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HUMAN SYSTEMS

EVIDENCE OF CULTURAL PATTERNS FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN GALAPAGOS SOCIETY

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The **Galapagos National Park Directorate** has its headquarters in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for the administration and management of the protected areas of Galapagos.

The **Governing Council of Galapagos** has its headquarters in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristóbal Island, and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for planning and the administration of the province.

The **Charles Darwin Foundation**, an international non-profit organization registered in Belgium, operates the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos.

Galapagos Conservancy, based in Fairfax, Virginia USA, is the only US non-profit organization focused exclusively on the long-term protection of the Galapagos Archipelago.



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Evidence of cultural patterns for sustainability in Galapagos society

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Although human settlement of Galapagos occurred relatively recently, nature has managed to influence the character, customs, and ways of life. Humans in Galapagos are in the process of adapting; it is expected that some cultural characteristics will be lost, habits changed, and new mindsets created.

Humans first arrived in 1535, traveling across the ocean, as did the birds and plants that colonized the Archipelago. The Islands were officially annexed by Ecuador in 1830 by Colonel Ignacio Hernández during the Presidency of General Juan José Flores. Since then, Ecuador has maintained sovereignty of the Islands. In addition to Ecuadorian settlers, groups of European immigrants arrived at different times, and for a variety of reasons all viewed Galapagos as a good place to live.

The population grew slowly until the 1980s and then much more rapidly, reaching a population of 25,124 by 2010 (INEC 2010). Galapagos residents include immigrants from all provinces of Ecuador (61% of the total population), foreigners (2%), and individuals born in Galapagos (37%) (Figure 1).

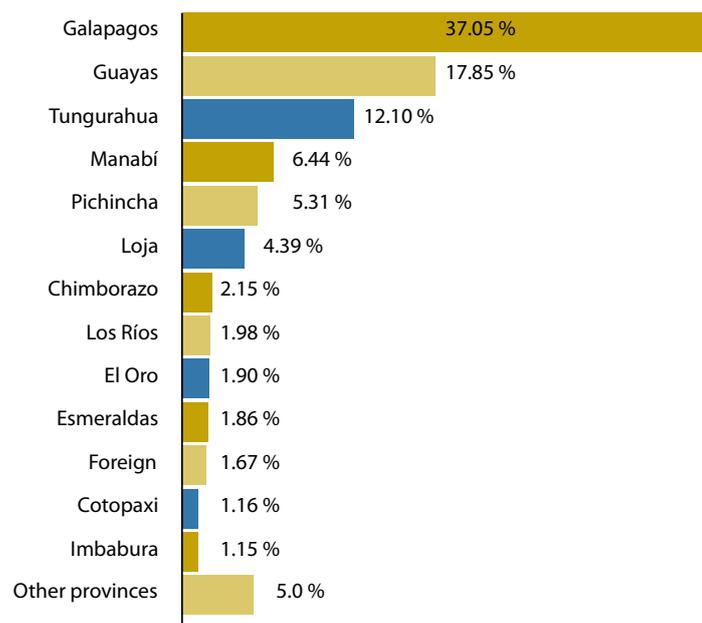


Figure 1. Galapagos population by place of birth. Source: INEC, Censo 2010

Galapagos society is comprised of various sized groups of people with ethnic and cultural characteristics from different regions of continental Ecuador. This cultural mix and the natural environment have led to new models. Although we talk about the culture of the Galapagos population, many support the thesis that no specific island culture exists. This article seeks to challenge that claim by highlighting various cultural patterns present in Galapagos society, which are focused on sustainability and protecting this fragile ecosystem.

Culture is defined as the combination of material and immaterial elements that determine the way of life of a community as a whole, including practices, social patterns, language, and social, economic, political and religious systems. Cultural patterns are those actions that recur by custom, habit, or tradition in a defined society. Finally, social patterns are the habits, including morals, beliefs, and customs, that a person acquires insofar as s/he is a member of a society.

Four cultural patterns have been identified in Galapagos as appropriate to island living: the use of bicycles, respect and care of nature, living together for sustainability, and participation in governance.

Mobility is an essential aspect of human daily life. Given that there is no public transport in Galapagos, every citizen must figure out how to move from one place to another. It is important, therefore, to consider those people who choose to travel by bicycle. Although there are regulations for entry of motorized vehicles into Galapagos, the use of a bicycle is still a personal choice, not an obligation.

