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**From Cultural Identity to Country Image: Intercultural
Narratives of South Korea and Ecuador**

**Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in International
Studies**

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For that little girl who always loved Korea, and who, at
one point, doubted her abilities and what the future
might hold.

Look at you today, just steps away from graduating.
Thank you for holding on until the end.

I am sure that younger self is looking at you with pride,
and that your future self will see the fruits of this effort.

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Thank you, Mom, Dad, for helping me during this last semester to focus more on my studies and my work.

To my dear sisters, for offering me your shoulder to lean on, allowing me to let my emotions out, and helping me regain the energy to keep going.

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ABSTRACT

This study comparatively examines the construction of cultural identity and its articulation in the international projection of South Korea and Ecuador, drawing on the frameworks of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding. Using a qualitative research design with a hermeneutic approach, the study applies methodological triangulation that combines specialized literature review, documentary analysis, and semi-structured interviews with experts from both countries. The findings show that South Korea has developed a coherent, sustained, and institutionalized strategy in which cultural identity functions as an internalized resource that strengthens its global image and positioning. In contrast, Ecuador exhibits a more fragmented construction, marked by institutional discontinuities and weak articulation between identity, country brand, and country image. The study concludes that effective international projection depends not only on available cultural resources but also on the state's capacity to integrate them into a long-term strategic narrative.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, cultural identity, country image, international relations, nation branding, soft power.

RESUMEN

La presente investigación analiza comparativamente la construcción de la identidad cultural y su articulación en la proyección internacional de Corea del Sur y Ecuador, desde los enfoques de poder blando, diplomacia cultural y marca país. A partir de un diseño cualitativo con enfoque hermenéutico, se emplea triangulación metodológica que integra revisión bibliográfica especializada, análisis documental y entrevistas semiestructuradas a expertos de ambos países. Los resultados evidencian que Corea del Sur presenta una estrategia coherente, sostenida e institucionalizada, donde la identidad cultural opera como un recurso internalizado que fortalece su imagen y posicionamiento global. En contraste, Ecuador muestra una construcción más fragmentada, caracterizada por discontinuidades institucionales y una incipiente articulación entre identidad, marca e imagen país. El estudio concluye que la consolidación de una proyección internacional efectiva depende no solo de los recursos culturales disponibles, sino de la capacidad estatal para integrarlos en una narrativa estratégica de largo plazo.

Palabras clave: diplomacia cultural, identidad cultural, imagen país, marca país, poder blando, proyección internacional.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
RESUMEN	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables, Figures and Appendices	vii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Appendices.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Justification.....	2
CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
1.1 Literature Review	4
1.1.1 Cultural Identity as a Strategic Resource for Countries' International Projection	4
1.1.2 Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, and Soft Power: Recent Perspectives ...	5
1.1.3 The Role of Nation Branding in International Projection: The South Korean and Ecuadorian Cases.....	6
1.1.4 International Integration in Latin America: a Regional Perspective	7
1.2 Conceptual Framework.....	8
1.2.1 Culture and Cultural Identity	8
1.2.2 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy.....	10
1.2.3 Intercultural Narratives and Country Image.....	11
CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DESIGN	13
2.1 Approach.....	13
2.2 Interviewees.....	14
2.3 Instruments	17
2.4 Procedure	17
CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES: SOUTH KOREA AND ECUADOR	19
3.1 South Korea Case Study	19
3.1.1 Projected Cultural Identity: a History of Selection	19
3.1.2 Evolution of the International Narrative: Intercultural Narratives through Nation Branding and Tourism Branding	20
3.1.3 Institutionalization of Cultural Identity	25
3.1.4 Cultural Diplomacy as an Operational Mechanism.....	26
3.1.5 Country Image and Results	28
3.2 Ecuador Case Study.....	30
3.2.1 Projected Cultural Identity: A History of Diversity and Fragmentation.....	30
3.2.2 Ecuadorian Intercultural Narrative: Redefinitions and Discursive Ruptures through the Nation Brand	31
3.2.3 Institutional Weakness and Cultural Diplomacy: Structural Limitations on Ecuador's International Projection	35

3.2.4 Country Image and Results: an Overview of Ecuador’s Current International Standing	37
CHAPTER 4 INTERVIEWS	39
4.1 Organization and Analysis Criteria	39
4.2 Interviews: South Korea Side	39
4.2.1 Aidan Donghwan Kim	40
4.2.1.1 Interviewee Profile	40
4.2.1.2 Interview	40
4.2.1.3 Narrative Description	41
4.2.1.4 Preliminary Findings	44
4.2.1.5 Thematic Areas	47
4.2.1.6 Analysis	47
4.2.1.7 Conclusions	50
4.2.2 Evelyn Almeida	50
4.2.2.1 Interviewee Profile	50
4.2.2.2 Interview	51
4.2.2.3 Narrative Description	51
4.2.2.4 Preliminary Findings	54
4.2.2.5 Thematic Areas	55
4.2.2.6 Analysis	55
4.2.2.7 Conclusions	57
4.2.3 Richard Salazar	57
4.2.3.1 Interviewee Profile	57
4.2.3.2 Interview	58
4.2.3.3 Narrative Description	59
4.2.3.4 Preliminary Findings	62
4.2.3.5 Thematic Areas	65
4.2.3.6 Analysis	65
4.2.3.7 Conclusions	68
4.3 Interviews: Ecuador Side	69
4.3.1 Mónica Martínez Menduño	69
4.3.1.1 Interviewee Profile	69
4.3.1.2 Interview	70
4.3.1.3 Narrative Description	70
4.3.1.4 Preliminary Findings	72
4.3.1.5 Thematic Areas	73
4.3.1.6 Analysis	73
4.3.1.7 Conclusions	75
4.3.2 Mateo Estrella Durán	76
4.3.2.1 Interviewee Profile	76
4.3.2.2 Interview	77
4.3.2.3 Narrative Description	77
4.3.2.4 Preliminary Findings	80
4.3.2.5 Thematic Areas	80

4.3.2.6 Analysis	81
4.3.2.7 Conclusions	82
4.3.3 Mónica Malo	83
4.3.3.1 Interviewee Profile	83
4.3.3.2 Interview	83
4.3.3.3 Narrative Description	84
4.3.3.4 Preliminary Findings	86
4.3.3.5 Thematic Areas	87
4.3.3.6 Analysis	87
4.3.3.7 Conclusions	89
4.3.4 Natalia Rincón	90
4.3.4.1 Interviewee Profile	90
4.3.4.2 Interview	90
4.3.4.3 Narrative Description	91
4.3.4.4 Preliminary Findings	94
4.3.4.5 Thematic Areas	95
4.3.4.6 Analysis	95
4.3.4.7 Conclusions	97
4.3.5 Cecilia Ugalde	98
4.3.5.1 Interviewee Profile	98
4.3.5.2 Interview	98
4.3.5.3 Narrative Description	99
4.3.5.4 Preliminary Findings	102
4.3.5.5 Thematic Areas	103
4.3.5.6 Analysis	103
4.3.5.7 Conclusions	106
CHAPTER 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	108
5.1 Chapter Mapping	108
5.2 Theoretical Analysis	109
5.3 Documentary Analysis.....	111
5.4 Interview Analysis	115
5.5 Integrated Analysis of the Results	120
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	124
6.1 Conclusions	124
6.2 Recommendations	125
REFERENCES	127
APPENDICES	132

List of Tables, Figures and Appendices

List of Tables

Table 1. Profile of Interviewees.....	16
Table 2 Preliminary Findings Aidan Kim – South Korea.....	45
Table 3 Preliminary Findings Aidan Kim - Ecuador	46
Table 4 Thematic Areas Aidan Kim.....	47
Table 5 Preliminary Findings Almeida.....	54
Table 6 Thematic Areas Almeida.....	55
Table 7 Preliminary Findings Salazar – South Korea.....	63
Table 8 Preliminary Findings Salazar - Ecuador	64
Table 9 Thematic Areas Salazar	65
Table 10 Preliminary Findings Martínez Menduiño.....	72
Table 11 Thematic Areas Martínez Menduiño	73
Table 12 Preliminary Findings Estrella Durán	80
Table 13 Thematic Areas Estrella Durán	80
Table 14 Preliminary Findings Malo	86
Table 15 Thematic Areas Malo.....	87
Table 16 Preliminary Findings Rincón del Valle.....	94
Table 17 Thematic Area Rincón del Valle	95
Table 18 Preliminary Findings Ugalde.....	102
Table 19 Thematic Areas Ugalde.....	103
Table 20 Theoretical Analysis	110
Table 21 Documentary Analysis.....	113
Table 22 Interview Analysis Matrix	116

List of Figures

Figure 1 Dynamic Korea Logo.....	22
Figure 2 Korea Sparkling Logo	22
Figure 3 Korea Be Inspired Logo	23
Figure 4 Imagine your Korea Logo	23
Figure 5 Elements of Imagine your Korea Logo.....	24
Figure 6 Creative Korea Logo vs Creative France Logo.....	24
Figure 7 Korean Cultural Centers.....	27
Figure 8 K-pop World Festival.....	28
Figure 9 Nation Brand Ecuador 2001	33
Figure 10 Nation Brand Ecuador 2002.....	33
Figure 11 Nation Brand Ecuador 2010	34
Figure 12 Nation Brand Ecuador 2023.....	34
Figure 13 Mind Map of the Comprehensive Analysis of the Results.....	121

List of Appendices

Appendix A Information Sheet Model: Interview	132
Appendix B Informed Consent Form	134
Appendix C Thematic Axes of the Semi-Structured Interviews	135
Appendix D Transcription of Interviews from South Korea	138
Appendix E Transcription of Interviews from Ecuador	147

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Given the current state of international relations, culture has taken on an increasingly important role in how countries project themselves internationally. Various authors agree that cultural, symbolic, and narrative elements have come to occupy a central place in the foreign policies of nations, given the nature of the international system, which is more favorable to states that enjoy reputation and legitimacy (Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2004). From this perspective, cultural identity is no longer conceived solely as an internal characteristic of a country, but rather as a projectable asset capable of contributing to the construction of a favorable national image in the international arena.

In this context, several studies highlight cases in which the articulation between cultural identity, cultural diplomacy, and strategic communication has been effectively structured. One prominent example is the Republic of South Korea, which has integrated its popular culture and national values into the country's foreign policy, thereby generating a coherent narrative that has facilitated their international visibility (Jin, 2024; M. Kim, 2022). This process, associated with the *hallyu* phenomenon¹, has been analyzed as a representative example of the strategic use of culture as a soft power² tool.

In contrast, research focused on Latin America reveals a more fragmented relationship between cultural identity and international projection. Authors such as Pérez Peña et al. (2021) point out that in countries such as Ecuador, cultural diplomacy and nation branding³ strategies have been marked by permanent institutional discontinuity, frequent changes in the projected narrative, and weak integration between cultural identity, foreign policy, and state communication. Although campaigns such as *Ecuador Ama la Vida* (Ecuador Loves Life) or *All You Need is Ecuador* have sought to position the country on the international

¹ Also known as the *Korean Wave* in English, this refers to the growing popularity of South Korean cultural products and industries. Notable examples include television dramas, films, and K-pop, among others (M. Kim, 2022).

² Also known as soft power, this concept refers to the ability of states to influence other international actors and achieve their desired outcomes through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or material incentives (Nye, 2004).

³ In academic literature, the terms country branding and nation branding are often used interchangeably to refer to strategies through which states manage and communicate their international image. For the purposes of this study, the term nation branding will be used consistently in order to maintain conceptual clarity.

stage, the literature identifies structural limitations that have hindered the consolidation of this nation's country image.

These differences raise questions about the factors that shape the strategic and favorable articulation between cultural identity and country image construction. In particular, the literature reviewed indicates that historical, political, and institutional contexts significantly influence the way states articulate their identity elements into official narratives aimed at international audiences (Aronczyk, 2013; Dinnie, 2008).

1.2 Justification

This research is motivated by both academic and practical considerations aimed at deepening the analysis of the role that cultural identity plays in the construction of a country's image, especially when this is managed through cultural diplomacy and nation branding strategies. Although existing studies have addressed these concepts individually, there are still gaps in the joint articulation of these elements from a comparative perspective that allow for a better understanding of how different national contexts influence the international projection of countries.

From an academic perspective, this work contributes to the field of international studies, as it proposes the integration of approaches from intercultural communication, public diplomacy, and nation branding through a hermeneutic reading of the official narratives employed by states. Furthermore, by contrasting the case of South Korea with that of the Republic of Ecuador, the analysis of international projection is expanded by situating it within the historical and structural differences between both cases.

From a practical perspective, the research opens up spaces for reflection by bringing into dialogue the different realities of these countries, both at the institutional level and in terms of strategic continuity. In this sense, the study provides an opportunity to identify the factors that facilitate or limit an effective articulation between cultural identity, country image, and international projection so thereby enabling both countries to optimize the management of this strategic resource and strengthen their visibility in the international sphere.

In this context, the research seeks to address the question of how cultural identity influences the construction of a country's image through cultural diplomacy and nation branding strategies, from a comparative perspective between South Korea and Ecuador. To achieve this, the study examines both the theoretical foundations of these concepts and their

materialization in official narratives and strategies, through a hermeneutic content and discourse analysis. In addition, to complement the findings, interviews were conducted with specialists and key actors involved in the core areas of this research. The objective of the study is to compare both cases in order to identify convergences, divergences, and contextual factors that shape these processes.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Cultural Identity as a Strategic Resource for Countries' International Projection

In contemporary international relations, cultural identity has become a key element in the successful international positioning of states. This element is no longer regarded as merely symbolic or patrimonial, but rather as a strategic resource through which states project themselves internationally. In this regard, Viktorin et al. (2020) point out that countries currently manage their national identity with the aim of achieving their political, economic, and diplomatic objectives. It is therefore essential to shape it coherently in order to build legitimacy and trust among other nations. Similarly, cultural identity is highlighted as a differentiating factor capable of capturing the attention of various foreign actors. Through the so-called *unique selling point*⁴, states emphasize their distinctive features in order to differentiate themselves from other states. Therefore, through this strategic use of culture, countries no longer only communicate who they are but also what values they represent and what they aspire to achieve internationally.

However, as Bolin & Ståhlberg (2020) point out that managing cultural identity poses certain challenges. For example, they mention the complexity of striking a balance between preserving indigenous cultural expressions and national narratives without hindering the global public's understanding and favorable interpretation of them. This tension between authenticity and functionality in today's culture is one of the major concerns regarding the use of this resource.

Turning now to the countries of this study, South Korea constitutes an illustrative case of how cultural identity can be managed strategically and effectively. Through Chang's (2022) theory of *compressed modernity*⁵, it becomes clear how the Republic of Korea has managed to combine its historical heritage and traditional elements with the modern and technological features that characterize it today. This harmonious articulation has enabled

⁴ Understood as those historical, symbolic, or creative features that distinguish a country from others and reinforce its uniqueness in the eyes of international audiences (Viktorin et al., 2020).

⁵ This seeks to explain the resulting condition in some societies, such as South Korea, which has undergone several rapid and simultaneous processes of change (Chang, 2022).

the country in question to construct an entire identity narrative capable of appealing to the masses and fostering internal cohesion, which in turn has positioned it as a reference point in the strategic management of culture and identity in the global era.

In contrast, the Ecuadorian case reflects a broad scholarly consensus regarding the country's rich cultural diversity and the way in which the lack of effective policies has perpetuated the effective international projection of its identity (Velásquez, 2024). Furthermore, as Hallo (2020) points out, the lack of a sense of belonging on the part of citizens to the image projected abroad can weaken the message conveyed by governments, raising questions about the configuration of this country's cultural identity.

1.1.2 Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, and Soft Power: Recent Perspectives

Currently, cultural diplomacy and soft power have been widely addressed as fundamental state policies for achieving the international positioning of nations. One of the most emblematic examples of this can be found in the Republic of Korea, which has built an entire infrastructure around these areas to strengthen its global presence and achieve its national objectives (M. Kim, 2022). Thanks to its early implementation of cultural policies, institutionalized since the 1990s, South Korea has now established itself as a cultural benchmark by planning its foreign policy from a logic of globalization (Global Korea), aimed at promoting its heritage and language and fostering the development of its creative industries to use them as tools of influence and cooperation.

Similarly, part of this positioning owes its success to the distinction made between the competencies of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. According to the South Korean government, public diplomacy is geared toward short-term communication and managing the country's image, while cultural diplomacy is dedicated to building a long-term process through the dissemination of the values, traditions, and expressions of the culture. This differentiation, notes Macías (2023), allowed for the design of a comprehensive policy that would be implemented in conjunction with the participation of actors from the private sector and society in general, thus creating the ideal conditions for strategically using the country's cultural identity in its international projection.

Nevertheless, as we currently operate in a digital age, soft power has also been subject to technological processes and media globalization. As a result, the expansion of the well-known Korean wave has been boosted through social media, streaming platforms, and the South Korean entertainment industry's local applications (Wavve or Weverse). In this

context, the public sector has also been an active participant in what is known as *people-to-people* diplomacy, promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). This practice is based on the transmission of positive experiences recounted by fans of Korean culture themselves, who act as cultural Ambassadors by sharing their experiences through their personal networks. This process, according to Jin (2024), helps to promote the country's national image by creating emotional bonds with audiences around the world.

At the same time, for authors such as S. T. Lee (2022), the Korean state's involvement in cultural promotion is not without its critics, as its growing participation has been perceived as an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of its culture. Added to this are the growing anti-hallyu movements already present in neighboring countries (Japan, China, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam), where the expansion of Korean culture has come to be seen as a cultural invasion due to the influence it has had on the youth and population of those countries.

On the other hand, referring to the Ecuadorian case, this has been marked by the continuous inability of successive governments to coordinate all areas relevant to international projection (culture, tourism, and international relations). Furthermore, according to Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth (2021), the absence of strategic planning that integrates both private and public efforts has meant that, despite the country's rich cultural diversity, its diplomatic initiatives have had limited impact. However, this structural deficiency is not unique to this country, as it responds to a widely observed trend in the Latin American region, where institutional weakness, a lack of diplomatic professionalism, and a strong dependence on presidential leadership to manage the country's image with the rest of the world (Manfredi Sánchez, 2022).

1.1.3 The Role of Nation Branding in International Projection: The South Korean and Ecuadorian Cases

Nation branding has become a fundamental element of contemporary foreign policy. Nation branding can be understood as the image that countries project to the world, it is managed with the ultimate goal of achieving a favorable reputation and reliability so that nations can position themselves in the international system. In this sense, speaking from the reality of the Republic of Korea, various studies consider its nation brand to be a benchmark, pointing to the consistent trajectory it has undergone, taking into account the country's modernization processes and evolving strategic needs (J. Y. Lee, 2021).

This assertion is made because, unlike many countries, South Korea distinguishes between nation branding and tourism branding, which has contributed to greater consistency

in its visibility and, therefore, its global reach. In this sense, the nation brand, managed at the government level, has diplomatic functions focused mainly on strengthening the reputation of the state, its institutional credibility, and the projection of its national identity. On the other hand, the tourism brand is administered by the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), which is an institution attached to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST). This brand, on the other hand, is used in the country's public diplomacy through the use of cultural experiences and visual narratives aimed at foreign audiences (필인리브, 2023). Furthermore, it should be noted that historically, the South Korea's nation brand has remained constant over time, with only two logos adopted to date: Dynamic Korea in (2002) and Creative Korea in (2016).

However, if we analyze Ecuador's nation brand, we see that it has undergone a process of continuous transformation. Since its first version was created in 2001 by the Ministry of Tourism, Ecuador has gone through different logos, slogans, and official campaigns, which, rather than strengthening its international projection policy, have been interpreted as reflecting the inclinations of the governments in power at the time. As a result of this dependence, there has been considerable confusion as to what the country's identity is or has been (Pérez Peña et al., 2021). In addition, unfortunately, as the management of the nation brand passed from one ministry to another (from the Ministry of Tourism to the Ministry of Foreign Trade), the official campaigns, despite being an extension of the nation brand, actually responded to the sectoral objectives of whoever was in charge at the time (Velásquez, 2024).

1.1.4 International Integration in Latin America: a Regional Perspective

To date, studies on the international integration of Latin American countries agree that the strategies aimed at consolidating their presence in the international system have been slow and fragmented. First, there is a marked emphasis on nation branding as a tool for achieving international visibility. However, this has been strongly linked to the promotion of specific sectors, such as tourism or foreign trade. Consequently, the construction of the country's image becomes more of an instrument geared towards the economic growth of nations, leaving aside the political, relational, and cultural dimensions that are required to provide sustained planning in terms of external projection.

In addition to the above, another structural problem facing the region is its heavy dependence on presidential leadership to conduct foreign policy. As Manfredi Sánchez

(2022) points out, this characteristic has an impact on the creation of campaigns that are subject to the interests of the governments in power. Furthermore, another result of this trend is discontinuity in international outreach policies, as well as institutional weakness that limits these countries' ability to design and execute long-term plans in a professional manner.

Similarly, with regard to the use of cultural identity, studies agree that despite the region's wide cultural diversity, its use in terms of international integration has been very simplified and selective. In fact, authors such as Azpíroz & Rodríguez-Espínola (2024) point out that by tending to highlight those features that they consider functional for external audiences and relegating citizens and internal cultural plurality from the participatory process, these elements are weakened, which ultimately undermines their export potential and function as a mechanism capable of generating legitimacy, recognition, and sustained links with international audiences.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

1.2.1 Culture and Cultural Identity

Culture is understood as the set of beliefs, values, practices, symbols, and knowledge shared by a group of people, through which they develop a sense of belonging (Geertz, 1973). Culture, in turn, is one of the fundamental pillars for understanding social organization and the production of meaning that occurs in each community. Furthermore, it is known that the construction of culture is a dynamic process and that it also plays a central role in the international projection of each state, since it is through these cultural narratives through which nations communicate who they are, what values they promote, and how they seek to position themselves on the global stage (Anholt, 2007; Nye, 2004).

In this sense, cultural identity emerges as a specific manifestation of culture by articulating historical, linguistic, and even religious and political elements. This conceptualization of cultural identity is closely related to the idea of the *Imagined Community* proposed by Anderson (2006). For the author, nations are not a natural entities, but rather the result of a symbolic construction produced by shared discourses, institutions, and cultural practices. Therefore, even if members do not know each other personally, they identify as part of the same collective because they have symbols and narratives that unite them.

In the case of Asia, the construction of South Korean identity is closely linked to its historical past and how this has shaped its society. Among the events that most marked the

course of this nation are the Japanese occupation and the division of its peninsula, which brought about a process of identity reconfiguration for the nation, which took on nationalist overtones and a strong determination to achieve the modernization and prosperity of the newly established state. Similarly, authors such as Seth (2020) highlight the legacy of Confucianism, which has played a fundamental role in shaping Korean culture and all the ethical and moral values that characterize it today.

In the Ecuadorian context, understanding cultural identity involves considering the various factors and conditions specific to the region. For authors such as Walsh (2007), Latin American identity projects find many of their roots and justifications in the legacy of colonialism, since it is through the historical structures and hierarchies that were formed during that era that power, knowledge, and ways of being were shaped. On the other hand, we have experts such as Cruz (2013) who highlight the rich identity of the Andean people and see it as a factor that can strengthen the cohesion of these nation-states and expand the collective representation of their cultural identities.

In contemporary times, cultural identity has evolved from being merely part of a country's internal definition to being conceived as one of the most important strategic resources for nations to compete internationally. States are increasingly resorting to their traditions, heritage, and historical narratives to differentiate themselves in today's globalized and competitive world. However, this instrumentalization of culture depends heavily on the creation of policies around public diplomacy, nation branding, and international projection (Anholt, 2007).

For this reason, and due to the importance currently attributed to culture as an active tool for building a prosperous future for nations, there are cases such as South Korea, where the strategic use of cultural elements, from hallyu (the Korean wave) to historical heritage and Confucian values in contrast to the country's modern and technological architecture, has allowed this state to consolidate its national identity in an attractive and coherent way before the world (K. Kim & Bae 2017). On the other hand, the reality in Ecuador highlights the challenges that arise when internal cultural diversity is not effectively articulated in the narratives constructed around the country's image, thus revealing its impact on the coherence and continuity of subsequent campaigns (Flores, 2016).

1.2.2 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

Now, if culture constitutes the symbolic basis for the formation of each nation's cultural identities, soft power and public diplomacy represent the means by which countries capitalize on their cultural wealth. Therefore, the following section conceptualizes these terms in order to explain how the elements shared by societies are transformed into instruments of international influence and legitimization.

To begin with, Nye (2004) defines soft power as the ability of states to achieve their objectives without resorting to the use of force or any other type of coercive measure. In other words, soft power refers to the strength of a nation to be perceived as attractive to other countries and thereby achieve its goals through the optimal and effective use of its values, policies, and culture. Therefore, it is clear that culture is one of the main sources of soft power, as it is through its manifestations that nations can generate empathy, admiration, and affinity in the international system.

However, for soft power to be effective, it is essential to have the necessary structures in place to channel this tool and thereby attract and influence other nations. In this regard, public diplomacy is the institutional instrument that will enable the effective use of this resource. According to Melissen (2005), this instrument seeks to generate lasting links with different countries around the world so that countries can build their credibility globally and strengthen their national image.

In addition, it should be noted that within public diplomacy there is a sub-branch that operates within the cultural sphere with a view to translating all the cultural values and expressions of a nation into diplomatic instruments. This branch is known as *cultural diplomacy* and aims to promote the exchange of ideas, traditions, and knowledge with other states in order to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding (Cummings, 2009). Under this logic, we can define cultural diplomacy as the application of soft power through culture to create foreign policy based on the symbolic assets of each country.

This highlights the close interconnectivity between soft power, public diplomacy, and, therefore, cultural diplomacy, enabling countries to gain a relevant position in today's competitive arena. Briefly elaborating on our cases of interest, South Korea has demonstrated how the dissemination of its language, the creation of cultural centers, and support for its creative industry have strengthened its country image and reputation internationally (Tadeo, 2018). In the case of Ecuador, although efforts to incorporate cultural

identity as a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy are recognized, the scope of these efforts has been very limited, and therefore there is a need for this nation to properly structure policies around public and cultural diplomacy (Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth, 2021).

1.2.3 Intercultural Narratives and Country Image

Having examined the means by which states can project their cultural identity (through soft power and public diplomacy), it is now appropriate to analyze the role played by cultural narratives and country image as projections of that identity, since it is through mechanisms that countries implement their culture to achieve recognition and improve their international perception.

Starting with intercultural narratives, these correspond to the set of cultural stories that are transmitted and reformulated over time, aimed at generating an identifiable discourse capable of producing social cohesion. However, these stories are based on a conscious and premeditated construction of cultural representation through which meanings and attributions made to certain symbols and narratives are continuously negotiated (Hall, 1990). However, as we now operate in an increasingly interconnected world, what Appadurai (1996) calls *mediascapes* are produced, symbolic landscapes that emerge as a product of globalization where the identities of each nation compete and are subject to a process of constant reinterpretation. This leads to the cultural narratives of each country being perceived as resources to be used to achieve positioning on the international stage.

In this context, the notion of country image is based on the codification of these narratives with a view to projecting them as representations of countries abroad. These are carefully selected and adapted from the discourses and elements of each nation's culture to ensure international recognition (Aronczyk, 2013). However, the above is only part of what country image is, as this image is ultimately shaped by the interpretation of foreign audiences, thus placing it on a more perceptual than managerial level.

In contrast, when we talk about nation branding, this constitutes a combination of cultural elements specific to a nation, articulated in conjunction with public policies and state actions, with the ultimate goal of being carried out as a strongly institutional process that seeks to strengthen the coherence and legitimacy of the national project both internally and as part of its international projection (Dinnie, 2008).

From this conceptual perspective, referring to our cases of interest, it is undeniable what the Republic of Korea has achieved in consolidating its reputation in the international

arena through its creative industries, as an example of a country that experienced unprecedented economic growth and development and its ability to exercise bargaining power that has enabled it to advance its national interests (Macías, 2023). As for the Republic of Ecuador, the reality facing the country is somewhat more complex. Despite recognition of its multicultural wealth and identity, institutional gaps persist that would enhance the proper articulation of its narratives and cultural values in order to project itself to the rest of the world (Pérez Peña et al., 2021).

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DESIGN

2.1 Approach

This study was conducted by using a qualitative epistemological approach, as its main objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, discourses, and practices through which states manage and project their cultural identity in the international arena. As Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014) argue, qualitative analysis not only presents findings but also interprets them in the light of the complexity of their contexts. Therefore, this approach was appropriate for analyzing the intercultural narratives, foreign policy dynamics, and public diplomacy strategies involved in the construction and projection of a country's image.

From this perspective, the research adopted an interpretive orientation grounded in hermeneutic methodology, since this approach enables a detailed analysis of the discourses, texts, and symbolic representations present in official nation branding campaigns, strategic documents on cultural and public diplomacy, as well as academic articles and specialized reports. This analysis was carried out with attention to the specific historical, cultural, and political context of each case (Van Dijk, 2011).

The methodological design was structured on the basis of a comparative study between South Korea and Ecuador. These countries were selected because they offer analytically relevant cases for contrasting two different ways of articulating cultural identity as a resource for international projection. This comparison enabled the identification of convergences and divergences in the narratives and strategies employed by each state without attempting to establish normative models or generalizations.

In line with this comparative logic and with the aim of strengthening the interpretative consistency of the work, a triangulation strategy was incorporated. According to Denzin (2015), triangulation is a methodological technique that allows the same phenomenon to be examined by combining various sources, favoring the contrast of perspectives and a more comprehensive understanding of the object of study. In this case, its use was relevant given the complexity of the phenomenon analyzed.

Thus, triangulation was structured around three complementary dimensions:

- 1) A specialized literature review on cultural identity, public and cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and country image.

- 2) Documentary and discursive analysis of official nation branding campaigns, strategic foreign policy and cultural diplomacy documents, regulatory frameworks, institutional reports, and international reputation indices.
- 3) Semi-structured interviews with institutional actors and experts linked to international projection in both countries under study.

This integration facilitated the contrast theoretical approaches with official narratives and the interpretations of the actors involved, thus identifying points of convergence, tensions, and gaps between the conceptual, discursive, and practical levels. Consequently, the scope of the study was more precisely delimited, focusing it on the description and comparative interpretation of the main strategies and narratives used by each case in relation to the management of their cultural identity.

2.2 Interviewees

Within the framework of the triangulation strategy described above, and with the aim of complementing the documentary analysis and deepening the understanding of international projection strategies linked to cultural identity, this research incorporated semi-structured interviews with experts and key actors in the fields of public diplomacy, foreign policy, nation branding, and cultural management. A total of eight interviews were conducted, five corresponding to the Ecuadorian case and three to the South Korean case.

It should be noted that the greater number of interviewees in the Ecuadorian case reflects the particular characteristics of this topic in the national context, where the available academic literature is still limited and the processes linked to cultural diplomacy, country image, and international projection have not yet been developed as extensively in academic and documentary terms as they have in South Korea. In this regard, it was necessary to incorporate a broader set of expert voices to complement these analytical gaps with professional experience and practice.

It should also be noted that the profiles selected for both countries were defined primarily based on the interviewees' professional or academic experience, as well as their direct involvement in the formulation, implementation, or critical analysis of strategies related to cultural identity, public diplomacy, and nation branding. This selection criterion responds to the nature of the qualitative approach, which privileges analytical depth and understanding of the reality being analyzed (Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson, 2003).

In the case of Ecuador, the study included officials and representatives involved in the formulation of policies related to international projection and country image. In this sense, professionals who have worked in institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were included, with the aim of analyzing the management of public diplomacy at the governmental level. Similarly, a representative from the Ministry of Tourism was included in order to examine the role this sector has played in building and promoting the nation brand. Finally, a representative from Mucho Mejor Ecuador participated in order to offer a complementary perspective on the application of the nation brand in Ecuador.

In the case of the Republic of Korea, representatives from the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Ecuador participated, specifically from areas related to academic and cultural diplomacy, with the aim of understanding how the Korean state articulates culture within its foreign policy. Representatives from cultural and educational institutions such as the King Sejong Institute in Quito were also included, as their work helps illuminate how Korean cultural values and identity are projected through language teaching and cultural exchange. In addition, the participation of an academic specializing in South Korea was considered appropriate in order to provide a critical perspective on the conceptualization and implementation of that country's cultural identity and public diplomacy strategies.

Attached is a table (Table 1) corresponding to the profile of each of the interviewees:

Table 1.
Profile of Interviewees

Interviewee	Profile
Mónica Martínez Menduño	Ecuadorian diplomat and Foreign Service Ambassador with a background in foreign policy and multilateral representation. She holds a master's degree in International Relations from the Universidad Simón Bolívar and a doctorate in jurisprudence. She has held positions as undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and minister to the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations in Geneva, participating in processes related to public diplomacy and the institutional projection of the state.
Mateo Estrella Durán	Lawyer and current Deputy Minister of Tourism of Ecuador. He has specialized training in sustainable tourism management and planning and a background as a consultant and academic in the hospitality and tourism sector. He has held positions as minister and advisor to the Ministry of Tourism, leading processes of international positioning, tourism cooperation, and strategic development of the sector.
Mónica Malo Jirón	Executive Director of Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador, with extensive experience in marketing, sales, strategic communication, and public relations. She has postgraduate training in marketing intelligence & CRM (IEBS Business School) and has led promotion and positioning processes for the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand, promoting networks and alliances aimed at enhancing the visibility of national companies.
Natalia Rincón del Valle	Professor and researcher at the Universidad del Azuay, with more than two decades of experience in the academic field of tourism and communication. She holds a master's degree in communication and marketing and is a PhD candidate, specializing in territorial positioning strategies and brand building from an academic perspective. She has held academic coordination positions at the School of Tourism and has participated in research projects and scientific publications related to the sector.
Cecilia Ugalde	Research professor with a PhD in Marketing from the University of Valencia, with extensive experience in higher education. She is a tenured professor at the Universidad del Azuay and has directed academic areas related to communication and marketing. Her work has focused on branding, social media, and strategic communication, with a string record of academic publications and participation in international projects.
Aidan Donghwan Kim	International analyst and official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, with experience at the Korean Embassy in Ecuador. He has conducted research and taught at South Korean universities and specializes in relations between Korea and Latin America, particularly in the analysis of bilateral ties and international cooperation.
Evelyn Almeida	Director of the King Sejong Institute in Quito, an institution dedicated to the teaching of the Korean language and the promotion of Korean culture, with experience in academic and cultural exchange.
Richard Salazar	Researcher and professor specializing in East Asian studies and relations between Latin America and Asia. He holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Granada and has conducted academic research with the support of international scholarships such as Fulbright-LASPAU and the Korea Foundation. He has taught and conducted research at various higher education institutions in Ecuador and abroad, with an emphasis on international relations, identity, and international projection.

2.3 Instruments

In line with the qualitative and interpretative approach of this study, the following instruments were used to analyze discourses, narratives, and representations related to the management of cultural identity and the international projection of countries.

First, a specialized literature review was conducted on cultural identity, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and country image. This provided the theoretical basis for the study and defined the analytical categories that subsequently guided both the documentary analysis and the preparation of the interview guide.

Second, documentary and discourse analysis were applied to official nation branding campaigns, as well as to a set of strategic foreign policy and cultural diplomacy documents, institutional reports, and relevant academic articles. This tool helped identify the main discursive axes, narratives, and symbolic representations through which states construct and project their international image, considering the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which these discourses were developed (Van Dijk, 2011).

Finally, semi-structured interviews provided access to the interpretations, assessments, and experiences of experts and institutional actors linked to areas related to the international projection of the cases under study. This instrument was selected because it combines a previously defined thematic structure based on the central research topics with the flexibility needed to delve more deeper into emerging issues that arose during the dialogue with participants (Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson, 2003).

The combination of these three instruments facilitated the contrast between the theoretical findings, official discourses, and perspectives of the actors involved, thus strengthening the interpretive consistency of this work.

2.4 Procedure

The procedure carried out in this research was structured sequentially and coherently, in line with the qualitative approach, comparative design, and triangulation strategy of the study. For its overall organization, the study followed a phased structure typical of qualitative research, since as Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson (2003) notes, this approach allows the research process to unfold progressively, integrating both the theoretical review and the information obtained through interviews and their subsequent analysis and interpretation.

In this sense, the first phase consisted of a literature review aimed at compiling theoretical and academic sources related to culture, cultural identity, soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, intercultural narratives, country image, and nation brand. Based on this review, the central analytical categories of the study were defined, which also served as the basis for the analysis of both cases, as well as for the construction of the interview guide.

In a second stage, the set of documentary materials corresponding to each country was selected and delimited, consisting of official nation brand campaigns, tourism brand campaigns, strategic foreign policy and cultural diplomacy documents, institutional reports, and academic articles related to South Korea and Ecuador that were thematically relevant to the central themes of this study.

In a third phase, semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted with the selected actors, both virtually and in person, depending on the availability of the participants. Once the documentary and interview data had been collected, it was organized and systematized for subsequent analysis.

Finally, a comparative analysis was developed between the cases of South Korea and Ecuador, integrating the findings from the theoretical review, documentary analysis, and interviews, which together helped identify the convergences, divergences, and contextual factors that influence the construction and projection of the country image in each reality. Based on this comparative exercise, the final conclusions and reflections of this study were formulated.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES: SOUTH KOREA AND ECUADOR

3.1 South Korea Case Study

3.1.1 Projected Cultural Identity: a History of Selection

The image that South Korea has projected of itself to the rest of the world is the result of a conscious process of selection, reinterpretation, and articulation of cultural traits that have been passed down from generation to generation over the years. Far from setting aside its historical past, this construction has integrated both its traditional roots and elements of modernity, allowing it to use this resulting identity as a strategic resource for its international projection.

From a historical perspective, South Korean identity has been deeply influenced by Confucianism, a philosophical current that for centuries influenced social, political, and family organization on the peninsula and the rest of the Asian region (Seth, 2020). This system of thought established principles such as hierarchy, loyalty, social harmony, and filial piety⁶, which became implicit norms that still regulate the behavior of modern South Koreans today.

However, these values are significant because they not only facilitate the organization of daily life at home and at work but also lay the foundations for the factors that are now attributed to the country's success, such as discipline and a strong emphasis on education. In fact, to this day, South Korean society continues to be characterized by one of the most competitive education systems in the world and by a collective orientation toward performance and academic excellence (García & Pintó, 2011).

Added to this are historical experiences such as the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century; the subsequent Japanese occupation and colonization from 1910 to 1945; and the violent division of the peninsula during the Korean War (1950-1953), as events that forged the Korean identity we know today, marked by deep nationalist traits and endowed with both resilience and cohesion at the national level (Seth, 2013).

⁶ Known in Korean as *hyo*, it is a central principle of Korean Confucianism that refers to respect and loyalty toward parents and ancestors (K. Kim & Bae, 2017).

Furthermore, in the case of Korea, the fact that its modernization process occurred extremely rapidly and overlapped with the pre-existing traditions and values of its society allowed the country to preserve its traditional social structures without having them displaced or nullified by transformations of that period, such as industrialization, urbanization, and integration into the global economy (Chang, 2022). For example, it is argued that, despite the country's authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s, family hierarchies remained grounded in Confucian principles and ethics, thereby fostering the sacrifice and collective discipline necessary to support rapid industrialization and capitalist expansion.

It is on this historical and structural basis that Korea has consciously selected those cultural traits that would be most beneficial to its international image. As K. Kim & Bae (2017) point out, the cultural identity exported by the country incorporates values such as community, courtesy, and social harmony into its cultural products, such as K-pop and K-dramas. For example, in the case of K-pop, the members of these idol groups are not only rigorously trained to perform polished choreography but are also taught to treat their fans with respect and gratitude, as well as to always put the well-being of the group above their personal ambition. Likewise, other traits such as collective enthusiasm (*sinmyeong*), cultural concepts such as *jeong*⁷, and *palli-palli*⁸ culture have been reinterpreted as competitive advantages that have allowed the country to enjoy its current technological innovation, creativity, and intense cultural production, which is widely accepted on a global scale.

Consequently, the cultural identity that South Korea projects internationally is not an artificial construct, but rather the coherent result of a process of selection and adaptation rooted in its history. It is therefore a hybrid identity that organically combines both traditional and modern elements, making it a strategic resource with broad global reach.

3.1.2 Evolution of the International Narrative: Intercultural Narratives through Nation Branding and Tourism Branding

Now, based on the hybrid cultural identity that South Korea has managed to build, it is pertinent to analyze how this identity translates into the narratives through which the South

⁷ A central concept in Korean culture that refers to a deep and lasting emotional bond between people and encompasses various emotions such as affection and closeness (K. Kim & Bae, 2017).

⁸ An everyday expression in South Korea meaning *quick, quick*, reflecting a social culture marked by constant urgency, self-imposed demands, and constant pressure for efficiency and high performance in everyday life (Wizenberg & Varsavsky, 2016).

Korean state communicates and reinterprets its cultural values in order to position itself in the competitive global environment. In this process, intercultural narratives operate as mechanisms of symbolic mediation that enable the transformation of identity elements into accessible and attractive signs that promote the country's national image among foreign audiences.

In this sense, the distinction made by the South Korean government between nation brand and tourism brand is of vital importance, as it has allowed for the development of differentiated discourses according to the target audience to which these messages are directed and has prevented the overlapping of functions between diplomacy, the tourism sector, and the nation brand. While the nation brand is oriented toward articulating abstract values associated with the state's reputation, such as reliability, dignity, and international credibility (Choi & Kim, 2014), the tourism brand adopts a more experimental and flexible language, focused on the individual experience of visitors to the peninsula. This discourse facilitates the creation of an emotional connection between the destination and the tourist, as the latter actively participates in the cultural experience of the country through practices such as visiting places where K-dramas or K-pop videos have been filmed (Parviainen, 2022). Within this framework, the evolution of the brands and slogans used by the Republic of Korea allows us to observe how the country has undergone a process of constant learning to strengthen the management of its country image.

To begin with, there was the first explicit attempt to project a national identity abroad with the nation brand Dynamic Korea (2002), as shown in Figure 1. This slogan was born in a context where high international visibility was demanded for the nation as it hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup. The slogan sought to portray Korea as a modern, future-oriented nation, emphasizing economic and social dynamism as a central attribute of its international image (필인리브, 2023). However, as K. Lee (2015) analyzes, due to the semantic breadth of the term *dynamism*, it was difficult to translate it into clearly identifiable cultural symbols capable of serving as recognizable symbols of that image on the international stage.

Figure 1
Dynamic Korea Logo



Source: Taken from 필인러브 (2023)

Next, following the introduction of Korea Sparkling (2007), as shown in Figure 2, South Korea entered a second phase in its discursive evolution, as this was the first slogan for its tourism brand. This new emblem aimed to convey an image of vitality and brilliance, attempting to position the country as an attractive destination within the Asian region (필인러브, 2023). However, according to reports in *The Korea Times*, many experts considered the slogan somewhat confusing and unrepresentative of South Korean identity, as it generated associations with a carbonated drink rather than promoting the country as a tourist destination (Kang, 2009). These criticisms escalated to such an extent that an institutional debate arose about its effectiveness and differentiating value, leading to the slogan being abandoned.

Figure 2
Korea Sparkling Logo



Source: Taken from 필인러브 (2023)

Similarly, Korea Be Inspired (2010), as can be seen in Figure 3, the subsequent tourism brand, set out to correct the limitations of its predecessor by shifting toward the emotional motivation of visitors and the idea of personal discovery (Do, 2010). However, despite its progress in terms of sensitivity towards foreign audiences, it remained highly abstract and

had little real connection with any of the country's cultural practices, which consequently hindered its consolidation.

Figure 3

Korea Be Inspired Logo



Source: Taken from 필인러브 (2023)

Fortunately, a turning point arrived for South Korea with Imagine Your Korea (2014), as illustrated in Figure 4, the slogan of its tourism brand that remains in use today. Unlike its predecessors, its central objective is to present South Korea as a destination capable of transforming visitors' everyday lives through their own experience of the nation's many cultural references. According to the Korea Tourism Organization, the current emblem defines four core values: Diverse, Vibrant, Creative, and Intriguing, from which the country builds its representation as a space where diverse cultural experiences can coexist without imposing a single conception of what South Korea is, as can be seen in Figure 5.

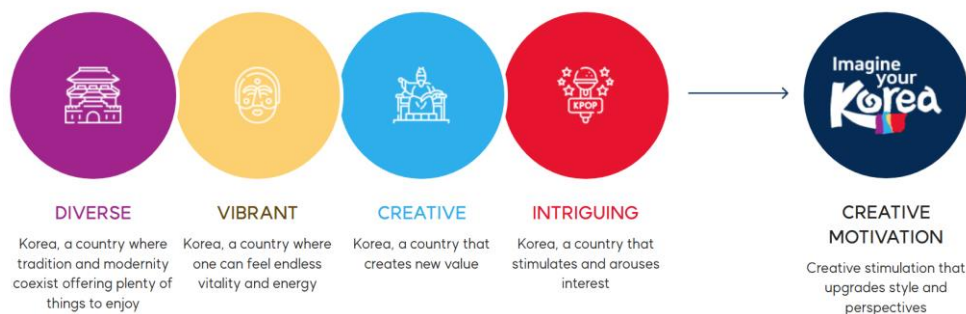
Figure 4

Imagine your Korea Logo



Source: Taken from 필인러브 (2023)

Figure 5
Elements of Imagine your Korea Logo



Source: Taken from Korea Tourism Organization (n.d.)

Finally, the launch of Creative Korea (2016), which can be seen in Figure 6, is the latest attempt to date to revamp South Korea's nation brand. This initiative sought to project values such as creativity, passion, and harmony, defined through public surveys and consultations with local and international experts (Lim, 2016). However, from its inception, the brand was involved in a series of controversies that affected its legitimacy. Among these were its similarity to the French campaign Creative France, as also shown in Figure 6, and criticism that it did not truly reflect the country's cultural image. In addition, its strong association with the government of then-President Park Geun Hye, marked by corruption scandals and political interference in the cultural sphere⁹, led to the discontinuation of this initiative (J. O. Kim, 2018; Kwon, 2017).

Figure 6
Creative Korea Logo vs Creative France Logo



Source: Taken from 필인러브 (2023) & H. S. Kim (2016)

From this perspective, the review of South Korea's nation brands and tourism brands highlights the importance of constant reformulation in order to effectively convey the values and symbols associated with the nation. However, these discourses cannot stand alone

⁹ Among these, the informal influence of individuals close to the president, without public office, on the orientation of cultural projects and the country's image stands out, as well as the implementation of exclusionary practices toward artists and cultural agents critical of her government (J. O. Kim, 2018).

without institutionalization to maintain and reproduce them. Therefore, in the following section, we will analyze the role that state agencies play in international projection through cultural identity.

3.1.3 Institutionalization of Cultural Identity

The institutionalization of South Korea's cultural identity is characterized by its progressive incorporation into the national image, as this element acquired a strategic role in the country's international projection. In this context, the South Korean state took on an increasingly active role in both the organization and coordination of this process (J. Y. Lee, 2021).

The first noteworthy aspect of this process is the creation of specialized agencies for the implementation and coordination of country image policies, as well as the implementation of institutions responsible for cultural promotion. Among the most relevant entities that were created for these purposes are the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST), the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The MCST assumed the leading role in promoting Korean culture and its creative industries, while the Korean Culture and Information Service, as an agency under this ministry, focused specifically on disseminating Korean culture and image abroad. For its part, the MOFA is responsible for supporting the country's promotion through public diplomacy initiatives, such as diplomatic representations and cultural cooperation programs (Macías, 2023).

In addition to the work carried out by these entities, the formulation of public policies and legal frameworks that integrate the promotion of the country as part of the duties of the state is fundamental to analyzing the South Korean case. Initiatives such as *Segyehwa*, aimed at strengthening South Korea's global integration since the 1990s; the Global Korea vision promoted by President Myung-bak (2008-2013); the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016; and the Cultural Property Protection Act reflect the political will to integrate the national identity into the country's international promotion (J. Y. Lee, 2021).

However, the institutionalization of South Korean cultural identity would not have been possible without coordination between the state, the private sector, and other social actors. Among the most emblematic examples is the joint work carried out with Samsung,

one of South Korea's largest chaebols¹⁰, and the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB¹¹) to develop tools for measuring the country's image. As a result of this collaboration, the SERI-PCNB¹² index was created, which fulfilled the objective of systematically evaluating the state of the country's reputation at the international level (Choi & Kim, 2014).

Overall, the case of South Korea shows how cultural identity has been organized and managed by the state through various agencies and policies that have sought to bring coherence and continuity to its international projection. This institutional foundation is essential to understanding how the country structures its cultural presence abroad, an issue that will be addressed in the following section based on an analysis of cultural diplomacy.

3.1.4 Cultural Diplomacy as an Operational Mechanism

Based on the integration of South Korean cultural identity within its state structures, it is pertinent to analyze how this cultural identity is articulated in the international arena through specific mechanisms, among which cultural diplomacy stands out. In this sense, cultural diplomacy acts as a projection tool that allows the state to transfer its cultural references abroad, generating links with foreign audiences and thereby strengthening its presence in the international sphere.

Among the most visible elements used by South Korean cultural diplomacy is the network of Korean Cultural Centers abroad, which function as physical spaces for cultural exchange where various activities related to the so-called *Han Style* are offered, as shown in Figure 7. Among the practices offered by these centers are Korean cuisine, calligraphy, traditional music (*samulnori*), board games such as *baduk*, and language courses. Administered by the Korean Culture and Information Service and under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (Tadeo, 2018), these institutes bring Korean

¹⁰ South Korean expression used to refer to large business conglomerates that concentrate a high degree of economic power in the country.

¹¹ The Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB) was an organization created in 2009 whose main function was to centrally coordinate South Korea's country image policies. Its work consisted of coordinating different ministries, state agencies, and private actors in order to unify the country's international outreach efforts. The council remained in operation until 2013, when it was dissolved following a change in administration (Choi & Kim, 2014).

¹² The SERI-PCNB index was a measurement tool developed in collaboration with the Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI). Like the PCNB, it ceased to be used after the council's dissolution.

culture closer to the local audiences through direct experiences that promote continuous contact with the nation's cultural expressions.

Figure 7

Korean Cultural Centers



Source: Taken from Audouin (2025)

In addition, the South Korean government, through the King Sejong Institute Foundation (KSIF), promotes the Korean language as one of its most important cultural diplomacy strategies. By expanding King Sejong Institutes globally, the Korean government is responding to the growing demand for learning its language, which is largely driven by the success of hallyu. However, these institutes not only fulfill an educational function, as Tadeo (2018) points out, but also involve a process of prolonged cultural exposure that allows students to become familiar with the social codes of Korean society, such as forms of courtesy and the use of honorific language, among others.

