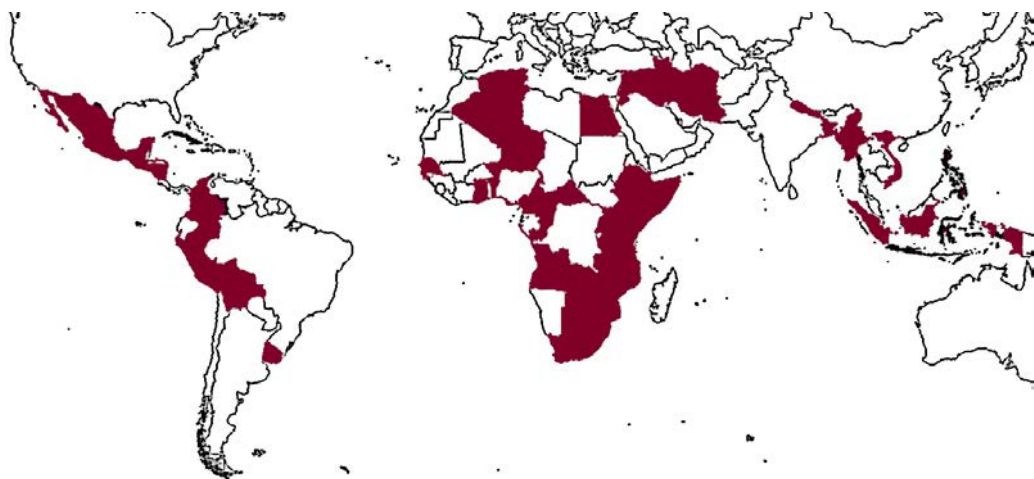


# Sapienza for International Development Cooperation

Strategies, Projects, Actions

edited by

Carlo Giovanni Cereti and Francesca Giofrè





Collana Convegni 52



# Sapienza for International Development Cooperation

Strategies, Projects, Actions

*edited by*

*Carlo Giovanni Cereti and Francesca Giofrè*



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In copertina: elaborazione grafica a cura della prof.ssa Francesca Giofrè.

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# Preamble

*Antonella Polimeni – Rectress of Sapienza University of Rome*

As the Rectress of Sapienza University of Rome since less than six months, I am particularly pleased to present the academic community of our University with this publication which introduces the activities of our students and teaching staff in the area of international development cooperation.

As a matter of fact, I still fully subscribe to one of the articles included in the Charter of Principles in International Development Cooperation adopted by Sapienza in 2007: “ ... Sapienza – University of Rome affirms the centrality of research and training in international development cooperation “(art. V) thereby underlining the strategic objective of an inclusive community in which research, training and third mission activities aim at fostering the development of human resources, primarily by building capacity in partner countries.

International cooperation is the main instrument to develop the university’s third mission dimension in the international field, mainly targeting areas in Asia, Africa and South America that represent the future of humanity, ranking high in European 21st century priorities.

Proof of this are the projects financed by the Italian Development Cooperation Agency (AICS) such as the Partnership for Knowledge program, where Sapienza coordinates the platform dedicated to Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism. We also consider important our membership in the University Council for Development Cooperation (CUCS - Consiglio Universitario per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo) an international cooperation network promoted by CRUI. In recent years together with five other Italian universities, Sapienza has created the Italian Higher Education with Africa Foundation aiming at the promotion of Italian transnational education in the African continent.

Similarly, we are a proud member of the CIVIS European Alliance that has a focus on cooperation with Africa and the wider Mediterranean.

Finally, a special thanks goes to Prof. Eugenio Gaudio who preceded me at the helm of Sapienza and who was well able to promote international cooperation, an area that is at once innovative, challenging and ethically significant for our community. We shall continue along the path traced in recent years to fully achieve the goals on the UN Agenda 2030.

# Foreword

*Eugenio Gaudio* – Rector of Sapienza University of Rome 2014 – 2020

In 2015, the United Nations, following on the path undertaken with the 2000-2015 Millennium Goals, approved the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The Agenda is divided into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which target all areas of social and economic development and aim at sustainability in a broad sense and on a global scale.

“Sapienza” University of Rome, aware that realizing the 2030 Agenda requires a strong involvement of all the components of society, committed itself to the development idea proposed and supported by the United Nations.