The creation of the Galapagos National Park in 1959 and the subsequent establishment of its territorial limits (97% of the Islands' land area) defined the inhabited and protected areas of the Archipelago. From that moment, Galapagos inhabitants have known that what happens in protected areas will impact the populated areas and vice versa.

Galapagos is quite different from other provinces in Ecuador in that those governing the Islands have had to take into account the unique reality of the historically small population. As a result, a strong social participation component was established in the Special Law for Galapagos enacted in 1998.

Use of bicycles

Residents of Puerto Ayora, the largest city in Galapagos, have historically used bicycles for mobilization, especially since the 1980s when the government began to pave the streets. Bicycles are an inexpensive means of transport that are easy to maintain and operate. Over the last decade bicycle lanes have been established on several streets to make bicycle use safer and more convenient. The establishment of bike lanes is an integral part of the land use plan of the municipality of Santa Cruz. In addition to being a means of transport for local inhabitants, bicycles are also used by tourists for independent or guided tours.

Authorities have recognized the importance of bicycles in Galapagos and have included bike path construction along the main roads of the province in their infrastructure planning.

As a result of the constant use of bicycles, cycling has become a popular sport in the Islands. Galapagos is now recognized as a national powerhouse in the sport, with a number of its residents winning national championships.

Bicycles are owned and used by 63.4% of households in Galapagos (Figure 2). In 2011, a baseline survey of terrestrial mobility in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island showed that bicycles are present in 85% of surveyed households; of these, 64% had more than one bike (Figure 3).

Respect and care for nature

Ecological and environmental terminology has become integrated into the common language of the Galapagos

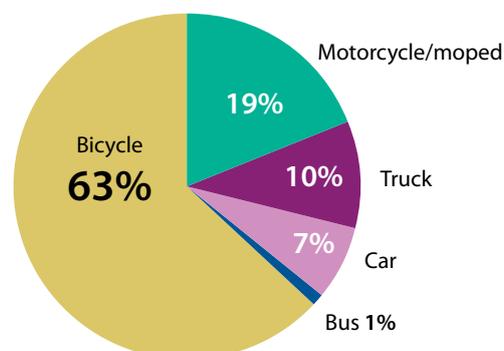


Figure 2. Modes of transport for households in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island in 2008. Source: Así Vamos Galápagos, Boletín No. 2008.

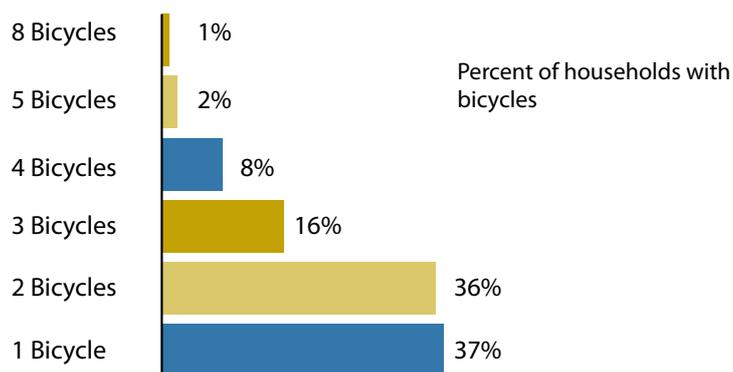


Figure 3. Number of bicycles per household in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island. Source: Informe Galápagos 2011-2012

population. This vocabulary has been learned in local educational institutions or as part of daily work, given that almost all work activity in Galapagos is related in some way to the natural environment of the Archipelago and its special management needs.

In 2012 and 2013, discussions during the provincial workshops Building a Vision of an Island Culture in Galapagos focused on how residents of Galapagos identify themselves. It was determined that “the only element that unifies people living in Galapagos to identify themselves as Galapagueño is their desire to do so, regardless of race, creed, origin, language, or traditions.” Respect and care for nature were highlighted as characteristics that differentiate island residents from those living in other communities.

With this background it can be concluded that a Galapagueño is anyone who feels they are one, and that the natural surroundings of Galapagos are a fundamental factor effecting changes in behavior of those who have made their home or work in the Islands.

