

Ancient Cultures Inside Modern Universes

Edgardo Civalero writes on the preservation and dissemination of intangible South American indigenous heritage and the maintenance of information using Web-based tools.

Introduction

Cultural Heritage

Heritage can be defined as a heterogeneous ensemble of environmental and cultural elements - material or otherwise - that are transmitted from generation to generation, creating the foundations on which people build and orientate their identity and vision of the world. According to the definition reached during the UNESCO Experts' Round Table in Turin (Italy, 2001), *heritage* includes:

‘... peoples’ learned processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity that inform and are developed by them, the products they create, and the resources, spaces and other aspects of the social and natural context necessary to their sustainability’. [1]

There is a number of things that may be considered to play an active role in the memory of all people: landscapes, sounds, objects, tools, pieces of work and buildings that show the path trodden by communities; the different parts that hold any clue to their motivations, their hopes and their quests; any element that may reveal their failures and losses, the reasons why they came into existence and, inevitably in some cases, vanished in the mists of time. Besides giving people a feeling of continuity in relation to previous generations, these elements are also important for their present identity and the preservation of human diversity and creativity.

A first approach to this matter allows us to make a clear difference between two main categories of heritage: *natural* and *cultural* [2]. The latter represents the most valuable product of human intellect and sensitivity, and therefore it is the most intimately linked with human nature. According to UNESCO’s definition, *cultural heritage*...

‘... includes the works of [humankind’s] artists, architects, musicians, writers and scientists and also the work of anonymous artists, expressions of the people's spirituality, and the body of values which give meaning to life’. [3]

For the most part, this rich heritage –used, enjoyed, renewed, enlarged and improved on a daily basis- is *non-material* (even if it is usually expressed through material means). Non-palpable aspects of life – such as words and languages, sounds, feelings, sensations, thoughts and beliefs – are considered to form the *intangible cultural heritage*, a group of manifestations belonging to the very spirit of a people. In addition to channelling a community's interests and different pursuits, it also acts as a means and a guide to the production of the *tangible heritage*, i.e. the material one.

UNESCO defines this *intangible heritage* as 'all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, i.e., collective works originated in a given community and based on tradition' [4]. Customs, tales, music, dances, rituals, festivities, medicine, culinary arts, dressing, games, theatre and the special skills related to material aspects (e.g. tool making or agricultural knowledge), are components of a huge mosaic that bestows all people with unique features, making them the owners of an invaluable richness. All these traditions are usually transmitted - through different channels and methods - within a framework of collective recreation processes [OR recreational activity ??]. Moreover, besides strengthening the social bonds within a community, they also facilitate the socialisation of its individuals as well as the development of their group identity.

Identity and Diversity

For a good number of societies, *intangible heritage* represents an inexhaustible source of facts and ideas that not only support their struggle for development, but also emphasise their *memory* and their *cultural identity*, which they proudly defend day after day. *Cultural identity* is the ensemble of traits and features that link a person to a group, maintaining a strong cohesion within society, harmonising customs, establishing both social rules and codes of communication. Inside this ensemble, *languages* act as a form of glue, fixing various elements together and giving a sense to the cultural characteristics surrounding them.

According to UNESCO Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean [5], cultural identity is the basis for the life of peoples, stemming from the past and projecting itself into the future; never static but simultaneously historical and forward-looking, and, therefore, always improving and renewing itself. As happens with *intangible heritage*, UNESCO recommends that the international community preserve and protect each people's identity, especially that of cultural and demographic minorities [4].

This recommendation deserves careful consideration: *heritages*, *memories* and *identities* of such minority communities have to withstand tremendous pressure from surrounding dominant cultures and ideologies, represented by mass media, modern digital information channels, official educative systems, religious creeds and socio-economic policies, all of which are themselves widely influenced by Western thought, idioms and models. Such considerable pressure on these fragile minority societies results in the phenomenon known as *acculturation*, namely the progressive abandonment of one's own culture (or a great part of it) and the gradual adoption of increasingly dominant alien structures. Besides the alarming loss of cultural identity, the resulting homogenisation threatens natural human *diversity* and leads to the eradication of valuable features that were part of our universal heritage.

