

**Diagnosis of tourism and gastronomy in Mexcaltitán, Nayarit. Economic, social and environmental factors that inhibit its development****Diagnóstico del turismo y la gastronomía en Mexcaltitán, Nayarit. Factores económicos, sociales y ambientales que inhiben su desarrollo**

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**Introduction**

For some years now, tourism has been facing a number of changes and the creation of new tourism products. The image and branding of the destination in relation to the cultural, historical and gastronomic roots of the place is becoming increasingly important. Gastronomic tourism stems from the motivations of visitors who wish to travel to a specific place to taste and delight their palate with typical dishes. It is a relatively new and potentially profitable tourism product that has generated a large number of terms such as gastronomic route or tourist brands aimed at cooking and culinary enthusiasts.

Tourism as an economic activity is mediated by events, social and cultural changes that the dynamics of a more demanding and active society demand. These demands mean that individuals make trips of shorter duration, but more frequently throughout the year. They are tourists who seek information about the destination and the products and services offered, which leads to the creation of new niches for the development of tourism activity. For this reason, the tourism sector has diversified and has moved towards thematic tourism, taking advantage of the particular richness of each geographical and socio-cultural region (Prieto, 2019).

The historical background of the island of Mexcaltitán has allowed it to become an important tourist destination today. In the 1960s, Mexican intellectuals began to speculate about the possibility that Mexcaltitán was the mythical Aztlán, the place from which the Aztec tribes that settled in the Valley of Mexico, where the city of Tenochtitlán was founded, departed. That is why the island is called the cradle of Mexican identity or the cradle of Mexicanity (Jauregui, 2019).

This research aims to show to what extent gastronomy in Mexcaltitán can be considered as a potential tourist attraction for the promotion and permanence of the Magical Town of Mexcaltitán de Uribe, Nayarit. Gastronomy, although it is considered as a phenomenon of communication, of social relationship and of approximation of history to the current state (Peláez, 2021), can become the star attraction of a town or a region.

The taste for gastronomy is becoming more and more valuable for tourists, since when they travel they like to get to know the local cuisine of the destination, discover new flavours, aromas and thus be able to live new, unique and special experiences.

**Historical - Contextual Theoretical Framework****Research problema**

Mexcaltitán de Uribe is a fishing village, settled on an island located in the estuarine zone of the northwest of the State of Nayarit in the municipality of Santiago Ixcuintla, with a population of 818 inhabitants, composed of 434 men and 384 women; a population that in recent years has been decreasing according to reports from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020). Although some state governments have promoted the island as the cradle of Mexicanity, historians and archaeologists consider these versions lacking scientific elements to locate the starting point of the founders of Tenochtitlán here. However, research continues and there is evidence that the island was populated by advanced peoples since ancient times (México Desconocido, 2010).

Today, the town of Mexcaltitán is abandoned, with an absence of visitors and above all of tourist products; traditional productive activities are also in decline, as is its social structure. According to information from the then Secretary of Social Development, 41.69% of the population over 12 years of age is employed in activities such as fishing and the sale of gastronomic products that they produce and businesses such as groceries (61.75% of men and 19.01% of women) (SEDESOL, 2020). This data can undoubtedly be a factor that contributes to the population migrating in search of better employment opportunities. Despite its unique way of moving, given its island status, its history and the gastronomy that differentiates it from other coastal towns in Nayarit, the town of Mexcaltitán is mired in paralysis and there is no glimpse of the sustainable development to which its inhabitants aspired when it was designated one of Mexico's first Magical Towns; on the contrary, environmental deterioration prevails; the public infrastructure is deteriorating, lacking maintenance, the degradation of the urban image is evident, and poverty and inequality can be observed.

The first attempt to consider Mexcaltitán as a place with historical, cultural and touristic use by the different levels of government failed largely due to the disapproval and apathy of the inhabitants, who at that time felt that it was obligatory and with a certain degree of prohibition, which was an attack on their privacy and local identity.

### Research Objectives

#### General Aim

To analyse the environment of Mexcaltitán in order to identify social, economic and environmental factors that allow the promotion of tourism and gastronomy as a means of sustainable development.

#### Specific Objectives

1. To identify the context of the tourist territory of Mexcaltitán.
2. To carry out an inventory and evaluation of the tourism and gastronomic resources of Mexcaltitán.
3. To identify social, economic and environmental impacts to be minimised or made more efficient in Mexcaltitán.
4. To analyse the gastronomic and touristic positioning of Mexcaltitán.

### Bibliographic Review

Mexcaltitán de Uribe, in Nayarit, is a locality that is considered an attraction with tourist potential first of all because of its condition as an island and the similarity it has to the place where the Great Tenochtitlan was founded, this allows it to have an important history that linked to the peculiar way of daily life of the islanders also constitutes an experience for the visitor who likes to taste pre-Hispanic dishes based on products of the sea and estuaries. The gastronomy of Mexcaltitán is considered an attraction that could boost the destination to position itself as the Pueblo Mágico that it is, also considering that in 2019 the Nayarit Gastronomy was declared Cultural and Intangible Heritage of the State of Nayarit (NAYARIT, 2019). The taste for gastronomy has more value every day among people who even travel to taste traditional dishes, discover new flavours, aromas and experience new experiences that can be unique and special.

