

SEEDS OF HONEY AND HOPE: ART, CHILDHOOD AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE IN BAJO CAUCA

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in communities in the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia, Colombia, with the aim of preserving and transmitting ancestral beekeeping knowledge to children aged between 6 and 10 living in territories affected by forced displacement, illegal mining and violence. The initiative seeks to strengthen intergenerational continuity and ensure the sustainability of the beekeeping production chain by integrating cultural traditions with creative experiences that recognise children as active agents of change.

The strategy combines the systematisation of traditional practices, the creation of play-based learning spaces, and the development of educational materials incorporating artistic and narrative expressions. This approach fosters not only the acquisition of technical skills, but also a stronger sense of identity and belonging to the territory, valuing tradition as a resource for social cohesion.

Within a context of social and economic vulnerability, the initiative becomes a bridge between past and future, strengthening cultural resilience and providing children with opportunities to protect their environment and contribute to the construction of a more peaceful territory.

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1. Introduction

The preservation of ancestral knowledge and artisanal practices constitutes one of the major contemporary challenges in the face of globalisation and cultural homogenisation. In contexts shaped by violence, territorial dispossession and illegal economies, these traditional practices are not only fragile but are also constantly threatened by their declining relevance among younger generations (Loewen & Kinshuk, 2012). In Colombia, and particularly in the Bajo Cauca subregion of Antioquia, beekeeping has in recent years represented an activity with considerable socio-economic and environmental potential. However, the structural conditions affecting the territory — including illegal mining, armed conflict, multidimensional poverty and forced displacement — have limited the transmission of knowledge between generations, weakening both the social fabric and the sustainability of this practice (Gobernación de Antioquia, 2020).

Against this backdrop, childhood emerges as a central actor in cultural revitalisation and in the possibility of building alternative futures. Studies in intergenerational education show that children can act as catalysts for change when they actively participate in learning processes connected to territory and tradition (Ballantyne et al., 1998; Bolaños & Rentería, 2020; Garcés, 2021). In this sense, involving children in beekeeping practices not only ensures intergenerational continuity, but also connects them with values of sustainability, environmental resilience and community cohesion (Pocol et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2023). At the same time, this approach highlights the pedagogical value of art as an ethno-educational tool that fosters autonomy and ethnocultural development among children and young people, underlining the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into educational processes (Bolaños & Rentería, 2020; Garcés, 2021).

Beekeeping, understood beyond its productive dimension, becomes a vehicle for peacebuilding and for restoring both territory and intergenerational bonds within vulnerable communities (Skewes, 2019). This activity has the capacity to strengthen local economies, promote lawful forms of livelihood and steer children and young people away from illegal networks through processes of identity formation and belonging connected to the territory. In contexts such as Bajo Cauca, initiatives of this kind acquire an urgent and strategic character.

However, the challenge lies not only in preserving traditional practices, but also in designing innovative and memorable methodologies capable of transforming this knowledge into meaningful experiences for younger generations. In this regard, art and design offer fertile ground for research-creation by enabling sensitive, narrative and visual forms of expression that strengthen cultural appropriation. Likewise, art reflects the most representative features of a society and acts as a privileged mediator between tradition and contemporaneity. Similarly, Blanco (2020) emphasises that arts education constitutes a key pedagogical tool for fostering creativity and respect for cultural diversity, while simultaneously strengthening students' identity and self-esteem (Concha-Huarcaya et al., 2024; Tao & Tao, 2024).

Within this framework, the present study explores how art functions as both a nostalgic infrastructure and a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, collective memory and cultural identities, particularly within Afro-Colombian communities that have used these practices as forms of healing and resistance in the face of armed conflict (Copete, 2022; Larrahondo, 2020).

