

Artisanal production. Establishment of an association of toquilla straw weavers in the Nazón parish

Producción artesanal. Constitución de una asociación de tejedoras de paja toquilla en la parroquia Nazón

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the production and marketing of toquilla straw hats in the Nazón parish. The objective was to assess the feasibility of forming an association of toquilla straw weavers in the Nazón parish, evaluating its benefits, challenges, and the applicable legal framework. This activity was identified as one of the main sources of income for at least 25 to 30 families and as a key component of intangible cultural heritage. However, it was evident that most weavers sell their products at low prices (less than \$10 per hat) due to the intervention of intermediaries and the lack of access to more profitable markets. Furthermore, 70.6% of the artisans have not received training, which limits their ability to innovate and improve the marketing of their products. The research adopted a qualitative and quantitative approach, conducting surveys with 17 women from a population of 20, who expressed interest in joining an association. Data were collected from primary sources, including the testimony of the president of the Decentralized Autonomous Government of the rural parish of Nazón, and supplemented with secondary information on regulations and previous studies. Among the most relevant findings, a low level of youth participation in this artisanal activity was identified, which puts its generational continuity at risk. Furthermore, 100% of those surveyed expressed their willingness to form a formal association. It is concluded that the formalization of a weavers' organization, accompanied by training processes, access to technology, and digital marketing strategies, represents a viable solution to ensure the economic and cultural sustainability of this artisanal activity.

Keywords: heritage, crafts, toquilla straw, women, association.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analizó la producción y comercialización de sombreros de paja toquilla en la parroquia Nazón, con el objetivo de

analizar la viabilidad de la conformación de una asociación de tejedoras de paja toquilla en la parroquia Nazón, evaluando sus beneficios, desafíos y el marco legal aplicable. Se identificó que esta actividad constituye una de las principales fuentes de ingresos para al menos 25 a 30 familias, además de representar un componente clave del patrimonio cultural inmaterial. No obstante, se evidenció que la mayoría de las tejedoras comercializan sus productos a precios bajos (menos de \$10 por sombrero), debido a la intervención de intermediarios y la falta de acceso a mercados más rentables. Asimismo, el 70,6 % de las artesanas no ha recibido capacitación, lo que limita sus capacidades para innovar y mejorar la comercialización de sus productos. La investigación adoptó un enfoque cualitativo y cuantitativo, aplicando encuestas a 17 mujeres de una población de 20, quienes manifestaron su interés en formar parte de una asociación. Los datos fueron recolectados a partir de fuentes primarias, incluyendo el testimonio de la presidenta del Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado parroquial rural de Nazón, y se complementaron con información secundaria sobre normativas y estudios previos. Entre los hallazgos más relevantes, se identificó una baja participación de jóvenes en esta actividad artesanal, lo que pone en riesgo su continuidad generacional. A su vez, el 100 % de las encuestadas expresó su disposición a conformar una asociación formal. Se concluye que la formalización de una organización de tejedoras, acompañada de procesos de capacitación, acceso a tecnología y estrategias de comercialización digital, representa una solución viable para garantizar la sostenibilidad económica y cultural de esta actividad artesanal.

Palabras clave: patrimonio, artesanía, paja toquilla, mujer, asociación.

1. Introduction

The artisanal production of toquilla straw hats is an ancient tradition in Ecuador, recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2012. This art, passed down from generation to generation, has been a source of cultural identity and economic development for various communities, especially in the Andean and coastal regions of the country (UNESCO, 2012).

Despite their importance, the weavers of Nazón parish face multiple challenges, such as low selling prices, lack of access to international markets, scarcity of financial and technical support, and the absence of a formal organization to represent them. According to the According to the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC, 2020), the precariousness of artisanal work and the lack of economic recognition threaten the sustainability of this activity. Furthermore, a study by Peña Facundo and Serna Linares (2024) on the productivity of the toquilla straw hat artisanal industry indicates that limited production capacity and dependence on intermediaries hinder market expansion and improved income for artisans.

The formation of a toquilla straw weavers' association emerges as a viable alternative to strengthen their autonomy and improve their working conditions. Formalizing this activity would allow access to financing, training, and more effective marketing strategies (Anchundia-Rodríguez, 2021). Furthermore, it would contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, ensuring the continuity of the artisanal tradition for future generations.

Previous studies have shown that organizing artisans into associations facilitates access to government incentives and fair trade programs (Sabando Santos, 2022). Similarly, experiences in other communities indicate that the formation of formal organizations has

been key to improving the competitiveness of the artisan sector, enabling participation in national and international fairs (National Institute of Cultural Heritage [INPC], 2020).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the feasibility of forming a toquilla straw weavers' association in the Nazón parish, assessing its benefits, challenges, and applicable legal framework. Specifically, it seeks to diagnose the current situation of toquilla straw weavers in terms of production, marketing, and working conditions; identify the main obstacles they face in their artisanal activity, including a lack of training and access to new markets; propose a model bylaw for the establishment of a formal weavers' association; and establish organizational strengthening strategies to improve the sector's competitiveness and sustainability.

