

When the Archaeologists Leave

Legacies and Services of the Historical Ecology of the Galápagos Islands Project

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ABSTRACT

The Hacienda El Progreso functioned as an important Ecuadorian agro-industrial enterprise in the late nineteenth century. Operating out of San Cristóbal Island in the Galápagos archipelago, the plantation exported refined sugar, coffee, cattle products, and other goods to national and international markets. From its beginnings in the 1860s, the plantation established the first permanent human settlement on the island, and long after its demise in the 1930s, it continues to exert an important influence in local culture. Contemporary communities of San Cristóbal are shaping their identities based on the historical importance of the hacienda. The summer of 2018 was our last field season. From its start, the Historical Ecology of the Galápagos Islands project involved close participation with communal authorities and town leaders to investigate the island's human past. In this article, we discuss legacy and services of our project in the contemporary setting of Galápagos. We examine the relevance and contributions of our project to education, heritage policies, and the local economy. We discuss lessons learned from interactions and collaborations between archaeologists and the local community, and we evaluate the consequences of implementing an archaeological project on a remote environmental sanctuary where interest in human history can collide with the agendas of nature conservation and a lucrative ecotourism industry.

Keywords: Ecuador, heritage policies, community archaeology, immaterial heritage

La Hacienda El Progreso fue una importante empresa agroindustrial ecuatoriana de finales del siglo XIX. Operando desde la isla San Cristóbal en el archipiélago de Galápagos, la empresa exportó azúcar refinada, café y otros productos a mercados nacionales e internacionales. La plantación funcionó entre las décadas de 1860 y 1930 y fue, al mismo tiempo, el primer asentamiento humano permanente en la isla. Tras su cierre y abandono en 1930, el legado de la plantación tiene una importante influencia en la cultura local. Actualmente, los habitantes de la Isla San Cristóbal configuran su identidad a partir de la importancia histórica de la plantación. El verano de 2018 fue nuestra última temporada de campo en El Progreso. Desde el inicio, nuestra investigación contó con la participación permanente de autoridades y líderes comunales para estudiar el pasado de la isla, ninguno de ellos descendientes directos de los trabajadores originales de la plantación. En este artículo, discutimos el legado y los servicios de nuestro proyecto arqueológico para la sociedad moderna de las Islas Galápagos. Los objetivos son examinar la relevancia de nuestro proyecto para la sociedad contemporánea en aspectos como educación, políticas patrimoniales y economía local; discutir las lecciones aprendidas sobre las interacciones y colaboraciones entre el equipo de arqueología con la comunidad y las autoridades locales; y evaluar las consecuencias a mediano y largo plazo resultantes de implementar un proyecto arqueológico en un santuario ambiental remoto. Las Islas Galápagos son un escenario en donde los intereses sobre la historia humana local colisionan con las agendas de conservación de la naturaleza y una lucrativa industria del ecoturismo.

Palabras clave: Ecuador, políticas patrimoniales, arqueología comunitaria, patrimonio inmaterial

From its inception in 2012, the Historical Ecology of the Galápagos Islands (HEGI) project focused archaeological and historical investigations on the nineteenth-century industrial plantation of Hacienda El Progreso. HEGI explored early interactions between humans and the isolated ecosystem of San Cristóbal, one of the easternmost islands of the Galápagos archipelago. Investigations contributed to defining important

cultural aspects of early human settlement on the island and presenting novel information regarding the ecological costs of early human colonization of the island (Stahl et al. 2020). Today, few contemporary inhabitants are direct descendants of the original plantation workers, given that the bulk of San Cristóbal Island's current population arrived through immigration dating to the 1970s.

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HEGI initialized a formal interdisciplinary partnership between three universities in Canada and Ecuador and two research and educational centers in San Cristóbal. An immediate project objective was to establish a high-quality research site that integrated student training and that mobilized cross-disciplinary and local, community-based knowledge for exploring the historical involvement of humans in the production of humanized landscapes, novel ecosystems, and ecological transformation and its significance for the integrated management of Galápagos National Park (PNG). The project focused on close collaboration with various stakeholders, including local Galapagueño constituencies and a broader international audience of students, academics, NGOs, and various levels of local and federal government. Knowledge mobilization involved a wide range of communication tools and activities that could access this potentially broad stakeholder community and facilitate its input in the project, its members, goals, and outcomes. A longer-term project goal was to establish a locally designed historical interpretive center dedicated to the contextualized display of archaeological and historical data pertaining to the history of El Progreso. This directly accords with PNG management plans emphasizing development of environmental and interpretive programs and prioritizing social integration and participation (1) to foster island identity, communication, and public relations in park management; and (2) to assist local-level education, participation, and communication in an effort to increase participation in developing social strategies for conservation.