Similarly, South Korea, through institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Korea Foundation, has promoted initiatives that prioritize the direct participation of foreign audiences in cultural, academic, and artistic activities (Jin, 2024). One example of this is the K-pop World Festival, as shown in Figure 8, an international competition that invites K-pop fans from all corners of the world to participate in regional selection processes, with the ultimate goal of performing in South Korea. Far from seeking to train professionals in singing or dancing, this type of initiative aims to encourage the active participation of fans and raise the profile of cultural expressions produced outside Korea.

Figure 8
K-pop World Festival



Source: Taken from MOFA (2025)

At the same time, South Korean cultural diplomacy has incorporated digital diplomacy and people-to-people strategies, relying on platforms and social media to facilitate direct interaction within the country and with foreign audiences. Through official channels such as KOREAZ, managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the state promotes the involvement of South Korean citizens, content creators, and international fans as cultural intermediaries who informally and constantly disseminate information about the country. These actions extend the reach of cultural diplomacy beyond institutional spaces, thus promoting the daily circulation of cultural content among foreign audiences, especially younger generations (Jin, 2024).

Through all these digital, face-to-face, educational, and participatory instruments, South Korean cultural diplomacy illustrate how cultural identity is circulated internationally, going beyond its programmatic dimension to appeal to other nations as a culturally dynamic, accessible, and reliable country. On this basis, it is then possible to examine how this projection ultimately translates into a recognizable country image and concrete results in terms of international perception.

3.1.5 Country Image and Results

The country image that South Korea has built by integrating culture into its international projection strategy is evident in terms of global positioning, external perception, and international recognition. Firstly, the nation's presence can be seen in

international rankings of reputation and influence such as the Global Soft Power Index. South Korea has experienced a sustained rise in this index in recent years, reaching its best position to date in 2025, when it ranked 12th globally (Jagodzinski, 2025). This progress has been associated with the strengthening of digital diplomacy and the wide reach of the country's creative industries, which have contributed to consolidating a largely positive international perception (Alves de Oliveira, 2025).

From an economic perspective, culture has also established itself as a fundamental pillar of South Korean development. Recent studies indicate that exports of cultural content, including music, films, television series, video games, and digital formats such as *webtoons*¹³, animation, and content for platforms, exceeded \$12 billion in 2023, demonstrating both their sustained growth and their increasing relevance within the national economy. Added to this is the multiplier effect of this content, which has indirectly influenced exports from other industries such as cosmetics, gastronomy, fashion, and technological products (S. T. Lee, 2022).

Similarly, the impact of cultural projection is evident both in education and in the tourism sector. In the area of tourism, various reports confirm the importance of K-dramas and K-pop as determining factors in foreign tourists' decisions to visit South Korea, demonstrating the ability of cultural products to function as mechanisms for attracting visitors to the country. At the same time, interest in learning the Korean language has experienced sustained growth, reflected in the global expansion of Kim Sejong Institutes and the increase in international students, confirming the impact of the Korean wave as a factor in promoting deeper and more prolonged processes of cultural engagement (M. Kim, 2022).

In the digital sphere, streaming platforms and social networks have played a significant role in South Korea's international projection, especially through the support of fandoms associated with idol groups. The impact of these fan bases is particularly notable in regions such as America and Europe, where cultural consumption has gone beyond entertainment and contributed to strengthening the country's international visibility in these territories.

However, despite the achievements made in building a favorable image of the country around the world, this process has also faced limitations. In the geopolitical sphere, for example, cultural soft power has been insufficient to counteract tensions linked to regional

¹³ A digital comic format originating in South Korea, designed to be consumed on mobile devices and characterized by its vertical presentation and distribution through digital platforms (González, 2020).

security and relations with neighboring countries. A specific example of this can be seen in the context of the deployment of the THAAD system, a missile defense system that was installed by South Korea with the support of the United States, after which informal restrictions were placed on the dissemination of South Korean cultural content in some markets, particularly in China (M. Kim, 2022).

Adding to these tensions are criticisms surrounding the gap between the image of a modern and inclusive Korea projected abroad and the persistent reality of certain social problems such as gender inequality and debates surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, which make it difficult to construct a fully coherent and sustainable image of the country over time (S. T. Lee, 2022).

3.2 Ecuador Case Study

3.2.1 Projected Cultural Identity: A History of Diversity and Fragmentation

The cultural identity projected by Ecuador is characterized by remarkable richness and diversity but also by a persistent difficulty in articulating these elements into a coherent national narrative. The country's richness is evident in the coexistence of different cultural and social groups, such as indigenous peoples, the Afro-Ecuadorian population, Montubio communities, and mestizo sectors, as well as in the different historical and regional trajectories that have given rise to diverse ways of understanding and experiencing the nation. However, this plurality has not been accompanied by an integrative framework capable of giving it collective meaning, which is why the projection of this nation's identity appears fragmented.

Firstly, this condition is closely linked to the way in which Ecuador has built its national project throughout its history. Various authors have described the country as a *Nación en ciernes* (An emerging nation) because it has undergone an incomplete and still unconsolidated process of nation-building, marked by territorial, political, and symbolic fractures that have hindered the formation of a shared collective identity (Quintero & Silva, 1991). From the formation of the Republic in 1830 to the current limited capacity of the state to consolidate a common identity narrative that encompasses the entire Ecuadorian territory, there are persistent difficulties in articulating an integrative national narrative.

However, from a reflective perspective, Adoum (2000) explores deeper into this issue by pointing out that Ecuadorian identity is not presented as a defined essence but rather as an ongoing process of construction, comparable to a self-portrait that is always incomplete.

This metaphor is used because it alludes to the idea of an identity that has been shaped by multiple historical, social, and cultural traits that overlap and accumulate over time, without ever fully integrating into a clear and shared image. Likewise, the comparison with a self-portrait also refers to a constant search, where national identity is experienced more as a question than as a certainty, which ultimately makes it even more difficult for large sectors of the population to recognize a common *us* capable of strengthening Ecuador's cultural identity.

Added to this dynamic is the persistence of regionalism and local loyalties as one of the most visible structural features of identity fragmentation. Historically, a large part of the Ecuadorian population has tended to identify first with their locality or region rather than with a shared national identity, which has led to a fragmented collective consciousness and weak symbolic attachment to the state (Flores, 2016). In this context, Adoum (2000) offers another critical perspective by referring to this phenomenon as the *patria chica* (Local homeland), a space of immediate belonging linked to the local, which contrasts with the idea of nation, which is often perceived by many Ecuadorians as a distant construct with little significance for their daily lives.

Similarly, the weakness of the national imaginary, understood as the set of symbols, narratives, and shared representations that give meaning to the idea of a nation, has been reinforced by the consolidation of dominant narratives that, for long periods, devalued indigenous and popular roots. This process, linked both to the colonial legacy and to the formation of republican elites, deepened social and symbolic divides and prevented cultural diversity from being incorporated as a legitimate and central component of national identity (Flores, 2016).

Taken together, these elements allow us to understand that Ecuadorian cultural identity is configured as a structure rich in cultural content, but fragile in terms of symbolic cohesion. The absence of a shared integrative framework, coupled with the persistence of local loyalties and a national experience marked by historical uncertainty and a search for identity, conditions the way in which the country constructs and projects its identity, both internally and in its projection to the rest of the world.

3.2.2 Ecuadorian Intercultural Narrative: Redefinitions and Discursive Ruptures through the Nation Brand

Now, if Ecuadorian cultural identity is configured as a structure rich in content but fragile in terms of symbolic cohesion, this condition will also be reflected in the discourses

through which the country seeks to project itself on the international stage. Through the nation brand, the state attempts to articulate this cultural diversity. However, the recurrence of reconfigurations in this device has hindered the consolidation of a continuous and cumulative intercultural narrative, a situation that is evident in the campaigns and messages developed over time.

In this regard, various studies agree that Ecuador's nation brand strategy has been marked by a succession of reformulations closely linked to the political cycles and communication priorities of each administration since, rather than responding to a process of progressive adjustment of the national narrative, these transformations have operated under a logic of symbolic replacement, in which each new proposal redefines the discursive axes without establishing clear links with previous initiatives. This dynamic has prevented the nation brand from functioning as a narrative reference capable of organizing shared meanings associated with national identity, and as a result, its effectiveness as a mechanism for generating coherence and recognition at both the national and international levels has been weak (Millingalle, 2024; Pérez Peña et al., 2021; Velásquez, 2024).

These tensions are clearly evident when comparing the different versions of Ecuador's nation brand. Initially, in 2001, Ecuador sought to establish a basic identification of the territory through the use of its own name as a Republic and simple geometric iconography, as can be seen in Figure 9, aimed at visually organizing the representation of the country in the face of the coexistence of multiple institutional and promotional images developed in a fragmented manner (Pérez Peña et al., 2021). However, this initial effort failed to consolidate a lasting symbolic framework, and so in 2002 a new logo was introduced, illustrated in Figure 10, which incorporated new figurative elements associated with the country's landscape and fauna, as well as a visual narrative focused on listing natural resources, supported by colors associated with territorial and cultural diversity. This shift marked a move toward a logic closer to tourism promotion.

Figure 9
Nation Brand Ecuador 2001



Source: Taken from Durán (2014)

Figure 10
Nation Brand Ecuador 2002



Source: Taken from Durán (2014)

Following this, we have a third instance for the Ecuadorian nation brand with the brand *Ecuador Ama la Vida* in 2010, as shown in Figure 11, which was initially conceived as a tourism brand and later adopted as a nation brand. This new proposal was based on a more abstract visual language than its predecessors but relied on a multicolored theme strongly inspired by mathematical patterns and the idea of megadiversity (Hallo, 2020). With this, the national narrative was redefined around values such as respect for life and harmony with nature, once again abandoning the figurative symbols of previous versions.

Figure 11
Nation Brand Ecuador 2010



Source: Taken from Durán (2014)

Finally, there is Ecuador's current nation brand, launched in 2023 under the slogan *Expandiendo nuestra luz* (Expanding our light) as shown in Figure 12. Unlike the multicolored identity of 2010, this new emblem significantly reduced the symbolic load and left out elements traditionally associated with national identity, such as the colors of the flag. In addition, the exclusive use of the color yellow and the typographical fragmentation of the name *Ecuador* were perceived by experts and the general public as a generic proposal, with little differentiating capacity and limited emotional connection to the Ecuadorian cultural imagination (Millingalle, 2024).

Figure 12
Nation Brand Ecuador 2023



Source: Taken from Millingalle (2024)

Added to this logic of constant reformulation is the persistent overlap between nation brand objectives and tourism promotion strategies. Although the nation brand should articulate dimensions such as institutional reputation, cultural projection, and investment

attraction, in Ecuador's case, the discourse has tended to focus on highlighting the landscape and diversity. Campaigns such as *All You Need is Ecuador* reinforced this orientation, prioritizing the tourist experience over the construction of shared intangible values associated with the citizenry and the social life of the country. As noted in studies by Poveda & Gómez (2019), the absence of these references limits the narrative's ability to generate symbolic identification and social appropriation, which ultimately weakens the nation brand's role as an identity project.

Finally, these dynamics have a direct impact on the relationship between the nation brand and its internal audiences. The absence of sustained participatory processes and the constant redefinition of the narrative have contributed to the low level of citizen appropriation, which translates into a lack of awareness of the current brand among the population. This distancing reinforces the idea of an intercultural narrative that remains weakly anchored in the social imagination, which in turn leads to institutional problems that transcend the communicational level and will be addressed in the following section.

3.2.3 Institutional Weakness and Cultural Diplomacy: Structural Limitations on Ecuador's International Projection

The current weakness of Ecuadorian cultural diplomacy does not stem from a lack of symbolic resources or cultural expressions, but rather from the limitations of the state framework that should strategically articulate the institutions responsible for organizing, sustaining, and ensuring the continuity of this projection. In this sense, cultural diplomacy in Ecuador can be understood as a tool in development, which has depended primarily on isolated initiatives and still lacks a clearly defined long-term orientation, allowing its current state to be characterized as an initial stage of emergence and learning.

Firstly, this weakness manifests itself at the regulatory and planning levels. As Velásquez (2024) points out, Ecuador has historically lacked a cultural policy system capable of clearly integrating culture into foreign policy. Although the approval of the Organic Law on Culture in 2016 represented a formal step forward by establishing a National Culture System, recognizing culture as a strategic area of development, and laying the principles for the protection of heritage and the exercise of cultural rights, its implementation has been partial. Various projects and guidelines derived from this legislation have not been accompanied by regulations or operational instruments that would allow for their effective application, which has limited their practical scope. For example, this has made it difficult for the state to establish priorities in the area of international cultural promotion, making

actions in this field dependent on changes in administration and the political will of the moment, rather than on stable institutional planning.

This regulatory fragility is compounded by a marked difficulty in coordinating a coherent external projection for the nation among state entities. The relationship between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, and the Ministry of Tourism has been marked by poor coordination, with each institution developing initiatives within its own sphere without joint planning. Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth (2021) illustrate this lack of coordination by analyzing how plans related to international relations, culture, and tourism tend to be developed in parallel, without a common framework to articulate objectives, messages, or audiences. A concrete example of this is the coexistence of tourism promotion campaigns such as *All You Need Is Ecuador* with cultural dissemination actions promoted by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, such as the participation of Ecuadorian artists in collective exhibitions, cultural fairs, and events organized by embassies. Although these initiatives shared international execution spaces, they did not respond to an integrated strategy linking cultural identity, heritage, and country image, which resulted in a fragmented and incoherent projection of Ecuador.

At the operational level, these coordination shortcomings are clearly reflected in the functioning of Ecuador's embassies and consulates abroad. In most cases, diplomatic representatives do not have departments specializing in cultural promotion or staff trained and dedicated exclusively to these tasks, which limits the state's ability to maintain a constant and strategically oriented cultural presence. As a result, cultural action has mainly taken the form of isolated events such as commemorations, one-off art exhibitions, or formal events linked to official dates, without continuity or follow-up over time. As a result, this situation has contributed to Ecuadorian cultural diplomacy being perceived as a secondary component of foreign policy, often subordinated to the objectives of either the tourism or commercial sectors.

Furthermore, budgetary and administrative constraints reinforce this scenario of institutional fragility. The low priority given to culture in public policy has had a direct impact on one of the areas in which Ecuadorian cultural diplomacy has been most visible: the management and protection of cultural heritage. These limitations are evident in the lack of maintenance of tangible heritage assets, such as historic centers, listed buildings, and museums, as well as in the difficulties faced by the responsible institutions in identifying, registering, and monitoring them. In addition, the insufficiency of resources allocated to their

conservation has led to citizen campaigns to raise the necessary funds to finance restoration work, highlighting the weakness of the state's commitment in this area. In this regard, it should be noted that these shortcomings not only compromise the protection of heritage but also reduce its potential as a strategic resource for cultural diplomacy and may jeopardize the recognition of certain assets, as well as the backing and support of multilateral organizations linked to their preservation.

However, it is important to note that this institutional weakness does not imply a total absence of efforts in the field of cultural diplomacy. In fact, Ecuador has promoted initiatives such as the Ambassadors in the World project, aimed at promoting the international circulation of artists and cultural managers through diplomatic missions, as well as concrete actions in the field of heritage, including the repatriation of more than 5,000 pre-Columbian archaeological pieces from Genoa in 2014, one of the most tangible achievements of its cultural diplomacy. Similarly, the country has participated consistently in regional and Ibero-American cultural diplomacy forums since 2007 and maintains long-term bilateral cooperation frameworks, such as the cultural agreement with South Korea in force since 1985 and the cultural reciprocity agreements with Mexico that allowed the opening of a branch of the Fondo de Cultura Económica in Quito. Added to this is the growing participation of non-state actors such as universities, academic networks, and civil society organizations, which facilitate cultural and educational exchange.

However, as Macías (2023) points out, these efforts have not managed to consolidate themselves within a specialized institutional structure or become a cross-cutting axis of foreign policy. In terms of institutionalization, Ecuador's cultural diplomacy remains at an early stage of institutional development, characterized by discontinuous actions that depend on specific initiatives and have limited scope. This situation has a direct impact on the construction of the country's image and on the results obtained in the international arena, aspects that will be addressed shortly.

3.2.4 Country Image and Results: an Overview of Ecuador's Current International Standing

An analysis of Ecuador's country image using recent international indicators and specialized assessments provides a general overview of the state of its international reputation. Unlike other countries, such as South Korea, where there is a broad empirical basis demonstrating cumulative results, the Ecuadorian scenario is characterized by a limited availability of systematic studies and by assessments that describe processes still in

development. In this context, the available information does not allow us to affirm the existence of a fully consolidated country image but rather a positioning that is in a stage of redefinition and strategic adjustment.

According to Future Brand's Nation Brand in Latin America report (2024), Ecuador is not currently ranked by a specific numerical position within the region but rather by its location within a strategic category associated with brand reconstruction and repositioning processes. This classification recognizes the absence of a unified intangible asset capable of coherently articulating tourism promotion, investment attraction, and export projection. As a result, strategies promoted by different sectors of the state have been developed in parallel and on a sectoral basis, limiting the consolidation of an integrated and recognizable national narrative on the international stage.

In terms of symbolic and narrative content, Ecuador's international image has continued to rely mainly on visual attributes linked to landscape, biodiversity, and sustainability. Although these elements have enabled specific levels of visibility and recognition to be achieved in international promotional spaces, institutional assessments agree that the nation brand has historically been conceived with a focus on tourism promotion (Ministerio de Turismo, 2023). This orientation has conditioned the scope of the country's image by prioritizing experiential and visual dimensions, relegating the construction of intangible values associated with institutional reputation, state credibility, and long-term economic projection to the background (Millingalle, 2024).

From an economic and symbolic perspective, the main international indices show a gap between the competitiveness of certain Ecuadorian products in global markets and their translation into reputational value. Reports such as Brand Finance's Soft Power Index 2025 place Ecuador in a lagging position in terms of nation brand strength and value, suggesting that the country's productive assets do not yet operate consistently as symbolic extensions of a differentiated national identity. However, the limited availability of long-term follow-up studies and specific assessments of the impact of these dynamics limits the possibility of drawing definitive conclusions about these results (Shanmuganathan & Bryzghalov, 2025).

CHAPTER 4 INTERVIEWS

4.1 Organization and Analysis Criteria

In line with the methodological design described above, the interviews were designed differently according to the institutional or professional profile of each participant, maintaining the relationship between cultural identity, country image, and international projection as a common analytical axis.

In the case of South Korea, representatives linked to cultural and academic diplomacy were included, as well as a specialist in comparative studies, with the aim of understanding the role of the state and cultural institutions in international projection, the continuity of strategies, and the operational mechanisms of cultural diplomacy. In the case of Ecuador, on the other hand, the participation of state actors, representatives of the productive sector, and academics were included, with the aim of gathering diverse perspectives on the construction, communication, and implementation of the nation brand.

Although each interview was structured with specific questions tailored to the profile of each interviewee, all followed a common thematic logic that subsequently allowed for comparative analysis. These dimensions included, depending on each case, aspects related to cultural identity, nation brand and image, public and cultural diplomacy, institutionalization processes, official narratives, and perceived results in terms of international positioning.

The analysis is organized first by country and then by the thematic areas addressed in each interview. This organization was determined in order to facilitate the identification of similarities, tensions, and contrasts both within each case and between South Korea and Ecuador.

4.2 Interviews: South Korea Side

The interviews corresponding to the South Korean case seek to understand how cultural and academic diplomacy is articulated as part of the state's international projection, considering its level of institutionalization, long-term continuity mechanisms, and the role of educational and cultural actors in disseminating Korean cultural identity abroad.

In this case, three interviews with institutional and academic actors linked to foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, and comparative analysis are examined.

4.2.1 Aidan Donghwan Kim

4.2.1.1 Interviewee Profile

Aidan Donghwan Kim is an international analyst and official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, currently working at the Korean Embassy in Ecuador in a research and political analysis role. His diplomatic career includes previous experience at the Korean Embassy in Guatemala, which has allowed him to develop first-hand knowledge of the political and cultural relations between South Korea and Latin America.

He has a solid academic background in Hispanic and Latin American studies. He completed doctoral studies in Hispanic Studies at Penn State University. In addition, he also holds doctoral and master's degrees in Hispanic American literature from the Complutense University of Madrid and Seoul National University. Added to this is his teaching experience at universities such as Yonsei University, Seoul National University, and Incheon University, which demonstrates a career that integrates both academic research and diplomatic practice in intercultural contexts.

His profile is particularly relevant to this research, as it allows for an analysis of South Korean cultural diplomacy from two perspectives: institutional and academic. His experience combines technical knowledge of the foreign service with a deep understanding of Latin American culture, a key element in understanding how South Korea articulates cultural identity and foreign policy in its international projection.

4.2.1.2 Interview

The interview with Dr. Aidan Kim was conducted virtually on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 19h00, through the Zoom platform. Throughout the exchange, the interviewee responded to the questions in a direct and structured manner, organizing his interventions around key concepts, institutional frameworks, and concrete examples of South Korean foreign policy. His responses maintained a clear argumentative thread, which allowed for a deeper exploration of specific aspects such as public diplomacy, the articulation between the state and the private sector, and the legal mechanisms that sustain the country's cultural projection.

In this sense, the interview was characterized by a more technical than narrative approach, in which the interviewee not only described processes, but also explained instead underlying logic and their continuity over time.

4.2.1.3 Narrative Description

From the beginning of the interview, Ambassador Aidan Kim adopts a conceptual approach that situates the discussion within the field of foreign policy. To begin with, the interviewee defines diplomacy as the set of official activities through which a state maintains and develops relations with other countries or international organizations through peaceful negotiations and dialogue, with the objective of “maximizing its own interests, that is, national interests” (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026). Based on this definition, he introduces the distinction between hard power and soft power, highlighting how influence based on culture, reputation, and attraction has come to occupy a central place in contemporary diplomacy.

Following this, Kim proceeds to elaborate on the South Korean case, arguing that the country’s international positioning cannot be explained solely by the recent rise of its cultural industry, but rather responds to a broader process of structural transformation. In this sense, he refers both to the global impact of Hallyu, “centered on K-pop, series, and film” (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026), as well as to the recognition of the so-called *Miracle on the Han River*, emphasizing that the latter had already been globally recognized as “a key element of Korean soft power” (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026). In this way, his argument suggests a progressive accumulation of soft power resources in which economic development, political consolidation, and cultural production are articulated over time.

Within this trajectory, the specialist identifies a turning point in 2010, when the Korean government declared the beginning of public diplomacy. From that moment onward, strategies aimed at generating trust, engagement, and understanding among foreign audiences were strengthened by the South Korean state, with the purpose of expanding its positive influence at the international level. In this context, Kim highlights the role of culture and education as structural instruments of South Korea’s foreign policy.

On the other hand, when addressing the institutional dimension, the interviewee explains how this strategy is not concentrated within a single institution, but rather follows an interinstitutional logic. Here, he highlights, for example, the case of the King Sejong Institute, as an initiative promoted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to disseminate the Korean language and culture abroad. However, the ambassador emphasizes that this type of program does not depend directly on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which

demonstrates that public diplomacy in Korea is not limited to a single state entity, but instead involves different ministries that jointly contribute to the country's international projection.

Regarding the strategic contents of this policy, Kim notes that the government has prioritized four major categories for cultural projection: K-Contents, K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Sports. These categories encompass both creative industries and traditional cultural expressions, allowing the organization of international dissemination efforts toward sectors with high global recognition potential. Additionally, the interviewee explains that these categories include elements ranging from K-pop, series, and webtoons¹⁴, to cosmetics, gastronomy, and taekwondo, considered Korea's national sport, thereby demonstrating the broad scope and projection potential of South Korea's cultural dissemination strategy.

However, one of the most relevant aspects of his explanation lies in the relationship between the state and the private sector. The ambassador describes a dynamic in which both actors operate in parallel but in coordination, emphasizing that it is a form of "equal cooperation", in which the private sector develops its own initiatives without being subject to direct control mechanisms (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026). Likewise, he clarifies that this relationship is supported by a convergence of interests between both sectors, derived from Korea's geopolitical position as a small country surrounded by major powers, which has driven a shared search for international positioning strategies.

Added to this is a key institutional component linked to the legal framework. In this regard, Kim highlights the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016 as a point of consolidation of the strategy, noting that it allowed the structuring and long-term sustainability of cultural projection policies. From this, planning mechanisms were established that combine a long-term approach through five-year plans with annual implementation instruments, as well as systems of cooperation between the central government, local governments, and the private sector.

In this context, the interviewee mentions the so-called K Initiative, corresponding to the third basic public diplomacy plan for the period 2026 to 2030, which sets out objectives such as enhancing Korea's position as a responsible global power, building an integrated public diplomacy ecosystem, and coordinating efforts under the concept of *Team Korea*. According to his explanation, this type of planning allows for an "integrated and systematic"

¹⁴ A webtoon is a digital comic format originating in South Korea, designed for reading on mobile devices, characterized by its vertical scrolling format and its distribution through online platforms (González, 2020).

implementation of public diplomacy (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026), which contributes to the coherence and continuity of Korea's strategy.

In the second part of the interview, the discussion shifts toward the Ecuadorian case, allowing for an analytical contrast. From the interviewee's perspective, one of Ecuador's main challenges lies in the difficulty of constructing a differentiated national identity within a regional context characterized by historical similarities. In this sense, he notes that the country simultaneously faces the challenge of differentiating itself from nations such as Peru and Colombia, with which it shares similar historical trajectories, while also integrating its internal cultural diversity as a multicultural nation, an understanding of which he describes as an "overwhelming task" (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

Therefore, according to the ambassador, this duality between similarity with neighboring countries and internal multidiversity is reflected in the difficulty of synthesizing a clear representation of the country. To illustrate this, Kim refers to the example of Ecuador's participation in Miss Universe, where the costume presented incorporated multiple cultural elements rather than representing a single unifying symbol. In his view, this case shows that national identity often needs to be explained rather than immediately projected. Nevertheless, the interviewee acknowledges that this same diversity constitutes an important asset for the country, as it is both attractive and differentiating for international audiences.

In contrast, when referring to the South Korean case, the existence of a historically constructed narrative based on the idea of a unified nation is highlighted. In this case, the specialist links this perception to historical processes of defense against external invasions, which would have consolidated a strong sense of internal cohesion. However, he also recognizes that this condition is currently undergoing transformation due to the increase in the immigrant population, which in recent years has come to represent around five percent of the population residing in the country. These factors, together with the rise in international marriages and labor mobility, are giving way to a transition toward a more diverse society.

In response to this scenario, the interviewee explains that Korea has opted to manage diversity as a resource, promoting policies of integration and non-discrimination, while reinforcing the transmission of traditional cultural values. He also highlights the role of Korean communities abroad as a complementary mechanism for cultural preservation. In his

words, the aim is to “preserve its unique culture and traditional values” while integrating diversity (Kim, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

Finally, Kim argues that the international image projected by Korea remains coherent with the internal perception of its society. In this sense, the culture promoted abroad is not perceived as an artificial construction, but rather as an extension of national identity. This correspondence between the internal and the external largely explains the effectiveness of its international projection strategy.

4.2.1.4 Preliminary Findings

In the case of the interview with Ambassador Aidan Kim, it was considered appropriate to organize the preliminary findings according to the two countries analyzed. Although the interviewee developed the case of South Korea in greater depth, he also provided relevant elements regarding Ecuador, particularly from a comparative perspective. In this sense, although his observations on the Ecuadorian context were more limited, they allow for the identification of certain challenges related to identity construction and international projection, which justifies the differentiated presentation of the findings for each case.

Preliminary Findings: South Korea Case

Table 2

Preliminary Findings Aidan Kim – South Korea

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Centrality of soft power in foreign policy	South Korean foreign policy has progressively prioritized the use of soft power, understanding culture, reputation, and the capacity for attraction as fundamental tools for international positioning.
Cumulative construction of international positioning	Korea's global recognition does not respond solely to the rise of Hallyu, but rather to a progressive process that articulates economic development, political transformation, and cultural projection.
Institutionalization of public diplomacy	Since 2010, public diplomacy has been consolidated as a strategic axis of foreign policy, aimed at strengthening the country's positive perception among international audiences.
Culture and education as structural instruments	Culture and education cease to be complementary elements and become central pillars within the state's international projection strategy.
Interinstitutional model of public diplomacy management	Public diplomacy is not concentrated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but rather involves multiple ministries, reflecting a coordinated state structure for cultural projection.
Strategic prioritization of cultural industries	The state has organized its international projection around specific sectors such as K-Contents, K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Sports, allowing for a more focused and enhanced global reach.
Balanced cooperation between state and private sector	The relationship between the public and private sectors is based on coordination without direct control, where both actors develop complementary initiatives under shared interests.
Legal framework as a guarantee of continuity	The Public Diplomacy Act of 2016 and structured planning mechanisms allow the strategy to be sustained over time, beyond contextual changes.
Long- and short-term strategic planning	The combination of five-year plans with annual implementation instruments facilitates a systematic and coherent execution of public diplomacy.
Coherence between internal identity and external projection	Korea's international image is perceived as an extension of its national identity, which strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of its global projection.
Management of diversity as an emerging resource	In response to the increase in the immigrant population, Korea has chosen to integrate cultural diversity as an element that enriches its identity, without abandoning its traditional values.

Overall, the findings derived from the interview with Aidan Kim show that South Korea's international projection is based on a structured strategy that articulates soft power, institutional capacity, and long-term planning. In addition, culture and education are positioned as central axes, supported by an interinstitutional model and balanced cooperation with the private sector. Likewise, the continuity of this policy is ensured by a solid legal framework and coherence between internal identity and the image projected abroad.

Preliminary Findings: Ecuador Case

Table 3

Preliminary Findings Aidan Kim - Ecuador

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Difficulty of differentiation in the regional context	Ecuador faces the challenge of building its own international identity within a context of historical similarities with countries such as Peru and Colombia.
Complexity in the construction of national identity	The country's ethnic and cultural diversity makes it difficult to consolidate a unified narrative that can be clearly projected abroad.
Need to translate identity for its projection	The country's international representation needs to be explained rather than immediately perceived, which reflects a lack of consolidated symbolic synthesis.
Cultural diversity as a not fully articulated asset	Multiculturalism constitutes a valuable resource for international projection, but it is not yet strategically structured.
Incipient progress in cultural institutionalization	The incorporation of culture as an axis of foreign policy reflects an ongoing process toward greater articulation between identity and international projection.

Based on the observations made by Dr. Aidan Kim, it is evident that Ecuador faces difficulties in consolidating a clearly differentiated country image, due both to its historical proximity to other countries in the region and to the complexity of its own internal diversity. This cultural richness, although it represents significant potential, has not yet managed to translate into a coherent and easily recognizable narrative at the international level.

4.2.1.5 Thematic Areas

Table 4

Thematic Areas Aidan Kim

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Interview Contributions – South Korea	Interview Contributions - Ecuador
Cultural Identity	Construction of shared values, practices, and meanings that shape the sense of belonging and guide the country's projection.	Identity constructed from a homogeneous base, associated with historical cohesion, with correspondence between the internal and the external, and a progressive openness toward cultural diversity.	Identity marked by ethnic and cultural diversity, which makes its synthesis into a clear narrative more difficult and creates the need to explain it rather than project it directly.
Nation Branding	Strategic construction of a national narrative to position the country in the international sphere.	Clear definition of priority sectors such as K-Contents, K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Sports, reflecting an organized strategy to project a competitive image.	Absence of a consolidated narrative that articulates cultural diversity, which limits the construction of a clear proposal for international positioning.
Country Image	International perception constructed from the country's cultural, political, and economic projection.	Positive and coherent image, resulting from a progressive process that combines economic development, democratization, and cultural expansion.	Weakly differentiated image within the regional context, influenced by historical similarities with neighboring countries that hinder its international recognition.
International projection and external legitimacy	Capacity of the country to position itself globally and generate recognition through its foreign policy.	Projection based on soft power, institutionalized since 2010, with sustained planning and articulation between state and non-state actors.	Projection in the process of consolidation, with advances in the incorporation of culture into foreign policy, but still lacking a fully structured strategy.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Participation of the state in the definition, articulation, and promotion of identity and country image.	Active and coordinated role through multiple institutions, supported by a legal framework and an articulated relationship with the private sector.	Role in development, with recent efforts to integrate culture into foreign policy, although with limitations in its strategic articulation.

4.2.1.6 Analysis

One particularly relevant aspect derived from the interview with Aidan Donghwan Kim is the way the South Korean case demonstrates a sustained articulation between identity, institutional structure, and international projection strategy. This logic is reflected in concrete elements mentioned by Dr. Kim himself, such as the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016, the implementation of five-year plans, and interinstitutional coordination under the concept of *Team Korea*. Taken together, these mechanisms allow for the long-term

sustainability of a strategy that integrates culture, development, and foreign action, which aligns with the notion of nation branding as an institutional process proposed by Dinnie (2008).

In this same line, the centrality that the analyst assigns to culture, reputation, and external perception allows for an understanding of how South Korea's international influence is based on its capacity to generate attraction. By pointing out that this positioning does not depend solely on the recent rise of Hallyu, but also on prior recognition associated with the Miracle on the Han River, a progressive construction of international legitimacy becomes evident. From this perspective, it is relevant to link this process with what is proposed by Nye (2004), who understands soft power as the ability to influence through values, policies, and achievements that are perceived as desirable by other actors.

Added to this is the fact that South Korea formalized its public diplomacy policy in 2010, as indicated by the official, with the objective of generating trust, engagement, and understanding among foreign audiences. This emphasis is not limited to the dissemination of cultural content, but also incorporates relational dynamics in which international audiences themselves act as intermediaries. In this way, the country's projection is also constructed through relationships sustained over time, in line with what is proposed by Melissen (2005), who highlights the relational character of public diplomacy in the construction of international credibility.

From the identity perspective, Kim explains that Korea's international image is based on a historical narrative of cultural homogeneity, linked to shared experiences such as defense against external invasions. However, what is significant is that this narrative is not perceived as an artificial construction when projected abroad, but rather as an extension of internal identity. This form of articulation can be understood through the notion of imagined communities proposed by Anderson (2006), where shared narratives and symbols allow for the consolidation of a sense of belonging that is later translated into country image.

In contrast, when referring to Ecuador, the interviewee introduces a different interpretation of the relationship between identity and projection. The characterization of cultural diversity as an "overwhelming task", together with the example of the Miss Universe costume that requires explanation in order to be understood, reveals the difficulty of synthesizing this diversity into elements of immediate recognition. This perspective is related to what is proposed by Quintero and Silva (1991) and Adoum (2000), who describe

the country as a nation in the process of configuration, where identity does not consolidate into a unified narrative and consequently affects its international projection.

To this difficulty is added the challenge of differentiation within the regional context. As Dr. Kim points out, the historical and cultural proximity to countries such as Peru or Colombia limits the possibility of constructing a clearly distinctive element. This observation is consistent with what is proposed by Anholt (2007) and Viktorin et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of developing a differentiated narrative that allows states to position themselves in a competitive global context. In this case, Ecuadorian cultural diversity has not yet been fully articulated as a strategically recognizable resource.

On the other hand, the way in which South Korea organizes its cultural projection offers a concrete example of how identity is translated into international image. The structuring into categories such as K-Contents, K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Sports reflects a process of selection and prioritization that facilitates global recognition. This type of codification can be understood in light of what is proposed by Aronczyk (2013), who argues that country image is constructed through carefully selected narratives adapted for international dissemination.

Regarding the role of the state, Kim describes a model based on cooperation between multiple ministries and the active participation of the private sector, without direct control mechanisms. This “equal cooperation” allows for the sustainability of long-term strategies and the distribution of responsibilities among different actors. This configuration contrasts with what is identified by Manfredi Sánchez (2022) and Pérez Peña et al. (2021) in the Latin American context, where the management of country image tends to depend on political leadership and presents institutional discontinuities. In the Korean case, on the contrary, multi-actor coordination reinforces the coherence and credibility of its international projection.

Overall, the elements analyzed make it possible to observe that South Korea’s international positioning responds to a sustained articulation between identity, institutional structure, and strategy. In contrast, the Ecuadorian case shows that cultural richness, although significant, requires processes of organization and synthesis that allow it to be translated into a clear and projectable narrative in the global context.

4.2.1.7 Conclusions

The interview with Aidan Donghwan Kim makes it possible to understand that South Korea's international projection responds to a structured process that combines soft power, planning, and institutional continuity. It is not a matter of isolated actions or recent results, but rather a strategy that has been built progressively. The interviewee makes it clear that the country's positioning is supported by both economic development and cultural expansion. Added to this is the institutionalization of public diplomacy and the existence of legal frameworks that sustain these policies over time. In this way, international projection is configured as a state policy that integrates different levels of action.

Another central element of the testimony is the way in which Korea organizes its cultural projection. The prioritization of sectors such as K-Contents, K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Sports shows that it is not a general diffusion, but rather a strategic selection of content with high recognition potential. This approach allows the country's image to be clearer and more easily identifiable abroad. At the same time, the model described by the interviewee reflects an articulation between the state and the private sector based on shared interests. There is no direct control, but there is coordination that allows these initiatives to be sustained and expanded. In this sense, cultural projection is constructed through an organized logic that combines planning, specialization, and cooperation.

From a comparative perspective, Kim's reading of Ecuador allows for the identification of certain challenges in the construction of its international projection. The difficulty of synthesizing cultural diversity into a clear narrative limits the country's ability to position itself abroad. Added to this is the historical proximity to other countries in the region, which reduces its differentiation. However, the interviewee recognizes that this diversity constitutes a valuable resource. The challenge, therefore, does not lie in the absence of cultural content, but in the capacity to organize it and translate it into a coherent proposal that can be recognized at the international level.

4.2.2 Evelyn Almeida

4.2.2.1 Interviewee Profile

Evelyn Almeida is an academic and researcher with a solid trajectory in the fields of linguistic, educational, and intercultural studies. Her academic background is multidisciplinary, as it integrates studies in Applied Linguistics to the English Language,

together with degrees in Business Administration and Marketing Engineering from the Escuela Politécnica del Ejército.

She has more than 17 years of experience working in the higher education sector, serving as a professor and senior researcher at institutions such as the Universidad Central del Ecuador and the Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas ESPE. In addition, between 2020 and 2024, she served as director of the King Sejong Institute in Quito, where she led processes related to the teaching of the Korean language and the dissemination of its culture in the country.

The relevance of her participation in this research lies in her direct experience in the management of cultural dissemination spaces linked to South Korea in Ecuador. Her tenure as director of the King Sejong Institute makes it possible to understand, from an applied perspective, how language teaching and cultural promotion are articulated as tools of international projection, thus providing a key perspective on the dynamics of cultural diplomacy in intercultural contexts.

4.2.2.2 Interview

The interview with Magíster Evelyn Almeida was conducted virtually on Thursday, March 12, 2026, at 10h00, through the Zoom platform.

Throughout the exchange, the interviewee responded to the questions in a clear and direct manner, drawing on her experience as former director of the King Sejong Institute in Quito. Her interventions focused on describing the functioning of this space for teaching and cultural dissemination, its process of implementation in Ecuador, and its role within South Korea's cultural projection strategy.

In this sense, the interview had a primarily informative character, in which the interviewee presented in a concrete manner aspects related to the teaching of the Korean language, the cultural activities carried out, the institutional support of the Korean state, and the observable results in terms of interest and participation. Likewise, her responses made it possible to identify more clearly the cultural values transmitted through this type of initiative.

4.2.2.3 Narrative Description

Based on her experience as former director of the King Sejong Institute in Quito, Evelyn Almeida began her intervention by explaining how this type of space forms part of a

broader cultural projection strategy promoted by South Korea. During her intervention, she made it clear that it is not limited to the teaching of the language, but rather to a proposal that intentionally integrates language and culture. In this sense, she stated that “the objective is not only to disseminate the Korean language, but also the culture” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), which allows these spaces to be understood as instruments that form part of the country’s cultural dissemination.

Regarding the implementation of the institute in Ecuador, the interviewee indicated that it resulted from a selection process among local universities under the support of the King Sejong Foundation. She also clarified that the space in Quito was consolidated after the closure of an initial initiative at ESPOL, becoming the only center of this type currently operating in the country. From her perspective, this process demonstrates continuity and sustained results, which reinforces its role within Korean cultural dissemination.

Likewise, Almeida highlighted the place that education occupies within this strategy, as language teaching serves as a tool through which cultural references are transmitted. Based on this, she explained that these spaces function not only as academic environments, but also as meeting points where open activities are carried out, such as presentations and open house events, directed both at students and the general public.

Regarding the interest generated around the Korean language, Almeida linked it to South Korea’s contemporary global positioning, particularly through the expansion of its cultural industries. In her words, it is a “boom of Korean culture” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), a phenomenon that has generated significant motivation among students, who approach the language mainly due to cultural affinity.

From this approach, the former director identified that learning Korean also involves the incorporation of certain cultural values, including respect, discipline, punctuality, and perseverance. These elements, as she explained, are not taught in isolation, but are reflected in everyday practices within the learning process, such as punctuality in class instruction, among others. She also emphasized the importance placed on quality in what is done, which reinforces a logic of commitment and rigor in activities.

Another element that the interviewee emphasized was the construction of community. According to her explanation, those who participate in these spaces develop a sense of belonging that goes beyond language learning, generating connections among students, teachers, and administrative staff that extend beyond class hours. In this context, she stated

that “if you are part of King Sejong, you are King Sejong family” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), which reflects a collective dimension articulated with cultural identity.

At the institutional level, Almeida highlighted the constant support from the South Korean state, particularly through the embassy and the Ministry of Education. In this sense, she noted that this support has been present since the initial stages of the project, which demonstrates active participation in its implementation and development.

In terms of results, the interviewee indicated that the interest in the Korean language and culture is reflected in the high demand for courses. In this regard, she stated that available spots “are filled within one hour” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), which demonstrates the level of reception and interest in the Korean language. Added to this is the existence of waiting lists, the participation of students from different cities, and the creation of spaces promoted by the participants themselves, which reinforces the consolidation of an active community.

From her perspective as an educator, the interviewee also established a distinction between learning Korean and other languages such as English. She explained that while English usually responds to academic or professional requirements, Korean is learned mainly out of cultural interest. In this sense, she noted that many students arrive “because of the music, because of K-dramas” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), which shapes a different relationship with the language and its learning process.

When referring to the Ecuadorian context, Almeida pointed out an important difference in terms of the level of support for cultural identity. She indicated that, unlike South Korea, this support in Ecuador is more limited, which affects processes of cultural appropriation. As an example, she mentioned the case of Kichwa, noting that its abandonment is often related to experiences of discrimination from early stages.

Regarding the challenges, the former director highlighted the complexity of the Korean language from a pedagogical perspective, especially due to its writing system. However, she emphasized the perseverance of students who manage to complete the training levels, as well as cultural differences that form part of the learning process.

Finally, when referring to identity, the interviewee characterized Koreans as individuals who are respectful, disciplined, and trustworthy, while in defining Ecuadorians

she highlighted traits such as joy, kindness, and sincerity, noting that, in general terms, they are “good people” (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

4.2.2.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 5

Preliminary Findings Almeida

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Culture as a strategic instrument of international projection	The dissemination of the Korean language is intentionally articulated with cultural promotion, reflecting a state strategy that uses culture as a resource for external positioning.
Structural role of education in cultural diplomacy	Education does not operate as an isolated component, but as a central axis that allows for the sustained cultural projection and the transmission of identity references over time.
Institutional articulation in cultural projection	The active participation of state entities, such as the embassy and the Ministry of Education, reflects a coordinated model that supports and ensures continuity in cultural initiatives.
Transmission of values as the basis of projected identity	Language learning incorporates values such as respect, discipline, and a sense of responsibility, reflecting a coherent cultural identity that is reproduced in educational spaces.
Community building as a mechanism of cultural appropriation	Educational spaces generate a sense of belonging, which facilitates the internalization of culture and reinforces processes of identification even beyond the national territory.
Influence of cultural industries on international projection	The expansion of Korean cultural products drives interest in the language and acts as a catalyst for cultural projection, integrating symbolic and media dimensions.
Differences in institutional support for cultural identity	In contrast to South Korea, the Ecuadorian case shows limitations in institutional support, which affects processes of cultural weakening or devaluation.
Coherence between cultural identity and external projection	Korean identity is presented as structured and consistent in its values, which facilitates its transmission and strengthens its image in the international sphere.

4.2.2.5 Thematic Areas

Table 6

Thematic Areas Almeida

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural Identity	Refers to the set of shared values, practices, and meanings that shape a society's sense of belonging and that can be transmitted and reproduced across different spaces.	Korean cultural identity is transmitted through language, incorporating values such as respect, discipline, punctuality, and a sense of responsibility. This identity is reinforced through collective dynamics that generate a sense of belonging, allowing for its internalization even in external contexts.
Nation Branding	Strategic tool that translates elements of cultural identity into narratives and symbols that can be projected externally for positioning purposes.	Korean culture, particularly through K-pop and K-dramas, functions as a vehicle of attraction that positions the country globally. Although it is not explicitly referred to as nation branding, a coherent symbolic construction that operates as such is evident.
Country Image	Perception is constructed externally about a country based on its cultural, political, and social expressions.	The image of South Korea is strengthened through a coherent identity and clearly transmitted values. The high demand for the language reflects a positive and attractive perception of the country, linked to its contemporary culture.
International projection and external legitimacy	Process through which a state positions its identity and values in the international sphere, generating recognition and acceptance.	International projection is based on the articulation between culture, education, and cultural industries. Global interest in Korean cultural products legitimizes its international presence and facilitates the dissemination of its language and values.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Participation of the state in the promotion, articulation, and sustainability of identity narratives projected abroad.	The Korean state plays an active role through institutional support from the embassy and the Ministry of Education, ensuring continuity, funding, and coordination in cultural dissemination.

4.2.2.6 Analysis

From the interview with Evelyn Almeida, it can be observed that the teaching of the Korean language is not limited to a linguistic process, but is accompanied by cultural content that expands students' interest in South Korea. According to what was described by the interviewee, the King Sejong Institute not only teaches grammar or vocabulary, but also introduces practices, customs, and cultural references that allow for a better understanding of the context of the language. This has consequently led those who approach the language to not perceive it as just another tool or class, but rather as part of a broader experience. In this sense, this dynamic can be linked to what is proposed by Nye (2004), who argues that states can influence through the attraction generated by their culture and values. In this case, it becomes evident that the study of the language acts as a first point of contact that facilitates

this attraction, as it allows students to gradually engage with other cultural elements of the country.

Similarly, the interviewee explains that most students do not approach the Korean language for professional or academic reasons, but rather due to a prior interest in cultural products such as K-pop or K-dramas. Therefore, it is possible to state that interest in South Korea does not begin in the classroom, but beforehand, through content that circulates on social media and digital platforms. This situation can be related to what is proposed by Anholt (2007), who suggests that countries achieve international positioning when they develop recognizable elements that differentiate them. In this case, music, series, and other cultural products function as that differentiating element that makes South Korea easily identifiable and attractive for young audiences in other countries.

From another perspective, Almeida points out that learning the Korean language also involves the incorporation of certain forms of behavior, such as respect, punctuality, and discipline. These are not taught as theoretical content, but rather appear in the way the language is used, for example, in levels of formality¹⁵ or in the way of addressing others¹⁶. This process can be understood through what is proposed by Anderson (2006), who argues that communities are constructed through shared practices that generate a sense of belonging. In this case, although students do not form part of Korean society, they do incorporate elements that allow them to feel symbolically connected to it.

On the other hand, the former director highlights that the functioning of the King Sejong Institute depends on constant support from state institutions, such as the embassy and organizations linked to education. Elaborating further on this aspect, the interviewee noted that this support is translated into funding and continuity over time, which prevents the project from depending on isolated decisions and, at the same time, allows for planning that makes it possible to sustain the institute in the long term. This aspect can be related to what

¹⁵ Levels of formality are linguistic registers that express respect and social distance according to age, status, and role. In Korea, they are manifested through honorifics and speech forms associated with *ye-ui* (예의), which refers to courtesy, etiquette, and respect toward individuals of higher hierarchy (K. D. Kim & Bae, 2017).

¹⁶ The way of addressing to others refers to the use of forms of address that organize social relationships according to hierarchy, intimacy, and context. In Korea, the use of *uri* (우리, *we*) stands out, as it replaces individual forms and reinforces collective identity (K. D. Kim & Bae, 2017).

is proposed by Dinnie (2008), who indicates that nation branding requires an institutional base that coordinates actions and maintains coherence in international projection.

4.2.2.7 Conclusions

The interview with Evelyn Almeida allows for an understanding that South Korea's international projection in the cultural sphere is not based solely on the dissemination of content. Based on her experience at the King Sejong Institute, it can be observed that the teaching of the Korean language is designed as a process that intentionally integrates language and culture. Learning is not limited to the linguistic dimension, but also includes practices, references, and forms of interaction that broaden the understanding of the country. In this way, the language functions as a point of entry that facilitates a more comprehensive approach to Korean culture.

Another relevant aspect is that interest in South Korea does not originate in the classroom. According to the interviewee, many students approach the language motivated by cultural products such as K-pop or K-dramas. In this sense, the cultural industry plays a key role by generating prior interest that is later translated into more formal learning processes. Thus, cultural projection does not depend solely on institutional action, but also on social dynamics that develop outside these spaces.

Finally, the experience described by Almeida shows that this process is sustained by two fundamental elements. On the one hand, language learning incorporates values such as respect, discipline, and responsibility, which are reflected in the way students interact. On the other hand, there is constant support from the state that ensures the continuity of these initiatives. This support is expressed through funding, planning, and coordination. Taken together, these elements show that international projection does not depend only on cultural richness, but on the capacity to organize it and sustain it over time.

4.2.3 Richard Salazar

4.2.3.1 Interviewee Profile

Richard Salazar is a university professor and director of the Center for Asia–Latin America Studies, an academic space oriented toward the analysis of relations between both regions. His work is framed within the study of political, economic, and cultural linkages between East Asia and Latin America, consolidating him as a reference in this field within the Ecuadorian context.

He has a highly specialized international academic background. He holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Granada, with an international mention in collaboration with the University of California, Irvine, where he also obtained a master's degree in East Asian Studies. He also holds a master's degree in Political Science from the Università degli Studi di Bologna. He has been the recipient of prestigious scholarships such as Fulbright and the Korea Foundation, and has conducted research stays at institutions such as UCLA and Yonsei University in Seoul. At the teaching level, he has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in Ecuador, the United States, Spain, Italy, and Peru, including institutions such as FLACSO Ecuador and the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar.

