

THINKING ABOUT ICH AND NATURAL DISASTERS: PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REGION

Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural
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Introduction

This text is the result of the first effort by the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL) to organize secondary data and primary information regarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

A brief presentation of CRESPIAL helps to understand how this work was developed. Created in February 2006, CRESPIAL aims to support the regional integration towards the safeguarding and the protection of ICH in Latin America. Its creation results from the subscription of the Constitution Agreement of CRESPIAL, signed between UNESCO and the Peruvian Government, a Category 2 Center, under the auspices of UNESCO. Currently, 15 countries are members and take part on activities: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Figure 1).



Figure 1 CRESPIAL.

The CRESPIAL has five Programs:

- Multinational Projects – Almost ten years of implementation, and three large projects: Aymara Indigenous People, Afro-descendent Communities and Guarani Indigenous People. In 2019, two new projects of CRESPIAL will focus on Natural Disasters and on Armed Conflict.
- Program of Incentives for the ICH Safeguarding – Almost seven years, offers two calls per year to finance civil society projects in the region.
- Community Management – It is considered a priority; it aims to encourage countries to value traditional knowledge and to include the community

management process into the public policies implementation. Among other activities, CRESPIAL elaborates material to help countries to promote effective community participation in the ICH safeguarding process.

- Capacity-Building Program – Articulated with the UNESCO's Global Strategy to Capacity Building. It consists of systematization and elaboration of capacity building material with different subjects, for a diverse audience. In 2019, CRESPIAL will promote training of trainers' workshop to improve regional capacities in the ICH management.
- Knowledge Management – Implies in the systematization of knowledge about ICH in the region, encompassing the State of the Art elaboration, which is an overview about ICH policies, actions, instruments to ICH safeguarding in the 15 Countries.

Considering the importance of natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean region, CRESPIAL intends to start a consultancy for the construction of a diagnosis in the region about this theme and the different experiences in Latin American countries. Subsequently, this consultancy will generate inputs to elaborate the bases of a multinational project in which the 15 member countries of CRESPIAL will take part.

The General Context of the Theme of 'ICH and Natural Disasters' in the Region

The information presented in this document is based on the 'Impact of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1990-2013' report, elaborated by United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Regional Office for the Americas, and OSSO Corporation. This report encompasses 22 countries. Other documents and reports were offered by the affiliated countries as per contribution to amplify the regional knowledge on ICH and natural disasters in the region.

According to the UNISDR report, between 1990 and 2013:

- From the total of more than 100,000 records of disasters, less than 1% (562 records) corresponds to intensive manifestations of the risk.
- On average, there are 23 intensive disasters per year.
- Each intensive disaster has an average of 37 human lives lost, 21,000 people affected, 1,064 homes destroyed and 1,302 homes damaged.
- For each intensive record, there are 177 extensive. This is equivalent to 4,100 extensive records per year.
- From the general total, Mexico and Colombia had the highest occurrence of records (43%), people killed (44%) and affected (65%), homes destroyed (44%) and damaged (73%), which in turn account for 52% of the population of the 16 countries analysed. However, Guatemala and Ecuador, countries with smaller populations, also recorded high losses and damages during 2012 and 2013.

Despite these impressive numbers, improvements in risk management are observed, although they are not evenly distributed in the countries. This justifies the urgency in

organizing efforts to improve our capacity to prevent and minimize the impacts of these events in the region and to offer methods of inventorying and safeguarding ICH manifestations affected by disasters.

There are few analyses and systematized experiences on ICH and natural disasters in the region, since the studies are often focused on material, tangible, and archaeological heritage. This fact makes it difficult to accurately understand the impact of these natural phenomena on ICH of the 15 member countries of CRESPIAL.

Information on Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and the Caribbean region is presented below.

Bolivia

The Lake Poopó is located more than 3,600 meters above sea level, in a desert and salted region of the Oruro Province, between Bolivia and Peru. This lake was once considered Bolivia's second-largest lake and an important fishing resource for local communities, the Uru. The Uru people inhabited extensive territory in northeastern Bolivia and the southern highlands of Peru around lakes Titicaca and Coipasa, and also along the Desaguadero River (Figure 2).

Throughout the 20th century, Poopó was completely dry between 1939 and 1944 and between 1994 and 1997, while between 1969 and 1973 it was reduced to a few salty puddles. Events such as El Niño and La Niña, climate change, the low fluvial rainfall, and river contamination by mining activities have aggravated the situation, and, in 2015, the lake dried up.