Research-creation, as a methodological approach, makes it possible to combine the documentation of knowledge with processes of artistic co-creation in which children and beekeepers engage in dialogue and collaboratively generate representations of knowledge. Within these dynamics, painting workshops, oral storytelling, community theatre and graphic design become tools that transform beekeeping experience into accessible pedagogical and cultural material (Álvarez Toribio, 2024). This perspective goes beyond the instrumental teaching of beekeeping techniques by placing them within a symbolic and affective framework in which children come to recognise themselves as heirs to and guardians of a tradition.

Likewise, UNESCO (2014) has insisted that intangible cultural heritage should be incorporated into educational systems as a pedagogical resource aimed at reinforcing cultural identity and social cohesion. In this regard, ancestral knowledge cannot remain confined to family practices alone; it must be translated into narratives, objects and experiences that children are able to integrate into their educational development. Cultural appropriation, when carried out through art and design, not only preserves tradition, but also reinterprets and adapts it to new social and technological realities (Kolay, 2016).

Another key aspect concerns knowledge management within artisanal production chains. Khalfan et al. (2010) highlight that knowledge management systems are crucial for the sustainability of productive sectors, as they enable practices distributed among multiple actors to be captured, organised and transmitted. In the case of beekeeping in Bajo Cauca, this process involves not only the technical recording of activities, but also the creation of artistic and pedagogical media that ensure their appropriation by children and young people. Here, design fulfils a mediating role through the production of infographics, illustrated stories and interactive guides that facilitate playful and collective learning.

The relevance of this initiative is also linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project engages directly with SDG 1 (No Poverty) by offering lawful productive alternatives to vulnerable communities; with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by strengthening sustainable production chains; and with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by promoting beekeeping as an environmentally respectful practice (United Nations, 2015). Likewise, its educational impact is connected to SDG 4 (Quality Education) through the integration of ancestral knowledge into innovative pedagogical methodologies.

In a context where communities face profound socio-economic inequalities, research-creation emerges as a means of intertwining memory, art and sustainability. As Schiuma (2011) argues, art-based initiatives have a positive impact on organisational innovation and on the resilience of communities. In this sense, the intersection of beekeeping, art and education in Bajo Cauca not only ensures the continuity of an ancestral tradition but also provides children with tools to construct narratives of hope and alternative pathways towards dignified lives.

In light of the above, this article explores how the integration of ancestral knowledge, beekeeping practices and artistic methodologies shapes a model of intergenerational transmission capable of responding to the social, cultural and environmental challenges of Bajo Cauca. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the study proposes understanding beekeeping as an expanded field that articulates production, identity and cultural creation, with children positioned as central agents in the construction of sustainable and peaceful territories.

1.1. Ancestral Knowledge, Arts and Sustainability in Contexts of Vulnerability

The intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge constitutes a central element in the preservation of cultural identities and the strengthening of community resilience. In the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia —a territory shaped by forced displacement, illegal mining and structural violence— beekeeping practices have generated a cultural and economic narrative that intertwines memory, territory and sustainability. Although this continuity is threatened by cultural erosion and the lack of generational succession (Gobernación de Antioquia, 2020), childhood emerges as a key agent of change when actively integrated into educational processes linked to intangible cultural heritage (Ballantyne et al., 1998).

Art and design emerge as catalysts for cultural appropriation and innovative pedagogies. Niwagaba (2024) highlights that artistic expressions make it possible to articulate and reinterpret community practices. Consequently, transformations become evident not only in individual and collective identities, but also in the ways communities interact with their environment and cultural heritage (Heard & Bartleet, 2024). From an urban perspective, Ondiviela García et al. (2025) argue that “the more creative a city is, the more resilient it becomes” (p. 68), reinforcing the idea that, in vulnerable contexts such as Bajo Cauca, beekeeping may be reinterpreted through

creative practices in ways that strengthen the social fabric. Similarly, Fabbri et al. (2020) and Semeghini (2020) examine urban art as a symbolic resource in the reconstruction of cultural memory, an approach that offers valuable insights for understanding beekeeping as a living form of heritage transmitted to children.

