

VISUAL MEMORY OF THE FOLKLORIC FESTIVAL OF THE MI SENDERITO SCHOOL AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY IN NORTE DE SANTANDER

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Abstract: This research article analyzes the Mi Senderito School Folk Festival and its influence on the establishment of cultural identity in the region, focusing on its role as an educational strategy for preserving intangible heritage in Norte de Santander. Given the risk of losing local traditions due to the effects of globalization, the study set out to build a visual memory of the festival, developed between 2010 and 2020, as an experiential learning tool. Using a qualitative approach and a case study design, surveys, participatory observation, and documentary analysis were applied to students, teachers, and administrators who played a leading role in the festival, either as volunteers in the organization or as direct participants in the event's thematic content. The results show a high appreciation of the festival as an educational and cultural space, highlighting its impact on strengthening the sense of belonging, intergenerational participation, and the transmission of traditional knowledge, even since its adaptation to contexts such as the pandemic. It is concluded that the festival, beyond a school activity, represents a pedagogical device that articulates culture, education, and community, and whose systematization contributes to its sustainable projection and institutional replicability.

Keywords: Heritage education, Cultural identity, Collective memory, Community participation, Folk traditions.

INTRODUCTION

As time has passed, societal traditions have been established as a form of cultural transmission, representing the history of a particular place and serving as a symbol that facilitates the maintenance of its identity. These traditions have the potential to foster cohesion and a sense of belonging among the human groups that comprise a given society (González et al., 2022). These practices, which include celebrations, rituals, artistic expressions, popular knowledge, and oral manifestations, constitute the intangible cultural heritage that serves as a conduit between the present and the past, thereby providing a sense of continuity and identity.

From a sociocultural perspective, Salazar (2021) conceptualizes traditions as systems of shared meaning that facilitate community comprehension of their world and enable action within it, thereby establishing interpretive frameworks that offer symbolic and emotional stability amidst social transformation. In a similar vein, Itchart and Donati (2014) posit that, while numerous traditions are social constructs, they fulfill critical functions in the reproduction of collective values and the legitimization of cultural norms and hierarchies.

Folklore festivals operating within the confines of traditional models are characterized as a collective expression that materializes in a public and scheduled event. These events serve as a platform for the exhibition of manifestations pertaining to a community's folklore, encompassing domains such as dance, music, traditional costumes, gastronomy,

myths, legends, and other characteristics that serve as hallmarks of its popular culture (Gaspar, 2022). According to García (2024), the objective of these events is to reinforce the cultural identity of the community, with the aim of facilitating intergenerational dialogue and, as previously mentioned, enabling the symbolic appropriation of territory and memory.

In the context of this research, the Mi Senderito School Folklore Festival is an experiential learning space that involves students, teachers, and families in the living interpretation of Colombian folklore. This approach enables the acquisition of an educational, community, and documentary dimension. During the period between 2010 and 2020, the festival became an integral part of the school community's educational strategy. It served to revitalize the cultural identity of the community, promote values of coexistence, and record the event's changes and adaptations through audiovisual material. This included period of critical context, such as the onset of the global pandemic known as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (henceforth referred to as "covid-19"). Consequently, the festival has come to be regarded as a school tradition that constitutes part of the intangible cultural heritage, for which its visual memory is considered essential for its preservation and future projection.

The event has transcended institutional boundaries, thereby becoming a cultural reference point in the local context of Cúcuta and the Norte de Santander region. Its continuity for more than a decade has enabled the consolidation of a space in which the community revives expressions of national folklore, thereby strengthening its sense of territorial belonging in terms of identity. At the community level, the collective appropriation of the event demonstrates that the strengthening of identity occurs through social encounters, where each edition becomes a celebration of roots, memory, and a shared commitment to cultural preservation.

In his study on traditional music in Santander, Posada (2018) has noted that children have faced greater difficulties in identifying with the cultural expressions of their territory due to the growing influence of globalized genres. In this context, school festivals emerge as fundamental strategies for reinforcing local identity and fostering a sense of belonging from an early age (Rodríguez, 2021). This objective is consistent with the event under investigation, which involves the entire educational community in its implementation, responds to this need, and becomes a living practice that preserves cultural heritage and generates social cohesion through intergenerational participation.

Conversely, Costa (2018) and Castro and Martínez (2017) have emphasized the importance of participatory pedagogical processes in analyzing cultural heritage in Latin America, particularly in marginalized or peripheral communities. These processes, as outlined by the authors, integrate social actors in the identification, appropriation, and safeguarding of their traditions. This perspective underscores the notion that cultural heritage is not merely a testament to the past; rather, it serves as a dynamic entity that alludes to ongoing construction, situated in the present and collectively sustained.

