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## Tourism and environmental and social sustainability through ethnomarketing in Isla Grande (Archipelago of Nuestra Señora del Rosario, Colombia)


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Ethnomarketing  
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### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Cartagena de Indias has become Colombia's main tourism destination. It is the first Colombian city to be declared a World Heritage site (1984) thanks to its impressive architectural heritage. Furthermore, it boasts a wealth of stunning beaches and islands with the potential to offer a wide range of tourism services and products. As a result, it has experienced outstanding urban-tourism growth.

The tourism appeal of the city also spills over into other areas within the same municipal district, such as the Barú Peninsula, Tierra Bomba Island and the Rosario Islands Archipelago, which includes Isla Grande, the largest island and the main focus of this study.

Isla Grande offers a range of unique and interesting circumstances that are worthy of a cross-disciplinary study (primarily geography and anthropology), in addition to justifying its research and laying the foundations for the use of ethnomarketing:

- Region with a high environmental value and protected by specific environmental legislation.
- Arrival of foreign economic and tourist interests that could be a threat to the region's natural resources.
- Afro-descendant native population, traditionally very poor and marginalised, but which now is taking on a new role in the fight to preserve its customs and foster respect for its culture.

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- Territorial administration and management at the grassroots level, mainly organised by the island's Community Council, to which the municipal and governmental authorities delegate, although other administrations and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels are involved.
- Land ownership mainly communal, although there are some tenants.
- Commitment to sustainable tourism development (ecotourism), conserving natural resources.
- Strong cultural identity, embodied in powerful community involvement through non-profits or associations and a sense of collectiveness (ethnodevelopment).

Tourism has become an opportunity, but it also poses a threat for the environment. The aim, therefore, has been to plan and manage this activity in accordance with ecotourism and ethnomarketing.

Ethnomarketing, properly applied, is considered an alternative that can help to balance tourism development without having to sacrifice local customs, as these are the main attraction for visitors, who learn about the lifestyles and knowledge of the local people, generating respect for the ancestral knowledge of the community.

The goal of this contribution is to study this territorial setting, its natural, social and cultural characteristics, and the new tourism possibilities offered by ecotourism through the use of ethnomarketing in this region.

In this study, the University of Cartagena de Indias is committed to the environmental sustainability of this unique region. Surveys and interviews with local people, tourists and business owners have been held. Direct observation and participatory workshops have also been important to understand and diagnose tourism activity.

## REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This island forms part of the Rosario Islands Archipelago, which consists of 31 islands and islets in total with an overall surface area of 325.5 ha. It is the largest island, covering 201.8 hectares, and with three ecosystems: coastal and inland lagoons, mangrove swamps and tropical dry forest (TDF). The climate is tropical. There is a population of around 1,000 people, settled mainly in the town of Orika, which has been registered at the City Hall of Cartagena since 2005. Historically, it has been a poverty-stricken population living mainly from fishing.

Several public administrations from different levels converge on this territory. On the national level: Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible (MADS), Agencia Nacional de Tierras (ANT), Dirección General Marítima (DIMAR), Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras (INVEMAR), among others. On the regional level: Corporación Autónoma Regional del Canal del Dique (CARDIQUE). And on the local level: Alcaldía de Cartagena, Corporación de Turismo de Cartagena and Consejo Comunitario of Orika in Isla Grande.

It is a region of afro-descendants governed by the Community Council, which is the maximum internal administrative authority in this unique territory. Its role is to improve the community in social terms by formulating a life plan, preserving the region's environment through the implementation of an environmental management plan, and legally protecting its cultural survival.

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This is a mostly descriptive research with a qualitative-quantitative approach. The application of ethnomarketing as a key tool for the sustainable development of the tourism destination involved a series of phases.

In the study phase, different data collection techniques were applied: tourist sampling, on-site census of accommodations and in-depth interviews with locals.

For the *Design of goals and strategies* phase, interdisciplinary working groups on initial proposals were held, and subsequently reviewed by the Community Council of Isla Grande.

Likewise, the *Plan execution* phase involved the active participation of the local community and the Community Council, where a number of strategies focused on ethnomarketing were applied.



The information sources obtained from field work, visual tours and workshops need to be supplemented by documentation.

## RESULTS

Following the above methodology, the study stage involved an analysis and diagnosis of the natural and cultural environment of Isla Grande. To achieve this, several chapters were key:

- An analysis of the macro and micro environment of tourism.
- An analysis of the tourism offer, its infrastructure and tourism promoters.
- An observation of Isla Grande's tourism demand by conducting surveys directly with owners, business managers and tourists. As a result, a profile of the tourist has been created.

Of the different aspects analysed of the demand, supply and destination, a profile has been created of tourists visiting Isla Grande.

All this is summarised in a SWOT analysis, which serves as the basis for the diagnosis. From there, we enter the stages of designing actionable strategies and tactics. To do so, different matrices were considered, in particular the Ansoff Matrix, which served to identify the strategic tactics needed to strengthen the tourism ranking of Isla Grande.

## DISCUSSION

Isla Grande has unique natural and cultural resources that are becoming a draw for tourists seeking contact with nature, active leisure and interaction with the cultural values of the local population. Likewise, there is a need for strategic planning that analyses those resources and ecotourism possibilities.

Ecotourism, ethnodevelopment and ethnomarketing are developing into key assets for Isla Grande. The first two, together, as a tourism development model to be pursued by offering activities related to natural and cultural resources. The third, as a planning tool in which emphasis is placed on cultural values and on the population's own commitment to the environment and tourism.

Interaction has taken place with the local community during this research. The aim has not been to impose academic ideas and actions, but rather to engage, with mutual contact and reciprocal knowledge.

The unique features and development of this region can generate new research, from different perspectives and specialities. We also believe that our contributions can be sustained over time to benefit this region.

## CONCLUSIONS

Without a doubt, there are many interesting sites in the Caribbean of Colombia and nearby countries, but it is hard to beat the unique cultural features and attractions of Isla Grande, whose economy already depends heavily on tourism, given that fishing activity is not enough. On the other hand, in this island location, special prominence is given to its natural and cultural heritage for economic, social and cultural progress, as well as to conserve and strengthen local identity. Thus, a development model based on ecotourism and ethnodevelopment is advocated.

The current COVID-19 crisis has slashed tourism figures that were on the rise. Many hopes, ideas and enterprising actions have been cut short by the impossibility of bringing in tourists, especially international ones. Nevertheless, Isla Grande hangs on to a social commitment and a model of local development that will continue once this global crisis has ended. This development model is becoming a challenge for the sustainability of this natural area and, likewise, it is important for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).