



**UNIVERSIDAD  
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## **Faculty of Legal Sciences**

**School of International Studies**

# **INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIRS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ARTISANAL JEWELRY EXPORTING COMPANIES IN AZUAY PROVINCE**

Thesis project prior to obtaining the Bachelor Degree in  
International Studies

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## DEDICATION

To God, my Creator, my support, and my inexhaustible strength.

I dedicate this achievement to the One who never left me alone, who held my heart when fear tried to stop me, and who strengthened my spirit on the days when my energy seemed to fade. Thank you, Lord, for being my constant guide, for opening paths where I saw only uncertainty, and for illuminating my mind and my steps until I reached this goal, I had dreamed of so many times. This accomplishment is a testimony of Your faithfulness in my life.

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This project is not only dedicated to you... this achievement belongs to you, because without your love and your presence in my life, this path would never have had meaning.

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# **International trade fairs and their impact on the internationalization of artisanal jewelry export companies in the province of Azuay**

## **ABSTRACT**

The present work analyzes the effects generated by participation in international fairs on the internationalization process of artisanal jewelry exporting companies in the province of Azuay. The objectives established were: to identify opportunities and barriers to entering international markets, to analyze the effects of fairs on variables such as commercial performance, market expansion, and institutional strengthening, and to compare two success stories to highlight changes in their products, design, and business management before and after participating in these events. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of internationalization and the creative economy, and it adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines semi-structured interviews, export data analysis, and comparative observation. The results show that fairs promote international positioning, market diversification, and sector professionalization, consolidating themselves as a key mechanism for sustainable development in Azuay's artisanal jewelry industry.

**Keywords:** Azuay, institutional strengthening, international fairs, internationalization, jewelry craftsmanship, market opening, positioning.

# **Las ferias internacionales y su impacto en la internacionalización de las empresas artesanales exportadoras de joyas de la provincia del Azuay**

## **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo analiza los efectos generados mediante la participación en ferias internacionales en el proceso de internacionalización de las empresas artesanales exportadoras de joyas de la provincia del Azuay. Se planteó como objetivos: identificar las oportunidades y barreras para la inserción en mercados internacionales, analizar los efectos de las ferias en variables como desempeño comercial, apertura de mercados y fortalecimiento institucional, y contrastar dos casos de éxito para evidenciar los cambios en sus productos, diseño y gestión empresarial antes y después de participar en estos eventos. El estudio se sustenta en la corriente teórica de la internacionalización y la economía creativa, bajo un enfoque mixto que combinó entrevistas semiestructuradas, análisis de datos de exportación y observación comparativa. Los resultados evidencian que las ferias impulsan el posicionamiento internacional, la diversificación de mercados y la profesionalización del sector, consolidándose como un mecanismo clave de desarrollo sostenible para la joyería artesanal del Azuay.

**Palabras clave:** Apertura de mercados, Azuay, ferias internacionales, fortalecimiento institucional, internacionalización, joyería artesanal, posicionamiento.

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## INTRODUCTION

The artisanal jewelry sector of Azuay Province represents one of the most important pillars of Ecuador's cultural and productive heritage. Filigree work, known for its delicacy and high symbolic value, constitutes an expression of identity that combines tradition, technique, and innovation. In recent years, the internationalization of Azuay's artisanal jewelry businesses has gained relevance, driven by the need to position their products in highly competitive global markets. In this process, international fairs have become a strategic tool that enables companies to showcase their work, access specialized buyers, and strengthen their image as representatives of Ecuadorian art.

Despite the sector's potential, the internationalization of Azuay's artisanal jewelry companies faces structural challenges that limit their consolidation abroad. These include limited access to financing for fair participation, weak commercial planning, insufficient institutional coordination, and the need to strengthen business management. Consequently, it is essential to understand how international fairs influence not only the economic dimension but also the organizational, technical, and symbolic development of companies, as these events act as spaces of learning, exchange, and professionalization.

The general objective of this study is to analyze the extent to which international fairs have supported the internationalization of artisanal jewelry-exporting companies in Azuay Province. To achieve this purpose, the following specific objectives were established:

1. To identify the main barriers and opportunities faced by jewelry-sector companies in Azuay—focusing on six representative workshops—in their efforts to consolidate a presence in international markets through participation in international fairs.
2. To analyze the effects generated in these companies after participating in international fairs, considering indicators of commercial performance, market opening, and institutional strengthening.
3. To highlight the success stories of two artisanal jewelry-exporting companies in order to illustrate the transformations in their products, design, and business management before and after participating in these events.

This study is grounded in business internationalization theory, which explains the gradual processes through which companies expand into external markets through the accumulation of knowledge and international experience, and in the framework of the creative economy, which recognizes culture, art, and innovation as drivers of sustainable economic development. These theoretical foundations allowed the phenomenon to be addressed from a comprehensive perspective, integrating both economic and sociocultural dimensions.

Regarding methodology, the research was conducted using a mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a deep and well-supported understanding of the phenomenon. From the qualitative perspective, semi-structured interviews were administered to six artisanal jewelry-exporting companies in Azuay Province, selected through non-probabilistic purposive sampling based on their trajectory, export experience, and participation in international fairs. These interviews made it possible to explore the perceptions, learning processes, and strategies adopted by jewelry companies to enter global markets.

In the quantitative dimension, descriptive tables and graphs were developed to complement the analysis, considering indicators such as the main destination countries, the degree of access to foreign clients, and the number of participations in international fairs. Additionally, secondary sources from official institutions such as the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE), the National Customs Service of Ecuador (SENAE), PRO ECUADOR, the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade and Investments, and CIDAP were used.

The study is descriptive and exploratory, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, given that no variables were manipulated; rather, the phenomenon was observed in its natural context during a defined period. This design allowed for an objective analysis of the effects of international fairs on the internationalization process of the jewelry sector, as well as the identification of internal and external factors influencing outcomes. The integration of the mixed approach facilitated the comparison of qualitative and quantitative findings, generating a more complete and coherent understanding of the actual impact of international fairs on the export dynamics and institutional development of Azuay's artisanal jewelry companies.

The results show that participation in international fairs not only increases the visibility of jewelry companies abroad but also drives an internal transformation reflected in improved product quality, innovations in design, modernization of business management, and the consolidation of a strong cultural identity. Likewise, the study demonstrates that fairs operate as platforms for commercial networking and collective learning, enabling artisans to establish strategic contacts, understand global trends, and strengthen their technical and institutional capacities.

The structure of this work consists of five chapters. The first chapter develops the theoretical framework, addressing the concepts of international fairs, internationalization, the creative economy, and their relationship with the artisanal sector. The second chapter describes the methodology applied in the study, justifying the approach and techniques used. The third chapter presents the analysis of commercial performance, market opening, and institutional strengthening derived from participation in international fairs. The fourth chapter examines the success stories of two representative jewelry companies, highlighting the transformations achieved in their products and business management following their participation in fairs. Finally, the fifth chapter presents the conclusions and general recommendations aimed at strengthening the competitiveness and internationalization of Azuay's artisanal jewelry sector.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.1. Context on International Trade Fairs

International trade fairs are strategic events in which the supply and demand of goods and services converge within the same space and during a specific period of time. These in-person encounters allow businesses to establish direct contact with potential buyers while creating a dynamic environment that enhances commerce (Gaitán, 2015). Likewise, the Escuela Europea de Empresa (2023) states that these events provide companies with a unique space to meet, promote their brands, and expand their international presence by showcasing their products and services.

According to Hansen (2004), trade fairs constitute not only a direct sales channel but also an effective means of establishing trust-based relationships with potential customers and international distributors. Such interactions strengthen companies' export capabilities, especially in markets where physical presence and face-to-face contact remain key factors for closing business deals.

Participation in trade fairs helps reduce perceptual barriers in the internationalization process, as these events provide companies with direct information about the competitive environment, consumer trends, and emerging opportunities (Contractor et al., 2007). In the case of artisanal businesses, this type of knowledge can make the difference between successful or unsuccessful entry into international markets. Moreover, international trade fairs not only function as commercial showcases but also as spaces for training and strategic learning, since many of them include capacity-building programs, conferences, and activities aimed at entrepreneurs and business owners, which contribute to developing participants' skills (ConnectAmericas, 2025).

International trade fairs have a millenary origin, predating even the European medieval era, and they played a fundamental role in the early commercial exchanges among civilizations. Since ancient times, trade fairs have enabled the exhibition of products and services, facilitating not only the exchange of goods between regions but also the sharing of knowledge and the creation of commercial networks (Cortez, 2023).

Civilizations such as the Phoenicians and the Romans highlighted the importance of trade fairs, as they were essential for consolidating commercial routes that connected continents and facilitated the circulation of goods (López & Azaustre, 2016). Likewise, during the Middle Ages, trade fairs played a crucial role in commerce between Northern Europe and the rest of the continent, establishing an exchange system that would remain for centuries. Thus, beyond stimulating trade, fairs opened opportunities for merchants of the time, contributing to the integration of economies and cultures, as well as to social development (Cuéllar & Parra, 2001).

In this context, it is noteworthy that these commercial practices have deep roots and have been used since ancient times. As evidence of this, the Old Testament in the Book of Ezekiel states: "Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of goods; with silver, iron, tin, and lead they traded in your markets." This passage not only shows the existence of markets and trade fairs in antiquity but also highlights two strategic territories of ancient commerce: Tyre and Tarshish. The first was a Phoenician city with a key port in the eastern Mediterranean that became an important commercial and cultural exchange hub, while Tarshish was known as a region rich in valuable natural resources and minerals (Cortez, 2023).

Likewise, the aforementioned reference highlights the relevance of trade fairs in the development of international maritime commerce, since in their beginnings the primary means of transporting and moving goods was by sea. Cartwright (2016) emphasizes the importance of maritime trade in the evolution of fairs, noting that it enabled connections between different civilizations through the expansion of various sea routes.

According to Gaitán (2015), international trade fairs are currently established as one of the most solid marketing tools, as they allow businesses to strategically present their products to specialized audiences. Their effectiveness lies in the personal interaction with new clients. This direct contact enables companies to identify potential improvements, adaptations, and innovations; moreover, trade fairs represent one of the most profitable and efficient ways to position themselves in the market (Tolavi, 2020).

## 1.2. Business Internationalization

It is essential to address the concept of internationalization, as it directly connects to international trade fairs. Meza (2016), defines internationalization as the process

through which companies expand their market reach and commercial operations beyond national borders, establishing their presence in different parts of the world. The Uppsala Model, one of the most representative theories on business internationalization, explains that companies advance through gradual stages—first consolidating locally, then nationally, and finally internationally (Rave et al., 2023).

Johanson & Vahlne (1977), argue that entering an international market depends on two key elements: information and resources. Limited access to information about foreign markets increases uncertainty because companies often lack knowledge about culture, language, politics, legislation, and sector dynamics. As firms gain more knowledge, they progressively increase investments, hire specialized staff, and explore markets directly, creating a cycle where new information drives greater resource commitment.

Understanding the concept of SMEs is also crucial for analyzing internationalization. SMEs include small and medium-sized enterprises with between 10 and 250 employees. Unlike microenterprises, which typically employ fewer than 10 people and often operate informally, SMEs participate in formal markets that offer broader growth opportunities. Large companies, with more than 250 employees, generally possess stronger international competitiveness. However, this classification can vary by context. Many entrepreneurs prefer SMEs due to their lower startup costs and greater potential for agile growth (Chavez, 2021; Romero, 2006).

Internal company factors strongly influence the degree of internationalization a firm can achieve (Westhead et al., 2001). Hollenstein (2005) notes that very small companies often face financial constraints that limit international expansion. Several authors also argue that long-established firms tend to have fewer chances of internationalizing than younger ones, which usually demonstrate higher growth potential (Autio et al., 2000).

From a human capital perspective, companies that employ qualified personnel and work with reliable suppliers find it easier to internationalize. Increased sales signal business growth and enhance international expansion potential. Competitive advantages and effective distribution channels also support business internationalization (Escandon & Hurtado, 2014). Additionally, maintaining a strong research and development department significantly boosts sales and positively impacts the internationalization process (Cerrato, 2009).

External factors include a wide range of conditions, resources, decisions, and environmental dynamics that shape international business operations. Key external variables include the physical-social context, the political-legal environment, competition, and cultural differences (Davies, 2015). Geographic knowledge helps managers identify the global distribution of resources, evaluate their quality and volume, and determine how to access them to export effectively. Canals (1994), highlights that geographic knowledge enables managers to identify the global distribution of resources, assess their quality and volume, and determine access to them in order to export correctly. National and international legal frameworks such as taxation, labor regulations, and foreign exchange policies also define the conditions for conducting operations abroad. Financial stability, inflation, and tax systems directly influence how companies manage their international activities (Davies, 2015).

Political and legal factors also shape internationalization. Governmental challenges can hinder expansion, while strong regulatory and institutional support facilitates it. Relevant elements include exchange rates, trade agreements, export-promotion policies, political stability, levels of protectionism, and conditions for foreign investment (Cardoza et al., 2016).

Competitive factors, as identified by Porter (1990), include national infrastructure, government policy, evolving consumer demands, and technological progress all of which influence how firms compete internationally. These factors affect global positioning and help identify advantages that result from well-designed strategies.

Finally, according to Ghemawat (2001), highlights the importance of cultural factors, defining *cultural distance* as the differences between home and host countries. Variations in social norms, language, religion, and ethnicity can create gaps that strongly influence consumer behavior and purchasing decisions.

### **1.3. Historical Evolution of Jewelry**

Jewelry has accompanied humanity for thousands of years, blending art, culture, and identity since the earliest civilizations. In Ancient Egypt, pharaohs adorned themselves with gold and precious stones not only as symbols of power and beauty but also as spiritual amulets believed to protect against negative energies in life and after death (Pons, 2024).

Long before that, during the Paleolithic era, Cro-Magnon humans crafted ornaments from bones, stones, shells, and teeth—objects that held spiritual or decorative value (Ferrer, 2023). Over time, jewelry evolved into a medium of exchange and a reflection of trade. Civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans traded precious stones and metals along the Silk Road, linking distant cultures through craftsmanship and commerce (Revista de Historia, 2023).

In the Middle Ages, European fairs turned jewelry into luxury goods and symbols of social prestige, marking its role in international trade (Cartwright, 2019). The Industrial Revolution transformed this art into an industry: mechanization made production faster and more accessible, turning jewelry into both a cultural expression and a growing commercial sector (Teichman, 2018).

Today, jewelry remains part of daily life—whether a pair of earrings, a watch, or a ring—often chosen not just for style but for its emotional or symbolic meaning. Pieces given during weddings, graduations, or anniversaries become lasting reminders of significant moments.

Tracing the history of jewelry means retracing the history of humanity. Each piece tells a story about beliefs, aesthetics, and social values. From its ritual origins to its place in the global luxury market, jewelry reflects cultural transformation, economic change, and human creativity. Understanding this evolution reveals why jewelry continues to hold both personal and commercial significance in the modern world.

#### **1.4. Jewelry sector in Azuay**

To thoroughly understand the jewelry sector of Azuay Province, it is pertinent to rely on a highly relevant and influential work for generations of artisanal jewelers in this region. This book, safeguarded in the CIDAP facilities, represents an invaluable source, as its author provides precise and detailed information on the characteristics of the sector: from its historical context and production processes to the selection of raw materials, the techniques employed, and the use of precious stones. Beyond its technical content, the work also reveals the cultural legacy and craftsmanship excellence of Azuay's artisans, whose talent and creativity grant each piece a unique value.

Supported by this artisanal tradition, the jewelry sector of Azuay possesses enormous potential to achieve international projection and to consolidate itself as a representative of Ecuadorian art and identity worldwide.

Mr. Juan Orden, former president of the Association of Jewelers of Azuay, notes that approximately two years ago a statistical study was carried out in which the existence of nearly 1,500 artisanal jewelry workshops in the province was identified. Among them, the most prominent are mainly located in the canton of Chordeleg, where the tradition of handcrafted jewelry through the ancestral filigree technique continues to be preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. This practice has granted artisans recognition even at the international level, especially when combined with innovation processes and new design proposals developed by various contemporary jewelers. The foregoing demonstrates a significant competitive advantage for the international projection of the sector, although the challenge of strengthening the appreciation and recognition of this artisanal richness within the national context still remains.

## **1.5. International Trade fairs as Pathways to internationalization**

International trade fairs constitute fundamental mechanisms for business internationalization, offering multiple benefits to companies of different sizes, whether small or large. These benefits include increased sales, brand strengthening, access to learning environments, the creation of business networks and the opportunity to explore new strategic markets for the company (Seringhaus & Rosson, 1994). It should be noted that, in many cases, international trade fairs represent an essential strategy to support companies in their initial export stages, allowing them to analyze competitors, gather information on foreign markets, and assess positioning opportunities. It is important to emphasize that, although these spaces facilitate contact with potential clients, the strengthening of commercial relationships and deeper interactions within the industry are consolidated at later stages (Parasuraman, 1981).

According to Santos & Mendonça (2014), the objectives of companies participating in such events are divided into two types of activities: sales-related activities, which include generating business contacts or networking, attracting and prospecting new clients, as well as closing sales; and non-sales-related activities, which are equally relevant, as they allow companies to enhance their corporate image and carry out product launches together with new distributors.

### 1.5.1. Successful Stories

These cases illustrate the experiences of artisanal companies that share similar characteristics in their production and commercial processes. This section also explores successful examples of businesses that have achieved international consolidation through active participation in trade fairs or consistent engagement in these spaces during their growth. Such experiences reveal the strategic importance of these events in opening new markets. All these antecedents support the relevance of the present study, which focuses on artisanal jewelry-exporting enterprises in Azuay Province and highlights how international fairs play a crucial role in their internationalization.

Several studies have examined the relationship between trade fairs and the commercial expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). One outstanding example is the Colombian company *Solo Evas S.A.S.*, which illustrates progressive internationalization driven by trade fair participation. Founded in 1986 as a small footwear workshop called *Alpha Shoes*, the company began its transformation when new investors recognized its potential and acquired it to expand regionally. Over time, the company rebranded as *Solo Evas* and became a leading manufacturer and marketer of women's footwear in Colombia.

By focusing on brand positioning and promotional trade events, *Solo Evas S.A.S.* began exporting to Ecuador its first international market. The company's strategy considered geographical proximity and cultural affinity, factors that eased the entry of its products into the Ecuadorian market. Encouraged by this success, the company later expanded to Brazil and Chile, showing that proper planning and regional awareness can significantly reduce barriers to foreign trade (Tabares et al., 2014).

The company then extended its international reach to Europe by building commercial links through participation in major trade events such as Colombiamoda in Medellín and the Leather Fair in Bogotá. These events allowed *Solo Evas S.A.S.* to present its products to international buyers and secure entry into competitive markets like France and Belgium. Later, the company attempted to enter the U.S. market but faced technical challenges, such as the need for greater sizing capacity in shoe soles, which hindered long-term consolidation. Despite this, the experience underscored the need to adapt products to market demands and confirmed trade fairs as key platforms for discovering new opportunities (Tabares et al., 2014).

According to Mares (2023), Mexico has also demonstrated the strategic value of trade fairs. More than 14 jewelry companies from Jalisco including *Arte en Dijes de Plata*, *Broqueles Covarrubias*, *Fractal*, *Platoro*, and *Sabelli* participated in the JCK Las Vegas Fair, supported by the Jalisco Jewelry Chamber. Their goal was to expand their international client base, strengthen export capacity, and gain specialized training. This experience highlights how trade fairs continue to be essential tools for global jewelry companies seeking entry into new markets.

In 2019, Mexican jewelry reached a new milestone when companies such as *Broqueles Covarrubias*, *Oro Boleado*, *Oro Excel*, and *Platoro* attended the Hong Kong International Jewellery Show, one of the world's most prestigious jewelry fairs. Instead of competing individually, they presented themselves collectively under the national brand "Mexico." This strategy projected a unified image of design, quality, and creativity in the demanding Asian market (Badás, 2019).

