



# Toward a Spanish Version of the Escazú Agreement in Comics: Needs, Research Background, and Methodological Steps

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**Abstract** This chapter delves into the project's evolution after the successful publication of books on the Escazú Agreement in English and Portuguese. The initiative shifted focus towards disseminating the

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knowledge contained in these works to the Chiquitano communities in Mato Grosso and sharing project results in academic fora and international conferences. The reception of these books was enthusiastic among both indigenous and scientific communities, garnering positive feedback. One notable suggestion emerged prominently: the urgent need to develop a Spanish version. This recommendation was driven by the widespread prevalence of Spanish as a major language in Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Bolivia, where the majority of Chiquitano communities reside. Therefore, this chapter explores the process of expanding the initiative to include a Spanish version, emphasizing its significance and implications for promoting indigenous rights and environmental protection. Adapting the project to this crucial language aims to ensure broader and more effective access to information about the Escazú Agreement, thereby strengthening indigenous community participation and fostering environmental protection in the region.

**Keyword** Project development · Inclusion · Spanish language

## I ADVANCING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS: EXTENDING THE REACH THROUGH LANGUAGE

### *1.1 Introduction*

After successfully publishing our books on the Escazú Agreement in English and Portuguese, our initiative focused on disseminating the knowledge contained within these works to the Chiquitano communities in Mato Grosso and sharing our project results in academic fora and international conferences. The reception of these books was met with enthusiasm from both indigenous and scientific communities. The feedback we received was resoundingly positive, with one prominent suggestion standing out: the urgent need to develop a version in Spanish. This recommendation was driven by the widespread prevalence of Spanish as a major language in Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Bolivia, where the majority of Chiquitano communities reside and speak

Spanish.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this chapter delves into the process of expanding our initiative to include a Spanish version, with a focus on its importance and the implications for promoting indigenous rights and environmental protection.

### 1.2 *The Significance of a Spanish Version*

The call for a Spanish version of our books holds immense importance for several reasons. Firstly, Spanish is the dominant language across Latin American and Caribbean nations, serving as a unifying linguistic tool for disseminating knowledge and fostering collaboration among diverse communities. By offering a version in Spanish, we can effectively broaden the reach of our work to engage a wider audience, empowering more individuals and communities to access vital information about environmental human rights and legal protections.

Secondly, a Spanish version is particularly pertinent for the Chiquitano communities in Bolivia. Despite the preservation of their indigenous language, the reality is that Spanish serves as the primary mode of communication in many spheres of their lives. Therefore, making these valuable resources accessible in Spanish directly addresses the immediate needs of these communities, ensuring that they can fully comprehend and engage with the content, ultimately strengthening their capacity to advocate for their rights and preserve their environment.

### 1.3 *Addressing Socio-Cultural Gaps*

By embracing a Spanish version, we aim to bridge socio-cultural gaps that can sometimes hinder effective communication and collaboration. While our books in English and Portuguese made significant strides in promoting environmental awareness and socio-environmental rights within the Chiquitano communities in Mato Grosso and the scientific international community worldwide, there remains a sense of empowerment that a Spanish version can uniquely provide. Language holds the key to unlocking understanding, connection, and cooperation, and by

<sup>1</sup>Weber, K. (2013). Chiquitano and the Multiple Meanings of Being Indigenous in Bolivia. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 32(2), 194–209; Weber, K. (2013). “We are all Chiquitano”: Struggles over Territory and Sovereignty in Lowland Bolivia. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 18(2), 314–336.

presenting our research and project findings in Spanish, we offer a more accessible pathway to engagement.

### *1.4 Empowering Indigenous Voices*

One of the core principles driving our initiative is the empowerment of indigenous communities. With a Spanish version, we foster a sense of ownership and empowerment among the Chiquitano community members in Bolivia.

### *1.5 Conclusion*

The development of a Spanish version of our books signifies a crucial step in the ongoing journey to advance indigenous rights and environmental protection. By embracing this initiative, we strive to strengthen our commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that the invaluable knowledge co-created by the community of researchers, student and indigenous representatives resonates with the hearts and minds of the Spanish-speaking countries, communities, and researchers from Latin America, the Caribbean, and beyond.

