

# Participatory governance of intangible heritage to develop sustainable rural tourism: the timber-raftsmen of La Pobla de Segur, Spain

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Isabel Paulino<sup>1\*</sup>, Carlos Burgos-Tartera<sup>2</sup> and Silvia Aulet<sup>3</sup>

*1* Faculty of Tourism, University of Girona, Spain & Faculty of Tourism and Geography, University Rovira i Virgili, Spain; [isabel.paulino@udg.edu](mailto:isabel.paulino@udg.edu); [orcid](#); [Linkedin](#)

*2* Faculty of Tourism, University of Girona, Spain; [burgostarteracarlos@gmail.com](mailto:burgostarteracarlos@gmail.com); [orcid](#); [Linkedin](#)

*3* Faculty of Tourism, University of Girona, Department of History and History of Art, Spain; [silvia.aulet@udg.edu](mailto:silvia.aulet@udg.edu); [orcid](#); [Linkedin](#)

\* Corresponding author

## ABSTRACT:

Rural areas face the challenge of managing intangible heritage in ways that avoid problems such as the loss of authenticity linked to over-tourism, or living heritage becoming disconnected from the local community due to overprotection. This study explores an innovative method for promoting a participatory governance process for intangible heritage currently managed on a non-participatory basis, in that the local community establishes a consensual model of sustainable tourism development that promotes both the rural renaissance of the area and the preservation of its Intangible Cultural Heritage. This research explores the case of the 'raiers' (timber-raftmen) of La Pobla de Segur, an ancient trade of transporting timber by river, recently awarded Intangible World Heritage status by UNESCO. Methods include participant observation, interviews, and discussion groups. The local community felt empowered to find a consensus on how to manage this Intangible Cultural Heritage by focusing on sustainable tourism development that preserves heritage while contributing to the rural renaissance of the area. The local community eagerly engaged by putting forward proposals, indicating the importance of agreements and new initiatives.

**Keywords:** participatory governance, intangible heritage, sustainable tourism, heritage management, rural renaissance, heritage-led innovation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intense processes of modernization and social change have favored the gradual depopulation of rural areas (Cánoves, Villarino & Herrera, 2006). Nowadays, many rural areas are being relegated to meeting the cities' demands without considering their development a priority, thus, threatening heritage conservation, particularly intangible heritage (Cánoves, Villarino, Herrera & Cuesta, 2004; Vergara-Muñoz & Martínez-Monedero, 2019). To address this problem, tourism is seen as an economic activity that can bring about rural renaissance through the creation of new sources of wealth and employment (such as restaurants, accommodation and activities), which boosts the tourism economy in general. This, together with the economic diversification, helps maintain the traditional values associated with rural life (Alisa & Ridho, 2020; Flores-Ruiz & Barroso-González, 2012; Randelli & Martellozzo, 2019). Indeed, cultural tourism not only boosts the economy, but also raises cultural awareness, preserves identity, and safeguards lost assets (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999).

However, tourism development in rural areas also poses a risk to the community regarding over-tourism and loss of authenticity (Al-Tokhais, & Thapa, 2020; George, 2010), particularly in the case of intangible heritage of rural communities. Although UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage continues to grow, there is an unsolved debate on how intangible heritage should be protected and developed. The concept of intangible cultural heritage is a contested concept, and its limits of acceptable change are not clear (Andrews, Viejo-Rose, Baillie & Morris, 2006; Miura, 2005). The development of rural tourism should contribute to the revival of rural areas, but prioritizing sustainability, the future prevalence of economic development, and the need to preserve identity (Conti & Cravero-Igarza, 2010). Thus, a balance needs to be found between the dimensions that make up economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

The local community is a key stakeholder in a rural tourism destination, and its role in the sustainable development of the destination would be highly relevant if it were to actively participate in the decision-making process (Monterrubio-Cordero, 2009). The local community's committed involvement in the design and management of a development project is what guarantees its success, due to the sense of ownership and the need for achievement generated during the process of community support and participation (Monterrubio-Cordero, 2009).

Previous studies focus on the concept participatory governance of heritage either from "an integrated approach to cultural heritage" (Council of Europe, 2018) or implementing case studies where participatory governance has developed organically (Innocenti, 2016; Alonso-González, González-Álvarez & Roura-Exposito, 2018). A methodological approach that fosters community-based participatory governance in tourism heritage management is not frequent, particularly one that can be applied to intangible heritage (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2017). This article seeks to fill this research gap and answer the research question "How can non-organic participatory governance be designed in a way that enables sustainable tourism development and at the same time, the re-evaluation for the local community of an existing intangible heritage festival?"

The aim of this paper is building a practical framework for managing the intangible heritage of a rural destination, where the local community is the main stakeholder in tourism policy decision-making. This process should ensure the preservation and re-evaluation of traditions, uses and practices; while simultaneously fostering sustainable tourism development in a way that can revive the rural community without succumbing to commodification, overexploitation or a sense of rootlessness. Establishing a framework of this nature would give the community the tools to join participatory projects and take part in tourism policy decision-making regarding local development.

This research takes the 'raiers' (timber-raftsmen) of La Pobla de Segur, Spain, as a case study; an ancient trade of transporting timber by river preserved as a living memory festival. The methodology

employed involved several stages, 1) participatory observation, with the purpose of gaining deeper insights into the festival and meeting the main stakeholders in La Pobla de Segur; 2) interviews aimed at meeting the needs, expectations and ambitions of the local community; and 3) thematic focus groups, to debate the red lines of tourism development, as well as the policy design and project proposals. Results indicate that the methodology was applied successfully and policy and project design may lead to sustainable tourism development in the region.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public managers are ever seeking recognition of heritage, seeing it as a contributing factor in local development (Hribar et al., 2015; Hampton, 2005). Many public boards attempt to include elements in the various international heritage lists promoted by UNESCO (e.g., World Heritage Convention, List of Intangible Heritage, Creative Cities) to increase visibility and gain recognition (Ryan & Silvano, 2009). For sites to be included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, they must be of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which is often also extended to the concept of intangible heritage. Heritage management based on values underpins good decision-making regarding preservation and conservation, and legitimizes actions undertaken by agents who protect and manage heritage. However, the Burra Charter (1979) revised in 2013 by ICOMOS, introduces a framework with multiple, interacting heritage values. This means that OUVs must be combined with the values and meaning heritage holds for local communities (Jokilehto, 2008; Von Droste, 2011), which at times come into conflict. Thus, the concept of heritage refers to the meanings and values assigned by individuals or groups of people; it is therefore not static and may generate conflict (Labadi, 2013; McClelland, Peel & Hayes, 2013; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2018).

