

Citizens' perceptions of World Heritage values: the case of Cuenca, Ecuador

Citizens'
perceptions of
World Heritage

Barbara Molina

Anthropology, Universidad de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Gabriela Eljuri

Universidad Del Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador, and

Xavier Roigé Ventura

Antropologia, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Received 12 January 2022

Revised 29 August 2022

14 December 2022

Accepted 13 January 2023

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to study possible differences between the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) defined in the designation of Cuenca as a World Heritage (WH) site and its inhabitants' perceptions of heritage value. The study is based on research conducted in the historic centre of Cuenca in Ecuador, which was accorded WH status in 1999.

Design/methodology/approach – The research employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, providing a complementary approach to the research subject. Quantitative research involved a probability survey of 400 informants randomly selected from the population of the canton of Cuenca, while qualitative research included 40 semi-structured interviews with residents and traders in the historic centre and 150 further written consultations with residents of the city.

Findings – Following the introduction, methodology and description, the paper presents the data gathered from the survey and interviews. These indicate inhabitants' perceptions of the meaning, values, and uses of WH in Cuenca and reveal differences between their perceptions and those of the official OUV.

Originality/value – Although there are several studies on WH residents' perceptions of UNESCO OUV, few highlight the mismatch between local community views of heritage and those established by UNESCO. This study reflects critically on the concept of OUV, which is based on technical and political criteria rather than social participation. The study employs methodologies that could be applied in other case studies and used to improve heritage management. This is the only study on local perceptions of Cuenca's OUV.

Keywords Citizens' perceptions, Cultural Heritage, Historic centre, Outstanding Universal Value, World Heritage

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The UNESCO World Heritage (WH) Convention has a major impact on cultural heritage conservation policies worldwide. Many analytical, applied and even critical studies have examined the significance of this global policy (Keough, 2011; Labadi, 2018). Besides, the Convention's influence on heritage protection, it has given rise to a set of theoretical concepts

© Barbara Molina, Gabriela Eljuri and Xavier Roigé Ventura. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

The authors acknowledge Christopher Blades for supporting the proofreading process.

Funding: This study was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and the FEDER Program, grant number PGC 2018-096190-B-I00 entitled: "Patrimonio inmaterial y políticas culturales: desafíos sociales, políticos y museológicos", and PID2021-123063NB-I00 entitled "Patrimonio inmaterial y museos ante los retos de la sostenibilidad cultural".



Journal of Cultural Heritage
Management and Sustainable
Development
Emerald Publishing Limited
2044-1266

DOI 10.1108/JCHMSD-01-2022-0006

that are used to evaluate elements in applications for inclusion on the WH List. These include concepts such as authenticity, creative process and integrity (Jokilehto, 2006).

One of the most commonly used concepts to determine whether it should designate WH is that of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which refers to the supposedly objective values required for inclusion (Von Droste, 2011). The OUV aims to enable cultural and natural sites to be evaluated according to general criteria through (1) the creation of an international framework for the enhancement, conservation and dissemination of cultural heritage and (2) the creation of new institutions and more international conservation work (von Droste, 2011, p. 27). When deciding which cultural assets should be considered WH, the OUV should enable decisions to be more objective.

The idea of the existence of OUV recognized internationally based on tradition, authenticity, and cultural and/or natural integrity has an extended history and existed long before the adoption of the 1972 Convention (Cotte, 2012; Von Droste, 2011). Since then, successive UNESCO and ICOMOS reports have specified the criteria for measuring them. The 2005 Operational Guidelines established 10 exceptionality criteria for including a heritage site on the List (six for cultural and four for natural heritage). The criteria evolved with the concept of cultural heritage following debates on several aspects: social participation in heritage processes and meanings; the intangibility of heritage for society, advances in technology, industry science; the fragility of the natural environment, and a drive towards a more representative and credible List (Jokilehto, 2006; Cameron and Rossler, 2011; Cotte, 2012, p. 168).

Operational Guidelines specify the items must (1) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius; (2) exhibit an important interchange of human values; (3) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; (4) be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage(s) in human history; (5) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which represents a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment; (6) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance; (7) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; (8) be outstanding examples representing major stages of the Earth's history; (9) be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes and (10) contain the most significant natural habitats for *in-situ* conservation of biological diversity (Sardon, 2013).

Several studies have pinpointed that despite the supposed objectivity in the WH designations and the technical criteria adopted, these aspects do not always coincide with the views of local people (Turner and Tomer, 2013; Fouseki *et al.*, 2020). This is because the attribution of certain values by specialists does not always match the values attributed to society. It is therefore important to understand the connections and meanings of the latter to achieve greater involvement of the population in heritagization processes. As several authors have criticized, the processes of WH designation are mostly based on political processes rather than true participatory practices (Messeri, 2013; Bortolotto, 2015).

The starting point for our article is a critical perspective on the mismatch between the community's perception of heritage values and the OUV recognized in the WH designation. The OUVs used to justify Cuenca's inclusion on the List are neither understood nor perceived by the inhabitants of the town, as we have stated in other works (Molina, 2019a, b). While community perceptions are to do with the predominantly social, cultural and political uses of heritage, the OUVs defined in the nomination process are based on technical reasons and highlight the values that increase the chances of being awarded WH status (Avrami and Mason, 2019; Van der Hoeven, 2020; Clark, 2019). Therefore, there are differences and even clashes between the technical reasons provided in WH nominations and the heritage values given by the inhabitants of Cuenca.

Based on the previous premises, our research has two main objectives: (1) to analyze community perceptions of the heritage values of Cuenca and (2) to highlight the main differences between those perceptions of WH and the criteria adopted as OUV.

The mismatch between the officially recognized OUV and inhabitants' perception of heritage can lead to problems in the management of WH sites. Such designation may alter the relationship between heritage and local society by establishing legislative and administrative frameworks or new economic dynamics that restrict society's access (Omland, 2006; Labadi, 2018). So, it is possible that inclusion on the List may produce reactions that are the opposite of the intention. Imposing of an external and standardizing view that is not in line with other local views may limit opportunities to re-signify heritages and for new generations to innovate and create new heritage elements (Ramo, 2012; Mišetić, 2015). Restrictions on cultural assets and values can distort their meaning for local groups, and generate a loss of originality in the broader context (Mallarach and Verschuuren, 2019).

