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The Rock Movement of Acapulco: Sociocultural Expression and Reconstruction of the Social Fabric in Mexican Popular Culture

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Abstract

The rock movement in Acapulco represents a cultural reflection deeply rooted in the youth and urban identity of the port city. For more than thirty-five years, this artistic collective has fostered processes of self-management, musical creation, and social reconstruction through the promotion and dissemination of rock and roll. This study, which employs a qualitative methodology based on ethnographic records and in-depth interviews, examines how local bands have transformed public spaces into arenas of expression, learning, and cultural resistance. Findings indicate that Acapulco's rock scene has evolved into a social practice that unites different generations, incorporating subgenres such as classic rock, hard rock, metal, punk, ska, and reggae, all closely connected to the city's everyday life. It is not merely a musical genre but a way of constructing identity and belonging, where music functions as a symbolic form of resistance against exclusion and inequality. Within this context, the movement has contributed to democratizing culture, strengthening artistic education, and establishing an active cultural citizenship. The study concludes that rock in Acapulco is a sociocultural phenomenon that transcends the musical sphere: it is a collective narrative that intertwines art, community, and memory. In its melodies, one can perceive the capacity of youth to reinvent their surroundings and affirm their right to create, participate, and transform reality through popular culture.

Keywords: Rock; Identity; Popular culture; Youth; Resistance; Acapulco



Introduction

Rock in Acapulco is much more than a mere musical category; it represents a social and cultural phenomenon that has accompanied the city's urban, economic, and symbolic transformations over the past decades. The arrival of mass tourism, the transformation of public spaces, the rise of urban violence, and the precarious conditions of youth have created an environment in which music emerges as a means of symbolic resistance and identity affirmation (Areschoug, 2024; Perasović et al., 2023). Within a context where entertainment and culture are primarily linked to tourist consumption and spectacle, the rock movement of Acapulco has become an alternative space for creation, sociability, and community strengthening (Vodopivec & Dürr, 2019).

Since the late 1980s, a group of young bands, cultural promoters, and self-managed collectives have given life to what can be defined as the Acapulco Rock Movement: a network of bands, local associations, neighborhood festivals, and cultural gatherings that have transformed plazas, neighborhoods, and marginalized urban areas into stages for expression. These places, traditionally excluded from the dominant culture, have become sites of creativity, urban appropriation, and the re-signification of identities (Nasution, 2015).

The aim of this study is to conceptualize rock in Acapulco as a total cultural practice not merely musical that connects community, memory, space, and art. From this perspective, rock is more than a set of sounds; it constitutes a collective narrative a way of voicing discontent, aspirations, identity, and the potential to reconstruct the social fabric from the periphery. As DeNora (2003) suggests, music can be understood as a social practice musicking those shapes identities and ways of inhabiting the world.

Moreover, from the standpoint of youth cultural sociology, musical subcultures emerge as responses to processes of exclusion, marginalization, and the search for meaning in complex urban settings. In this regard, Hebdige's (2013) seminal work on youth subcultures reveals how musical and aesthetic styles operate as forms of resistance against hegemonic structures, as also emphasized by Hyder (2020). In Mexico, studies focused on rock urbano highlight that this phenomenon is deeply connected to peripheral areas, youth as social actors, and the local reinterpretation of global trends. Thus, the case of Acapulco is particularly relevant, as it embodies a geographic and social



frontier: the juxtaposition of tourism and marginalization, where young people seek to create their own meanings.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine how rock in Acapulco has been defined as a practice of identity, resistance, and renewal of the social fabric, and how this experience aligns with the national context of urban rock in Mexico. To achieve this, a qualitative narrative approach is adopted one that explores local history, social actors, and cultural practices, as well as the community implications of the movement.

Background

The development of rock music in Mexico must be understood within a broad context of hybrid youth and musical cultures. Since the 1950s, the arrival of rock in the country has generated both symbolic debates and social tensions: for conservative sectors, it was perceived as an external “cultural threat,” while for young people it became an alternative form of expression. Studies such as Bárcenas (2018) have demonstrated how Mexican rock became intertwined with the nation’s sociopolitical processes.

During the 1960s, the phenomenon known as rock nacional influenced by artists such as The Beatles and Elvis Presley gave rise to significant events like the Avándaro Festival in 1971, which fostered a collective youth consciousness but also triggered a repressive state reaction toward those cultural movements. In the following decades, rock reemerged from urban sectors through self-managed initiatives: it was in neighborhoods and working-class areas of Mexico City, as well as in Guadalajara and Monterrey, where manifestations of the so-called rock urbano began to take shape. These movements are characterized by their critical lyrics, street aesthetics, connection with youth, and local reinterpretations of global sounds.