Acting as a national brand not only strengthened Mexico's global image but also showed how trade fairs can foster intercultural learning. Participating in culturally distinct regions such as Asia exposed companies to new consumption habits, religious customs, and commercial dynamics insights essential for adapting export strategies and enhancing competitiveness (Romo, 2019). Beyond business, the fair became a space for cultural exchange and a platform to showcase Mexican identity through design, proving that trade fairs foster both commercial and cultural growth.

In Ecuador, the canton of Chordeleg in Azuay Province stands out for its rich artisanal heritage, particularly in jewelry making. Recognized by UNESCO as a Creative City in 2017 and later as a Magical Town of Ecuador in 2020, Chordeleg is renowned for its filigree technique one of the most traditional and distinctive local crafts (Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador, 2017); (Asociación de Municipalidades Ecuatorianas, 2021). Among its leading artisans, Andrea Tello from Cuenca has gained international recognition for her innovative designs that combine ancestral techniques with contemporary aesthetics. Her work honors the cultural heritage of Latin American indigenous communities while integrating modern artistic vision (Sánchez, 2021).

In 2010, UNESCO granted Andrea Tello the Award of Excellence for Handicrafts for her filigree comb design, now displayed at the Louvre Museum in Paris (El Comercio, 2014). This achievement opened international doors, enabling her to participate in

numerous trade fairs and commercialize her work in markets such as Colombia, Japan, France, Israel, and China (El Tiempo, 2014).

Overall, these examples confirm that trade fairs are powerful instruments for internationalization, especially in artisanal industries like jewelry. The experiences of *Solo Evas S.A.S.* and the Mexican jewelry collectives demonstrate that such events enhance visibility, create business connections, and strengthen brand positioning on a global scale. However, in Ecuador and particularly in Azuay Province there remains limited information about the real impact of international fairs on jewelry exporters. Although artisans like Andrea Tello have achieved international success, the sector still lacks comprehensive data to assess the broader effectiveness of these events.

Additionally, limited institutional follow-up after trade fairs and rising insecurity in the country may discourage artisans from international participation. Fear of public exposure and a lack of guarantees can hinder their confidence to project themselves abroad. Therefore, while other countries have leveraged trade fairs as effective internationalization tools, Azuay's context still requires detailed research and data to understand how these events can truly benefit local jewelry exporters.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ARTISANAL JEWELRY COMPANIES IN AZUAY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIRS

#### 2.1. Barriers in the Internationalization Process of the Jewelry Sector

According to an article published by PRO ECUADOR (2017), several barriers become evident when jewelry companies enter international markets and participate in global trade fairs. One of the main constraints identified is the limited initial investment capacity required for export processes. The case referenced in that document shows that the first export made by an artisanal jewelry company to the French market reached only USD 5,340, reflecting the scarce financial resources the company had at that time.

However, despite the low level of investment, this initial operation demonstrated the presence of international interest in Ecuadorian artisanal jewelry. This became an opportunity to expand the product's presence in new markets and gain greater visibility. Furthermore, the process was supported by public institutions, which made it possible to strengthen commercial links and position the company in three countries of the European Union. Participation in international trade fairs, combined with this institutional support, became key factors for its growth and recognition abroad.

##### 2.1.1 Structural and Administrative Limitation

In general terms, various Ecuadorian companies face structural limitations that restrict their export performance. Although expansion into international markets is often viewed as a positive process, the reality shows that traceability and the requirements associated with internationalization do not always prove favorable. As noted by Kaleka & Katsikeas (1995), García & Avella (2007) and Vanegas & Restrepo (2016) the lack of international positioning does not necessarily stem from conditions imposed by importing countries but often results from deficiencies within the domestic market. Among the most recurrent factors are the complexity of procedures, high costs, tariffs, and the duplication of required documentation.

Along this same line, studies such as those by Zou & Stan (1998), Beleska-Spasova (2014), Skosan & Kabuya (2014) and Fugazza (2004), Along this same line, studies emphasize that trade barriers remain a major concern, especially when they become

obstacles to achieving competitive entry into foreign markets. Therefore, attaining a satisfactory export performance requires addressing both the structural conditions of the country of origin and the demands of the international destination market. In this regard, Casillas et al. (2011), argue that effective internationalization is explained by two key determinants: on the one hand, the factors linked to the host market, and on the other, those related to the domestic market.

## 2.2. Macroeconomic Conditions of Ecuador

Ecuador's economic structure has historically relied on primary sectors such as oil, agriculture, and the extraction of raw materials. Additionally, the country's dollarization, adopted after the financial crisis of the year 2000, aimed to stop the devaluation of the sucre and reduce inflation (Calderón et al., 2016). Within this framework, exports play a strategic role, as they allow foreign currency inflows that ensure liquidity and contribute to the balance of trade (Alvarado & Iglesias, 2017).

However, export performance has not shown sustained growth in recent years. The Ecuadorian Federation of Exporters (2023) indicates that, in addition to internal factors that limit competitiveness, the appreciation of the U.S. dollar represents an additional constraint, as it makes Ecuadorian products more expensive compared to competitors in the region that operate with more flexible currencies. This scenario directly affects sectors with lower export volumes, such as artisanal jewelry, where competitiveness depends on reducing transaction costs and ensuring access to preferential financing.

### 2.2.1 Institutionality and Public Management

Analyses of the 2015–2020 period (see Graph 1) show that the loss of competitiveness is not primarily explained by the conditions of destination markets, but rather by internal limitations. Among these, weaknesses in institutional management, the complexity of administrative procedures, and deficiencies in public policy formulation stand out factors that collectively have restricted the country's export capacity (Quiñónez Cabeza et al., 2021). These elements have a direct impact on the jewelry sector in Azuay, where artisanal producers must allocate additional resources to overcome administrative obstacles before being able to access international fairs and buyers.

### 2.3. Statistical Evidence of the Sector

Table 1 below presents the annual FOB values of Ecuadorian jewelry exports classified under subheading 7113, which corresponds to jewelry articles and parts made of precious metals. The data are expressed in thousands of U.S. dollars and cover the period from 2015 to 2024, allowing the observation of the sector's export evolution over the last decade. This information, obtained from the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE) and systematized for this study, constitutes an essential empirical basis for analyzing commercial trends in the sector and identifying the years of greatest expansion or contraction within the national export dynamics.

**Table 1**

*Ecuadorian Jewelry Exports (Subheading 7113), 2015–2024 (thousands of FOB dollars)*

| YEARS | FOB    |
|-------|--------|
| 2015  | 88,48  |
| 2016  | 52,58  |
| 2017  | 147,77 |
| 2018  | 56,06  |
| 2019  | 40,95  |
| 2020  | 63,57  |
| 2021  | 404,40 |
| 2022  | 48,52  |
| 2023  | 366,89 |
| 2024  | 241,92 |

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Central Bank of Ecuador.

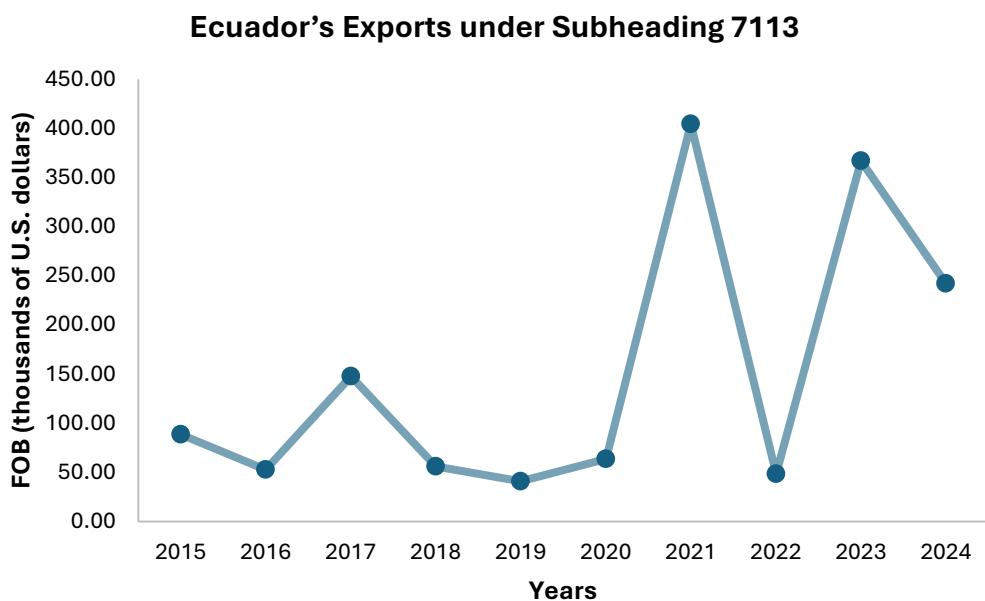
Figure 1 shows that Ecuadorian jewelry exports display an irregular pattern, characterized by a downward trend between 2015 and 2019, followed by a recovery starting in 2020 and significant peaks in 2021 and 2023. These increases contrast with pronounced declines in 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2024, revealing the high volatility of the sector.

This instability confirms what was stated by Quiñónez Cabeza et al. (2021), regarding the fact that the main barriers to foreign trade originate from internal factors such as complex procedures, the lack of effective public policies, and the limited institutional capacity to support exporters.

The low export values, consistent with the case cited by PRO ECUADOR (2017), reflect the limited initial investment capacity of the sector. However, the graph also shows that when there is institutional backing or participation in trade fairs, exports increase, demonstrating real opportunities to strengthen the international presence of Azuay's artisanal jewelry.

### Figure 1

*Ecuador's Exports under Subheading 7113, 2015–2024 (thousands of FOB dollars)*



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Central Bank of Ecuador.

The comparative analysis between the periods before and after 2020 reveals a substantial improvement in the export performance of the jewelry sector, increasing from an average of approximately USD 77,000 to nearly USD 225,000. This progress reflects

a higher level of international projection, although it is not exempt from fluctuations that demonstrate a lack of long-term stability. In this regard, participation in international trade fairs is consolidated as an effective mechanism for expanding presence in foreign markets and stimulating export growth; however, such results tend to be temporary if they are not supported by institutional strengthening policies, productive financing, and sustainable business strategies.

#### **2.4. Opportunities in the Internationalization Process of the Jewelry Sector**

Although the jewelry sector faces various barriers to its expansion, there are also valuable opportunities that can strengthen the international presence of artisanal jewelry businesses in Azuay. These opportunities arise from internal aspects, linked to the essence of the craft, as well as external factors associated with the global environment.

Regarding internal factors, tradition, design, and quality remain fundamental pillars for competing in international markets. According to Jara et al. (2020) in their study on the Peruvian jewelry industry, the customization of designs, innovation, and the transmission of artisanal knowledge become competitive advantages that open the door to new destinations. Today, consumers value products with cultural identity, crafted using ancestral techniques, but that also meet demanding quality standards.

From this perspective, the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay has notable potential. Filigree, as a cultural heritage transmitted from generation to generation, is fused with contemporary design proposals and 18-karat gold craftsmanship, offering exclusive pieces that meet what international consumers seek: authenticity, quality, and differentiation. As stated by Jara et al. (2020), the capacity to adapt designs to market preferences without renouncing cultural essence constitutes a strategic opportunity to position jewelry within specialized segments where tradition, design, and quality are recognized as added values.

On the other hand, external factors refer to the conditions of the global economic environment, international demand, current foreign trade policies, public institutional support, and consumption trends that increase the value of products with cultural identity all of which influence the internationalization process of the artisanal jewelry sector.

In Latin America, recent studies show that artisanal jewelry is at a point of convergence between tradition, culture, and innovation, positioning it favorably in

international markets. According to ProColombia (2024), Colombian artisanal jewelry has gained prominence abroad thanks to the combination of traditional techniques with contemporary designs that convey authenticity and symbolic value. This phenomenon reflects an external opportunity derived from the growing interest of international consumers in handmade and culturally representative products a trend that directly benefits countries with strong artisanal heritage, such as Ecuador.

From a regional perspective, reports by IMARC Group (2024) and Mordor Intelligence (2024) project that the Latin American jewelry market will exceed USD 23 billion, with an annual growth rate of around 5%. This dynamism is largely driven by external factors such as the expansion of e-commerce, the diversification of distribution channels, and the increased purchasing power of both Latin American and foreign consumers. These elements create a favorable environment for the integration of artisanal jewelry into international markets, especially those that incorporate cultural and sustainable attributes.

In the Ecuadorian context, Alonso et al. (2024) research on artisanal companies in the country highlights that the institutional structure and public–private support policies are decisive external factors that condition sector competitiveness. Entities such as ProEcuador, CIDAP, and Fedexpor have enabled the development of international promotion spaces, training programs, and specialized fairs that facilitate market access for jewelry producers. However, the author warns that the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on interinstitutional coordination and the strengthening of regional cooperation networks.

Similarly, the study by Galvão et al. (2021) identifies government incentives, institutional support, participation in international trade fairs, and visibility in digital networks as essential external drivers for the sustainable internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises. These external conditions serve as catalysts that reduce logistical and financial barriers, enabling artisanal producers to project themselves into global markets with greater chances of success.

Additionally, Jara, Román, Surichaqui, and Vicente-Ramos argue that the international environment provides competitive advantages to jewelry companies when they manage to adapt to global trends in design, sustainability, and traceability. In this regard, the rise of major trade fairs such as VicenzaOro (Italy), JCK Las Vegas (USA),

and MadridJoya (Spain) represents a strategic channel of entry for Latin American jewelers by providing visibility, contact with specialized buyers, and insights into global market demands. Taken together, these studies confirm that external factors such as growing international demand, public institutional support, global commercial platforms, technological and digital innovation, and the trend toward ethical and culturally aware consumption constitute tangible opportunities for Azuay's artisanal jewelry sector. Capitalizing on these conditions requires proper coordination between artisans, sector associations, and trade promotion agencies so that cultural identity and artisanal quality can translate into sustainable competitive advantages in the international market.

## **2.5. Identification of Barriers and Opportunities According to the Interviews**

This section presents the main barriers and opportunities identified from the fieldwork conducted through semi-structured interviews with six representative companies of the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the dynamics, limitations, and potentialities that influence the internationalization process of these companies, considering their participation in international trade fairs as a mechanism for projecting themselves into foreign markets.

The analysis is based on the perceptions and experiences of business owners and representatives, addressing productive, cultural, institutional, and commercial dimensions that allow establishing a correlation between empirical evidence and the theoretical perspectives developed in previous chapters. In this way, the aim is to reveal the local particularities of the sector, as well as the structural and strategic factors that condition or enhance its international positioning.

The findings from each company are presented below, distinguishing the barriers that limit their international competitiveness and the opportunities that strengthen their insertion into international markets.

### **2.5.1. Isabel López Joyería**

The experience of Isabel López Joyería, led by architect and artisan María Isabel López Vera, represents a significant case within the internationalization process of the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay. Her trajectory demonstrates how the combination of tradition, innovation, and strategic management can transform a local workshop into a brand with international projection. From the beginning, López has focused on aesthetic

differentiation and the contemporary reinterpretation of filigree an emblematic technique of Chordeleg which has granted cultural value and authenticity to her creations. However, her path toward international recognition has not been exempt from challenges that reflect the structural and operational limitations of the sector.

First, economic and logistical barriers were identified, derived from the high costs associated with participation in international trade fairs, which can range between USD 3,000 and 10,000, including transportation, accommodation, and booth setup. Although entities such as ProEcuador have provided partial support of approximately 30%, the lack of sustained financing is a significant limitation for the continuity and expansion of artisanal ventures. Additionally, limited production capacity resulting from the artisanal nature of jewelry making, the shortage of skilled labor, and the lack of adequate infrastructure affects the ability to meet international demand within competitive timelines. López also highlights the insufficient valuation of artisanal craftsmanship within the domestic market, which impacts the economic sustainability of workshops that often rely more on the personal motivation and social commitment of their founders than on a consolidated business structure.

Moreover, technological and digital positioning barriers are evident, particularly the need to strengthen online presence through professional websites and the effective use of social media as direct export channels. This digital gap restricts the international visibility of Ecuadorian artisanal brands, especially in a global context requiring robust digital marketing strategies aligned with product identity.

Despite these constraints, Isabel López's trajectory also reveals significant opportunities arising from participation in international trade fairs. Events such as Artigiano in Fiera (Milan), Colombiamoda (Medellín), and NY NOW (New York) have served as key platforms for learning, expanding business networks, and understanding global market dynamics. Through these experiences, López has developed skills in negotiation, product presentation, and brand positioning, establishing commercial alliances with retailers in France and the United States. Her first export to Paris in 2017, valued at approximately USD 6,000, symbolized not only an economic milestone but also international recognition of the artistic value of Ecuadorian artisanal craftsmanship.

Likewise, trade fairs have allowed her to redefine her business model toward author jewelry and limited-edition collections aimed at exclusive niches a strategic opportunity

that differentiates her from mass production and enhances competitiveness through the symbolic and cultural value of each piece. In this regard, López believes that internationalization is not only about selling abroad but also about projecting a brand with identity, history, and social purpose capable of representing Ecuador on global stages.

Ultimately, Isabel López's perspective reaffirms that the internationalization of artisanal jewelry requires coordination between support institutions, technical training, design innovation, and sustained cultural promotion strategies. Her case demonstrates that, despite the sector's structural limitations, real opportunities for growth exist when creativity is combined with business management and a strategic focus toward specialized markets.

### **2.5.2. Sajo Joyería.**

The experience of SAJO Joyería, led by Mr. José Carlos Sánchez, highlights both the barriers and opportunities faced by artisanal jewelry companies in Azuay in their internationalization process. Among the primary barriers is economic and financing limitation, as the high costs of participating in international trade fairs ranging from USD 4,000 to 5,000 must be fully covered by the company without institutional support. Additionally, the lack of specialized guidance and advisory services from entities such as ProEcuador or industry associations generates uncertainty when deciding which fairs to attend and how to strategically leverage them. Likewise, limited production capacity, inherent to artisanal craftsmanship, restricts the ability to fulfill large orders or respond quickly to international demand, reducing competitiveness compared to companies with mechanized processes. Furthermore, technological and digital marketing barriers such as the absence of a website and an active presence on social media hinder visibility and brand promotion in global markets. Logistical and transportation challenges, coupled with the country's economic instability and migration-related restrictions such as visa requirements, also represent additional obstacles limiting ongoing participation in fairs abroad.

On the other hand, the company has also identified significant opportunities arising from participation in international spaces. The Feria de Artesanías de América (FAAM), organized by CIDAP, has been a key platform for SAJO Joyería's projection, enabling the company to gain visibility, receive awards for artisanal excellence, and establish business relationships with wholesale and retail clients from the United States and Latin America leading to an approximate 3% increase in sales and exports. Additionally, participation in

these fairs encouraged improvements in packaging and product presentation, incorporating luxury materials that convey exclusivity, and promoted the implementation of follow-up and customer loyalty strategies after the event.

Creatively, the “Flores y Fauna” collection inspired by nature and pre-Columbian symbols, reflects a blend of tradition and innovation that offers cultural identity and differentiation in international markets. Finally, the company maintains expansion plans toward Europe and Asia, demonstrating a strategic growth vision and a continued commitment to innovation.

Overall, the case of SAJO Joyería shows that despite economic, technological, and logistical limitations, participation in international trade fairs represents a decisive opportunity to strengthen competitiveness, position Azuay’s artisanal jewelry, and consolidate its presence in global markets.