Simultaneously, scholars have shown a growing interest in heritage, focusing on deepening understanding of the relationship between people and heritage and how it can foster both individual and societal change (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2017; Timothy, 2018). Research should deepen understanding of how the links between heritage and tourism can help empower local communities (Khalid, Ahmad, Ramayah, Hwang & Kim, 2019; Schmidt & Uriely, 2019), forge identities (Zhang, Pearce & Chen, 2019; Al-Zo'by, 2019) and become a tool for sustainable development (Alisa & Ridho, 2020; Jelinčić & Mansfeld, 2019; Monterrubio Cordero, 2009). Furthermore, the ongoing debate among scholars regarding conservation; and the lack of clear instructions, tools, facilities or resources from these international organizations adds to the difficulty in preserving this heritage (Al-Tokhais & Thapa, 2020; Meskell, 2013).

For intangible heritage, the discussion about merging its values with significance for local communities is crucial, as it can be approached from two perspectives: conservation and use. Perceiving different heritage values pushes many conservationists beyond their comfort zone and experience, greatly hindering the development and use of the concept (Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Vakhitova, 2015). Historical values connect communities to past legacies, fostering local belonging, *genius loci* and a sense of place. Contrastingly, contemporary values are linked to economic benefits, leisure opportunities, health and ecology (Mason, 2006). Intangible cultural heritage stems from the interaction between nature and history, involving communities with a sense of identity and including oral traditions, expressions, social practices, rituals, festivities, knowledge and others (ICOMOS, 2003; Kato, 2007). As such, intangible cultural heritage is intimately connected to and embodied in the identity and will of its creators and performers and may not exist as an independent entity (Giudici, Melis, Dessì & Francine Pollnow Galvao Ramos, 2013). Thus, it is key to consider community values in community-based processes (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2018).

When heritage preservation systems are set up without considering local communities, they tend to be no more than a snapshot of a specific moment in time, thus failing to consider the future direction the landscapes and communities might take. This means that the survival of intangible cultural heritage depends on its actors and their propensity to transmit their knowledge and know-how to younger generations (Lenzerini, 2011). Vakhitova (2015) claims the concept of living heritage in order to understand current interactions between people and the environment. The key concept in preservation, therefore, is that of acceptable change and striving to find a balance between preservation and use (Walter, 2020; Bell, 2015). Thus, we should accept the evolution of intangible heritage along with society, particularly considering future generations. In fact, following UNESCO, involving young people is key to ensuring the prevalence of intangible heritage. Their creativity, innovation and ability to foster change give them an essential role in heritage conservation, particularly considering that they are the ones that grant its future preservation. Therefore, other key concepts are intergenerational handover and engaging youth (Medina-Peña, 2022), whose perspectives should be included in management strategies (Spiridon, Kosic, & Tuci, 2014; Vaeliverronen, Kruzmetra, Livina, Grinfilde & Esaf, 2017).

When heritage appears on international heritage lists, such as UNESCO, awareness is raised and an influx of heritage visitors follows, being particularly threatening for rural heritage (Bachleitner, & Zins, 1999; Al-Tokhais, & Thapa, 2020; Conti & Cravero-Igarza, 2010; George, 2010). The gradual depopulation leaves rural areas with a lack of the resources needed to manage sustainable tourism development (Cánoves, Vilarino, Herrera & Cuesta, 2004; Vergara-Muñoz & Martínez-Monedero, 2019). Additionally, rural areas face the challenges of heritage commodification, resource depletion, and environmental destruction. (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Styliadis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014). Furthermore, planning and managing tourism development without the support of the host community has been criticized given the prioritisation of policies from the prism of business values over the community one (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). In the face of this dilemma, the authors believe that the local community should establish an intelligent management and governance regime (Fabry & Zeghni, 2019) with a consensual tourism development model which preserves intangible cultural heritage (Cortés-Vazquez, Jiménez-Esquinas & Sánchez-Carretero, 2017). In rural areas, the local community is an essential stakeholder which plays a moderating role in sustainable tourism development (Monterrubio-Cordero, 2009). In the case of intangible heritage, the local community is responsible for its survival by transmitting knowledge and know-how to younger generations (Lenzerini, 2011).

Scholars widely support involving the community in the management of heritage and tourism (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2017). Participatory governance is a switch from conventional hierarchy models of decision-making to networks and partnerships, where decisions are taken in consensus. It diverges from other public consultation processes, like deliberate or direct democracy, designed to provide limited information and choices. Participatory governance involves the community in the local policy-shaping processes, giving the opportunity for all voices to be heard (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Wampler & McNulty, 2011). However, the concept of community remains ambiguous since it refers to both locality and a network of relationships (Bortolotto, 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos et al. 2014; Salazar, 2012). Key elements in the concept of community include sharing a geographic space (Cathcart, 2009; Mann, 2000, Gascon, 2013), a feeling of belonging (Theodori, 2005; McLain & Jones, 1997; Dalby & Mackenzie, 1997; Harrison, 2002) and a common organizational and decision-making structure (Putnam, 2000).

Participatory models emphasize the definition of stakeholders but other elements have to be considered like the application of the method, the practical and ideological barriers, the long-term commitment of the community or the perceived benefits (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2018). Participatory governance challenges the traditional management structures (Barile, & Saviano, 2015; McKercher,

& Du Cros, 2002; Guzmán, Roders, & Colenbrander, 2017), since there is a need to move from “public administration to public management” (Dredge & Jamal, 2015, 287). The rigidity of current administrative-based governance, as well as the shared jurisdictions among several public administrations, constitutes an impediment for developing participatory governance, since mediation with different public administrations and other stakeholders will be needed (Bramwell, 2011). There is a need for legal frameworks and mechanisms for achieving shared governance in which collective information and transparency is key, followed by education and training for all stakeholders: politicians, managers, and communities (Sani, 2016). Furthermore, public authorities frequently lack the tools or knowledge to plan, regulate, and manage the development of tourism around intangible heritage, and fail to enter into direct dialogue with local inhabitants (Cánoves et al., 2006). Cultural heritage professionals must acquire new competences so they can act as facilitators and middlemen in participatory processes.