Education for all, technology transfer, the promotion of culture and the protection of cultural heritage, relations with the territory, international networks, development cooperation, attention to energy saving and the protection of the environment and ecosystems, sustainable mobility are all priority issues for our University and inspire both our scientific and didactic activities.

Sapienza offers many international development cooperation projects of the highest quality that target a great many geographical areas, covering an enormous width of subjects. We are particularly proud of our ongoing cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation and its Director for Development, Giorgio Marrapodi, as well as with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, led by Luca Maestripieri. Furthermore, we are proud of closely collaborating with the Rome UN pole, including FAO here represented by Fernando Ayala, Special Adviser Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division and Jean Luois Tuoadi, Special Coordinator for Parliamentary Alliances Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division.

Sapienza is proud of its study courses dedicated to development cooperation that answer to the pressing request for wide-ranging, qualified, and international training by students, both Italian and international, on this topic.

The University development cooperation projects include interventions to promote cultural specificities and the preservation of artistic heritage, such as support for the Fort Apollonia Museum in Ghana and the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Iraqi Kurdistan, but also urban development projects, programs addressing climate change, e. g. in Dar El Salaam in Tanzania, and studies on the conservation of biodiversity in Mozambique, all sponsored both by national and international bodies.

Our projects in the medical field are important and innovative, ranging from the training of paramedical personnel in Benin, to the surgical support offered in Burkina Faso, and again remote training in Iraq and the cooperation with hospitals in Chad or our program with the University of Sana'a in Yemen, all in highly critical contexts.

Sapienza currently has more than a thousand institutional agreements with non-EU institutions in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America while collaboration with other European universities has been strengthened, first of all through our participation in the outstanding CIVIS Alliance. Sapienza is also a proud member of the Italian Higher Education with Africa Foundation, a consortium of six leading Italian universities supported by our Ministry of University and Research that will play a leading role in fostering Italy's role in Africa.

Over the last three years, Sapienza has provided around 430,000.00 euros out of its own funds for cooperation projects with partner university institutions in developing countries. This choice turned out to be strategic since it had an undeniable positive impact on our University, since we conceive this funding as seed money to develop larger international projects.

Finally, the present volume best represents the integration between a renewed vision of international cooperation and the role Sapienza will play in Italian and European strategies of internationalization of knowledge and knowledge transfer.

# Sapienza's Ethnological Investigations in Mexico: from Observation to Cooperation and Restitution<sup>1</sup>

*Alessandro Lupo* – Sapienza University of Rome

## **Abstract**

The article presents the most recent research developments of the Italian Ethnological Mission in Mexico, which covered a wide thematic spectrum and increased the restitution to indigenous populations of ethnographic materials collected over the last 45 years. It highlights the relevance of issues such as medical anthropology and health management, and the new forms and uses of the indigenous material and intangible cultural heritage, such as oral traditions, music and dance.

Ethnological research among the indigenous peoples of Mexico started under the direction of Italo Signorini over forty years ago, in 1973, when the Italian Ethnological Mission of Sapienza University was founded. Recently, the Mission has undertaken several initiatives aimed at the restitution of research results to the scientific community, to state institutions, and more directly to indigenous communities. During early fieldwork campaigns, research was mainly aimed at documenting the specific knowledge, practices and social institutions of well-circumscribed ethnic groups: the Huave of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in the state of Oaxaca, and the Nahua of the Sierra de Puebla. Following classic ethnographic monographs on Mesoamerica of the second half of the 20th century, the focus here was on political-religious organizations, kinship terminologies and godparenthood, cosmologies and knowledge of the human being, classifications of the natural world, oral traditions and ritual practices. Alongside such issues, considerable importance was given to ethnomedical

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<sup>1</sup> The term "restitution" is employed here to convey the ethical implications of sharing research results, giving voice to the communities studied.

knowledge, therapeutic practices and the difficult interaction among native populations, traditional healers and public health institutions. These had, since the 1970s, slowly begun to penetrate even most peripheral areas by promoting hygiene practices and implementing public health programmes among the Native populations.

