

# Introduction:

## Twenty Years of the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Yoselin Rodriguez<sup>1</sup>

Luciana Gonçalves de Carvalho<sup>2</sup>

UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in October 2003. Its main goals are promoting the protection, respect, awareness and mutual appreciation of intangible heritage worldwide, as well as cooperation and international assistance. Currently, the Convention has 181 Party States, of which 32 are in Latin America and the Caribbean. The importance of the 2003 Convention in the region can be seen, to begin with, from its broad adoption.

In this publication, we will present multidisciplinary studies on strategies, synergies and reflections around intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a collaborative work that has two immediate precedents. The first, a series of colloquia organized in June 2023 by the permanent Delegations of Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, and Panama, in the quality of representatives of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) in the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.<sup>3</sup> The second, the International Forum on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, organized by the Government of Peru, in October 2023, in Lima.<sup>4</sup>

With the aim of promoting fresh perspectives on intangible cultural heritage in the region, the seminars just mentioned were centred on three major areas: 1) contributions from the region to the implementation of the 2003 Convention; 2) the relation between intangible

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1 PhD in International Cultural Relations in Latin America and the Caribbean – Paris-Saclay University.

2 PhD in Anthropology, professor at Ufopa, coordinator of the Heritage and Museums Committee of the Brazilian Anthropology Association.

3 The activity was developed within the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention on intangible cultural heritage during the Latin America and the Caribbean Week at UNESCO – SALC 2023, on June 21 and 22, 2023, in rooms IV and IX of UNESCO's headquarters, in Paris.

4 It was held from 19 to 21, 2023.

cultural heritage, tangible heritage, cultural diversity, memory, and identity; and 3) the relation between intangible heritage and environmental issues, collective rights, and sustainable development.

As a follow up to these debates, GRULAC invited its Member States to participate in the organization of a collective publication discussing the mentioned issues and, especially, how the agenda of the convention can be renewed in order to meet old and new challenges. This book, without ignoring the complexity and variety of cultural manifestations in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlights common challenges and convergent approaches for the protection of intangible heritage in the region, with the objective of promoting a better perception of regional experiences, priorities and perspectives.

The texts collected in this book intend to help us answer the following questions: what is the relation between intangible heritage, tangible heritage, cultural diversity, identity, memories, and human rights? What projects, programs and activities could be considered particularly successful and what is the potential of such good examples for replication in other contexts? What intangible cultural manifestations in the region need urgent safeguarding and how can such manifestations be protected? How to promote a more equitable geographic balance in the mechanisms of international recognition and protection of cultural heritage?

Over the past few years, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have made investments education and public awareness, as well as in the development of political, legal and institutional frameworks for the protection of intangible heritage. Throughout the region, educational programs, especially in primary and secondary levels, now include topics related to intangible heritage. National inventories dedicated to intangible heritage have been created. Competent organizations to coordinate the implementation of the Convention have been designated. The first UNESCO category 2 centre dedicated to the safeguarding of the intangible heritage was established in the region. The Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL), created in 2008, in Peru, has 18 participating member countries.

At the international level, it is worth noting that countries from the region have inscribed approximately 90 elements to the different lists and registers created within the framework of the 2003 Convention. Such recognition efforts help raise awareness on the importance of intangible heritage and give additional weight to policies favouring dialogue and respect to cultural diversity in the region.

With this project, we hope to contribute to the following fields of study: intangible cultural heritage; Latin American and Caribbean cultural history; and international cultural relations in Latin America and the Caribbean. As a result of the open and continuous dialogue within GRULAC regarding cultural issues, this work counts with contributions dealing with different aspects of cultural heritage in the region.

The first part addresses the origins of the 2003 Convention and the participation of countries from Latin America and the Caribbean in its implementation. Yoselin Rodríguez highlights the preliminary discussions, the process of adopting and implementing the convention, the work carried out by CRESPIAL and the main challenges regarding the inclusion of historically marginalized communities in policies to promote intangible cultural heritage. Also in the first part, a former secretary of the 2003 Convention, Cécile Duvelle, in an interview, presents a critical view of the progress and obstacles to the full implementation of the convention's principles, warning about the risk of cultural objectification posed by excessive emphasis on its lists.

The necessary search for balance is precisely the central theme focused by Ambassador Paula Alves de Souza, from Brazil, who opens the second part of the book highlighting the risks of overvaluing the lists to the detriment of the Convention's main objective, which is to promote the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage through cooperation between states. She calls attention to three major problems - the typological imbalance, the geographic imbalance, and the procedure imbalance – and suggests the need for initiatives aimed at renewing and updating the mechanisms of the convention. Also in the second part of this book, Ambassador Nancy de Gorostiaga, from Paraguay, emphasizes the importance of linking education and culture in order to achieve the objectives of the convention. In the following article, Veronica Ugarte, from CRESPIAL, comments on the role played by this centre in valuing cultural diversity in Latin America, by promoting regional and international cooperation, in line with sustainable development in its 18 member countries.

The third part of this book is composed by reflections produced by members of the UNESCO secretariat. Krista Pikkat discusses the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. She addresses the importance of this international instrument for the protection of peoples' memory, identity and cultural rights. Ernesto Ottone discusses the interdependence between intangible cultural heritage and tangible cultural heritage. He focuses on the synergies between the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 2003 Convention. Toussaint Tiendrebeogo, in turn, comments on the synergies between the 2003 and the 2005 Conventions, calling attention to the limits and complementarities of both instruments. Finally, after a brief assessment of the first 20 years of the Convention, Tim Curtis argues that living heritage, although threatened by a myriad of factors from demographic changes to environmental degradation, remains a powerful source of wellbeing and resilience, allowing communities to "pass on and share contextually appropriate solutions to contemporary global challenges".