### Mexico's Magical Towns Programme

In Mexico, as part of the tourism policy and after more than twenty years, the Magical Towns Programme has been promoted as a strategy to diversify the tourism product and in the search for the incorporation into the economic activity of towns with tourist attractions, which, due to their history, transcendent events or their identity, make them unique and differentiated (SECTUR, 2014). There are currently 132 magical towns in Mexico and there are four in Nayarit: Jala, Sayulita, Compostela and recently, for the second time, Mexcaltitán de Uribe was named.

Originally there were five conditions that a site had to meet to enter the programme: to be close to a growing or developed tourist destination; to have reasonable road access; to have some historical or religious attraction; to have a population willing to participate; to have craft shops, restaurants and shops so that the locality could benefit from the spending of potential visitors.

The programme began with the naming of the first three "Pueblos Mágicos": Huasca de Ocampo, in the mountains of Hidalgo; Real de Catorce, a near-ghost mining town in San Luis Potosí; and Mexcaltitán, our tiny lake island in Nayarit. However, Mexcaltitán was removed from the programme by the Federal Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) in 2009.

SECTUR (2014) points out that in order to achieve permanence in the National Programme of Magical Towns, the locality must comply with the development of important activities for the operation of the programme, such as the implementation of public investment projects: to strengthen the tourism development of the locality; development and innovation of tourism products: to attract new specialised segments and generate more visitor flows; promotion of quality seals and tourism certifications of the destination and service establishments. Also, to address the recommendations of the Diagnoses of Competitiveness and Sustainability of the Magical Towns, to present social, inter-institutional and inter-governmental coordination programmes; to carry out actions for the implementation of an integral marketing plan and social participation in the whole process of operation and development of the programme.

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## Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomy is defined by the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) as: "the set of dishes and culinary uses typical of a certain place" (Real Academia Española, 2019). On the other hand, tourism is considered as an activity carried out by people who travel to places different from the ones they are used to, with durations ranging from one day to less than a year. Gastronomic tourism is understood as the displacement or trip made by people who consume dishes typical of a certain place; this being the main objective. This is how it can be understood that many authors give importance to gastronomy as a generator of tourism in a certain region, so much so that they affirm that gastronomy is one of the main reasons for visiting a place. This highlights the relevance of gastronomy in terms of its relationship with the social heritage of the people, the idiosyncrasy and the popular, cultural and environmental knowledge of the inhabitants of the towns and regions.

The ideal of this tourist experience is to try dishes that are not part of the place of origin. In this way, it is evident how gastronomic tourism produces an economic impact, as the gastronomic and culinary experience is irremediably linked to the socio-cultural experience and gives rise to other activities that arise from gastronomic tourism. Current tourism trends (adventure tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism) have a significant economic impact and go far beyond the search for relaxation and leisure activities. Some are aimed at tourists developing and experiencing a significant event, which not only satisfies their expectations of the trip, but also leads to an experience that allows them to give a pleasant recommendation and memory of the destination. Among these new trends is what is experienced as a result of gastronomy, either because eating typical food is part of a tourist experience or because it is the purpose of the trip. This is called gastronomic tourism.

## Method and tolos

A set of systemic enquiries were developed, such as descriptive research using predominantly the exploratory and descriptive method, as well as direct observation, which allowed us to know and analyse the real situation of Mexcaltitán, Nayarit, in order to establish priorities of the problems and needs that afflict the community.

Consequently, the methodology used was that of community diagnosis, which allows us to influence social, political, economic and environmental matters, whose methodology does not pretend to be exhaustive, only to know the dynamics of society. It was strengthened with the research of existing secondary sources such as academic works, books, reports and studies, specialised magazines and case studies related to economic, social and environmental factors and their impact on magical villages.

Characterisation of the social, economic and environmental factors of Mexcaltitán as a tourist territory, 2. Detection of problems and needs of the community, 3. Elaboration of the inventory and evaluation of the tourist and gastronomic resources of Mexcaltitán and 4.

## Results

For the detection of problems and needs, a workshop was held with key local actors, the objective of which was for the participating community groups to identify and describe the situations that exist in the community. With the help of an instrument (a survey designed by the participants in the project), which facilitated the identification and prioritisation of community problems, so that they could subsequently generate ideas for their solution, in order to increase the interest and participation of the community.

Interviews and surveys were carried out during the on-site visits, and the following results were found: Mexcaltitán has a variety of resources and tourist attractions, identifying tourism and gastronomy as an inseparable binomial, where the influx of tourists leads to the consumption of food. In the same way, it can be identified that the withdrawal of the designation of Mexcaltitán as a Magical Town in 2009, diminished the promotion of the destination, therefore the recovery of the designation in 2021, has generated interest and motivation in the inhabitants, detonating new possibilities of social and economic development for the island.

