

Perception of the population of Texcoco regarding their archaeological heritage: the case of the Tetzcotzinco hill

Jorge Antonio Durán-Méndez¹
Silvia Xóchilt Almeraya-Quintero^{1,§}
María Isabel Rosas-Jaco¹
Lenin G. Guajardo-Hernández¹
Mercedes Borja-Bravo²

1 Colegio de Postgraduados- Campus Montecillo. Carretera México-Texcoco km 36.5, Montecillo, Texcoco, Estado de México. CP. 56230.

2 Campo Experimental Pabellón. INIFAP. Carretera Aguascalientes-Zacatecas km 32.5, Pabellón de Arteaga, Aguascalientes, México. CP. 20660.

Autora para correspondencia: xalmeraya@colpos.mx.

Abstract

Perception studies are very useful when seeking to generate information through the population perspective on a specific topic; this data collection process also contributes to managing the various elements that constitute the territorial space, such as archaeological heritage, which is believed to influence the reinforcement of the historical and cultural identity of the population; the objective of the study was to generate information about the perception of the Tetzcotzinco Archaeological Zone among the population of Texcoco, with the purpose of providing data that contribute to the design of strategies for its preservation and use; the methodology employed was based on activities such as documentary review, field visits, and preparation of semi-structured surveys and interviews with key informants; the results obtained showed a diversity of opinions about the current state of the Tetzcotzinco Archaeological Zone, as well as variability of references regarding it; it was concluded that the information generated can favor development and territorial management initiatives from which local tourism, tourism education, and the dissemination of information on the history and archaeological heritage of Texcoco are encouraged.

Keywords:

cultural identity, educational tourism, territorial development, territorial management.



Introduction

The planning process for the development of a territory involves specifying the participation of the population to define productive vocations; Langebeck and Beltrán (2016) point out that for such action, it is necessary to generate validated information through a process of identification and data collection that contributes to the design of proposals for the implementation of territorial planning instruments, such as public policies, plans and programs, as well as for the regulation and legitimization of civil society initiatives and the private and public investment system.

To obtain this information, studies of population perception can be carried out; these studies, as indicated by Anderson (1968), allow us, through the review of rational evidence of social judgments, to determine the degree of importance that people place on something; likewise, Arias (2006) describes them as a psychosocial function that interprets stimuli caused by a sense of appropriation that can be related to how the territory is perceived.

According to Navarro (2020), the territory is made up of geographical-spatial fractions that are made up of diverse subsystems, among which the material and historical aspect and artificial elements stand out, which the author describes as those tangible portions of reality that were built by man, as well as places of development, cultural transformation, and social events on a physical support.

These elements are also cataloged as archaeological heritage, which, according to López (2020), contributes, from the population perspective, as an indicator for the construction of value and meaning in the face of what distinctively prevails in the territory.

Based on the Municipal Development Plan (2022-2024), the municipality of Texcoco represents the largest territorial extension in the state of Mexico (422.49 km²); it is made up of 79 localities distributed in 6 zones (municipal capital, lake shore area, northern zone, southern zone, metropolitan zone, and mountain zone); its economy is concentrated in the development of the service (92.36%), industry (7.61%), and agriculture, animal rearing, forestry, fishing and hunting sectors (0.02%).

In addition, it should be noted that it played an essential role in the development of the Texcoco civilization during the late postclassic period (1321-1521), as pointed out by Hernández *et al.* (2023); Prusaczyk (2023), which gives it possession of certain material fragments that are today cataloged as archaeological heritage.

For its part, the Tetzcotzinco Archaeological Zone (TAZ), stands atop the Tetzcotzinco hill, located in the locality of San Nicolás Tlaminca, within the mountain area, at an approximate altitude of 2 580 m (Durán *et al.*, 2023); its heritage value, according to anthropological, archaeological, and historical studies, arose from its various attributes, mainly as a hydraulic system, botanical garden, astronomical observatory, place of retreat and meditation, and space for ceremonial, political and social activities (Parsons, 1971; Hernández, 1993; Evans, 2000; Tecpan *et al.*, 2016; Hernández *et al.*, 2023; Moreno, 2023; Prusaczyk, 2023). It is currently listed by presidential decree as an archaeological monument according to the Cultural Information System (SIC, 2002), and since 2001, it has been declared a protected natural area (NPA), with the category of state reserve called Tetzcotzinco System, based on the State Commission of Natural Parks and Fauna (CEPANAF, 2024).

Within the PDM (2019-2021), it is indicated that the elements corresponding to the archaeological heritage constitute, in the municipality of Texcoco, a set of resources that, through tourism activity, contribute to local economic development.

On the other hand, the PDM (2022-2024) places tourism within economic activities, specifying the creation of jobs, infrastructure, innovation and responsible production and consumption as axes; however, when addressing it by subtopic, only gastronomy stands out superficially, suppressing the importance of archaeological heritage.

