

# Museum & Place

Editors

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Kerstin Smeds

Professor emeritus, Umeå University, Sweden

Ann Davis

Professor emeritus, University of Calgary, Canada

## **President of ICOFOM:**

François Mairesse

Professor, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, France

International committee for Museology – ICOFOM

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# Sustaining a Sense of Place through Community Crafts and Culture<sup>1</sup>

*Jamie Brown and Karen Brown*

## Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a strong academic focus on the idea of a “sense of place” relating to ecomuseums,<sup>2</sup> referring to how local people identify what is distinctive about their territories, and how documenting, safeguarding, and promoting heritage in places under decline can work toward building sustainable futures. Some authors have considered the idea of a “sense of place” more broadly in relation to “social capital,” being “the benefits in terms of wellbeing, good health and civic engagement which are generated through interactions between people, identifying pride in place, shared values and citizenship, and ‘place dependency’.”<sup>3</sup> The European Landscape Convention (2000) describes landscape as a “living context,” referring to a holistic concept of landscape in relation to tangible and intangible heritage, among other considerations.<sup>4</sup> Understood in this framework, community and ecomuseums can be conceived of as active agents in the preservation not only of their collections but also of the cultural and natural heritage that surrounds them. The CCC project therefore aligns with the European Landscape Convention and with the 2016 Italian “Strategic document” of ecomuseums in its premise that

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1. Research for this essay was supported by the Scottish Funding Council Global Challenges Research Fund.

2. Peter Davis, *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Continuum 2011); Peter Davis, “Ecomuseums and the democratization of cultural tourism,” *Tourism, Culture and Communication* 4 (2004): 45–58; Peter Davis, “Ecomuseums, societies and sustainability: contrasting global experiences,” in *Heritage and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 2, 1285–1295 (Evora, Portugal: Green Lines Institute for Sustainable Development. 2010); S. Cousin, “Un brin de culture, une once d’économie: écomusée & économusée,” *Publics et Musée. L’Écomusées: Rêve ou Réalité* 17–18 (2000): 115–137; M. Maggi and V. Falletti, *Ecomuseums in Europe: What they are and what they can be*. Working Paper no. 137 (Torino: IRES – Istituto Recherche Economico-Sociale del Piemonte, 2000); Amareswar Galla, “Cultural Diversity in Ecomuseum Development in Viet Nam,” *Museum International* 57, no. 3 (2005), 101–109.

3. Rhiannon Mason, Andrew Nemwan and Helen Graham, “Literature review: Historic Environment, Sense of Place and Social Capital,” Report (English Heritage and International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, Newcastle University, 2009). The report also includes an extensive bibliography on this topic, mostly relating to the UK. See also P. Selman, “Social Capital, Sustainability and Environmental Planning,” *Planning Theory and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2001), 13–30.

4. European Landscape Convention, accessed 19 April 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/1680080621>

*Crafts and handmade knowledge, linked to environmental resources and landscape, stand as domestic economic help in a period of economic and personal problems. Ecomuseums can start processes of re-utilization of knowledge, predisposing them to technical innovation, education to new handmade jobs, creative competence, in a pact between generations, directed to small and medium form and job opportunities for young people.*<sup>1</sup>

The CCC project has involved close collaboration between the Museums, Galleries and Collections Institute at the University of St Andrews in Scotland and three small local museums in Costa Rica, as well as the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, the Red de Museos Comunitarios de Costa Rica, students from the University of Costa Rica, and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Costa Rica. The museums are the Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega of San Vicente located in Guanacaste, and Boruca and Rey Curré Yimba Cajc *museos comunitarios* located in the indigenous Brunka region in southern Costa Rica. In San Vicente (Costa Rica's oldest ecomuseum), local people produce pottery according to traditional methods, and in Boruca and Rey Curré Yimba Cajc, the main craft traditions are mask-carving (associated with the "Dance of the Little Devils" festival) produced mostly by men, and traditional dying and weaving of textiles produced mostly by women. The aim of our research has been to consider the innovation potential for the promotion of artisan crafts, while respecting the integrity of community museum principles, including community decision-making, agreement and governance. In our consultations, each community identified artisan crafts as one of their main income generators, and the desire to see young people carry on these traditions toward long-term sustainability. The motivations behind the creation of these museums and the vision of community members for sustainable development underpin all CCC's aspirations and activities.

