

# SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY AND “BUEN VIVIR” (GOOD LIVING) AT HERITAGE SITES: ASSESSMENT OF THE AGUA BLANCA CASE, ECUADOR

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## Introduction

Incorporating sustainability objectives at the core of cultural heritage preservation demonstrates a strong concern, which has intensified in recent decades, for governments, NGOs and the community in general. The socio-cultural sustainability sphere, in all its dimensions, involves the preservation of diversity in the broadest sense, keeping the system of values, practices and symbols of identity that allow the reproduction of the social fabric and ensure national integration, through times (GARCÍA and PRIOTTO, 2008).

From this view, the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 establishes the “Rules of Good Living” as a system of social protection based on rights and, from it, it settles an alternative linkage between politics, economics, social issues, culture and environment (MANOSALVAS, 2014). This notion of Good Living or *sumak kawsay*<sup>i</sup> appears as a new condition of political, legal and natural contractuality, which has started its route from the hand of the cultural legacies of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador and Bolivia (DÁVALOS, 2008). The Good Living has positioned itself as a paradigm in its broadest sense and scope, through a constitutional provision and ultimate purpose of state policies (CEVALLOS TEJADA, 2012). It is a concept both, challenging and novel, as it includes, for example, that nature is a subject of law (art. 72 of the Constitution).

Nevertheless, Gudynas (2011) emphasizes that it is a concept under construction and that, because of its relativistic character, it is necessary to adapt its application to each cultural and environmental context. In this sense, Good Living can be understood as a platform, a common space where different ontologies can coexist and from where to build the interculturality that aims at generating alternatives to development. This

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implies a new ethic and represents a civil society to take a proactive role in the debate about its scope.

In this context, the National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017 was developed in Ecuador (SENPLADES, 2013), whose objectives respond, among other aspects, to the socio-cultural purposes pursued from the sustainability paradigm. The objectives of the Plan are organized into three areas: 1) change in power relations for construction of popular power; 2) rights, freedoms and capabilities for Good Living; and 3) economic transformation from the change of the productive matrix. The second area of the program, as set out in the Plan itself, argues that “to sustainably ensure the exercise of rights and freedoms and capacity building of the population, it is essential to have adequate material basis that are not only economic, productive and financial support for Good Living, but also allow the flourishing of human beings, individually and collectively and become a source of creativity, initiative and personal and group achievement” (SENPLADES, 2013: 82). All this is conceived under the fundamental principle established in the Constitution (chap. 1, Art. 3 no. 7) which refers to the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

Based on this approach, objective 5 of the Plan proposes “building meeting spaces and strengthening national identity, different identities, national diversity and interculturality”, promoting in the commitments of the State, the construction of a national identity in diversity based in sustaining symbolic elements of representation: the collective and individual memories and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage (SENPLADES, 2013: 181). That is, the elements that constitute the cultural heritage are witnessing how a society or culture relates to its environment, these manifestations being the starting point to ensure the socio-cultural sustainability of the peoples (CUNNINGHAM, 2013).

In this context, a methodological and also operational gap is evident when trying to answer the following question: what are the aspects that should be considered to assess the socio-cultural sustainability and therefore the Good Living of the archaeological site Agua Blanca which is part of the cultural heritage and is an identity symbol of a community?

In order to provide possible answers to the question above, the purpose of this paper is firstly to define those aspects that should be considered in assessing the socio-cultural sustainability of the archaeological site “Community Tourism Center Agua Blanca” in the Province of Manabi, Ecuador; and then to analyze its sustainability in terms of policies and strategic guidelines established in the National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017. This site was chosen because it is a case of national reference regarding the involvement of a native community in the preservation of an archaeological site located in a National Park, and that it once served as a justification to continue living in the protected area.

This analysis aims at contributing to the diagnosis of a particular case and test the development of a methodology capable of rendering the policies and strategies of the Good Living into qualitative indicators that could serve as input to improve the management of heritage sites from the sustainability perspective.