Culture assumes diverse forms through different places and time. This *diversity* is manifest in the plurality and originality that characterise human groupings and

societies. The planet currently plays host to very many different human communities, each presenting unique facets of our *diversity*, demonstrating particular elements or aspects that make them what they are. Each community has different ways of facing the same (or very similar) problem(s), particular rhythms and sounds expressing the same feeling, specific words used to define broadly similar concepts, specific images for the same belief... all of them form a set of infinite pictures that presents common contents in the widest diversity of manners.

The first article of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity [6] proposes that it must be ‘recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations’, for it is a continuous ‘source of exchange, innovation and creativity ... as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature’. However, and according to UNESCO’s report ‘Knowledge versus information societies’ [7], only 4% of the planet’s languages are used by 96% of its population; 50% of the world’s languages are in danger of extinction; 90% of all languages are not represented on the Internet. Smith [8] states that ‘education dominated by commercial interests or by the English language may threaten vulnerable local languages and cultures’. Capurro [9], quoting another UNESCO document [10] points out that ‘globalization ... by highlighting the culture of economically powerful nations, has created new forms of inequality, thereby fostering cultural conflict rather than cultural pluralism’.

These excerpts – brief paragraphs extracted from a plethora of detailed and related works - serve to highlight an unequal and unbalanced environment: that of ‘minority’ communities. Despite (inter)national recommendations, declarations and laws (as quoted above), those communities’ rich and diverse cultural heritage has been pushed to one side in favour of mainstream, globalised, dominant cultures. Such minorities are usually under- or mis-represented in books, journals, the Web and other media, and they are placed behind different types of socio-economic barriers, including that of the Digital Divide. Their intangible heritage is rarely included in libraries, archives or other repositories of knowledge, they have almost no access to information and their freedom of expression is far from guaranteed, despite Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other similar international documents.

Key components of these minority indigenous populations are very important elements of human diversity and, at the same time, prime targets for socio-economic and cultural pressures, inequalities, exclusion and discrimination. As a result of these processes, their ancient and traditional wisdom, memories, identities and cultural heritage are seriously threatened, and their mother tongues endangered. In the developed world where information and knowledge seem to be at the fingertips of every person thanks to new ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), they have difficulty in recovering just a little part of their culture in order to remember who they are, why they exist, what they are heading for and what their struggles are... Nonetheless, some successful steps have been taken to re-balance this inequitable situation. And, curiously enough, new technologies -Web sites, blogs and digital libraries - have played a key role in this process.

Indigenous Peoples and Their Heritage

Traditional Cultures in a Modern World

Indigenous peoples are neither a romantic part of a past that has come to an end, nor a museum curiosity in a globalised present. These societies are bursting with vitality,

and preserve their traditional characteristics while trying to adapt them to the times in which they live. Such indigenous communities make up a population of about 300-370 million people, according to latest international estimates (World Bank - United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues) [11]. According to IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) [11], they constitute over 5% of the world population, speaking more than 4000 different languages and dialects and comprising more than 5000 groups inhabiting 70 countries across the five continents. According to the same source, they account for 15% of the poorest people on the planet, and about one-third of the 900 million extremely poor rural inhabitants in the world. In Latin American countries, these societies comprise some 300-400 groups, amounting to something like 40-50 million people, i.e. around 10% of the regional population [12][13][14][15]. In the case of Bolivia and Guatemala, they make up more than half the total population of each nation.

From the 16th century onwards, native peoples in South America have been decimated by disease, invasion, slavery and war, and consequently harmed on every imaginable front: political, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, educational. Many such peoples were eradicated in their homeland, together with any living memory; some others, however, managed to survive, and developed new forms of social structure and development, ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. Their ancient cultures constitute a surprisingly high percentage of total global cultural diversity. Both in South America and worldwide, the cultures of indigenous peoples represent an immense mosaic of languages, cultural features, philosophies and literatures (both oral and written), of rituals and daily custom. Their cultural background is intimately connected with the environment they inhabited (which usually is not the one that they occupy at present). They also represent a wide spectrum of knowledge about the world that is very different from the range of ideas presented by the dominant cultures on the planet. In South America, many of their words and attitudes have been added to the *mestizo** heritage of each nation, thereby enriching their own plural identity. Indigenous traditions, sounds and sense of time have been acknowledged around the world. However, the Western understanding of such traditions needs to be much deeper if it is to be anywhere near complete and accurate.

