

Article

Ancestral Rituals Heritage as Community-Based Tourism. Case of the Ecuadorian Andes

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Abstract: This research aims to describe aguacolla's ancestral ritual in a local community in Ecuador, determining the use of ancestral medicine, the healing process, its sociological antecedents, diagnosis and treatments. A micro-ethnographic design was carried out in the local community with total involvement in the ritualistic process for 20 days, where, in addition to collecting data through participant observation and interviews, a video production of the ritual was generated. As a result, the involvement of religious and cultural syncretism in the ceremony, acceptance of the locals and strengthening of their identity by including symbolisms of the area, the different categories of ancestral medicine were analyzed: wachakhampiYachak for pregnant women and children, yurakhampiYachak for headaches and fever, KakuyampiYachak for bones and rikuyhampiYachak for supernatural diseases. Concluding, the healing experience produced by the "aguacolla" shows that in addition to the healing spectrum, there is also a touristic, historical and patrimonial repercussion in the ceremonies.

Keywords: rituals; medicine; aguacolla; Ecuador; tourism; documentary

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1. Introduction

According to UNESCO [1], rituals are part of the intangible cultural heritage, which must be guaranteed, preserved, protected and transmitted. Rituals are cultural expressions that prescribe ancestral practices toward a particular cosmovision aimed at different purposes, among them to motivate fertility, sowing, harvesting and healing of diseases.

For the latter, according to Nakazawa [2], healing rituals are used to manage family losses and restore physical and mental health. These ritualistic healing practices involving traditional medicine have been implicated as a tourist attraction, as shown by the cases of Cayambe, Ecuador [3], Alal, Nicaragua [4], Alto Napo, Perú [5], Media Guajira, Colombia [6], Caleria, Mexico [7].

Particularly, these rituals have served as social recognition and tourist motivator in the communities advocating their offer in which there are no unequivocal positions, not only responds to market logic, it is not a strategy of the indigenous, on the contrary, it is a complex phenomenon [8] that will be treated from a detailed ethnographic description of the ceremonial act.

There is previous research on the ritualistic theme of the "aguacolla" as the main axis of the ceremony [9]; however, this research aims to review the socio-historical background of the consumption of "San Pedro" by the community of Saraguro, the preparation of the ritual and the healing components of the "San Pedro". Specifically, the contributions of this study to the academic field are: a. A video documentary was made that allowed the in-depth extraction of the cultural manifestations of the ceremony. b. There is a multiplicity of studies on ancestral medicine, which are related to a holistic, generic and

comparative vision of the ceremonies; on the other hand, the following study details the phases, the types of healing processes, information from primary sources, the relationship of the community with the consumption of “aguacolla” and its potential implication for a touristic development.

There are references to the use of San Pedro throughout the Andean region, but there are few studies on the use of San Pedro among the Saraguro population. One of the main references is Chabaco Armijos and his team, which investigated different plants used by Saraguro healers (Yachak) [10]. From an anthropological view, Alberto del Campo Tejedor, whom we met personally in Saraguro, has conducted research on spiritual tourism in Saraguro, where the Incan past has been mythologized [11].

Ethnographic documentaries are the most used resources since they help anthropologists communicate. Documentaries become a source of data collection and are a tool of expression for both the anthropologist and the people investigated. It is also a tool of expression and transmission of the information obtained, differently from the written communications typical of the academic world [12]. It is not only a tool to record as a field journal, but it is a way to transmit the knowledge acquired in the encounter with others. It is a way to reach a larger audience to transcend the academy and learn what is unknown [13,14].

The documentary was edited and titled *Aguacolla* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = uXLUGdNigX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXLUGdNigX0) (accessed on 16 June 2022)) and was filmed in the Saraguro community of Ilincho. A healing ritual with San Pedro (*echinopsis pa-chanoi*) can be observed. How the beverage is obtained, interviews with Yachak and his wife, symbols and costumes can also be seen. The documentary was made as a participatory proposal among the community, and they have copies to be used as a tourist and cultural resource for free.