## Community Tourism Center Agua Blanca and the archaeological site

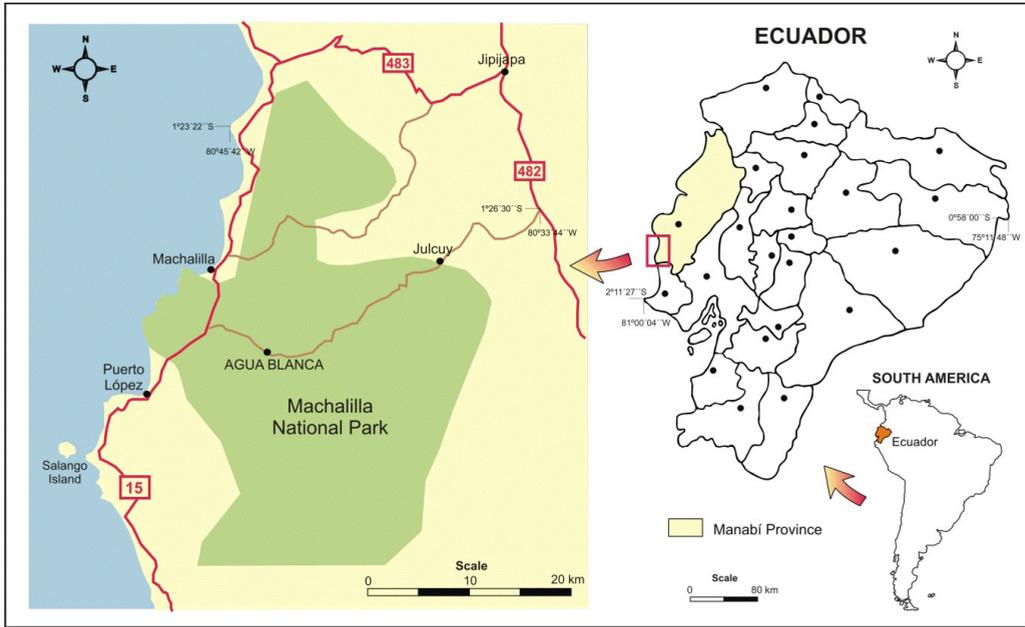
This center (Figure 1) is located in the Machalilla National Park, Machalilla Parish, Puerto Lopez canton, Manabi province. It is accessed by the coast road, 12 km north of Puerto Lopez. It has a paved road to the village of the community, where the site museum is located.

Machalilla Park has a land area of 55,095 ha (Figure 2), where the ecosystem of tropical dry forest is developed, and a sea area, including the islands of Salango and La Plata. The most populated area of the park corresponds to the community of Agua Blanca, which has attractions like the archaeological site of the same name, the museum and the lagoon that has medicinal properties due to its sulphurous waters.

Figure 1. Signpost located on the coast road.



Figure 2. Location of the Machalilla National Park and Agua Blanca.



In the archaeological site, there are stone foundations of several thousand structures which are visible from about 4 km<sup>2</sup>. They are mostly located in the wetlands of the mountains surrounding the floodplain of the Buena Vista River and in the hills. There are archaeological remains which are attributable to the cultures of Valdivia, Machalilla, Chorrera, Bahía, Guangala and Manteña. The main archaeological complex reveals a hierarchy of public and private structures with different functions. It has large buildings to which a public use is attributed and where remains of stone seats are found. The community itself is located on the foundations of part of the site and only a few sectors are visited. During the tour, there are small interpretive centers with models that provide shelter from the sun and relaxation during the visit. Some of the most prominent structures have an enclosure for protection (Figures 3 and 4).

The museum (Figure 5) has a thematic exhibition where a synthesis of the archeology of the site and the region is presented, including maps and models. Ceramic, lithic, and bone material, and certain minerals such as turquoise are displayed.

Figure 3. Ceramic pots left *in situ*.



Figure 4. Foundations of the main structure where there are remains of stone seats *in situ*.



Figure 5. View of the community house where the site museum was built.



A stone seat (Figure 6) that was donated by a community member is also shown. This seat has a particular story. It was accidentally found intact and sold to a local merchant. When he knew the community was claiming the seat, he decided to voluntarily give it away without asking any reward. That moment, Mc Ewan and Silva point out (2011: 257 and 258) “was key to driving the project of building a small community house in order to exhibit the material from the site and to demonstrating the significance that the community gave to cultural resources”.

Since then, the seats are a symbol of pride and local identity. Currently, the logo of the Community House is a drawing of a Manteño seat (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Complete stone seat delivered by a local merchant and seating remains found during excavations.



**Figure 7. Front of the community house, in the centre, Mr. Hugo Ventura Asunción, guide site.**



## Site History

It has been proved through archaeological research that between the years 800 and 1532 AD (coinciding with the arrival of the Spaniards), the region was densely populated, it had important ceremonial centers corresponding to the Manteña culture and vast sea and land commercial networks driven by the exchange of red *Spondylus princeps* shaped as *chaquiras* (i.e. in beads/bracelets) (MC EWAN, 1995; NORTON, 1992; HIDROVO QUIÑONES, 2005). There were two major manors, Salangome to the south, with its capital in Agua Blanca, with Salango, Puerto Lopez (Cercapez) and Machalilla (Tuzco) as part of it and Cancebí to the north. These manors of the coast were linked with two large ceremonial centers in the interior, Jaboncillo and Hojas Hill, located on a plateau at 600 m. There, an important set of seats and steles with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs were found, which marked social hierarchy and religious power. Stone seats, steles and other sculptures are characteristic elements of the Manteño culture and appear in archaeological contexts associated with a ceramic type with the same name (MC EWAN and SILVA, 2011).