Consequently, schools are regarded as pivotal cultural institutions that foster territorial roots, facilitating the dissemination of knowledge through educational methodologies that are attuned to the local context. Therefore, community participation—including parents, students, teachers, and cultural managers—is conceived as a transformative axis that guarantees the continuity of traditional practices, fostering processes of empowerment and social cohesion. From this perspective, Muñoz and Thibaut (2022) emphasize the importance of intangible cultural heritage in the articulation of education, culture, and community for the sake of sustainability, where local expressions are experienced and analyzed as part of a collective construction.

In light of the points, the festival, while alluding to the reproduction of a school tradition, is integrated as a community pedagogical practice that reinforces cultural identity from the territory, as well as projects heritage as a living and shared construction. Consequently, the experience of the Mi Senderito school exemplifies a replicable model of how educational institutions can evolve into cultural revitalization centers, integrating citizen participation and the construction of collective memory.

Consequently, the investigative nature of the project is justified, as it responds to the need to consolidate the comprehensive management of cultural tradition as a school educational practice that has acquired heritage value in its community. In this sense, the Mi Senderito School Folk Festival is a paradigm of an institutional activity, as it is regarded as a space in which constructive processes are activated in terms of the sociocultural dimension of the territory through active participation.

In contexts where traditions are susceptible to dilution by globalization and generational discontinuity, the establishment of an organized visual memory of the festival is instrumental in ensuring the preservation of its history and evolution. This contributes to its formative character as a tool for experiential learning and the construction of cultural citizenship (Caycedo et al., 2022). Consequently, the present research is oriented towards the documentation of a significant event for the purpose of future sustainability, offering a replicable model for other institutions interested in the integration of culture, education, and community from a territorial and participatory perspective.

METHODS

The objective of the present study was to document the history of the Mi Senderito School Folk Festival between 2010 and 2020 through the construction of a visual memory. To this end, a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive approach based on a case study design was adopted, a method that is ideal for understanding cultural phenomena in real educational contexts (Ruiz, 2021).

For the present study, participants were deliberately selected and comprised of 20 fifth-grade students, five teachers, and three administrators from the institution who have previously participated in the festival. The integration of experiential, testimonial, and visual aspects into a holistic perspective of the phenomenon was achieved through the implementation of participatory observation, documentary analysis (photographic and audiovisual), and structured surveys (Retegui, 2020).

The methodological development was structured into five phases to ensure a logical, coherent, and systematic process. This approach was adopted to guarantee that each stage of the study would contribute to the fulfillment of its objectives and the enhancement of the study's quality. The initial phase entailed a meticulous examination of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research, with the objective of situating it within the domain of school cultural heritage and establishing the foundation for the problem. The methodological design, as the second phase, permitted the planning of data collection strategies, the criteria for selecting participants, and the instruments to be used.

Subsequently, a systematic compilation of photographic and audiovisual material, as well as confidential documentation from the institution, was conducted. This material corresponds to the editions of the Folklore Festival between 2010 and 2020. Furthermore, institutional records and external contributions were incorporated to facilitate the researcher's comprehension of the school dynamics of the festival and to enable the identification of symbolic and emotional aspects. Concurrently, structured surveys were administered to students, teachers, and administrators, with a focus on eliciting perceptions regarding cultural identity and community participation, which is imperative for establishing a link between visual and testimonial (Rocha, 2017).

In the fourth phase, the information collected was triangulated to identify patterns and important moments in the festival. This process resulted in the creation of a visual timeline that reflects its evolution. In accordance with this, for the final phase, a photographic exhibition was organized within the institution as a way of sharing the findings with the educational community and consolidating visual memory as a pedagogical resource.

The information obtained is then subjected to analysis using the thematic analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke in Tonon (2013). This technique facilitates the identification, organization, and interpretation of significant patterns within qualitative data. The research process entails an initial phase of familiarization with the documentary and visual evidence, which is then followed by the coding and categorization of emerging themes. This procedure is employed to construct an interpretive narrative of the Folklore Festival.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings derived from the analysis of surveys, audiovisual material, and the construction of a timeline of the Mi Senderito School Folk Festival, covering the period 2010–2020. It reveals the positive perception of the educational community regarding the cultural and educational value of the event, as well as its visual evolution, its ability to adapt to critical contexts, and its emotional impact on participants.

