

COLLABORATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

IN



INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES

The Amazon is a diverse territory inhabited by Indigenous peoples who have shaped cultural landscapes over time. Today, these territories face pressures such as extractivism and environmental degradation. Archaeological research in Amazonian indigenous territories provides insight into the deep connections between communities and their landscapes, where the past is an integral part of daily life. In the territory of the Mosaic People, in the Bolivian Amazon, in places like Asunción de Quilibey, archaeological remains are not isolated artifacts but elements of everyday life, linked to memory, identity, and territory. In this context, articulating and making visible indigenous knowledge about archaeological heritage is fundamental to territorial defense and community decision-making, integrating local knowledge and scientific tools into processes grounded in consent and community trust.



FROM CONVENTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Traditional archaeology developed within Western academic frameworks, where questions, methods, and results were defined primarily by external researchers. In many cases, this involved the extraction of materials and knowledge without considering local perspectives. In contrast, recent experiences in indigenous territories show that research is not an inherent right

of researchers, but rather a privilege granted by communities, based on trust and collective consent. This shift highlights the need to rethink extractivist practices and move toward more ethical models in which knowledge is jointly constructed and responds to communities' needs and expectations.



TO COLLABORATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

Collaborative archaeology proposes joint work between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous researchers, based on interdisciplinary and decolonial methodologies. This approach integrates academic and Indigenous knowledge systems, recognizing the central role of community researchers in decision-making, intercultural mediation, and the production

of situated knowledge. Research unfolds as a continuous process, from planning through the return of results, responding to interests defined by the communities themselves. Thus, archaeology becomes a tool for strengthening collective memory, the connection to the territory, and local capacities to manage heritage.



COLLABORATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY IN INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES IN THE BOLIVIAN AMAZON

Present Indigenous territories in the Bolivian Amazon face growing threats: the expansion of extractive industries, environmental degradation caused by mining, and the pressures of globalization directly affect their ways of life and their links with the environment. In the face of these challenges, a collaborative archaeology approach brings together tools and methodologies to enable communities and local researchers to answer specific questions about their archaeological, natural, cultural and biocultural heritage, a key strategy for defending their territory. Through a collaborative archaeological approach, archaeological practices can serve and support local needs while enriching the discipline with other epistemologies.

Key steps

Collaborative archaeology is an ongoing process that involves communities from planning through heritage management, integrating academic and indigenous knowledge.



WHAT IS ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE FOR THE MOSETÉN PEOPLE?

the territory, linked to cultural practices, knowledge and current ways of life.

It is the living memory of

Heritage is the imprint or knowledge of our ancestors that we still draw upon today. Know-how, knowledge, objects and even language.
Clemente Caimani

To gain a deeper understanding of their territory's history, the Mosestén people requested archaeological research to answer questions about the periods when ancient inhabitants lived there, their diet, and the diseases they suffered. The community of Asunción de Quibey wanted to learn more about the people with whom they share their territory today – the ancestors from whom they have inherited their knowledge of the forest, the rivers, their language and much more.

FIELD SENSORY EXPERIENCE

The path between the community of Asunción de Quibey and the Charies Jinak site was beautiful, surrounded by lush vegetation and birdsong. However, something unexpected happened: on different days, three archaeologists walking alone heard a strange sound at the same spot. Thinking it was an animal, each of them tried to scare it away, but the sound was getting closer. Each felt fear and fled. Members of the community searched for the supposed animal, day and night, without finding any traces. It was an unsettling experience that reminds us that the territory is not only observed, but also perceived and felt.

Experience shared by Carla, Lesly, and Grobert.

Heritage and Territoriality: Past, present, and future perceptions among the Tacana, Tsimane', Mosaic and Waiwai

Project website

Anthropology of the Americas at the Uni Bonn

Bibliography

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GRAPHICS

The project Heritage and Territoriality: Past, present, and future perceptions among the Tacana, Tsimane', Mosaic, and Waiwai seeks to comprehensively understand the meaning that these Amazonian indigenous peoples attribute to cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. The project analyzes the relationship between heritage, territory, local knowledge, and perceptions of time and space, while also considering the pressures and threats these communities face. Through a comparative, interdisciplinary, and collaborative approach, the project highlights both the differences and similarities among the participating peoples, promoting the revaluation of heritage as a key element for cultural strengthening and territorial defense.

More information about the project, its activities, and results on the official website:



The Department of Anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn conducts interdisciplinary research on indigenous societies, heritage, and archaeology, promoting collaborative and critical approaches to the study of the Americas.

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