The article is organized as follows: it begins by presenting a brief explanation of the literature on the subject, providing information on the use of entheogens by ethnic groups and the application of ethnographic documentaries. The following sections then present the methodology used to validate the ceremonial process, including research objectives, similar studies and data collection tools. As for the results, they were subdivided into aguacolla and its relationship with the ritual, aguacolla consumption by the Saraguro community and the treatment elements of the ritual, ending with a discussion that relates the experience and the openness to replicate this study in other contexts recognizing the limitations for its appropriate application.

2. Literature Review

Research on the use of plants to obtain modified states of consciousness has been conducted in the last 20 years from different perspectives, especially in the areas of medicine, psychology, ethnobotany and anthropology. Various academic institutions have described shamanic practices with different substances in various parts of the world, creating different religious and symbolic forms present in different cultures [15,16].

The word “entheogen” is a neologism commonly used in academia to designate a god within the consumer. It is used in those vegetal, animal, mineral or synthetic substances used in religious or shamanic contexts that modify states of consciousness [17]. This term is distinguished from the word “hallucinogens” due to the connotations associated with the 1970s [18].

The use of entheogens in different indigenous societies has been described by numerous social researchers. They are used primarily for healing rites but also to solve problems affecting the community. The consumption of entheogens is part of the construction of cosmovision and the elaboration of myths [19].

The use of different entheogens in different American ethnic groups has transformed over the last 40 years, escaping from the traditional or the modern forms. Traditional forms of consumption have been affected by modernization and also by the constant processes of globalization and interconnection with other groups. There have been

profound changes in the communities thanks to the migration of their members, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and also the community where they offer mainly “light” and short ceremonies (around 30 min). However, there are other more complex and difficult rituals (around 8 h) where entheogens are consumed and are not recommended for tourists. Further, access to the “western” health developed by the states, as well as better access to communication, favors the arrival of tourists [20].

Our research shows the ritual use of San Pedro among the Saraguros through an audiovisual view. Our audiovisual methodology is a place where we experiment and think about the different visions of our object of study. There are no marked or fixed rules. From this anthropological audiovisual view, we try to get knowledge of the present Saraguro culture through the participant’s observations, where the actors are immersed [21]. Thanks to this audiovisual methodology, we can see those cognitive processes that are not verbal and the relationships between healers and visitors in these mountainous lands. The audiovisual medium allows those brief moments of intimacy and recollection to be captured that is difficult to understand if not using a camera. Anthropologists who use cameras try to capture moments and discover signs and symbols that help their subsequent understanding [22].

Aguacolla is a participatory documentary that is the result of a research project that began in 2019 and ended in 2021. The title of the project was “Saraguros Ancestral Rituals”, whose director was Mónica Hinojosa Becerra and was conducted at the National University of Loja. The objective of the project was to determine the ritualistic process of the use of ancestral medicine in the Ecuadorian Andes. For this purpose, the specific objectives are the following: 1. Describe the healing process carried out during the “aguacolla” ceremony, 2. Analyze the socio-historical antecedents of the local community on the application of ancestral medicine, 3. Review the elements of diagnosis and treatments applied in the ancestral medicine ritual knowing the effects of this substance on the body.

3. Materials and Methods

The documentary describes how San Pedro is used in the community of Ilincho, in the Saraguro canton, Loja, Ecuador (Figure 1). Although interviews were conducted with different healers, the recording of the ritual was performed with Yachak Polibio Japón at the Health and New Life Foundation at the Yachak center in Ilincho. At present, there is a Yachak community that guarantees the fulfillment of a deontological norm for all those engaged in healing processes in Saraguro.

Similar studies are reflected mainly in the north of Peru, allowing the participation of tourists in shamanic rituals, particularly in ayahuasca consumption [23]. Research on these cases responds to the same premises, searching for spaces of spirituality, tradition and elimination of negative energies [23]; the main difference found is that, in the case of Ecuador, it does not contain the same levels of commercial exploitation and promotion, in the case of Ilincho, it is the same community that offers opportunities for accommodation and participation in the ceremony and rituals of aguacolla. With respect to this case, there is a previous publication that analyzes the psychological effect of the rituals, showing a positive internalization, emotional disinhibition and sensory exacerbation, resulting in an improvement in mental health [23].



Figure 1. Location of Health and New Life Foundation, Community of Ilincho, Saraguro canton, Loja province, Ecuador. Source: Google Maps [24].