This research aimed to generate information on the perception of the TAZ among the population of Texcoco, with the purpose of providing useful data that contributes to the design of strategies for its preservation and use and, in turn, reinforces the historical and cultural identity of the Texcoco population.

Materials and methods

The methodology used is qualitative with an interpretative approach and is divided into three stages: the first stage consisted of a documentary review in digital libraries such as Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Google Scholar and Dialnet, as well as in institutional repositories of an academic and public-administrative nature, and consultations of the municipal historical archive, from which information on ZAT was obtained from the different areas of study from which research has been carried out; in addition, the information collected served as a guide for the development of a data collection instrument that served as a pilot test in the second stage.

During the second stage, field visits were carried out through tours in the ZAT, during which an approximation to the reality of the object of study was obtained, which allowed us to observe the use that visitors give to the ZAT, as well as its current physical condition; in addition, fifty informal interviews were carried out with visitors, local population, and auxiliary authorities, which allowed the identification of variables that served to build the final data collection instrument in the form of a survey, which was used to collect the information for analysis.

The applied survey was divided into five modules, which considered nominal variables (general data of the surveyed population) for non-numerical modalities that do not admit a criterion of order, such as marital status, gender, age, education and occupation; likewise, ordinal variables were determined for the non-numerical modalities, within which there is an order, these variables (historical knowledge, cultural identity, location, use, and exploitation) were measured through the Likert (1932) scale model in order to interpret the opinions of the surveyed population about the TAZ.

The total percentages obtained were automatically tabulated on the Google Forms server, which enables us to process the data obtained instantly and generate graphs to interpret the information.

A three-month time frame was established for the application of the survey, from July to September 2024, and the survey was shared through social networks; the type of sampling was simple random; a finite subset of 170 respondents was reached, which allowed us to establish representative assessments of the population's perception of the TAZ.

Results and discussion

General population data

Of the total population surveyed, 63.9% of responses were from women and 35.5% from men; according to Valdez (2022), in her study on gender roles and their perception of well-being and happiness, women report higher rates of participation and satisfaction with their environment, while men orient these parameters towards the search for their personal development; in relation to the territory, this has to do with the evaluation of the well-being provided by territorial development through different factors such as education, which, within the results, behaved as follows: 36.1% have a postgraduate level of education, 43.7% hold a bachelor's degree, 14.6% only completed the upper secondary level, 4.4% only have basic education and 1.3% preferred not to indicate it.

In the labor aspect, as indicated by the PDM (2022-2024), the Texcoco population makes a living primarily from the tertiary sector; this information is verified with the following figures: 55% of respondents indicated that they are employed, 17.8% are students, 16.6% are engaged in entrepreneurship, 3.6% do not have a job, 1.8% are already retired and 5.3% did not mention the activity they carry out.

It should be noted that a higher percentage of the surveyed population indicated that they live in the municipal capital (35.5%), followed by the mountain area (19.5%), which is of great relevance because it is in the central area where a greater number of cultural activities that promote the historical and cultural identity of Texcoco are developed and it is in the mountain area where the TAZ is located, which allows us to obtain perceptions closer to the reality of the object of study.

Historical knowledge

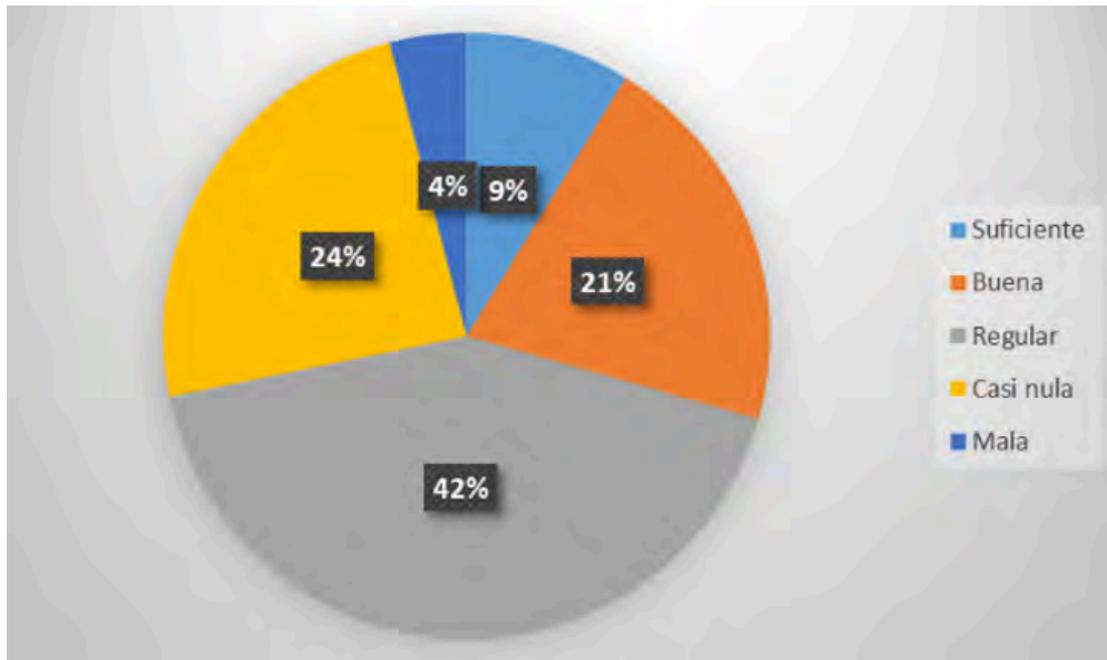
The municipality of Texcoco has been the cradle of various historical events, which has led to the preparation of local historians who captured their memories in documents that give legitimacy to the historical, material, and intellectual value of the municipality and that allow broadening the perspectives formed from theoretical constructs; such is the case of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, who, according to Lesbre (2009), described Tetzcotzinco as a large garden of prestigious Western comparison emptied of any idolatrous content, which indicates that it was not related to the veneration of a deity, rather it was described as a recreational park where the feats of their ancestors were highlighted from a political and development perspective.

