



ECOMUSEUMS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EDITORS

NUNZIA BORRELLI, PETER DAVIS AND RAUL DAL SANTO

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Ecomuseums and Climate Change

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10. Community Crafts and Cultures in Costa Rica: community resilience in response to climate change

*Karen Brown, Jamie Allan Brown, Althea Davies,
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“As a material for development, heritage should be managed as a non-renewable but creative resource by the community itself as a whole, and by each one of its members or groups of members. This should be recognised by all other actors of development, whether public or private.”

(Hugues de Varine, in Brown, Davis and Raposo eds, 2019).

Understanding intersections between ‘living heritage’ and community resilience has never been more urgent for community museums and ecomuseums in countries adversely affected by climate change. This situation is exacerbated amongst indigenous communities which often remain outside the political mainstream, even in countries like Costa Rica, which has set global standards in the sustainable management of biodiversity, including measures that may help alleviate poverty for some communities (Naidoo et al. 2019). For indigenous communities living outside conservation areas, however, like the Brunca peoples in south-eastern Costa Rica¹, the need to maintain essential health, education, food security, and income constrain the intergenerational transmission of skills and knowledge required to conserve cultural heritage as a non-renewable but creative resource, all the while adapting to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions.

¹ The *Borucan* people are one of the eight originary Costa Rica’s people. They live in the territories of Boruca and Rey Curré, located in the south side of Costa Rica. It has about 2,500 members.

This chapter case study considers the Community Crafts and Cultures ('CCC') project (2017-2021) funded by the Scottish Funding Council's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) - a collaboration between The University of St Andrews, the National Museum of Costa Rica (NMCR), two community museums and one ecomuseum in Costa Rica.² The University of St Andrews has collaborated with NMCR since 2015 in supporting the community museums of Costa Rica through a suite of research projects, with CCC funded specifically to provide Overseas Development Assistance.³ The community museums involved are Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc and Museo Comunitario de Boruca, both located in the southern region of Buenos Aires de Puntarenas, and Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega in the north-western region of Guanacaste.⁴ In addition to presenting this project as a case study of museums' relationship with sustainable development and the climate crisis, the chapter offers reflections by the researchers on their roles in relation to the communities, highlighting the benefits of self-determination in local conception and delivery of practice-based research projects. Over all sites, we have sought to explore links and articulate research findings in line with scholarship and practices of safeguarding cultural heritage, ecotourism, slow food and food security, agrobiodiversity and ethnobotany (Callot 2013, Holdridge et al. 2020, Sauini et al. 2020). There has been a strong sustainability element on multiple levels - health, livelihood, representation and sharing of

² These museums form a network of community museums in Costa Rica, and are also strongly connected to the wider Network of Community Museums of América coordinated through Mexico led by Cuautémoc Camarena Ocampo and Teresa Morales Lersch. See <https://www.museoscomunitarios.org>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

³ These research projects are: Royal Society of Edinburgh Museums and Social Sustainability in Scotland and Costa Rica (2015); EU-LAC Museums (2016-2021); Community Crafts and Cultures (2017-2021).

⁴ The CCC project assistant John Large created a Google Map to show where these museums are, found here: <https://communitycc.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk>. An interactive Timeline for these museums and their development was also created by University of St Andrews Museum and Gallery Studies student Leonie Leeder supervised by the project team. See here: <https://communitycc.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/community-museum-timeline/>.

The respective community museum website may be found here: <https://www.museoscomunitarios.org/yimba>. Accessed 15 June 2022. <https://www.museoscomunitarios.org/boruca>. Accessed 15 June 2022. <https://www.museoscomunitarios.org/sanvicente>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

cultural heritage via food (production, restaurant); as well as an ecological/conservation perspective via permaculture or soil management, i.e. avoiding the need for artificial fertilisers and pesticides, possibly using some medicinal plant knowledge.

