

# The Role of CRESPIAL on the Framework of the Twenty Years of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention

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UNESCO, as a reference organization in the creation of international normative instruments, focused its debate in 2003 on the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity (ICH). This concern is justified by the lack of precedents that connect actions on the protection of this heritage and by the urgency of showcasing the importance of its preservation and continuity in the world.

The 2003 Convention was conceived for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, as an instrument that hosts decisions and concrete reflections from the others previous conventions. This document is a multilateral accomplishment discussed and agreed upon internationally for the safeguarding of the ICH, which, on its turn, is a milestone that originates cultural policies worldwide.

The main goal of the 2003 Convention was to reconcile and foster actions aimed at ensuring the viability, preservation, safeguarding, and management of living heritage. Additionally, it sought to encourage international cooperation and assistance to generate awareness at local, national, and international levels about the value of intangible cultural heritage.

When nomad peoples settled in Latin America, 40,000 years ago, the first historical revolution happened in the continent. Advances were observed in technology, agriculture, development of pottery, wickerwork, fabrics, and construction of buildings in stone. All of these represent an original and essential contribution from American indigenous peoples to human culture.

The development of high civilizations soon manifested through settlement of urban and ceremonial centers, architecture, artistic manifestations, forms of religious organization, administrative organization. Likewise, through astronomical knowledge, occupation of vast territories with settled peoples connected through their own identity, with distinction of language, traditions, especially with a common millennial past inherited from an original culture.

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These processes embrace the genesis of cultural diversity in Latin America. According to the World Bank report titled “Indigenous Latin America in the twenty-first century,” there are approximately 42 million people belonging to indigenous communities in Latin America. Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia are the countries with the highest rates of indigenous population, with more than 80% of the region, which represents about 34 million individuals.

The growing self-identification by those people has contributed to the increase of the demographic dynamics. According to CEPAL, there are 826 indigenous peoples in Latin American countries – Brazil hosts approximately 305 indigenous peoples, followed by Colombia (102), Peru (85) and Mexico (78); at the bottom of the list, are Costa Rica and Panama, with 9 indigenous peoples each, El Salvador (3) and Uruguay (2).<sup>37</sup>

## **The creation of CRESPIAL and its role**

This extraordinary cultural diversity in Latin America drives UNESCO to turn its focus on safeguarding the Latin American ICH. For this reason, the organization makes efforts to advance the implementation of the 2023 Convention in the region. To achieve this goal, the organization has created a Category 2 Centre – the Regional Center for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Latin America (CRESPIAL). Its main goal is to strengthen the capacities of each Member State and increase the participation of bearer communities. Finally, it aims to promote regional and international cooperation in the purpose of safeguarding the living heritage.

Thus, CRESPIAL represents a transcendental initiative to boost sustainable development and cultural governance of the 18 Member Countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela. These countries participate in the Administration Board and the Executive Committee, which are the governing bodies of the Center. Together with the Technical Secretariat, they contribute to the effective safeguarding of the ICH in Latin America.

CRESPIAL has been promoting the fulfillment of the goals of the 2003 Convention. One of its key principles is to understand cultural heritage as a fundamental source that gives meaning and identity to communities, peoples and individuals in their daily work and life projects that serve as a foundation for their sustainability and well-being. Additionally, it advocates for respect and equal conditions for all individuals, encouraging community participation as an essential action for safeguarding living heritage

We have witnessed the exceptional diversity in our continent. CRESPIAL’s work is to safeguard this diversity regarding its preservation. To achieve this goal, it has implemented three programs: the multinational project program, the program for strengthening capabilities

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37 <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b1b631f7-30df-4668-9047-6e2060cb30a6/content>

and incentives, as well as two programmatic lines, which are community management and knowledge management.

One of the Centre's most notable contributions is the implementation of multinational projects outlined as regional or sub-regional initiatives. They foster multinational cooperation and collaboration, facilitating the exchange of experiences among countries and encouraging active participation from cultural bearers in communities from CRESPIAL Member States.

The multinational project "Safeguarding of the ICH related to music, singing and dance from Afro-descendant communities in CRESPIAL countries" is one of the projects concluded. It recognizes and enables cultural manifestations that include music and singing that are part of the lives of the Afro-descendant population. As a result of this excellent work there is a music record, a two-tome book about the situation of the Afro-descendant living heritage, and an audiovisual compilation of ten videos produced collaboratively by communities of bearers retrieved from the 15 countries that comprise CRESPIAL.

The project "Safeguarding of the ICH from Guarani communities" fostered the active participation from Guarani communities in the safeguarding of cultural expressions through the elaboration of a cultural cartography. This allowed the systematization of national diagnoses from the five countries participating in the project and the translation of the 2003 Convention to value and save the Guarani indigenous language.

There are still some projects under execution. One of them has received international recognition: "Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage of Aymara communities in Bolivia, Chile and Peru". It was selected by UNESCO on the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. This project includes actions that safeguard music, oral traditions, textile art, agricultural technologies, and food processes, as well as use of language as a vehicle for transmitting the living heritage. As a result, they produced three albums of traditional music by Aymara communities, along with three essays showcasing the registration, compilation, research and dissemination of oral and musical expressions obtained in collaboration of constant dialog between technical teams, Aymara communities and the civil society involved.

Currently, the third component of this project is coming to life, which is to identify, register, research knowledge, wisdoms, agriculture and cattle farming and ritual practices from Aymara communities. CRESPIAL emphasized the valuation of the cultural essence and transmission of knowledge between generations of Aymara communities. This phase has facilitated contributions to strengthening policies on management and coordination among key stakeholders, including governments, bearer communities, and civil society. By doing so, it enables the collaboration and coordination of actions and initiatives that align with the management of cultural policies while fully integrating Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 15. Likewise, according to the principles and enforcement of the Convention, the multinational project for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Afro- descendant People from the Central American Integration System (SICA) region and Cuba is being executed.

It represents a cooperation effort to strengthen the abilities from community leaders and public managers in the participative construction of a subregional inventory. Nine countries, CRESPIAL, SICA and the Central American Black Organization (CABO) are committed to this important project.

Given the context of global concern with climate change, CRESPIAL is prioritizing efforts on the project 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergency Situations.' This project aims to develop strategies for risk management, guiding actions to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage from the five participating countries.

## Final remarks

In summary, over the course of seventeen years, CRESPIAL has solidified its expertise in Latin America as a hub of cultural diversity, providing its Member States with essential tools for building, implementing, and managing cultural policies. These efforts directly facilitate the participation of various stakeholders from civil society, while also strengthening ties between the Center, UNESCO, Member States, and bearer communities. The overarching objective remains the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

This means that CRESPIAL is a benchmark in Safeguarding of the ICH in the region. For this reason, our work as CRESPIAL and our path are reaffirmed by managing to safeguard the different and diverse expressions, practices and knowledge from bearer communities in Latin America and, with this, strengthen the institutional capabilities from the Centre's Member States.

Our firm commitment to generating public cultural policies that allow expanding the actions for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is an incentive that is in harmony with all programs implemented. The results are nothing more than the fruit of years of effort made by the Center and its Member States in the hard and constant work of safeguarding our living heritage.

### Links for consultation

<https://www.crespial.org/mapapci/>

<https://ich.unesco.org/es/convenci%C3%B3n>

<https://redsinfronteras.cl/project/diversidad-cultural-en-america-latina/>

<https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b1b631f7-30df-4668-9047-6e2060cb30a6/content>

<https://www.bancomundial.org/es/region/lac/brief/indigenous-latin-america-in-the-twenty-first-century-brief-report-page>

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/541651467999959129/pdf/>

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