It should be noted that recent studies, such as that of Rodríguez *et al.* (2022), are also based on the work of Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, as it is the recorded document with content closest to a context about time; however, there are positions that expand the history of Tetzcotzinco, as well as that of Texcoco, based on other assumptions related to pre-Hispanic deities, such as the case of the god Tláloc, a fact that is supported by the contributions of Cetzal and Noguera (2014) and more recently by Contla (2022); these types of documents proves that the historical information in Texcoco is extensive and is available to any inhabitant; in addition, local initiatives such as, Texcoco en el Tiempo (2024), have now been developed, which document historical information about Texcoco and its various stages of development, available and accessible to everyone through digital media.

In order to measure the level of knowledge that the population has about its archaeological heritage, a series of questions were formulated on historical data that, within the documentation consulted and information obtained, were considered basic because it is believed that the population do not require a greater historical-analytical effort because they are information produced within the territory they inhabit; nonetheless, it was found that 42% of the population consulted considers that the information they know about Tetzcotzinco is regular (Figure 1), on a scale where regular is an intermediate point of knowledge that is not good and is not enough, 24% considered it almost null, 21% good, 9% sufficient, and 4% bad.



Figure 1. Historical information that the population considers they know about the TAZ.



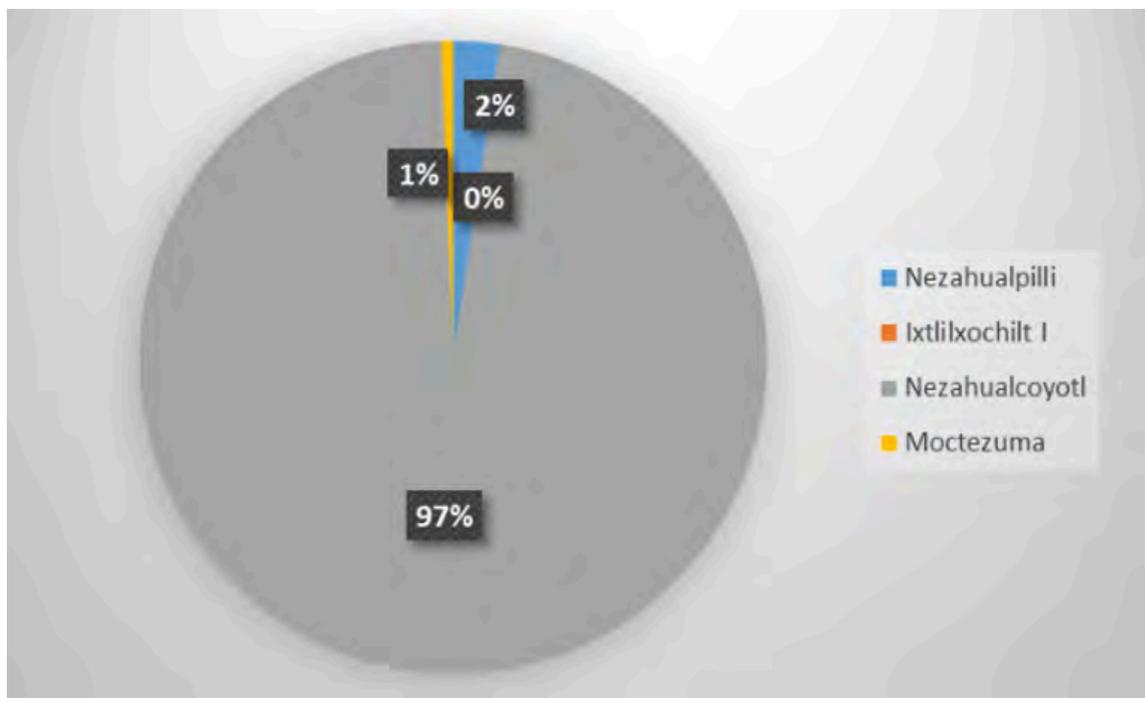
Findings such as those of Rodríguez *et al.* (2022) point out that historical narrative contributes to revaluing the pre-Hispanic past and strengthens historical-cultural roots; nonetheless, spatiotemporal contexts adapt to new discourses that can weaken historical memory, which, within the data obtained, represents a variability in terms of knowledge, which, although they do not indicate negative percentages with respect to the information that persists, they do express contrasts in terms of the information validated by documentation. For example, based on García and Kauffman (2017), the figure of Nezahualcōyotl within the history of Texcoco stars in various scenarios that make him a representative historical figure of the territory; therefore, it would not be permissible for the Texcoco population not to know this data; favorably, of the surveyed population, 97% indicated to know who Nezahualcōyotl is and with which archaeological monument he is related; nonetheless, some answers with minimal percentages attribute it to Nezahualpilli (2%) and Moctezuma (1%), taking into account that the first of these last two figures is described by Horcasitas (1978) as Nezahualcōyotl's consanguineous successor.

