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TERRITORIES OF ORIGIN

▣ Let's begin by wondering...

Do we, the young people of the Colombian Amazon know our territory and those different ways of acknowledging and interpreting it?

How do we know our territories of origin?

What spaces of the territory do the Elders narrate their stories about "Origin"?

Have we, as young peoples, participated within those spaces?

What do we understand for "*cultural affinity*" for the indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon?

What do we look for?

To generate a reflection on the ways in which the Amazon indigenous peoples recognize or interpret the territory from their traditional knowledge; as a tool for the defense of the very territories and cultural preservation.

On the specific:

- Acknowledge the diverse indigenous peoples' spiritual practices in the different territories of the Amazon.
- Value the importance of the different *Territories of Origin* of the indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon.

- Identify what are and where the *Territories of Origin* and sacred places of the indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon are located, for their protection and territorial defense.
- Encourage the use and/or strengthening of students' native tongue in order to generate a greater knowledge and interpretation of Amazon knowledge.

WHY A MODULE ON TERRITORIES OF ORIGIN?

"Our territory holds the imprints of our creators, this is the heritage given by them, it is the testimony of the very history of our evolution. That's why we say that the shamanic knowledge is not an invention of ours, it is the real and clear evidence of our origin."

Because every people or clan thinks of itself from their very culture and experience; and, it is important to reflect, analyze and share knowledge about what the territory means to every one of us.

Why The Territory, for the indigenous peoples of the Amazon "it is the core, it is the material and spiritual life, with which they in turn communicate, this is the space where different bounds of things are linked and related amongst human beings, nature and sacred sites." "Space, time, spirituality and collectivity is the territory, territory is the whole".

Because when talking about concepts as *Territories of Origin*, we are going beyond the physical, administrative, and legal space. It is about that very place where the balance of the origin of life and spirituality is maintained, based on the principles of a *law of origin*, nourished and materialized in the ancestral knowledge of the elderly peoples, the *sweet word*, the teachings, nurturing and learning; it is about the mambadero, the chagra, fabrics, dances, the own traditional medicine and the ecological calendar.

Because the territory is the holistic view of the Amazon life, it is also implicit those aspects related to the origin of life of living beings made up of humans, biotic and abiotic, each of them connected to each other in a spiritual way. That is why it is explained the special existing with the jaguar, the anaconda, yagé and other beings of the jungle.

Because in the Colombian Amazon, over 56 forms of way of thinking, practices and worldviews converge. This means a multiplicity of constructions and thought systems give rise to the need to defend and count on the territory for the continued existence of the peoples.

Territories of Origin (The Own)

It is worth considering...

Do we know what an *ancestral origin territory* is?

A traditional origin territory? A territory of *indigenous thinking*?

What do we mean that the territories are connected?

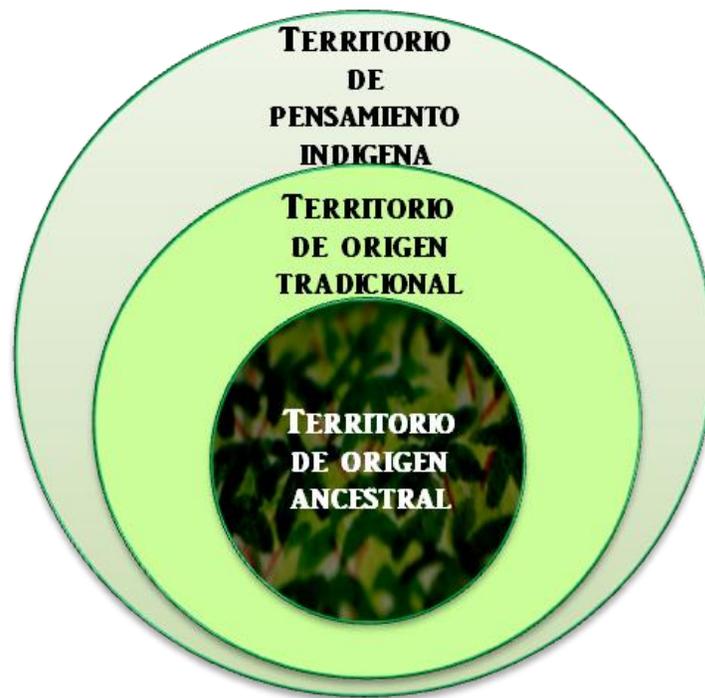
There are three types of territories in Amazon way of thinking: the **territories of ancestral origin, traditional territories and indigenous thinking territory**. It does not mean that they are detached interpretations, since they are all correlated and consolidated in the existence of life as Amazon way of thinking.

