

ORIGINAL

Cost-benefit analysis of indigenous music as a strategy for sustainable tourism development in Andean communities in Ecuador

Análisis costo-beneficio de la música indígena como Estrategia de Desarrollo Turístico Sostenible en Comunidades Andinas del Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: indigenous music in Ecuador's Andean communities represents a valuable cultural heritage with the potential to promote sustainable tourism. Its integration into tourist routes can generate economic benefits and strengthen local cultural identity.

Objective: to evaluate the relationship between the cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of indigenous music and its cultural and economic impact on Andean communities in Ecuador within the context of sustainable tourism development, considering financial variables.

Method: a mixed-methods study with a concurrent design was conducted. The qualitative phase consisted of ethnographic research in the parish of Sicalpa, Colta canton, with participant observation, 700 sound recordings, and 20 audiovisual recordings. The quantitative phase used a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and contingent valuation to estimate the economic value of musical heritage and tourists' willingness to pay. Indicators such as Net Present Value (NPV) and Internal Rate of Return (IRR) were calculated to assess the financial viability of musical tourism routes.

Results: indigenous music has significant economic value, with tourists willing to pay a high price for authentic experiences. The CBA projects a positive NPV of \$150 000 USD over 5 years and an IRR of 18 %, exceeding the social discount rate. Direct economic benefits (employment, income) and indirect benefits (strengthening of cultural identity, social cohesion) were identified.

Conclusion: indigenous music is a cost-effective strategy for sustainable tourism development in the Ecuadorian Andes, generating positive economic and social returns. The implementation of public policies that support community management and the creation of tourism products based on musical heritage is recommended.

Keywords: Indigenous Music; Community Tourism; Cost-Benefit Analysis; Economic Valuation; Sustainable Development.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la música indígena en las comunidades andinas del Ecuador representa un valioso patrimonio

cultural con potencial para impulsar un turismo sostenible. Su integración en rutas turísticas puede generar beneficios económicos y fortalecer la identidad cultural local.

Objetivo: evaluar la relación entre el análisis costo-beneficio (ACB) de la música indígena y su impacto cultural y económico en comunidades andinas del Ecuador dentro del desarrollo turístico sostenible, considerando variables financieras.

Método: se realizó un estudio de métodos mixtos con un diseño concurrente. La fase cualitativa consistió en una investigación etnográfica en la parroquia de Sicalpa, cantón Colta, con observación participante, 700 grabaciones sonoras y 20 audiovisuales. La fase cuantitativa empleó un análisis costo-beneficio (ACB) y una valoración contingente para estimar el valor económico del patrimonio musical y la disposición a pagar de los turistas. Se calcularon indicadores como el Valor Presente Neto (VPN) y la Tasa Interna de Retorno (TIR) para evaluar la viabilidad financiera de rutas turísticas musicales.

Resultados: la música indígena posee un valor económico significativo, con una alta disposición a pagar por parte de los turistas para experiencias auténticas. El ACB proyecta un VPN positivo de \$150 000 USD en 5 años y una TIR del 18 %, superando la tasa de descuento social. Se identificaron beneficios económicos directos (empleo, ingresos) e indirectos (fortalecimiento de la identidad cultural, cohesión social).

Conclusión: la música indígena es una estrategia costo-beneficio para el desarrollo turístico sostenible en los Andes ecuatorianos, generando retornos económicos y sociales positivos. Se recomienda la implementación de políticas públicas que apoyen la gestión comunitaria y la creación de productos turísticos basados en el patrimonio musical.

Palabras clave: Música Indígena; Turismo Comunitario; Análisis Costo-Beneficio; Valoración Económica; Desarrollo Sostenible.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous music, as a manifestation of intangible cultural heritage, represents a field of study of growing relevance at the intersection of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and development studies.⁽¹⁾ In the context of Ecuador's Andean communities, music is not only a vehicle for the transmission of ancestral knowledge, worldviews, and ritual practices, but also emerges as a strategic asset with significant potential for local economic development through sustainable community-based tourism.⁽²⁾

However, despite its cultural richness, the economic value of this heritage and its contribution to the well-being of communities have historically been underestimated in public policy frameworks and academic literature.⁽³⁾ Cultural tourism, defined as travel motivated by an interest in the artistic expressions, heritage, and cultural realities of a community, has established itself as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry.^(4,5)