During the workshops Audiovisual Production to Strengthen the Culture and Good Living in Galapagos carried out in 2013 on San Cristóbal, Santa Cruz, and Isabela, adolescents and youth also referred to respect and care for nature. Comments included:

- “Being Galapagueño is learning how to conserve an environment that is unique and to enjoy the places we have here.”
- “For me, being Galapagueño is not only living in Galapagos but getting involved in conservation and having a vision and an ability to move forward.”
- “I feel I am a Galapagueño because I was fascinated by and loved nature from the day I arrived; the quality of life that one leads here, zero stress, enjoying family, children, cannot be found in big cities. I feel privileged to have arrived here.”

A sense of caring for the natural environment has a high social importance in Galapagos and is present among all age groups in the province. In this way, it has become a unique characteristic of the Galapagos community.

Social codes for sustainability

Urban planning in the Islands led to the elaboration of Codes for Social Coexistence in 2012. One was developed by the owners of land parcels in the development El Mirador (Santa Cruz Island), who defined their vision for the nature of relationships within their community, and the other by the inhabitants of Puerto Villamil (Isabela Island). In both instances, a high value was placed on the harmonious relationships of those living within the community and on the adoption of sustainability criteria to guide growth. The Codes for Social Coexistence of these two island populations demonstrate that mutual respect and care for the environment are characteristics of Galapagos society (Table 1).

Many of the guidelines outlined in the Codes of Social Coexistence are the result of implementation of local policies related to integrated solid waste management or recycling, the care of native and endemic species of the Islands, and the respect shown for not altering their habitat.

The Islands’ first formal recycling effort began in Santa Cruz Island at the end of the 1990s, with the support of the Galapagos National Park Directorate, the Galapagos Foundation, and the municipality. Since then, several other organizations have supported the municipalities in all three cantons to adopt solid waste management systems.

The active participation of Santa Cruz citizens in adopting new waste management practices, such as sorting trash in their homes, has resulted in some noteworthy achievements. Between January 2007 and August 2009, waste recycling increased by 260%, which reduced non-recycled waste by 35% per capita (from 0.62 kg/person/day to 0.4 kg/person/day), and increased both the

Table 1. Citizen testimony regarding the Social Codes in Santa Cruz and Isabela Islands.

El Mirador–Puerto Ayora – Isla Santa Cruz	Puerto Villamil – Isla Isabela
Site description	
<i>I have my home in the development El Mirador; I like to live in peace with my peers and in harmony with nature.</i>	<i>People walk barefoot in the sandy streets of Puerto Villamil and visit its beautiful landscapes, volcanoes, flora and fauna. Its inhabitants always welcome tourists who come to visit its wetlands.</i>
Social responsibility of citizens	
<i>In this neighborhood there are people from all over the country, from all races and cultures. We are aware that we are living in a unique natural place, which we want to keep the same for our children's children. We know our neighbors and we respect each other. We are tolerant of diversity; we don't discriminate based on sex, gender, race, religion, ability, or personal or social status.</i>	<i>As an inhabitant of Isabela Island, good living is always present in my mind and a priority for my family; I follow the rules and regulations that govern my canton, and I am an active member in planning and implementing improvements in our community.</i>
Use and value of water	
<i>Water is scarce; we must use it sensibly. In our homes we must collect rainwater and store it carefully so that it does not become contaminated.</i>	<i>I am aware that the water resource is scarce on the island, both for human consumption and for the agricultural sector; therefore I practice water conservation at home, at work, and in public places.</i>
Waste management, recycling, and not littering	
<i>The waste produced at home must be separated and classified according to recycling regulations. We must avoid the use of disposable bags and containers; we want to reduce unnecessary consumption.</i>	<i>Sanitation is essential in my island. I will avoid creating pockets of infection by disposing waste in an irresponsible manner. I always put waste in the corresponding garbage can (green, blue, black, or red) and I will remain conscious of the need for my neighbors and the authorities to do the same.</i>
Protection and care for the flora and fauna of Galapagos, responsibility with pets	
<i>We know and adhere to the list of permitted products, those not permitted, and those that can enter Galapagos with restrictions.</i> <i>We take great caution in using animal or plant species that could become a pest and alter our environment. We do not want to alter the natural world; therefore we do not feed or touch native and endemic animals. We are responsible for our pets and care for them properly in our home and in public places.</i>	<i>To ensure that the animals of my island do not change their behavior, I do not touch or feed them; I mention this rule to those who visit me from outside Galapagos and make sure that they follow it.</i>
Internal transport	
<i>When we need to go somewhere, we prefer to walk or go by bicycle. Vehicles respect speed limits and show courtesy to pedestrians and bicyclists.</i>	<i>It is our custom on this island to walk peacefully along our streets; we use bicycles to keep our bodies active. Drivers of vehicles respect speed limits ensuring their own safety and that of pedestrians.</i>

