

VALUES OF THE LARGEST MOSAIC MURAL IN LATIN AMERICA. THE CASE OF TRUJILLO-PERU

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KEY WORDS

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SUMMARY

Murals are evidence of urban evolution and fulfil an aesthetic function, but they also highlight different values. In order to analyse the intrinsic values of the mosaic mural in the university city of Trujillo, Peru, a case study was carried out. A comprehensive array of data collection methods was employed, encompassing video recordings, testimonies, journalistic statements, photographic documentation, on-site observation records, and discourse analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the mural in question, hailed as the largest of its kind in Latin America, serves as an invaluable regional heritage asset, particularly in the domains of education, cultural identity, and tourism.

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1. Introduction

The practice of mural art has its origins in ancient times, with evidence of its presence dating back to the ancient Americas and Peru. In the field of American art, Mariana Accornero has provided seminal insights into the art of the pre-Columbian peoples (Accornero, 2007a; Accornero, 2007b). Jean Guffroy has notably emphasised the rock art of ancient Peru (Guffroy, 1999), while the anthropologist Max Uhle has contributed significantly to the understanding of Moche art (Uhle, 1913). Years later, the researcher Duccio Bonavia dealt with pre-Columbian mural art with probity, recording more than thirty mural paintings at the national level, including those of Huaca del Dragón, Chan Chan, Huaca de la Luna, among others (Bonavia, 1974). Bonavia, an Italian scholar based in Peru, had close ties with the National University of Trujillo (UNT), an institution that recognised him on multiple occasions. His work was also consulted in the elaboration of the mural.

The UNT is located in the city of Trujillo, in the region of La Libertad. It is noteworthy as the inaugural university of the republican era in Latin America, established on 10 May 1824 by Simón Bolívar and José Faustino Sánchez Carrión (Centurión, 1943; Centurión, 1981; Utano Mazuda and Culquichicón Gómez, 2001). The university city, which covers an area of more than 40 hectares, is surrounded by a wall, and on part of this wall, on two of its four main sides, the spacious mosaic mural has been built. The extensive mural on Avenida Juan Pablo II in Trujillo is notable for its combination of abstract and real elements, representing scenarios where these two dimensions do not exclude each other. These scenarios, comprising both real and ideal elements, intervene with each other, thereby constituting a cognitive synthesis of the urban panorama. In essence, the iconographies of muralism serve to transport real and/or abstract images. Cruz (2016) refers to the notion that: "This mural is decorated with a work of art, for which the mosaic technique has been used, which consists of cutting ceramic of one square centimetre of different colours and making these designs", which responds to the tenor of theories about street art that depend on labour, cultural or geographical contexts (Bianco, 2018). The mural located on Jesús de Nazaret Avenue, entitled "Pinacoteca Artística de la Historia Milenaria Regional", serves as a visual representation of the transcendent events that have shaped the historical landscape of La Libertad and northern Peru.

Urban art, irrespective of geographical location, "is a phenomenon that is here to stay, and its most relevant characteristic may be the fact that it intensifies over time, enabling, among other things, the emergence of new ways of perceiving the landscape it influences" (Gaviria-Puerta, 2022, p. 33). The creation of the University City's artistic mural was led by Rafael Hastings, with Carlos del Mar Pacheco serving as the executing artist and coordinator of the artistic team, and the participation of over twenty artists (Velásquez, 2008). The rector who promoted the mural was Jorge Ruiz Dávila and the manager was Orlando Velásquez Benites, a teacher who brought the idea to fruition by chairing various commissions. The mural was created to prevent the perimeter fence from being used for propaganda purposes, thus avoiding the ugliness that is evident in the form of ruins (Palomares López, 2017). The selection of the public space for the mural was made with the intention of ensuring its visibility by those who would appreciate it; as Briceño-Ávila (2018) points out: "public space exists by its quality, by and for those who move around on foot, this is its main priority, the reason for its existence, planning and design: the pedestrian" (p. 12).

