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Financial and sustainable management of the gastronomic industry in special customs regime areas*

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Abstract

The municipalities of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure, in Colombia, historically face a socioeconomic complexity marked by inequality, natural wealth, and the cultural heritage of the Wayúu indigenous people. The rich local gastronomic industry of ethnic character is driven by the inhabitants themselves from their cultural activities, causing imbalances and precarious states for its efficient exploitation. Therefore, the objective of this documentary-hermeneutic research seeks to analyze the ethnic gastronomic industry of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure, linking the financial and economic dynamics resulting from the creation of these municipalities of Colombia's La Guajira as special customs regime zones. Although the creation of this regime dates back more than two decades, local ethnic gastronomy has had little impact on the systematic offering to the client under tourism standards; therefore, it has had little impact on the development of the region. The value chain of Wayúu gastronomy begins with the production of local products and their processing using ancestral techniques, culminating in an informal offer to the client. In conclusion, it is necessary to implement support and public policies for access to financing for formal enterprises, with their respective training, in order to satisfy the current growing demand in an efficient manner.

Keywords: The Colombian Guajira; gastronomy; special customs regime; Wayúu ethnic group; development.

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Gestión financiera y sostenible de la industria gastronómica en zonas de régimen aduanero especial

Resumen

Los municipios de Maicao, Uribia y Manaure, en Colombia, enfrentan históricamente una complejidad socioeconómica signada por la desigualdad, la riqueza natural y el patrimonio cultural del pueblo indígena wayúu. La rica industria gastronómica local de carácter étnico, es impulsada por los mismos pobladores desde su hacer cultural provocando desequilibrios y estados precarios para su eficiente explotación. Por ello, el objetivo de esta investigación documental-hermenéutica procura analizar la industria gastronómica étnica de Maicao, Uribia y Manaure, vinculando la dinámica financiera y económica producto de la creación de estos municipios de La Guajira colombiana como zonas de régimen aduanero especial. Aunque la creación de este régimen data de más de dos décadas, la gastronomía local étnica ha tenido poco impacto en ofrecimiento sistemático al cliente bajo estándares turísticos, por lo tanto, ha sido de bajo impacto al desarrollo de la región. La cadena de valor de la gastronomía wayúu se inicia con la producción de productos locales, procesamiento de estos aplicando técnicas ancestrales, para culminar con una oferta informal al cliente. En conclusión, es necesario entonces, implementar soporte y políticas públicas para el acceso al financiamiento a emprendimientos formales, con su respectiva capacitación, para satisfacer la creciente demanda actual de manera eficiente.

Palabras clave: La Guajira colombiana; gastronomía; régimen aduanero especial; etnia Wayúu; desarrollo.

Introduction

The immeasurable cultural heritage of La Guajira, Colombia, exhibits a gastronomic richness of incalculable value. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], 2023), this richness is influenced by ancestral values and customs of the Wayúu ethnic group, which represents the largest native group living in the territory, along with other racial phenotypes. Furthermore, the department presents a perspective of contrasts marked by the abundance of natural and cultural resources, coupled with existing social inequalities (Uribe-Gómez & Londoño, 2023) that generate a social complexity of inevitable praxeological relationship.

From this approach, with the territorial triangle formed by the municipalities of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure declared as

a Special Customs Regime Zone (ZRAE), Wayúu ethnic gastronomy stands as an element capable of transforming the region's economy (Cujía et al., 2017). Even though the zone has undergone significant transformations (Paz et al., 2023), the achievements since its creation do not meet the expectations of the expected social and economic development. Following the same purpose, the implementation and regulation of the opportunities offered by this special regime have not been effective.

For this reason, this documentary research hermeneutically reflects through the analysis of the ethnic gastronomic industry of the municipalities under study, to observe its implications with the created customs regime and visualize opportunities for support that can be provided from governance to transform the potential of Wayúu gastronomy throughout its value chain, into a pole of social development for the well-being and improvement of the quality of life of the residents.

1. General data of the department of La Guajira, Colombia

According to the latest National Population and Housing Census conducted in Colombia during 2018, the department of La Guajira has a population of 880,850 inhabitants (DANE, 2019). This department is a multicultural territory located in the northeastern part of the country, bathed by the Caribbean Sea and close to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The population is distributed in 15 municipalities, with the capital being Riohacha, among other municipalities are: Maicao, San Juan del Cesar, Manaure, Uribia, Fonseca, Urumita, Villanueva. For 2024, a population of nearly 1.06 million inhabitants is projected, representing 2% of the national total (DANE, 2021).

