

Between the past and the market: social representations of coffee culture in the tourism business of the Colombian coffee cultural landscape

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This article examines the configuration and transformation of social representations of coffee culture in the tourism context of the Colombian Coffee Cultural Landscape (CCCL). An alternative classification is proposed: dominant, archaic, residual and emergent social representations, based on the theory of social representations and Raymond Williams' contributions on selective tradition. A multi-methodological approach is adopted, integrating documentary analysis, interviews, participant observation, surveys and projective and analytical techniques such as drawing and semantic networks, applied to tourism entrepreneurs, local inhabitants and tourists. The results show how different forms of representation coexist and temporarily overlap in the tourism field, influenced by both institutional discourses and commercial practices. Stable figurative nuclei (coffee, family, traditional architecture, landscape) and differentiated processes of objectification and anchoring are identified. The proposed typology allows us to understand how representations are configured, negotiated and updated in heritage contexts with tourist uses. It is concluded that social representations are not static structures but polyphasic and dynamic assemblages that reflect tensions between tradition, innovation, market and collective memory. Finally, this paper emphasizes the need to strengthen heritage management that recognizes the landscape and ecological dimensions of the CCCL while incorporating the evolving dynamics of cultural groups in tourism contexts.

KEYWORDS: Social representations, coffee culture, cultural heritage, tourism

The CCCL was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011 as an outstanding example of human adaptation to a complex geographical environment, articulating sustainable productive practices, cultural values and social structures associated with coffee in the central Andes. This declaration activated a series of processes, including tourism, that reconfigured the meanings attributed to the coffee culture, both by local actors and visitors.

Although there is ample literature on the CCCL and rural tourism, there are still few studies that examine comparatively how entrepreneurs, settlers and tourists construct, negotiate or dispute these meanings in a patrimonialized territory. This limitation is particularly relevant given that the CCCL is one of the agro-productive landscapes recognized worldwide by UNESCO, whose cultural identity is actively recreated through tourism

The general objective of this study is to analyze the social representations (SR) of coffee culture among entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists in the CCCL, and to understand their role in shaping tourism products, narratives, and practices, as well as their relevance for heritage management in the region.

The article proposes an alternative typology of SR, dominant, archaic, residual and emergent representations, which dialogues with the structural theory of SR (Abric, 2001) and with Raymond Williams' (1988) critical theory of selective tradition that considers its dynamic, contradictory and polyphasic character. This model is introduced here, and subsequently operationalized in the results and discussion, in order to establish a conceptual bridge between the theoretical review and the empirical analysis. Using a multi-method approach, this study examines how different actors shape, reproduce, and transform these representations, revealing tensions between tradition and innovation and between authenticity and commodification in the touristic interpretation of the CCCL. The findings provide empirical bases for strengthening tourism planning, improving heritage interpretation strategies and promoting contextualized tourism products for the area.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The dynamic and contradictory nature of SR is explicitly mentioned in the academic literature. Several authors, from different theoretical and empirical perspectives, establish that SR are not static entities, but constantly evolving constructs (Del Carmen & Quintero, 2008; Foster, 2011; Jodelet, 2020; Mazzara, 2021; Roussiau & Valence, 2013; Rubira-García & Puebla-Martínez, 2018; Wachelke, 2012). Moscovici (1979) departed from Durkheim's (1898, cited by Farr, 1998) notion of collective representation because he considered it too static and immutable (Farr, 1998). SR change, evolve and develop as they are used and appropriated by different social groups, as they come into contact with other representations and with other forms of knowledge, such as scientific knowledge (Foster, 2011).

There are specific theories that explain the evolutionary dynamics of SR. For example, the structural approach, through Abric's (2001) central core theory, states that all social representations are organized around a relatively stable central core, accompanied by peripheral elements that are more changeable and sensitive to context. This structure allows representations to adjust and evolve in response to new circumstances, giving them a dynamic and heterogeneous character (Piñero, 2008).

The Toblerone model (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999) conceptualizes SR as a process and emphasizes the interrelation between a representing subject, a represented object, and a group project that unfolds over time as a driver of change. From this perspective, the temporal dimension is explicitly incorporated into the theoretical framework of SR, emphasizing social interaction (Foster, 2011), thereby expanding the tools for analyzing their processes of transformation and change (Cisternas, 2022). This model dialogues very well with the central core theory because it recognizes the importance of peripheral elements as subject to change and represents this process through an elongated three-dimensional figure (similar to a Toblerone chocolate bar), showing how SR traverse past, present and future, capturing the evolution of common sense meanings over time (Marková, 2017).

The model has been further developed into the Toblerone pack, or “compass rose model”, in which the same object can serve as the basis for different representations across communities or historical moments, reflecting the plurality and divergence of social perspectives (Sammut, 2013). However, groups tend to grow and fragment; within these subdivisions, dynamic triangular structures emerge that may coexist, compete, collaborate, or come into conflict with one another. As a result, different forms of common sense may prevail simultaneously across subgroups and evolve along divergent trajectories over time (Marková, 2017).

A concept closely related to the temporal evolution of social representations, driven by broader cultural and social changes, is that of the “spirit of the times” (*zeitgeist*). Conceiving it as the intellectual climate, the habits of thought, and the set of opinions, ideas, and judgments characteristic of a given epoch, Denise Jodelet (2020) incorporates this concept into her analysis of the relationship between the *zeitgeist* and SR. The author considers representation as "content of the spirit of the time and/or as its result, that is to say as a system of ideas that orients the positions of the public" (p. 19). In this perspective, Jodelet (2020) assumes change as a constituent of SR and argues that a speaker can articulate different levels of SR to forge a vision of particular situations or events.

The capacity of social representations to incorporate contradictions and ambivalences arises from the coexistence of multiple voices and meanings within the same representational field. As Rubira-García and Puebla-Martínez (2018) argue, there are no “pure” representations; rather, there are systems of representations that remain in constant interaction and development. From this perspective, consensus within social representations necessarily involves mechanisms of dissent, without which even the core of the representational field could not sediment. Contradictions within a representation are therefore understandable given its complex structure, which is simultaneously dynamic and stable. The central point is that representations should be understood not as finished products, but as ongoing processes (Rubira-García & Puebla-Martínez, 2018).

