



Charter on Philosophical Thought in Cultural “Heritage”

Considerations

Considering that 60 years have passed since the Venice Charter, that more than 50 years have transpired since the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) called for protection against threats of destruction; that 30 years have gone by since the signing of the Nara Document on authenticity (1994), a relevant reflection on intangible heritage; that 25 years have passed since the Built Heritage Charter (1999), which makes an urgent call against the destruction of vernacular architecture in Mexico and the world; that 21 years have gone by since the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), a text that recaptures the safeguarding of traditional and popular culture of 1989, as well as the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001. Likewise, 11 years have elapsed since the Coatepec Charter (2013), the same year that the Mexican ICOMOS created its Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage; and 7 years since the recognition of the category of temporary wood heritage, relevant for safeguarding the cyclical cultural landscape of indigenous peoples of Mexico and the world.

Considering that our Federal Law on Monuments and Archaeological, Artistic and Historical Zones is designed to protect material heritage, which historically classifies and partializes heritage, as if there were no continuity in cultural expressions, denying the historicity of the millennial heritage of indigenous peoples, excluding the validity of vernacular heritage, putting at serious risk the protection of the biocultural heritage of the native peoples, a heritage expressed in a continuity of spiral cycles that validate their millennial presence, with their existence prior to the archaeological heritage, such as the first Mesoamerican architecture from which architects were inspired to create monumental architecture, which today is protected as archaeological heritage, but which no longer has life.

Highlighting the importance of Mexico’s cultural plurality, its ancient wealth that has come at the price of struggles and losses of indigenous peoples, who have faced global processes and social transformations, who were subject to centuries-long colonialism and who maintain their struggle against uneradicated coloniality, present in internal colonialism derived from hegemonic policies and social positions of discrimination, exclusion, racism, exploitation and dispossession of lands, knowledge and resources.



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Considering that the philosophical thoughts of indigenous peoples have been classified as intangible heritage. Thus, for indigenous peoples, the term “heritage” is limited, since it fragments the Thought-System that integrates the components of their living in the territory, of everything that also lives in it and of the guardians of each place and creation. Furthermore, the etymology of the word has patriarchal roots as it focuses on the traditional inheritance from fathers and mothers to their children, so it would be more acceptable to speak of an inheritance.

This document bases its position on those that precede it, in order to present with due respect a reflection on the philosophical thoughts of the Hñähñu, Ikoots, Maya, Mè'phàà and Nahua indigenous peoples.

Philosophical thoughts

Intangible cultural heritage is a reflection and manifestation of the philosophical thought of indigenous peoples, where the spaces within the territory, considered sacred and cyclically sacralized, express rites, customs, and festivities, and integrate this universe of the material, immaterial and natural.

What has commonly been known as worldview, cosmogony or cosmology, and which we can now understand as “cosmocoexistence”, integrates the recognition of the totality of what exists, based on which each indigenous people founded its origin and perception of the world.

In this Thought-System, language is like the window that allows us to look into their worlds and from which each people also looks into other worlds. When there is no possibility of writing, language is the memory of books written in the different episodes of one's own history, books that are used for learning, to understand the universe of identity, to know our origin through stories and songs.

In philosophical thoughts, feminine thought is essential for the transmission of knowledge, however, being little recognized, it has had to fight against patriarchy that has minimized its role in the valuation of cultural and natural heritage. In the Thought-System, women are the receptacle of knowledge, as they are present in various scenarios since childhood, learning a diversity of knowledge. They will not use some of this knowledge on a daily basis, but they will be aware of it because it involves taking care of the space we inhabit, of the territory, and if necessary, they will put the knowledge into practice to guarantee living well, living in peace, living the good life.

Territory

Territoriality is a thought construct about how to live that is structured from within domestic spaces, expanding to rural and urban public spaces, agricultural spaces and even those spaces that are not necessarily inhabited by human beings, but have a sacred bond. Territoriality is as diverse as are the ecosystems in which indigenous



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peoples have lived and continue to live, that it can be configured with cosmograms or compartmentalized surfaces, with fixed borders and other dynamics; with continuous or separate surfaces, within the same ecosystem or as distant as the town can configure the extensions of its territory, including places located in other countries.

Thus, the territory is formed as a subjectified space; as the origin of worlds and the vital materials with which things were created, including human beings as subjects of creation.

The territory is seen as a borrowed space, from which permission must be sought and thanks given for what it provides for living well, living peacefully. The territory is the land that lends itself, it lends itself to give us food and let us live within it. The idea of lending itself is due to the fact that it is a being just like we are, it has no owner, that is why when the land feels mistreated it no longer produces good harvests or it becomes hostile and throws us out of the place. Petition rites teach us that we are not the creation that controls the world, a way of thinking that is contradictory to capitalism. Thus, living implies being in various spaces, resting, working, partying, living within the community, with other communities and other beings that coexist in the territory. In short, it means coexisting with creation, creators, and caretakers.

Being and living are manifestations of indigenous peoples thinking therefore, the creations for this living, under the premise of the ways of life of each people, living well, living peacefully or living well, are tied to various areas. of cultural heritage, what is commonly known as “heritage categories”. These cyclical creations, and the new ones that each generation includes in thinking and living, become subjects that inhabit the territory, so they cease to be an exclusively material inheritance, therefore, they will have a cycle in this living, they will die. as subjects and new subjects will come to life, carrying with them the timeline of their existence in this philosophical thought.

The learning scenarios

Through millennia, indigenous peoples have constructed, maintained, cared for and enriched their identity. The common thread that holds them together in a dynamic way is the intangible heritage, which has been maintained through learning scenarios within the family and community space. These scenarios are defined and maintained, they are configured in other spaces and cyclically transform the spaces that host them.