For the mid-sixteenth century, it was an important ceremonial and social center that brought together several thousand people (MC EWAN, 1995). The arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century marked the decline of the settlement of Agua Blanca. No reference appears to these manors in the chronicles, in part due to the peripheral nature of the area during Spanish rule. Little is known about what happened to their population. It is considered that, since it is a border area, the population had some autonomy, as there were no relevant resources to tap. For the eighteenth century, the place is shown

on the cartography as “Indian village” (map of Requena 1774, LAVIANA, 1984 cited by RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2007). According to Arauz (2000) and Alvarez (2001, 2002) during the XVIII to XX centuries, the indigenous of the region self-declared as mestizos to improve their status in the society of the time, but sometimes they demanded land, as the Jipijapa Indians did in 1763 (LOOR, 1939; 1969).

In the late nineteenth century the territory began to be coveted for the exploitation of the tagua and its commercialization in the port of Machalilla. According to recent research, the by then Agua Blanca ranch was owned by José Joaquín González, after passing through several owners, the property was acquired by the Tagua German House in 1924. In 1944, the property was confiscated and sold by Dirección General de Casas Bloqueadas al Coronel Pablo Borja (the General Directorate of Blocked Houses) to Colonel Pablo Borja. The last owner was Pablo Lemaire. After his death, his widow tapped the ranch for some time. From 1979 onwards, the property was abandoned, coinciding with the draught period of the region. The Lemaire family lost the property due to heavy debts and much of the land became public (RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2009).

At that time, there were about five families settled in the area. Oral memory does not extend beyond four generations. According to it, local residents were subject to the ranch, worked as cane cutters and they could continue living in the place under that condition. People lived in the dry and unproductive part of the ranch (RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2007; 2009).

The community was formed in 1964, but it was a formality and did not mean the land reform it had promised to be. Finally, in 1979, the Machalilla Park was created. The territory passed into state property but there was uncertainty about the continuity of the population. The community mobilized due to the lack of information and the harassment they received for them to stop exploiting the natural resources of the area. They lived from coal mining, logging and hunting, which are inconsistent activities with the conservation of the park. There were protests and the community of Agua Blanca, who claimed to have been founded in 1930, could prove its legal status since 1964, through the Ministerial Agreement 34.33.

The community has had many projects but its archeology project is the ultimate one, which has marked the history of the community in recent years. This was in large part due to the special relationship established with the archaeologists. In 1978, Colin Mc Ewan went to the site for the first time and returned a year later to excavate for his doctoral thesis. Colin McEwan (Scotsman) and Maria Isabel Silva (Ecuadorian) lived in the community uninterruptedly between 1985 and 1990. What is relevant is that they conducted an investigation that they qualify as “participatory archeology” with the community (SILVA and MC EWAN, 1989; MC EWAN, 1995). The villagers were hired and trained to dig, draw topographic maps and process the post excavation material. The main strategic decisions were discussed and agreed with the community (MC EWAN and SILVA, 2011). This constitutes a pioneering methodology of archaeological work and promotion of heritage at that time (BENAVIDES, 2001; ENDERE, 2007). Apart from this, and facing the uncertainty regarding the continuity of the villagers in possession of their lands, these archaeologists became allies and mediators between the community

and the park, national authorities, and foreign entities to whom they turned to in search of financing.

By 1986, the park authorities and the community had improved relations thanks to a change of director of the park and the role that archeology, as enhancer of the touristic attraction of the place, and archaeologists involved in that process took. In that year, excavations were afforded by the Central Bank and there was an exhibition in the community house. The British Embassy provided grants to expand community orchards.. In 1988, the archaeological area was fenced, the first tourist trail opened and cultural meetings began, as a forum for dissemination and communication among communities, as well as institutions and scientists.

Nevertheless, the alliance between archaeologists and the community in Agua Blanca generated resentment and the Central Bank decided to cut funding. That strengthened the ties between the two sides to consolidate the presence of the community and the continuity of the archaeological-tourist project (RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2009). By then, it was planned the construction of a pipeline that crossed the community territory, and funds of the entity responsible for the work were obtained to build the museum site of the Agua Blanca community. In turn, the British Embassy financed the participation of Chris Hudson for its design, which was built using traditional techniques and opened to the public in 1990 (MC EWAN *et al.*, 2006).

The archaeological project was continued for five years and created jobs but its effects were longer lasting because it allowed the villagers to learn about archeology -to the point of being able to judge the quality of projects proposed in the future - and generated awareness of the importance of heritage preservation together with the natural resources of the park.

In 2005, the cultural center was remodeled with the support of the British Museum, new glass cases were installed and lighting was improved. In 2008, the center received the Hernán Crespo Toral award for its conservation, protection, development and dissemination of the Ecuadorian heritage. In recent decades, the community and the park have kept an informal but stable alliance. Local tour guides are considered honorary rangers and the community enjoys the park infrastructure.

