

Art School in the Bolivian *Chaco*

**Pilot Project for the Institution of a School for  
the Visual and Musical**

Arts in the Territory of the *Guarani People*

**(a summary)**

## General Information

*Title*

### **Art School in the Bolivian Chaco**

PILOT Project for the institution of a school for the visual and musical arts in the territory of the *guarani*

### **Creator and Coordinator of the Project**

**Mimmo Roselli**

### **Architectural Proposal**

Fondazione Michelucci

Firenze

### **In Collaboration With**

Vicariato Apostolico di Camiri

Teko Guarani

Asamblea del Pueblo Guarani

### **Location**

Bolivia. Chaco Region, ex- Franciscan Mission Santa Rosa di Cuevo.



## Background Context

The Region of the Bolivian Chaco includes five provinces that belong to three departments: the Henando Siles and Luis Calvo provinces from the Chuquisaca department; the Cordillera Province of the Department of Santa Cruz; and the Gran Chaco and O'Connor provinces of the Tarija Department. The comprehensive population of the Bolivian Chaco is estimated to be 260,000 people, around 60% of which live in rural areas where there are 350 mostly guarani rural communities and small « pueblos » of less than 5,000 people. The other 40% are distributed in the urban centers of Camiri, Yacuiba, Villamontes, Monteagudo. The guarani people, formed by the ava, izoceño-chiriguano, guarayo, sirionò, yuqui and guarasu'we-pauserna ethnic groups, number 80,000 and live in rural areas.

The Chaco population is prevalently rural and organized into communities, permeated by the guarani culture. Essential communal elements that characterize the Guarani are: language, a sense of belonging to the community's land, the presence of *ipaye* (a shaman), and the sense and practice of democratically lived autonomy. This autonomy comes directly from a sense of, and appreciation for freedom, which may be the most highly held value in guarani society. At every level of this society: individual, family,

community, one finds a specific degree of autonomy. These elements allow us to consider the guaraní community as essentially autonomous, democratic and federal. In the guaraní society, the participation of an individual in a group, or a group in a larger movement, is conceptualized « from the bottom up » and only rarely « from the top down. »

The guaraní also have a practical knowledge of nature, of the earth's qualities and of the possibilities of their land, that is concurrent with the scientific analyses of modern agronomers. Their houses do not represent isolated bodies but they maintain important relationships with courtyards (oka), where they keep large jars, and hold meetings, parties and reunions.

The population of urban centers is, instead, prevalently formed by mestizos, who descend from meetings between autoctonous peoples, the Spanish and, since the mid 1800s, even Germans, Italians, Arabs, and other populations.

The principal cities are Camiri, the capital of the Cordillera Province, and Yacuiba, the capital of the Gran Chaco Province. Camiri (about 36,000 inhabitants) is located at the heights of the first buttresses of the Andes and it is considered the oil capital of Bolivia, due to the presence of important deposits that have offered work to many people and contributed to the urbanization of the city. Yacuiba, with approximately 45,000 inhabitants is the region's largest city and it witnessed an



important demographic and commercial growth due to its strategic position along the main way of the pan-american road at the border with Argentina.

## Historical Precedents

The indigenous Guaraní population once lived in a vast territory that included the present states of Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia. Throughout history, the wealth of natural resources in these lands made them theatres of numerous unending wars, such as : conquest attempts by the Incas, more than three hundred years of clashes with the Spanish during the colonial period, and finally, the Chaco War from 1931 to 1935. This conflict literally decimated the Guaraní who today live dispersed in the region of the Bolivian, Argentinian, and Paraguayan Chaco. These wars, the progressive penetration of large ranchers, the growth of large estates, and lastly, the Agrarian Reform Act of 1953 that tore away from the Guaraní of the Bolivian Chaco their last lands, on which they had historically lived and worked, forced this group into conditions of slavery inside large estate properties.

The guaraní created a last resistance to « conquest » and they succeeded, with great sacrifice, in maintaining their independence for three centuries. The last violence occurred one hundred years ago, on January, 28 1892 in Kuruyuky. This battle represented an attempt at genocide of the guaraní people by the new republican government. The consequences were devastating : the community dispersed, some migrated to surrounding states, others sought refuge in the more inaccessible areas, while the large majority of the population was enslaved by the « Tierratenentes ».

The current situation is in large part the result of these historical events that we can summarize as thus :

- almost half of the Bolivian guaraní live in semi-slavery conditions as « peons of the Tierratenentes »

- the communities that remained « free » are almost without any lands on which to work or live
- contacts with « whites » has almost always signified economic dependence and the progressive loss of cultural identity.

In Bolivia, the guaraní still live in the same geographic area, however, the political and administrative divisions created by new artificial borders and frontiers have caused deep disarticulation at the ethnic and cultural level, to the point where it seems difficult to speak today of one single group.