We add to what has already been said the need to understand this intangible heritage within a process in the territory, which involves various learning spaces where thoughts about being, and living can be transmitted. Scenarios that integrate learning from other types of knowledge from the Thought-System, linking biotic and



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constructive knowledge, terminating in the creation of what we know as vernacular architecture, the house as a living being or entity, creating the private frontier within the territory.

Cyclical cultural landscapes are another vernacular expression of indigenous peoples where ephemeral architecture, constructed with plant materials, claims its learning scenario for short periods. The materialization of this architecture is recreated by bringing together the different component parts that have been resting in various places and sacralizing the public space in order to celebrate rites linked to water, rain, agriculture, in syncretism with paying homage to patron saints and virgins. Learning scenarios are vital in this dynamic cultural landscape where short cycles of learning and sacralization are alternated with long cycles of disintegration of the vernacular architecture into its component parts which then lie resting for the remainder of the year in people's backyards. The other components, that grow in the forest, mountains, or hills, wait to be collected at the established times.

In the same way that the process of collecting material goods involves rituals, cycles and requests for permission, the creation of the house or ephemeral structures is completely different from the Eurocentric concept of building, The verbs "tying" and "weaving" involve much more than building, they are part of the life cycles from other forms of knowledge that are also associated with "tying" and "weaving". For indigenous peoples, the integration of architecture with the village and nature occurs in language, making the borders of the house, the backyard and the village disappear, as they become integrated into the territory under a single skin.

Just as this vernacular heritage has diverse learning scenarios, many other forms of knowledge are also learned at the same time and in the same cycles in these scenarios. Caring for intangible heritage involves the protection of its various learning spaces, which do not occur at the same time, are not learned in classrooms, and require cycles, permission, sacredness, and festivities of gratitude, and are part of life itself, part of inhabiting the territory.

What are we facing?

Considering that the diversity of cultural heritage exists in time and space, and that it demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems, its care has not been integrated into public policies and into the valuation of vernacular and biocultural manifestations, which have a validity and antiquity of more than 3000 years in Mesoamerican and now Mexican territory.

Social, economic, and environmental threats exist, mainly due to the global capitalist system which is contrary to the philosophical thinking of indigenous peoples. In this respect, the position of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Coatepec Charter on the importance of the intrinsic relationship between the intangible and the material, as well as its profound interdependence



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with the natural heritage, obliges us to comprehend the intangible legacy as a system of hereditary components. It also makes us understand that the damage or loss of a part of the system (material, natural or immaterial) seriously affects the biocultural inheritance. Likewise, if measures taken to care for this system only consider part of it they will not be enough to fully protect all of the heritage of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and they will fail to comply with the commitment to respect the intangible cultural legacy of the communities.

Material heritage requires a geopolitical delimitation for its protection, which is established with a polygonal. However, this protection is not effective in the case of material heritage derived from philosophical thought in which borders are not fixed but change cyclically and at different times. In other words, a polygonal layout focused only on material expression could leave vital spaces for the production and significance of the material legacy unprotected.

The borders established by indigenous peoples range from the house as a built space, the backyard that integrates the space of the house with the activities around it, the village that establishes in its settlement pattern the social relations of the community, relations between the backyards and the community spaces, and finally, the ecosystem in which everything exists, which links agricultural and hunting activities with the backyard and the house, as well as the sacred spaces where the animals and divine protectors of the territory live.

To think about the cultural and natural legacy, or rather the biocultural heritage of Mexico's native peoples, is to refer to the way they inhabit their territories, it implies combining several categories established by UNESCO, and in some cases, to include new manifestations or expand existing ones.

Position

This document is just a step in understanding the philosophical thinking of native peoples, in which we try to understand being and living in the territory in a different way than the way we were taught to document and protect cultural legacy.

To do this, we adopt the perspective of critical interculturality, which implies decolonizing the Eurocentric thinking with which we have been educated. This implies basing our reflections on the intangible legacy of non-European cultures.

It also implies a horizontal relationship between academics and indigenous people through intercultural dialogue, in which the holders of knowledge become the specialists and the backbone of the process in order for the heritage to go through cycles of renewal.



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In addition, it is necessary to accompany the indigenous peoples in their struggles against colonialism, to strengthen processes which defend their territory and to get involved together with them in their way of being and inhabiting their territory. To achieve this, we must recognize ourselves as multicultural, with different thoughts that enrich us, distinguish us, but also bring us together for exchange.

Ethics forms a substantial part of this relationship, in which we must eliminate the colonialist position that there is only one scientific knowledge and respect the other scientific ways of thinking that have been developed by indigenous peoples.

For this to happen we must promote governance and denounce actions that put the free expression of culture at risk. Governance goes hand in hand with the legal resources that indigenous peoples have gained, such as prior, free, and culturally appropriate consultation for any project linked to their territory and culture.

We still have much to understand about the philosophical thoughts of indigenous peoples, but we have started the dialogue, to which we hope more thoughts will be added and that we will walk with respect for the care of cultural manifestations, which are the cultural heritage of the native peoples.

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The letter on Philosophical Thought in Cultural “Heritage” is the product of dialogue and reflection between academics and indigenous peoples Deca, Molino, Juchitán (Hñahñu), San Mateo de Mar (Ikoots), Chinantla (Mixteca Poblana), Pinotepa Nacional (Ñusavi), Nunkiní, Campeche (Maya), Acatepec, Malinaltepec (Mè'phàà) and Ayotitlán, Jalisco (Nahua), as part of the research project “Study of the philosophy of how native peoples inhabit their territory. Cultural landscape, vernacular, and biocultural knowledge”, CF-2019/51229, funded by CONAHCYT, and developed by the following institutions: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Cooperación Comunitaria, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia and the Universidad de Guanajuato.



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