## **The site and the Agua Blanca community**

In 2005, the community of Agua Blanca, as well as Salango, Las Tunas and Pital, asked the CODENPE (stands for Development Council of Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador) its recognition as Pueblo Manta. The grounding of the request was based on archaeological data and references to the Pueblo Manta, as well as the Manteña raft festival (RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2007; 2009). Indeed, every October 12 since 1992, the community celebrates the day of the Manteña raft; guides and their families dress up as Indians and recall the meeting with a Manteña draft described in the chronicles of Bartolomé Ruiz, Pizarro and Almagro's pilot. That raft symbolizes the power of the Manteña ancient people, as they conducted important maritime trading with other

pre-Columbian peoples dwellings in Mexico and Peru exchanging *Spondylus* and other luxury items.

Their self identification as communities descendents of the Pueblo Manta and the state recognition as such, as part of a legal context that is favorable, mark this new phase of the community of Agua Blanca. Note that “Manteño” is the archaeological name of the culture that was developed in Manabi in pre-Hispanic times. The impact of archeology in the area had a strong influence on the local population who consider themselves as descendants of the inhabitants of these dwellings.

The work of archaeologists has undoubtedly helped build awareness of the value of heritage and gave the community a new sense of existence. It is also noted that the archaeologists-community relationship was not intermediated by the state.

There were other archaeologists in Agua Blanca following this participatory approach, being noteworthy Kimbra Smith’s contribution, who promoted craftwork through working with tagua and *Spondylus*.

For the villagers, archeology is not only scientific research; it has an impact on the development of the community as a provider of employment, on the one hand, and supplies for tourism -through scientific information and objects for the museum- on the other. In fact, they differ from other communities in the area as they clearly know what they want; they work independently and maintain a relationship on an equal footing with researchers.

There are at least five community museums in the Ecuadorian coast: Real Alto, Salango, Agua Blanca, Juan Montalvo and Valdivia. Many were pioneers in their day. However, the community impact of archeology in these places was not as in Agua Blanca. Mc Ewan and Silva in a recent publication highlight among the “lessons learned” from Agua Blanca that it is “vital to build on the needs expressed by the community, rather than to impose unwanted projects”; “The long-term benefits of preserving and managing cultural resources exceed short-term gains that provide sales for looters”; “The commitment of the community can make a positive and essential contribution to heritage management and conservation projects” (MC EWAN and SILVA, 2011: 261).

The community of Agua Blanca has clear present objectives and future prospects in a climate of substantial autonomy. They prefer being apart as much as possible from the state, which, on the other hand, has always remained absent, and this is a matter of complaint.

### **Socio-cultural sustainability of the archaeological site: aspects to consider in its evaluation**

The 2008 Constitution of Ecuador establishes among the rights of Good Living, the right of people to “build and maintain their own cultural identity (...) to know the historical memory of their cultures and to access their cultural heritage; to disseminate their own cultural expressions and to have access to diverse cultural expressions” (art. 21).

In response to the lack of specific methodologies, the clear identification of the aspects that should be considered to assess the socio-cultural sustainability of an archa-

eological site, it was necessary to use two different general methods which can be supplemented to achieve the objectives. Both deductive and inductive methods are useful for identification, selection and implementation of criteria and indicators for assessing the sustainability of archaeological sites.

Overall, the deductive method is applied to the review of the criteria for selection, appraisal and zoning of the archaeological and paleontological sites described by Endere and Prado (2009) and to the analysis of policies and strategies of the National Plan for Good Living in response to the achievement of objective 5 (SENPLADES, 2013). The inductive method is used in the fieldwork, in which qualitative methodologies were employed, especially semi-structured interviews and participant observations. 12 interviews were conducted to site guides, community members, visitors, representatives of the National Heritage Institute and specialists in archaeological and anthropological issues of the region. The abovementioned observations were carried out on the site itself, participating in guided tours and various activities, including a ritual ceremony in one of the structures considered to have sacred value. Detailed records (notes, recordings, photographs) were obtained. Interviews were completed at research centers and offices of various officials of the Culture area.

Based on the above, six major criteria were defined (features and state of the site, management, perception, transmission of knowledge and experiences, economic support, and environmental protection), which include qualitative indicators to gauge the socio-cultural sustainability of an archaeological site integrating different aspects involved in the concept (Table 1). Later, these criteria were applied to the Community Tourism Center Agua Blanca, contemplating a qualitative rating scale: high, medium and low sustainability.