Including a site on the UNESCO List implies achieving exceptional status in certain categories. However, cultural sites are in unique economic, political and social contexts, which prompt whether UNESCO's unique and authentic values considered more important than those perceived by local society (Smith, 2015; Harrison, 2012; Vahtikari, 2016). As determined by UNESCO, we can refer to these values as social constructs, then to what extent should the criteria established by this institution be recognized as "the best"? And is it possible to consider local processes to give them new meanings? This should be possible as long as we can identify the different ways in which cultural values are appreciated and instrumentalized by diverse stakeholders. Albeit either complementing or opposing each other, these processes and the heritage management narratives that describe them, are essential for both establishing unique WH status and enabling local groups to play a role in the process (Smith, 2015; Bryce, Curran *et al.*, 2015; Graham *et al.*, 2016).

Despite the various changes proposed by UNESCO to encourage social participation in heritage management (Brown and Hay-Edie, 2014), one wonders whether significant work has been done regarding the OUV. Considerable contributions have been done in theory, but there is still a wide gap between the supposedly global perspective implied by inclusion on the WH List and local perspectives that endow cultural heritage with specific meanings.

The global/local duality raises numerous theoretical questions about WH management and the definition of the OUV, as stated in the academic literature (Cameron and Rössler, 2018). Perhaps UNESCO should consider the following questions: Can genuine participatory engagement in WH processes be achieved when external assessments differ from local perceptions? Is it possible that the OUV, which is frequently the outcome of technical dossiers created to gain WH designation, is a technical artifice that is far removed from communities' perceptions of heritage? There are also practical questions regarding the improvement of WH management processes that the institutions should consider: Can the community's values and opinions about what they consider being cultural heritage incorporated into management so that it becomes part of the OUV? The monitoring and evaluation of OUV by local people would allow us to better face the challenges of conservation and management of these heritage assets (Cameron and Rössler, 2018).

2. Research methodology

Academics recognize that all research methods have their limitations. Quantitative methods make it possible to evaluate hypotheses by generating quantifiable data that establish objective associations or correlations (Allwood, 2012; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Qualitative methods explore meanings more deeply and seek to understand relations amongst social subjects heuristically (Guerrero, 2002). Both methodologies have inherent biases that can be neutralized by combining the two in a mixed methodology that provides

understanding of the research problem by highlighting the similarities or inconsistencies between the two sets of results (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Allwood (2012) argues that researchers who choose to use mixed methodology must justify clearly why it is necessary. In our case, our main objective was to identify disparities between the authorized discourses of OUV and public perceptions of heritage value (Ateca-Amestoy *et al.*, 2021). To achieve that goal, we employed both quantitative and qualitative procedures [1].

The quantitative approach involved a probability sample of 400 random surveys that were extrapolated to the entire population in the canton [2] of Cuenca. The sample size was collected from the estimated population of the urban parishes (636,269 inhabitants, INEC, 2017), with 95% confidence. Since not all parishes have the same population density (INEC, 2010), the sample was stratified to improve balance. Given the lack of studies that use probability sampling to study perceptions on WH (Molina, 2019a, b), we drew on the surveys on citizen perception of Cultural Heritage conducted out in Edinburgh (Edinburgh Council, 2011) and Victoria, Australia (The Heritage Council of Victoria, 2014). In addition, we collected data on the local context generated from primary sources, such as budgets, programs and projects of all the local public institutions involved in heritage management.

The questionnaire for the survey employed ten-point Likert scales with pairwise discrimination to avoid central tendency bias. The Likert scale is one of the most reliable instruments for measuring perceptions of a particular phenomenon, as it provides clear responses indicating different degrees of opinion (Jebb *et al.*, 2021).

The data obtained were coded in the SPSS software and percentages were obtained for each item. To generate supplementary information, two open questions were also asked about citizens' knowledge of the OUV and the elements of the historic centre of Cuenca with which people identify [3]. The responses were coded in categories based on response frequencies.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested to assess its reliability and refine the questions. The final survey information was collected by 52 trained interviewers in public places with intense pedestrian traffic. The surveys conducted were randomized during the first two weeks of April 2017 in two-hour periods (morning and afternoon), on different days.

For the qualitative analysis, we employed an ethnographic approach that Guber, (2001) has described in three ways, as focus, method and text: a means of understanding social phenomena from the perspective of actors; a type of fieldwork; and a text that relates theory and fieldwork with the support of ethnographic data. The ethnographic method is based on fieldwork and what Clifford Geertz (1973) called dense description, an intellectual endeavour to probe the complexities, networks and structures of the meaning of social events in context. Two procedures were employed:

- (1) **In-depth interviews** with 40 frequent users of the historic centre of Cuenca (shopkeepers and residents). The interviews—based on ethnographic questionnaires—were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis. The interviewees came from peri-urban, rural, or working-class neighbourhoods.
- (2) **Written consultations**, employing an open-ended questionnaire, sent by convenience sampling via email and social networks to inhabitants of different neighbourhoods in the city. The questionnaires were answered by 150 informants (31–60 years), mostly middle and upper-class (94.4%). Nearly 50% had some connection with culture or cultural and heritage management.

Open coding was used to analyse the in-depth interviews, written consultation, and to create study categories. Axial coding was used to establish relationships and subcategories. As these are studies that involve social participation, all the ethical requirements for the research were voluntarily met, including prior informed consent. It's important to note that the results

of the qualitative component of the survey will be compared with the data generated by the ethnographic method.

3. Research context: the historic centre of Cuenca as WH site

Cuenca is located in the southern Andes of Ecuador, at an altitude of 2,538 metres above sea level. The canton of Cuenca has an estimated population of 636,269 inhabitants (INEC, 2017). Its mountainous relief and the four rivers that run through the city have had a major influence on its history, culture and physiognomy. The historic centre of Cuenca, accounts for 18% of the city's population (60,173 inhabitants) (INEC, 2010). Declared a "National Cultural Heritage Site" in 1982 and later, in 1999, became a WH site by UNESCO, led by the nomination initiative by the Municipality of Cuenca.