The methodological process consisted of applying an exploratory qualitative approach through a micro-ethnographic design, which can be defined as direct and personal involvement with the community to understand a social phenomenon. To achieve this design, a group of 13 researchers from Universities in Spain and Ecuador, belonging to the areas of education, psychology, anthropology, sociology and communication, attended the ritualistic process over 20 days, from 2 August 2019 to 22 August 2019, in person, taking detailed notes on the process of organization, preparation and planning of the ritual and medicine, a video documentary was also made with a duration of 27 min 54 s, in which a record/summary of the participant observation of the entire pre-ritual, ritual and post-ritual is shown (Figure 2). It is worth mentioning that the documentary was recorded in August 2019, but the production and editing process was postponed due to the pandemic, being completed in February 2021. This documentary, in addition to having served as a reliable and testimonial sample of the information gathered, was also presented between 5 July and 30 July 2021 at the “V International Festival of Archeological Film of Castile and Leon”, winning “Viriato de Oro”.

The evidence of the participant observation contains a record of the open-ended-question interviews conducted with five people that are part of the ritualistic process. The questions involved three taitas: Ángel Japón, Ángel Polibio Chalán and Emilio Anangón, and two mamas: María Delfina Gualán Lozano and Angelita Chalán. The five people mentioned above work in collaboration in the management of the ritual, dedicating themselves to the correct selection of the day, knowing the physical and mental situation of the people who are going to participate, and preparing the people who are going to participate in the ritual, cooking the aguacolla and the medicines in the ritual and preparing the post-ritual. The interviews had a duration of 10 to 15 min, which focused on the topics already presented in the specific objectives.



Figure 2. Ritual preparation located in the touristic center Inti Wasi. Source: Authors.

4. Results

4.1. Aguacolla: Etymology, Components and Ritual

Saraguros, like other Andean peoples, have used the cactus of San Pedro (*echinopsis pachanoi*) (Figure 3) throughout history. Its history dates back to 10,000 years in the Guittarrero Cave in Ancash (Peru) [25]. The Chavin culture of Huantar used sampedrillo in its rituals in dark rooms where water ran through some canals [26]. Why is it called San Pedro? Legend says that a priest drank it and saw heaven opening its doors to him, and that is why he called it San Pedro (St. Peter in English) [14]. When Yachak drinks aguacolla, he has visions that help him determine the disease and the remedy. When aguacolla is drunk, users start to fall asleep; then they have visions. They also begin to have dizziness, headaches, vertigo, diarrhea, vomiting, they see sounds and listen to colors [27].

Sampedrillo grows in Andean zones, between 1000 and 3000 m above sea level. It is located in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Ecuador. It is also called aguacolla or Huachuma, containing mescaline [28]. Aguacolla must be cooked before drinking it.



Figure 3. San Pedro, sampedrillo or aguacolla (*echinopsis pachanoi*). Source: Authors.

In Saraguro, cactus is cooked on a wood-burning stove for about twelve hours. Water must be poured constantly so it does not dry [29]. Another way, more conventionally in Peru, is to cook all the sliced cactus in water [30]. An hour after consuming the sampedrillo, there is a period of latency; the arms and legs get loose, it causes sleep (many people during the ritual were deeply asleep), and people experience heat and cold. Then the person has a feeling of flying, dizziness, seeing in the dark, listening to colors and has a greater sensitivity throughout the body. These effects last about eight hours [31].

The beginning of the documentary briefly shows how aguacolla is prepared. Women are the ones who collect the cactus. Collection is performed near the house. It is a plant that protects homes. Once located, the plant is cut and cleaned from the spikes and the bark. It is chopped into smaller and smaller pieces. The bark remains are washed and removed. The pieces are deposited in a large metal pot where they are boiled in 6 L of water for 6 h by constantly adding more water. The liquid becomes yellowish and brown. Its taste is bitter. The drink is set aside and stored to be consumed at night (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Cooking San Pedro (*echinopsis pachanoi*). Source: Authors.