## **Background to community and ecomuseums of Costa Rica**

The *Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega* of San Vicente was established in 2007 in an effort to safeguard and promote the Chorotega indigenous craft of pottery-making and the way of life of the local community. Involving Chorotega artisans, the ecomuseum offers practical workshops using traditional materials and techniques for painting and creating motifs relating to Chorotega indigenous beliefs, such as the sacred jaguar, regarded as a symbol of rain and fertility.

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1. "2016 Ecomuseums Agenda 'Strategic document' of ecomuseums," trans. Raul Dal Santo, accessed 12 May 2018, <http://www.ecomusei.eu/ecomusei/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Strategic-document.pdf>. See also *Ecomuseums and cultural landscapes. State of the art and future prospects*, ed. Raffaella Riva (Santarcangelo, Italy: Maggioli Editore, 2017).



*Chorotega Jaguar Ceramic.* Photographs © University of St Andrews.

The Chorotega people were the most powerful American Indian tribe of northwest Costa Rica at the time of the Spanish conquest. Corn farmers, they had most likely migrated from Chiapas many generations before the Spanish conquest, speaking a language called Mangué, which disappeared in the colonial period. Columbian Chorotega-Mangués people still live on the Nicoya peninsula, speaking Spanish rather than Mexican, and cultural traits, such as the reliance on corn, distinguish them from the rest of Costa Rica.<sup>1</sup> In the words of the ecomuseum and local Community Development Association president Maribel Sanchez:

*The mission of the ecomuseum is to rescue the culture of our Chorotega indigenous ancestors. Because it's a living culture that we have and although we do not keep the language, we do have our culture in the aspect concerning ceramics, traditions, let's say, food ... corn, all around this area, the cultural aspect.*<sup>2</sup>

The creation of the ecomuseum at San Vicente was supported by the Fundación Interamericana, the Costa Rica Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Fine Arts, the National Museum, and regional museums.<sup>3</sup> The Ecomuseum Association is distinct from the Community Development Association, but the land on which the museum is built is owned by the latter, meaning that, officially, the

1. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 20 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chorotega>.

2. Maribel Sanchez, interview with Karen Brown, June 2016. This research, funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, was carried out by Dr Karen Brown as a way of comparing community empowerment and local museum initiatives directed at tourism in Costa Rica and Scotland. See Karen E. Brown, "Paradigm or Predator? Eco and Community Museums in Scotland and Costa Rica", *ICOFOM Study Series*, 45 (2017), 23–36.

3. Maribel Sanchez, interview with Karen Brown, June 2016.

local community take responsibility for it. The museography was implemented in consultation with Ronald Martinez of the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, who led a series of workshops and guided the community in curating their own history. It was updated in 2017 as part of the EU-LAC-MUSEUMS project workshops called “Our Vision for Change” led by Martinez.<sup>1</sup> The “eco” suffix in the San Vicente museum concept was, according to the president, a means of valuing nature in the community and, especially, a way to avoid burning down the community’s sacred tree. The distinctive tree of Guanacaste is useful for its seed pods, traditionally used as detergent for washing clothes, as illustrated in the museum display.