The case of Acapulco must be framed within this context: a tourist destination where luxury tourism coexists with popular neighborhoods, structural violence, and social exclusion. Within this environment, a local rock movement emerged that not only replicated the national rock urbano model but also transformed it according to its own reality through the fusion of genres (rock, ska, metal, and reggae), community networks, self-management, the creative use of public spaces, and a focus on local identity.



The most recent literature on the sociology of music and youth culture supports this perspective. For instance, DeNora (2015) examines how music functions as a social practice that shapes identity across diverse contexts. Although not all studies focus exclusively on Mexico, they provide solid theoretical foundations for situating the Acapulco case within a broader debate on youth, music, and cultural resistance.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted using a qualitative narrative approach, aimed at understanding the cultural and symbolic experiences that shape the rock movement in Acapulco. This methodology enables the interpretation of the meanings that participants assign to their actions, based on the premise that music and popular culture constitute manifestations that construct social reality.

The analysis is grounded in the interpretive tradition of the social sciences, acknowledging as Geertz (2017) suggests that the study of culture requires a “thick description” capable of capturing the complexity of meaning and local modes of interpretation. In this context, rock in Acapulco is examined not merely as a musical phenomenon, but as a social practice intertwining identity, community, and territory.

Two principal methods were employed for data collection:

Ethnographic Records and Field Observations

Direct observations were conducted at events, concerts, workshops, and festivals organized by the Movimiento Rockero de Acapulco between 2019 and 2023. The field notes documented aspects such as performance dynamics, audience participation, interactions between musicians and attendees, and statements from organizers. These records facilitated the reconstruction of how the movement uses music to appropriate public spaces, strengthen community bonds, and redefine local identity.

In-Depth Interviews



Semi-structured interviews were carried out with musicians, cultural promoters, community managers, and active members of the movement. These interviews sought to recover personal histories and individual trajectories reflecting the meaning of rock in their lives, the processes of self-management, and the social transformations generated through this artistic expression. The narratives were analyzed as cultural accounts revealing forms of resistance, memory, and belonging.

Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected were analyzed through thematic coding, identifying emerging categories such as youth identity, cultural resistance, use of public space, self-management, and reconstruction of the social fabric. These categories were compared with theoretical frameworks from popular culture and the sociology of music, allowing for a deeper understanding of how rock becomes a tool for social action.

Validation of the analysis was supported by internal triangulation of the two data sources, comparing the information gathered from direct observation with that obtained from participants' testimonies. This process allowed the formulation of a clear and contextually grounded interpretation of the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical principles of qualitative inquiry, ensuring informed consent from participants and the confidentiality of their narratives. Furthermore, the active role of the researcher in the field was acknowledged, following a reflexive perspective in which writing and observation are understood as dialogic and co-constructive processes of knowledge creation.

In this regard, the fieldwork in Acapulco demonstrated that rock transcends its role as a musical genre: it becomes a focal point of connection, resistance, and collective renewal in the face of the challenges confronting the coastal community. As DeNora (2015) notes, music is not only present within social life but also structures and shapes it, allowing individuals and groups to reconsider their roles within their environment.



Results

The exploration of new avenues for the promotion and dissemination of art within the field of rock has fostered, for over thirty years, a continuous development of culture and creativity in Acapulco. The Rock Movement of Acapulco has consolidated its role as an intergenerational meeting point where musicians, cultural promoters, and the local audience come together to preserve rock as both an artistic expression and a manifestation of collective identity.

Within this framework, Acapulco's bands have embraced a wide range of subgenres including classic rock, hard rock, heavy metal, punk, ska, reggae, and various fusions that reflect the diversity and dynamism of contemporary urban culture. This blend of genres responds to processes of cultural hybridization that, as García (1989) observes, characterize popular forms of expression in Latin America, where the global and the local intertwine to create new identities and meanings. Rock in Acapulco does not merely replicate foreign models; it reinterprets them from its own social context, incorporating the language, imagery, and aesthetics of the Costa Chica region and the port city itself.

