

Patrimonialization in Mexico: disputes over intangible cultural heritage

La patrimonialización en México: las disputas en torno al patrimonio cultural intangible

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to analyze the tense and conflictive process of legitimizing intangible cultural heritage (ICP) in order to enhance its value, which in Mexico goes through a dispute between the intention of obtaining the maximum commercial use and the best way to protect it. This leads to a political arena in which the different ways of conceiving the management of the ICP and what is expected of it struggle: frequently, a collision between the interests that move the community to participate and the powers, motivated by profit. Therefore, the defense of the PCI has to resolve the contradictions between the logic of cultural valuation and economic valuation. This paper reviews how this dispute has unfolded in some communities and localities in Mexico regarding asset activation. Our report illustrates the processes of patrimonialization –the process of construction of the meaning and sense of the cultural manifestations of a people–, various conjugations of the political, economic and social uses of intangible cultural heritage, as well as the effects derived from litigation.

Keywords

Intangible cultural heritage; cultural management; uses of heritage; Patrimonialization.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar el tenso y conflictivo proceso de legitimación del patrimonio cultural intangible (PCI) en aras de su puesta en valor, que en México pasa por una disputa entre la intención de obtener el máximo aprovechamiento comercial y la mejor forma de protegerlo. Así se deriva a una arena política en la que luchan las diferentes maneras de concebir la gestión del PCI y lo que se espera de ella: con frecuencia, una colisión entre los intereses que incitan a la comunidad a participar y a los poderes fácticos, motivados por obtener ganancias. Ante esto, la defensa del PCI ha de solventar las contradicciones entre la lógica de la valoración cultural y la de valorización económica. En este trabajo se hace un repaso de cómo se ha desplegado esta disputa en algunas comunidades y localidades de México, a propósito de la activación patrimonial. En esta revisión se ilustran los procesos de patrimonialización –el proceso de construcción del significado y sentido de las manifestaciones culturales de un pueblo–, a la par que se muestran diversas conjugaciones de los usos políticos, económicos y sociales del patrimonio cultural intangible, así como los efectos derivados de los litigios.

Palabras clave

Patrimonio cultural intangible; gestión cultural; usos del patrimonio; patrimonialización.

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INTRODUCTION

More often than not, inhabitants of a community ignore that their daily practices – religiousness, the ways they eat, dress and speak– have a patrimonial value, since ancestral practices, codes and symbolic values are alive in them, which would be undecipherable if their historical path were unknown. These habits comprise the reference for the identify communities currently build their life with, and this set of practices is what has been referred to as *cultural heritage*.

Patrimonial appropriation is understood as the process of social construction where a group or groups of people give a symbolic and economical value to certain material or immaterial aspects of culture. From this valorization, assessment, appropriation and appreciation of said expressions, are given the name of Cultural Heritage of a people.

In Mexico, cultural management is facing persons who prefer protection over commercialization and vice versa; for this reason, the strategic lines of action of patrimonial appropriation face a dilemma between the purpose of preserving and that of getting the best benefit. Among the tasks for the protection of cultural heritage are: to maintain its identity, to prevent likely plagiarism and to maintain ecological balance.

An example of this is to prevent the introduction of spurious substitutes, such as including machinery for processes formerly made by hand, substituting natural materials for synthetic materials, preventing *haute couture* transnational companies from unlawfully appropriating designs made by indigenous communities –which often happens– or preventing wear and tear and exceeding the loading capacity of a cistern to favor the renewal of natural resources. These issues sometimes imply an extreme measure to limiting the use of or denying the consumption of the heritage.

Notwithstanding, economic achievement strategies put pressure to commercialize the heritage, by promoting dissemination –whether by means of fairs and parties– or by fostering the conversion of the cultural space into a tourist attraction to expand the market. Therefore, the possibilities to activate local economy are explored by means of expositions, rentals, consignment or sale, not only of products, but also of the cultural practices of a community.

From the foregoing, it is inferred that there are contradictory aspects in managing the cultural goods of a community, to the extent that some ways of the

beneficial interest compromise the preservation of this heritage. It is possible that the promotion of a popular festivity sparks immediate gains, however, this might eventually turn into a predator of the symbolic values of the community. This conflicting scenario caused by patrimonial appropriation is caused by different manners of conceiving how the cultural heritage is to be managed.

In the broader context of the consumption society, the world has turned into a big supermarket and, since everything is bound to become merchandise, it is the time for culture to incorporate to the whim of the market. In the face of this, conservation efforts sink into the tidal waves of commodification, where tourism has a prominent role. Based on this, the purpose of this work is to analyze the tense and conflicting process of legitimizing the intangible cultural heritage (ICH)¹ in México, specifically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Actors inclined to protection and those who bid for commercialization are equally necessary for setting the value of ICH, hence the paradox. This point is to be emphasized, for they are not opposing groups, but they complement each other, even at irreconcilable points that are mutually abhorred. The crux of the matter is that the need for cultural evaluation demands the execution of specific tasks within the municipal public policy, community organization and democratic governance.

By performing joint work, it is achieved that the population holding cultural legacy are aware (unless it already is aware) that their habits, cultural practices, religiosity, customs and traditions have an intrinsic value, different from its economic value, as they are unique and represent a way of seeing and being in the world, rooted in a specific territory.

Each ICH enriches the inventory of the Cultural Heritage of Humanity, after all, cultural heritage is “a historical construction, a concept and a representation which is created through a process where both different class interests and social groups comprising the nation take part, such as historical and political differences that set countries in opposition to each other” (Florescano, 1993, p. 10).