### 2.5.3. Joyería Sol de oro

The case of Joyería Sol de Oro, owned by Mr. Juan Marcelo Orden, reveals several barriers that limit its internationalization process. Among the main challenges are the lack of institutional and financial support from local and national authorities, the high investment required to participate in international trade fairs (between USD 2,000 and 3,000), and the absence of public policies aimed at promoting the artisanal sector. Added to this are intense international competition, the standardization requirements demanded by foreign buyers, limited technological and production infrastructure, and language barriers that complicate negotiations with international clients. Internal challenges are also present, such as the limited association among artisans and the lack of cooperation within the guild, which prevents the consolidation of a collective production capacity capable of meeting large-scale demand. Finally, gold price volatility and the decreasing domestic demand for high-value jewelry represent economic obstacles affecting the sustainability of the workshop.

On the other hand, there are significant opportunities derived from the artisan’s extensive trajectory and reputation, as he has more than fifty years of experience and local market recognition. Participation in the International Fair of Durán allowed him to gain visibility, expand his network of contacts, and achieve a 50% increase in both national and international sales. Additionally, the growing foreign interest in customized artisanal

pieces, along with his previous experience working with international companies such as Tiffany & Co. and Paloma Picasso, strengthens his capacity to compete in global markets.

The incorporation of cultural elements such as “la yapa” in his commercial strategy and the possibility of formalizing currently informal exports through personal commissions reflect concrete opportunities for expansion and international positioning of artisanal jewelry from Azuay.

#### **2.5.4. Imelda Joyería Galería**

The case of Imelda Joyería Galería, led by Cuenca artisan Imelda Esperanza Chérrez Vimos, reveals multiple barriers and opportunities that reflect the structural conditions and potential of the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay as it seeks to enter international markets through participation in trade fairs.

Regarding the barriers, one of the main challenges faced by the artisan is the high cost of participating in international fairs, which includes registration fees, transportation, lodging, and promotional materials factors that limit the possibility of maintaining a consistent presence in such events. This limitation is exacerbated by the absence of institutional support, as the company’s internationalization efforts have been sustained solely through self-management and personal reinvestment, without financial or logistical assistance from public entities or guild associations. This lack of institutional backing reflects the absence of effective policies to promote the artisanal sector at the international level.

Another major obstacle is the bureaucracy associated with artisanal certification processes, since obtaining official accreditation requires extensive and complex procedures that hinder workshop formalization and participation in international fairs organized by government agencies. Additionally, unfair competition from imported industrial jewelry, particularly low-cost products from China, is a constant challenge for artisans, as these products reduce the competitiveness of handcrafted pieces. Finally, among personal and social limitations, Imelda has faced episodes of gender discrimination in international spaces, where her work was undervalued because she is a woman and does not represent a brand with institutional backing. These experiences reveal persistent gender gaps within the artisanal and commercial spheres, affecting the recognition of women’s work in Ecuadorian jewelry.

Despite these challenges, the case of Imelda Joyería Galería also demonstrates multiple opportunities that have helped strengthen its positioning abroad. First, participation in international fairs has been crucial to showcasing the quality and authenticity of Ecuadorian artisanal jewelry, enabling significant sales, commercial relationships, and the projection of a positive national image. Her presence in fairs in countries such as Colombia, Belgium, France, and Spain have supported the creation of a strong commercial network and has enhanced the prestige of Cuenca jewelry internationally.

Additionally, the cultural and symbolic value of her pieces represents a key competitive advantage, as her designs merge the ancestral heritage of the Cañari tupos and the traditional earrings of Cuenca women with modern enameling and metal-fusion techniques, giving each creation a cultural identity highly appreciated in international markets. Technical and aesthetic innovation further strengthens this value proposition, as the artisan has been a pioneer in the use of enameling in Cuenca, allowing her to diversify her offerings and differentiate herself from other local workshops.

Her experience also shows that self-management and constant reinvestment can lead to highly successful results. For instance, her participation in a fair in Bogotá where an investment of approximately USD 7,000 resulted in sales exceeding USD 60,000 demonstrates the profitability potential of artisanal production when combined with effort and strategic vision. Likewise, her international recognition when selected by the Ministry of Culture to represent Ecuador in Pamplona, Spain, consolidated her reputation as a leading figure in the country's artisanal jewelry sector.

Another relevant opportunity is the personalized customer service she offers during fairs, providing immediate size adjustments or custom modifications, which builds trust, customer loyalty, and added value to the purchasing experience. Ultimately, Imelda's professional path represents a process of women's empowerment and the sustainability of artisanal craftsmanship, as she has transformed a family tradition into a successful entrepreneurial project, passing her knowledge on to new generations and promoting the appreciation of manual work as a form of cultural expression and a driver of local economic development.

Overall, the barriers and opportunities identified in the case of Imelda Joyería Galería reflect the dual reality of the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay, where the lack of

institutional support, bureaucratic hurdles, and industrial competition coexist with outstanding creativity, strong cultural identity, and entrepreneurial resilience. Through participation in international trade fairs, artisans like Imelda succeed in projecting the essence of Cuenca's artistic heritage into global markets.

#### **2.5.5. Andrea Tello Design**

The experience of Andrea Tello reveals clear and demanding barriers to achieving international consolidation through design fairs. The first obstacle is cost: between lodging, travel expenses, and participation fees, each event amounts to roughly USD 10,000. Time is another critical factor: in Asia, these fairs usually last no more than five days, which means the collection must be impeccably prepared in advance in order to capture buyers' attention, generate media visibility, and secure purchase orders in just a few days.

Additionally, strict curatorial requirements characterize these platforms Foire de Paris being a clear example where participation demands a product with a well-defined identity, a coherent narrative, and flawless finishes. If the proposal does not resonate with the target audience, the risk of not recovering the investment increases significantly. For this reason, her advice is practical and strategic: without an agent or a specialized market-research partner someone who defines the buyer persona, validates brand positioning, and builds a commercial agenda investing is not advisable; entering "blindly" often results in visually attractive showcases but disappointing outcomes.

Despite these challenges, her trajectory demonstrates solid opportunities when preparation is rigorous. Design fairs and fashion weeks with experiences in New York, Macao, and Hong Kong, in addition to Foire de Paris function as commercial accelerators: in a matter of days, Tello's reinterpretation of filigree, crafted with natural stones such as topaz and rooted in a narrative of women's empowerment, gains visibility among professional buyers and the press. This translates into increased sales and exports: wholesale orders, restocking, and the opening of commercial points such as Dallas complemented by an e-commerce channel that now ships internationally. The concentration of qualified demand shortens commercial cycles that would typically take months through traditional channels.

Furthermore, she holds a competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate: cultural identity combined with slow and sustainable fashion principles, elevating perceived value

and opening editorial and market opportunities. Lastly, her social impact work in the southern region of Ecuador providing 3- to 9-month training programs in jewelry-making for vulnerable groups, equipping them with tools, and purchasing their production strengthens productive capacity and increases international buyer confidence, enabling a sustainable and socially embedded positioning of Azuay's jewelry in global markets.

#### **2.5.6. Sempertegui Joyería.**

Joría Sempertegui faces a set of barriers and opportunities that reflect the dynamics of the internationalization process within the artisanal jewelry sector of Chordeleg. Among the main barriers are the high economic costs associated with participation in international trade fairs, which include booth fees, transportation, lodging, promotional materials, and travel expenses, with an estimated investment between USD 4,000 and 6,000. This represents a significant limitation for family-scale workshops that lack public or private financial support. The company also faces restrictions in artisanal production capacity, making it difficult to meet large-volume orders without compromising product quality. Added to this are logistical and bureaucratic difficulties involved in formalizing small-scale exports, especially due to high shipping, insurance, and customs clearance costs, which force the company to rely on informal alternatives such as sending products through relatives or private courier services.

However, these limitations contrast with important opportunities resulting from their participation in international trade fairs. Their participation in Expo Joyas Perú, the company's first international event, enabled an increase in sales between 25% and 35%, and the establishment of commercial links with buyers in Peru, Chile, and the United States, creating an initial foundation for future exports. Moreover, exposure to a competitive and diverse environment encouraged professionalization of the workshop, improving production planning, quality control, and product presentation. The development of bilingual catalogs, customized packaging, and certificates of authenticity strengthened brand identity, while the creation of a capsule collection inspired by Andean elements showed a creative adaptation to international market trends, which value the fusion of tradition and contemporary design.

Institutional support from the Municipal GAD of Chordeleg and CIDAP in matters of promotion and international negotiation has also played a key role, although still insufficient in terms of financing. Altogether, these experiences have allowed Joyería Sempertegui to gradually position itself internationally, understand foreign trade

requirements, and project a sustainable expansion strategy based on cultural authenticity, artisanal quality, and the consolidation of long-term international clients.

The analysis of interviews conducted with the main artisanal jewelry exporters of Azuay including Isabel López Joyería, SAJO Joyería, Sol de Oro, Imelda Joyería Galería, Andrea Tello Design, and Sempertegui revealed multiple factors influencing the sector's internationalization process, both in terms of limitations and opportunities arising from participation in international trade fairs.

Among the main limitations identified are the high costs of participating in fairs, which can range from USD 3,000 to 10,000 per event, constituting a barrier to maintaining sustained presence abroad. Limited access to financing, weak institutional support, logistical challenges, and time-consuming procedures required for artisanal certifications and visa acquisition were also noted. Likewise, artisanal production entails constraints in volume and response time due to the shortage of specialized technical personnel and the lack of modern infrastructure. Weaknesses in digital presence and promotion were also evident, as many jewelers still lack websites or effective social media strategies to enhance their international visibility.

On the other hand, interviews also highlighted major opportunities generated by participation in international fairs. These events serve as key platforms to showcase the talent, quality, and cultural value of Azuay's jewelry, while generating business connections and facilitating access to new markets. The collected testimonies indicate that such experiences have significantly contributed to the professionalization of workshops, encouraging innovation in design and strengthening brand positioning through the authenticity of filigree and the cultural identity embedded in each piece. Cases such as Isabel López, Imelda Joyería, and Andrea Tello Design illustrate how participation in international fairs enhances brand recognition, promotes strategic commercial partnerships, and consolidates a more solid corporate image abroad. Nonetheless, participation in these events requires strategic planning, particularly the support of a specialized agent able to conduct market research that guides investment decisions, given that associated costs are high and cannot be assumed spontaneously or experimentally, as emphasized by the interviewed designer.

Overall, the findings reveal a sector with strong creative and symbolic potential that requires reinforcement through support policies, technical training, access to credit, and

digitalization strategies to ensure more competitive and sustainable international market insertion.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIRS ON THE ARTISANAL JEWELRY SECTOR IN AZUAY

Before identifying and analyzing the effects generated by the jewelry companies studied, it is essential to present the complete methodological structure that guides this research. This section will describe, sequentially and in detail, each phase of the study in order to clarify the “what,” “how,” and “why” of each methodological decision and to ensure coherence, replicability, and rigor throughout the investigative process.

#### 3.1. Methodological Design

The research adopts a qualitative approach complemented by quantitative elements to analyze how participation in international trade fairs has influenced the internationalization of artisanal jewelry-exporting companies in Azuay. The qualitative component will allow for a deeper understanding of perceptions, strategies, and transformations within these businesses, while the quantitative component will support the analysis with concrete data—such as the number of fairs attended, export performance over time, market diversification, and acquisition of international clients. Combining both methods will enrich the analysis and strengthen the study’s rigor in line with its objectives.

The study will follow a descriptive and exploratory, non-experimental, cross-sectional design, aiming to identify and examine the characteristics of the phenomenon without altering it. Its exploratory nature responds to the limited number of studies on the internationalization of artisanal jewelry through trade fairs, allowing the detection of emerging trends and the establishment of a foundation for future research. At the same time, its descriptive focus seeks to systematically detail the particularities of this sector, offering a clear view of its current dynamics and behavior.

Because no variables will be manipulated, the non-experimental design observes events as they naturally occur. The cross-sectional approach will collect data at a single

point in time, providing an accurate snapshot of the current state of the sector and its relationship with participation in international trade fairs.

### **3.1.1. Context and Participants**

For this study, the population corresponds to artisanal jewelry-exporting companies from Azuay that have participated in international trade fairs. To select the sample, a non-probabilistic purposive and convenience sampling method will be applied, selecting six companies with extensive experience that meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Having participated in at least one international trade fair.
- Being formally registered as an artisanal jewelry company.
- Willingness of the business owners to collaborate in the interviews.

From this group of jewelry companies, two will be studied in greater depth as success cases, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding and comparative perspective within the research. This selection process ensures the relevance of the data obtained and will support the fulfillment of the specific objectives established in the study.

### **3.1.2. Procedure (Data Collection Techniques and Instruments)**

The main data collection technique will be the semi-structured interview applied to the representatives or owners of the six selected artisanal jewelry companies in Azuay Province. The purpose of this technique is to obtain qualitative information regarding their experiences, opportunities, obstacles, and results related to participation in international trade fairs.

The interview process is structured into several sections following a standardized protocol that guarantees methodological coherence and adherence to ethical research principles. Additionally, each section of the questionnaire includes one Likert-scale question with the objective of transforming participants' perceptions into quantifiable data. This allows for the systematization of responses, facilitating statistical analysis and the graphical representation of results, contributing to an objective and well-supported interpretation of the information collected.

#### **Instrument Design and Development**

Initially, a questionnaire of approximately 25 questions was developed to be used in the semi-structured interviews. It is organized into six sections, enabling the collection

of information aligned with the objectives previously established. Below, the names of the sections and their intended purpose will be detailed.

- **Section 1: Getting to Know the Company.**

This section aims to gather information about the company's history, trajectory, and the products that identify it as a brand.

- **Section 2: Motivation and Selection of Trade Fairs.**

Reasons for participating, expectations, and criteria for choosing trade fairs.

- **Section 3: Preparation and Investment.**

Pre-fair strategies, investment, institutional support, and obstacles encountered during the process.

- **Section 4: Experiences.**

Experiences during the fair, creation of new contacts, lessons learned, and barriers faced.

- **Section 5: Results and Impact.**

Post-fair benefits, changes in the company and its products, increase in exports, and market positioning.

- **Section 6: Opportunities and Barriers.**

Opinions on the advantages and disadvantages that international trade fairs offer for the artisanal jewelry sector in Azuay.

It is important to emphasize that each of these questions has been written in clear and understandable language, in order to generate a fluid dialogue and allow the interviewee to freely express their experiences, while respecting their perspectives.

Before starting with the questions, participants will be provided a brief introduction explaining the academic purpose of the research, the relevance of their participation for the analysis of the jewelry sector, and assuring them that the information provided will be used exclusively for academic purposes. Additionally, a written informed consent form will be provided, recognizing the interviewee's right to participate voluntarily.

### **Interview Execution**

Interviews will be conducted in person at a location agreed upon by both the interviewer and the interviewee. However, if logistical restrictions arise, digital tools may be used to carry out the process.

Each interview will last between 40 and 60 minutes. With the interviewee's authorization, the session will be audio-recorded for the purpose of later transcription. In cases where recording is not possible, a written record will be created through note-taking during the interview.

### **Documental Review**

As a complementary technique, a document review will be conducted using secondary sources issued by official institutions such as the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE), the National Customs Service of Ecuador (SENAE), PRO ECUADOR, the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade and Investment, and CIDAP.

### **Systematization of Information**

The most significant excerpts from the interviews will be systematized in summary tables and organized into thematic categories aligned with the specific objectives of the research, such as barriers, opportunities, effects, transformations, and success stories. The quantitative information obtained such as the number of fairs attended, increase in exports, and growth in the acquisition of international clients will be represented through descriptive graphs that complement and enrich the qualitative findings. Finally, all records will be stored in digital format, ensuring compliance with confidentiality standards and the ethical safeguarding of the information.

#### **3.1.3. Method for interpreting results**

The interpretation of results will be carried out through a qualitative analysis supported by complementary quantitative data, aimed at establishing relationships between the perceptions of the interviewees and the information obtained from various academic and institutional sources. In this way, the quantitative component will serve as support and validation for the qualitative findings, strengthening the consistency and depth of the analysis (Creswell & Plano, 2018).

Within the qualitative component, thematic content analysis will be applied through coding, categorization, and the identification of common and divergent patterns in the responses collected during the semi-structured interviews. This process will allow for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by artisanal jewelry companies in Azuay in their internationalization process.

The analytical categories will be directly linked to the specific objectives of the research, emphasizing topics such as: internationalization barriers, opportunities derived from participation in international fairs, results obtained, and success cases. To reinforce internal validity, the qualitative information gathered from the interviews will be contrasted with quantitative data and institutional documents reviewed (BCE, PRO ECUADOR, SENAE, CIDAP, among others).

For its part, the quantitative analysis will be based on descriptive statistics, presenting results through tables, charts, and percentages that facilitate visualization of the information derived from the Likert-scale questions and indicators related to the number of international fairs attended, export growth, and market diversification.

Finally, the interpretation of the findings will be developed in alignment with the theoretical framework, contrasting empirical evidence with prior studies and supporting conclusions through a critical reading that identifies both progress and limitations within the internationalization process of artisanal jewelry businesses in Azuay.

Below, the questionnaire used in the semi-structured interviews applied to artisanal jewelry-exporting companies in Azuay Province is presented, as well as a summary of each of the interviews conducted. This section aims to address the second specific research objective, which focuses on examining the effects generated in these companies following their participation in international trade fairs.

The analysis will focus on identifying and describing the main changes observed in aspects such as commercial performance, entry into new markets, and institutional strengthening, based on the information provided by the company representatives. This approach seeks to understand, from an empirical perspective, the dynamics and transformations resulting from their experience in these international environments.

### **3.2. Interview Model**

#### **Block 1. Getting to Know the Company**

1. I would like to start by learning a little about your company: how did it begin and how has it evolved within the artisanal jewelry sector?
2. At what point did you decide to look toward the international market or consider exporting your products?

3. What types of jewelry or collections best represent your company's identity abroad?

## **Block 2. Motivations and Selection of Trade Fairs**

4. What motivated you to participate for the first time in an international trade fair?
5. Which international fairs have you attended, and in what years?
6. How did you learn about these fairs, or what factors made you decide: "yes, we should participate"?
7. When deciding which fair to attend, what aspects do you consider most important: the market, the reputation of the fair, costs, institutional support?
8. What expectations did you have prior to attending these fairs?

### **8A. Please rate the extent to which the following factors influenced your decision to participate in an international trade fair (1 = not important, 5 = very important):**

- Possibility of attracting new clients
- Brand positioning
- Institutional support
- Prestige of the fair
- Costs and financing

## **Block 3. Preparation and Investment**

9. How do you prepare for the fair in terms of products, catalog, promotional materials, booth design, staff training?
10. Could you give me an idea of the investment required to participate (flights, lodging, booth, promotional materials, etc.)?
11. Did you receive any financial or logistical support from entities such as ProEcuador, Chambers of Commerce, or associations?
12. What challenges or difficulties did you face during the preparation stage?

12A. Did you receive financial or logistical support from any institution to participate in international fairs?

**Yes**  **No**

12B. If yes, please rate the importance of this support

(1 = not important, 5 = very important).

#### **Block 4. Experience at the Fair**

13. How would you describe your experience participating in the fair as exhibitors?
14. What types of contacts were you able to establish: buyers, distributors, colleagues, designers?
15. Beyond business, what personal or professional learning experiences do you highlight?
16. Did you face barriers such as language, cultural differences, competition, or logistical issues?
17. What did you do to stand out from other exhibitors and capture visitor attention?
- 17 A. Which of the following barriers did you face most significantly during the fair? (You may select more than one)
  - Language
  - Cultural differences
  - International competition
  - Logistics and transportation
  - None

#### **Block 5. Results and Impact**

18. After the fair, what concrete results did you obtain (orders, contracts, new clients, increased visibility)?
19. Did you notice an increase in exports or new market opportunities as a result of these experiences?
20. Were there any internal changes within the company after the fair, such as in production processes, designs, packaging, certifications, or personnel?
21. From your perspective, did international trade fairs truly support your company's internationalization path? How do you demonstrate this?
22. To what extent did these experiences impact your company's image and positioning inside and outside the country?
- 22A. After participating in international fairs, did your company increase its exports?

