

Inga Ancestral Inhabitation Knowledge Mapping

It has been a year since we – Pedro Jajoy, Jhon Tisoy, Musu Jacanamijoy (Colombian Inga indigenous architects living in Valle del Sibundoy and Bogotá, Colombia), Juliana Ramírez and Catalina Mejía Moreno (Colombian architects and spatial practitioners living in Bogotá, Colombia and Brighton, UK) - started a research project entitled 'Inga Ancestral Inhabitation Knowledge Mapping.' Initially focusing on the *Tambowasi* – the ancestral Inga construction and space for ancestral forms of life¹ that precedes the Spanish colonisation in the 1500s, the mapping aims to recognise the symbolic, spiritual, spatial and constructive aspects of the Inga Inhabitation knowledges and practices in parts of the Colombian Andean Amazon region.²

The mapping will serve as a fertile ground for the designs of the future Inga AWAI Panamazonic University, an initiative which centres Inga ancestral knowledge as the base of its educational project. The university project promoted in 2018 by former Inga AWAI (Inga Governmental Organisation) leader Hernando Chindoy Chindoy, and a network of Inga and intercultural alliances that currently support the ongoing process.³

The process of working and thinking together in the mapping throughout this year has brought to the fore the urgency of sharing with the Inga Peoples and beyond the outcomes and some of the thoughts and observations that have originated from this initial mapping, whilst being aware that this mapping is only a starting point of what can be a longer enquiry. We have therefore decided to work towards a publication where, faithful to our experiences in the Inga territories, we re-centre and foreground the value of Inga ancestral forms of inhabitation for younger Inga generations and other worlds. What you are about to read is an initial dialogue in which we, part of the architecture intercultural team of the Inga AWAI University, work through the 'what', 'why' and 'whom' of the mapping, hoping it will inform the introduction to this forthcoming publication.⁴ This text, originally written in Spanish – language used in our conversations, and translated for this publication by Catalina Mejía Moreno, records some of these exchanges. As a plurivocal piece it aims to foreground individual voices and contributions indicating the inclusion of the authors' names throughout the text.

WHO

As Inga Peoples of Colombia, we are a millenary population descendent from the Inca family. We live in different territories and cities across Colombia and our roots are *mitimajkuna* (those who leave – explorers of new lands and territories), as articulated in our Plan de Salvaguarda (Safeguard Plan) *NUKANCHIPA KAUSAITA IUAAITA MANA SAKISUNCHI UAÑUNGAPA* (2013),⁵ and in the mandate of our national organisation *Atun Wasi luai* – AWAI ‘Gran casa de pensamiento’ (‘Big house of thought’) from 2017 where we also recognize *mitimajkuna* as our origin of our history and cosmovisions. We identify ourselves as 97 communities across 8 territories across southeast Colombia and different urban centres.⁶ This makes us a diverse population within a shared origin, and common guiding ancestral practices and principles⁷ [Pedro Jajoy].

Our history is defined by movement and migration [John Tisoy]. This mostly due to processes of forced migration and land reappropriation associated with Spanish colonization in the 1500s, the arrival of settlers in the 1600s, the control of land by missionaries in the 1800s and the arrival of Capuchino and Dominicos monks in 1800-1900s amongst others [Musu Jacanamijoy]. All these introduced neocolonial practices which included the prohibition of Inga ancestral language and clothing [Pedro], the burning down of the houses for traditional medicine, and the forced inclusion of foreign building practices and forms of living, as the oral history of *mamita* Feliciano Tajamanchoy’s in Aponte, Nariño (southwest Colombia) reminds us [Juliana Ramírez].⁸ Today, extractive practices such as oil exploitation, illicit crops and practices and the presence of illegal armed groups only reinforce the violence that the Inga territories have historically faced [Catalina Mejía Moreno]. Historically (and still today) we have migrated to different territories as an alternative of resistance and at the same time to start processes of reclamation of our right to our ancestral lands and forms of life. The mapping also speaks to this [Pedro].

WHAT

Conversations about the Inga AWAI Panamazonic University have recurrently brought to the fore questions about Inga ancestral inhabitation [Juliana]; questions that raise the importance

of the coherence between the material, symbolic and spatial within the spaces where the Inga knowledge will be transmitted and disseminated [Catalina]. We believe that by nurturing a renewed search and re-encounter with our ancestral knowledge and practices around ways of living and *pervivir*,⁹ our mapping is the first contribution into this enquiry [Pedro].