¹ Social uses, rituals, festive events or traditional knowledge are Intangible Cultural Goods (ICG). This is about goods shared by a social group, neither provided by the State nor initially conceived for sale. Once they become ICH, they are the object of both legal protection and likely cultural consumption.

To the extent a community is recognized as the legatee of its heritage, its members will be involved in its protection. Constant social participation trains the people to better determine how to use it; that is to say, the heritage ought to be activated to make it work, in search for social benefits for the development of the community and, at the same time, to strive for the continued existence of its beliefs, values, traditions and customs.

ICH is part of the collective identity; therefore, it revolves around the socio-political imagination as an element of cohesion and social peace. In actual fact, this means that local actors ensure both the comprehensiveness of their cultural heritage and the demand to keep it active, current and with the possibilities to have it renewed; furthermore, they are interested in fostering public ways of representation capable of fostering economic activities by means of rituals, festive events, commemorations, legends, uses and ways of speaking, dressing, eating, and anything that may combine the richness of the past as a learning process in the present. This implementation may be understood as the accrual of knowledge to create goods inserted in present economic dynamics.

The ideas of ecological sustainability and human development are akin to the protection of ICH, and are translated into patrimonial appropriation processes or social activation for symbolic and economic valuations, which shall only be sustainable if there are distributive consequences for the benefit of most of the community, by means of a productive investment, or the procurement of goods and services resulting from heritage activation. Simultaneously, this adds to social cohesion by fostering and applying civic values. Sustainable management is not feasible without participation, solidarity, inclusion, equal opportunities, respect of human rights and social justice.

Concurrently, there is an economic aspect included in the activation of ICH where commodification of culture provides benefits for development, a point where the conflict of interests among the actors of the patrimonial appropriation gains momentum. Agents are grouped per the emphasis they uphold by means of symbolic valuation for the reinforcement of identities, or rather, by means of the economic evaluation through commodification.

During the first activation stages, there are common objectives among actors: all of them work for cultural evaluation and together answer the question of the initial investment –needed by the requirements to obtain official recognition– as well as economic dynamics, so that production processes –to the extent of attractive

goods– compete for touristic markets. In spite of the diversity of interests, actors are willing to cooperate, at least ideally, to obtain distinctions.

The actions of the groups are complemented in this stage of the process; however, values of trust, solidarity and altruism in social participation usually lag in the face of motivations related with competitiveness and the search for gains. There is a tendency of the scale to tip towards economic tasks, valuing; even, if hegemonic groups manage to prevail over grassroots organizations, they will not only have a significant advantage, but they will also end up expropriating the heritage of a community and manage it as if it were privately owned.

When the heritage activation process is focused on valuation, that is to say, in the economic sense, natural and cultural attributes of a people are reduced to goods. The kind manner to demonstrate this phenomenon is to refer to certain tourist attractions where the promotion of *cultural destinations* reinstates the people's practices, for the sake of heritage activation, by means of an *ad hoc* way of management for commercialization purposes. Thus, the culture of peoples, their history, traditions, customs and roots, face a controversial type of patrimonial appropriation reaching its maximum point by the arrival of tourism.

In the heritage activation logic inclined towards economic evaluation, the symbolic values attributed to processes and products comprising the ICH lose their social cohesion effects, as if they have been sedated for the surgery of economic success to act in the body of the community; this means that the benefits will be capitalized by factual powers in and out of the location. There is a tendency of activation processes inclined to commodification to become manifest at a local level, but it is a manner to adhere to the world tendency of tertiarization of rural economy, the components of which precisely are in fostering tourism.

Hence, the encouragement to packaging cultural heritage with a label of *tourist attraction*; the dominant orientation is touristification,² whose collateral effect is that of cultural trivialization. Cultural tourism fosters the consumption of "authentic goods", however, *souvenirs* and cultural representations offered thereby –such as staging rituals, dances, et cetera– are but stereotypes.

Proof of the above can be found in the stages of Mayan ritual ceremonies in Hispanic dances presented every night at the Xcaret complex in the Mayan Riviera,

² Zúñiga (2014) understands this as "a process whereby historical, cultural or natural goods are changed into valuable products in the tourist market" (p. 155).

that boosts commodification to the detriment of the symbolic richness of ICH. This phenomenon is known as *folklorization*: a frivolous conversion of objects and artificial staging to please tourists. Activities aimed to capitalistic accrual, such as staging age-old past representations intended for non-nationals (also known as dramatization) make a perverse use of the cultural heritage.