The population of the region is pluricultural, with the Wayúu ethnic group being the most predominant, occupying 35.7% of the population and also inhabiting 98.03% of the national total territory (Cámara de Comercio de La Guajira, 2023). The nuclear family coexistence of this ethnic group is biparental, with a maternal cultural root. An important fact of the Wayúu culture is that the marriages of children are parental arrangements, with the father being the negotiating authority in the union, with the approval of the future spouses (Morales et al., 2009). The matrimonial structure is based on union between clans favoring social ties so that there is cohesion between them.

The population of La Guajira faces significant challenges that have been historical in Colombian society (Paz, 2000), since the region represents one of the departments with the highest poverty, extreme poverty, and social inequality (Uribe-Gómez & Londoño, 2023). Although the department has abundant natural resources such as coal, seafood, and ethnic crafts (Arboleda, 2014), from this approach, there has not been equitable socio-economic development based on the existing wealth that contributes to social welfare.

The municipalities of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure, objects of this research, form a

territorial axis of geographical contrasts and differentiated economic-commercial activity. Maicao represents the commercial point of the department, with buyers coming from Colombia itself, as well as from neighboring Venezuela (Güette, 2012). In fact, according to official data provided by Rodríguez & Londoño (2002), the localities to be studied represent a warm, dry, desert and semi-desert territory, with very high temperatures close to thirty degrees Celsius, which have conditioned economic and cultural activities.

From a demographic-cultural approach, the municipalities under study show a worldview that has shaped the social roots of the entire department, due to their ancestral practices, recreational and food rituals practiced by the clans of the Wayúu ethnic group and other minority ethnic groups, also ancestral such as: the Wiwa, Kinqui, Ika, and the Kogui (Uribe, 2021). Many Afro-descendant, mestizo, and white residents of the department of La Guajira have self-included in the social and cultural practices of the Wayúu people, further forging the cultural identity of the region (Banks, 2020).

From a socio-economic perspective, Maicao represents the pole of commercial and financial development, not only in comparative analysis with Uribia and Manaure, but of the entire department (Tuirán et al., 2024). In this order, the municipalities of Uribia and Manaure have indicators that show high rates of poverty, due to the scarcity of resources, little commercial activity, and low opportunities. In these territories, there are problems of basic infrastructure, so accessing public services has been an enormous challenge (Ávila, 2016). Despite this, the residents of Uribia and Manaure have generated social and economic resilience, through the realization of survival strategies, with economic practice such as the sale of crafts, subsistence agriculture, informal trade, and artisanal fishing.

The current situation of these municipalities, as well as their geo-strategic position, allow these territories to be placed with a diverse and important tourist potential, since they have beaches, desert ecosystems,

walking routes, ancestral cultural roots, and a typical gastronomy of socio-cultural interest (Cujía et al., 2017). The Colombian government has identified opportunities for growth in the tourism sector in the region (Huertas et al., 2015). However, it is necessary to increase local capacities and services for tourism use.

The municipalities under study present failures in basic services such as: drinking water, electricity, sanitation, and human health care conditions (Salas et al., 2021). On the other hand, the region has high rates of extreme poverty, adult malnutrition, child malnutrition, illiteracy, especially in ethnic communities. Likewise, the territory has been part of the armed conflict in Colombia, which has caused internal and external human displacement (López-Ríos, Cristancho & Posada-Zapata, 2021). The municipalities addressed, especially Uribia and Manaure, present a precarious labor system, presenting a high rate of informal employment that inhibits social development (Rodríguez et al., 2020).

As can be seen, the Municipalities of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure present a series of dichotomies linked to territorial problems, differentiated economic, social, and cultural dynamics. Although these regions constitute commercial hubs of the Colombian nation, there are high rates of poverty and deprivation in the provision of services. However, this has not limited their actions, but has driven resilience through subsistence strategies, diversifying economic opportunities and the possibility of preserving cultural wealth, promoting the equitable development of the Department of La Guajira.

2. Economic and financial dynamics of La Guajira, Colombia

According to the vision of the Cámara de Comercio de La Guajira (2023), the department during a large part of the 19th and 20th centuries developed a commercial dynamic of the primary sector with the neighboring Caribbean islands and Venezuela,

that dynamic today has changed to an extractive economy of mineral resources such as coal, gas, and salt. Likewise, there is moderate commercial activity in the populations of Riohacha and Maicao. An important fact to highlight is that the elements of the economy of the Wayúu are based on traditional activities such as agriculture, fishing, commerce, and ethnic crafts.