2. Theoretical framework

Background of the toquilla straw. Intangible Heritage

The topic of the production of the toquilla straw hat has not been addressed exhaustively, the author Regalado (2021) establishes:

A significant effort is required to review the literature published in previous years, which, in the case of Azuay and Cañar, is particularly extensive. However, this body of literature is understudied and undervalued. This requires a plural perspective, both from the authors' perspectives and from their approaches and points of view (p. 28).

Therefore, a fundamental aspect in the consolidation of the toquilla straw weavers' association in the Nazón parish is a review of the existing literature on artisanal production in the province of Cañar, as it has historically been a key focus of toquilla straw weaving,

and its documentation reflects the sector's evolution, problems, and opportunities. However, although there are studies and historical records on the toquilla straw weaving tradition, much of this literature has been undervalued or understudied in recent research.

This bibliographic review will not only contribute to revaluing the artisanal tradition, but will also lay documented foundations for the design of policies to support the production and marketing of toquilla straw. By recognizing and critically analyzing the existing bibliography, a bridge can be established between historical knowledge and the current needs of the artisanal sector, thus ensuring its sustainability and evolution over time and providing an incentive for the women of the Nazón parish.

Toquilla straw hat weaving is a traditional craft that dates back to the pre-Hispanic cultures of present-day Ecuador. Civilizations such as the Manteña, Jama-Coaque, and Chorrera already used this natural fiber to make baskets and shelter covers (INPC, 2020). However, the use of toquilla straw for hat making, as it is known today, emerged in the 17th century, when indigenous artisans adapted weaving techniques to European hat models (UNESCO, 2012).

In Ecuador, there are two important moments in time. On the one hand, the 1840s, when the first references to an organization in hat production were identified, and on the other, the 1950s, when initiatives to regulate the trade of these products began to be implemented. In particular, since 1952, with the creation of the Economic Recovery Institute, specific measures were promoted to intervene in hat marketing (Regalado, 2021, p. 10).

In 2012, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the traditional weaving of the Ecuadorian toquilla straw hat an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This distinction recognizes the historical and cultural value of this craft, as well as the importance of its preservation for future generations (UNESCO, 2012).

Now, what does intangible heritage mean? Bringing together researchers and stakeholders to discuss heritage has not been difficult; however, ironically, this very ease has generated certain inconveniences, as the term “heritage” has become a broad and almost unlimited concept, as described by Roland Barthes. In its most recent formulation, proposed by UNESCO (2003) with the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), heritage encompasses everything that gives a community or an individual a sense of identity and continuity. In this contemporary approach, heritage is conceived as that which endures, that which is remembered, and to which a special bond is felt. Even a goal, ideal, or project that reflects identity and continuity in a person’s life could be considered part of heritage (Nicolás, 2020).

In particular, intangible heritage constitutes the cultural heritage of a social group, transmitted from generation to generation as a collective and spiritual memory. However, the conceptualization of intangible heritage has not created the identity or memory of a people, but rather has classified certain cultural elements within a specific logic, which has not always been understood by the social actors themselves (Andrade Orellana, Cárate Tandalla, & Freire García, 2020).

The Nazón parish

Nazón is one of the four rural parishes that make up the Biblián canton, in the province of Cañar. Its parish seat is located just 3.2 kilometers from the cantonal center, facilitating connections with Biblián and other nearby towns. Its territory covers approximately 9,020.65 hectares, extending between an altitude ranging from 2,640 to 4,320 meters above sea level. Geographically, the parish is located between the coordinates 2° 37’12” and 2° 43’48” south latitude, and 79° 05’40” and 78° 53’59” west longitude, located in a mountainous environment with significant natural and cultural wealth (Gómez Ríos, 2022).

The Nazón parish shares boundaries with several jurisdictions, strengthening its territorial interconnectedness. To the north, it borders the Cañar canton and the Jerusalem parish; to the south, it borders the Turupamba parish and the Déleg and Cuenca cantons; to the east, is the cantonal capital of Biblián, and to the west, it borders again with the Cuenca and Cañar cantons (Gómez Ríos, 2022). Regarding its parochialization: “(...) together with Turupamba, Official Registry No. 267 of April 23, 1945, was issued. This same registry decreed the elevation to the category of civil parishes of the territorial fractions of the hamlets of the same name (Gómez Ríos, 2022, p. 29). “

One of its potential assets is the population that is knowledgeable about toquilla straw weaving. One of the projects addressed within the Nazón parish's Territorial Planning Plan is a group called “Toquilla Straw Weavers of the San Roque Neighborhood,” which consisted of 20 members, including four teenagers, six older adults, and two men (Gómez Ríos, 2022).

The parish has a total population of 2,232 inhabitants, of which 1,262 are women (56.5%) and 970 are men (43.5%). This figure is significant, as it demonstrates a greater female presence in the community, which supports the relevance of implementing policies to support women entrepreneurs, as is the case with the toquilla straw weavers (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC], 2022).

Nazón has an area of 89.86 km², with a population density of approximately 44 inhabitants per km². This value indicates that it is a low-density area, with a population dispersed across its 13 communities (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC], 2022). This geographic characteristic poses challenges in terms of access to infrastructure, basic services, and connectivity, which must be considered when planning projects that strengthen the production and marketing of toquilla straw weaving.