The area recognized by UNESCO has a surface area of 224 hectares, split between 178 of the historic centre, 30 of the special areas and 15 of the archaeological area. In addition, 1836 hectares were also recognized as an area of special protection due to their links with the historic centre, especially in terms of landscape (Figure 1).

The dossier for the inclusion of the historic centre of Cuenca into the WH List described a set of cultural values associated with the landscape. On the one hand, the document highlighted the city's relationship with the Andes and with natural elements, such as the rivers, determining factors in urban life and as the setting for the social and cultural practices

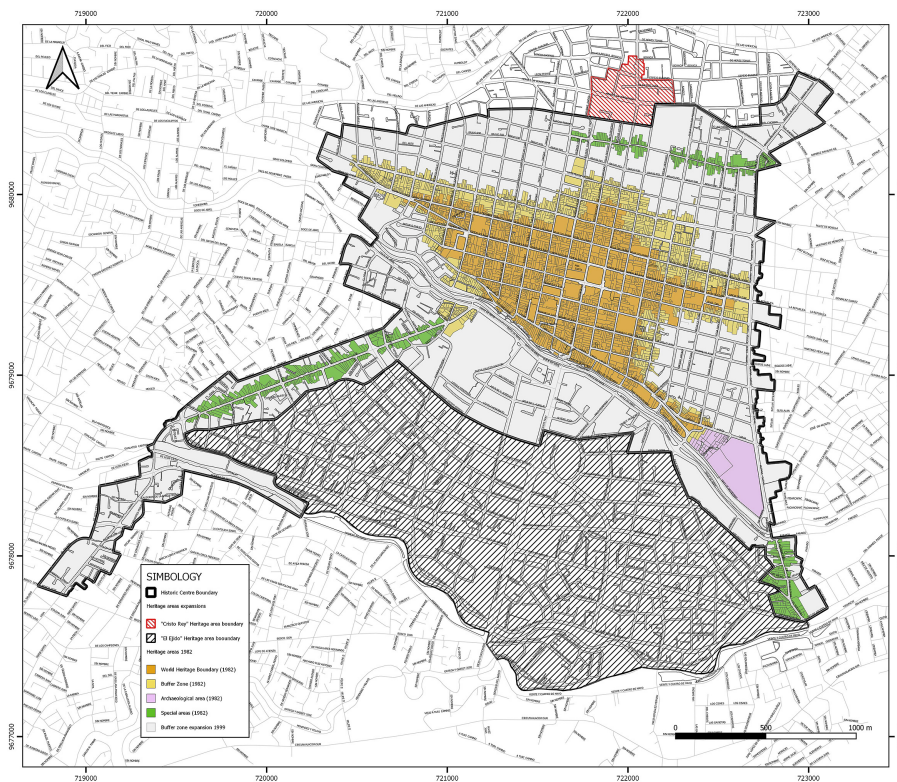


Figure 1. Delimitation of the Historic Centre of Cuenca, special areas, archaeological and buffer zones

Source(s): Dirección General de Áreas Históricas de Cuenca 2021

of its inhabitants. The area known as *El Barranco* on the banks of the *Tomebamba* river [4], was proposed as an OUV because it provides an amalgam of *mestizo* architecture (Andean Baroque) which has architectural and urban elements from all historical periods (Cañari, Inca, Colonial, Republican and Contemporary). Furthermore, the dossier focused on indigenous, Spanish and *Mestizo* cultural coexistence, emphasizing the Renaissance checkerboard urban design set out in the first half of the 16th century. The grid extends from the Central Plaza and takes in two hundred blocks broken up by wide, sunny, cobbled streets and public spaces such as squares, parks and church porticos, giving form to the identities of the city's traditional neighbourhoods.

Although the OUV proposal prepared by the Municipality sought UNESCO's recognition in four of the six cultural criteria for inclusion on the WH List, the WH Committee recognized only three:

Criterion (ii): Cuenca illustrates the perfect implantation of the principles of urban planning of the Renaissance in the Americas.

Criterion (iv): The successful fusion of the different societies and cultures of Latin America is symbolized in a striking manner by the layout and townscape of Cuenca.

Criterion (v): Cuenca is an outstanding example of a planned inland Spanish colonial town (UNESCO, 1999).

The heritage site is regulated, managed and administered based on the criteria recognized by UNESCO and in the building inventories of the historic centre. By focussing principally on built heritage, the inclusion of historic centre of Cuenca on the WH List has given rise to a management model that is largely based on rehabilitating public spaces. Proof of this is that local legislation—despite the changes proposed in the 2008 Constitution and the 2016 Culture Law on issues of social participation and cultural rights—could not mediate effectively between the need to protect cultural heritage and the needs of residents.

The difficulty of conserving and restoring private real estate, depopulation, gentrification of the historic centre impact of traffic, climate change and the property market are examples of a failure to take society's views into account in heritage management. We should note that no management plan has been implemented in the historic centre of Cuenca. These long-standing problems, as pointed out in the retrospective dossier prepared by the Municipality of Cuenca for the WH Centre in 2010 [5], reflect a fragility because the inhabitants lack of knowledge of the OUV.

4. Findings

4.1 Results of quantitative research

The data collected in the survey on local perceptions of the heritage values in the historic centre of Cuenca revealed that Cuenca's inhabitants' views of the OUV do not correspond with the elements recognized in the UNESCO declaration.

First, we asked respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree (on Likert scales from 1 to 10) with statements about the WH of the city (Table 1). The data reveals that, on average, there is high esteem and considerable concern for the city's WH status. This contributes to a feeling of social well-being and reflects the high percentages gathered in the first three questions: Whether it was important to provide education about the city's cultural heritage (item 1) if living in a WH city makes citizens feel happy (item 2) and whether heritage should be acknowledged (item 3).