His participation in this research is particularly relevant due to his experience in comparative analysis between South Korea and Latin America, as well as his critical approach to development, science policy, and international insertion. His contributions make it possible to understand, from a specialized academic perspective, the structural dynamics that condition the international projection of countries such as Ecuador, as well as to identify lessons from the South Korean case in terms of public policy, institutional development, and the strategic use of knowledge.

4.2.3.2 Interview

The interview with Professor Richard Salazar was conducted virtually through the Zoom platform on Wednesday, March 11, 2026. The conversation developed in a reflective and analytical tone, characterized by responses that were broadly supported by his academic experience and by historical and comparative examples, particularly between South Korea and Ecuador.

From the beginning of the meeting, the dialogue was oriented toward a comparative reading between both countries based on the questions posed regarding their international projection, which allowed the conversation to be structured around the identification of historical, cultural, and institutional factors that explain their differentiated trajectories.

In general terms, the interviewee's trajectory was reflected in the strength of his arguments, providing a critical reading of the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that influence the international projection of the countries analyzed.

4.2.3.3 Narrative Description

To begin with, Dr. Salazar addressed the case of South Korea by explaining that its international positioning cannot be understood solely through the recent rise of soft power or the Hallyu phenomenon, but rather that it responds to a sustained process of construction that dates back at least to the 1960s. As he indicated, since that time the country began to work on its international image in order to project itself as an efficient, disciplined, and competitive nation, linking its integration into global markets with a deliberate construction of its international reputation.

In continuity with this idea, the professor added that the country's international projection is linked to the incorporation of cultural elements deeply rooted in Korean society. In his words, "family, work, and studies are the most important things, they are at the center of the imaginary and the way of life of Koreans" (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026). These values are articulated with principles such as *palli-palli*, understood as a logic of rapid, efficient action oriented toward achieving objectives, which allow the country to reinforce its image of productivity and discipline before the world.

Based on this cultural foundation, the interviewee further developed the evolution of South Korean soft power, noting that it was particularly strengthened from the 1990s through sustained investment in cultural industries such as music, film, and audiovisual content. In this process, he highlighted the decisive role of the state, indicating that it has actively supported these strategies by investing significant resources in their international promotion.

In relation to this consolidation process, Dr. Salazar also explained that after the Asian crisis of 1997¹⁷, South Korea reconfigured its economic and cultural model. Initially, large conglomerates such as Samsung, belonging to the *chaebols*¹⁸, entered these industries. However, later the state decided to limit their direct participation and promote the creation of new specialized companies in cultural content, financing their development. This shift allowed for the diversification of the economy and the consolidation of a globally competitive cultural industry.

¹⁷ The 1997 financial crisis in South Korea, caused by the insolvency of large conglomerates and the decline of international reserves, led to IMF intervention and the implementation of structural reforms aimed at economic liberalization and global competitiveness, marking a turning point in its development model (M. S. Kang, 2003).

¹⁸ *Chaebol* is a South Korean term used to refer to the country's large business conglomerates, characterized by their diversified structure and by concentrating significant economic and financial influence.

Under this same logic of positioning, the professor noted that South Korea sought to present itself as an attractive country for international audiences, especially among young people. As he explained, the objective was for Korea to “become something attractive, something people like, something that is cool for the world” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026). More concretely, a particularly illustrative element was the experience that the interviewee himself described from his visit to Seoul in 2025, where he observed materials that promoted South Korea as a competitive country and an exporter of human talent at a global level.

In contrast with this scenario, when addressing the Ecuadorian case, Professor Salazar proposed that one of the main obstacles to building a solid country image is the existence of low national self-esteem, a phenomenon that he associates with historical processes such as coloniality, as well as with social dynamics of classism and internal fragmentation. In addition, from this context, the interviewee explained that people in the country tend to identify first at the local level rather than at the national level, which is reflected in everyday expressions such as “I am Ecuadorian, but from Cuenca... from Guayaquil... from Quito” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026), thus making it difficult to construct a shared narrative. This fragmentation is also shaped by persistent social hierarchies that differentiate the population according to class, origin, or ethnic belonging.

However, complementing this idea, Dr. Salazar emphasized that the main problem for Ecuador does not lie in its cultural diversity, but in the way it is perceived and represented. In his words, “cultural diversity is not a problem... the problem is how we perceive it” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026), highlighting that far from being a weakness, it actually constitutes one of the country’s main strengths. From this perspective, he also criticized the tendency to simplify or folklorize certain cultural elements, particularly those related to indigenous cultures, which has limited the construction of a more complex and inclusive country image.

To reinforce this idea, the interviewee referred to comparisons with other countries. For example, he cited Brazil as a country that, despite its diversity, has a strong national self-esteem, visible in pride for its sporting and cultural achievements, as well as in the valuation of its festivities. In his words, “Brazilians have a much less self-conscious attitude toward life... with pride in being world football champions and in their carnival” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026). Similarly, he mentioned other countries such as Thailand

and Vietnam, which, despite their rich cultural diversity, have managed to build stronger country images, demonstrating that diversity does not constitute a structural limitation.

In addition, at the institutional level, the professor identified as a key difference the existence of public policies sustained over time. In the case of South Korea, he highlighted the continuity of strategies implemented since the 1960s, placing particular emphasis on the role of President Park Chung-Hee¹⁹. Although he acknowledged the authoritarian nature of his government, he noted that it allowed for the establishment of a foundation of planning and continuity in development and international projection policies, which were later maintained after the democratization of 1987.

In a complementary way, he highlighted the existence of mechanisms such as five-year plans²⁰, which have allowed for the maintenance of a long-term vision in state management. In contrast, he noted that in Ecuador there is a prevailing logic of institutional discontinuity, where “each government refounds the country, changes ministries, eliminates programs, and starts from zero” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026), which prevents the consolidation of sustained strategies over time.

In addition, in relation to the consequences of this institutional weakness, the interviewee also addressed structural problems such as corruption, which he described as a phenomenon present at different levels of society and normalized in everyday practice. According to his explanation, this situation hinders the implementation of effective public policies and limits the country’s development.

On the other hand, with regard to improving Ecuador’s international projection, Professor Salazar proposed the need to strengthen education as a central axis to transform these social conditions, particularly those related to inequality, classism, and the way Ecuadorians perceive one another. To achieve this, he suggests promoting values such as equity, respect, and the appreciation of diversity. He also emphasized the importance of innovation not only in the technological field, but also in areas such as medicine or public policy. As he exemplified, “we have ancestral medicines, however, what is lacking is research into their components in order to develop products” (Salazar, personal

¹⁹ Park Chung-Hee was president of South Korea from 1961 to 1979 after leading a military coup in a context of economic crisis. His government promoted a development model based on industrialization, state planning, and coordination with large business conglomerates, laying the foundations for the country’s economic growth (Seth, 2013).

²⁰ Five-year plans, implemented from 1962 under the government of Park Chung-Hee, were instruments of state planning that directed investment toward strategic industries and promoted an export-oriented economy, enabling the rapid growth and international positioning of South Korea (M. S. Kang, 2003).

communication, March 11, 2026), thus showing that innovation can emerge from local knowledge.

Finally, when reflecting on national identity, the interviewee described Ecuador as a diverse, rich country full of potential. In his words, “being Ecuadorian is a privilege, since we have a very diverse country”, also highlighting that Ecuadorians are “very hardworking, very innovative, and capable of adapting to different contexts” (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026). In contrast, the professor noted that in South Korea there is a very high level of national self-esteem, accompanied by a disciplined and at the same time humble attitude. According to his explanation, Koreans have a strong conviction about the value of their country, which has been key to its development and international projection.

4.2.3.4 Preliminary Findings

Due to the scope and analytical depth of the interview conducted with Professor Richard Salazar, whose contributions address in a differentiated manner the cases of South Korea and Ecuador, it was considered methodologically appropriate to separate the presentation of the preliminary findings. In this sense, in order to preserve clarity in the exposition and facilitate comparative reading, the findings are organized into two separate tables: the first corresponding to the case of South Korea and the second to the case of Ecuador, thus respecting the particularities identified in each context.

Preliminary Findings: South Korea Case

Table 7

Preliminary Findings Salazar – South Korea

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Sustained historical construction of country image in South Korea	South Korea's international positioning responds to a long-term process that began in the 1960s, based on the deliberate projection of efficiency, discipline, and competitiveness.
Integration of cultural values in international projection	Values such as family, work, and education, together with the palli palli logic, reinforce an image of discipline and productivity.
Active role of the state in the development of soft power	The state has strategically promoted cultural industries through sustained investment and planning.
Strategic reconfiguration after the 1997 crisis	The Asian crisis enabled the diversification of the economy toward cultural industries, fostering new actors beyond the chaebols.
Intentional construction of international attractiveness	A strategy was developed to position the country as culturally attractive and "cool" at the global level.
Institutional continuity as the basis of development	The stability of public policies since Park Chung-Hee has allowed for the sustainability of long-term strategies.
Long-term state planning	The existence of five-year plans has made it possible to maintain coherence in the management of national development.
High national self-esteem as a positioning factor	A positive self-perception, combined with discipline and humility, strengthens the country's international projection.

Based on the preliminary findings table of the South Korea case, its international projection can be understood as the result of a sustained historical process, characterized by the articulation between long-term state planning, institutional continuity, and an active role of the state in the development of soft power. This process has strategically integrated cultural values such as discipline, work, and the palli palli logic, reinforcing a coherent image of efficiency and competitiveness. Likewise, the reconfiguration following the 1997 crisis allowed for the diversification of the economy toward cultural industries, consolidating a positioning oriented towards building its attractiveness at the global level. Taken together, these elements are strengthened by a high level of national self-esteem, which contributes to projecting a solid image in the international arena.

Preliminary Findings: Ecuador Case

Table 8

Preliminary Findings Salazar - Ecuador

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the finding
Identity fragmentation and low national cohesion	National identity is weakened by regionalism, classism, and low collective self-esteem, which hinders the construction of a unified country narrative.
Limited and folklorized representation of cultural diversity	Cultural diversity is not strategically leveraged, as it tends to be simplified or folklorized, particularly in relation to indigenous cultures.
Institutional discontinuity and weakness of public policies	The constant reinvention of the state prevents the consolidation of sustained strategies in international projection.
Corruption as a structural obstacle	The normalization of corruption limits the effective implementation of public policies.
Education as an axis of social transformation	Strengthening education is key to overcoming inequalities and improving identity construction.
Innovation from local knowledge	There is potential for innovation based on ancestral knowledge, but it has not been strategically developed.

In the Ecuadorian case, the findings show an international projection conditioned by weak internal articulation, marked by identity fragmentation and low social cohesion. Added to this is a limited representation of cultural diversity, which tends to be simplified and is not strategically integrated into the construction of a country narrative. Likewise, institutional discontinuity and the presence of corruption hinder the consolidation of sustained public policies. Nevertheless, relevant opportunities are identified in the strengthening of the education system and in the valorization of local knowledge as a basis for a more coherent and sustainable projection.

4.2.3.5 Thematic Areas

Table 9

Thematic Areas Salazar

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Interview Contributions – South Korea	Interview Contributions - Ecuador
Cultural Identity	Construction of shared values, practices, and meanings that shape the sense of belonging and guide the country's projection.	Construction of shared values, practices, and meanings that shape the sense of belonging and guide the country's projection.	Identity fragmented by regionalism, classism, and low national self-esteem, which makes the construction of a collective sense of belonging more difficult.
Nation Branding	Strategic construction of a national narrative to position the country in the international sphere.	Deliberate and sustained process to project an image of a country that is efficient, competitive, and modern.	Absence of a consolidated narrative, with difficulties in articulating a coherent proposal that represents the country's cultural diversity.
Country Image	International perception constructed from the country's discourses, practices, and outcomes.	Positive image associated with modernity, innovation, discipline, and cultural attractiveness, strengthened by soft power.	Weak and inconsistent image, affected by internal fragmentation and the lack of a clear representation of its identity.
International projection and external legitimacy	Strategies of international positioning and the level of recognition, credibility, and acceptance of the country in the international system.	Strong international projection based on soft power and cultural industries, which has allowed for the consolidation of high external legitimacy.	Limited projection and low external legitimacy due to the lack of sustained strategies and the weak articulation between identity, discourse, and state action.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Capacity of the state to articulate, sustain, and project national identity through public policies.	Active, planning oriented, and continuous state, with sustained public policies, investment in culture, and long-term planning through five-year plans.	state characterized by institutional discontinuity, constant reinvention, and the absence of sustained policies in international projection.

4.2.3.6 Analysis

When addressing the case of South Korea, the interview with Richard Salazar highlights how cultural identity is configured as a central element in the country's international projection. Far from being limited to an internal characteristic, it is articulated around socially shared values that guide both the organization of everyday life and the way in which the nation presents itself to the world. In this sense, by pointing out that family, work, and study occupy a central place in the Korean imaginary, the professor shows how these elements function as symbolic bases that structure collective behavior. From this perspective, this engages with the notion of imagined community proposed by Anderson

(2006), insofar as these values allow for the consolidation of a sense of belonging that transcends the individual and is projected into practices recognizable at the international level.

In continuity with this idea, the reference to the concept of *palli palli* adds an important element that allows for an understanding of how certain cultural traits are transformed into competitive advantages. This logic of rapid, efficient, and results oriented action not only describes an everyday practice, but is also projected as a national attribute associated with productivity and discipline. In this sense, the interviewee's contributions also engage with the idea that culture, when strategically articulated, can become a key asset within global competition, as proposed by Anholt (2007) and Nye (2004).

In contrast, when addressing the Ecuadorian case, Salazar introduces a critical reading that complements the contributions of Walsh (2007) on coloniality in Latin America. His diagnosis of low national self-esteem, regionalism, and social fragmentation reveals the weakness in the construction of a collective *we*, which limits the possibility of projecting a coherent identity abroad. With this argument, not only is the fragility of the existence of an Ecuadorian community confirmed, but a key subjective dimension is also added, as it allows us to observe how self-perception and classism directly affect the capacity to consolidate a shared national identity.

When translating this analysis to the field of nation branding, the interviewee's contributions reinforce the importance of institutional continuity as a condition for its consolidation. In the South Korean case, Salazar highlights that the country's international positioning is not the result of a recent strategy, but rather of a sustained process since the 1960s, in which the state has played an active role in constructing an image of efficiency and competitiveness. In this sense, this aligns with the perspective of Dinnie (2008), who defines nation branding as an institutional process that requires coherence between identity, public policies, and strategic communication.

On the contrary, in the Ecuadorian case, the interviewee identifies a dynamic of discontinuity that prevents the consolidation of a stable national narrative. The tendency to constantly reformulate international projection strategies, eliminating previous programs and reconfiguring institutional structures, confirms what is pointed out by Pérez Peña et al. (2021) regarding the dependence of nation branding on political cycles. This lack of

continuity not only weakens external projection, but also prevents the brand from becoming rooted in the international imaginary.

With regard to country image, Salazar's reflections make it possible to articulate the approaches of Aronczyk (2013) and Appadurai (1996) with the empirical evidence of the cases analyzed. In the case of South Korea, his assertion that the country sought to position itself as an "attractive" or "cool" nation in the eyes of the world reflects an intentional construction of its international image, in which cultural industries have played a fundamental role. This process confirms that national narratives are not spontaneous, but rather respond to codification strategies aimed at generating recognition and differentiation in the global arena.

In contrast, when analyzing the Ecuadorian case, the interviewee introduces a critical element by pointing out that cultural diversity, far from being leveraged as a strength, tends to be simplified or folklorized. This tendency limits the construction of a complex and inclusive country image, reducing its symbolic potential. At this point, his comparison with countries such as Brazil is particularly illustrative, as he highlights that, despite their diversity, they have managed to build a stronger national self-esteem, visible in pride for their sporting and cultural achievements. Likewise, the mention of countries such as Thailand and Vietnam reinforces the idea that diversity does not constitute a structural limitation, but can become a strategic asset when properly articulated.

In the field of international projection, the interviewee's contributions allow for a deeper understanding of Nye's (2004) concept of soft power. His analysis of the South Korean case, especially after the Asian crisis of 1997, shows how the country reconfigured its economic model through investment in cultural industries, diversifying its economy beyond large conglomerates. This process not only strengthened its capacity for attraction, but also demonstrates the role of the state as a facilitator of new forms of international insertion based on culture and creativity.

At the same time, his reflection on the Ecuadorian case introduces a more practical perspective by pointing out the need to innovate from local knowledge. The reference to ancestral medicine as a field with development potential shows that international projection should not be limited to the export of primary resources, but can be built from the valorization of local knowledge. This argument expands the theoretical framework by

proposing an alternative path to generate external legitimacy, based on authenticity and contextual knowledge.

Finally, the role of the state emerges as a decisive element in the symbolic construction of the nation. In the South Korean case, the continuity of public policies, the use of five-year plans, and the consolidation of a long-term vision reflect an institutional structure capable of sustaining strategies beyond changes in government. As the interviewee notes, processes initiated during the period of Park Chung-Hee established foundations that were maintained after democratization, which highlights the importance of institutional stability.

In contrast, in the Ecuadorian case, the normalization of corruption and the lack of sustained planning limit the state's capacity to fulfill this role. This diagnosis confirms what is proposed by Manfredi Sánchez (2022) and Calle Forrest and Caicedo Barreth (2021), who warn that institutional weakness constitutes one of the main obstacles to international projection in Latin America.

4.2.3.7 Conclusions

The interview with Professor Richard Salazar allows for an understanding that international projection cannot be understood as the result of isolated actions, but rather as a process in which cultural identity, state action, and institutional continuity are articulated in a sustained manner. In the case of South Korea, the interviewee's emphasis is placed on the historical construction of this coherence, where values such as discipline, work, and education are not only part of the discourse, but are translated into concrete practices that reinforce its global positioning. Added to this is a state that does not act in a fragmented way, but rather sustains long-term planning, invests strategically in key sectors, and maintains a consistent country narrative.

Viewed from another perspective, the Ecuadorian situation reveals that the limitations do not stem from a lack of cultural richness, but from the difficulties in articulating it in a cohesive manner. The identity fragmentation, low national self esteem, and social divisions identified by the interviewee point to a deeper problem in the construction of a collective sense. In this same line, his argument that cultural diversity is not the obstacle, but rather the way in which it is perceived and represented, is key, as it is often reduced to simplified expressions that fail to project its complexity.

Under this reading, the interview directs the reflection toward changes that go beyond the immediate. The need to strengthen education, promote a more comprehensive valuation

of diversity, and generate processes of innovation based on local knowledge emerges as part of a foundation that still requires consolidation. Hence, the challenge does not lie in the creation of new image strategies in isolation, but in the capacity to sustain over time an articulated vision that allows the country to project itself with greater coherence and credibility.

4.3 Interviews: Ecuador Side

The interviews for the Ecuadorian case were conducted with five actors from different fields of action: diplomacy, tourism management, the productive sector, and academia. This diversity enabled an examination of the construction of the country's image from institutional, operational, and analytical levels, as well as identify tensions related to strategic continuity, social appropriation, and narrative coherence.

The analysis of each interview is organized according to the themes addressed on with each participant, maintaining consistency with the question guide designed for each profile.

4.3.1 Mónica Martínez Mendiño

4.3.1.1 Interviewee Profile

Mónica Martínez Mendiño is an Ambassador of the Ecuadorian Foreign Service and currently Undersecretary for Africa, Asia, and Oceania at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility. She holds a PhD in Jurisprudence and a master's degree in international relations from Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, as well as complementary training in International Studies from the Diplomatic School of Spain.

Throughout her diplomatic career, she has held high-level positions in multilateral and bilateral forums, including as Minister at the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations in Geneva, where she was responsible for issues related to development, humanitarian aid, human rights, and international cooperation. She has also held positions of responsibility within the Foreign Ministry, including the Directorate of Sovereignty and functions in the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), which has allowed her to participate in the articulation of Ecuadorian foreign policy from different institutional levels.

Her participation in this research is key to understanding how the country's image is formulated and projected by the state apparatus. Her experience in multilateral spaces and in the formulation of foreign policy allows for an analysis of the degree of

institutionalization, continuity, and coherence of international projection strategies linked to cultural identity.

4.3.1.2 Interview

The interview with Ambassador Mónica Martínez Menduño was conducted in person on Wednesday, February 19, 2026, at the Citizen Service Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility in Azogues.

As this was a semi-structured interview, brief interventions were made to request clarification or expand on certain points when necessary, which allowed for thematic coherence without losing spontaneity in the exchange. In general terms, the interviewee's professional experience was reflected in the way she constructed her responses, providing a critical and well-grounded perspective on the country's foreign policy and international projection.

4.3.1.3 Narrative Description

As a starting point, the place of cultural identity within Ecuadorian foreign policy was addressed. In response to this approach, Ambassador Martínez Menduño introduced a preliminary reflection: “before talking about identity and international projection, it is necessary to ask, does a foreign policy exist?” (Martínez Menduño, personal communication, February 19, 2026). From her experience as a career diplomat, she pointed out that currently “there is no direct statement at this time,” which, in her view, reflects the absence of a clearly defined strategic orientation.

On this idea, the ambassador explained the current institutional structure, mentioning the existence of the Undersecretariat for Economic Affairs²¹ and the Directorate for Cultural Affairs²². However, she indicated that these bodies are not focused on promoting the nation brand abroad, and emphasized that there is no clear articulation between the economic and cultural spheres.

²¹The Undersecretariat for Economic Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for managing economic matters in the international sphere, such as relations with multilateral economic organizations, regional integration processes, and bilateral trade relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, 2023).

²²The Directorate of Cultural, Heritage, and Tourism Affairs is part of the foreign relations process and is responsible for the management and international projection of cultural matters within the framework of Ecuadorian foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, 2023).

The conversation then moved to the normative level. The interviewee recalled that Ecuador has historically maintained a foreign policy based on principles, which were incorporated into the 2008 Constitution, with the intention of providing continuity and stability to state action. However, she drew a distinction between the declarative level and effective practice when she stated: “Is it being complied with or not? That is another reality” (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026).

From a practical perspective, the interviewee linked identity to concrete actions carried out by the country, for example in international forums, participation in spaces related to the elimination of racial discrimination, the defense of indigenous peoples, and the positioning of Ecuador as a megadiverse state. She pointed out that this recognition is not spontaneous, but rather responds to technical processes, research, and sustained diplomatic management.

Later, the dialogue addressed the evolution of different nation brands. The Ambassador stated that cultural identity is a necessary element for national construction. However, she warned that it has often been used from political perspectives, generating what she called “a void of content” (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026). She also explained that when structural concepts are reduced to slogans, they lose depth and credibility.

Continuing with this analysis, Martínez differentiated between nation brand proposals with a conceptual dimension linked to diversity and nationalities, and those of a more descriptive or graphic nature. In some cases, she mentioned that certain proposals were “tremendously manipulated” (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026), which affected their continuity and legitimacy, while in others she pointed out that they “have no ideological context behind them,” considering them more explanatory from a geographical perspective. She also referred to the *All You Need Is Ecuador* campaign and the debates that emerged from its aesthetics and promotional approach within the context of international positioning policy.

Towards the end, she developed her view of Ecuadorian identity based on the notion of *syncretism*. She explained that Ecuador cannot be understood as a simple sum of elements, but rather as the result of a historical fusion that produces “that third element which has a life of its own based on diverse roots” (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026). To illustrate this, she shared historical, cultural, and gastronomic examples, as well as diplomatic experiences in which cultural practices such as the

preparation of traditional dishes or the use of traditional clothing functioned as mechanisms of symbolic representation of the country.

4.3.1.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 10

Preliminary Findings Martínez Menduño

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Questioning the existence of a current foreign policy	The existence of a clearly defined foreign policy is questioned.
Institutional fragmentation in the management of international projection	A lack of articulation between the economic and cultural bodies of the state is identified, as well as a lack of clarity regarding the management of the nation brand abroad.
Distinction between normative foreign policy and effective practice	A gap between the declarative level and its concrete practical is identified.
Political instrumentalization of cultural identity	It is noted that cultural identity has been used for political contexts, which can empty it of content and affect its credibility.
Ideological load and discontinuity in nation branding	It is observed that different nation brands have responded to specific political contexts, generating changes that have affected their credibility and symbolic stability.
Cultural identity understood as syncretism	The notion of syncretism is proposed as an explanatory category for Ecuadorian identity, understood as a historical fusion that produces its own cultural synthesis.

4.3.1.5 Thematic Areas

Table 11

Thematic Areas Martínez Menduiño

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural Identity	Dynamic set of historical and symbolic processes that shape the collective understanding of the national.	Identity is presented as syncretism, understood as a historical fusion that produces a cultural synthesis with its own dynamics. It is also noted that identity can be emptied of content when it is used as a political slogan.
Nation Branding	Strategic instrument of state representation aimed at international positioning.	A lack of institutional articulation for its management is identified, as well as the influence of political contexts in its formulation and replacement. A distinction is made between proposals with an identity based conceptual dimension and those of a more descriptive or graphic nature.
Country Image	External perception of the state constructed from diplomatic actions, political decisions, and internal reality.	The image of Ecuador is linked to its participation in international forums and its positioning as a megadiverse State. It is recognized that external reputation depends on internal coherence and the effective fulfillment of principles.
International projection and external legitimacy	Capacity of the State to sustain a coherent narrative supported by concrete actions in the global arena.	The existence of a clearly defined foreign policy is questioned, indicating that without an explicit strategic orientation, international projection lacks sustained coherence. The difference between declared principles and effective practice is emphasized.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Institutional function of articulating identity, foreign policy, and strategic communication.	Fragmentation between economic and cultural bodies is identified, as well as a lack of clarity regarding the management of the nation brand. It is emphasized that institutional structure is key to avoiding discontinuity and symbolic manipulation.

4.3.1.6 Analysis

The starting point of the interview with Ambassador Mónica Martínez Menduiño is particularly significant when she raises the question of whether a clearly defined foreign policy actually exists. This concern does not appear as a simple rhetorical doubt, but rather as a reflection that arises from diplomatic practice and reveals a perception of a lack of sustained strategic orientation over time. What is stated by the Ambassador engages with what is proposed by Calle Forrest and Caicedo Barreth (2021), who argue that the Ecuadorian state has operated without clear priorities in terms of international cultural promotion and has depended to a great extent on the political will of each administration. Similarly, this perspective is shared by Manfredi Sánchez (2022), who warns that in several countries of the region foreign policy has been affected by institutional weaknesses and the absence of professionalized long-term plans.

At the institutional level, the Ambassador refers to the lack of articulation between the different areas involved in the country's international projection, particularly pointing to the absence of joint work between the cultural and economic sectors. In addition, through her observations, it can be understood that there is no clearly defined leadership of the nation brand abroad. This perception is supported by Pérez Peña et al. (2021), who identify constant institutional discontinuity and weak integration between identity, foreign policy, and state communication. Likewise, authors such as Calle Forrest and Caicedo Barreth (2021) support these statements by showing how the Foreign Ministry, Culture, and Tourism have developed initiatives in parallel, without a common framework that articulates their efforts.

Another relevant aspect of the interview relates to the distance between normative principles and their practical application. The Ambassador questions how, despite the existence of constitutional provisions, Ecuadorian foreign policy has not always effectively reflected these guidelines. This observation coincides with what is proposed by Calle Forrest and Caicedo Barreth (2021), who explain that, despite the formal advances introduced by the Organic Law on Culture of 2016²³, its implementation has not been comprehensive nor accompanied by the necessary operational regulations. In the same direction, Macías (2023) points out that efforts in the cultural field have not been consolidated within a specialized institutional structure.

Likewise, the Ambassador also warns about the risk of emptying cultural identity of meaning when it is reduced to political slogans or adapted to the interests of the government in power. This concern is linked to what is proposed by Manfredi Sánchez (2022), who points out how many positioning campaigns are conditioned by presidential leadership and political contexts. In a similar way, Velásquez (2024) complements this analysis by indicating that initiatives have responded, in several cases, to temporary sectoral objectives. As a result, identity loses historical depth and becomes an instrumental resource, which affects its credibility and stability over time.

In relation to nation branding, the Ambassador mentions how certain processes have been marked by replacements that do not necessarily maintain continuity with previous proposals. This appreciation aligns with what is proposed by Pérez Peña et al. (2021), who argue that different nation brands have been perceived as reflections of the ideological

²³ The Organic Law of Culture, approved in 2016, established the National System of Culture, recognized culture as a strategic area of development, and defined guidelines for the protection of heritage and the exercise of cultural rights; however, its implementation has faced operational and regulatory limitations (Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth, 2021).

orientations of each administration. In the same line, Millingalle (2024) also analyzes that some recent changes have operated under a logic of symbolic substitution, without building on what had previously been developed.

In light of these dynamics, the way in which the Ambassador understands cultural identity becomes particularly valuable when she refers to the idea of a third element with a life of its own as a result of historical syncretism (Martínez Menduño, personal communication, February 19, 2026). Through this perspective, the interviewee proposes a vision of identity as a dynamic synthesis rather than a mechanical sum of isolated elements. This conception finds a clear resonance in Adoum (2000), who describes Ecuadorian identity as an ever-incomplete self-portrait in permanent construction. Quintero and Silva (1991) also point out that the nation has been shaped by historical tensions that seek to articulate a shared collective identity, while Walsh (2007) links these processes to the hierarchies and historical roots inherited from coloniality.

Finally, the interviewee emphasizes that international legitimacy depends on internal coherence. The Ambassador insists that it is not possible to project abroad principles that are not fulfilled at the internal level. This argument aligns with Viktorin et al. (2020), who state that identity must be shaped coherently in order to achieve legitimacy in relation to other nations.

4.3.1.7 Conclusions

The interview with Ambassador Mónica Martínez Menduño allows for an understanding that the debate on cultural identity and nation branding cannot be isolated from the structure of foreign policy itself. Rather than offering closed answers, her intervention introduces a deeper problematization: without an explicit strategic orientation and a clearly defined institutional leadership, efforts of international projection tend to become dispersed, as the issue does not lie solely in how the country is communicated, but in who articulates and sustains that narrative from the state.

Likewise, her reflection also shifts attention toward the relationship between discourse and practice. As the Ambassador makes it possible to identify, the existence of constitutional principles does not in itself guarantee international consistency if these are not translated into verifiable and sustained actions. From this perspective, the country image is configured as the result of concrete diplomatic decisions and cumulative thematic positionings, rather

than as the effect of short-term campaigns. Therefore, external credibility depends on the capacity of the state to symbolically support what it projects through coherent actions.

Finally, the most distinctive contribution of the interview lies in the understanding of Ecuadorian identity as syncretism. By describing it as a historical synthesis with its own dynamics, the Ambassador introduces a reading that goes beyond fragmented or merely descriptive views of the national. This conception suggests that a sustainable international projection requires not only institutional stability, but also a collectively internalized identity capable of sustaining over time a narrative with historical depth and symbolic legitimacy.

4.3.2 Mateo Estrella Durán

4.3.2.1 Interviewee Profile

Mateo Estrella Durán is a lawyer, and at the time of the interview, was serving as Vice Minister of Tourism of Ecuador, after having held the position of Minister of Tourism since August 2024. Prior to this role, he was part of the Ministry as an advisor in areas related to connectivity, investment, and legal components, which allowed him to participate directly in the design and implementation of strategies aimed at strengthening the country's tourism positioning and international image.

His professional trajectory combines experience in public administration, specialized consultancy, and university teaching. He has led consultancy projects focused on the planning and development of tourism, hospitality, and gastronomic initiatives, including feasibility studies, market analysis, evaluation of project outcomes, and the search for financing opportunities. In parallel, he has developed an academic career as a full professor in the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Sciences at the Universidad de Cuenca, where he has also held academic management roles, further strengthening his technical and educational profile within the sector.

From the perspective of this research, his profile offers a valuable basis for examining the relationship between cultural identity, tourism, and nation branding from the standpoint of sectoral implementation. His experience provides valuable insights for analyzing how cultural components are translated into tourism promotion policies and strategies, as well as the challenges involved in maintaining their continuity and narrative coherence over time.

4.3.2.2 Interview

The interview with Vice Minister of Tourism Mateo Estrella Durán was conducted on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, in a virtual format through the Zoom platform. From the beginning of the conversation, the interviewee showed a receptive attitude toward the questions posed, which allowed for a clear and continuous dialogue throughout the interview.

During the meeting, the interviewee responded to the questions from a perspective linked to his experience in the public management of the tourism sector, with interventions characterized by an explanatory style that combined references to institutional practice with reflections derived from his professional trajectory within the Ministry of Tourism.

Overall, the dynamics of the interview reflected a fluid interaction, in which the interviewee's institutional experience was evident in the way he organized and argued his responses.

4.3.2.3 Narrative Description

The interview with the Vice Minister of Tourism of Ecuador, Mateo Estrella Durán, made it possible to address the relationship between cultural identity, tourism promotion, and nation branding from the institutional perspective of the tourism sector. During the conversation, the interviewee explained that the mission of the Ministry is centered on promoting Ecuador as a tourist destination both nationally and internationally, as well as on strengthening competitiveness, quality, and the attraction of investment within the sector. In this context, the interviewee also noted that tourism promotion constitutes a strategic axis of state action aimed at making visible the positive attributes of the country abroad, particularly those related to its natural and cultural heritage.

In relation to this orientation, the official emphasized that Ecuador's tourism strategy seeks to differentiate itself from the model of mass tourism predominant in other destinations. Instead, he explained that the country has chosen to prioritize an approach based on the principles of sustainable tourism, aimed at attracting visitors who remain longer in the territory and generate a greater economic contribution. As he expressed during the conversation, "we are not interested in mass tourism, we rather align ourselves with the principles of sustainable tourism" (Estrella Durán, personal communication, March 3, 2026). From this perspective, the valorization of biodiversity and cultural heritage constitutes a central component of Ecuador's tourism offer.

In this same line, the interviewee highlighted that the country's natural richness is closely linked to its cultural diversity. In this regard, Estrella Durán stated that Ecuador is considered the most megadiverse country per square kilometer in the world, a condition that coexists with the presence of multiple indigenous peoples and nationalities, as well as with diverse material and intangible cultural expressions. According to the official, this historical interaction between ancestral cultures, Andean influences, and colonial legacies has given rise to a process of cultural syncretism that is manifested in popular festivities, artisanal practices, and contemporary expressions that form part of the country's projected image.

On the other hand, Estrella Durán referred to the role that nation branding plays within the international positioning strategy. He indicated that the current brand, launched in 2024 under the concept *Ecuador brilla auténticamente*, was developed through a technical process led by the international firm FutureBrand and conceived as an umbrella brand capable of articulating institutional communication across different sectors. In his view, having a nation brand is fundamental to avoid anonymity in the international tourism market, as it allows for the clear identification of the values associated with the destination. As he stated during the interview, "not having a brand is, in some way, being somewhat anonymous" (Estrella Durán, personal communication, March 3, 2026).

Regarding the implementation of this strategy, the Vice Minister described several concrete actions through which cultural identity is integrated into the country's international promotion. Among these, he mentioned participation in international tourism fairs such as FITUR²⁴, ANATO²⁵, or ITB Berlin²⁶, where Ecuador's presence incorporates both tourism operators²⁷ and representative cultural elements. In these spaces, the official indicated, products associated with cultural heritage are used, such as cacao, coffee, chocolate,

²⁴ FITUR, an abbreviation for International Tourism Fair, is one of the main professional events in the global tourism sector. It is held annually in Madrid and brings together tourist destinations, companies, and public institutions with the purpose of promoting international tourism (IFEMA, 2027).

²⁵ The ANATO Tourism Showcase constitutes the main tourism event in Colombia and one of the most relevant in Latin America. Organized by the Colombian Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies (ANATO), this event brings together travel agencies, destinations, companies, and professionals in the sector to promote tourism products, generate commercial agreements, and strengthen regional cooperation (Vitrina Turística ANATO, 2026).

²⁶ ITB Berlin, from its name in German (*Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin*), is considered one of the most important tourism fairs in the world. It is held annually in Berlin and brings together destinations, companies, and organizations linked to the international tourism sector (ITB, n.d.).

²⁷ A tour operator is understood as the set of companies or intermediaries in the tourism sector responsible for designing, organizing, and marketing travel packages, coordinating services such as transportation, accommodation, and activities for travelers (Tourism Notes, n.d.).

traditional textiles, or toquilla straw hats, accompanied by historical and cultural narratives that reinforce the country's image. Likewise, he noted that in certain cases living cultural expressions are incorporated, such as the *Diablada de Pillaro*, with the aim of conveying a broader cultural experience of Ecuador.

Regarding the observed results, the interviewee indicated that the nation brand has progressively contributed to strengthening the recognition of Ecuador as a destination in the international tourism market. In this sense, Estrella Durán emphasized that during the last year the country received approximately 1.2 million foreign visitors, and that although this result responds to multiple factors, the existence of a coherent visual and narrative identity facilitates the identification of Ecuador by travel agencies, tourism operators, and international audiences. In this regard, he highlighted that tourism functions as a cumulative positioning process, noting that “tourism is not a business of speed, it is a business of endurance” (Estrella Durán, personal communication, March 3, 2026).

Nevertheless, the official also identified certain challenges in the process of consolidating the nation brand. Among these is the need to strengthen its appropriation at the national level, since its use has so far been concentrated mainly on international promotion. In his view, it is necessary to promote internal campaigns that allow citizens to identify with the brand and perceive it as a legitimate representation of the country's cultural diversity.

Finally, Mateo Estrella reflected on the relationship between nation branding and politics, noting that one of the main lessons derived from previous experiences has been the importance of keeping this instrument separate from partisan disputes. In his view, a nation brand should remain “as apolitical as possible” so that it can be considered a “shared national asset”, regardless of the political party in power (Estrella Durán, personal communication, March 3, 2026). From this perspective, he argued that Ecuadorian identity is expressed in multiple historical, cultural, gastronomic, and social dimensions, and therefore the nation brand should function as a broad framework capable of integrating this diversity under a common narrative.

4.3.2.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 12

Preliminary Findings Estrella Durán

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Biodiversity as a foundation of cultural diversity	Ecuador's megabiodiversity is linked to its cultural diversity, integrating nature and culture as elements that strengthen the country's international projection.
Nation branding as a mechanism of international visibility	The nation brand allows for the coherent communication of Ecuador's attributes in the global market and contributes to avoiding anonymity within international tourism competition.
Depoliticization of nation branding as a condition of legitimacy	The effectiveness of the nation brand depends on its appropriation by citizens, which is why its management must be maintained as a national project rather than a governmental tool.
International projection through products with territorial identity	Products such as cacao or coffee can contribute to Ecuador's international projection by incorporating narratives linked to their cultural and historical origin.
International fairs as spaces of cultural projection	Ecuador's participation in international tourism fairs makes it possible to combine destination promotion with the dissemination of products, cultural expressions, and historical narratives of the country.
International positioning as a cumulative process	The construction of Ecuador's international image is presented as a gradual process that depends on sustained efforts over time.

4.3.2.5 Thematic Areas

Table 13

Thematic Areas Estrella Durán

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural Identity	Relationship between biodiversity, historical diversity, and cultural expressions that shape the projected national identity.	Highlights the interaction between ancestral roots, Andean influences, and colonial legacies, reflected in cultural expressions that form part of Ecuador's international image.
Nation Branding	Strategic instrument of state communication aimed at positioning the country in the international market.	Described as an <i>umbrella brand</i> that articulates the communication of different sectors and allows Ecuador to differentiate itself within global tourism competition.
Country Image	Result of international positioning constructed through coherent narratives and visual identities over time.	Indicates that international recognition depends on sustained efforts and on a clear visual identity that facilitates the identification of Ecuador by external audiences.
International projection and external legitimacy	Strategy of international promotion that combines tourism, culture, and products with territorial identity.	Emphasizes participation in international fairs and the use of products such as cacao or coffee to communicate cultural narratives of the country and strengthen its presence abroad.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Institutional responsibility to manage the nation brand and ensure its continuity as a national policy.	Emphasizes the need to keep the nation brand separate from partisan disputes and to promote its appropriation by citizens as a collective asset.

4.3.2.6 Analysis

The interview with Vice Minister Mateo Estrella provides insight into how, from the institutional practice of the tourism sector, Ecuador's cultural identity is articulated with territorial elements that contribute to the country's international projection. During the conversation, the tourism authority emphasizes the relationship between biodiversity and cultural diversity as one of the features structuring the national narrative used in destination promotion. This perspective aligns with Hallo (2020) and Poveda and Gómez (2019), who identify that Ecuador's international representation has tended to be constructed through the association between landscape, biodiversity, and culture. Under this logic, the natural richness of the territory appears not only as an environmental attribute but also as a symbolic component that reinforces the cultural identity projected abroad.

Another relevant element mentioned in the interview is the use of products with territorial identity as instruments of international communication. In various promotional settings, particularly at international tourism fairs, the country relies on products such as cocoa, coffee, and traditional textiles, accompanied by historical and cultural narratives that reinforce Ecuador's image. This approach is consistent with the arguments of Viktorin et al. (2020), who suggest that states tend to mobilize distinctive cultural resources to differentiate themselves within a competitive global environment. Similarly, Anholt (2007) notes that the international projection of countries is strengthened when cultural attributes are coherently integrated into national communication strategies.

Additionally, another central theme addressed during the interview relates to the role of the country brand within the international positioning strategy. The characterization of the brand as a strategic tool to avoid anonymity in the global market represents a point of convergence with the specialized literature. By describing it as an *umbrella brand* capable of articulating communication across different sectors, the official highlights its function as an organizing instrument of the national narrative. This perspective aligns with Dinnie (2008), who defines the country brand as an institutional process that integrates cultural identity, public policy, and communication strategies. At the same time, the reference to the need to manage it independently from partisan disputes relates to the issue identified by Pérez Peña et al. (2021) and Manfredi Sánchez (2022), who warn that in Latin America many country branding initiatives have been subject to political cycles that hinder the consolidation of long-term strategies.

Finally, the interview introduces a relevant temporal dimension for understanding Ecuador's international positioning. During the discussion, the official points out that the construction of a country's image does not depend on immediate results but rather on cumulative processes that require sustained efforts over time. This idea can be interpreted in light of Melissen (2005), who argues that public diplomacy seeks to generate long-term relationships and build international credibility through sustained strategies. Within this framework, the interviewee also emphasizes the importance of citizens recognizing the country brand as a representation of society as a whole, an aspect that several authors have identified as a factor that can strengthen the legitimacy of international projection strategies (Hallo, 2020; Poveda & Gómez, 2019).

4.3.2.7 Conclusions

The interview with the Vice Minister of Tourism provides an institutional perspective on how cultural identity and tourism promotion are integrated into Ecuador's international projection. From a public management standpoint, the discussion shows that the national tourism strategy is based on the combined valorization of biodiversity and cultural diversity, which function as key narrative references to communicate the country's uniqueness in international contexts.

One of the most relevant contributions of the interview relates to the understanding of international positioning as a process of gradual construction. According to the official, the consolidation of a country's image does not depend on immediate results but rather on the sustained accumulation of efforts in terms of promotion, international presence, and coherence in the projected message. In this sense, the tourism strategy is conceived as a long-term endeavor aimed at progressively strengthening Ecuador's recognition within the global market.

In conclusion, the interview with Mateo Durán introduces a reflection on the institutional conditions required to sustain these strategies over time. As the Vice-Minister points out, the effectiveness of the country brand depends on its stability and on its recognition as a project that transcends governmental cycles.

4.3.3 Mónica Malo

4.3.3.1 Interviewee Profile

Mónica Malo is a professional with a background in marketing, sales, strategic communication, and public relations, with more than three decades of experience in the business sector. She currently serves as Executive Director of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation, an organization from which she leads brand positioning processes and the articulation of business networks aimed at strengthening the national productive sector.

Her professional trajectory includes leadership and management roles across different sectors, highlighting her work at Mucho Mejor Ecuador both as Marketing Director and Executive Director, as well as previous positions in brand management and commercial management. Her profile combines capabilities in strategic planning, brand building, institutional communication, and partnership development with a strong orientation toward results and the consolidation of organizational reputation.

The inclusion of her perspective allows the analysis to incorporate the non-state dimension of a country's image. Her experience helps illuminate how institutional discourse relates to the business sector's appropriation of the nation brand and what effects are perceived in terms of positioning and reputation in the international arena.

4.3.3.2 Interview

The interview with Dr. Mónica Malo was conducted in person on Wednesday, March 5, 2026, at the Chamber of Industries building in Cuenca. The conversation developed in a close and reflective tone, characterized by clear explanations and the consistent use of examples drawn from the interviewee's institutional experience, particularly in relation to the positioning of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador label and its connection to country image construction processes.

Overall, the interview addressed the proposed analytical axes with breadth and depth, maintaining an argumentative dialogue throughout the conversation. This facilitated the identification of relevant insights to understand the dynamics between identity, international reputation, and the participation of public and private actors in the country's international projection processes.

4.3.3.3 Narrative Description

During the course of the interview, Dr. Mónica Malo reflected on how Ecuador has constructed its international projection, noting that in many cases it has relied more on its geographical location than on the country's cultural richness. From her perspective, the concept of the *middle of the world* has been recurrently used as a symbolic basis for the design and narrative of different country brands, rather than more strongly appealing to Ecuador's pluriculturality and ancestral traditions. However, she warned that this approach may ultimately displace deeper identity elements linked to the country's cultural diversity and traditions. In this regard, she stated that "the country is not exploiting its cultural richness, but rather its geographical position, and from that geographical position it seeks to move into a cultural dimension" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). Based on this reflection, the interviewee argued that one of Ecuador's key challenges in its international projection lies in constructing a narrative that more consistently integrates its cultural diversity.

In relation to this discussion, the interviewee introduced the case of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador label as an initiative aimed at strengthening national productive identity from the business sector. She explained that this initiative emerged in 2005, driven by five companies from Cuenca seeking to create recognition for products made in the country under standards of quality and legality. Among the founding companies, she mentioned Indurama, Cartopel, Colineal, PASA, and Graiman, which promoted the creation of a label that would identify goods produced in Ecuador through responsible processes. From her perspective, this initiative not only sought to differentiate products in the market but also to foster greater appreciation of Ecuadorian talent. In this context, she emphasized that "the only way to generate territorial development is to believe in the value of national enterprise" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026).

Within this initiative, Malo explained that the label is based on a logic she describes as "we all win," which proposes a model of interconnected benefits within the national economy. As she noted, "when a consumer chooses a product that holds this certification, they obtain a previously evaluated guarantee of quality, which strengthens trust in national production" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). She further added that this process increases demand for local goods and services, thereby generating new employment opportunities and higher revenues for businesses.

As the conversation progressed, the interviewee addressed the issue of Ecuador's country brand and the difficulties that have hindered its consolidation over time. In her view, one of the main obstacles has been the strong dependence of these initiatives on changes in government, which has led to constant interruptions in international positioning strategies. At this point, she noted that "Ecuador achieves an international image, but unfortunately the country brand has been highly dependent on the government in power" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). According to her explanation, this situation has resulted in short cycles of visibility for the different brands developed in the country, making it difficult to build a sustained identity in the international imagination.

In response to this institutional instability, Malo argued that Ecuador's international reputation has been sustained primarily through the quality of its products and the recognition they have achieved in global markets. In this regard, she mentioned examples such as Ecuadorian bananas, shrimp, roses, and cocoa—products that have gained international positioning due to their intrinsic characteristics, beyond the existence of an official country brand. She also highlighted the role played by Ecuadorian athletes and chefs in promoting the country's name abroad. From this perspective, she stated that "a country's reputation does not depend exclusively on whether it has a country brand" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026), emphasizing that production processes, product origin, and the recognition of their actors are key factors in shaping international image.

Similarly, the conversation addressed the internal dimension of national identity and its relationship with the country's external projection. At this point, the interviewee emphasized the importance of strengthening citizens' sense of belonging, arguing that building a strong country image requires Ecuadorians to recognize and value their own capabilities. In this regard, Malo pointed out that one of the main cultural challenges lies in overcoming perceptions that limit confidence in local talent. As she expressed during the interview, "Ecuadorians still need to believe in themselves, to believe in what we are... to tell people 'trust your talent'" (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). Based on this reflection, she stressed that consolidating a strong national identity is a key element in projecting a positive image of the country abroad.

Later in the discussion, the interviewee emphasized the need to rethink the management model of Ecuador's country brand, suggesting that its administration should incorporate greater participation from private sector actors and civil society. In this context, she stated that "I have always told the state that there should be a concession, or at least an

articulation, between the country brand and the private brand” (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). According to her explanation, a shared governance structure would allow for the development of more stable roadmaps aligned with the real needs of the productive sector.

Toward the end of the conversation, Malo reflected on the elements that characterize Ecuadorian identity and their relationship with societal resilience. In this regard, she described Ecuadorians as perseverant and committed to progress, highlighting national pride as a driving force to face the country’s current challenges. In her words, “for me, being Ecuadorian means being proud of where one was born. It means having the desire to move forward... Ecuadorians are resilient, hardworking, and enthusiastic” (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026). This final reflection allowed the interview to close by reconnecting the cultural dimension with Ecuador’s international projection, emphasizing that building a sustainable country image requires both coherent institutional strategies and a shared narrative grounded in confidence in national capabilities.

4.3.3.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 14

Preliminary Findings Malo

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Predominance of geographic over cultural narratives in country brand construction	Ecuador’s international projection has frequently relied on the concept of the <i>middle of the world</i> as the symbolic foundation of country branding, while the country’s cultural richness and diversity have been less emphasized as a central narrative axis.
The Mucho Mejor Ecuador label as a private initiative for productive and identity strengthening	Mucho Mejor Ecuador emerges from the business sector as a mechanism to recognize the quality of national production, promote Ecuadorian talent, and generate shared economic benefits among consumers, firms, employment, and the country.
Instability of the country brand due to its dependence on changing governments	The constant modification of country brands in Ecuador reflects a lack of strategic continuity, which has hindered the consolidation of a sustained national narrative over time.
International reputation based on emblematic products and prominent actors	Ecuador’s international recognition has been primarily built on the quality of products such as bananas, roses, and cocoa, as well as on the positioning achieved by Ecuadorian athletes and chefs abroad.
Importance of sense of belonging in country image construction	The strengthening of Ecuador’s international image also depends on internal processes of collective identification and greater confidence in national talent.
Need for coordinated management between the state and the private sector	The interviewee suggests that a more stable management of the country brand would require coordination mechanisms between the state, the private sector, and other social actors to ensure continuity in positioning strategies.
Ecuadorian identity associated with pride, effort, and resilience	The interviewee describes Ecuadorians as hardworking, perseverant, and proud of their origin, which she considers essential traits for building a stronger national narrative.