•

Yes                    No

If your answer is Yes:

- – 22A.1. By approximately what percentage did your exports increase after the fair?
- – 22A.2. Which markets or countries were incorporated as destinations for your products?
- – 22A.3. What types of international clients were acquired (wholesalers, distributors, retailers, online platforms)?
- 22A.4. Was this growth sustained over time or was it temporary?

## **Block 6. Opportunities and Barriers**

23. In your opinion, what opportunities do international fairs offer to artisanal jewelry companies in Azuay?

24. What do you consider are still the main barriers that prevent these fairs from being fully leveraged?

25. What types of support, programs, or policies do you believe are necessary for more local companies to benefit from participation in international fairs?

- 25A.6. How accessible do you currently consider international trade fairs to be for artisanal jewelry businesses in Azuay?

1 = not accessible at all, 5 = very accessible

## **3.3. Development of the Interviews with the Six Jewelry Companies in Azuay Province**

### **3.3.1. Interview with Designer Andrea Tello**

“I grew up surrounded by conversations about gold, stones, and artisans,” recalls Andrea Tello when sharing her origins in Cuenca. That family environment, where jewelry was a daily topic, shaped her artistic sensibility and later influenced her decision to study art, marketing, and public relations in the United States. After seven years of training including a master’s degree she returned to Ecuador and worked for a period in her father’s factory. That experience allowed her to save money and, more importantly, reaffirm a conviction: she wanted to propose her own design language, one in which

artisanal technique engaged in dialogue with contemporary aesthetics. In 2003, she formally began her path as a creator; her first emblematic piece was a filigree hair comb. A commission recommended by the Ministry of Industry and Productivity (MIPRO) encouraged her to compete, win awards, and ultimately obtain, in 2011, the UNESCO Award of Excellence for Handicrafts. This milestone solidified her identity as a designer working with Andean symbolism, but with a modern and refined look.

Alongside recognition came commercial learning. Her first major “international thermometer” was Asia: The Canton Fair showed her that filigree in silver and gold-plated formats could compete in demanding markets. From then on, she refined her strategy and specialized in design fairs rather than general craft fairs, due to their strict curatorial standards, the presence of professional buyers, and the potential for editorial exposure. As she notes, her participations in Asia typically lasted no more than five days intense, highly scheduled, and costly. “A design fair at that level demands investment; between lodging, travel expenses, and the fair itself, the budget reaches around USD 10,000,” she explains. Another key step was Foire de Paris, where she confirmed the appeal of her work for European audiences. Subsequently, her brand was invited to runways and fashion platforms such as New York Fashion Week, and she showcased collections in Macao and Hong Kong, contexts where jewelry is conceived as a designer accessory that accompanies fashion garments on the runway.

The impact of this international agenda was twofold. On the commercial side, it resulted in increased sales and exports: at the end of each fair season, the brand accumulated wholesale orders, distributor contacts, and special requests that, in the medium term, translated into points of sale and recurring replenishments. First in Dallas and simultaneously in Cuenca and Quito supported by an e-commerce platform that currently manages international shipments. Symbolically, the fairs functioned as signs of legitimacy: by exhibiting in highly curated environments, Cuenca’s filigree was positioned as a design language, not only as a heritage technique. Andrea summarizes it clearly: “Fairs opened the map for me; each invitation puts you in front of buyers who arrive ready to discover proposals and close deals.”

Product development supported this expansion. Her creative focus lies on earrings, which she describes as “the frame of the face,” combining filigree with natural stones topaz being among her favorites and compositions that evoke female empowerment: flowers symbolizing self-love, dual elements representing sisterhood and women’s

networks. Her creative process is tied to life stages travels, recovery periods and to a refined aesthetic learned from observing Asian displays: synthesis, balance, precision.

Her entrepreneurial trajectory, she insists, is not a solitary endeavor. From the beginning, she has worked with a team of artisans many from the southern region of Ecuador as well as a marketing team and market-research professionals. In fact, her primary recommendation for workshops seeking to internationalize through fairs is direct and strategic: “Do not invest in an international fair without an agent or specialized market researcher. That is the first step; without it, the results will not come.” In her experience, the approximate USD 10,000 cost of a design fair is only justified when there is clear segmentation, strategic clients, post-fair commercial channels, and a brand narrative aligned with the target audience. For that reason, she prioritizes short, curated design fairs: fewer days, more focus, better buyers.

This same logic guides her social work. In recent years, she has led a training program for young people in vulnerable situations in southern Ecuador: processes lasting from 3 to 9 months in which she teaches artisanal techniques, provides machinery and tools, and purchases the resulting production to ensure income and continuity. Her goal is clear: discourage forced migration, professionalize the craft, and create local value chains that meet international quality standards. In this way, her brand grows on an ethical foundation: each collection not only tells an aesthetic story but also sustains jobs and dignifies craftsmanship.

Creatively, she has also explored other materials and scales such as woven metallic textiles in copper and silver that reinterpret traditional handbags always under the principles of “slow & sustainable fashion”: slow processes, traceability, and respect for artisanal labor. The coherence among narrative, design, and commercial strategy explains why, after fairs, her brand not only sells more, but sells better: with higher average ticket purchases, recurring clients, and stable alliances in markets that value authorship.

### **3.3.2. Interview with Imelda Joyería Galería – Ms. Imelda Esperanza Chérrez**

Imelda Joyería Galería, led by Cuenca artisan Imelda Esperanza Chérrez Vimos, stands as one of the most prominent references in the artisanal jewelry sector of Azuay. Her story is characterized by perseverance, self-management, and a strong commitment to preserving the cultural value of traditional Ecuadorian jewelry.

From an early age, Imelda was linked to the craft through her siblings. At the age of twelve, while playing in the family workshop, she began polishing and finishing pieces, unaware that this experience would mark the beginning of a professional trajectory spanning more than three decades. Over the years, she strengthened her technical training at the Azuay Economic Reconversion Center (CREA), where she learned enameling techniques and the creation of antique-style jewelry, especially the traditional earrings worn by Cuenca women. This knowledge allowed her to develop a style that combines tradition and innovation, where each piece represents a symbol of identity, energy, and authenticity.

For more than twenty-five years, she worked with the community of Ingapirca in the province of Cañar, an experience that deeply influenced her artistic vision. By observing traditional clothing and customs particularly the striking earrings worn by Indigenous women she incorporated these elements into her designs, creating collections inspired by the Cañari “tupos.” Unlike other local jewelers focused on filigree, Imelda chose to innovate through the fusion of metals such as silver and gold, providing her pieces with an attractive and distinctive contrast in the artisanal market.

Her workshop, located in Cuenca’s historic center, functions not only as a production space but also as a place for learning and knowledge transmission. She has trained apprentices and family members, helping preserve the craft across generations. For Imelda, creativity also has an emotional dimension: “when I feel stressed, I find inspiration and express my emotions through colors; I relax by creating,” she explains, highlighting the therapeutic and spiritual connection she finds in her work.

The recognition of Imelda Joyería Galería expanded beyond national borders thanks to her participation in numerous international fairs. Her first experience abroad was in Pasto, Colombia, where despite not yet holding an official artisan certification, she impressed organizers with the quality of her finishes and the originality of her designs.

From that fair, she initiated commercial relationships with buyers from Medellín, Palmira, and Bogotá, marking the beginning of her internationalization process.

She later participated in the Popayán fair, where she won first place in booth decoration for presenting a visual concept inspired by Ecuadorian culture, incorporating textiles such as macana and Cañar reata. According to her testimony, these details were key to capturing the audience’s attention and differentiating her work from that of other

exhibitors. In Europe, she participated in fairs in Spain, France, and Belgium—this last one being especially significant, as during a private exhibition organized by her family in Brussels, she sold her entire stock of jewelry in less than three hours. In Paris, she exhibited alongside renowned Ecuadorian designers, including Andrea Tello, in a fair held at an iconic park temporarily transformed into a trade venue.

Furthermore, she was selected by the Ministry of Culture of Ecuador to represent the country in Pamplona, Spain, during an international gathering of Latin American artisans. These experiences strengthened her entrepreneurial vision and confirmed that Ecuadorian artisanal jewelry holds strong acceptance in foreign markets.

However, her path has also involved notable structural challenges. Among the main barriers she identifies are the high costs of participating in international fairs, the absence of institutional support, the bureaucratic difficulties of obtaining artisan certifications, and unfair competition from imported industrial jewelry, particularly from China. Despite this, she has maintained her business through self-management and reinvestment of her profits, without relying on subsidies or loans. A clear example is her participation in a fair in Bogotá, where she invested approximately USD 7,000 and achieved sales exceeding USD 60,000 demonstrating that planning, perseverance, and product excellence are key to success.

Imelda has also faced episodes of gender discrimination, especially internationally, where her work was underestimated because she is a woman and lacked the institutional backing of a recognized brand. Rather than discouraging her, these experiences strengthened her resolve: “they told me my jewelry was not of high quality because it was something made by women at home; later, when they saw my work, they apologized,” she recounts. Her story thus becomes a testament to resilience and female empowerment within the artisanal sector.

One of the differentiating aspects of her proposal is personalized customer service during fairs, offering immediate resizing, closure adjustments, or modifications, which fosters trust and satisfaction among clients. For her, participation in international fairs is not only about selling but also about positioning her brand, expanding her network, and enhancing the reputation of Ecuadorian craftsmanship. Although she recognizes that the costs are high, she maintains that “when a fair is good, the expense becomes secondary,” as the opportunities for growth outweigh the investment.

Artistically, Imelda merges ancestral tradition with contemporary innovation. Her pieces combine noble metals with enamel, natural stones, and artisanal finishing techniques particularly enameled jewelry, a technique she pioneered in Cuenca. Her production seeks to rescue Ecuadorian cultural symbolism and adapt it to modern market preferences.

Finally, she emphasizes the need to value and dignify artisanal labor. She frequently recalls an anecdote that reflects the lack of appreciation for this craft: “a customer once asked for a discount on a handmade piece, and I responded: do you ask for a discount in a supermarket for something made by machine?” Through this reflection, she defends fair pricing and the recognition of the human labor behind each creation.

Today, Imelda Joyería Galería continues producing unique jewelry, passing down her knowledge to new generations, and promoting Azuay’s cultural identity through goldsmithing. Her story demonstrates how determination, talent, and passion can transform artisanal tradition into a successful example of internationalization and women’s empowerment in Ecuador’s jewelry sector.

### **3.3.3. Interview with Joyería Sol de Oro – Mr. Juan Marcelo Orden**

The interview was conducted with Mr. Juan Marcelo Orden, owner of Joyería Sol de Oro, located in the Gran Pasaje of the city of Cuenca. Mr. Orden has an extensive career as a goldsmith, with more than fifty years of experience in the sector. He was the first in his family to dedicate himself to the art of jewelry-making, and thanks to his perseverance, skill, and knowledge, he has become one of Cuenca’s most recognized artisans, designing exclusive pieces for commercial jewelry stores and high-profile clients.

His beginnings trace back to a young age, learning every stage of the production process: from sourcing and preparing raw materials to the final fully handcrafted creation of jewelry pieces. While he preserves traditional artisanal methods, he has also sought to adapt to the technological and industrial changes demanded by the current market, integrating micro-casting techniques that combine artisanal and industrial processes. However, he emphasizes that he will never abandon the artisan hallmark that defines his work, which he considers fundamental to his professional identity.

Mr. Orden expressed concern about the possible disappearance of the artisanal jewelry trade, as most active artisans are over fifty years old, and there is no formal mechanism to transmit knowledge to new generations. Although his children have different professions, he has taught them the basics of the craft in hopes of preserving the family legacy and preventing the disappearance of this artistic tradition. He also regrets that the State has not invested in or sufficiently supported the artisanal sector, despite its cultural and economic relevance in a city like Cuenca, recognized as a “City of Handicrafts.”

He is a member of the Azuay Jewelers Association, through which he has received international training, including from the Casa Morte School in Italy. In 2015, he served as president of the association, leading initiatives to promote the sector’s internationalization. During his term, he worked on projects aimed at facilitating export procedures and proposed to IEPS a review of taxes applied to goods classified as luxury products, in order to grant greater commercial access for exporting artisans. He also recalls having contributed, along with other jewelers, to the creation and donation of the crown for the Queen of Cuenca, as a symbol of local jewelry identity and promotion.

Regarding the market, he notes that the demand for gold jewelry has declined locally, mainly due to the high price of the metal, with the ounce approaching USD 4,000. Consequently, many workshops have opted to produce more affordable items in silver, gold-filled materials, or other metals. Currently, foreign customers represent the main commercial support for the sector, as they tend to have greater purchasing power and prefer innovative and personalized designs. To meet these preferences, the artisan constantly renews his models, incorporating new combinations of materials and contemporary styles.

Mr. Orden’s interest in participating in international fairs stemmed from the need to give visibility to the artisanal work behind jewelry pieces since commercial wholesalers often take credit for artisans’ creations. In 2016, he participated in the International Fair of Durán, a large-scale event organized by the Ministry of Industry and Productivity (MIPRO), which brought together national and foreign exhibitors for fifteen days. MIPRO selected the most prominent jewelers in the country, provided exhibition space at no cost, and trained artisans in presentation protocols. However, costs related to promotional materials, lodging, and meals were borne by the participants.

Mr. Orden invested between USD 2,000 and 3,000 for his participation, including business cards, large-format promotional banners, and rustic packaging designed to project a distinctive brand image. Due to the high turnout at the event, he succeeded in making multiple sales and establishing contact with retail customers and international business representatives. Nonetheless, he faced barriers such as international competition, logistics expenses, and language limitations despite having lived several years in the United States.

One of the cultural strategies he applied to stand out was incorporating the concept of “la yapa,” a traditional Cuenca expression referring to a small additional gift included with a purchase. This gesture sparked curiosity and goodwill among visitors, strengthening cultural and emotional ties with the audience.

Among the main results obtained, Mr. Orden emphasized a 50% increase in sales following the fair, both domestically and abroad. He established commercial relationships with clients in the United States and Spain, and even collaborated temporarily with two designers from Texas who requested highly precise and lightweight pieces (between 1 and 1.5 grams). However, the production conditions were not profitable, as labor costs exceeded the value of the material.

Mr. Orden also shared his experience working for internationally renowned companies such as Tiffany & Co. and Paloma Picasso, where he acquired advanced technical knowledge in jewelry-making. He continues to work diligently in his workshop, maintaining a stable level of production.

Finally, he believes that international fairs represent a major opportunity for promotion and market positioning, but stresses that the main obstacle remains the lack of government and financial support. In his view, many jewelers in Azuay possess exceptional talent and creative capability, but the absence of public policies for promotion and financing limits their access to international opportunities. He concludes that although fairs offer significant prospects for growth, they are still “not sufficiently accessible” for artisans in the sector due to financial constraints and a lack of institutional recognition.

### **3.3.4. Interview with Mr. José Carlos Sánchez – Owner of SAJO Joyería**

SAJO Joyería, directed by Mr. José Carlos Sánchez, is a well-established representative of Cuenca’s artisanal jewelry sector, with more than three decades of

experience. Its origins date back to 1988 as a small workshop dedicated to the production and commercialization of gold and silver jewelry. By 1989, the business was formally consolidated, and in 2000 it opened its first physical store in Cuenca. However, due to the economic crisis resulting from the dollarization process in Ecuador, the business was temporarily forced to close, resuming operations in 2005 under a family-run model focused on customized design and traditional techniques such as filigree. Currently, the company operates two branches in Cuenca's historic center.

The idea of expanding to international markets emerged in 2012, when the company noticed a strong reception of its products locally, particularly its enameled jewelry line, which faced limited competition. This interest materialized in its first export in 2024, valued between USD 900 and 1,000, carried out through a courier shipment under the modality of small-scale exports. At other times, the company has relied on relatives traveling abroad to deliver pieces. Its most representative line, called "Flowers and Fauna," combines natural elements and pre-Columbian motifs, and has been especially appreciated by international audiences.

The primary motivation for participating in international trade fairs has been to showcase the quality and originality of its artisanal work, promoting Ecuadorian identity through art and jewelry. Its most notable participation has been in the Feria de Artesanías de América (FAAM), organized by the Inter-American Center for Arts and Popular Crafts (CIDAP), an international event that gathers artisans from across Latin America. Through this fair, SAJO Joyería received awards for artisanal excellence, strengthening its reputation and visibility within the sector.

Mr. Sánchez emphasizes the importance of carefully planning fair participation, considering aspects such as the reputation of the event, the target market, participation costs, and the availability of institutional support. He mentions that promotional materials are prepared months in advance, including business cards, large-format banners, and visual elements aligned with the brand identity. Production for exhibition is planned up to a year ahead, prioritizing the best finishes and designs. However, he acknowledges a lack of guidance and expertise in digital promotion strategies, such as developing a website or maintaining active social media — aspects he considers essential for future growth.

Economically, participation in FAAM 2018 represented an investment of approximately USD 4,000 to 5,000, financed mainly through internal resources, although lodging costs were reduced by sharing accommodation with other artisans. He notes that the company has not received financial or logistical support from public entities such as ProEcuador or from guild associations, which has limited its presence in other international fairs. The lack of specialized guidance to determine which fairs are more strategic also generates uncertainty and caution when investing in events of high cost without guaranteed results.

Among the main barriers identified, Sánchez highlights capital limitations, reduced production capacity compared to international demand, and logistical and transportation challenges. Additionally, he notes that the country's economic instability and migration restrictions (such as visa requirements) pose additional obstacles for artisans seeking internationalization. Despite these constraints, family economic stability has enabled the continuation of the business and payment of participation expenses.

The experience at the fair was described as highly enriching. It allowed the establishment of commercial relationships with both retail and wholesale clients, especially from the United States, strengthening brand positioning. The company implemented a post-fair follow-up strategy, gathering contact information from visitors to pursue future negotiations. After participating, they improved product presentation by incorporating high-quality packaging blue velvet cases with the company's name to convey luxury and exclusivity. As a result, they reported an approximate 3% increase in sales and exports, as well as greater regional visibility within Latin America.

Finally, the owner values international fairs as spaces that enable cultural exchange, promotion of artisanal talent, and access to new markets, although he considers their business impact to be moderate (rated 3/5 in relevance). He reaffirms that Ecuadorian artisans' competitiveness lies not in production volume, but in the quality, originality, and symbolic value of their pieces. He suggests implementing loans with preferential interest rates and expanding institutional support programs so that more artisanal jewelry businesses may participate in international fairs and strengthen the presence of Ecuadorian craftsmanship worldwide.

### 3.3.5. Interview with Ms. María Isabel López Vera – Owner of Isabel López Joyería

Ms. María Isabel López Vera, owner of Isabel López Joyería, is a recognized figure from Chordeleg, known for her ability to fuse artisanal tradition with contemporary design. In addition to being a jeweler, she is a licensed architect—training that has enriched her aesthetic vision and her commitment to preserving cultural heritage.

From a very young age, Isabel developed a deep connection to the art of jewelry-making. She grew up in a family of master goldsmiths who have shaped the history of her canton, where craftsmanship is understood not only as a trade but also as a form of expression, communication, and cultural identity. Filigree holds a special place in her journey, symbolizing the roots, memory, and dedication of generations of artisans. Surrounded by workshops, metals, and expert hands, Isabel learned to value the beauty of handmade work and to see jewelry as a living expression of culture.

Although her academic path led her to architecture—a profession she successfully practiced, even serving as head of the heritage department in Sígsig—her artistic calling remained constant. During her time in this institution, she worked alongside women artisans of toquilla straw hats, which strengthened her commitment to protecting local traditions and identities.

In 2012, after getting married, she decided to pursue her dream and launched her first jewelry line: “Isabel López Tiaras and Combs,” inspired by the idea that every bride should wear a unique piece that reflects her essence. From the beginning, she focused on innovation and differentiation, avoiding the replication of traditional models and designing pieces that convey elegance, originality, and meaning.