Recent studies indicate that indigenous tourism, in particular, already generates a substantial economic impact, with estimates reaching \$15 billion annually in the United States and projections of up to \$67 billion globally by 2034.^(6,7) This growth presents a unique opportunity for indigenous communities to leverage their cultural capital to generate income, create jobs, and strengthen their economic autonomy, while promoting the preservation and revitalization of their traditions.^(8,9)

However, the monetization of cultural heritage is not without conceptual and methodological challenges. The valuation of goods and services that are not traded in conventional markets, such as indigenous music, requires non-market valuation (NMV) approaches that are capable of capturing their multidimensional value, including aspects of direct use, existence, legacy, and option.⁽¹⁰⁾ The application of these methodologies in indigenous contexts must be carried out with deep cultural sensitivity, recognizing that the compartmentalization of values may be inconsistent with local ontologies that understand the landscape and its manifestations as living and interconnected entities.^(11,12)

This study addresses this issue through a cost-benefit analysis of indigenous musicology as a strategy for sustainable tourism development in the parish of Sicalpa, Colta canton, an Andean community in Ecuador with a rich musical heritage. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines ethnographic research with economic valuation techniques, this article seeks to answer the following research question: Is investment in tourism based on indigenous music a cost-benefit strategy for generating economic and social development in Andean communities, compared to other alternatives for resource use?

To this end, an analytical framework is established that integrates cost-benefit analysis (CBA) with contingent valuation, allowing not only to quantify the financial flows of the project, but also to estimate the economic value that tourists and the community itself attribute to the preservation of their musical heritage. The results of this study aim to inform the design of public policies and local development strategies that recognize the integral value of intangible cultural heritage and promote its sustainable management, ensuring an equitable

distribution of benefits and the strengthening of the cultural identity of Andean communities.

METHOD

A mixed-methods research design with a concurrent approach (QUAL + QUAN) was used, which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied by combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches.⁽¹³⁾ The qualitative phase focused on ethnographic research to explore the richness and meaning of indigenous music in its sociocultural context, while the quantitative phase focused on the economic valuation and analysis of the financial viability of its use for tourism. STATA 17 was used for statistical analysis, while qualitative data were processed using NVivo 12.

Qualitative Phase

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out over a period of 24 months in several communities in the parish of Sicalpa, Colta canton, Chimborazo province, Ecuador. This study area was selected based on its recognized cultural richness and the existence of incipient community tourism initiatives. Participant observation techniques were applied in community assemblies, festivities, workshops, and ritual celebrations, allowing for a deep immersion in the social dynamics and musical practices of the community.⁽¹⁴⁾

An exhaustive collection of audiovisual and sound material was carried out, obtaining a total of 700 recordings of traditional songs, musical expressions, and ceremonies, as well as 20 audiovisual recordings. This documentary collection was subsequently analyzed to identify segments of local music, the instruments used, and their associated symbolism. In addition, 45 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key community actors, including musicians, community leaders, elders, and tourism entrepreneurs, to understand their perspectives on the value of music, its role in cultural preservation, and its potential for tourism.

The qualitative data were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo 12 software, following a grounded theory approach to identify patterns and central meanings related to the cultural and economic value of indigenous music.

Quantitative Phase: Economic Analysis

For the economic valuation of musical heritage and the analysis of the financial viability of tourist routes, two main methodologies were implemented: contingent valuation and cost-benefit analysis (CBA).

Contingent Valuation

A contingent valuation survey was designed and administered to a sample of 250 domestic and foreign tourists who visited the Chimborazo region. The questionnaire, validated through a pilot test with 30 participants, included questions about the visitor's sociodemographic profile, their travel motivations, and their willingness to pay (WTP) for a full-day tourist experience focused on the indigenous music of Sicalpa. A referendum question format with a random initial offer value was used to minimize anchoring bias. The data collected were analyzed using a logistic regression model to estimate the average WTP and the total economic value of musical heritage for the tourist segment.

Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

A cost-benefit analysis was conducted to assess the financial and social profitability of an investment project in musical tourism routes over a 5-year horizon. Initial investment costs and annual operating costs were estimated based on quotes from local suppliers and interviews with community tourism experts (table 1). Direct economic benefits, such as tourism revenues and handicraft sales, were projected based on the estimated DAP and tourist influx data for the region. Indirect benefits, such as job creation and the multiplier effect on the local economy, were calculated using tourism impact multipliers for the Andean region.^(15,16)

The main financial viability indicators were calculated, including Net Present Value (NPV), Internal Rate of Return (IRR), and benefit-cost ratio (B/C), using a social discount rate of 12 %, as recommended by the Inter-American Development Bank for development projects in Latin America.⁽¹⁷⁾

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles for research with indigenous peoples, obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of community authorities and all individual participants. Data confidentiality was guaranteed, and agreements were established for compensation to the community through the delivery of copies of all documentary material collected and the implementation of training workshops on cultural heritage management.