Comparing data from 2010 (2,569 inhabitants) and 2022 (2,232 inhabitants), a reduction of 337 people is observed in 12 years, representing a negative average annual growth rate of -1.17% (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC], 2022). This population decline could be attributed to migration to cities in search of better economic opportunities, a lack of local employment, or a decline in birth rates.

Population decline is a warning factor, as it jeopardizes the continuity of traditional activities such as toquilla straw weaving if younger generations migrate and there is no succession in learning the craft. In this context, the formalization of the Toquilla Straw Weavers Association is key to generating local economic opportunities, encouraging weavers to remain in their communities, and strengthening the social and cultural fabric.

The production of toquilla straw hats is a craft of great cultural, social, and economic value in Ecuador, recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In the Nazón parish, this tradition has been sustained primarily by women weavers, who face challenges such as market access restrictions, informal employment, a lack of financial support, and a lack of legal security in their work.

Given this situation, the Law Department at the Catholic University of Cuenca - Azogues Campus, in response to a request from the Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) of the Nazón Rural Parish, has identified the need to develop a legal framework that would allow for the formalization of a toquilla straw weavers' association.

Regulatory analysis

Through Official Gazette No. 136, published on February 26, 1993, the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources approved the Statutes of the "5 de Mayo" Toquilla Straw Weavers Association of the Cañar Canton. This approval was granted after reviewing favorable technical reports contained in memoranda No. 496-SDRH-92 of 1992 and No. 31-AJT-92

of January 12, 1993 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Recursos Humanos, 26 de febrero de 1993).

The officialization of this trade association set a precedent for the formal organization of toquilla straw hat producers, allowing access to legal benefits, representation before government entities, and strengthening the artisanal economy. Its creation laid the groundwork for the structuring of similar associations in other producing regions, including Nazón, where formalization of the sector remains a key challenge for improving the working and commercial conditions of weavers.

On April 24, 2013, the commemorative postal issue entitled “The Traditional Weaving of the Toquilla Straw Hat - Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” was approved through Official Registry No. 940. This initiative arose in response to Memorandum No. 2013-GFL-120-CDE EP-PIC of March 12, 2013, by which the General Manager of Correos del Ecuador CDE EP instructed the National Legal Directorate to prepare the corresponding Internal Resolution (Gerente General de Correos del Ecuador CDE EP, 24 de abril de 2013).

This official stamp entered circulation on March 18, 2013, in the city of Montecristi, the historic birthplace of the toquilla straw weaving tradition. The postal issue not only commemorates UNESCO’s recognition of toquilla straw weaving as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2012, but also represents an effort to promote and preserve this ancient tradition. The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), in Article 319, provides:

Various forms of production organization are recognized in the economy, including community, cooperative, public or private enterprise, associative, family, domestic, autonomous, and mixed. The State will promote forms of production that ensure the well-being of the population and discourage those that violate their rights or those of nature; it will encourage production that satisfies

domestic demand and guarantees Ecuador's active participation in the international arena.

Within this legal framework, the State recognizes that the economy can be organized in a variety of ways, including community and cooperative models, as well as public or private, family, and autonomous business structures. Each of these forms plays a role within the productive system and contributes to the country's development. The Supreme Law also provides:

Participatory, transparent, and efficient management will be encouraged in the various forms of production organization. Production, in all its forms, will be subject to principles and standards of quality, sustainability, systemic productivity, labor valuation, and economic and social efficiency (Constitution of the Republic, 2008, art. 320) .

In the organization of production processes, participatory, transparent, and efficient management will be encouraged, with stakeholders having a voice in decision-making and resource management carried out in a clear and equitable manner. Within the legal framework (ibid.), the right to freedom of association and the protection of cultural heritage are guaranteed, fundamental principles for the formalization of the Nazón Toquilla Straw Weavers' Association. Article 66, paragraph 13, recognizes the right of individuals to freely associate, assemble, and demonstrate, which supports the organization of weavers to defend their interests, improve their working conditions, and strengthen the marketing of their products.

In this context, Article 377 of the Constitution establishes that the National Cultural System has the responsibility to strengthen national identity, protect cultural heritage, and promote the diversity of artistic

expressions. Given that toquilla straw weaving was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2012, the State has the obligation to preserve and promote this ancestral practice, ensuring its transmission to future generations.

On the other hand, the Organic Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy (2011), with respect to the associative sector, provides:

It is the set of associations formed by natural persons, with productive or service economic activities, similar or complementary, with the purpose of producing, marketing and consuming lawful and socially necessary goods and services, self-supplying raw materials, inputs, tools, technology, equipment and other goods, or marketing their production in a supportive and self-managed manner under the principles of this Law (art. 18).

Regarding the previous quote, this concept refers to a model of solidarity-based economic organization, in which individuals join together in associations for the purpose of jointly developing productive or service activities. These associations can be made up of individuals who share interests in similar or complementary sectors, allowing for more efficient management of resources and greater production and marketing capacity.