However, these Wayúu communities over time have been inserting themselves into commercial and mining activities, overcoming important challenges, such as access to financial services (Simancas, 2022). The extraction of coal and gas has been an important economic event to promote development; however, the cultural, environmental, and social conflict caused by the degradation of ecosystems, territorial transgression, and transculturation of communities has represented a problem still unresolved (Sandoval et al., 2017; Salamanca & Egea, 2019; García et al., 2023), causing forced displacement, violence, and pollution.

It is clear that, the activities described have generated investment, employment, related commercial services, and royalties to the Colombian State. However, the economic benefits have not been distributed to improve the quality of life of the impacted communities (Hernández, 2018). Rather, the imposed extractivist development model has caused serious environmental impacts and displacements, especially in vulnerable indigenous communities. In this sense, Meisel (2007) states that:

The result shows that the economic backwardness of La Guajira before gas and coal was so great that the rapid development of a single sector is not enough to boost the entire economy and thus produce a good level of well-being for its inhabitants. (p. 2)

Tourism, ecotourism, ethno-tourism, and typical gastronomy represent a true alternative to diversify the economic dynamics of La Guajira, as the region presents a potential as a source of harmonious socio-economic development important with the cultures and nature of the region (Cujía et al., 2017). For the case of Uribia, for its gastronomy and unique ecosystem, while for Manaure also for

its gastronomy, its beaches and ecotourism in general. As a premise for the diversification of the economic dynamics, a model of sustainable and equitable development must be imposed.

While the population of Maicao presents an economic dynamic composed of a social fabric of ethnological character, since Arabs, Wayúu, and Alijunas intervene in its economy and in the commercial and financial dynamics (Güette, 2012), they share social scenarios in the city. Foreigners from the Middle East settled in the city base their commercial activity in the area of textiles, trade in household appliances, and the food sector. Generally, it presents financial credit strategies, with little circulating capital, since the investment strategy for economic growth is very relaxed (Angulo & Berrío, 2014).

Uribia represents a municipality of rural demographic character of a dispersed type, since the capital is practically the only concentrated population center (Bravo, 2021). According to Rojas (2014), the economic activities of this municipality are fundamentally goat farming, an incipient trade, tourism, and the export of coal and gas, since Puerto Bolívar is located in its territory, the main export center of mineral coal to diverse markets, there is also a gas pipeline to transport gas to Venezuela.

In the Municipality of Manaure, the main economic dynamics are based on salt exploitation, artisanal fishing, incipient tourist activity that as a whole present's decades of financial and economic difficulties, which derive from the difficulties in accessing financing, little or no training activity to carry out the activities (Ardila et al., 2014). There is in the municipality a small extractives' activity of clays in the Santa Cruz community, this being the main source of supply and employment of the inhabitants of the community (López & Salazar, 2016) practically exploiting it in an artisanal way without knowledge of environmental legislation in the matter.

It is observed that the populations of Maicao, Uribia, Manaure, and in general throughout the department face significant challenges to achieve sustainable development

according to productive capacities. The absence of equity and inclusiveness, access to the financial market to meet financing, advice, and technical support exacerbate the inequalities and difficulties of entrepreneurship in the region, especially in the Wayúu communities. The development and implementation of public policies that address the problem are imperative, in order to generate opportunities for the development of potentialities of the region, such as tourism, ecotourism, traditional gastronomy, among other activities.

3. Value chain in the typical gastronomy of La Guajira

The gastronomic particularity of the department of La Guajira is its rich form of feeding with ancestral traditional products. This constitutes a food value chain that ranges from breeding or cultivation, production, food processing, production of inputs, and commercialization of indigenous dishes (Torres, 2019). The Maicao-Uribia-Manaure triangle are populated centers of the department that offer traditional foods of Wayúu cuisine in formal and informal restaurants, where their specific particularities stand out and differentiate themselves.

From a historical gastronomic approach, it can be affirmed that the ancestral Wayúu food is the origin of the typical food of the entire department of La Guajira, Colombia, even moving to other departmental borders (Malagón, 2021). Currently, many dishes are shown complemented with the cuisine of African and European cultures. Even so, many original typical dishes are preserved, especially in the municipalities of Uribia and Manaure, where the influence of seafood products is decisive in food.