According to Dragouni & Fouseki (2018) when it comes to intangible heritage, communities tend to engage less as it's not recognized as significant as tangible heritage, evidencing a shortage of cases and studies of tourism heritage management applied to intangible heritage. Studies by Alonso-González, et al. (2018) and Cortés-Vazquez, et al. (2017) follow this line; however, they found that participatory processes were severely hindered by a lack of participatory culture stemming from traditional governance models, compounded by the difficulty in selecting delegates and representatives to participate in the process, and the confusion between real participation and improved communication among stakeholders.

In cases where governance structures already involve local communities' participation, rigidity still poses a risk by hindering a participatory approach and impeding the adoption or adaptation of strategies to address current trends and challenges (Jopela, 2011; Gilrein, Carvalhaes, Markolf, Chester, Allenby & Garcia, 2021). The strategy should focus on building resilient local communities, capable of withstanding change, adapting for future generations and promoting sustainable practices that respect the environment and foster human interconnectedness (Magis, 2010). Empowerment is a key concept in participatory management, involving the enhancement of community's skills, strength and potential across various aspects of life (Cole, 2006). Empowering local communities, entails fostering their confidence and security, skills and active involvement in the decision-making processes related to their land, culture and heritage (Babić, 2015; Hampton, 2005). The main challenge is to showcase stakeholders' needs, ideas, and projects while supporting their resilience and community-building efforts.

To fill this gap in the literature, this study aims to explore the feasibility of introducing an innovative governance model based on bottom-up participatory processes to manage intangible heritage in a rural destination (Robertson, 2016). This would enable both, the development of sustainable tourism and local community's revalorization of existing intangible heritage. This model stands out as it involves civil society's active participation in decision-making, and is designed to achieve equitable and effective intangible heritage tourism management. This study aims to promote a management platform which includes residents, local associations, public boards and local tourism businesses, who together have a voice in deciding the best tourism development model for their Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### 3. CASE STUDY

Timber-rafting is a historical method of transporting felled tree trunks by tying them into rafts and drifting or pulling them downriver. It originated with the Romans and was common in regions where

ivers connected forests with populated areas. In Catalonia (Spain), timber-rafting trade, conducted by the 'raiers', started in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries and became economically significant during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the construction of dams at Sosis (1913) and Talarn (1916), along with the advent of trucks and improved roads, led to the gradual abandonment of river transport by Catalan Pyrenees traders, ultimately ceasing in the early 20th century.

*Figure 1. Detail of the traditional methods of building 'rais'. Source: researchers*



In 1972, the first timber-raftsmen recovery experience called 'els últims rais' (the last timber-rafts) sparked an annual festival known as 'La Diada dels Raiers' in La Pobla de Segur and neighboring towns in el Pallars area. The festival involves building rafts using traditional methods passed down from the last surviving timber-raftsmen (See Figure 1). These rafts are then floated down the Noguera Pallaresa River recreating the work of the timber-raftsmen (See Figure 2). Local associations were formed to preserve the practice, focusing on the festival, establishing museums/visitor centers, and joining the International Timber-raftsmen Association. Their efforts culminated in submitting an application to UNESCO for the inclusion of the timber-raftsmen of the Noguera Pallaresa River on the World Intangible Heritage List. On 1 December 2022, UNESCO officially added the timber-raftsmen of the Noguera Pallaresa to the World Intangible Heritage list, coinciding with the final stages of this research paper.

*Figure 2. Picture of a 'rai' floating down the Noguera Pallaresa River. Source: researchers*



La Pobla de Segur, a municipality in the Catalan Pyrenees with 2,939 residents, actively preserves the legacy of timber-raftsmen. The community takes pride in maintaining this internationally recognized heritage. The festival serves as a gathering for locals to celebrate the start of the summer season and reconnect with their roots in La Pobla de Segur. The local 'raiers' association organizes and promotes the festival, and also manages 'Espai Raier', a research center and visitor's exhibition dedicated to timber-raftsmen and the festival's history. The association relies primarily on funding from public bodies like the City Council and Catalan Government, supplemented by membership fees and festival ticket sales. However, the relationship between the public boards and the association has recently deteriorated and is now no more than a mere formality.

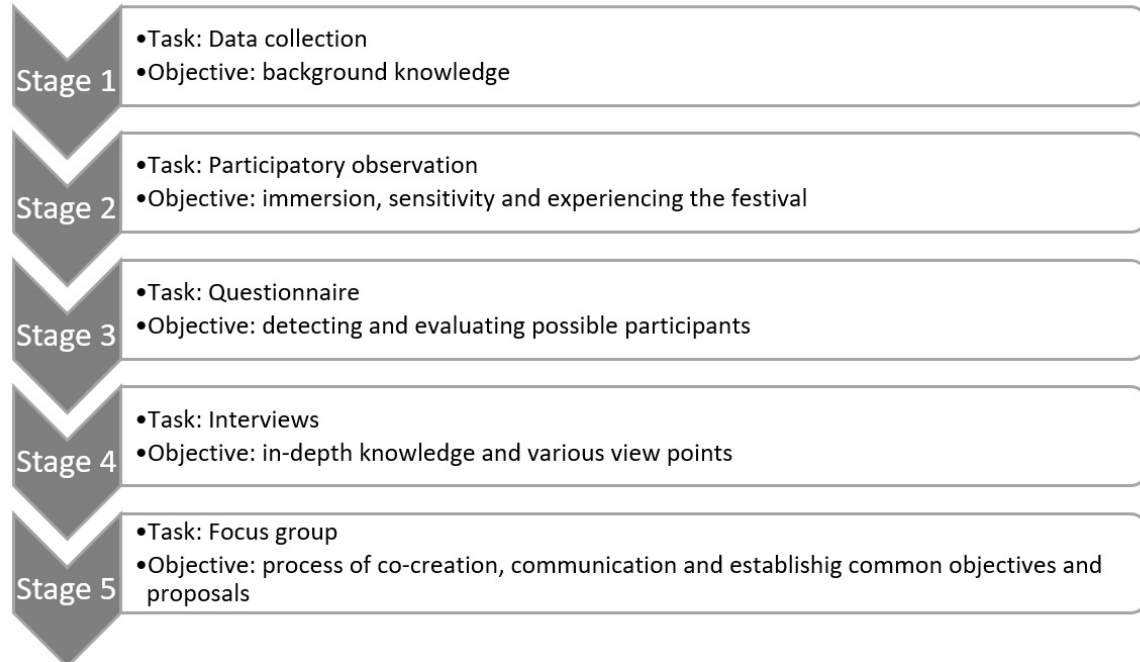
Apart from the 'raiers', other popular tourist attractions in the area include the train of the lakes, a circular hiking route called 'El Cinquè Llac' (The Fifth Lake), the natural settings of 'Collegats' and