In 2023, the Organic Law to promote the Violet Economy will be issued. Article 16 on Public Policies, in section 4, literal a), establishes that the State must develop actions to promote equal opportunities in employment, which is directly aligned with the formalization project of the Toquilla Straw Weavers Association in Nazón, emphasizing the need to broaden the notion of employment for women and strengthen the mechanisms that drive their productive ventures.

In the case of Nazón, where toquilla straw weaving is an essential economic activity for many women, implementation of this public policy

would formally recognize their artisanal work as a legitimate form of employment, granting them access to labor benefits, social security, and institutional support. Furthermore, strengthening their businesses would involve developing strategies to improve production, optimize marketing, and guarantee fair working conditions.

Furthermore, the General Regulations of the Organic Law to promote the Violet Economy (2023), the article establishes the destination of incentives in the productive sector fits directly with the formalization project of the Toquilla Straw Weavers Association in Nazón, since its focus is on guaranteeing support for women entrepreneurs and facilitating the creation of sustainable businesses.

3. Methodology

This research applied a mixed methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, to obtain a comprehensive view of the situation of toquilla straw hat weavers in the Nazón parish. The study adopted an exploratory-descriptive design. The qualitative phase involved a semi-structured interview with the president of the Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Nazón rural parish, while the quantitative phase consisted of structured surveys with the artisan producers.

The target population consisted of 20 artisans active in the production of toquilla straw hats in the Nazón parish. A sample of 17 women artisans was selected intentionally using a non-probabilistic approach based on their willingness to participate and their experience in the craft. For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a local authority, which allowed us to identify the main challenges and institutional perceptions of the craft.

For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire with closed-ended and multiple-choice questions was developed, validated by

legal and social experts, and evaluated through a pilot test to ensure its content validity and reliability.

The surveys were administered in person, respecting fundamental ethical criteria. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. An informed consent form was used, voluntarily signed by each artisan before beginning the survey, in accordance with the Organic Law on Personal Data Protection (LOPDP).

The quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics, representing the information through frequency tables, percentages, and graphs. This analysis allowed us to identify patterns in production, marketing, working conditions, access to resources, and willingness to form associations.

The fieldwork was complemented by a legal analysis of Executive Decree No. 193 and other regulations applicable to organizations in the popular and solidarity economy, which served as the basis for the development of a model statute for the future association.

This comprehensive methodology ensured a deep understanding of the weavers' economic, social, and legal context, providing solid evidence to support the proposal to establish a formal association in the Nazón parish.

4. Results

In order to gain a detailed understanding of the current situation of toquilla straw hat artisans in the Nazón parish, surveys were conducted with 17 producers, representing 85% of the total sample of 20 people selected for this study. An interview was also conducted with the president of the Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Nazón rural parish. This data collection aimed to identify the main challenges, needs, working conditions, and their willingness to join a formal association. The results

shed light on both the socioeconomic situation of these artisans and the opportunities for organizational strengthening, providing fundamental input for the design of the bylaws. The most relevant findings derived from this data collection are presented below, which will serve as the basis for future proposals and actions to benefit the toquilla straw artisan sector.

Technical interview with the president of the Nazón Parish GAD

Interviewee: Dr. Maritza Calle

Date: 09/01/2025

Location: Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Rural
Parish of Nazón

Production context

- Question: How many families are dedicated to the production of toquilla straw hats in the parish?
- Answer: Currently, approximately 25 to 30 families depend on this craft activity.
- Question: What is the main source of income for these families?
- Answer: The production of toquilla straw hats is their main economic activity, although many families complement it with agriculture.

Production process

- Question: What is the production process of a toquilla straw hat?
- Answer: Production follows three main phases:
- Purchase of straw.
- Alignment and preparation of the material.
- Weaving and shaping the hat.
- Question: What materials are used and how are they obtained?
- Answer: The main raw material is toquilla straw, which is acquired through intermediaries.

- Question: What are the main challenges in the production process?
- Answer: The payment to the weavers is not fair and does not compensate for the effort and time invested.

Marketing

- Question: How are hats currently marketed?
- Answer: Mainly in local markets, although the lack of specialized outlets limits their access to better prices.
- Question: What are the main difficulties in selling the products?
- Answer: There are no suitable physical spaces for direct marketing, which forces us to rely on intermediaries.

Training and resources

- Question: Have you received training on production and marketing techniques?
- Answer: Only one training session has been conducted to date, which is insufficient to improve sales techniques and strategies.
- Question: What additional resources are needed to improve production and marketing?
- Answer: The municipality is required to allocate more resources to support production and generate more efficient marketing mechanisms.