In the municipal spaces of Uribia and Manaure, the breeding and grazing of animals such as goats and sheep is typical as a primary activity, this form of production represents the power of the Wayúu clans and families. Also in this region, artisanal fishing is characteristic, both activities represent family sustenance

and the ability to commercialize or exchange products (Araujo & Camacho, 2021). The hunting of wild animals also constitutes an activity of sustainability in this region of La Guajira, Colombia, where solar dehydration, salting, and smoking constitute the methods and techniques of food preservation (Malagón, 2021).

Good gastronomy and ancestral gastronomy represent a strong milestone for the development of tourism; therefore, the trend of Colombian public policies should be to develop tourist activity in the Upper Guajira, supported by its ancestral food and unique ecosystem spaces to promote the development of the region (Escobar, 2013).

In the territorial spaces of the municipality of Maicao, apart from the grazing of goats and sheep, there is the breeding of cattle, with the consequent production of milk to manufacture the typical coastal cheese of La Guajira, which is an important economic activity in the northern region of Colombia (Lesmes, 2017). Additionally, the region presents better soil quality that favors agricultural crops such as: Corn, yucca, malanga, fruit trees, among other items. In this municipality, being the one that is most linked to commercial activity, opportunities are generated to make productive ventures derived from the processing of primary items, such as restaurants and hotels.

Within the characteristic gastronomic preparations of the region are those made with seafood products, among which are the pickled, fried, stewed fish, and the cachirra, some with particular influence of European techniques (Guerra, 2020). Mojitos of salted fish such as chucho, raya, or dogfish are also made, which consist of a shredded stew based on onion, annatto, and other seasonings. In the coastal region of Manaure and Uribia, food based on seafood is traditional, such as: Ceviche's, turtles, and shrimp cocktails, fish, and other seafood, a dish that is generally accompanied with rice.

A food that must be present in the dishes of the inhabitants of the studied region is the arepa based on white corn, yellow corn,

or purple corn, the latter called *chichiware* (Malagón 2021). One of the most traditional foods in the region is the egg *arepuela* that is filled with beaten egg, sweetened, and moistened with a panela and anise melao (Guerra, 2020). It is typical within the communities the consumption of yucca, since this is part of their daily diet, it is consumed in different presentations, either cooked, fried, or roasted, as well as corn flour buns and funche as traditional foods. Another food that stands out in the diet of La Guajira is corn chicha or Yajaushi.

According to Uriana (2007), the Wayúu woman builds family gardens for survival consumption, that is, the indigenous female participates in the construction of the family fabric from the beginning of the food value chain. In this sense, the woman maintains family gardens to cultivate primary products and prepare the Yajaushi and the Wanna, foods prepared based on auyama, yucca, or millo; as well as the hapuulana, which is a food prepared with corn, beans, auyama, guajiro cucumber, goat tallow, water, and salt; among other dishes prepared as ethnic food is the typical poi, which is a preparation of white beans and goat tallow.

According to Araujo & Camacho (2021), one of the representative dishes of the Wayúu ethnic group is the Friche, a food prepared based on meat, viscera, fat, and blood of the goat, it is sautéed with few vegetables in its own fat and salt. Another way to consume the goat is in jerky, stewed, and in Shaapülana, which is a soup with beans, with goat tallow and vegetables. In the Wayúu ethnic group, the central role of women in the feeding of the family is common (López-Ríos, Mejía-Merino et al., 2021), a matter that has been transmitted for generations.

The hunting of wild animals also forms an important part in the way of guaranteeing the food of the Wayúu indigenous peoples, it is common to observe homemade preparations and also served in restaurants food prepared with iguana, deer, rabbit, guartinaja, armadillo, saíno, and other hunted animals (Rivas et al., 2010), they are usually cooked in stew with

vegetables. The inhabitants consider the game meat exquisite. Although poaching is prohibited in Colombia, ethnic groups use this method as a survival mechanism.

The distribution of food both to restaurants and local markets in Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure is carried out through both formal and informal channels, and food product fairs are often held. Both restaurants and these distribution fairs have contributed to gastronomic tourism in the studied region, increasing the diversity of indigenous products offered. It is important to note that the absence of adequate infrastructure represents difficulties for this business segment to grow rapidly.