The establishment of a Master degree in Ethno-Anthropological Disciplines at Sapienza in the early 2000s led to the institutionalization of field research for all master graduates and to an increase in the number of Ph.D. students focusing on Mexico. Accordingly, the mission research activities increased and extended in territorial scope, with the inclusion of Purépecha-speaking (or Tarascan) peoples of Michoacán, Tarahumara of Chihuahua, Yaqui of Sonora, Nahuatl of Veracruz, Michoacán and the slopes of the volcanoes in the states of Mexico and Puebla, Otomí of Hidalgo and Tlaxcala, Zapotec, Chontal and Zoque of Chiapas, Maya of Chiapas and Yucatán, as well as the mestizo population in the cities of Oaxaca and Tuxtla Gutiérrez. An increase in range and a renewal of research topics also followed, as well as the possibility of coordinating surveys across different regions, which increased their comparative and explanatory potential.

This has been especially evident in the field of medical anthropology. Here, research has evolved from the mere study of indigenous conceptions of body, illness, local specialists and traditional healing



Fig. 1. Nahua women awaiting medical consultation at a public health facility in the municipality of Cuetzalan (Puebla), January 2010, photo by Silvia Scippa.



practices, to the critical examination of themes such as the relationship between native populations and health institutions (Milano, 2008), issues pertaining to communication with health personnel and consequent lack of patients' compliance (Scippa, 2013), structural and organizational deficiencies, misunderstandings and forms of structural violence affecting indigenous populations - in particular women.

Concerning these topics, it is worth mentioning research paper conducted on the shortcomings of prevention strategies of cervico-uterine cancer (in Yucatán and Chiapas; see D'Eredità, 2014 and Valenti, 2017), on the management of reproductive health and related issues of domestic violence (in Chiapas, Puebla and Oaxaca; see Cosentino, 2014 and Donat, 2017), on dietary behavior and diabetes (in Oaxaca and Puebla; see Rizzoni, 2013), and on blood donation and its management (in Oaxaca and Puebla; see Rizzoni, 2016).

Such variety and wealth of ethnographic materials, analyses and critical reflection, accumulated over the past twenty years, has been made available through the usual channels supplied by scientific publishing. However, these often clash with language barriers, translation costs, limited circulation typical of specialized journals and book series. As a result, access to scientific publications is often limited for scholars from the host countries, and practically non-existent within indigenous communities. Therefore, we decided to engage the institutions that had welcomed our researchers by promoting opportunities to share the results of our research with them.

An example of this was the meeting "Salud indígena e instituciones sanitarias en la Sierra de Puebla", which took place in September 2014 at the Hospital of Cuetzalan del Progreso. A research program carried out in that very institution and in the surrounding area was presented by six Mission researchers. The audience was formed mainly by health workers and a few Nahuatl and mestizo patients. The topics covered included blood donation and management, prevention and treatment of tuberculosis and eating disorders, contraception and problems of reproductive health among native women. In parallel, an academic meeting entitled "Antropología médica e instituciones sanitarias: investigaciones recientes de la Misión Etnológica Italiana en México y el Posgrado de Antropología en Salud de la UNAM" was held in Mexico City, at the Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine of *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. The meeting offered an opportunity for Masters and Ph.D. graduates from Sapienza and UNAM

to compare their methodologies of investigation, theoretical perspectives, as well as research topics and results. Despite these initial efforts, it is still unlikely that research produced by the Sapienza Ethnological Mission could have tangible repercussions. Structural problems hamper the project, such as chronic lack of resources and personnel in health structures (especially in peripheral regions); very high mobility of such personnel and their lack of training on the cultural and social dimension of health and illness phenomena; challenges in communicating with the bearers of cultural models profoundly different to biomedical ones. Evidently, a great deal of work remains to be done, including perhaps the implementation of multidisciplinary collaboration among Italian and Mexican researchers from different disciplines.