Despite these desparate conditions, the guaraní people have been able to maintain their culture, especially their language, their own « Ñandereko » (way to be) and organizational characteristics. Even the « cautivas » (enslaved) communities have maintained the guaraní language and the « Mburuvichas » (traditional authorities) have represented an important reference point.

## Hope for the Future

Changes that are considered positive in the Guarani people have occurred in recent years for various reasons.

- Slow recovery of the capacity for comunitarian organization in a calmer political climate, in which helpful elements also derive from the legal recognition that the city, as an organized community, has the responsibility for the planning, management, supervision and control of resources.
- The growth of international sensitivity for the human rights of native peoples.
- The statement of the Church in favor of the Guarani, coinciding with the historical commemoration of the 100 year anniversary of the battle of Kuruyuky and the 500 year anniversary of the « the discovery of america ».
- The rediscovery of the Guarani people of their cultural and identity roots.

Despite grave subsistence problems resulting from their disastrous socio-economic situation, the Guarani have freely organized in recent years in the *Asamblea del Pueblo Guarani* (APG), a form of popular decision-making organ that acts in the name of the community and works on a development plan in five specific areas (Production, Infrastructure, Health ; Education, and Land/Territory : P.I .S.E.T.)

## The Subjects of the Transformation

In this area, a role of particular weight is held by the Vicariato Apostolico di Cuevo, composed of religious officials coming from the Tuscan province of the *Frati Minori*, that is creating, in the context of its pastoral work, activities promoting human development throughout the region of the Bolivian Chaco. Together with other local church institutions, it supports the organization of the Guaraní population and the conscious realization among its members of their fundamental rights and responsibilities, and the reclaiming of their own cultural identity. The Asamblea del Pueblo Guarani (A.P.G.) is a representative organization structured according to socio-cultural needs and in function with the lines of development agreed to with supporting institutions and democratic choices. It extends throughout the entire region of the Bolivian Chaco that corrisponds to its territory in the Republic of Bolivia.

The numerous institutions that work in the region sustaining the various sectors of development (education, health, infrastructure, production and commercialization, communitarian participation, the promotion of women, sustainable and eco-compatible development) are united in a federation that coordinates activities towards the completion of the Plan for Regional Development.

## ***Project Strategy***

### **General Project Objective**

The project proposes to introduce an elite scholastic institution in the fields of the visual and musical arts that we shall call Art School, in a very vast area of Bolivia, which completely lacks access to this type of teaching. This project bridges a large gap in the field of educational activities where its need has become progressively more evident since education reforms introduced secondary schools and technical education, including artistic and musical training.

### **Specific Project Objectives**

The specific project objectives are the following :

- create an adequate site to host the Art School through the restoration (already partially completed) and the restructuring of an old Franciscan Mission situated in the town of Santa Rosa de Cuevo.
- offer to both local populations and others the possibility to develop talent and expressive qualities in the fields of music and visual arts with the institution of three-year long training programs at the school
- create a connection with other schools that have similar objectives and with the Bolivian Ministry of Education in order to have national recognition

The area covered by this project regards the entire geographic region of the Bolivian Chaco and it indirectly benefits the entire population, estimated to be around 259,000 people.

### **Expected Results**

For each of the pending operational lines described above, the expected results correspond to the functions of the specific objective followed :

1. The completion of the Art School structure in the old Franciscan mission at Santa Rosa de Cuevo.
2. The organization of three year long courses in the visual arts and three year long courses in music.
3. National legal recognition of the school.

### **Activities to be Carried Out :**

The activities to be carried out can be divided into 4 branches :

- a- Restoration and restructuring of the part of the mission of Santa Rosa de Cuevo that collapsed
- b- Three year long courses in the visual arts
- c- Three year long courses in music
- d- The creation of connections with other schools and the Ministry of Education

### **Project Organization and Methodology**

The four branches of the project will organized in the following way :

A The Fodazione Michelucci, on the basis of the documentation supplied by the coordinator of the project, will prepare a general work program to be carried out in Bolivia.

Its members will, therefore, make a preliminary trip to Bolivia, with the assistance of the project coordinator, in order to view the site, as well as the state of the buildings, begin work, and nominate a local work director.

It will create an executive project for restoration of the Fraciscan Mission of Santa Rosa del Cuevo and it will direct, together with a local architect, the execution of the work.

B Three year long courses for visual arts' students will be structured as three year long internships with artists in the fields of painting, sculpture, ceramics, and film-making, beginning with the local traditional ceramic taught by guarani

C Three year long courses for music students will be structured on models previously tested in music schools and the old Jesuit missions, where they have an orchestra director and a chorus director who teach both musical and instrumental diction.

D The connection with other schools will be organized through meetings between directors of the schools and through student exchanges. Constant contact will be maintained with the Ministry of Education so that the school can be integrated into the state educational system.