Despite the relative continuity of their historical presence on the global map – admittedly more important in some cases than in others - and the recognition of their rights in a good number of international recommendations and treaties, most native peoples nonetheless continue today down the path to cultural and actual oblivion. Current statistics (such as those quoted above) show a regrettable connection between indigenous communities and the highest levels of poverty, with all the problems associated: lack of human rights, poor general health, malnutrition, violence, substance addiction, unemployment, and loss of identity. National efforts across South America have managed to do little to improve this situation; they largely comprise a range of disparate and insufficient support initiatives which fail even to guarantee a temporary level of basic welfare, let alone the development for the future that they would wish for themselves.

Largely against their will they have increasingly become pawns on a political chess board, participants in a power struggle in which they count for relatively little. In many cases, their culture, far from being restored, promulgated and proudly lived out, has turned into a folksy postcard caricature which they can barely recognise at all. In the worst cases these people's culture has become a burden, an undesirable marking that only attracts discrimination and prejudice. In fact, official oppression and/or

social discrimination have forced them towards the voluntary abandonment of their traditional ways of life in an attempt to 'integrate' into the dominant society, in order to be accepted; something that they have yet to achieve: their physical characteristics, which they neither can nor should alter, remain the main reason for their exclusion in South America.

Yet despite the often critical situation in which they find themselves, many of these indigenous peoples keep up the struggle to survive. Many strong socio-political and cultural indigenous movements have spread across the continent. They acknowledge the importance of keeping a foot in their own traditional culture and, at the same time, having the other in the global, hi-tech, dominant society. On the one hand, they work - sometimes against mainstream pressure - towards the restoration and revitalisation of their language, heritage, customary laws and attitudes through education programmes and other activities. On the other, they work with the new ICTs, in order to attain their goals and serve their own interests: disseminating their knowledge, exposing their problems, sharing their culture and exchanging ideas, experiences and opportunities in a global arena.

On the Other Side of the 'Digital Divide'

Digital tools and Web-connection have demonstrated –in those areas where they are available, which are not so many below the line that separates North and South - that it is possible to respond to the challenge that many underserved users represent, by recovering their memories, traditions and knowledge and spreading them worldwide with due respect for their cultural and linguistic patterns and characteristics. Once it has been proved to be possible to do this in some cases, it should be increasingly possible to carry out such recovery work in many more. ICT should help South American indigenous populations to recover part of their cultures, make their current socio-political situation more widely known, and spread further news of their hopes and endeavours. Equally such technology could also support the first steps of traditional peoples towards their inclusion in the 'global (digital) village', creating opportunities for cross-cultural meetings and exchanges.

Indigenous populations in South America have faced such challenges with imagination and creativity, somewhat characteristic of their daily life. Socially and demographically strong communities - like Aymara in Bolivia, Quechua in Peru and Mapuche in Chile - living in areas where there is access to Web technologies, have already made extensive use of them in order to inform the wider world about their social and political issues, their traditional literature, their music and their customs. They have also used new tools, such as forums, blogs and wikis, in order to collect information on languages and culture, and share news and claims.

Other minority communities -like Wayúu in Colombia, Kuna in Panama, Guaraní in Paraguay, Tikuna in Brazil or Qom in Argentina- have started to use new ICTs in order to gather not only their intangible heritage, but also their communities' current affairs information and updated news, and share them with the (inter)national society, while providing their own community members with valuable material for bolstering their endangered identity.

Governmental institutions, universities, private foundations and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) across the continent have also collaborated with native communities – admittedly with different levels of commitment according to their capacity and engagement - to create Web-based spaces where indigenous culture can

be appropriately displayed under open access terms. Good examples of these activities can be found in Chile and Colombia.

Certainly, the Web-based material created by such diverse types of authors - with such different educational and training backgrounds, ethnic origin, linguistic and literacy skills, technological capacity and funding support – is very variable, but all of it has one thing in common: it has been designed for sharing knowledge about its community with the global and national community, and seeks to ensure that indigenous voices (usually silenced and forgotten) are heard.