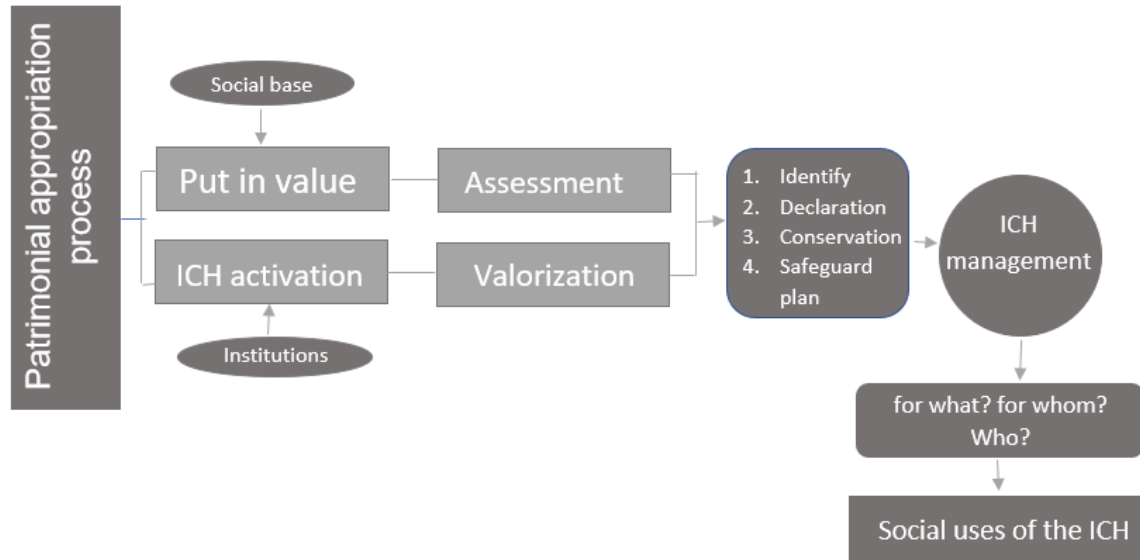
The participation of factual powers prevents distribution of economic benefits for the creation of social and human development in repository locations of ICH. All of the above reinforces cultural homogenization and favors spurious hybridizations of cultural manifestations. Furthermore, banalization triggers deterritorialization and decontextualization phenomena of the cultural practices, that are nowadays be represented anywhere, and this decreases the identify of original peoples and impoverishes the symbolic value of practices, beliefs and representations comprising the inventory of ICH –as is the case of the Papantla Flying Pole Dancers, that are presented in tourist destinations outside Veracruz.

In some Mexican communities a dispute has arisen as a result of heritage activation, which is an evidence of cultural tourism on the activation of ICH. Performers directed towards symbolic evaluation admit the importance of economic activation, however, only to the extent this is in compliance with the objectives of sustainable and human development, and a commitment is made with the authenticity and fight against touristification. There are communities that struggle against self-determination to preserve their identity and culture. Generally, patrimonial appropriation driven by the majority participation of the community are inclined to rescue and safeguard their culture rather than their commercialization.

ICH does not only consist of products created by a group, but of collective processes where their culture embodies: their education and ethics, and their peculiar world view, made by learning and the socialization of knowledge. Thus, a community produces specific objects, ideas and representations the particularities of which are conferred a symbolic value interpreted by the inhabitants for the construction of their daily life; their condition as ICH derives from this.

Legitimacy of the heritage is not exempt from any conflict among social actors, especially when there are factual powers underpinning their specific concerns, with the intention of expropriating the legacy pertaining to the whole community. Although it is ideal that every patrimonial appropriation process operates under UNESCO's precepts, the interpretation and execution of the rules fall upon involved actors. Figure 1 shows a chart germane to this political arena.

Figure 1. Patrimonial appropriation process chart



Source: based on UNESCO (2006) and Prats (1997).

In spite of the rules, there are different avenues for their processes. Villaseñor & Zolla (2012) mention that the following are included among the risks of the patrimonial appropriation processes:

- The folklorization of otherness or foreign culture.
- The transformation of local cultural forms into merely commercial products.
- Patrimonial activation from a nationalistic discourse by the authorities, which often implies change of ownership of local cultural practices, and an attack against the rights of the bearers or creators of the community.

This is not about demonizing commercialization as a pernicious whole, with no nuances or grades, the purpose is to maintain the balance between safeguarding the cultural good and the benefit of social use from an economic impact. Problems really start with excessive profit motives of factual powers, that break the connection with the authenticity of the heritage, and leave cultural manifestations converted into goods circulating in markets devoid of their symbolic value:

Patrimonial appropriation of cultural expressions has not only given rise to economic benefits for quoted companies (SECTUR, FONATUR, etc.), but it has also been used as a

resource to strengthen the public image of officers and politicians, since their statement consist of their official address the realization of which gives the appearance of safeguarding the appropriated cultural good, although no specific actions in this sense are performed (Sevilla, 2017, p. 147).

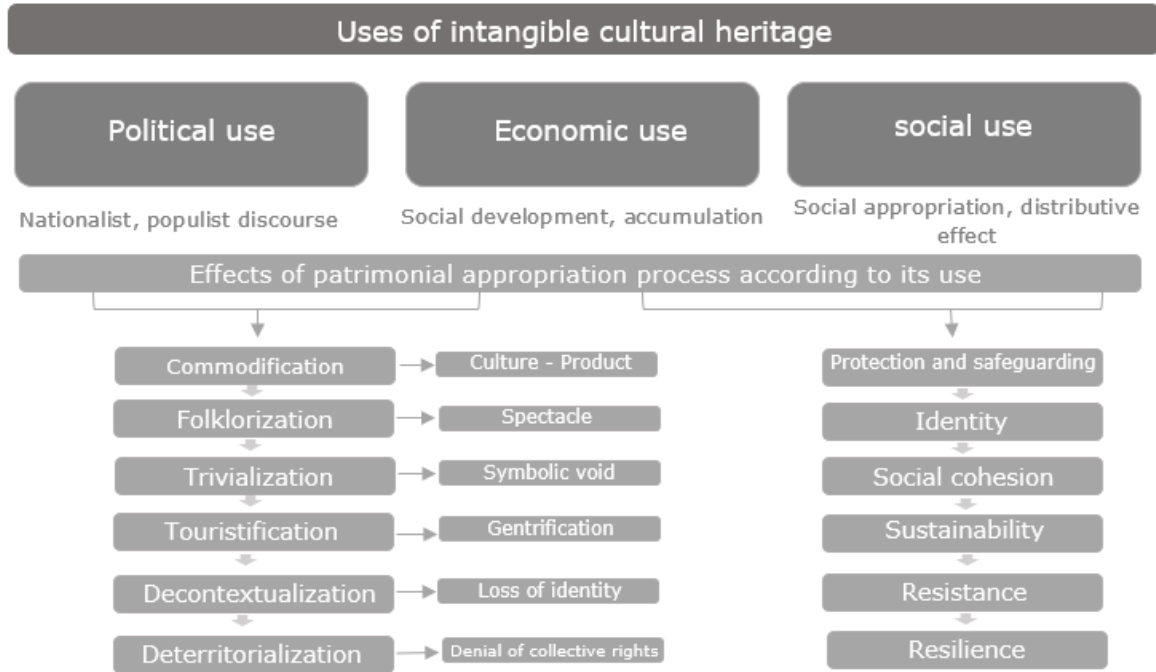
Folklorization encourages simulation strategies validated by the authorities, where real data are twisted with the purpose of having competitive advantages in the market of tourist destinations centered on ICH. One of these illegal practices is artificial fossilization of archeological objects and, in this sense, to submit the design of cultural space to a dominant pattern of comfort and modernization, which ends up homogenizing the design of tourist attractions at a facility level –such as museums and staging ritual performances, which result in spectacularity³ of representations.