It is believed that the information can be altered during basic education and not be verified later; likewise, it was discovered that the majority attribute the construction of Tetzcotzinco to what is known as a botanical garden (64.5%), its relevance as one of the most relevant hydraulic systems of the late postclassic (Hernández, 2023), even though the information related to the meaning and divinity to which its origin is attributed is dispersed in various responses, which shows errors in the memory and historical knowledge of the population (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Figure who is credited with the construction of the TAZ.

Note. Within the literature consulted, the historical data on the TAZ and Texcoco point to Nezahualcóyotl as the central figure in the construction of what is now cataloged as municipal archaeological heritage.



Cultural identity

The concept of cultural identity, according to Molano (2007), is understood through the multiple definitions of culture and its evolution over time; nonetheless, for the purposes of this research, it is approached from the role it represents in society through its patrimonial meaning and historical memory, which in turn are oriented within the discussion on territorial development as a language that allows establishing instruments aimed at the conservation, restoration, value, and social use of heritage assets.

On the other hand, González (2011) points out that, in order to study identity, it is necessary to start from the notion that the inhabitants have about the territory, because it allows a direct understanding of the space socially created over time, since the latter contains a specific symbolic load that results in an identity, creating in the resident population a sense of belonging through the perception and value assigned to said identity.

In this sense, through the data obtained, it was found that 68.8% of the surveyed population (Figure 3) considers Tetzcotzinco as the most representative element of the archaeological heritage and their feeling of pride; however, just over half (56.5%) indicate that, during their academic studies, they were never enlightened about the history of Texcoco, which coincides with the fact that 67.6% (Figure 4) indicate that it is not of much interest to them to investigate the archaeological heritage of Texcoco, but they are not indifferent to receiving information about it.

Figures 3 and 4 show the variability in the percentages obtained according to the response options provided.

Figure 3. Most representative archaeological element for the Texcoco population.