The construction of the mural commenced in 1992 with the activities of a preliminary commission (Velásquez, 2008). "On 18 February 1994, the process of adhering the mosaics to the mural's structural framework commenced" (Meregildo, 2023), marking the inauguration of the initial phase of the Juan Pablo II Avenue on 12 December 2008, during the tenure of four successive rectors. The event was highlighted by the Peruvian News Agency Andina (Agencia Peruana de Noticias Andina) (2008): "The mosaic mural, measuring one kilometre in length, was inaugurated amidst a colourful parade in the city of Trujillo, capital of the department of La Libertad". This event marked the culmination of the initial phase of a project that was subsequently followed by a second phase, during which the regional and national essence was revalued. The mural captured the natural landscape, characterised by deserts, hills, and a rich variety of fauna and flora, as well as the cultural landscape, encompassing daily and historical events, and artistic expressions such as the marinera, a traditional dance. The legacy of notable individuals, including César Vallejo, Haya de la Torre, Antenor Orrego and Ciro Alegría, is also commemorated. The perimeter walls of the first republican university serve as a tangible representation of the immense artistic work.

On 15 October 2009, the commencement of the second phase of the mural on Avenida Jesús de Nazaret was formally declared. During this occasion, the rector conveyed his sentiments to the Peruvian News Agency Andina (2009) as follows: "We are the only university in the world that has this type of artistic work. During my visit to Europe, I exhibited it and many were impressed by its beauty and expansive scale". The mural, which spans approximately one and a half kilometres, encompasses an area of four thousand five hundred square metres and was constructed using forty-five million pieces of mosaic, each measuring one square centimetre (Meregildo, 2023).

The mosaic mural at the Universidad Nacional del Trujillo (UNT), regarded as the longest in Latin America (Dirección de Imagen Institucional de la UNT, 2020; La Riva Vegazzo, 2012), has been the subject of nearly three decades of effort, with the two stages of its construction now complete. This mural has been identified as a significant component of "Trujillo's cultural heritage, thereby establishing it as a tourist attraction in the region" (Coronado, 2019). "The initial phase of the project is situated on Juan Pablo II Avenue and features pre-Hispanic motifs. The second stage is located on Jesús de Nazaret Avenue and relates to the millenary history of the region of La Libertad" (UNESCO, 2023). This work is of outstanding universal value in that it incorporates, with colossal artistic class, various cultural elements, such as the Citadel of Chan-Chan, which has been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The World Heritage Centre of the aforementioned international organisation defines outstanding universal value as "cultural significance so exceptional that it transcends national boundaries and is of common interest to present and future generations of all humanity" (World Heritage Centre, 2008), a definition that "emphasises the universality and exceptionality of the value" (Villaseñor Alonso, 2011).

Urban muralism has been described as a "ubiquitous phenomenon" which "extends independently of the size of the localities that host these colossal works, and which arouses great interest on a large number of levels: cultural, social, urban, economic or academic, among others" (Fernández Arcos, 2023, p. 48). 48) and many of them merit consideration due to their role in constituting the heritage of cities. There is a global tendency to protect cultural property, as evidenced by the ratification of the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the "Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" by the majority of countries worldwide (World Heritage Centre, 2008). However, the Trujillo mural does not align with the neoliberal urban development model, nor does it serve as a commodity, a tool for de-ideologisation, or what Abram (2024) refers to as the "muralisation of capital". Instead, from the perspective of its creators (artists, historians, and archaeologists), the mural's objective is to revalue regional culture, identity, and other pertinent aspects. As Tremblin (2024) observes, the mural occupies a significant graphic position within the urban landscape and is presented as a continuous dialogue.

The article is the result of a study whose objective was to analyse in the urban landscape the educational, cultural and touristic value of the mosaic mural of the university city of Trujillo, La Libertad, Peru, associated with the following question: How does the educational, cultural, and touristic value of the mosaic mural of the university city of Trujillo stand out in the urban landscape? This question is addressed through a case study (George & Bennett, 2005; Yacuzzi, 2005). This artistic work, when considered within the context of the architectural and urban framework, enables analysis from diverse perspectives, including educational, cultural, and tourist-related vantages. This analysis can be facilitated through the utilisation of varied techniques, subjects, and temporal perspectives.