Between 2016 and 2018, the director consistently reported that the museum was in a period of crisis, with the ecomuseum staying alive mainly owing to the voluntary activities of some elderly people providing ceramics to sell in it. They also depend on external tour companies, employing mostly Nicaraguan tour guides, to bring tourists to the museum. The profits gained from this initiative are frustratingly minimal.<sup>2</sup> The researchers recognized that there is great potential for the museum to develop its surrounding offerings, such as utilizing its outdoor space for workshops demonstrating traditional pottery-making using local materials and the techniques of Chorotega artisans, or cooking in the distinctive village ovens (used for both firing ceramics and home or communal cooking). San Vicente’s identification of its cultural assets, both in the formation and curation of the museum, and in its engagement with the CCC project, has involved processes of musealization (in bringing objects from the territory into the museum), and heritagization (in the mapping of its territorial heritage, tangible and intangible). As described by Lynn Maranda, musealization can be understood as the process whereby the object enters the museum to assume another function as a source of knowledge. Sharon Macdonald has further deployed the term to highlight the musealization of significant objects from everyday life. As Maranda articulates, the moment of “transformation” takes place when a decision is made assigning museal status. A similar logic can be followed in the context of ecomuseums, where sites in cultural landscapes become mapped and assume new kinds of value when considered as a territory museum consisting of cultural and natural assets. This local development process is often bracketed with tourism and codified using words associated with economic growth, including asset management, regional competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and GDP.<sup>3</sup> However, the crucial point of decision-making identified by Maranda assumes added significance in this context as we need to ask who has control over decisions in processes of heritagization, who the actors are, what are their agendas, and what decisions are discussed and agreed. CCC methodology adopts the position that commu-

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1. EU-LAC-MUSEUMS Youth Exchange, accessed 20 April 2018, <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/youth-exchange-2>.

2. Maribel Sanchez, interview with Karen Brown, 2016.

3. See Richard Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: balancing nature and heritage in preservation practice*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Zoltán Bujdosó, “Basis of Heritagization and Cultural Tourism Development,” *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* 188 (2015), 307–315.

nity consultation toward local solutions to local problems is key to sustainable development relating to culture.



*Guanacaste tree seed. Stone washing in San Vicente.* Photographs © University of St Andrews and Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega San Vicente.

To illustrate this point, take the Guanacaste tree and its seeds, discussed above. These seeds can be used for washing clothes without chemical detergents, but once the seed pods are brought inside the museum and displayed, they take on new importance as objects of cultural significance and study, not only for the local people and tourists, but also for researchers in botany, geography and sustainable development. The tree, one of which is located outside the museum, then becomes an interesting natural heritage asset and one which the local community collectively seeks to preserve. When considered as part of an ecomuseum, the tree, which has always been of traditional and household significance among the older generation, then takes on added value and becomes “heritagized,” making it part of a tourist route around the territory and listed as a significant heritage asset, rendering it a powerful instrument capable of resisting unethical development.

When consulted about what matters to the ecomuseum in San Vicente and its sustainability, the president lamented that the ecomuseum was going through hard times. She said that she worried for its future sustainability, adding:

*Just imagine that I should, like my mother, pass away, then what happens is that [the museum] dies. That’s why I want young people, especially young people – that’s what we’re doing with the cooperative. We want young people to get involved and manage the cooperative well, as it is needed.*<sup>1</sup>

In response to such consultations within the community and with Martinez, the CCC project worked with a map of local artisans in San Vicente created by the community. Together, we conceived the novel idea of building on their data to create a new interactive online map of the community, highlighting significant

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1. Maribel Sanchez, interview with Karen Brown, 2016.



places of interest across the ecomuseum site. However, beyond mere promotion, San Vicente faces two distinct challenges that need to be overcome: first, the need to secure the sustainability of its ecomuseum and Chorotega heritage itself; and second, to address the issues facing its young people, such as a lack of opportunity, and peer pressure leading to substance addiction. CCC researchers identified the need to increase wider community participation rather than rely on the already overburdened volunteers, therefore bringing new ideas and thoughts to the table while fostering more community ownership and involvement. A potential outcome of the CCC project is a future partnership between the ecomuseum and the local high school to train and empower young people as tour guides. By documenting San Vicente's landscape and by increasing community capacity through sharing – passing Chorotega knowledge from the elders to the young people – the community can offer young people an opportunity to get involved and gain essential skills relevant to the local economy. In this process, the young people gain a better understanding of ways in which to maintain their heritage, thus reducing the likelihood that they will be uprooted and move out to seek employment, or turn to antisocial behavior.