After several years of research and negotiations with the local community, many questions emerge from reflecting on our work. How relevant was our archaeological project for contemporary communities on the Galápagos Islands? How can people connect to a past that is not necessarily related to them? How can contemporary populations be motivated to work with archaeologists to examine basic questions about the place that they and their families are occupying today? These questions are not new to archaeology (e.g., Holtorf 2007; Little 2012). Archaeologists question how archaeology might address emerging, contemporary, sociomaterial phenomena—and, hence, to issues of both contemporary and future ecological, social, political, and economic concern (Harrison 2016:165).

THE SERVICES OF ARCHAEOLOGY TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Archaeologists have a vested interest in expanding their focus on the analysis and identification of material culture from the past to a consideration and discussion of the impacts that their interpretations bring to contemporary societies. Demonstrating how archaeology is relevant to contemporary lives, interests, communities, and heritage can ensure that archaeology is *for someone* rather than simply *about something* (Scott-Ireton and Gaimster 2012:156). Reflecting on the relevance of archaeology to the contemporary world is an essential aspect of archaeological practice (Kohl 2012; Little 2012; Selvakumar 2010). There is no universal way of describing the role and meaning of archaeology and how it can function in service to contemporary societies. The discipline contributes to the development of relevant curriculum in education, local policies, development, environmental conservation, local economics, tourism, and demystification of the past.

Selvakumar (2010), for instance, has pointed out that the relevance of archaeological practice for contemporary societies can be situated in discussions about economic development; conservation of important heritage monuments; the fulfillment of regional, national, communal, and popular sociopolitical needs; and the satisfaction of curiosity about the past (Selvakumar 2010:478).

The relations between people living and interacting with archaeological sites is also an important element in defining the role and relevance of archaeology in the contemporary world. The connections between contemporary societies with the past depend on aspects such as ethnic origins, the characteristics of the archaeological site, local legislation, geographical setting, and/or memories about the past. Perhaps the most important consideration is the existence or absence of a “sense of place,” which influences behavior and creates specific conditions through connection to the land, culture, and memories of the past (Ardoin 2014; Convery et al. 2012; Lavoie 2005; Schofield and Szymanski 2011).

In remote places and frontiers recently colonized or re-colonized by humans, connection with the past brings a set of challenges. Historically, people have traveled to frontiers for dissimilar reasons. Many South American countries designated certain islands as places of exile in the 1800s, mainly to relocate criminals and political prisoners. The geographical isolation and economic and political instability of South American governments have negatively influenced the formation of stable human societies in these remote locations. Islands can appear as complex settings in which the past can be politicized, commercialized, and misused by various actors to fulfill personal or political agendas (Selvakumar 2010:471). It is particularly in cases such as this that archaeology can provide important contributions to a discussion of a past legacy for contemporary societies.

NATURE AND POLITICS IN GALÁPAGOS

A conflictive relationship between humans and nature in the Galápagos Islands has existed since the first colonization of the archipelago. Initially documented in 1535 by the Spanish Crown, they were formally colonized during the middle nineteenth century by the Republic of Ecuador. Bishop Tomás de Berlanga (1884) described Galápagos in the sixteenth century as inhospitable territories for people and forgotten by God. Since then, the archipelago, due to its remote ocean location and limited resources, has often been labeled as an inhospitable frontier, outside the control of society. The geographical isolation of the islands made governance difficult, leaving the islands isolated and with no specific legislation to control activities there before the 1830s.

In 1832, the independent nation of Ecuador formally claimed the archipelago as part of its national territory. During the nineteenth century, colonization projects from the mainland incentivized increasing human presence and agricultural development. This emphasis on Galápagos as a remote frontier for colonization continued until the islands were declared a national park in 1930. Substantial control over human activities in the archipelago only started to be regulated in the late twentieth century, when the

strongly conservationist Special Law of the Galápagos was passed by the Ecuadorian senate.