On top of that, the access to the Uru territory is limited because it is surrounded by other communities, which prevent the Uru people from accessing their traditional territory and therefore their natural resources. The identity of this population is deeply rooted in the water use and management they carry out, which means canalization, management of small, water distribution, strategies to provide drinking water to the animals, among other key elements for their economy.

The water management system is organized and planned by communities in advance, and it is sustained by ceremonial acts. In recent times, this system has shown its



Figure 2 Lake Poopó (left); and Urus indigenous people (right).
(Source: Ministry of Culture, Bolivia)

limits, due to the prolonged drought and the change in other factors. The Ministry of Culture of Bolivia is working on the declaration as ICH of the Plurinational State of Bolivia of the knowledge and ways of life linked to the water of the original nation Uru (Qhas´- qot ´Zoñi). This effort seeks to make visible the relationship between climate change, vulnerability and ICH, through the strengthening of the role of traditional knowledge of indigenous communities for the resilience of the ecosystems where they live.

Ecuador

On 16 April 2016, the Ecuadorian coast was shaken by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, whose epicenter was in Pedernales province of Manabí. This epicenter zone includes a large concentration of heritage places in different cities and also has two manifestations inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage: marimba music and traditional songs and dances from the Colombian region of the South Pacific and the Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas (2015) and traditional weaving of the Ecuadorian toquilla straw hat (2012).

In this occasion, the post disaster needs assessment methodology was applied to the tangible, intangible, archeological heritage, and cultural industries. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage (MCyP) and the National Institute of Cultural Heritage implemented a mechanism of inter-institutional coordination, the Ecuadorian Action Strategy, in order to collect, consolidate and report periodically the information about the impacts in the field of culture and cultural heritage at the national level. Some relevant outcomes of this work are:

- First response actions (emergency)
- The policy of post-disaster reconstruction and recovery for cultural heritage
- Diagnosis of effects on the intangible cultural heritage

The intangible cultural heritage diagnosis showed that with more than 200,000 people



Figure 3 Traditional weaving of the Ecuadorian toquilla straw hat (left); and Marimba music and traditional songs and dances from the Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas. (Source: Ministry of Culture, Ecuador)

affected, including artisans, entrepreneurs of traditional cuisine, popular artists and cultural managers, 40% of the ICH inventoried in the region was affected. One of the most affected sectors was handicrafts, especially those related to the weaving of straw hats from toquilla. About 500 families of weavers in the region would have been affected in the value chain, especially in the distribution and marketing of their products. The earthquake also influenced recreation, and the processes of intergenerational transmission of the intangible cultural heritage came to a standstill, which caused a major rupture in the social fabric of these territories. The heritage festivals were interrupted, negatively impacting the economy.

The Plan for the Reconstruction and Recovery of the Culture and Heritage Sector proposes short, medium and long term actions on three fronts of action:

- Intervention and protection of cultural heritage and repositories of social memory
- Strengthening of cultural enterprises for the socio-economical activation of the territory
- Brigades and cultural accompaniment points for community emotional containment through art and culture

The Plan strategies for the mitigation and recovery included:

- Offering technical support to the ICH practitioners and to the local governments to facilitate processes of community participation in the transmission of knowledge and the execution of the festive calendar
- Promoting workshops to the development of local traditional dance and music such as marimba, and oral expressions
- Creating space for a meeting of traditional games in the affected communities
- Promoting meeting for local narrators for the oral transmission of heritage in the shelters
- Formulation of plans to safeguard manifestations at risk, especially those related to crafts, traditional building techniques, and cuisine heritage

Peru

The Peruvian territory is frequently affected by torrential rains, severe landslides, and floods, associated with the phenomenon known as El Niño. In February 2017 the northern Peruvian coast, regions of Piura, Lambayeque and La Libertad suffered the consequences of one of these events. The regions are rich in heritage sites – especially archaeological heritage – and intangible expressions, and host some of the country's most important museums and many of their inhabitants live from the traditional crafts sector.

The Culture Sector of the Lima UNESCO Office, the UNESCO Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit at the headquarters in Paris, and the Ministry of Culture conducted post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) for the Culture Sector in the

region. To prevent the extensive damage often caused by El Niño, Peruvian Ministry of Culture launched a disaster risk prevention program known as ENSO 2014. The prevention program was developed in 63 sites of the affected region and through the application of a set of management measures. Certain sectors also received the direct intervention.