In this case, the topic is how to defend heritage and at the same time make it visible to enter the idea of tourists. In other words, ethnical and cultural diversity offers tourists the possibility of having a unique life experience, that would enrich their cultural capital and allow them to maintain a dialogue with members of other cultures (Oehmichen & De La Maza, 2019).

Some patrimonial appropriation processes are promoted by the State itself (Van Geet, Roige & Conget, 2014), so, therefore, it would be expected that they contribute to the sustainable development. If it is considered that “the different social uses characterizing the different manners on how a society relates to the past, how it is interpreted, selected and managed, may offer us keys to understand the diverse dynamics” (p. 11), one may get to understand why they do not escape the trend towards touristification but they rather sponsor it. As a way to outline the management of ICH, figure 2 described the most common uses and effects of the patrimonial appropriation process.

³ It is understood as a theatricalization and magnification of cultural expressions and manifestations for the consumption of cultural tourism.

Figure 2. Diagram of the uses of intangible cultural heritage



Source: own elaboration based on Van Geert, Roige and Conget (2014), Pérez and Machuca (2017), Prats (2006) and Linck (2012).

CASE STUDIES

The commitment to preserve the cultural heritage of the peoples is ratified in the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The purpose of is to establish basic rules for the protection of the ICH, as well as measures to counteract major risk factors. Thus, the basic elements of the heritage activation processes were defined by means of international instruments for cooperation and development; and the inclusion of cultural practices and manifestations was instituted in an international prestige registry: The Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices (UNESCO, 2003) considered as the highest decorations of a country's cultural wealth.

Below are some of the cultural manifestations that achieved this distinction in Mexico.

- Indigenous festivities dedicated to the dead (2008)
- Ritual ceremony of the flying pole dancers (2009)
- Memorial sites and living traditions of the Otomi-Chichimecan of Toliman: the sacred territory of the Bernal Rock (2009)
- The gastronomic tradition of Michoacan, Mexican traditional cuisine: communitarian, ancestral and living culture. The Paradigm of Michoacan (2010)
- The Pirekua, a traditional chant of the P'urhépecha people (2010)
- The Parachicos at the traditional festival of January in Chiapa de Corzo (2010)
- The Mariachi, string music, songs and trumpet (2011)
- Charrería, a Mexican traditional equestrian and charro cowboy and cowgirl art (2016)

In the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices is the Xtaxkgakget Makgkaxtlawana: Center of Indigenous Arts and its contribution for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of the Totonacan people of Veracruz, Mexico (2012).

It must be emphasized that Mexico is a nation with the largest number of registers, which is not strange, given its rich multicultural history. Even with a large inventory of the ICH, the problem is that there is no clear idea of what is still to be included, because of the long list of cultural manifestations that are not in the catalogue and, therefore, it is unknown which would be subjected to being appropriated, since declarations ought to be granted from the need and decision of the community producing the cultural goods.

Dedicated research engaged in analyzing the procedures to have access to the representative list is greatly relevant, with the purpose of contributing for the safeguarding of the heritage of the peoples, above all of indigenous communities. Therefore, we have advanced a conclusion by underscoring the urgency of deepening on the critical analysis of the patrimonial appropriation processes, specifically in those where the logic of commercialization was imposed.

Evaluation and follow-up of the communities and locations is paramount whose heritage has been catalogued, and that currently are representative of the nation, because, frequently, at a certain level of the processes there lies the logic of

commercialization, many times encouraged by government officials themselves. Deep knowledge of this phenomenon would allow us to revert the processes which drag cultural heritage towards touristification.

Below are some of the Mexican cultural manifestations included in the Representative Register of the ICH, along with a look at their disputes regarding patrimonial appropriation; moreover, the elements are analyzed that justified that they were to be included in the list, with special attention on after effects to said recognition, the results of the management. Broadly speaking, it is concluded that the efforts to safeguard the heritage have not been satisfactory, since, sadly, once inclusion in the Representative List has been attained, the protection was no longer emphasized, thus favoring touristic commercialization of these heritages.