2. Material and Methods

The present study was guided by a case study design. In this type of study, qualitative methods "allow us to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions and meanings of the participants, which helps to understand the context and the influence of social, cultural or historical factors on the phenomenon under study" (Medina Romero et al., 2023, p. 104). The study employed a single case design, utilising multiple units of analysis (Yacuzzi, 2005). Information was collected from various sources and informants, using discourse analysis and triangulation. The analysis encompassed six videos in Spanish, broadcast from 2008 to 2024, along with eight interviews conducted in July 2024 with professionals versed in the intrinsic values contained in the mural of the university city of Trujillo. The latter set of interviews was obtained through the process of data saturation (Ortega Bastidas, 2020). Triangulation was employed to ensure the convergence of data or evidence, thereby enhancing the reliability of the results (Medina Romero et al., 2023).

3. Results

The artist responsible for the creation of the mural adorning the university city of the UNT's first stage was Rafael Hastings, while the execution of the mural was overseen by Carlos del Mar Pacheco, who also served as the coordinator of the artistic team. The president and manager of the commissions of teachers of the Faculty of Social Sciences was Orlando Velásquez Benites, and the initiating rector was Jorge Ruiz Dávila (Velásquez, 2008). In order to avoid the appearance of ugliness in the urban area, a mural was planned and "the walls should not be used as blackboards for political purposes" (report by Iván La Riva Vegazzo, on TV Cosmos Perú, 2008). Hastings, a renowned national artist, hailed from Lima, while the artists accompanying him were descended from the mochero masters, representing an imperturbable cultural heritage and the unique ability to capture the essence of architecture, ceramics, textiles, painting, and sculpture, as well as, in this particular instance, the exquisite murals that they have produced (Velásquez, 2008, p. 193). The aforementioned artist who promoted the work expressed to the aforementioned author: "I am composing the work as if it were an immense score with long crescendos and vibratos" (Velásquez, 2008, p. 195).

Regarding the magnitude of the work, in 2008 at the conclusion of the first stage of the mural, its creator Rafael Hastings in a speech expressed: «16 years ago a dream began that is now going to be fulfilled. Yes, at first it seemed more like a nightmare and not a dream, because having in front of a canvas more than a kilometer long was quite complicated" and when the artist was asked: What does this mean? What stories are behind it? «Many, many stories. The first stories about the beginning of the mural were absolutely Trujillo stories, because it was my trip with the archaeologists to La Pampa and Cupisnique, the field watercolors that I made, etc.» The cultural manager Luis Repetto notes that it is the "largest mural in America" with the mosaic technique (Castillo, 2012; Orgullo truxillano, 2016; Radio Programas del Perú, 2012).

The mural in question has been found to contain significant educational potential (Cruz, 2016). Pacheco (interviewed by Sánchez, 2023) has highlighted that: "The university has been good enough to educate the people, the public, with these works of art". Furthermore, historian Iván La Riva has indicated that "tourism students can generate several interpretation scripts of this mural" (TV Cosmos Perú, 2008), thereby serving to develop their interpretative skills. The mural's grandeur in the university city served as a catalyst for the creation of a mural of significant artistic and cultural proportions on health in the Faculty of Medicine of the same UNT (Aguado Peña, 2020).

Figure 1. Sánchez Carrión, bell tower and house with arches in Huamachuco.



Source. Authors' photograph, 2024 (section of the artistic mural).

This image of José Faustino Sánchez Carrión serves to pay homage not only to the founder of the first republican university in America, but also to the most prominent civilian of that period of independence and Simón Bolívar's first minister (Porrás Barrenechea, 1953). The figure of the hero and heroine of the

homeland is thus highlighted, as is their homeland, Huamachuco, represented by its ancient bell tower and the house of arches, where the final strategy of the South American War of Independence was designed, just three months before the victory at Junín and seven months before the final battle at Ayacucho, where the role of the sole minister was decisive (Gamio, 1988).

Figure 2. Giant head of a bird from time immemorial.



Source. Authors' photograph, 2024 (section of the artistic mural).