"The territory 'for its usefulness we conserve our law of origin we maintain the identity by conserving and developing our ways of life and at the same time we maintain the territory. Identity without territory is not possible, nor maintaining the territory without having our identity as peoples'".¹

¹Taken from

http://sic.mininterior.gov.co/sites/default/files/plan_integral_de_vida_del_resguardo_indigena_yunquillo.pdf.p96

The territorial conception of the Amazon way of thinking is related to all territorial spaces, physical, spiritual and geographical. Figure 1 shows this relationship between the territory of ancestral, traditional and thinking origin. In other words, it is explained as follows:



*Figure 1. An approximation to the territorial configuration in the Amazon way of thinking.
OPIAC School*

The *Territory of Origin* of the indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon is focused in three major dimensions:

1. Territories of Ancestral Origin

A *Territory of Ancestral Origin* is acknowledged as that space where one was born, where the diversity of indigenous peoples and their respective clans emerged.

The *Territory of Origin* refers to the Ancestry, framing the place where life was cleared to humans, clans and communities; quoting Mr. Fiagama, "*it is the cave of birth, the origin and its spiritual and territorial connection*", Thus, the origin connects with the cultural tradition translated into the existence of life, inherited from the mother earth or the fertile breast of Mother Earth, that is to say, it is transposed from the *law of origin* to spirituality and hence the circumscription of humanity.

Correspondingly, the origin of each people obeys the order and mandate given by spiritual beings; for example, the Jaguars of the Yurupari - *HEE YAIA KETI OKA*, assert that; after the creation of the world, the four living beings [gods] ordered and left a regulation to handle it. They thought and left an area for each of the ethnic groups of the Caquetá, Mirití-Paraná, Apaporis, Pirá-Paraná, Taraira and Vaupés rivers, and their main tributaries.²

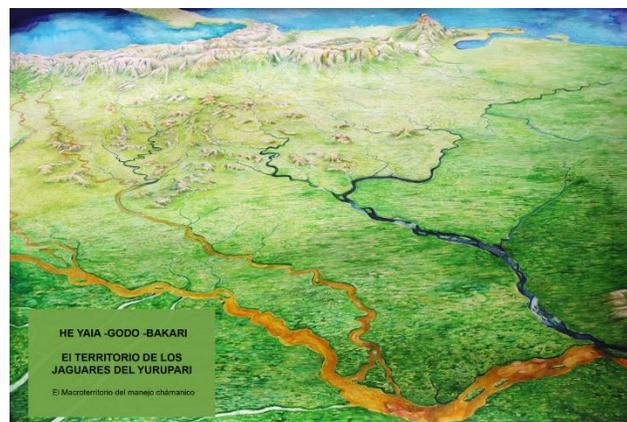


Figure 3. Jaguars' territory from Yurupari. Documents ACAIPI

²Focus and [prioritization documents of OPIAC's Guarantees Scheme OPIAC, 2013.](#)

Territories of ancestral origin

In these territories dwell life and the essence of the Amazon peoples, there is transmitted knowledge (through the narrations that the elders share in these spaces), as the core element to identify its root, the reason for being and personal, cultural and collective existence.

"The territory is full of myths about its origin and its nature and the pertaining relationship. How to understand the territory? with such. Myths revealing the origin of the human being in itself, providing models of human behavior and so conferring for that very reason, a meaning and a value to the existence "(Yucuna-Matapí, 2012, p.105).

What do Amazon peoples say about the *Territories of Origin*?

*"It is conceived as the place where it was born, where the indigenous peoples were born and upon that depends the plans and instructions to be performed"*³

*"It is the place occupied by the primitive ancestors since immemorial times, that is to say, the beginning of a clan where its limits and territoriality are defined"*⁴.

"These are the places in charge of maintaining the balance of life and spirituality, based on the principles of the law of origin nurtured and materialized in the ancestral knowledge of the elders."

³ OPIAC training school students' conceptualization, by the Department of Guaviare, when defining the *Territory of Origin*.

⁴OPIAC training school students' conceptualization, by the Department of Guainia, when defining the *Territory of Origin*.

"These are the places where emerged the different indigenous peoples"⁵.

"These are the places where events take place on the part of the ethnic groups, where humanity emerges"⁶.

"Territory of Origin is the place where begins every ethnic group, always under the guidance of the creator father"⁷.

2. Territories of Traditional Origin



Figura 4. Ilustración sobre la tradición de los pueblos indígenas que son de afinidad cultural del Tabaco, la Coca y la Yuca dulce. Diseño de Gil Farekade.

Figure 4. Illustration about the tradition of the indigenous peoples sharing cultural affinity on Tobacco, Coca and Sweet Manioc. Design by Gil Farekade,

"This is the place where elders' ancestral knowledge is carried out, the sweet word of the elder woman, the teachings and rearing of the mother; it

⁵ Conceptualización de los estudiantes de la escuela de formación OPIAC, por el departamento del Caquetá, al definir el territorio de origen

⁶ Conceptualización de los estudiantes de la escuela de formación OPIAC, por el departamento del Vaupés, al definir el territorio de origen

⁷ Conceptualización de los estudiantes de la escuela de formación OPIAC, por el departamento del Amazonas, al definir el territorio de origen.

*is the refractive /reflexive?? In the game, the mambeadero, the chagra,
the fabrics, medicine, among others."*

OPIAC Training School students, Department of Putumayo.