Several political actors currently wield power and authority in the archipelago. Since 1832, the government of Ecuador has implemented federal taxation and policy controls. The Charles Darwin Foundation, created in 1959, is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to scientific research in the archipelago. The foundation has an agreement with the government of Ecuador to pursue and maintain collaborations with government agencies by providing scientific knowledge and technical assistance in order to promote and secure conservation in Galápagos. The PNG, also founded in 1959, is the government institution responsible for the protection and conservation of the national reserve, a park that includes 97% of the land area of the archipelago and a large maritime reserve. The Galápagos Governing Council (Consejo de Gobierno de Galápagos), in turn, was created in 2009, with provincial-level powers over planning and property ownership, resource management, migration, and oversight of activities in Galápagos. There are several other large NGOs dedicated to conservation, scientific research, and social work that are very active in the islands. This diverse set of institutions has created a scenario of overlapping missions and objectives, which can at times result in conflicts over policy decisions, nature conservation, regulations for tourism, and funding (see Batty et al. 2019; Celata and Sanna 2012; Durham 2008; Hennessy 2018a, 2018b; Hennessy and McCleary 2011; Hoyman and McCall 2013; Hunt 2021; Mathis and Rose 2016; Pecot and Ricaurte-Quijano 2019; Quiroga 2019; Villacis and Carrillo 2013).

HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

Contemporary society in Galápagos consists mainly of recent Ecuadorian and international immigrants who have traveled to the islands for the seeming benefits of a healthier life, higher incomes and standard of living, little state control, or geographical isolation. A diverse set of people of different ethnicities and nationalities arrived at different times and in different economic contexts. This relatively new society formed during the past 200 years through dissimilar migratory events, including colonization of the archipelago in 1832, occupation of some islands by foreign families escaping from European wars, displacement from an earthquake that destroyed the Ecuadorian city of Ambato in 1949, the first Galápagos ecotourism boom in the middle 1970s, a lucrative sea-cucumber (*Isostichopus fuscus*) fishery in the 1990s, the Ecuadorian economic crisis of 1999, and a second tourism boom focused on luxury ecotourism in the late 2000s (Ahassi 2007; Castillo de Vargas et al. 2005; Latorre 2011; Ospina 2001). Relatively few people on the islands today are direct descendants of the first colonizers. Most immigrants began their island life from scratch, many not knowing about—or interested in—the archipelago's human past.

During the nineteenth century, several agricultural colonies were created to exploit natural resources in Galápagos. The Compañía de Pesca y Orquillera was managed by Ecuadorian businessmen Manuel J. Cobos and Jose Monroy on San Cristóbal Island through the Hacienda El Progreso, which functioned as an industrial plantation starting in the 1870s. The collapse of this

profitable company began after Cobos's murder in 1904 by his workers, characterized at the time as a rebellion against this authoritarian owner. Thereafter, many workers returned to the mainland, and few families stayed on the island. Today, El Progreso is a rural community formed mainly by farming descendants of immigrants who relocated to Galápagos between the 1940s and 1970s, attracted by the possibility of accessing inexpensive land. The town, including the hacienda ruins, and most of the southwestern portion of San Cristobal Island are not part of the national park and are still under active agricultural production.

In the last 20 years, a few heritage projects have focused on the history of El Progreso (e.g., Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional 2015; Bolaños et al. 2002). These included the creation of an inventory of preserved heritage objects in the community and an attempt to attract some tourism to this small highland town by creating a heritage-focused tourist attraction out of the remaining hacienda ruins. In 2002, the Hacienda El Progreso was declared a national heritage site and consequently included in the list of the protected sites of Ecuador. However, only a portion of the plantation complex was protected at that time, including the main plantation house and its immediate surroundings. The hacienda's industrial mill, the workers' village, cultivated fields, and the original port and piers on the coast were omitted from legislative protection.

From 2012 onward, HEGI explored the hacienda and its landscape through the lens of historical ecology and community archaeology. Our initial priorities included organizing meetings with the local community to discuss the scope and relevance of our project, engage in an open dialogue about the plantation's historical legacy, and recruit interested community members for several aspects of the project. Community involvement was a priority both for engaging with the recent past and acknowledging that archaeology constitutes a material and discursive intervention in the present (Harrison 2016:170). From the beginning, coauthor Edy Becerra participated in organizing fieldwork and accommodations in El Progreso. Having one of the local leaders on our team was key social capital for a horizontal relationship between the local community and archaeologists. In this regard, trust with community members was built through renting a house in the community where we lived and set up a field laboratory. Local authorities recognized the possible benefits of mutual collaboration, and community members were attracted by the project's scope and for the opportunity of temporary employment (Figure 1).