INDIGENOUS FESTIVITIES DEDICATED TO THE DEAD

The festivity of the dead is a syncretic tradition amalgamating the pre-Hispanic and the catholic world view. This celebration emerged as a national festivity, there even is an observed day in the official calendar every second of November, a date when there are competitions throughout the country for rewarding the best altars, disguises and paraphernalia related to the Day of the Dead.

On the eve of this celebration, there are epigrams and legends in the media and social networks related to the dead, where, in a joyous and fun tone, reference is made to prominent characters as if they were *Calaveras*.⁴ Tombstones are decorated at cemeteries, a task calling for the presence of the household members of the dead, who deploy local aesthetics, generally solemn, but at the same time festive and colorful which is attractive to visitors.

Although this tradition is widely disseminated throughout the national territory –Oaxaca, Jalisco and the State of Mexico stand out– Janitzio and Patzcuaro, in the State of Michoacan, are the sites with the major reputation regarding the Day of the Dead. Patrimonial appropriation and later worldwide recognition of this celebration brought about significant changes for the locations of Michoacan (Perez, 2014).

The national festivity of the Day of the Dead has a specific, profuse, picturesque, original and authentic materialization in Michoacan; it is mostly rooted in Patzcuaro, an original P'urhépecha community. From the seventies, local and

⁴ These compositions are known as *Literary Calaveras* or *Calaveritas*. Generally, they are written as a verse and dedicated to historic, public or known characters, whether alive or deceased.

state officials imposed the festivity of the Day of the Dead as a tourist strategy of the entity (Agüero, 2007); which caused that the projection at an international level be established, the summit of which was the inclusion thereof in the above list. The foregoing notwithstanding, this heritage activation produced radical changes and alterations in Patzcuaro, because of the fact that, as it became a tourist attraction, a growing number of visitors is attracted each year.

The problem was that the ritual practice gradually became a spectacle for massive consumption, which gave rise to a touristification process which “has transfigured the authenticity of a tradition of more than five centuries, by establishing a whole series of supplementary activities, to meet the demands of tourists” (Hiriart, 2008, p. 6). This kind of economic success is marked by inconveniences for the characters, and generally, for the hosting community, because the attendance level exceeds the load capacity of the local system; agglomerations make residents to suffer because of the saturation and scarcity caused thereby.

Although the intention of patrimonial appropriation was focused on safeguarding the festivity, the consequences of this achievement were of paradoxical nature. Before the heritage activation, the festivity was freely organized and recreated, and in the diversity of their festive practices was the reflection of social-economic, territorial (rural-urban) and ethnic (mixed-indigenous) stratification of the site. Although the excesses of tourists on those days are temporary, the worst situation is the degradation of rituals: the conversion of the ICH into a spectacle lacking mysticism and the symbolic value it had until recently. To the original people, the ritual ceremony has turned into a *performance* for massive consumption (Perez, 2014).

The ritual celebration of the Day of the Dead in Patzcuaro is one of the most representative events in the country, which due to touristification suggests symbolic degradation as a result:

On the one hand, its role is encouraging to strengthen the social structure, as, from these festive and ludic spaces, collective interaction frameworks are constructed and, in this sense, local identities are strengthened. Another favorable element is the reactivation of local economy as production and trade are encouraged. In exchange, it is questionable that in said events, the commercial dimension is more important than the cultural and identity dimensions, and that using the indigenous heritage for this dimension –altar contests, for example– almost never includes the participation of indigenous people or shows a concern to build educational and public policy spaces towards eliminating racism, discrimination and exploitative relations they are submitted to (Perez, 2014, p. 51).

In contrast, Uruapan, a neighboring town located a few kilometers away, has managed to have their festivity of the dead to be a truly cultural heritage, not only for meeting the desirable profile of an ICH –identity, social cohesion, economic dynamism, et cetera– but because it has served the community to re-appropriate the public space which has been seized by criminal groups.

Since the office of President Calderon (2006-2012), the inhabitants of Uruapan suffered the violence of organized crime and the inefficacy of the authorities in the so called fight against drug dealing. Insecurity has reached high tolls of violence and entailed symbolic and material appropriation of social spaces. People were terrorized, with an explicable fear of going out on the street. In this context, people began to organize, they even formed self-defense groups, to face criminals. In the midst of this loaded atmosphere, celebration of the dead implied a truce. People dared to go out on the streets because of the festivities, a decision was made to celebrate and, therefore, the public space was recovered, and the tradition had a new meaning (Perez, 2014). Organizing festivities reactivated the local economy and became a collective instrument to reinstate the social structure, the indigenous people included.

THE RITUAL CEREMONY OF FLYING POLE DANCERS

The ritual of the Papantla Flying Pole Dancers directs its symbolism to the petition of fertility and appreciation for the four elements –wind, water, earth and fire– a propitiating performance for the maintenance of prosperity, the column of which is the provision of food. Its value derives from the fact that “it is a musical-dancing practice of pre-Hispanic origin widely disseminated in different indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America” (Lopez, 2015, p. 17), and its entry in the representative list of UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage has awarded it international recognition.

Execution of the ritual is a challenging feat: it is a revolving flight from the top of a pole at an impressive height which demands skill and courage to dive into the air; visually speaking, it is a spectacular event, just like symbolism, for the fliers pay homage to deities by their performance without regard to profit. Transformation of the ritual into entertainment impoverishes the cultural pedagogy involved in the symbolic value of the performance; therefore, representation of the Papantla flying pole dancers in deterritorialized contexts trivializes the religious ceremony, and it is reduced into a circus performance, a business for recreation and tourist entertainment companies.