4.3.3.5 Thematic Areas

Table 15

Thematic Areas Malo

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural Identity	Symbolic and cultural elements that shape the collective sense of belonging and guide the identity narrative projected abroad.	Predominance of the <i>middle of the world</i> geographical reference in Ecuador's international narrative, while cultural diversity and traditions are less utilized as a basis for identity construction.
Nation Branding	A strategic instrument aimed at positioning the country and its products in international markets.	Frequent changes in the country brand associated with shifts in government, which have limited its continuity. In contrast, the Mucho Mejor Ecuador label appears as a private initiative focused on recognizing productive quality and national talent.
Country Image	International perception constructed from the reputation of products, actors, and narratives associated with the country.	Ecuador's international recognition is primarily linked to emblematic products such as bananas, cocoa, shrimp, and roses, as well as to the visibility of Ecuadorian athletes and chefs.
International projection and external legitimacy	The process through which a country positions itself internationally through narratives, products, and actors that generate external recognition.	Ecuador's projection relies more on the prestige achieved by its products and human talent than on the existence of a consolidated country brand.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	The institutional function of designing, managing, and sustaining the country's positioning strategies over time.	Proposal for coordinated management between the state, the private sector, and civil society to ensure strategic continuity in the administration of the country brand.

4.3.3.6 Analysis

The interview with Director Mónica Malo provides a perspective from the productive sector that allows for a comparison between Ecuador's international projection strategies and the theoretical approaches reviewed in this research. To begin with, one of the most relevant reflections concerns the way in which the country has constructed its positioning narrative. Drawing on her experience in marketing and brand management, the interviewee argues that Ecuador's international communication has repeatedly relied on the concept of the *middle of the world* as a symbolic axis, often displacing the country's pluricultural richness and ancestral traditions within the country brand narrative. This observation is consistent with the arguments of Viktorin et al. (2020), who suggest that culture can serve as a key differentiating resource in states' international positioning strategies. However, as Malo indicates, in the Ecuadorian case this cultural potential has been used in a limited way,

with preference given instead to geographical or landscape-based attributes. This diagnosis aligns with Hallo (2020) and Poveda and Gómez (2019), who identify a tendency to construct the country's international narrative around biodiversity and natural landscapes rather than cultural values.

Another relevant dimension that emerges from the interview relates to the institutional fragility of the country brand. According to the interviewee, the different initiatives developed in Ecuador have been strongly conditioned by changes in government, resulting in short cycles of visibility and a lack of consolidation in the international imagination. This assessment confirms what Pérez Peña et al. (2021) identify as one of the main obstacles to the consolidation of international positioning strategies, namely institutional discontinuity.

Furthermore, the interview provides important insights into how Ecuador's international reputation has been constructed beyond the formal management of the country brand. As highlighted in the discussion, the director argues that the country's recognition abroad has been largely sustained by the quality of emblematic products such as bananas, cocoa, roses, and shrimp, as well as by the visibility achieved by Ecuadorian athletes and chefs. This observation relates to the concept of soft power developed by Nye (2004), according to which a country's international attractiveness can arise from its cultural practices, values, and social expressions. It also aligns with Anholt (2007), who argues that a nation's identity is communicated through everything the country produces and projects externally. In this sense, the interviewee's perspective suggests that Ecuador's international reputation has been largely sustained by these productive and human assets, even in contexts where the institutional country brand has lacked stability.

At the domestic level, the interviewee emphasizes the importance of a sense of belonging and the recognition of national talent as necessary conditions for strengthening the country's international projection. By stating that Ecuadorians must "believe in what they are," she introduces a reflection that resonates with Anderson (2006), who explains that the idea of the nation is sustained through shared narratives and the construction of a collective sense of belonging among those who identify as part of the same national community. Along in the same lines, Hallo (2020) argues that the absence of internal appropriation of the country narrative undermines the effectiveness of international communication strategies. These considerations reinforce the importance of social identification processes as a foundation for international projection.

Finally, based on her experience in coordinating business networks and positioning the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand, Mónica Malo highlights the need to rethink the management model of the country brand in Ecuador through greater coordination between the state and the private sector. From her perspective, a shared governance approach would allow for the development of more stable positioning strategies that are less dependent on political changes. This perspective aligns with Dinnie (2008), who argues that the country brand should be understood as an institutional process involving multiple social actors. A similar logic can be observed in cases such as South Korea, where coordination between the state and the productive sector has been a key factor in sustaining a coherent and competitive national narrative over time (Choi and Kim, 2014).

4.3.3.7 Conclusions

The interview with Mónica Malo introduces a particularly revealing element for understanding the Ecuadorian case. Her experience in managing the Mucho Mejor Ecuador label shows that international positioning processes are not built exclusively through state strategies, but also through dynamics driven by the productive sector. In this sense, her testimony highlights a very specific situation in which, while different country brands have faced difficulties in consolidating over time, initiatives emerging from the business sector have managed to generate recognition and trust around national production. This observation allows for a reconsideration of the role that economic actors can play in shaping the country's international reputation.

Similarly, the interviewee's reflections help explain why, despite the institutional instability of the country brand, Ecuador has managed to maintain a certain level of recognition abroad. According to her perspective, the country's image has been largely sustained by the prestige achieved by its emblematic products and by the international visibility of various Ecuadorian actors. Products such as cocoa, bananas, roses, and shrimp, together with the presence of chefs, athletes, and other cultural figures, have contributed to positioning Ecuador's name beyond official promotional campaigns. This interpretation introduces a relevant perspective for the analysis of country image, suggesting that international reputation can be constructed organically through productive quality and human talent.

Ultimately, the interview offers a reflection that connects the economic and cultural dimensions of international projection. The interviewee's emphasis on the need to "believe

in being Ecuadorian” points to the importance of internal recognition as the foundation of any external positioning strategy. From this perspective, the construction of a solid country image depends not only on communication narratives or branding campaigns, but also on collective confidence in the country’s productive, cultural, and human capacities.

Taken together, her testimony suggests that strengthening Ecuador’s international image requires not only institutional continuity, but also greater coordination between the state, the private sector, and society, as well as a deeper process of valuing national identity.

4.3.4 Natalia Rincón

4.3.4.1 Interviewee Profile

Natalia Rincón del Valle is a lecturer and researcher at the Universidad del Azuay, with a longstanding trajectory in the fields of tourism and communication. She has served as a professor in the School of Tourism and Communication for more than two decades and has held academic coordination roles, including the position of Coordinator of the School of Tourism, which has allowed her to develop a comprehensive perspective that integrates professional training, research, and institutional management.

Her academic profile is closely linked to the analysis of territorial positioning and the construction of narratives through tourism and marketing. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Tourism from the Universidad del Azuay and a master’s degree in communication and marketing from the same institution. In addition, she is currently pursuing her doctoral studies, which further strengthens her research-oriented approach and her capacity to critically address contemporary processes of communication and territorial projection.

Her contribution to the present study lies in the possibility of examining nation branding and cultural identity from an academic perspective centered on territorial narratives. Her viewpoint helps to problematize the ways in which narratives about the country are constructed within the tourism sphere and to identify tensions between promotion, identity, and discursive coherence.

4.3.4.2 Interview

The interview with Magister Natalia Rincón was conducted virtually through the Zoom platform on Wednesday, February 18, 2026. The conversation developed in a fluid and pedagogical tone, characterized by extensive explanations and the constant use of

illustrative examples by the interviewee, who drew on both academic references and comparative cases to support her arguments.

In addition, it should be noted that during the dialogue the exchange alternated between semi-structured questions and brief interventions on my part, with the purpose of clarifying concepts, requesting further explanations, and exploring emerging topics that arose throughout the conversation.

Overall, the interview allowed for an in-depth discussion of the planned thematic axes, maintaining thematic coherence and argumentative continuity, which facilitated a detailed presentation of the interviewee's perspective.

4.3.4.3 Narrative Description

At the beginning of the interview, Natalia Rincón argued that cultural identity, nation branding, and country image are not equivalent categories, although they are related to one another, since each corresponds to different levels of analysis within the international projection of a state. When introducing the topic, she noted that these were “three rather strong and different issues” (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026), thereby highlighting from the outset the need for conceptual differentiation. In this regard, she explained that cultural identity is linked to social processes of belonging and symbolic construction, whereas nation branding constitutes a strategic communication tool that translates certain identity traits into a visual and narrative language. Country image, for its part, corresponds to the perception that is externally consolidated about a nation.

In structural terms, Rincón del Valle argued that cultural identity is a complex phenomenon involving multiple social dimensions that operate simultaneously within a society. In this regard, she noted that culture, although difficult to incorporate, possesses a remarkable capacity for permanence, since “once it enters society, it is what remains the longest over time” (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026). Building on this idea, she illustrated how certain everyday practices may transform into culture once they become collectively internalized. In this sense, she referred to the case of Cuenca and to the habits of cleanliness and recycling adopted by the population, noting that currently “people from Cuenca no longer think about it; they simply do it because it is already culturally rooted” (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026). This example illustrates the transition from external regulation to symbolic internalization as a defining feature of cultural identity.

Within the Ecuadorian context, Rincón pointed out that although the country is territorially small, it displays a wide diversity that has produced multiple identities strongly shaped by regions, ethnic groups, and local characteristics. She also noted that this identity is often expressed through national symbols or heritage icons, such as recognized architecture, UNESCO designations, and others. However, she emphasized as a central point that there is a recurrent conceptual confusion when these elements are equated with the nation's brand. In this regard, she stated that “a national symbol can never be a brand” (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026), thereby underscoring the distinction between the historical-political dimension and the strategic-communicational dimension.

At the institutional level, the interviewee referred to the evolution of Ecuador's nation brand, arguing that the repeated reflects in its visual elements ~~reveal~~ not only a lack of clarity regarding the identity that the country seeks to project but also an absence of strategic continuity. At this point, she maintained that the problem does not necessarily lie in the fact that a brand is created under a specific government, but rather in the way it is treated as an asset of the government in power. In her words, "The brand does not belong to the government of the day. The brand should belong to Ecuadorians" (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026). From this perspective, institutional discontinuity directly affects the possibility of consolidating a stable position over time.

This situation was contrasted with the behavior of global commercial brands such as Coca Cola and Pepsi, which, although they have also undergone transformations in their logos, have maintained recognizable elements without abruptly disrupting the public's perception of them. Within this framework, Rincón proceeded to examine the trajectory of Ecuador's different nation brands, showing that, at the national level, these changes have not always followed a logic of cumulative continuity.

In a first stage, corresponding to 2001, the nation brand was centered on the idea of the equatorial latitude, incorporating a sun inspired by the work of Guayasamín as a symbolic representation of the middle of the world. Likewise, the differentiated use of colors referred to the country's four regions, visually reinforcing the notion of territorial diversity²⁸. Taken

²⁸ See Figure 9 in this document to view the logo corresponding to the year 2001.

together, these elements sought to position Ecuador through its geographical centrality and cultural plurality.

In a second phase, she focused on the 2002 nation brand, which was characterized by a strong reliance on explicit visual resources such as the sun, a fish, mountains, a snow-capped volcano, and tropical birds, all integrated within a single band²⁹. This composition aimed to represent directly the country's biodiversity and natural richness, reinforcing a tangible and easily recognizable tourism identity.

In contrast, the 2010 nation brand opted for a more intangible proposal aimed at appealing to shared values and abstract meanings associated with the country, such as the ideas of love, coexistence, and diversity, thereby reducing the direct representation of the territory in favor of a symbolic narrative³⁰. Nevertheless, the expert warned that regardless of the conceptual proposal adopted, one of the structural problems has been the constant need for explanation in order for the brand to be understood. As she noted, "When a brand has to be explained, it means it is not well designed" (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026). This observation is particularly relevant, as it directly affects the brand's limited permanence in collective memory and the weak sense of attachment that citizens display toward this symbolic construction intended to consolidate itself as a nation brand.

From a reputational perspective, when addressing the issue of country image, the interviewee maintained that it is shaped by multiple variables, among which communication and public relations stand out. In the current context, Rincón pointed out that the rapid circulation of news through the media and social networks has significantly influenced the international perception of Ecuador, particularly due to factors such as security. In line with this idea, Rincón del Valle emphasized that "the best advertising in the world is word of mouth" (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026), highlighting the influence of interpersonal recommendation as a decisive mechanism in reputational construction. In this way, she stressed that the construction of a positive internal perception directly affects external projection.

Regarding the role of the state, from her perspective, the nation brand should be understood as a national asset sustained by clear rules that prevent its replacement. Likewise,

²⁹ To complement the discussion, see Figure 10 in this document.

³⁰ See Figure 11 in this document for greater clarity regarding what has been described.

she emphasized that without a plan for dissemination and internal appropriation, the brand loses its operational capacity. In her words, "If Ecuadorians do not know their brand well, how are they going to project their country?" (Rincón del Valle, personal communication, February 18, 2026). This reflection reinforces the idea that external legitimacy depends on processes of internalization and recognition.

Toward the end of the interview, the phenomenon of territorial fragmentation and the prevalence of local identities were discussed as factors that have complicated the consolidation of a truly integrative nation brand. Finally, the conversation addressed how certain emblematic products, such as cocoa, bananas, and the toquilla straw hat, also contribute to identity projection, particularly when they are articulated through denominations of origin or consolidated associations. In this regard, the interviewee also mentioned the case of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal, which, despite being a private initiative, has managed to position itself as a sign of quality and belonging.

4.3.4.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 16

Preliminary Findings Rincón del Valle

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Structural differentiation between cultural identity, nation branding, and country image	A clear distinction is identified between cultural identity as a historical and social process of belonging, nation branding as a strategic communication tool, and country image as the resulting external perception.
Cultural identity as the structural foundation of national projection	Once collectively internalized, culture acquires permanence and shapes stable social behaviors, thus constituting an indispensable foundation for any attempt to construct a nation brand.
Confusion between national symbols and nation branding	A recurring tendency is identified to equate historical or heritage elements with state branding strategies, revealing a lack of conceptual delimitation between the identity dimension and the communicational dimension.
Strategic discontinuity in the management of the nation brand	Repeated changes in the visual and narrative elements of the nation brand associated with different governments are observed, which hinders the consolidation of a stable and sustained positioning over time.
The nation brand as a national asset rather than a governmental asset	The need to institutionalize the nation brand as a national asset, detached from political cycles, is emphasized in order to guarantee coherence and strategic continuity.
Internal appropriation as a condition for external legitimacy	The effectiveness of nation brand projection depends on citizens' knowledge and recognition of it; without processes of social internalization, international projection loses symbolic effectiveness.
Influence of communication and reputational factors on country image	The international image of Ecuador is shaped by variables such as media coverage, security conditions, and interpersonal recommendations, demonstrating that external reputation does not depend solely on institutional discourse but also on broader social and media dynamics.

4.3.4.5 Thematic Areas

Table 17

Thematic Area Rincón del Valle

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural identity	Historical process of symbolic construction and collective belonging underpins national projection.	Its structural and internalized character is emphasized, clearly distinguishing it from nation branding and identifying it as the foundation of any positioning strategy.
Nation branding	Strategic state communication tool aimed at international positioning.	Frequent confusion with national symbols is noted, and the lack of institutional continuity in its management in the Ecuadorian case is identified.
Country image	External perception is shaped by communicational and contextual variables.	It is emphasized that factors such as media coverage, security conditions, and interpersonal recommendations decisively influence international reputation.
International projection and external legitimacy	The capacity of the state to sustain a coherent narrative that is socially legitimized toward external audiences.	It is highlighted that without internal appropriation, the nation brand loses operational effectiveness and legitimacy in international contexts.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Institutional responsibility guarantees strategic continuity and coherence.	The need to detach the nation brand from successive governments and consolidate it as a national asset is emphasized.

4.3.4.6 Analysis

The distinction that Natalia Rincón del Valle establishes between cultural identity, nation branding, and country image is central to understanding the conceptual tensions present in the Ecuadorian case. By noting that these are differentiated yet related categories, her argument aligns with the work of Dinnie (2008), who defines nation branding as the strategic articulation of cultural elements, public policies, and institutional actions, rather than national identity itself. Similarly, Aronczyk (2013) warns that country image is ultimately configured at the perceptual level, that is, through the interpretations made by external audiences. In this way, the distinction raised during the interview reinforces the need to separate the structural dimension of identity from the strategic dimension of nation branding and the relational dimension of country image, a differentiation that in practice has often been blurred in the Ecuadorian context.

Similarly, when the interviewee emphasizes that culture, once internalized, possesses a remarkable capacity for permanence, her reflection resonates with Geertz's (1973) conception of culture as a system of symbols and shared meanings that guide social action. Likewise, the idea that identity is constructed and reproduced through collective practices echoes Anderson's (2006) description of the nation as an imagined community sustained by

shared narratives and representations. In the analysis of the Ecuadorian case, authors such as Adoum (2000) and Quintero & Silva (1991) characterized national identity as an unfinished and dynamic process, shaped by historical and regional tensions. From this perspective, Rincón's assertion helps to demonstrate that cultural identity cannot be reduced to an instrumental campaign resource; rather, it constitutes the symbolic foundation upon which any strategy of international projection must be built.

The warning regarding the confusion between national symbols and nation branding is particularly relevant in the Ecuadorian context. Pérez Peña et al. (2021) note that early nation-brand initiatives sought to organize a fragmented image through simplified iconography and direct territorial representations. However, this effort to condense diversity into visual symbols did not necessarily imply the existence of a sustained narrative strategy. In this sense, Rincón's observation that a national symbol cannot become a brand suggests that the use of historical or heritage references does not in itself constitute a coherent international positioning policy, but rather requires a strategic translation aligned with clear institutional objectives.

The issue of strategic continuity represents another significant point of convergence. Documentary analysis has shown that transformations of Ecuador's nation brand have been marked by frequent replacements associated with political cycles. Pérez Peña et al. (2021) and Velásquez (2024) identify a logic of institutional discontinuity that prevents the consolidation of cumulative positioning, which aligns with Rincón's critique regarding the evident lack of clarity and strategic continuity in the management of Ecuador's nation brand.

In relation to this institutional dimension, the idea of conceiving the nation brand as a national asset rather than a governmental asset finds support in the work of Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth (2021), who emphasize that in the Ecuadorian case many actions have depended on the political will of the government in power rather than on long-term structural planning. Rincón's insistence on detaching the brand from political cycles reinforces the need to consolidate normative and strategic frameworks capable of guaranteeing coherence and permanence over time.

Furthermore, the relationship between internal appropriation and external projection is also supported by the reviewed literature. Hallo (2020) argues that the absence of a sense of civic belonging weakens the international message, while Azpíroz & Rodríguez-Espínola (2024) warn that excluding citizens from the process diminishes the exportable identity

potential. Similarly, Poveda & Gómez (2019) note that the absence of shared values limits the social appropriation of the brand. In this context, Rincón's reflection on the impossibility of projecting internationally what is not internally recognized confirms that external legitimacy depends on prior processes of internalization and social recognition.

Finally, the reference to factors such as security, media circulation, and interpersonal recommendation makes it possible to connect the interview with broader approaches to reputation and public diplomacy. Melissen (2005) and Nye (2004) emphasize that legitimacy and attractiveness decisively influence the international position of states. Moreover, in line with Aronczyk (2013), country image is not constructed exclusively by the state apparatus but rather emerges through the interaction between official discourse and social reception. From this perspective, Rincón's position contributes to understanding that Ecuador's international reputation is shaped by communicational dynamics that do not depend solely on direct governmental action.

4.3.4.7 Conclusions

The interview with Natalia Rincón del Valle provides a decisive conceptual clarification for the development of this study by clearly distinguishing cultural identity, nation branding, and country image as distinct yet interrelated levels of analysis. This precision is not merely terminological but structural, as it allows for an understanding that the problems observed in the Ecuadorian case do not stem solely from communicational shortcomings but from a persistent confusion between historical, symbolic, and strategic dimensions. In this sense, her contribution helps to organize the interpretative framework and strengthens the internal coherence of the research.

From another perspective, her emphasis on culture as an internalized phenomenon with long-term permanence introduces a fundamental criterion for evaluating the sustainability of any positioning strategy. By arguing that the nation brand should be conceived as a national asset rather than a governmental asset, the interviewee shifts the debate toward issues of institutionalization and social appropriation. The effectiveness of international projection does not depend solely on design or promotional narratives but on the capacity to generate internal recognition and strategic continuity over time.

Added to this is her interpretation of the communicational and reputational factors that shape country image. Media circulation, security conditions, and interpersonal recommendations demonstrate that international perception is formed within a broader

framework that extends beyond direct state action. This understanding broadens the scope of the analysis by showing that sustainable international projection requires not only conceptual clarity and strong institutional frameworks but also social legitimacy and consistency in the everyday experiences that support the national narrative.

4.3.5 Cecilia Ugalde

4.3.5.1 Interviewee Profile

Cecilia Ugalde is a lecturer, researcher, and consultant in marketing and communication, with an extensive career in higher education. She currently serves as a full professor at the Universidad del Azuay, where she has taught courses related to digital marketing, branding, advertising, communication campaigns, and research. She has also held university management positions, including Director of the School of Communication and Advertising and Director of the Department of International Relations.

She holds a PhD in Marketing from the Universitat de València and a master's degree in advertising and public relations from Marquette University. Her research lines focus on the analysis of social networks, branding, and educational communication. In addition, she participates in international projects, including initiatives linked to the Erasmus+ program, and maintains a presence in the public sphere as an opinion columnist.

Her contribution to this research is particularly relevant because it provides a basis for an examination of the construction and dissemination of country image from the perspective of strategic communication and narratives, especially within digital environments. Drawing on her experience, it becomes possible to analyze how institutional discourses are sustained within the contemporary media ecosystem, as well as their impact on the coherence of international projection.

4.3.5.2 Interview

The interview with Dr. Cecilia Ugalde was conducted in person at the Universidad del Azuay on Monday, February 23, 2026. The meeting took place in a close academic setting, characterized by a fluid exchange in which the interviewee's responses stood out for their conceptual clarity and critical orientation toward the country's communicational reality.

Unlike other conversations previously conducted, this discussion maintained a more direct rhythm, with concise yet substantial argumentative interventions, in which Dr. Ugalde drew on concrete examples, references to cultural indicators, and analogies related to

strategic marketing in order to support her arguments. The interview progressed gradually from the definition of cultural identity toward more structural reflections on national narrative, nation branding, and country image, allowing connections to be established between theory, institutional practice, and political context.

The exchange also made it possible to introduce implicit comparisons with the case of South Korea, particularly regarding narrative coherence and internal transformation, thereby contributing insights that enrich the comparative analysis developed in this research. Overall, the interview became a space for critical reflection that enabled a deeper examination of the relationship between identity, strategic communication, and international projection from a perspective grounded in the Ecuadorian context.

4.3.5.3 Narrative Description

From the beginning of the dialogue, Cecilia Ugalde positioned cultural identity as a central element within any communicational process. In her words, identity is present in “basically everything we do” (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026). Building on this statement, she elaborated on a distinction that shaped the development of the conversation: the difference between what we truly are as a society and what we identify with or aspire to become. She explained that identity incorporates an aspirational dimension, as it not only reflects an existing reality but also a desired horizon. In this sense, national identity is configured between “what we are” and “what we would like to be,” confirming its dynamic rather than static character.

To illustrate this constant transformation, the interviewee referred to Hofstede’s cultural index, noting that Ecuador moved from a score of 8 out of 100 in individualism to 24 within a relatively short period (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026). This variation was interpreted as a significant shift from the collectivism historically associated with Ecuadorian identity. From her perspective, collectivism is not a minor characteristic, as it is linked to community-oriented values that are even reflected in the Constitution through the recognition of diversity and the social construction of the state. Nevertheless, she warned that this normative proclamation does not always translate into state decisions consistent with such identity, revealing a gap between official discourse and political practice.

Regarding narratives, Ugalde argued that the national narrative should be grounded in cultural identity. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that a gap often exists between what a

country claims to be and what it actually projects. This discrepancy becomes particularly problematic when transferred to the international sphere, since country image depends on internal coherence that grants it legitimacy. In this regard, she stated that “you cannot project outward something that you are not internally” (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026), emphasizing that communication lacking a foundation in reality ultimately becomes an empty promise.

When referring to the case of South Korea, the interviewee clarified that she is not a specialist on the country and that her observations were based on conversations with a former student who had pursued graduate studies there. From this exchange, she suggested that South Korea’s international positioning appears to respond to greater coherence between internal transformation and cultural projection. However, she also pointed out that “not everything that glitters is gold” (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026), indicating that even countries considered successful project selective versions of themselves and do not necessarily expose their structural problems. This observation highlights that selectivity is inherent to narrative construction, but it cannot be based on realities that do not exist.

Regarding the management of nation branding in Ecuador, Ugalde was critical of institutional discontinuity. She argued that each administration has tended to treat the brand as its own project, generating constant ruptures and the loss of accumulated positioning. At one point during the interview, she even questioned whether these repeated changes might be interpreted as “a business deal,” given the resources invested in each transition (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026). From her perspective, this logic turns the brand into an instrument of government rather than a national asset, thereby weakening its continuity and legitimacy.

Along the same lines, she introduced a strategic reflection by stating that when a brand does not work, the immediate response should not be to replace it, but rather to ask why it is not functioning. In her words, the issue is not simply that it “does not differentiate itself” (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026), but understanding the reasons behind that lack of differentiation. This observation implies examining whether cultural coherence, clarity of positioning, and consistency in communication function exist before proceeding with a structural change.

Another relevant aspect was her recognition that every brand operates through a process of selection. Ugalde explicitly mentioned the concept of *spin* to describe the way in which, in public relations, a truth can be presented from a particular angle without necessarily lying, though not revealing the entire truth either (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026). Nevertheless, she warned that the line is crossed when the narrative lacks support in the country's real experience. In the current context of social media, she explained that if a country projects certain characteristics that visitors do not encounter in reality, they may feel deceived and publicly expose this inconsistency. Today, anyone can comment, share experiences, and amplify perceptions, accelerating the collapse of inconsistent narratives and directly affecting international credibility.

Regarding narrative actors, she emphasized that the construction of the national narrative is not exclusive to the state. It includes politicians, civil society, community leaders, academics, and multiple voices that shape the collective experience. From this perspective, narrative legitimacy depends on its capacity to integrate diverse actors rather than remaining a purely top-down construction. She also highlighted the importance of diagnoses produced by specialists in fields such as anthropology and sociology, since the construction of a solid narrative requires a deep understanding of cultural and historical realities.

Toward the end of the interview, she emphasized the lack of civic and cultural awareness as one of the main obstacles to consolidating a coherent country image. She argued that as a society there is not always sufficient clarity about how what we are is projected or about the shared responsibility involved in that projection. She also addressed the use of folkloric elements in campaigns, noting that incorporating traditional elements is not problematic as long as they are handled ethically and generate tangible benefits for the communities represented. At this point, she referred to the principle of "no one left behind," associated with the inclusive approach of the 2030 Agenda, to emphasize that identity projection should neither exclude nor instrumentalize historically marginalized sectors (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026).

Finally, when defining what it means to be Ecuadorian, she described the country as "an undervalued but profoundly rich country" and as a "fruit of contradictions" (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026). For her, Ecuadorian identity emerges from historical and cultural contrasts that, despite their tensions, merge and allow society to move forward. This reflection closed the interview by returning to the idea of identity as a dynamic

and complex process whose international projection can only be sustained when there is coherence between internal lived realities and the messages communicated externally.

4.3.5.4 Preliminary Findings

Table 18

Preliminary Findings Ugalde

Preliminary Finding	Descriptive Summary of the Finding
Cultural identity as a dynamic construction between reality and aspiration	National identity is not reduced to a fixed essence but is configured through a constant tension between what a society is and what it aspires to project. This duality explains its mutable character and its direct influence on processes of international projection.
Transformation of collectivism and the gap between constitutional discourse and state practice	The increase in individualism within cultural indicators reflects a reconfiguration of values traditionally associated with Ecuadorian collectivism. This transformation contrasts with the constitutional discourse that proclaims diversity and community, revealing a distance between declared identity and effective state decisions.
The need for structural coherence between identity, narrative, and projection	The national narrative should emerge from cultural identity rather than replace it. Without internal coherence, the nation brand loses legitimacy and becomes an empty representation that cannot be sustained in the international sphere.
Institutional discontinuity and the fragility of nation brand positioning	The management of the nation brand in Ecuador has been marked by ruptures between administrations, preventing the consolidation of stable positioning. The brand has been treated as a governmental instrument rather than a national asset, weakening its strategic continuity.
Strategic diagnosis as a prerequisite for brand change	A lack of differentiation should not be addressed through immediate replacement but through structural analysis that examines cultural coherence, clarity of positioning, and communication consistency. The absence of such diagnosis perpetuates symbolic weakness.
Narrative selectivity, the limits of <i>spin</i> , and exposure in the digital environment	Although every brand operates through processes of selection and discursive framing, it cannot be sustained through a narrative disconnected from real experience. In the context of social media, inconsistencies quickly become visible, directly affecting international credibility.
Multi-actor construction, civic awareness, and an inclusive approach to projection	The national narrative is not exclusive to the state but is shaped by multiple social actors. Its legitimacy depends on processes of internal appropriation, interdisciplinary diagnoses, and an inclusive approach aligned with the principle of leaving no one behind.

4.3.5.5 Thematic Areas

Table 19

Thematic Areas Ugalde

Thematic Area	Description of the Area	Contributions from the Interview
Cultural Identity	A dynamic construction that articulates historical memory, social values, and the aspirational dimension of the political community.	Identity is emphasized as a tension between what a society is and what it aspires to become, highlighting its mutable character. The example of Hofstede's index illustrates a transformation in Ecuadorian collectivism and reveals a gap between declared identity and state practice.
Nation Branding	A strategic communication instrument aimed at translating identity traits into international positioning.	Institutional discontinuity in its management is questioned, as well as the tendency to replace it without prior diagnosis. It is noted that the lack of differentiation stems from problems of cultural coherence rather than solely from issues of visibility.
Country Image	A perceptual outcome shaped by lived experience, media coverage, and the digital circulation of narratives.	It is emphasized that no strategy can be sustained without coherence between discourse and reality. In the social media environment, inconsistencies quickly become visible, directly affecting international credibility.
International Projection and External Legitimacy	The capacity to sustain a coherent narrative that is socially validated and aligned with real internal processes.	It is argued that "you cannot project outward what you are not internally," establishing internal coherence as a condition for external legitimacy. The contrast with South Korea reinforces the importance of alignment between internal transformation and cultural projection.
Role of the state in Symbolic Construction	The institutional function of guaranteeing strategic continuity and multi-actor articulation in national projection.	The logic of treating nation branding as a project of the government of the day is criticized, proposing instead that it be understood as a national asset. Likewise, the need for interdisciplinary diagnoses and an inclusive approach that avoids the instrumentalization of cultural identities is highlighted.

4.3.5.6 Analysis

Understanding cultural identity as a tension between what a society is and what it aspires to project allows the Ecuadorian case to be examined from a dynamic perspective. When Ugalde states that identity lies between what we "are" and what we "would like to be" (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026), she moves the discussion beyond any fixed or essentialist interpretation. This approach aligns with the argument advanced by Viktorin et al. (2020), who contend that through culture, states communicate not only who they are but also which values they represent and which aspirations they project internationally. Similarly, Anholt (2007) and Nye (2004) understand culture as a process in constant transformation that directly influences the way a nation positions itself on the global

stage. Within this framework, identity emerges as an open process shaped by continuous adjustments and redefinitions.

At the same time, the observation regarding the decline of collectivism according to Hofstede's index should not be interpreted as an isolated datum but rather as an indication of a broader transformation in the way Ecuadorian society conceives itself. This variation resonates with the notion of a national identity that historically has not reached definitive consolidation. Quintero & Silva (1991) describe Ecuador as a nation still in the process of formation, while Adoum (2000) conceives it as a self-portrait that remains perpetually incomplete. In this sense, the transition from certain communal values toward more individualized forms does not break with the country's historical identity but rather confirms its dynamic and tension-filled character.

Likewise, the distance between proclaimed identity and practiced identity becomes particularly relevant when examining the institutional dimension. The Constitution recognizes cultural diversity as a structural feature of the state; however, this recognition does not always translate into coherent decisions or sustained policies over time. Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth (2021) note that Ecuador's cultural normative framework has at times lacked consistent operational mechanisms, remaining conditioned by the administrative priorities of the moment. This observation reinforces the concern expressed by Ugalde regarding the lack of correspondence between multicultural discourse and effective state practice.

In the sphere of international projection, internal coherence emerges as a structural requirement. The idea that it is impossible to project externally what is not sustained internally is supported by Viktorin et al. (2020), who link international legitimacy and trust to identity consistency. Similarly, Hallo (2020) argues that the absence of citizen appropriation weakens the external message, while Azpíroz & Rodríguez-Espínola (2024) warn that excluding internal cultural plurality undermines the legitimacy of nation branding. For this reason, international projection cannot be conceived solely as a communicational exercise but rather as the extension of internal processes of recognition and cohesion.

By contrast, the comparison with South Korea introduces a complementary perspective that highlights the role of narrative selection. Although Ugalde's reference is based on indirect academic experience rather than specialized expertise on the case, her observation finds support in studies such as that of K. Kim & Bae (2017), which demonstrate

that South Korea's cultural strategy is based on the conscious selection of identity traits for global export. This practice corresponds to what Hall (1990) describes as the deliberate construction of cultural representation. However, selection does not imply complete invention. The sustainability of a narrative depends on the existence of a recognizable anchoring in the social reality that supports it, a point that Ugalde herself emphasized when warning that external projection loses credibility when it does not correspond to internal experience (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026).

In the Ecuadorian case, discontinuity in the management of the nation brand has been documented by Pérez Peña et al. (2021), Velásquez (2024), and Millingalle (2024), who identify a tendency to redefine symbols and messages with each change of administration. This dynamic undermines the symbolic accumulation necessary to consolidate positioning. The reflection on the need to understand why a brand fails to differentiate itself before replacing it is linked to the contrast between both contexts. J. Y. Lee (2021) shows that in South Korea brand changes were preceded by public consultations and strategic evaluations, whereas in Ecuador some transformations did not strengthen emotional connections or cultural coherence. In this regard, the warning that replacing a brand without prior diagnosis merely reproduces the problem rather than solving it aligns directly with Ugalde's argument (personal communication, February 23, 2026).

Furthermore, the notion of strategic framing associated with the concept of spin can be interpreted through Hall's (1990) theory of representation, which maintains that every national narrative necessarily involves processes of selection. Nevertheless, the contemporary digital environment complicates this practice. Appadurai (1996) explains that identities circulate within media landscapes subject to constant reinterpretation, and Jin (2024) demonstrates how digital publics actively validate or challenge official narratives. In this context, coherence is not merely a discursive quality but a condition that can be verified through shared experience.

Similarly, the multi-actor dimension of symbolic construction is also supported by literature. Macías (2023) argues that a comprehensive projection policy requires the participation of both the private sector and civil society, while Azpíroz & Rodríguez-Espínola (2024) warn that marginalizing internal actors weakens the exportable identity potential. The reference to the principle of leaving no one behind, linked to the 2030 Agenda, introduces an ethical dimension that broadens the discussion: international projection should

not instrumentalize cultural diversity but rather integrate it through an inclusive and sustainable perspective.

To conclude this analysis, the characterization of Ecuador as the result of historical contrasts allows the complexity underlying the entire discussion to be synthesized. Adoum (2000) conceives the national as a permanent question, while Walsh (2007) analyzes identity through the tensions inherited from colonial processes and enduring historical hierarchies. Within this framework, defining Ecuadorian identity as shaped by contradictions does not imply instability but rather historical density. Rather than a homogeneous essence, it is a tension-filled construction that continues to be reformulated and whose international projection can only be sustained if it acknowledges that complexity rather than simplifying it.

4.3.5.7 Conclusions

The interview with Cecilia Ugalde provides a strategic reading of cultural identity as a dynamic process that oscillates between reality and aspiration and, for this reason, cannot be treated as a fixed or merely decorative resource within institutional communication. By situating identity between what a society is and what it seeks to become, the interviewee shifts the discussion toward the coherence between social practice and public narrative, emphasizing that international projection only acquires meaning when there is verifiable correspondence between what is experienced internally and what is communicated externally.

At the level of nation branding, her contribution emphasizes that the main weakness does not lie solely in a lack of visibility or differentiation, but rather in the absence of diagnosis and strategic continuity. The tendency to replace brands with each administration disrupts the symbolic accumulation necessary to consolidate positioning and demonstrates that the brand has been managed as a governmental instrument rather than as a national asset. From this perspective, before modifying the sign itself, it is essential to understand the causes of its limited performance by evaluating cultural coherence, clarity of purpose, and communicational consistency.

Finally, the interview introduces a crucial criterion for the contemporary context: narrative sustainability depends on its capacity to withstand public validation within the digital ecosystem. The notion of *spin* acknowledges that every narrative involves processes of selection and framing; however, its legitimacy is lost when it lacks grounding in real

experience or when it instrumentalizes identities without generating benefits for the communities represented. Consequently, Ugalde argues that the construction of country images must be multi-actor and inclusive, grounded in interdisciplinary diagnoses and sustained through shared responsibility, so that international projection does not simplify the complexity of the country but rather communicates it with coherence and ethical awareness.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Mapping

This section presents and discusses the results obtained from the analytical process developed throughout the research. In line with the qualitative approach adopted and the interpretative orientation based on hermeneutic analysis, the findings are organized according to the methodological triangulation strategy outlined in the research design.

As explained in the methodology chapter, triangulation allows the examination of a single phenomenon through the combination of different sources of information in order to contrast perspectives and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the object of study. In this case, this strategy was structured around three analytical dimensions: the review of specialized theoretical literature, the documentary analysis of campaigns and strategic documents, and the interviews conducted with experts linked to public diplomacy, cultural management, and nation branding strategies.

Based on this logic, the chapter is organized into three main sections. First, a theoretical analysis table is presented, which synthesizes the main conceptual contributions identified in the theoretical framework and the state of the art, organizing them around three analytical axes: cultural identity, instruments of international projection, and country image.

Second, a documentary analysis matrix corresponding to the cases of South Korea and Ecuador is developed. This section examines how each country articulates its cultural identity, constructs intercultural narratives through nation branding strategies, develops processes of institutionalization through instruments of public and cultural diplomacy, and projects its image on the international stage.

Finally, the chapter presents the results derived from the interviews conducted with specialists, whose testimonies make it possible to complement and contrast the findings identified at the theoretical and documentary levels.

The articulation of these three analytical dimensions makes it possible to identify convergences, divergences, and contextual factors in the ways in which South Korea and Ecuador manage the relationship between cultural identity and international projection. Based on this comparative analysis, the chapter also seeks to reflect on the lessons and

insights derived from the experiences of both countries in the construction of their country image.

5.2 Theoretical Analysis

In order to systematize the main conceptual approaches addressed in the theoretical framework and the state of the art, a theoretical analysis matrix was developed to organize the contributions of different authors around the analytical axes that structure this research. The purpose of this matrix is to synthesize the central ideas that explain the relationship between cultural identity, the instruments through which states project this identity externally, and the construction of country image on the international stage.

The organization of this matrix follows the conceptual logic that underpins the study, in which cultural identity constitutes the symbolic foundation upon which states build national narratives and strategies of external projection. Based on this foundation, various instruments such as soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding strategies enable these identity elements to be channeled toward international audiences. Ultimately, these dynamics influence the configuration of country image and the international positioning of states.

The following table synthesizes the main theoretical contributions that support this conceptual relationship.

Table 20
Theoretical Analysis

Cultural Identity	Instruments of International Projection	Country Image / International Projection
Culture can be understood as a system of shared values, symbols, and practices that generate a sense of belonging within a community (Nye, 2004).	States can project their cultural identity through soft power, understood as the ability to influence other actors through cultural attraction and values (Nye, 2004).	Country image is constructed through cultural narratives that are strategically disseminated, although their interpretation ultimately depends on international audiences (Aronczyk, 2013).
The nation can be interpreted as an imagined community constructed through shared narratives that allow individuals to identify with a national collective (Anderson, 2006).	Public diplomacy constitutes an institutional instrument to generate connections with foreign audiences and strengthen the international credibility of states (Melissen, 2005).	Cultural narratives make it possible to represent a country's identity in intercultural contexts where meanings and symbols are constantly negotiated (Hall, 1990).
Cultural identity can be strategically managed by states in order to achieve political, economic and diplomatic objectives (Viktorin et al., 2020).	Cultural diplomacy facilitates the exchange of ideas, values, and traditions between societies, contributing to the strengthening of international relations (Cummings, 2009).	In a globalized context, national identities circulate within media landscapes where narratives compete for visibility and international recognition (Appadurai, 1996).
The construction of national narratives involves balancing cultural authenticity with the need to project identities that are understandable to global audiences (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2020).	Nation branding integrates culture, public policies, and strategic communication to project a coherent national narrative (Dinnie, 2008).	A coherent cultural projection strategy strengthens international positioning and differentiation between countries (Anholt, 2007).
In some national contexts, cultural identity is constructed through the combination of historical heritage and modernity, generating cohesive identity narratives (Chang, 2022).	These projection strategies also seek to strengthen the international reputation of the state through values such as reliability and institutional credibility (Choi & Kim, 2014).	International positioning depends on the coherence between cultural identity, public policies, and global communication strategies (Dinnie, 2008).

Based on the table presented, it is possible to observe that cultural identity constitutes the starting point for understanding the processes through which states project themselves internationally. From an anthropological perspective, Geertz (1973) argues that culture can be understood as a system of shared meanings that shapes the sense of belonging within a community. In a same manner, Anderson (2006) argues that nations are constructed as imagined communities articulated through symbolic narratives that generate cohesion among individuals who, even without knowing each other directly, share a collective identity.

Building upon this cultural foundation, several authors emphasize that states can strategically manage their identity in order to project it externally. Viktorin et al. (2020) note that national identity can become a political, economic, and diplomatic resource when it is articulated within strategies of international projection. Nevertheless, this management involves navigating certain tensions, particularly between the preservation of local cultural expressions and the need to construct narratives that are understandable and appealing to global audiences, as highlighted by Bolin & Ståhlberg (2020).

Within this context, various institutional instruments enable the channeling of cultural identity into the international sphere. The concept of soft power proposed by Nye (2004) highlights the capacity of states to influence other actors through cultural attraction and shared values. Complementarily, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy function as mechanisms through which cultural elements are translated into processes of communication, exchange, and international cooperation. Likewise, nation branding strategies analyzed by Dinnie (2008) seek to integrate culture, public policy, and strategic communication in order to project a coherent national narrative.

These dynamics ultimately influence the construction of the country's image, understood as the set of perceptions that international audiences develop about a nation. Authors such as Aronczyk (2013) and Hall (1990) emphasize that this image emerges from cultural narratives circulating within intercultural spaces where meanings are constantly reinterpreted. In a globalized context, as Appadurai (1996) suggests, these narratives are also embedded within mediascapes in which national identities compete for visibility and international recognition.

Taking together, these contributions make it possible to understand that the international projection of a country depends on the coherent articulation between its cultural identity, the institutional instruments that enable its external projection, and the narratives through which this identity is communicated to international audiences. This conceptual relationship constitutes the analytical foundation upon which the comparative analysis of South Korea and Ecuador will be developed in the following sections.

5.3 Documentary Analysis

Once the conceptual foundations guiding this research have been established, the next step is to examine how these approaches are reflected in concrete policy experiences related to cultural policy and international projection. To this end, official nation branding

campaigns, institutional documents related to cultural diplomacy and foreign policy, and academic studies concerning the cases of South Korea and Ecuador were reviewed.

The analysis of these sources made it possible to identify patterns in the way both countries articulate their cultural identity within their international positioning strategies. In order to organize this information systematically, a comparative matrix was developed that compiles the main documentary findings and structures around four axes of analysis: cultural identity, intercultural narratives, institutionalization, and country image and outcomes.

Each of these axes corresponds to dimensions that allow for the observation of how states translate the symbolic elements of their identity into concrete strategies of communication, cultural diplomacy, and the management of their international reputation. While the cultural identity axis makes it possible to identify the values and historical references that underpin each country's national narrative, the intercultural narratives axis shows how these elements are communicated to external audiences. In turn, the institutionalization axis examines the degree of coordination among public policies and the institutions responsible for implementing these strategies. Finally, the country image and outcomes axis captures the effects of these policies on international positioning.

The comparison between South Korea and Ecuador is particularly relevant because both countries present very different trajectories in the relationship between cultural identity and international projection. While the South Korean case is often cited as an example of strategic articulation between culture, public diplomacy, and the creative industries, the Ecuadorian case reflects a more recent process that is still in the stage of consolidating its international narrative.

The following table synthesizes the main elements identified in the sources analyzed for each of the case studies.

Table 21
Documentary Analysis

Axis of Analysis	South Korea	Ecuador
Cultural Identity	Confucian values of hierarchy, discipline, and social harmony (Seth, 2020). Integration between tradition and accelerated modernization, described as <i>compressed modernity</i> (Chang, 2022). Historical resilience that strengthens national cohesion (Seth, 2020).	National identity in the process of construction with territorial and symbolic fractures (Quintero & Silva, 1991). Predominance of local identities or <i>patrias chicas</i> over a consolidated national narrative (Adoum, 2000). Influence of historical structures of coloniality (Walsh, 2007).
Intercultural Narratives	Distinction between nation branding and tourism branding in international projection (Choi & Kim, 2014). Global cultural diffusion through the hallyu phenomenon and the creative industries (Jin, 2024).	Frequent changes in nation branding that hinder narrative continuity (Pérez Peña et al., 2021). Narrative mainly centered on biodiversity and tourism (Hallo, 2020; Poveda & Gómez, 2019).
Institutionalization	Coordination between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, KOCIS, and embassies for international cultural projection (Macías, 2023). Legal framework that supports public diplomacy (J. Y. Lee, 2021).	Weak coordination among the ministries of culture and tourism (Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth, 2021). Cultural diplomacy in an incipient stage with discontinuous actions (Macías, 2023).
Country Image and Outcomes	Global positioning driven by cultural industries and digital diplomacy (Jagodzinski, 2025). Economic impact of hallyu on cultural exports (S. T. Lee, 2022) .	International image is mainly associated with biodiversity and tourism (Future Brand, 2024). Gap between productive potential and international reputational value (Shanmuganathan & Bryzghalov, 2025).

Based on the information systematized in the documentary matrix, it is possible to identify significant contrasts between South Korea and Ecuador in the way each country articulates its cultural identity within its international projection strategies. In the literature on South Korea, a relatively cohesive national narrative can be observed, in which historical elements coexist with accelerated processes of modernization. Seth (2020) notes that values associated with the Confucian tradition, such as social discipline, hierarchy, and the pursuit of collective harmony, have contributed to consolidating a shared cultural foundation that strengthens social cohesion. Building on this cultural base, Chang (2022) describes the South Korean development process as a form of *compressed modernity*, in which economic, technological, and cultural transformations were concentrated within a relatively short period of time. This process allowed tradition and innovation to be integrated within a single national narrative, which has facilitated its subsequent projection in the international arena.

In contrast, the literature on Ecuador describes a different scenario in terms of identity construction. Various authors agree that the formation of the Ecuadorian state was marked

by territorial, social, and cultural divisions that hindered the consolidation of a widely shared national narrative. Quintero & Silva (1991) explain that these historical fractures influenced the way national identity was configured. In a same way, Adoum (2000) highlights the persistence of regional identities or *patrias chicas*, which in many cases carry greater symbolic weight than identification with a common national project. These interpretations are complemented by Walsh's (2007) arguments, which point out that structures of coloniality continue to influence the ways in which cultural identity is interpreted and represented both within the country and in its projection abroad.

These differences are also reflected in the narratives used to communicate national identity in the international sphere. In the case of South Korea, the global expansion of cultural industries has played a key role in disseminating a contemporary image of the country. The phenomenon known as *hallyu* has enabled the international projection of cultural content that combines entertainment, creativity, and innovation, generating a significant cultural presence in various international markets (Jin, 2024). This process has developed alongside communication strategies that differentiate tourism promotion from nation brand construction, thereby facilitating the articulation of multiple dimensions of national identity within international communication (Choi & Kim, 2014).

In the case of Ecuador, by contrast, the international narrative has tended to focus primarily on elements related to biodiversity, natural heritage, and tourism offerings. Studies such as those by Hallo (2020) and Poveda & Gómez (2019) highlight that these attributes have been used as central axes in the country's international communication. Although these resources constitute important symbolic assets, several authors point out that frequent changes in nation-branding campaigns have made it difficult to consolidate a stable narrative over time. Pérez Peña et al. (2021) argue that these recurrent modifications have affected the strategic continuity of Ecuador's international communication, which limits the development of a more consistent country image.

Another aspect that emerges from the documentary review is the degree of institutionalization of cultural projection policies. In South Korea, a relatively coordinated institutional structure can be observed, in which different governmental bodies participate in cultural promotion and public diplomacy strategies. Institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Korean Culture and Information Service, and diplomatic missions abroad perform complementary roles in the international dissemination of Korean

culture. These actions are also carried out within a legal framework that supports public and cultural diplomacy policies (J. Y. Lee, 2021; Macías, 2023).

In contrast, in the case of Ecuador, several studies suggest that coordination among the institutions responsible for culture, tourism, and foreign policy has been more limited. Calle Forrest & Caicedo Barreth (2021) note that initiatives related to cultural promotion and country image construction are often developed by different institutions with varying levels of coordination. As a result, many of these initiatives are implemented in a fragmented manner and with less strategic continuity. Macías (2023) points out that Ecuadorian cultural diplomacy is still in a stage of development, with important advances but without a fully consolidated institutional framework.

Consequently, these differences in identity construction, international narratives, and institutional coordination are also reflected in the outcomes associated with country image. South Korea has managed to consolidate an international positioning strongly linked to its cultural industries and to the strategic use of digital diplomacy tools. This process has had visible effects on the global recognition of Korean culture and on the growth of exports related to creative industries (Jagodzinski, 2025; S. T. Lee, 2022). In contrast, Ecuador's international image continues to be primarily associated with its biodiversity and tourism appeal (Future Brand, 2024). Although these elements represent important advantages, some studies suggest that there remains a gap between the country's productive potential and the reputational value it manages to project in the international arena (Shanmuganathan & Bryzghalov, 2025).

Based on these findings, the documentary analysis suggests that a country's international positioning does not depend solely on the existence of cultural or symbolic resources, but also on the institutional capacity to integrate them into coherent and sustained strategies. While South Korea demonstrates a greater articulation between cultural identity, public policies, and creative industries, Ecuador presents a process that is still evolving, in which the international narrative and the institutional mechanisms for cultural projection remain under construction.