## **The community museums of Boruca and Rey Curré Yimba Cajc**

Inhabiting very different landscapes and supporting different artisan crafts, the *museos comunitarios* of *Boruca and Rey Curré Yimba Cajc* are located in indigenous territories in the south of Costa Rica, created from processes of evangelization by Franciscan missions and Spanish colonial rule in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> The community groups and museums in Boruca, and in the neighboring Terraba-Broran territory where Rey Curré is located, were developed in the 1980s as a form of resistance against external forces attempting to take away their resources, especially cedar and balsa wood. Boruca and Rey Curré peoples are known collectively as the “Brunca” tribe, as they share the same roots and traditions, especially the Dance of the Little Devils, a festival that takes place over the new year period.

Of particular note in the conception and creation of the community museum in *Boruca* is that the leaders of the Boruca movement were strong women who fought to respect and recover ancestral culture while overcoming discrimination in their communities.<sup>2</sup> Their method was to recognize the value of women outside the domestic sphere by allowing them to promote the female organization of crafts production and administration of an artisan collective. This group of women called Nora Maroto – Marina Lázaro Morales, Feliciano González Lázaro,

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1. See “Memoria de la Red de Museos Comunitarios de Costa Rica: 1980–2014,” in *Memory of the Network of Community Museums of America: experiences of Community Museums and National Networks*, eds Edited by Cuauhtemoc Camarena Ocampo and Teresa Morales Lersch. Creative Commons, 2016. Hereafter “Memoria.”

2. Margarita Lázaro Morales, lecture, University of St Andrews, May 2018.

Acernia Villanueva, Ema Rojas, Margarita Lázaro Morales, Beliza Maroto, and Lucia Morales – worked together to lobby the local development association for a plot of land. Meanwhile, four women – Marina Lázaro Morales, Feliciano González Lázaro, Margarita Lázaro Morales, and Beliza Maroto – set about learning the craft of weaving from two elder women, Petra and Ángela, eventually selling their wares through the National Museum in San Jose and dividing the profits between them. By the 1980s their confidence had grown, and they came up with the idea of marketing traditional Borucan masks for tourist and external markets, a venture that has proven to be very profitable. “Thank God, we’ve been so blessed, so here we are, Margarita and me, still in the fight,” reported doña Feliciano.<sup>1</sup>

To create the museum in Boruca, the organization Mujer y Familia made a financial contribution; Doña Feliciano González became the treasurer, and Mrs. Maria Eugenia Murillo (General Director of Museums of the Ministry) also contributed 300,000 colones (ca. 520 USD). By 1985, following hands-on work by the women and the men they selected to help them, the community museum, Museo Comunitario de Boruca, was built in the traditional rancho style and opened. Strengthened through the Network of Community Museums of America since the 1990s,<sup>2</sup> by 2015 the community museum has, according to Margarita Lázaro Morales, rescued 90% of its culture, including historical pieces, legends, and medicinal plants. One of its greatest achievements was the loan transfer and custody of three pre-Columbian spheres to the Boruca territory, with the largest one of 7.5 meters being installed on loan at the door of the museum. Moreover, the women joined forces with others to create the Association of Artisans La Flor, enabling the local people to make an honest living through craft production and sales. Today, 95% of the Borucan people live off crafts.<sup>3</sup> However, Feliciano reported:

*It’s the same story – non-indigenous people enter the community because they buy the land, and they have been chopping down the trees, the savanna, where all the raw materials grow ... the pine trees, and so on.<sup>4</sup>*

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1. Feliciano González, interview with Karen Brown, Boruca Museo Comunitario, 2016.