The cultural value of the mural is frequently highlighted. At the inauguration of the II stage of the UNT mosaic mural, called the Artistic Pinacoteca of Regional Millennial History, the president of the Congress of the Republic Luis Alva Castro said in his speech that the work "will help the population become aware of the identity with the regional historical legacy." In this peculiar Pinacoteca, elements of the Mochica culture can be seen, such as their warriors and the god Degollador; the Chimú culture with its founder and first ruler Takaynamo, the caballitos de totora and the citadel of Chan-Chan; the colonial era and its architecture, such as colonial windows; the main square of Trujillo from the beginning of the 20th century. This stage is a genuine artistic gallery of ancient history. The mural work closed with the institutional shield or emblem of the UNT. "The design of the work allows it to be appreciated from afar, it has a landscape support and worked with the impressionist technique, where the background is a range of blue and the ochers are placed in the foreground so that they stand out," highlighted the responsible artist José Pacheco Vega. to the newspaper *La Industria* de Trujillo on December 16, 2022.

Cruz (2016) underlines the significance of the art museum as the "cultural sequence of our region [La Libertad]", while Repetto (2016) points out that the "main façade exhibits an iconography that is connected to emblematic manifestations of this city, such as, for example, the proclamation of independence on 29 December 1820". However, historical culture is also evident, as Cruz (2016) notes, citing a "scene of the founding of the Villa de Trujillo and the arrival of the Spaniards through the mangrove sector of Tumbes" and the presence of "the city of Chanchán and Takaynamo, who is the Chimú leader, who according to legend came from the sea to organise that town. We observed the lady of Cao, the god Aiapaec and a series of Moche sacrificial rituals". The mural goes through different stages, from the lithic period until the Republican era.

The artist José Pacheco has stated that the 500-metre wall on Avenida Nazaret contains "a slightly more historical part, more of a testimony of Trujillo" and has further added that as a Pinacoteca "it is made with various paintings, various works by various artists that have been captured here and each painting is a representation of our city... From prehistory, history, pre-Inca, Inca and the republic... to the present day", in contrast to the mural of the first stage on Avenida Juan Pablo II, which is more artistic, including "personal compositions by the master Rafael Hastings" (Pacheco, interviewed by Sánchez, 2023). Juan Pablo II, which is more artistic, including "personal compositions by the master

Rafael Hastings" (Pacheco, interviewed by Sánchez, 2023). The cultural value of the mural is intrinsic to its nature (Fernández Arcos, 2023).

Figure 3. Mochica warriors depicted at Huaca de la Luna



Source. Photograph by the authors, 2024 (section of the Pinacoteca).

José Pacheco Vega, an experienced restorer in the citadel of Chan-Chan and the Huacas Moche who completed the mosaic murals, stated that the emblem griffin or coat of arms of the UNT "represents the final closure of the mural art gallery... it has a landscape support and is worked with the impressionist technique, where the background is a range of blues and the ochres are placed in the foreground to stand out" (UNT press release, 2020). This symbol of the UNT is the one that best identifies the bicentennial academy. Dated from 1941, it is based on the Coat of Arms of the city of Trujillo, granted by King Carlos I of Spain in 1537. The symbol highlights the name of the founder of the university with the volitive lamp, an oval with the red and white colours of the republican flag, an olive tree crown and laurel, symbols of glory and peace (Utano Mazuda and Culquichicón Gómez, 2001). As Baraliu and Muharremi (2023) argue, this mural has been used to express the manifestations of a people in a considered manner.

Figure 4. Representative figures from the history of the university and Peru



Source. Photograph by the authors, 2024 (section of the Pinacoteca).