'Boumort', the modernist heritage of la Pobla de Segur and the 'Falles' festival, which is recognized as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study adheres to Robert Yin's (2008) case analysis framework, involving the definition of research questions, selecting case studies, identifying data sources, collecting, organizing, coding, and analyzing data, as well as developing comprehensive descriptions and theories based on the analysis. The paper adopts a qualitative approach inspired by participatory governance in tourism development at the local level, tailored to the specificities of the case study to enhance its value for researchers and the community (Beregold & Thomas, 2012; Pitarch-Garrido, Ferrandis-Martinez, Peñarrubia-Zaragoza, 2017; Viswanathan, et al., 2004). The aim of the methods was, firstly, obtaining in-depth, high-quality data on La Pobla de Segur timber-raftsmen. Secondly, helping establish a framework for dialogue through a previously inexistent participatory table of governance. A third methodological aim was to empower the local community of *la Pobla de Segur* to find a consensus on how the 'raiers' intangible cultural heritage should be managed. The governance table should be capable to decide about the sustainable development of tourism linked to the 'raiers', so that the heritage is preserved and, at the same time, the rural renaissance is boosted. All methods were carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations and obtaining written participants' consent.

Figure 3. Methodological steps. Source: researchers



Data was collected between 2021-2022, and a participatory governance framework was developed using a structured process (Figure 3). The first step was to collect data from public sources that could provide background knowledge on the tradition of timber-raftsmen and the festival.

The second step of data collection involved participant observation during the festival (3-4 July 2021). The researchers observed, listened, and interacted with participants to understand the traditions, history, management, and significance of the 'raiers'. The researchers maintained a detached yet involved approach, documenting their observations, perceptions, and insights in a notebook (Flick,

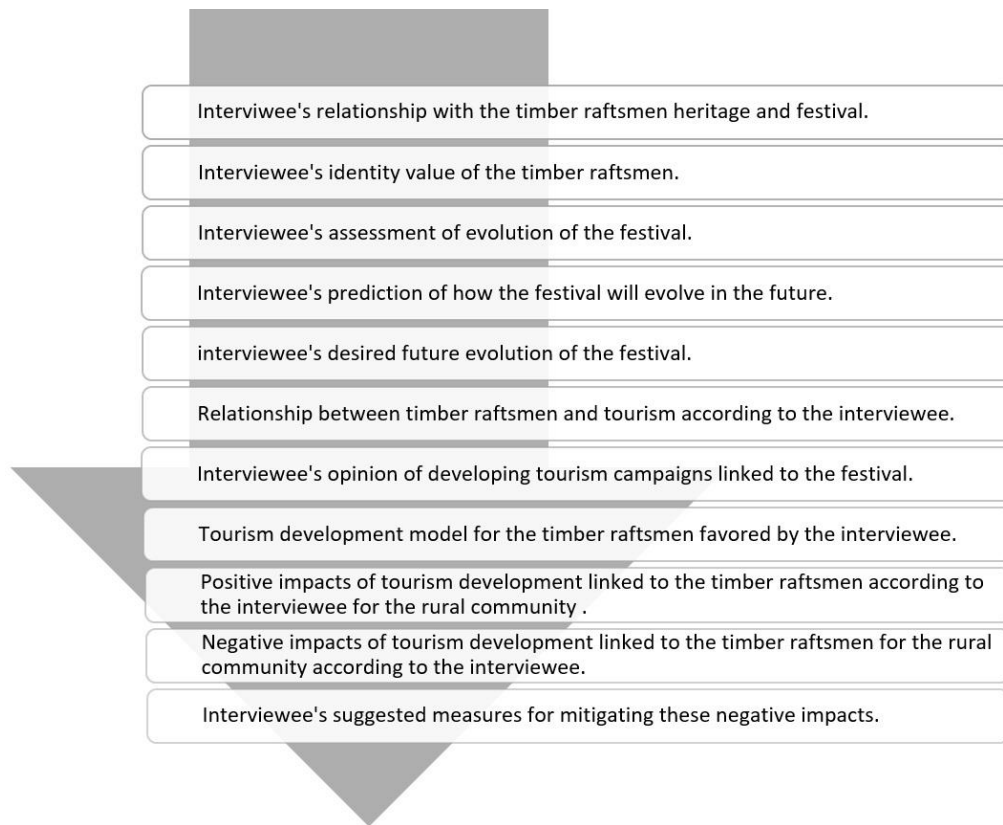
von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004; Kawulich, 2005). This exploratory method was crucial for problem-definition, establishing field contacts, building trust with the researchers and gaining a deeper understanding of the festival's social and political aspects. Data were categorized to gain insights into the festival as a heritage expression, as well as identifying management-related issues and key local figures, which was key to create a profile of the community and target potential participants for further methodological steps.

The third step involved classifying key figures according to their role in the local community; whether a social role safeguarding the timber-raftsmen, or an economic role directly or indirectly linked to tourism or the public board. Using a Likert scale, these key figures were asked to answer a short questionnaire on their level of involvement with the timber-raftsmen and affinity with tourism development in the community (Matas, 2018). They were also asked about their availability and willingness to pilot-test a participatory governance process. From this, the final sample of interviewees was selected considering a balance of participants' role in the community, and according to their affinity level with tourism development, commitment level to the timber-raftsmen and willingness to participate (Table 1).