2. Museos Comunitarios de América, accessed 12 May 2018, <http://www.museoscomunitarios.org/>.

3. Feliciano González, interview with Karen Brown, Boruca Museo Comunitario, 2016.

4. Feliciano González, interview with Karen Brown, Boruca Museo Comunitario, 2016; public talk by Margarita Lázaro Morales and Adriana Lázaro Morales, University of St Andrews, May 2018.



*(Left) Sphere outside Boruca's community museum. (Right) Masks on sale at the artisan shop. Photographs © University of St Andrews.*

In response to consultations with the community, the CCC project conducted interviews with artisans identified by the Association of Artisans La Flor to contribute to the project's online collaborative map. Each participant was asked to identify the boundaries of Boruca, significant sites deemed relevant for their crafts, and potential areas of interest, such as the sacred waterfall, river and religious sites that play a key role within the local environment. The project also engaged women artisans in a group discussion about their crafts, their history and significance, and women artisans identified traditional materials and techniques for producing their attractive weavings using traditional looms and natural dyes. As in San Vicente, the links between musealization of traditional materials from nature (in this case, pictures of a small sea snail in the community museum alongside a weaving display) and community empowerment became clear in this consultation. Margarita Lázaro Morales described at length how this snail, which lives in a natural reserve nearby, secretes a purple dye at a certain time of year and phase of the moon, a dye that is highly resistant to fading, so creating the most resilient and valued colored dye for weavings. In 2018, for the first time in many years, the community gained access from the government to these snails and made a significant community activity around the historic journey to the beach in the footsteps of their ancestors. It is these types of activities, according to the women's group, that help to strengthen the roots of the community, especially those of the young people who then learn, appreciate and carry forward knowledge of traditional crafts.<sup>1</sup>

During discussions to find out which way would be best to promote their landscapes, individual crafts and workshops, it was agreed by the participants that they would create an online map of Boruca's sights and landmarks without listing each individual's contact details. Instead, it was proposed to name the museum as a central place to buy Boruca's unique masks as it retains some of the profit for the benefit of the community, as well as using it as a starting point for a visit to their region. This simple yet effective decision demonstrates the

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1. Craftswomen of Boruca and Rey Curré, in consultation with Karen Brown, Jamie Allan Brown, and Teresa Morales, 2018.

community's *comunalidad* principle of sharing and working together, rather than each artisan operating individually for their own self-profit. The principle is not restricted to crafts but is applied throughout daily life in decision-making and action, whereby communal tasks, such as repairing the damaged roof of the community *salon*, organizing the annual *Fiesta de los Diablitos*, or picking fruit from a tree is shared evenly for the benefit of the whole community.

The *Community Museum Yimba Cajc* was created in Rey Curré following a series of discussions begun in 2011 and running through to 2012–13. The economy of Rey Curré is based on their crafts which, as in Boruca, respect the traditions of their ancestors and elders. In the words of the local school principal:

*The school is concerned with how the society of our grandparents, of our ancestors, was like. And above all, we want to exalt it, for the Boruca society, in this town of Curré, has been [existing] for many years, right? It's an ancient people. It's located in that place. And that aside, we exalt the Boruca art, crafts, which is what our society is based on (in this case, the Curré society, the Boruca society), what the economy is based on – the production of masks, jícaras [small cups] and weaves.<sup>1</sup>*

This community has already trained young people from the school to conduct articulate and engaging guided tours around the museum and significant sites, an initiative that the CCC project profited from in its collection of data and in conducting interviews. When questioned about threats to heritage preservation in their local territory, the school principal cited the need to maintain their roots by preventing outsiders from building over their cemeteries, by finding ways to control tomb robbers, and by resisting modern carving techniques:

*We maintain the roots of the Boruca people when it comes to arts and crafts, right? Logically, we don't want to bring in machines or other types of tools that would make it easier to craft masks that are traditionally made with gouges, tips of knives and all that. So we've tried to conserve crafts by not introducing machines that would facilitate things a little bit because that would make the true sense of being an artisan disappear.*

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1. School principal, interview with Karen Brown, Rey Curré, Costa Rica, 2016.