The turning point in her professional trajectory came with the support of ProEcuador, which became a key institutional pillar in the growth of her business. Through technical assistance and training programs, Isabel gained a deeper understanding of export processes, international branding, and commercialization, thereby strengthening the foundations of her enterprise.

Through this institutional network, she also became involved with artisan organizations such as CIDAP and MIPRO, where she exchanged experiences and received technical guidance. It was during this stage that, thanks to the support of Ximena Franco then an official responsible for artisan promotion Isabel received her first

invitation to participate in an international craft fair in Europe, marking the beginning of her global projection.

Although Isabel notes that establishing contact with ProEcuador was relatively easy, the true challenge has been exporting consistently and maintaining brand positioning abroad. Nonetheless, her perseverance, artistic vision, and strategic mindset have allowed her to overcome early limitations.

Her collections often incorporate nature-inspired motifs, produced through a fusion of ancestral knowledge and contemporary aesthetics, with filigree serving as the central artistic language. Her work also has an important social dimension: generating local employment and opportunities for artisans in her community, particularly in response to the high levels of migration affecting Chordeleg. Her workshop has become a space of collaboration and learning, driven by her belief that “a piece of jewelry is not only about shine or design; it carries history, emotion, and life.”

Throughout her career, Isabel has represented Ecuador in several major international fairs, helping consolidate her presence in the field of contemporary artisanal jewelry:

- Artigiano in Fiera (Milan, 2013): Her first international participation, considered a transformative milestone in her career.
- Andean Business Meeting (Peru, 2014): Organized by the Andean Community and CAAPE, enabling enhanced commercial networking and knowledge on SME internationalization.
- Colombiamoda (Medellín, 2015): Introduced her to the fashion industry, where jewelry is perceived as an essential expressive component.
- NY NOW (Javits Center, New York, 2018): A leading global trade fair for artisanal, sustainable, and designer jewelry, where her brand stood out by combining art, identity, and design.

Each fair represented a continuous learning process. Isabel used these opportunities not only to showcase her pieces but also to refine her brand, paying attention to details that make a difference: presentation, packaging, commercial storytelling, and emotional connection with customers.

Through experience, she learned that not every fair is suitable for every type of product; the key lies in strategically selecting events aligned with the brand identity.

In 2017, she completed her first export shipment to Paris, worth approximately USD 6,000, destined for the boutique Équatorianne. Although this commercial relationship did not continue long-term, the operation became a significant milestone in her internationalization journey. She currently maintains business connections established in the Andean Business Meeting and recognizes these platforms as essential tools for Ecuador's artisanal sector to gain visibility.

Isabel emphasizes that participation in international fairs requires preparation, investment, and a strategic vision. Participation costs can range between USD 3,000 and 10,000 depending on the location, fair type, and services involved (stand, transport, accommodations, and promotional materials). In some cases, she received partial support of around 30% from ProEcuador, although she notes that not all artisans have access to such assistance.

For her, the greatest challenges are not merely financial, but also logistical and production-related: having the capacity, infrastructure, and trained personnel required to respond to international demand. She also highlights the low recognition of artisanal products within Ecuador, which limits the economic sustainability of workshops.

Still, her philosophy remains steadfast: invest in quality, train the team, and continue participating in fairs not only to sell, but to learn, position the brand, and evolve.

Isabel clearly distinguishes artisanal jewelry from commercial jewelry, explaining that a piece's true value lies in its identity, craftsmanship time, and the story it carries. The same silver design may cost USD 25 if sold as craft, or USD 100 if positioned under a consolidated brand. In her workshop, she promotes fair business practices ensuring that artisans receive equitable compensation for their work.

Among the current challenges, she identifies the need for digital transformation: building a strong website, improving social media presence, and leveraging online platforms as direct export channels.

For Isabel López, international fairs have been instrumental in consolidating her brand. These events have enabled her to establish strategic alliances, collaborate with designers, and gain a broader understanding of global trends and quality standards.

As a result of these international activities, she has achieved commercial agreements with the United States and retail availability in Europe and North America. Although her current shipments remain small due to the fact that 90% of her work is customized, she has recorded a 35% increase in sales and exports, particularly to France and the United States.

Her experience at NY NOW was especially significant, as she received expert advice that helped refine her target market strategy. She learned that her business model should focus on limited-edition and designer jewelry, intended for exclusive boutiques and galleries rather than mass production.

Today, Isabel López Joyería has become a leading brand in Ecuadorian artisanal design, gaining recognition both nationally and internationally. Her example has inspired other artisans to professionalize their work, value their craftsmanship, and pursue global opportunities.

She recognizes that international fairs are indispensable platforms for promoting Ecuadorian craftsmanship, but also stresses that limited incentives and insufficient institutional support restrict the participation of many talented artisans. She proposes the establishment of permanent international exhibition spaces in major world cities to promote Ecuadorian artistry on an ongoing basis.

With a realistic outlook, she states that participating internationally is no longer a matter of “trying one’s luck,” but of researching markets and choosing the right platforms for each product and brand. She is currently working on her new “Floral” collection, set to launch in December, as well as the development of her official website, with the goal of reaching customers around the world.

“A piece of jewelry is not just an object of beauty; it is a story that is worn. And my purpose is for the world to know the stories that are born in Chordeleg,” Isabel López concludes.

### **3.3.6. Interview with Mr. Carlos Sempertegui – Owner of Sempertegui Joyería**

Sempertegui Joyería, located in the canton of Chordeleg in the Azuay province, is a family-owned workshop with forty years of experience in crafting handmade gold and silver jewelry using the traditional filigree technique. The company combines a long-standing cultural heritage passed down through generations with contemporary designs

that reflect the identity of Chordeleg's goldsmithing tradition while adapting to current international market trends.

During the interview, the representative explained that their interest in expanding into international markets emerged after foreign tourists, captivated by the delicacy of their pieces, began requesting personalized shipments abroad. This early exposure revealed the product's potential and motivated the company to pursue participation in international trade fairs. Their first experience outside Ecuador was at "Expo Joyas Perú" in Lima, one of the most important jewelry and fashion accessory fairs in the region, bringing together designers, artisans, and distributors from several Latin American countries.

The interviewee noted that participating in this event demanded considerable effort, as the total investment ranged between USD 4,000 and 6,000, covering the cost of the stand, transportation of products, lodging, promotional materials, and travel expenses. To ensure a professional presentation, the company developed a bilingual catalog (Spanish–English) with high-quality photographs, technical specifications detailing the metals and stones used, and a display design that combined Azuay's cultural aesthetics with a modern, minimalist style. In addition, the company strengthened its internal planning and production timeline management by implementing more rigorous quality control procedures prior to shipment.

Regarding institutional support, Sempertegui Joyería received guidance and training from the Municipal Government of Chordeleg and the Inter-American Center of Handicrafts and Popular Arts (CIDAP), particularly in matters related to international promotion, fair selection, and negotiation with foreign buyers. However, the company fully financed its participation, which remains a common challenge among artisanal workshops seeking internationalization.

As for the results achieved, the representative highlighted that following their participation in Expo Joyas Perú, the company experienced an estimated sales increase of between 25% and 35% in the following year, in addition to establishing commercial relationships with new buyers from Peru, Chile, and the United States. International orders are fulfilled through courier services such as DHL and FedEx, or occasionally through relatives and acquaintances traveling abroad, as high shipping, insurance, customs, and tax costs make formal export procedures difficult for small consignments.

Despite these barriers, the workshop has managed to maintain ongoing relationships with some international customers, particularly for customized orders.

Internally, the company enhanced its packaging, labeling, and visual presentation by incorporating customized branded boxes and certificates of authenticity in both Spanish and English. It also introduced a capsule collection of jewelry inspired by floral motifs and Andean geometries, crafted in 18-karat gold with fine filigree details design elements that appeal to international consumers seeking a blend of tradition and modernity.

The main barriers identified include high participation costs in international trade fairs, limited artisanal production capacity for large-volume orders, and logistical challenges associated with formalizing small-scale exports. Nevertheless, the company views the experience as highly beneficial, as it strengthened brand positioning, expanded their understanding of international market demands, and generated strategic contacts with the potential for long-term commercial relationships.

Looking ahead, the representative emphasized that their medium-term goal is to secure at least three stable international clients and continue participating in fairs that feature artisanal designer jewelry. Their broader vision is to contribute to the positioning of Chordeleg as an international reference for artisanal fine jewelry, while preserving the essence of handcrafted work, design quality, and the cultural value embedded in each piece they produce.

### **3.4. Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings**

The analysis of the interviews conducted with the six artisanal jewelry-exporting companies from Azuay is focused on identifying the effects generated by their participation in international trade fairs in both commercial and organizational dimensions. This analysis considers variables such as the impact on commercial performance, access to new markets, and institutional strengthening.

#### **3.4.1. Commercial performance**

Commercial performance is one of the most representative indicators for assessing the effects generated in Azuay's artisanal jewelry exporting businesses after their participation in international fairs. This indicator makes it possible to identify the impacts achieved in terms of sales, economic growth, market positioning, and brand recognition

elements that are essential for the sustainability and competitiveness of micro and small enterprises in the craft sector within internationalization contexts.

The results obtained from the interviews, along with their quantitative systematization, show that participation in international trade fairs has had a direct and positive effect on commercial variables, both by generating immediate contacts and business opportunities and by contributing to increases in exports and the international visibility of the brands.

### **3.4.1.1. *Immediate commercial results***

According to Table 2, all the companies interviewed reported having obtained concrete results after participating in international trade fair events. One hundred percent of

| <b>Result</b>        | <b>Frequency by type of result</b> | <b>% of total companies</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Orders               | 6                                  | 100%                        |
| Contracts            | 3                                  | 50%                         |
| New clients          | 6                                  | 100%                        |
| Increased visibility | 6                                  | 100%                        |

jewelry businesses indicated that they received orders and attracted new clients, while 50% stated that they formalized commercial contracts. Likewise, 100% acknowledged a significant improvement in the visibility and positioning of their brand, both in the national market and abroad.

**Table 2.**

*Commercial results obtained after participation in international fairs*

Source: Author's own elaboration

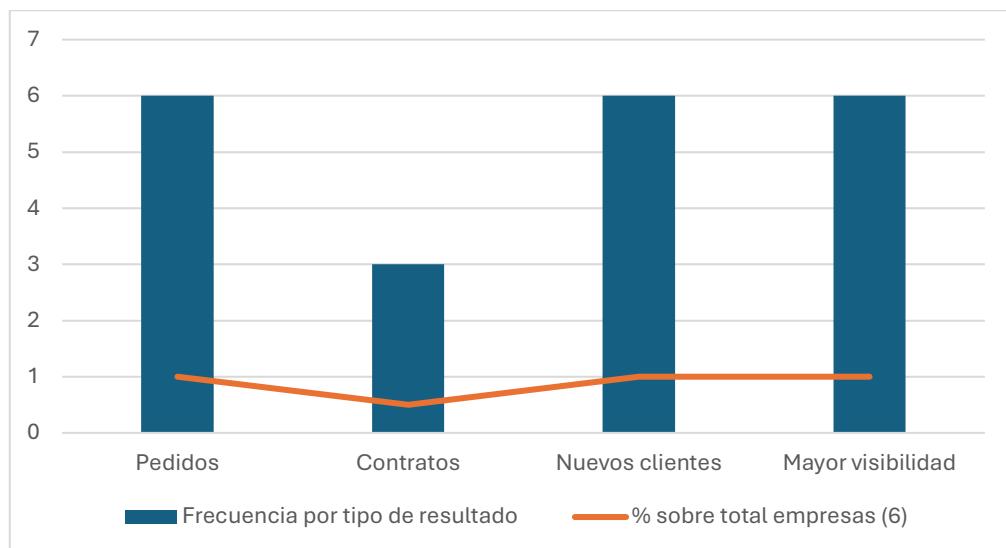
These results show that international fairs constitute a strategic platform for commercialization and networking, not only promoting cultural and business exchange, but also serving as an effective channel for increasing the exposure and recognition of Ecuadorian artisanal brands. In terms of immediate performance, the companies obtained

tangible benefits related to the expansion of their client network and the projection of their product offerings toward new audiences.

The high frequency of variables such as “orders,” “new clients,” and “greater visibility” demonstrates that fairs are an effective tool for generating tangible short-term commercial outcomes. Nonetheless, the level of materialization in terms of commercial contracts suggests that the consolidation of formal agreements requires a subsequent follow-up process, which reflects the importance of post-fair commercial management to transform initial contacts into stable business relationships.

**Figure 2.**

*Commercial results*



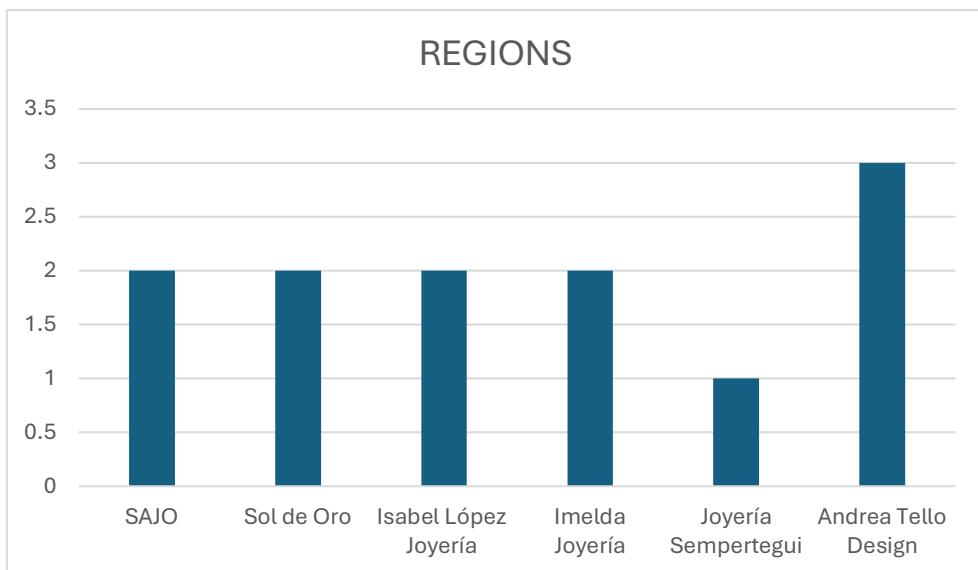
Source: Author's own elaboration

### **3.4.1.2. New market opportunities**

As shown in the figure, the participating companies were able to open between one and three new regions or international destinations as a result of their participation in the fairs. This finding reflects the capacity of trade fairs to broaden commercial horizons and facilitate the insertion of artisanal enterprises into new export contexts.

**Figure 3.**

*New market opportunities by region*



Source: Author's own elaboration

Andrea Tello Design was the company with the greatest diversification, reaching three new destination regions, while Sajo Joyería, Sol de Oro, Isabel López Joyería, and Imelda Joyería managed to expand into two markets each. For its part, Joyería Sempertegui reported the opening of only one new market. These results suggest that the impact of fairs depends not only on participation in the event itself, but also on the companies' capacity for negotiation, adaptation, and the management of international opportunities.

From an international trade perspective, this finding confirms that international fairs operate as mechanisms of access and learning within the internationalization process, enabling companies to understand market dynamics, identify consumer preferences, and strengthen their marketing and export strategies. In the context of Azuay's artisanal jewelry sector, these spaces have facilitated the exploration of niche markets in North America, Europe, and Latin America, where craftsmanship and contemporary design are attributes highly valued by culturally sophisticated consumers.

#### **3.4.1.3. *Export growth***

The data presented in Table 3 and its corresponding graph show that all companies (100%) experienced an increase in their exports following their participation in international fairs, although with varying magnitudes. Growth percentages ranged from a minimum of 3% to a maximum of 50%, with an overall mean of 31.33% and a standard deviation of 16.69%, indicating a moderate dispersion among the cases. According to the

empirical 68% rule, the growth values are concentrated within a range of 14.64% to 48.02%, demonstrating a positive performance in the majority of the companies.

**Table 3.**

*Export growth*

| COMPANY                     | INCREASE IN EXPORTS | PERCENTAGE | TYPE OF COMMERCIAL GROWTH |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| <b>SAJO</b>                 | Yes                 | 3          | Sustained growth          |
| <b>Sol de Oro</b>           | Yes                 | 50         | Sporadic growth           |
| <b>Isabel López Joyería</b> | Yes                 | 35         | Sustained growth          |
| <b>Imelda Joyería</b>       | Yes                 | 30         | Sustained growth          |
| <b>Joyería Sempertegui</b>  | Yes                 | 25         | Sporadic growth           |
| <b>Andrea Tello Design</b>  | Sí                  | 45         | Sustained growth          |

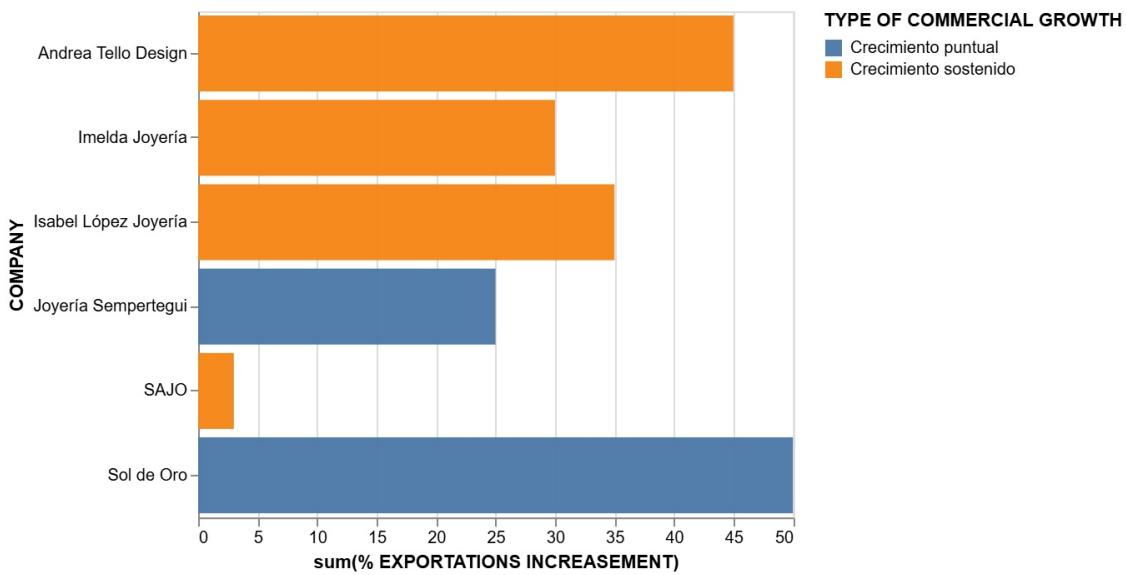
Source: Author's own elaboration

The analysis of the type of growth shows that four of the six companies (66.7%) recorded sustained growth, while the remaining two (33.3%) reported sporadic growth resulting from the orders or contracts obtained during the fairs. This contrast suggests that the impact of trade fair events varies according to the organizational and commercial capacity of the companies to maintain contact with international buyers, manage new orders, and adapt their production to the demands of the global market.

The companies that reported sustained growth, such as Andrea Tello Design, Isabel López Joyería, and Imelda Joyería, demonstrate a more structured post-fair management process, characterized by follow-up with contacts, maintaining communication channels, and consolidating commercial relationships. In contrast, the cases of sporadic growth, such as Sol de Oro and Joyería Sempertegui, show a positive short-term response but without continuity, possibly due to limitations in production capacity, logistics, or the formalization of international agreements.

**Figure 4.**

*Type of export growth of each surveyed company*



Source: Author's own elaboration

These findings are consistent with the arguments of authors such as Kotler & Keller (2016), who assert that participation in trade fairs should be understood as a component of a broader international marketing strategy, in which the generation of contacts constitutes only the first step toward the consolidation of sustainable markets. Consequently, the results obtained demonstrate that the effect of international fairs on commercial performance is significant, but depends on the level of preparation, follow-up, and strategic commitment of each company.