This is another example of patrimonial appropriation process where cultural goods are to be touristified. Decontextualization of the ritual (Martinez de la Rosa, 2015) serves advertising companies that use the image of the flying dancers to promote beer brands and other products. These illegitimate uses of cultural elements have been intensified to the extent that UNESCO's declaration turned on the spotlights to enlighten the flying dancers' performance across the world.

The original ritual includes a procession into the woods in search for the tallest tree, the tree trunk of which is used as a pole to start the flight, and setting it is part of the ritual; in addition, a hen is sacrificed and the remains are placed on top of the highest point. Since the community is partaking every moment to prepare the ritual, execution of the performance strengthens the social structure, and enforces continuity of the cultural practice. All of this is neglected when the ritual turns into a spectacle for tourists: "Nowadays in Papantla they fly for tourists several times a day, without performing old rituals to prop the pole (wooden tree trunk) because as a steel pole has been installed. Each performance is followed by asking for tips and selling different handcrafted objects –*souvenirs*, rather" (Martinez de la Rosa, 2015, p. 26).

Patrimonial appropriation of this ritual was the result of the participation of the state for the promotion of tourism. It was even the reason to create the *Tajin Summit*, as well as decontextualization and deterritorialization of the Papantla flying pole dancers who perform in Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, Cancun and some other tourist destinations. Ultimately, this entails a negative effect of touristification: an indigenous ritual performance turned into a touristic attraction. This raises social, economic and political dispute around the cultural goods and the spurious modality of "institutionalization of several cultural manifestations or the whole manifestations from the formal activation process of intangible heritage" (Teran, 2014, p. 59).

In current staging of the flyers: "patrimonial appropriation permits appreciation of the central role of the imaginary and the imaginaries in these dynamics" (De Suremain, 2017, p. 177), but also the corroding effect of ICH touristification when it is presented deterritorialized and decontextualized in tourist destinations.

THE PIREKUA, A TRADITIONAL CHANT OF THE P'URHÉPECHA

The *pirekua* is a traditional musical expression of Michoacan, specifically of the *p'urhépecha* ethnicity; this word means "song" and it is interpreted in two beats. This cultural manifestation achieved its inclusion in the UNESCO list because: "in the

social sense, it may be understood as a manner of speaking among the *p'urhépecha*, by means of which composers, men and women, tell stories, of their own or of others, to cry, to laugh or, as one of the *pireri* interviewees would say, to feel" (Flores, 2017, p. 37).

Although it well deserves a place in the list, its inclusion was in charge of governmental officials. This may be due to the fact that within the *p'urhépecha* community "there are diverging positions regarding what their intangible cultural heritage is, what use would derive from it, and what best manners there are to safeguard it" (Ojeda, 2013, pp. 13-14), hence, this process has been directed towards commercialization from the beginning.

The heritage activation driving force was done by local government officials; in fact, obtaining the application raised controversy, because they did not seek advice from *pirekua* followers to make the file or to apply for the declaration. As a result, there arose the Pireri Movement, and the dispute intensified among a selected group of musicians, state officials and federal institutions, in addition to some hegemonic performers who encourage the declaration.

This is a clear example of conflicts that arose due to patrimonial appropriation, which is biased to the degree that most of the participation of the community was annulled, which favors the loss of the ritual's symbolic meaning: "Not only divergence of meanings and feelings but the antagonism thereof around what the *pirekua* was and what it should be, that is to say, there was clear opposition among those who stand in support of their community uses and those who focus it to tourist or commercializing uses" (Flores, 2017, p. 94).

A failure which is worth rescuing in the heritage activation process was the overvaluation of the commodity, combined with the omission of the participatory process. The players in the cultural manifestation of songs and music were relegated to a secondary role, when preservation of the ICH involves learning skills, methods and specific features of the performance and knowledge between composers and interpreters.

Tradition is not only repetition, it also implies innovation, updating and accumulation of knowledge on the historical perspective of the *pirekua* composition, which is nurtured from the elements of life and the traditions of the community. The *pirekua* is a collective creation and a social link transcending composers and interpreters, it lies in identity and belonging which, by singing, performers and the audience are fused together, which causes an aesthetic experience transversely

moving through the symbolic system: the meeting of the word with the community or the community in words. Leaving these elements out also leaves defining aspects of ICH out, as a set of social articulations inherent with the creative process comprising knowledge, values and specific beliefs of the community.

It must be noted that the linguistic displacement process has included phrases in the Spanish language, in spite that the *pirekua* is sung in *purepecha*: in addition, the traditional garments of singers correspond to the predominantly slow and paused rhythm; another peculiar manifestation is the inclusion of female participation, since in the past, singers were only men.

This activation process raised conflicts, because not only was it due to the lack of the participation of the community, but also to the fact that there was deliberate obstruction in the information and consultation process. Commercialization was enforced from the beginning, given that the course of heritage activation was governed by the vision and commendation of government officials, who used the *pirekua* as a brand of tourist promotion in the State of Michoacan; apart from the fact that true composers of *pirekua* were displaced by groups who only were interpreters.

Throughout the whole process there prevailed some kind of institutional inequality. Although a contest was introduced calling performers of the *purepecha* song, as a strategy to safeguard their condition as ICH (Flores, 2017). The abusive participation of different government officials was evident to form the committee that would be in charge of obtaining the declaration, which enabled manipulation of the public consultation, an essential element of social participation.