As we reflect on Alicia Bárcena’s profound words during the signing of the Escazú Agreement, we find ourselves united in the endeavour of leaving no one behind: “With the determined support of all, the Escazú Agreement will soon become synonymous with greater democracy, transparency and well-being. The countries and peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean will always be able to count on ECLAC to assist in this noble and necessary endeavor.”<sup>2</sup>

Our project, driven by the principles of environmental justice and the empowerment of indigenous communities, seeks to contribute to the vision set forth in the Agreement. By expanding the reach of our work through the development of a Spanish version, we strive to bridge linguistic gaps, ensuring that knowledge and awareness are accessible to all interested parties and earth defenders. As we work together towards a prosperous, inclusive, and equitable region, we are reminded that the

<sup>2</sup> Bárcena A. (2018), The Escazú Agreement: An Environmental Milestone for Latin America and the Caribbean, [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/article/files/op-ed\\_escazu\\_final\\_english\\_final.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/article/files/op-ed_escazu_final_english_final.pdf); available also in Spanish: [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/article/files/op-ed\\_escazu\\_final\\_.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/article/files/op-ed_escazu_final_.pdf). Last access August 2, 2023.

Escazú Agreement serves as a guiding light, inspiring transformative change and progress on our shared path to sustainable development with equality. The countries and peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean can indeed count on our unwavering commitment to this vital mission, bolstering the Escazú Agreement's legacy of greater democracy, transparency, and well-being.

## 2 THE SPANISH VERSION: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the following sections, we will delve into the process of co-creating a Spanish version of the Escazú Agreement in comics, presenting the viewpoints of both researchers based in Europe who have been involved in the project. The comic book's assembler and Spanish translator will share their experiences, highlighting the key elements of their contribution, as well as the opportunities and challenges encountered during the final stages of the comics' co-creation.

Section 3 focuses on the composition of the comic book in Spanish. It provides technical details about the editing, formatting, and layout of the comics. Moreover, it emphasizes that the book, particularly the vignettes, should not be seen as a research product in and of itself, serving as the final output of research activity. Instead, the comics serve as a platform to explore and disseminate crucial issues. They act as a medium that amalgamates material, spatial, and temporal aspects while interweaving subjective experiences and structural elements (Cancellieri, 2023, 107)—such as environmental and social injustice, and the coloniality of modern Western epistemology (including law).

Section 4 centers on the Spanish translation of the comic book. Given that constant dialogue and the active engagement of the Chiquitano peoples were fundamental elements of the methodology employed in creating the comics, the translation into Spanish emerged as a crucial step. By doing so, we aimed to extend the reach of the acquired knowledge, especially its embodiment in the form of a graphic product, to a broader audience. Through the translation of the comics into the most widely spoken language in Latin America and the Caribbean, the comic book now becomes accessible to a larger and more diverse audience. This effort ensures that the valuable insights and experiences shared within the comics can resonate with a greater number of people, furthering the commitment to promoting environmental human rights and empowering communities across the region.

### 3 THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMIC BOOK

#### 3.1 *Storage and Organization of the Research Material*

The graphic product of the comic in Spanish has been developed following a process slightly different from the two versions in English and Portuguese (2021)<sup>3</sup> and from the version featured in this volume. It is the result of the work conducted both in the field by the participants/recipients of the project result—the Chiquitano People (as illustrated in Chapter 3)—, and remotely by an ECO\_CARE team member based in Italy (hereinafter: the assembler), with the aim of transferring the scientific findings and legal content into an accessible verbo-visual form (the comic book). As above described, the comic material was produced following the principles of LD by applying the techniques of VL, throughout the research activity conducted at Vila Nova Barbecho, in Mato Grosso (Brazil) with the active engagement of the Chiquitano People, whose involvement was ensured by the mediation of Silvano Chue Muquissai—community member, and graduate at the Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso (UFMT). The vignettes were co-created as part of the legal research (see details in Chapter 3 a, b, and e) on the field, they were collected and stored in a shared folder on *Microsoft Teams*, to connect all the ECO\_CARE team members and ensure a thorough and methodical sharing of the research material. The material was organized into two main folders: (1) the comic dialogue (the script) which was structured into sections (short sentences), one or two for each vignette; (2) the vignettes which were organized into sub-folders, namely an “Introduction to the Escazú Agreement”, and 9 chapters composing the comic book, one for each article of the Escazú Agreement chosen by the participants/recipients (Chapter 5).