As with other indigenous communities in Costa Rica, the Brunicans do not live in isolation: although internet connectivity is limited, they have adopted technology and participate in market economics (particularly tourism) alongside - and often as part of - efforts to maintain indigenous cultural heritage. Understanding how indigenous peoples conceptualise and develop sustainability within this modern context is essential for safeguarding cultural identity and heritage. In the project, we therefore addressed the role of community-led oral, material and technological methods for gathering, preserving and sharing cultural memory and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) between generations.

TEK is an important component of the world's biocultural heritage. It helps to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services, is especially important with regard to climate change, and builds resilience in the face of global change. Globally, indigenous biocultural diversity is increasingly valued and being eroded at alarming rates (Aswani et al. 2018). This is evident in our communities: the Brunca language is on the brink of extinction (Seibert Hanson 2019), and despite Costa Rica's international reputation for protecting its high biodiversity, landscape degradation (especially forest loss) is a feature of this part of the country, which lies outside protected areas. This is placing stress on remaining natural resources, particularly those gathered for traditional crafts such as textiles, carved masks and pottery which contribute to tourism-derived income (Cedeño Montoya et al. 2010), and it constrains community resilience to shocks like the hurricane-induced flooding that occurred at Rey Curré in 2017, and COVID-19. The resulting stress and poverty are leading to outward migration, which contributes to intergenerational erosion of knowledge about culture and natural resources. This generates 'shifting baseline syndrome', where each generation accepts the situation that they see as normal, thus leading to a lowering of expectations and diminishing the sustainability of local management skills and knowledge (e.g. Lyver et al. 2019). For all of these reasons, in our research approach, we combined heritage/museums/memory studies, ecology and participatory techniques to promote inter-

generational sharing of TEK so to both avoid shifting baseline syndrome and support adaptive use of TEK and indigenous ecological knowledge among the communities.

Therefore, as regards the relationship between community museums, ecomuseums and sustainable development, this project addresses key issues in 21st century indigenous sustainability, centred on biocultural diversity and community resilience. We drew on best practices in participatory ethnobotany to aid community recording, exploring how technology can be used to help local communities conserve TEK and prevent intergenerational erosion of knowledge by going beyond oral transmission to record the knowledge in danger of being lost. This has begun to build on the corpus of work on participatory ethnobotany, which has not yet focused on indigenous communities in Costa Rica where modern technology (e.g. smart-phones, the use of which is prominent in Costa Rica) are part of the social norm (e.g. Gilmore & Young 2012, Sauini et al. 2020, Rodrigues et al. 2020). Moreover, as well as generating practical outcomes to meet community needs, this work contributes to the current debate over the role of TEK and social memory (i.e. cultural heritage and genealogy) in supporting adaptive capacity (e.g. Fonseca-Cepeda et al. 2019, Rodríguez Valencia et al. 2019). In particular, it provides insights into the potentially competing notions that traditional knowledge and practices are being merged with contemporary experience and technologies to create hybrid knowledge systems which are adapted to changing times, and the risk that reduced intergenerational exchange under modern conditions is weakening indigenous adaptive capacity that is relevant to climate change (Caballero-Serrano et al. 2019, Lyver et al. 2019).

Considering this wider context of sustainable development discourse and in relation to the expressed needs of the Costa Rican communities involved, the project asked:

- What does indigenous sustainability [SD] look like in Costa Rica in the 21st century in the face of climate change?
- How can ethical heritage preservation support this goal?
- What are the roles of youth and intergenerational transmission of knowledge in processes of remembering and building resilience?

The research focus for this project has therefore been inherently interdisciplinary, moving between Heritage Studies, Sustainable

Development and Memory Studies, to greater understand and respond to the issues being faced by the community museums of Costa Rica. Intertwining Heritage Studies and Memory Studies, the majority of activity has fallen under the umbrella of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Stefano and Davis eds, 2019; Akagawa and Smith eds, 2019). The UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) demands that ICH (including oral traditions, traditional craft skills, performing arts, social practices, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe), are key to community resilience throughout the world as people seek to engage with the past, understand the present and plan for meaningful futures. The Convention proved especially important for indigenous and native populations living in areas of natural significance and, at the time, the Convention was widely supported by countries from the so-called global south - not least the Latin American and Caribbean countries - as the agreement validated their heritage and worldviews.