production of compost and the efficiency of the recycling system by 400% (WWF, 2010).

A culture of recycling and sustainable waste management has grown in Galapagos, making recycling an essential component of efforts to ensure the sustainability of the Archipelago.

Although it is difficult to verify, it is very likely that the respect for and a harmonious relationship with the natural environment expressed by the local population are a result of environmental education provided three decades ago, by the Galapagos National Park Directorate and the Charles Darwin Foundation, which enhanced understanding of the island environment and produced changes in behavior.

Citizen participation in governance

One of the recurring discussions in the province surrounds the question of who is responsible for its management and governance. At various times in the history of Galapagos, concern has been expressed about it being governed from the mainland without taking into account the various stakeholders or the interests of the local inhabitants.

Beginning in the 1980s the Galapagos population became more interested in participating in the development of local legislation and governance. This article does not highlight specific legislation rather it provides several examples of participatory processes through which citizens contribute to improved environmental management.



Photo: © Andrés Tapia.

One of the milestones of social participation was the creation of the Core Group (known locally as the Grupo Núcleo), which functioned from 1997 to 1999. This working group was tasked with developing and reviewing the *Management Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Galapagos Marine Reserve (GMR)*. Representatives of different sectors, such as fishing, tourism, conservation, naturalist guides, and governmental institutions, were involved in this process. The Participatory Management Board (PMB) evolved from these efforts and became the forum for participation of users of the GMR. The PMB, in conjunction with the GNPD, seeks to ensure effective and responsible participation of users of the GMR in its management. The PMB was institutionalized in the management plan of the GMR and the Special Law for Galapagos of 1998, aimed at conservation and sustainability, which is currently in force and is considered effective.

Another key moment for multi-sector participation, dialogue, and debate occurred during the development and discussion of the Special Law, which involved local organized groups and individuals, as well as national institutions and sectors. This high level of local citizen participation included not only contributing ideas and discussing regulations, but also participating in planning and formulating and implementing management regulations.

Currently, a high percentage of the Galapagos population believes that participation is important for the Archipelago, and that due to its remote island setting, it must be administered differently than other Ecuadorian provinces (Zapata, 2013).

In recent years, citizen participation has become the norm in all work related to the development and review of regulations and legislation. The elaboration of the Special Law, management plans, and cantonal plans have all involved strong public participation, which has helped ensure more effective implementation and governance of the province in ways that achieve harmony between humans and nature.

Conclusions

There is clear evidence of aspects of Galapagos culture that are closely related to sustainability, such as: the value, respect, and enjoyment of nature; the adoption of environmental norms in daily life and as part of codes for social coexistence; and citizen participation as a fundamental part of constructing the legal framework, management, and governance of Galapagos.

The diverse origins and cultures of the local population in Galapagos become key elements in developing a shared view of sustainability for the Islands. Understanding this,

there are three cultural patterns already present in the Galapagos society that contribute to sustainability:

- Galapagos citizens have adopted several codes for social coexistence, such as those related to the use of bicycles and recycling, etc.
- The local population respects and cares for nature, motivated by the sense of satisfaction they receive from nature and an understanding that nature generates income.
- Citizen participation is a fundamental part of processes related to establishing and reviewing the legal framework, management, and governance of the Islands.

As social and cultural processes evolve, we must strengthen the Galapagos culture in ways that promote balanced and sustainable development without compromising the natural environment and the ecosystem services it generates. With this need in mind, as well as the results of the various workshops referred to in this article, a “code of good living in Galapagos” should be developed in a participatory fashion to serve as the benchmark for the lifestyle and culture of the inhabitants of the Archipelago.

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