

Wind Bands as Cultural Tradition and Economic Opportunities in Transformation in Sincelejo (Sucre, Colombia)

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Abstract

Human interactions are permeated by multiple factors, including cultural practices, where music is a fundamental element. The objective of this study was to understand the cultural identity of traditional wind band music and its organisational capacity in Sincelejo, Sucre - Colombia. The methodology was framed under the qualitative approach with a case study design, and interviews were used to collect the information. The results indicate that traditional wind band music constitutes the cultural identity of the inhabitants of Sincelejo, reinforcing the sense of belonging and social cohesion; in terms of organisational capacity, the bands have been financially consolidated over the years, although it is still necessary to strengthen this aspect to guarantee their sustainability. In conclusion, traditional wind band music in Sincelejo plays a fundamental role in the preservation of cultural identity and social cohesion. However, greater structuring of its financial management is required to ensure the continuity and development of this cultural tradition.

Keywords: *Cultural identity; wind bands; organisational capacity; traditional music; social cohesion.*

Introduction

In the construction of expressions related to the culture of the communities, music has been a fundamental element, taking advantage of it as a means through which values, beliefs and traditions can be transmitted and transformed. Referring particularly to the context of Sincelejo, Sucre, where wind band music has a privileged place in the different cultural manifestations, for its great contribution to the strengthening of social ties in the different festivities, such as rituals and public events, to which the Sincelejan community is accustomed to attend proverbially (Gutiérrez Calderón, & Mendivil Hernández, 2024). It is important to mention that these musical practices caused by the wind band have deep roots in popular traditions of the region, which go beyond an artistic expression, becoming a symbol of identity, a cultural seal that directs the historical, social and cultural dynamics of the region (Fortich, Taboada and Prieto, 2014).

It should be noted that interest in wind bands is not a new phenomenon, but has its origins in the late nineteenth century, a period in which this type of music played a crucial role in the construction of national identity, serving as a symbol of military power and modernity in the colonised lands. This type of musical ensembles represented European colonialism, with the aim of impressing the populations of the territories occupied by them at the time (Montoya, 2011; Reily & Brucher, 2016).

It is important to state that wind bands represent a form of traditional musical identity, characterised by musical expressions deeply rooted in the history and culture of a particular community or region. This type of traditional music reflects the experiences, values, beliefs and emotions of a specific group, demonstrating its essential role in the preservation and transmission of cultural identity over time (Fortich, Taboada and Prieto, 2014). Traditional musical identity manifests itself in various genres, styles and forms, which are transmitted from one generation to the next, contributing to social cohesion and strengthening the sense of belonging within a community.

In this way, the wind bands, which emerged at the end of the 19th century as entertainment for the local elites, particularly for the region's cattle-raising class, contributed to the adaptation of a European musical tradition, integrating it with influences from the indigenous communities and the African diaspora, into the

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musical identity of the Colombian Caribbean Coast. In this context, *corrалеja* parties became the characteristic space for these bands, and by the first decades of the 20th century, both the *porro* and the *fandango* were established forms of this type of musicality (Wade, 2002). The musicians, of humble origin, were hired to provide the ambience for social gatherings and popular festivities organised by politicians, landowners and members of high society, the latter reality present today, where the social significance delegated to wind band musicians has not changed much.

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of wind band musicians in Sincelejo about the cultural identity associated with this type of music, with the aim of understanding how this form of music contributes to the sense of belonging and social cohesion. This allows us to understand the meanings associated with these traditions, addressing aspects such as the role of music in everyday life, the transmission of musical knowledge between generations, and how these practices try to be preserved over time, seeking to understand the fundamental role it plays in shaping local identity.

Theoretical Framework

Bands as an element of cultural identity

The preservation and revitalisation of local cultural expressions has become a challenge in the contemporary context, particularly in those regions where modernisation and globalisation threaten to dilute traditions and customs that are part of the identity of communities. In this sense, wind bands represent a form of local cultural expression, which may face the risk of disappearance due to these globalising processes. According to Fortich Díaz et al. (2014), these musical organisations have their historical roots in the War Bands of the Spanish colonial period, which gives them a deep connection with the cultural identity of the region. These bands are not only a musical artefact, but also a means of preserving collective memory, which is passed down through the generations.