The principal characteristics of this Web-based material are as follows:

- All kinds of Web tools are used, from Web sites to portals and from blogs to wikis. Free Web pages and weblogs - with simple designs and usually overloaded with advertisements - are the most common choices for little indigenous communities and groups, usually operating on a small budget, scarce access to technology, low digital literacy and with little chance of developing a more complex or elaborate setup. By contrast, universities and governmental institutions display the most sophisticated designs, including elements like databases, virtual libraries, sound archives, etc. Therefore social exclusion, lack of resources and information illiteracy, in effect the Digital Divide, may be pointed to for the reasons why such a huge distance exists between indigenous minorities on the one hand and established institutions on the other.
- Contents displayed in these Web spaces include a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from socio-political claims and activity to cultural matters and traditional knowledge. Again, free Web pages and blogs are generally used by indigenous (and non-indigenous) local or grass-root organisations in order to spread news on their current circumstances and information on their culture. Detailed and complex Web sites are used by bigger or official organisations in order to share educative materials, ancient heritage, oral tradition, art and handicraft, books and music, etc. Somewhere in the middle between those two ends of the spectrum, simple Web sites are used by national indigenous organisations in order to disseminate their news and information. When one compares the various outputs, it is indigenous communities which provide the most up-to-date news and ‘fresh’ cultural information; however, it is the institutional Web presences which provide a better quality of content and presentation, more resources and a wider range of informative options.
- Most of this material (whether of indigenous or non-indigenous authorship) are written mainly in Spanish or Portuguese. Few Web pages are exclusively written in an indigenous language; and when they are, more often than not, they are the work of an official institution or group rather than an indigenous community (though some of latter’s members may be part of such an institution). It can be concluded therefore that most of the indigenous thought is usually put into non-indigenous words. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex: basically, among aboriginal language speakers in South America there is a low level of literacy in their mother tongue; furthermore, some of these languages do not have a written form, or it may happen that their orthographic and grammar standards have yet to be entirely developed. With some exceptions, these circumstances make it difficult to express content using native languages. In addition, it is intended that the information

presented in those pages be understood by the whole national society where most individuals barely understand indigenous languages, much less speak them. Thus, with the target audience in mind, Spanish and/or Portuguese are preferred. Where content is intended to reach the native community *as well as* non-indigenous society, the dominant (usually national) languages nonetheless remain the most employed: indigenous people who are able to access Web tools are invariably bilingual, while the official languages are the only tongues understood by non-indigenous people.

- Free Web space where digital files, text, news or messages can be shared and exchanged are the most popular among indigenous individual users (see Other Media below). Apart from the obvious economic reason, namely that free Web space is popular with Web surfers worldwide, it should be noted that indigenous peoples have a deep sense of communal sharing; it can be argued, then, that (digital) locations where information products can be exchanged without charge and accessed openly, do in themselves fit better with their customary attitudes and habits.

The taxonomy proposed by Hernández and Calcagno [16] for indigenous and indigenous-related Web sites provides further information and might clarify some of the ideas suggested in the previous paragraphs.

There is not a single, simple assessment of South American indigenous presence on the Web. The direct involvement of native communities in the digital universe is still very limited, due to several reasons: geographical or social isolation, exclusion, poverty, digital illiteracy, lack of reading and writing skills, language, absence of resources such as electricity, telephone or computers, etc. Furthermore, the South American indigenous material on the Web largely derives from a small number of ethnic groups: Mapuche in Chile, Aymara in Bolivia, Quechua in Peru and, to some extent, Guaraní in Paraguay and Wayúu in Colombia. These particular groups are numerically significant in terms of population and have developed long-term, enduring strategies to defend their rights, using Web-based material as a means of sustaining their movement.

Once participation is achieved, usually by indigenous peoples with a strong presence in their national society and living in areas where the infrastructure and ICT are reasonably available, the initial aims relate to creating free or low-cost Web space where socio-political issues, claims and activity can be exposed, as well as content in respect of their own culture and identity. The sort of information they make public generally reflects their grievances about the violation of their rights, as well as their efforts to guarantee respect for and promote the restoration of their culture and language.

Universities, NGOs, official organisations and governmental institutions have become the main sources of accurate, scholarly knowledge on indigenous cultures, since they have the budget, the know-how, the technologies, the staff and the research resources to extend such knowledge. Their Web sites include bibliographies, images, sound files, books, news, interviews, analysis and essays, sometimes with multilingual facilities (Spanish / Portuguese, English and indigenous languages). They work in collaboration with indigenous persons, usually scholars, students, artists, journalists and leaders, to design them.