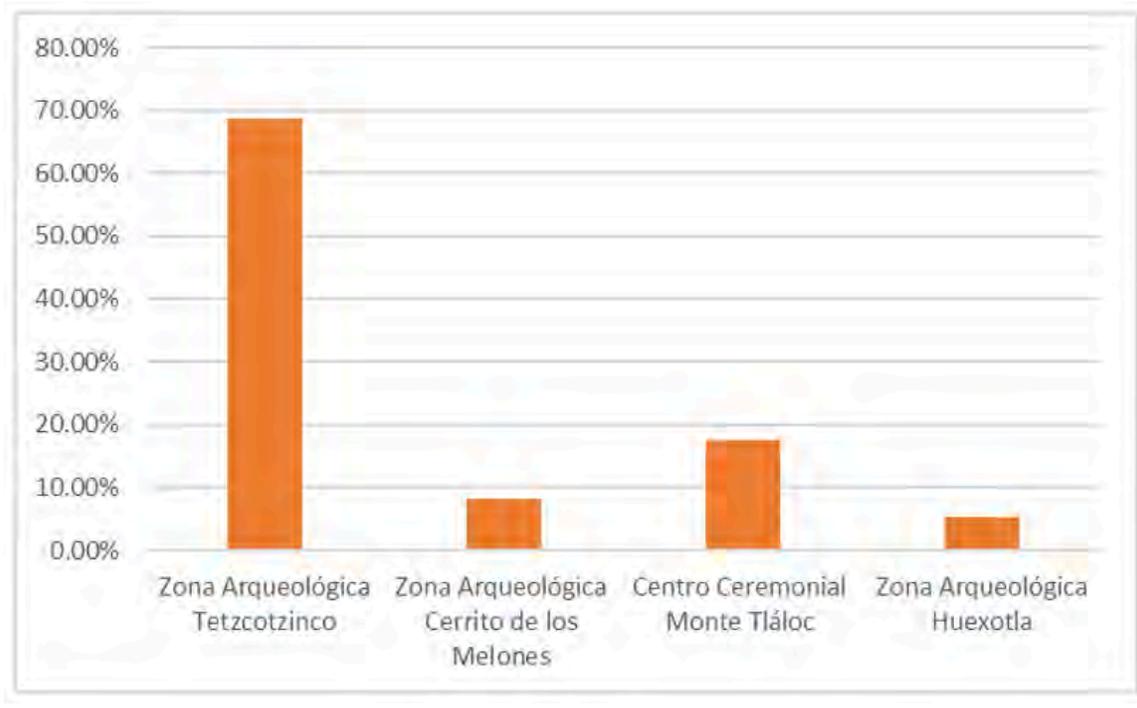
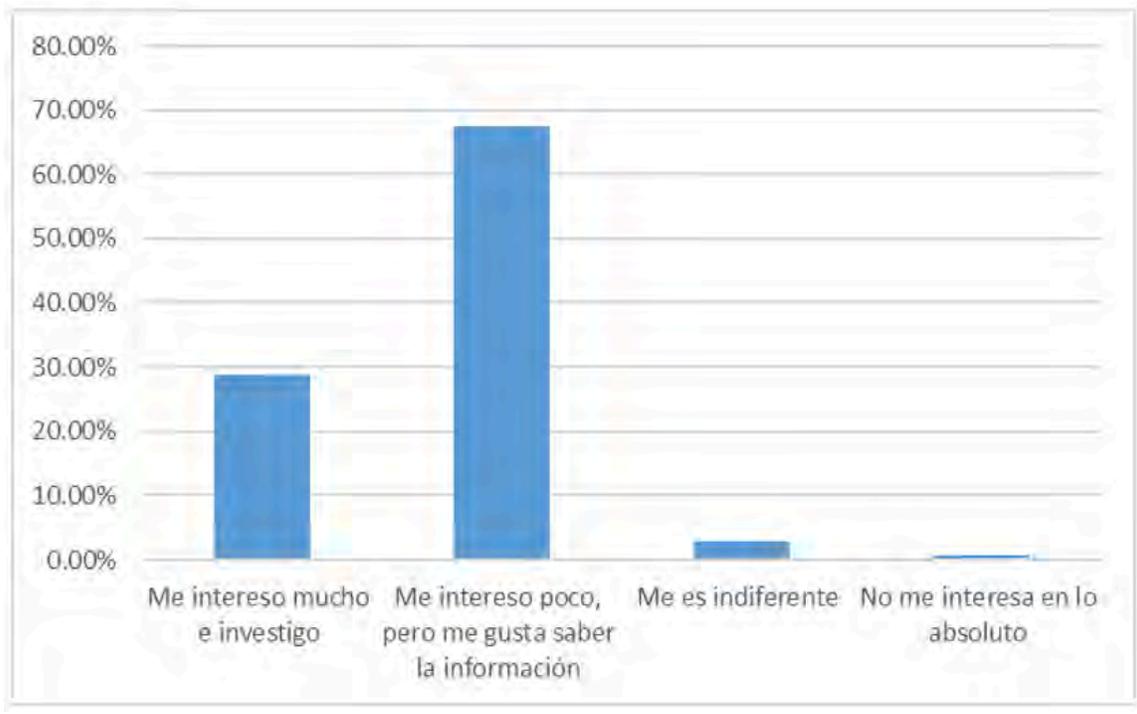


Figure 4. Interest of the Texcoco population in information on the TAZ.



Therefore, in relation to what Molano (2007) describes, cultural identity, as a sense of belonging, is reaffirmed through the frequency with which it is linked to the territory; nevertheless, the emergence

of cultural manifestations linked to space-time also turn out to be a factor so that identity is not directly linked to the historical memory of the archaeological heritage, which, in the case of Texcoco, diversified due to the process of urbanization that created new scenarios of material and immaterial production, which could cause radical changes in the cognitive map of the local population; as Lechner (2002) pointed out, they promote a spatiotemporal redefinition that limits individuals to new symbolic referents.