5.4 Interview Analysis

Building on the findings derived from the documentary analysis, the next stage of this research is introduced. In order to contrast and complement the reviewed studies, together with the previously conducted bibliographic review, interviews were carried out with

institutional actors, specialists, and professionals linked to processes of cultural projection and country image construction.

The inclusion of these profiles responds to the opportunity to incorporate the perspectives of those who directly participate in the design, implementation, or analysis of these strategies. This contributes to deepening the elements identified in the documentary review and to exploring the different approaches, convergences, and tensions surrounding how South Korea and Ecuador project their cultural identity in the international arena.

The following section presents a matrix that synthesizes the main insights derived from these interviews, with the aim of organizing and comparatively visualizing the most relevant elements emerging from the perspectives of the consulted actors.

Table 22
Interview Analysis Matrix

Thematic area	South Korea	Ecuador	Interpretative Synthesis
Cultural Identity	Cohesion, homogeneity, internalized values, collectivism, historical continuity, internal-external alignment.	Diversity, fragmentation, regionalism, syncretism, low cohesion, explanatory identity.	Divergence: cohesion versus fragmentation.
Nation Branding	Clear strategy, defined sectors (K-Content, K-Beauty, K-Food), continuity, institutionalization, coherent narrative.	Discontinuity, political changes, lack of narrative, weak articulation, isolated initiatives.	Divergence: institutionalization versus volatility.
Country Image	Positive, coherent, differentiated, associated with modernity and innovation, consolidated soft power.	Diffuse, weakly differentiated, based on products, vulnerable to inconsistencies, low coherence.	Divergence: coherence versus perceptual weakness.
International projection and external legitimacy	Based on soft power, cultural industries, sustained planning, high legitimacy, global recognition.	Incipient strategy, dependence on products, low articulation, limited legitimacy, weak coherence.	Divergence: consolidated strategy versus incipient construction.
Role of the state in symbolic construction	Active state, institutional coordination, legal framework, continuity, public-private articulation.	Discontinuous state, institutional fragmentation, politicization, lack of strategy, weak coordination.	Divergence: planning versus instability.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, differences can be observed in how both countries articulate their international projection. To begin with, when analyzing the dimension of cultural identity, in the case of South Korea this is configured as a system of internalized values that does not require constant explanation in order to operate socially. This is evidenced in what Almeida (personal communication, March 12, 2026) points out,

explaining that norms such as respect and hierarchy are embedded in language use, particularly through levels of formality and honorifics. In this sense, identity is not limited to discourse, but is integrated into everyday practices that structure social interaction, as language not only communicates but continuously reproduces these values.

This logic is reinforced by the principle of *palli palli* mentioned by Salazar (personal communication, March 11, 2026), which shows how an orientation toward efficiency is not merely an individual trait but a social expectation. Thus, predictability in practices facilitates collective coordination and, at the same time, allows identity to be projected outward from a coherent base, without the need for constant reformulation. In contrast, findings in Ecuador point to difficulties in articulation, as regionalism and class divisions affect the construction of a shared sense of belonging (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

This is further compounded by the strategic use of identity in certain political contexts (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026), which introduces instability in its meaning, as it shifts from a sustained construction to one dependent on specific circumstances. In the same line, the gap between declared and practiced identity (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026) shows that, without correspondence between discourse and practice, identity loses its capacity to sustain a coherent external projection, explaining its lower consistency compared to the Korean case.

When this logic is transferred to the sphere of nation branding, in South Korea it appears as an organized extension of a previously structured identity. As Kim (personal communication, March 11, 2026) notes, the definition of sectors such as K-pop and audiovisual content not only responds to economic criteria but also functions as an axis of international projection. However, what is relevant is not only the existence of these sectors, but that they condense already internalized cultural values, allowing the brand not to introduce a new narrative but rather to articulate and project elements that already possess internal coherence.

In this same line, K-dramas function as vehicles that disseminate ways of life and cultural codes without the need for explicit mediation (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), reinforcing the idea of a projection that operates organically. In contrast, in Ecuador, nation branding faces difficulties in consolidating over time, as changes associated with political cycles (Martínez Menduiño, personal communication, February 19, 2026) interrupt narrative continuity and limit the accumulation of meaning.

Moreover, although there are initiatives from the private sector (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026), these reflect more a reaction to instability than a structured articulation. As Ugalde (personal communication, February 23, 2026) points out, the issue is not only the visibility of cultural resources, but the absence of a unifying axis capable of integrating them into a shared narrative.

In the case of South Korea, the country image is configured as the result of sustained coherence between internal development and external projection, rather than as a purely communicational construction. This is reflected in the growing global interest in the Korean language (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), which not only indicates attraction to cultural products but also a deeper connection with the country's identity. In this sense, language learning represents a more structural engagement, as it involves time, investment, and recognition of cultural value, suggesting that the projected image is not only appealing but also credible.

This is further reinforced by the consolidation of soft power as an articulating element of this perception (Salazar, personal communication, March 11, 2026), where culture, technology, and education converge within a unified projection. This integration allows the country's image to be relatively uniform and easily recognizable, consistently associated with innovation, modernity, and cultural dynamism. In other words, the country image does not depend on isolated efforts but on coherence across multiple dimensions that reinforce each other.

In contrast, Ecuador's country image presents a more fragmented configuration. International recognition associated with emblematic products such as cacao or roses (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026) demonstrates the existence of valued elements, but not necessarily integrated into a common narrative. This implies that the country's perception is constructed through specific associations rather than from an articulated identity.

Additionally, as Rincón del Valle (personal communication, February 18, 2026) notes, external factors such as media coverage, security, or individual experiences significantly influence international perception. This introduces a higher level of vulnerability, as in the absence of a strong articulating axis, perceptions can easily shift. Consequently, the country image tends to be less stable, making its consolidation over time more difficult.

In South Korea, international projection responds to a sustained strategy that articulates different domains under a shared logic, rather than a set of isolated actions. As Kim (personal communication, March 11, 2026) explains, the institutionalization of soft power has enabled culture, education, and industry to operate in a coordinated manner, ensuring continuity over time. This is crucial, as projection does not depend on specific circumstances but on structures that sustain its development, directly contributing to the construction of external legitimacy.

In this line, education and cultural dissemination (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026) do not only fulfill a promotional function but also create spaces of interaction that strengthen the country's recognition from a more relational perspective. Thus, legitimacy is built not only through visibility, but through the consistency with which the country sustains its international presence, articulating what it produces, communicates, and represents.

In the Ecuadorian case, however, international projection presents a more incipient character. The absence of a clearly defined strategy (Martínez Mendiño, personal communication, February 23, 2026) results into dispersed efforts that hinder the construction of a sustained narrative. This is reflected in the reliance on specific achievements or the promotion of particular products (Malo, personal communication, March 5, 2026), which, although they generate visibility, fail to consolidate a continuous presence.

As a result, Ecuador's international projection tends to be more reactive than structured, limiting its capacity to build legitimacy over time. Without a clear articulation among different positioning efforts, the country's recognition remains fragmented and less stable compared to the Korean case.

In South Korea, the role of the state is characterized by its capacity to articulate and sustain the country's international projection over time, rather than through isolated interventions. As Kim (personal communication, March 11, 2026) points out, coordination among different institutions has enabled the consolidation of a coherent strategy, where culture, education, and industry operate under a shared orientation. This articulation not only facilitates policy implementation but also ensures continuity, which is essential for international projection not to depend on short-term changes.

In this sense, state support for cultural through mechanisms such as education or international initiatives (Almeida, personal communication, March 12, 2026), demonstrates

that the symbolic construction of the country is not limited to specific campaigns, rather forms part of a sustained policy. This implies that the state acts not only as a promoter but as an organizer of a system in which different actors contribute to a shared narrative. As a result, the country's image and projection remain stable over time, reinforcing their coherence.

In contrast, in Ecuador the role of the state is marked by discontinuity and institutional fragmentation. When Martínez Mendiño (personal communication, February 19, 2026) highlights the politicization of nation branding and the constant changes in its management, this reveals the absence of a sustained strategic line. Instead of accumulating progress, each change implies a reconfiguration that interrupts previous processes.

Furthermore, the lack of evaluation and continuity mechanisms (Ugalde, personal communication, February 23, 2026) limits the possibility of learning from past experiences, weakening the construction of a long-term strategy. Although efforts exist across different sectors, they fail to articulate consistently, reducing their impact.

In this context, as Malo (personal communication, March 5, 2026) suggests, it becomes necessary to strengthen coordination among the state, the private sector, and civil society, not only as an operational measure but as a condition for ensuring continuity. Without such coordination, the symbolic construction of the country remains subject to changing circumstances, which explains the instability observed in its international projection.

5.5 Integrated Analysis of the Results

This section synthesizes the findings derived from the study through the methodological strategy of triangulation, which included a hermeneutic analysis of the literature review, the examination of strategic documents related to international projection, and semi-structured interviews with experts, in order to complement and enrich the analysis.

Through the articulation of these sources, it was possible to contrast perspectives, as well as to identify patterns, tensions, and gaps concerning the construction of cultural identity and its influence on the country image in the selected cases of South Korea and Ecuador. In this context, Figure 13 is presented below, corresponding to a mind map that synthesizes the integrated results derived from the study.

Figure 13
Mind Map of the Comprehensive Analysis of the Results



Note: Created by the author with the assistance of Gemini for translation and using NotebookLM (2026).

When the elements synthesized in the map are analyzed, it becomes evident that a country's international projection is not an isolated outcome, but rather the result of an effective articulation between cultural identity, institutional management, and strategy. In the case of South Korea, these components not only coexist but operate in alignment, which explains the consistency of its global positioning. At the outset, it can be observed how the country's cultural identity, shaped by values such as social cohesion, a collective orientation, and dynamics such as *palli palli*, translates into concrete practices that guide both internal organization and the way the country projects itself externally. In this sense, elements such as *jeong* or compressed modernity not only describe cultural processes but also explain the strength of an identity base that sustains its international projection.

By contrast, when this dimension is analyzed in the Ecuadorian context, it becomes clear that the main challenge does not lie in the absence of identity, but in its lack of articulation. This is evident in the fact that cultural diversity, although significant, does not consolidate into a shared narrative, resulting in fragmentation that limits its projection capacity. The persistence of regionalism, together with the notion of *patrias chicas*, reflects an identity structure that remains insufficiently integrated, while the idea of an incomplete self-portrait reveals a weakness in how the country recognizes itself, directly affecting the construction of a clear and coherent country image.

Similarly, these differences extend to other domains, such as institutional management. South Korea presents a model in which coordination among actors is not circumstantial but structural. The logic of joint action, reflected in the idea of *Team Korea*, is supported by regulatory frameworks, specialized institutions, and long-term planning. In this context, the promotion of language and culture, through mechanisms such as the King Sejong Institutes, does not operate in isolation but as part of an integrated strategy that reinforces the coherence of the country's narrative.

In contrast, Ecuador exhibits institutional fragmentation that limits the consolidation of a sustained strategy. The lack of coordination among ministries, regulatory instability, and the influence of political factors create a context in which initiatives fail to endure over time. As a result, international projection tends to respond more to reactive dynamics than to structured planning, weakening the role of the state in building a consistent country image.

Regarding the domain of narratives, South Korea has managed to consolidate a model that combines strategic clarity with emotional connection. The articulation of its cultural

pillars, together with the impact of the Hallyu wave, allows it to project a recognizable image while simultaneously fostering closeness with global audiences. This approach not only positions the country but also strengthens its presence in international imaginaries in a sustained manner.

In contrast, Ecuador presents an unstable narrative, characterized by constant changes and a lack of clear direction. The emphasis on landscapes and certain specific products contributes to visibility but fails to structure an integrative narrative. Consequently, the projection of flagship products such as cacao or roses remains isolated and does not contribute to a cumulative construction of the country image.

Overall, the findings confirm that the difference between both cases is not explained by the availability of cultural resources, but by the capacity to organize and project them strategically. Thus, the Republic of Korea stands as an example of a country that has successfully articulated identity, institutions, and narrative under a unified logic, generating a coherent and sustainable model, while Ecuador still faces the challenge of overcoming fragmentation and advancing toward an articulation that enables it to consolidate its internal identity and project it consistently in the international arena.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this research, it is possible to affirm the decisive influence of cultural identity in the construction of a country's image, due to its role in shaping the meanings projected externally and in conditioning how these can be sustained over time. From a comparative perspective, the study shows that this relationship does not depend solely on the available cultural content, but on the capacity to articulate it through cultural diplomacy and nation branding strategies supported by coherent institutional structures.

In the case of South Korea, cultural identity emerges as a relatively integrated element, the result of historical processes that have favored the consolidation of shared references. This foundation has made it possible to develop a coherent narrative, capable of effectively linking with public policies and international projection strategies. As a result, identity is not only expressed as an internal characteristic, but also becomes a strategic resource that strengthens the country's positioning across different domains.

In contrast, Ecuador presents a different reality. Although it possesses significant cultural diversity, this does not translate into a cohesive identity construction. The persistence of regional dynamics and the difficulty in consolidating a shared narrative limit the internal appropriation of identity, which directly affects its external projection. In this context, the country's image is shaped by a lack of articulation that prevents this diversity from being transformed into a structured axis of positioning.

Additionally, another important finding of this study is the decisive role played by the state in these processes. In South Korea, a sustained effort can be observed in coordinating actions, establishing clear guidelines, and ensuring continuity in implemented strategies, allowing cultural identity to be integrated within a planning logic that transcends specific circumstances. In contrast, Ecuador faces limitations associated with institutional fragmentation and instability in management, which hinder the consolidation of a long-term strategy around the country's image.

Overall, the findings highlight that the construction of a country's image responds to a complex relationship between identity, institutional capacity, and strategy. While the Republic of Korea stands out as an example of successfully aligning these elements in a consistent manner, Ecuador continues to face the challenge of creating the conditions necessary for their integration. From this perspective, this study not only contributes to

understanding how country images are built and consolidated, but also underscores the need to strengthen internal articulation as a foundation for a more coherent international projection.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is identified that, in the Ecuadorian case, one of the main challenges lies in the need to strengthen coordination between the public and private sectors, given that the construction and management of the nation brand cannot rely on isolated initiatives but requires sustained collaboration that aligns interests, resources, and capacities. Therefore, to move toward more integrated forms of cooperation that enable the development of effective international projection strategies, the joint participation of both sectors emerges as a necessary condition.

Additionally, it is essential to reinforce the role of education in this process. As evidenced throughout the analysis, the limited appropriation of cultural identity among Ecuadorians constitutes one of the country's main weaknesses. In this regard, and in line with Salazar (personal communication, March 11, 2026), strengthening educational spaces aimed at fostering the appreciation of national culture may contribute to consolidating a stronger identity base, from which a more consistent country image can be projected.

Furthermore, Ecuador must consider how nation branding is addressed within the institutional sphere. The tendency to link it to successive governments has generated discontinuity and weakened its positioning. In response, it is recommended to move toward its depoliticization and instead recognize it as a national asset that should transcend political cycles. This shift in approach would provide greater stability to implemented strategies and enhance their long-term sustainability.

Regarding South Korea, although its model has demonstrated high levels of effectiveness in articulating cultural identity, strategy, and institutional capacity, the study suggests the need for certain adjustments. In particular, the high degree of state intervention, which has been key to its positioning, is beginning to generate critical perceptions in some international contexts. Therefore, it is recommended to seek a balance in this participation by promoting greater openness to more organic dynamics of cultural diffusion, where social and cultural actors play a more prominent role.

Moreover, considering recent demographic transformations, especially the increase in migrant populations in South Korea, it becomes important to strategically manage the

transition toward a more diverse society. As noted by Kim (personal communication, March 11, 2026), this process could gradually reshape the patterns of cohesion that have historically characterized the country. In this sense, it is crucial to maintain existing planning mechanisms while also beginning to anticipate and design the necessary adaptations to this emerging reality, in order to preserve the sense of a unified nation that has long defined South Korean society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Information Sheet Model: Interview

Hoja Informativa: entrevista

DE LA IDENTIDAD CULTURAL A LA IMAGEN PAÍS: NARRATIVAS INTERCULTURALES DE COREA DEL SUR Y ECUADOR

HOJA DE INFORMACIÓN PARA LOS ENTREVISTADOS

El presente proyecto de investigación, desarrollado como parte de un trabajo de titulación de pregrado, se propone analizar el rol de la identidad cultural en la construcción y proyección de la imagen país, así como su instrumentalización a través de narrativas interculturales, la diplomacia pública y la diplomacia cultural. El estudio se desarrolla a partir de un análisis comparativo entre Corea del Sur y Ecuador, con el fin de comprender cómo los Estados seleccionan, organizan e institucionalizan elementos culturales para posicionarse en el escenario internacional.

El presente trabajo de investigación considera las implicaciones que tiene la identidad cultural como un recurso estratégico dentro de las relaciones internacionales contemporáneas, particularmente en un contexto global donde la reputación, la legitimidad y la narrativa proyectada por los países adquieren un papel central. En este marco, la identidad cultural deja de ser concebida únicamente como un rasgo interno de los Estados y pasa a ser entendida como un activo proyectable que incide directamente en la construcción de la imagen país.

Es por ello que la presente investigación busca obtener información a través de entrevistas dirigidas a actores clave vinculados a la diplomacia pública, diplomacia cultural, política exterior, marca país y gestión cultural. Se busca conocer cómo las instituciones y los actores involucrados articulan la identidad cultural dentro de sus estrategias de proyección internacional, así como las limitaciones y oportunidades que se presentan en estos procesos. El análisis comparativo de los casos de Corea del Sur y Ecuador permitirá identificar convergencias, divergencias y factores estructurales que influyen en la construcción de narrativas interculturales y en la consolidación de la imagen país.

Palabras clave

Identidad cultural, imagen país, diplomacia cultural, diplomacia pública, narrativas interculturales, proyección internacional.

Parte del proyecto incluye la realización de entrevistas semiestructuradas, mediante las cuales se podrá profundizar en la delimitación del problema de investigación, la comprensión del contexto institucional, la identificación de actores relevantes, la recolección de datos cualitativos, su análisis e interpretación, así como la elaboración del reporte final de resultados. En este sentido, las entrevistas permitirán complementar el análisis documental y discursivo desarrollado en la investigación.

De esta manera, se busca comprender la relevancia de la identidad cultural como un eje transversal dentro de la política exterior y la proyección internacional de los Estados. Se trabajará con entrevistas que indagarán en las experiencias, percepciones y valoraciones de los participantes respecto al uso de la cultura como herramienta estratégica. Se procurará entrevistar a funcionarios del sector público, representantes institucionales, académicos y actores vinculados a la gestión cultural y la proyección internacional, tanto a nivel nacional como internacional.

Adicionalmente, el estudio contempla la revisión de literatura especializada mediante un análisis hermenéutico vinculado a los conceptos de cultura, identidad cultural, soft power, diplomacia pública, diplomacia cultural, imagen país y marca país. Esta revisión permitirá contextualizar teóricamente los discursos y prácticas analizadas, así como comprender las dinámicas históricas, políticas e institucionales que influyen en cada caso de estudio.

Esto permitirá conocer el nivel de articulación institucional de la identidad cultural dentro de las estrategias de proyección internacional, la coherencia de las narrativas construidas y su relevancia dentro del posicionamiento de los países en el ámbito internacional.

Se espera que las entrevistas permitan generar un diálogo que conduzca a la recopilación de narrativas, experiencias profesionales y reflexiones críticas que representen un aporte para la comunidad académica, particularmente desde el campo de los Estudios Internacionales, al abordar la identidad cultural y la imagen país desde una perspectiva comparativa e intercultural.

La recopilación de la investigación documental será luego revisada para concluir con la redacción y edición de la tesis **“DE LA IDENTIDAD CULTURAL A LA IMAGEN PAÍS: NARRATIVAS INTERCULTURALES DE COREA DEL SUR Y ECUADOR”**

A través del presente documento, extendemos a usted (**nombre del entrevistado**) la invitación a participar en una entrevista que se llevará a cabo el día (**día, mes, año**), a las (**hora de la entrevista**), en modalidad (**presencial/virtual**) en (**lugar de la entrevista/la plataforma Zoom**), conforme a lo previamente coordinado.

La información obtenida será tratada con responsabilidad académica y utilizada exclusivamente con fines investigativos. Dado el carácter especializado de las entrevistas a perfiles institucionales y expertos, los nombres, cargos e instituciones de los participantes podrán ser mencionados en la tesis y en posibles publicaciones académicas derivadas de esta investigación, previo consentimiento expreso.

En caso de no estar de acuerdo con partes o la totalidad de la entrevista o con los datos a publicarse, el entrevistado podrá abstenerse de participar y la información correspondiente será retirada de la investigación siempre que la solicitud se realice antes de la entrega final del trabajo de titulación. Asimismo, el entrevistado podrá negarse a responder cualquier pregunta o solicitar el retiro de información en cualquier momento durante el desarrollo de la investigación. Una copia de los resultados finales estará disponible una vez concluido el proceso de titulación.

Cabe indicar que únicamente el equipo designado, es decir la investigadora y la directora de la tesis que suscriben, tendrán acceso a los datos recopilados.

Se prevé que la duración de la entrevista sea de aproximadamente **45 a 60 minutos**.

En cuanto a los dispositivos que se utilizarán para la realización de la entrevista, se empleará el sistema de grabación de Zoom o un dispositivo de grabación de audio, con el fin de garantizar la fidelidad en la transcripción de la información. Adicionalmente, se tomarán notas de los aspectos más relevantes de la entrevista.

El entrevistado podrá solicitar que se apaguen los dispositivos de grabación en cualquier momento durante la entrevista, si así lo considera conveniente. Los datos recopilados serán posteriormente transcritos, analizados y seleccionados de acuerdo con su pertinencia para la investigación a publicarse.

<p>Daniela Sabina Peralta Lovato Investigadora E mail: daniela.peralta@es.uazuay.edu.ec Cel: 0988376195 Dirección: Manuel Arturo Cisneros y Julio Vinuesa s/n Cuenca</p>	<p>Mgst. Mónica Martínez Sojos Directora Email: mmartinez@uazuay.edu.ec Teléfono: 0998470787 Dirección: Guangarcucho s/n Cuenca</p>
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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Hoja de Consentimiento Informado

Nosotras, Daniela Sabina Peralta Lovato y Mg. Mónica Martínez Sojos, queremos asegurarnos de que las personas entrevistadas como parte del trabajo de titulación “**DE LA IDENTIDAD CULTURAL A LA IMAGEN PAÍS: NARRATIVAS INTERCULTURALES DE COREA DEL SUR Y ECUADOR**”, están completamente informadas acerca de implicaciones de participar. Por favor, marque las casillas a continuación si cree que tiene toda la información relevante. Si no, háganoslo saber.

- He leído y comprendido la hoja de información del proyecto.
- Se me ha brindado la oportunidad de realizar preguntas sobre el proyecto.
- Estoy de acuerdo en participar en una entrevista como parte de esta investigación.
- Entiendo que la entrevista tendrá una duración aproximada de 45 a 60 minutos, pero que podría extenderse o acortarse dependiendo de mi disponibilidad.
- Entiendo que mi participación es completamente voluntaria.
- Entiendo que puedo negarme a responder cualquier pregunta, por cualquier motivo.
- Entiendo que puedo retirarme de la entrevista en cualquier momento, sin necesidad de justificar mi decisión.
- Acepto que se grabe el audio de mi entrevista con fines exclusivamente académicos.
- Acepto que la investigadora tome notas durante la entrevista.
- Entiendo que mis palabras podrán ser citadas en la tesis y en otros documentos académicos derivados de la investigación.
- Autorizo expresamente que mi nombre, cargo e institución sean mencionados en la tesis y en posibles publicaciones académicas derivadas de esta investigación.
- Entiendo que la información proporcionada será utilizada exclusivamente para fines académicos.
- Entiendo que puedo solicitar mi retiro del proyecto dentro de un plazo de 15 días hábiles a partir de esta fecha, comunicándome con el equipo de investigación cuyos datos de contacto constan en la hoja informativa. En este caso, mi información será retirada y no será utilizada en la investigación.

Nombre del participante	Firma

Fecha:

Appendix C

Thematic Axes of the Semi-Structured Interviews

Nº	Entrevistado	País	Ejes principales	Justificación
1	Mónica Martínez Menduño	Ecuador	Imagen país - Diplomacia pública - Institucionalización	Aporta la visión estatal sobre la gestión de la imagen país y la diplomacia pública.
2	Mateo Estrella Durán	Ecuador	Marca país - Identidad cultural - Turismo	Permite analizar el rol del turismo en la construcción de la marca país ecuatoriana.
3	Mónica Malo	Ecuador	Imagen país - Marca país - Resultados	Aporta una mirada no estatal sobre la aplicación práctica de la marca país.
4	Natalia Rincón	Ecuador	Marca país - Identidad cultural - Narrativas	Permite examinar la imagen país desde el turismo y el marketing.
5	Cecy Ugalde	Ecuador	Imagen país - Comunicación - Narrativas	Aporta una mirada práctica sobre difusión y recepción de la imagen país.
6	Aidan Donghwan Kim	Corea del Sur	Diplomacia cultural - Diplomacia pública - Estado	Permite analizar la proyección cultural coreana desde la práctica institucional.
7	Evelyn Almeida	Corea del Sur / Ecuador	Diplomacia cultural - Identidad cultural - Idioma	Aporta evidencia operativa sobre la diplomacia cultural coreana.
8	Richard Salazar	Ecuador	Identidad cultural - Imagen país - Diplomacia cultural	Permite articular una lectura analítica y comparativa de los ejes centrales del estudio.

PREGUNTAS TENTATIVAS POR ENTREVISTADO

CASO ECUADOR

1. **Contextualizar**
2. **ICE BREAKER:** ¿Qué es para usted ser ecuatoriano?

1. Mónica Martínez Menduño

Perfil: Diplomática – Cancillería

Ejes: Imagen país – Diplomacia pública – Institucionalización

¿Qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la política exterior ecuatoriana?

Desde su experiencia en la Cancillería, ¿cómo describiría la imagen internacional que actualmente proyecta Ecuador?

¿De qué manera las instituciones del Estado instrumentalizan la identidad cultural, a través de la diplomacia pública, para construir y proyectar una imagen país en el ámbito internacional?

¿Cree usted que hay una integración consciente de la identidad cultural dentro de la proyección que se hace desde las instituciones?

¿Qué factores han dificultado la continuidad de las estrategias de proyección internacional?

Desde su perspectiva, ¿qué resultados concretos se han logrado hasta el momento en términos de posicionamiento internacional?

¿Qué aspectos considera prioritarios para fortalecer una estrategia de imagen país a largo plazo?

2. Mateo Estrella Durán

Perfil: Funcionario – Ministerio de Turismo

Ejes: Marca país – Identidad cultural – Turismo

¿Qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la política exterior ecuatoriana y a nivel interno?

¿Cómo se incorporan los elementos culturales en las campañas de promoción internacional?

¿Qué criterios se utilizan para seleccionar determinados rasgos culturales dentro del relato país?

¿Qué rol ha desempeñado el Ministerio de Turismo en la construcción de la marca país de Ecuador?

¿Cómo se ha articulado la relación entre marca país y promoción turística?

¿Considera que la imagen proyectada logra representar al país más allá del ámbito turístico?

¿Qué resultados percibe en la percepción internacional y nacional del Ecuador a partir de estas estrategias?

¿Qué desafíos enfrenta el sector turístico al momento de sostener una narrativa coherente de país?

¿Cómo inciden los cambios institucionales o políticos en la continuidad de la marca país?

3. Mónica Malo

Perfil: Sector productivo – Mucho Mejor Ecuador

Ejes: Imagen país – Marca país – Resultados

¿Qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la comercialización internacional y a nivel interno?

- ¿Cómo cree usted que se incorporan los elementos culturales dentro de las marcas nacionales?
- ¿Cómo percibe la imagen internacional del Ecuador desde el sector productivo?
- ¿Qué relación identifica entre la marca país y el posicionamiento de los productos ecuatorianos en el exterior?
- ¿Considera que la marca país ha logrado consolidarse como un activo reputacional?
- ¿Qué tan coherente percibe el relato oficial de país con la realidad productiva y cultural?
- ¿Cómo impacta la inestabilidad institucional en la reputación internacional del Ecuador?
- ¿Qué limitaciones observa en la forma en que se comunica la imagen país hacia el exterior?
- ¿Qué rol podrían asumir con mayor fuerza los actores no estatales en la proyección internacional?
- ¿Qué cambios considera necesarios para fortalecer la imagen país desde el ámbito productivo?

4. Natalia Rincón

Perfil: Académica – Turismo y marketing

Ejes: Marca país – Identidad cultural – Narrativas

- ¿Qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la academia? (turismo y marketing)
- Desde su especialidad en turismo y marketing, ¿cómo evalúa la imagen país de Ecuador?
- ¿Qué rol ha tenido el turismo en la construcción de las narrativas oficiales de país?
- ¿Considera que estas narrativas responden a una estrategia de largo plazo?
- ¿Qué tensiones identifica entre la diversidad cultural del país y las exigencias del marketing internacional?
- ¿Cómo influyen los cambios institucionales en la redefinición constante del relato país?
- ¿Qué vacíos observa en el abordaje académico o institucional de la imagen país en Ecuador?
- ¿Qué límites presenta el uso del turismo como eje central de la proyección internacional?
- ¿Qué aprendizajes podrían tomarse de otros contextos más institucionalizados?

5. Cecy Ugalde

Perfil: Profesional – Comunicación, marketing y gestión cultural

Ejes: Imagen país – Comunicación – Narrativas

- ¿Qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la academia? (comunicación y marketing)
- ¿Cómo se comunica actualmente la identidad cultural ecuatoriana hacia el exterior y a nivel nacional?
- Desde su experiencia profesional, ¿cómo percibe la imagen país de Ecuador?
- ¿Considera que estas narrativas logran generar apropiación social?
- ¿Qué brechas identifica entre el discurso institucional y las prácticas culturales reales?
- ¿Qué actores o expresiones culturales quedan fuera de estas narrativas oficiales?
- ¿Qué efectos tiene esta exclusión en la legitimidad de la imagen país?
- ¿Cómo inciden los cambios políticos en la continuidad de la proyección internacional?
- ¿Qué aspectos deberían replantearse para fortalecer la comunicación de la imagen país?

CASO COREA DEL SUR

6. Aidan Donghwan Kim

Perfil: Agregado académico – Embajada de Corea

Ejes: Diplomacia cultural – Diplomacia pública – Estado

- Desde su rol institucional, ¿qué importancia tienen la cultura y la educación dentro de la política exterior de Corea del Sur?
- ¿Cómo se articulan la diplomacia académica, las instituciones culturales y la política exterior dentro de una misma estrategia estatal?
- ¿Qué rol cumple el Estado en la selección de los elementos culturales que se proyectan internacionalmente?
- ¿Cómo se logra coherencia y continuidad en estas estrategias a largo plazo?
- ¿Existen tensiones entre la identidad cultural proyectada y la realidad interna del país?
- Desde su experiencia, ¿qué diferencias observa con el caso ecuatoriano?
- ¿Qué aprendizajes del modelo coreano podrían adaptarse a otros contextos nacionales?

7. Evelyn Almeida

Perfil: Directora – Instituto King Sejong Quito

Ejes: Diplomacia cultural – Identidad cultural – Idioma

¿Cuál es el rol del Instituto King Sejong dentro de la diplomacia cultural de Corea del Sur?

¿Qué lugar ocupa el idioma en la proyección cultural coreana?

¿De qué manera el Instituto se coordina con la Embajada u otras instituciones del Estado coreano?

¿Qué resultados observa en términos de percepción cultural en el contexto local y cómo se evalúa ese impacto?

¿Qué distingue a este modelo de otros enfoques de diplomacia cultural?

¿Qué elementos de esta experiencia podrían adaptarse al contexto ecuatoriano?

¿Qué desafíos enfrenta actualmente la diplomacia cultural coreana?

8. Richard Salazar

Perfil: Académico – FLACSO Ecuador

Ejes: Identidad cultural – Imagen país – Diplomacia cultural

Desde una perspectiva académica, ¿cómo compara la relación entre identidad cultural e imagen país en Corea del Sur y Ecuador?

¿Qué factores estructurales explican las diferencias entre ambos casos?

¿Qué rol juega la institucionalización en la proyección internacional de la cultura?

¿Cómo influyen los contextos políticos en la continuidad de estas estrategias?

¿Qué límites observa en el uso de la cultura como herramienta de proyección internacional?

¿Qué aprendizajes del caso coreano podrían dialogar con la realidad ecuatoriana?

¿Qué riesgos existen al intentar replicar modelos sin considerar el contexto local?

¿Qué reflexiones considera clave para comprender estos procesos en América Latina?

Appendix D

Transcription of Interviews from South Korea

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistado: Aidan Kim (AK)

Fecha: 11 de marzo de 2026

Modalidad: Virtual, plataforma Zoom

DP: [Inicio de grabación]. Buenas noches, estimado Aidan Kim. Gracias nuevamente por aceptar esta entrevista. Sin más preámbulos, quisiera comenzar con la primera pregunta. Debido a su rol institucional, me gustaría conocer la importancia que Corea del Sur le otorga a la cultura y a la educación dentro de su política exterior.

AK: La diplomacia se refiere a las actividades oficiales mediante las cuales una nación mantiene y desarrolla relaciones con países extranjeros u organizaciones internacionales a través de negociaciones pacíficas y diálogos, con el fin de maximizar sus propios intereses, es decir, los intereses nacionales. Estas actividades diplomáticas utilizan tanto el poder duro como el poder blando. Tradicionalmente, los dos campos principales de la diplomacia han sido la diplomacia política y la diplomacia económica. Sin embargo, en la actualidad, dentro de la diplomacia moderna, el poder blando desempeña un papel más importante que el poder duro.

En el caso de Corea, la reputación del país y el desarrollo de su poder blando comenzaron a cobrar gran importancia con el éxito mundial de la ola coreana, el *Hallyu*, centrada en el K-pop, las series y el cine. No obstante, antes de este fenómeno cultural, el crecimiento económico y la democratización política de Corea, conocidos como el milagro del río Han, ya habían sido reconocidos mundialmente como un elemento clave del poder blando coreano. Es decir, no solo la cultura contemporánea, sino también su proceso histórico de desarrollo económico y político ha contribuido a la construcción de esa imagen internacional.

Corea, como un país relativamente pequeño del noreste asiático, rodeado por grandes potencias como Estados Unidos, China, Rusia y Japón, ha tenido que buscar formas de posicionarse en el sistema internacional. En ese contexto, el desarrollo del poder blando se convirtió en una estrategia importante. Según recuerda, alrededor del año 2010 el gobierno declaró ese periodo como el año inaugural de la diplomacia pública, y desde entonces se han realizado esfuerzos constantes para fomentar un clima de amistad, aumentar la confianza, el compromiso y la comprensión hacia Corea entre el público extranjero, así como para ampliar la influencia positiva del país.

En este sentido, la cultura y la educación, como componentes representativos del poder blando, ocupan un lugar crucial dentro de la política exterior de Corea, especialmente a partir de ese momento. Para entonces, Corea ya estaba ganando popularidad y reconocimiento mundial a través de sus expresiones culturales, particularmente el K-pop. En la actualidad, tanto la cultura como la educación se han consolidado como elementos fundamentales dentro de su estrategia de proyección internacional.

DP: En esa misma línea, quisiera preguntarle sobre los institutos King Sejong. En Quito contamos con uno de estos espacios para la enseñanza del idioma coreano, aunque en ciudades como Cuenca no existe esta posibilidad. ¿Cómo se articula esta diplomacia académica dentro de la estrategia estatal? ¿Forma parte directamente de la política exterior?

AK: El Instituto King Sejong forma parte de un programa internacional impulsado por el Ministerio de Cultura, Deportes y Turismo, a través de la Fundación Instituto King Sejong. La función de esta fundación y de este programa es difundir el idioma y la cultura de Corea entre el público extranjero. En ese sentido, sí forma parte de la estrategia del gobierno y también de la diplomacia pública de Corea.

Sin embargo, es importante señalar que no forma parte de las actividades de la cancillería coreana, sino que pertenece a otro ministerio. Esto es relevante porque permite entender cómo funciona la diplomacia pública en Corea. No es únicamente una función del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, sino que también involucra a otros ministerios que contribuyen a sostener y desarrollar esta estrategia. Es decir, la diplomacia pública no es solo una responsabilidad de la cancillería, sino un esfuerzo interinstitucional más amplio dentro del Estado.

DP: Dentro de este rol del Estado, ¿qué elementos culturales considera que Corea del Sur ha seleccionado estratégicamente para lograr esta proyección internacional tan reconocida?

AK: El gobierno coreano ha identificado ciertos sectores culturales en los cuales centra sus esfuerzos para proyectarlos internacionalmente. En el contexto actual, se destacan cuatro grandes categorías: *K-Contents*, *K-Beauty*, *K-Food* y *K-Sports*. Aunque existen otros elementos culturales, estas cuatro categorías son las que reciben mayor prioridad.

K-Contents incluye el K-pop, las películas, las series y también los webtoons, que son muy populares entre el público internacional. *K-Beauty* abarca no solo la industria cosmética, sino también la moda, incluyendo elementos tradicionales como el *hanbok*, que es la vestimenta tradicional coreana. *K-Food* comprende tanto la gastronomía coreana como diversos productos agrícolas y alimentos procesados, como el ramen coreano. Por su parte, *K-Sports* incluye el deporte, destacando especialmente el taekwondo, que es considerado el deporte nacional de Corea, y cuya difusión internacional es parte de la estrategia cultural del país.

Estos constituyen algunos de los ejes principales del gobierno para difundir la cultura coreana en el mundo. No obstante, también es importante destacar el papel del sector privado. En estos ámbitos, especialmente en la industria cultural, el sector privado desarrolla sus propios planes y actividades de manera independiente. Si bien existe colaboración con el gobierno para generar sinergias, no hay un mecanismo de control directo ni de imposición. La relación entre el sector público y el sector privado se basa en una cooperación equitativa, lo cual es un elemento clave dentro del modelo coreano.

DP: ¿Y qué cree que ha permitido que Corea mantenga esta coherencia y continuidad en su estrategia?

AK: En primer lugar, existe una coincidencia de intereses entre el gobierno y el sector privado. Corea, al ser un país pequeño y estar rodeado de grandes potencias, ha tenido históricamente la necesidad de buscar estrategias para su supervivencia geopolítica. Esta condición ha generado que tanto el gobierno como el sector privado compartan un objetivo común.

Además, el gobierno ha realizado un esfuerzo importante por establecer un marco jurídico que respalde la diplomacia pública. En 2016 se promulgó la Ley de Diplomacia Pública, que dio sustento legal a una estrategia que había comenzado en 2010. A partir de 2017, esta política se ha promovido de manera activa.

Para su implementación, se ha establecido un sistema de cooperación entre el gobierno central, los gobiernos locales y el sector privado. Asimismo, existen planes estructurados, como un plan básico de cinco años y un plan de implementación anual, lo que permite una ejecución sistemática y organizada.

El tercer plan básico de diplomacia pública, correspondiente al periodo 2026–2030, fue publicado en noviembre de 2025 y plantea una visión orientada a contribuir al crecimiento y a la paz global a través de la denominada Iniciativa K. Esta iniciativa contempla tres objetivos principales: elevar la posición de Corea como una potencia global responsable, construir un ecosistema de diplomacia pública integrado y coordinar los esfuerzos del gobierno central, los gobiernos locales y el sector privado bajo el concepto de *Team Korea*. Este marco institucional es clave para explicar la coherencia y continuidad de la estrategia coreana.

DP: Desde su experiencia viviendo en Ecuador, ¿qué diferencias observa en la construcción de la imagen país?

AK: La diplomacia pública tiene como objetivo principal difundir una imagen positiva del país. En el caso de Ecuador, existe un reto importante en la construcción de una identidad nacional. Ecuador comparte una historia bastante similar con países como Perú y Colombia, lo que dificulta su diferenciación internacional. Incluso, desde la percepción de muchos coreanos, no siempre se distingue claramente a Ecuador de otros países andinos, lo que evidencia este desafío.

Al mismo tiempo, Ecuador enfrenta el reto de integrar su diversidad cultural interna. Se trata de un país multicultural, con múltiples identidades étnicas y culturales. Un ejemplo de esta complejidad se puede observar en la representación cultural en espacios internacionales, como el caso de Miss Universo, donde el traje nacional presentado integra diversos elementos culturales en lugar de representar un símbolo único. Esto refleja la dificultad de sintetizar una identidad nacional clara.

Sin embargo, esta diversidad también constituye un activo importante, ya que resulta atractiva para el público extranjero. A diferencia de Corea, donde históricamente ha existido una mayor homogeneidad cultural y la idea de una sola nación, Ecuador presenta una riqueza cultural diversa que puede ser utilizada estratégicamente.

También considera positivo que Ecuador haya comenzado a incorporar la cultura como un eje dentro de su política exterior, evidenciado en la creación de instancias institucionales dedicadas a su promoción.

DP: ¿Usted considera que la identidad que proyecta Corea representa su realidad interna?

AK: En Corea existe una fuerte creencia en la idea de una nación única, cuyo origen se remonta al reino de Gojoseon. Esta visión ha sido reforzada históricamente, especialmente a través de procesos de defensa frente a invasiones externas. Sin embargo, Corea está experimentando cambios importantes. En la actualidad, aproximadamente el 5% de la población es inmigrante, debido al aumento de matrimonios internacionales y de la migración laboral.

Esto ha llevado al país a una transición hacia una sociedad más multicultural. Frente a este cambio, el gobierno y la sociedad han optado por gestionar la diversidad como un recurso, promoviendo políticas de integración y no discriminación, al tiempo que buscan preservar sus valores culturales tradicionales. Asimismo, existen iniciativas dirigidas a las comunidades coreanas en el exterior, orientadas a mantener la transmisión cultural.

En este sentido, la cultura que Corea proyecta sí representa su identidad, ya que existe una correspondencia entre la imagen externa y la percepción interna.

DP: Muchas gracias por su tiempo.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistada: Evelyn Almeida (EA)

Fecha: 12 de marzo de 2026

Modalidad: Virtual, plataforma Zoom

DP: Buenas tardes, estimada Evelyn Almeida. Muchas gracias por aceptar la entrevista. Sin más preámbulos, quisiera comenzar con la primera pregunta. Desde la posición que ocupó como directora, ¿cuál es el rol que el Instituto King Sejong tiene dentro de lo que sería la diplomacia cultural de Corea del Sur?

EA: Bueno, gracias por la entrevista, Dani. Yo estuve como directora del Instituto King Sejong desde octubre de 2020 hasta diciembre de 2024. Fue una trayectoria bastante larga, pero también muy fructífera.

El Instituto King Sejong comenzó como una idea. Lo primero que se realizó fue un concurso entre varias universidades ecuatorianas para seleccionar cuál sería la encargada de implementarlo. Este instituto está bajo la Fundación King Sejong en Corea.

Entonces, creo que lo que se busca no es únicamente difundir el idioma coreano como tal, sino también la cultura. Es decir, no se trata solo de enseñar el idioma, sino de transmitir todo lo que lo rodea. Me parece que es una estrategia muy interesante que realiza Corea del Sur para promover su cultura, porque articula varios elementos al mismo tiempo.

Por ejemplo, articula la diplomacia cultural con la educación, y la educación ocupa un lugar muy importante dentro de esta estrategia.

En el caso de Ecuador, el instituto en Quito fue el segundo que se creó. El primero estuvo en la ESPOL, pero no tuvo el efecto esperado y terminó cerrándose. Incluso, muchos de los materiales, como libros y otros recursos, fueron trasladados desde la ESPOL hacia Quito.

Entonces, muy orgullosamente puedo decir que el Instituto King Sejong de la Universidad Central es actualmente el único en el Ecuador. Ha tenido muchos logros durante la trayectoria que tuvimos y continúa desarrollándose. Creo que sí se pueden ver los frutos del trabajo realizado.

Sin embargo, el papel del instituto no se limita a ser un centro de enseñanza del idioma. No funciona únicamente como un espacio académico. También es un lugar donde las personas que aman la cultura coreana pueden conocerla más a profundidad.

Nosotros realizamos muchas actividades con los estudiantes, pero también involucramos a personas externas. Por ejemplo, organizamos casas abiertas donde puede participar tanto la comunidad estudiantil como el público en general. También realizamos presentaciones culturales.

Estas actividades son muy importantes porque permiten profundizar no solo en la cultura, sino también en los valores. Y creo que ese es un aspecto fundamental.

DP: En esa misma línea, usted mencionaba que a través del idioma se transmiten valores. Desde su perspectiva formativa y como directora, ¿qué lugar ocupa el idioma como herramienta de proyección cultural?

EA: Sí, claro. Como te decía, creo que es una estrategia muy bien pensada y muy bien lograda.

Actualmente estamos viviendo un boom de la cultura coreana. Tenemos el K-pop, los K-dramas, el K-beauty... todo esto funciona como una marca. Y esa marca atrae a mucha gente, especialmente a los jóvenes.

Yo recuerdo que antes, a pesar de que Ecuador tiene más de 55 años de relaciones con Corea del Sur, no se la consideraba de la misma manera que ahora. No tenía ese nivel de visibilidad o reconocimiento.

En cambio, hoy en día, esta estrategia ha logrado posicionarse muy bien. Y como te decía, no solo se difunde el idioma, sino todo lo que conlleva.

A través del idioma se transmiten valores muy marcados. Yo he podido observar estos valores directamente en el instituto, especialmente a través de los docentes, que son nativos. Tenemos docentes que vienen directamente desde Corea del Sur, así como algunos que han vivido muchos años aquí, pero que siguen siendo coreanos.

Por ejemplo, uno de los valores más importantes es el respeto. Siempre existe respeto hacia las autoridades y hacia las personas mayores. Esto se refleja incluso en actividades cotidianas, como comer: primero debe comer la persona de mayor edad.

También está la disciplina. Son muy disciplinados, muy puntuales. Entran a la hora exacta y salen a la hora exacta. No existe esa flexibilidad de “dar unos minutos” para llegar tarde.

Además, son muy responsables y constantes en lo que hacen. Buscan que todo esté bien hecho, de manera muy lograda, casi perfecta.

Otro elemento muy importante es el sentido de comunidad. Existe un fuerte sentido de pertenencia. Dentro del instituto se construye una identidad colectiva.

Por ejemplo, nosotros hablamos de ser “familia King Sejong”. Esto incluye a estudiantes, docentes, administrativos y autoridades. Todos forman parte de una misma comunidad.

Ese sentido de pertenencia es muy importante para ellos, y está directamente vinculado con la identidad nacional.

DP: Usted mencionaba actividades como casas abiertas. ¿Existe coordinación con instituciones como la Embajada de Corea?

EA: Sí, totalmente. Desde el día uno en que se planteó la idea de crear el instituto, la embajada estuvo involucrada. Siempre ha trabajado de la mano con el instituto.

Por ejemplo, en la Universidad Central tenemos el Korea Corner, que es un espacio dedicado completamente a Corea. Es el más grande de Sudamérica, e incluso uno de los más grandes a nivel mundial.

Es prácticamente un piso completo de la biblioteca dedicado a Corea. Es un espacio muy bonito, pero también muy funcional.

Este Korea Corner se desarrolló con el apoyo del Ministerio de Educación de Corea y de la embajada.

Esto demuestra que existe un respaldo institucional muy fuerte. Corea apuesta claramente por la educación y por la promoción de su cultura.

Además, el instituto recibe financiamiento de la Fundación King Sejong y apoyo constante de la embajada para actividades.

Entonces, hay una articulación muy clara entre distintas instituciones del Estado coreano.

DP: Desde el contexto local, ¿qué impactos ha observado en la percepción de la cultura coreana?

EA: Yo creo que los resultados son bastante evidentes.

Por ejemplo, cada vez que abrimos cupos para el primer nivel, estos se llenan en una hora. Eso demuestra el nivel de interés que existe.

Siempre tenemos listas de espera. La gente está muy interesada en aprender el idioma y la cultura.

Además, el instituto está abierto a todo el público mayor de edad, no solo a estudiantes de la Universidad Central. Tenemos estudiantes de diferentes lugares del país.

Durante la pandemia, por ejemplo, tuvimos estudiantes de todo el Ecuador. Recuerdo el caso de un estudiante de Cuenca que participó en un concurso de oratoria.

También hay oportunidades como viajes a Corea, donde los estudiantes pueden conocer la cultura directamente.

Las redes sociales también cumplen un rol importante en la difusión. Constantemente recibimos preguntas sobre cuándo se abren los cursos.

Y algo clave es que los cursos son gratuitos. Eso facilita el acceso.

Además, se han creado clubes entre los estudiantes. Por ejemplo, grupos que organizan actividades, cocinan, realizan eventos. Esto demuestra que se está generando una comunidad real alrededor del instituto.

DP: Desde su formación docente, ¿qué distingue el aprendizaje del coreano frente a otros idiomas?

EA: Creo que los intereses son completamente diferentes.

El inglés, por ejemplo, se aprende muchas veces por obligación, ya sea para titularse o para comunicarse globalmente.

En cambio, el coreano se aprende por interés cultural. Los estudiantes llegan por el K-pop, los K-dramas o la música.

Además, el aprendizaje del coreano es más integral. Incluye actividades culturales como cocinar o hacer origami.

Y, como te decía, se genera comunidad. No es solo asistir a clases. Es un proceso más holístico.

Esto también lo he visto con el kichwa. Antes, tanto el kichwa como el coreano se aprendían por interés personal, no por obligación. Eso genera un vínculo distinto.

DP: En relación con la identidad cultural, ¿qué diferencias observa entre Corea y Ecuador?

EA: Creo que una de las principales diferencias es el apoyo institucional.

En Corea existe un respaldo muy fuerte detrás de la cultura. Esto permite que las personas se identifiquen más con ella.

En Ecuador, aunque tenemos una gran diversidad cultural, no siempre existe ese apoyo.

Por ejemplo, en el caso del kichwa, muchos estudiantes dejan de hablarlo porque han experimentado discriminación desde pequeños. Sentían vergüenza, se burlaban de ellos, y eso genera un distanciamiento con el idioma.

En Corea, en cambio, la cultura genera unidad. Aquí, a veces, genera aislamiento.

Entonces, además del apoyo institucional, también influye lo que se transmite desde el hogar.

DP: ¿Qué desafíos ha identificado en el aprendizaje del coreano?

EA: Desde el punto de vista pedagógico, es un idioma complicado. Utiliza símbolos, lo cual es diferente al español.

Sin embargo, los estudiantes muestran mucha perseverancia. Tenemos varias cohortes que han completado los ocho niveles.