*Table 1. Participant selection. Source: researchers*

Name	Affiliation	Sector	Affinity with tourism industry	Commitment with the 'raiers'	Interview	Focus Group
C.B.	Groceries	Business	Very high	Very high	Yes	-
A.P.B.	Spirits shop/'raiers' association	Business/social	Very high	Very high	Yes	1
P. D.	'Raier's' association	Social	Very high	Very high	Yes	1
N.dIP.	'Raier's' association	Social	High	Very high	No	1
B.T.	'Raier's' association	Social	High	Very high	Yes	-
R.E.G.	Tourism Alderman	Public board	High	High	Yes	2
E.G.	Tourism officer	Public board	High	Medium	Yes	2
M.F.V.	Bed & Breakfast/sustainability association	Business/social	Medium	Medium	Yes	2
J.S.	Sort Archive/'raier's' association	Public board/social	Low	Very high	Yes	1
N.M.	Local travel agency	Business	High	High	Yes	2

*Figure 4. Script of the semi-structured interviews. Source: researchers*



The fourth step involved carrying out in-depth semi-structured interviews with the selected sample (García, Martínez-Garrido, Martín-Martín & Sánchez-Gómez, 2013), aimed at compiling issues and needs surrounding the timber-raftsmen and local community. Interviewees provided knowledge and opinions on tourism development within the community linked to the timber-raftsmen. The interview was designed *in crescendo* regarding the depth and intensity of questions (Figure 4), beginning with basic questions to create a comfortable environment, and ending with more relevant and complex questions. The last question was the most important as it offered the interviewees the opportunity to propose creative solutions to the issues raised during the interview. Interview data were analyzed using content analysis, involving thorough reading and identification of analytical categories connected with the researcher's prior knowledge and literature review. After noting agreement and discordance among interviewees, a coding guide was established to categorize specific interview passages into locals' values, festival evolution, 'raiers' governance model, community cooperation, and festival's tourist development model (Alahakoon & Udunuwara, 2022; Flick, et al., 2004). This analysis yielded detailed insights into timber-raftsmen and tourism management, revealing aspirations, concerns, and suggestions for the next steps.

Finally, a participative governance platform was built to enable consensus-finding among stakeholders to develop the intangible heritage of the timber-raftsmen in a sustainable way. This was done through 2 thematic groups containing the stakeholders interviewed. The two tables allowed for sectoral discussion topics, while guaranteeing operational discussions by not exceeding the recommended maximum of 6 participants per table (Pitarch Garrido, et al., 2017).

The first group comprised 5 social actors with a direct involvement with the festival and a strong commitment with the timber-raftsmen (Table 1), as well as a researcher who acted as moderator. Profiles connected to politics or the tourism sector were purposely avoided so the social sector could freely voice their ideas without being conditioned or influenced by their presence. The group moderator started the sessions by presenting the main results of the interview phase and initiating a debate on the list of needs and issues revealed. The debate took a philosophical tone, exploring the

significance of the timber-raftsmen, followed by an introspective approach using SWOT analysis to reflect the position of the timber-raftsmen. Finally, the red lines that should not be crossed and objectives were set out in accordance with sustainable tourism development guidelines.

The second focus group comprised a sample of 4 actors indirectly connected with the timber-raftsmen, but linked to public boards/politics and the tourism sector and a researcher acting as moderator. Initially, participants were informed of both, the main results of the interviews and the results of the first focus group session. Participants were prompted to design strategies, create alliances and make innovative proposals in line with the results of the previous stage. Following this, proposals and strategies offered by the second focus group were classified and presented to the 'raiers' association and other study participants.

In both cases, the role of the investigator was to create the right conditions to unfold the group's structural identity as part of a process to reach a consensus departing from a certain degree of lead established by the investigator. The researcher's interventions and questions during the discussion groups were limited to moments of a 'lapse' in the conversation and were directed to the entire group, suggesting topics rather than prescribing specific propositions. Towards the end of the discussions, the moderator referred back to the main points of agreement and disagreement to reaffirm consensus (Flick, et al., 2004). Participants were also encouraged to continue utilizing the governance platform created for future decision-making.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1. Detecting individual concerns

Initially, most participants showed a high level of acceptance of tourism development of the timber-raftsmen. This is due to the current low tourism demand in the region and the belief that tourism contributes to the renaissance of the region. Most participants were also highly involved in the intangible heritage of the timber-raftsmen and their protection, which indicates that involving local residents in participatory governance could be successful.

"We feel the 'raiers' very deep inside our hearts. If it was declared intangible heritage by UNESCO, which seems quite doable, together with the 'falles', our town would be almost unique. From here we have tried to collaborate as much as possible, although the association does not have knowledge of the heritage field. I have contacted the mayors of the different municipalities across Spain to request their involvement". R.E.G.

The interview process gave rise to several concerns, ambitions and reflections. Participants noted the need to establish a community-based governance platform separate from local administration where they could decide about the tourism development model and how best to safeguard their intangible heritage in a context where problems and opportunities cross administrative borders:

"Our eternal problem is that outside the municipality's administrative borders there is Finisterre and the same outside the county or region. It is impossible to work in isolation from other administrative areas because tourists do not care about which municipality or administrative region they find themselves in. We need to work together with other Councils and regions, leaving exclusivity aside and working in a more transparent way with everyone's involvement." J. S.

"People travel to Rome to see more than just the Coliseum. In the same way, people won't go to Pallars to just see the timber-raftsmen. They look for other elements of

cultural interest to complete their stay and justify their trip, regardless of whether it is in one municipality or another.”. N.M.

Several participants noted a lack of communication between them and the public board, tourist office, and local travel agency (the main tourism promoters, marketers, and managers). They proposed to address the issues in terms of sectors and considered from supra-municipal and supra-county perspectives. Furthermore, participants believe to boost public-private collaboration and synergies at different scales in order to generate a common discourse and carry out consensual actions that avoid territorial and competence fragmentation.

Participants criticized the lack of coordination between the different public boards and their failure to manage without engaging the local community and entrepreneurs in dialogue. This resulted in a lack of economic development and mismarketed national and international tourism, delegating these efforts to the community and entrepreneurs without support. The interviewees also pointed to recent attempts to break away from policies set by previous public boards which were aimed at inviting political personalities, strengthening ties with other associations and generating an international impact, all of which further discouraged the local community and entrepreneurs. Today, the ‘raiers’ organize the entire festival, and people who want to participate or volunteer are faced with a barrier that discourages any kind of initiative. Furthermore, people who have invested time in setting up the association, building bridges between stakeholders and generating an impact feel frustrated to see their efforts crumble.

“The festival grew significantly, and we invested many hours in it, maybe too many. I was even more involved with the timber-raftsmen than I was with my sons. (...) For me it has been very enriching, I speak a little English, I have learnt Italian and held meetings in Italian, and I have also maintained my French thanks to these meetings. I have friends in all these countries and I have travelled all over Europe. All that work now appears to be lost.” A.P.B.

