

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Amazonian Kichwa People

Subjects: [Ethnic Studies](#) | [Anthropology](#) | [Development Studies](#)

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Indigenous peoples are the holders of a great diversity of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (uses, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques), also known as living heritage.

indigenous communities

Amazonian Kichwa nationality

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Safeguarding

1. Contextualization of the Amazonian Kichwa Nationality

They call themselves Runas which means “man” or “person”. This nationality is settled in a large part of the Ecuadorian Amazon, mainly in the provinces of Sucumbíos, Napo, Orellana and Pastaza ^[1]. They are the result of continuous and intense inter-ethnic relations, which is a condition that allows for internal differentiation. According to Vizcaíno ^[2], the Napo Kichwas have two opposing identity concepts: Ali Runa or the good Christian Indian, and Sacha Runa, or the forest inhabitant. Meanwhile, the Pastaza Kichwas define themselves as Runas, who mark their ascription and belonging to the same intra-ethnic identity space as opposed to other non-Kichwa indigenous peoples

2. Nacionalidad Espacialidad

This nationality is organized into two groups: “Napo runa” or Napo Kichwas and “Canelos” or Pastaza Kichwas. According to Restrepo & Cabrejas ^[3], the Amazonian Kichwas originate from an ethnic fusion, due to the fact that diverse ethnic groups were able to converge to the missionary centre of the Amazon region, escaping from the oppressions experienced by control regimes, which is why they were ‘kichwized’ by missionaries, from the 16th century ^[4]. The initial societies were Saporas, Western Tukanos and Quijos, from which two distinct cultural groups emerged, Canelos Kichwas and Quijos Kichwas ^[1].

The Napo Kichwas settled in the cantons of Tena, Archidona, Quijos and Carlos Julio Arosemana Tola ^[5], that is, along the banks of the Napo, Aguarico, San Miguel and Putumayo Rivers; they are also found in the urban areas of the province of Sucumbíos, as well as in neighbouring areas of Colombia and Peru ^[6].

Meanwhile, the Pastaza Kichwas are located in the four cantons of the province, Pastaza, Arajuno, Mera and Santa Clara ^[7], along the banks of the Arajuno, Curaray, Bobonaza, Pindo, Anzu and Puyo Rivers ^[8] (**Table 1** and

Figure 1).