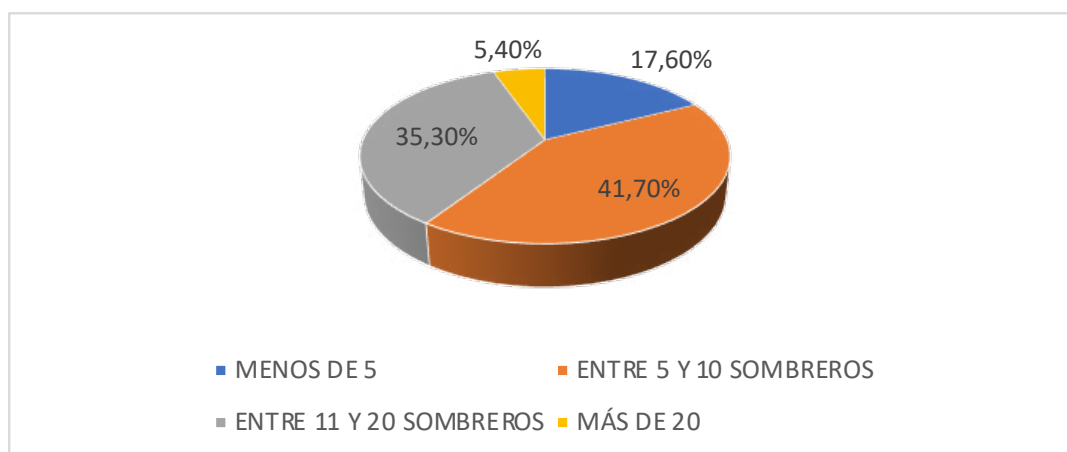
Organization and formalization

- Question: How important is the creation of a formal weavers' association?
- Answer: It is extremely important, as it would strengthen the economy of producers and improve their working conditions.
- Question: What would be the main benefits of the partnership?
- Answer: An association would contribute to:

- Improve organization and access financing.
- Establish fairer prices for products.
- Promote marketing in national and international markets.
- Generate greater visibility and recognition of artisanal work.
- Question: Any additional comments on the current production situation?
- Answer: The weavers' pay is neither fair nor sufficient, which affects the sustainability of this artisanal tradition. Surveys were conducted among 17 women artisans who work with toquilla straw in the Nazón parish.

Chart 1

Monthly production of hats



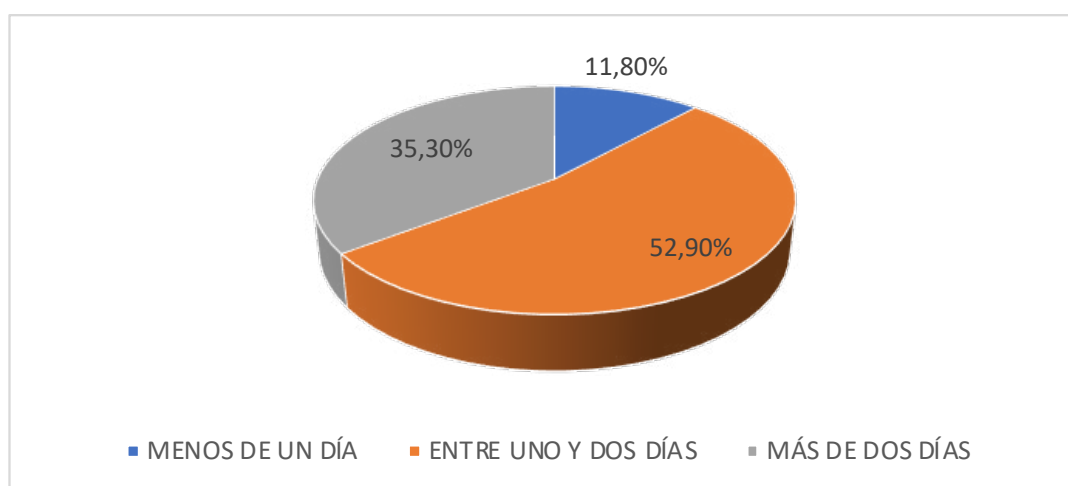
Source: Prepared by the authors.

The majority of weavers (41.7%) have a moderate production of between 5 and 10 hats per month, suggesting that the work is manual and detailed, limiting the quantity they can produce. Only 5.4% produce more than 20 hats per month, indicating limitations in production capacity, either due to lack of time, resources, or demand. Another 17.6% produce

fewer than 5 hats per month, suggesting low productivity in some cases, likely due to factors such as age, lack of inputs, or low profitability.

Chart 2

Production time of a hat

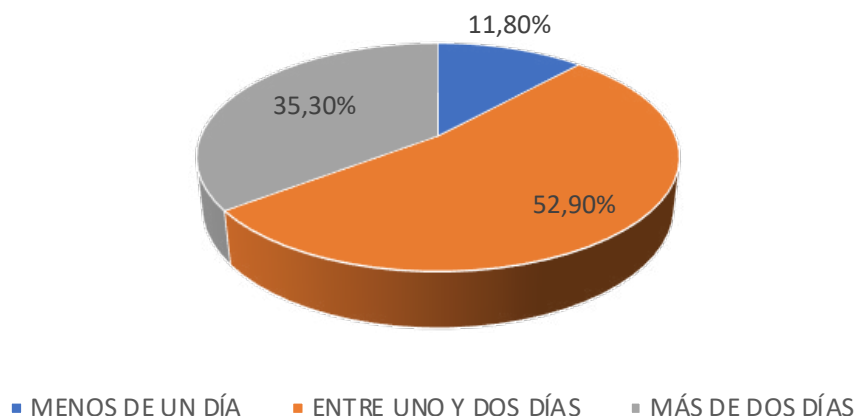


Source: Prepared by the authors.