We see our mapping as a collective exercise [John]. We understand this mapping as a woven fabric [Pedro] that aims to weave together forms of living in the different Inga ancestral territories [Catalina], and weaving physical, emotional, and spiritual forms of life. This entails re-centring and re-recognising the role of the different *tambo wasi* as constructions that hold family and life [Musu], community and practices of *ambiwaska*, our ancestral medicine and sacred yagé vine [John]. *Tambos* are spaces that have been with us for centuries and shaped in response to the particularities of each territory [Pedro]. We had the opportunity to visit some long-standing *tambos*. However, these are rare [Juliana]. We also witnessed a loss in their use of material and ancestral construction knowledges. Some *tambos* today have been built with industrialised materials that are cheaper, more accessible, and durable, replacing local palm trees such as *Iraca* or *Wasipanga* [Musu]. But also, we observed that the *tambo wasi* still exists, especially the *ambi upiadiru* – spaces for the practice of ancestral medicine of *ambiwaska* – which remains a pillar and example for us to return to. With this mapping we want to contribute to the exercise of *guardianar* (guard) this / our living memory [Pedro].

We believe in the importance of approaching this mapping with an understanding of what entails thinking about our physical and spatial forms of inhabitation – as above, but also the symbolic and the spiritual [Musu]. This is reflected in the five themes that have guided our visits to the territories, have guided our conversations and will guide the forthcoming publication [Pedro]. These are: symbolic / ceremonial, *Tambo wasi* or ancestral knowledges, material/technical/constructional, relationship with the territory and lastly appropriated knowledges: new forms of inhabitation [John].

HOW

As an architecture team, and since 2018, we have walked and reconnected with the voices of many of our territories, whilst thinking about our future University [Pedro]. Since then,

different architectural proposals for the University's first roofs have come forward [Juliana].¹⁰ In turn, these design proposals have prompted a series of in-depth questions into our Inga's own architecture and forms of inhabitation [Pedro]; this mapping tries to respond to these [Catalina]. In October 2022, we joined the Inga Biocultural Cartographies research team led by Santiago del Hierro in collaboration with Alvaro Hernández Bello.¹¹ We visited eight of our territories and met with authorities, leaders and representatives of some of the communities in each of the territories where our Inga People inhabit. We visited *tambos* and *lugares de vida*¹² - *chagras*¹³ of different *sabedores*,¹⁴ we talked with *mamitas*, we felt, and we listened [Musu].¹⁵

Mingas de pensamiento – an encounter to reflect and construct through dialogue having as main principles listening, respect and spirituality, have informed and guided our approach to the mapping [Pedro].¹⁶ We have thought together, had dialogues, revisited conversations, materials and observations [Catalina]. The thought of a publication outcome of this mapping is also a result of these dialogues [John].

WHY

It is important to reinforce that this mapping recognises the urgent need for transmission of knowledge [John] of our Inga cosmovisions, world views, and techniques [Pedro].

We hope for a publication that will foreground the Inga ancestral language and will transmit knowledge in a written and multilingual form through its Spanish and English translation [Catalina] to new generations that enquire about our Inga Inhabitation [Musu], and to multiple interested worlds [Juliana]. The publication will bring *Taitas*,¹⁷ and *sabedores* and *sabedoras* to the fore. Their knowledges of spatial traditions and immaterial adaptation to territories are crucial for the future University [Catalina], and their stories and perceptions of their ancestral worlds are crucial for an understanding of a living world in a more attentive, conscious, and respectful way [Juliana]. These voices will be followed by our own observations of the territories visited [Pedro] – always being respectful and truthful to these [John].

This mapping is only a door that opens [John]; it is an invitation to keep investigating. It is an invitation to our Inga Peoples to weave together [Pedro], and in the same way an entry door for other worlds and peoples to recognise and value these ancestral knowledges and practices

[Catalina]. We hope this will help in keeping the Inga livelihoods and memories alive, and to prompt a shared commitment and responsibility from the young people who live in ancestral territories or cities, allowing for a caring form of living and more conscious of the world in which we live [Juliana].

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¹ In Spanish reads 'lugar de vida ancestral'. *Wasi*: expression in Inga or Quechua to reference a home or a house, *Tambo*: term or expression that refers to temporary refuges along the *capac ñan* (Inca's path), used by the *mitimak* (travelers) and *chasquis* (messengers), and as place to rest.