The idea of consensus within social representations was critically examined by Rose et al. (1995), who proposed replacing the notion of fixed and homogeneous representations with that of a dynamic representational field. In this field, contradictions, fragmentations, tensions, and ambivalences coexist. However, they also argue that, despite this diversity, a consensual basis of historically shared meanings persists, enabling dialogue and negotiation among social actors. From this perspective, consensus should not be understood as general agreement. Rather, it refers to the existence of a shared semantic framework that allows individuals to recognize what is being discussed and what the object of reference is, even in situations of disagreement.

This SR perspective illustrates how ideas that reflect social tensions coexist simultaneously in the social world. Tradition and modernity and multiple identities coexist. Indeed, "substantial research, including the work of Jodelet (1991), Duveen and Lloyd (1990), De Rosa (1987) and Giami (1987), has shown how oppositional themes can be found in a wide range of social representations" (Rose et al., 1995, p. 151).

In the field of heritage studies, the coexistence and negotiation of past and present ideas is also problematized, with the integration of new perspectives. The concept of selective tradition incorporated by Williams (1988) for example, involves choosing specific elements from the past to shape present and future narratives (Sebastian, 2014).

The concept of cultural hybridization introduced by García-Canclini (2001) also recognizes that cultures are not pure entities, but processes of mixture where traditions, modernities and emerging resignifications coexist as a fusion of ancestral practices with global innovations.

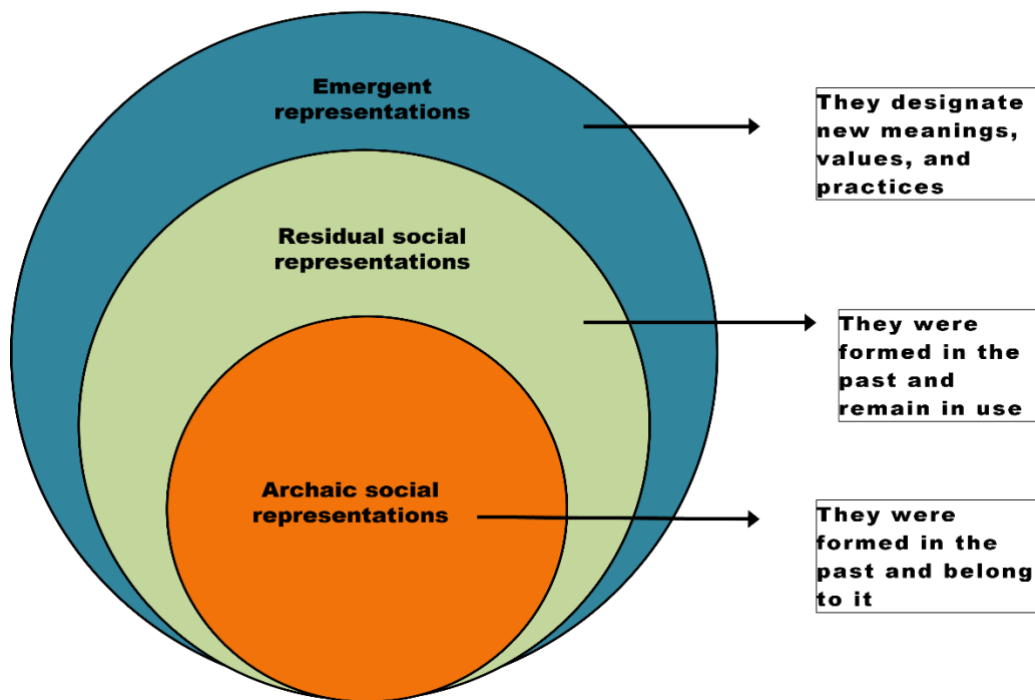
Although the recognition of contradictions and oppositions within social representations is explicitly addressed in the academic literature, within Social Representations Theory there is still no clear classification that explains how different social representations become juxtaposed over time within a specific context, such as those examined in Heritage Studies. The Toblerone model of social representations proposes a framework that incorporates the temporal dimension of representations; however, it does not provide sufficient analytical tools to delimit or clearly distinguish the different representations that may coexist in a given historical context.

Based on a case analysis of the SR of coffee culture in tourism within the CCCL, this study proposes understanding SR not as fixed structures, but as temporal assemblages that juxtapose the traditional, the contemporary, and the emergent. It also advances a classification that offers alternative analytical tools for understanding the production and transformation of SR. These representations change throughout the historical trajectory of social groups and may coexist without necessarily becoming emancipated or polemical, as proposed by Moscovici (1979). Rather, they are mobilized according to the needs of the group and do not necessarily come into conflict, although they do express the ambiguity and contradictions of the social world.

In this sense, the typologies of dominant, archaic, residual, and emergent SR (see Figure 1) are proposed as a flexible framework for analyzing how representations interact and are mobilized according to specific circumstances. These typologies illustrate how SR change over time without such variation necessarily implying a contradiction that is problematic in itself within the social context. Drawing on Williams's (1988) notion of selective tradition, the following classification is proposed.

Figure 1

Archaic, residual and emergent social representations



Note: the dominant SR are not represented as an independent category in the figure because they correspond to the hegemonic and consensual core of the representational system, which operates as a structuring reference for the other forms. Source: adapted from Williams (1988).

The dominant SR coincide with the hegemonic ones proposed by Moscovici (1979), in that there is a high degree of consensus, referring to the ideas and values that are widely accepted and supported by society. They correspond to the central elements of the figurative core, highly consensual and stable, and therefore do not operate as particular forms, but as the hegemonic framework from which they are derived.

Archaic SR represent those ideas or practices that were once dominant, but over time have been superseded by new ways of thinking, acting or producing. These elements have been relegated to the past, but still exert some influence on contemporary society through, for example, their use in tourism, such as the forms of use of material objects and cultural practices of the regional past in museums and exhibitions.

Residual SR refer to those that persist, despite having lost their prominence. They may have been dominant in the past, but over time have been replaced, for example, traditional forms of coffee production. However, they still influence society and contemporary culture.

Emerging SR are new ideas, beliefs, practices or values that are emerging in society and have the potential to become dominant in the future. They can be innovative and disruptive, challenging established norms and offering new ways of thinking and acting. New forms of identity production through technologies fall into this category.

It is necessary to highlight the importance of the anchoring process in these SR typologies, because it allows the integration of new (emerging) representations in the pre-existing representational system (archaic and residual), which results in a constant reconstruction of the perception of reality and explains the continuity of groups, but also the possibility of innovation; they allow explaining how cultural changes occur in human groups, how beliefs, myths, practices fade over time and new ways of doing, of seeing the world, of understanding reality are introduced without conflict.