Interdisciplinary education provides another important perspective. Simão (2016) demonstrates that pedagogical approaches combining art, design and local culture foster both the appropriation of knowledge and the development of transferable skills, underlining the relevance of incorporating beekeeping into research-creation strategies. Equally relevant is the contribution of Pazmiño et al. (2021), who show how urban graphic design contributes to identity formation, offering direct inspiration for the development of illustrated booklets, community infographics and murals aimed at transmitting beekeeping knowledge to children.

According to UNESCO (2014), intangible cultural heritage should be incorporated into educational systems as a pedagogical resource capable of strengthening identity and social cohesion. Within this framework, research-creation proposes methodologies that not only document knowledge, but also transform it into meaningful experiences. Workshops based on oral storytelling, painting, theatre and visual design become tools that connect ancestral knowledge with sensitive and contemporary forms of expression (Álvarez Toribio, 2024).

2. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative in nature and grounded in a socio-critical approach. It is based on the collection of field data through methods that enable an in-depth understanding of cultural and social dynamics (Granados & Hooker, 2023). Techniques such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews with community members, local leaders and holders of ancestral knowledge, as well as co-creation workshops with children, were employed in order to document their perceptions and experiences (Morales-Pérez et al., 2022; Nieto-Vallejo et al., 2020).

Biographical and ethnographic methods were also used, including the review of academic sources such as indexed journal articles and doctoral theses, in order to ensure the rigour and theoretical grounding of the findings (Ocampo-Talero et al., 2023). This approach enabled data triangulation, enriching the interpretation of the phenomena under study and offering a holistic perspective on the interconnection between art, childhood and ancestral knowledge (Quiñones, 2017). By integrating multiple sources of qualitative information, this methodological design seeks to generate in-depth analyses based not on statistical validation, but on a contextualised understanding of cultural realities (Granados & Hooker, 2023).

In particular, social cartography was employed as a key participatory tool for identifying sites of memory, lived territories and zones of conflict, enabling participants to map their own narratives and worldviews (Cubillos, 2022). This process was complemented by the identification of settlements and the geolocation of key sites associated with beekeeping activities, demonstrating the method's capacity to represent complex dynamics and interactions within geographical and social spaces. Beyond facilitating the collection of spatial and narrative data, this method also empowered communities by validating situated forms of knowledge and promoting critical awareness of their environment (Granados & Hooker, 2023). The articulation of these qualitative methodologies enabled the construction of an inventory of natural and cultural heritage, particularly within informal settlements, where the community plays an active role in shaping the territory (Villamil-Mejía & Blanco-Ramírez, 2022).

This methodological approach aligns with the perspective of understanding reality as a rhizome, recognising the multiple connections and non-linear nature of human experiences within the territory (Ngutuku, 2023). The approach is further complemented by documentary analysis, understood as a qualitative research strategy that combines interview techniques with the systematic examination of existing records and archives (Ribeiro & Altamirano, 2023). In addition, technological tools were incorporated to support the interpretation of behavioural

patterns, and NVivo software was used to cross-reference and refine the information in a more impartial manner.

The methodological process was carried out as follows:

Phase 1: The project was introduced to beekeepers and associations belonging to the Bajo Cauca Beekeeping APP.

Phase 2: A diagnostic assessment and characterisation of the target population were conducted in order to identify and understand the ancestral knowledge and artisanal practices of beekeepers in the subregion. To this end, in-depth interviews, life-history collection and participant observation were undertaken (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Source: Own elaboration, 2026

Phase 3: The field data collected were processed through micro-analysis and the use of NVivo software, enabling the documentation of the stories that would serve as the primary input for the co-creation activities with children.

Phase 4: Development of artistic co-creation workshops with children from communities located in the municipalities involved in the project within the Bajo Cauca subregion of Antioquia.