In the short term, it would be desirable not only to increase direct indigenous involvement in the connected world of the World Wide Web, but also to include more ethnic groups from different areas, and to create new spaces for participation and exchange. At the same time, major organisations should provide support to indigenous communities for developing such spaces and disseminating their material in the WWW universe. Partnership ought to be the option of choice, relying on fruitful collaboration between local and official organisations. It should encourage native peoples to face the challenge of new technology, by which they would benefit enormously in terms of their information needs. Such an association would also provide national societies with the opportunity to extend their own knowledge horizon through the inclusion of indigenous wisdom. In so doing, it is expected that new developments will stem from best practice and these innovations will make it possible to live traditional cultures in a modern, digital way.

Some South American Experiences

Wikipedia

The most famous open access encyclopaedia has new versions in Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní languages (added to Nahuatl, Inuit, Navajo, Cherokee and Cree). *Wikipedia Aymar Aru* [17] had 110 articles in November 2007. *Qhichwa Wikipidiya* [18] numbered almost 5000 articles at that time, while *Wikipedia Avañe'eme* [19] had just been launched. Besides using exclusively indigenous languages, these wikis display intangible heritage, historical and geographical information and other cultural content.

Local Organisations' Weblogs

Some local indigenous associations have decided to use blogs in order to spread their own cultural expressions and news. This is the case of Aymara organisations such as *Consejo Regional Aymara de Mallkus y T'allas* [20], *Consejo Autónomo Aymara* [21] and *Consejo Nacional Aymara de Mallkus y T'allas* [22] in northern Chile. In the south of Chile, Mapuche associations like *Newen Mapuche Kimn* [23], *Noticias Mapundial* [24] and *Newen Tuleimy Compuche* [25] have also chosen Weblogs for introducing themselves on the Web. Valuable examples from Colombian Wayúu people include *Cabildo Wayúu Nóüna de Campamento* [26], a macro-blog system lodging subsidiary blogs as *NotiWayúu* [27], *Itinerario de víctimas Wayúu* [28] and *Tienda de Wayúu Nóüna* [29]. The Wayúu organisation *Wayúumunsurat* edits the Weblog *Acontecimientos de la Guajira* [30] and the NGO *Solidaridad Wayúu Solidarity* also has another blog [31].

National Organisations' Web Sites

Major national organisations maintain interesting Web sites where they publish news and other updated cultural content on indigenous peoples. These bodies are, roughly speaking, non-native institutions working on indigenous issues, which allow different degrees of participation on the part of aboriginal communities' members.

In Argentina, the Web sites *Comunidades Aborígenes de la República Argentina* [32], *Equipo Nacional de Pastoral Aborígen* [33] and *Equipo de Pueblos Indígenas* [34] may serve as examples. All of them belong to non-indigenous groups, mostly influenced by the Catholic Church. They exhibit a variety of content, most of them

describing contemporary indigenous societies, their geographical setting, their socio-economic situation, and their cultural traits.

In Bolivia there is a large number of indigenous organisations present on the Web. Important ones - some of them truly remarkable - are *Parlamento del Pueblo Aymara* [35], *Plataforma de Información del Pueblo Indio* [36], *CIDOB - Confederación Indígena del Oriente, Chaco y Amazonía Boliviana* [37], and *APCOB - Apoyo para el Campesino Indígena del Oriente Boliviano* [38]. The latter has done impressive work, editing multimedia material with a great deal of material on indigenous intangible heritage. At the same time, it has improved information literacy skills within native communities. Official, non-aboriginal institutions working with or for native communities are *CEDIB - Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* [39], *CEJIS - Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* [40] and *CENDA - Centro de Comunicación y Desarrollo Andino* [41]. All of them support aboriginal groups by providing strategic information (e.g. health information and human rights).

In Brazil, *Fundação Nacional do Indio* [42], *Instituto de Desenvolvimento das Tradições Indígenas* [43], *Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazonia Brasileira* [44], *Centro de Trabalho Indigenista* [45] and the Web site 'Povos Indígenas do Brasil' of the *Instituto Socioambiental* [46] are a few examples of governmental organisations working in close collaboration with indigenous communities and disseminating cultural content and news updates.

In Colombia, two major indigenous organisations are *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia* [47] and *Asociación de Cabildos del Cauca* [48]. Their contents focus principally on political issues, in a country where breaches of human (especially aboriginal) rights reach dramatic proportions.