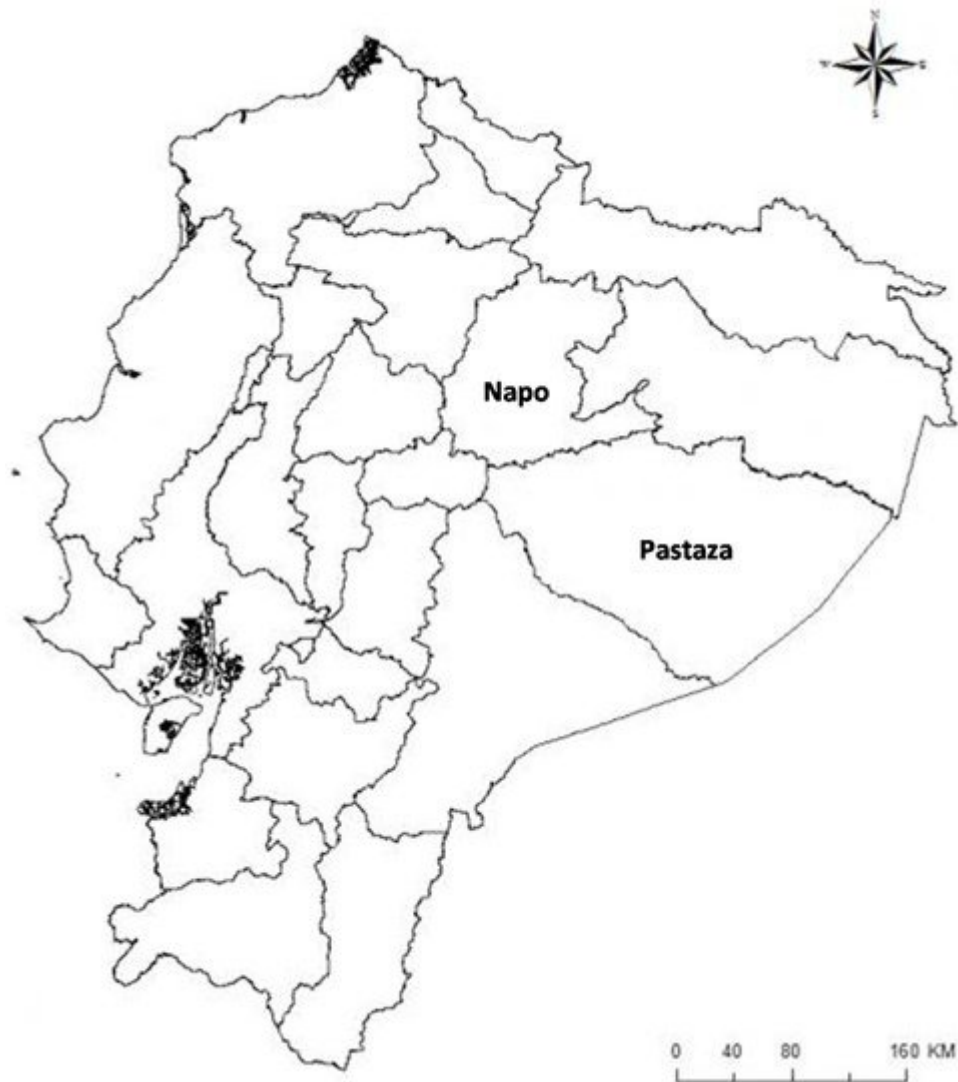


Figure 1. Ecuador Political Map.

Table 1. Geographical location of the Kichwas.

Province Canton		Parishes
Napo	Tena	Tena, Ahuano, Carlos Julio Arosemana Tola, Chontapunta, Pano, Puerto Misahuallí, Puerto Napo y Tálag
	Archidona	Cotundo y San Pablo de Ushpayacu
	Quijos	Papallacta
	Carlos Julio Arosemana Tola	Carlos Julio Arosemana Tola
Pastaza	Pastaza	Puyo, Canelos, 10 de agosto, Fátima, Montalvo, Río Corrientes,

Province	Canton	Parishes
		Sarayaku, Tarqui, Tnte. Hugo Ortiz y Veracruz
	Arajuno	Arajuno y Curaray
	Mera	Mera y Madre Tierra
	Santa Clara	Santa Clara

The well-known region and subsequent Governership of Quijos is established as a strategic point to enter the Amazonian area. Castro & Glerad Tapu (9), Santhosita (10) located in the mountain ridge, that is, in the eastern foothills of the Andes Mountains towards the Amazon (11). Although it has not been possible to delimit precisely the territories that comprised the province or region of the Quijos (12), some authors have concluded that the region included the valleys of the Cosanga, Papallacta, Quijos, Coca, Suno and Misahuallí Rivers, extending up to the upper courses of the Napo and Aguarico Rivers (13)(14)(15).

This point was established as the gateway to the Amazon colonization process (12). From 1537–1557 the first colonial incursions took place, which allowed for the exploitation of gold and silver mines, as well as the extraction of cinnamon, a highly regarded spice for the Spanish. It also provided access to several expeditions that longed to find “El Dorado” (13). This first period was characterized by brutal confrontations between the indigenous population and the Spaniards, which led to a reduction in the indigenous population density, breakdown of the reciprocity system between the mountains and the Amazon (11), in addition to constant looting of goods (resources of the the region) (8). According to Horteigón et al. (13), “no Spanish city was founded, no “encomiendas” were distributed in Quijos, no reservations were made, and no doctrines were created” (p. 15).

In these early years, two expeditions of great importance stand out: the first one, commissioned by Francisco Pizarro to Gonzalo Díaz de Pineda, which began in December 1538 and culminated in February 1539, advanced as far as the Sumaco volcano (15). The second one took place in 1541, under Pizarro’s command, guided by Díaz de Pineda and later joined by Francisco de Orellana, during which confrontations with the Quijos took place and they advanced as far as the River Payamino, an area of the Omaguas and where the “Country of Cinammon” was believed to be (9). After the accidental separation from Orellana on 26th December, 1541, which ended in the discovery of the Amazon River, the expedition returned to Quito in 1542 without resources, because they found neither gold nor silver and very little cinnamon, thus debunking the myth of “El Dorado” (13)(9), and for approximately seventeen years, no new conquest ventures were undertaken (1542–1559). In addition to the previous dissatisfaction, the difficult terrain that prevented easy access, and the presence of extremely aggressive groups discouraged the colony from advancing in this region (11)(12)(13)(15).

