be the object of some initiative of enhancement (Terry, 2020).

Another traditional sport, the Fish Race, which in its beginnings was a daily activity in the Paris region (France), has come to be considered cultural heritage. It is held in the French town of Boulogne-sur-mer, with the aim of promoting tourism, which has a dual function: first, to provide spectators with a sense of local identity, of belonging, through a heritage cultural element; second, to attract an audience that, although in the first editions of the event, in the early nineties, was mainly local, later this sport would attract an audience outside the area where the race takes place, promoting rural tourism in this area (Pégard and Pruneau, 2002).

With regard to the Ecuadorian context, the research that has so far been possible to evidence is focused on the origin of ecuavóley as a traditional game in Ecuador (Galeno, 2020), to know the origin and time when the term ecuavóley began to be used, as well as the provinces in which its practice began (Galeno, 2020). In addition, to determine the place and date of the first international ecuavóley championship, to know the countries in which ecuavóley is practiced (Galeno, 2020). In addition, Galeno (2021) within the line of research focuses on the studies of ecuavóley in the Physical Education curriculum. Guapi *et al.*, (2020) consider Traditional Games and Sports and the relationship with experiential tourism. For their part, Mendoza *et al.*, (2017) made a proposal of popular games where their didactic contribution and possible adaptations that will allow a more operative development of Physical Education classes are identified. Sailema *et al.*, (2017), in research, demonstrate that traditional ludic activities are effective means of motor and intellectual arousal in children with Down syndrome. Lara *et al.*, (2020) carry out the patrimonial registry in the Químiag parish of the province of Chimborazo, where they identify the typical traditional games of the community. Ponce (2016), as a result of the research, raises the need to include traditional games in the curricular block of education. Based on the analysis of the aforementioned bibliography,



the author considers that no research is being conducted to convert traditional games and sports into Intangible Cultural Heritage in Ecuador.

Regarding the context of the Eastern region of Ecuador, there are studies on the classification of traditional games, such as: the four corners, the nail, perinola, the marro game, tserentsere (spinning top), the binge eating, iwianchi (hidden devil), the hidden belt and the ray. However, in the work, there is no data on the collection of information on traditional games in each region (Sailema and Sailema, 2018).

For their part, Ecuadorian state agencies, with the aim of promoting the practice of traditional games and sports in the Oriente region, have carried out cultural and sporting events related to traditional games and sports. The Inter-American Center for Crafts and Popular Arts (Cidap) in 2014 held the sixth meeting of Cultural Exchange between 5 ethnic groups with traditional games, shamanic rituals and talks (Cidap, 2014). And the Secretary of Sport of Ecuador, with the aim of promoting culture and recovering the identity of peoples and nationalities, as well as boosting local tourism in the different provinces, held the sporting event: Ancestral, Traditional Indigenous and Popular Games of the peoples and nationalities (Ministry of Tourism, 2018).

### Conceptualization of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is associated with traditions, festivities, music, gastronomy, lifestyles and local production. Various authors have made their contributions around cultural heritage, so we will start by raising a generalized conception by saying that they are all the cultural manifestations of the past that are considered worthy of conservation, which at the time were practiced by a group of people or community (Prats, 1998). However, for Garcia (1999), cultural heritage does not refer only to material and immaterial resources of the past, but also to present-day assets, visible and invisible, new crafts, languages, knowledge and traditions.

For his part, Pastor (2003) describes cultural heritage as all those data left by human beings during the coexistence and interaction among peers, through which the group of people or a particular community is identified. But an important aspect to take into account is that these data and cultural manifestations will be considered cultural heritage, as long as the whole group or collective of people accept and assume the cultural practices.

For Medina (2017) "... It has to do, among many other meanings, with something inherited from a more or less distant past that is considered to be preserved." (p. 107). In the last decade, the concept of cultural heritage has been redefined. According to the guidelines of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is considered to be composed of natural and cultural objects that refer to tangible heritage and, on the other hand, the behaviors, knowledge and values of the people who inhabit it, which correspond to intangible heritage (Olivera, 2011). The above approach has made it possible to differentiate and classify cultural heritage into two types: on the one hand, the tangible part and, on the other, the intangible.

According to UNESCO (2003), intangible cultural heritage is understood as.

"... the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills - together with the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces inherent to them - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as an integral part of their cultural heritage." (p. 2).



Therefore, communities must constantly recreate the customs of their environment, such as music, dances, sports activities, handicraft activities, among others, in order to maintain their identity through the practice of their traditions.