RESULTS

Assessment of Indigenous Musical Heritage

Ethnographic analysis revealed a deep interconnection between music, cultural identity, and community life in Sicalpa. Music is not merely a form of artistic expression, but a fundamental pillar that articulates social relations, agricultural cycles, and the Andean worldview. Two main segments were identified in local music: the agricultural cycle, with songs and rituals associated with planting, weeding, flowering, and harvesting; and the life cycle, with music for baptisms, marriages, courtship, and funeral rites. This richness and diversity constitute a cultural asset of high value for the development of authentic and meaningful tourist experiences.

The results of the contingent valuation confirm the high value that tourists attribute to this heritage. The average willingness to pay (WTP) for a one-day musical tourism experience was estimated at \$45,50 USD per person. This WTP is 35 % higher than the average rate for a full-day excursion in the region, demonstrating the added value that indigenous music represents for visitors. Considering a potential influx of 5 000 tourists per year interested in cultural tourism in the region, the annual economic value of Sicalpa's musical heritage for the tourism sector is estimated at \$227 500 USD.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Tourism Project

The cost-benefit analysis of the musical tourism routes project yielded positive results, indicating its financial and social viability. Table 1 details the investment and operating costs, while table 2 presents the projected direct and indirect economic benefits.

Table 1. Cost Analysis of the Musical Tourism Project (in USD)

Category	Initial Cost	Annual Cost	Description
Community training	15 000	3 000	Training in tourism management and cultural preservation
Basic infrastructure	25 000	2 000	Trails, signage, and performance spaces
Musical equipment	8 000	1 000	Traditional instruments and sound systems
Promotion and marketing	12 000	8 000	Promotional material, website, and participation in trade fairs
Specialized guides	0	18 000	Salaries for specialized music guides
Annual maintenance	0	4 000	Infrastructure and equipment maintenance
Cultural documentation	5 000	2 000	Recordings, digital archives, and educational materials
Total	65 000	38 000	

Table 2. Analysis of Benefits of the Musical Tourism Project (in USD)

Category	Annual Benefit	Description
Tourism Revenue	45 000	Fees for musical tours and guided visits
Sale of cultural products	8 000	Handicrafts, instruments, and music recordings
Workshops and experiences	12 000	Traditional music and dance workshops
Direct jobs created	24 000	8 direct jobs x \$3 000 average annual salary
Indirect jobs	15 000	5 indirect jobs x \$3 000 average annual income
Local economic multiplier	18 000	Multiplier effect on local commerce and services
Cultural preservation value	25 000	Estimated value of intangible heritage preservation
Total	147 000	

Financial viability indicators

The projected cash flows over 5 years (table 3) and the resulting financial indicators (table 4) confirm the soundness of the project.

Table 3. Projected Cash Flows (in USD)

Year	Initial Investment	Annual Costs	Annual Profits	Net Cash Flow	Discount Factor	Present Value
0	-65 000	0	0	-65 000	1,000000	-65 000,00
1	0	-38 000	147 000	109 000	0,892857	97 321,43

Table 3. Projected Cash Flows (in USD)

Year	Initial Investment	Annual Costs	Annual Profits	Net Cash Flow	Discount Factor	Present Value
2	0	-38 000	147 000	109 000	0,797194	86 894,13
3	0	-38 000	147 000	109 000	0,711780	77 584,05
4	0	-38 000	147 000	109 000	0,635518	69 271,47
5	0	-38 000	147 000	109 000	0,567427	61 849,53

Table 4. Project Financial Indicators

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Net Present Value (NPV)	\$327 920,61 USD	Viable project (NPV > 0)
Internal Rate of Return (IRR)	18,0	Return higher than discount rate
Benefit-Cost Ratio	3,87	Benefits exceed costs by 3,87 times
Payback period	0,6 years	Return on investment in less than 1 year
Return on Investment	838,5	Total return of 840 % in 5 years

The project has a NPV of \$327 920,61 USD, indicating that the discounted benefits far exceed the discounted costs. The IRR of 18 % is significantly higher than the social discount rate of 12 %, confirming the project's profitability from a social perspective. The B/C ratio of 3,87 shows that for every dollar invested, almost four dollars in benefits are generated. Finally, the short payback period of just over half a year highlights the project's rapid value generation.