To determine whether events occurring in the historic centre affect people's well-being, we asked the respondents if they were concerned by them. Results indicated residents care about WH (item 4). For a broader picture, we also asked about the availability of public information

Items	Rating of inhabitants (percentage of answers that agree with the question) Scale from 1 (don't agree at all) to 10 (completely agree)				
	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
1. It is important to provide education on local cultural heritage	1.1	1.8	9.3	21.7	66.2
2. Living in a WH city makes me happy	2.1	2.5	18.4	36.1	41.0
3. It is important for the inhabitants of Cuenca to acknowledge the cultural heritage in the historic centre	0.3	1.8	16.3	24.4	57.4
4. I am concerned about what happens in the historic centre	5.4	8	25.6	32.9	28.2
5. I think that the public information about the historic centre is:	1-2 Very limited	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10 Very plentiful
	8.8	14.2	32.8	25.6	18.6

Table 1. Rating in percentages of social perceptions of the historic centre of Cuenca

about the historic centre (item 5). The mean scores suggest people are uncertain about the information on OUV. It thus seems to be the case that the less official information there is about the importance of the OUV (which is the case of Cuenca), few people believe the OUV are essential for the long-term conservation of the WH site.

Concerning the survey's open-ended questions, Table 2 indicates large generic answers to the first question of why people believe the historic centre of Cuenca has WH status. Categories such as historic architecture (68%), culture and tradition (41%) and other reasons (38%) indicate that the majority of inhabitants in Cuenca don't recognize the OUV defined by UNESCO.

The UNESCO OUV are not well identified by society, so which heritage elements do the inhabitants of Cuenca identify with? The data in the second question (Table 2) provides specific answers. People identify with most are churches, parks and *plazas*. We believe that built cultural heritage is the most valued category due to people's aesthetic appreciation and the association of these spaces with memory, daily life, socialization and religious practices. Our conclusion relies

	% Of responses per topic	Number of responses/400
<i>1. Why do you think that Cuenca has World Heritage status?</i>		
Historic architecture	68.25	273
Tradition and customs	22.5	90
Culture	20.7	83
History	13.0	52
Natural environments	9.5	38
Beauty	10.2	41
Various reasons	9.5	38
People	8.7	35
<i>2. Which of the following heritage aspects in the historic centre do you identify with?</i>		
Churches and historic architecture	39	156
Parks and squares	32.5	130
Festivities	19.5	78
Rivers and mountains	15.5	62
Gastronomy	10.5	42
Others	18	72

Table 2. Percentage of main aspects described as heritage values in open responses on Questionnaire [6]

on the great importance given to intangible heritage in relation to the historic centre, with numerous references to religious festivities such as the *Pase del Niño* on Christmas and the festivities of *Corpus Christi* and Carnival.

The natural environment, especially rivers and mountains, is also considered an outstanding heritage element (16%), with references made to memories and well-being generated by these spaces. Therefore, the population's perceptions of the values of the historic centre of Cuenca have more to do with the way of life than with the historical values recognized in the designation of WH status. The OUV are blurred and less significant than other elements of social life. Local people's perceptions of the heritagization of the historic centre thus differ from the technical perspectives of authorized heritage values attributed to the site.

4.2 Results of qualitative research

The qualitative interviews we conducted reinforce the ideas of the perception of OUV's and heritagization in the quantitative survey. Qualitative research shows there are three different social positions on the importance of the WH declaration for the inhabitants of Cuenca: (1) there are people whose views are in line with the official criteria, albeit with some reservations and with different views of their own; (2) there are those who take a more negative view and state that the heritage values make it difficult to restore buildings and they even oppose the values altogether; (3) and lastly, people who are indifferent or do not quite understand what's defined by the WH status accorded to the historic centre.

When asked about reasons for inclusion of the historic centre of Cuenca on the WH List, most of the informants associated WH with the age of the built heritage. They describe it as "old houses", "old churches", "buildings", or "houses which are very old", in line with the institutional discourse. In the words of a street trader in *Plaza San Francisco*:

I understand that cultural heritage is for old houses, for the old things that are there (. . .)there are houses that are very old, and churches that have been restored; but there are new [buildings] that would not be [heritage] (L., woman, trader in the historic centre, 12/7/2018)

Although the urban layout of the historic centre of Cuenca is from the colonial era, the architecture was mostly built after independence. Despite this, people tend to see it as colonial:

It has been declared heritage because of the Colonial houses, old churches, the beautiful cathedrals (G., man, trader in the historic centre, 12/7/2018).

Because really what has been maintained are the houses. The centre is a fusion of a Spanish and Creole city and the streets are laid out as a checkerboard (A., woman, resident of historic centre, 7/7/2018).

Some informants also mentioned culture, art and the existence of cultural centres (museums and libraries) while others referred to the city's public spaces, particularly the cobbled streets and squares. Along with architecture, cultural heritage is associated with manifestations of intangible heritage such as handicrafts, traditions, popular festivals, gastronomy and traditional construction techniques. This broader view of heritage can be seen in various opinions:

It's the capital of a town, it is the mixture of the past and the present of a community and it is what we must take care of; we must protect and keep alive the stories, tales, myths and legends that are woven around it (. . .) It is our life in small parts of the town. (R., man, craftsman living in the historic centre, 15/8/2018)

Cuenca is a city full of heritage and we should have kept it as it was. And it is no longer there, it is now behind us and that makes me very "sad" (A., woman, merchant in the historic centre, 16/7/2018).