However, the field of medical anthropology is not the only area of cooperation established with the Mission's Mexican interlocutors. It is worth mentioning periodical teaching activities at Mexican academic institutions (such as the aforementioned *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, the *Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia* in Mexico City, the *Universidad Veracruzana* of Xalapa, and the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*), as well as research conducted jointly with the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* of Mexico City. The latter is carried out through fieldwork among the Nahuatl of the Sierra of Puebla and the Otomí and the Nahuatl of the Sierra de Hidalgo, as well as by focusing on archeological artifacts in museological contexts. Notable in this regard is the research conducted by Valeria Bellomia – Ph.D. graduate in History, Anthropology, Religions at Sapienza – on musical instruments made of human bone. These artifacts, idiophones played by rubbing on their engraved notches with a shell or a bone, are part of the sacrificial and religious practices of pre-Hispanic Mexican civilizations. Specimens are preserved at the “Museo delle Civiltà” in Rome and at several other Mexican Museums. In Dr. Bellomia's research, special attention has been devoted to modes of preservation and showcasing (Bellomia and Fiore, 2020). One of the outcomes is expected to be a renewal in their fruition, including more careful historical contextualization and the possibility of listening to their sound.

However, the ways of collaboration and so far mentioned concern mainly Mexican institutions. The native communities we have studied have instead been subject to investigations and forms of sharing of native peoples' intangible cultural heritage, such as ethnopharmacology, oral traditions (both ritual and narrative), music and dance practices

(Lupo, 2019). Some of these are of colonial derivation, like the Nahua dance of the Conquest or the more syncretic Huave Snake dance; others have ancient, pre-Hispanic origins, like the famous Flying-pole dance (*Palo Volador*), which recently acquired UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity status.

The forms of restitution we have recently started implementing are also a response to the importance that indigenous communities attribute to the wealth of data and materials gathered in nearly half a century by the Sapienza Ethnological Mission. With teachers from Huave bilingual schools of San Mateo del Mar we focused on a rich corpus of historical-mythological narratives. This raw material can form the basis for a school curriculum that consciously supports the safeguarding of indigenous identity, as well as provides sources for innovative forms of self-produced artistic expression. Good examples include the short videos about important founding myths of the oral Huave tradition, realized with the support of the Ministry of Education of the state of Oaxaca. This narrative corpus is now accessible in audio format, and has been carefully transcribed, translated and commented on, in order to be made available to indigenous teachers in digital form, since their schools have recently acquired access to the Internet.

Starting this year – thanks to a project funded by Sapienza University – the Mission has endeavored to digitize, archive and make accessible on-line a large repertoire of audiovisual documents concerning the dances and songs of the Nahua municipality of Cuetzalan. The repertoire was acquired by Sapienza and stored at the audiovisual laboratory “Diego Carpitella” of the Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Art History and Performing Arts. Traditional dances have been filmed, recorded and studied here since the early 1990s. As with all forms of orally transmitted traditional knowledge, processes of continuous transformations over time have to be taken into account. Several innovations have been introduced in recent times, such as new habits for the Voladores, inspired by now forgotten pre-colonial models, which enhance the the potential appeal of dance to tourists (Tuzi, 2013). In this regard, the opportunity to access such historical repertoire offers native communities and specialists precious means for preserving, promoting and enhancing their particular forms of artistic expression.

An interesting development of these collaborations – made possible by the support of the Mexican Embassy in Italy – was the Italian tour of dance group “Voladores Cabelleros Aguila”, from Cuetzalan. The



Fig. 2. Voladores “Caballeros Aguila” from Cuetzalan performing in Sapienza Aula Magna on March 14th, 2019, photo by Valeria Bellomia.

group was the main attraction at the Almond Blossom Festival of Agrigento, in March 2019, and it finally performed at Sapienza Aula Magna, where students had the opportunity to see first-hand the dances the Mission had been studying for decades.

In the past such types of cooperation, involving a University institution and the people studied by Italian ethnologists, would have been difficult to imagine. It demonstrates how much increased interconnection and mobility in today’s world can offer to scientific research, and their potential applied outcomes.

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**T**he volume presents the interventions of the speakers and the posters of the professors of Sapienza University of Rome as evidence of the results achieved in international cooperation with a special emphasis on capacity building actions in the main geographical areas identified as: Africa, Mena countries and Latin America and Asia. The materials were presented at the University Conference “Sapienza in International Development: Strategies, Projects, Initiatives” held in Rome, at the Aula Magna of Sapienza University of Rome, on 11 December 2018 and organized with the collaboration of the Roma Sapienza Foundation.

The volume also presents in its introductory part a moment of reflection on the geographical areas of cooperation of greatest interest and strategic for Sapienza.

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