Despite the advances and transformations that Colombian society has undergone, wind bands in Sucre continue to be a vital element in local festivities and celebrations. Londoño and Betancourt (1983) argue that these musical organisations not only strengthen cultural life, but also create spaces for social interaction. Music, in this context, is presented as a means of expression that helps the community to strengthen its identity in the face of external influences.

The wind band tradition, associated with the social and religious life of the region, goes beyond a simple artistic manifestation. According to Alzate (1980), these bands have been an essential part of the festivities in the *corrалеjas*, a cultural expression that connects the landowning elites with the popular classes. In this scenario, music not only acts as an instrument of enjoyment, but also as a means for the reaffirmation of power and social prestige. Wind bands, then, are not only associated with entertainment, but are also symbols of power, prestige and community. This phenomenon underlines the importance of music as a social engine that keeps traditional cultural practices alive in the midst of a constantly changing environment (Peralta-Farak & Espinosa-Espinosa, 2018).

The importance of wind bands is not limited to their value as an artistic expression, but also has a profound impact on the emotional and collective identity of the inhabitants of Sincelejo and other localities in the region. According to Tipa and Zebadúa (2014), popular music becomes a cultural artefact whose lyrical and sonorous content directly influences social behaviour and the psychic health of individuals. In this context, wind bands are not only a sound tradition, but also a means to connect people to their history and cultural heritage. At significant events such as weddings, religious festivities or funerals, bands become the medium that articulates the emotions of the community, in a process that reinforces the sense of belonging and unity.

Acevedo (2005) and Sheehy (2007) argue that music is not only a universal language, but that in each society it acquires its own meaning that reflects the history and practices of that community. In this case, wind bands are much more than a group of musicians playing instruments: they are the bearers of a collective memory that is passed down through generations, a cultural legacy that must be preserved and revitalised for future generations. The revitalisation of these cultural expressions involves not only the preservation of a musical repertoire, but also the reaffirmation of a collective identity that faces the challenges of an increasingly globalised world.

The construction of cultural identity through wind bands

Music is considered a form of cultural expression that not only provides entertainment, but also plays an important role in the formation of social identities and the cohesion of communities, as it has done since ancient times. For López and Salcedo (2021), music has served as a bridge to transmit values, traditions and shared feelings. In this sense, music is a resource that contributes to the reconstruction of social identity, enabling the collective and individuals to express themselves and to be able to define a place in the world through their identity (De Nora 2016). The above indicates that music with its compositions becomes cultural resources that create knowledge and social ties, as is the case of the participation of wind bands in the Sucreño territories.

When we refer to the Caribbean region of Colombia, specifically the department of Sucre, we can find historical accounts that for a long time have been charged with countless violent events, and it is precisely here that music, especially that created by wind bands, fulfils its function of social cohesion, especially visible in times of conflict and change. This is why Tschmuck (2020) referred that music became in times of crisis a tool for healing and, on the other hand, for the construction of collective identities, creating a sense of hope and belonging. This provides the understanding that through the narratives of the songs, the resilience of the communities is reinforced, such is the case of one of the most recognised porros in the region called Imágenes de auditoria Leonardo Gamarra and recorded by the Colomboy band.

In this sense, according to Durán et al. (2022), music can help to build identity through the relationships that are established between the individual and his or her social context. People can then use music as a strategy to define themselves and settle into a social group, creating emotional ties with their culture (Hargreaves and North 2017). The musical genres with their lyrics and rhythms included revive the experiences of individuals, which are manifested in expressing their own history and traditions, so music has the ability to create a sense of belonging which can be reflected in their cultural manifestations (Meza and Herrera, 2019). This is the case at the regional level with the band meetings, festivals and corralejas held in the region. For all of the above, music has become a profitable subject for different disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and other social sciences, which have managed to demonstrate that music through songs not only manages to identify a group, but also contributes to the individual with his or her cultural identity (Hargreaves and North (2017). For Peralta-Farak & Espinosa-Espinosa (2018) music in a traditional way fulfils a function that allows the expressions of the cultural identity of a region or society to persevere.