#### 3.4.1.4. *Interpretive synthesis of commercial performance*

In summary, the analysis of the “Commercial performance” indicator demonstrates that international fairs have generated positive and measurable effects on Azuay’s artisanal jewelry exporting companies, both in terms of immediate results and in economic growth and commercial expansion. One hundred percent of the companies obtained tangible benefits in terms of orders, new clients, and visibility, and all recorded increases in their exports, with an average exceeding 30%.

However, the degree of sustainability of commercial growth depends on internal variables such as strategic planning, the professionalization of commercial management, and the capacity to maintain long-term relationships with international buyers. In this regard, international fairs function as catalysts for commercial development within the artisanal sector, but their sustained impact requires a business vision oriented toward progressive internationalization and the consolidation of long-term commercial relationships.

In conclusion, the commercial performance achieved by Azuay's artisanal jewelry businesses shows that international fairs not only strengthen the presence of companies in external markets, but also contribute to the competitive repositioning of Ecuador's artisanal sector, fostering the integration of creativity, quality, and cultural identity as differentiating elements within international circuits of artisanal luxury.

### 3.4.2. Market opening

The Market opening indicator constitutes a key component in analyzing the effects derived from participation in international fairs, as it allows examination of the extent to which these spaces have favored geographic expansion, client diversification, and the strengthening of the international presence of Azuay's artisanal jewelry exporting companies.

Through the study of dimensions such as trade fair participation, contact generation, perceived internationalization, export destinations, and types of clients, patterns emerge that confirm the strategic role of fairs as platforms for the international insertion of micro and small artisanal enterprises.

#### 3.4.2.1. *Trade fair participation and geographic reach*

The results indicate that the six companies analyzed have participated, collectively, in 19 international fairs, distributed across three major regions: the Americas (11 fairs; 57.9% of the total), Europe (5; 26.3%), and Asia (3; 15.8%). This distribution highlights the predominance of the American market, where geographic proximity, cultural affinities, and trade agreements have facilitated the presence of Azuay's jewelry businesses particularly in fairs held in the United States, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia.

**Table 4.**

*Participation in international fairs by company*

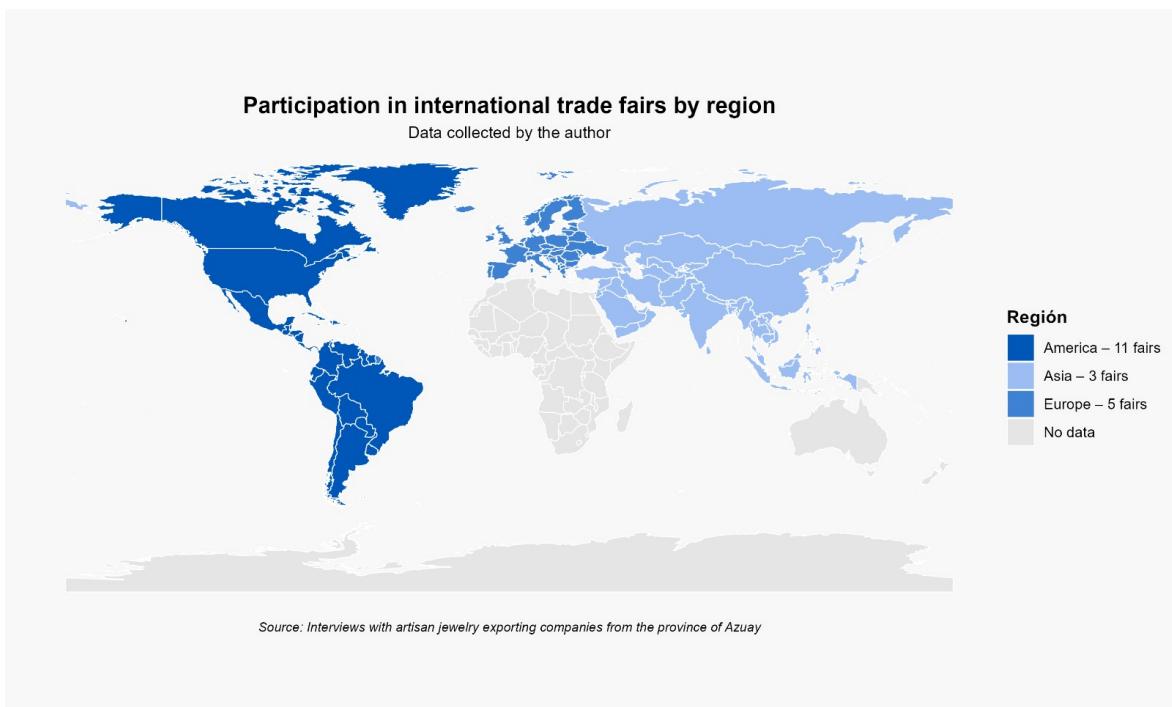
| COMPANY             | REGION          | # FAIRS |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------|
| <b>SAJO</b>         | America         | 1       |
| <b>Sol de Oro</b>   | America         | 1       |
| <b>Isabel López</b> | Europe, America | 4       |
| <b>Joyería</b>      |                 |         |

|                       |                       |   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Imelda Joyería</b> | America, Europe       | 7 |
| <b>Joyería</b>        | America               | 1 |
| <b>Sempertegui</b>    |                       |   |
| <b>Andrea Tello</b>   | Asia, Europe, America | 5 |
| <b>Desing</b>         |                       |   |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

**Figure 5.**

*Participation in international fairs by region*



Source: Author's own elaboration.

At the individual level, Andrea Tello Design stands out with participation across three continents, followed by Isabel López Joyería with four fairs, demonstrating a greater degree of international projection and continuity in its internationalization strategy. In contrast, Sajo, Sol de Oro, and Joyería Sempertegui report more limited participation, restricted to the American region, which suggests either an initial phase of market opening or a lower investment capacity for international mobility.

In this case, the statistical analysis was based on the median (rather than the mean) number of fairs, which is 2.5 international fairs per company. This measure is considered more representative, as the arithmetic mean (3.16) is distorted by the presence of extreme values such as the case of one company that participated in up to nine trade fairs which leads to an overestimation of the overall average. The median, being less sensitive to outliers, more accurately reflects the true central tendency of trade fair participation among the companies.

The geographic distribution map produced shows that Azuay's jewelry businesses have succeeded in positioning themselves in key regions of the global artisanal jewelry market, with a strong presence in the Americas and an emerging insertion in Asia, particularly in countries such as China. This finding reflects a progressive diversification of fair destinations, which broadens opportunities for international exposure, cultural exchange, and business learning.

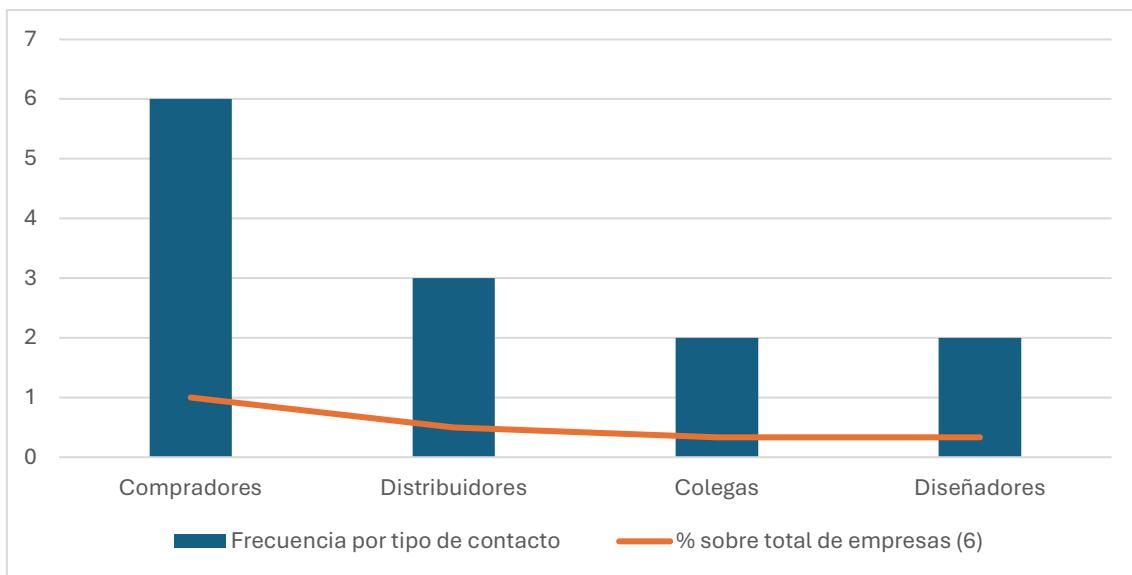
From an analytical perspective, it can be inferred that recurrence in trade fair participation directly influences market-opening capacity: companies with a higher number of participations tend to develop broader and more lasting commercial networks, consolidating their international insertion and accumulating experience in intercultural negotiation processes.

### **3.4.2.2. *Types of contacts achieved***

The analysis of the table on contacts established at international fairs shows that these events have operated as a key mechanism for business linkage, facilitating the creation of commercial and cooperative relationships. One hundred percent of the companies interviewed reported having established contact with international buyers, demonstrating the effectiveness of fairs as meeting points between specialized supply and demand. In addition, 50% established connections with distributors, while 33.3% expanded their network toward colleagues or designers, and an additional 33.3% gained access to digital platforms or e-commerce channels.

### **Figure 6.**

*Contacts established at international fairs*



Source: Author's own elaboration.

On average, each company achieved approximately 2.2 different types of contacts, indicating a medium high level of relational diversification. This pattern reveals that the companies did not use the fairs solely as exhibition platforms but as strategic networking spaces that enabled them to interact with key actors in the international market.

The combination of commercial contacts, alliances with designers, and presence on online platforms suggests a mixed internationalization approach that integrates both traditional and digital commercialization channels.

Likewise, the results confirm that the contacts established during the fairs go beyond transactional interactions, as they form the basis for the development of strategic alliances, collaborative relationships, and collective learning. In this sense, business networking becomes a form of relational capital that strengthens the competitiveness of artisanal jewelry companies, enabling them to understand global trends in design, quality, and commercialization.

### 3.4.2.3. Evidence of internationalization and positioning

Based on the qualitative systematization of the responses, four semantic categories were identified that summarize the evidence of internationalization experienced by the companies following their participation in fairs:

- **Networking (83.3%)**, associated with the creation of contact networks and international commercial linkages.

- **Commercial growth (83.3%)**, reflecting increases in sales, contracts, and the expansion of the client base.
- **Brand positioning (100%)**, linked to the strengthening of international reputation and visibility.
- **Improvement and adaptation (50%)**, related to adjustments in production processes, design, and quality in response to the demands of external markets.

**Table 5.**

*Semantic frequency matrix of the determinants of internationalization according to the interviewed companies*

| ID | Semantic Category (Variable) | Operational Definition  | Codes/Concepts to Count   |
|----|------------------------------|---|---|
| A  | Networking                   | It demonstrates the fair's capacity to create and expand the commercial contact network from the country of origin to foreign markets.              | Contacts, strategic commercial relationships, foreign alliances.  |
| B  | Commercial Growth            | It demonstrates the fair's direct and immediate economic impact on sales and market expansion.  | Increase in sales, export growth, new markets, opening of new markets.  |
| C  | Brand Positioning            | It demonstrates the strengthening of the brand's intangible value, its reputation, and its unique cultural proposition in the international sphere. | Brand consolidation/strengthening, international projection/positioning, strengthening of artisanal reputation, validation of cultural value. |
| D  | Improvement and Adaptation   | It demonstrates the use of the fair as a source of market intelligence for  | Improvements in production, improvements in presentation, understanding of international requirements.  |

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making tangible  
adjustments to the  
product or the  
process.

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Source: Author's own elaboration.

**Table 6.**

*Binary Coding Matrix of Internationalization Evidence by Interviewed Company*

| COMPANY                           | A.<br>Networking | B.<br>Commercial<br>Growth | C.<br>Positioning | D.<br>Improvement<br>and Adaptation |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>SAJO</b>                       | 1                | 0                          | 1                 | 1                                   |
| <b>Sol de Oro</b>                 | 1                | 1                          | 1                 | 0                                   |
| <b>Isabel López Joyería</b>       | 1                | 1                          | 1                 | 1                                   |
| <b>Imelda Joyería</b>             | 0                | 1                          | 1                 | 0                                   |
| <b>Joyería Sempertegui</b>        | 1                | 1                          | 1                 | 1                                   |
| <b>Andrea Tello Design</b>        | 1                | 1                          | 1                 | 0                                   |
| <b>Absolute Frequency (Total)</b> | 5                | 5                          | 6                 | 3                                   |
| <b>Relative Frequency (%)</b>     | 83,33%           | 83,33%                     | 100,00%           | 50,00%                              |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

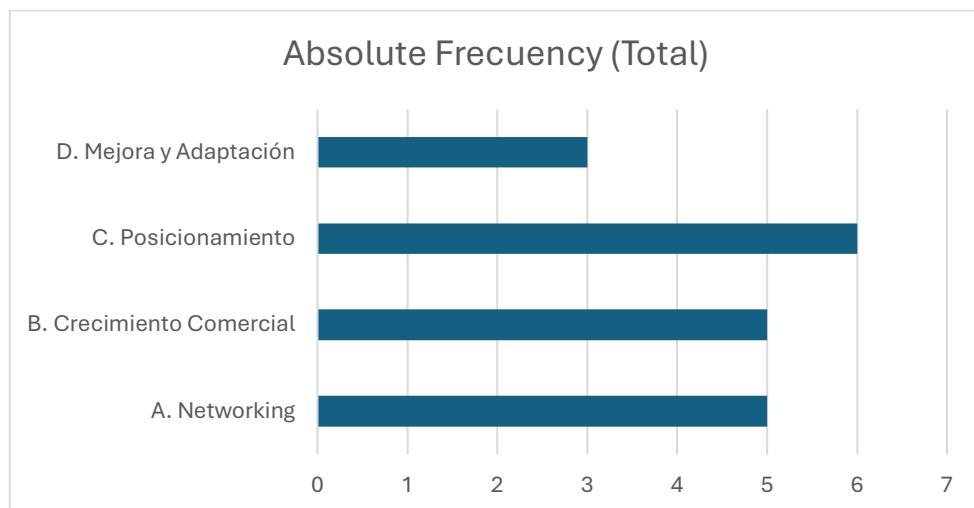
On average, each company exhibited three of the four internationalization categories, indicating a broad and balanced process of learning and consolidation in the global arena. The predominance of brand positioning as the main form of evidence shows that international fairs not only represent sales opportunities but also act as spaces of symbolic legitimization, where Azuay's artisanal jewelry companies project their cultural identity, creativity, and added value.

Likewise, the fact that half of the companies highlighted processes of improvement and adaptation suggests that the fair experience fosters the internalization of international standards and the professionalization of production practices.

Taken together, the semantic frequency matrix indicates that trade fairs generate a multidimensional impact: they promote interaction (networking), stimulate economic growth, reinforce brand image, and encourage business innovation. These four interrelated dimensions explain the progressive advancement of Azuay's jewelry companies toward a model of structural and sustained internationalization.

**Figure 7.**

*Internationalization evidence*



Source: Author's own elaboration.

### 3.4.2.3. International destinations of the products

export destinations, Azuay's jewelry businesses have managed to position themselves in nine countries, with a strong predominance in the United States (present in 83.3% of the companies), followed by France and Peru (both with 50%), as well as notable mentions of Italy, Spain, Mexico, Chile, China, Belgium, and Colombia. The distribution map confirms a solid presence in the Americas and Europe, along with an emerging opening in Asia.

**Table 7.**

Destinations of the products of the interviewed companies

| COMPANY               |  | COUNTRIES OF<br>DESTINATION OF THEIR<br>PRODUCTS |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| <b>SAJO</b>           |  | USA.   |
| <b>Sol de Oro</b>     |  | USA, Spain                                       |
| <b>Isabel López</b>   |  | France, USA, Peru                                |
| <b>Joyería</b>        |  |  |
| <b>Imelda Joyería</b> |  | Colombia, Spain,<br>Francia, Belgium             |
| <b>Joyería</b>        |  | Peru, Chile, USA.                                |
| <b>Sempertegui</b>    |  |  |
| <b>Andrea Tello</b>   |  | China, USA, México,                              |
| <b>Design</b>         |  | France y Peru                                    |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

**Table 8.**

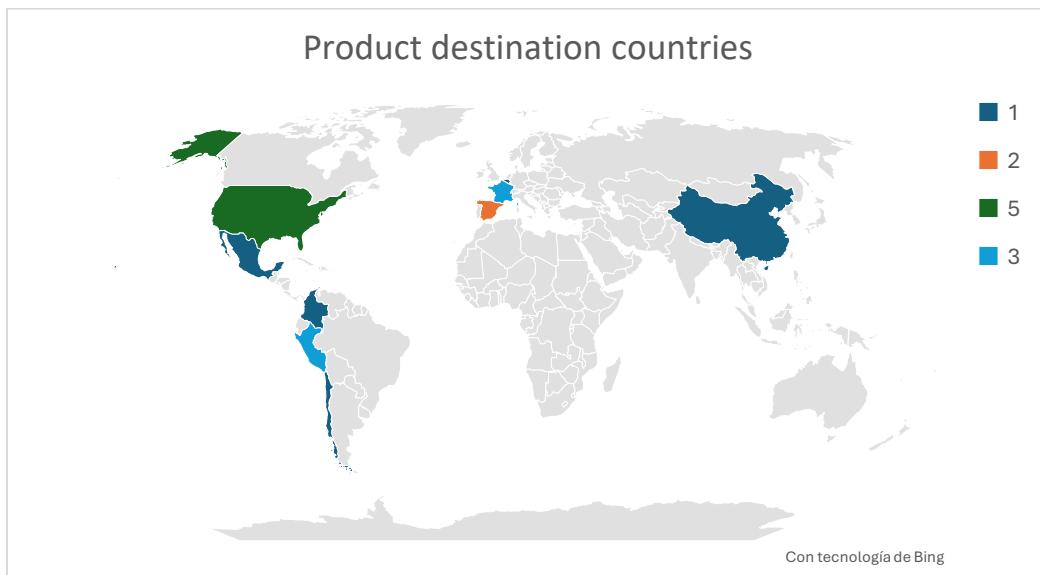
*Frecuency of destinations countries*

| PAÍSES<br>DESTINO | Frecuency |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Belgium           | 1         |
| Chile             | 1         |
| China             | 1         |
| Colombia          | 1         |
| Spain             | 2         |
| USA               | 5         |
| France            | 3         |
| Mexico            | 1         |
| Peru              | 3         |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Across the sample, each company succeeded in inserting its products into three different international markets, reflecting considerable diversification for small-scale productive units. This geographic pattern demonstrates a gradual internationalization process in which companies initially prioritize nearby and culturally aligned markets (such as Latin American countries), and subsequently expand toward destinations characterized by higher levels of competition and sophistication (Europe and Asia).

The fact that several companies converge in markets such as the United States and France suggests the existence of strategic commercial nodes where specialized buyers of high-quality, handcrafted jewelry with distinctive design are concentrated. Therefore, expanding into new countries not only broadens commercial reach but also diversifies risks and strengthens the export resilience of the artisanal sector in the face of fluctuations in the local market.

**Figure 8.***Product destination countries*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

**3.4.2.4. Types of international clients**

Regarding the typology of international clients (wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and online platforms), the data show that 83.3% of the companies work with wholesalers, 66.7% with retailers, 50% with distributors, and 33.3% with digital platforms.

