Strategies for Strengthening the Mezcal Production Chain in the Community of Oponguio, Michoacán

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Introduction

Mezcal is an agave-based distilled beverage with deep cultural significance, shared history, and ancestral knowledge. This research was conducted in the community of Oponguio, Michoacán, a place recognized for its tourism visibility during the Day of the Dead festivities.The study analyzes the current conditions of the Palomas Mensajeras vinata (mezcal distillery) production chain, with the purpose of proposing strategies to strengthen its local economic development.







Relevant Literature

COMERCAM — The Mexican Mezcal Regulatory Council provided statistical data on mezcal production at the national level by state, allowing us to obtain a general overview of its production.

SIAVI — The Online Tariff Information System of the Ministry of Economy allowed us to analyze the growth of mezcal exports.

Horacio Alonso Vásquez, Raul Enriquez Valencia y Felipe de Jesús Cruz Palma — The authors identify the limitations faced by small mezcal producers who hold a Denomination of Origin.

Importance and Problem Contextualization

Mezcal is experiencing an economic and cultural boom in Mexico. In 2024, more than 11 million liters were produced, of which 97% was artisanal, and exports increased by nearly 900% over the past decade. Although production is concentrated in Oaxaca, Durango, and Michoacán, small producers face disadvantages due to unequal competition and complex certification processes. The Palomas Mensajeras vinata in Oponguio exemplifies this scenario: a family-owned business with intergenerational tradition and limited resources, which keeps artisanal production alive but faces technological and administrative barriers in competing in national and international markets.

Methodology

Figure 1 presents the phases of the methodology employed, developed in two stages. The first stage consisted of desk research, focused on collecting information from official websites related to mezcal production and export, as well as conducting a bibliographic review. The second stage involved fieldwork, during which in-depth interviews were conducted with the members of the Palomas Mensajeras vinata in the community of Oponguio. The information obtained was then analyzed accordingly.

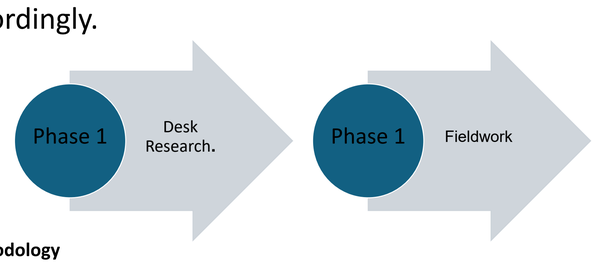

Figure 1. Phases of the Methodology

Preliminary Results

The preliminary results are grouped into three main categories, which are described below:

1. Importance of Ancestral KnowledgeFigure.

2 shows the genogram of the Palomas Mensajeras vinata in its fifth generation, reflecting the intergenerational continuity in mezcal production. Knowledge is transmitted empirically. The administration is managed by two brothers, while their spouses participate in sales and bottling, forming a collaborative family model.

Preliminary Results

2. Production Chain.

Figure 3 shows that the Palomas Mensajeras production chain adapts to local conditions, producing 57% of the agave and purchasing the remainder. Commercialization relies on an intermediary to the U.S. and other Mexican states. Sales are focused on local markets and tourists, and production equity and income depend on tourism and community acceptance.

3. Limitations and Challenges in the Production.

ChainProducers face mistrust toward associations and certifiers, as well as limited linkages with governmental institutions. The lack of cooperation among vinatas limits strategic alliances. The high cost of certification and the annual production of 3,040 liters make it difficult to fulfill large orders, especially compared to industrial brands such as 400 Conejos, which exports much higher volumes.