More than half of the weavers (52.9%) take between one and two days to complete a hat, indicating that production follows a meticulous process. A further 35.3% take more than two days to complete, which may be due to producing higher-quality or more detailed hats. Only 11.8% manage to make a hat in less than one day, suggesting that most weavers cannot significantly speed up the process without compromising quality.

Chart 3

Selling prices of hats

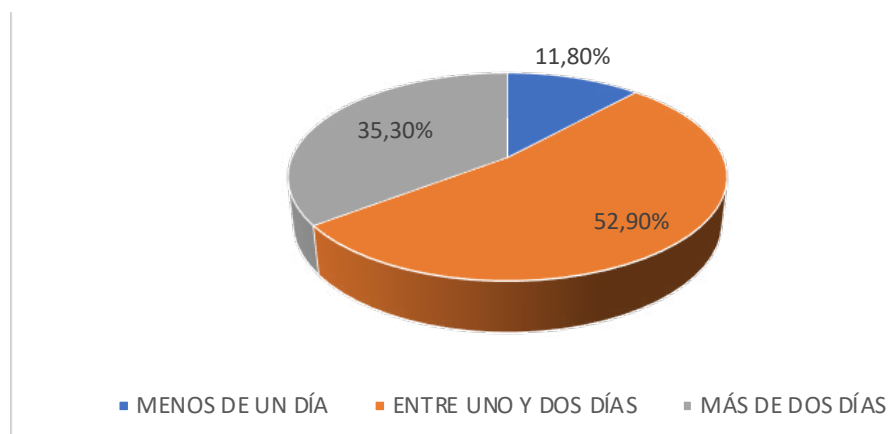


Source: Prepared by the authors.

The vast majority (82.4%) sell their hats for less than \$10, reflecting an undervaluation of the artisanal product and a dependence on intermediaries. No weaver earns more than \$20 per hat, indicating that they lack access to markets that value artisanal work or allow for fair prices. The 17.6% who sell between \$10 and \$20 may be accessing better markets or producing higher-quality hats. The low selling price, compared to the production time, suggests that the profitability of the activity is low and that marketing strategies and access to more profitable markets are required.

Chart 4

Income satisfaction from the sale of hats

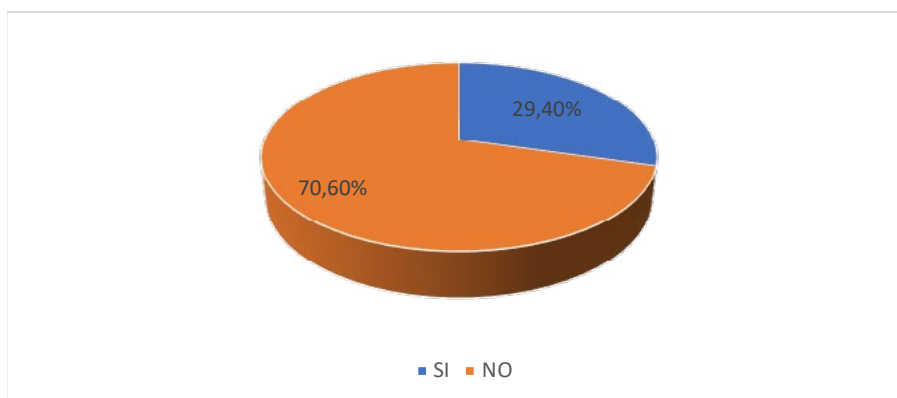


Source: Prepared by the authors.

Nearly half (47.1%) of weavers are dissatisfied, confirming that their current income does not cover their financial needs. Forty-one percent (41.2%) say they are somewhat dissatisfied, meaning that the majority of weavers do not perceive their activity as profitable. Only 11.7% (combining satisfied and very satisfied) are satisfied with their income, highlighting the urgent need to improve sales prices and marketing.

Chart 5

Access to training on production techniques

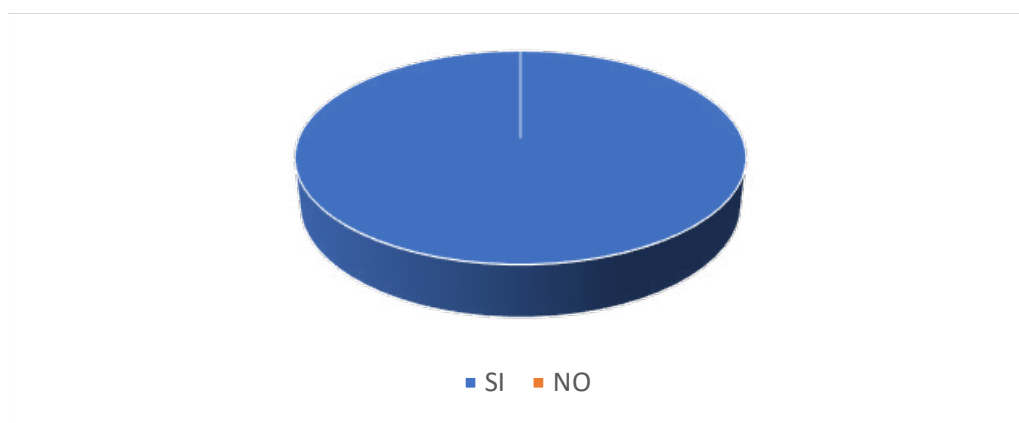


Source: Prepared by the authors.