During the ritual, the so-called “huma devils” appear. They have a mask and a dress that distinguish them from the rest. The huma devil is one of the indigenous legends in Ecuador. Terminologically it means “devil’s head”. The huma devil appears as a symbol of ancestral traditions during the viceroyalty as part of the group of dancers in Catholic religious festivals [32]. The huma devils are submerged spirits that allow everything to be recycled (Figure 5). They are counselors, guides responsible for maintaining order in the Andean culture and owners of the vital energy of nature. They are not considered bad or negative; on the contrary, they are dual (like night and day). They can be good and bad (they have whips and can use them to keep order) [33]. During the ritual, they are the ones offering punta (liquor), tobacco and the sampedrillo, and they determine the dose. They are the ones who keep the fire alive. They wear colorful shirts and pants tight with a belt or chumbi. They wear colorful espadrilles.



Figure 5. Huma devils during the ritual accompanying the Yachak. Source: Authors.

4.2. The Consumption of Aguacolla among the Saraguro Population

Saraguro is a canton and municipality located less than 70 km to the northwest of Loja, in the south of Ecuador. Its limits, to the north, is the province of Azuay and its capital Cuenca; to the south, its limits are Loja; to the west it borders the canton of Zaruma and the province of El Oro; to the east it borders the Ecuadorian province of Zamora-Chinchiipe. The Saraguro canton has an area of 1080 km². It is a mountainous territory from 1000 to 3800 m above sea level. The village of Saraguro has about 28,000 inhabitants, but the Saraguro ethnic group is made up of 98,000 people [34]. Most of the Saraguros live in the canton of Saraguro and in Loja. There is another important group in the province of Zamora-Chinchiipe. Many Saraguros live in Cuenca or Quito for work or educational reasons, and due to the economic crisis of 2000, many migrated to the United States and Spain.

The main languages are Kichwa and Spanish. Its economy is based on agriculture (maize and beans) and livestock (cows) [35]. The main religion is Catholic but recently, from the year 2000, Inca pagan ancestral beliefs have emerged, such as the worship of the god Pachakamak, the Pachamama, the four elements (water, air, earth and fire) or the four main festivities, such as the intis. Our documentary was made completely in the community of Ilincho, located about four kilometers away from the center of the village of Saraguro. This community has both taitas and mamas (word meaning “wise”) Ángel Japón, Ángel Polibio Chalán, Emilio Anangonó, María Delfina Gualán Lozano and Angelita Chalán.

The ceremony was conducted by Yachak Polibio Japón at the Health and New Life Foundation at the Yachak center in Ilincho. The ritual lasted about 10 h. It started in the evening and lasted until the morning of the next day. There was a small altar with some stones, croziers, drums, horns, cups with beverages, the flag of Ecuador and images of Christ and saints. During the ceremony, they prayed for the health of the people present. Offerings were also made to the spirits, to the wakas, to the grandparents (stones that were heated and used in the temazcal) and to Pachakamak (the creator god). The Yachak performed a healing ritual to balance the elements of nature using sacred plants, and finally, we ended up in a kind of sauna (temazcal). It finished at the end of dawn.



Figure 6. People during the ceremony. Source: Authors.

During the ceremony (Figure 6), the Yachak looked for the right place to organize the people who participated in the ceremony around the fire. In another moment, the people made their healing requests. Then, they consumed punta, tobacco by the nose and aguacolla. The Yachak was the first to consume them, followed by his helpers (the huma devils), and passed it on to the participants as a communion.

Aguacolla is used to treat diseases, the “evil eye” or the espanto (a spiritual disease caused by a shock). Yachaks use it to diagnose diseases of their patients [36]. During the ceremony, Yachak sucked evil eye with noises, and he vomitted it. Patients also started vomiting and were relieved after this.

Yachak was calling the good spirits to help him heal the people. In the ritual, repetitive hymns were sung using a tambourine. After a short time of having consumed aguacolla, its effects started. It is the moment in which the Yachak starts treating the disease according to the ailments indicated to him by the visions of the aguacolla.

Further, the cleaning and *soplada* (blows) occurred next to the fire using perfumes. The Yachak spoke with each of the participants, guiding them and discussing situations. Then, there was the so-called renewal, when the Yachak asked the spirits to heal the patients. Finally, the water ritual was performed, where all the participants drank to go to their houses feeling healed and energized. The *temazcal* was the end of the ritual.