The importance of Intangible Cultural Heritage lies in the fact that it can be an example of how to standardize ways of understanding other cultures, the different, from the perspective of exoticization, of taking care of the other (Téllez, 2013). But without leaving aside the identity of the peoples. The contact with other cultures and specifically with the western world has given rise to the adoption by the peoples of the demand for their heritage, entering the commercial network promoted by developed countries (García, 1998).

From the analysis of the preceding studies, it is inferred that the heritage of traditional sports, which identifies the Amazonian peoples, can be an initiative for social transformation, under the recognition of identity and as a possibility to (re)build the past, contributing to a historical narrative that is inclusive and part of the culture (Téllez, 2013).

### **Relationship between Traditional Games and Sports and Intangible Cultural Heritage**

In each country, community or people, the ancestors have left as cultural heritage ancestral, traditional and autochthonous games that, at the time, fulfilled an objective; at present, many of these games have been redefined. According to UNESCO (2005), in article 2, it states: "The different indigenous cultures of the world have given rise to a great variety of traditional games and sports that are expressions of the cultural richness of a nation". (p.2). Among the ways of preserving cultural heritage is to convert it into Intangible Cultural Heritage, as has been done by some countries that have traditional sports that are part of their culture within their national cultural manifestations. Such is the case of field hockey in Canada, palín in Chile, pelota in Mexico and Guatemala, Canary Island wrestling, Basque pelota, Valencian pelota and Aragonese bar throwing in Spain, and fish racing in France.

In this sense, traditional games and sports are considered part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, because through them it is possible to educate and work on aspects that identify a community or ethnic group such as: tolerance, respect, identity, communication and peace in a diverse culture (Ruiz, 2012). Traditional games and sports have always been linked or identified with the Intangible Cultural Heritage of peoples, that is, with their culture, identity, history, magic, sacredness, love, art, language, literature, customs and war.

That is why the relationship established between traditional games and sports and Intangible Cultural Heritage, in the first instance, is given by considering that the playful and sporting manifestations, practiced by our ancestors, are part of the culture of the community, which should continue to be practiced and made known to today's society. Also the character of identity that traditional games and sports provide, which allows the members of the community to have a sense of belonging to their culture and distinguish themselves from that group of people, communities or ethnic groups.

In this sense, tourism emerges as a third element, establishing a triad between "tourism-heritage-sports and traditional games". This relationship is established by considering that sports and tourism are related to the extended and claimed concept of heritage, since sports, with other cultural aspects, are part of the process itself, considering it as



an aspect of "showable" identity, becoming an interesting tourist attraction. This relationship is significant in autochthonous, ethnic or traditional sports (Alonso, Medina, and Leal, 2020). The result of the previous study reinforces the criterion that traditional games and sports, being considered Intangible Cultural Heritage, in addition to the character of identity that they provide to the community, are capable of promoting tourism in all its manifestations, through the exhibition of traditional sports as culture and identity of the locality.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research has made it possible to address the cultural value of the practice of traditional games and sports in the community, region and country. At the international level, it was identified that there are traditional sports such as field hockey in Canada, palín in Chile, pelota in Mexico and Guatemala, lucha canaria, pelota vasca, pelota valenciana and barra aragonesa in Spain and fish race in France. Through the practice of these sports, each country makes known the Intangible Cultural Heritage they possess. In addition, tourism is promoted in its different manifestations. In the Ecuadorian context, the studies analyzed have been limited to conceptualizing traditional games and sports. The typology of these ludic and sports activities, classifying them by regions, and to focus on traditional games in the school educational environment.

In the literature reviewed with respect to Intangible Cultural Heritage, it was found that from the beginning it was conceptualized only as cultural heritage. However, at present, several authors have given treatment to cultural heritage, differentiating between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The relationship that exists between Traditional Games and Sports and Intangible Cultural Heritage lies in two aspects. The first is that traditional games and sports are cultural heritage of our ancestors and therefore part of the cultural heritage. The second aspect is that through recreational and sports activities, people make known their identity and sense of belonging to a community or ethnic group, which differentiates them from similar groups.

The background of the research serves as a theoretical basis to identify how, through traditional games and sports, the culture of the villages can be maintained and promoted, in addition to considering local tourism as a means of disseminating Ecuador's cultural wealth. In this sense, the author recommends that new studies be carried out to gather information on the types of traditional games and sports that exist in the Amazon region of Ecuador.

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**Conflict of interests:**

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

**Authors' contribution:**

**Fausto Iván Guapi Guamán:** Conception of the idea, literature search and review, compilation of information resulting from the instruments applied, general advice on the topic addressed, drafting of the original (first version), review and final version of the article, article correction, authorship coordinator, translation of terms or information obtained, review of the application of the applied bibliographic standard.



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