The Cameras of Diversity

Context As a specialized agency of the United Nations system, UNESCO contributes to peace-building, poverty reduction, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue mainly through the cultural sector. To this end, it gives priority, on the one hand, to the protection, safeguarding and management of tangible and intangible heritage and, on the other, to the promotion of cultural diversity expressions and dialogue among cultures with the purpose of promoting a culture of peace.

In order to materialize these priorities and seek the legal, political, and moral commitment of Member States, UNESCO develops policy instruments, namely 7 Conventions legally-binding for countries ratifying them. Likewise, and in order to contribute to the implementation of such Conventions and other thematic programs, UNESCO encourages information exchange, contributes to enhancing the capacities of Member States and serves as a catalyst for international cooperation in each of its spheres of activity.

At UNESCO's 33rd Session held in 2005, Member States adopted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which became effective on March 18, 2007. This Convention, which has its antecedent in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001- a non-binding document of political and moral value- hopes to create an enabling envi-
environment where diversity of cultural expressions can be asserted and renewed for the benefit of all societies. The Convention focuses on the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions, understood as a chain process where emphasis should be placed on the creation, production, distribution, dissemination, access, and enjoyment of expressions embodied in cultural activities, goods and services of and within each community and/or society.

In this framework, the audiovisual becomes an excellent instrument of intercultural dialogue provided that the diversity and representativeness of its content is ensured. Local content is the expression and communication of the knowledge of a community relevant to its situation and adapted to its context and experience.

The local content creation and dissemination process provides community members with the opportunity of interacting and communicating, expressing their own ideas, wisdom and culture in their own language. In this regard, the creation and promotion of these audiovisual materials is a means for guaranteeing cultural and linguistic diversity as a defining characteristic of humanity. Likewise, its dissemination contributes to protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions and intercultural dialog, as well as fostering interculturality.

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UNESCO, in its capacity as a United Nations agency in the field of culture, encourages the promotion of cultural diversity through community and indigenous audiovisual creations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Such actions, within the framework of the Cameras of Diversity project, have the medium and long term strategic objective of contributing to capacity-building, production, dissemination, distribution and preservation of the indigenous audiovisual produced by communities of the abovementioned areas.

For some years now, the Cameras of Diversity project has been supporting the training and professionalization of indigenous community members and the production and dissemination of their audiovisual products. This effort allows communities to become creators of their own word and image, thus reflecting their own worldview. The creation and dissemination of their own contents helps fight cultural stereotypes and folklorization while contributing to appraise the intangible heritage and linguistic diversity of these communities.

Within the framework of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures declared in 2010, the United Nations system established the promotion of cultural diversity and the strengthening of intercultural dialogue as priorities. To this end, four focal points have been defined:
• Promoting knowledge about cultural, ethnic linguistic and religious diversity;
• Building a framework of shared values;
• Strengthening quality education and encouraging intercultural skills;
• Promoting dialogue for sustainable development.

Taking on these guidelines and with the purpose of achieving the objectives set, the Camer-
as of Diversity, as a rational and systematic driving force for audiovisual creation and dissemination, serves as a catalyst for regional research –thanks to the strengthening of observatories on creation, production and dissemination – and contributes to the proliferation of public debate, thus fostering the involvement of communities in the actions promoted by national policies related to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

The experience gained by the project shows the difficulties indigenous and community audiovisuals encounter in getting access to conventional dissemination and distribution circuits due to lack of information, resources, and strategy planning know-how. In order to help overcome such difficulties a strategy called Cameras of Diversity Dissemination Network: Indigenous and Community Audiovisual has been put in place at regional and international levels to disseminate audiovisual products. Since 2007, the Network has been disseminating indigenous and community video and cinema by sending works and materials to compete in main regional and international events and festivals. Likewise, and with the purpose of contributing to the disseminations of these contents within the community itself, showcases have been organized to tour alternative spaces where the community becomes both the protagonist and the audience.

A concrete example is the travelling tour undertaken by the Cameras of Diversity Project together with the Peruvian Association Nómadas during 2010 through 80 communities in Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, and Peru. The tour lasted over two months, visiting indigenous communities and screening materials included in the Cameras of Diversity Dissemination Network, among them the several times award winner Brazilian cartoon “Taina Kan, the Big Star” (Photos 1 and 2).