4. Special customs regime of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure

The Special Customs Regime Zone (ZRAE), is made up of the territorial spaces of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure located in the northern point of the department of La Guajira, was created by Decreto 2685 published on December 30, 1999. Along with the territorial space under study, Tumaco and Guapi and the area of Leticia were also created. Special benefits apply to them for the import and export of essential products for local development, paying only 4% of the tax levied on the value of the merchandise, being exempt from this special regime some products (Naranjo & Zapata, 2012).

In the study area, this special regime has generated another economic dynamic, as it maintains a differential advantage over other regions, even though it has been more than two decades, human results have been slowed down -at least until 2008- promoting only the business dynamic, to the detriment of the social and integral welfare of the citizen, which has caused that it has not been possible to overcome the unsatisfied basic needs of the inhabitants (Bolívar, 2009). This consideration in sight, perhaps, is the product that the resources destined to create a fund for such purpose, are increasingly smaller.

According to Aragón (2018), in the period prior to the creation of the Special Customs Regime Zone Maicao, Uribia, Manaure, there was economic prosperity, it was a period of boom and local economic development, especially Maicao, people were employed with job permanence. After the creation of ZRAE from the year 2000 with the creation of the regulation of the decree and so many other modifications, affected the commercial activity to the point of leading it to a crisis, losing many jobs.

Beyond the positions described above, the gastronomic samples and uses of the service itself have a direct link with tourism, ethno-tourism, ecotourism, and the growth of transport. In this sense, Ochoa et al., (2014) affirm that the growth of tourism in the department of La Guajira has been sustained during the first half of the 2010s, observing a growth of more than two annual digits of the segments of domestic travelers, visitors to national parks, and use of the hotel and restaurant service.

In fact, according to the Cámara de Comercio de La Guajira (2023), foreign trade in items of import and export of goods and services has been increasing for the Maicao area, as well as sales, segments that also drag along the gastronomic sector. In the same vein, between 2014 and 2021 the active labor population increased by 16.4%, being the only department that experienced growth in the Caribbean region. Another interesting fact is that according to DANE (2023) for the year 2021 the department contributed 1.2% to the national GDP.

A study on the financial situation in the trade, hotel, and gastronomy sector in Maicao for the year 2018-2022 highlights that most of the companies managed to maintain positive net profits, facilitated by the support of electronic commerce (Ayala & Vásquez, 2023). On the other hand, through international relations of trade associations, it has been possible to obtain preferential treatment with suppliers of products and goods from Panama and new trade agreements with Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay as market

options (Villa et al., 2018) a matter that will facilitate commercial movement.

Conclusions

The Colombian Guajira, especially the regions of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure, are scenarios of economic and social contrasts, due to ethno-cultural and economic inequity, with the Wayúu ethnic group being the majority and most representative. This suffers the rigors of poverty and inequality. The coal and gas industry generate the main economic activity; however, the impact on the quality of life has been insufficient. The tourism sector and the activities described drive the gastronomic sector, which, in the absence of adequate infrastructure and public policies, may represent an alternative that contributes to the socio-economic development of the inhabitants, if the rich ethnic food products of the region are efficiently used.

The tourism sector is a multiplier factor of secondary sectors, such as construction, public services, culture, and gastronomy. Although Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure have been in the Special Customs Regime for more than two decades, the achievements so far have not been sufficient to stimulate the performance of integral economic activity. In the same conclusive order, the value chain of the gastronomic business of La Guajira is fully linked to the cultural, historical, and traditional features of the region; therefore, it is presented as a potential trigger for social development. An adaptive financial policy is necessary, which normalizes access to financing for the inhabitants to develop ethnic and non-ethnic gastronomic activities to meet the needs of the market that is still growing.

In summary, the research has evidenced the complex reality of La Guajira, a diverse department, but with constant challenges, mainly in the municipalities of Maicao, Uribia, and Manaure. This region has tourist potential and resilience to adapt to adversities, so it requires the support of public policies that strengthen its infrastructure and economic

opportunities to move towards the equitable development of all its inhabitants.

Seen in this way, this study provides an interdisciplinary and broad theoretical-documentary vision, which can serve as a theoretical reference for future research on the subject. In addition, the need to improve the scope of financial policies is underlined, through a Special Customs Regime, with an impact on the quality of local life. Despite this, the limitations found lie in the analysis of statistical and specific data on certain items, so future lines of investigation could focus on the economic impacts of ecotourism, the scope of financial programs, the transfer of knowledge to indigenous communities, among other aspects.

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