A Territory of Traditional Origin referring to those territories that after migratory processes for long periods of time became their homes, their point of dwelling, territory serving for their cultural and social practices for generations and tradition.

Traditional territories are considered as places sustaining the social and cultural dynamics of the people who inhabit them, where networks are created in order to connect and channel energy flows. Besides, it is right there where the people make their offerings with the purpose of achieving the management, protection and conservation of both, the territory and its nature, so preventing diseases affecting life and tranquility in the communities. They are places of interaction and thinking that keep stories from generation to generation in order to maintain the balance of energies. As stated by Yucuna-Matapí (2002) *"It is the area where the spirits of our ancestors are, it is the place of symbolic reproduction of the being by means of a ritual that allows the continuity and transcendence of the collective being"*.⁸.

Each people or clan identifies the traditional territory as of their thinking and their daily life, for some of them, these are those territories that were settled by the very indigenous people coming from the territories of origin, as a result of events that affected the community, and caused displacement. This is determined by a Uitoto leader:

Such territories were acquired, others located by family heritage, others due to forced displacement as a result of violent actions. For example: the rubber economy (Cuaucherías – rubber plantations), the Colombo-Peruvian conflict, the presence and outrage of the catholic church that implied the resettlement in other places. These territories began to reconfigure themselves from the spiritual and the physical, as experiential property; in order to be owners, spirituality and the background of being is established, in stubble demarcations, cemeteries of elderly peoples, the

⁸Matapí U. Yucuna R. 2012, *Ancestral Cartography Yucuna-Matapí*. Tropembos. Bogotá D.C. p.104

lives of those peoples born there, as language of territorial possession, it is right there where we are said to be owners. (Fiagama 2017)

If for the external vision, there exists a single world, a single god; for the indigenous peoples the dimension is different. For instance; there is not only about land, but also territory with different characteristics, so that for some Amazon peoples, there are territories of origin, traditional and spiritual territory, for other peoples, such as the Andean (Misak and Nasa) there are three worlds established in the world of sub soil, soil and space.

Territories of traditional origin

Such territories correspond to the scenarios of coexistence in which, day by day, knowledge and cultural practices have been consolidated in their own systems of life such as health, chagras, education, security and food sovereignty, arts, and their architecture expressed in terms of Amazon way of thinking are shared. The territories of traditional origin are those using their own learning methods, their own research and the transmission of knowledge to new generations, starting from the very experience and putting into practice of knowledge itself; that is to say, it is not theorized to be applied, as the very system of non-own knowledge has made.

3. Territories of Indigenous Thinking

A territory of *Indigenous Thinking* corresponds to those immaterial places where spirituality arrives, the thinking of the clans and the peoples, these are of specialized management and allow the connection with the spirits in order to protect the great Amazon territory.

This territorial dimension of way of thinking refers to such Amazon spirituality which is transversal in all the cited territories, inherited from the divine forces of tobacco, coca, sweet manioc, karayuru, yopo and others; as well the places where they prepare themselves spiritually in order to provide guidance and support the daily activities of their clans and communities. There is no mental limit of the territory, all Amazonia is understood as a spiritual territory, given that there are diverse forces ranging from north to south and from east to west, by the pathways of rivers, rapids, cananguchales⁹, as well as it is explained by the tradition of the Yurupari, when referring to the pathway through which the anaconda transits.

This territory has no tangible limits, they start from a lattice of relations between the thinking of peoples and clans that seek to connect with each other, they seek to inform, relate, and give answers, among others. Hence the comrade *Benjamín Jacanamijoy* of the Inga people, asserts: *"the territory constitutes in itself a place of coexistence and exchange of knowledge, in this sense, there are words that gather the meaning the world has for us as a single great territory subdivided likewise in a considerable number of places of life and thinking"*. National U. 2001, p.15



Figure 5. Illustration resembling the Indigenous Thinking Territory. Taken from ACAIPI documents

Territory of Indigenous Thinking

It is the spiritual translation, where it breaks the imaginary limits of the territories, there converge the life stories in relation to spirituality or what is known for external thinking, it is the world of myths. Finally, the integral vision of the territory would be configured in three parts that in turn are connected among Territory of Origin, Traditional Territory and Territory of Indigenous Thinking.

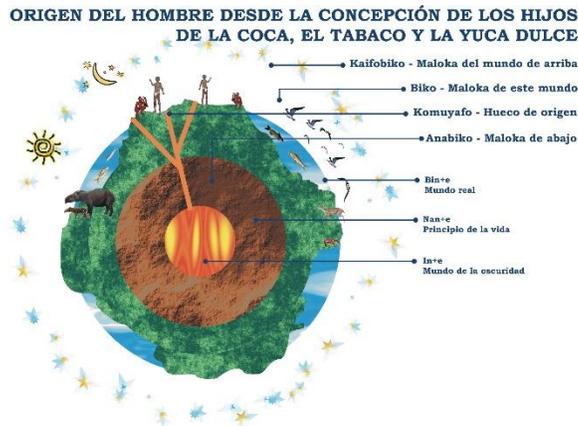


Figura 3. Origin of mankind from the very conception of the Coca, Tobacco and Sweet Manioc offspring. Gil Faredkatde and Paola Quiroga.