“Our travel agency created a product which included an international meeting of the timber-raftmen. We were very much involved as we coordinated the logistics around accommodation. I'm talking about many years ago, but it was very nice, people came from all over the world”. N.M.

The combination of these issues entails this intangible heritage has been facing obstacles of cooperation in the community before the researchers’ intervention, which saturates the organizers and distances itself from the local population. Thus, the same festival model is repeated each year, albeit with a feeling of stagnation among the local community, which may lead to its gradual disappearance in the not-too-distant future. In face of this, some participants declared the need for an internal renewal of the association and the festivity, to allow their opening also outside the municipality level. This renewal should be done through the diversification of activities linked to the timber-raftmen. This will grant the social impact on the community, the implication of new generations and thus the survival of the cultural intangible heritage.

“At the participation level, the festivity is deeply rooted only at the municipality level since 80% or 90% are people from La Pobla or related to it.” J.S.

“The peak of the festivity was in 2012 and since then, it hasn't changed much. The current and previous presidents have worked hard to reinvent the festivity and integrate more people, but this is a difficult job that will be achieved over time. It is difficult to involve people from outside in a festivity that is not their own”. C.B.

“It seems that the festivity is only focused on the timber-raftmen descend on Sunday. I wish there would be other activities that get people more engaged, more

participatory activities, where people of all ages can get more involved. This would contribute also to more quorum. This should be the festivity's natural evolution. The festivity will always have this sense of a popular festival, and this evolution will mean an expansion of impact at a social level." B.T.

Regarding tourism, there is a great deal of agreement on the type of tourist the festival wants to attract. The community strongly agrees with developing a sustainable tourism model that is not subject to seasonality, and which enables and gives prevalence to the future prevalence of economic development and the preservation of identity and natural values:

"We like working with associations to develop culture and tourism of the Pallars and the Pyrenees because it contributes to the economy. I think that the 'raiers' association has to continue working to make the trade known and to help develop the territory." P.D.

"The ideal tourist in La Pobla would be curious. Apart from being respectful of the environment, a curious tourist, attracted to something specific such as the timber-raftsmen, wants to know about what surrounds the timber-raftsmen, whether it is the river itself, the legacy, or whether it is the town of La Pobla and Pallars". E.G.

"The problem we have here is seasonality because workers want permanent contracts, not temporary ones. We have tried to keep the same staff all year round and now we can; but no matter how hard we try to find work in winter so we can keep the same distribution of work year round, the volume of work in summer continues to grow." C.B.

Here in Pallars, we have the 'Pallars Gratitude Project' to encourage regenerative tourism. We invite visitors to make improvements to the place they enjoy and try to raise awareness. They can become volunteers with their time and/or money (...). This means that the countryside can be improved over time, or can benefit from direct donations aimed at regenerating the natural and cultural landscapes". M.F.V.

## 5.2. Group reflections and proposals

To avoid contradictions conceptualizing the living heritage of timber-raftsmen of La Pobla de Segur, the first group, comprising social actors, agreed to consider the timber-raftsmen as a lost profession that manifests itself in three ways: 1) timber-raftsmen associations; both the international association and the local one in La Pobla de Segur, 2) the 'raiers' festival as the maximum element of expression and 3) the 'Espai Raier', which carries out research and is responsible for dissemination of knowledge. Subsequently, a SWOT analysis was drawn up to highlight the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of this intangible heritage linked to its development as a tourism attraction (Table 2).

Table 2. SWOT analysis of first focus group. *Source: researchers*

Strengths	Weakness
Unique heritage Traditional activity Minimal impact on the environment Highly committed association members Festival deeply rooted (38 years)	Lack of generational handover in the association Participation barriers to getting involved in the association Timber-raftsmen activity considered dangerous Non-viability of adding more 'rais' during the descent. Lack of internal communication in the organization Short-term activity without continuity during the year
Opportunities	Threats
Growing implication of the community and entrepreneurs Growing interest of tourists in rural experiences UNESCO declaration of intangible heritage Digitalization to reach a broader audience Large stimuli to encourage public participation	Lack of coordination with other organisations and public boards Seasonality of the tourism phenomena Other festivities

This helped members of the first group establish red lines that should not be crossed for ensuring sustainable tourism development around the intangible heritage of the timber-raftsmen of La Pobla de Segur: 1) the denaturalization of the festival and loss of its didactic element, 2) overcrowding infrastructures and 3) any action that detracts from the festival and leads to losing its traditions.

Finally, the members of this first table supported sustainable tourism development linked to the timber-raftsmen, focusing on the following objectives: 1) improving marketing and communication through a new communication plan which includes new technologies, 2) converting the 'Espai Raier' into a timber-raftsmen museum, 3) raising awareness among young people, 4) looking for new funding possibilities and 5) creating complementary tourism products to the festivity.

Once the objectives of the timber-raftsmen were set out, the political/business members of the second governance table agreed on a list of proposals (Figure 5). The main aims were twofold. Firstly, to address the gradual disappearance of this heritage caused by the discouragement and exhaustion of members of the 'Raier' association and by the lack of generational handover. Secondly, to promote rural renaissance of the region by creating new wealth and employment linked to tourism. This should involve contributing to the continuity of the traditional values embedded in rural life, as well as diversifying the economy. The participants of the second focus group were motivated to design strategies and create alliances, which resulted in 7 thematic proposals (Figure 5):