**Table 1. Criteria, indicators and definitions referred to in assessing the socio-cultural sustainability.**

Criteria	Indicators	Definitions
Features and state	Integrity	It refers to intact stratigraphy, <i>in situ</i> archaeological remains and the relationship between these <i>in situ</i> remains and their context.
	Preservation	It involves the preservation of artifacts, organic material and structures (buildings, tombs, etc.).
	Vulnerability / fragility	It refers to the ability to respond to natural and anthropogenic risk factors and feasibility of conservation measures and/or mitigation
	Real or potential value for research	It includes: excavation and/or investigation of comparable monuments in the same archaeological region, made in recent decades; systematic and recent archaeological research in the area; recent and systematic research of the same archaeological period.
Management	Organization and planning	It refers to the organizational and planning ability to set goals, set priorities and keep the site running from previously defined goals.
	Interpretation	It refers to the ability to make heritage resources visible, from the arrangement, presentation of exhibitions, used technology, required equipment.
	Participation	It considers the ability to generate instances and participatory mechanisms at the various stages involved in the operation of the site.
	Physical accessibility within the site	It involves the resolution of difficulties to ensure physical accessibility to the site for all people, even those who have special needs.
	Self Management	It includes methods, strategies and skills that enable the administration, planning and autonomous implementation of the activities on the site.
	Access to information	It includes techniques to search, categorize, modify and obtain appropriate and necessary information for making decisions.
	Maintenance	It refers to the ability to take steps to provide financial support to the activities carried out at the site.
	Future projection	It gathers management potential to generate new proposals within site.
Perception	Aesthetic values	It refers to visibility at ground level or as part of the landscape, form and structure, relationship with the surrounding environment.
	Traditional values	It includes oral tradition, local historiography
	Symbolic values	It involves the connection with current historical events and the association with meanings or attributed qualities by the community.
Transmission of knowledge and experiences	Knowledge and communication	It refers to scientific, historical and oral tradition knowledge we have of the site and the capacity in which that knowledge is communicated (intellectual accessibility) and the tangible and intangible knowledge.
	Institutional linkage	It reflects the ability to build links, networks, and associations with institutions, organizations, etc. to generate joint actions to enhance the site.
	Education and awareness	It includes the values found at the site based on their qualities to spread the regional history, strengthening local identity and raising awareness in the community about the need to preserve it.
Economic support	external accessibility	It includes available infrastructure to visit the site.
	Incorporation of heritage to value chains	It refers to the site's ability to generate economic income to sustain communities through tourism, for example.
	Convergence of Activities	It involves the ability to develop complementary activities that allow the support of the communities from building a production model based on cultural diversity.
Environmental Protection	Knowledge of the natural heritage	It reflects the scientific knowledge and existing experience regarding the natural heritage of the site
	Respect for the natural heritage	It promotes the development of activities compatible with the potentials and limitations of the ecosystems, respecting their capacity.
	Natural heritage conservation	It promotes practices consistent with the protection of species and ecosystems of ecological and socio-cultural interest.
	Stability of the natural environment	It refers to the resistance and resilience of ecosystems to natural events or anthropic interventions.

Source: Self compilation on the basis of Endere and Prado (2009), National Plan for Good Living and fieldwork.

## Socio-cultural sustainability of the Community Tourism Center Agua Blanca

### *Features and state*

The archaeological heritage is the material substrate of the intangible culture carried by the community members of Agua Blanca. The largest proportion of the site has not been excavated yet and it is presumed the existence of numerous *in situ* remains. For this reason, integrity is intact and is evaluated as high.

Additionally, since it is a protected area where there are no visible threats and which is permanently monitored, the preservation of the site is also considered high. No risks are associated with urban sprawl, mining works, road works, and industrial and shrimp activities, among others, as in other areas of the Ecuadorian coast.

The analysis of vulnerability/fragility admits distinctions based on its origin. In that sense, vulnerability/fragility is low as regards anthropogenic factors, which are tightly controlled as in the case of looters. However, in the case of natural factors, the evaluation of this criterion is considered medium as there are long periods of climatic stability alternated with other periods of instability caused by seasonal rains and especially by El Niño. This phenomenon, which has a variable recurrence period, is repetitive but not cyclical and is manifested as part of a complex system of global climate variability known as ENSO (El Niño - Southern Oscillation) (ESPINOZA, 1996). Huertas Vallejos (1993) notes that archeology, within the social sciences, is one of the most interested disciplines in researching the phenomenon of El Niño and stresses that these studies contribute to understanding pre-Columbian history.

Both seasonal rains as the mentioned phenomenon help buried archaeological objects emerge as a result of increased surface runoff and intensified erosion. Therefore, large objects usually appear but out of context with altered stratigraphy. In order to protect the archaeological heritage in these periods of instability, it is necessary to have a Contingency Plan.

The actual or potential value for research is high. The excavated area is small relative to the size of the site and its potential may be assessed, at least in part, through geophysical surveys.

### *Management*

In connection with the organization and planning, the community has shown a high capacity to carry out the proposed activities and to have a proactive attitude in their implementation. However, the lack of guidance to improve the organizational and planning ability is manifested on the criteria of interpretation, that is, on the ability to make heritage resources visible. With no permanent specialist advice, the villagers incorporate new glass cases with improvised labels which include pieces of paper containing very simple handwritten descriptions of the objects (Figure 8). In addition, the community is eager to have more museum objects and, with this desire, they include in the exhibition objects found out of context, for example, objects

collected after a seasonal rain. The sustainability of this criterion (interpretation) was evaluated as medium.

Participation is generally considered medium. The ability to generate instances and participatory mechanisms is high within the community. However, in instances of linkage to the National Park in which the site is inserted, participation is not regulated and depends heavily on the decisions made by the authority in power.