These processes help to explain the continuous and sometimes contradictory nature of the process of formation and transformation of SR. Similarly, the proposed classification recognizes the importance of the concept of cognitive polyphasia proposed by Moscovici (1979), in which "thought does not develop univocally from prelogical to logical forms, but rather different logics coexist" (Barreiro & Castorina, 2009, p. 456). In SR coexist and mix contents, processes, emotions and meanings of diverse origin and nature, generating tensions, oscillations or ambivalent responses to the same social object (Zamudio-Elizalde & Reyes-Sosa, 2021).

This classification also aligns with Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández (2015), who distinguish three types of cognitive polyphasia:

- (a) selective prevalence, recognizes different knowledge systems that cohabit retaining their content, logic and emotional charge, same that are held together and retrieved separately at different points in time/space;
- b) hybridization, implies the mixture of knowledge systems that are produced from previous knowledge, which merge and create a new form of knowledge, and;
- c) displacement, favors a knowledge system over parallel systems that lead to a displacement of alternative representations of a field of representation (Zamudio-Elizalde & Reyes-Sosa, 2021, p. 3).

In this sense, archaic, residual and emergent SR are manifestations of the process of formation and transformation of representations. These typologies coexist in the social space and social groups tend to privilege, select and retain certain elements in the discourse and expose them in their social interactions.

This proposed model recognizes that changes in social representations are not always abrupt; rather, representations may intersect and coexist at particular historical moments. Within these contexts, some representations become more prominent or influential than others depending on the prevailing social and cultural conditions. This flexible perspective facilitates a deeper understanding of how social representations are formed, evolve, and are mobilized in everyday life. It also helps explain how, within tourism–heritage systems, companies, tourists, and destination residents interact from heterogeneous identity frameworks, expressing different ways of interpreting cultural realities while simultaneously creating opportunities to build bridges of understanding between them.

In this sense, as noted by Urry (2019) tourists seek to rapidly make sense of unfamiliar social environments by assimilating them into their existing cognitive frameworks—what Serge Moscovici describes in Social Representations Theory as the process of anchoring. This process involves the search for symbols and values that are initially foreign but gradually become meaningful, providing tourists with both pleasure and a mechanism for adapting to a new social environment.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a multi-method approach using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. The research began with a qualitative phase aimed at identifying categories and representational patterns among tourism entrepreneurs in the CCCL area. This phase was followed by a quantitative component applied to residents and tourists in the same region in order to contrast and expand upon the qualitative findings. The integration of both components was conducted through analytical triangulation, articulating and comparing the results within the theoretical frameworks of Social Representations theory (Moscovici, 1979) and the core–periphery model proposed by Abric (2001). The research was carried out in the following phases:

Phase 1. Documentary review

The documentary review was conducted between 2019 and 2024 and included academic, normative, and grey literature related to coffee culture, patrimonialization, tourism, and social representations theory. The search was carried out in the databases Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO, and Google Scholar, using keywords in both Spanish and English, including: *coffee culture, heritage, social representations, tourism, patrimonialization, and coffee cultural landscape*, as well as their Boolean combinations.

A total of 150 documents were reviewed in two stages. The first stage consisted of a preliminary screening of titles and abstracts, through which 57 potentially relevant documents were identified. In the second stage, a full-text analysis was conducted on these 57 documents. Ultimately, 47 references were selected based on criteria of thematic relevance (explicitly addressing social representations, heritage, or cultural tourism), theoretical contribution (drawing on the perspectives of Moscovici, Abric, Jodelet, or Williams), and geographical or contextual relevance to the CCCL.

Phase 2. Qualitative component with tourism entrepreneurs

In this second phase, participant observation was conducted at 19 sites that incorporate coffee culture as part of the tourist experience, including theme parks, coffee farms, specialty coffee shops, and restaurants. These sites were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria such as thematic relevance (coffee culture), diversity of experiences, geographic distribution, accessibility, popularity on social networks, and availability of information. An observation guide was designed and applied at each site with the support of audiovisual records, and field observations were carried out following the established protocol. Subsequently, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 18 entrepreneurs and key stakeholders in tourism and the CCCL, selected through convenience and snowball sampling. Priority was given to individuals linked to the 19 observed tourism sites as well as recognized actors in regional tourism planning. The sample size was determined by theoretical saturation.

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were designed according to the dimensions of social representations theory: conditions of production, field of information, field of representation, and attitude. In addition, the projective drawing technique was incorporated

to explore elements of the figurative core. Interviewed tourism entrepreneurs were asked to produce a drawing in response to the question “What is the CCCL?” and to briefly explain it without additional instructions, in order to encourage spontaneity and capture the central figurative elements of their representations. From the 19 observed sites, four were selected for a multimodal analysis of digital and advertising content following the methodology proposed by Pauwels (2012) and the semiotic principles of Barthes (1986, 2017). These sites were chosen due to their regional importance and high visitor numbers, suggesting a greater potential influence on the social representations of coffee culture among tourists. Figure 2 presents the components analyzed on the websites of the selected tourism sites. The analysis was systematized using a comparative matrix in Excel, where the visual, textual, and symbolic elements identified were recorded.

Figure 2

Methodological adaptation for the multimodal analysis of websites from Pauwels (2012)



The interviews and drawings were analyzed using ATLAS.ti 24 through a coding process based on initial theoretical categories complemented by emerging categories identified during analysis. Although the study did not require approval from an institutional ethics committee, ethical procedures were implemented in accordance with national regulations governing social research. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was ensured by assigning coded identifiers (e.g., Entrepreneur 1). Personal data were stored separately from analytical data, with access restricted to the principal investigator and safeguarded on encrypted, password-protected devices. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study voluntarily at any time. All data will be retained for five years and subsequently deleted.

Phase 3. Quantitative component with tourists and residents

Based on the dimensions of SR theory, two survey instruments were designed and administered: one for tourists and another for residents living in the vicinity of the tourist sites analyzed in the previous phase. The surveys included questions on knowledge, perceptions, practices and valuations associated with coffee culture and the patrimonialization of the CCCL. The questions also evaluated semantic associations in relation to the universe of coffee culture.

A simple random probability sampling design was applied for tourists ($n = 246$), with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, based on an estimated proportion of 20% awareness of the CCCL as a World Heritage site. For residents ($n = 225$), a two-stage probability sampling design with a 6% margin of error was implemented using a population estimate of 595,884 inhabitants for the CCCL area, as reported by the Ministry of Culture (2012). In this case, the sampling procedure involved first selecting geographic zones and subsequently individuals over 18 years of age within each location of the CCCL.