LEGACY AND SERVICES

The HEGI project created an opportunity for changes in contemporary communities in the Galápagos Islands, particularly in the area of material and immaterial heritage policies, education, and the local economy. We discuss lessons learned from the interactions and collaborations between archaeologists and local communities, and we evaluate the social, political, and material consequences of implementing an archaeological project on a protected environmental sanctuary.

Heritage Policies

During our residency in El Progreso, local authorities and community members developed an interest in enforcing local and



FIGURE 1. Our first meeting with the local community of El Progreso in 2014 was organized during the first week of fieldwork and held at the GAD building. Former president Paulina Cango and coauthor Florencio Delgado explained the archaeological project to the local community. This meeting created a democratic scenario to discuss the island's past. In addition, it lowered the invisible barriers between researchers and community members. (Photos from Stahl 2017.)

national legislation to protect and conserve the entire archaeological site. The Community Government of El Progreso (Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Parroquial El Progreso, or GAD El Progreso) eventually initiated negotiations with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Culture to request legal custody of the archaeological site, prompted by other successful cases on the Ecuadorian mainland where Indigenous communities are today administering and conserving archaeological sites with relative success.

The local GAD has supported its custody request with the archaeological and historical information gathered by HEGI. Justification for the request of legal custody of the archaeological site is based on its current stage of abandonment, a lack of maintenance, and actions of intentional destruction. After the plantation's near abandonment in the 1930s, the Ecuadorian government took possession of the property. During the mid-twentieth century, plantation land was subdivided into several parcels for farming. At this time, Galapagueños were leaving their highland homes for the coast to participate in the developing fishing industry. The town of El Progreso became dormant, and the remains of the plantation ended up in the hands of private owners, some of them new immigrants to the islands. During this time, Galápagos was largely left to the *colonos*, whose primary objective was to domesticate nature through domination and control during a period of isolated self-sufficiency, an ethos that to some degree extends into the present (Stahl et al. 2020:131).

Today, many preserved—primarily metal—objects from the original hacienda are found in various locations throughout the inhabited parts of San Cristóbal Island. These range from private keepsakes in residences to intentionally relocated machinery for open display. During the early portion of our project, the owner of a property on which much of the in situ sugar mill infrastructure was located met us with hostility. His land was eventually sold to a coastal entrepreneur who established a paintball emporium (Figure 2). During our final field season in 2018, we noticed the intentional demolition of the old plantation's smokestack base

and an associated brick building on an adjacent property. The smokestack base was a rectangular brick building connected to the sugar mill's furnaces by a series of underground tunnels. These buildings were still visible in situ in Spring 2016.

Unfortunately, some landowners with properties on which the preserved mill infrastructure is located were more interested in eliminating the material remains of the plantation than in preserving them. Most likely, they feared the perceived negative economic consequences that any preserved archaeological remains might have for their properties: the possible impacts on taxes, the perceived impossibility of building new structures and difficulties reselling the properties, and the fear of outright expropriation of their real estate. There have been no legal consequences for the destruction of the mill's preserved material legacy.

The intentional destruction of El Progreso's heritage is an example of problematic interactions in areas where historic and archaeological sites are more often than not merely considered as impediments to economic development by those who have occasion to think about them; most people simply have no engagement with heritage at all (Flatman et al. 2012:70). Unfortunately, heritage protection was not declared over most of the original property in 2002, and local heritage policies are not well positioned to deal with this in the future. In places such as Galápagos, local legislation protects the environment as well as the macroeconomic interests related to luxury ecotourism. Many current residents of the islands have little or no connection to—or memories of—earlier events, and they show little interest in local human history given that it has little relation to making a living. In areas with recently established communities such as Galápagos, heritage laws and policy tend to be marginalized and dealt with both quickly and cheaply.