After the ritual, and to purify them, a *temazcal* or a steam bath was performed in an indigenous *tipi* with red stones inside. *Temazcal* literally means, in Nahuatl language, “house of hot stones”. It could not be recorded because of the high temperatures inside it. It all ends in the sunrise. The purification that was obtained was external and also internal. Inside, people shouted their names and made requests. The notion of time is lost inside the *temazcal*. This type of *temazcal* is the so-called “warrior”, and is used in ceremonies. It is more focused on the mind and spirit than on the body. Not everyone is prepared, and it requires great mental and physical strength. No one abandoned the *temazcal*. The goal was to temper the mind so that people can face the adversity of life calmly. This *temazcal* faces people in front of weaknesses and fears. The use of *temazcal* is typical of Mesoamerica but is currently also used in Latin America by American indigenous communities. At present, the consumption of aguacolla continues in the Saraguro population, as well as in part of the mestizo population that live in the Andean region. It is necessary to know about this phenomenon since it has an essential role in different rituals practiced in the Saraguro population.

The relationship between the Saraguros and the Pachamama (Mother Earth) is very intense. Their worldview considers that humanity and Pachamama are intimately related. The chakana or Andean cross represents their entire cosmovision. Each side of the chakana represents an element (water, earth, air and fire), and the center is the sun and moon (both male and female). This chakana accompanied us, molded into the ground by the fire during the entire ritual ceremony. The ceremony began on a Friday at eight pm, and ended the following day at six am.

The word Yachak means “wise” [17]. They were those who, in pre-Columbian times, decided the best time for planting and solved problems in the communities. Their knowledge has been passed from generation to generation to our day. It was said that Yachaks talk to mountains and know how to cure diseases with plants [36]. Sixty-five Yachaks in Saraguro are registered in the Provincial Department of Health, called the Council of Healers of Saraguro [37].

4.3. The Saraguro Community

Saraguros represent one of the ethnic groups in Ecuador. The meaning of “saraguro” is different depending on the researchers. Everyone believes that the word has a meaning composed of two roots, but they all agree on the root of “sara” meaning “corn” but the “guro” has no direct meaning. Some indicate that it comes from the word “kuri” meaning “gold”. Others identify it with “kuru” meaning “worm.” Other researchers identify it with “guru”, which is a “pot.” Today, the Saraguro ethnic group speaks Runashimi (a Kichwa dialect) and Spanish [38]. The Saraguros are found in the south of Ecuador or in the Chinchaysuyu. During the 14th century, in the Inca expansion of Tupak-Yupanki, this group was found in regions of Bolivia and Peru. The Paltas (the community of native inhabitants in the Ecuadorian province of Loja) were relocated to territories in Bolivia. The Saraguros were moved to territories where they were the Paltas; in order to maintain peace. Once there, they began to perform civil and infrastructure works such as the Royal Road (Kapak Ñan) that ran throughout the empire. A tambo was built, a resting shelter for the chasquis, the real messengers.

They sat in what is now known as the caton of Saraguro. The Incas carried out these activities to reduce the conflicts in their conquered territories, with the aim of integrating these new territories into the Inca kingdom or Tahuantinsuyo [39]. The Saraguros are mitimae groups whose meaning is “noble”, indicating that they were transferred to the territory but with economic and social profits. It can be stated that the Saraguros belonged to the Inca militia. After the fall of the Inca empire and the arrival of the Spaniards, the Saraguros managed to obtain ownership of their lands thanks to the royal card.

Some authors indicate that Saraguros began to be defined culturally with the arrival of the Spaniards [40]. The Saraguros were small owners of their land, supporting themselves economically and socially. The Saraguros were known to be self-sufficient. They had barter systems with neighboring territories (Loja, Cuenca, Zamora-Chinchiipe and Machala), mainly of dairy products (cheese or milk).

The first Spanish settlers arrived in Saraguro lands around 1548 to start with the process of social and religious acculturation. Traditions related to ancient gods were replaced by Catholic Christianity, and political power began to be ruled by a Spanish mayor and later a native one. However, this process was slow due to the terrain. The village of Saraguro had very few mestizos and Spaniards compared to the native population. It is stated that at the beginning of the 19th century, there were no more than five Spanish families living in the village and all of them were dedicated to trading with Loja and Cuenca. Commercial activity was complicated since there were no roads, and it was performed using mules until the arrival of the first roads in the middle of the twentieth century [41].