Windbands as an economic process

Wind bands not only represent a cultural manifestation, but can also be understood as fundamental economic processes in many communities. Throughout history, these musical groups have played a key role in the preservation of traditions and the construction of a collective identity, as pointed out by authors such as Fortich Díaz et al. (2014). However, in recent decades, their potential to generate income and foster local development has been recognised. Wind bands participate in a wide variety of events and celebrations that attract tourists, promote local commerce and create direct and indirect jobs in the region. In this way, wind bands not only preserve cultural heritage, but also become agents of economic dynamism in their communities.

When analysing wind bands as productive units, it can be seen how historically this type of musical activity was seen as underemployment, relegated to informality and precarious employment. Alzate (1980) argues that, for a long time, musicians were perceived as tools of entertainment for the wealthy classes and landowners, in a system that excluded them socially and economically. This view has conditioned the working conditions of wind bands, plunging them into economic uncertainty and lack of access to fundamental labour and social rights. The need for formalisation and the establishment of institutional support policies is crucial to ensure that these groups are recognised not only as cultural exponents, but also as viable economic units that can access the benefits of any formal labour activity.

The economic impact of wind bands is particularly evident in their capacity to generate employment through their participation in festivals, concerts and celebrations. According to Londoño and Betancourt (1983), these events are a platform for musicians to earn income, while the communities that host them benefit from the increased flow of tourism. Festivities in which wind bands have a central presence also benefit sectors such as gastronomy, handicrafts and hotels, as the influx of public demand for additional products and services. This phenomenon underlines how cultural activities, when integrated into the local economic cycle, can boost the development of various associated industries.

Despite their relevance, wind bands have faced significant economic difficulties, particularly due to the informality in which many of these groups operate (Gutiérrez Calderón, & Mendivil Hernández, 2024). For years, wind bands were not recognised as formal productive units, which limited their ability to generate sustainable income. Alzate (1980) points out that, historically, wind bands were considered a form of underemployment, where musicians were hired under precarious conditions and without adequate remuneration. This situation of informality has negatively conditioned the possibilities of these groups to access economic support, resources or public policies that favour their growth and stability.

In order for wind bands to become sustainable economic processes, an approach that considers their formalisation and the diversification of their sources of income is necessary. According to Típa and Zebadúa (2014), the integration of cultural management strategies and the establishment of music schools are essential to guarantee the continuity of musical traditions while ensuring a steady flow of income for musicians. The possibility of creating formal economic entities that can access financial resources and structure themselves as cultural enterprises would allow them to generate income not only from participation in events, but also from the sale of associated products (Espinosa, Abello and Aleán, 2013).

Wind bands should be seen as a key economic resource that can contribute to local development if properly managed. Salanova, Gracia and Peiró (1996) argue that efficient cultural management allows artistic activities not only to play a role in the preservation of culture, but also to generate tangible economic benefits. Cultural tourism is a clear example of how wind bands, when integrated into a local development strategy, can attract visitors, boost the regional economy and improve the living conditions of musicians and surrounding communities. The combination of economic development and cultural preservation strategies will allow wind bands to evolve from a cultural tradition to a sustainable and recognised economic process.

According to Gutiérrez Calderón, & Mendivil Hernández (2024) wind bands are not only an essential component of cultural heritage, but can also be seen as economic processes with great potential for development. The key for these musical groups to become sustainable productive units lies in their formalisation, the implementation of cultural management policies and the diversification of their economic activities. In this way, wind bands will be able to strengthen both their cultural identity and their capacity to generate income and contribute to the social and economic well-being of the communities in which they operate.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was framed within the qualitative approach, which allows for an in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena from the perspective of the participants. This approach is particularly suitable for studying subjective aspects such as the perceptions, experiences and

meanings attributed by individuals to their environment, in this case, to the influence of wind bands on cultural identity and their economic potential (Verd and Lozares, 2016).