A final reflection

Territories and Governance

"We speak of Own-government for all the management of the way of thinking and what is around it. About what we observe here, about nature, animals, the environment, and what lies beneath this territory, deep down in the world. We do not have knowledge speaking only about this space, but also we hold knowledge and thinking related to the other spaces of the world. The same for the Earth. "

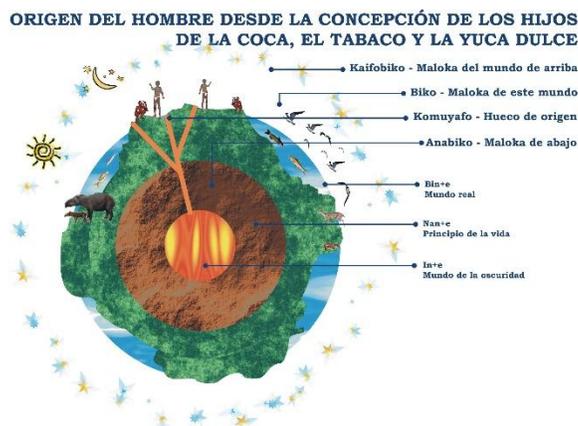


Figure 2. *Origen del hombre desde la concepción de los hijos de la coca, el tabaco y la yuca dulce.* Gil Faredkatde y Paola Quiroga.



FIGURE 6. Illustration Own Government, taken from OPIAC School archive.

The Own government for the indigenous peoples is based on the proper ways of managing the territory in relation to nature, through the spirituality and ancestral knowledge owned by men and women who are prepared to work a specialty in the culture of their peoples as (doctors, singers, dancers, maloquero, maloquera, chagrera¹⁰ ...), who seek through rituals, harmony and coexistence among all, welfare and social order.

Why an Amazon leader ought to be clear with respect to his or her *Territory of Origin*?

¹⁰Maloquero, maloquera, chagrera: male owner of the maloka, female owner of the maloka, female owner of the chagra

A leader who knows his/her origins, is a leader with a sense of belonging who is able to defend his/her people and his/her territory, someone who manages to advocate and generates credibility with his/her speech, a leader is a person who is culturally strong and whose voice will be heard.

The purpose of a leader is to continue with the legacy of their ancestors, complying with the laws of life, strengthening the practice of their ancestral and traditional knowledge, in order to assume the process carried out by the preceding leaders for the sake of the rights of their communities and the protection of the territory.

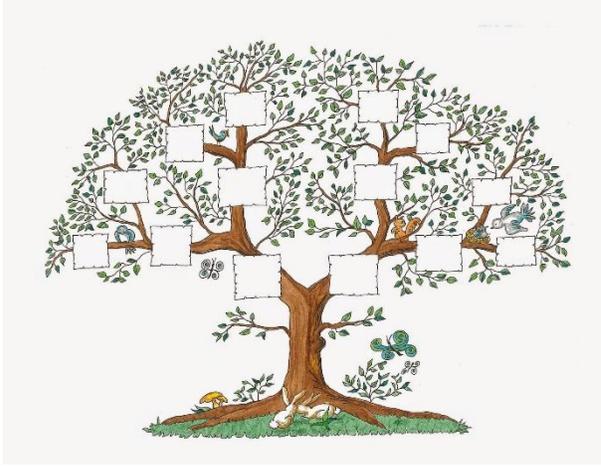
For leaders there may be demands with regard to organizational capacity, updating with legal and technical tools for the benefit of the community or, even, in that generational change that the school is looking for, the young people ought to be prepared mainly with the "Own", and the knowledge of their territory is fundamental.

From the tradition, the leader must have coherence between the traditional knowledge that he or she possesses with the actions of the daily life, as well as in the decision making, given that it strengthens his/her abilities for governability.

In conclusion, it is necessary to be aware of the relevance of the topic of *Territories of Origin* for the leaders and for the Amazon indigenous peoples since by having clarity about their origins, they will be able to assume with greater property the legacy of their ancestors, reaffirming their identity and defending the territory that ancestrally was handed over to his/her people or clan.

Recognize the concepts of *Territory of Origin* (ancestral, traditional and Thinking) because as of them we will have more clarity about where we come from, where we are going; so, we can grant the importance that each of them has for other happenings.

Activity



We will construct a genealogical tree in order to identify our origin, we will go years in the past and we will find out such information with our relatives regarding our descendants, always bearing in mind the people and clan to which both families, the father and the mother belonged to. This is in order to strengthen their identity and sense of belonging with the territory and their cosmovision.

Figure7.COSMIC VOICES, Messages from the sky. - blogger.

Let's think back...

With the help of our relatives and according to the stories of the elderly people at home, we will construct our genealogical tree, which should be oriented to accomplish the furthest section of the timeline, in order to identify our origin as a clan and as people.

HISTORIC CENTERS (THE FOREIGN)

▮Let's begin by wondering...