Figure 5. Proposals made by the second focus group. Source: researchers

Proposal 1: Open the Raiers association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eliminate barriers to forming part of the association; allow new members to get involved with this heritage</li><li>• Open the association to people from other municipalities of el Pallars</li><li>• Open a participatory platform on the topic of Timber raftsmen where anyone interested can freely express their opinion and offer alternatives.</li><li>• Encourage people to participate in organizing activities and/or events</li></ul>
Proposal 2: Improve internal and external communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Draw up an open calendar so that everyone can be aware of the activities organized.</li><li>• Open a new official monthly/quarterly newsletter, as well as a social network accounts to keep members and supporters informed.</li><li>• Keep other stakeholders regularly informed of events in order to attract a larger audience to activities.</li></ul>
Proposal 3: Expand the festival to boost sustainable tourism and involve new generations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan activities linked to the timber raftsmen heritage at Pont de Claverol School so new generations are involved.</li><li>• Hold demonstrations, set up stalls or hold projections in other areas such as beaches or/and surrounding areas to raise awareness of the local heritage.</li><li>• Organize complementary activities during the the raftmen's descent to liven up, energize and raise awareness of the timber raftsmen's trade.</li><li>• Introduce alternative activities for visitors during the festival, e.g., cannoning or nocturnal descents.</li></ul>
Proposal 4: Break with seasonal dependency on the festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan activities linked to the timber-raftsmen's descents beyond the festivity to keep people engaged with the heritage throughout the year.</li><li>• Boost visits to 'Espai Raier' throughout the year</li></ul>
Proposal 5: Marketing and complementary product creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activate an effective marketing plan for the festival 2-3 months in advance.</li><li>• Fix the lagoons train as a complementary attraction and means of transport from Lleina to la Pobla de Segur.</li><li>• Create products linked to the timber raftsmen in collaboration with local stakeholders to promote rural tourism, i.e., traditional clothes or gastronomy.</li><li>• Boost coordination with public boards and other associations to promote complementary cultural activities</li><li>• Create synergies with neighbouring complementary attractions, such as Gerri Saltworks and Capdella station.</li></ul>
Proposal 6: Turn 'Espai Raier' into an active museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up temporary exhibitions to dynamize the museum and local area.</li><li>• Collaborate with the neighboring Valls d'Aneu. eco-museum.</li><li>• Stimulate and promote artisan businesses through museum activities.</li><li>• Cooperate with local cultural entities to manage the museum and co-organize activities.</li></ul>
Proposal 7: Boost financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look for festival sponsors.</li><li>• Open doors to subscriptions and micro-financing</li><li>• Create and sell timber raftsmen products.</li><li>• Apply for European funding.</li></ul>

## 6. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS & LIMITATIONS

The participatory governance system is an innovative breakthrough that ensures sustainable development of communities (Theodori, 2005; Vaeliverronen, et al., 2017); however, its transverse and borderless characteristics make it particularly challenging for the development of tourism (Al-Zo'by, 2019; Salazar, 2012). It involves rethinking the current cultural heritage management system so it is more social, democratic and transparent (Cortés-Vázquez, et al., 2017; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2018).

The present research highlights the need for change in traditional governance structures, and reorganization of institutional stakeholders, who must show the willingness to give up some of their authority and power in order to build a common organizational and decision-making structure (Bramwell, 2011; Cánoves et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000). This requires a positive attitude and cooperative spirit that values information and communication equally, from the decision-maker to those who will be affected by the decision, and establishes that anyone who takes part in a participative process of governance not only has right to decide how this participation is to be carried out, but should be empowered to participate through confidence and skill building (Cole, 2006; Babić, 2015; Hampton, 2005). Participative management is more than just improved communication. It involves better coordination and requires a multi-stakeholder approach, both from a communication and management perspective. This approach enables representatives from key sectors to improve governance and promote a holistic vision (Alonso-González, et al. 2018; Cortés-Vázquez, et al., 2017; Babić, 2015; Pitarch-Garrido, et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000; Sani, 2016).

Although legal frameworks and mechanisms for shared governance and transparency are needed along with stakeholder education and training (Sani, 2016), this research has shown a feasible participatory model of planning and management to effectively achieve the sustainable development of a rural destination (Khalid, et al., 2019; Schmidt & Uriely, 2019; Magis, 2010). Thus, the main challenge lies in effectively showcasing stakeholders' needs, ideas, and projects, and in empowering and helping them to build more resilient communities.

Participatory governance has a number of disadvantages, mostly linked to the complexity of its practical application and the difficulty of exactly replicating methods because of the lack of homogeneity in communities (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Gascón, 2013; Salazar, 2012). However, scholars increasingly point to participatory governance as a way to manage intangible heritage (Alonso-González, et al., 2018; Babić, 2015; Cortés-Vázquez, et al., 2017; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2018; Kontogeorgopoulos, et al., 2014; Robertson, 2016). As intangible heritage is a living heritage, participatory governance is seen as an opportunity to enable it to evolve together with its community (McClelland, et al., 2013; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2018; Vakhitova; 2015).

Intangible heritage, as seen in this case study, can lead to a sustainable development strategy for a rural community and its heritage (Alisa & Ridho, 2020; Al-Zo'by, 2019; Andrews, et al. 2006; Hampton, 2005; Hribar, 2005;). To do this, a participative governance system needs to be developed where actors from different sectors feel called to participate in heritage preservation through community empowerment. At the same time, they should collaborate with each other to develop a strategy that goes beyond heritage preservation and tourism development, which can lead to a revitalization of the area (Alisa & Ridho, 2020; Alonso-González, 2018; Barile & Saviano, 2015; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2018; Flores-Ruiz & Barroso-González, 2012; Vergara-Muñoz & Martínez-Monedero, 2019; Schmidt & Uriely, 2019; Theodori, 2005). In this case study, the stakeholders themselves were highly aware of issues linked to the structures of governance before the researchers' intervention and noted the need to establish a community-based governance platform to decide on a tourism development model and the safeguarding of the local

intangible heritage. This, together with the high level of involvement and participation during the participatory process, indicates a high probability of governance platforms' continuity over time to reach agreements and proposals without the researchers' intervention. In fact, one of the proposals made regarding festival management was to update internal governance systems related to 'Raier's' association, which is framed within the discussions of participatory governance and heritage preservation. As seen above, the concept of living heritage is also related to the level of acceptable change (Andrews, et al., 2006; Miura, 2005). At the same time, several authors identify the existence of traditional management systems as a threat in the sense that rigid management structures can be a barrier to the development of a participative management system.

Another key concept is sustainability, referring to both the sustainability of heritage and ways heritage can strengthen the concept of sustainable development in rural areas (Khalid, et al., 2019). At present, the study area and specifically the timber-raftsmen festival do not suffer from problems related to tourist overcrowding. In fact, the geographical context is a rather underdeveloped rural area with a tendency towards depopulation, and where local authorities are trying to boost economic activity through a number of actions such as tourism development (Vaeliverronen, et al., 2017; Flores-Ruiz & Barroso-González, 2012; Vergara-Muñoz & Martínez-Monedero, 2019). However, local communities perceive the risk of excessive tourism development linked to the intense publicity around being declared a UNESCO Intangible Heritage Site, not only in terms of heritage conservation, but also for the destination in general (Bachleitner, & Zins, 1999; Al-Tokhais, & Thapa, 2020; Conti & Cravero-Igarza, 2010; George, 2010). There is acute awareness of the fragility of heritage, detectable by the red line of overtourism and denaturalization of the festival, which the participants mentioned should not be crossed; a lesson learnt from observing other cases in which heritage has been overwhelmed by unchecked tourism development.