In Chile, the main governmental groups are *CONADI - Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena* [49], *Programa de Derechos Indígenas* [50], *Ser Indígena - Portal de las culturas indígenas de Chile* [51] and *Pueblos Indígenas de Chile* [52]. They offer extensive and detailed information on native heritage; *Ser Indígena* has a virtual library (see Digital Libraries and Archives) with many documents available to be downloaded. Indigenous associations with a strong presence on the Web are *Mapuche Inter-regional Council* [53], *Centro de Documentación Mapuche* [54], *LIWEN* [55] and *Portal mapuche* [56] for Mapuche people, and *Aymara Net* [57] for Aymara communities. Their chief concern is the present circumstances of indigenous peoples; however, they also include much interesting cultural content.

In Ecuador, core indigenous organisations are *Confederación de nacionalidades indígenas del Ecuador* [58], *Ecuadorunari - Confederación de los pueblos de nacionalidad Kichua del Ecuador* [59] and *CODENPE - Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y pueblos del Ecuador* [60]. Examples of official institutions are *FODEPI - Fondo de desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas* [61] and *DINEIB - Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural bilingüe del Ecuador* [62].

In Peru, space for indigenous peoples is provided on the Web by *Red de Información Indígena* [63], *Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* [64], *AIDSESEP - Asociación Interétnica para el Desarrollo de la Amazonia Peruana* [65] and the NGO *Chirapaq* [66]. They exhibit a considerable amount of cultural content and support local socio-political movements.

At a continental level, there are several political organisations such as *Fondo Indígena Latinoamericano* [67] and *Minkandina - Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones*

Indígenas [68]. The *III - Instituto Indigenista Interamericano* [69] together with OEA (*Organización de Estados Americanos*), UN, UNESCO and WHO, have developed a remarkable amount of material concerning aboriginal issues, similar to the efforts undertaken by other regional organisations like *RUTA - Desarrollo Rural Sostenible de Centroamérica* [70] and *Red de Información Indígena* [71]. These efforts are aimed at restoring, preserving, organising and managing indigenous knowledge and information. These organisations have also developed specific initiatives, within indigenous communities, to promote information literacy and skills for handling their own heritage in a digital context.

The Web sites of some national non-indigenous organisations have been created in European countries. Good examples are *Fundación Rehue* [72] which originated in the Netherlands and *Ñuke Mapu* [73] created in Sweden, both displaying Mapuche cultural content and political material.

Educational Organisations

In the Andes, *PROEIB Andes* [74] is a major institution supporting and encouraging bilingual education. In Bolivia, *THOA - Taller de Historia Oral Andina* [75] is one of the members of REDETBO, an online network of anthropological organisations and libraries. THOA carries out extensive research on oral history. In northern Chile, *Instituto de Estudios Andinos Isluga* [76], *IECTA - Instituto para el estudio de la cultura y tecnología andina* [77] and *ILCA - Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara* [78] are recognised institutions working for the restoration of traditional Aymara culture, while in southern Chile, a very important institution is *Instituto de Estudios Indígenas* at the *Universidad de la Frontera* [79], which has an outstanding documentation centre focusing on Mapuche culture. In Peru, a well known centre is *Centro Bartolomé de las Casas* [80], with scholarly work on Andean Peruvian native culture; furthermore, organisations like *CAAAP - Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica* [81] and *IIAP - Instituto de Investigación de la Amazonia Peruana* [82] are involved in similar work in Peruvian Amazonia.

Language Web Sites and Blogs

The Quechua language is the most prevalent across Latin-American indigenous sites. Web sites such as *Runasimi* [83], created in Germany, and *Yachay* [84] are widely recognised for the detail and accuracy of the documents they hold. However, platforms such as *Habla quechua* [85], *Quechua Imperial* [86], *Asociación tucumana de investigadores en lengua quechua* [87], *Asociación de investigadores en lengua quechua* [88] and *Academia Mayor de la Lengua Quechua - Regional Lima* [89] also make interesting contributions. The Aymara language is supported by really good Web sites, such as *Aruskipasipxañanakasakipunirakispawa* [90], *Aymara Uta* [91] and *ILCA - Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara* [92]. The Guaraní language, for its part, is described on the German-based Web site *Guaraní Ñanduti Rogue* [93] and on the *Ateneo de lengua y cultura guaraní* [94], among others. Other indigenous languages are represented as well, with their material published online, especially by the *Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)* [95] and by the *Stanford University Department of Linguistics* [96].