(Left) Rey Curré artisan carving a traditional mask seated on a hammock in his workshop. (Right) Interior of Yimba Cajc Museum. Photograph © University of St Andrews.

From the 1990s, in order to strengthen their activities and resolve, Maribel Sanchez of San Vicente and Margarita Lázaro Morales of Boruca engaged with the wider Network of Community Museums of America. Then in 2008 and 2009, the idea of creating a national network of community museums emerged as a reciprocal arrangement between the National Museum and the local community. It is managed through the National Museum of Costa Rica, and is a CCC project partner.<sup>1</sup> In Boruca one of the new projects in 2016 was to set up a basic cafeteria and serve only traditional food.<sup>2</sup> As a result of our consultations it has become clear that, ultimately, the community is working toward a bigger museum and a small library which would host historical material, including screenings of Intangible Cultural Heritage footage. There is also a desire to sustain indigenous gardening for the next generation, thereby further increasing resilience through traditional practices. With increased security in a new museum, the community's aspiration is to negotiate the removal of significant objects, including gold and archaeological pieces, from their current location at the National Museum of Costa Rica in the capital city, San Jose, to their own museum.<sup>3</sup>

To be sustainable, staying connected to other community and ecomuseums in their country and region has been a priority for all three museums under investigation. Through the national and regional networks, they can share their problems and discuss how to overcome them, thereby strengthening their resolve toward community cohesion through heritage identity work.

The Red de Museos Comunitarios meets in Central America every two years, and the community members report essential reinforcement work taking place through this network of shared visions and goals. One of the current priorities of the network is the "Our Vision of Change" program, which seeks to empower young people to engage with, and continue the fight for, the maintenance of

1. "Memoria", *op. cit.*

2. Feliciano González, interview with Karen Brown, Boruca Museo Comunitario, 2016.

3. Adriana Lázaro Morales, public talk and conversation with Karen Brown and Jamie Allan Brown, University of St Andrews, May 2018.

indigenous crafts and identity.<sup>1</sup> However, while community and ecomuseums are located in remote settings with poor infrastructure in place for physical access, they are not immune to the threats associated with globalization, including the interference of media and new technologies, on the lives of young people. Although not everywhere has good internet access, all the community members in possession of a smart phone have mobile data access. In the words of Margarita Lázaro Morales:

*What is worrying now is that we are focusing a lot on material and that also is a challenge for us. That weakness, I could say it like this, seen in youth, in childhood, I feel it as a weakness, that they ignore how important it is to want to keep our roots alive, this is a very big challenge, I feel it is a very difficult task, because along with our culture there is something more powerful, and it's that now we are seeing those mobiles, internet, that are stealing all that is culture... We have to fight a lot not to have a great loss of our memory, in our childhood, in our youth.<sup>2</sup>*

One way to overcome this threat is to make something positive of technology, and also to assist the communities in developing an online presence that they are proud of. In the CCC project, then, technology has been deployed as an enabling tool to empower the local community to promote its indigenous crafts on its own terms.

## Community Craft and Culture methodology

Working in collaboration with ICOM Costa Rica and Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, the CCC project facilitated a community-based approach to find local answers and solutions to the self-identified problems facing each community and its local environment. Benefiting from the existing eco/community museum's role as a focal point for community activities and celebrations, and as a place for dialogue between the community and outsiders, CCC sought to support the musealization and preservation of each community's heritage, traditions, and way of life by empowering the communities to document and map each landscape.

As explained, despite each community being located in remote areas, all are heavily influenced by the ever-increasing accessibility to the internet and media, and in all the interviews conducted it was clear that, while this phenomenon increases access to outside worlds, it poses a particular challenge to the community: how can they help young people to balance access to the wider world and its attendant behavioral patterns with the aspiration to retain tradition and respect for the local environment? Through discussions and participation with both CCC project partners and community leaders, five objectives were agreed, and considered relevant and achievable within the project's timeframe:

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1. Margarita Lázaro Morales and Adriana Lázaro Morales, lecture at University of St Andrews, May 2018.