What is needed in Galápagos is a wholesale, comprehensive change in heritage policy reflecting the new realities of the twenty-first century. National policies for protecting the native and



FIGURE 2. The property on which most of the preserved sugar mill infrastructure is located was sold to a coastal entrepreneur who established a paintball emporium. During the 2010s, the historic infrastructure was constantly vandalized and eventually destroyed. The venture quickly became insolvent, after which the land was up for resale. (Photo by the authors.)

endemic environment of Galápagos were first implemented in 1936 to restrict hunting and extraction of natural resources. The most important action for protecting nature was the creation of the Charles Darwin Foundation and the PNG in 1959. The current Special Law of Galápagos, implemented in 1998 (Ley Organica del Regimen Especial de Galápagos) aims to balance development and tourism, acknowledges the historic interactions that existed between inhabited zones and protected areas, and seeks to promote the maintenance of ecological systems and biodiversity—especially for endemic biota—through sustainable and controlled development (Stahl et al. 2020:132). Robust policies are in place for human activities permitted inside the PNG and the protected natural reserve, yet policies for protecting its human history are weak and generally ignored by authorities, society, and visitors.

Communal authorities and some families are reacting to the lack of heritage protection policies and are leading initiatives to protect and conserve local heritage. To our surprise, most of the communal leaders and authorities demanding changes in local heritage policies are not directly related to the first occupants of the island. The current community request for custody of the site centers on two main objectives: (1) expanding the status of protection to the entire site of the plantation and (2) obtaining the legal tools for site protection and conservation. Obtaining legal custody is also seen by the community as a path to obtaining benefits, such as a permanent public funding base and creating heritage tourism jobs, which are not currently available in Galápagos province.

These actions demonstrate local interest in applying or designing local policies to protect the cultural heritage of the archipelago.

The objectives of the local GAD of El Progreso, together with community members interested in the human past, are transforming the site into an important tourist attraction in the island's highlands. During the past few years, the GAD has been designing tourism packages focused on visiting the preserved material infrastructure of the plantation along with the training of local guides. The community also redesigned its official logo based on historical imagery disseminated during our archival research (Figure 3). This is not a recent idea, however; it has been debated for decades with no visible results. We hoped that information from our archaeological research would boost this and other initiatives.

Finally, in the summer of 2021, the first law aimed at protecting the human history of the Galápagos Islands—the Ordenanza para preservar, mantener, y diseminar el patrimonio cultural y arquitectónico de San Cristóbal (Ordinance to Preserve, Maintain and Disseminate the Architectural and Cultural heritage of San Cristóbal)—was enacted. The efforts of coauthor Edy Becerra and local leaders were key to the creation of this policy to protect the material and immaterial human heritage of the Galápagos Islands.

The approval process began in September 2014, when a remaining wall of the heritage site Casa Hacienda de Cobos collapsed. At the same time, a few citizens began to build houses and modern structures on top of the historical remains located in the area where the plantation's sugar mill existed. Community members denounced these actions to the local municipality, but authorities did not act, arguing that the destruction of heritage is a matter of the federal Ministry of Culture. However, an administrative office of the ministry no longer existed in Galápagos



FIGURE 3. The official logo of the GAD Parroquial El Progreso was redesigned in 2021 based on 1888 photographs of El Progreso Plantation. The plantation’s main house is in the center, with cultivated fields and the workers’ village on either side, resembling the original plantation’s layout, which is visible in the historic photographs. (Image courtesy of GAD Parroquial El Progreso. Pictures: NARA, National Archives and Record Administration NARA-22-FA-90 and NARA-22-FA-88, Albatross Expedition).

province. Given this scenario, the community organized civil actions to work with foreign volunteers in the conservation of the archaeological site and in presentations to children and young people about the importance of conserving the historical legacy of the plantation.

On July 27, 2020, the community sent a letter to the mayor of San Cristóbal (a great-grandson of Manuel J. Cobos, one of the plantation owners) with the first draft of the Ordenanza. The goal was to stop the ongoing destruction of the plantation remains and to enforce the relevant policies to protect local heritage. The document outlines the legal framework and the regulations to protect and conserve the cultural heritage of San Cristóbal Island, Galápagos (see Supplemental Text 1). This recommendation is based on Article 55 of the Organic Code of Territorial Organization, Autonomy, and Decentralization of Ecuador, which in section H specifies that the municipalities have exclusive powers determined by national law to preserve, maintain, and disseminate the architectural, cultural, and natural heritage of the municipality. The approval process for the recommendation was difficult because the Municipal Council of San Cristóbal found it of little importance, arguing many times that the destroyed material remains were of no historical significance. After public insistence, the ordinance was discussed by the council in ordinary sessions on October 29, 2020, and May 13, 2021. Finally, on May 21, 2021, the long-awaited ordinance was approved by the municipality and validated by the community council of El Progreso.