The surveys were administered through both face-to-face and online modalities. The online format was included to facilitate participation among respondents who preferred to answer remotely, without affecting the consistency of the instrument. The tourist survey targeted visitors at the main tourist sites in the region, while the residents' survey was directed at inhabitants living in areas surrounding these tourism development locations. Statistical analysis was conducted using STATGRAPHICS Centurion, incorporating techniques such as word association analysis and natural semantic networks.

Qualitative–quantitative integration was carried out in two stages. During the analysis phase, qualitative categories were contrasted with quantitative patterns in order to identify convergences and divergences among the SR of the three population groups studied, using a comparative analytical matrix. In the discussion phase, the findings were articulated with Moscovici’s (1979) dimensions of SR and the figurative core model.

The choice and combination of techniques addresses the recommendations of multiple authors regarding the need to implement diverse methodological frameworks in the study of SR given their complexity (Banchs, 2000; Cuevas, 2016; Gutiérrez, 2016; Mireles, 2015; Mireles & Cuevas, 2004; Moscovici, 1979; Navarro & Restrepo, 2013; Weisz, 2017) and were intended to capture the multifaceted character of coffee culture SR among heterogeneous actors.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Typologies of tourism products in the CCCL.

The region offers a diverse range of tourism products based on coffee culture, which can be classified into four major categories, each with differentiated implications in the formation and circulation of SR. First, there are converted family farms, traditional rural homes adapted for rural tourism and combine hospitality services with traditional productive elements. A second category consists of theme parks, where coffee culture is theatricalized through nostalgic representations of the rural past, emphasizing symbols such as traditional costumes, coffee harvesters, and regional music. Additionally, there are coffee-tour experiences focused on the production and specialized consumption of coffee, explaining the ‘seed-to-cup’ process, incorporating advanced technologies and technical language to emphasize the authenticity and quality of the coffee. These experiences are offered by three types of actors: returnees-descendants of coffee growers who, after leaving the region for study or work, return and transform their family farms into tourism ventures; new coffee growers-entrepreneurs from urban areas or non-coffee-producing regions who enter the coffee and tourism sector from scratch; and continuators-heirs who diversify the family economy by adapting the productive system to provide tourism services while maintaining the family farming base. Finally, the category of complementary services that corresponds to cafés, stores and restaurants that incorporate material references of the coffee culture (objects, ambience) without integrating productive processes or complex experiential narratives.

Social representations of coffee culture among tourism entrepreneurs

Coffee tours have emerged as a differentiated alternative to the theme park model, the pioneering form of tourism development in the region. Rather than theatricalizing coffee culture, these tours emphasize technical specialization, the authenticity of the production process, and the artisanal or industrial character of coffee, depending on the case. Within this framework, coffee culture is represented through a narrative centered on production, entrepreneurship, and integration into global markets. In contrast, theme parks tend to frame coffee culture within a festive or folkloric tradition.

Although some tours incorporate symbolic elements—such as baskets or hats used to simulate coffee harvesting—they generally avoid the artificialization of the experience. Some companies explicitly highlight their decision not to rely on this type of staging, positioning their offer as “authentic” in contrast to the performative character of show-based tourism.

Traditional architecture acts as a visual anchor to the past, yet it is re-signified in contemporary contexts, for example through its adaptation to tourism services. The coexistence of traditional methods of coffee production and preparation—such as the empirical assessment of bean moisture through sound and texture—with technified practices, including the use of laser thermometers, symbolizes the transition between a residual representation of coffee growing and an emerging one centered on innovation, quality control, and the sophistication of consumption.

Processes of objectification, figurative nucleus and anchoring in the social representations of coffee culture

The analyses carried out show that the SR of coffee culture in the tourist context of the CCCL are configured through differentiated processes of objectification and anchoring, which contribute to stabilize and give symbolic form to this cultural practice in the tourist market.

In the context of *coffee tours*, objectification operates through the strategic selection of specific stages of coffee production, such as harvesting, drying and threshing, which are decontextualized from their original social, historical and economic matrix, to be reinscribed as part of a technical, modern and sophisticated narrative. The incorporation of specialized lexicon inspired by practices such as wine tasting, along with the emphasis on quality control and traceability, reconfigures the image of coffee into a gourmet product. This discursive

transformation consolidates a representation of coffee culture as a highly specialized industry, shifting the emphasis from rural and traditional elements—predominant in theme parks—toward innovation and sensory experience.

In contrast, in theme parks—and, to a lesser extent, in some cafés, restaurants, and bars—objectification operates through a nostalgic aestheticization of the rural past. Figures such as the farmer, vernacular architecture, antique utensils, and traditional costumes are transformed into visual and scenographic signs that portray coffee culture as a timeless tradition. In both cases, objectification simplifies the complexity of the sociocultural phenomenon by privileging a limited set of signs that are repeatedly reproduced across multiple media—including websites, tour guide narratives, and advertising materials—thereby stabilizing images that become widely recognizable to visitors.

The figurative core of the SR identified comprises five key elements: coffee (both as a product and as a practice), traditional architecture, human effort, peasant¹ customs, and the figure of the coffee grower. These images function as structuring axes within the representational field, organizing the perceptions and meanings mobilized in tourist experiences. Human effort, for instance, acquires symbolic value when interpreted as an expression of dignified labor and as one of the foundations underpinning the recognition of the CCCL as a heritage site.

Each type of tourism product incorporates these elements of the figurative core in a particular way: while *coffee tours* re-signify them from a minimalist and functional aesthetic associated with production, theme parks reproduce them in a folklorized way. However, in both cases, their reiteration and circulation through different channels (advertising, interpretative scripts, *merchandising*) contribute to their naturalization as authentic images of coffee culture.

Anchoring can be observed in the ways tourism entrepreneurs interpret new coffee-related experiences through already established cultural categories. Even when innovative narratives are introduced—such as the technical specialization of coffee or the professionalization of the coffee grower as a cupper or barista—these are articulated within traditional symbolic frameworks that exalt the figure of the farmer as an icon of authenticity and origin. Ideas such as effort, humility, and rurality function as legitimizing devices that

¹The terms *peasant* and *farmer* are used interchangeably in this article. This choice reflects the Spanish term *campesino*, which does not convey the potentially pejorative connotations associated with *peasant* in English, but instead functions as a neutral and widely recognized social and cultural category.

validate contemporary transformations without severing their connection to the collective memory of coffee cultivation.