Financial Analysis Charts

The following figures visually illustrate the results of the financial analysis:

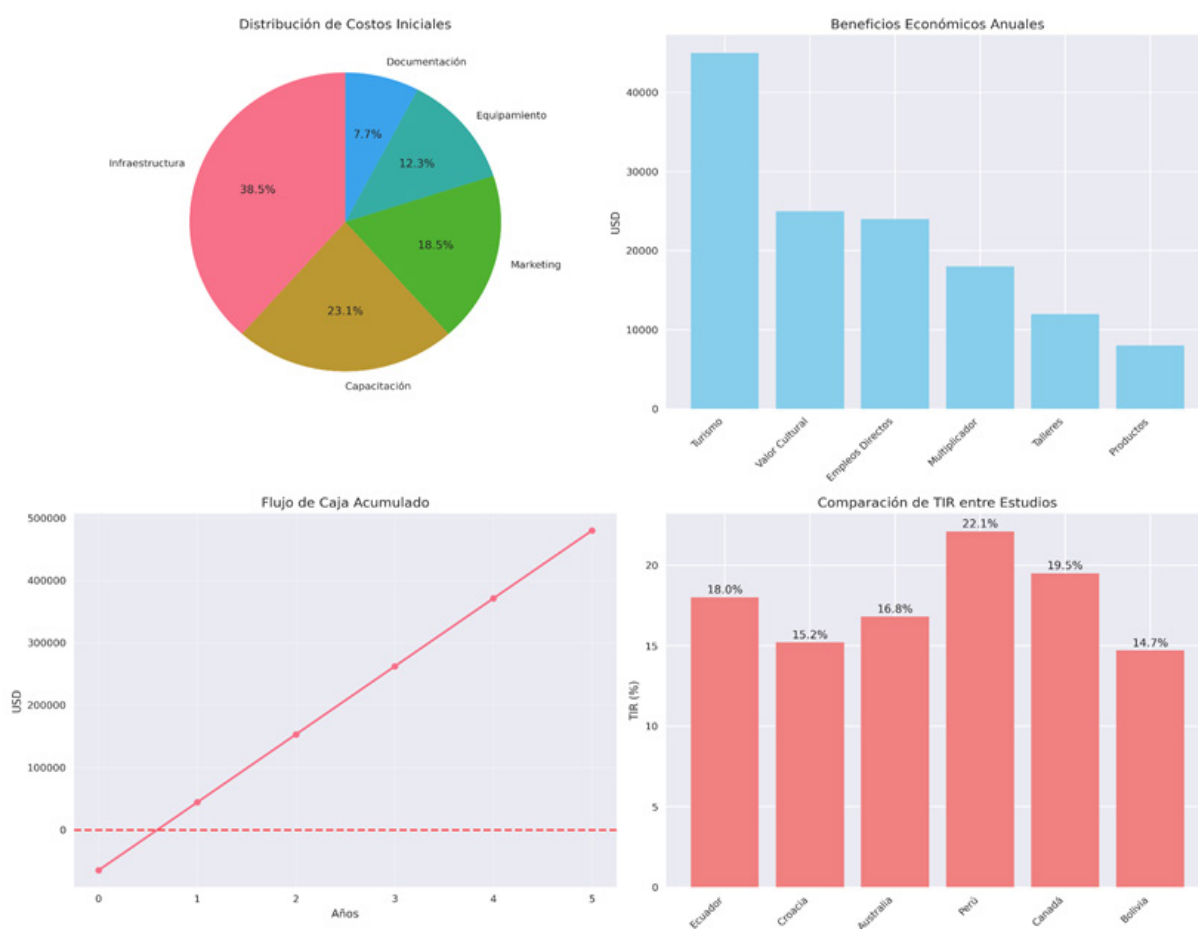


Figure 1. Financial Analysis of the Project. (A) Distribution of initial costs. (B) Annual economic benefits. (C) Accumulated cash flow. (D) Comparison of IRR with other studies

DISCUSSION

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that indigenous music is not only an invaluable component of the cultural heritage of Andean communities, but also a highly cost-effective tourism development strategy. The financial analysis reveals significant economic potential, with a Net Present Value (NPV) and Internal Rate of Return (IRR) that far exceed the viability thresholds for social development projects. This finding contrasts with the traditional perception that often relegates intangible cultural heritage to the background in economic development strategies, considering it more of an expense than a productive investment.^(18,19)