- What do we mean by historic centers?
- Are there any historic centers in your community, village or territory?
- Was such a historic center created by foreign people? Was the community consulted?
- Name historic centers in the Amazon favoring the indigenous peoples?

What do we look for?

As young people we are able to identify or recognize how society has assigned a value to the historical and ancestral memory of the Amazon peoples, and thus, be able to establish mechanisms for the defense of the proper ways of seeing the territory.

What do historic centers represent?

For the indigenous peoples these centers can be referenced as places of power and spiritual preparation. However, from the Colombian State the traditional historical centers of culture are places "of human events with human affectation" and they are narrated by humans who witnessed the events that left sequels in the territory and the communities.

Such places are named this way when we turn to the collective memory in order to repair the facts, in such a way that it becomes a reminder of the memory to reflect, but also to give strength and continuity to the process of Amazon enhancement, based on the "Own", and giving ourselves feedback from other knowledge with the purpose of helping to position more and more the Amazon way of thinking.



Figure 8. Historic Centers.

Every existence on Earth has its history of origin. In the same way, life without history would not be life and would not make any sense. In order to make history, our creators, that is to say, the Ayawa, had to face several difficulties, and those difficulties were turned into knowledge by these people¹¹. The elderly peoples and the caciques have guided from the spirituality and the historical memory, determining that; The traditional wise people - Kubua from Rio Pira Parana manage the territory and the environment - according to the knowledge of the origin stories left by our creators¹².

There are also **historical places** for indigenous peoples, where the elders tell oral histories "myths", with great spiritual meaning; in other words, the sacred places are historical, but at the same time, they are present as sites of great respect, of prevention to any act that goes against nature.

Also, there are **sacred and historical places**, with great spiritual significance, some of them explain the origin of the clans, which are living spaces of great respect, where any act going against nature, could cause effects; for example, access to the Yurupari, which requires spiritual and physical preparation for those who visit it.

For the protection of their traditional and native territories, the indigenous peoples have resorted to their **own historical Center**, such as cornerstones, spaces (architecture), objects, oral narratives, etc., mostly inhabited by communities who suffered violent historical events. This is achieved by means of the transformation of negative experiences into processes of

¹¹<http://gaiaamazonas.org/manejo-del-territorio-y-medio-ambiente/?lang=es>

¹²<http://gaiaamazonas.org/manejo-del-territorio-y-medio-ambiente/?lang=es>

survival and territorial defense, which stops the fragmentation of communities in their own dynamics of experience.

A historic center in the Amazon?

Yes, it does exist, one of the most emblematic cases of historical centers in the Colombian Amazon is Casa Arana, located in La Chorrera - Amazonas, a place where the economic interests for the production of rubber generated the most atrocious actions on the indigenous population. Nearly 80% of the people who inhabited this area lost their lives there.

This building is conceived as a center of historical memory; there, the population narrates their stories and revive the traditional episodes of life present in all the historical memories recorded from the material and spiritual context.

The place is currently also known as the *House of Knowledge*, which aims to train technicians (mostly young) in areas such as nursing and other external knowledge sciences.



Figure 9. Ceres Training Center, before know as Casa Arana in La Chorrera, Amazonas.

What does the State pronounce about the Historic Centers?

In the area of historic centers, the Colombian State has created the Center for Historical Memory, under the victims' law 1448 and more specifically in its decree in force of law 4633 concerted for indigenous peoples as a mechanism of reparation for indigenous victims of the armed conflict.

Article 2 of the law states that *"The Center for Historical Memory aims at the reception, recovery, conservation, compilation and analysis of all documentary material, oral testimonies and by any other means, and with regard to the violations that occurred on the occasion of the Colombian internal armed conflict, by means of research, museum, pedagogical and implementation of other activities... "*. However, for indigenous peoples' way of thinking, such centers of Own-memory must guarantee that living stories are also related to culture, spirituality as a way of maintaining the memory of communities.

Is it positive to establish memory centers?

According to the proper dynamics of the Amazon indigenous peoples, they make a daily memory in each song, each narration, in the river, in the chagra, among the multiple activities they carry out. Hence, the memory centers in the region might be very useful to safeguard the ancestral history of the Amazon, as long as:

- Respect for territorial autonomy,
- The contents motivate the community's attendance.
- Involve young people and children, so that, through the narrations and explanations of the elders - men and women -.
- Strengthen knowledge about the ancestral culture and its tradition.
- Created under the coordination of the community members in their territory.

As a conclusion, memory is the benchmark for the historical reconstruction of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon; hence, the need to specify the events and milestones present in the time and space of our territories.

Resort to memory will give us elements to defend and strengthen territorial autonomy, which in turn is the safeguard for those meaningful spaces that keep our collective wealth. Memory cannot be at the order of commercial purposes, but quite the contrary, it ought to be to the order of those young people who for many reasons have distanced themselves from their cosmivision and their territory.



Figure 10. Historic Memory Center.

SACRED SITES (THE APPROPRIATE)



Figure 11. Maps Territories of Origen, Sacred Sites, Memory Centers, Departments of Guainía and Putumayo. OPIAC School

▣ Let's begin by wondering...