Algo interesante es que las primeras cohortes estuvieron conformadas únicamente por mujeres, lo cual fue motivo de orgullo.

También existen diferencias culturales, como la puntualidad, que pueden generar cierto choque.

Pero eso también forma parte del proceso de aprendizaje.

DP: Finalmente, ¿cómo definiría la identidad de los coreanos y de los ecuatorianos?

EA: Creo que los coreanos son personas íntegras, muy respetuosas, amables. Siempre hay un “por favor” y un “gracias”. Son confiables, leales.

En cuanto a los ecuatorianos, creo que somos alegres, amables, sinceros y buenas personas.

DP: Muchas gracias por su tiempo.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistado: Richard Salazar (RS)

Fecha: 11 de marzo de 2026

Modalidad: Virtual, plataforma Zoom

DP: Bueno, buenos días y muchas gracias, profesor Richard Salazar, nuevamente por aceptar esta invitación. Partiendo con mi primera pregunta, desde su perspectiva académica, ¿cómo compara la relevancia que le han dado tanto Corea del Sur como Ecuador a la integración de la imagen cultural y cómo esto ha llegado a impactar en el resultado de su imagen país?

RS: Bueno, a mí me parece que estamos comparando dos casos interesantes para un ejercicio académico porque los dos serían un paradigma de cómo a un país le ha ido muy bien y cómo ha trabajado muy bien su imagen país, y cómo a otro país le ha ido más bien mal, ha tenido un desempeño bastante pobre en el manejo de su imagen país. Por lo tanto, tiene prácticamente casi todo por hacer, que es el Ecuador.

En el caso de Corea, ellos han trabajado en su marca país, en la difusión de su imagen, desde hace muchísimo tiempo. Y cuando digo muchísimo tiempo, no es solamente desde la promoción más fuerte del soft power, que tú sabes muy bien lo que es el soft power y todo lo de la hallyu, la música, el cine, etcétera, sino desde los años sesenta. Desde los años sesenta, cuando ellos decidieron dar el giro para empezar a ser un país que exporta cosas al mundo y después orientarse hacia la tecnología, etcétera, ellos empezaron a manejar una imagen país muy fuerte para que les conozcan como eficientes.

Ellos siempre han querido dar la imagen de que son grandes trabajadores, muy competentes, etcétera. En mi última visita a Seúl el año pasado, si quieres te puedo mandar, por ahí tengo la foto, que es una foto así informal, pero me encontré con una publicidad que se promocionaba en libros y en revistas de Corea y de Estados Unidos, y bueno, era para mandar por el mundo revistas de envío de trabajadores coreanos al mundo. Y ahí había un mapa en donde dice: “Hemos mandado trabajadores a...”. Entonces, en América Latina aparecía Argentina. Habían mandado a Vietnam, a muchos países del mundo. Pero ellos promovían esa imagen de país competente y de grandes trabajadores.

Esa ya es una promoción de una marca país, es una promoción de una imagen del país que está ligada además con una cuestión cultural muy fuerte de los coreanos, que es ese sentido del trabajo. Para ellos el trabajo, junto con el estudio, es lo más sagrado de su vida. Familia, trabajo y estudios son las cosas más importantes, están en el centro del imaginario y de la forma de hacer la vida en los coreanos. Y por eso tienen este dicho del *pali pali*, que es trabajar mucho y trabajar de una forma eficiente y certera, es decir, cumplir los objetivos.

Entonces, esa es la imagen que ellos trataban de dar porque en ese momento lo que ellos querían es que el mundo contrate trabajadores coreanos y así empezar a promover y enviar. Tempranamente ellos ya se dieron cuenta de que si tenían coreanos por el mundo, pronto productos coreanos iban a poder simpatizar en esos otros países del mundo.

Eso por un lado. Luego, en el caso de Corea, el manejo del soft power empezó ya desde los años noventa, con un énfasis orientado hacia las industrias culturales. Cuando Corea tuvo ya un fuerte desarrollo tecnológico, de manera que empezó a exportar, y bueno, ya era un exportador de electrodomésticos, LG, Samsung, etcétera, y de automóviles en los años noventa, ellos empezaron a trabajar en industrias culturales como la música pop, como el cine, que no es que antes no hacían cine, pero empezaron a invertir dinero del Estado en esas industrias.

Algo muy importante que hay que decir, para tener clara la diferencia de estos dos modelos, es que el Estado siempre ha estado detrás de todas estas campañas, incluso hasta la actualidad, detrás de la ola coreana, etcétera. El Estado invierte muchos, muchos millones de dólares en estas industrias y en estas estrategias de promoción internacional.

Entonces, en los años noventa, los primeros que empezaron a trabajar este tipo de cosas eran los grandes *chaebols*. Los *chaebols* son estos conglomerados industriales familiares, como por ejemplo Samsung. Ellos son los que empezaron a trabajar eso. Desde luego, ellos en su momento, en los años sesenta, recibieron préstamos del Estado, etcétera, para promoverse. Y en los años noventa, los primeros que sacaron discos y grupos de música que eran apoyados por ellos eran estos conglomerados.

Como al final de los años noventa, en el año noventa y siete, hubo una crisis económica muy grave, que es conocida como la crisis asiática, afectó especialmente a los países del este de Asia, tanto del noreste como del sudeste asiático. Corea cayó en una crisis, pero dramática. En alguna de las clases contigo la vimos también, o quizá en más de una. La gente además, se le pidió colaboración de su bolsillo y de su propio patrimonio para pagar la deuda externa de Corea. Fue una cosa muy dramática y que, por cierto, ha ido de nuestro... bueno, como para los coreanos el país es lo más importante, entonces iba gente y donaba hasta su reloj, su cadena, cosas de oro, etcétera.

Pero cuando ocurrió eso, el Estado dijo: no, ahora tenemos que enfocarnos en nuevas industrias y ya no pueden ser las mismas empresas que tenían los temas tecnológicos las que hagan esto. Entonces prohibieron que estos grandes *chaebols* se dediquen a eso y decidieron financiar a nuevas empresas, porque son empresas privadas las que trabajan esto, para que empiecen a trabajar las industrias culturales.

Entonces, desde el final de los años noventa, quienes trabajaron esto fueron nuevos empresarios que ahora se han convertido en emporios enormes de reclutamiento, de entrenamiento, de producción y de lanzamiento de grupos, por ejemplo, de K-pop. Al mismo tiempo, empezaron a invertir en políticas públicas para apoyar, para desarrollar, para dar recursos, es decir, no solo recursos económicos, sino recursos de acceso, a cómo producir, etcétera, a nuevos cineastas, por ejemplo, para que puedan empezar a trabajar.

Y así es como floreció, desde finales de los años noventa a inicios de los años dos mil, una ola muy fuerte de industrias culturales en Corea. El objetivo de ellos era básicamente empezar a irrumpir en la gente joven y en la gente en general por el consumo de música, de videos, de películas y telenovelas, de manera que Corea se haga popular en el mundo y que Corea, básicamente, se haga *cool*. Lo que ellos buscaban es que Corea sea *cool*, porque querían que a la gente le guste Corea, que sea *cool* seguir a Corea. Y lo han logrado, lo han logrado muy bien.

Pero, como vemos al hacer este corto relato, esto no es una cosa ni espontánea ni de corto plazo, sino un trabajo extenso que ha ido también evolucionando en el tiempo, pero siempre con una proyección internacional.

Eso es en el caso de Corea. En el caso de Ecuador, paradójicamente, yo voy a saber más de Corea que de Ecuador, aunque yo soy ecuatoriano. En el caso ecuatoriano, yo te voy a decir una cosa más como de mi percepción, digamos, porque yo no soy un experto en las políticas de marca país, etcétera, que haya hecho el Ecuador. Sin embargo, puedo decir que en el caso ecuatoriano más bien ha existido históricamente una baja autoestima nacional, lo cual ha llevado a que no haya, digamos, un orgullo para promover una imagen nacional.

Y hay muchos motivos para eso, motivos históricos, motivos culturales, motivos políticos. Algo muy importante es que en Ecuador estamos sumamente atomizados, divididos por muchas cosas, por muchas cosas de origen antiguo, incluso colonial, porque nosotros, a diferencia de los coreanos, no nos vemos como iguales. La naturaleza del ecuatoriano es: “yo soy ecuatoriano, pero de Cuenca”, “yo soy ecuatoriano de Guayaquil”, “yo soy ecuatoriano de Quito”, y todo eso como diferenciándose. Entonces ya existe un regionalismo que es un problema, digamos, en este caso un problema natural de regiones naturales que nos divide.

Por otro lado, tenemos una historia que hizo que el país esté muy clasificado, sea por clases: los ricos, los pobres, los blancos, los indígenas, los cholos, los mestizos, los negros. Y esas cosas lastimosamente persisten. Adicionalmente, tenemos una gran diversidad cultural, que es una enorme riqueza, pero al mismo tiempo eso hace que seamos distintos, ya no en el sentido de clases en una jerarquía de pirámide, sino distintos, lo cual hace que hablemos otro idioma. Los indígenas hablan otros idiomas, comamos distinto, nos gusten tipos de comida, tipo de vestimenta, tipo de música, es decir, toda una diversidad cultural.

¿Y por qué menciono esto? No solamente porque hay que analizar ciertos elementos, sino porque si estamos hablando de una marca país y de una cuestión de proyección internacional, estamos hablando de identidad. Entonces aquí existen muchísimas identidades. Y, históricamente, al principio, o bueno, hace muchos años, hace un siglo, no existía la idea de poder promover una idea ecuatoriana con contenidos indígenas o de diversidad cultural. El Ecuador se quería vender como una nación todavía hispana, hispánica, española, y tratar de ser competitivo frente a la identidad hispánica de los colombianos, de los peruanos, de los mexicanos, de los latinoamericanos, y que sea bien apreciada todavía por España, o sea, que les vean como iguales.

Entonces, eso era un problema porque era mentira. O sea, este país no es de blancos, este país no es de hispanos. Este es un país súper diverso, aquí hay de todo. Luego, en los años setenta, y esto ya lo digo siempre desde mi propia percepción porque yo estoy recordando mis primeros recuerdos, mis primeros recuerdos de finales de los años setenta es que se trataba de promover, en cambio, una identidad más folclórica, una identidad más... como en ese tiempo estaban muy en auge grupos que no eran de Ecuador, pero por ejemplo Inti-Illimani, Los Cuatro del Altiplano, cosas así que trataban, en cambio, de exaltar la identidad indígena y promover una música más andina.

Y eso, digamos, estuvo bien. Estuvo bien porque era tratar de volver hacia algo que nos identifique más. Sin embargo, para el Ecuador eso es también un problema, porque en Guayaquil, en Manabí, etcétera, no tienen nada que ver con esa música y con pueblos indígenas de los Andes de altura. Entonces eso siempre ha sido un problema. Y al mismo tiempo eso llevó a una folclorización de los pueblos indígenas especialmente.

Y yo creo que hasta la actualidad existe esa idea de que, por ejemplo, alguien va a estudiar un posgrado, cuando yo he estado fuera del país y me he encontrado con colegas, estudiantes de Ecuador, existe como la necesidad de mostrar el lado indígena andino de lo ecuatoriano. Y siempre eso es discutible, ¿no? No porque uno quiere hacerse el blanco, sino porque yo, que vivo en Quito, que soy un ecuatoriano común y corriente, digamos, o sea una persona común, no soy un gran hacendado ni un blanco venido de que mis padres sean españoles o gringos, yo soy un ecuatoriano, pero no soy indígena, tampoco soy indígena. Entonces es una cosa como: ¿cómo te puedes identificar con eso y tratar de decir que así somos, si no es lo que somos todos? Entonces es un tema complicado.

Eso ha llevado además a que haya distintos tipos de complejos y de problemas, etcétera. Pero a la larga también ha hecho difícil que puedan existir políticas más apropiadas para promover una imagen del país. Esa diversidad, esa rivalidad entre identidades, hace que también sea difícil, porque ponte tú que tú fueras la ministra de temas culturales, o temas de educación y cultura, o de patrimonio, o de turismo, o de promoción, y dices: bueno, ahora, ¿cómo hago esto? Para los coreanos, en ese sentido, era más fácil porque no tienen una diversidad como nosotros. A pesar de que son cincuenta millones de personas ahora, todos hablan un solo idioma, todos son de etnia han, estéticamente tienen una fisonomía similar y no tienen esos problemas de sentirse que yo soy mejor o peor porque sea más blanco o tenga otro apellido o sea de otra región y se coma distinto. Allá hay mucho más uniformidad y esos temas son importantes a la hora de proyectar la imagen del país.

Finalmente, a mí me parece que el país ha hecho muy poco como Estado para promover esto de una forma más eficiente y más ambiciosa. Yo creo que durante el gobierno de Correa, entre el año 2007 y 2017, se emprendieron algunas campañas que fueron muy interesantes, que es verdad que nos pusieron un poco en el radar. Sin embargo, ese tipo de cosas nunca han sido sostenidas. De hecho, ahora que han pasado diecinueve años desde que empezó el gobierno de Correa, ya no hay nada de lo que había. Todos esos temas de imagen que se promovieron y que tenían un contenido político también, eran bastante propagandísticos. Pero, de todos modos, no existe una continuidad en las políticas y cuando el Estado, el gobierno, tiene menos dinero, automáticamente se cierran todos los temas que tengan que ver con cultura dentro del país. O sea, lo que más sufre es la educación y la cultura, y peor fuera del país, peor en pensar en trabajar en una campaña a nivel internacional, porque todo eso se traduce en dinero, en fondos que vas a promover, primero promoviendo una marca y luego además haciendo que en todas tus embajadas del mundo se empiecen a trabajar estos temas.

Entonces, no ha existido una continuidad, no existe por lo tanto una verdadera política pública orientada hacia estos temas en el Ecuador.

DP: Listo. Bueno, continuando con nuestra siguiente pregunta, que usted ya comenzó a elaborar un poco, profe, era con respecto a estos factores estructurales que pueden, bien sea, como usted dice, ayudar o limitar. Y hablábamos también un poco del rol institucional. ¿Cree que podría ahondar en que quizás los contextos políticos de cada uno de estos países inciden en esta construcción de imagen y marca país?

RS: Sí, sí, definitivamente. O sea, concluyendo la idea de lo que estábamos hablando antes, en síntesis, en Corea ha habido una política pública sostenida, permanente y que ha evolucionado hacia una mayor promoción de la imagen y de todos estos temas. Mientras en Ecuador, en esto no ha habido ni una política pública sostenida. Han habido iniciativas puntuales que han quedado aisladas de acuerdo a los intereses o a la planificación de gobiernos particulares, pero no ha habido una política pública, porque para que se llame política pública tiene que ser una cosa que es sostenida en el tiempo y que forma parte de una cuestión institucionalizada.

Ahora, hablando de los entornos políticos, esa es una pregunta central en el análisis de ambos casos, porque en el caso de Corea, como tú viste en nuestros cursos, todo esto empieza en los años sesenta, desde el año prácticamente sesenta y dos, sesenta y tres, en que Park Chung-hee, bueno, él llega al poder, siendo el que hizo el golpe de Estado en el año sesenta y uno. En el año sesenta y tres es supuestamente elegido democráticamente. Ya desde entonces, desde que él era el que gobernaba en el año sesenta y dos, cuando iniciamos relaciones diplomáticas entre Corea del Sur y quince países latinoamericanos, entre ellos Ecuador, él ya tenía una política definida para promover la imagen del país a nivel mundial.

Él era un dictador y él fue el dictador que gobernó hasta el año setenta y nueve, cuando murió asesinado. Murió él y se quedó otro militar, y le sucedió otro militar, y bueno, vivieron en dictadura hasta el año ochenta y siete. Desde el año ochenta y siete se democratiza el país, pero continuaron en una línea de promoción internacional, etcétera.

Ahora, ¿por qué traigo a colación lo de Park Chung-hee y de la dictadura? Porque, si bien una dictadura es criticable por todas las cuestiones de autoritarismo, de abusos contra los derechos humanos, y en Corea del Sur no fue la excepción, ahí hubo torturas, hubo excesos, persecuciones, y lograron tener democracia después, en el año ochenta y siete, gracias a la lucha de la gente, etcétera, pero eso ayudó para que la política sea sostenida, porque era el mismo gobernante desde el año sesenta y uno hasta el año setenta y nueve, lo cual son dieciocho años. Y luego una continuidad en todas las políticas con los militares y luego con los gobiernos que sucedieron.

Aquí existe una cuestión fundamental que es cultural, de los coreanos, y no solo de los coreanos, sino de todos los que tienen una raíz más bien confuciana, como por ejemplo, para empezar, China, desde luego Japón, Corea, Taiwán, los tigres asiáticos en general e incluso algunos del sudeste asiático. Ellos tienen una perspectiva de que el gobierno debe ser estable, de que las políticas tienen que planificarse y respetarse.

Entonces, no es como sucede en Ecuador y en América Latina, que aquí llega un nuevo gobernante e inaugura el país. Cambia de ministros, suprime unos ministerios, aumenta otros y se inventa el país de cero. Y, por lo tanto, las políticas del gobierno anterior, que normalmente son opuestas porque son gobiernos de oposición, no se van a seguir. O sea, por regla es como de manual no hacer lo que hacía el gobierno anterior, cerrar todos los programas acusándoles de que eran malos y corruptos, etcétera, lo cual muy generalmente suele ser así también. Pero, hablando de la política pública, no existe una continuidad.

En el caso de Corea existió una continuidad por esos dos factores. Uno, porque empezaron a desarrollarse en dictadura. Y dos, porque tienen una lógica cultural que les exige tener un rigor y continuar las políticas, especialmente las políticas buenas.

Ahora, en el caso de Corea, además hubo una particularidad. Empezaron a hacer planes quinquenales, planes de desarrollo de cinco años. Y esa, que paradójicamente es una política promovida desde la Unión Soviética, porque eso proviene de la Unión Soviética, es algo que lo tomaron los tigres asiáticos y luego también China. China hace sus planificaciones quinquenales y siguen esos planes, pero rigurosamente. Y en el caso de Corea, porque bueno, China es otra historia porque es el gobierno del partido y ellos continúan y es un único partido que gobierna, pero en el caso de Corea ellos, independientemente de que cambiaban de gobernante, continúan con el plan quinquenal. Entonces eso ha ayudado a que desde los años sesenta hasta la actualidad exista una línea de continuidad que, por motivos históricos políticos así como por motivos culturales, ha hecho un escenario favorable para que esta política y otras políticas, como las de innovación, etcétera, puedan promoverse de manera sostenida, permanente y a largo plazo.

En el caso del Ecuador es exactamente al revés, todo lo contrario. Pero incluso cuando aquí se cambia de ministro, tú eres todavía muy joven y si es que vas a trabajar en Ecuador, y si alguna vez te toca trabajar con instituciones públicas, vas a ver que es un total desastre, es una pesadilla. Porque si tú estabas haciendo un estudio, una consultoría, un plan, un proyecto, algo con un ministerio, cambian al ministro y el nuevo ministro, a pesar de que es del mismo gobierno, llega el nuevo ministro y dice: no, todo estaba mal, y despide a todos los funcionarios medios y altos que son de libre remoción y trae sus propios allegados, que pueden ser allegados, amigos, parientes o lo que fuera. Pero el asunto es que cada ministro inaugura el ministerio y las políticas nuevamente y dice: no, ahora sí vamos a hacer esto bien, ahora sí vamos a cambiar, ahora sí vamos a progresar. Y así sucesivamente. Entonces no existe una lógica de continuidad ni un escenario favorable políticamente en el Ecuador para el desarrollo de esta ni de otras, de ninguna política.

DP: Bueno, algo que también me gustaría quizás profundizar un poco más. Usted hablaba, profe, de que en el caso del Ecuador tiene una cultura, una multiculturalidad muy diversa. Entonces, la cultura podría ser, como dicen en el caso de Corea del Sur, más bien una herramienta, ya que son un país un tanto más homogéneo. En el caso de Ecuador, se ve cómo esta multiculturalidad, a pesar de que le brinda una característica única, no se ha podido cohesionar. Entonces, ¿podríamos decir que se observan limitantes en el uso de la cultura como herramienta de proyección internacional?

RS: A ver, yo creo que la diversidad cultural no es un problema, nunca debe ser vista como un problema, debería ser vista más bien como una cuestión que nos fortalece. El problema no es la diversidad cultural, sino la forma de percibir la diversidad cultural. Nosotros, por cuestiones históricas, aquí y en prácticamente toda América Latina, seguimos teniendo la idea de que los pueblos indígenas tienen menos derechos, son menos valiosos, tienen peor estética, etcétera, que los grupos hegemónicos, que casi coincide con prácticamente los blancos más europeos. Existe una racialización todavía de la sociedad que es muy, muy fuerte.

Mientras nosotros no nos veamos como iguales, lo cual nos lleva a tener igualdad de derechos y que podemos tener igualdad de condiciones, capacidades y derechos en todo sentido con los pueblos indígenas, afroecuatorianos, campesinos, etcétera, mientras no nos percibamos como iguales, no vamos a poder proyectar una identidad, aunque fuera diversa, con éxito. Y ese es el grave problema que nos lleva a tener una baja autoestima de estos temas nacionales, digamos, una baja autoestima nacional.

Porque fíjate, hay países que son sumamente diversos y que tienen una proyección internacional, incluso en el caso latinoamericano, tienen problemas muy parecidos a los de acá, pero tú no ves esa falta de autoestima que tenemos nosotros en los brasileños. Los brasileños son gente que tiene una autoestima, una actitud hacia la vida mucho menos acomplejada, mucho más libre, mucho más relajada, mucho más sin complejos ante el mundo, digamos. Entonces eso les lleva hasta a ser campeones mundiales de fútbol y todo eso, a promover el carnaval, etcétera, que además son cosas que, a pesar de que ellos también tienen pueblos indígenas, pueblos mestizos, la gran mayoría pueblos afros, etcétera, hay cosas que son nacionales, o sea, de orgullo nacional, como los carnavales.

Entonces, como nosotros somos un país pequeño que tiene unas condiciones históricas concretas, que tiene una herencia de idiosincrasia concreta, nosotros nos hemos percibido como menos valiosos que estos otros países, incluso vecinos como Brasil o latinoamericanos. Pero también existen, por ejemplo, en el sudeste asiático, países como Tailandia, que son sumamente diversos también, que ahí también tienen pueblos indígenas, ahí también tienen diversidad de lenguas, y que en este momento están promoviendo una imagen país mucho más potente que la del Ecuador.

Lo mismo Vietnam. Vietnam es un país que además ha surgido, igual que Corea, después de las cenizas de las guerras terribles de los años sesenta y setenta en el caso de Vietnam. Y ahora empieza a ser una potencia internacional y es un país que visitan millones y millones de personas. Ecuatorianos visitarán contados con los dedos de una mano al año. Pero yo una vez, para un programa que hice en radio, presenté esta noticia, era una cosa descomunal. En un mes Vietnam había recibido como doce veces más turistas de lo que recibe el Ecuador en todo el año. O sea, es una cosa impresionante. Y son países que son también diversos culturalmente, no solo tienen un idioma, tienen problemas, tuvieron problemas históricos, guerras, colonias.

En el caso de Vietnam, China... o sea, China se ha caracterizado por no invadir países, pero el único país que sí invadió fue Vietnam. Entonces, aun así, en esos países que han tenido graves problemas y conflictos, ellos ahora han logrado promover una imagen de país y atraer turistas y tener infraestructura y hacer cosas en turismo, por ejemplo, mucho más importantes, pero de lejos más importantes que el Ecuador.

DP: Y bueno, debido a su formación académica, tanto que tiene un amplio conocimiento de Asia y, bueno, como latinoamericano sabemos lo que pasó en nuestra región, ¿qué aprendizajes derivados, siendo más puntuales del caso de Corea del Sur, cree que serían necesarios para poder crear esta cohesión y proyección eficaz de tanto nuestra marca país y con ello tener una imagen país favorable?

RS: A ver, a mí me parece que hay que hacer un fuerte trabajo en educación. O sea, la política pública más importante que tiene que desarrollar este país es en la educación, pero una educación con valores bien concretos hacia la promoción de la equidad y de la diversidad de nuestro país, de tal forma que no nos sintamos menos, que no nos sintamos acomplejados por ser un país pequeño, por ser un país diverso, por ser un país con alto contenido indígena, no solamente, digamos, el mestizaje, sino también en la diversidad actual, y que nos haga ver entre todos nosotros como personas con iguales capacidades, derechos y dignidad.

O sea, si eso no se trabaja con las nuevas generaciones, eso no va a cambiar nunca. El problema es que los gobiernos no ayudan. Al contrario, nos llevan a tener una proyección siempre... o sea, como si fuera una consigna, como si fuera una cruz que tenemos que cargar, siempre con lo mismo. Porque fíjate, yo soy mucho mayor que tú. Yo ya he visto muchos más gobernantes que tú. Y cada gobierno viene con la historia de que ahora sí el nuevo país, el nuevo país, el nuevo país. O sea, lo que dice ahora el gobierno de Novoa, el nuevo país, es lo que vengo oyendo desde que tengo uso de razón.

Pero llegan todos los gobiernos y a pesar de que somos un país petrolero, hay cosas fundamentales en las que no se ha invertido y que seguimos teniendo problemas estructurales, por ejemplo la educación, por ejemplo la energía. Fíjate que tú empezaste, cuando hablábamos hace un momento, hablando de que lo único bueno de la lluvia es que no se va a ir la luz. Qué terrible. Estamos en el siglo veintiuno. Somos un país petrolero. ¿Por qué no estamos produciendo energía desde el petróleo? Obviamente para eso necesitamos tener una tecnología concreta, hidroeléctricas, todo lo que haya que tener. Pero ya teníamos que tener eso hace cincuenta años, porque el petróleo empezó a sacarse en el año setenta y dos. No es que empezamos a sacar el petróleo hace cinco años, hace diez años o hace veinte años, o cuando iba a empezar Correa. No. Esto es cosa de toda la vida y seguimos siendo un país que tiene esos graves problemas de inequidad, de problemas de educación, problemas estructurales, siendo país petrolero.

Y eso es una vergüenza, porque fíjate, estos países del este de Asia, que no tienen ni un cuarto de lo que tenemos nosotros aquí, han llegado a ser potencias. Y claro, hay algunos que dicen: bueno, lo que sucede es que a ellos les ayudó Estados Unidos. Sí, pero a nosotros también nos ha ayudado Estados Unidos y hemos recibido cooperación internacional de Estados Unidos, de Europa. Y hay estudios que analizan eso, la cantidad de cooperación que han recibido esos países. Y, a pesar de que no ha sido, digamos, un país privilegiado como fue Corea en los años sesenta por la cooperación de Estados Unidos, ellos despegaron, o sea, fueron muy inteligentes y aprovecharon esa cooperación para despegar. Nosotros no despegamos nunca.

Y lo peor es que siempre le seguimos echando la culpa a los de afuera. Siempre es culpa de los gringos. Después es culpa de los chinos. Después es culpa de los europeos. Después es culpa otra vez de los europeos porque nos colonizaron, y ya no somos colonia desde hace doscientos años y le seguimos echando la culpa a los españoles. O sea, por favor. Obvio que ellos tuvieron un rol concreto y fue terrible la colonia y hay problemas y hemos heredado cosas. Pero desde hace doscientos años, doscientos años, ya somos país. Ya no es echarles la culpa a ellos sino a nosotros mismos.

Y el grave problema es que las élites gobernantes, que pueden o no ser de origen colonial, pueden ser más blancas o más oscuras, pueden ser de mejores condiciones económicas, privilegiadas como ahora el gobierno de Novoa o no, como fue antes el gobierno de Correa, como fue antes el gobierno de Lucio Gutiérrez, pero esas élites gobernantes no han dado un paso decisivo con un verdadero compromiso para tratar de cambiar las cosas.

Y cuando digo esas élites gobernantes no estoy pensando solamente en sus cuatro años o en los ocho años si se reeligieran, sino que ese compromiso que tienen en Corea y en los países del este de Asia de continuar las políticas que vienen de gobiernos anteriores porque ya están planificadas. Entonces lo que se empezó hay que terminarlo, lo que está bien hay que continuarlo, lo que está mal, lo que sale mal, hay que corregirlo, hay que cambiarlo. Pero las políticas que funcionan y que son útiles para el país no pueden ser vistas como que es una política del Gutiérrez, o del Correa, o del Novoa, o del que sea. Tienen que ser políticas a largo plazo para que esto funcione.

Entonces, a mí me parece que hay que invertir mucho en educación, porque si no invertimos en educación, no solamente para estudiar mucho, sino para generar ciertos valores de equidad en la diversidad, esto no va a cambiar. Porque si las nuevas generaciones, ustedes, que van a ser líderes pronto, porque tú ya te estás graduando de la universidad y luego tú, tus compañeros y tus coetáneos van a ser los que gobiernen el Ecuador en su momento, entonces tiene que haber ese cambio de mentalidad.

Otro grave problema que tenemos nosotros, de raíz estructural, es la corrupción. Porque claro, el problema de la corrupción hace que, como es un sistema, la corrupción es un sistema, porque está en todos los niveles y no está solamente en las instituciones públicas. La corrupción está en todos los entes sociales, en todos los estamentos de la sociedad. Porque si un policía te para porque has cometido una infracción, tú tienes que pagar la multa. No puedes no pagar la multa y pedirle al policía que no te haga la infracción. Entonces esos detalles te hacen notar que la corrupción está sumida y naturalizada en nuestro país.

Y cuando ya empiezas a trabajar en cuestiones institucionales dentro del Estado, las coimas, los temas que se negocian, ya no son una pequeña coima de semáforo. Son cantidades grandes de dinero, grandes negocios del Estado, grandes consultorías. O sea, es muy jugoso pensar en lo que una persona puede sacar del Estado y que lastimosamente todos los gobiernos lo hacen. Entonces a veces incluso generan unos mecanismos súper bien estructurados, inteligentes, de corrupción.

Y yo digo, si nosotros estuviéramos más bien pensando en innovar otras cosas para generar industrias, para generar empresas, para generar empleo, para generar cosas con esa misma inteligencia, porque yo sostengo que los ecuatorianos y los de América no somos poco inteligentes, somos muy inteligentes. Somos además gente que tiene ideas, porque como nos toca vivir a veces con poco y con problemas, entonces te das modos de hacer cosas. Eso nosotros lo podríamos utilizar para innovar. Pero innovar no quiere decir solamente hacer computadoras y hacer carros eléctricos. Innovar quiere decir, por ejemplo, en la política pública; innovar quiere decir también, por ejemplo, hacer una medicina nueva si es que te da COVID y aquí hay medicinas ancestrales o los remedios de la abuela que te empiezan a curar. Lo que tenemos que hacer es empezar a investigar para ver qué componente tiene eso para que se saque una medicina. Y eso es innovar. Y eso puede ser un producto de venta mundial. O sea, el potencial mercado es todo el planeta. Entonces innovar no es solo tecnología, innovar es mucho.

Entonces el tema de la corrupción está muy enraizado en toda la sociedad y hace que esto sea un círculo vicioso que no se supera. Entonces, claro, viene un chico de tu edad y se gradúa y entra a trabajar en un ministerio con toda la voluntad y con ideas nuevas y quiere ser una persona buena y progresar y ser honesto y tal. Pero poco a poco se va dando cuenta que el otro, que el otro, empiezan a sacar una tajada y ya le ven con el auto nuevo y después en dos años ya tiene una casota y no sé qué, y el otro igual, y dicen: bueno, ¿y yo por qué no? Y encima te quedas sin trabajo y tienes que empezar a buscar y estás desesperado buscando trabajo, y después dices: oye, qué pendejo que era yo, era de haberme metido en esas y no estaría con problemas. Porque cuando ya no tienes trabajo y ya eres mayor, es un problema grave, porque no puedes pagar la educación de tus hijos, no puedes pagar la comida de tu familia, no puedes pagar ni tus propios zapatos. Entonces es un problema, y dices: carajo, no, algo tengo que hacer, y tal. Y es un círculo vicioso que se repite porque al final una persona que se queda sin trabajo y que está sin oportunidades, solo le quedan dos opciones: o la corrupción, en cualquier vía, o la migración.

Y entonces a eso nos ha llevado. Ahí hay un montón de... Y en el sur del Ecuador, tú conoces, además todos tenemos familiares en el resto del mundo, pero ustedes en el sur han tenido una tradición migratoria. Entonces es terrible que no te quede más que o meterte en esos círculos que son así muy tóxicos, porque repiten el ciclo de la corrupción, o migrar, o máximo tener un espacio modesto que no te dé mucho dinero, porque si no quieres meterte en cosas así, te toca estar abajo en la jerarquía de la gestión del Estado, por ejemplo.

Entonces el tema de la corrupción es un problema grave y que afecta a todo, desde luego que eso afecta también a la autoestima nacional como país, porque hace que todas estas políticas que se deberían ejecutar no se ejecuten, porque tiene que ser una cosa sostenida en el tiempo, a largo plazo, y seguimos, gobierno tras gobierno, década tras década, en lo mismo.

DP: Y bueno, para ir cerrando, profe, como dije, mi punto de partida es la identidad cultural y cómo esto incide en la imagen país. Entonces, como pregunta de cierre, estamos preguntando: ¿qué es para usted ser ecuatoriano? Y también, bueno, en su caso, ya que usted ha convivido bastante con coreanos, igual, como le dije, más tarde voy a tener la entrevista con Aidan Kim y le voy a preguntar qué es para usted ser coreano. Pero quería igual contestar primero su respuesta de qué es para usted ser ecuatoriano y cómo usted cree que llegaría él a identificar o dar respuesta a esto, para ver si la proyección o lo que él se cree ser es lo que llegamos a transmitir o entender nosotros, en especial usted, que ha tenido un acercamiento muy cercano con varios coreanos.

RS: A ver, o sea, la pregunta sería, por un lado, decir para mí qué es ser ecuatoriano y, por otro lado, decir mi opinión sobre cómo creo que los coreanos se perciben a sí mismos. ¿Ok? A ver, para mí ser ecuatoriano es una suerte. Yo creo que nosotros tenemos un país muy rico, muy bello y que además, pese a las vicisitudes, a los problemas, etcétera, nosotros tenemos mucho color, nosotros tenemos mucha diversidad, mucha diversidad en nuestra propia familia, en nuestra propia cultura, en nuestra propia idiosincrasia. Y eso hace que seamos personas bastante flexibles en las perspectivas del mundo.

Y quienes hemos tenido la suerte de tener educación y poder hacer una carrera universitaria y tal vez, en mi caso, también salir fuera del país y tener buena educación, digamos, eso nos hace tener un rango de acción enorme. Porque nosotros lo mismo podemos desenvolvemos en un campo, por decirte, cerca de Cuenca y subimos a veces a hacer paseos o investigaciones en las acémilas, cruzando montañas, que estar en el foro de las Naciones Unidas hablando de temas trascendentes de la política internacional. Lo mismo. O sea, tenemos un rango de acción muy, muy importante. Toda esa diversidad para mí es una riqueza.

Entonces, para mí ser ecuatoriano es eso, es ser una persona, alguien que tiene un acervo muy importante. Y en mi caso me considero afortunado de haber tenido buena educación y haber podido conocer mucho, no solo fuera del país, porque sí he tenido la suerte de poder ir fuera del país, sino también en el Ecuador. Yo he podido trabajar en muchas provincias, he podido hacer cosas, y la verdad es fascinante. Y además, cuanto más te mueves por las provincias, más encuentras gente muy valiosa, gente generosa.

Yo creo que además los ecuatorianos somos gente muy trabajadora, gente muy innovadora, ¿no es cierto?, porque, digo, nos damos modos de hacer cosas, y eso es parte de nuestra perspectiva y de nuestra identidad y de lo que somos.

Hablando de los coreanos, mi idea de cómo ellos se autoperciben es que para los coreanos lo mejor y los mejores del mundo es Corea y los coreanos. O sea, ellos tienen una altísima autoestima, a pesar de que tienen una actitud muy humilde, que es muy cultural. Entonces tú normalmente no les ves a los coreanos como, en el caso de Ecuador y América Latina, mucha gente que es súper jactanciosa y que cuando está hablando en público trata de demostrar que sabe o que es hijo de no sé quién o que proviene de no sé dónde o que ha estudiado en no sé dónde. No. Son generalmente muy discretos, muy humildes, pero tienen una altísima autoestima.

Para ellos lo mejor es Corea. Para ellos Corea es lo bello, lo bueno, lo inteligente, lo valioso. Y eso hace que ellos hayan podido desarrollar con éxito también esa proyección internacional, porque ellos están convencidos de eso, ellos están convencidos de que todo lo coreano es bueno y que, a pesar de que tengan errores y que de pronto te sale mal un electrodoméstico, no, ahora lo vamos a hacer de nuevo y lo vamos a hacer bien porque somos coreanos y el coreano es bueno y gana y es lo máximo.

Entonces eso yo creo que es algo muy importante en esa perspectiva de la vida. Pero fíjate, todo eso viene también con la cultura y la educación, porque si todo el día te están diciendo que somos pobres y que la culpa es de otros y que somos víctimas y que somos pobrecitos, nos han maltratado y muchas de esas cosas son verdad, pero llega un momento en el cual tienes tan asumido eso, que es como... y claro, cómo no voy a ser de mala calidad, o sea, cómo percibirse malo, malo no digo en el sentido de ser delincuente, sino en el sentido de como de menos calidad, si nos viven diciendo eso en los libros de historia una y otra vez, y si nos viven diciendo que además somos más pequeños y que tenemos menos potencialidad, y encima no vamos ni a las olimpiadas, no sacamos medallas y todo eso va abonando.

Entonces, en el caso de los coreanos, ellos tienen una percepción cultural muy alta de sí mismos. O sea, es una cuestión civilizatoria porque lo tienen muy asumido y desde hace muchas generaciones, hace miles de años. Y ese orgullo les ha llevado además a persistir, porque si ellos no hubieran tenido esa actitud históricamente, ya serían japoneses o chinos, porque además la península coreana es una pequeña península que toda la península no llega a ser ni la mitad del territorio del Ecuador y son dos países, y antes eran, digamos, un reino. Todo. Pero porque tenían esa autoestima y tal de que los coreanos nos debemos proteger para que no nos invadan, no podemos ser chinos y no podemos ser japoneses. Entonces eso es antiguo.

Y luego la educación, porque claro, a ellos les inculcan esto del *palli palli*, esto de... o sea, hay cosas que nosotros no podemos copiar, hay cosas que son excesivas, que te llevan a mucha frustración también. Pero, de todos modos, en su educación, tanto en su casa como en la escuela, les enseñan que lo coreano es valioso, que lo coreano es mejor, que lo coreano es bueno, que lo coreano es bello. Y eso lo vas a encontrar en cualquier ámbito en el que te relaciones con un coreano.

Yo me acuerdo, hace unos... no sé si te conté a ti o a quién le conté esta anécdota. Hace unos años, o sea ya unos ocho años debe ser, el consejero, o el segundo de a bordo de la embajada de Corea, me invita a comer para hablar sobre un evento que ellos querían hacer y que se hizo finalmente en la Universidad Andina. Entonces me invita a comer y éramos tres personas. Estaba él, una persona que era cónsul, que era mujer, y estaba yo. Y estábamos en un restaurante italiano.

Y ya en la sobremesa, el coreano dice: es que a las mujeres les gustan mucho los italianos, dicen que son guapísimos, que son bellos y tal. Y le digo: bueno, sí, pues eso dicen todas las mujeres. Y le digo: ¿tú también piensas eso?, le digo a la coreana. Y ella me dice: no, no, no, para nada. Pero sería, sería, o no era una broma. Dice: no, no, los más guapos hombres son los coreanos.

Entonces, claro, o sea, es una estética y una autoestima, pero ella lo decía serio, porque además no era una persona así chicharachera ni nada, sino que hablaba en serio. Bueno, ellos lo tienen asumido en todo sentido. En todo sentido, para ellos lo coreano es lo mejor. Y por eso les lleva a veces a tener actitudes también racistas. Fíjate, en Corea hay algunas discotecas y bares que solo pueden entrar coreanos y que, a pesar de que sean europeos, muy rubios, lo que sea, pero no, no, esto es solo para coreanos, usted no puede entrar. Solo los buenos pueden entrar. Pero yo hablo perfecto coreano. No importa, esto es solo para coreanos.

Y entonces es una cosa que te rompe los esquemas, ¿no?, que a la larga es también una actitud racista porque es excluyente, es limitante, es solo nosotros, solo nosotros, ustedes no, ustedes son otros, externos. Entonces te lleva a extremos. Pero ellos se autoperciben como lo mejor y yo creo que eso es algo muy positivo.

DP: Muchísimas gracias, profesor Richard Salazar, por su tiempo, su apertura y por todas las reflexiones compartidas. Han sido de gran aporte para esta investigación.

RS: No, con todo gusto, Daniela. Encantado de poder colaborar. Te deseo muchos éxitos en tu trabajo.

Appendix E

Transcription of Interviews from Ecuador

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistada: Mónica Martínez Mendiño (MM)

Fecha: 19 de febrero de 2026

Modalidad: Presencial, Centro de atención ciudadana del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana en Azogues

DP: Partiendo con la primera pregunta que le tengo: ¿qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la política exterior ecuatoriana?

MM: Como usted me dice, pero hay que partir de: ¿existe una política exterior? Exactamente. Al ser yo diplomática de carrera, debo decirte que, como los que se acogen a la quinta enmienda de quedarse en silencio, sí te puedo decir que no hay en este momento un pronunciamiento directo.

De hecho, se creó el Viceministerio de Cooperación Internacional, y ahí es donde se busca encontrar nichos de mercado para productos ecuatorianos. Lo que tú me estás preguntando es mucho más profundo, mucho más allá de simplemente colocar un producto en el mercado. Hoy por hoy tenemos una Subsecretaría de Asuntos Económicos y una Dirección de Asuntos Culturales, pero no están enfocados en la promoción de la marca país afuera.

Y esto se debe a varios motivos. En la parte comercial —no sé si conoces— el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, a pesar de ser el segundo ministerio que se creó cuando se constituye la República (primero se crea el Ministerio de Gobierno e inmediatamente se crea el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores), como Estado partimos con esos dos ministerios. Es una larga trayectoria, una larga historia, y esta historia ha hecho que vaya variando de acuerdo con los cambios que hemos tenido de política exterior. Si me preguntas cuál es la política exterior hoy por hoy, tengo mis dudas.

No existe vinculación entre esa subsecretaría de asuntos económicos y la parte cultural. Que yo conozca, no; no trabajan de manera conjunta. Y además surge otra pregunta dentro de la estructura del Estado: ¿quién está llevando marca país? Porque lo que tú sabes es que las relaciones exteriores son un juego de espejos con la realidad nacional, y todo lo que ocurre a nivel nacional tiene de alguna manera una proyección en la arena internacional.

¿Cuál es la institución nacional que vela por estos temas? Porque el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores lo que hace es servir de canal de estas instituciones, de estas acciones. Es el vocero, el negociador. Pero no somos —a no ser ente ejecutor en ninguna área— lo que hacemos es conducir, digamos, lo que sucede a nivel nacional.

En el caso, por ejemplo, de la marca país: ¿quién lo está llevando? ¿El Ministerio de Comercio? Si lo está llevando el Ministerio de Comercio, nuestro ministerio, desgraciadamente —y digo desgraciadamente— en el año 2007 perdió, bueno, miento: ahí lo recuperó en 2009... y en el 2011, más o menos, no me acuerdo exactamente las fechas, deja de ser Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Comercio Exterior y pasa a ser solamente Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana. Entonces, ese mandato que tenía de comercio exterior lo asume el Ministerio de la Producción.

De nuevo, históricamente ha habido como esta puja entre Ministerio de la Producción, Ministerio de Desarrollo Industrial, todos los nombres que tú quieras. Actualmente es el MIPRO: Ministerio de la Producción, Comercio Exterior... y hasta hace poco era “y Pesca”; ahora ya no es “Pesca”. Entonces son ellos los que son responsables de ese manejo. ¿Por qué? Porque la marca país tiene que ver con cómo te proyectas afuera, con cómo te proyectas afuera en el tema de mercados.

Si me hablas de marca país en términos de identidad, eso es un concepto mucho más abstracto y más complejo, y ahí tiene que ver con actuaciones que son parte de la tradición de la política exterior. Te doy un ejemplo: haber participado, ser muy activos en el Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial. ¿Qué tiene que ver la discriminación racial con la identidad? Mucho, porque eso significa también luchar por la diversidad.

Después, a partir de esas luchas, eso evoluciona y se da, por ejemplo, el Comité Intergubernamental de Pueblos Indígenas, donde ahí sí aparece con mayor fuerza esto de nuestra identidad y la defensa de la identidad. Pero eso está en la parte, digamos, antropológica.

Por otro lado, tienes otras defensas de la identidad nacional o de la marca nacional, como es la diversidad y la biodiversidad. Que se haya reconocido al Ecuador como uno de los 17 países megadiversos del mundo no es por un acaso. Detrás de eso hay una presentación, hay una investigación; el poder probar que somos por kilómetro cuadrado el país más megadiverso del planeta tiene que tener sustento científico detrás.

DP: Perdón que le interrumpa, pero me acuerdo: ahorita estamos viendo una materia que se llama Foreign Affairs y la docente es Estefanía Tello, no sé si le indica. Ella nos decía que si bien un país no puede tener tácitamente expresada una política exterior, debe tener una corriente o un propósito.

MM: A ver, de nuevo volvemos a la parte histórica. Ecuador históricamente ha tenido una política exterior basada en principios. En 2007, cuando se redactó la nueva Constitución —que en lo personal yo no estoy de acuerdo, pero por otras razones— el artículo 416, a diferencia de lo que ocurría antes, fija principios. Antes, la política exterior iba variando, iba teniendo diferentes matices: a veces estaba más enfocada en derechos humanos, a veces en temas de comercio. Teníamos épocas brillantes, como por ejemplo en 1980 con la doctrina Roldós, en la que la política exterior ecuatoriana se manifestaba como tal en los foros internacionales.

Esto fue variando a lo largo de los años hasta que algún iluminado dice: “no quiero que eso cambie”. Entonces lo ponen en la Constitución, marcando los principios de la política exterior y, por lo tanto, al estar en la Constitución, nosotros no podemos salirnos de eso.

Desde mi punto de vista personal, tienes una política exterior marcada en la Constitución, en el artículo 416, que dice lo que tenemos que hacer. ¿Se cumple o no se cumple? Esa es otra realidad. La pregunta que tú me haces... estoy segura de que este artículo lo defiende en muchas cosas, pero estamos preguntando ahora qué es la política exterior, esto de la marca país y cómo la identidad se proyecta en forma internacional.

El 416, el punto quinto, dice: reconoce los derechos de los distintos pueblos que coexisten dentro de los Estados, en especial el de promover mecanismos que expresen, preserven y protejan el carácter diverso de sus sociedades, y rechaza el racismo, la xenofobia y toda clase de

discriminación. Si esto es un principio de política exterior, nosotros tendríamos que tener un movimiento activo para que esto se haga efectivo.

Porque en eso yo sí soy abogada de la vieja escuela, de la escuela positivista. Cuando yo fui a la escuela de derecho, las leyes estaban para cumplirse, no como una aspiración de sociedad como es el caso de nuestra Constitución. Pero ser una aspiración igual tendría que ser exigible: que alguien diga al gobierno “bueno, ¿qué está haciendo para que...?” Y honestamente no lo veo.

DP: Y sobre lo que le preguntaba, estimada, si usted ha logrado percibir una integración consciente desde cada uno de los institutos o del gobierno: una integración de la identidad cultural, ¿a qué cree que se debe eso? ¿O desde su punto de vista considera necesario que tuviera una incidencia?

MM: Es necesario, es útil, es lo que nos permite construir nuestra identidad nacional. Desgraciadamente ha sido usada y manipulada por las diferentes corrientes políticas. Entonces, cuando estos conceptos tan profundos los utilizas como un eslogan político, los vacías de contenido. Y lo que hay en esta marca país es un vacío de contenido. Un vacío de contenido porque, al momento que quieres hablar de eso, siempre surge el debate político; no lo llamaría ideológico porque es una pena que ya ni siquiera tengamos debate ideológico, sino que este es un debate populista.

Y ahí tiene razón esto de confundir el folclor con identidad, comercio con preservación, por ejemplo, del conocimiento ancestral. Por ejemplo, no sé si vio el último logo de la marca país impulsado por el presidente... Aquí tengo una imagen. Encontré una tesis que decía que es un tanto simplista, ya que si usted lo ve comparando con la última que tuvimos en 2010 con el presidente Correa, también hubo un cambio, una transición; siquiera había una cierta identificación. Pero también fue tremendamente manipulada, fue tremendamente distorsionada y nos hizo un daño increíble porque perdimos credibilidad. Ese es el problema cuando tú tienes una imagen que pierde contenido: deja de representar lo que estabas buscando.

Esta fue la primera que tuvimos. ¿Qué quería representar? Quería representar la diversidad, las cuatro regiones, y no solamente las cuatro regiones. Recuerda que ellos son los impulsores de poner en la Constitución la palabra “nacionalidades”, cuando Ecuador siempre fue un país unitario. Y en la Constitución, dentro de las múltiples contradicciones que tenemos, se habla de pueblos y nacionalidades y un país unitario: una contradicción total, porque o eres pueblos y nacionalidades o eres país unitario. Y aquí lo que trata es de mezclar eso. Pero es más grave todavía porque lo mezcla con una cruz. Entonces estamos hablando ahí de una identidad cristiana. El símbolo de la cruz es totalmente católico. Entonces eso olvida la diferencia entre el sincretismo —que somos producto del sincretismo— y lo mezcla con esto de la diversidad, mezclando habas con queso.

Claro, de ahí tenemos este siguiente logo, que tiene un poco más de coherencia porque lo que busca es simplemente... y es solamente gráfico. Lo otro era profundo, con una identidad. Este, en cambio, es gráfico de nuestra realidad.

DP: Sí, entrevisté a una docente, Natalia Rincón; ella es coordinadora de la escuela de turismo y decía que esta segunda marca tiene elementos más tangibles.

MM: Totalmente. Y además no te dicen nada más que no sea la realidad geográfica. Ella decía: “para mí esa es la representación verdadera de lo que es el Ecuador”. No tiene que esforzarse; es explicatoria por sí misma, porque no tiene ningún contexto ideológico detrás. Entonces aquí solamente es biodiversidad.

De ahí tenemos esta que, si bien tuvo alcance, fue por el uso político que se le dio. Pero esta tenía otro vínculo: el símbolo de Naciones Unidas de la Agenda 2030. Si tú coges el símbolo de la Agenda 2030, te vas a dar cuenta que utiliza los mismos colores, el mismo círculo. Y es como diciendo: “bueno, vamos a poner aquí las metas y el Ecuador”. Es más tratar de ser parte del mundo sin decirlo. Como cuando se te agotan las ideas y copias lo que está de moda.