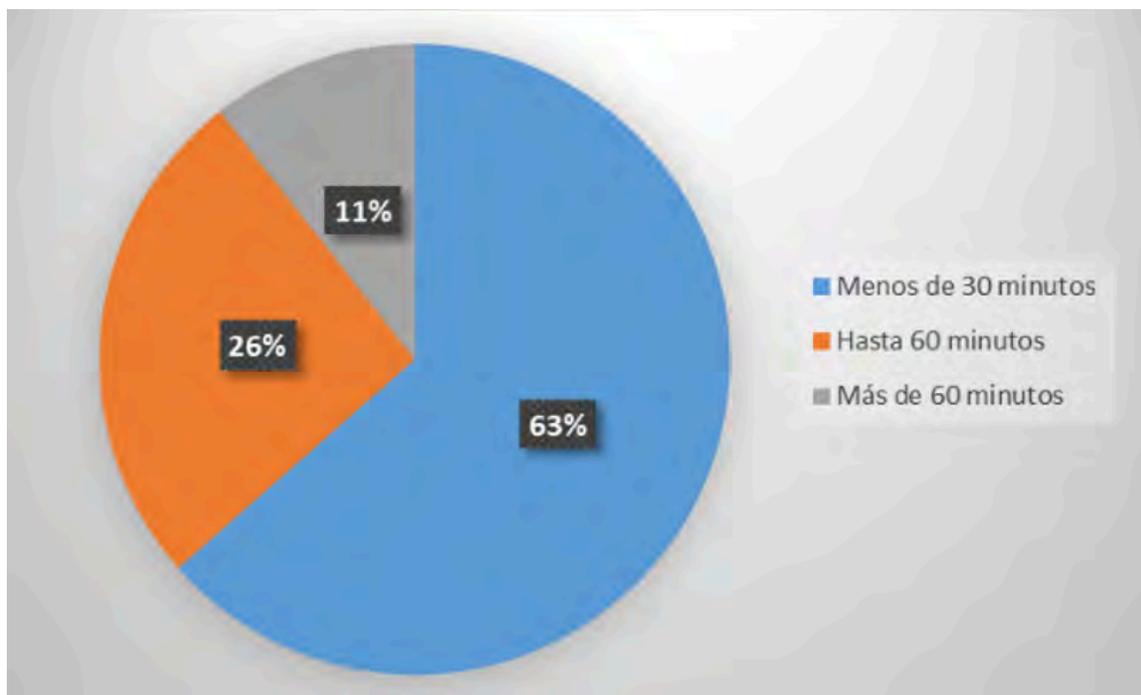
Location

As mentioned in previous sections, the Tetzcotzinco archaeological zone is located on a slope of the hill bearing the same name, at an altitude of 2 580 m, within the locality of San Nicolás Tlaminca, adjacent to the Metecatl hill, corresponding to the locality of San Dieguito Xochimanca.

These physiographic characteristics, according to Zamora (2013), considerably influence accessibility, resulting in a condition of 'not visible', which can cause devaluation of the archaeological heritage due to the time needed to arrive and the difficulty of access; however, access to Tetzcotzinco does not represent conditions that prevent free and easy access.

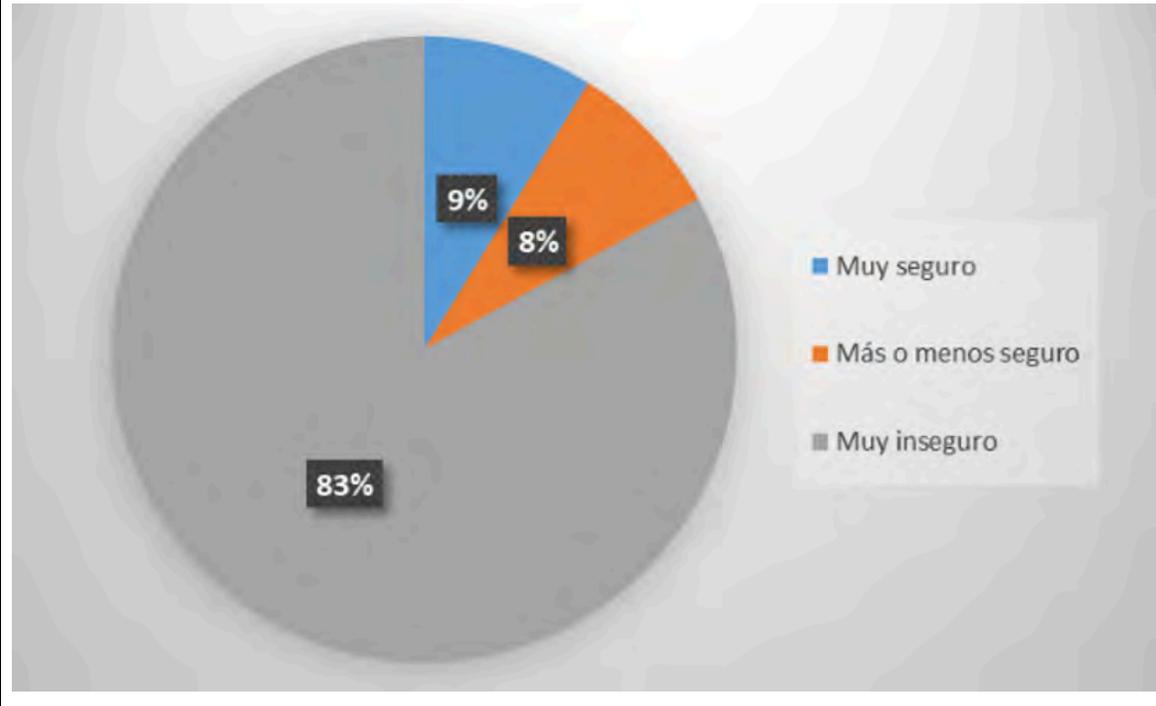
In relation to the perspective of the surveyed population regarding the location, it is noted that the access routes are easy and fast, both to reach the locality of San Nicolás Tlaminca, which serves as the primary connection point with the TAZ, and to access the TAZ; the travel time (Figure 5), according to the results, is approximately 30 minutes from the municipal capital by private car or public transport, less than thirty minutes on foot or by bike from the neighboring towns (63%), up to an hour coming from neighboring municipalities (26%), and more than an hour (11%) if visiting from other parts of the region, Mexico City, or other states.