Then from 1557 to 1576, the colony was strengthened or consolidated in the Amazon, although it did not occur as strongly as in the sierra region. In 1559, Gil Ramírez Dávalos entered the area with the help of the cacique Don Sancho Hacho de Velasco, who eased the subjugation due to his knowledge of the local languages. Thanks to this collaboration, the city of “*Baeza de la Nueva Andalucía*” was founded, which was the first Spanish settlement (9) (p. 89–95). After this, the cities of Ávila, Archidona and *San Juan de los Dos Ríos de Tena* were founded in the region, which, as Muratorio (10) points out, initiated the process of socio-historical production of the colonial territory in what

was called *La Gobernación de Los Quijos, Sumaco y la Canela*, which Rodrigo Núñez de Bonilla was responsible for [13].

During this administration, there was an increase in the use of the indigenous population for construction, crops and mining, which was a condition that began to break relations and was aggravated by the constant trips of the indigenous people to Quito to supply the colonial settlement with food and provisions, which led to the first indigenous uprisings [15]. By 1561, the third governor was proclaimed, Melchor Vásquez de Ávila -who administered the territory from Cuzco all the time-, through his provisions the subjugation of the “rebellious Indians” was completed, establishing the colony in the area. In 1568, indigenous “doctrines” and “reservations” were developed as systems for regrouping Indians into larger settlements, which facilitated evangelization and population control (native control and hunting packs were eliminated) [12], while at the same time liberating space for colonial rule and dismantling the indigenous social organization [11][16]. The doctrines were mainly handed over to the Dominican friars [12]. According to Padilla [17], tributes were imposed on the indigenous people for having been born in America, but these taxes were increased because the value of the fines for mistreatment of the “encomenderos” was transferred to the indigenous people, which were elements that increased indigenous exploitation and provoked strong uprisings in the future [15].

From 1576 to 1600, there was a period marked by indigenous uprisings and the decline of the colony. As Rumazo [9] details, the uprising of 1578 is established as the most important, since it attempted an integration of regions, given that the mountain chiefs (caciques serranos) agreed to carry out the uprising at the same time and the leadership fell to the pendes. The cities of Archidona and Ávila were devastated, although during the attack on Baeza, the uprising was harshly repressed by Rodrigo Núñez de Bonilla, which discouraged further confrontations [12].

Gradually, Spanish presence decreased due to the scarcity of large-scale mines and gold-panning sites, the reduction of the indigenous population and the low production of cinnamon, which made the region unprofitable [11].

The transition from the colonial to the republican era did not represent a change in the situation of the region, but instead, the control and domination systems already indicated continued. From 1660 to 1661, a segmentation of the doctrines can be seen: the Jesuits entered to take charge of Archidona (towns of Tena and Puerto Napo), the Dominicans continued in Baeza and a priest in Ávila. This new scenario was to have a decisive influence on the process of conlonization, acculturation and relationship with the indigenous people.

In relation to the language, in order to facilitate the evangelization process, the missionaries preferred to learn only one language, an action whereby they encouraged the use of Kichwa [18], for example, in Archidona the Jesuits started a school for interpreters with foreign natives (coming from other regions or not necessarily Kichwa-speaking). According to Garcés [19], this was all with the purpose of encouraging the use of Kichwa among the population. This and other actions consolidate the thesis that the Kichwa language was used as a commercial language, which is supported by Magnoni [20] and Whitten [21], who state that several languages used by the society that settled in what today comprises the inter-Andean alley and the Amazon region, were eliminated in

order to maintain exchange and trade relations. This is supported by the political impositions used by the Incas, who established Kichwa as the lingua franca of the entire Sierra. Although the pre-Inca languages did not disappear, the unification process of the language, imposed by the Incas in the 15th century ^[18] was facilitated.

Then, in relation to its population density, there is evidence of other historical facts that correspond to the emergence of measles outbreaks during the years 1660 and 1665, of chickenpox waves in 1756 and 1762, in addition to a number of indigenous revolts and capture of the population as slaves by Portuguese expeditions in 1762, which caused a reduction of approximately 80% of the population participating in the missions ^[18].