3. Results

The findings of this study reveal the profound interconnection between art, childhood and ancestral knowledge as fundamental pillars in the construction of resilience and peace in the Bajo Cauca region. This relationship is reflected in cultural practices that reinterpret collective memory and strengthen community identity (Ossa et al., 2021). The results demonstrate how the visual memory and oral narratives of local inhabitants, expressed through different artistic

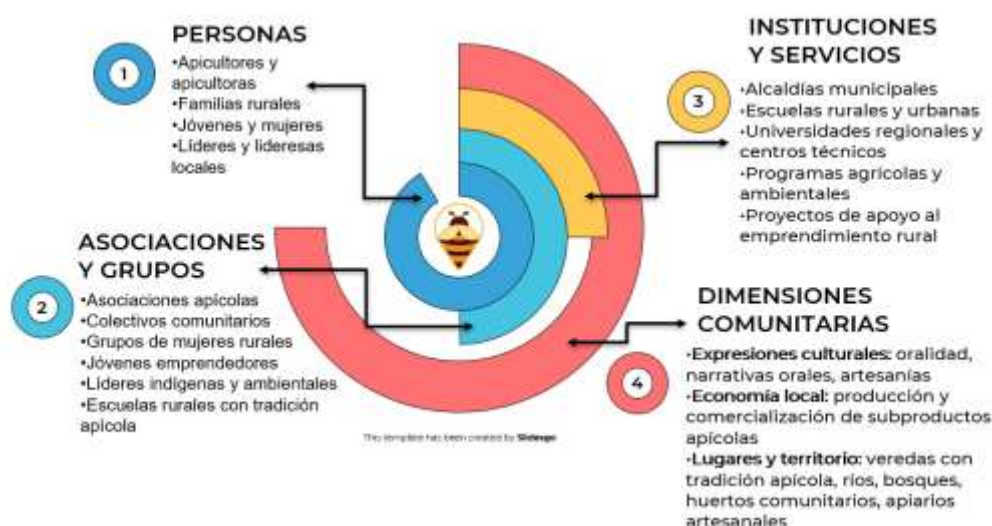
manifestations, play an essential role in the reconstruction of intangible cultural heritage and in the symbolic reconfiguration of the territory (Monti, 2020). Likewise, the fieldwork process enabled the collection, systematisation and visibility of the ancestral knowledge and artisanal practices that sustain beekeeping activities across the municipalities of the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia. Through interviews, life histories and participant observation, key actors within rural communities and municipalities were identified, including community leaders, traditional beekeepers, women recognised as guardians of ancestral knowledge, and young people undergoing training processes.

The application of pedagogical social cartography emerged as a key instrument for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as it enabled local actors to express their perceptions and expectations, thereby facilitating the collective construction of territorial knowledge (Romero, 2018). In addition, the study demonstrated that the integration of ancestral knowledge into pedagogical and artistic practices contributes significantly to the recovery of identity and to the strengthening of social cohesion, particularly among younger generations (Ocampo-Talero et al., 2023). These findings highlight the importance of promoting learning experiences in non-formal settings through the use of local heritage as a vital resource for introducing children and young people to values such as social justice, solidarity and cultural empathy (Mora & Torres, 2019).

The construction of the social cartography became a collective exercise through which these voices and forms of knowledge were brought together within an integrative framework. The map, organised through concentric circles, structures the information across different levels: at the core are the beekeepers and their families; the second circle includes associations and community groups that support the practice; the third level incorporates educational institutions, municipal authorities and support programmes; and finally, the outer sphere highlights broader community dimensions related to cultural expressions, local economies and territory (see Figure 4).

These findings demonstrate that beekeeping extends far beyond a purely productive activity, forming part of a broader social, cultural and environmental network. Social cartography provides a comprehensive perspective on how ancestral knowledge, intergenerational transmission and local innovation intersect in sustaining biodiversity and territorial development in the Bajo Cauca region.