Figure 5. Average travel time to the TAZ.



Nonetheless, it is also indicated that visiting the Tetzcotzinco archaeological zone causes a feeling of insecurity due to the absence of local or municipal security elements and, although no acts that violate the integrity of visitors are reported, 83% (Figure 6) of the total surveyed considered that it is very necessary to reinforce security both for the safeguarding of the archaeological heritage and for the visitor.

Figure 6. Feeling of insecurity when visiting the TAZ.



On the other hand, in relation to environmental care and considering that the archaeological zone is located within a protected natural area, emphasis is placed on the increase in garbage containers (82.9%), even though it is indicated to have a high rate of education for environmental care by trying not to generate garbage within the area (65.9%); likewise, it is pointed out that plant and animal deterioration (Figures 7 and 8) has not been high (61.2%), and it is considered that the progressive construction of houses (8) close to the TAZ significantly affects the natural environment (73.5%).



Figure 7. Plant and animal deterioration in the TAZ.

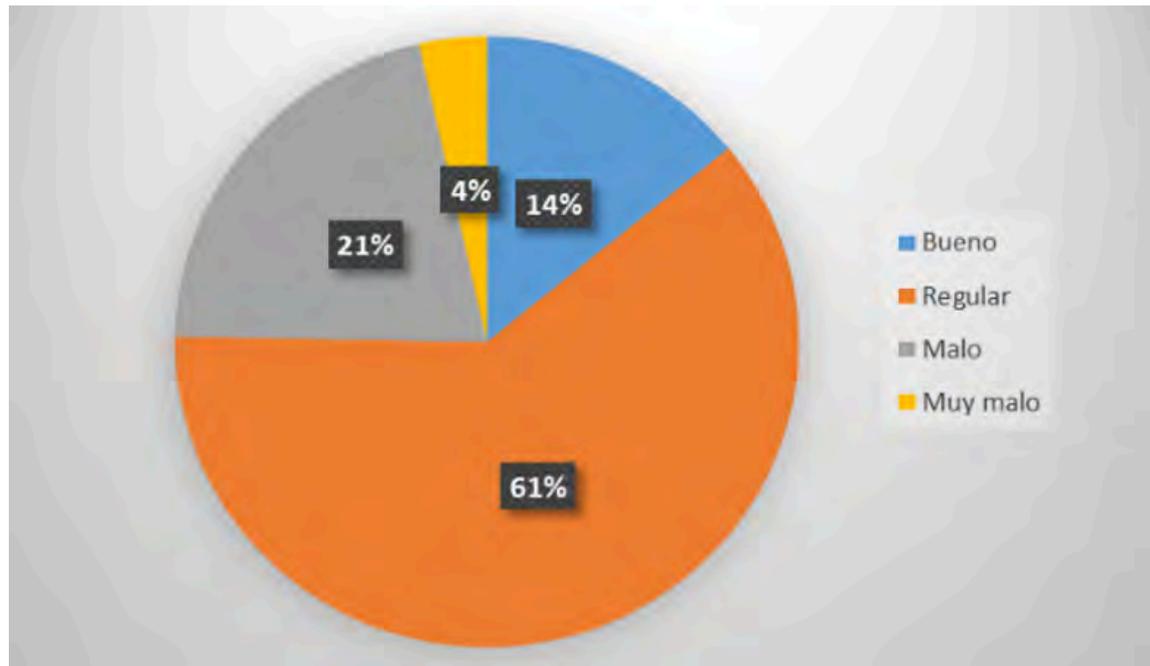
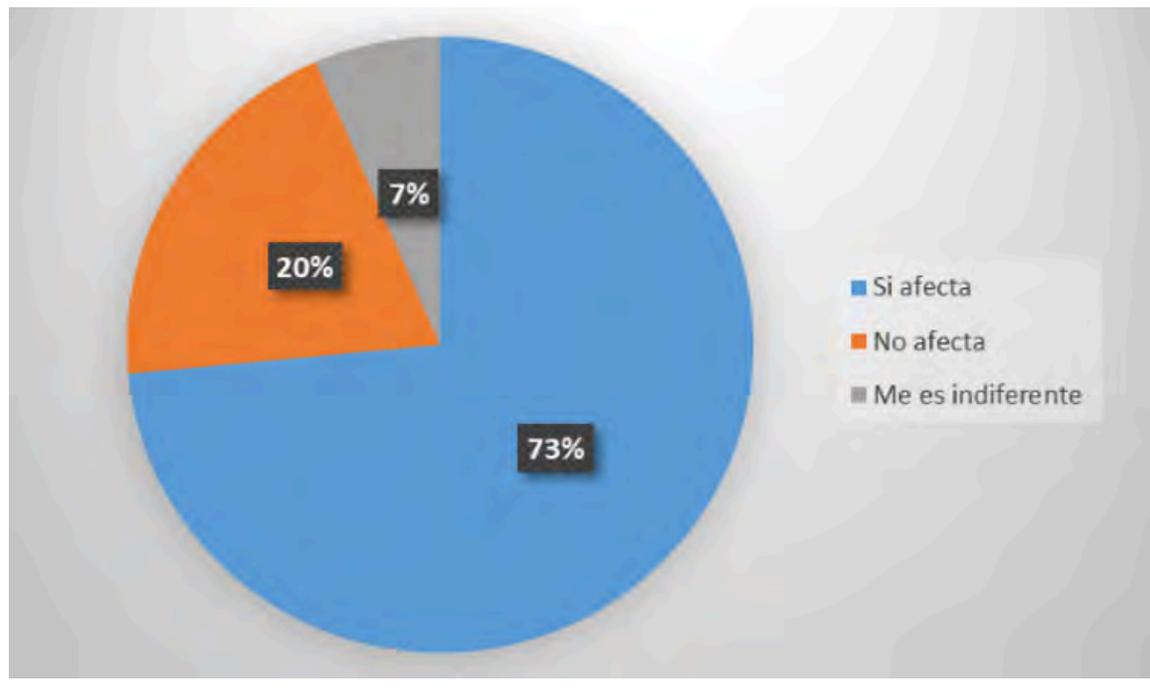


Figure 8. Damage by housing.

Note. In relation to its natural environment, the location of the TAZ is complicated by the rising construction of human settlements, which also contributes to the deterioration of the bases, flora and fauna; likewise, its location has not been a priority for implementing security strategies by local authorities; for this reason, the percentage of feeling of insecurity is high.



Use and exploitation

The attractiveness of the bases that constitute the TAZ, as well as its location, make it a space through which activities of different kinds are developed; for example, although the tourist-economic activity, according to Durán *et al.* (2023), is not adequately regulated and managed at the municipal level, it has not prevented the development of dynamics linked to the tourism sector through various local groups, which take advantage of free access, their self-documentation and empirical experience to obtain individual benefits through the activities they promote, such as mountain biking, hiking, walks, and guided tours for historical-educational purposes, among others.