All these events caused the population to retreat towards the interior of the rainforest, which did not prevent “white people’s diseases” from disappearing, but instead, spread deeper into the forest ^[22]. In addition to this, this led to the termination of all evangelization processes, mainly due to the low presence of the indigenous population, as indicated by the records of the Quijos and Macas Governorship. This was followed by the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 by order of the Spanish King ^[11], resulting in the departure of the parish priests of Archidona and Puerto Napo, who were subsequently replaced by clergymen, characterized by abuse in the collection of tithes for their services ^[15].

Then, in 1844, the exploitation of rubber, an endemic product of American rainforests, began on a larger scale, turning the region into an area of interest. The arrival of English expeditions to Brazilian and Peruvian forest areas is observed, in order to obtain this desirable material. To do so, they took advantage of indigenous knowledge to identify the plants and enter the forest, generating a social battle that caused the genocide of indigenous populations due to the abusive work and torture processes to which they were subjected ^[23]. In addition, the relocation of some Napo Runa populations for extraction processes in the middle basin of the Putumayo River and the San Miguel and Aguarico Rivers was observed, according to the analysis of indigenous records carried out by Mongua-Calderón ^[24].

After that, at the continent level, there were several social changes, resulting from the independence struggles generated in various latitudes, processes in which the Quijos had an incipient participation ^[15]. Although the political-administrative structures were modified throughout the region, the reality of these territories remained, the relations of labour exploitation and abuse in the collection of taxes continued.

Once the Republic of Ecuador was established, in 1869, the Jesuit mission returned to Alto Napo in the Oriente province, which was created from the First Law on Territorial Division of 1861 ^[25]. This action was carried out by President García Moreno, since this province was controlled from the capital of Quito because it did not have a significant population centre. This mission had a regional approach, from which schools were created. Six years later, García Moreno was assassinated, which caused a decrease in Jesuit influence and thus, relations were aggravated, causing constant uprisings that were put down. With the transition to a secular government system led by Eloy Alfaro, they left the region in 1896.

For several years the region was abandoned, but the administrative division of the Oriente province was reconfigured, which in 1920 was divided into two provinces: to the north the Napo-Pastaza province, whose capital was Tena, and to the south the Santiago-Zamora province with Macas as its capital. In 1922, the Josephine Missionary Order was established, starting in the city of Tena and extending to Loreto, Napo-Pastaza province [23]. Its work focused on education and health, through the provision of infrastructure for this purpose, mainly within the areas that today constitute the provinces of Napo and Orellana. It was an action that caused the displacement of girls, boys and adolescents, exacerbated by the boarding systems that were implemented to ensure assistance, thus distancing the population from populated centres [26].

As Albán [12] states, the human groups known up to this point as Quijos undergo a total displacement of their languages and completely adopt Kichwa, a result of indigenous miscegenation processes, giving rise to new ethnic identities such as Napo Kichwa or Napo Runas, Curaray Kichwa (Canelos) and Sucumbíos Kichwa.

The aforementioned rubber boom lasted until 1941 due to international needs. However, in that year, the national reality due to the conflict with Peru paralyzed the flow of river trade, causing the implementation of agricultural haciendas that retained the workforce with various activities to continue financing rubber, generating an uncontrolled peonage system based on indebtedness, migration towards other areas and thus, family separation [27].

After that, the territorial division was modified again in the 1950s, when the provinces were divided into Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe, and then into the provinces of Pastaza and Napo, which would later be subdivided into two more provinces: Sucumbíos and Orellana [28].

During the 1960s, a new social change took place based on the internal colonization process (occupation generated mainly by Lojanos and Manabís) within the Amazonian territory, which was encouraged by the 1964 Agrarian Reform Law or the 1964 Law of Vacant Land, as well as the 1978 Colonization Law [29]. This process generated more problems than solutions for the country. On the one hand, it caused an accelerated population growth, which in the case of the Napo province was 7.5% per year, being the highest in the country and which resulted in the need to allocate more resources to the management of this area [12][29].