2. "Memoria", *op. cit.*

- to build on existing partnerships and community groups using an integrated approach, from communities to national and international levels;
- to empower local women to take ownership of selling their crafts;
- to support the communities with the relevant necessary skills to promote their crafts;
- to evaluate and harness the knowledge gained from the project across the wider Community Museums Network of the Americas; and
- to utilize the increased capacity and empowered community in a future wider Latin America project.

Building on mapping work already carried out by the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica in San Vicente, the CCC project facilitated student volunteers from the University of Costa Rica to extend this approach to the *museos comunitarios* of Boruca and Rey Curré Yimba Cajc. Community elders and young people were encouraged to join the students in mapping their respective landscapes, interviewing artisans, and documenting places of interest, for example, ceremonial sites such as Rey Curré's graveyard and pre-Columbian wall, and natural resources such as balsa and cedar wood, utilized for craft-making and daily life. A local development plan to boost community participation and involvement, youth empowerment, and the musealization of the artisan process and artisanal resources is being developed in collaboration with partners to exploit the eco/community museum as a hub for each respective community. Through digitalization of the eco/community museum, community sites are being identified with videos and photographs, and will then be used to develop a website hosting an online map. The goal of this map is to address the connection between each community's heritage and memories and their environment and craft resources. The CCC map thereby supports the local artisans in their goal of preserving and sharing their environment and heritage with the wider world by creating an online cultural landscape. Another outcome desired by the communities was to develop an educational resource pack using the online map as a learning tool for parents, teachers, and youth workers with community-themed activities, thus sharing their unique environment (such as Boruca's waterfall), sacred sites (such as the Guanacaste tree), and their legends with a wider audience.



*Doña Celedina* the indigenous Bruncan language to young people in Rey Curré. Photographs © University of St Andrews.

Working with existing groups and respected women leaders, the CCC project and its collaborative partners empowered young people by teaching them about their indigenous heritages – their language, craftsmanship, building techniques, and the medicinal use of local plants and traditional cookery. Intergenerational activities between each community group, mediated by a positive adult role model, helped younger people participate more positively in their education, thus increasing their confidence and self-esteem, helping them to understand their local environment, and contributing to the overall future sustainability of their heritage. It is hoped that by inspiring each community’s young people to explore their community and environment, they will be encouraged and empowered to become involved in the decision-making process. What is more, their practical experience can contribute toward a more equal and fair community, one that respects the landscape of their ancestors and that will safeguard their distinctive ecology for future generations.

## Conclusion

Cultural landscapes occupy a privileged place in indigenous systems and cosmologies, and while an attempt to fit these assets into the digital museum world presents challenges on many levels, the CCC project design was based on community need. At a time when the role of culture is gaining increased agency in relation to sustainable development, and when ICOM is considering the role of cultural landscapes as protectors of local identity and natural resources, ecomuseums and community museums have much experience to share with the global museum community. Research engaging with these remote communities at grass-roots level has the potential to bring their voice and a more sensitive understanding of their knowledge systems into higher-level discussions, with the potential to impact upon policy relating to museum priorities and ethical sustainable development goals. The question posed by Maranda in relation to museum objects, “why musealize?” is equally important to heritagization processes of ecomuseums



and community museums. For both types of museums the sustainability of local communities, culture, and nature is the goal. Although occupying the borders of traditional museums in the ICOM sense of the word,<sup>1</sup> they have immense potential through collective action to adopt self-determined responsibility for cultural and environmental heritage preservation, as well as to communicate knowledge about it on their own terms. The collective memory of communities such as those engaged in the CCC project is fragile, but assisting communities to build their own path toward sustainable futures is the goal.

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1. ICOM Definition of a Museum, accessed 20 April 2017, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>.