CASE STUDY 12

Community involvement in the preparation of a nomination file in Mexico

The element concerned, Places of memory and living traditions of the Otomí-Chichimecas people of Tolimán: the Peña de Bernal, guardian of a sacred territory, was inscribed on the Representative List in 2009.

The element can be described as follows (adapted from the nomination file on the website of the Convention):

Living in the semi-desert zone of the State of Querétaro in central Mexico, the Otomí-Chichimeca people have developed a range of traditions that express a unique relationship with their environment. People bearing crosses make annual pilgrimages to sacred hills in the region to pray for water and divine protection, venerate their ancestors and confirm their communal identity. Other community festivities throughout the year make up a calendar of rituals dedicated to the endurance of the Otomí-Chichimeca people and focused on water, a dangerously scarce resource. The rituals often occur in small family chapels dedicated to ancestors or in *chimales,* temporary reed structures with leaf roofs built as an offering. The relationship between spiritual culture and physical space is influential on the art of the region – including religious images, murals, dance and music – and the traditions that embody it are central components of the cultural identity of the community.

#### A commission investigates community concerns about their heritage

In 2005 the Government of the State of Querétaro initiated a project to promote research, safeguarding and sustainable use of the cultural and natural heritage of the Otomí-Chichimeca people, who live in Querétaro’s semi-desert. The inter-institutional and multidisciplinary commission that created a framework for the project was composed of representatives from:

* the Querétaro Department of Urban Development and Public Works (SDUOP);
* the Querétaro Department of Sustainable Development (SEDESU);
* the Querétaro Tourism Department (SECTUR);
* the National Commission of the Development of Indigenous Populations (CDI); and
* the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) of the Federal Government.

Under this commission, investigations were carried out by the three agencies involved in the region: they revealed community concerns about their natural and cultural heritage.

#### Communities discuss safeguarding and nomination of their ICH

In 2006 a process of community participation was thus started to discuss safeguarding and the possible nomination of the places of memory and living traditions of the Otomí-Chichimeca people of Tolimán to the Representative List. The consultation with the communities concerned in this nomination, which was very extensive, was divided into different stages:

1. Two information and consultation meetings were held with the four municipal city councils of the region.
2. Two information and consultation meetings were held with civil and religious authorities as well as community representatives.
3. A wide-ranging community consultation was conducted through five participative subregional workshops and an opinion poll in 1,195 households. Around 400 people participated in these workshops, including the traditional authorities of the community concerned, such as caretakers, preachers, members of the traditional dance groups, owners of chapels and members of the State Council of Native People of Querétaro.
4. Over 600 proposals for safeguarding measures were received in this process.
5. These proposals were summarized at a Regional Forum where community members formulated a Declaration, signed by hundreds of community members and incorporated into the nomination file.

#### Inscription on the Representative List

When inscribing the element on the Representative List in 2009, the Intergovernmental Committee considered that it satisfied all the criteria (see OD 2). The reasons why it satisfied criteria R.1, R.3 and R.4 were given as follows (emphasis added):

* R.1: The element is a cultural space encompassing symbolic and spiritual meanings and practices related to nature and *rooted in the value system of the community, constituting an important part of the social life of the communities concerned and providing them with a sense of identity and continuity.*
* R.3: Safeguarding measures, respecting nature in the context of climate change, are proposed *based on the diverse forms of community participation*, while the commitment of federal and local governments as well as the communities concerned is demonstrated.
* R.4: The nomination was elaborated *based on consultation with communities, groups and individuals concerned through a series of consultative meetings and submitted with their free, prior and informed consent.*

#### Community participation in safeguarding

To ensure community participation in the safeguarding process after the inscription, a management body with community representation was established, called the Intersectional Commission for the Conservation and the Development of the Places of Memory and Living Traditions of the Otomí-Chichimeca People of Tolimán.

This body aimed to coordinate non-governmental community organizations and State authorities on the three levels of government, including representatives of community organizations from each community and representatives of the National Board for Culture and Arts, the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the Department of Social Development, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Populations, Government Departments of Sustainable Development, Health, Urban Development and Public Works, Education, Tourism and Planning and Finances, as well as the four municipalities of the area.

For further information:

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/places-of-memory-and-living-traditions-of-the-otomi-chichimecas-people-of-toliman-the-pena-de-bernal-guardian-of-a-sacred-territory-00174>