Ethnographic records and in-depth interviews reveal that performance venues such as parks, working-class neighborhoods, open-air auditoriums, housing complexes, and schools have become symbolic spaces of resistance, creativity, and collective memory. Within these settings, Acapulco's youth have found a means to express their daily experiences, challenge inequality, and reaffirm their identity. As Reguillo Cruz (2000) asserts, youth cultures are not limited to visual styles; they are communicative practices that enable young people to appropriate and reinterpret their social environment. In Acapulco, music functions as a language narrating life on the margins emerging as a form of resistance to urban fragmentation and cultural exclusion.

The rock movement has also fostered a community-based artistic pedagogy, in which experienced musicians transmit their technical and performative knowledge to younger generations. This collaborative, equitable, and solidaristic process has resulted in the emergence of a new generation of artists who are academically and musically trained, and deeply committed to their environment and the development of the genre. The training practices described by participants reflect what DeNora (2015) defines as music as social practice a process in which artistic learning intertwines with identity formation, emotional development, and the construction of community. Thus,



concerts, workshops, and music clinics not only serve as spaces for acquiring technical skills but also as venues for encounter and symbolic reconstruction of the social fabric.

The collected narratives indicate that the rock scene in Acapulco has had a significant impact on the renewal of the region's urban popular culture. Youth from diverse social backgrounds actively participate in its activities, building networks of cooperation that promote inclusion and community cohesion. In this sense, music becomes an instrument of cultural exchange and social connection. As Hyder (2020) and Frith (1998) emphasize, musical styles such as rock function as symbolic forms of resistance that give visibility to marginalized groups and challenge prevailing power structures and cultural hierarchies. In Acapulco, this movement has succeeded in redefining what is considered "popular" as a legitimate sphere of creativity and dignity where culture is no longer just a tourist attraction but a form of civic expression.

With more than thirty-five years of history, the Rock Movement of Acapulco exemplifies a model of self-sustaining cultural management that has endured over time through collaboration, community engagement, and the constant reinvention of its participants. The organization of workshops, festivals, gatherings, and concerts not only strengthens musical practice but also expands educational and cultural opportunities for both artists and local audiences. Through these initiatives, the movement has demonstrated that rock can serve as a tool for social transformation, promoting civic participation, artistic education, and the reconstruction of the social fabric from the grassroots.

Today, the movement focuses on establishing comprehensive programs that ensure the continuity of rock promotion and dissemination in schools, neighborhoods, and cultural centers. This collective effort reaffirms the relevance of this genre as a symbol of identity, resistance, and intercultural dialogue. As García (1989) states, contemporary popular culture is not a vestige of the past but an active manifestation of citizenship. In this way, the Rock Movement of Acapulco demonstrates that music can serve as a transformative force one that unites art, community, and hope amid the social challenges of the present.



Discussion

The phenomenon of rock in Acapulco stands as one of the most significant cultural expressions of resistance and identity formation in southern Mexico (Andrade, 2025). Its trajectory demonstrates how music beyond being a mere artistic product becomes a tool for social action that connects communities, fosters educational practices, and promotes self-management (José María et al., 2025). As DeNora (2003) proposes, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a social activity that organizes shared experience, defines interpersonal relationships, and shapes the ways people interact with their environment. In Acapulco, rock not only accompanies urban life but also transforms it: it reshapes public spaces and generates new opportunities for encounter within an environment marked by inequality and structural violence (Niman, 2025).

The study reveals that rock serves as a symbolic space where processes of cultural hybridization (García, 1989) and strategies of everyday resistance converge. Local bands combine global sounds with identity elements rooted in the port's social landscape, showing that the integration of external influences can be an act of creation and cultural autonomy (Liu, 2024). As Reguillo Cruz (2000) highlights, Latin American youth are protagonists who defend social meaning through their expressions; in this context, the young people of Acapulco have adopted rock as a language of identity and visibility, establishing a symbolic arena to assert their presence in the face of exclusion.

When compared with other urban rock movements in Mexico such as those in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey the Acapulco case exhibits distinctive characteristics. In larger metropolises, rock urbano emerged as a response of the working class to state repression and marginalization (Zolov, 1999). In contrast, in Acapulco, cultural resistance intertwines with the need to reclaim public spaces from the dominance of tourism. Here, resistance extends beyond words it materializes in the daily organization of concerts in plazas, schools, and neighborhoods. This process aligns with what Hebdige (1979) described as symbolic resistance: a form through which subcultures transform the symbols of dominant culture into affirmations of autonomy and defiance.