Other informants mentioned that the reasons for recognition as WH were traditions, festivals, handicrafts, traditional medicine and gastronomy:

Its fiestas, the *Pase del Niño*; the culture. (P., man, craftsman living in the historic centre, 19/6/2018)

In my opinion, it's because traditions are still maintained, (. . .) such as the bakers, the *toquilla* straw hats, and the baskets. (U., man, craftsman living in the historic centre, 27/6/2018)

It is important for the traditions (. . .) it is the best city that has even has its own clothes, like the Chola *Cuencana* [7] (a dress) (. . .) It is unlike any other city. (D., woman, street trader in historic centre, 12/6/2018)

An interesting aspect usually not associated with heritage from an institutional perspective, but one that informants frequently refer to, are the attributes and behaviour of the people. They believe that the inhabitants of Cuenca stand out for their kindness, good taste, warmth, education, cleanliness, solidarity and friendliness. Some interviews point out that the Cuenca way of life was the reason why UNESCO granted Cuenca WH status:

Because of the people. Our kindness, and our good manners. (M., woman, resident of historic centre, 4/6/2018)

Because of the people's kindness, Cuenca has always been listed because the best people live here, the best mannered, and the best universities. There are a lot of well-educated scholars here, and that is why Cuenca was declared a world heritage site (J., man, resident of historic centre, 14/6/2018)

Another interesting element that appeared in the interviews—and that we have seen in the quantitative data—has to do with aspects related to the city's natural environment, especially the rivers:

A city with a river in the middle is quite unheard of . . . And when the river is full it is beautiful. Cuenca with its river! The Tomebamba River; because there are old things, but there is also the river and the three bridges. (A., woman, resident of the historic centre, 2/7/2018).

Other informants mentioned mainly the value and richness of the heritage and its economic benefits. These informants point out the benefits of tourism, noting its positive effects on the local economy and the international reputation that this entails:

I think that with heritage the city has more value for tourism. We will be able to have more tourists visiting Cuenca don't we? (C., woman, trader in historic centre, 12/6/2018).

In contrast to those who reveal a degree of knowledge and positive attitudes about Cuenca's heritage, there is a group of informants who express a rather negative view. Since the concept of heritage is associated with the institutions responsible for its management, cultural heritage is also linked to what is not allowed, to what cannot be touched, with the difficulty that entails restoring the interiors of buildings. One resident claimed:

What I would ask is that the façades should be maintained, but permission should be given to modify interiors, we are now in a different time; maybe, for example, a room for the children, or something modern. (P., man, resident, and trader in the historic centre, 3/7/2018)

This idea of heritage status as something that prevents the refurbishment and improvement of living spaces was also expressed by other informants, who saw negative connotations to heritage status. A cultural manager living in the historic centre, told us that:

"Heritage, as things stand, is highly dehumanizing. You see, when a house is declared as heritage, you can no longer refurbish it. A house, even economically, you know,' it's like having a chronic illness. (E., man, resident in the historic centre, 19/6/2018).

Another informant, also a cultural manager, pointed out the broad characteristics of heritage and the need to link it to more than just tourism. She indicated that the heritage values of the city go far beyond those adopted in the city's WH status:

It is necessary to manage things correctly and promote tourism in the city; however, I believe that there is an elitist view of culture that is based on colonizing criteria, with definitions of what should and shouldn't be considered as heritage; moreover, the diversity of views expressed in the city should be taken into account and not just one single view of what heritage is supposed to be. Architecture reflects a way of thinking and what has been declared heritage is mostly related to colonial values, with the "enlightened" view imposed on the people. I believe that the ancient trees, the rivers, and the spaces of memory should also be considered heritage. (D., woman, resident in the modern part of the city, 21/8/2018)

Several informants agree that heritage could be static, in complete contrast with WH philosophy. A craftsman in the historic centre complained that he cannot make modifications to his house, which is registered as a heritage site, as he is not granted permits for the changes he requires. This makes his daily life very difficult:

"Is this what cultural heritage is? In other places I see houses falling apart (. . .) cultural heritage? Happy! Well, no! I think that . . . I don't know . . . what is the true reality of cultural heritage? Well, I don't know! (V., craftsman living in the historic centre, 2/7/2018).

This craftsman finds little meaning in heritage status, which he associates with rules, institutions and regulations. This non-dynamic view of cultural heritage is a significant issue when it comes to trying to understand OUV, but mostly how society appropriates the heritage values.

Lastly, another group of responses shows that although "heritage" status is highlighted by different public and private institutions, there are people who do not fully understand the real benefits it brings to the city and its inhabitants. Nor are they familiar with the criteria used to approve Cuenca's inclusion in the WH list. Significantly, some respondents took time to answer, were uncertain, or even expressed a lack of knowledge:

I can't help you with that. (T., woman, resident and trader in the historic centre, 28/6/2018)

Something old, something that should be preserved and conserved, heritage should be something like that (M., woman, street trader in the historic centre, 20/6/2018).

The limited knowledge of the meaning of the term heritage amongst those who live in the WH historic centre highlights their poor understanding of WH and what it might imply. The opinions of various informants indicate a certain distance between technical and institutional criteria and people's perceptions. Many interviewees spoke with pride about WH status, but when asked about the reasons for Cuenca's inclusion on the list, very few were aware of the actual reasons. For them, cultural heritage is related to public institutions' management of the site, especially experts from public agencies. They identify people's kindness as "heritage" and see heritage an administrative process or an item on a list. One informant, a writer, told us that heritage was a mixture of conservation and bureaucracy:

A word that seeks to embrace concepts, aspects of tradition, history and roots within cultural policy. Conservation, preservation and bureaucracy (J., man, resident in the modern part of the city, 4/8/2018).

It is evident that citizens have not appropriated the values that were recognized as exceptional by UNESCO. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that these criteria have not been sufficiently disseminated by management institutions and are therefore not referred to by people who live in the historic centre.

5. Conclusions

Both quantitative and qualitative data reveal local residents' views of the historic centre of Cuenca differ in various aspects from the UNESCO criteria being evaluated differently from OUV. These differences reveal the polysemous nature of heritage and the differences between citizens' diverse views and the OUV official narrative. Local people's construction of cultural heritage has more to do with everyday uses and ways of "inhabiting" heritage, issues not considered in the technical requirements, which are influenced by political decisions (Roigé and Frigolé, 2010; Bortolotto, 2015).