In this way, anchoring operates as a mechanism of symbolic continuity, stabilizing the new representations within previous cognitive structures and facilitating their appropriation by tourists and local actors.

Dimensions of the social representations of coffee culture among tourism entrepreneurs

The formation and circulation of SR of coffee culture among tourism entrepreneurs in the CCCL are structured through a framework of interrelated dimensions—conditions of production, field of information, field of representation, and field of attitude—which shape the region’s tourism-cultural identity.

Conditions of Production: Structural Context and Motivations within the Tourism Sector

The conditions of production of SR are shaped by historical, cultural, economic, and technological factors that have influenced the development of the CCCL as both a heritage territory and a heritage tourism destination. Elements such as the region’s coffee-growing trajectory, the processes of patrimonialization promoted by the UNESCO declaration, the technification of agriculture, the influence of public policies, and the dynamics of the global tourism market together constitute the framework within which entrepreneurs design their tourism products.

In particular, the growing need for differentiation and specialization in the tourism sector promotes the emergence of proposals such as *coffee tours*, which articulate production and experience, and encourages a particular coffee aesthetic in new proposals for cafés, bars and restaurants. These spaces incorporate antique objects, domesticated landscapes and symbolic references to the coffee plantation as identity components and combine them with high-tech instruments and utensils for the preparation of coffee.

Attitudinal field: valuations, resignifications and orientations towards the coffee culture

The attitudinal field expresses how the tourist actors value, re-signify or negotiate meanings around the coffee culture. In the analyzed offer, two predominant orientations are identified: one that evokes tradition and rural nostalgia, centered on the exaltation of the peasant, their way of life, vernacular architecture and antique objects; and another that values innovation, technology and the sophistication of the coffee production process.

These attitudes directly influence the interpretative narratives, the modes of guiding and the type of experience offered. In some cases, both tendencies coexist, articulated in hybrid proposals that oscillate between the traditional and the emergent.

Field of representation: symbolic devices and cultural staging

This field encompasses the set of practices, discourses, and images that shape the representation of coffee culture within the tourism environment. Among the most recurrent elements are traditional architecture, the staged representation of coffee harvesting, coffee tasting or cupping, farm tours, advanced technologies applied to coffee production and preparation, typical gastronomy, music, and historical narratives associated with the CCCL.

These representations are not homogeneous; they differ based on the type of tourism offering and the entrepreneur's goals. While some emphasize authenticity and cultural heritage, others reconfigure coffee culture as a technified, efficient practice oriented toward the global market, leading to new experiential forms.

Field of information: sources and circulation of knowledge on coffee culture

The field of information is composed of the resources and knowledge that shape the representation. The entrepreneurs interviewed draw on diverse sources, including historical and technical information provided by coffee-sector institutions (such as the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia [FNC]), barista and specialty coffee training, courses offered by public institutions, and content circulating through social and mass media.

In addition, their own life trajectories—as inhabitants of the region or heirs to the coffee-growing tradition—constitute a source of experiential knowledge that reinforces the legitimacy of their narratives. This combination of expert and experiential knowledge forms a type of

cultural capital that materializes in the creation of tourism products aimed at transmitting the essence—or at least a symbolically effective version—of coffee culture.

Mental Images of the CCCL from the perspective of the Tourism Sector

The drawing technique applied to thirteen² entrepreneurs and agents of the tourism sector allowed the identification of visual SR of the CCCL, revealing central elements that structure their ideas about coffee culture. The images, analyzed with the qualitative *software* ATLAS.ti, reflect the figurative nucleus shared in the SR of coffee culture: the farmer, the traditional dwelling, the coffee plantation, the family and the cup of coffee are recurring images. These elements are visually objectified and condense values such as effort, rural life and cultural continuity, suggesting stable and widely naturalized representations.

Most of the drawings are situated in the registers of archaic and residual representations. Archaic, because of their evocation of idealized forms of the rural past, "The farmer is the author of the history of our countryside" (Entrepreneur 8); residual, because they maintain elements displaced in practice, but still loaded with symbolic value (e. g., wood stove, muleteer). "I represent the CCCL as coffee crops on hillsides associated with banana plants and other trees. A house with traditional architecture, kitchen, family, animals, Willys³, elements for coffee processing (mill, coffee dryer)" (entrepreneur 2). In contrast, emerging representations, linked to the technification of coffee and new forms of consumption, are absent in these images, indicating that their discursive circulation has not yet consolidated a stable visual form in local actors. This evidence supports the idea that tourism innovation coexists with a strong symbolic persistence of traditional referents, which allows us to understand the representational polyphasia in patrimonialized contexts such as the CCCL.

The figure of the coffee farmer emerges as the dominant symbol, represented through elements of material culture (hat, poncho, basket) and activities associated with the production process (harvesting, pulping). In many cases, these figures are accompanied by representations of the family, reinforcing a vision of coffee growing as a communal and

² Of the eighteen entrepreneurs interviewed, only thirteen made the drawing.

³ In Colombia, the term "Willys" is used to refer to the Jeep, a traditional all-terrain vehicle that became emblematic in rural areas, especially in the Eje Cafetero for its capacity to carry loads and transport people and products in steep areas.

inherited practice: “the family is the foundation of this culture; its preservation is the very rationale of patrimonialization” (Entrepreneur 1).

Figure 3

Word cloud of recurrence of codes obtained from the drawings



Note: farmers, landscape, nature, architecture and mountains are the elements most frequently evoked by the entrepreneurs in their drawings.

Another central axis is the transformed landscape, where mountains, coffee plantations, trees, fauna, and roads illustrate the shaping of the territory through the interaction between the natural environment and human action. Traditional architecture—particularly the coffee farmhouse—is represented as an identifying space for social interaction and production, often depicted in harmony with the rural landscape: “I focused my drawing on the architecture and the beautiful mountains that surround us” (Entrepreneur 4).

Coffee is evoked both in its productive and symbolic dimension, through icons such as the cup and the bean, and is linked to national and affective values. Likewise, elements of mobility such as *jeeps*, mules and airplanes evidence the relationship between the rural and the urban, between the local and the global.