Figure 4. Social mapping



Source: Own elaboration, 2026

The study also highlighted how the philosophy of art intersects with the lived reality of children exposed to armed conflict, fostering resilience and social transformation through artistic expression (López et al., 2019). Photography and other artistic practices, such as drawing and painting, emerged as powerful tools for promoting everyday and community-based peace,

facilitating processes of healing, the construction of territorial identity and intergenerational dialogue within conflict-affected communities (Fairey et al., 2023; Guevara et al., 2021). This integration demonstrates the capacity of art to mediate the understanding and processing of traumatic experiences, consolidating spaces for identity reconstruction and the promotion of creative citizenship (Montáñez et al., 2022).

The methodology also made it possible to observe how storytelling and collective artistic creation function as cathartic mechanisms, providing children and young people with ways of processing experiences of violence and reconstructing their sense of belonging (Charles & Fowler-Watt, 2022). Emotional cartography, combined with these forms of expression, revealed both the emotional fractures and the resilience capacities within the community, emphasising the importance of care and the defence of rights (Romero, 2018). Furthermore, participatory action research emerged as a fundamental pedagogical strategy which, through the active involvement of the community, facilitated the development of critical awareness and the promotion of peace (Cerquera, 2009; Valencia-Gálvez, 2023). This collaborative approach transformed participants from passive subjects into active protagonists in the generation of new knowledge and in shaping their own territorial realities (Loaiza et al., 2019). Artistic practices not only function as channels for individual expression, but also reinforce social cohesion and community agency, as reflected in the increased participation of young people in activities promoting peace and psychosocial well-being in contexts of adversity (Anderson & Nesterova, 2024; Lee et al., 2019). Artistic production thus becomes consolidated as a catalyst for resilience in situations of armed conflict, enabling the expression of subjectivities and the construction of resilient identities (Buriel et al., 2020).

This artistic-pedagogical intervention demonstrates how cultural expressions can become powerful tools for rebuilding the social fabric and promoting mental health among vulnerable populations (Bedoya-Gallego et al., 2024). These findings are consistent with existing literature highlighting art as an effective means through which young people can develop a sense of purpose and hope, acquire artistic and life skills, and foster self-discovery and expression (Lee et al., 2019).

As part of the creative process, and in order to create an environment conducive to guiding and engaging children, stories were written using accessible and imaginative language that enabled children to understand the real and meaningful experiences gathered during fieldwork from beekeepers who have transformed the activity within the subregion into a driver of economic, social and environmental development. Through stories combining magical and realistic elements, children were introduced to the ancestral knowledge and artisanal practices associated with the beekeeping production chain in Bajo Cauca, which had previously been documented through the initial characterisation process carried out in the field.

Images 5, 6 and 7 show some of the activities carried out in the field with children from the participating communities.

Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



Source: Own elaboration, 2026

Working jointly with the partner company, educational materials were provided to introduce children to the role of bees as agents of territorial transformation, both from an environmental perspective linked to ecosystem conservation and from a social perspective that recognises beekeeping as a source of employment for more than 1,500 families in the subregion. The children were also given the opportunity to explore the organoleptic properties of honey, the structure of honeycombs and brood caps, and the role of each bee within the hive in sustaining these processes.

In addition, a framework was established through which the partner company, its strategic collaborators and the associated organisations may continue to promote spaces for interaction with children and young people, fostering greater understanding of the beekeeping production chain and helping to ensure its sustainability in the medium and long term.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study highlights the transformative capacity of art to facilitate emotional recovery and collective agency within communities affected by conflict (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2022; Smith, 2024). It thus reaffirms that artistic and cultural practices not only provide spaces for expression and healing but also constitute essential platforms for citizenship-building and social empowerment (Quinchuela, 2023; Montero, 2009). The findings demonstrate that research-creation, when articulated through artistic and cultural practices, opens up an innovative methodological horizon for understanding and transforming complex realities in contexts of conflict. The experience accumulated through long-term projects shows that the centrality of art lies not solely in its aesthetic dimension, but in its capacity to activate processes of dialogue, reinterpretation and the construction of collective meaning.