The study demonstrated people's acknowledgement of the OUV of the historic centre of Cuenca is not as expected for a WH site. Although the status prompts a degree of pride among the people, they are not familiar with the reasons for UNESCO's decision. As Arizpe (2000) points out, this is crucial: "It is people with local pride, who want to share their pride with others; and once others give this recognition, it adds to the value of the site. So, the pride of the few becomes the pride of all. Thus, it is the interaction between local and global valorizing that gives strength and continuity to the WH List" (p. 36). The responses also reveal that people are happy to live in a city whose historic centre is a WH site and point to its considerable symbolic significance in the social imaginary. The historic centre continues to have a central character, as a space that is alive and where there is interaction amongst locals and visitors, regardless of whether it is a WH site. This aspect seems very important to us, and we believe that research into WH site management should be pursued because while there are numerous studies on residents' relation to WH OUV, mostly in relation to tourism (e.g. López-Guzmán *et al.*, 2018), there is less research on local people's knowledge and perceptions of heritage values in WH sites.

Despite widespread knowledge of the city's WH status and pride it produces in local community, the people of Cuenca attribute differing values to their heritage, for these reasons, they believe the city was chosen have nothing to do with the OUV recognized by UNESCO. Although most believe cultural heritage is related to architecture, other elements seem to be considered significant, such as manifestations of intangible heritage, the natural environment and even the ways of life and attitudes of the people of Cuenca. On the contrary, the elements officially recognized as OUV, such as "the perfect implantation of the principles of urban planning of the Renaissance in the Americas," "successful fusion of the different societies and cultures of Latin America symbolized in a striking manner by the layout and townscape," and the fact it is "an outstanding example of a planned Spanish colonial town," a lack of knowledge is common by the inhabitants of Cuenca.

We conclude that the inhabitants' construction of Cuenca's heritage value is based on their appropriation of identity and urban space. Local evaluations and a sense of place are relevant than the OUV recorded in the UNESCO decision (Ingold, 2014; Dines, 2016; Pastor Pérez, 2019; Jones, 2021). In our opinion, there are four reasons for this phenomenon:

- (1) The OUV's criteria in the dossiers submitted to UNESCO do not correspond with the values that people attribute to their heritage. They are technical and expert criteria, alien to popular appropriation of heritage. The urban spaces of the historic centre are not only spaces of heritage but places where people live.
- (2) The multiple identities present in the city mean that the authorized WH narrative differs from the symbolic and cultural heritage elements identified by the inhabitants. This significance to the city can be endowed with a range of various political and cultural meanings, which result in differing views of social sectors and the UNESCO declaration.

- (3) The Municipality of Cuenca, the institution responsible for managing the WH site, has not made sufficient efforts to disseminate the criteria for which the historic centre was granted a WH status.
- (4) The historic centre of Cuenca faces management challenges similar to other historic centres in Latin America (Scovazzi, 2011) due to different symbolic meanings given to cultural heritage. Individual views and the clash of imaginaries and different perceptions in uses are common in all historic centres (Hiernaux *et al.*, 2006).

Despite their different perceptions, most interviewees are not critical of the hegemonic view of heritage, accepting official discourses. There is no questioning of elite discourses (Smith, 2015), as discourses are reformulated by the people. Their manner of understanding the historic centre is dynamic, and multifaceted than the criteria applied in the official declaration. This is perhaps because UNESCO and international WH practice, in general, is based significantly on supposedly universal elements and not on local community values.

Although the paradigm of social participation is present in political and technical decisions, this level of participation has not always been accompanied by a revitalization of the dynamics of valorization (Pastor *et al.*, 2021). To incorporate multivocal discourses in heritage practices, decision-makers' and experts' views of heritage should include social perceptions of heritage elements to improve management and uses (Van Geert *et al.*, 2017).

To conclude, our research provides a methodological example that may be useful for future research designed to assess local views on heritage and involve local community perceptions in heritagization processes. As we have pointed out, the notion of heritage is defined and understood in numerous ways. To what extent do OUVs hide local communities' true feelings, emotions and perceptions? What are the true values of Cuenca's heritage? As we have indicated, the perception of the heritage of the local population in Cuenca is closely related to its appropriation and daily use of heritage than the elements defined in the OUV. To receive greater support from the local community in WH management, managers and decision-makers must try to reconcile both views: all heritage is, above all, local, and while universal values may supplement the perceptions of local communities, they cannot replace them. Heritage values comprise of emotions, perceptions and sensations of the local communities determining the social values of heritage. Management that considers both views will achieve a significant horizontal vision of cultural heritage (Pastor *et al.*, 2021) for greater community support and long-term conservation of the WH site.

Notes

1. The original research on the historic centre of Santa Ana de Cuenca in Ecuador was carried out between 2015 and 2020. The research was broader in nature and focused on the relationship between society and heritage.
2. Canton is the word used to designate a political region or local government area in some countries. Ecuador is administratively divided into provinces, cantons, and parishes. Cantons are administered by the municipality and the mayor.
3. Since this survey was conducted for an earlier study, in this analysis we have only selected items that can be extrapolated for this article. For this reason, we have discarded variables that are not relevant to this study. For ease of reading, the order of the selected items has been modified but the content has not been altered.
4. Nomination Dossier of the Historic Centre of Cuenca Ecuador in the World Heritage List, drawn up by the Municipality of Cuenca. (1998).
5. [Municipalidad of Cuenca \(2010\)](#)

6. The categories are devised from the coding of numerous responses, so percentages do not add up.
7. *Chola Cuencana* refers to a woman who is part of a mestizo ethnic group. Her traditional dress is a symbol of the city