Figure 4

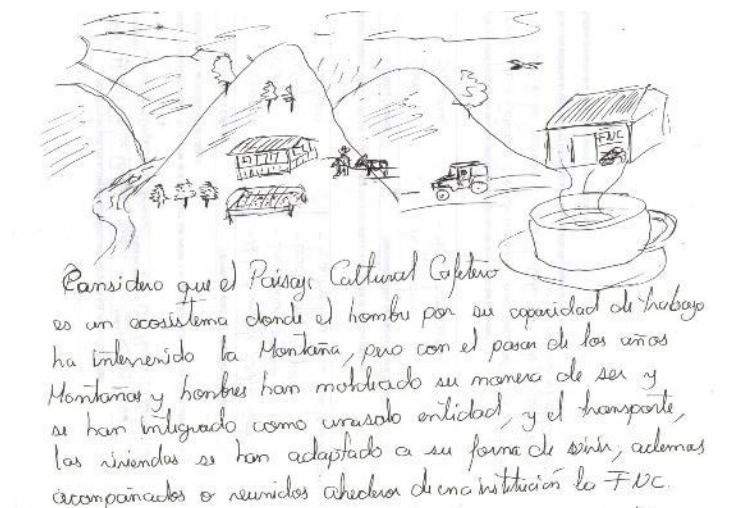
Drawing by entrepreneur 2. Woman entrepreneur, owner of a rural hotel and coffee tour



Note: In her explanation of the drawing, the entrepreneur states the following: "A house with traditional architecture and elements for coffee processing. Nearby appear the city, the Coffee Growers' Committee, and the cooperative, along with a 'Welcome' sign, because we always feel welcomed when we arrive at a coffee farm." The drawing was edited to remove identifying authorship and to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

Figure 5

Drawing elaborated by entrepreneur 3. Man owner of rural lodging and coffee producer



Pansiduo que el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero es un ecosistema donde el hombre por su capacidad de trabajo ha intervenido la Montaña, pero con el pasar de los años Montañas y hombres han moldeado su manera de ser y se han integrado como una sola entidad, y el transporte, las viviendas se han adaptado a su forma de vivir, además acompañados o reunidos alrededor de una institución la FDC.

Note: In his explanation of the drawing, the entrepreneur stated: "I consider the CCCL to be an ecosystem in which humans have intervened in the mountains through their capacity for work. Over time, however, mountains and people have shaped each other's ways of being and have come to function

as a single entity. Transportation and housing have adapted to this way of life, accompanied by—or organized around—an institution: the National Federation of Coffee Growers (NFCG).”

The drawings also refer to coffee institutions—such as the NFCG, local committees, and cooperatives—recognizing their articulating role in the life of the territory. The results obtained through this technique reinforce the categories identified through other methodological approaches: the coffee-growing family, the productive process, traditional housing, the figure of the coffee farmer, and associated elements of material culture (baskets, hats, utensils). The drawings also reveal a strong valuation of the territory as a cultural system in which tradition, landscape, labor, and a sense of belonging are closely intertwined.

Social representations of the coffee culture among local settlers

The analysis of semantic networks revealed that, within the representational field of residents, concepts such as “coffee,” “landscape,” “tradition,” “culture,” and “family” stand out (see Table 1), as they appear with greater frequency and are rated by respondents as the most relevant. These concepts also show a high degree of correlation with one another, supporting the idea that coffee culture constitutes a significant object of representation among inhabitants, insofar as these organizing elements are intrinsically associated with it.

Table 1

Nucleus of the network with semantic weight and semantic distance for the inducing phrase coffee culture for settlers

Definers	Semantic weight	Semantic distance
Coffee	372	100
Landscapes	125	33.6
Tradition	90	24.1
Culture	72	19.3
Family	58	15.5
Gastronomy	55	14.7
Villages	38	10.2
Tourism	35	9.4

Farms	31	8.3
Economy	27	7.2
Identity	26	6.9
Pride	23	6.1
Collectors	21	5.6
Architecture	17	4.5
Heritage	12	3.2

Participants were asked to select, from a list of options, the elements that, in their view, best represent coffee culture. This question made it possible to identify the attributes most strongly associated with coffee culture in their representations.

Table 2

Elements that best reflect the coffee culture for the settlers

Element	Percentage of total surveys (225)	Number of responses
E. Coffee and agricultural activities	63.6%	143
H. Quality coffees	57.3%	129
B. The character of the people	55.6%	125
G. Gastronomy	55.1%	124
C. Attire: poncho, carriel (leather bag), hat, espadrilles, long skirt	44.4%	100
A. Bahareque architecture	42.7%	96
N. Coffee production facilities such as processing plants (<i>beneficiaderos</i>), drying sheds (<i>heldas</i>), and pulpers	39.1%	88
J. Coffee shops	33.3%	75
F. Vehicles	31.6%	71
L. Coffee making machines	26.7%	60
M. Roasting and grinding machines	26.2%	59
D. Furniture and/or objects	19.1%	43
I. Baristas	15.6%	35
K. Baristas' attire	10.2%	23

Social Representations of Coffee Culture among Tourists

Tourists were asked which elements they consider best represent coffee culture. Most respondents identified coffee and agricultural activities as the main referents expressing its essence. In second place, they highlighted traditional clothing—such as the poncho, the *carriel*, the hat, the espadrilles, and the long skirt—as distinctive symbols of this culture.

Table 3

Elements that reflect the coffee culture for tourists

Elements	No. of Responses	Percentage
E. Coffee and agricultural activities	161	14.5%
C. Attire: poncho, carriel (leather bag), hat, espadrilles, long skirt	143	12.9%
H. Quality coffees	142	12.8%
B. The character of the people	130	11.7%
G. Gastronomy	120	10.8%
A. Bahareque architecture	71	6.4%
J. Coffee shops	63	5.7%
F. Vehicles	56	5.0%
M. Roasting and grinding machines	49	4.4%
L. Coffee making machines	48	4.3%
N. Coffee production facilities such as processing plants (<i>beneficiaderos</i>), drying sheds (<i>heldas</i>), and pulpers	42	3.8%
D. Furniture and/or objects	35	3.2%
I. Baristas	30	2.7%
K. Baristas' attire	19	1.7%

The analysis of semantic networks made it possible to identify the representational field of coffee culture among tourists in the CCCL, in which concepts such as “coffee,” “landscape,” “tradition,” and “gastronomy” stand out. These terms appeared with the highest frequencies and were rated by respondents as the most relevant, showing a strong correlation with the inducing term (see Table 4).