Interviewees mainly commented on preserving the heritage so that it is not altered excessively, and regulating visitor access. Therefore, one of the actions (4) proposed is to work on deseasonalizing festival areas (Andereck, et al., 2005). The timber-raftsmen festival is an event held every year for a short period of time only. One of the concerns is how to ensure that this heritage can stimulate a sustainable development strategy, both through the festival itself and by enhancing aspects of identity linked to this tradition. One of the proposals that emerged from the discussion groups was to transform the festival into a bid and a loudspeaker for encouraging visitors to come at other times of the year. To do so, the participants proposed awareness-raising activities throughout the year related to the timber-raftsmen, or relaunching the 'Espai Raier' as a museum (actions 4 and 6) (Bachleitner, & Zins, 1999; Khalid, et al., 2019;). The museum is an opportunity to offer the resource in a different way all year, and heritage interpretation can help raise awareness among young people (Medina-Peña, 2022; Spiridon, et al., 2014; Vaeliverronen, et al., 2017). This is a key element in strengthening local communities' sense of belonging (Theodori, 2005; McLain & Jones, 1997; Dalby & Mackenzie, 1997; Harrison, 2002) and can be a powerful interpretation tool for visitor knowledge and engagement (Zhang, 2019).

A key requirement when working towards sustainability is to ensure generational renewal. UNESCO points out the need to work with young people in the field of culture and heritage and to think of ways to involve them more. Participatory governance will only be a success when young people's involvement is also recognized (Medina-Peña, 2022; Spiridon, et al., 2014; Vaeliverronen, et al., 2017). In the example studied, the participants mention the challenge of generational handover and incorporating new members to ensure the engagement of the youth (Medina-Peña, 2022; Spiridon, et al., 2014; Vaeliverronen, et al., 2017), while, on the other hand, there is the will to preserve the essence of the celebration (Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Wijesuriya, 2018), which confronts the concepts of living heritage, evolution, preservation and acceptable change (Miura, 2005). Some of the actions proposed by the participants are aligned with the generational renewal supported by UNESCO, such

as working with local schools or incorporating young people into the management structures. The actions proposed along these lines (1 and 3) encourage the empowerment of the local community and are an example of the positive benefits of applying a participatory governance system. However, one of the most significant challenges faced by heritage is funding, particularly in rural areas where local authorities have only a basic structure and limited budget (Cánoves, et al., 2004; Cánoves, et al., 2006; Vergara-Muñoz & Martínez-Monedero, 2019). Furthermore, the non-existence of funding linked to UNESCO's declaration and lack of clear instructions, tools, or facilities adds another layer of complexity, as being included on UNESCO's Heritage List is a global loudspeaker triggering a visitor influx that needs to be managed (Al-Tokhais & Thapa, 2020; Labadi, 2013; Meskell, 2013; Ryan, & Silvanto, 2009). In our case, the participants supported nominating the timber-raftsmen of La Pobla de Segur to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List; but at the same time, they were aware of the lack of funding and technical support. Thus, participants tried to rethink funding strategies, not only for the festival itself but also to develop economic activity around the heritage to revitalize the area. One of the proposed actions (7) is specifically aimed at working in the area of fundraising and seeks to respond to this challenge. This intense involvement of the local community can justify public spending, and at the same time, the local community can contribute to finding ways to co-finance and co-manage the resource and thus alleviate public spending.

To conclude, participatory governance is not a new concept; however, the innovation of this study lies in the practical application of a method to promote participatory governance in a case study where participatory governance has not been developed organically. The authors have implemented a method for inducing this governance with the aim of developing sustainable tourism linked to intangible heritage. This enables the rural renaissance of a community as well as helping it reevaluate its cultural heritage. The participatory governance of the 'raiers' should be capable to create spaces of understanding and exchange to ensure both tourists and locals feel comfortable. Ultimately, the benefit is twofold; individuals can participate in decisions related to their heritage and tourism, and the community as a whole can establish a strategy to preserve their heritage while offering a tourism resource in line with their beliefs and considering the prevalence of benefits over time. Moreover, the community is able to decide on relevant issues and establish red lines for issues such as overcrowding or the loss of a sense of community (Alonso-González, et al., 2018; Cortés-Vazquez, et al., 2017; Monterrubio-Cordero, 2009).

Through this work, we have sought to develop a practical framework for the participatory management of intangible heritage tourism, and from our own perspective, we have far exceeded our initial expectations. The community's warm welcome, cooperation and involvement in this project have been fundamental to its development. This has led to setting objectives for the sustainable development of tourism surrounding the timber-raftsmen in la Pobla de Segur and carrying forward proposals to achieve these objectives.

The greatest practical impact of the work is twofold. First, the introspective analysis carried out in the first focus group discussion, based on knowledge of individual perspectives expressed in the interviews. Second, the bridge building undertaken in the second focus group, where once the concerns and objectives of the timber-raftsmen were expressed, residents of La Pobla de Segur became involved in generating proposals for improvement. This second group was keen to participate in the process and contribute to improving both visitors' experience and the heritage development of the timber-raftsmen.

Limitations to this study include a lack of surveys measuring the number of existing links between local residents and the heritage of timber-raftsmen, local residents' satisfaction with the festival, or their affinity with tourism. The exclusive focus on the heritage of the timber-raftsmen of la Pobla de

Segur can be also considered a limitation, considering that this tradition is shared by other villages nearby and many others around the world.

Further research should assess the new participatory roundtables to verify their continuity and their capacity to implement the proposals made. In fact, this continuity is crucial, given the recent inclusion of the timber-raftsmen on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. It would also be interesting to monitor the socio-economic impact on the rural community of the proposals implemented through participatory governance and to measure the community's and association's assessment and perception of both the functioning of participatory governance and the proposals implemented. Future research should replicate this methodology at other intangible heritage sites such as Coll de Nargó, a neighbouring timber-raftsmen village, or at other cultural and natural heritage sites to compare its effectiveness in other environments.

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