Translator: Peter Colins

References

- Allwood, C.M. (2012), "The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods is problematic", *Quality and Quantity*, Vol. 46, pp. 1417-1429, doi: [10.1007/s11135-011-9455-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9455-8).
- Arizpe, L. (2000), "Cultural heritage and globalization", in Avrami, E., Mason, R. and De la Torre, M. (Eds), *Values and Heritage Conservation*, The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, pp. 32-37.
- Ateca-Amestoy, V., Villarroya, A. and Wiesand, A.J. (2021), "Heritage engagement and subjective well-being in the European union", *Sustainability*, Vol. 13 No. 17, p. 9623, doi: [10.3390/su13179623](https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179623).
- Avrami, E. and Mason, R. (2019), "Mapping the issue of values", in Avrami, E., Macdonald, S., Mason, R. and Myers, D. (Eds), *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*, Getty Publications, available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/74916>
- Bortolotto, C. (2015), "UNESCO and heritage self-determination: negotiating meaning in the intergovernmental committee for the safeguarding of the ICH", in Adell, N., Bendix, R.F., Bortolotto, C. and Tauschek, M. (Eds), *Between Imagined Communities of Practice: Participation, Territory and the Making of Heritage*, Göttingen University Press, Göttingen, pp. 249-272.
- Brown, J. and Hay-Edie, T. (2014), "Engaging local communities in stewardship of world heritage: a methodology based on the compact experience", *World Heritage papers*, UNESCO, Vol. 40.
- Cameron, C. and Rössler, M. (2011), "Voices of the pioneers: UNESCO's world heritage convention 1972-2000", *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 42-54, doi: [10.1108/20441261111129924](https://doi.org/10.1108/20441261111129924).
- Cameron, C. and Rössler, M. (2018), "Introduction of management planning for cultural World Heritage Sites", in Makuva, S. (Ed.), *Aspects of Management Planning for Cultural World Heritage Sites*, Springer, Cham, doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-69856-4_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69856-4_1).
- Clark, K. (2019), "The shift toward values in UK heritage practice", in Avrami, E., Macdonald, S., Mason, R. and Myers, D. (Eds), *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*, Getty Conservation Institute, online available at: <https://www.getty.edu/publications/heritagemanagement/>
- Cotte, M. (2012), "World heritage. Concepts and idea", in Douet, J. (Ed.), *Industrial Heritage Retooled. The TICHH Guide to Industrial Heritage Conservation*, Routledge, London, pp. 167-173.
- Curran, R., O'Gorman, K. and Taheri, B. (2015), "Visitors' engagement and authenticity: japanese heritage consumption", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 46, pp. 571-581, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.08.012>
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2017), *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed., SAGE Publications, Newbury Park.
- Dines, N. (2016), "Critical ethnographies of urban heritage in the western Mediterranean region", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 85-88, doi: [10.1080/13527258.2015.1110532](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2015.1110532).
- Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh World Heritage Site, Historic Environment Scotland, Steering Group (2011), "The old and new towns of Edinburgh WHS management plan 2011-2016", available at: <https://plannededinburgh.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/onte-consultationjuly-2016-text-version.pdf>
- Fouseki, K., Taylor, J., Díaz-Andreu, M., van der Linde, S.J. and Pereira-Rodgers, A.R. (2020), "Locating heritage value", in Saville, S. and Hoskins, G. (Eds), *Locating Value: Theory, Application and Critique*, Routledge, New York, pp. 37-50.

-
- Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York.
- Graham, B., Ashworth, G. and Tunbridge, J. (2016), *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*, Routledge, London.
- Guber, R. (2001), *La etnografía, método, campo y reflexividad*, Grupo Editorial Norma, Bogotá.
- Guerrero, P. (2002), *Guía etnográfica para la sistematización de datos sobre la diversidad y la diferencia de las culturas*. Quito: Escuela de Antropología Aplicada UPS, Ediciones Abya Yala.
- Harrison, R. (2012), *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 1st ed., Routledge, London, available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203108857>
- Hiernaux, D., Lindón and Aguilar, L. (2006), *Lugares e imaginarios en la metrópolis*, (coord), Anthropos, Barcelona.
- INEC (2010), “VII Censo de Población y VI de Vivienda del Ecuador”, available at: www.inec.go.cr/sites/default/files/documentos/anuario.../reanuarioestad2010-02.pdf
- INEC (2017), “Conozcamos a Cuenca a través de sus cifras”, Noviembre 1 available at: <http://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/conozcamos-cuenca-a-traves-de-sus-cifras/>
- Ingold, T. (2014), “That’s enough about ethnography”, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 383-395, doi: [10.14318/hau4.1.021](https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021).
- Jebb, A.T., Ng, V. and Tay, L. (2021), “A review of key Likert scale development advances: 1995-2019”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 12, 637547, doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2021.637547](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.637547).
- Jokilehto, J. (2006), “Considerations on authenticity and integrity in World Heritage Context”, *City and Time*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 1-16, available at: <http://www.ct.ceci-br.org>
- Jones, A. (2021), “Public realm ethnography: (non-)participation, co-presence and the challenge of situated multiplicity”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 58 No. 2, pp. 425-440, doi: [10.1177/004209802090426](https://doi.org/10.1177/004209802090426).
- Keough, E.B. (2011), *Heritage in Peril: A Critique of UNESCO’s World Heritage Program*, Washington University Global Studies Law, St. Louis, Vol. 10, p. 593.
- Labadi, S. (2018), “Historical, theoretical, and international considerations on culture, heritage, and (sustainable) development”, in Bille, P. and Logan, W. (Eds), *World Heritage and Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London, pp. 37-49.
- López-Guzmán, T., Pérez, J., Muñoz-Fernández, G. (2018), “Satisfaction, motivation, loyalty, and segmentation of tourists in World Heritage cities”, *Pasos*, Vol. 16, pp. 73-86, available at: http://www.pasosonline.org/Publicados/16118/PS118_05.pdf
- Mallarach, J.-M. and Verschuuren, B. (2019), “Changing concepts and values in natural heritage conservation: a view through IUCN and UNESCO policies”, in Avrami, E., Macdonald, S., Mason, R. and Myers, D. (Eds), *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*, Getty Publications, p. online, available at: <https://www.getty.edu/publications/heritagemanagement/part-two/10/>
- Messeri, B. (2013), “The role of management plans in saving irreplaceable heritage of “outstanding universal value”, European and International Guidelines, *Actas Del Primer Congreso Internacional de Buenas Prácticas En Patrimonio Mundial: Arqueología Mahón*, pp. 535-553.
- Mišetić, A. and Ursić, S. (2015), “Remembering cities: the role of memory in the culturally sustainable development of Dubrovnik (Croatia)”, in Auclair, E. and Fairclough, G. (Eds), *Theory and Practice in Heritage and Sustainability*, Routledge, London, pp. 69-83, doi: [10.4324/9781315771618](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315771618).
- Molina, B. (2019a), “Foros híbridos, participación y gestión sostenible del Patrimonio Mundial. El caso de Santa Ana de Cuenca”, *Methaodos.Revista De Ciencias Sociales*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 225-243, doi: [10.17502/mrcs.v7i2.262](https://doi.org/10.17502/mrcs.v7i2.262).
- Molina, B. (2019b), “La percepción ciudadana sobre la sostenibilidad del patrimonio mundial. El caso del centro histórico de Santa Ana de Cuenca”, *Pensamiento Americano*, Vol. 12 No. 24, pp. 79-95.