Demystification of the Past

Human history and the past have different meanings for different people in Galápagos. Some of the first colonizers of the archipelago were convicts and prisoners relocated from Guayaquil’s public jail in the 1830s. Forcibly relocated to the islands to work in the recently created agricultural colonies, they never overcame the isolation, harsh ecosystems, and work conditions. This resulted in a volatile society and led to a series of violent rebellions on Floreana and San Cristóbal Islands. Almost all the colonization projects failed, and most prisoners and workers returned to the mainland on their own or remained on the islands as free residents (Latorre 2011). These events were repeated until the middle of the twentieth century, when the last incarceration project—a penal colony on Isabela Island—was closed in 1959.

This troubled and violent past created the stereotype of Galapagueños as descendants of poor laborers, convicts, or sex workers, which is emphasized not just in local stereotypes but also in the history presented in tourism literature (e.g., Geller and Goldfine 2014; Latorre 1991, 2002; Latorre et al. 1990). Contemporary society in the archipelago can be divided into those who celebrate the tenacity and grit of early colonization efforts and those who would prefer to forget a past perceived as violent and shameful.

The contemporary population of San Cristóbal is perhaps the most denigrated population among the islands. Other

Galapagueños characterize San Cristóbal inhabitants as part of an undereducated working-class society, who trace their origins to rural areas on the mainland, and whose major activities often conflict with progressive international initiatives surrounding conservation and international tourism. These characterizations of San Cristóbal are directly linked to the island's historic role in human colonization and specifically to Hacienda El Progreso. It is not uncommon to hear San Cristóbal referred to as a hopeless mess, a lost cause, or a ruined island (Stahl et al. 2020:140).

Archaeology can help to demystify this troubled past by providing contextualized archaeological data and historical information. As Tilley (1989:112) argues, a critical archaeology must be one made practically relevant to the present and must not remain merely an arcane discourse on the past. The HEGI project focused on understanding the ecological costs of human occupation in isolated island ecosystems. It also involved sharing information to understand the historical, political, and economic reasons for human colonization of the island.

We took a community approach to our work. At first, the community thought that our research would laud the heritage of the historic plantation owner, Manuel J. Cobos. Instead, our meetings, fieldwork, and outreach showed that we were not interested in validating the myths and legends of the local past. Our interests were focused on understanding the early society of El Progreso as a whole. The larger-than-life myth and dramatic death of Cobos have been the core of local stories and beliefs about the hacienda (Webster 1904). By turning our attention to people and environmental relations, our research opened up options to think about the plantation workers and their families, which promoted an inclusive scenario for local collaboration, democratizing archaeological practice. The HEGI project emphasized a demystification of the past and included perspectives that had been ignored in local historical narratives.

Today, coauthor Edy Becerra is the president of the LUDATO-SI foundation for the arts and culture in Galápagos. He acts on suggestions for stronger local heritage legislation and has presented his work in national workshops and roundtables. He also leads voluntary work with national and international visitors to conserve the material remains of the plantation, and he collaborates with the local GAD and the Municipality of San Cristóbal in cultural activities. In February 2023, Becerra was elected president of El Progreso GAD for the period 2023–2027.

Becerra, together with volunteers, also directs a radio show that is focused on presenting projects on the history, culture, and heritage of Galápagos (Becerra 2022). The show broadcasts interviews of senior citizens about their memories, histories, and anecdotes from the past. This is how the producers of *Raíces* describe the radio show:

An anthropological and humanist project that seeks the historical essence of Galápagos' society based on the experiences, memories, and traditions of local people, considering the town of El Progreso, in San Cristóbal, the epicenter of human history in the Galápagos. The first colonizers of the islands came from the Ecuadorian coast, the Amazon mountains, from Colombia, Peru, Mexico, the United States, and even from Norway; they have traveled from all over the world to start a life in our archipelago.