This research demonstrates how art, in its different manifestations, becomes a vehicle for social transformation, empowering communities and addressing conflict through processes of appropriation and self-management (Luna, 2020). This perspective emphasises the role of art as a fundamental mediator in the recovery of identity and social cohesion, particularly within vulnerable communities (Labor, 2018). Likewise, the impact of artistic practices on the social transformation of territory has shown that, beyond occupying leisure time, these activities constitute a key strategy for the containment and prevention of violence, fostering spaces of peace and well-being (Quinchuela, 2023).

Artistic education therefore emerges as a crucial component in the holistic development of children and young people living in conflict zones, providing tools for resilience and social reintegration (Golden et al., 2024; Quinchuela, 2023). Artistic expressions enable communities to engage with creative processes from within their own realities, opening spaces for dialogue and encouraging critical reflection on lived experiences (Quinchuela, 2023). In this way, a virtuous cycle is established in which artistic creation becomes a catalyst for critical reflection and for the construction of new collective narratives (Quinchuela, 2023). This interaction fosters an environment in which creativity acts as a mechanism for coping and empowerment, enabling individuals to express complex emotions that would otherwise be difficult to articulate verbally, while also strengthening networks of social support (Jaramillo et al., 2025; Moula et al., 2022).

In addition, creative expression promotes emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility, both of which are crucial for mental health in populations exposed to trauma (Jean-Berluce, 2024). This reinforces the premise that artistic interventions transform not only individuals, but also collective spaces, turning them into environments of resistance and community-building (Sanz & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2022). In this sense, the capacity of art to foster social cohesion and generate community autonomy constitutes a fundamental element in the rehabilitation of environmental and social conditions in sacrifice zones (Sanz & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2022). This perspective positions art as a key restorative force capable of repairing damaged relational values and rebuilding the social fabric affected by environmental degradation and socio-territorial conflicts.

The study further demonstrates that the incorporation of artistic activities not only functions as a healing practice but also enables the creation of safe environments in which communities can process local realities, strengthen identities and reaffirm their collective agency, thereby fostering collective resilience (Haring et al., 2020; Sanz & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2022). Likewise, mobilisation through research-creation projects promotes continuous interaction between communities and external actors, enriching both cultural and methodological exchange (Quinchuela, 2023). This synergy is essential for sustaining long-term initiatives, consolidating practices that transcend immediate impact and become embedded within collective memory (Bedoya-Gallego et al., 2024). Moreover, artistic expressions and the integration of playful-pedagogical spaces involving children and young people may serve as means of fostering intergenerational continuity in a more organic and natural manner within communities linked to productive activities (Fernandes et al., 2023; Mantilla-Blanco, 2024; Ortiz, 2020).

In this regard, it is important to emphasise that the processes documented here confirm a hypothesis consistently advanced in the literature: artistic practices function as mechanisms of social mediation that enable new forms of cultural and community governance. Far from being merely temporary interventions, these dynamics create sustainable spaces of agency through which communities can appropriate their present realities and envision possible futures. This finding reinforces the argument that art not only accompanies processes of healing but also helps to shape territories of peace through the reconstruction of relational values and intergenerational bonds.

In addition to the above, the study contributes to broader discussions concerning generational continuity. The integration of children and young people into artistic-pedagogical processes connected to community and productive life demonstrates that creativity can function as a catalyst for the appropriation of ancestral knowledge and sustainable practices. Within this framework, the arts become a vehicle for cultural transmission, capable of ensuring the continuity of local production chains, such as beekeeping, while simultaneously allowing them to be renewed through contemporary innovations.

Finally, this study emphasises that research-creation, by bringing together art, sustainability and resilience, transcends immediate outcomes in order to become a process of structural transformation. The key lies in understanding artistic practices not merely as cultural products, but as transdisciplinary methodological processes capable of exerting a tangible impact on the regeneration of the social fabric and on the consolidation of sustainable community-based models.

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