

San Juan de Pasto, October 21, 2023

**Dear 2003 Convention**

UNESCO

Paris, France

**Subject:** a journey that never ended: Amazon and Immaterial Cultural Heritage,  
nature and culture.

As a sociology student at the University of Nariño, I thought that culture is a powerful instrument to achieve different objectives. The first time I heard about Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) was in 2006, when I traveled to the heart of the Amazon in Colombia, specifically to Mitú, Department of Vaupés, a place from where I was able to travel along the great Vaupés River to Yavarate on the Brazilian border. This journey began with Marco Vanegas, a Yiba Masa indigenous who knows a lot about the jungle, culture and native languages, including Spanish. Everything, to start with the ICH inventory in Carurú, Mitú and Taraira.

After a six-months trip, the indigenous people and the jungle sealed my relationship between culture and nature. I was never the same person again, because I talked with the tribes and the rainforest about food, rituals, celebrations, music, dance, crafts, the universe, sacred spaces, hunting, fishing and the most important: since that moment I shared my life with this people, I am one of the family, an apprentice of nature and culture.

Here I understood something beautiful: it is impossible to divide culture and nature, they are always together, and this is the main objective that I want to develop in the coming years of the 2003 Convention. I consider, in most cases, that communities, researchers, entities and organizations are more concerned about knowing the human role in ICH. Perhaps our conscience is only looking at one side of the coin. With my experience in the Amazon I know that it is necessary to discuss spirits, forces, climate change, deforestation, mining, land, economy, politics, globalization, etc. In short, it is essential to revitalize the relationship between human and non-human beings, as Bruno Latour proposes, because each of us is a hybrid being of nature and culture.

In this sense, an important question to address is ¿How can we reestablish the connection, the relationship, the association with those seemingly opposites? In these 20 years (2003-2023) humans were more important than non-humans, and that is why we misinterpreted the importance of the environment in the elements of the ICH. We need to reconnect humans and non-humans, subjects with objects, cultures and natures, individualities with communities, local and global actions, development with tradition, everything will be necessary to better understand our role in the world. Always thinking, we only have one home, the earth, and this is connected with many cultures and natures, it is still impossible to be one, the same in the globalized world. A world with many worlds, as Marisol de la Cadena says.

In these 20 years of Convention, people were protagonists of files, photographs, videos and safeguarding plans, it is imperative in the coming years to establish a balance between culture and nature, all elements of ICH have non-human components, which must also be recognized and preserved. The most important thing is to realize the situation that the elements of ICH face with nature and from there begin to strengthen both aspects as if they were one.

With that trip to the Amazon, people and Mundo Espiral began to carry out different ICH processes in Colombia: we made inventories, we formed ICH volunteer groups, dossiers, photos, videos and special safeguarding plans, appropriation strategies, dissemination actions and evaluations, in the Caribbean, Pacific, deserts, jungles, mountains, plains, cities, towns and rural areas. However, the “Traditional Knowledge and Techniques associated with the Pasto Varnish mopa-mopa, Putumayo and Nariño”, a traditional handcraft that was included in the list of Cultural Heritage of Humanity with urgent safeguard measures in December 2020 is a process very interesting for me, because for more than 10 years I have been trying to mix the nature represented in the mopa-mopa harvesters in the Amazon jungle, the wood artisans and the masters of decoration in the Andes, in the Colombian southwestern.

Currently we (harvesters, artisans, masters, apprentices and Mundo Espiral Foundation) are finishing the project that supports ICH-UNESCO with financial assistance from August 2022 to April 2024. Subsequently, we are thinking that it is essential to work with the ICH in three aspects: 1. Deepen into the relationship between culture and nature, humans and non-humans, always together, with the same importance. 2. Carry out inventories with a methodology that includes nature in the same place as culture in the ICH. 3. Strengthen the Denomination of Origin and protection of Copyright for Pasto Varnish mopa-mopa practitioners.

This is a footprint that we have as Mundo Espiral Foundation in Pasto, Nariño, Colombia. That is why I am completely convinced why our organization has the name Spiral World, because in the Andes of Nariño the indigenous people speak of connections between similar and opposite elements, for example: the world above and the world below, individuality with community, inside and outside, nature and culture, human beings and non-human beings. Perhaps our task is to disseminate with people all over the world these associations, these are our hopes in the past, present and future always mixed.

Thank you, 2003 Convention, because with the ICH concept it is possible to think and better understand the world and its multiple connections.

Sincerely,

**Giovany Arteaga Montes**

From a corner between the Andes and the Amazon  
Pasto, Nariño, Colombia, South America,  
Place where we want to live in a Spiral World