The worst is that this example not only is an unusual and isolated case, but also a dominant line under which cultural managers operate sponsored by state and municipal governments in the activation of the heritage; they allegedly intended to “help” the communities to obtain recognition from UNESCO, when the bottom line was to have the heritage consolidated as a tourist attraction. The result in this case was that the *pirekua* was placed as one of the merchandising labels for the tourist image of the state.

THE ‘PARACHICOS’ IN THE TRADITIONAL FESTIVITIES OF JANUARY IN CHAPA DE CORZO

This traditional festivity is held every year from 8 to 23 January in the community of Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas. Of Hispanic origin, but during the colonial period there were Christian features included. During its performance –including

choreographies, compositions, music instruments, garments, among other elements- symbolic values are conveyed nurtured by popular participation. The tradition is strengthened with the custom of teaching how to dance from the early years in life. Among the garments, which are of unique design, performers wear traditional masks, made, like the rest, with handcrafting techniques, such as embroidering a shawl, and coating the *chinchin* with varnish, distinctive emblems of autochthonous clothe making (Ochoa, 2019).

This cultural manifestation got its name from the World Heritage Site without arguing about the legitimacy of the process because of open popular participation attribute. In this sense, handcrafters who made the masks have become specialists on the use of traditional techniques, so that they do not take authorship of their products as something personal, but as a fruit of community know-how; however, once institutional recognition had been obtained, cultural managers began to reconsider the idea of community participation; so, some composers, performers and group leaders observed the advantage of vindicating their individual creativity by filing an application to have ownership of their items registered.

By having registered “the compilation of handcrafting techniques used to prepare the masks, music instruments and garments, in addition to recovering and having the lyrics and music of traditional prayers registered” (Ochoa, 2019. P. 55), they abolished community ownership of the cultural heritage, so that the symbolic meaning of the practice as an ancestral community creation weakened. In spite of this, community participation has remained, although it is now seen as a public feature. As a passive entity and not as a cocreating ritual agent.

The community assured that excessive use of this cultural practice as a tourist attraction has “degraded” the notion of *parachicos* (Fernandez. 2015); but other researches indicate that from UNESCO’s declaration, there have been phenomena of a different nature, ranging from transformations of the masks and the traditional garments to social unrest that gave rise to “a field of socialization and the creation of tension between locals and outsiders” (Alonso, 2018, p. 68), the latter disdainfully dubbed as the other *parachicos*.

Safeguarding works were centered in the recovery of lyrics and traditional music. The vitality of cultural consumption is confirmed every year by the boisterous attendance to the ceremony. It is understood that the public accepts update, although as a secondary performer. Ochoa (2019) established four participation dimensions to facilitate an evaluation to recognize contradictions:

- Social dimension: this considers that public loyalty is essential, hence the weighted attendance average, which has not decreased even in years of economic crises.
- Political dimension: this records the weakening of local links at a citizens' level, above all among institutions of different governmental directives regarding citizens.
- Economic dimension: this is reflected on the production and commercialization of handcrafts, in this case an increased consumption of products and services lined to the festivity.
- Cultural dimension: although there have been difficulties due to the loss of certain ritual practices, traditions and customs are generally maintained, at least in the mind of most of the *parachico* groups (Ochoa, 2019).

OFFICIAL GUELAGUETZA VERSUS POPULAR GUELAGUETZA. A CASE OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT.

The largest festivity in Oaxaca brings together more than 50 towns of the 17 ethnic villages of the 8 regions in the State who commute to the capital city to celebrate life and unity of the peoples from ethnic and cultural diversity, by means of music, dances, gastronomy, and handcrafted items. To original peoples, this ceremony is “an expression of solidarity to whom requires support because he/she is going to marry, because of a celebration, because a house will be built or because the fields are to be harvested” (Zepeda & Bravo, 2019, p. 47). The celebration dates back to pre-Hispanic age, but during colonial times this gave rise to syncretism, which resulted in the festivity of the Virgin of Carmen, for this reason this festivity is held every year between 15-20 July.

Guelaguetza -a Zapotecan word which means offering, gift, sharing, cooperating- became popular both at national and international level in the last third section of the 20th Century; as a result, the audience has gradually increased, until it turned into a milestone of cultural tourism in Mexico. This means wondrous gains arising the economic and political interest, both by the state government and the local elites, beyond the symbolic value this means to indigenous communities.

The State government has organized the Guelaguetza since 1932, the fourth centennial year of the city of Oaxaca. Once they became aware of the potential of this celebration, a patrimonial bias was given to the sponsorship, as the symbolic identity force of the event for the official section to hunt for voters and business

opportunities; afterwards, the Secretariat of Tourism would facilitate the participation of media powers, such as Televisa.

In 2006, section 23 of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE, by its acronym in Spanish) conducted the popular resistance movement, which linked the heritage defense to their fight for free education for all, and for the improvement of labor conditions of their group. They called other popular bodies and they together decided to make a *Guelaguetza* of the people and for the people, which was soon identified as the *other Guelaguetza*.

The difference from the official festivity, which charges access to the events, is that the activities of CNTE are free and foster the participation of indigenous communities. Promptly, this popular event was the object of intimidation by the State, which was confident that some of the repressive actions would eliminate preservation of the alternative festivity; however, the communities did not only resist, but they also showed evidence that government officials were detached from the essence of the cultural heritage of Oaxaca.

Protests and disagreement spread in defense for the free manifestation of indigenous cultural traditions and against spectacularization that is characteristic of an official event. The parallel festivity was held as an authentic expression of popular art and culture which is the voice of silenced groups. Gratuity of these events was an efficient inclusion mechanism and popular participation, interpreted as an opportunity of justice to the marginalized who could not pay to enter the official *Guelaguetza*.