The independence of Saraguro from Spain was achieved on 10 March 1822, yet the native political power continued until the 21st century, when the first mayor of the Saraguro ethnic group won. After the battle of Tarqui in 1829, the village was burnt by Peruvian troops. It was rebuilt and became an important town on the way between two cities,

Loja and Cuenca. Once Ecuador was independent, Saraguro became important and started being a canton on 10 June 1878 [42].

It can be seen in the documentary that the clothes of the Saraguro women are different from Western ones. María Delfina Gualán wears wool clothing. These woolen fabrics are handcrafted. The main dyeing in Saraguro is the black color, perhaps because it absorbs more heat since there is little sun in these lands. The typical Saraguro hat is a white hat with black spots of pressed wool, but the one worn by María Delfina is a black hat of pressed wool. She is wearing an anaco; that is a black skirt, pleated along with its chumbi or strip. She wears a gray blouse and a black coat made of wool and big earrings with filigree. Around her neck she wears the walka, which is a necklace made of small beads of different colors, and finally, the topo or tupu used to close the coat [43]. Tupu is the main jewel of any Saraguro, made of high-nickel silver, and those with more value are made with pearls. Tupus are inherited from mothers to daughters.

The religion of the Saraguro people was lost when the Spaniards arrived. Catholicism permeated all the religious manifestations of Saraguros to accelerate the acculturation process. The main deities in the Saraguro culture were the god Inti or the god Sun. There was also Mama Quilla or Mother Moon. She was the mother of the firmament. She was the sister and wife of the god Inti. This cult had a group of priestesses in the Inti temple. One of the four raimis (celebrations) was dedicated to Mama Quilla. There is another female deity that was the Pacha Mama, based on the material world. Another female deity was Mom Sara, or the corn deity. She was the mother who supported the population and is closely related to our research [44]. They also worship rivers, mountains and lagoons.

4.4. Saraguros Medicine

For this, people look for hampiYachakkuna to get help since he knows the properties of medicinal plants and helps cure diseases [45]. The medicinal Saraguro knowledge is called Yachakkuna and is classified into four categories. The first is the wachakhampiYachak (midwives), who uses plants to cure pregnant women and babies. The yurakhampiYachak, who uses plants to cure diseases such as headaches or fevers. KakuyampiYachak treats bone and joint problems, and there is the rikuyhampiYachak, who uses entheogenic plants to cure supernatural diseases in night sessions called mesadas [46]. During the documentary, it is observed that the Yachak uses lotions of plant extracts and rapid movements in the head and limbs to cure muscular problems.

In healing rituals, swords and sticks are used to defend against negative energies that threaten the mesada or the chakana. During the ritual, the command stick is seen since it represents the energy during the ritual with magical powers. Cleaning processes are carried out to eliminate negative energies. In the ritual, the shells are used as vessels to drink the aguacolla or punta (distilled sugar cane brandy) that will be used as an offering in the ritual. Nor can they lack macerated tobacco, which is sniffled by the nose or in perfumes, and Florida water used to remove negative energies during sopladas. In sopladas, the mesada and the patients are cleaned [47].

Rituals with entheogenic substances were a problem when spreading Christianity among the natives; for this reason, it was banned because it was related to the devil. However, its use continued in a hidden way. The name was changed from achuma to San Pedro, who holds the keys to heaven [48]. Currently the use of this cactus, as well as the rest of the plants, are considered traditional medicine since they are used to diagnose and cure diseases [49]. Saraguros are not the only ones who use the aguacolla; it is widespread throughout the Andean region. It is known as Huachuma, huando, cimorra or gigantón [39]. It was defined as *Trichocereus pachanoi* by Britton and Rose in the Ecuadorian highlands [50]. This plant, in addition to growing in the Andean Highland, is cultivated in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. According to tradition, San Pedro is the guardian of houses [51].