In terms of physical accessibility, sustainability is rated as medium. A tour called "Knowing the Manteño road" is offered, which lasts from two to three hours and includes visits to the museum, the ceremonial center, the riverbank, the dry forest and the sulphurous water lagoon, where swimming is allowed. Alternatively, it is offered a one night stay in the forest. The museum and the food stalls are accessible as they are in the community, which is the starting point of the visit. In turn, there are roofed spaces where models are displayed and in which there are seats to rest on during the visit. However, the visit is not prepared for people with disabilities and the path to the site area of the lagoon involves a walk of medium difficulty that increases during peak hours of sun exposure.

Self-management of the site is high within the limits that the National Park allows and considering the socio-cultural context compared to other communities.

**Figure 8. New additions to the exhibition without proper interpretation.**



The Community has a collective territory of 8,048 ha, which is governed by the communal council and assembly. This form of organization was formalized with the Law of Communities of 1937. Until that time, all the communities were settlements formed by the dispersion of indigenous families held in the Reductions or Indian Villages of the

coast (ÁLVAREZ, 2011). According to the same source, the communities form stable social units, identified by their association with a political-productive territory of ethnic nature and by kinship; administratively, Communities depend on the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries (MAGAP, because of its Spanish acronym).

For several years, the Community has created several working teams including the Archaeology Working Group, which, although it has considerable autonomy, has to discuss its projects in the community assembly and they have to be approved by the council.

A sign of self-management and ethnic self-identification is represented in the museum, especially with the inclusion of photographs of the members of the community in the exhibition (Figure 9). This feature is also present in Salango and Real Alto. Certainly, the agenda of Latin American Social Archeology is present in coastal Ecuadorian archeologists because, as Lumbreras (1974) points out, an indispensable part of the process of recovering meanings is to restore the link between objects and their original location and the people who live there today.

**Figure 9. Similarities in physical traits of local residents with ceramic figures found in archaeological context.**



Regarding access to information, the members of the community maintain excellent relations with domestic and foreign archaeologists who are welcomed along with other specialists such as designers, who have helped the community get national and international funds. However, the assessment of this criterion is medium because this relationship is not continuous but sporadic, which requires finding more fluid and permanent ways of interaction.

The ability to take steps to provide financial support for the conducted activities is considered high. The community is self-financing and has converted

itself to ensure its sustainability. Through tourism and self-management, the living conditions of the members of the community have significantly improved. Future projections have the potential to be assessed as high. The members of the community have previous experience of working with researchers and have consolidated relations with professionals so they are receptive to proposals that allow enhancing future instances.

It should be noted that, within these projections, there is a plan carried out by the National Heritage Institute (INPC, because of its Spanish acronym) to include the Agua Blanca site in a nomination to be a World Heritage site, which includes five sites of the coast<sup>ii</sup>.

### *Perception*

The perception the community has on its heritage can rescue the aesthetic, traditional and symbolic values of the site. As regards the aesthetic ones, although the site is not monumental, some major structures protected indoors are clearly observable. The assessment of this criterion is medium.

Regarding traditional values, the community is working on recovering the oral history and recreation of its traditions. This value is rated as medium because, although the community is aware of the cultural significance that the site represents inside and outside the community, the recovery of oral tradition and local historiography is still in progress.

The perception of the site in its symbolic values is considered high. The involvement and participation of the community is very active, as well as the strengthening of cultural identity through various projects such as the “Manteña raft festival”, for which they receive State funds.

In addition, the site has become a meeting place for representatives of indigenous communities, under which there have been, for example, meetings with shamans from the jungle.

### *Transmission of scientific knowledge and experiences*

The community had a very strong interaction in the time McEwan and Silva lived with them. The members of the community did not do the work of field laborers but were actively involved with the excavations and laboratory activities. During that time, they received instruction on the methodology of archaeological work and the importance of preserving and retrieving contextual information. Later, they participated in training with handicraft workshops in instances of horizontal learning that allowed the exchange of knowledge. This is explicitly explained in published papers by the scientific teams but it is also clearly understood from interviews with community members. Communication and knowledge are considered high, although continuity in time fails.

The institutional linkage is considered low but there is a perceived potential for change. According to the testimonies of the members of the community, they have a good relationship with the park authorities and have virtually no relationship with the Heritage authorities. However, the lack of relationship with the heritage area is not a threat

because the community manages itself. This situation could be reversed in the event that the site is nominated for the list of World Heritage, as this would require the creation of an institutional framework that contains instances of participatory management.

Education and awareness are considered high. The community is very aware of the importance of the values of the natural and cultural heritage of the area and the strong link between this heritage and community identity. They also make it explicit in their tourism promotion activities.

### *Economic support*

External accessibility is highly important for the site because it allows the influx of tourists, the largest source of income for the community. In this case, access is considered high. The community is accessed from a coast road through a paved route which is in excellent condition. The ride is short and is clearly marked. Specific signage for the site is adequate and the area has space for parking.