In your Clan/People is there any talk of Sacred Sites?
What are Sacred Sites from the very Amazon way of thinking?
Are there any similarities and/or differences between the *Territories of Origin* and the *Sacred Sites*?
Amongst the cultural practices such dances, fabrics, chagras, is it remarkable the importance of their *Territories of Origin* and the *Sacred Sites*? ¿How do they do that?
What are those problems jeopardizing the Sacred Sites?

What do we look for?

Generate in the youth a reflection on how the Amazon indigenous peoples strengthen respect, appropriation and protection of the *Sacred Sites* of their people and / or clan, as a tool for the exercise of autonomy.

What are the Sacred Sites?

The language of the **Sacred** was accepted and began to gain momentum and be used by the people to refer to places where they perform rituals (lagoons, rivers, crags), these are such strategic points of great relevance and respect.

A national and institutional interest gave way to many professionals of the human sciences to support the communities and indigenous peoples in the construction of documents that help to endure the demands of collective interest. That very support achieved in itself that communities and

indigenous peoples took ownership of an anthropological and historical language very close to the sacred that seemed to be conjugated with the religious expression. However, the debate was established on the beliefs that the indigenous peoples were not religions, but these are part of the spiritual expressions, and they have nothing to do with religions.

As the "sacred" term is not characteristic of the indigenous peoples, for years, this term has been part of their speech as an appropriate theoretical reference with which they have sought at different levels the protection and conservation of the territory and these places of great value in the indigenous Amazon cosmovisions.

The personalities of the indigenous people who know and resort to these sacred places of such transcendence are the Caciques, Payes, Taitas¹³ and authorities of the clans and peoples, with a high level of knowledge of their culture, spiritual preparation, as well as physical and moral strength to which they accede whenever it is necessary and by means of an arduous physical and mental preparation (diets).

This is for the indigenous peoples an appropriation of the concept of **Sacred Sites**, as a strategy for the protection of the forms of how they relate to their territory, to which they assigned a connotation based on the cosmovision.

Let's check some definitions:

- Spaces that "are covered with signs, codes and languages that indicate the sacredness of the site, the orientation, the forms, the positions, the behaviors, revealing the dynamics and communication processes they maintain with other sacred sites, they provide the balance necessary for the subsistence of individuals or groups, this perspective of sacred space corresponds to the earthly reality, from where they are linked with other worlds.¹⁴
- All the places where some supernatural power inhabits or manifests itself. Such locations might be natural (caves, springs, green crosses, inside and outside land in the town), or built (temples, chapels, altars)

¹³ [Caciques, Payes, Taitas: All these terms refer to traditional authorities in different regions.](#)

¹⁴ Zapata Jair Espacio y territorio sagrado, lógica del ordenamiento territorial indígena. CIT. P.2

belonging to traditional practices. They perform rituals that have their explanation in a mythical reason.¹⁵

- Territory as sacred, identifying the sacred hills in which cosmogony is synthesized, symbols, meanings, as a vital space of reproduction of the community, the space of identity, of belonging, of appropriation;
- Total space full of values and encouragement that lead the subject to ask permission (in the chagra, the hillock), to plant, harvest, explore, etc. From there, the meaning of the beginning of the planting ceremony, Mayehak, addressed to Tzuultaq'a, in Q'eqchi 'territory. In fact, the Tzuultaq'a.¹⁶

Such concepts are close to the thinking of the Amazon peoples:

"The sacred sites correspond to those that arose with the first creators and those who possess spiritual owners; they give them a cultural, social and daily dimension as sites of respect and special management of Yucuna-Matapi".¹⁷.

"The sacred territory is a prevailing concept in the indigenous territorial symbolization, its incidence in the organization of the usage and management of the territory has allowed to characterize the relations of the communities with the land, where time shapes the reality ... names, figures and familiar places, places that have names and meanings, that explain the characteristics, uses, histories and memories of the events related to it ... in such a way each stone is different from any other, each region is different from another and they are articulated through similarities that constitute a system of integrated relations to the ancestral way of thinking.¹⁸

¹⁵Lo sobrenatural en el territorio comunal Oaxaca. Benjamín Maldonado.

¹⁶Adriana Estrada (2006: 153).

¹⁷Ibid. p.08

¹⁸<http://www.alberdi.de/ESPACIO%20%20Y%20TERRITORIO%20SAGRADO-Jair.actu.02.06.07.pdf>. Pág. 13.