The chosen research design was a case study, which focuses on the analysis of a specific phenomenon in its real context. In this case, the case study focused on wind bands in a given region, allowing to explore how these ensembles influence local cultural identity and how they could be transformed into sustainable economic units. The case study investigated the particular situation of wind bands, delving into their characteristics, internal dynamics and the impact they have on communities, as well as identifying the economic challenges and opportunities they face.

The participants in the study were the members of two wind bands located in the municipality of Sincelejo - Colombia. For the collection of information, the interview was used as the main technique. Qualitative interviews provide a powerful tool to obtain detailed and enriching data on the experiences, opinions and attitudes of the participants (Verd and Lozares, 2016). The interviews allowed us to obtain direct data on the internal functioning of the groups, their economic challenges, the musicians' perception of their cultural role and the way in which these bands are inserted into the local economy.

The analysis of the data collected focused on the methodology of thematic analysis. After transcribing the interviews, open coding was applied to identify key units of information related to economic challenges, preservation of cultural tradition and job opportunities for wind bands. These units were grouped into categories, allowing for the identification of patterns and relationships between the musicians' experiences.

Results and Discussion

Wind bands play a key role in promoting a shared culture that allows individuals to feel part of a wider community. Their presence at social events represents a symbol of identity and belonging for specific groups. In economic terms, these groups also generate employment opportunities and strengthen local entrepreneurship, demonstrating that, like any economic activity, they contribute to social and personal well-being, as pointed out by Salanova, Gracia and Peiró (1996). The musical creation that emerges from these bands enriches cultural diversity and fosters social integration, reaffirming their relevance in the cultural and economic fabric.

Wind bands also promote social inclusion by bringing together people of different races, ages, genders and social classes, both as members and audience. This diverse environment fosters acceptance, harmonious coexistence and mutual understanding, reducing social tensions and promoting community cohesion.

Another significant aspect is their impact on strengthening family traditions. Participation in these groups is passed on from generation to generation, reinforcing cultural continuity and commitment to family roots. Young people not only learn to play musical instruments, but also acquire fundamental values such as discipline and respect for their elders, providing a symbolic and daily legacy of great value, as highlighted by (Garay 2007).

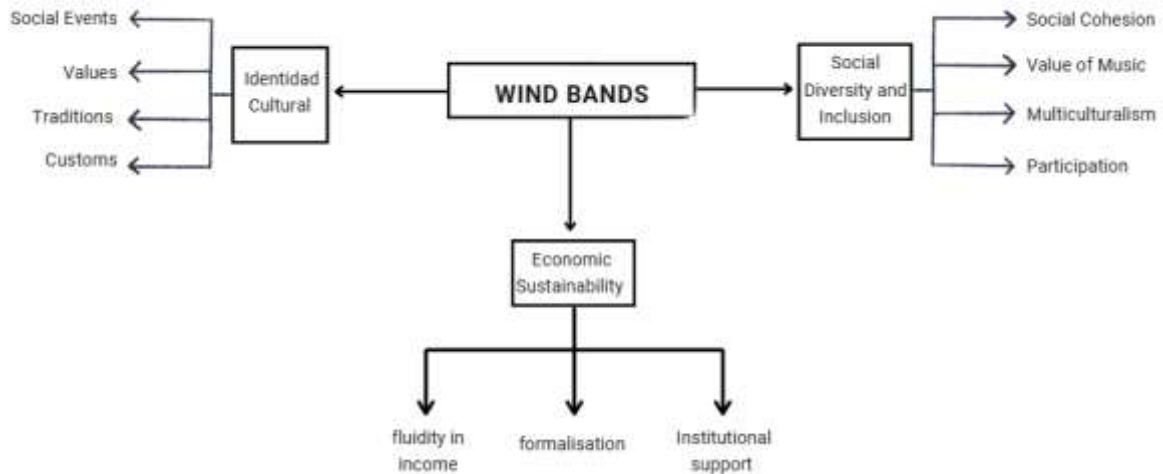


Figure 1 Categorical relationships from the interviews

Note: Interconnections between the categories, showing how wind bands influence not only cultural identity and social cohesion, but also economic development and the preservation of family traditions.