The mural features prominent figures from the regional and national culture and history of the 19th and 20th centuries, including the "Grupo Norte", a group that included César Vallejo, Haya de la Torre, Antenor Orrego, José Eulogio Garrido, and Ciro Alegría (Luján Sandoval, 2022; Robles Ortiz, 2015). Three distinct directions can be identified within this movement: The first of these is the aesthetic or poetic, the most vigorous of the three with Vallejo as its maximal representative. The second is the

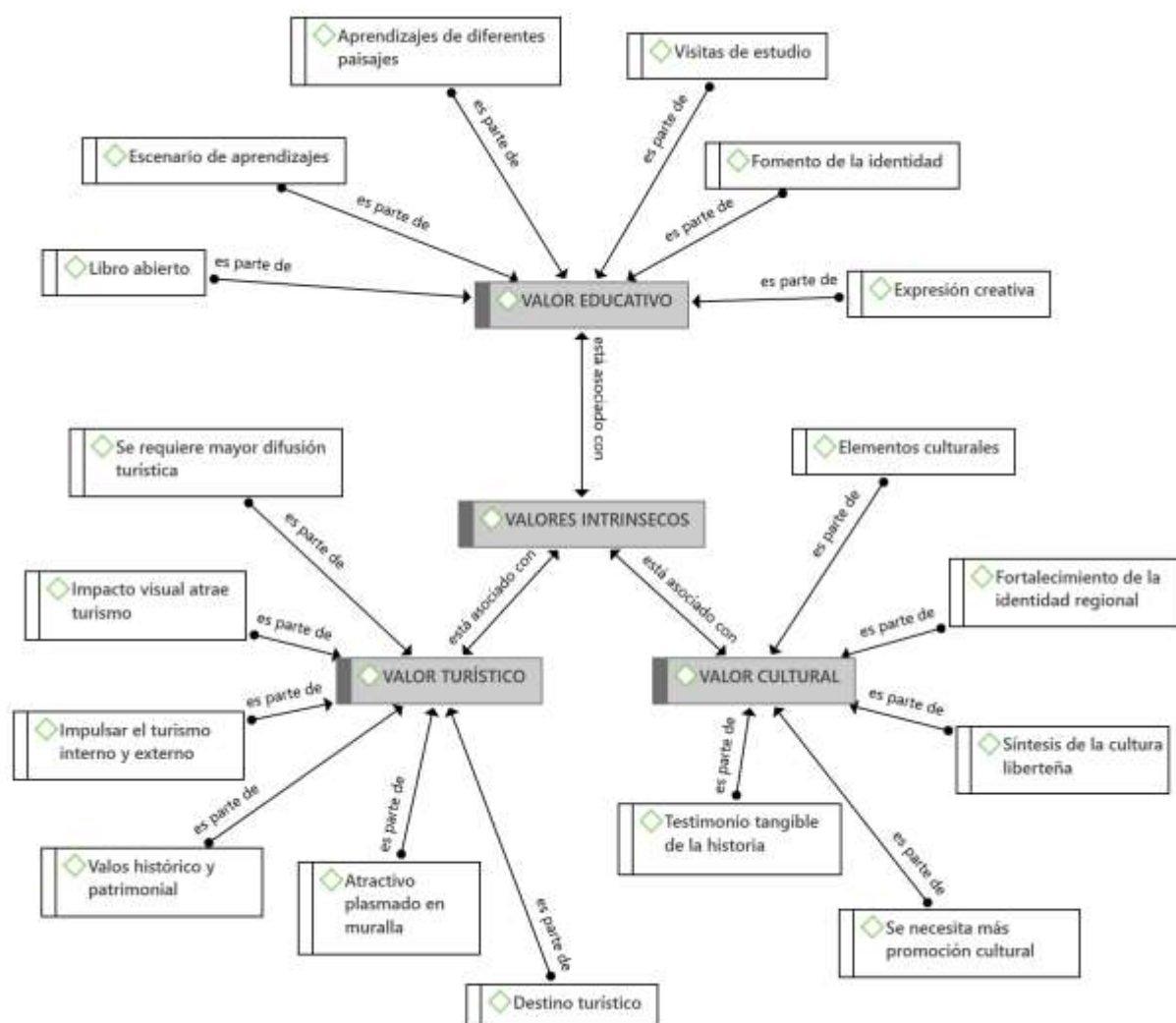
political, led by Haya de la Torre. The third and final one is the ideological and theoretical, in which the other members converge (Orrego, 1989, cited by Rivero-Ayllón, 2015).