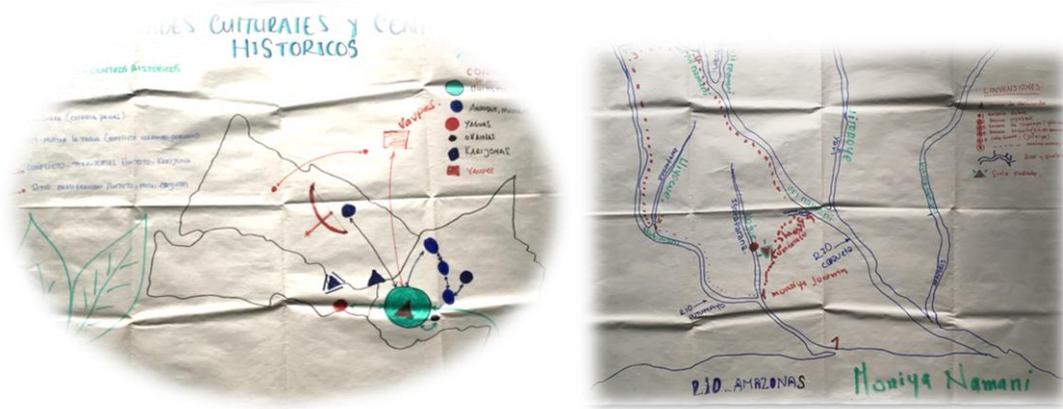


Figure 12. Maps of Territories of Origin, Sacred Sites, Memory Centers, Departments: Vaupés and Amazonas. OPIAC School

Does "The Sacred" exist for the Amazon peoples?

Some Amazon indigenous peoples consider that the sacred does not exist in indigenous way of thinking; they determine that the sacred is the spiritual, not the human, nor the pure physical spaces.

In such a way that it is then the spirituality the prevailing one, a spirituality that has two ways:

- a. Sites of spiritual connotation; there are the lagoons, rivers, rocks, caves and,
- b. *Sites of spiritual preparation* (places like the Chorro de Araracuara, the Yurupañi, Chorro de Córdoba, Chorro de Yarí and the Apaporis, among others). Every Amazon individual who has the proper gifts identified by the elderly and wise peoples goes from an early age to those sites in order to prepare spiritually.

Activity

Let's recall our sacred places.

Through a tour we will answer the guiding questions of the subject and illustrate the places of origin of our people or clan.

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY (THE IMPOSED)



Figure 13. Cultural Heritage of Colombia: San Agustín.

▮ Let's begin by wondering...

Do we know the meaning of Cultural Heritage of Humanity?

Do you know any case in your community or territory about locations acknowledged as national or cultural heritage?

Does it represent any benefit or affectation for the Amazon indigenous peoples to name *Own places* as Intangible national and/or cultural heritage of humanity?

What do we look for?

Identify the benefits and risks for the Amazon territory, the settlement of sites such as Historical and Cultural Heritage of the World.

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage - ICH -?

In the framework of the Thirty-second meeting UNESCO's General Conference. According to the Convention, Immaterial Cultural Heritage is defined as:

*"The uses, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques – together with the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces inherent to them – that communities, groups and in some cases individuals acknowledge them as an integral part of their cultural heritage. This immaterial cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation is constantly recreated by communities and groups according to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, instilling a sense of identity and continuity, and also contributing to promoting respect of cultural diversity and human creativity"*¹⁹

What one might say is not just about objects or monuments, but it also has to do with the own expressions and traditions (orality, dances, rituals, ecological calendar, crafts, hunting and many others) of the peoples, which are transmitted from generation to generation and inherited from the elders to the young peoples in order to conserve and strengthen them.

During the course of time, the material and immaterial culture (in this case, the territory), the historical centers and the sacred sites, have been partly declared historical cultural patrimonies of humanity, under the discourse, that "alternative protection "nationally and internationally measures are being created, as a policy of national states and other institutions such as UNESCO.

However, "protection measures" have turned certain locations identified as heritage into places of common interest, in which other people outside the territory can access; in fact, generating situations of tension and / or conflict that directly affect and weaken the spiritual and territorial autonomy of the peoples, because these visitors are unaware of cultural practices, spiritual power and preparation (diets) that must be met in order to access to such spaces.

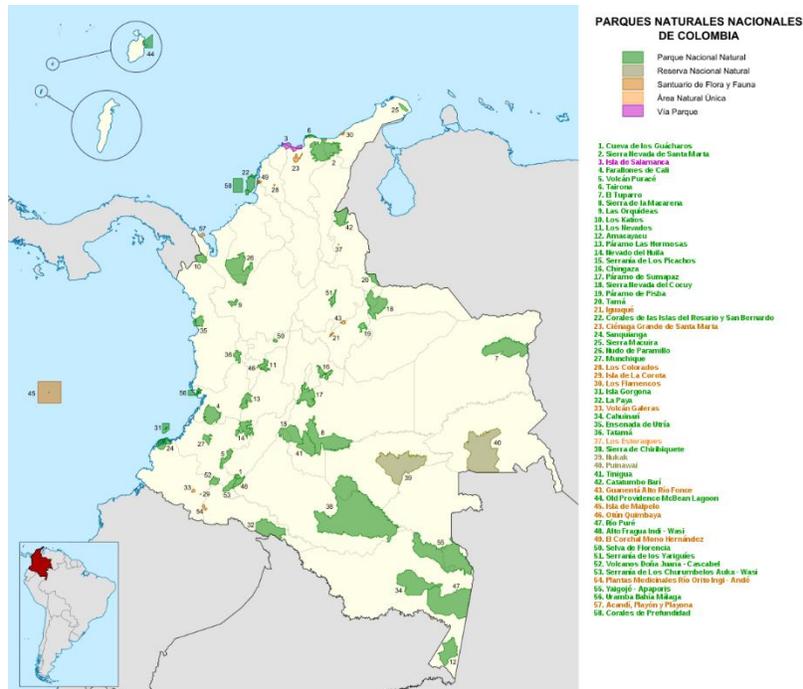
¹⁹(Convención para la Salvaguardia del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial, Unesco, 2003, pp.17)

ICH in the Colombian Amazon?