The assessment encompasses: a) the creative industries and handicrafts, and b) intangible traditions and practices, since for the Peruvian State they are part of the same system of recognition and protection. Manifestations both recognized and not recognized at the National level were assessed. The most affected manifestations were those not recognized at the National level, in all the three regions.

The assessment showed that the natural disaster mostly affected cultural manifestations through:

- The difficulty of access to raw material
- Damages of housing or offices
- Damages or loss of furniture and tools
- Reduced accessibility
- Difficulty to access market and points of sale
- Shrinking of tourism

Caribbean region initiatives

There are some initiatives being taken in the region, among them:

- The Dutch Caribbean (composed of the six islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Saint Eustatius, and Saint Maarten) and Suriname held a consultative meeting having ‘intangible cultural heritage and natural disasters’ as one of its themes. Short pilot inventories were made in these territories.
- CARBICA (the Caribbean regional section of the International Council of Archives) establishes a Caribbean disaster heritage network. This initiative encompasses intangible heritage in the region.
- MOWLAC, the Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Memory of the World Program, in its annual meeting, organized a workshop on strategies for young people on human rights, memory, resilience, and natural disasters.
- Cuba mapped ICH as a heritage management tool with application in disaster preparedness.

General Impacts

General aspects of the impacts of natural disasters on ICH identified across Latin America and the Caribbean region are here presented. Importantly, this is the first institutional approach to the theme in the region, and does not have the intention to

trace generalizations.

The most relevant impacts of natural disasters on the ICH of the communities in the region were on **livelihoods of artisans, with an increase of poverty levels**. The impacts on sites of historical value and the loss of resources also affect a range of practices and have the potential to cause **the loss of cultural value and diversity in the communities**. These losses lead artisans to look for cheaper alternatives to produce more and at lower prices, considering that their economy is weak. They may also choose to abandon the activity, and **traditional crafts lose value**.

Many cultural manifestations that are closely related to economic income, such as artisans' practices and knowledge and the development of festivals and carnivals, are seriously affected by the breakdown of value chains and the decrease in tourism.

The increased frequency of El Niño episodes has meant a greater risk of young people abandoning the cultural traditions of their communities. This situation provokes, for instance, **the loss of spaces where traditional activities are developed and the interruption of educational activities that encourage young people to practice their traditions**. Adding to that is **the lack of diffusion of places to practice music and dance** contributes to decrease the young people's connection to their culture.

All these aspects put **community sustainability at risk** as well. The loss or low accessibility to adequate inputs for artisans to maintain traditional practices is aggravated in cases of uprooting, when severe impacts on the territories impose displacement which affects the social fabric of communities.

Challenges

The effort endured by CRESPIAL and presented here allowed the identification of the challenges to preserving ICH in the face of natural disaster in Latin America and the Caribbean region. They are:

- **Articulate ICH and risk management.** Priorities in emergency contexts focus on providing basic needs to the affected population. Achieve inter-sectoral actions to seek comprehensive attention to the ICH in emergencies is a need.
- **Measure the damage.** In many cases, the evaluation is based on material aspects of ICH, disregarding the intangible aspects that consequently are not included in the planning of emergency actions. ICH tools such as Safeguard Plans or inventories could be used.
- **Generate clear protocols and procedures** for care in the prevention, emergency and post-disaster contexts are essential.
- **Generate strategies of memory and transmission of knowledge associated with ICH in an emergency situation.**
- **Strengthen networks for the exchange of experiences** that help the systems of anticipation, emergency, and post-disaster in the cultural sector.

- **Consider traditional knowledge as input in resettlement process**, including worldviews, access to natural resources, traditional organizations and community's relation with the environment.
- **Demonstrate that ICH can contribute to the prevention of natural disasters.** To make visible the fundamental role of communities' traditional knowledge in the prevention and anticipation of the impacts that natural disasters can generate.
- **Demonstrate that ICH can contribute in post-disaster scenarios.** Not only must safeguarding actions be carried out to recover practices, manifestations and cultural expressions of the communities, these practices can also help in turn to generate processes of adaptation and easier resilience of the populations in their territories.

CRESPIAL Proposals

In a context of Multinational Program, CRESPIAL makes the following proposals:

- **To develop a consultancy for the construction of a diagnosis in the region about ICH and natural disasters and the different experiences in Latin American countries.**
- **To develop multinational projects on the subject of ICH and natural disasters in the 15 states members of CRESPIAL.**

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