Figure 5. The god Aipaec or Degollador, the deity of the Moche culture



Source. Photograph by the authors, 2024 (section of the Pinacoteca).

The rector of the UNT stated in 2020 that the work of art is situated "in an area of obligatory attendance by those people who come to Trujillo from other places and by the locals themselves, because it is a very attractive place; here the historical development and cultural expressions are reflected" (Dirección de Imagen Institucional de la UNT, 2020). In 2021, the Peruvian State, through the Regional Government of La Libertad and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (Mincetur), recognised the mosaic mural as one of the fifteen tourist attractions of the Trujillo destination with the "Safe Travels seal of approval for its quality services" (Mincetur, 2021). The award was presented by the Minister of Mincetur and the Regional Governor of La Libertad to the rector of the university (UNT, 2020). "The mosaic mural in question has been lauded as a remarkable work, offering a visual representation of diverse historical passages" and adds "Its uniqueness and extraordinary artistic quality are particularly noteworthy. It is of great significance not only for the UNT, but also for the general public and tourists", declared the rector in 2021, following its recognition by the Regional Management of Foreign Trade, Tourism and Handicrafts of La Libertad with the Safe Travels seal (Buenapepa, 2023). From a tourism perspective, Castillo (2012) emphasises the importance of the local population and tourists appreciating the mural's true dimensions, which has been lauded by critics as a "pictorial score" due to its colour and dynamism. These accolades, bestowed upon the emblem of muralism, serve as a testament to the profound intrinsic value of Trujillo's cultural heritage, a testament that extends beyond the local context to encompass the broader region of Latin America. Consequently, the mosaic mural has been elevated to the status of a tourist destination in Trujillo, standing shoulder to shoulder with other notable landmarks such as the colonial architecture of the Historical Centre, the museums, the Huaca de la Luna of the Mochica culture, and the mud city of Chan Chan, a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Chimú culture.

Figure 6. Intrinsic values of the university city of Trujillo, Peru

Source. Authors' elaboration, 2024.

The interviewees identified three intrinsic values of the mural in the University City of Trujillo: educational value, cultural value and tourist value. The mural has been conceived as "a beautiful work of art to pay homage to the human manifestations that forged the culture of our country" (Castillo, 2012). In terms of educational value, the interviews highlighted that the work functions as an open book and a learning scenario; as well as being an optimal destination for study visits in various areas due to its educational potential (Cruz, 2016), it allows for the promotion of regional and national identity, as well as being a notable expression of creativity, in line with the opinion of Velásquez (2008). Regarding the cultural value of the mural, the interviewees concur that the mural exhibits a compendium of cultural elements from diverse historical periods, thereby reinforcing the regional identity and embodying a synthesis of Liberteño culture. It serves as a tangible testament to the regional history, underscoring the necessity for enhanced cultural promotion, both among the local populace and visitors. With respect to its tourist value, the mural is considered a notable tourist destination in the city due to its status as an artistic attraction. It is regarded as a valuable heritage asset, representing the historical and cultural legacy of Trujillo over thousands of years, particularly highlighting the pre-Columbian, colonial, and republican eras. However, its significant visual impact on visitors necessitates enhanced promotion and dissemination to promote its recognition as a destination. The mural has been formally recognised by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (Mincetur) through the award of the Safe Travels seal (Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, 2020; deTrujillo.com, 2021), yet it is imperative that the Commission

for the Promotion of Peru for Exports and Tourism (PromPerú) plays a pivotal role in its promotion, as an entity closely affiliated with the aforementioned ministry. The values in question are also highlighted in the videos analysed, which implies a uniform vision of the mural's values.