<sup>3</sup> Parola, G., Poto, M. P. (2021) (ed. by) *The Escazú Agreement in Comics with and for the Chiquitano People. A Co-Created Project of Legal Design and Visual Law*, ISBN/EAN 978-88-921-4266-4 (English version), pp. 1–80, Giappichelli, Torino; Parola G., Poto M. P. (2021) *O Acordo de Escazú Em Quadrinhos Feito Pelo e Para o Povo Chiquitano Um Projeto Co-criado de Legal Design e Visual Law* ISBN/EAN 978-88-921-4267-1 (Portuguese version), pp. 1–80, Giappichelli, Torino.

### 3.2 *Assembling the Vignettes for the Spanish Version*

The digital platform chosen for the Spanish version is *Comic Life*.<sup>4</sup> The program was chosen for its accessible and intuitive interface, which allowed a smooth advancement into comic creation, thanks to its pre-existing full-page templates and panel layouts, ready-made “bubble speeches” to apply to each vignette and appropriate fonts for the chosen research result. The comic book was assembled following a chronological order (from the introduction to the Escazú Agreement to Article 9 of the Agreement, “Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters”), combining each vignette with its relevant dialogical section. Each dialogical section was placed into a white “balloon”, and associated to a character. The comic book’s layout was then refined through *Adobe InDesign*.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.3 *Assessing the Research: Knowledge Decolonization*

The process of transforming the Escazú Agreement into comics in different languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish) holds profound implications in the ongoing process of decolonizing knowledge. Firstly, it empowers the Chiquitano voices and faces, placing them at the very heart of the investigation. By co-creating and co-validating the comics, the indigenous communities themselves become active participants in shaping their narratives and advocating for their rights. Moreover, the comics play a pivotal role in broadening the audience and impact of the message they convey. Not limited to indigenous communities alone, these graphic representations reach a wider public, including non-indigenous individuals. As readers and researchers engage with the comics, they develop empathy, compassion, and care towards the struggles that indigenous peoples endure in their quest for the recognition of their human and environmental rights. The multilingual approach further enhances the global reach of this transformative endeavor. By rendering the Escazú Agreement into various languages, the comics transcend linguistic barriers, allowing diverse communities to connect and engage in conversations about environmental justice and indigenous rights. This process, in turn, fosters a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between human beings

<sup>4</sup> <http://comiclif.com/>, Last access May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Ottavia Ferraris for the technical support.

and their natural surroundings, leading to a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmental protection.

In summary, the transformative process of turning the Escazú Agreement into comics in multiple languages embodies a powerful act of decolonization, centering indigenous voices, and promoting inclusivity. By creating a platform that encourages dialogue, understanding, and collective action, these comics serve as a catalyst for positive change, bringing us closer to a world that upholds and protects the rights of all, regardless of cultural background or origin. This leads to three significant outcomes that bring benefits to the involved community, legal researchers, and comic book readers simultaneously.

Firstly, it provides the Chiquitano Peoples with the opportunity to represent their social, temporal, and spatial world in their own terms, ensuring the utmost accuracy in delivering a research product that truly reflects their cosmovision and daily habits.

Secondly, it enables the research team to adhere to the principle of “avoid[ing] abstractionism and determinism and observing and representing human action as a socially and politically situated embodied practice,” as highlighted in the quote (Cancellieri, 2023, 112).

Thirdly, it prevents the romanticisation of the indigenous group, their customs, and traditions, as the comic book portrays real people and the socio-ecological struggles that profoundly impact their lives and prospects for survival and prosperity.

In this context, the result of a book in comics aims to make a non-Western experience accessible to a hybrid audience, bridging cultural gaps. By mainstreaming this experience, it normalizes a struggle that may directly impact some, but concerns everyone, fostering a sense of empathy that unites readers, researchers and community members of all ages and backgrounds. On the one hand, for indigenous readers, the mainstreamed experience allows them to relate to the content or learn how to respond should they encounter similar situations. On the other hand, non-indigenous readers have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the struggle and empathize with the protagonists. Indeed, comics serve not only as an effective means of communication but also as a medium for exploring alternative perspectives, encouraging readers to think, imagine, and see the world differently from the norm (Atalay et al. 2019; Cancellieri 2023, 109).