Across the sample, each company maintains relationships with an average of 2.8 types of international clients, indicating a high level of commercial diversification. This finding reveals a clear orientation toward a B2B (business-to-business) model, in which artisanal companies market their products through specialized intermediaries or international distribution chains.

**Table 9.***Types of international clients (n=6)*

| Types of international clients | Frequency | % of total companies (6) |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| <b>Wholesalers</b>             | 5         | 83,33%                   |
| <b>Distributors</b>            | 3         | 50,00%                   |

|                         |   |        |
|-------------------------|---|--------|
| <b>Retailers</b>        | 4 | 66,67% |
| <b>Online platforms</b> | 2 | 33,33% |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The simultaneous presence across different types of channels reflects a hybrid commercialization approach in which jewelry companies combine direct-to-consumer sales (B2C) with intermediation and digitalization strategies. Participation in online platforms, although still emerging, represents an opportunity for sustained expansion, especially in a global context where e-commerce for artisanal products has gained increasing relevance.

These data demonstrate that Azuay's jewelry businesses are not only seeking to open new markets but also to consolidate stable and diversified export structures capable of sustaining their international presence in the medium and long term.

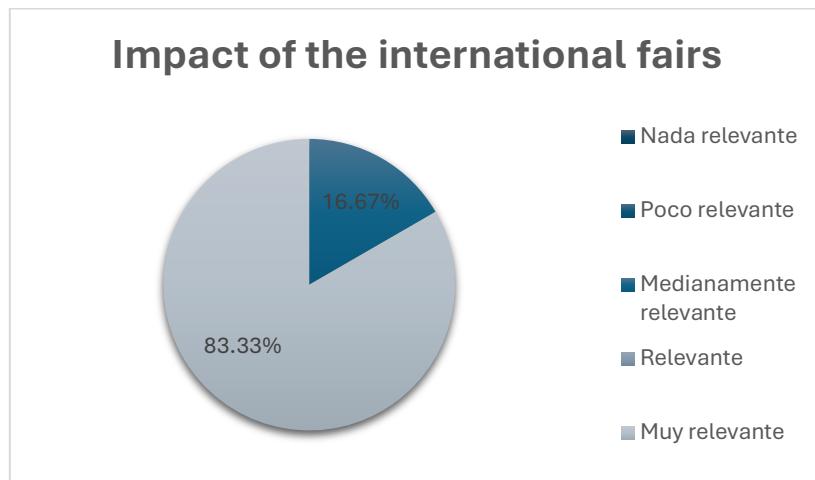
#### ***3.4.2.5. Assessment of internataional impact***

The overall assessment of the impact of international fairs on market opening shows a very positive trend: five of the six companies (83.3%) rated this impact as "highly relevant," while one company (16.7%) rated it as "moderately relevant," resulting in an overall average of 4.83 points on a scale from 1 to 5.

This demonstrates a unanimous perception of the decisive role that international fairs play in strengthening the international projection of Azuay's artisanal jewelry companies.

**Figure 9.**

*Overall assessment of the impact of international fairs on the companies' international growth*



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The high valuation reflects that companies perceive fairs not only as promotional events but also as spaces for learning and positioning, where intercultural competences, commercial skills, and brand differentiation strategies are developed. Furthermore, this assessment is consistent with the previous findings on contacts and international destinations, demonstrating a direct relationship between trade fair participation, international visibility, and effective market opening.

#### **3.4.2.6. Interpretive synthesis of market opening**

The results obtained allow us to affirm that participation in international fairs has been a determining factor in the market-opening process of Azuay's artisanal jewelry exporting companies.

These experiences have enabled geographic expansion into three continents, the establishment of international contact networks, client diversification, and the strengthening of the brands' corporate and cultural image.

The comprehensive analysis demonstrates that fairs fulfill not only a commercial function but also an institutional and symbolic one, by positioning Azuay's jewelry businesses as representatives of Ecuadorian identity-based craftsmanship in global circuits.

The predominance of brand positioning and networking as the main categories shows that the internationalization process does not rely solely on economic variables but

also on intangible elements such as reputation, artisanal identity, and the capacity to adapt to international standards.

Across the sample, each company has participated in more than three international fairs, established more than two types of contacts and nearly three types of clients, and accessed three different international markets configuring a strong and sustained internationalization pattern.

In sum, the market opening achieved through fair participation has enabled these companies to transition from local projection to international visibility, progressively integrating into the global value chains of the jewelry sector.

This indicator, together with the results on commercial performance, confirms that international fairs are strategic instruments for internationalization and competitive development, directly contributing to the fulfillment of the specific objective of this research and consolidating Azuay's role as a reference in Ecuadorian artisanal jewelry with global projection.

### **3.4.3. Institutional strengthening**

Institutional strengthening constitutes the third analytical axis of this study and makes it possible to understand how participation in international fairs has influenced organizational consolidation, the development of internal capacities, and the strategic sustainability of the artisanal jewelry exporting companies of Azuay Province.

This dimension examines how the jewelry businesses have strengthened their internal structures, organizational culture, and inter-institutional linkages as a result of their international experience—configuring a progressive professionalization process that transcends product sales or promotion.

The findings show that internationalization is expressed not only through market opening but also through the institutional maturity acquired by companies through preparation, learning, and cooperation with public and private actors.

This strengthening is analyzed based on three dimensions: organizational management and institutional preparedness, inter-institutional coordination and support, and institutional learning and transformation.

### 3.4.3.3. *Organizational management and institutional preparedness*

The preparation carried out prior to international fairs represents one of the most revealing indicators of the level of institutional development achieved by Azuay's jewelry companies. The data show that the companies that achieved a stronger presence in international markets are those that planned ahead, invested in their corporate image, and strengthened the technical competencies of their staff consolidating a more competitive and professional organizational profile.

**Table 10.**

*Semantic frequency matrix of the preparation processes for internationalization in international fairs*

| ID | Semantic Category (Variable)      | Codes/Concepts to Count (Presence = 1)  |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| A  | Graphic/Digital Materials         | Printed/digital catalogs, professional/high-quality photographs, detailed technical sheets, large-format graphics, professional promotional materials.      |
| B  | Staff Training                    | Staff trained in customer service, international sales techniques, and marketing coaching.  |
| C  | Booth and Product Design          | Design of exclusive collections, planning of stand image/decoration, exhibition design, quality controls and timelines, selection of representative pieces. |
| D  | Cultural Strategy/Brand Narrative | Cultural identity strategies, the Cuenca-based concept of "la yapa," coherent brand narrative, representative elements (macana).                            |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The semantic frequency matrix identified four priority areas of action:

- Professional graphic and digital materials (83.3%): Most jewelry companies produced printed and digital catalogs, technical sheets, and high-quality photographs, recognizing that the visual presentation of the product constitutes a strategic resource for attracting international buyers.
- Stand and product design (83.3%): The companies dedicated significant efforts to the aesthetic selection of representative pieces, the planning of decoration, and the coherence of the visual identity of the exhibition space.
- Staff training (66.7%): A clear orientation was observed toward training human resources in customer service, marketing, and international negotiation strategies.
- Cultural strategy and identity discourse (50%): Half of the companies incorporated cultural elements into their narrative, strengthening their territorial identity through the Cuenca-based concept of “la yapa”, the authenticity of design, and the symbolic coherence of the artisanal discourse.

**Table 11.**

Binary Coding Matrix of Preparation Tactics for Trade Fairs

| <b>Empres</b>       | <b>A.</b>                        | <b>B. Staff</b> | <b>C. Booth and</b>   | <b>D.</b>                |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>a</b>            | <b>Graphic/Digital Materials</b> | <b>Training</b> | <b>Product Design</b> | <b>Cultural Strategy</b> |
| <b>SAJO</b>         | 1                                | 1               | 1                     | 0                        |
| <b>Sol de Oro</b>   | 1                                | 0               | 0                     | 1                        |
| <b>Isabel López</b> | 1                                | 1               | 1                     | 0                        |
| <b>Joyería</b>      |                                  |                 |                       |                          |
| <b>Imelda</b>       | 0                                | 1               | 1                     | 1                        |
| <b>Joyería</b>      |                                  |                 |                       |                          |
| <b>Joyería</b>      | 1                                | 0               | 1                     | 0                        |
| <b>Sempertegui</b>  |                                  |                 |                       |                          |

|                     |       |       |       |       |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Andrea Tello</b> | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     |
| <b>Design</b>       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>Frecuencia</b>   | 5     | 4     | 5     | 3     |
| <b>Absoluta</b>     |       |       |       |       |
| <b>Frecuencia</b>   | 83.3% | 66.7% | 83.3% | 50.0% |
| <b>Relativa (%)</b> |       |       |       |       |

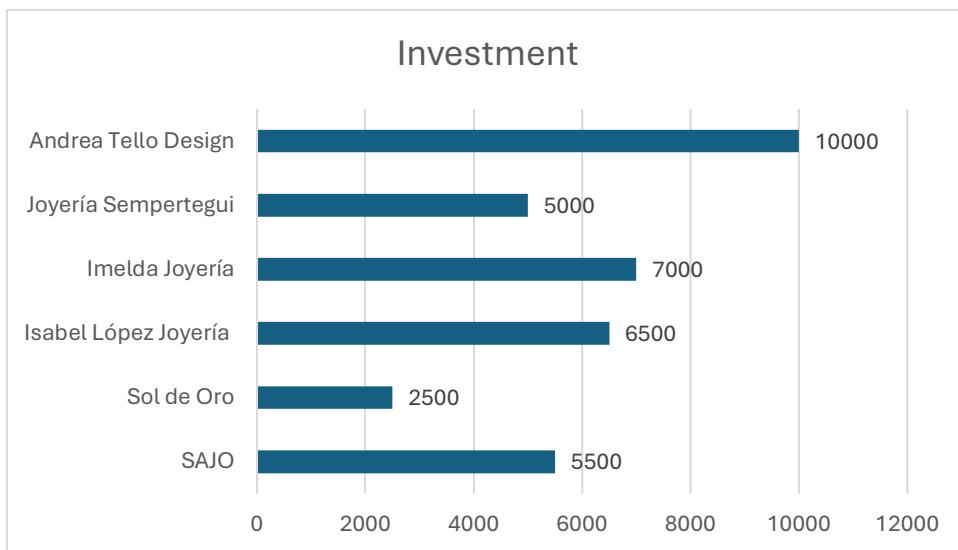
Source: Author's own elaboration.

The statistical analysis supports these findings: the areas with the greatest weight (graphic materials and booth design) fall within what can be described as execution leadership (83.3%), reflecting institutional preparation oriented toward visual and technical excellence. In turn, the human factor (66.7%) and the cultural strategy (50%) complement this process, generating a balanced combination of professionalization and identity-based authenticity.

Regarding average investment, the companies allocated USD 6,083.33 to their participation in fairs, with a range between USD 2,500 and USD 10,000. The standard deviation of 2,478.23 suggests moderate dispersion, indicating that although differences exist in the economic scale of each workshop, all assume a considerable financial commitment. Sixty-eight percent of the investments fall between USD 3,605 and USD 8,561, a range that confirms a trend toward professional budgetary planning. This economic effort despite the heterogeneity in firm size demonstrates that international participation is not the result of improvisation but rather an institutionalized process of investment and management.

### **Figure 1.**

*Investment of the surveyed companies*



Source: Author's own elaboration

On the other hand, the companies identified four types of institutional challenges in the preparation and fair-execution stages:

**Table 12.**

Semantic frequency matrix of the challenges encountered in international fairs

| ID | Semantic Category (Variable)     | Concepts/Synonyms to Count (Presence = 1)  |
|----|----------------------------------|--|
| A  | Logistics and Cost Challenges    | <i>High costs, logistics, customs procedures, transportation, shipment of pieces.</i>  |
| B  | Market and Adaptation Challenges | Language barriers, communication difficulties, competition, limited understanding of the artisanal context, limited production capacity, limited international demand, need for market research. |

|          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| <b>C</b> | Regulatory and Bureaucratic Challenges | <i>Bureaucracy, obtaining artisanal certifications, lack of institutional support.</i> |
| <b>D</b> | Social and Contextual Challenges       | Gender-based discrimination issues.  |

Source: Author's own elaboration

- Logistics and cost challenges (100%): Difficulties related to transportation, customs, and shipment of pieces were universal, evidencing the need for a consolidated operational structure.
- Market and adaptation challenges (83.3%): The complexity of interpreting global market trends and requirements without losing artisanal essence was highlighted.
- Regulatory and bureaucratic challenges (16.7%): Associated with procedures, certifications, and access to institutional support.
- Social and contextual challenges (16.7%): Isolated cases of discrimination or invisibilization of artisanal work.

The frequency of these challenges reveals that institutional strengthening is also forged through the overcoming of structural, financial, and communicational limitations. The jewelry companies that managed to address them demonstrated a greater capacity for adaptation and organizational learning, confirming the direct relationship between the challenges faced and the institutional maturity acquired.

**Table 13.**

Frequency table of the challenges encountered in international fairs

| Position | Challenge Category               | Absolute Frequency | Relative Frequency (%) |
|----------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1        | A. Logistics and Cost Challenges | 6                  | 100.0%                 |

|   |   |   |       |
|---|---|---|-------|
| 2 | B. Market and<br>Adaptation<br>Challenges       | 5 | 83.3% |
| 3 | C. Regulatory and<br>Bureaucratic<br>Challenges | 1 | 16.7% |
| 3 | D. Social and<br>Contextual<br>Challenges       | 1 | 16.7% |

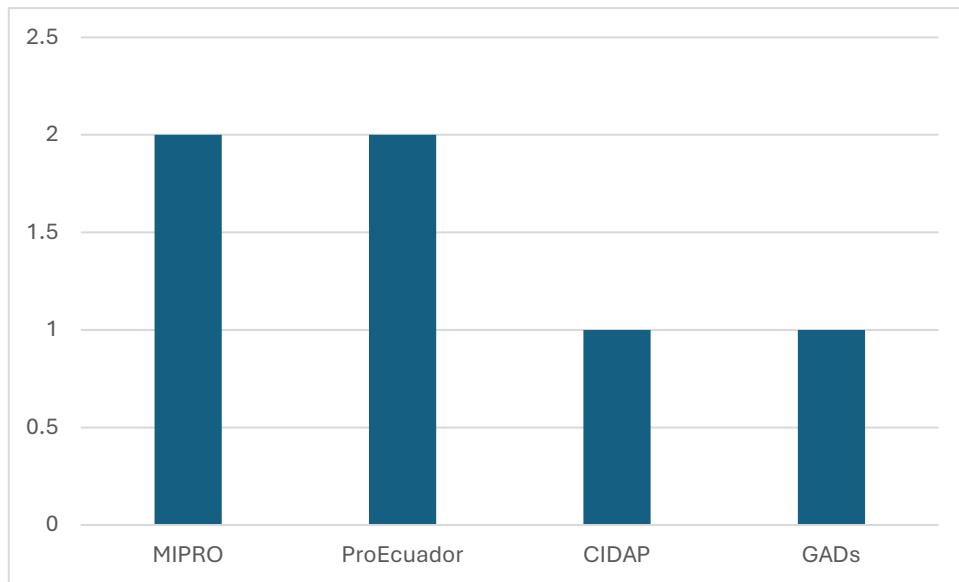
Source: Author's own elaboration

The average rating of the support received was 4.67 out of 5, demonstrating that this type of assistance is perceived as highly relevant for the consolidation of internationalization. The beneficiary companies reported a higher degree of planning, better exhibition materials, and more consistent commercial results, suggesting a correlation between institutional support and strategic performance.

MIPRO and ProEcuador were the institutions most frequently mentioned (two mentions each), followed by CIDAP and local GADs (one mention each). This diversity of actors reflects a mixed institutional ecosystem in which national, local, and sectoral entities converge around the promotion of craftsmanship and exports. However, the fact that half of the jewelry businesses did not receive any type of economic or logistical support shows that the system still presents gaps in access and inequalities in resource distribution, limiting equity within the strengthening process.

**Figure 2.**

*Supporting organizations*



Source: Own elaboration

Despite this, the overall trend is positive: international trade fairs have encouraged closer ties between the craft sector and public institutions, promoting a shared vision of local development, partnership, and sustainable competitiveness. This interaction has strengthened the institutional structure of jewelry makers by providing legitimacy, visibility, and technical support, factors that contribute to their continued presence in international markets.

#### ***3.4.3.4. Learning and institutional transformation***

Organizational learning and internal change processes are the most tangible evidence of institutional strengthening. Based on semantic frequency analysis, three main areas of learning were identified.

**Table 1**

*Semantic frequency matrix of post-fair professional learning among surveyed companies*

| ID | Semantic Category   | Codes/Concepts to Count<br>(Presence = 1)  |
|----|---|--|
| A  | Global Market Knowledge                                   | Understanding consumer tastes, recognizing oneself as part of a global industry, knowing global trends, understanding international demands.                 |
| B  | Validation and Reaffirmation                              | Value your own craftsmanship, strengthen your confidence, reaffirm quality, assume leadership, reaffirm cultural value, reaffirm the importance of identity. |
| C  | Acquisition of Negotiation Skills and Commercial Strategy | Differentiation strategies, negotiation skills, develop a business strategy.   |

Source: Own elaboration

- Validation and reaffirmation (83.3%): the fairs allowed companies to value their own work, recognize their craftsmanship, and consolidate their cultural identity as a competitive advantage.
- Knowledge of the global market (66.7%): they understood trends, consumer behavior, and international competition dynamics.

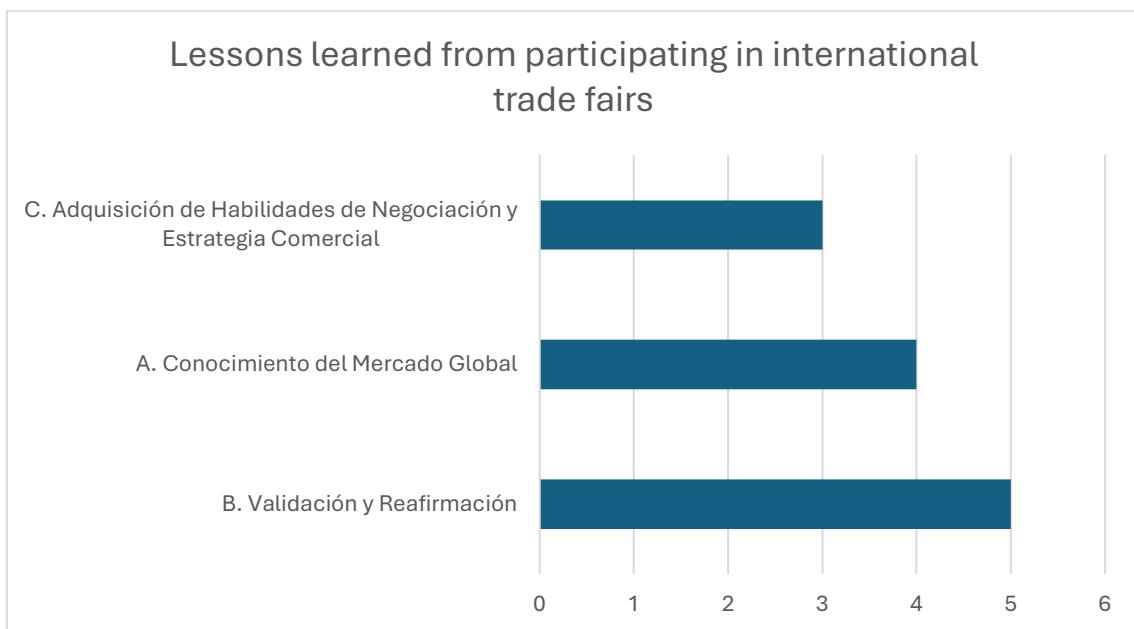
- Acquisition of negotiation and business strategy skills (50%): they strengthened intercultural communication, negotiation skills, and the formulation of differentiated business strategies.

On average, each company reported 2.7 relevant learnings, confirming that participation in trade fairs functions as a comprehensive training process that goes beyond the commercial dimension and contributes to the consolidation of institutional competencies.