² The publication will include episodes that focus on the geopolitical, sacred and inhabited landscapes of the Inga Peoples in the Andean Amazon, an episode that focuses on the *Tambo Wasi* and its material and spatial transformations through time, episodes on the symbolic and collective dimensions of the Inga ancestral inhabitation knowledge – ranging from collective work to rituals, and a series of episodes where we, as intercultural group, work through some of the observations and processes of resignification that the mapping has brought to the fore. These episodes will be accompanied by voices from the different Inga ancestral territories present in a glossary that foregrounds the importance of the Inga ancestral languages and the act of naming, a

photo-essay of the journey across the territories, and ancestral and traditional oral histories and stories shared by the wider Inga People across their different territories.

³ The University as a project is the result of years of an educational process that starts with the 'Inga Own Educational Project,' currently taught to Inga children and youth in bilingual schools (Inga-Spanish) and endorsed by the Colombian national education system as an ethno-educational project. For context and reference see: Ursula Biemann, Santiago del Hierro, Alvaro Hernandez Bello, Giovanna Micarelli, Juliana Ramirez and Ivan Dario Vargas Roncancio, 'An indigenous University' In: The Architectural Review, September 2022 Issue. See: <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/an-indigenous-university>.

⁴ The publication is produced the five authors listed above, in dialogue with other Inga friends and collaborators, and in collaboration with Yanina Valdivieso as editorial consultant, and Abbie Vickress, graphic designer from Graphic Design and Communication at Central Saint Martins London, UAL. Funded by CSM - UAL.

⁵ See: https://www.mininterior.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/pueblo_inga_diagnostico_comunitario.pdf

⁶ Alto Putumayo, Medio y Bajo Putumayo, Baja Bota Caucana, Media Bota Caucana y Yunguillo, Caquetá, Nariño - Aponte, Ciudades 1, Ciudades 2

⁷ *suma iuia* – think beautifully, *suma kaugsai* – live beautifully, *mana iui* – do not lie, *mana sisai* – do not steal, *mani killai* – do not be lazy. These principles that go hand in hand with ancestral practices and knowledges such as: the *Inga rimai* – speak inga, *la Chagra* – agrícola ancestral system, *el Ambi* – practice of ancestral medicine, *el Awai* – weave, *la Minga y dibichidu*– collective work, and the *Atun Puncha kalusturinda* Big day in honour of Mother Earth and the Rainbow.

⁸ *Mamita* is a warm and respectful way to call a mature woman.

⁹ 'pervivir' is almost synonymous with 'survive' or 'endure' though those terms don't do it justice. A closer approximation would be 'living while persisting.' Indigenous groups in Colombia have brought this term to the fore to represent their nature of living, despite forced migrations and other difficulties, and to resist terminologies such as 'resilience' which effaces histories of resistance and care.

¹⁰ Propositions include collaborations with Anne Lacaton's studio from the ETH, Zürich in 2019, a series of design proposals outcome of the studio Nuevos Territorios (New Territories) Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá 2019 – 2020, design of Espacio Chumbe for the first roofs of the University at Piamonte, Cauca by Juliana Ramirez of Estudio Bosque and John Tisoy 2019, designs by Salón Selva – Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá 2020-23. The current mapping exercise and publication is possible due to the support of Central Saint Martins, UAL – London.

¹¹ As part of Santiago del Hierro's PhD project 'Towards an expanded representation of indigenous territory in the Northern Andean Amazon' based at the Institute of Landscape and Urban Studies (LUS), ETH Zürich.

¹² Lugares de vida translates as spaces for ancestral forms of life.

¹³ Changra ancestral agricultural system which translates as place for growing medicinal and edible plants.

¹⁴ *Sabedores* those who hold knowledge.

¹⁵ The initial visits to territories mapping were realised in coordination with a research project entitled Biocultural Cartographies of the Inga Peoples [Juliana Ramirez]. In some of the visits you were also accompanied by members of the Inga audiovisual collective Ñambi Rimai [Catalina Mejia Moreno].

¹⁶ 'Minga' means the gathering of children, men, and women, in a collective activity. It is a space where indigenous peoples, in this case Ingas, come together, culturally, aiming to preserve family ties with different families. Original language – Inga in this case – is used so that younger generations remain attached to their own culture, ways of living, encounter and reconciliation.

¹⁷ *Taitas* means father, respected man, elder man, medicine man.