

Otavaleños and Cotacacheños: Local Perceptions of Sacred Sites for Farmscape Conservation in Highland Ecuador

Lee Ellen Carter and Fausto O. Sarmiento*

*Honors Program and Department of Geography, University of Georgia,
Athens, Georgia, 30602, USA*

*E-mail: <lee.ellen.carter@gmail.com >, *<fsarmien@uga.edu>*

KEYWORDS Sacred Sites. Indigenous Conservation. Intangibles. Otavalo. Ecuador. Andes

ABSTRACT Indigenous communities around the world face pressures from ecotourism practices and conservation. Otavalo, Ecuador, is an example of how local spiritual values can add to the conservation efforts of ecotourism. The Imbakucha watershed includes mountain landscapes with natural and cultural values of numerous indigenous communities where most residents associate their livelihood with iconic, sacred, natural features. Because this region has been conserved with a vibrant artisan economy, it is a well-known cultural landscape in Latin America, and therefore, the increased pressure of globalization affects its preservation as it undergoes a shift from traditional towards contemporary ecotourism practices. We investigate the relationship between the indigenous people and their intangible spiritual environment by local understanding of identity and cultural values, using ethnographic and qualitative research to analyze the influence of spirituality on environmental actions and intersections that reify the native sacred translated into Christianity, to define synchronisms of modernity and the ancestral influence on the Andean culture in the Kichwa Otavalo living in the valley. This study concludes that there is an outlook among indigenous leaders, politicians, researchers, and scholars that a stronger influence of environmental ideals and ecofriendly lifestyles should and can be instilled into the livelihood that exists in indigenous communities to favor sacred sites conservation with development. We recommend the implementation of a sacred site conservation category for the Imbakucha watershed to help with the conservation efforts of local indigenous ecotourism practices.