3.1 Visual memory: The photographic and audiovisual material was obtained from the institution's archives and digital records available on YouTube. In the subsequent phase of the project, images were meticulously curated to ensure the inclusion of those that clearly depicted traditional dances and costumes. A particular emphasis was placed on selecting images with identifiable dates, thereby ensuring the inclusion of visual documentation that could serve as a valuable reference point for future research and analysis. The videos from the 2019 and 2020 virtual editions, recorded during the pandemic, demonstrated the active involvement of parents, who assumed a primary role in documenting the performances from their residences.

Utilizing this information, a chronology of the event was formulated, illustrating the aesthetic evolution of the festival, encompassing the adaptation of attire to the characteristics of the students and the logistical challenges encountered in both in-person and virtual settings. This instrument facilitated the visualization of alterations in cultural representations on an annual basis, thereby underscoring the enduring dedication of the educational community to the preservation of the event (Pedrero et al., 2017).

3.2 Survey results: This section aims to broaden the overall perspective on the event by organizing the results into seven thematic categories. These categories reflect a consensus on the cultural and educational value of the festival, highlighting its impact on institutional cultural identity through active participation and the preservation of school traditions. This assertion is elaborated upon subsequently.



FIGURE 1. SURVEY CATEGORIZATION

Source: Own elaboration

- **Cultural heritage:** This concept refers to the perception of the festival as an expression that welcomes and projects the cultural values of the country. It acknowledges that knowledge and appreciation of Colombian traditions are promoted through dance, music, and traditional costumes. Consequently, the event is conceptualized as a praxis that contributes to the edification of collective memory and the fortification of cultural identity within educational institutions.



FIGURE 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOLK FESTIVAL IN RELATION TO SCHOOL CULTURAL IDENTITY

Source: Own elaboration

- **Community involvement:** This category underscores the significant value attributed to the active involvement of diverse members of the academic community in the festival. For instance, parents, teachers, and students collaborate to prepare costumes, rehearse, and stage performances, fostering emotional bonds, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Consequently, the community is acknowledged as a pivotal element in the evolution of the event. Its active involvement is intrinsic to the event's essence, endowing it with significance, legitimacy, and temporal continuity (Carvajal, 2019).

6. ¿De qué manera percibe la forma como la comunidad se ha involucrado con el Festival a lo largo los años?

[Más detalles](#)

28
Respuestas

Respuestas más recientes

"cuando los papas vienen a vernos y participan y aprenden también"
"con la participación de los padres como observadores"
"La comunidad se ha comprometido con el festival durante 41 años, hasta ins..."
...

12 encuestados (43%) respondieron el para esta pregunta.

comunidad educativa fuerte compromiso participación respeto presentación festival folclórico varias generaciones papas el bailes padres preservación papás Colegio Mi Senderito colaboración 41 años creciente involucramiento propias tradiciones organización

FIGURE 3. COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE FOLKLORE FESTIVAL

- **Documentation strategies:** The collection of photographs, videos, and other graphic materials has made it possible to construct a timeline documenting the history of the festival, making it an educational and heritage tool that contributes to the visibility, analysis, and future projection of the event.
- **Cultural preservation:** Participants agree on the need to continue the festival over time, recognizing its value as a means of transmitting customs and cultural knowledge to new generations. Therefore, preserving the event implies a commitment to its content and cultural significance, so that it can be replicated in terms of its relevance and contextualization, avoiding its trivialization or loss of meaning (Amaya & Medina, 2024).
- **Educational impact:** According to participants, the festival is perceived as a meaningful learning experience that transcends the artistic realm, enabling students to learn about different regions of the country, their cultural expressions, and social values. In addition, some teachers propose integrating it as a cross-curricular project, given its potential to link knowledge from different areas of learning, develop physical skills, and promote coexistence.

12. ¿Qué tipo de impacto educativo tendría integrar el Festival como estrategia curricular en el colegio Mi Senderito?

[Más detalles](#)

28
Respuestas

Respuestas más recientes

"muy bueno por que podriamos aprender mas de la cultura de colombia"
"por la importancia del aprendizaje de las culturas"
"Sería muy importante profundizar a través de los proyectos transversales."
...

10 encuestados (36%) respondieron mas para esta pregunta.

Motivación dinámico coordinacion Comunidad interés
colaboración actividad parte mas estudiantes coordinacion
otras ocasiones festival folclórico importancia empeno aprendizaje temáticas
país diferentes bailes región

FIGURE 4. EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF THE FOLKLORE FESTIVAL AS A CURRICULUM STRATEGY

- **Changes over time:** This category includes observations on the evolution of the festival in areas such as organization, quality of performances, and adaptation to new contexts. Of particular note is the transition to a virtual format in 2019 and 2020, which encouraged the tradition to continue amid the pandemic. Improvements in costume design and the students' level of appropriation of regional dances are also mentioned.

