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Sowing Wisdom: Spirituality, Territory and Community in the Development of the Autonomous Intercultural Indigenous University (UAIIN-CRIC), Colombia.

Short description / Abstract:

In Latin America, recent decades have seen a growing diversity of indigenous approaches to higher education, giving rise to debates about the possibilities and challenges of different models. This article examines whether the guiding principles of the Autonomous Intercultural Indigenous University (UAIIN) in Cauca, Colombia, align with the educational processes implemented, or whether they point to the emergence of new, distinct educational models. To this end, the CRISSAC methodology was employed, through participation in rituals, ãsx wa'txya (mambeo) sessions, collective work in mingas, and interviews with spiritual elders such as the kiwe thẽ' Olmedo Ramos. The findings show that spirituality is not an added component to the educational process, but rather its guiding centre. In Ramos's words, the word, as an intangible principle, "connects the territory with life and becomes a vehicle for teaching". Within this framework, the pedagogical subjects: the community, authorities, counsellors, and students, share knowledge from a natural, spiritual, and cosmogonic perspective, strengthening collective values and intercultural dialogue. The paper also addresses an emerging tension: some elders argue that the UAIIN may be moving away from its founding principles, raising questions about the sustainability of indigenous higher education models under institutional pressure.

The article concludes that UAIIN's holistic and relational approach not only enriches academia but also strengthens community identity, unity, and resilience. These findings may have direct relevance to other contexts of indigenous higher education.