The movement also reveals an educational dimension often overlooked in studies of Mexican rock (Zolov, 2023). The experience of workshops, music clinics, and artistic exchange programs demonstrates that the Rock Movement of Acapulco has established an alternative form of education



through music, grounded in the transmission of knowledge, solidarity, and collective creation. This view supports Frith's (1998) notion that popular music is a moral practice one through which values, identities, and shared emotions are expressed. From this perspective, Acapulco's rock scene is not merely an aesthetic experience but also an ethic of community and collaboration.

The findings are also consistent with DeNora's (2015) conception of music as a catalyst for social change. She argues that musical processes have the capacity to shape identities and foster collective resilience, particularly in contexts of inequality or crisis (Argyriou, 2025). The history of Acapulco's movement supports this view: musical creation has facilitated the rebuilding of trust, the reestablishment of intergenerational connections, and the redefinition of community in a fragmented urban environment (Hess, 2019).

From the standpoint of popular culture theory, the movement can be situated within what García (1989) defines as the new forms of cultural citizenship, in which individuals not only consume culture but also produce and manage it. The self-management that characterizes the rock movement exemplifies this active citizenship that defends the right to create, organize, and use public spaces through art. Moreover, this process carries a political dimension: it transforms culture into a means of rebuilding the social fabric, democratizing artistic education, and strengthening the port's collective memory (Lim et al., 2019).

Similar processes can be observed in Latin American rock scenes from Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, where local bands have also used music as a form of cultural resistance against exclusion and violence (Sandoval Espinel et al., 2024). However, Acapulco's case is unique due to its direct connection with tourism and the city's stark social duality a place designed for visitors but inhabited by marginalized communities. Within this contrast, rock becomes both a political and aesthetic manifestation that restores the voices of the neighborhoods, turning noise into a symbol of identity (Vallee, 2015).

The ethnographic analysis demonstrates that Acapulco's rock movement represents a narrative of belonging that integrates art, education, and social organization into a single project (Andrade, 2025). The movement has not only trained musicians but also cultivated cultural citizens who promote values of respect, freedom, and solidarity (Reed, 2019). Thus, rock ceases to be a mere



artistic form and becomes a complex social practice capable of linking past and future, memory and innovation.

Finally, the study confirms that the Rock Movement of Acapulco represents one of the most vibrant manifestations of contemporary popular culture in Mexico. Its continuity and renewal demonstrate the power of art as an instrument of resistance, cohesion, and collective hope. As García (1989) asserts, popular cultural practices are not remnants of the past but active forms of modernity that reinvent society from its margins. The Acapulco rock movement with its energy, diversity, and social commitment shows that music remains one of the most effective expressions for rebuilding a sense of community amid change and adversity.

Conclusions

The rock movement in Acapulco represents one of the most significant manifestations of contemporary popular culture in southern Mexico. For over three decades, this collective initiative has demonstrated that art can serve as an effective tool for promoting social change, rebuilding community ties, and reaffirming local identity. Rock, far from being a mere musical genre, emerges as a language that conveys emotions, knowledge, and resistance a way of narrating reality and asserting the existence of groups historically excluded from the official discourse.

The Acapulco experience illustrates that music not only entertains but also educates, unites, and empowers. The concerts, workshops, and festivals organized by the movement are more than isolated events; they constitute spaces for artistic and civic education where multiple generations converge. In these encounters, young people not only learn to play instruments but also acquire skills to organize, collaborate, and build community. This educational dimension of rock based on self-management and social commitment represents a cultural alternative to social fragmentation and to the consumerist model imposed by the tourism industry.

The Rock Movement of Acapulco has established itself as a long-lasting project, resilient amid the political, economic, and social transformations experienced by the city. Its continuity shows that cultural resistance manifests not only through words but also through daily actions and persistent creativity. Through music, local artists have built networks of solidarity, visibility, and shared meaning, transforming public spaces and strengthening citizen participation from the grassroots.



Taken together, this experience supports what authors such as DeNora and García Canclini have argued: that popular culture is an active and transformative practice capable of redefining social relations and the way humans inhabit the world. Acapulco's rock movement, through its diversity and commitment, embodies this creative force that interweaves memory, identity, and hope. It serves as a model of cultural citizenship that transcends the musical sphere to address political, educational, and community dimensions.

In this sense, the rock of Acapulco stands as a symbol of resistance, local pride, and historical continuity. Its melodies resonate beyond the stage they are the collective voice of a people who, through music, reaffirm their right to exist, to create, and to transform their reality. The movement has thus left an indelible mark on the cultural history of the port, becoming part of Mexico's living memory as an enduring expression of dignity, creativity, and love for freedom.

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