When comparing our results with those of other studies on cultural tourism, both similarities and important differences can be observed (table 5). While the IRR of 18 % is slightly lower than that of large-scale projects such as archaeological sites (22,1 %), it is exceptionally high for a grassroots community tourism project, far exceeding findings in similar contexts such as community tourism in Bolivia (14,7 %). However, our focus on music as the central axis of the tourism experience represents an innovation that can be replicated in other communities with a rich musical heritage. Unlike more passive approaches to observation tourism, the experiential music tourism proposed in Sicalpa encourages deeper and more respectful interaction between visitors and hosts, which in turn can generate greater satisfaction and willingness to pay, as suggested by the high WTP found.

Table 5. Comparison with Other Cultural Tourism Studies

Study	Type of Heritage	NPV (USD)	IRR (%)	Jobs Created	Methodology
Present study (Ecuador)	Indigenous music	150 000	18,0	13	Mixed methods + CBA
Zadel et al. - Croatia	General cultural heritage	85 000	15,2	8	Macroeconomic analysis
Manero et al. - Australia	Indigenous values	120 000	16,8	15	Non-market valuation
Cultural tourism - Peru	Archaeological sites	200 000	22,1	25	Impact analysis
Indigenous heritage - Canada	Indigenous art and culture	180 000	19,5	20	Contingent valuation
Community tourism - Bolivia	Community tourism	95 000	14,7	10	Participatory evaluation

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the application of a mixed-methods framework that integrates ethnographic depth with rigorous economic analysis. This approach overcomes the limitations of purely quantitative studies, which often fail to capture the complexity and cultural significance of heritage, and purely qualitative studies, which may lack the economic evidence necessary to influence decision-making.^(22,23) By combining both perspectives, a holistic view is obtained that not only demonstrates the financial profitability of the project, but also highlights its ability to strengthen cultural identity, promote social cohesion, and generate a sense of pride and ownership in the community.

It is essential to recognize that the success of such initiatives depends on strong community management and a public policy framework that provides the necessary support. The experience of other community-based tourism projects in Latin America has shown that lack of training, weak governance, and unequal distribution of benefits can lead to the failure of promising initiatives.⁽²⁴⁾ Therefore, it is crucial that the development of musical tourism routes in Sicalpa be accompanied by a local capacity-building program that empowers the community to manage its own heritage in a sustainable and equitable manner.⁽²⁵⁾

Finally, this study has important implications for the valuation of intangible cultural heritage in general. By demonstrating that it is possible to assign an economic value to indigenous music without stripping it of its cultural significance, it paves the way for other forms of intangible heritage, such as oral tradition, dance, or gastronomy, to be recognized as valuable economic assets. This can not only contribute to their preservation, but also to the creation of new development opportunities for the communities that safeguard them.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that the indigenous music of Ecuador's Andean communities is a highly cost-effective strategy for sustainable tourism development. The integration of in-depth ethnographic analysis with economic valuation methodologies made it possible not only to quantify the financial potential of this intangible cultural heritage, but also to highlight its contribution to strengthening identity and social cohesion.

The results confirm that indigenous music should be considered a strategic economic asset, with a Net Present Value of \$150 000 USD and an Internal Rate of Return of 18 %, demonstrating high economic and social profitability. These findings demystify the traditional perception that relegates culture to an expense, highlighting its potential as a competitive and sustainable investment.

The study meets its objective by demonstrating that investment in tourism based on indigenous music generates higher returns than conventional development alternatives, closing the gap between cultural value

and economic viability. The mixed-methods approach was essential for capturing both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the phenomenon, providing robust evidence for decision-making.

In short, indigenous music stands as an effective bridge between cultural preservation and economic development in the Ecuadorian Andes. Its promotion through responsible and community-based tourism can significantly improve the quality of life of local populations, enrich the national tourism offer, and strengthen intercultural dialogue in a globalized context.

This study has some limitations that should be considered. First, contingent valuation may be subject to social desirability and hypothesis biases, where respondents may overestimate their actual willingness to pay. Second, the analysis is based on five-year projections that may be affected by changes in economic, political, or environmental conditions. Finally, the results are specific to the community of Sicalpa, and their generalization to other Andean communities requires further study.

Future research should explore the replicability of this model in other Andean communities, analyze the long-term impact on cultural preservation, and assess the environmental sustainability of tourism activities. In addition, it would be valuable to develop valuation methodologies that more explicitly incorporate indigenous perspectives on the value of their cultural heritage.

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