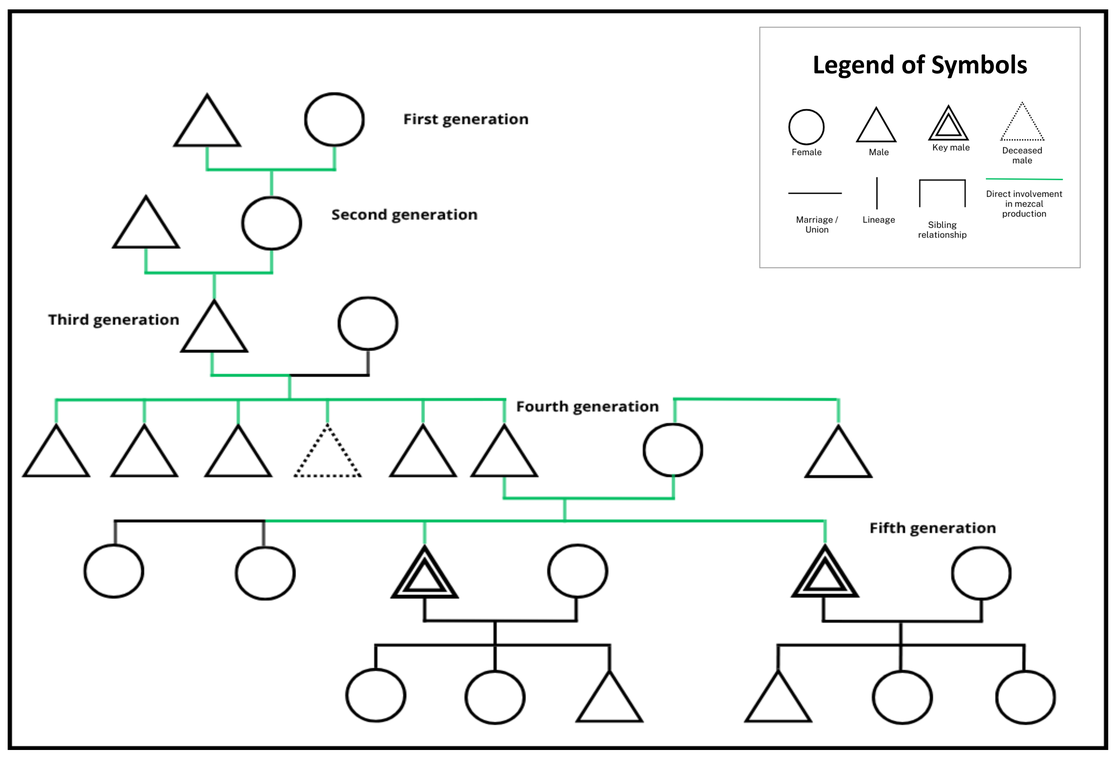

Figure 2. Genogram of the "Palomas Mensajeras" distillery.

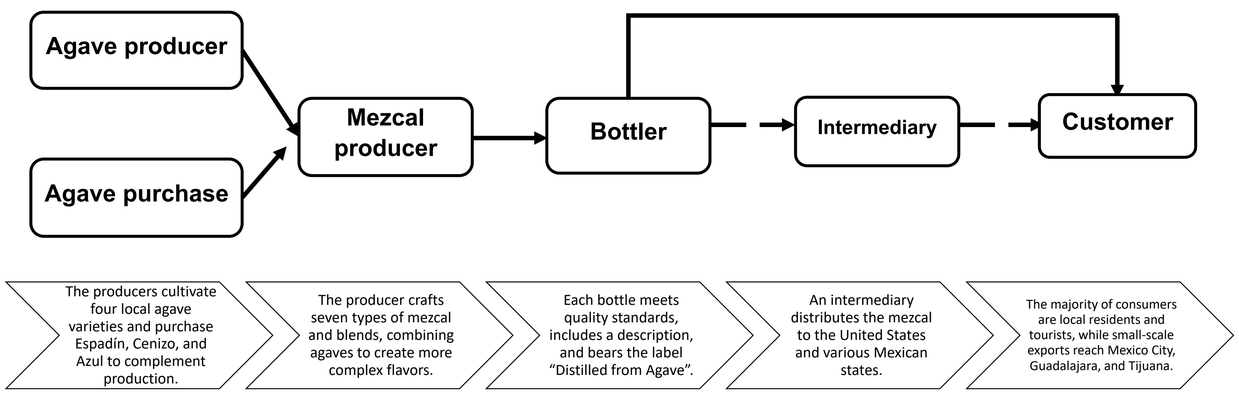

Figure 3.Productive chain of the "Palomas Mensajeras" distillery.

Strategies for the Development of Mezcal Producers

Several strategies are proposed, focusing on traditional knowledge, innovation, and commercialization, with the aim of strengthening the mezcal production chain:

- ✓ Documentation and Digitization: Record artisanal recipes and processes to preserve cultural memory and local identity.
- ✓ Collaboration Among Producers: Create networks to share resources and manage large orders.
- ✓ Interinstitutional Linkages: Collaborate with universities and institutions for advice on certification and commercialization.
- ✓ Technological Innovation: Use QR codes for traceability and to highlight cultural value.
- ✓ Commercial Strategy: Develop tourist routes and digital promotion to increase sales and raise awareness of mezcal.

References

1. COMERCAM. (2025). Informe Estadístico 2025.
2. Horacio, A. V., Raul, E. V., & Felipe de Jesús, C. P. (2024). Denominación de origen mezcal: ¿comercio justo o robo legal de la riqueza campesina? https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386140901
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