These pioneers survived a wild and primitive environment. They faced adversity, harsh weather, tyrannies, and even death itself. Because pioneers live in every corner of the Galápagos, they are the roots in which our identity is grounded. They live in the island's highlands where the land is farmed, in the sea where the nets are launched, in the dreams and hopes of better days than the ones that they remember. Our radio show is a tribute to first colonizers to recognize their struggles and sacrifices, their history, and the experiences and traditions that shaped the modern Galápagos. The archaeological heritage of the Galápagos Islands constitutes a cultural, social, and economic resource of great importance and fragility, for which adequate planning and administration are necessary, starting from an interdisciplinary and interinstitutional approach. Galápagos is nature but also culture, history, and heritage [Becerra 2022; translation by the authors].

The radio show is based on San Cristóbal Island and accessed by inhabitants of all the populated islands of the archipelago, which has created a community forum to debate aspects of local cultural identity, material and immaterial heritage, and the human history of the Galápagos islands.

Education

The relevance of our archaeological findings for local education in Galápagos is perhaps the most significant outcome of our project. Archaeological results have provided tools for teachers designing history-based lessons in their classes. It has also provided the basis for city and county administrators to manage cultural sites in their jurisdiction, and it assists park rangers in identifying and protecting cultural resources (Scott-Ireton and Gaimster 2012:154). We are delighted that project information is now included in local elementary and high school curricula, as well as in training programs for park rangers, tourist guides, educators, and local authorities (e.g., Astudillo 2018; Astudillo and Jamieson 2021; Jamieson 2018; Stahl et al. 2020), both of which improve chances for local support for the conservation of historic sites. Project reports and publications are publicly accessible, and all recovered material specimens are currently curated by the local GAD.

In 2020, we created a digital exhibition, permanently hosted by the University of Victoria library (Stahl 2017), that explores project materials and houses a large collection of annotated historical images. Shortly after its launch, we engaged in dialogue with Cobos descendants currently residing in southern California. The human history of San Cristóbal Island and El Progreso is less mysterious today. The local GAD is designing exhibits and exploring government resources for the creation of an archaeological industrial park and interpretive center on the site. Current and future generations of students on San Cristóbal Island are left with archaeological information that is already creating a more democratized, inclusive, and demystified past.

The legacy of our archaeological project has also opened up new possibilities for expanding and initiating archaeological research on other inhabited islands in the Galápagos archipelago. In addition, we are collaborating with the local GAD and cultural agencies to seek more efficient options to disseminate the history of El Progreso and to exhibit preserved specimens recovered in our excavations.

Cultural Tourism

An immediate legacy of our archaeological research has been a small expansion of tourism in El Progreso, and undoubtedly, future efforts to protect and conserve archaeological heritage on the island will also include dialogue with the existing lucrative Galápagos tourism industry. Archaeology is globally relevant for the tourism industry because it shapes places and people and also generates revenue (Flatman 2012:294). This is certainly the case throughout South America, where thousands of tourists visit archaeological parks and museums annually.

The Galápagos archipelago has been an iconic tourist destination since the 1960s due to its unique flora and fauna and its historic role in the development of Darwin's theory of evolution. The creation of the Charles Darwin Foundation and its research station in 1959 facilitated global interest in Galápagos ecotourism, and by 2019, the archipelago was visited by almost half a million tourists annually. The local economy has become dependent on the tourism industry, which also serves an important role in generating income for the national budget (Brewington 2013; Hoyman and McCall 2013; Hunt et al. 2023; Mathis and Rose 2016).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the local GAD provided funds to construct giant letters with the slogan "I Love El Progreso" in the town park. This is a common strategy used in Ecuador today to attract tourists for a brief social media photo opportunity. The El Progreso sign incorporates images related to local identity. Details and characteristics of natural resources, conservation efforts, biodiversity, economic activities, and opportunities for tourism are incorporated into each letter. The final three letters (*E*, *S*, *O*) are dedicated to the human history of the town and the historical legacy of Hacienda El Progreso. The letter *E* incorporates a portrait of Manuel J. Cobos, the archaeological remains of the plantation house, and images of tokens that were used on the plantation as a method of social control, which were recovered in our archaeological excavations (Astudillo and Jamieson 2021). The letter *S* displays the material remains of the plantation machinery, which is on display in the village, and a tree house built in a silk cotton tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), which is a popular local tourist destination. The letter *O* shows coffee plants and the coffee export industry, which began with the plantation and remains an important source of income for some families today. The Café de Origen trademark was assigned in 2019 to coffee cultivated in Galápagos, which is now sold in national and international markets (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4. The "I Love El Progreso" sign, displaying natural and cultural aspects of the town's identity. The sign was designed by local artist Johny Cobos—a descendant of the Cobos family—to attract tourists to the site. (Photos by the authors.)