Table 4

Network core with semantic weight and semantic distance for the inducing phrase coffee culture for tourists.

Definers	Semantic weight	Semantic distance
Coffee	516	100
Landscapes	141	27.3
Tradition	113	21.8
Gastronomy	88	17.0
Tourism	51	9.8
Farms	50	9.6
Parks	48	9.3
Family	46	8.9
Nature	46	8.9
Culture	45	8.7
Mountains	40	7.7
Crops	39	7.5
Friendliness	36	6.9
Work	25	4.8
Architecture	23	4.4

The results indicate a marked orientation within the representational field toward coffee and, more specifically, toward the production process—an aspect that was also observed in the analysis conducted with tourism entrepreneurs.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis among entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists indicates a convergence in the figurative core of the SR of coffee culture: coffee, traditional architecture, peasant labor, and rural life emerge as shared images, widely naturalized and structuring the ways in which the territory is perceived and valued. Nevertheless, differences appear in the representational field and in the processes of objectification. While entrepreneurs articulate traditional elements with discourses of modernization and coffee technification, residents tend to anchor their representations in lived memories, community attachments, and an idealized image of the coffee farmer. Tourists, in turn, privilege symbols of authenticity and hospitality, emphasizing

the landscape and sensory experiences, although generally with less knowledge of the productive processes.

This divergence suggests that, even though a basic symbolic consensus exists, each group reconfigures coffee culture from its own frameworks of experience and expectation, reinforcing the polyphasic and relational character of social representations. In this sense, the tourism offer not only reflects these representations but also mediates, reproduces, and transforms them, operating as a space of symbolic negotiation among actors.

This process has intensified following the declaration of the Coffee Cultural Landscape as a World Heritage site, as it has brought greater visibility to—and re-signified—previously marginal components, such as the richness of the landscape and biodiversity, which now occupy a central place in the social representations of both residents and visitors.

Table 5
Comparison between the social representations of businessmen, locals and tourists

<i>Aspect</i>	Entrepreneurs in the tourism sector	Local inhabitants	Tourists
<i>Figurative core</i>	Coffee and its preparation, traditional architecture, the coffee farmer engaged in agricultural work, human effort, and antique objects.	Coffee, farmer's work, agricultural activities, traditional architecture	Coffee crops, mountain scenery, local hospitality, emblematic tourist sites
<i>Field of representation</i>	Traditional practices and production technologies, coffee professionalization	Coffee, landscape, tradition, culture, pride, heritage and preservation of the environment	Coffee, gastronomy, landscape, culture, authenticity, tourism and tradition
<i>Objectification</i>	Construction of a modern image of coffee culture, combination of tradition and technical specialization.	Emphasis on the human effort as an intangible value, validation through the declaration of patrimony	Reaffirmation of coffee as a national emblem, desire to live an authentic experience in the territories.

<i>Anchoring</i>	Linkage between cultural heritage and contemporary production and consumption logics	Idealized image of the farmer, anchoring in memory and traditional practices	Emotional connection with the "authentic" and valuation of coffee cultural roots
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Archaic, residual and emerging social representations of coffee culture.

The analysis of the empirical data indicates that the representation of coffee culture in tourism is not structured in a linear or homogeneous manner, but rather as a complex web of meanings in which past and present are juxtaposed. The different tourism proposals in the CCCL oscillate between traditional stagings that reproduce hegemonic narratives of peasantry and rural identity, and contemporary experiences that reconfigure coffee culture through processes of technification, specialization, and sensory innovation.

To address this temporal and conflictive dimension of representations, the approach proposed by Raymond Williams (1988) on culture and selective tradition is revisited, and an analytical classification is established that distinguishes dominant, archaic, residual, and emerging SR, according to how different actors—entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists—select, reconfigure, or displace elements of coffee heritage.

This typology allows SR to be interpreted not only as individual or group constructions, but also as the outcome of bidirectional interaction. At the same time, tourism narratives—structured for cultural consumption—influence how tourists and residents perceive, value, and reproduce coffee culture. Thus, the tourism industry not only draws on local SR but also transforms them, reaffirming their dynamic, relational, and performative character within patrimonialized contexts.

The proposed typology complements rather than replaces the classical models of Serge Moscovici and Jean-Claude Abric. While these models focus on the processes of objectification and anchoring, as well as on the core–periphery structure, the classification adopted here incorporates a historical and political dimension—drawing on the work of Raymond Williams (1988)—which makes it possible to distinguish how certain contents remain hegemonic, others persist as vestiges of the past, and others emerge in connection with processes of innovation. In this way, the typology expands structural analysis by showing how central and peripheral

elements are reconfigured in response to cultural disputes and processes of patrimonialization specific to the CCCL.

In this sense, in the context of tourism in the CCCL, this typology of SR of coffee culture is expressed as follows:

Dominant social representations

These refer to ideas about coffee culture that are widely accepted and promoted by official and institutional discourses (e.g., the Ministry of Culture, FNC, and UNESCO). They center on themes such as the heroic character of peasant labor, the quality of Colombian coffee, vernacular architecture, and the notion of sustainability. These elements constitute the foundation of the patrimonial narrative articulated in the declaration of the Outstanding Universal Value of the CCCL.

Archaic social representations

They are materialized in antique objects, photographs, museum displays, and traditional clothing, primarily used in theme parks and staged experiences. While no longer actively practiced, they retain symbolic and nostalgic value.

Residual social representations

These refer to traditional methods of coffee production and ways of life associated with preserved rural farms, which occasionally resurge through agroecological initiatives or family-based economic practices. Although they have lost their hegemonic status, they are re-signified by some actors as markers of authenticity.

Emerging social representations

They emerge in ventures that incorporate technical specialization, advanced tasting practices, modern preparation methods, and discourses of origin or denomination. These initiatives engage with international markets and younger audiences, redefining coffee culture as a creative and sophisticated industry.

DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurs in the tourism sector play an active role in shaping representations through processes of selective tradition. These decisions are influenced by their life trajectories, market conditions, tourist profiles, global coffee trends, and regional development policies. As a result, the territory of the CCCL becomes a space where different cultural temporalities coexist, expressed through concrete commercial practices.

Despite this representational richness, a significant omission was identified: within both the core and the representational field of the SR constructed by entrepreneurs, the landscape as an ecological and cultural category is largely absent. Terms such as “nature,” “biodiversity,” “green,” or “mountain”—which might be expected in a heritage territory such as this—appear only marginally in tourism discourses and are not articulated as active resources within the tourism offer.