San Pedro is considered an entheogen since it contains alkaloids, and the most important is mescaline [32]. This art of healing is generally passed through the generations

in the family. In the interview with Polibio Japón, he indicated that his knowledge does not come from his family. He became Yachak thanks to his ability to diagnose diseases through the aguacolla. The plant is often given the capacity to cure, not the healer [51].

Aguacolla, along with the tobacco and punta, is used in the ritual of mesada. A chakana is put on the ground where “the arts” are distributed. Each Yachak creates his own mesada. Some more glossy and some less. It is a combination of magical objects that are obtained throughout time, from generation to generation, found, purchased or received in barter. There are swords, daggers, croziers, sticks, rattles (chungana or bells), the images of virgins and Christ, the Ecuadorian flag, containers with beverages, sea chucks and stones [10, 52]. As can be seen in the documentary, the mesadas have two principles. The symmetrical duality and the quadripartition of the chakana. The aguacolla is a magic plant in the center of the mesada [9].

5. Discussion

The following research, “Saraguros Ancestral Rituals”, prescribed the understanding of the healing procession of the aguacolla ceremony, reviewed the background of the local community with the use of ancestral medicine and reviewed the diagnostic elements of the treatment, demonstrating that Yachak is a main representative in the Ilincho community. During the field-work, various leadership positions are observed in the community, such as counselors, healers or entrepreneurs. This leadership position is based on the number, origin, and age of the patients and the tourists motivated to experience new sensations. There are patients from different Ecuadorian cities, such as Loja and Cuenca, although there are new people from Guayaquil or Quito and even foreigners.

There are young patients living in urban areas where the consumption of aguacolla allows them to meet their reality and their worldview. The conduction of the research allows us to know the ritual consumptions outside Saraguro. The people interviewed told us that they visit the Yachak looking for a cure thanks to the indigenous health rituals. Many people prefer to go to the Yachak to cure their diseases; one of the reasons may be because Western medicine is expensive for them or because the diseases they have are not from the Western world, such as an “evil eye”.

Rural tourism is related to experience. Locals are wanted to share their experiences with tourists [53], from their daily work routines in the field to taking care of the cows, eating their meals or sharing their rituals and traditions. This type of tourism benefits the community, thus having social development and managing its progress. This type of tourism increases the cultural value of Saraguro and encourages the ancestral knowledge to not be lost, hence empowering the community.

There is mystical tourism in Saraguro that is related to a Neo-Incaism, the relationship with magical places, the aguacolla, the idealization of the community that seems to be isolated from western life, the interculturality, the processes of syncretism of a new age and the fast rituals [49]. The ritual is not suitable for a tourist without an open mindset since it takes a lot of hours and is intended for a patient with a specific disease; tourists can participate in rituals, be cared for by members of the community and spend at least 3 nights on site. In spite of the rituals being focused on healing different types of diseases, most tourists arrive to live a proper indigenous identity experience. It is also observed that these rituals are not offered in the streets of Saraguro nor appear on any sort of street billboard. There is a risk of commodification and folklore of the Saraguro culture, but tourism also favors cultural strengthening [37].

The ritual of the aguacolla has been analyzed in the Saraguro community of Ilincho through an audiovisual approach with the participative ethnographic documentary called Aguacolla.

It is confirmed that the Yachak of the Saraguro community consumes entheogenic substances, specifically San Pedro (pachanoi echinopsis), in ritual ceremonies to treat diseases of all kinds. Our research aimed to rescue the Saraguro consciousness and promote

its ancestral medicinal resources for future tourist promotion. This ancestral medicine is stated in the current Constitution of Ecuador in article 360.

Yachaks are not only spiritual therapists or medical specialists but also counselors or guides, thus strengthening their position in the community through their prestige and social status due to the other activities they perform in the community, such as tourism promoters. The tourist who comes to Saraguro sees the Saragura cosmovision, as well as the experiences and knowledge transmitted in these rituals. However, there are “light” rituals conducted for tourists, within a short period of time and without using aguacolla. The rituals that do include aguacolla and that last longer are not recommended for tourists or for people who only want to live the “experience”.

From the objectives set out in this research, several findings can be obtained for academic knowledge. First, shamanic tourism is not the same as community-based tourism. In this case, the aguacolla ceremony has an identical purpose to the values of the community; in fact, in the pre-ritual, visitors are exposed to the historical, cultural background and medicinal use of its consumption.