The incorporation of heritage to value chains is high. The ability to generate income is scheduled within the community and they communicate it to visitors. 25% of the income is invested in community development. The site has places to eat in different sectors near the community, the museum and the lagoon. They also have cabins for lodging. The lagoon has equipped changing rooms and security measures such as lifeguards. The areas that are available and not available for visiting are adequately signaled and tours are carried out with a guide. There are keepers along the way in the different areas available for visiting.

Agua Blanca receives about 9,500 visitors per year (RUIZ BALLESTEROS, 2007), including children from nearby schools, national and international tourists, researchers and volunteers. They make short visits or they stay for several days. They have different motivations; some are interested in archeology and others in natural attractions or in the experience of living with the community. There is an adequate infrastructure, without neglecting traditional architecture (Figures 10, 11 and 12).

**Figure 10. View of the sulfur water lagoon.**



Figure 11. Tourist infrastructure in the area of the lagoon.



Figure 12. Cabins and bar area.



Undoubtedly, most of the financial resources come from tourism. However, the convergence of activities and the ability to develop complementary ones is high. Apart from tourism, Agua Blanca lives off of poultry farming, beekeeping, agriculture and handicrafts:

“72 families with 300 inhabitants live in Agua Blanca. Agua Blanca lives off of poultry farming, beekeeping, agriculture, handicrafts and tourism. Currently, we have 25 families in the guiding system, 16 families in handicrafts, 2 families guarding the lagoon and we provi-

de lodging and cottage and we have a community restaurant. That is, out of the 300 people, 80% are involved in community tourism. Initially, men were the ones who carried out most of the activities, now it is more balanced, since there is another source, that is, women can help families... Women are in handcrafting" (Hugo Ventura Asunción, site guide).

The activities are diversified and the community awards its Good Living to the ability to support and survive that they have been creating in the site:

"There is awareness of the community, the community will try to get ahead because when we started, we did so with an initiative only of archeology, then we had to start changing and involving advertising, information, because we are now involved definitely, because the cultural and natural part has become a source of income for the community, that is, there is a communal survival and there we do have Good Living. It is not that the Good Living is given by the government, but it is rather we as a community who have tried to lead the Good Living" (Hugo Ventura Asunción, site guide).

### *Environmental Protection*

As mentioned, Agua Blanca is located in the Machalilla National Park, created in 1979. According to the specifications provided by the Ministry of Environment<sup>iii</sup>, it is one of the largest protected areas of the Ecuadorian coast and its dominant ecosystems are the semi deciduous lowland forest, deciduous lowland forest, lowland dry brushwood, montane low haze forest, piedmont semi deciduous forest and coastal dry brushwood. The wealth of flora and fauna is very important, notable for its abundance and level of endemism.

Being a National Park, scientific knowledge is high and so it is the existing knowledge concerning natural heritage that is partly inherited from the tradition of occupation of the area and partly acquired. A greater interaction between the community and the Park authorities was gradually generated, which has strengthened the awareness and knowledge of the site.

Respect for natural heritage is currently high, mainly because of imposition by the Park and then because the community understood the importance of this heritage and from that respect, they make a living. This arises in the testimonies of the members of the community when they say they had to reconvert themselves in guardians of the heritage. The conservation of the natural heritage is high. While the community is authorized to carry out productive activities in the area, they are compatible with conservation and are monitored by the Park.

Natural environment stability is considered medium because it is generally stable except for the El Niño periods. In sustaining stability, it is crucial to protect the tropical dry forest. It is important to point out that coastal dry forests of Latin America are considered endangered (MURPHY and LUGO, 1986; BULLOCK *et al.*, 1995) and those of

Ecuador are among the world's ecosystems that present the greatest crisis for biodiversity conservation (ALMENDARIZ *et al.*, 2012).

### Summary of the assessment of socio-cultural sustainability in Agua Blanca

The conducted analysis allows reaching the summary presented in Table 2. Socio-cultural sustainability is considered high for 64% of the selected indicators and medium for 32% of them. Only one indicator shows a low rate, the one connected to the institutional linkage within the transmission of knowledge and experiences criterion.

**Table 2. Summary of the assessment of the socio-cultural sustainability of the Community Tourism Center Agua Blanca.**

Criteria	Indicators	Evaluation
<b>Features and state</b>	Integrity	High
	Preservation	High
	Vulnerability / fragility	Medium
	Real or potential value for research	High
<b>Management</b>	Organization and planning	High
	Interpretation	Medium
	Participation	Medium
	Physical accessibility within the site	Medium
	Self Management	High
	Access to information	Medium
	Maintenance	High
	Future projection	High
<b>Perception</b>	Aesthetic values	Medium
	Traditional values	Medium
	Symbolic values	High
<b>Transmission of knowledge and experiences</b>	Knowledge and communication	High
	Institutional linkage	Low
	Education and awareness	High
<b>Economic support</b>	External accessibility	High
	Incorporation of heritage to value chains	High
	Convergence of Activities	High
<b>Environmental Protection</b>	Knowledge of the natural heritage	High
	Respect for the natural heritage	High
	Natural heritage conservation	High
	Stability of the natural environment	Medium

Source: Self compilation

### Final Thoughts

The socio-cultural sustainability of heritage sites reflecting the Good Living of the communities and their evaluation through indicators is a useful starting point for reversing critical situations.