In relation to the perspective of the surveyed population, the preference for hiking and walking stands out, because it is considered to be a way of relating history, culture, and sport, in addition to not gradually affecting the bases by introducing bicycles or motorcycles, and it is an option that allows them to visit the TAZ in a group and safely; nevertheless, it is also pointed out that, from the cultural field, local and municipal authorities do very little promotion of the events that take place around the TAZ or other initiatives that are related to archaeological heritage.

According to data from Tecpan *et al.* (2016), it is possible to assign an economic valuation to Tetzcotzinco in order to generate economic resources for its preservation, which also contemplates access restrictions; however, Durán *et al.* (2023) found that it is complicated to develop a management model on archaeological heritage because of the interference of political-administrative, institutional and land-tenure factors that make it challenging to develop horizontal mechanisms where the actors involved can establish agreements; nonetheless, it is believed that civil society can develop strategies that, from an appropriate use and exploitation, allow them to continue enjoying free access to archaeological and natural heritage.

Conclusions

The information generated is useful to complement projects or initiatives for territorial management that prioritize the preservation of archaeological heritage as an element of the territory that can be used from its historical and cultural value, as well as for the sustainable development of activities such as local tourism, which contributes to promoting the historical and cultural values of Texcoco, through the meaning that the population gave to these elements, and that it also serves to implement new local educational models and for the updating of territorial planning documents, such as the municipal development plan, or the creation of a tourism planning program.

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