Another significant contribution is that today, there is no in-depth analysis of aguacolla in Ecuador. Although it responds to a descriptive micro-ethnographic study where the phases of the ceremony, its historical-cultural connection and the elements of diagnosis of diseases are established with great particularity, they allow the elucidation of its opening towards an eco-healing tourism that reaffirms the values of its community, clarifying its planning, its connection with sustainable tourism and management of its resources in a balanced way with the market and its inhabitants.

The reading target of this research is researchers oriented toward the areas of tourism, sociology, anthropology, communication and environmental sciences since determining the ritualistic process of the use of ancestral medicine in the Ecuadorian Andes allows the generation of a multidisciplinary approach to social phenomena.

Regarding the limitations of the study, there are multiple difficulties in the process of data collection; among them, the process of pre-ritual, ritual and post-ritual can take a week or even more; therefore, it is recommended that a group of researchers attend, as in our case, to not lose any details from the entire ritualistic process. However, for a tourist, it would be enough to stay 3 days to have the full experience. Similarly, as the ceremony is performed in Spanish and Quichua, it is necessary to at least include a translator or have basic knowledge of Spanish to understand the ceremony. Finally, the last limitation of this research is the harm that visitors may have directly, it is recommended, as the main premise, to have an open mind and respect the community-based tourism to the cultures avoiding mockery and rejection during the ceremonies.

It is important to carry out further research on the consumption of aguacolla in the canton of Saraguro with the aim of conducting studies that include its ritual consumption. This will be a key element in identifying Saraguro culture.

6. Conclusions

The Yachak consumes various substances during the ritual as well as the people in the ceremony. Tobacco inhaled through the nose is used. The tobacco leaves have been macerated in water. In Andean cultures, the tobacco plant has therapeutic meanings. The spirit of the tobacco invades the healer and those who attend the ceremony. Another substance consumed is punta (sugarcane liquor) and several small glasses of aguacolla. The effect starts progressively. People start to sing to attract the spirits. These are repetitive songs using drums [54].

In the diagnosis and treatment of patients, the healer uses the knife and fire. It is part of the magical material he uses to clean the bodies of his patients. He also uses different perfumes that have magical properties and the knife to “cut” and extract the evil by sucking it with his mouth, later throwing the substance away. This indicates that the patient has been cured of the disease. Friegas and massages are also performed in the sick areas

(the head, back or stomach). During the process, people sing rhythmically and repetitively.

From the intake of aguacolla, the person perceives strange feelings; smells differently, hears strange noises or sees shadows in the dark. New colors are seen, and new textures are felt in the fingers.

The time of the ceremony is related to the active time of the aguacolla, where the consumer is in an altered state of consciousness. Its duration is eight hours. During those eight hours, the senses of the consumer are sharpened. This type of ceremony is always performed at night and in the dark. Only illuminated by fire and candles.

The ritual is composed of two parts. The first part is from 21:00 to 00:00 and consists of consuming different substances; it starts with the tobacco macerated by the nose, later punta, and finally the aguacolla, all this with songs and invocations of people. The second part is from midnight to 6:00. At this time, different activities are performed, such as the “tracing”, the diagnosis or vision of problems that have motivated the mesada. In the case of the documentary, they were rites of healing. The chakana was present on the table, and the aguacolla was in its center [55].

Duality is observed in the mesada; it is divided into two areas. There are Catholic images in the east, from where the conquerors arrived, associated with the white magic, “fresh” plants such as tobacco or corn, sugar cane or honey. Pre-Columbian images are oriented to the west, associated with black magic and wild plants such as nettles; and the aguacolla is in the center of the mesada [56].

Aguacolla is the main element in the mesada. It is like a central cosmic tree that commands the place of the ceremony. A cross also has an important position, but it does not have a Christian meaning; but instead, it means universal enlightenment [57, 58].

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. And they are recorded on video in interview format. These recordings were used for the audiovisual documentary and for the collection of field data. The audiovisual documentary made was sent to the Castilla La Mancha International Festival and received the Viriato de Oro award from the public. Direct proof of the authorization and consent of all the subjects interviewed and who have appeared in the award-winning video, including the researchers.

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