La propia campaña de *All You Need Is Ecuador*, si bien para llegar al público exterior se tuvo que hacer en inglés, hasta incluso el hecho de que... No, porque se consideró una ofensa, porque nos estábamos apropiando de una canción que tenía su identidad propia. Y aquí también hay este “robo” al logo de la Agenda 2030.

Y la actual, con el presidente... esta no te dice nada tampoco. No es una marca que se explique y dejó atrás los elementos propios. Esta tiene una ventaja: tienes un sol y tienes una línea que atraviesa, que es la línea del Ecuador. Entonces, así como la otra de la biodiversidad, tal vez aquí no parezca tan evidente, pero tiene conceptos que no son ideológicos, sino fácticos: Ecuador, mitad, sol.

DP: Y ya dejando a lo gráfico que se puede ver, ¿cómo usted percibe que en el ámbito internacional se ha logrado proyectar el Ecuador, la imagen internacional del Ecuador? ¿En qué estado cree que se encuentra?

MM: Terrible. Pero no necesito escopeta porque me van a botar. No, no hay. No hay política exterior.

Hablaba con la docente que me me dijiste —hecho ya fue mi primera entrevista; ustedes la segunda— y ella decía: “¿qué imagen tenemos?”, dejemos de lado el favor que pudo habernos hecho nuestra marca país. La seguridad... ni siquiera la recomendación boca a boca es buena: “vacaciones, no te vayas a la costa, está peligrosa”. Basta con... Todos los países, sobre todo los desarrollados, tienen lo que se llama la lista de países seguros. Nosotros estamos en casi todos los desarrollados en la lista de países no recomendables. O sea, las embajadas no recomiendan visitar el Ecuador.

Yo sí tengo amigos que me dicen: “bueno, ¿cuán real es?” Me gustaría ir a visitarte, pero ¿es verdad que matan en las calles, así indiscriminadamente? Lo que pasó en la pandemia y cómo se vio el desastre de Guayaquil es un daño del que no nos hemos recuperado. La gente sigue acordándose de los muertos tirados en la calle. Y no hubo en su momento —y no hay ahora porque ya se considera extemporáneo— una política de remediación de esa imagen.

DP: Y hablando sobre políticas, ¿cree que hay algo en el poder de las instituciones para poder priorizar o reconstruir factores que ayuden a esta proyección internacional, considerando que no parte desde una política exterior clara?

MM: Desgraciadamente, cuando el presidente Correa asumió el poder —y digo desgraciadamente porque destruyó la carrera— la ley decía, y todavía lo dice, que solamente el 20% del servicio exterior puede ser político y en la primera categoría. Tú sabes que la carrera exterior tiene seis categorías; la primera categoría es la de embajador. El 20% de los embajadores pueden ser políticos. ¿Qué hizo Correa? Dijo: “ok, 20%, pero de todos”.

Y no solamente de todos los diplomáticos, sino de todo el servicio exterior. El servicio exterior está compuesto por dos carreras: el servicio auxiliar, el servicio administrativo y el servicio diplomático. Entre todos hacemos, creo, cerca de 2.000 personas. Tenemos en el mundo 48 embajadas. Hoy por hoy, si el presidente nombra a todos los embajadores políticos, igual no incumple la ley. Y esa culpa la tuvo Correa.

Yo regresé al país hace dos años. Desde que he regresado, he visto cómo cada vez regresan a diplomáticos de carrera y los sustituyen por políticos.

Los diplomáticos de carrera todavía existimos, pero estamos arrinconados. Cada vez más nos obligan a jubilar, nos obligan a irnos.

DP: Y entonces podríamos decir que desde las instituciones hay esta dificultad para poder crear continuidad...

MM: Una de las críticas que decía Correa —y a mí me hacía enojar muchísimo— es que el servicio exterior era elitista y no democrático. Y eso es mentira. ¿Por qué? Porque el servicio exterior elitista existió hasta 1987. Hasta ese año, de cada diez diplomáticos que ingresaban, siete ingresaban por contactos, por buena familia, por lo que tú quieras, y tres ingresaban por méritos. Siempre han existido personas que han ingresado por méritos. Cuando en 1987 se crea la Academia Diplomática, la Academia revierte esa tendencia. No te voy a decir que pasamos al 100% de mérito, pero ya un 70% por lo menos era de mérito. Y habían excepciones, y conocemos las excepciones: algún favoritismo, algún amigo.

Eso se mantuvo hasta que Correa eliminó la Academia Diplomática, eliminó la carrera diplomática y, con el cuento de la integración de la identidad, permitió que ingresaran al servicio exterior personas que no dominaban el inglés, que es la lengua de trabajo de la diplomacia. Le guste a quien le guste, no puedes tapar el sol con un dedo: esa es una lengua de trabajo, no es una lengua de la colonia ni del elitismo, es una lengua de trabajo universal.

Entonces, si tú tienes gente que no maneja ese idioma, tú tienes gente que no ha estudiado derecho, relaciones internacionales, economía, sino que ha estudiado, por ejemplo, turismo. Tienen otros tipos de conocimientos, pero no manejan idiomas. Tienen vacíos enormes.

Yo recuerdo que un año me pidieron que sea juez de un concurso de terceros secretarios. Acepté ser juez. Recuerdo que, para ayudar a una persona —era una indígena—, le tenía que preguntar sobre literatura. Nosotros, para ingresar al servicio exterior, teníamos que conocer literatura, historia, geografía, historia de límites. Esas eran las bases para poder ingresar, porque tú no puedes defender lo que no conoces y tú no puedes amar lo que no sabes.

Entonces, para no atormentarle como a mí sí me atormentaron —cuando me preguntaban, por ejemplo, dentro de la generación de decapitados cuál fue el representante más joven—, le dije: “dígame usted cuál es su autor ecuatoriano preferido”. ¿Qué crees que me contestó? “Ninguno, porque a mí no me gusta leer”. ¿Qué hace aquí?

Pasaron los meses y un día me la encuentro en los pasillos de la Cancillería. Y yo digo: “¿y usted?” Y me dice: “ya ve, pese a su nota, yo gané el concurso”. Entonces esa gente tenemos ahora.

Cuando tú tienes una masa de personas con ese tipo de formación y viene otra idea política o viene otra ideología, ¿qué es lo que pasa? Dicen: “yo no puedo trabajar con esto”. Claro. Porque no se quedan por sus habilidades, sino porque “sirve para ser mi títere”. Y ese mismo después dice: “me discriminan, me ponen a un lado”. Y eso, a la vez, a la autoridad le da un pretexto para decir: “yo no puedo trabajar con esta gente, tengo que poner a los míos”. Y ahí empieza esa pugna política, esa pugna de ideología. Ya no es porque no sirve para el puesto; es una excusa para reemplazos sucesivos.

DP: ¿Cree que hay un trabajo que se pueda hacer desde las instituciones para romper esto?

MM: Yo tenía mucha esperanza, por ejemplo, en el Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio. El INPC jugó un rol importante. Hay que reconocer que en gobiernos pasados surgieron instituciones interesantes con fuerza identitaria y de preservación, pero este rato yo veo que no cumplen su papel. Perdieron el norte, perdieron para lo que fueron creados. Debería ser una institución líder, porque es clave el tema de patrimonio.

Y el vínculo con Cancillería es a través de las responsabilidades que nosotros hemos adquirido por los convenios de UNESCO. Ser parte de UNESCO nos obliga a la conservación, nos obliga a que esa marca país sea una marca país con contenidos. Pero yo no veo que se esté haciendo nada.

Te doy un ejemplo: en diciembre de este año tenemos que presentar el informe nacional del plan de implementación de la conservación del Qhapaq Ñan. Hace unas dos semanas se suponía que íbamos a conformar el comité local. Fui a Ingaipirca; no llegó ninguna otra autoridad. Estábamos los del INPC, estaba yo, y delegados de los GAD. El delegado no tiene poder de decisión. Fue como: “bueno, como no están las autoridades no podemos firmar nada, entonces no podemos seguir conversando”. Y nunca más me volvieron a llamar. ¿Qué vamos a hacer de aquí a diciembre? Ya diciembre está a la vuelta de la esquina.

DP: Una pregunta para cerrar: para usted, ¿qué es la identidad cultural ecuatoriana?

MM: Yo te dije la palabra sincretismo. Creo que necesitamos trabajar más, porque se habla mucho de la identidad mestiza y a mí la identidad mestiza me suena como yuxtaposición de cosas. En cambio, si uno analiza, y te invito a que vayas a cualquiera de nuestras iglesias —Santo Domingo o El Cenáculo— y te fijas bien en las imágenes, ahí no ves misticismo; ahí ves sincretismo.

¿Qué significa el sincretismo? Esa fusión que a partir de dos crea un tercero. Y nosotros somos ese tercero. No somos el mestizo de esa mezcla. Somos ese tercero que tiene vida propia a partir de una raíz diversa. En tiempos de colonia esa raíz diversa era indígena y española. Pero hoy día esa raíz diversa incluso llega a ser norteamericana, europea, euroasiática, y permite ese sincretismo como resultado algo diverso.

Y no me voy más allá: los gustos culinarios. Nuestros gustos culinarios con el tiempo han ido cambiando. Hace 40 años en Cuenca no se sabía lo que era el sushi, y este rato el sushi es un plato internacional como cualquier otro. Es más: el sushi que nosotros tenemos no existe en ninguna otra parte del mundo. ¿Por qué? Porque ya es un producto sincrético: trae elementos nuestros que no los vas a encontrar en Perú —que es el país que más ha desarrollado el maridaje con comida japonesa—, y no lo vas a encontrar en Japón definitivamente.

Es lo mismo que, por ejemplo, dicen que la pizza es “newyorkina” a pesar de que sus orígenes están en... y Marco Polo lo trajo a Italia... y luego Italia lo mueve por el mundo a través de sus migrantes, no como una política colonizadora, sino a través de su gente. ¿Dónde está la mayor población inmigrante italiana del siglo pasado? En Nueva York. Entonces tienes que ir conectando historia.

Para mí, eso tiene que ver mucho con la historia. Necesitas conocer historia. No es solamente hablar de identidad en esta pelea ideológica. Por eso cuando me dicen: “¡Ay, el orgullo del traje ancestral!” Nuestros indígenas visten así por una imitación de las costumbres europeas del siglo XVI. No es anterior a eso. Si uno lee historia, va a encontrar indicios de que no utilizaban lana, sino fibras vegetales.

Yo mi carrera la he desarrollado fundamentalmente en organismos internacionales. En la década de los 90, uno de mis primeros comités internacionales era el comité Ramsar, protección de humedales. Pero protección de humedales también vinculada a fibras, y yo creo que hemos estado negando por demasiado tiempo la identidad que el Ecuador tiene con las fibras vegetales.

Tenemos el sombrero de paja toquilla. Pero ¿cuál es esa historia detrás? Si uno va calando, calando, calando, se da cuenta de que la utilización de fibras vegetales es mucho más rica y más profunda que un sombrero. ¿A qué le damos valor?

En cambio, la pollera de la chola cuencana es solamente la pollera andaluza del siglo XVI de las mujeres campesinas. Entonces, creer en esta pelea de “indios versus blancos”, de “indios versus españoles”, es negar la historia, negar el sincretismo, negar que somos un producto distinto de fuerzas que en algún momento se encontraron. Somos un tercer producto de todo lo que hemos vivido. Y vamos a seguir desarrollándonos y evolucionando en esa tercera vía. Si tratas de volver a hacerla en confrontación, pierdes identidad. Y el momento que pierdes identidad, pierdes esa capacidad de presentarte al mundo.

En esto de la marca país —y sin que haya sido una política exterior— sí es cierto que los diplomáticos de carrera utilizamos los eventos internacionales para mostrar quiénes somos. Yo, por ejemplo, todos los años cuando estuve en Ginebra, en el día de las Naciones Unidas, era famosa por hacer mote pillo, porque es algo súper rico, súper identitario, súper novedoso, y es sencillo dentro de lo que cabe cuando consigues el maíz. Yo conseguía el maíz “hindú”, que es así, gordo, de la sierra. Pero eso transmite algo.

Por ejemplo, el orgullo de vestirme de chola en las fiestas nacionales. Y alguna vez una colega —otavaleña— estaba furiosa conmigo y me dijo: “no te permito que te disfraces”. Pero es verdad: si yo me vistiera de otavaleña, me estaría disfrazando. Pero si yo me visto de chola, esa es mi identidad. Y te pido, con respeto, que tú me respetes a mí.

DP: Me acuerdo que ahora estamos viendo Contemporary Thought y hablamos de esta visión del “otro” en nuestro propio país...

MM: El servicio exterior... no hemos tenido indígenas como diplomáticos de carrera. Fuimos mestizos, es como yo. Bueno, de hecho, yo soy la primera mujer cuencana embajadora diplomática de carrera. Fui la primera que ingresó. Tras de mí todavía no hay embajadoras, pero hay muchos jóvenes que eventualmente van a llegar. Espero que con su vida siga así, porque se necesita que llegue.

No sé en qué vamos a acabar, porque se ha vuelto más un juego político. Y si un joven me pregunta ahora: “¿usted cree que valga la pena que yo ingrese a ese servicio exterior?”, le voy a decir: “no sé”. Porque cuando yo ingresé, yo sabía que si yo me esforzaba, si yo cumplía... y no es que las cosas eran fáciles, y no es que no me hayan discriminado, y no es que no me hayan dejado en el rincón de años, y no es que no haya sufrido persecución política; todo eso lo sufrí. Pero había esa esperanza de llegar a la primera categoría.

¿Ahora? Si llegan a la primera categoría, ¿para qué? Si no les van a dejar salir, si no les van a dejar representar al país. Antes de Correa, por ejemplo, siempre han habido embajadores políticos, siempre; cuota mínima, pero siempre. En algunos gobiernos más, en otros menos. Pero en el ámbito en el que nunca se metían era en organismos internacionales. ¿Por qué? Porque se supone que para organismos internacionales tú tienes un conocimiento muy especial, muy específico, muy técnico, muy profesional.

Hasta que llegó el señor Ferreira y nos sacó de los organismos internacionales. Entonces ahora todos los gobiernos de turno piensan que eso es facilito, que cualquiera puede estar a la cabeza de un organismo internacional. Ya ni siquiera es un espacio que antes era sagrado; ahora ya no se respeta.

DP: Muchas gracias por su tiempo. Completé todas mis preguntas y, más que todo, le agradezco por adelantarse a otros temas que también me aportan muchísimo.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

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DP: [Inicio de grabación]. Bueno, primero muchas gracias, Mateo, por aceptar esta entrevista. Para contextualizar brevemente, mi investigación aborda la relación entre imagen país y marca país. Y, obviamente, para poder lograr esto se necesitan instrumentos, y parte de esos instrumentos es la política y el involucramiento del gobierno. Entonces, sin más preámbulo, quería consultarle: desde su ocupación y su cargo, ¿qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la proyección que se lleva desde el Ministerio de Turismo?

ME: A ver, recordando que ahora estamos fusionados con Producción, nuestra misión básicamente es la promoción del Ecuador como destino turístico, tanto a nivel interno como a nivel internacional. Y luego también desarrollamos otras acciones que tienen que ver con las inversiones, con la competitividad y con la calidad turística. Entonces, eso es lo que nosotros hacemos.

Y claro, básicamente este tema de la promoción es un puntal absolutamente importante dentro de las acciones que nosotros ejecutamos. Evidentemente, nuestra labor es promover todo lo positivo que tiene el Ecuador hacia el mundo. Y lo positivo se refiere, básicamente, a los atractivos turísticos que tenemos en el país. Nosotros tenemos un inventario de atractivos turísticos, tenemos un catastro de establecimientos turísticos, donde están todos los establecimientos que tienen cierto nivel de calidad en el país, y eso es lo que promovemos a nivel nacional e internacional.

Dentro de esta propuesta, el tema de la cultura ecuatoriana como concepto es muy importante. El Ecuador es un país que se aleja del turismo de masas. A nosotros no nos interesa el turismo de masas; nos acercamos más bien a los principios del turismo sostenible. Preferimos que haya menos visitantes, pero que sean visitantes que se queden más tiempo y que gasten más.

En ese sentido, esos turistas que se quedan más tiempo y gastan más son mucho más valiosos, porque evidentemente aportan más al país y conocen mejor todo lo que el Ecuador ofrece. Claro que hay que crecer en el número de visitantes, pero sin llegar a lo masivo.

Entonces, nosotros valoramos dos cosas fundamentales. Primero, el patrimonio natural del país. Por supuesto, el tema de la biodiversidad que tenemos es realmente importante. El 25 % de nuestro territorio tiene algún nivel de protección, y uno de los indicadores interesantes es que, por kilómetro cuadrado, somos el país más megadiverso del mundo, con muchísimas especies de aves, de orquídeas, de mamíferos y de reptiles.

Y luego, por supuesto, esa diversidad natural también se traduce a lo cultural, a la diversidad cultural que nosotros tenemos, representada por más de 18 poblaciones distintas y 14 nacionalidades indígenas, con todo su patrimonio y con toda su historia. Y también con todas las poblaciones que forman parte de la conformación de la cultura ecuatoriana.

Entonces, todas esas manifestaciones materiales e inmateriales son importantes para promover el país. Es decir, promovemos el país con ese reflejo de la diversidad cultural que tenemos. Esa diversidad cultural viene de esa mezcla entre antiguas culturas propias de este

territorio, la cultura inca y la cultura española. Básicamente eso nos da un sincretismo muy interesante, que se convierte en fiestas populares, en manifestaciones artesanales de gran importancia y también en una cultura contemporánea importante que nosotros promovemos.

En ese sentido, tenemos una alianza importante también con el Ministerio de Cultura, porque compartimos muchos valores en esta promoción del turismo a través de la cultura ecuatoriana como concepto. Ahora además hemos creado una marca país, una marca país que combina un logotipo con un concepto.

DP: Y justamente en esa línea, usted mencionaba que el país se articula en parte a través de productos y de una historia detrás de esos productos. ¿Hay alguna selección consciente de rasgos culturales o de valores intangibles que desde el Ministerio de Turismo se esté haciendo actualmente?

ME: A ver, primero hay que decir que esta marca país se empezó a usar después de un proceso competitivo para ubicar una marca que nos identificara. El tema de las marcas país es algo que está comprobado en el mundo: se requiere una marca país potente para que el mercado pueda ubicar un destino, tanto a nivel interno como internacional.

Entonces, esta marca es una marca paraguas. Hasta el momento se la ha usado sobre todo en el tema turístico. Todos los materiales que tenemos desde el Viceministerio de Turismo tienen como cobijo esta marca. Y, en realidad, hay una posibilidad grande de que el Ecuador pueda posicionarse con ella.

Esta marca, además, debe tener varias aplicaciones en el futuro. Una de esas aplicaciones es una campaña de promoción internacional en la que estamos trabajando. Vamos a tener también una campaña vinculada al Mundial de Fútbol, que engloba la marca país y los valores que están ahí. Entonces, de todas maneras, es una propuesta importante e interesante que estamos promoviendo.

Y como ejemplo, la semana pasada estuvimos en la feria ANATO, en Bogotá. Nosotros vamos a varias ferias turísticas al año, no ferias culturales sino turísticas, y en esas ferias tenemos stands en los que está aplicada la marca país. Ahí tenemos espacios para operadores turísticos que van a vender su producto.

No hay que olvidarnos de una cosa: el turismo es una actividad del sector privado, facilitada por el sector público. Entonces, en esos stands de operadores llevamos también productos ecuatorianos que son parte de la cultura, como café y cacao, que son componentes productivos importantes del país. Pero detrás del café hay una cultura, detrás del cacao hay una historia que contamos. Hablamos del Ecuador como origen del cacao, de los estudios arqueológicos de Palanda, por ejemplo, y de ahí se proyecta también la imagen turística.

Tenemos igualmente manifestaciones culturales. Este año hemos decidido llevar más animación a las ferias para que el stand sea bonito y atractivo. Por ejemplo, la Diablada de Pillaro nos ha acompañado a FITUR, en Madrid, a ANATO, en Colombia, y esta semana a la ITB, en Berlín. Entonces, claro, también estamos mostrando que el Ecuador tiene una cultura popular y unas manifestaciones inmateriales muy interesantes.

Y luego, en nuestra propuesta de material promocional, nosotros trabajamos mucho con elementos que reflejen la cultura del Ecuador: sombreros de paja toquilla, textiles tradicionales, chocolate ecuatoriano, café ecuatoriano. Es decir, nuestro merchandising también tiene elementos culturales que han sido curados, que han sido seleccionados para ser utilizados de manera adecuada.

Esta vinculación entre turismo y cultura es importante en la imagen externa que tiene el país. Tenemos una colaboración con el Ministerio de Cultura en ciertos eventos internacionales. Por ejemplo, colaboramos en el festival de cine de Cannes el año pasado para promover, desde turismo, al Ecuador como destino filmico y, desde cultura, todo el tema de las artes.

Este año vamos a hacer algo similar en otros espacios, como el Festival de Venecia y la Feria del Libro de Lima, también con la imagen de marca país. Es decir, tenemos una colaboración importante para promover, desde el exterior, la cultura ecuatoriana.

Y desde el punto de vista del turismo interno, que también es importante, hay que saber que el turismo externo es fundamental porque trae nuevas divisas a la economía, pero el turismo interno también es importante porque significa circulación de dinero dentro del país, incluso en zonas que no siempre están vinculadas al sector tradicional. Entonces ahí también tenemos campañas donde mezclamos elementos de cultura ecuatoriana y naturaleza para atraer al turismo interno y para que la gente se anime a viajar localmente.

DP: Bueno, decía justamente que de alguna manera esto se articula en rasgos culturales y productos con una historia detrás. Pero, por ejemplo, recordando la marca país previa, "Ecuador ama la vida", esta apelaba bastante a valores intangibles, como el amor a la vida o a la naturaleza. ¿Hay actualmente una selección similar de valores intangibles?

ME: Los valores intangibles de la cultura son todos aquellos que están dentro del imaginario de la gente. Entonces, ese valor intangible, por supuesto, está reflejado en la marca país actual. Está el nombre de Ecuador con color amarillo, que alude al sol, y también a la diversidad que tenemos en el país. Y está también toda la aplicación y el manual de marca, que básicamente propone eso.

No hay que olvidarse de que la marca país es una marca paraguas. Es una marca paraguas de todo lo que nosotros intentamos hacer para que distintos ministerios y distintas organizaciones nacionales puedan usarla en diversas actividades. En este caso, el Ministerio de Cultura usa, por ejemplo, la marca país en las ferias de libros, en las ferias de cine y en otros eventos a los que va.

Pero claro, la marca sí tiene detrás un estudio muy grande de lo que implica, y lo que la marca dice es: Ecuador brilla auténticamente. ¿Por qué brilla auténticamente? Porque brilla por su diversidad, en todos los sentidos: diversidad natural y diversidad humana. Entonces, eso es algo que sin duda está presente.

DP: Y actualmente, aunque sabemos que es una marca relativamente nueva, ¿qué resultados o qué imagen proyectada considera que ha logrado hasta ahora, sobre todo dentro del ámbito del turismo?

ME: Bueno, la marca país empezó a usarse en enero de 2024. Desde entonces ya llevamos un tiempo de uso de la marca. Es una marca que se ha utilizado mucho más a nivel internacional, en la promoción del turismo, y los resultados son importantes.

Primero, porque el año pasado tuvimos aproximadamente 1,2 millones de visitantes extranjeros. Eso se debe a muchos factores, por supuesto, pero uno de ellos es que cuando vamos a las ferias con el sector privado y con el objetivo de promover el país, ya nos ubican. Ya saben quién es Ecuador, ya saben cuáles son los valores de la marca, ya saben que existe esa diversidad asociada al destino.

Luego, esa marca se ha ido apropiando cada vez más dentro del sector turístico, y también en los negocios privados se la empieza a usar. Entonces, el concepto que usted explicaba se va consolidando: el turismo ecuatoriano no es un turismo masivo, es un turismo sostenible, un turismo que aprecia la diversidad, que aprecia la cultura y que aprecia una serie de valores que están ahí.

Entonces, además de que ha aumentado el número de visitantes, la marca país nos ayuda a que nos ubiquen mucho más en el mercado. Porque el turismo no es un negocio de velocidad, es un negocio de resistencia. Los frutos de una feria o de un evento de promoción no se ven de inmediato; se cosechan con el tiempo. Si uno hace una acción ahora, probablemente los frutos se verán en 2027 o en 2028. El mercado necesita tiempo.

Pero la marca ayuda justamente a eso. Un agente de viajes que va a un evento de promoción turística del Ecuador en Italia, y luego va a Francia o a Argentina o a Canadá, o ve una publicación especializada, al encontrar la marca país sabe de qué destino se está hablando. Esa es la ventaja de tener una marca que identifique de manera clara los valores del destino.

DP: Quizás más desde su experiencia, porque revisando su trayectoria profesional vi que también fue asesor entre 2021 y 2024. Desde ese acercamiento, ¿cuáles considera que han sido los impactos más destacables de la evolución de la marca país?

ME: De hecho, yo no estuve dentro del proceso de creación mismo de la marca, pero sí estuve cerca del proceso. La empresa que hizo la marca país fue una empresa internacional muy importante, FutureBrand, que ha trabajado también la marca turística de Perú y la de Nueva Zelanda, entre muchas otras.

Entonces, uno puede ver claramente el proceso. Cuando yo empecé a trabajar en el Ministerio de Turismo, no teníamos una marca país. Teníamos simplemente el nombre del Ecuador, sin concepto, sin una marca que identificara al país. Y claro, cuando uno está en el mercado turístico, se da cuenta del impacto que tiene una marca dentro del tema promocional.

Vemos que realmente hay una gran diferencia en el mercadeo y en la comunicación entre tener una marca país y no tenerla. No tener una marca es ser, de alguna manera, un poco anónimo. Sí, existe el nombre del país, pero eso no es una marca. No hay aplicación, no hay un manual de marca, no hay una ubicación clara en el mercado.

Entonces, una marca país nos da la posibilidad de vender mejor el atractivo turístico del Ecuador. No nos olvidemos de que el turismo es un negocio, un tema comercial, aunque tenga un componente muy grande de diversidad, de cultura y de gastronomía. Finalmente, es un sector productivo que debe generar recursos para la economía y empleo para la gente.

Actualmente generamos más de 600.000 empleos dentro del sector turístico, y el sector aporta alrededor de 2.000 millones de dólares a la economía. Entonces, evidentemente, la promoción y la marca cumplen un papel importante dentro de eso.

DP: Y actualmente, ¿considera que existe algún desafío para que esta nueva marca ayude a la narrativa del país, tanto para el turista extranjero como para el ecuatoriano?

ME: Sí. El principal desafío está en que la marca se use mucho más a nivel nacional. Hasta ahora el uso de la marca ha sido básicamente internacional. Entonces, ahí hay un vacío.

Hace falta una campaña nacional de posicionamiento de la marca país, una campaña que contribuya a que el ecuatoriano se identifique con ella. La marca tiene que estar realmente dentro del imaginario de la gente. Ese es el gran desafío: que este proceso de marca país contribuya también a que internamente la gente se apropie de ella.

DP: ¿Y qué aspectos culturales cree que podrían ayudar a lograr más ese apropiamiento por parte de los ciudadanos? Porque, investigando, veía cambios entre un logotipo y otro, desde los pececitos hasta la paleta de colores.

ME: A ver, el asunto va mucho más allá de eso. Una marca país no puede ser una marca política. Lamentablemente, la marca “Ecuador ama la vida” se transformó en una marca política, vinculada a un gobierno y a un partido. Y una marca país no es eso.

La marca país debe mantenerse lo más apolítica posible. Entonces, si usted quiere ver una aplicación clara de la marca país, no tiene que ir necesariamente a las redes institucionales del ministerio, que son redes de comunicación política del gobierno. Tiene que ir más bien a nuestras redes de promoción turística, como Ecuador Travel, por ejemplo. Esas son redes donde la marca país está aplicada a la promoción sin ningún uso político.

Porque evidentemente la marca país debe considerarse como patrimonio de todos, de cualquier partido político que exista. Entonces, ahí estamos promoviendo al Ecuador turístico a través de esas redes. Si usted revisa esas redes, verá que hay muy pocas referencias al gobierno. No hay un uso político porque justamente queremos que la marca país sea una propuesta promocional absolutamente apolítica y que no tenga nada que ver con el tema del gobierno.

Ahora, por ejemplo, tenemos una campaña de turismo comunitario donde está aplicada la marca país en una serie de videos. El turismo comunitario, por ejemplo, es una apuesta fuertísima hacia la cultura local. Entonces, aparte de fomentar ese turismo, tenemos la posibilidad de que el turismo comunitario se exprese a través de una marca país presente y de un lenguaje visual adecuado para el visitante.

DP: Exacto, porque a la final, varias de las marcas país que ha tenido el Ecuador han tenido una fuerte incidencia política. Y en ciertos papers que encontré se hablaba justamente de cómo eso afectó la apropiación ciudadana. Entonces, ¿siente que el camino actual está más separado de ese ámbito?

ME: Claro, eso es justamente lo que estamos haciendo. Y el ejemplo está en las redes sociales que le comento. Si usted revisa Ecuador Travel, es una red absolutamente apolítica. En ningún sitio de esa red decimos que pertenece al Ministerio de Turismo, aunque evidentemente nosotros la alimentamos.

En cambio, si usted ve las redes de comunicación oficial del Ministerio de Turismo, del Ministerio de Obras Públicas u otras instituciones, ahí sí hay una comunicación política, porque representan al gobierno. Pero esa es la diferencia que hay que mantener para que la marca sea apolítica y para que la gente se pueda apropiarse de ella.

Ahora, falta todavía una campaña nacional de apropiación local para que el ciudadano se apropie de la marca y sepa que esa marca sí lo representa. Y también falta que esa marca trascienda el sector turístico y vaya hacia otros sectores de la economía.

Por ejemplo, la idea también era que esa marca pueda estar en el sector exportador. Es decir, que en una caja de banano pueda ir la marca país de Ecuador con un código QR, y que cuando se lea ese código QR la persona llegue a una página del Ecuador donde pueda conocer más del país. Ese tipo de cosas hacen falta.

Hay que trabajar más en que la marca país trascienda al sector turismo y vaya también hacia el sector exportador, hacia el sector de inversiones y hacia otros eventos internacionales donde el Ecuador está presente. Eso todavía hay que irlo construyendo.

DP: Perfecto. Y ya como pregunta de cierre, una más personal: para usted, ¿qué es la identidad ecuatoriana? Y, si estuviera en su control, ¿qué valores quisiera que se vieran reflejados en la marca país?

ME: Para mí, la identidad ecuatoriana es lo que todos nosotros somos. Está en los valores que tenemos como sociedad, como país, en nuestra historia, en nuestra cultura ancestral. La identidad está también en lo que comemos, por supuesto; el tema gastronómico es muy importante.

Y yo creo que esos temas sí se reflejan en la marca país actual, porque la marca tiene un paraguas muy amplio. La marca país no restringe absolutamente nada. Y eso es importante, porque al ser un país tan diverso y tan grande en términos culturales, la marca debe ser justamente ese paraguas amplio que acoja, bajo nuestro nombre y nuestro logotipo, a todo lo que existe en el Ecuador.

¿Por qué no poner de marca país un cuy? ¿O por qué no poner un encebollado? Porque nuestro país es tan diverso que seguramente necesitamos un concepto mucho más amplio, mucho más estructurado, que cobije a todos. Y eso es lo que se privilegió cuando se hizo la marca país.

La identidad tiene muchas aristas: históricas, familiares, de valores, de la gente, de la gastronomía, de las creencias. Pero la marca país actual tiene esa posibilidad y esa flexibilidad para poder englobar todo lo que tenemos.

DP: Perfecto, Mateo, eso sería todo. Muchísimas gracias nuevamente. Y, bueno, no sé si sea posible, pero yo de hecho tenía un pequeño presente para darle. Sé que usted tiene otras obligaciones y me está dando su tiempo, entonces quisiera hacérselo llegar.

ME: No, gracias, pero no tenía por qué darme nada.

DP: ¿Entonces qué hago con mi presente?

ME: Bueno, puede dejarlo en mi oficina y luego le mando la ubicación.

DP: Sí, en serio, muchas gracias.

ME: No, gracias a usted.

DP: Perfecto, muchas gracias. Que tenga una buena tarde.

ME: Igualmente, buena tarde. Hasta luego.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistada: Mónica Malo (MM)

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DP: [Inicio de grabación]. Bueno, una vez más, muchísimas gracias, Mónica, por su tiempo. Y para no robarle más tiempo, dado el contexto de mi investigación, quería hacerle las siguientes preguntas. Para partir, ¿qué lugar ocupa, desde su perspectiva, la identidad cultural dentro de la proyección internacional y también a nivel interno de lo que usted ha podido observar? Obviamente, me gustaría también que lo ilustre un poco con el caso del sello Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

MM: Ya. A ver, en cuanto a la imagen cultural del país, creo que estamos apalancándonos muchísimo en el concepto del centro del mundo, ¿verdad? Y es desde ahí desde donde estamos llevando la exportación de nuestros productos: por su sabor, por su aroma, por su color, por su luminosidad. Es decir, estos adjetivos, vinculados al lugar donde está asentado el país, te llevan a un concepto que pretende ser cultural, pero que en realidad va más allá —o más bien deja de lado— los conceptos ancestrales y lo que realmente debería ser la pluriculturalidad que tiene el Ecuador, así como las tradiciones ancestrales del país.

Entonces, desde mi punto de vista, el país está explotando no su riqueza cultural, sino más bien su posición geográfica. Y desde esa posición geográfica quiere traerla hacia un plano cultural.

Con Mucho Mejor Ecuador, en cambio, nosotros lo que buscamos es rescatar el talento de los ecuatorianos. Y ese talento de los ecuatorianos puede pasar por aquello de lo que estamos hechos, por cómo se han ido transmitiendo las tradiciones de generación en generación, pero también por toda la innovación y la tecnificación de las empresas en la actualidad.

Con base en eso, la Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador lo que busca es despertar un sentido de identidad nacional basado en las buenas acciones que hacen las personas y las empresas, siempre dentro de una lógica de legalidad y calidad, para fomentar el desarrollo económico del país.

DP: Y bueno, desde el posicionamiento que usted cree que ha logrado su marca, ¿podría contarnos un poco de la historia? Creo que también sería relevante para poder contrastarla con la historia que ha tenido la marca país del Ecuador.

MM: Claro. La huella Mucho Mejor Ecuador nace en el año 2005 por la intención de cinco empresarios cuencanos que buscaban generar valor para la empresa nacional. La idea era que, con base en un elemento diferenciador —que sería justamente la huella Mucho Mejor Ecuador—, los ecuatorianos podamos reconocer aquello que está bien hecho en el país.

Si nos remontamos a esa época, en 2005, la industria ecuatoriana ya tenía muy buenos procesos. Estamos hablando de cinco grandes empresas que dieron forma a la huella Mucho Mejor Ecuador: Indurama, Cartopel, Colineal, PASA y Graiman. Estas empresas vieron la necesidad de inspirar a otros empresarios ecuatorianos a que muestren su identidad, a que muestren lo que son capaces de hacer y a que, con base en eso, aportemos a la creación de un concepto: que en Ecuador se produce con calidad, se produce con excelencia y se puede llegar a cualquier parte del mundo.

La filosofía en la que Mucho Mejor Ecuador se basa es la filosofía de “ganamos todos”. ¿Qué significa eso? En primer lugar, gana el consumidor, porque al recibir o escoger un producto o servicio que tiene esta huella, está comprando algo que ha sido previamente calificado; es decir, tiene una garantía de calidad.

Luego, al generar mayor demanda o mayor reconocimiento al producto ecuatoriano, eso va directamente al empleo. Porque a mayor demanda de productos o servicios, se necesita mayor mano de obra. Entonces gana el empleo. Después, eso genera mayores ingresos para la empresa, gana la empresa, y finalmente gana el país. Por eso hablamos de una lógica de “ganamos todos”.

DP: Exacto, como dice, no es solo una filosofía, sino que se aplica. Ahora, pasándolo desde su perspectiva, y tomando como ejemplo el sello Mucho Mejor Ecuador ya consolidado, basándonos ahora en la marca país del Ecuador, ¿cómo percibe la imagen internacional que ha logrado el país?

MM: El Ecuador logra una imagen internacional, pero lamentablemente la marca país ha sido muy dependiente del gobierno de turno. Y con base en eso ha tenido picos, luego vuelve a caer, muere, se reemplaza por otra marca y así sucesivamente.

Desde mi punto de vista, el Ecuador apalanca su reputación en los productos maravillosos que tiene, como el banano ecuatoriano, el camarón, la rosa del Ecuador y ahora también el cacao. Si nos remontamos a mediados del siglo XX, estaríamos hablando incluso de la “pepa de oro”, del cacao, del café. Entonces, con base en eso, el Ecuador es reconocido por sus productos.

Y no solo por sus productos. El deporte ha hecho un gran trabajo por el Ecuador. Grandes deportistas como Daniel Pintado, Richard Carapaz, nuestro primer medallista olímpico Jefferson Pérez, o las hermanas Dajomes, por ejemplo, ponen el nombre del Ecuador en el mundo. También chefs ecuatorianos que están afuera, ganando premios. Desde mi punto de vista, son esos actores los que van apalancando el nombre del Ecuador en el exterior.

DP: Luego, la marca Mucho Mejor Ecuador, al menos dentro del imaginario de muchas personas, se ha consolidado casi como si fuera una marca país.

MM: Exacto. Y no diría que eso es una confusión propiamente dicha. Más bien responde a qué es lo que está impregnado en el imaginario de la gente, qué es lo que está viendo de manera constante, dónde ha habido consistencia y solidez del mensaje.

Mucho Mejor Ecuador tiene 20 años diciendo todos los días lo mismo: consume el producto que tiene la huella porque tiene calidad; consume el producto hecho por manos ecuatorianas porque así generamos empleo; consume lo hecho por empresas nacionales porque así dinamizamos la economía. Y, desde mi punto de vista, la única manera de generar desarrollo territorial es creer en el valor de la empresa nacional, en este caso identificada con la huella Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

DP: Entonces, ¿podríamos decir que hasta cierto punto no existe una coherencia o un relato oficial sostenido con las distintas marcas país que ha tenido el Ecuador?

MM: No, porque en realidad las marcas país han estado más destinadas al concepto de turismo, a la atracción de turismo, y no necesariamente a la atracción de inversiones o al posicionamiento integral del país.

Hay un estudio, si no me falla la memoria, de León Roldós o de León algo, por esos años 2014 o 2015, en el que se plantea que una marca país debe ser una marca aceptada por el mundo. Y para eso, una marca país no puede tener adjetivos subjetivos. Tiene que ser tan amplia que pueda firmar todo tipo de producto, todo tipo de servicio, que pueda dar origen y que pueda garantizar calidad.

Eso es justamente una de las cosas que hace Mucho Mejor Ecuador. Al decir “la huella”, la gente ya se identifica con el símbolo. Luego, al decir “Mucho Mejor Ecuador”, estamos hablando de algo bien hecho en el país. Y esa huella puede estar en una marca de ropa, en alimentos y bebidas, en neumáticos, en automóviles o incluso en empresas turísticas. Porque estamos hablando del país como país.

Y yo sí pienso que uno de los grandes dolores ha sido justamente la imposibilidad de consolidar una marca país del Ecuador.

Sin embargo, también pienso que los esfuerzos de los gobiernos de turno deberían orientarse sobre todo a la atracción de inversiones, a la colocación del producto ecuatoriano en el mundo. Y eso no pasa necesariamente por una marca país, sino por generar política pública adecuada, por tener promoción de exportaciones, oficinas comerciales, acuerdos necesarios para homologación de normativa técnica, y así lograr que nuestros productos estén en el mundo entero.

DP: ¿Y esta inestabilidad que usted menciona cree que tiene incidencia en la reputación internacional que tenemos como país?

MM: No necesariamente. Porque, como te decía, el país per se, con sus productos y con sus acciones, genera una buena reputación.

El banano del Ecuador no lleva una marca país, pero la gente sabe que, si está comprando banano ecuatoriano, está comprando sabor, está comprando trazabilidad, está comprando un producto confiable. Si hablamos de la flor del Ecuador, ellas sí tienen una marca de origen, pero no una marca país; y aun así, en los mercados del mundo, la flor ecuatoriana es de las más apetecidas. ¿Por qué? Porque es una flor de alta durabilidad y porque la empresa ecuatoriana ha desarrollado muchísimo ese sector.

O si tú vas, por ejemplo, a Suiza, ves una marca como Lindt y encuentras en percha referencias que dicen “hecho con cacao ecuatoriano”. Y ahí no está operando una marca país, sino el origen del producto.

Entonces, la marca país puede ser una buena herramienta si lo que se busca es generar nuevas oportunidades y apalancar el origen que ya tienen nuestros productos. Puede motivar al extranjero a visitar el Ecuador, a consumir el producto ecuatoriano, pero la reputación del país no depende exclusivamente de tener o no una marca país.

DP: ¿Y qué tan importante considera usted que esa marca integre elementos culturales? Porque, si bien se orienta al turismo extranjero, también está el turismo interno y el sentido de pertenencia.

MM: Sí, es importantísimo. Y ahí es donde incluso nos podemos topa o pisar entre esfuerzos.

Mucho Mejor Ecuador viene generando campañas desde hace 20 años en las que no solamente hablamos de la empresa productora o de la empresa de servicios, sino de sentirte orgulloso de ser ecuatoriano. Y para sentirte orgulloso de ser ecuatoriano te decimos que comas Ecuador, que viajes Ecuador, que conozcas Ecuador antes de terminar la vuelta al mundo. Porque es importantísimo crear sentido de pertenencia del ecuatoriano para con su país, que es justamente lo que todavía nos falta mucho.

Yo siempre digo que a los ecuatorianos nos falta creernos, creernos lo que somos. Y ese es el trabajo que Mucho Mejor Ecuador viene haciendo durante estos años: decirle a la gente “confía en tu talento”. Cuando vayas a comprar, busca que tenga esta huella, porque seguramente ese producto lo fabricó tu papá, o ese servicio lo está dando tu abuelo, o esa artesanía la hizo tu primo. Entonces busca siempre la huella, porque si tiene la huella, es bueno.

Sí hay que trabajarlo de manera interna. Por ejemplo, la campaña que ellos hicieron de “No seas extranjero en tu tierra” es bien interesante, porque parte de sentirse orgulloso de ser ecuatoriano pasa por ir hacia los conocimientos ancestrales, por rescatar esas habilidades y oficios que se están perdiendo. Es la única manera de que nuestra cultura se siga manteniendo y no terminemos convirtiéndonos en un híbrido con demasiadas influencias externas. Hay que fortalecer lo que somos.

DP: Claro, porque al final la marca es una herramienta, pero detrás está la imagen país que se ha construido por los productos, por los deportistas, por los chefs. Aunque, como dice, la marca no ha generado el impacto que debería por la inestabilidad que ha tenido.

MM: Exactamente. Pienso que no ha generado el impacto que debería justamente por esa falta de continuidad.

DP: Hablando ahora más bien de la proyección internacional, yo comparaba mucho el caso de Ecuador con Corea del Sur, donde sí se ve un trabajo más eficaz y sostenido. Y por eso quería tocar este tema, porque al final sí se necesita un instrumento, pero también políticas detrás. Entonces, si el Estado nos ha fallado hasta cierto punto, ¿cree que hay algún rol o alguna fuerza que podrían tener otros actores para lograr mayor cohesión de la imagen país?

MM: Definitivamente sí. Por ejemplo, tienes el caso de Perú, que para mí es la marca país mejor manejada de la región. Perú basó gran parte del desarrollo de su marca en un líder, Gastón Acurio. Entonces, desde la gastronomía peruana, le vendieron al mundo la curiosidad de conocer Perú.

Y de ahí sí fueron atrayendo más y más empresas para que se sientan peruanas, por decirlo así. Es un poco lo mismo que buscamos desde Mucho Mejor Ecuador. Somos una entidad privada sin fines de lucro, y lo que hacemos es apoyar al desarrollo económico del país, que al final es lo mismo que quiere cualquier gobierno de turno y lo mismo que necesita la empresa.

Entonces, podemos ser grandes articuladores. Y la sociedad civil definitivamente, para mí, es un eje motor del reconocimiento de lo que se hace bien en el Ecuador. Con base en eso podemos aportar a esa conciencia, a ese orgullo ecuatoriano y al sentido de nacionalidad.

DP: Y eso, como menciona, sí se logró trabajar mucho en determinado momento, sobre todo alrededor de 2010.

MM: Sí, se levantó mucho en esa época. No se puede negar que el expresidente Rafael Correa, con un estilo nacionalista muy marcado, levantó ese amor por el Ecuador. Sin embargo, las condiciones de ese momento hicieron también que se generara un mar de marcas, y eso hizo que se dilucionaran los esfuerzos, que se diluyeran.

DP: Y como le comentaba, cuando yo preguntaba informalmente “¿qué marca país recuerdas?”, la mayoría se acordaba de la de esa época, de la paleta de colores de “Ecuador ama la vida”, pero más por la politización que tuvo que por un verdadero sentido de pertenencia.

MM: Y ese es precisamente el gran problema. Por eso, por ejemplo, la marca Mucho Mejor Ecuador es una marca que nace desde el sector privado y que busca el bien común, el desarrollo del país. Tiene estatutos claros, una administración transparente, y lo que hacemos es promover a la empresa nacional que se destaque por ser legal, es decir, que cumpla con todo el marco legal del país, y que tenga altos procesos de producción.

DP: Claro. Y por eso mismo me interesaba entrevistarla, porque siento que desde el sector público la gestión de la marca país no ha servido como un verdadero instrumento para incidir en la proyección internacional. Entonces, más allá de volver a confiarle ese rol exclusivamente al Estado, ¿qué cambios cree usted que serían necesarios?

MM: Yo siempre le he dicho al Estado que debería haber una concesión, o al menos una articulación, entre la marca país y la marca privada. Que el Estado sea parte del directorio o del comité de marca, de manera que, con base en las necesidades del empresario y del emprendedor, se vaya desarrollando una hoja de ruta que realmente sirva para apoyar la generación de nuevos negocios.

DP: Y bueno, ya como pregunta de cierre, que estamos haciendo en todas las entrevistas: para usted, ¿qué es ser ecuatoriano?

MM: Uy, Dios mío, es una pregunta compleja. Pero para mí ser ecuatoriano es ser una persona orgullosa del lugar donde nació. Es tener ganas de salir adelante. Es tener ese entusiasmo que hace que podamos levantarnos todos los días, aun cuando el camino sea difícil.

El ecuatoriano es luchador, es trabajador y es entusiasta. Y yo siempre digo que en los ecuatorianos los buenos somos más, y que este Ecuador que ahora nos quieren convertir en un país violento es una circunstancia que nos corresponde castigar, es decirle que no, y con nuestras actitudes poder salir adelante.

Entonces, para mí, el ecuatoriano es entusiasta, trabajador y orgulloso de la tierra donde nació.

DP: Más parece, como usted dice, que estas circunstancias que vemos ahora nos exigen justamente actuar.

MM: Exactamente. Hay que tomar acción, no podemos ser impávidos.

DP: ¿Eso serían todas mis preguntas? Cualquier cosa que vaya necesitando, le agradezco muchísimo.

MM: A tus órdenes. Y déjame añadir algo que me parece importante. La marca país debería cumplir con tres funciones: primero, dar origen al producto o servicio que está avalando; segundo, garantizar la calidad de ese producto o servicio; y tercero, poder firmar cualquier tipo de producto o servicio.

Cuando una marca cumple esas tres funciones, entonces se convierte realmente en una marca país capaz de servir para turismo, para atracción de inversiones y para comunicar la diversidad del país.

Por eso, por ejemplo, Estados Unidos no tiene una gran marca país como eslogan; tiene el “Made in USA”. Alemania tiene el “Made in Germany”. México también tiene el “Hecho en México”. Y son países orgullosos de lo que son, de su producto y de su gastronomía.

Perú, por ejemplo, logró construir una marca muy fuerte, pero sin perder la identidad de su país. En el caso nuestro, la marca país ha perdido los colores. Ya no tienes con claridad el amarillo, azul y rojo. Y lo mismo pasó con la marca anterior: era un multicolor que no necesariamente remitía al Ecuador.

Tal vez uno puede darse ese lujo cuando ya está absolutamente posicionado. Pero la marca país tiene que ser perenne en el tiempo, no perder consistencia. Y por eso la gente, cuando le preguntan, cree que la marca Mucho Mejor Ecuador es la marca país.

DP: Sí, de hecho, incluso cuando investigaba para mi tesis, muchísima gente me decía eso: que está mejor posicionada porque funciona.

MM: Exacto, porque funciona. Porque no se trabaja desde intereses coyunturales, sino desde el interés común.

Lo que te dicen muchos exportadores, por ejemplo, es: “yo quiero una campaña, no quiero un sello”. Entonces, hazme una campaña y te compro la idea de mostrarme como ecuatoriano. Porque en el mercado internacional, si ya te ponen “banano del Ecuador”, ya estás.

DP: Y por ejemplo, para mí, en el caso de Perú, ellos se basaron en algo de su propia identidad, como las líneas de Nazca, y desde ahí construyeron una narrativa cultural reconocible.

MM: Exactamente. Ahí estás diciendo “esto es Perú”. Y eso le da mucha fuerza.

DP: Y por eso también elegí este tema de tesis, porque a veces incluso desde afuera nos ponen a todos los países latinoamericanos en una sola bolsa. Y aunque sí compartimos pasados históricos similares, siento que Perú usa un elemento cultural y ha logrado posicionarse. Nosotros también tenemos una enorme diversidad cultural dentro del país. Entonces, ¿por qué eso no se convierte en una fuerza de cohesión?

MM: Porque en Ecuador no encuentras algo único que te una. En Perú, por ejemplo, se apropiaron mucho desde la gastronomía, con el ceviche. Pero nosotros en el Ecuador no tenemos un plato único que diga “esto es Ecuador”.

La misma diversidad del país hace que no logremos encontrar una sola cosa que concentre esa idea. Pero sí puedes decir que somos el centro del mundo. Y desde ahí es desde donde, de alguna manera, se está tratando de generar esa narrativa. Porque lo que nos falta es justamente eso: narrativa, consistencia y persistencia para hacer las cosas.

DP: Sí, exacto. Muchísimas gracias, Mónica.