All audiovisual works whose Latin American and Caribbean producers belong to an indigenous or local community culture and formally represent it, can ask for registration in the network. The materials’ content must be related to topics dealing with popular and traditional forms of expression, places of traditional cultural activities and must be associated to regularly performed acts, such as regular rituals and processions.
The Dissemination Network hopes to mitigate the threat of extinction of cultural expressions and diversity posed by homogenization, globalization, rural exodus, migrations or environmental degradation, and links dissemination to the promotion of linguistic diversity by including works dealing with linguistic diversity as a key element of cultural diversity and a way to reaffirm identity and the right to self-representation of the native people. In this regard, a subtitle service has been developed in order to maximize promotion of audiovisual material in the original language. Moreover, to encourage this production and publicize international, regional and national festivals and spaces, the Cameras of Diversity Award has been established to honor audiovisual works that best express, through a narrative language of its own, the diversity of cultural expressions and heritage of indigenous and local community people.

Regarding the promotion and dissemination of local community audiovisual material and on the basis of global priority, Africa: The Cameras of Diversity is implementing a course of action related to the promotion of local community audiovisual with particular emphasis on those which promote the local content of communities linked to African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this regard, and with the purpose of contributing to the promotion of local community audiovisual materials dealing with African descent, it has been decided to incorporate it to one of the thematic programs.

**The Network’s Thematic Programs**

In keeping with UNESCO’s course of action and strategy, the Network has developed thematic programs.

The thematic program “Indigenous Audiovisual Material and Cinema” has accumulated a vast quantity of materials related to the indigenous issue in order to encourage reflection on this issue and promote its contents. The Network plans different showcases, organized by subtopics. The indigenous audiovisual material produced by women, migration, or programs by countries and regions, are some of the modalities.

The Thematic Program “Local Community Audiovisual and Cinema, and Afro descendants” aimed at enriching the experience accumulated through years of indigenous cinema production and dissemination. The Cameras of Diversity project has widened its plan of action to cover the promotion of local community audiovisuals related to the Afro descendent theme, placing particular emphasis on the Afro-Caribbean legacy.

The Thematic Program “Crossed Looks” links to views of the indigenous audiovisual:
the Latin American indigenous view and the Canadian indigenous view, providing a scenario for reflection on cultural diversity and indigenous communities beyond regional barriers. This thematic program promotes North-South cooperation by linking the first Latin American and North American nations through the screening of and discussion on indigenous materials representative of native cultures and showing the ancestral traditions and current life of indigenous communities in both hemispheres.

The Thematic Program “From South to South” -still being developed- with Africa as UNESCO’s global priority in all culture related actions including, in this case, the promotion of cultural and audiovisual industries. This Thematic Program expects to develop cooperation between UNESCO’s field offices for Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean in order to foster synergies promoting and disseminating the indigenous audiovisual in both continents.

In short, the Cameras of Diversity is a project determined to disseminate the indigenous and local community audiovisual
Since 2008, the International Film and Television School in San Antonio de los Baños holds an annual minimum-time workshop on audiovisual training known as Workshop on Gender-Approach Audiovisual Training for Native and Agricultural Leaders to train them on the basic documentary techniques and gender-oriented studies for the benefit of their communities and as a way to empower native agricultural women.

In general, the EICTV, with the collaboration of other international institutions like the Filmmaking and Training Center (CEFREC), has provided support to the Quechua, Aymara, Kikanantay, Rapa Nui and Mapuche populations in Latin America through training activities in audiovisual production and community TV.

The project is aimed at the promotion of free creative works and the production and distribution of audiovisual materials made by native populations to give voice to those who are not heard, to the unknown. The transfer of filming means and techniques has allowed them to become artisans of their own image, to create their filming speech, to mirror themselves in their own creations and to be acknowledged.

Undoubtedly, the Cameras of Diversity is a program of indisputable impact in the Latin American film and audiovisual community. It has become a network integrating efforts made by many entities from native cultures and peoples in our countries. It has also helped to get acquainted with, promote and protect the audiovisual heritage of native populations, to appreciate their creative potential, to reinforce their presence on the screen, to train human resources inside and outside communities, to empower a universe of knowledge and relations, to support the struggle of nations and communities and to provide a greater presence to their works here and elsewhere.

Juan Carlos Sardiñas
New Latin American Film Foundation.

Material given its importance for the interaction of cultures, social cohesion, and reconciliation in order to foster a culture of peace, thus contributing to the development of the indigenous and local community audiovisual and its presence in regional and sub-regional festivals in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Moreover, the Cameras of Diversity contributes to promote regional integration through cultural expressions, namely through thematic programs on the indigenous and local community audiovisuals, as well as North-South and South-South cooperation initiatives based on actions aimed at the dissemination of such materials.

Besides these achievements, the Cameras of Diversity provides community members with the opportunity to grow, both individually and socially, through the audiovisual, by offering the necessary tools to generate marketable audiovisual products and strengthening their production and distribution capabilities, so as to make this project, already in their hands, sustainable.

Yumey Besú Payo