Lack of training affects 70.6% of weavers, limiting their access to better techniques, production time optimization, and marketing strategies. The 29.4% who have received training represent a minority, indicating a lack of institutional support to strengthen their knowledge and skills. Implementing technical and commercial training programs would be key to improving production and increasing profitability.

Chart 6

Formation of an association for women weavers in the Nazón parish



Source: Prepared by the authors.

All women who weave toquilla straw are 100% interested in joining an association.

5. Discussion

The results of this research reflect the complex reality faced by toquilla straw weavers in the Nazón parish, where artisanal production represents not only a means of economic support but also a fundamental element of cultural identity. However, the findings reveal multiple

structural limitations that affect the profitability of the activity, its sustainability, and the well-being of the artisans.

One of the key problems identified is the low wages per hat, with 82.4% of weavers selling their product for less than \$10, despite the fact that more than 88% take at least a day to make. This confirms the existence of inequality in the value chain, where intermediaries obtain greater profits at the expense of the precariousness of artisanal labor (Gaudin & Pérez, 2020). This phenomenon has been documented in previous studies on the popular and solidarity economy, where the lack of direct market access and dependence on external actors limit the growth of small producers (Gaudin & Pérez, 2020).

Another significant finding is the lack of training and technical assistance. 70.6% of weavers have never received training in production or marketing, which restricts their ability to innovate, diversify products, and access more profitable markets. Studies in other toquilla straw-producing communities have shown that training in advanced weaving techniques, time management, and digital marketing can increase income (Aguirre Castro, 2018).

The study also shows unanimity in favor of forming a formal association, with 100% of those surveyed expressing interest in this initiative. The creation of associations has improved negotiating capacity, provided access to credit, and strengthened national and international marketing (Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural [INPC], 2024).

In contrast to these challenges, the analysis also reveals strategic opportunities for strengthening the activity. Global demand for authentic artisanal products has grown in recent years, especially in luxury and fair trade markets (UNESCO, 2012). If weavers manage to organize and access these markets, they could multiply their income and reduce their dependence on intermediaries. To achieve this, it is essential that local authorities and the State implement policies to incentivize artisanal

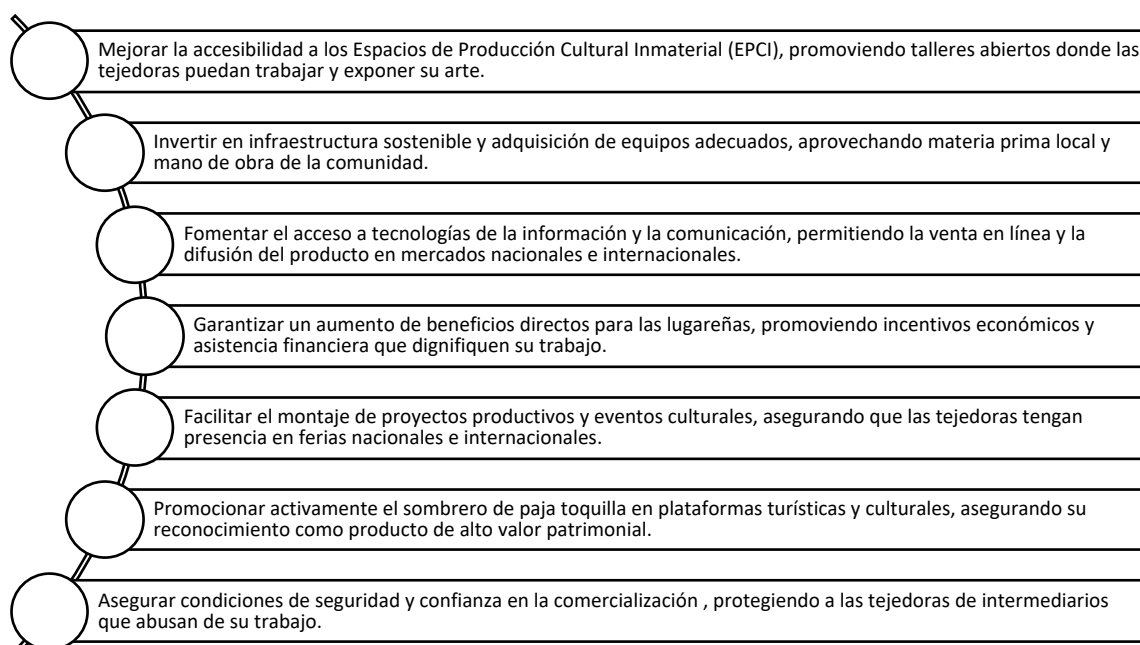
production, such as accessible credit, marketing opportunities, and ongoing training programs (Popular and Solidarity Economy Law, 2011).