The heritage collects the tangible as the archaeological monuments and the intangibles with spiritual values based on the cosmovision. An example of this has to do with the indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon who for centuries have preserved their culture, but, due to new activities and the interference of external agents (governments, tourism companies, NGOs), they usurp the territorial rights. A notable fact is the definition of natural parks, which have overlapped the community lands, such as the case of the National Park AMACAYACU which has tourist services with benefits for tourism companies, affecting the culture of the people, in this regard, visitors see the cultural issue only as folklore: dances, artisanal elements, but do not internalize any spiritual values.

The range of physical and spiritual connections that surround the *Territories of Origin* (ancestral, traditional and thinking), are kept alive in the indigenous peoples and the communities of the Colombian Amazon, because they preserve their culture, tradition and ancestry.

Although over time they have been violated, due to the entry of foreign agents and external factors which ignore the *Law of Origin* and the dynamics characteristic of these peoples, and, considering the territory as a simple physical space from which someone can take advantage of for one's benefit without dimensioning the consequences that such actions might bring to the communities and involve in these territories.



Figur6 16. National Heritage, National Parks of Colombia.

What is the Colombian State?

The Ministry of Culture of Colombia counts on some measures in order to safeguard the Immaterial Cultural Heritage in Colombia. The Ministry seeks to acknowledge and respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Nation, For which a series of strategies were raised. in which the following are highlighted:

- a) Strengthening the social management of the ICH.
- b) Promotion and encouragement of knowledge about ICH
- c) Effective ICH safeguard
- d) Communication and dissemination of the ICH
- e) Recognition of cultural diversity: education and differential approach.
- f) The ICH as a strategic factor of sustainable development.

Likewise, the Ministry determined 12 fields of action Cultural Heritage scope:

1. Languages and oral tradition
2. Social organization
3. Traditional knowledge about nature and the universe
4. Traditional medicine
5. Traditional production
6. Techniques and traditions associated with the manufacture of handicrafts
7. Popular arts
8. Festive and ludic acts
9. Traditional religious events of collective nature
10. Traditional knowledge and techniques associated with habitat
11. Culinary culture
12. Immaterial Cultural Heritage associated to cultural spaces

The Ministry has advanced with the Amazon indigenous peoples with regard to some of these 12 fields, as follow: Languages and oral tradition; Social organization; Traditional medicine and Immaterial Cultural Heritage associated to cultural spaces in Vaupés.

Benefit or threat to declare the Amazon territories as a National or Humanity Heritage?

Moments of history such as the colonial stage, the republic and in our current times, confirm that these activities against the territory have always existed, the concern is that such activities and behaviors are increasing because of the policies of the State, which projects the development of the country by trampling down the human dignity and setting aside, –their obligation –, for protecting the *Territories of Origin* that mark the physical

and cultural survival of indigenous peoples, as well as other forms of natural, mineral, spiritual, and plant life, among others, which exist and intertwine in the jungle.

Some Amazonian peoples agree that these foreign configurations should not exist, because they affect the autonomous territory, given the fact that the declaration as heritage is determined in most cases with involuntary mechanisms by governments; in doing so, they disrupt spirituality and culture, leading to the detriment of the exercise of traditional authority and the indigenous autonomy in itself.

In addition to being a way to delimit and usurp the territory, when this activity is concerted, it is not always granted with the consent and will of the communities, but rather because this initiative is presented as their only way out and the alternative is to safeguard their lives and territories.

However, there is an experience declared by UNESCO in 2011 as Immaterial Heritage of Humanity, "*The traditional knowledge of the jaguar shamans of Yuruparí.*"

This declaration is constituted as ethnic patrimony of numerous ethnic groups settled on the banks of the Pirá Paraná River, in the Department of Vaupés, in the southeast of Colombia";²⁰Such a designation has allowed them to establish for a long time a process of work and coordination with different entities in order to achieve the conservation of their knowledge and territory, in the search of better living conditions with regard to health, education, among others.

In conclusion, these processes coming from outside might represent benefits and threats, and this will be subjected to the form of such declaration and the level of consultation and agreement occurring with the inhabitants of the territory, and how they can exercise their autonomy within the framework of any protectionist figure coming from external players.

²⁰<https://ich.unesco.org/es/RL/los-conocimientos-tradicionales-de-los-chamanes-jaguares-de-yurupari-00574>



Figure 15. Jaguares of Yurupari, ICH in Colombia. Taken from GAIA Foundation, Colombia archives.

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