- Municipalidad de Cuenca (2010), Expediente Retrospectivo Propiedad C-863, Santa Ana de los Ríos de Cuenca-Ecuador, I. Municipalidad de Cuenca, Cuenca.
- Omland, A. (2006), "The ethics of the World Heritage concept", in Scarre, C. and Scarre, G. (Eds), *The Ethics of Archaeology: Philosophical Perspectives on Archaeological Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 242-259.
- Pastor Pérez, A. (2019), *Conservación Arqueológica Social. Etnografías Patrimoniales en el Barri Gòtic de Barcelona*, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Doctoral Thesis, available at: <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/668161>
- Pastor Pérez, A., Barreiro Martínez, D., Parga-Dans, E. and Alonso González, P. (2021), "Democratising heritage values: a methodological review", *Sustainability*, Vol. 13 No. 22, 12492.
- Ramo, B. (2012), "Merry Go Round; proposte per un manifesto non troppo paradossale", *Casabella, Italian Review of Architecture*, No. 812, pp. 56-73.
- Roigé, X. and Frigolé, J. (2010), *Constructing Cultural and Natural Heritage: Parks, Museums, and Rural Heritage*, Documenta Universitaria/ICRPC, Barcelona.
- Sardón, I. (2013), *Patrimonio de la Humanidad. El Valor Universal Excepcional*, No.2, Axa. Revista de Arquitectura y Arte, Madrid, pp. 1-20.
- Scovazzi, E. (2011), "Centros históricos y cultura urbana en América Latina", *Ciudades*, Vol. 3, pp. 135-154, 1996.
- Smith, L. (2015), "Intangible Heritage: a challenge to the authorised heritage discourse?", *Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya*, Vol. 40, pp. 133-142.
- The Heritage Council of Victoria (2014), "The community perceptions of heritage", available at: <https://heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/Community-Perceptions-of-Heritage.pdf>
- Turner, M. and Tomer, T. (2013), "Community participation and the tangible and intangible values of urban heritage", *Heritage and Society*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 185-198, doi: [10.1179/2159032X13Z.00000000013](https://doi.org/10.1179/2159032X13Z.00000000013).
- UNESCO WHC-99/CONF (1999), 209/22 Report. Twenty-third session 29 November – 4 December 1999, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom99.htm#863>
- Vahtikari, T. (2016), *Valuing World Heritage Cities*, 1st ed., Routledge, London and NY, doi: [10.4324/9781315548425](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315548425).
- Van der Hoeven, A. (2020), "Valuing urban heritage through participatory heritage websites: citizen perceptions of historic urban landscapes", *Space and Culture*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 129-148, doi: [10.1177/1206331218797038](https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331218797038).
- Van Geert, F., Roigé, X. and Conget, L. (2017), *Usos políticos del patrimonio cultural*, Edicions UB, Barcelona.
- Von Droste, B. (2011), "The concept of outstanding universal value and its application: 'From the seven wonders of the ancient world to the 1,000 world heritage places today'", *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 26-41, doi: [10.1108/20441261111129915](https://doi.org/10.1108/20441261111129915).

Further reading

- Alrwajfah, M., Almeida, F. and Cortés, R. (2021), "The satisfaction of local communities in World Heritage Site destinations. The case of the Petra region, Jordan", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 39, 100841.

About the authors

Barbara Molina (first author) holds Ph.D. in Cultural Heritage from the University of Barcelona and Master in Cultural Heritage and Museology, is Research Technician in the Department of Cultural Heritage of the GAD of Cuenca, Ecuador, and is Researcher of the PINMAT PGC2018 096190-B-100 Project. Her areas of research include World Heritage historic city centres management, participatory processes, museology, cultural heritage sustainability and intangible cultural heritage. She is Former

Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Azuay, Faculty of Design, Assistant Professor of Museology at the University of Cuenca, Faculty of Hospitality, Former Smithsonian Fellow intern at the National Museum of the American and Member of ICOM Ecuador. Barbara Molina is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: barbara.molina@ub.edu, baramonei@yahoo.com

Gabriela Eljuri (second author) is Cultural Anthropologist, holds Ph.D. in Society and Culture at the University of Barcelona and Master in Cultural Studies, is Professor-Researcher and Director of the Anthropology Chair at the University of Azuay, in Cuenca-Ecuador, is Former Undersecretary of the Cultural Heritage of Ecuador, is Former Director of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage in Cuenca and, and for several years, worked at the Inter-American Center of Crafts and Popular Arts (CIDAP). Her research focuses on cultural heritage, migration and traditional festivals and handicrafts. She has been external consultant for UNESCO, the National Council for Culture and the Arts of Chile and CRESPIAL.

Xavier Roigé Ventura (third author) is Senior Lecturer of Social Anthropology and Museology at the University of Barcelona, Former Coordinator of the Master in Management of Cultural Heritage and Former Vice-rector. His research deals with cultural heritage, museology, ethnological heritage, memory museums and intangible heritage. At the present, he is the Director of the Research Group on Heritage Anthropology and Director of the project "Intangible heritage and cultural policies". He has a long trajectory in research activities and is author of several publications in the fields of cultural heritage, museology, intangible heritage, memory museums, kinship studies and family history. He has been visiting professor at different universities in different countries.