Although the landscape constitutes the conceptual axis of the CCCL declaration, its omission in tourism narratives suggests a disconnection between the official heritage discourse and its appropriation by local actors.

None of the visual representations included elements associated with emerging categories of coffee culture. Instead, traditional and rural aspects predominate in this technique, with a marked presence of archaic and residual representations.

The results support the notion that the figurative core of SR of coffee culture remains stable, coherent, and resistant to change (Wagner et al., 1999). The central elements—coffee, peasant identity, traditional architecture, family, and productive effort—persist as organizing structures of meaning, while peripheral elements adapt and transform in response to new economic and tourism dynamics, allowing representations to be updated without altering their fundamental symbolic base.

The combined use of techniques made it possible to capture not only explicit narratives but also the visual imaginaries that shape SR, thereby enriching the understanding of their symbolic and affective dimensions. It should also be noted that most of the tourists surveyed were of national origin and came from regions close to the CCCL. This geographical proximity, together with cultural familiarity with the symbolic universe of coffee, may explain the similarity observed in the representational field among the actors. Indeed, coffee culture has

achieved an effective diffusion of its historical and identity referents at the national level, facilitating its recognition even among non-local visitors. In this sense, it would be pertinent to develop comparative analyses focused specifically on foreign tourists in order to explore possible divergences in the forms of cultural representation and appropriation.

The findings of this research confirm the dynamic, ambiguous, and polyphasic nature of the SR of coffee culture among tourism entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists in the CCCL. Far from constituting fixed or homogeneous structures, SR operate as temporal assemblages that juxtapose past and present, tradition and innovation, institutional legitimacy and lived experience. This complexity demands— as noted by Denise Jodelet (2020) and further discussed by Rubira-García and Puebla-Martínez (2018)—an analytical perspective that recognizes the coexistence of multiple meanings in tension, without reducing them to binary typologies.

Along these lines, the Toblerone model (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999) provides a useful framework for understanding how these representations overlap and evolve, giving rise to a polyphasic configuration in which different logics—traditional, technical, scenographic, institutional, and economic—coexist within the same tourism proposal.

Within this framework, the proposed classification of representations made it possible to capture the diversity of discursive and scenographic uses of coffee culture in tourism. Dominant SR largely coincide with the institutional heritage discourse, centered on peasant labor, traditional architecture, and the sustainability of the productive system. This narrative is hegemonic within the UNESCO declaration and serves to legitimize the CCCL as a heritage property. However, in practice, the representation of this heritage appears fragmented: on the one hand, archaic forms are exalted through theme parks that nationalize tradition; on the other, emerging representations gain prominence by reconfiguring coffee culture as a specialty industry associated with technical sophistication and sensory experience.

This tension is also manifested in the contradiction between heritage discourses and market logics. While peasant culture is celebrated as a symbol of authenticity, in practice narratives that devalue traditional forms of coffee production and consumption are often promoted. The specialty coffee industry, for example, seeks to differentiate itself through product sophistication, frequently discrediting historical practices such as brewing coffee in a pot or consuming it with sweeteners. Although this positioning strategy may be understandable from a market perspective, it may prove detrimental to the sustainability of heritage if it is not accompanied by processes that recognize and strengthen traditional practices and actors.

The coexistence of archaic, residual, dominant, and emerging SR confirms that heritage is not a static legacy but rather a contested field in which interests, memories, and expectations converge. Recognizing this plurality does not imply abandoning conservation; rather, it requires redefining it as an inclusive, situated, and negotiated process in which the emergent holds as much value as the ancestral. Tourism and heritage management in the CCCL must therefore acknowledge this complexity by incorporating interpretive tools and governance mechanisms that foster dialogue among the diverse actors and visions shaping the territory.

Finally, the extended typology proposed in this study engages with the classical models of Serge Moscovici and Jean-Claude Abric, while introducing nuances that respond to the specificities of heritage and tourism contexts such as the CCCL. Unlike Moscovici's original model—focused on the processes of anchoring and objectification—this proposal distinguishes how different actors selectively update elements of the coffee-growing tradition according to their positions and interests within the tourism context. It also complements Abric's structural model by identifying the simultaneous coexistence of archaic, residual, and emergent representations, thereby accounting for dynamic configurations of the figurative core that are not fully explained by the core-periphery distinction. In this way, the model maintains continuity with classical theory while offering a more nuanced interpretation of representational polyphasia in heritage territories.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the relevance of SR theory for analyzing how different tourism actors understand, transform, and activate coffee culture in the CCCL. The proposed typology of dominant, archaic, residual, and emergent SR highlights the coexistence of multiple temporalities and meanings within tourism practices, thereby extending the classical framework proposed by Moscovici (1979).

The representation of the CCCL among tourism entrepreneurs is not limited to a staged vision for tourism, it reveals a complex symbolic appropriation that combines tradition, nature, work and community. This symbolic richness, however, is not always translated into discursive strategies or interpretive practices for visitors, which poses a challenge for heritage management approaches that understand the landscape in its broader sense.

Dominant representations tend to reproduce the institutional discourse of patrimonialization. However, these coexist with archaic representations of a nostalgic tone, residual representations that reinterpret traditional practices, and emerging representations that reconfigure coffee culture as a modern industry. This coexistence reveals processes of selective tradition that shape the formation of tourism products and, consequently, influence heritage management.

The results revealed a limited use of the concept of cultural landscape among entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists, indicating the need to strengthen heritage interpretation processes and to promote the landscape dimension of the territory. In addition, a concerning trend toward the elitization of coffee consumption and the devaluation of traditional practices was identified, which could affect the social and cultural sustainability of the CCCL.

Finally, the study shows that SR can serve as a strategic tool for diversifying the tourism offer, strengthening the social appropriation of heritage, and designing public policies that are more responsive to the meanings and practices of local stakeholders. It is recommended to advance comparative and interregional studies in order to validate the usefulness of this typological proposal and to foster critical reflection on heritage management in cultural landscapes from a Latin American perspective.

NOTE

In this document, AI assistance was used to improve aspects of writing, formatting, and information synthesis in some sections. AI was not used for the conceptualization of the paper. ChatGPT version 4.0 (OpenAI, September–November 2024) was employed for this purpose. Its use was human-mediated and critically reviewed, following the recommendations of UNESCO (2022) and Penabad et al. (2023) regarding the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

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