Digital Libraries and Archives

One of the most interesting digital archives in Latin America is curiously placed at the University of Texas (USA). *AILLA - Archivo de los Idiomas Indígenas de Latinoamérica* [97] is an archive where sound examples of many indigenous languages can be freely accessed and downloaded alongside transcriptions and complementary information.

A good example of digital library containing indigenous documents is the Chilean *Biblioteca Virtual Ser Indígena* [98]. It lodges many resources on native culture, ranging from digital books to useful links and from art pictures to mp3-format music.

University libraries and other institutions throughout South America usually include in their virtual space digitised versions of early national or regional books, including those written in indigenous languages and about native peoples. It should be noted that the digitisation of the first Aymara grammar and vocabulary, a book written by the Jesuit Ludovico Bertonio in 1603, appears on the Web site *Lengua andina* [99].

News

Indigenous online newspapers as *Mapuexpress - Informativo mapuche* [100] and *Periódico Mapuche Azkintuwe* [101] from the Chilean Mapuche people release updated information on political and cultural issues; a similar task is accomplished by the Ecuadorian organisation *Ecuarunari* bilingual electronic newspaper 'Rikcharisun' [102].

Independent platforms include *Indymedia* [103] (an example from Argentina), where there is a section for First Nations [104] (again from Argentina); *Red Voltaire* [105], *Agencia Latinoamericana de Información* [106], *Revista Ser Indígena* [107], *Redes Indígenas* [108], *Choike* [109], *Ukhamawa* [110] and *Minga Informativa* [111] are other informative channels collecting news about the reality of native communities.

Individual Weblogs

Many individuals within indigenous communities have built personal blogs in order to expose and share different aspects of their own native culture such as music, history, language, customs or art. Examples are *Aymaras de Chile* [112], *Encuentro Kollasuyo* [113], *Comunidad Ayllu* [114], *Aru Wayna - La voz de los jóvenes* [115], *Crónicas Aymaras* [116] and *Cultura Aymara* [117] related to the Chilean Aymara people; *Comunidad Mbyá Guaraní* [118] to the Argentinean Guaraní people; *Ilamagun* [119] to the Panama Kuna people, *El camino de los tobas* [120] and *Barrio Toba de La Plata* [121] relating to the Argentinean Qom people, and many others.

At the same time, there are non-indigenous authors publishing Weblogs on indigenous issues, like *Cine indígena* [122], *Organizando la esperanza* [123] or *Resistencia indígena* [124]. There is also a high number of photoblogs and audioblogs sharing indigenous material, edited mainly by young people.

Other Media

Indigenous organisations and individuals have also made use of other Web-based tools for disseminating their intangible heritage, their opinions and their current circumstances. Forums and listservs have been employed in exchanging ideas, news

and experiences, as well as in disseminating claims and calling for initiatives. A perfect example is the listserv Ukhamawa [125]. Popular, free platforms like *Flickr* (for storing images) and *YouTube* (videos) have been also used in order to share tourist pictures and videos, music performances, traditional celebrations and ceremonies (like the Andean Carnival), debates and other political activism, documentary films, TV interviews with indigenous leaders and many different examples of cultural expression. Native users also profit from free shared spaces like *RapidShare* [126]. Online indigenous radio stations broadcast music, language courses, cultural programmes and current affairs at local and regional level, using both dominant and native languages.

Conclusions

Despite the adverse repercussions of the digital divide and information illiteracy across Latin America, the adoption of new ICTs is becoming more widespread. Even if inside the WWW universe, ‘dominant’ languages, alphabets, media and cultural traits still represent a high percentage of its content, it is also true that minority groups are finding a niche in the digital world thanks to the expansion in use of the technology that can connect them. The increased use of Web-based tools and space as an arena for communication and dissemination will undoubtedly remain a priority for years to come.

Furthermore, these spaces and tools could also represent a means to greater intercultural exchange between different (indigenous and non-indigenous) societies. After centuries of silence, the indigenous peoples of Latin America now have the opportunity to make their voices heard worldwide. These their initiatives deserve international support if we are to create a better and deeper understanding among cultures and peoples and so allow humankind to develop its plural societies successfully.

***Editor’s note:** ‘mestizo’ defined as ‘(in Latin America) a man (or woman) of mixed race, especially the offspring of a Spaniard and an American Indian. Origin: Spanish, “mixed”, based on Latin “mixtus”.’ *Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th edition*

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