Most tourists are unaware of the existence of towns in Galápagos and its long human history. Cultural and heritage tourism is a niche that has not yet been fully exploited. The contemporary community of El Progreso is clearly interested in creating an attractive tourist site that presents the history of colonization, human impacts on its ecosystems, and narratives and memories of the local past (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100074423817984>).

Current initiatives by the El Progreso GAD are further inspired by projects on other Latin American islands where old plantations or confinement centers have been turned into tourist attractions. Tourism based on archaeological research has a practical relevance for the present by providing the possibility of readily recognizable financial or social benefit. Heritage tourism is relevant here, as are the less well-defined but real benefits of development either organized around or incorporating a historical sense of place (Hoyman and McCall 2013; Mathis and Rose 2016; Rockman 2012:4).

IS ARCHAEOLOGY RELEVANT IN THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS?

Through its study of the material remains of the past, archaeology necessarily has a political dimension, and its value lies not in its peculiar ability to interpret the past objectively (which it does not possess) but in its demonstration that all people have participated actively in a shared historical past (Kohl 2012:230). Our experience on San Cristóbal Island clearly suggests that archaeological practice constitutes a material and discursive intervention in the present. The contemporary population of San Cristóbal is now actively focused on enforcing local heritage policies, demystifying the past, creating democratized education agendas, and designing cultural and heritage tourism projects. Consequently, archaeology is relevant on the islands, but it is not yet of primary importance for a society with numerous developmental needs (Selvakumar 2010:477). However, in the case of San Cristóbal, archaeology has the potential to redress historical conflicts that remain a part of the contemporary political landscape, and it is relevant for people and professionals working in areas where political, economic, environmental, or spatial injustices can be traced to historical conflicts or the purposeful erasure of history (Mrozowski 2012:243–244).

Archaeology in Galápagos is more important for protecting heritage and memory than for protecting material remains. We share Flatman and colleagues' (2012:72) view of the engagement dilemma: we must consider how to best balance public access to archaeological information while protecting archaeological resources. Archaeology has the potential to provide information on how to shape engagement strategies between contemporary people with the archipelago's human history. We also agree with Scott-Irenton and Gaimster (2012:156) that simply telling the public about archaeology is no longer sufficient. As archaeologists, we must engage members of the public in the study and preservation of their own past by enabling them—through training and hands-on opportunities—to participate in archaeological research to the extent of their interest. Human history in

Galápagos has been traditionally ignored because of the difficult memories of past events involving imprisonment and violence and the lack of local historical knowledge on the part of recent immigrants to the archipelago. However, an important segment of society currently understands the possible benefits of engaging with the past for both the present and the future. As Flatman and colleagues (2012) point out, engagement is a sticky issue requiring patience, understanding, and a willingness to compromise. However, it is a far better alternative than ignoring the various publics who, whether they realize it or not, have much at stake when it comes to the ways in which their heritage is used in the contemporary world (Flatman et al. 2012:73). The ultimate issue for those working within heritage studies is to explore broader mediums of engagement in which trust is built up and communities and individuals respond in their own terms and at their own pace (Flatman et al. 2012:76). Our project always believed that new archaeological and historical data would have value for contemporary and future generations on San Cristóbal Island, and we believe that it did.

The most important contribution and service of our project for the people of El Progreso was in starting a conscious and mature engagement between the island's contemporary society and its human past, even if this was, initially, an unpopular discussion. The process of demystifying San Cristóbal and El Progreso's past provided evidence for identity formation in islands whose inhabitants were not connected with a local past. This discussion necessitated a particular set of legal policies, which resulted in the enactment of the local *Ordenanza* and subsequent job opportunities in local institutions for protecting both the material and immaterial heritage of the islands. Minimally, scientific discussions in general dismissed the idea of El Progreso's landscape as a pristine environment. It has been anthropogenically transformed for over 200 years, and many of those currently living in El Progreso are part of the large tradition of this landscape transformation.

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Data Availability Statement

No original data were used in this article.

Competing Interests

There are no competing interests to the best of the authors' knowledge.

Supplemental Material

For supplemental material accompanying this article, visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2023.08>.

Supplemental Text 1: Preservation Ordinance, San Cristóbal Municipal Council, 22 May 2021 (in Spanish).

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