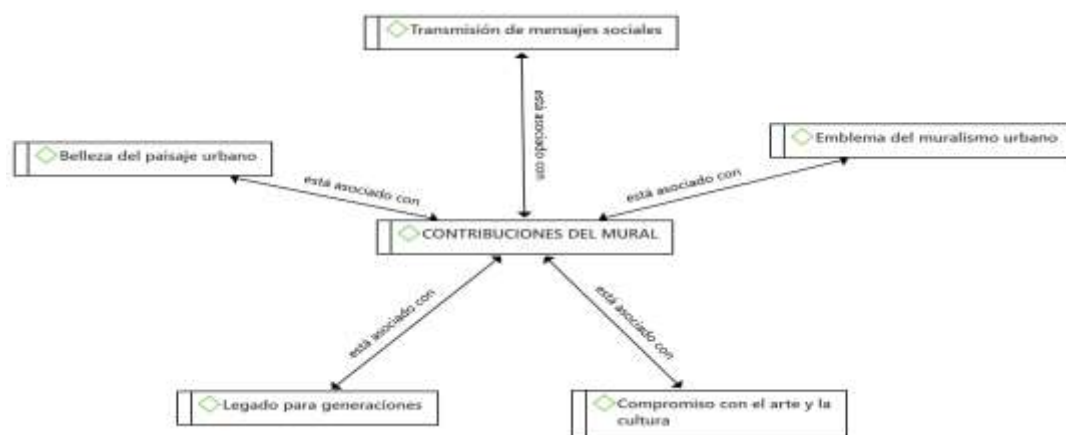


Figure 7. Contributions from the mural of the university city of Trujillo, Peru
Source. Authors' elaboration, 2024.

The preceding figure illustrates the remarkable contributions of the mural in the university city of Trujillo, emphasising the following: the transmission of social messages through ideas aimed at generating a positive impact on society based on the cultural and artistic values it contains; as an emblem of urban muralism from its condition as a work of great artistic value, the remarkable fruit of creativity; a reflection of the commitment to art and culture of the university within the framework of its mission and social responsibility; it constitutes a legacy for generations of natural, cultural and human history; it is a beauty of the urban landscape that combines art and architecture in the beautiful university city of Trujillo. All of the aforementioned aspects are in alignment with the content of the videos that have been analysed. The mural in question can be regarded as constituting "one of the most extraordinary treasures that human creativity has been able to conceive at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century" (Velásquez, 2008, p. 190). It represents a monumental work that fits in with the trend of "the use of muralism to attract tourists, as well as to regenerate depressed areas of cities" (Martínez Rodríguez, 2023, p. 68).

4. Conclusions

The mural in the UNT University City of Trujillo is regarded as a symbol of Peruvian and Latin American mural painting. Utilising the innovative technique of mosaic with one centimetre square majolica tesserae, the artist has transformed one and a half kilometres of length into a confluence of pre-Hispanic artistic and cultural traditions. The mural's depictions encompass a wide array of subjects, including volcanoes, fish, prehistoric birds, lakes, the Parthenon, Italian angels, and abstract themes. Notably, it incorporates elements that reflect the rich artistic and cultural heritage of the pre-Columbian Mochica and Chimu civilisations, as well as the splendour of the Huacas de la Luna with the god Aiapaec, the city of Chan-Chan, and the caballitos de totora. In addition to the cultural traditions of the colony and the republic, there is also space for nature, with birds and other animals, plants, volcanoes, mountains, jungles, sandbanks, storms and gales. Furthermore, the region boasts a rich tapestry of historical figures and events, both regional and national in scope.

The mosaic wall, which covers 50% of the perimeter fence of the UNT University City and is the largest of its kind in Latin America, is presented to society as an open book, embellished by art, and represents a significant educational resource, showcasing elements of the natural landscape and the rich cultural tradition of the region. The wall has the potential to become a place where students of different levels of education, citizens of La Libertad and tourists should go. Furthermore, it is of inestimable cultural value, since it contains a variety of creations from pre-Hispanic civilisations and from the colonial and republican eras. The mosaic's tourist potential has been recognised by the Peruvian national government and the regional government of La Libertad. Further development of this potential

is possible, however, with the determined support of the university, municipal, regional and national authorities, as well as civil society. Consequently, greater efforts must be made to provide this significant creation with a suitable location that will showcase its educational, cultural and tourist values. This is a viewpoint being emphasised by prominent figures and institutions that are recognising the magnificence of the emblematic work of mural painting in Peru.

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