Strategies and proposed statutes for strengthening artisanal production in Nazón through the establishment of an association.

In this sense, the production of toquilla straw hats in Nazón faces significant challenges in terms of remuneration, market access, and organizational strengthening. However, the results of this research suggest that, through appropriate training, financing, and direct marketing strategies, it is possible to transform this activity into a model of sustainable and equitable economic development for the weavers, ensuring the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Chart 7

Complementary strategies to strengthen the artisanal economy in Nazón



Source: Prepared from Mejía & Varón Parra (2016)

As part of its commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of toquilla straw hat weavers, the Law Department at the Catholic University of Cuenca has developed a Statute for the establishment of a formal association. This statute was developed in accordance with Executive Decree 193 (2017), specifically Article 12, with the goal of guaranteeing the artisans' labor rights, facilitating access to state benefits, promoting entrepreneurship, and strengthening the marketing of their products. In this way, the program seeks to establish a legal framework that protects and regulates their activity.

The statute will establish and regulate at least the following aspects:

Table 1.

Contents of the Statute

Aspect	Description
Name, scope of action and address of the organization	Defines the official name of the organization, its purpose, and the location of its headquarters.
Territorial scope of the organization	Determine the geographic extent in which the association will operate.
Aims and objectives of the organization	It establishes the main purposes of the association and will carry out volunteer activities for social action and development.
Organizational structure	It defines the internal composition of the association and its governing bodies.
Rights and obligations of members	Specifies the rights and duties of those who are part of the organization.

Method of election of dignities and duration of office	Explains the selection process for leaders and their term in office.
Powers and duties of internal bodies	Details the functions of the board of directors, administrators and legal representatives.
Social assets and resource management	Regulates the financial management and assets of the organization.
Form and times of calling general assemblies	Establishes the procedure and frequency with which general meetings will be held.
Quorum for the installation of general assemblies and the decision-making quorum	Defines the minimum number of members required to validate decisions.
Mechanisms for including or excluding members	It establishes criteria for the admission and dismissal of members, guaranteeing the right to due process.
Reform of statutes	Describes the procedure for modifying the organization's bylaws.
Dispute settlement regime	Establishes mechanisms to resolve internal conflicts.
Causes and procedure for dissolution and liquidation of the organization	Defines the reasons and process for terminating the partnership

Source: Prepared from Executive Decree No. 193 (2017)

This statute aims to provide weavers with a solid regulatory framework that allows them to operate in an organized and efficient manner, ensuring respect for their rights and promoting their economic and social development.

6. Conclusions

Research on the production and marketing of toquilla straw hats in the Nazón parish has identified the main challenges and opportunities for artisanal weavers. The production of toquilla straw hats is a fundamental activity for the economy of at least 25 to 30 families, being one of their main sources of income. At a heritage level, this practice represents an invaluable cultural legacy, linked to the community's identity and internationally recognized by UNESCO. However, the remuneration per hat is low, as 82.4% of weavers sell their products for less than \$10 USD, which does not compensate for the effort and time of production. Furthermore, marketing is carried out primarily through intermediaries, reducing the weavers' profits and limiting their access to more profitable markets. Likewise, the lack of adequate physical spaces for direct sales restricts their visibility in the national and international markets.

Another problem identified is limited training and access to technology, as 70.6% of weavers have never received training in advanced weaving techniques or marketing strategies. Furthermore, they lack access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) that enable digital sales and promotion on online platforms. This not only limits their competitiveness but also restricts their reach to new consumers. Another worrying aspect is the lack of generational renewal, as the majority of active weavers are between 31 and 65 years old, while only 17.6% are young people under 30, which jeopardizes the continuity of the craft. To ensure its continued viability, it is urgent to create incentives to interest new generations in learning to weave toquilla straw.

A key element for strengthening the sector is formalization and collective organization. The creation of a formal weavers' association would strengthen their market position, access financing, and improve their productive organization. However, 70.6% of weavers have expressed interest in forming associations. To overcome the problems in this

area of intangible heritage, it is essential to incorporate technical and commercial training focused on improving product quality, optimizing production time, and facilitating access to international markets. It is also necessary to promote the use of digital tools for promoting and selling hats on e-commerce platforms, in addition to promoting public policies that support craftsmanship by providing infrastructure, financing, and raising the profile of artisanal activity.

Furthermore, it is recommended to create intergenerational training programs, where experienced weavers teach young people, ensuring the continuity of the craft, as well as implementing tourism and cultural promotion strategies, positioning the toquilla straw hat as a craft product of high heritage value. Therefore, toquilla straw weaving in Nazón is an activity that combines economic, social, and cultural value, but it faces multiple challenges that threaten its sustainability. The lack of fair prices, training, market access, and generational renewal puts the continuity of this tradition at risk. The formalization of a weavers' association, along with the support of public policies and commercial innovation strategies, can represent the key to transforming this activity into a sustainable development model, guaranteeing better living conditions. life for artisans and the preservation of their cultural legacy.

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