

# La Payada: Emergency and Strategies to Face Covid

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## La payada

The payada is presented as a poetic challenge produced spontaneously or in a planned manner. The improvised poetry is sung by one or more “payadores”. The counterpoint or challenging singing is the most expected moment in the performance, where the craft and the improvisation come into play more intensely; it is the moment that summarizes the tradition that identifies it.

Among the common coding artifices, we must indicate: the poetic improvisation sung as a dialog with alternate verses; the respect for the versing system of Castilian and Portuguese rules coming from the Iberian Peninsula; the observance to isosyllabism and strong attachment to rhyme; the use of formulary structures for opening and closing the verses; the abundance of poetic resources such as metaphor and the moralizing sentence; and a similar profile on their protagonists that is based on strong character.

At times, the audience gives a phrase and the “payador” needs to finish his ten-line stanza with it. This is called “pie forzado” or forced foot. If another phrase is added to make it complex, it is called “dos pies forzados”, or two forced feet.

The payada culminates mid-lyrics, where the “payadores” alternate two verses each, until concluding the ten. Each payada represents a unique and unrepeatable moment, not only for the social context where it develops, but also because the “payadores” improvise on a theme agreed, commonly using satirical humor. They come dressed in gaucho attire

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that takes them back to their rural origin. For this reason, this genre is also considered a true dramatization of the figure of gaucho, revitalized in each presentation (M.Isolabella, 2012 in L.Cannella, O.Picún, 2019 Saberes Compartidos, CPCN, MEC).

## Multinational Project

Within the framework of the Multinational Project conducted by CRESPIAL concerning intangible cultural heritage and emergencies, the Focal Centers from Argentina and Uruguay agreed to conduct a bi-national project. It aims to address an element already acknowledged as intangible cultural heritage from the Mercosur in 2015, making the relevant consultations nationwide to work with La Payada.

Concerning this, Argentina and Uruguay decided to conduct the analysis and reflection around the impact of the sanitary emergency due to Covid-19 on an intangible cultural manifestation. It has as its main feature the poetic improvisation in ten-line stanza accompanied, in general, by a guitar, common to both countries and similar to different expressions present both in Latin America and the world.

Likewise, certain risks or threats had been identified in the payada before the emergency situation. This is demonstrated by the document resulting from the 3rd Meeting of Payadores from Mercosur in Tala, Uruguay. This document establishes the need “for governments members of Mercosur to define a regional cultural and educational policy concerning the situation of the payada and paya. Additionally, the project includes the creation of a sound and graphic archive per country that encompasses written, graphic, audiovisual materials that allow scholars and the general public from the region and the world to have access to knowledge on improviser art in these latitudes. Furthermore, it seeks to increase visibility in communication outlets and budget for conducting workshops to teach the improviser art (safeguarding lines document).

The pandemic deepened a few existing aspects and presented, on its turn, new unexpected risk situations. It includes the impossibility of in-person events, the conduction of “payadores” meetings nationally and internationally, and how the teaching workshops were being conducted, added to the drop in income from “payadores” as a consequence of this forced paralysis of activities. On the other hand, the sanitary emergency allowed the development of new strategies for artistic performance and communication, both inside groups of “payadores” and “payadoras” and to the outside, and we reflected about it in this project.

It was decided to start at La Payada as a cultural manifestation. Furthermore, a process of analysis, reflection and awareness around the impact from the pandemic of Covid-19 is being undertaken with its bearers in both countries.

In Argentina, virtual meetings were held with bearers to inform, consult, and agree on the work methodology, with the goal of addressing the diagnosis on the impact and the response from La Payada and its bearers to the Covid-19 emergency in the country. It will be necessary to analyze the pandemic management policies in each province and its impact in the cultural sector, particular features in the rural and urban scopes, the work situation from bearers, etc.

In Uruguay, communication channels with “payadores” were kept open during the pandemic and the process of consultation about the work methodology is being implemented for this project (communication dated of June 6 in the WhatsApp group “La Payada Patrimonio”, virtual meeting on June 9 and in-person communications). The interaction among local governments, communication outlets, cultural organizations and “payadores” from different communities will be analyzed. A special emphasis will be given to the survey on economic impacts, loss of spaces of payada, compilation of the payada as a testimony of the historical moment of the pandemics, and the role of private archives on payada.

Since it is a manifestation that requires an audience, we question: how was the virtual payada implemented? Through which devices? What difficulties did they face to adapt to the technology? What was the role of the “payadores” age in this process? What was the role of young “payadores” in the alternative strategies for communication? How did the audience change? Did the presence of digital networks allow audiences from other places?

In the beginning of the “return to normal”, how was it managed and how was it expanded? How was the return to in-person events? Were the virtual channels for communication maintained with the return to in-person events? Concerning the workshop with “payadores”, which during the Covid-19 pandemic had considerable development in different regions of Argentina and Uruguay, what happened to those spaces? How was the activity resumed?

Likewise, what was established in the Multinational Project profile from CRESPIAL around the theme selected was used as a benchmark, to work around the following axes:

- Processes of loss and retrieval of the social fabric around the payada.
- Overall financial situation of the payada foundation before, during and after the Covid-19.
- The payada as a registration of memory on the pandemic.

Given the territorial accessibility of Uruguay and its geographic dimensions, we worked with “payadores” and “payadoras” from around the country.

In both countries, the work was consulted and coordinated with a representative group of “payadores” and “payadoras” from different regions (to include particular and general characteristics). It may include gender diversity. In addition, it must cover an age group that includes from the youngest to those who are renowned and have a long career. Thus, proposals to face possible new emergency scenarios may be developed. The aim is to strengthen the articulation and development of recommendations that can be used for prevention and activation of responses to face similar situations in a combined and more efficient manner in terms of safeguarding the practice and the well-being of its bearers.