The fourth part of the book presents national policies dedicated to intangible heritage implemented over the past 20 years. The contributions by Nerva Fondeur, from the Dominican Republic; Edaly Moreno and Carmen Hernández, from Mexico; Marina Lacerda,

from Brazil; and Pablo Palomino, from Peru, provide an insight into efforts to implement the convention in the region. The panorama given by the authors is rich and vibrant, and shows the vitality of intangible cultural heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The relation between intangible heritage, identity and memory is addressed in the fourth part of the book. Antonio Pecci, from Paraguay, presents Guaranía and reveals that more than a musical genre, it is a true living expression of Paraguayan culture. For this reason, efforts are ongoing for the inscription of this musical genre into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, following the example of the tango and, more recently, the chamamé. Hippolyte Sogbossi revisits Benin linguistic and cultural legacy in the Americas, looking for Dahomean or Ewé-Fon elements in Arará Santería, Vodun in Haiti, and Mina-Jeje Candomblé in Brazil. From Haiti, Ambassador Dominique Dupuy presents Cassava, a traditional preparation made from manioc flour, developed a thousand years ago on the fringes of the Amazon basin and presented for inscription into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023 as a multinational nomination.

From the province of Colon, Panama, Emma Gomez presents the experience of The Afro-Panamanian Memory Museum in Portobelo in preserving historical heritage and disseminating narratives based on the interpretation of the local communities, an example of good practice in safeguarding cultural heritage. In the next text, cultural rights are at the centre of the reflections presented by Humberto García and Eneida Hernández, stimulated by the work carried out by the Indigenous Arts Center, located in Totonac, in the eastern Mexican territory. The Centre, as the authors demonstrate, enforces the constitutional right of indigenous peoples to fully exercise their culture, their education, and the use of their language, strengthening social cohesion and promoting peace and regional development.

The issue of the environment and its relation with the intangible heritage is developed in the sixth part of this publication. Ángela Martínez Sanabria, from the indigenous Cabécar territory of Nairi-Awari, in Costa Rica, runs several projects with the help of her family. Some of them are closely related to safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage, as well as the protection of the environment, for example: a traditional artisanal project that can reduce the use of plastic; an initiative of traditional agriculture and cuisine, capable of combining healthy food and Cabécar culinary traditions; and, finally, an individual project of jewellery made with recycled and natural materials. In general, they look for the promotion of a balance between culture and environment. The sixth part of this book also presents a project carried out by Ilma Neri, an indigenous woman living in the city of Santa Isabel do Rio Negro, state of Amazonas, which aims to safeguard the traditional Agricultural System of the Upper Negro River Region, recognized in 2010 as part of the cultural heritage of Brazil. This traditional system of agriculture is shared by 23 indigenous peoples and has a major economic importance, helping with the fulfilment of food needs, while preserving the forest. The Mundurucu People's Sacred Heritage is the subject of the following text, based on an

interview with representatives of the Association of Munduruku Wakoborün Women. The five indigenous women interviewed recounted various threats to their cultural heritage, developed around waterfalls and other places they consider sacred, caused by illegal gold mining and hydroelectric dam construction projects on the Tapajós River. They emphasize that cultural heritage, in this context, is closely linked to natural heritage, the defense of one requiring the protection of the other.

Luciana Carvalho's text closes this section, reinforcing the intertwining of natural and cultural heritage in the Brazilian Amazon. Addressing two mining contexts in the region and two demands for the patrimonialization of intangible cultural goods, she emphasizes that the intangible cultural heritage policies must not lose sight of the principles that guide the legal texts related to the topic in favor of technicality, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the connection between heritage and cultural rights and the inclusion of such rights in the broader list of human rights.

Finally, the seventh part is dedicated to the study of binational and multinational projects on intangible heritage. The first refers to the *payada*, a musical expression characterized as a poetic challenge, common in Argentina and Uruguay, which was the subject of a binational project conceived to address an element already recognized as intangible cultural heritage of MERCOSUR in 2015 in the context of the health emergency caused by the covid pandemic. The second and final text in this collection deals with the Monument of Regional Integration and Cradle of Living Cultures, *Qhapaq Ñan*. Ambassador Silvia Alfaro, from Peru, presents the element – a road network built during several centuries by the Incas, who partially took advantage of existing pre-Inca infrastructures – and emphasizes its continuous role in the organization of space and society. This site was inscribed into the World Heritage List in 2014.

Bringing together such varied writings, this book will allow, first, a diagnosis on opportunities and challenges brought about by the Convention. At the same time, it provides a space for reflection on how to better articulate the protection of intangible heritage with issues such as climate change, sustainable development, native peoples, gender equality, fight against racial discrimination, fight against poverty, food sovereignty, peace and safety. It is also intended to explore synergies between intangible and tangible heritage, cultural diversity, and collective rights, in order to identify successful experiences and promote their replication or adaptation to local conditions, when possible. Finally, we hope this book will give greater visibility to the diversity and sophistication of intangible heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean, making clear the importance of traditional knowledge and practices for bearer communities throughout the region and for the sustainable development of our societies as a whole.