• **Overall assessment of the festival:** Participants generally highlight the meaningful experience that brings together culture, coexistence, and institutional identity. This perception was confirmed by a word cloud analysis (Harrington, 2023), constructed from the open-ended responses of the survey participants, which highlighted terms such as dance, culture, identity, folklore, Colombia, camaraderie, joy, and tradition, reinforcing the influence of the festival as a symbolic reference point in school life.

In addition, the prominence of these words suggests that the festival as a central event integrates affective, pedagogical, and cultural values associated with the expression of regional diversity, interaction between generations, and the strengthening of a sense of belonging. This type of collective recognition confirms the importance of the festival in strengthening institutional identity, consolidating shared memories that transcend the classroom (Urbina, 2021).

3.3 Participatory observation: Participatory observation was carried out during the Folkloric Festival and Hiking Pageant at Mi Senderito School, making it possible to document the atmosphere, cultural dynamics, and participation of the educational community from its epicenter. This event was characterized by the quality of the dance performances and the representation of various regions of the country through traditional costumes and choreography.

At the same time, a timeline entitled “Living Memories” was displayed, compiling images of the festival between 2010 and 2020, creating a space for emotional reunion, where students, parents, and alumni recognized themselves in the photographs, evoking past experiences and strengthening ties with the cultural history of the institution.

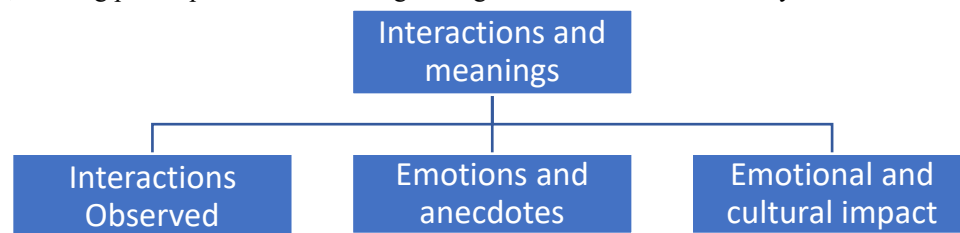


FIGURE 5. EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE FOLKLORE FESTIVAL BASED ON PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION

• **Interactions observed:** During the festival, it was evident that the attendees' primary focus was on the artistic presentations, momentarily superseding the photographic timeline. However, as the event unfolded, parents and former students approached the exhibition, recognizing themselves in the images and expressing emotions such as pride, nostalgia, and joy. These emotions served to fortify their emotional bond with the institution. The exhibition was perceived as a valuable historical account that evoked shared memories and generated a high level of interest in preserving this type of initiative in future editions.

• **Emotions and anecdotes:** Family and student stories highlighting the emotional impact of the festival stood out. Here, a family of single mothers relived moments shared by their daughters over the years through photographs, expressing gratitude for reconnecting with those memories.

• **Emotional and cultural impact:** The photographic timeline served as a space for recognition, where attendees identified themselves as active participants in the school's history. The emotions evoked by the images reaffirmed the festival as a tradition that strengthens collective identity and contributes to the preservation of the school's cultural heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study has demonstrated that the Mi Senderito School Folk Festival, while remaining an annual occurrence, has evolved into a prominent gathering point for the broader educational community, facilitating interaction, learning, and self-expression. The construction of visual memory has been demonstrated to undergo a transformation over time, both in its aesthetic dimensions and in its capacity to adapt to challenging contexts, such as the pandemic or social changes in the environment. This pedagogical approach has been instrumental in fostering the development of students' creative abilities, collaborative skills, dedication, and artistic expression. Consequently, it has reinforced a comprehensive education that extends beyond the academic domain and encompasses both the individual and the collective. The creation of the visual timeline facilitated the organization and reinterpretation of the festival's historical records, thereby establishing itself as an innovative educational resource that fostered the evolution of an educational community that shares emotions and maintains dialogue between generations. The results obtained from this study underscore the significance of incorporating the festival as an institutional pedagogical strategy. The systematic inclusion of the festival within the curriculum has been demonstrated to enhance its educational scope while ensuring its permanence as a meaningful educational practice.

The emotional component evident in the participants suggests that the festival is a meaningful experience that strengthens students' roots, identity, and sense of belonging. The festival can be considered a symbolic legacy that preserves the cultural history of the school and future students.

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