The results show that in the configuration of Agua Blanca as a heritage tourism site, achievements gained in relation to community involvement are usually the most difficult

to achieve in the long-term. In this process, community involvement in research in the area has been central. As Valdez (2010) argues, this participation tends to return to the people the greatest treasure that pre-Hispanic societies had: ancestral dignity; the notion of identity is not inherited but is forged with community work. This is expressed in the different indicators evaluated, which show that respect for heritage resources comes with the understanding of their nature and with an awareness of their potential as a source of welfare and development (VALDEZ, 2010).

The most critical outcome of the evaluation is presented in the institutional linkage of the community with state agencies, whose participation is very weak. Since Agua Blanca is self-managed and self-financed, that little connection does not represent, in principle, a threat to communal living. Nevertheless, government support is considered essential to enhance the site within the framework of policies and lines of action promoted in the National Plan for Good Living. In that sense, it is key that the mechanisms of Good Living are flexible enough to promote self-management and not to hinder the desire for autonomy of the community. Accordingly, it is expected that this work constitutes a contribution to improve the socio-cultural sustainability of the site, in line with the objectives of Good Living.

## Notes

- i In Quechua, as it is mentioned by Macas (2010) *sumak* means fullness, the sublime, excellent, wonderful, beautiful, superior; *kawsay* is life, to be, to exist; *sumak kawsay* would be the fullness of life, life in material and spiritual excellence.
- ii It should be pointed out that this site was already in the indicative list in 1998.
- iii <http://www.ambiente.gob.ec/parque-nacional-machalilla/>

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# SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY AND “BUEN VIVIR” (GOOD LIVING) AT HERITAGE SITES: ASSESSMENT OF THE AGUA BLANCA CASE, ECUADOR

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**Abstract:** The incorporation of sustainability objectives as the focus of preservation of cultural heritage show a strong social concern in Ecuador, especially in the framework of the Buen Vivir (Good Living) Plan, proposed as a state policy. This paper examines the socio-cultural sustainability of the archaeological site Agua Blanca, a Community Tourism Center located at Manabi province, after defining a number of aspects needed to assess sustainability. Six main evaluation criteria were identified, which include 25 qualitative indicators. These may serve as an input to improve the management of heritage sites. The results reveal that the socio-cultural sustainability of the site, in this particular context, is high for 64% of the indicators considered. The involvement of the community of Agua Blanca in the configuration of the site is what mainly determines the high sustainability of its tangible and intangible heritage in line with the objectives of the Buen Vivir.

**Keywords:** sustainability indicators; archaeological sites; community self-management.

Resumen: La incorporación de los objetivos de sustentabilidad como eje de preservación del patrimonio cultural evidencia una fuerte preocupación social en Ecuador, especialmente en el marco del Plan del Buen Vivir, propuesto como política de Estado. El presente trabajo analiza la sustentabilidad socio-cultural del sitio arqueológico Agua Blanca, Centro de Turismo Comunitario ubicado en la Provincia de Manabí, definiendo previamente aquellos aspectos necesarios para evaluar la sustentabilidad. Se identificaron seis grandes criterios de evaluación que incluyen 25 indicadores cualitativos susceptibles de servir como insumo para mejorar la gestión de los sitios patrimoniales. Los resultados obtenidos revelan que la sustentabilidad socio-cultural del sitio en el contexto analizado es alta para el 64% de los indicadores considerados. El involucramiento de la comunidad de Agua Blanca en la configuración del sitio determina en gran medida la alta sustentabilidad de su patrimonio tangible e intangible en línea con los objetivos del Buen Vivir.

**Palabras clave:** indicadores de sustentabilidad; sitios arqueológicos; autogestión comunitaria.

**Resumo:** A incorporação dos objetivos da sustentabilidade como eixo da preservação do patrimônio cultural evidencia uma forte preocupação social no Equador, especialmente enquadrada no Plano para o Bem Viver, proposto como política de Estado. Neste trabalho é analisada a sustentabilidade sociocultural no sítio arqueológico Agua Blanca, Centro de Turismo Comunitário localizado na província de Manabí, depois de definir os aspectos necessários para avaliar a sustentabilidade. Identificaram-se seis grandes critérios de avaliação que incluem 25 indicadores qualitativos passíveis de serem utilizados como insumos para melhorar a gestão dos sítios patrimoniais. Os resultados obtidos revelam um alto nível de sustentabilidade sociocultural do sítio em 64% dos indicadores considerados. O envolvimento da comunidade de Agua Blanca na configuração do sítio determina a alta sustentabilidade do patrimônio tangível e intangível na linha dos objetivos do Bem Viver.

**Palavras-chave:** indicadores de sustentabilidade; sítios arqueológicos; autogestão comunitária.

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