Human migration was also encouraged in order to take advantage of the land for agriculture, which did not work because of the low fertility of this territory and led to the overexploitation of the few agricultural lands, causing an expansion of the agricultural frontier in relation to the primary Amazonian forest. These elements led to a drastic reduction in the areas available for hunting, fishing, harvest and subsistence agriculture by indigenous families, including the Kichwas.

These practices, in contrast to those introduced by internal colonization, are characterized by the non-affectation of space and respect for the natural cycles of ecosystems. Consequently, changes in access to resources led to a change in the patterns of production, settlement and social organization [30], motivating the generation of

organizational structures for the representation and struggle for rights that have been maintained to this day and have worked for the consolidation of Ecuador as a plurinational country.

4. Social, Political and Economic Organization of the Nationality

The Amazonian Kichwas have ancestrally organized themselves into two types of families: the *ayllu*, which corresponds to the nuclear family, and the *muntun*, which is an extended family figure [15]. The *ayllus* establish their origin from the head of the family or the most prestigious person in the family group [15], whereas the *muntun* were the grouping of several nuclear families, which controlled territorial spaces, where their centres of production and reference were established. Nowadays, the *ayllu* is the maximum unit of territorial settlement and their union generates communities, associations, centres and cooperatives.

Families are formed mainly through marriage, by means of exogamous or endogamous alliances, since relationships are allowed between members of the same community, as well as with people of other nationalities. It is necessary to mention at this point, that bilateral marriage between cross-cousins is allowed. In any form of family constitution, only one spouse is allowed, so they are monogamous.

Kinship relationships have shifted from a totemic (sacred animals) descent relationship to one based on the family surname, whereby the kinship system is bilateral, as a person will belong to both the father's and mother's family group.

Within the marriage rules, it is mentioned that women can get married from the age of 15–16, whereas men can get married between the ages of 18–20, since their parents must ensure that they are able to provide the necessary resources for the family that is about to be constituted [4]. Wedding rings are given voluntarily after the marriage proposal. The residence of the married couple is patrilocal, which means that once the marriage has taken place, the wife moves to live with her husband's parents, to become one more member of the nuclear family.

Ritual kinship works in two ways: within the family in which a member is designated to perform the first haircut, the first *cargada* (first person to hold the baby in her arms after its mother), among others; and outside the family in which inter-ethnic relationships can be established through godparenthood or "compadrazgo" for ritual acts such as baptisms or marriages.

Regarding the socio-political organization, the social space is organized in the *llackta*, in which the *runakuna* (people), *ayllukuna* (families) and *apukuna* (authorities) converge. Within this space, the activities to be carried out by all the members are organized and planned, in relation to the natural and cultural resources shared in the social space.

The authorities are made up of the *kuragakuna* and *yachakkuna*. The *kuraga* are responsible for the administration of order and justice based on the customary and formal law of the people and whose function falls mainly on the

Yachak ^[1].

On the other hand, in some communities much closer to the urban areas of the territory, the organizational systems were modified to *cabildo* structures, i.e., election processes are carried out, in which the highest authority, which is the general assembly (all members of the community) elect a board per year. This *cabildo* is made up of: a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and trustee.

In order to work for the defence of the collective and legitimate rights of communities, they organized themselves into structures of different levels (**Figure 2**). Finally, the traditional economic organization is based on itinerant slash-and-burn agriculture in the *purinas* (treks), in addition to the *chacra* or forest plantations. These areas are subject to rituals or cultural practices for their care, which are strictly respected as they form part of the cosmovision. As a complement, hunting, fishing, harvest, and the exchange of products and handicrafts are also practised.