Figure 1 shows that in terms of economic sustainability, one of the most relevant challenges identified is the lack of institutional support from national bodies such as the Ministry of Culture. This lack of financial backing limits the growth of these groups, which require resources to consolidate themselves as sustainable economic activities and to continue promoting local economic development.

From a financial perspective, wind bands do not perceive themselves as formal economic organisations because they are sometimes not legally constituted, and this lack of formalisation does not guarantee their economic sustainability, which is why these types of musical groups may choose to consider the possibility of creating music schools to ensure the continuity of the musical tradition and contribute to the development of their communities.

Other economic perceptions of wind band members are that they have not been consolidated as economic units. This is related to what Londoño and Betancourt (1983) mention: most of the musical groups have not been consolidated as formal productive units, which has limited their economic development. Only recently have they begun to reflect on the need to improve their working conditions. According to the field study carried out in this research, many of these groups face violations of their social and economic rights, with incomes that sometimes do not reach the minimum wage and, in many cases, musicians must resort to other economic activities, such as agriculture and livestock farming, in order to survive (Salanova, Gracia & Peiró, 1996).

It is worth noting that, over the years, the way wind bands hire their musicians and negotiate their rates has evolved. According to Alzate (1980), in past decades, bands were hired on a 'toque' basis for multi-day festivities, and the rates were considerably lower. Today, however, the dynamics have changed, and musicians are hired by the hour, although the rates are still insufficient to guarantee significant economic stability. Despite this, the bands have made improvements, although the economic value of their services is still insufficient, with many musicians receiving their remuneration in kind, such as meals and alcoholic beverages.

The progress of wind bands in Sincelejo has been significant in terms of professionalism and cultural projection. Many musicians have managed to rise from the amateur level to more prestigious ensembles, even at the national level, reflecting a positive transformation in the perception and reality of music as a livelihood. However, as Tipa and Zebadúa (2014) point out, diversification of income sources has become crucial for musicians, who now combine their passion for music with other ventures, such as food

businesses, to secure their livelihoods. This evolution highlights the need for a more holistic approach to improve the quality of life of musicians and foster a sustainable economic environment in the region.

Conclusions

The study on wind bands reveals that they are an important element in the preservation of cultural identity as well as in their potential to generate local economic impacts. Through their participation in festivals, community events and cultural activities, bands not only keep musical traditions alive, but also contribute to the economic dynamism of their regions. The results indicate that, although these groups play a crucial role as vehicles of cultural expression, they still face important challenges related to the lack of economic formalisation and limited institutional support, which limits their capacity to consolidate themselves as sustainable productive units.

On the other hand, the analysis of the interviews highlighted that, despite economic difficulties and job insecurity, wind band musicians show a deep sensitivity and commitment to the preservation of their cultural heritage. However, most of them recognise the need to diversify their sources of income and access cultural management strategies that would allow them to improve their working conditions. The lack of an organised economic model prevents the bands from achieving adequate financial stability, which in turn limits their potential to generate employment and contribute significantly to local economic development.

In conclusion, wind bands play a fundamental role in the cultural life of the territories, being a key driver for the preservation of local cultural identity. Through their rhythms and traditions, they not only keep alive the customs and musical expressions of the region, but also foster a sense of belonging and community. In addition, these groups have a significant potential to generate sources of income by contributing to the development of the local economy through their participation in festivities, cultural events and tourism. Thus, wind bands not only represent a form of art and expression, but are also an economic and cultural pillar, essential to the social well-being and economic sustainability of their communities..

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