## 4 THE TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH

### 4.1 *The Importance of Understandable Legal Documents and Information*

Understanding the rules of a game results in the possibility to navigate it. In our modern society, the rules of the game are our law systems consisting of the national frameworks and the international frameworks that depend on each other. When asking the question what the rules of the game are we must define what law is and especially what it is not.

A legal norm is a rule imposing how reality *should* be.<sup>6</sup> Starting from that standpoint it is crucial to identify the following components of such a written norm: Who is the addressee of the norm? What is the goal of the norm? What is the consequence if the rule isn't complied with? Are there any exceptions?

Oftentimes, these components can only be understood by individuals with great legal knowledge creating a system in which the accessibility of legal information and enforcement of rights is bound to the individual possibility of affording a lawyer. This results in the problem that the field of environmental law exists as an uneven playing field making the most vulnerable that need judicial intervention in their favour powerless.

In the context of this co-creation, it is important to understand that a rule that isn't obeyed is worthless, resulting in the responsibility to not only impose rules but to make them understandable for the addressees. This obligation is catalyzed if we discuss laws granting rights to certain groups.

Thus, it is crucial to not only translate norms into the language of the norm addressees but also translate it into an understandable language to ensure that they can enforce and understand their rights to navigate the everlasting contradiction of economic growth and protection of the environment. Because only the law that is understood can be enforced and therefore be effective.

The Escazú Agreement aims to not only provide understandable environmental information that is accessible, but it also entitles the local societies to participate in the process of sustainable development.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> Alexy, 'Theorie der Grundrechte' p. 46. Robert Alexy states that a normative sentences indicate how things should be while norms are expressed through them.

<sup>7</sup> FES Briefing, *Acuerdo de Escazú ¿Qué hace especial al Acuerdo de Escazú?*, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mexiko/19256.pdf>, Last access July 25, 2023.

addressees of this international law treaty are the people living in the Caribbean and Latin America with a focus on environmental defenders and vulnerable groups.<sup>8</sup> This project aims to facilitate access by using the concepts of LD and VL. The translation into Spanish ensures linguistically that most norm addressees of the treaty know their rights and understand their role in this context.

#### 4.2 *The Process of Translation*

The biggest difficulty in translating is to deliver the meaning of the written word in another language to the addressee while also trying to keep the “style” of the writing of the author. In our case, we also aimed to translate the text into understandable Spanish that isn’t academic. Because the addressees of this co-creation are people from Latin America and the Caribbean the next difficulty is that Spanish isn’t Spanish. The “Castellano” from Buenos Aires isn’t the same as the one from Bogotá or Santiago de Chile. The attempt to translate into neutral Spanish was made even though some words or structures are going to be in Argentinian Spanish.<sup>9</sup> The translation process took place in four steps: (1) Reading and understanding the message of every sentence, (2) Using translation tools like *DeepL* to compare to the personal translation, (3) Translating in the sense of writing the translation and (4) Reading only the Spanish version to make sure if it is understandable.

#### 4.3 *Inclusive Language: Progress Over Perfection*

Since it was the goal to create an addressee-appropriate comic book, it was also discussed if and how we would use inclusive language. In Spanish, there are different ways to gender an expression for example tod@s, todes, todxs.<sup>10</sup> Because the Spanish language offers so many “genderable” words because of the use of the masculine “o” and the feminine “a” in nouns, articles, and adjectives we faced the problem that the sentences would be much longer if we gendered by using both (todos y todas). At

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The translator is of Argentinian descent.

<sup>10</sup> Fundéu, *La x, la @, la -e*, [www.fundeu.es/lenguaje-inclusivo/la-x-la-@-la-e.html](http://www.fundeu.es/lenguaje-inclusivo/la-x-la-@-la-e.html), Last access July 25, 2023.

the same time, we didn't want to compromise our goal to create an understandable source of knowledge by using very unknown and politicized ways of gendering like the ones mentioned.

Hence, we decided to use the “o” and “a” if we felt like the noun, article or adjective was especially emphasized in the context of the sentence. We know that using inclusive language is a key to mirroring gender justice in the linguistic context. Thus, we want to clarify that this comic book is for everyone regardless of their gender identity.

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- Cancellieri, A., Scienze sociali a fumetti. Caratteristiche e affordances di un campo emergente, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 1, 2023, pp. 105–123.

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