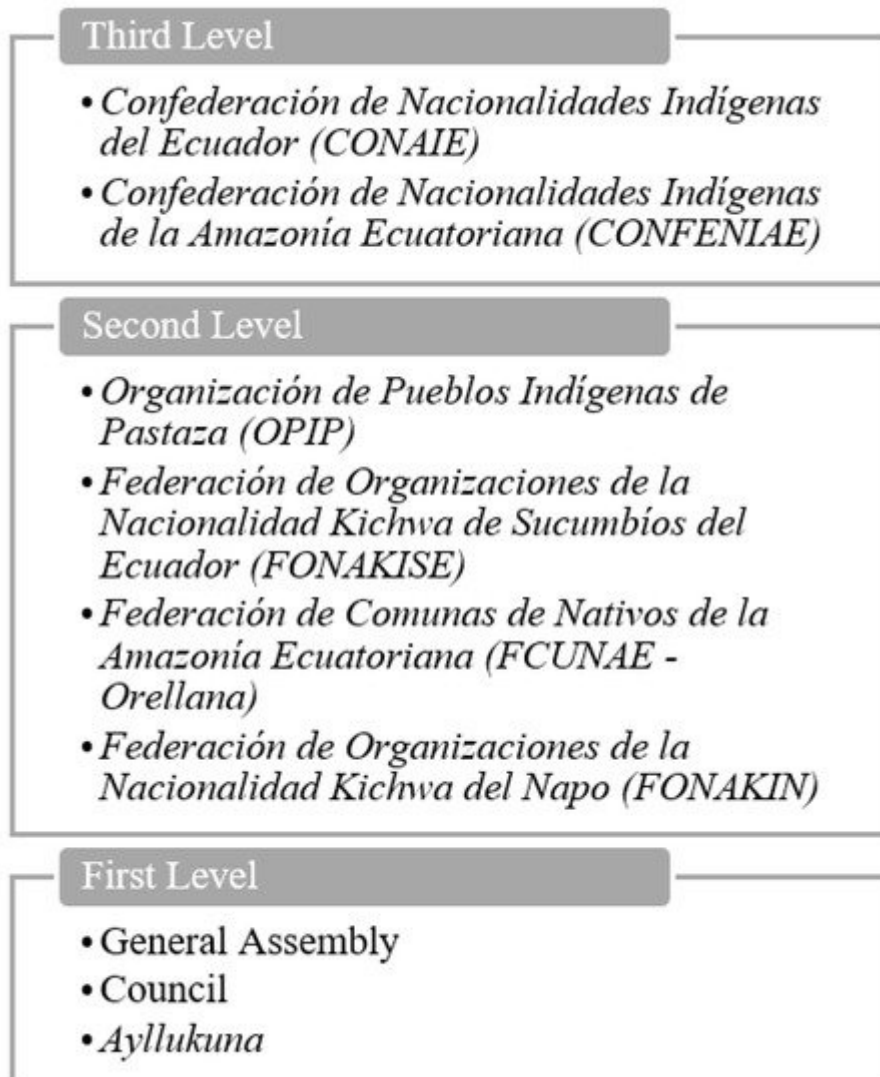


Figure 2. Political organization by levels.

In relation to hunting, this practice is regulated on the one hand by formal law, but it is also subject to the cosmovision of the Sacha Runa (forest man) who, based on his knowledge of the restrictions and rituals, guarantees that good specimens are obtained.

It is necessary to mention that, the transmission of knowledge begins from a very young age when making small traps such as: *tuklya* used to catch small birds, the *tikta* that enables to hunt medium-sized animals such as rabbits, agoutis, snakes, among others. The young people, on the other hand, make traps with a carbine for slightly larger animals and accompany them, which enables them to strengthen their practices through observation. They are also responsible for carrying the elements necessary to make the parents' food (sacha runas); the youngsters are obliged to have the food ready for the hunters, otherwise they are punished with chili pepper (*Capsicum annuum*), which is a nettle, that is spread over the body in the form of a whip and with a bath in cold water at dawn so that they learn not to be lazy.

They usually hunt the following animals: woolly monkey, capuchin and spider, agouti (rodent of the genus *Dasyprocta*), capybara (rodent of the family of the *cavids*), squirrel, anteater, armadillo, river otter, peccary, deer; among the birds: toucans, macaws, aracarí (*toucans of the genus Pteroglossus*), quail, among others.

It can also be seen that due to the integration processes of the communities into the market economy, they have seen the need to incorporate economic activities such as monoculture agriculture. The main products are bananas, cassava, corn, naranjilla, palm heart, cotton, coffee and cocoa; which are used for self-consumption and for sale in the local and provincial market; about 75% of the population declares this as their main income. The activities of cattle raising and tourism have also been incorporated, which are causing alterations both in the ecosystem and in the contents of its culture. They are involved in raising cattle, horses and to a lesser extent, domestic animals: chickens, ducks and turkeys, which are aimed at self-consumption and also at the provincial market. Handicrafts are established as a lower production activity, which is aimed at self-consumption and local markets, and is also in demand in the tourist market.

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