There are problems of poverty and inequality in the locality, where 90% of the population is dedicated to fishing, being the predominant activity.

In Mexcaltitán, shrimp production favours the preparation of exquisite dishes that form part of its traditional cuisine, which is believed to be linked to Chinese culture, derived from vestiges of an important settlement of Chinese immigrants, who arrived on this island in the second half of the 19th century and who gave great importance to the tradition of fishing arts and influenced its gastronomy (González L, 2020)

One of the prevailing social factors was the migration phenomenon, which is an alarming aspect for its position as a Pueblo Mágico, as the population has decreased by more than 100 inhabitants in less than 10 years. The main factors of migration are the search for higher education (university), as well as the hope of finding better job opportunities which, consequently, allow them a better quality of life. Some of the social and environmental impacts to be addressed that resulted from the interviews with the locals, as well as from the observation during the on-site visits are:

- a) Promotion of environmental education among the population to care for the environment.
- b) Heritage and natural resource conservation plans.
- c) Support for the leaders to carry out management to increase the local operation of spaces such as the Fishermen's Cooperative, sale of handicrafts, commercialisation of their gastronomic products (tamales and shrimp tortillas, among others).
- d) Plan of actions to reinforce cultural traditions and revitalisation of their customs (patron saint festivities of San Pedro and San Pablo, planting of mangroves, pre-Hispanic gastronomy).

### Discussion and conclusions

Tourism is one of the main economic industries at the international level. There are two forms of tourism: mass tourism and alternative tourism. The latter group is characterised by the fact that it is developed in a more sustainable way.

Among the pillars of sustainable development are socio-economic development and the conservation and protection of the environment. These pillars, when applied to tourism, and as such, new typologies and forms of tourism appear that can be developed in a sustainable way. Such is the case of gastronomic tourism.

Gastronomy as cultural heritage emphasises the identity and historical memory of a community or social group. If we take as references elements that persist over time and that denote evolution from changes that arise from the adaptation to the demands of a society that likes experiences that revive practices, ancestral knowledge and popular knowledge. These references can be useful for organising tourist trips that allow the recovery of localities or regions; likewise, they can be incorporated into this type of tourist enterprise and help to reactivate local economies.

Gastronomic tourism as a promoter of regional development has shown in some concrete cases that it is a fundamental aspect in this process, since in addition to ensuring quality in the production chain, rescuing culture and increasing tourism to the locality, it fosters the integration of public and private entities and improves the quality of life of the host population. In other words, gastronomic tourism allows for social cohesion.

With the present research it is demonstrated that there is a real relationship between tourism and gastronomy, La Isla de Mexcaltitán de Uribe, despite being a Magical Town recognised in 2021 for the second time, whose main attractions are: its denomination as "Cradle of Mexicanity", its natural characteristics and its gastronomy; it has social, economic and environmental factors that inhibit its development. However, the gastronomic phenomenon is and should be a tourist attraction that should be worked on in order to turn it into a unique tourist product of the place, which makes it indispensable to manage training for the learning of the hygienic handling of food, elaboration and preservation of preserves, handicrafts and crafts, attention to tourists, among others; with the aim that the inhabitants themselves can cover the aspects that tourists may need during their stay.

The island of Mexcaltitán has the potential to position itself at an international level due to the historical importance it represents for Mexico, for being a natural reserve and for having a variety of birds, its gastronomic variety, its flavour and the knowledge it entails. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to involve the entire population, with the support of the government and the academic sector in tourism and gastronomy, and to add training strategies for the development and positioning of tourism in the area.

The development of gastronomic tourism in disadvantaged areas can help to generate economic resources for local populations, thus contributing to the social and economic development of the population and the destination. In addition, this form of tourism can generate greater awareness in the local community, promoting aspects such as conservation and respect for nature and other existing resources in the destination (culture, heritage, etc.).

In this sense, it is necessary that gastronomic tourism is carried out considering a series of actions that will promote the sustainable development of the destination. Firstly, it is necessary to involve the local population in the planning and management process of the tourism activity. Secondly, it is necessary to draw up a tourism development plan for the destination, which will help to plan tourism activity appropriately. Third, aspects such as culture (gastronomy, local dances, folklore, etc.), historical heritage (buildings, monuments, etc.) and natural resources (rivers, lakes, forests, flora, fauna, etc.) should be valued and at all times managed by the local communities, or at least this group should have a large say in the distribution of the benefits of tourism development.

Fourth, a plan to raise awareness and educate the local population prior to the start of tourism activities is necessary, which will help to train better human resources for the performance of tourism activities in the destination. Here, the academy should design educational programmes that contemplate training axes such as culture, environment, tourism, business creation, quality of services, languages, among others.

As a final conclusion, gastronomic tourism, developed from a previous planning where the local community will be one of the main axes in the management and planning of tourism, can contribute to develop in a sustainable way the tourist destination, and above all, in localities with an incipient development, where this form of tourism can help to alleviate poverty and to better conserve the natural, cultural and heritage resources of the destination for the enjoyment of future generations, whether they are residents or visitors.

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