MM: Con gusto.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistada: Natalia Rincón (NR)

Fecha: 18 de febrero de 2026

Modalidad: Virtual, plataforma Zoom

DP: [Inicio de grabación]. Bueno, primero muchas gracias, Magíster Natalia Rincón, por aceptar esta invitación. Para mí es un honor contar con su presencia y, en honor al tiempo que prometí no tomarle más de una hora, quisiera partir con las preguntas.

En primer lugar, desde su perspectiva y formación académica, me interesa saber qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural dentro de la academia, en línea con lo que le mencionaba sobre marca país y, si es posible, imagen país, que es el resultado, básicamente.

NR: A ver... estás abordando tres temas para mí bastante fuertes y diferentes. Tú me hablas de identidad cultural. Es sumamente complejo esto de la identidad cultural, no porque no tengamos cultura.

Hay un autor que vale la pena que leas, que se llama Rolando Arellano, que es peruano. Él te habla del comportamiento del consumidor, pero cuando habla del comportamiento del consumidor también habla de los factores que afectan justamente a la gente; y uno de esos, el primero y el más fuerte, es justamente la cultura. Y dentro de la cultura él divide tres tipos: cultura, subcultura y clase social. Esto es interesante y quizás te puede servir.

Es más, yo doy clases sobre eso. ¿Y por qué te toco estos temas? Porque hay una parte que te dice que la cultura es una de las cosas más complejas para ingresar dentro de una sociedad, pero una vez que ingresa dentro de la sociedad, es la que más se mantiene en el tiempo.

Para que la entiendas más fácil: Cuenca es una ciudad que siempre ha sido conocida por ser limpia, ¿sí? Y después empezó el proceso de reciclar, ¿es cierto? Nos costó al inicio porque no lo aprendimos a la primera; fue como... ¿cómo podría decir? Si no lo cumples te multo, si no lo haces te multo, ¿me explico? Y cuando ya aprendimos a reciclar, forma parte de nuestra cultura y se queda. Este rato el cuencano ya no piensa: simplemente lo hace porque ya está arraigado culturalmente.

Ahora, hablar de eso desde el punto de vista de la cultura, y cuando hablamos del Ecuador: nuestra cultura es sumamente amplia porque, al ser un país pequeño relativamente, al tener “cuatro mundos” (te hablo ya desde el punto de vista turístico), estamos sumamente marcados por las cuatro regiones. Obviamente tenemos una gran diversidad de culturas, grupos étnicos, una mezcla que va y viene.

¿Y por qué te digo esto? Porque en algunos casos sí nos causa orgullo e identidad cultural y en otros no. Y todo el tiempo tenemos esa disonancia, no sé si me comprendes por dónde voy. Entonces, claro: el ecuatoriano cuando está afuera y oye... yo qué sé... “zapateando el uyayay”, pues todo mundo lo hacemos. Y si estamos aquí en Cuenca y estás en una zona que quizás no es en la que yo estoy acostumbrada, no haría lo mismo. ¿Me comprendes por dónde voy?

Entonces yo sí creo que está todo el tiempo ese “sí o no”, y es esa disonancia que yo creo que todos la tenemos en algún momento, y mucho más nosotros los mestizos, ¿sí? Porque tenemos un poquito de aquí, de aquí, de aquí, de aquí, y a veces ni siquiera nos definimos, ¿no? Pero cuando estamos afuera, pues hasta yo me siento... que me encanta... yo qué sé... ¿cómo se llama esta sopa guayaquileña que es sumamente conocida? Ay, se me fue...

DP: ¿Encebollado?

NR: El encebollado, exacto. ¿Me explico? Cuando nosotros somos más de fritada, de mote, de humitas/tamales, de cuy... pero si yo estoy afuera y dices: “Ah, no, yo también soy ecuatoriana”, ¿no? Entonces son justamente estos rasgos, estas características, estos valores, estas expresiones... obviamente es muy étnico. Entonces depende de la zona. Yo me siento más identificada con el hornado que con la chugchucara que está en Latacunga, ¿me explico? Pero según el movimiento en el que yo esté, obviamente eso sí genera la identidad.

Al fin del día, como tú lo estás diciendo, a veces la identidad sí tiene que estar un poco plasmada a través de símbolos patrios: la bandera, el escudo, ¿me explico?, o íconos arquitectónicos que son muy reconocidos a nivel internacional, o también podrían ser los nombramientos por la UNESCO de patrimonios de la humanidad.

Y tú sabes que en eso, Ecuador, al ser pequeño, tenemos más de cuatro nombramientos dentro de la UNESCO como tal, y siendo Quito la primera ciudad a nivel mundial que fue nombrada por la UNESCO, ¿no? Entonces tienes esos rasgos que te van definiendo y demás.

Retomando esto de los símbolos patrios, ¿por qué te digo esto? Porque a veces mucha gente piensa que el símbolo patrio puede ser una marca. Y ese es un gran error: el símbolo patrio jamás puede ser una marca. O sea, una cosa es el país y otra cosa es esta marca turística, que me imagino que es lo que tú quieres hablar.

Ahora, me voy a permitir compartirte, porque yo justo tengo una clase sobre eso y yo hice también un estudio sobre las marcas país, para que le tengas una idea. Dame cinco segundos... acá la tengo. Me confirmas si la tienes. ¿La tienes?

DP: Sí, sí lo puedo visualizar. Perfecto.

NR: Aquí es donde quiero llegar contigo: la evolución. Yo ya lo tengo hecho, pero justo para arrancar sobre esto de las marcas, ahí viene un gran problema. Mi área también es marketing, mi área también es turismo, como sabrás. Y ¿qué es lo que pasa? Que hay un gran problema del Ecuador como identidad porque no lo tenemos clarísimo.

¿Y por qué te digo esto? Porque mira: en veinte años, te estoy mostrando... las cuatro primeras son marcas, y este rato tenemos una marca nueva, turísticamente hablando. No sé si sabías...

DP: ¿La de Noboa, “Expandiendo nuestra luz”? Esta de acá. Sí, “Expandiendo nuestra luz”.

NR: Exacto. Rompió totalmente lo que nos ha caracterizado. Aunque sea un poco de lo que pude ver, al menos visualmente incorpora algunos elementos, pero esta rompió totalmente, siento yo.

A ver, yo creo que todo lo que quieran hacer con marca turística para lo que tú dices —mostrar la identidad de nuestro país a nivel mundial— es válido. Lo que no es válido, desde mi punto de vista, es que una marca se cambie con el gobierno de turno, porque eso confunde. La marca no le pertenece al gobierno de turno. La marca debe pertenecer al ecuatoriano, como una identidad que sea conocida, obviamente, a nivel mundial, turísticamente.

Lo que tú quieras hacer como campaña y demás... ¿por qué te digo esto? Porque confunde. Un muy buen ejemplo de eso son marcas como Coca-Cola y Pepsi. Claro que han cambiado sus marcas, pero ha sido un cambio sumamente sutil. Si tú buscas el historial de marcas de Coca-Cola o de Pepsi, han cambiado, pero no ha sido tan brusco; y se queda dentro de la mente de las personas.

Entonces yo puedo estar en cualquier lugar donde no hablen español, o donde Coca-Cola esté en japonés, o esté en chino, y yo voy a reconocer la Coca-Cola porque la tengo en mi mente. Pero cuando no lo tienes, ahí viene la confusión.

Ahora, solo para que tengas una idea: turísticamente el Ecuador, entre comillas, es “nuevo”. Realmente empieza en 1930. Sin embargo, si hay muchos más antecedentes. Te voy a mostrar aquí para que le tengas una idea.

Realmente turísticamente arrancamos en 1930, pero hay otros antecedentes. Por ejemplo, vale la pena que veas lo de Galo Plaza Lasso. Él generaba el Ecuador como una marca, como identidad. Búscate... hay tesis en la Andina que te hablan de la historia de Galo Plaza y es fabuloso. Y te cuentan que él fue el primer visionario en llevar justamente a indígenas a Nueva York a una feria turística para demostrar la identidad y la cultura que tenía el Ecuador.

DP: Y en esa línea, profe, ¿qué opina sobre...? [Intervención incompleta / se superpone con la respuesta].

NR: Sí, ya empieza. O sea, date cuenta de que son poquísimos años. Si yo me pongo a comparar con otros países que tienen marcas... por ejemplo, Perú. A mí me encanta hablar de Perú: duela a quien le duela, Perú es el que más tiene una marca reconocida mundial y se mantiene muchísimo en el tiempo. Y eso que sí la cambió, te cuento, pero el cambio fue interesante. Hubo una campaña fabulosa desde el punto de vista de marketing.

Ahora, ¿qué es lo que pasa? El Ecuador... mira tú. Estamos hablando de estas cuatro primeras: son marcas. Estas dos de aquí son campañas, y ya te voy a explicar por qué.

Por ejemplo, ¿cuál era la idea cuando empezaron a hacer la marca turística del Ecuador? Esta de aquí parte de la latitud cero, por eso tiene el círculo en la mitad, y está basada en un sol de Guayasamín, y te pone las cuatro regiones del país, cada una con un color diferente. Y la palabra “Ecuador” tiene como una rayita. Era para posicionar al Ecuador desde el punto de vista de los elementos tangibles y demostrar que Ecuador estaba en la mitad.

Si pasa menos de un año, se les ocurre ya poner la del Ministerio de Turismo. Si ves, nuevamente retoman la latitud cero; por eso la “O” está con amarillo: Ecuador en el centro.

Y realmente, para mí, una de las marcas a las que le tuve mucho aprecio —porque fue la que más estuvo, a pesar de cambios políticos— fue justamente la del 2005. Y te trabajaba mucho lo tangible: elementos de costa, sierra, una ola gigante. Marcaba nuevamente la palabra Ecuador y tenía la latitud cero, si le ves. Pero esta marca cambió algo más y le aumentó el eslogan, que era muy bueno para mí: “Ecuador, la vida en estado puro”.

¿Y por qué? Porque claro, lo más fuerte para nosotros siempre ha sido Galápagos. La gente identifica primero Galápagos antes de Ecuador. (Bueno, no voy a llorar por lo que haya pasado políticamente y demás).

A los cinco años vuelven a hacer un cambio de esta marca. Y esa transición es interesante: sueltan lo tangible y convierten en intangible. Por eso ya los elementos desaparecen y lo que buscaban era una visión más de ideas intangibles. Analizan la postura del país desde la palabra “amor”: amor por la paz, amor por la alegría, por la cultura, por la gente, etc. Sin embargo, sí mantienen un concepto que se ha trabajado siempre: el punto cero, Ecuador en la mitad.

Por eso la marca tiene nuevamente el cero y empieza a darse la vuelta a partir de colores y connotaciones. Pero date cuenta: todos estos elementos te los tengo que explicar yo. Y cuando una marca tiene que ser explicada, es porque no está bien hecha.

Mira las imágenes que te ponían: eran intangibles. Te ponen una ballena en el cielo, algo que no es real; o el tren, la Nariz del Diablo; empiezan a mezclar, por ejemplo, flamings y el Cotopaxi... (no sé si era Cotopaxi o Chimborazo), pero ves cómo empiezan a mezclarse esos elementos. Era justamente por eso.

Ahora, me haya gustado o no me haya gustado, fíjate que es la marca que más tiempo ha estado. Es la marca que, si tú preguntas a cualquier persona, te va a decir: “esta es la marca que yo conozco”. Punto. Porque es 2010 hasta prácticamente la fecha.

Después empiezan a crear las dos campañas. Esta campaña, para mí, sí es muy buena: “All You Need Is Ecuador”. Es súper buena porque mucha gente no sabe que utilizaron tótems a nivel mundial y colocaron letras en “All you need is...” en los países donde más turistas

recibíamos: España, Estados Unidos, Francia, etc. En cambio, la palabra “Ecuador”, la E, la C, y tal, se dividía por principales ciudades turísticas del país. Es una campaña sumamente fuerte y la gente la desconocía. Y aquí viene este apego de la marca... acá está, para que le busques, quizá te sirve dentro de tu tesis. ¿Ves que la A está en París?

DP: Profe, ¿sí me oye bien? ¿Se me oye mucho?

NR: Sí, sí, te oigo. Ya. Ves: São Paulo, Lima, Perú, México, y demás. Si ves cómo está...

DP: Sí, sí. En algunas tesis que vi había opiniones que le criticaban, pero como usted dice, al final hizo visible la marca. Y algo que sí siento muy importante es que una marca debe explicarse por sí misma y no tener esa necesidad. Aunque hasta cierto punto yo comparto que la de 2010 es la más válida: aunque sea intangible, por la paleta de colores, la multiculturalidad... pero la de ahora, la verdad, discrepo totalmente.

NR: Exacto. ¿Y sabes por qué le tienes más apego a esa marca? Primero, porque estuvo más tiempo en la gente; y segundo, porque la trabajaron todo el tiempo. Políticamente generaron esa identidad de marca. Por eso, hasta el día de hoy, lugares turísticos tienen esa marca.

¿Te gusta o no te gusta? Hay un apego. Y el apego a la marca tú lo mides con cuatro variables. Yo te puedo dar después, si quieres, porque hay varias escalas para medir apego de marca; y bueno, es con cuatro preguntas.

Y te digo: la idea no fue mala (soy muy sincera), hubo esta campaña, pero aquí hay un error. A veces las campañas... Por ejemplo, “elige tu marca” para la votación. Esto fue interesante porque yo hice un ejercicio con un grupo de estudiantes de Perú y no les permitió votar; solo podía votar yo en Ecuador. No podías votar fuera del país. Y eso me llamó la atención.

¿Por qué? Porque estaba bien desde el punto de vista de que la marca nace del pueblo, es lo que tú quieres proyectar. Cada uno de nosotros tenemos una marca: tú tienes una marca todos los días; la vas cambiando, pero tu esencia siempre es la misma, es esa imagen que tú generas.

Pero ¿cuál fue el problema? No hubo difusión para esta votación. Yo la sé porque estoy todo el tiempo en el ámbito turístico, pero una persona como tú, o mi mamá, o un tío que no tiene ni idea, jamás vio una campaña que diga “vota por la marca”, “conoce la marca”.

Entonces, ¿qué está haciendo este rato el Ministerio? Tú sabes que ahora Turismo forma parte del Ministerio de la Producción. Este rato están dándose las vueltas por todo el Ecuador presentando la marca. Pero esta votación se hizo hace uno o dos años atrás. Entonces, si el ecuatoriano no conoce bien su marca, ¿cómo tú vas a proyectar a un país?

DP: Sí. Y profe, yo estoy trabajando Corea del Sur (no China). Y justamente Corea hace la distinción entre marca país y marca turística.

NR: Totalmente.

DP: Entonces, por ello es mi siguiente pregunta: desde su especialidad en turismo y marketing, ¿cómo evalúa usted la imagen país que tiene el Ecuador? Saquémosle un poco de la marca: ¿qué imagen cree que tenemos?, ¿cómo está construida?

NR: Aquí sí tiene mucho que ver la comunicación y los medios de comunicación para crear lo que es la imagen de un país. Y son las estrategias que tú puedas tener en relaciones públicas para saber qué noticia sale, qué noticia no sale y qué noticia sale poco tiempo, para que la imagen de tu país no esté afectada.

Este es un trabajo sumamente fuerte de comunicación, relaciones públicas, estrategias, casos y demás. Porque este rato, la imagen de nuestro país a nivel internacional yo sí siento que está muy golpeada en algunos casos. El factor seguridad... algo que nunca se había vivido así. Y te digo: yo soy hija de colombianos.

A mí sí me tocó vivir Colombia en los años 80, cuando estaban las FARC y grupos subversivos. El irme a Colombia... mi hermana me cuenta que viajábamos (mis papás son de Medellín) y en esa época eran dos o casi tres días de carretera, y mi papá lo hacía. Pasábamos por el Valle del Cauca para llegar a Medellín, por Cali. Y ahí tuvimos un retén (“cerrona”) de grupos subversivos. No nos hicieron nada, gracias a Dios, pero te hacían esa cerrona. Y a mí me tocó escuchar bombas en Medellín.

Y que ahora, después de... ¿qué? treinta y pico de años... yo tenía ocho años en esa época... sentir que estoy volviendo a vivir eso, sí es bastante complejo.

Te dicen también “Cuenca es una burbuja”, “Cuenca es diferente del resto del país”, y demás. Pero claro, los medios de comunicación, esta información mediática tan rápida, en décimas de segundo, te genera un pánico colectivo. Te la piensas dos veces: si me voy a Esmeraldas o si me voy a Manabí, ¿entiendes?

Y claro, si adentro estamos diciendo eso... la mejor publicidad del mundo es la de boca a boca (BTL, en cierto sentido). Si dentro sabemos que no estamos bien, ¿tú qué expones? Eso. Es como una persona: cuando internamente no estás bien, tú proyectas eso. Y eso es lo que está pasando.

Sin embargo, no voy a decir que no hay trabajos de manera individual, privada y demás, de productos del país con muy buena imagen y que tratan de manejarlo de mejor manera. Pero sí es bastante complejo este rato.

Lo primero sería ver medios internacionales y en qué ranking sale siempre Ecuador. Se dice: “Ecuador tiene tres de las ciudades más peligrosas del mundo”, y eso se queda.

DP: Profe, dentro de eso, también hemos hablado de que la gestión de marca país ha pasado por distintas instituciones: Ministerio de Turismo, Ministerio de Comercio... Entonces, ¿usted qué opina del rol que ha jugado el aparato gubernamental, o qué tanta incidencia ha tenido en esta marca e imagen país?

NR: ¿Tú te refieres actualmente o históricamente?

Históricamente, como decimos, es un constructo que no se ha terminado. Para mí la mejor estrategia es generar el apego al ecuatoriano, y ese será el mejor portavoz para proyectar la marca.

Si tú no te sientes identificado con esa marca, si tú dices “no me gusta para nada esa marca, no me siento identificada”, es porque no ha habido estrategia comunicacional o de apego para que tú sientas eso.

Y, te guste o no te guste, la del 2010 fue la que mejor trabajaron porque tú te dabas la vuelta y donde sea estaba la marca: podía estar en una servilleta, en publicidad, en todo. Estuvo hasta en el Super Bowl (creo que se gastó uno o dos millones de dólares), y fue una de las críticas más fuertes.

No digo si estuvo bien o no. También utilizó una canción de los Beatles, y hubo controversia porque “All You Need Is Love” es de los Beatles. Entonces yo creo que si no trabajas internamente, no vas a poder.

Y aquí, si quieres investigar un poquito (sin alargarte mucho), busca el documental de la marca Perú-Nebraska. Es genial porque Perú primero le trabajó la marca a nivel interno. Tan fuerte es que tú ves un restaurante peruano en Ecuador con el logo, y ya sientes “certificación” solo por la marca. Esa es la percepción que te genera.

DP: Sí, me gusta el ejemplo que dio. Y creo que nosotros muchas veces solo creamos cohesión cuando estamos afuera, cuando realmente sentimos la necesidad de formar ese sentimiento de pertenencia.

Yo siento —y por eso le leí mi pregunta— que nos falta esta triangulación: sector privado, sector público y academia. Y también he sentido un vacío en mi tesis: desde turismo y marketing han estudiado bastante la marca país, pero en mi carrera hablamos de proyección internacional, visibilidad... y dónde queda esto de la identidad. Al final, somos las personas quienes creamos esta negociación; y si no tenemos cohesión como ecuatorianos, ¿a dónde llegamos?

NR: Lo que tú dices... y quizá esta triangulación... tiene algo que ver con la academia, pero también te digo por qué: a veces los gobiernos de turno presionan a la academia sobre qué deben estudiar las personas. Por eso hay cambios de pensum.

A veces sacan contenidos que sí deberían estar. Y tú ves en otros países que sí tienen contenidos que aquí se consideran “materias de relleno”, pero que sí tienen cosas interesantes.

Por ejemplo: antropología. Yo sé que ustedes tienen antropología. A veces ustedes se mueren de rabia, pero es súper interesante, porque te permite ver diferentes puntos, te cambia la forma de pensar, y entender al ecuatoriano.

Yo te digo algo que yo sí tuve, y por eso yo soy muy querendona del Ecuador, de mi país: yo tuve... me acuerdo... sexto grado... una materia que era “Lugar Natal”. Y este rato no hay esas materias. Me acuerdo que había también un proyecto (yo estudié en colegio católico privado), pero todos los viernes venía (no era Ministerio de Turismo, era Secretaría de Turismo) y nos daban cápsulas de “tu país, tu ciudad”, artesanías, cosas súper interesantes. Capaz por ahí me metieron en turismo y no me di cuenta.

En cambio, los contenidos actuales no son tan fuertes. Yo creo que eso tiene que ver con identidad. No te metas mucho porque te puedes ir por otro lado en tu tesis, pero sí puedes decir “por aquí pasó”.

Es interesante entender que a veces la identidad del pueblo se construye a través de la academia: los contenidos, historia, geografía. Si yo comparo lo que yo estudié con lo que tú estudiaste, hay un gap abismal. Yo tengo detalles mucho más fuertes que los que ustedes tienen. Y quizá ahí empieza a perderse identidad: poca historia, poca narrativa que se cultive en jóvenes.

DP: Profe, ¿y usted siente que, por ejemplo, la última marca que tenemos (“Expandiendo nuestra luz”) se creó en conflicto entre integrar elementos propios de los ecuatorianos y responder a exigencias del mercado internacional?

NR: Se te cortó, perdóname. Te volviste a freeze.

DP: ¿Usted qué cree sobre la marca actual, la de “Expandiendo nuestra luz”?

NR: A ver, lo primero: haya sido o no haya sido creada en el gobierno de Noboa, lo primero que tienen que hacer, así me guste o no me guste, es generar una campaña de promoción y difusión de esta marca, ya sea turísticamente o como marca país.

Y que se genere —Dios mío— una ley, una regla, de que estas marcas no le pertenecen al gobierno de turno. Así el gobierno de turno lo haya realizado: se hizo con fondos públicos. Punto. Que se le entregue a la nación.

Pero para eso tiene que haber un plan comunicacional sumamente claro para que los futuros presidentes tengan claro que no les pertenece a ellos, sino al país, como los símbolos patrios. Tú no cambias la bandera cada cinco años. Tú no cambias un escudo cada cinco años.

Y aquí, saliéndome un poquito de contexto: una de las críticas más fuertes a Pedro Palacios fue por qué pone el escudo de Cuenca como marca de él, ¿te acuerdas?

DP: Sí. Y profe, veo que usted toma como referencia a Perú. Tomando en cuenta que ellos también son multiculturales, ¿qué aprendizajes cree que le faltan a Ecuador para que su marca actúe como un ente de proyección internacional?

NR: Tienen que generar una campaña comunicacional utilizando elementos que generen apego: primero desde Ecuador, y después hacia afuera. Pensar de manera global: de lo local a lo global.

Esa sería la mejor manera. Jugar con elementos. Por ejemplo, con la nueva marca, me guste o no me guste, puedes hacer storytelling con las líneas, con significados. Hay estrategias. Hay ejemplos de empresas que lo hacen.

Pero muéstrame la marca. Yo no la veo. ¿Tú la ves?

DP: No, no la vemos.

NR: Exacto. No se conoce. No la hemos visto en nada.

No creo que esa sea la estrategia. Ok, no la pongas con el presidente de Noboa, no pasa nada; pero ponla en un letrero en la vía Cuenca-Girón, yo qué sé. O no lo quieren hacer.

Por ejemplo, este rato se ve más la marca de la prefectura. A mí me gusta o no me gusta, pero la veo todo el tiempo. La veo muchísimo.

DP: Ahora que me habla de lo local... no recuerdo el autor que me mandó a leer la profe Moni, pero hablaba del fenómeno de la “patria chica”. Nos identificamos más como cuencanos, serranos, guayaquileños, antes que como ecuatorianos.

NR: Total, total. Y esto viene muy arraigado desde la independencia. Yo creo que la independencia marcó un antes y un después. Cuenca, relativamente, no hubiera sido Ecuador; Cuenca se iba por el otro lado, se iba para Perú. Y creo que tiene que ver con eso.

Y ahí, me atrevo a decir, una estrategia de Bolívar que le funcionó bien fueron los colores de la bandera: tres países los tienen hasta el día de hoy. No es marca, sabemos que no, pero está posicionado. (Ya estoy filosofando, pero quién quita... fue buena estrategia). Muy buena estrategia del caballero.

DP: Como última pregunta de cierre, quisiera consultarle: viéndolo así, ¿qué tan conectada cree usted que está la identidad cultural con la imagen país que llega a tener cada nación para generar proyección internacional? ¿Tiene peso este elemento dentro de la creación?

NR: Totalmente. Claro que tiene peso. Y también tiene peso muchos otros componentes, no necesariamente... A ver, no. Sí tiene peso. Y hay muchos elementos culturales y naturales, tangibles e intangibles.

Porque a veces los productos también pueden ser una forma de generar identidad y ser reconocidos a nivel mundial. Aquí tendrías que ver la historia con los "booms": boom cacaoero, boom bananero. El mismo sombrero de paja toquilla (Panama hat), me guste o no me guste... Y también la denominación de origen: tú hablas de café y piensas en Colombia. Ahí estás pensando en elementos como identidad.

DP: Y ahora que habla de eso, el sello "Mucho Mejor Ecuador" de hecho tengo pensado entrevistar a Mónica. Pero preguntando a compañeros, mucha gente, al menos gente de mi edad, decía: "¿Mucho Mejor Ecuador es la marca país?". Entonces, como usted dice, sentido de pertenencia, apego y visibilidad son base.

NR: Estoy trabajando una tesis con un estudiante que está en Mucho Mejor Ecuador. Hace un ratito la estaba viendo. Te voy a mostrar para que te rías un ratito. Justo la estaba revisando. Dame cinco segundos... ¿sí me estás viendo?

DP: Aún no se me proyecta nada... ahora sí.

NR: A ver... este cuál es... Sebastián Pezantes. Justo ves, estábamos viendo el contexto empresarial...

DP: Sí, que es muy interesante. Es una iniciativa privada, pero está haciendo el intento de lo que una marca no nos ha generado. Como usted dice: un restaurante peruano con el sello de marca país, y es suficiente. Y acá una iniciativa privada tuvo que dar validez al producto ecuatoriano. Entonces eso me hace pensar: ¿dónde queda el rol del gobierno? Porque la proyección al final no es solo para el país, sino para emprendedores. Y que no haya podido generar eso... una marca... y una iniciativa privada ya tuvo que generar este sello.

NR: Y el sello lo que te está diciendo es que es un producto hecho en Ecuador y que tiene calidad. Nada más. Por ahí va.

Y te digo por qué: porque justamente en este drama estamos en la tesis, porque estamos viendo cómo buscar que otro país haga lo mismo, generar una marca similar, pero no encontramos otro país que tenga esta iniciativa.

¿Y por qué? Porque estamos buscando cómo medir esa percepción que tenemos de la marca Mucho Mejor Ecuador, y buscamos escalas y no encontramos. Estamos en ese drama.

DP: Profe, más bien, muchas gracias. Y perdón por haberle extendido.

NR: No, por favor. Tranquila.

TRANSCRIPCIÓN ENTREVISTA

Entrevistadora: Daniela Peralta (DP)

Entrevistada: Cecilia Ugalde (CU)

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DP: Bueno, primero, muchas gracias, doctora Cecilia Ugalde, por aceptar esta entrevista. Como pude comentarle en la invitación, el tema de mi tesis busca vincular la identidad cultural y su incidencia en la proyección internacional, comparando el caso de Corea del Sur y Ecuador. Sin embargo, dentro de este eje general también entran otros elementos que se relacionan con comunicación, narrativa, percepción externa y, sobre todo, marca país. Para empezar con las preguntas, desde su formación académica, tanto comunicacional como de marketing, ¿qué lugar ocupa la identidad cultural?

CU: La identidad cultural está presente en básicamente todo lo que nosotros hacemos. Y aquí creo que hay una distinción clave que vale la pena señalar desde el inicio: la identidad cultural es, en el fondo, lo que realmente somos o lo que creemos ser. A veces, incluso, se parece a lo que ocurre con las marcas: puede existir una parte aspiracional, es decir, aquello que tú quisieras ser, con lo que te identificas, aunque todavía no estés completamente ahí; y, al mismo tiempo, también están las cosas con las que ya eres en el presente.

Con la identidad nacional pasa un poco eso: ahí está lo que somos, pero también aparece esta dimensión aspiracional de lo que quisiéramos ser como país. Eso está presente dentro de la identidad y, además, es una identidad que está todo el tiempo cambiando; no es una identidad fija. En realidad, la identidad se va modificando de manera constante.

Por ejemplo, si tú has entrado a la escala cultural o al índice cultural de Hofstede, puedes ver cómo ese tipo de mediciones muestran transformaciones culturales. Yo trabajo mucho con Hofstede. Y, por ejemplo, no sé si te has fijado, pero en la parte del individualismo, hasta hace dos años Ecuador tenía una clasificación de 8 sobre 100. Eso nos ubicaba como un país muy poco individualista; es decir, éramos mucho más colectivistas que individualistas, porque en individualismo puntuábamos casi nada. De hecho, en América, solo Guatemala tenía una puntuación más baja que nosotros.

Sin embargo, en apenas dos años esa calificación de 8 en individualismo ha subido a 24; es decir, se ha triplicado en dos años. Y eso te habla de que, como identidad cultural, si miras la escala, nos estamos modificando gravemente hacia una pérdida de ese colectivismo que había sido una parte tan fundamental de nuestra identidad cultural. En el colectivismo están los valores compartidos, está nuestra historia y está también una forma de organizarnos socialmente; por eso, cuando esa base se mueve, se siente.

DP: En esa línea, pensando en Ecuador como un país que normalmente se describe como multidiverso y multicultural, yo creía que existía un sentido común, un sentido colectivo o una base compartida. ¿Usted opina que realmente existe ese "nosotros"?

CU: Eso mismo que te estoy diciendo: eso se está perdiendo. Entonces, no es tan claro. O sea, sí, la Constitución nos plantea como un país multicultural y diverso, pero otra vez: eso es aspiracional. Es decir, uno podría decir “sí, quisiéramos que seamos eso”, pero cuando tú miras la realidad, te preguntas: ¿realmente crees que, por ejemplo, en las decisiones del Estado hay una representación efectiva de las culturas? No la hay.

Entonces, ¿qué pasa? Tú tienes una identidad cultural, y también tienes una narrativa nacional. En términos de comunicación —y esto también se sostiene desde la teoría— la narrativa nacional debería obedecer a la identidad cultural. Nosotros, hasta cierto punto, sí podemos reconocernos como una sociedad multicultural. Sin embargo, la narrativa no siempre proyecta lo que la identidad dice. Y ahí es donde aparece la discrepancia: a veces hay una distancia entre lo que declaramos ser y lo que realmente vivimos o representamos.

Además, esa narrativa tiene distintos niveles, porque esa comunicación opera hacia adentro, para cohesionar, y también hacia afuera, para proyectar. Entonces, la pregunta importante sería: ¿qué está realmente comunicando esa narrativa cuando se vuelve discurso público, política o marca? ¿Y qué tan coherente es con lo que somos?

DP: Y, de hecho, el instrumento que analizo en mi tesis para esa proyección hacia afuera es la marca país. Si bien comunica al exterior, también debería tener una fuerza de cohesión interna. ¿Cómo ve usted esa relación?

CU: Es que si no tiene cohesión, no tiene “cara”. Tú no puedes proyectar hacia afuera algo que no eres en el interior. Eso no se puede.

Es como si yo dijera: “mañana amanezco y voy a proyectar una nueva Ceci; quiero ser una persona diferente”, y empiezo a actuar distinto, como si estuviera cambiando mi esencia. Eso no va a funcionar, porque en el fondo no es real. Se vuelve una publicidad vacía, se vuelve una comunicación que no tiene anclaje.

Posiblemente el éxito de Corea del Sur, de lo poco que he visto —porque no estoy especializada en Corea—, obedece a que ellos sí tienen una coherencia muy clara entre lo que proyectan y lo que son. Y no hablo solo de la marca como un logo: tú ves el tema de la música, el tema de las películas, el tema de los productos. Hay una proyección que viene desde una conciencia país, y eso tiene relación con procesos internos que ellos han vivido; es decir, han sufrido una transformación interna real.

Hace poco estuve conversando con una alumna mía que estudió una maestría en Corea del Sur; se llama May González. Y por eso también estoy un poco más familiarizada, porque si no, de Corea del Sur no sabría mucho. Ella nos contaba cosas y, al mismo tiempo, también te habla de realidades que no ves en la proyección: por ejemplo, este tema del machismo, un machismo terrible; o el tema de la depresión. Eso no lo ves en la narrativa que se exporta, no se proyecta como parte de la marca, pero son problemas reales que Corea del Sur tiene. Entonces, tampoco es que todo sea perfecto o que la proyección muestre todo. Por eso digo: no todo lo que brilla es oro. No va a haber una sociedad perfecta.

DP: Me quedé impresionada al escuchar, desde alguien que vive allá, cómo es la realidad. Y, como usted dice, creo que eso termina estando en línea con el tema de narrativas. Porque, en lo que vi revisando la literatura, hay que diferenciar lo que es marca país, imagen país e identidad. La marca trata de ser construida y controlada hasta cierto punto desde el Estado; pero, si la marca no obedece a la narrativa que está anclada a la identidad...

CU: Exacto, tiene que existir un hilo conductor entre identidad y narrativa.

La identidad es lo que somos: ya está ahí. Eso lo comunicas y lo trasladas a cómo actúas en función de tu identidad. Y eso, claro, puede pasar por correcciones del caso desde marketing, porque tú sí le puedes hacer marketing para transformarlo en una marca país. Pero el punto es que esa narrativa tiene que obedecer hacia dentro y hacia afuera.

Si esa narrativa no es coherente con lo que eres, entonces estás intentando aprovechar algo que no eres. A ver, el papel aguanta todo. Tú puedes venderlo como una fantasía hasta cierto punto. Pero el problema del Ecuador es que se quiere vender como un país multicultural —como si eso bastara como discurso— y eso no tiene peso, y no va a tener peso nunca, si eso no refleja la realidad interna del país.

Entonces la pregunta vuelve a ser: ¿cuál es nuestra identidad? Y, para poder sostener una proyección, tiene que existir una coherencia real.

Ahí entra este discurso institucional y, como tú dices, las prácticas culturales reales: lo que efectivamente se vive, lo que efectivamente se practica.

DP: En ese punto me acordé de un autor que me gusta mucho: Dan Walls. Él habla de campañas, marca país y este tipo de cosas, y dice que no hay ninguna campaña de marketing que pueda vender un país sobre una base de una realidad inventada, porque tiene que anclarse sí o sí a una realidad.

CU: Exacto. Y más aún en el tiempo que vivimos ahora, con redes sociales y todo. Tú dices “este es un país de tales características”, la gente va y se encuentra con que no es esa la realidad.

Claro, quizá “cayeron” unos pocos, y tú podrías decir “bueno, me llegó un bus lleno de turistas”, pero ¿qué pasa luego? ¿Qué van a hacer esos turistas? Van a decir: “esto no es”. “Esto es una farsa”. “Nos sentimos estafados”. Y lo van a poner en redes, y ahí caes. Porque, más pronto cae un mentiroso que un cojo, y ahora eso es todavía más fuerte, porque todo el mundo puede comentar y exponer.

DP: Claro. Al final, el papel puede decir maravillas, pero si no se puede probar, no se sostiene.

Y conectando con esto: si la imagen país es el resultado de toda esta construcción consciente y filtrada, ¿cuál es su percepción de la imagen país que tiene Ecuador?

CU: Justo ahora salgo de una clase de estrategia publicitaria y hablábamos de coherencia, de constancia y de conexión cultural. Nuestra marca país no tiene nada de eso.

Y ojo: esto no es solo un problema de marca país. Es un problema de marca ciudad, es un problema de lo institucional. Cada administración viene y piensa que es la marca la que representa. Entonces nosotros no tenemos realmente una marca país sólida, porque cada uno se ha encargado de destruir el anterior, gastando millones en el camino.

Yo ya me pregunto aquí si estamos hablando de que esto es un negociado, porque hay mucha plata de por medio, o si es simplemente ignorancia. Porque no te puedes explicar de otra manera: o alguien se está haciendo millonario con esto, o estamos gobernados por gente que no entiende lo que hace, porque no hay forma de que alguien coherentemente te diga: “sí, claro, cambia la marca país”.

Tú puedes cambiar una marca cuando no hay posicionamiento, cuando te confunden, cuando no te reconocen como tal, cuando tu marca dice una cosa y el país está haciendo otra. Ahí podrías pensar en un cambio. Pero si ya tienes una marca medianamente posicionada, y vuelves a arrancar de cero, eso es irracional.

Yo me acuerdo también del caso de nuestro alcalde, cuando eliminaron a la Hormiga Chua. Es que me salen las lágrimas. Es difícilísimo crear un personaje con éxito. ¿Por qué “asesinar” algo así? Eso es absurdo, es ridículo. Ahí hay egos y hay ignorancia, lamentablemente.

Y en una materia justamente se decía esto: nosotros tenemos políticas de turno, no políticas de Estado.

DP: Claro, entonces, la imagen se vuelve muy dependiente de la administración que está a cargo.

CU: Exactamente. La imagen se vuelve diluida y dependiente del gobierno o de la administración de turno. Viene alguien con nuevas ideas y, en términos de continuidad, no tenemos una imagen consolidada.

Y, lamentablemente, pasa algo adicional: muchas veces esa marca intenta proyectar una identidad, pero realmente no proyecta lo que la narrativa nacional vive o sostiene. Lo que proyecta termina siendo un ideal, una versión idealizada de esa identidad cultural. Pero no se parece a la narrativa real del ecuatoriano: lo que piensa, lo que siente, cómo actúa. Entonces se vuelve una cosa artificial.

DP: En ese marco, la función de las narrativas sería lograr sentido de pertenencia y apropiación social. Es decir, transmitir claramente esa identidad. Y si la marca intenta apropiarse de la narrativa, es porque sería el vehículo para comunicarla y transmitirla. Porque uno puede decir “sí, como país tenemos identidad”, pero ¿cómo se muestra eso?, ¿dónde se refleja?

CU: Claro. Todo eso es parte de las narrativas. Y, además, claro que podemos elegir: obvio que puedes ser selectivo. Una marca no te va a elegir todo; una marca selecciona.

Eso no significa mentir necesariamente. En relaciones públicas se habla de “spin”: no dices toda la verdad, pero tampoco es que mientas; simplemente manejas el relato. Muchas veces pasa eso con una marca país o con una marca en general: no te está diciendo toda la verdad, pero tampoco necesariamente te está mintiendo.

El problema aparece cuando ya se vuelve descaro: cuando venden una marca país con una narrativa inexistente y, en la práctica, sí te está mintiendo.

DP: Y dentro de los actores que tienen incidencia en la construcción de esta narrativa, ¿a quiénes podríamos mirar? ¿Quiénes serían los partícipes?

CU: Hay muchísimos actores. Y sí, es importante hacer ese mapeo de actores, porque tienes actores a todo nivel.

Quiénes conforman la narrativa de una sociedad incluyen a los políticos, sí; pero también tienes un montón de influencers; tienes un montón de gente que está haciendo cosas desde la sociedad civil; tienes voces de muchos grupos marginados; y tienes voces desde la parte cultural y desde la parte científica. Es decir, hay muchas voces.

La pregunta sería: ¿qué voces priorizar y qué voces tomar en cuenta? Te cuento un ejemplo. La semana pasada, fue jueves, estuve en una salida de campo y conocí a una lideresa, acá cerca, a unos 40 minutos de aquí. Ella es miembro de una red de mujeres indígenas y campesinas de América Latina. Es una señora que expone en foros internacionales. Y ella habla de lo que somos como cultura, de lo que significa ser una mujer campesina, de lo que es realmente la comunidad, la vida comunitaria, de esos principios e intereses de solidaridad que nos han caracterizado, y también te comenta que se están perdiendo.

Yo creo que fue un baño de humildad escuchar a una mujer así. Porque es una mujer impresionante, por la organización que ha hecho con las otras mujeres a las que lidera, y por la influencia que puede tener. Y, sin embargo, muchas veces esas voces no tienen el eco que deberían tener. Esa voz es parte de una narrativa, es parte de la identidad también, es parte de nuestra narrativa “fija”, por decirlo así.

Pero, de nuevo: las voces pueden salir de cualquier parte. Hay muchos protagonistas y, en sociedades como la nuestra, van a surgir voces nuevas y también otras se van a apagar con el tiempo.

DP: Claro. A la final, es una identidad proyectada y seleccionada, pero, como usted dice, debe sostenerse en lo real. No se puede vender una proyección de largo plazo basada en mentiras.

CU: Exacto. Las mentiras no sostienen una marca país.

DP: En ese sentido, quería preguntarle también sobre las marcas que hemos tenido. Por ejemplo, yo también entrevisté a la profesora Natalia Rincón, y me interesa contrastar perspectivas. Yo, la verdad, no he seguido toda la evolución desde marketing, pero tengo el registro gráfico y quería saber qué opina.

CU: Esa misma, la última. Exacto. Y gastaron tanto en esa “payasada”.

Tenemos la primera, en 2001. Después otras. Hubo una que llegó a posicionarse medianamente; esa fue la que más se posicionó.

Y ahí viene una diferencia importante: el posicionamiento no es solo “estar”, sino conectar con algo identitario. A veces tú te identificas más con una marca que con otra, y eso ya te dice algo.

Justamente esto lo hablábamos en clases de estrategia publicitaria: tú puedes pensar que el problema es que tu marca no se diferencia de las otras. Pero el problema real no es que la marca no se diferencia, sino el motivo de por qué no se diferencia.

Entonces, puede ser que no haya coherencia cultural; puede ser un posicionamiento débil; puede haber confusión con otras cosas. Hay un montón de motivos por los cuales una marca se confunde con otras o no logra diferenciarse.

Acá se han metido millones y millones en una marca para que se posicione, pero si tú ves una marca que realmente no te está diciendo nada, es una marca “whatever”; no te comunica nada en realidad.

Y luego viene otro punto: cuando tú dejas de pagar, tú puedes tener una ilusión de que estás bien. Pero si volvemos al problema real, es lo mismo que pasa en redes. Si tú dices: “mi problema es que no estoy en redes” o “no tengo suficientes seguidores”, el problema real no es ese. El problema es que no estás generando contenido que atraiga. Esa es la verdad.

Pero si tú lo planteas solamente desde “tener seguidores”, entonces dices: “bueno, meto plata aquí”, pagas publicidad, pagas anuncios, y te suben los números. Ahí entran cosas como SEO y SEM. Pero eso no es orgánico. Algo queda, sí, pero cuando dejas de poner plata, baja. Y eso es normal.

En cambio, si tú has puesto contenido interesante para las personas y existe coherencia entre lo que dicen tus públicos, si hay estrategia detrás del mensaje, cuando dejas de pautar no tendría por qué caer. Pero si aquí estamos partiendo de un mensaje inventado, que no obedece a una narrativa real y que no refleja una identidad estructural, entonces se cae.

DP: Entonces, ¿usted diría que los cambios políticos, especialmente en un país como el nuestro, llegan a tener incidencia directa en esta proyección internacional?

CU: Sí, directamente. Y, además, está ligado a seguridad. Si estamos hablando de turismo, por ejemplo, la decisión de venir o no venir está en función de que haya seguridad. Hay un montón de cosas políticas que van a afectar a la marca.

Si estás hablando de un país que no es seguro, o de un país que no permite inversiones, no hay coherencia entre el “país divino” que vendes en fotos —con las cuatro regiones, con todo perfecto— y, por otro lado, lo que sale en noticias: inseguridad, narcotráfico, corrupción.

Y ahí también entra lo cultural y lo mediático. No hay coherencia entre narrativa y realidad, porque marca país no es solamente la campaña o el mensaje publicitario. No es solo “publicidad”. Implica coherencia de país.

No hay campaña o imagen de marca país que borre esas otras cosas. Tiene que existir coherencia.

DP: Me gusta que usted traiga a la luz el rol de los medios, porque yo he elaborado bastante desde el rol del Estado, pero como usted dice, al final están los ciudadanos. Y al no sentirse integrados o representados, las voces también caen. Además, sabemos que, si se va el siguiente político, cambia todo; entonces nosotros tampoco nos hemos identificado con ninguna marca, creo yo.

CU: Claro. Por eso esta construcción cae. Esto es básico.

DP: Dentro del aspecto comunicacional, y en base a su experiencia, ¿qué aspectos cree usted que deberían reemplazarse o fortalecerse para consolidar una imagen país más sólida?

CU: A mí me parece que como ecuatorianos nos hace falta conciencia. Yo me acuerdo que en la escuela tenía educación cívica; llevaba una materia. Es un poco eso: hace falta conciencia de que esto se trabaja y de cómo se muestran las cosas.

La parte cultural, con el valor que tiene, debería generar orgullo. Y ese orgullo debería ir más allá de lo folclórico como “postal”. Lo cultural es parte de lo interno, pero también parte de la narrativa y de la identidad misma de lo ecuatoriano.

Por ejemplo, a mí me da frustración ver que tenemos una gastronomía maravillosa y que es desconocida. Y es desconocida porque, a veces, cuando se intenta proyectar algo, lo único que sale es el encebollado. Sin quitarle méritos, el encebollado es delicioso, pero no es lo único que traemos como país, y no es lo único que debería destacarse.

En ese sentido, hay muchas cosas de esta identidad cultural que sí tenemos, que sí están ahí, y que deberían trasladarse de manera positiva a la narrativa. Y ahí sí somos todos parte.

DP: En esa línea, yo también encontré algunos papers que dicen que las campañas y servicios muestran la riqueza cultural desde lo folclórico y, a veces, solo muestran al indígena desde ciertos estereotipos. Y luego llega un turista y dice: “bueno, ¿dónde está la mujer con la falda?”

CU: Claro. Y eso es ridículo. No vas a encontrar eso en todas partes. Si tú vas a Noruega, no vas a encontrar gente vestida todo el tiempo con ropa típica de Noruega. Eso pasa en todos los países.

Sí vas a encontrar ciertos espacios donde hay vestimenta tradicional, sí vas a encontrar componentes culturales, y además esos componentes también se reconfiguran. Por ejemplo, fijate en nuevos diseñadores de moda que incorporan macana. Entonces no es que “no está”. Siempre se puede proyectar, pero proyectarlo bien.

Pero más allá de eso, yo creo que lo clave es el uso ético o no ético del folklore. Porque si estás utilizando a la gente o esos elementos culturales como gancho para promoción, entonces debes darles algo a esas personas. Para que sea ético, tiene que haber una devolución: un beneficio.

No puede ser que vayas, saques, saques, saques información o imagen, y no vuelvas nada. No es solo explotación. Hay que darles algo. Hay que ayudarles a que sea sostenible lo que ellos hacen. Que el turismo vaya y compre sus productos, por ejemplo.

Y tampoco se trata de un enfoque paternalista de “darles” sin más. Se trata de dar herramientas para que puedan salir adelante. Aquí hay mucha tela que cortar, porque hay oportunidades concretas que se pueden generar para gente que tiene oportunidades limitadas. Entonces el enfoque debería ser: ¿cómo les das más oportunidades?

Y eso debería interesarnos a todos como sociedad. A mí me gusta mucho esta idea de “no dejar a nadie atrás”. Es decir: ayudémonos. No tiene sentido que alguien se quede atrás y que otros acaparen todo. Ayudémonos a que tengan herramientas para salir adelante. Todos nos beneficiamos.

DP: Volviendo al tema de las narrativas, si quisiéramos construir una marca que literalmente resuene con esta identidad, ¿qué narrativas culturales cree que deberían integrarse?

CU: Yo pienso que ese tipo de cosas tienen que partir de diagnósticos colaborativos. No creo que nadie tenga el conocimiento absoluto como para decir “esto es”. Tiene que partir de análisis, de puestas en común, y de cómo quisiéramos mostrar lo que somos.

Y, en este caso, se requiere un análisis antropológico, sociológico. Hay gente experta en esas áreas. Ellos son quienes realmente pueden construir una narrativa con sustento, porque pueden ver e identificar realidades.

Uno puede opinar como ciudadano: con qué se identifica, qué le parece valioso, qué le parece que debería estar. Pero construir una narrativa requiere diagnóstico hecho por quienes saben y por quienes están empapados en el tema.

Y, además, esa narrativa tiene que ampliarse a un montón de procesos: no es solo una marca país. La narrativa está en lo que hacen los políticos, en lo que hace la empresa privada, en cómo actuamos. Esa narrativa recoge identidad, pero también se expresa de muchas maneras.

Por eso también importa la parte cultural y la historia: qué proyecta, qué muestra. Y ahí tiene que haber coherencia, conexión cultural. Porque si no, terminas trasladando a una marca solo lo idealizado, lo utópico.

Lo feo existe. No lo vas a poner en una marca, obviamente. Pero tienes que asegurarte de cómo tamizas, de cómo construyes, y de cómo aprovechas de una narrativa que ya está ahí. No es algo que inventas desde cero, sino qué tomas de lo real para construir algo que sea coherente y sostenible.

DP: Exacto, como aprovechando. Y ya para cerrar, una pregunta que mi profesora me sugirió incluir: ¿qué es para usted, o cómo definiría lo que es ser ecuatoriana?

CU: ¿Qué es ser ecuatoriana? Para mí dice mucho.

Si bien me identifico como ecuatoriana, yo creo que mi esencia es sobre todo andina. Pero, en general, ser ecuatoriana es ser parte de un país que está totalmente subvalorado, pero que es profundamente rico. Es un país lleno de riqueza. Yo tengo muchísimo orgullo de ser ecuatoriana, y eso es parte de mi esencia.

Y te digo: parte del orgullo era que yo sentía que éramos una sociedad muy cooperativista, y me da pena tanto que eso se esté perdiendo. Pero yo creo que el ecuatoriano, en esencia, es bueno. Pienso que el ecuatoriano tiene muchísimas cualidades positivas.

Para mí, Ecuador es parte de un conglomerado que es fruto de contrastes. Somos fruto de contrastes. Y, si analizas lo que somos, también miras de dónde venimos.

¿Quiénes son nuestros antepasados? Básicamente tenemos cañaris, incas y españoles. Unos adoraban al sol, otros adoraban a la luna. Fíjate que ahí ya venimos de un conflicto de opuestos, totalmente opuestos. O sea, somos fruto de contradicciones.

Y creo que Ecuador es eso: el fruto de contradicciones que, de alguna manera, se fusionan, se acomodan, y nos permiten surgir, avanzar y salir adelante.

DP: Doctora, muchísimas gracias por su tiempo y por compartir estas reflexiones.

CU: Con gusto.