Internal changes implemented after attending trade fairs reinforce this trend: all jewelry companies (100%) introduced improvements in product and packaging, modernizing designs, materials, and final presentation. Additionally, 83.3% applied enhancements in production processes and quality control, incorporating planning, traceability, or authentication methodologies. Furthermore, 50% invested in human or digital development, including training, commercial communication, capacity-building programs, and the creation of digital platforms.

### **Figure 3**

*Lessons learned after participating in international trade fairs*



Source: Own elaboration

The average of 2.7 transformations per company reflects sustained organizational evolution, in which international experience acts as a catalyst for innovation and

institutional strengthening. Companies with more frequent participation in trade fairs (such as Isabel López Joyería and Andrea Tello Design) show a stronger correlation between learning, investment, and structural change, confirming the interdependence between the level of international exposure and the depth of internal strengthening.

Taken together, these transformations demonstrate a transition from traditional artisanal models to more competitive hybrid structures, where cultural identity coexists with organizational efficiency and modern management practices.

#### **3.4.3.5. Internal changes**

Comprehensive analysis leads to the conclusion that participation in international trade fairs has generated a process of organizational maturation and profound structural strengthening in Azuay's artisanal jewelry exporters. This process manifests itself on three complementary levels:

**Table 2.**

*Internal changes post-fair*

| ID | Semantic<br>Category<br>(Variable) | Operational<br>Definition  | Codes/Concepts to<br>Count (Presence = 1) |    |
|----|------------------------------------|--|---|----|
|    |                                    |  | Improvements                              | in |
| A  | Product and Packaging Improvements | Physical changes to collections, design, presentation/packaging, materials, or new combinations of presentation (packaging). |   |    |
| B  | Process and Quality Improvements   | Implementation of new management systems, quality processes, control, planning, or improvements in production processes,     | Improved planning and quality control     |    |

---

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
|   | production methodologies.                                      | production certificates of authenticity, traceability, and social responsibility. |   |
| C | Investment in Changes focused on Human and Digital Development | Strengthened staff training, management structure, communication technology.      | staff training, management, or commercial communication, strengthened its business structure, training programs, made progress in creating its website. |

---

Source: Own elaboration

- Execution leadership (83.3%): reflects the institutional capacity to plan, invest, and present a professional image consistent with international standards, articulating design, narrative, and visual brand management.
- Human factor (66,7 %): continuous training and organizational learning strengthen internal structure, productivity, and institutional resilience in the face of the challenges associated with internationalization.
- Cultural strategy (50%): the integration of symbolic elements and identity-based narratives enhances authenticity and positions Azuay's jewelers as representatives of an artisanal culture with global reach.

The average investment of USD 6,083.33, the learning processes recorded in more than two categories per company, and the implementation of internal transformations confirm that institutional strengthening is not a circumstantial outcome but rather a cumulative, deliberate, and sustainable process. Likewise, cooperation with national and

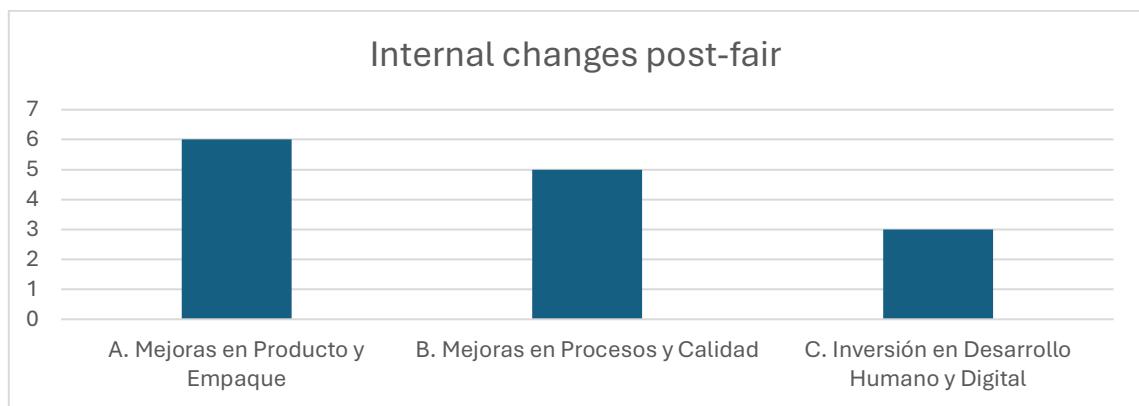
local institutions demonstrates the construction of an institutional environment that favors the professionalization of the artisanal sector, although gaps in equitable access to public support persist.

In summary, international trade fairs have served as platforms for learning, legitimization, and institutional transformation, contributing to the development of organizational, cultural, and human capacities that support the sector's internationalization.

In this sense, institutional strengthening constitutes the structural foundation for commercial performance and market expansion, consolidating Azuay's jewelers as competitive, innovative, and culturally representative actors on the global stage.

**Figure 4.**

*Impact on internal structure*



Source: Own elaboration

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. COMPARISON OF SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONALIZATION CASES OF TWO JEWELERS FROM AZUAY AFTER PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIRS

Of the six artisanal jewelry export companies interviewed, two leading jewelry brands from Azuay were identified: Isabel López Jewelry from the canton of Chordeleg and Andrea Tello Design from Cuenca, both of which have achieved notable visibility, recognition, and positioning at the national and international levels. These companies were selected because, according to the information provided in the interviews, they have not only participated in international fairs and high-level commercial exhibition events, but have also been able to translate these experiences into local and international brand positioning, diverse types and scales of foreign sales, the creation of specialized product lines that meet foreign market standards, and the professionalization of packaging, commercial discourse, and visual materials.

In the development of this chapter, and building on the trajectory and active participation of these two jewelry brands discussed in previous chapters, we present the changes their products have undergone in terms of design, materials, finishes, presentation, and narrative before and after participating in international trade fairs.

It is essential to compare the “before and after,” since the business internationalization literature indicates that trade fairs serve not only as exhibition platforms but also as strategic learning spaces. In these environments, producers receive direct feedback from international buyers and adjust their products accordingly, making them competitive, exportable, and—above all—defensible in terms of price (Monreal & Geldres, 2020).

#### 4.4. Transformations of products resulting from participation in international trade fairs: The case of Andrea Tello Design

Andrea Tello Design’s experience at international trade shows reveals a strategic learning process that has influenced the aesthetic, technical, and communication definition of its brand. These transformations observed before and after its participation

in such events can be analyzed across four main dimensions: strategic collection design, technical standards and usability, packaging, and responsible scalability.

- **Strategic Collection Designs**

In its early stages, the designer's portfolio was broad and experimental, featuring multiple aesthetic variations that reflected an exploratory process typical of artisanal creation. However, participation in international fairs enabled her to identify, through interaction with foreign buyers and curators, which lines best represented the identity of her brand. As a result, the designer strategically refined her catalog, focusing on iconic collections that reinterpret traditional filigree through a contemporary lens. Recurring motifs include floral compositions associated with female empowerment and the use of semi-precious stones such as topaz in pieces of high symbolic value. This curation of the portfolio resulted in a coherent proposal in which each collection communicates a consistent and recognizable aesthetic narrative.

- **Technical Standards and Usability**

Participation in international trade shows allowed the designer to receive direct feedback from buyers and users on practical aspects of her jewelry, such as weight, comfort, clasp strength, and material durability. In the local market, these details were not always considered essential, but abroad, customers place high value on functionality in addition to aesthetics.

Thanks to this feedback, the designer introduced several adjustments to her production process to ensure that the pieces were not only visually appealing but also comfortable, secure, and durable. As a result, international trade shows became true learning environments in which she was able to refine the technical quality of her jewelry and better adapt it to the expectations of the international market.

- **Packaging and Brand Messaging**

Another important transformation occurred in the way the brand communicated its identity. The designer began using personalized packaging and certificates of authenticity and incorporating the story behind the origins of her jewelry. This narrative highlights filigree as a living tradition in southern Ecuador and gives each piece a deeper cultural meaning.

Through this strategy, the jewelry is valued not only for its design or materials but

also for what it represents. This aligns with international trends that favor products with a clear identity and provenance. As a result, the brand succeeded in creating a stronger emotional connection with customers and justifying higher and sustainable prices over time due to the symbolic value conveyed by each piece.

- **Responsible Scalability**

Finally, Andrea Tello Design has chosen to grow in a controlled and sustainable manner, prioritizing quality and exclusivity over mass production. Its strategy centers on creating limited collections with high value per piece rather than producing large quantities. This approach aligns with emerging trends in the internationalization of artisan workshops, where the main competitive advantage lies in product authenticity, respect for ethical production processes, and the unique identity of the brand. Thus, Andrea Tello's expansion does not aim to increase volume but rather to strengthen positioning in specialized markets that value original design, cultural heritage, and the responsibility embedded in each piece of jewelry.

The following figure presents the orchid comb created by designer Andrea Tello, a piece recognized by UNESCO in 2011 and exhibited at the Louvre Museum as an example of the artistic and technical value of Ecuadorian filigree.

**Figure 14**

*Filigree orchid comb*



Source: Andrea Tello Design (2021), Instagram post.

The orchid comb created by Cuenca-based designer Andrea Tello is one of the most representative pieces of contemporary Ecuadorian artisanal jewelry. Crafted using fine silver filigree techniques, it combines delicacy and precision through the manual intertwining of metal threads that form floral motifs inspired by the orchid—a symbol of femininity and of the country's natural heritage. This piece merges tradition with contemporary design, giving it both aesthetic and cultural value. Thanks to its technical and symbolic excellence, the comb was recognized by UNESCO in 2011 and later exhibited at the Louvre Museum in Paris, establishing Tello as a leading figure in Ecuadorian jewelry artistry and positioning Austro filigree as a living heritage with international projection.

The following figure presents two earring models designed by Andrea Tello, which illustrate the fusion of traditional filigree craftsmanship with contemporary reinterpretations tailored to different cultural contexts.

### **Figure 15**

*Earring designs by Andrea Tello*



Source: Andrea Tello Design (2025), collage created by the author based on Instagram posts.

The first design, crafted in fine filigree with a topaz stone, symbolizes female empowerment and inner strength recurring elements in the designer's creative discourse. The second model illustrates an aesthetic adaptation to the Asian market, incorporating forms inspired by Eastern iconography, such as Buddha motifs, along with golden tones that resonate with the symbolic values of Chinese culture.

#### **4.5. Transformations of products resulting from participation in international trade fairs: The case of Isabel López Jewelry**

As in the previous case, participation in international trade fairs led to visible changes in the product and in how the brand was managed. These experiences not only served as exhibition spaces, but also as real learning opportunities where the company obtained direct feedback from the market and adjusted its proposal to meet export standards. The main changes observed are described below.

##### **a) Standardization of Collections**

Before participating in trade shows, production was based almost entirely on unique, one-of-a-kind pieces created individually according to the customer's taste or the designer's momentary inspiration. Each piece of jewelry was different and difficult to reproduce exactly. However, after gaining international experience, the brand recognized the importance of offering stable and consistent product lines.

As a result, it developed reproducible collections—such as ceremonial crowns, tiaras, and bridal sets—that maintain the same level of finish and quality across all replicas. This shift enabled the company to respond to small but recurring orders while ensuring design consistency. For international buyers, this aspect is fundamental, as they must be confident that they can reorder an identical piece without variations in materials or finish.

#### **b) Technical Improvements in Finishes**

Trade shows also became important spaces for technical learning. Through events such as Colombiamoda and NY NOW, the designer received specific feedback on details that influence user experience: appropriate piece weight, comfort at contact points, strength of stone settings, and durability of the shine.

Based on this feedback, the finishing processes were refined to ensure greater quality and comfort during prolonged use. These adjustments align with higher international standards and reflect a clear process of professionalization. In fact, the literature on the internationalization of small artisan businesses notes that this type of technical learning derived from interactions at trade fairs—is one of the mechanisms that drives their evolution toward more competitive models.

#### **c) Packaging and Brand Narrative**

Another significant transformation occurred in product communication. After attending international trade fairs, Isabel López strengthened her brand's narrative of origin and territorial identity. She began integrating expressions such as "*this is filigree from Chordeleg*" or "*this piece represents flowers from Azuay*" into her commercial discourse to build an emotional connection between buyers and the cultural value embedded in the jewelry.

She also incorporated personalized packaging and certificates of authenticity elements that not only elevate perceived value but also reinforce trust and product traceability. This communication strategy transforms each piece into an object with history and meaning, beyond its material composition.

#### **d) Commercial Responsiveness**

Finally, trade shows contributed to the professionalization of the company's commercial management. Following these experiences, the brand reorganized its processes to communicate more effectively with international buyers. It began providing detailed quotations, clear delivery timelines, defined price ranges by product line, and precise

shipping and payment terms.

This change marked an important transition: from an artisan workshop focused primarily on artistic creation, the company evolved into an export-oriented brand with a more formal structure and a clear promise of reliability to its customers.

The following figure presents various designs of bridal combs and hair accessories created by Isabel López Joyería.

**Figure 16**

Filigree combs and hair accessories by Isabel López.



Source: Isabel López Joyería (2024), collage created by the author based on Instagram posts

The pieces shown belong to Isabel López's bridal line, renowned for reinterpreting traditional filigree through a contemporary lens. Each design combines finely woven silver threads with natural pearls and gold details, creating light and elegant floral compositions.

The following figure presents three crowns designed by Isabel López Jewelry, which illustrate the versatility of her creative approach by combining tradition, religious

symbolism, and contemporary design elements applied to different cultural and social contexts.

**Figure 17**

Filigree crowns by Isabel López



Source: Isabel López Joyería (2025), collage created by the author based on Instagram posts.

The crowns illustrate different emblematic commissions in Isabel López's career. The first, made for Virgen del Cisne, combines popular devotion with artisanal excellence through the technique of silver and gold filigree, accented with details of stars and flowers. The second is the official crown for Miss Ecuador 2022, featuring a floral-inspired design with crystal inlays, a symbol of elegance and modernity. Finally, the third piece was created for the Queen of Loja, reinterpreting traditional filigree with pearls and organic lines that evoke regional identity and contemporary femininity.

#### 4.6. Conclusion and comparative table of the cases analyzed

**Table 17**

## Summary comparison of success stories

### DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS ANDREA TELLO DESIGN ISABEL LÓPEZ JEWELRY

|                                    |  |   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| STRATEGIC DESIGN OF THE COLLECTION | Refines its portfolio and consolidates iconic collections that reflect identity and aesthetic consistency.       | Move from unique pieces to reproducible lines with the same quality and finish.                   |
| TECHNICAL ASPECTS                  | Improves weight, closures, and resistance based on feedback from trade shows; combines beauty and functionality. | Enhance finishes, comfort, and durability based on suggestions from international buyers.         |
| PACKAGING AND ORIGIN STORY         | Implements customized packaging and a narrative that highlights Austro filigree as living heritage.              | Strengthen your regional identity (Chordeleg watermark) and add certificates of authenticity.     |
| MANAGEMENT AND SCALABILITY         | Implements customized packaging and a narrative that highlights Austro filigree as living heritage.              | Professionalize your commercial management with defined quotes, deadlines, and prices for export. |

Source: Own Elaboration

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

International trade fairs have played a decisive role in the internationalization process of Azuay's artisanal jewelry makers. More than simply exhibition or sales spaces, they became genuine platforms for learning, growth, and connection—places where companies not only showcased their products but also strengthened their identity, learned to adapt to demanding markets, and built sustainable commercial relationships. Through their continued participation in fairs, Azuay's jewelers were able to present themselves to the world with a clear identity grounded in the quality, authenticity, and cultural value of their work. Each international experience represented an opportunity to refine their processes, improve their designs, and broaden their business vision. In this way, the study demonstrates that trade fairs are not an end in themselves, but rather a means of driving comprehensive business transformation, both internally and in their global positioning.

In the commercial sphere, the effects were evident. Although not all six companies analyzed were able to maintain sustained economic growth over time, several did demonstrate favorable results from their participation in international trade fairs. These companies secured sales during the events and established meaningful commercial contacts. However, the lack of continuity in that growth may be attributed to internal limitations in management, planning, and business development—factors that shape the ability to sustain achievements after international exposure. Participation in these spaces also allowed jewelry companies to expand beyond national borders into markets in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Nonetheless, the most valuable contribution goes beyond sales: it includes the development of new competencies such as negotiation skills, knowledge of international trade, intercultural communication, and the capacity to adapt to global quality standards. These lessons strengthened their professionalism and marked a turning point in how they manage their economic activity.

Market expansion also reflects the power of trade fairs as bridges between the local and the global. Artisans did not merely bring pieces to exhibit—they brought their history, their culture, and their artistic worldview. Through these experiences, they succeeded in positioning Azuay's artisanal jewelry as a product with its own identity, competitive and highly symbolic. This international exposure allowed Azuay's craftsmanship to be

recognized as a benchmark of excellence, capable of competing with major brands without losing its essence.

Another fundamental aspect that emerged from the analysis was institutional strengthening. Participation in trade fairs drove profound changes within jewelry workshops: production processes were improved, packaging modernized, communication professionalized, and digital tools incorporated. Many of these companies evolved from family workshops into more solid structures, with business-oriented mindsets and long-term growth strategies. This shift demonstrates that internationalization is reflected not only in exports, but also in learning to manage with vision, plan strategically, and grow with identity.

Likewise, the importance of cooperation between public, private, and academic sectors became evident. Institutions such as ProEcuador, Fedexpor, CIDAP, and local governments have played an essential role in promoting, training, and supporting the sector. However, the study also revealed existing gaps in equitable access to this support, particularly for smaller workshops. Therefore, stronger institutional coordination and financing mechanisms are essential to ensure that the internationalization of the craft sector becomes a sustainable and inclusive process.

Taken together, these findings confirm that international trade fairs not only stimulated commercial growth but also transformed the way Azuay's jewelers perceive themselves. Today, these companies demonstrate how craftsmanship can become a tool for local development, innovation, and national pride—combining tradition and modernity under a single vision.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to consolidate current achievements and plan for the sector's future. First, jewelry workshops should maintain consistent participation in international trade fairs, selecting those that best align with their product type and target audience. It is equally important to continue innovating in design, packaging, brand narrative, and digital presence, ensuring that each piece stands out not only for its aesthetic qualities but also for the story it conveys. Continuous training in foreign trade, marketing, languages, and negotiation will be key to strengthening their competitiveness in international environments.

Second, public institutions and trade associations should expand financial and technical support programs, prioritizing preparation prior to attending trade fairs. The

creation of a craft internationalization fund—jointly managed by local and national entities in collaboration with universities—would allow more artisans to participate in global marketplaces and ensure their sustained presence. Such initiatives would promote equity and provide greater visibility to workshops seeking to expand internationally.

Third, academia has the opportunity to become a strategic ally for the craft sector. Universities can offer training programs tailored to artisans' real needs in areas such as innovation, sustainability, brand management, and digital transformation. This would bridge the gap between technical knowledge and productive practice, contributing to the professionalization of the craft industry.

Finally, it is recommended to strengthen collaboration among artisans, exporters, designers, and support institutions, forming a solid network that promotes the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Integrating principles of environmental sustainability, gender equality, and social innovation will ensure that internationalization is not only an economic accomplishment but also a socially meaningful and community-centered process.

Future research should expand this analysis to other Ecuadorian craft sectors such as toquilla straw, ceramics, and textiles, with the aim of identifying common trends and promoting comprehensive public policies that enhance the country's cultural internationalization.

In conclusion, international fairs proved to be far more than commercial showcases—they were spaces for transformation, learning, and projection. The artisan jewelers of Azuay gained not only new markets but also a new understanding of their value, their art, and their potential. This process has consolidated the sector as a symbol of innovation with deep roots, where culture and creativity become real drivers of economic and social development for the region and for Ecuador.

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