In 2019, the *other Guelaguetza* took advantage by expressing rejection of neoliberal policies, specifically, because of its terrible effects on education and, indeed, because of the commercialization of the culture incurred by the *Official Guelaguetza*. Furthermore, wrong use of natural resources in the area was disapproved and 41 mining projects approved by the governor were repudiated, amounting to 322 mining concessions granted by the federal government. CNTE has framed the celebration of the *other Guelaguetza* as part of the resistance of the indigenous peoples and communities affected by mining projects.

A little more than ten years from the first Popular *Guelaguetza*, there is material enough to assess the evolution thereof. An important fact is how the number of communities that participate have increased and how public attendance has increased as well, a growing number of tourists included, especially interested in the reality of the 'other' Oaxaca. Since both events take place at the same time,

people who were not able to get tickets for the Official Guelaguetza –they are sold fast despite their high price– attend free events of *The Other Guelaguetza*.

By way of summary, table 1 shows a common vision on how managing the intangible cultural heritage in Mexico has evolved.

Table 1. Assessment on how cultural manifestations are managed in Mexico, recorded in the representative list of the ICH

Celebration Characteristics	Day of the Dead	Voladores	Pirekua	Parachicos	Guelaguetza
Authenticity (tradition)	x	x	x	x	x
Safeguard (protection)					x
Involvement	x			x	x
Consultation				x	x
Management			x		x
Tourism-related	x	x	x	x	x

Source: own elaboration from the analysis of the cases.

CONCLUSIONS

In Mexico, patrimonial appropriation processes are traversed by a dispute on how to perceive the heritage activation, from the contradiction between cultural valuation and economic valuation. Cases reviewed show two trends, the course of which is determined by social, political and economic uses of the heritage.

Within the globalization context, the political and economic use of the intangible cultural heritage by government officials make the strength of the factual powers to prevail over community participation, although there also are examples of successful resistance, like that of *The Other Guelaquetza*. But, managing the ICH has a tendency to decide on commercialization with a detrimental effect against safeguarding.

Cultural manifestations are each time more vulnerable in the face of economic strategies, especially by the inclusion of tourism, which gives rise to the conversion of the ICH into a tourist attraction. So far, public policies, programs, and governance strategies related with cultural management are directed to economic evaluation, which causes commercialization of the ICH of the peoples, especially if this is about indigenous communities; in doing so, the symbolic meaning is lost as a milestone of identity and weaken its role as an element of social cohesion.

Confrontation of strategies is not an intrinsic issue, actors involved in the patrimonial appropriation processes may be supplemented instead of being in opposition: valuation and valorization may be joined together. They start separating and conflict when the economic dynamics takes sides with a profit motive of hegemonic groups and factual powers, and supplant social values (confidence, cooperation, solidarity, cohesion, equity, inclusion, among others) customary in social participation. All of the above degrades the symbolic value of cultural heritages.

When social participation is predominant, constant and plural, social bases are created with actors committed with the symbolic valuation, who usually are more aware than what is needed to be applied to calls and recognitions seeking to safeguard the ICH; their basic organizations underpin actions towards governance from below. In brief, they are capable of negotiating, containing and limiting the factual powers which struggle for commercialization at any cost.

The communities that are aware of their heritage are better prepared to manage their social use, in a way that positive results from the symbolic valuation foster economic valorization, with distributive results seeking social and human development; not only are heritage preservation aspects monitored, but that managing thereof is proper from the ecological point of view. This awareness on the ICH includes the protection of patrimonial processes and not only of its products; it considers cultural valuation as a learning, the production of cultural goods as the accrual of knowledge and experiences, equivalent to an antidote against commodification of culture reduced to its condition as an object. Being against the conversion of culture into merchandise reduces the ways in which authenticity is degraded, call it folklorization, spectacularization, or touristification.

The communities are in a better condition to defend their ICH if they are aware, itemize and, therefore, prepare and manage a safeguarding plan to take the advantage of the heritage, as a source of development and prosperity for the community. In this sense, it is convenient to work to obtain institutional recognition,

such as their inclusion in the ICH List and on the List of Good Practices; likewise, it is essential to see to it that success does not exceed the loading capacity of local systems or derives into touristification, because this is about being in favor of sustainability and human development.

It is essential that the peoples who pose as bearers of the heritage make a decision on how to manage their ICH, they are holders of the intellectual and moral property, and only from informed decisions they will be able to give continuity and protection to their heritage. The knowledge of this analysis is that some recognized heritages are being weakened by the wear and tear caused by their commercialization. Even so, there is evidence of communities that, even without recognition, have activated their ICH, in the sense of strengthening the identity, the degree of cohesion, peace and restitution of the social structure; as is the case of Uruapan, with its Day of the Dead festivity, and in Oaxaca, with the *other Guelaguetza*.

In Mexico, there is a huge work to do in preparing a national catalogue of the ICH; however, there are challenges in doing institutional recognition work aimed to safeguard the ICH of indigenous communities. The application of participatory methodologies will contribute not only for the collection of data and give an account of symbolic elements that characterize cultural manifestations, but to insure identification, safeguarding and that they contain the expectations and participation of every agent involved in their protection, with distributive consequences towards development and prosperity. The analysis of the ICH management is critical for their protection, and to prevent that declarations lead the way towards commercialization and derive into such phenomena as touristification.

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