Museos comunitarios in Costa Rica

As has been written about elsewhere, *museos comunitarios* address contemporary issues including identity, sustainability, decolonisation and climate change in ways often under-recognised by the academy and policy makers (Camerena Ocampo and Morales Lersch, in Brown, Davis and Raposo eds, 2019, pp. 38-53; Brulon Soares 2021). Costa Rica has a good system of protected natural areas, but this system does not include cultural protection. For example, located in the indigenous Brunca territory of south-eastern Costa Rica, Rey Curré Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc (inaugurated in 2015) lies outside the national network of protected areas. Consequently the ecosystems and communities that are vulnerable to changing climate impacts are much less prominent in the scientific literature and rarely feature on policy agendas. To the best of our knowledge, there are not specific actions or policies that involve protected areas, community culture and prepare for natural disasters in these areas, and the way that Costa Rica attends to cultural diversity and minorities comes from the Cultural Rights Policy.⁵

⁵ Costa Rica 'Cultural Rights Policy'. Available at: <https://www.dircultura.go.cr/documentos/politica-nacional-derechos-culturales-2013-2024>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

Yet, Rey Curré, which has been severely affected by storm intensification and flooding in recent years, has managed these environmental changes through collective action, making it a valuable case study for climate action at *the* local level.

This and the other two community museums involved in CCC form part of the Network of Community Museums of Costa Rica, which is supported by the Regional and Community Museums Program (PMRC), established in 2003 and co-led by Ronald Martínez Villareal. A branch of the National Museum of Costa Rica (founded 1887), PMRC supports museums managed by communities and civil society groups. Established on the premise that self-determined and self-sustaining management of the national heritage is possible, the programme focuses on advising and accompanying regional or community organisations under a participatory management methodology of cultural heritage through museums. It is the only specialised state entity defending and respecting identities and heritage within the framework of the cultural rights of citizens. It consolidates the role of museums and develops programs for the positioning, development and sustainability of museums and communities. Beyond the museums, Brunca communities have a history of strong self-mobilisation to address perceived development threats (Hite 2018, Wallbott et al. 2018), a further indication of their proactive approach to maintaining community resilience.



Fig. 1. Group of participants at the Final Encounter, Community Crafts and Cultures project, Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc, December 2021 (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

Geographically, Rey Curré is in a valley close to the Grande de Térraba river (locally known as “Diquís”⁶), and it is easily accessible from the inter-American highway, while its neighbouring *museo comunitario* Boruca is high up in the mountains and accessed by a rough track. In the case of Rey Curré, in an interview with K. Brown in 2018 the community identified as “Bruncan” and “cien por cien indígena” (one hundred per cent indigenous) to Costa Rica. The beautiful, small *museo comunitario* built by local craftsmen in the traditional ‘rancho’ style is in the grounds of the Yimba Cajc School (Figure 1). The museum works with the school and local families to strengthen the historical memory of ancestral culture among young people. This community action takes place through intergenerational workshops for the transmission of knowledge around craftwork (especially the carving of Bruncan masks, and weaving), as well as the traditional use of plants and other natural resources such as sea snails that are used for making natural dyes. As with Boruca, the local community also organise an annual festival in January or February featuring the “Baile de los diablitos” / *Kagrú^rójc* (Dance of the Little Devils) that has become a tourist phenomenon; they enact a battle with the Spanish conquerors in the form of overthrowing a bull (Amador, 2020).

The Yimba Cajc *museo comunitario* collection and museography itself focuses on themes of the town’s origin, archaeology, founding families, the knowledge of the ancestors, trips along the Térraba river, political achievements, traditional crafts, medicine and medicinal plants, as well as the origin of the names Curré and Yimba. This *museo comunitario* works in alliance with the general objectives of the Yimba Cajc Indigenous School, seeking to strengthen the ancestral historical and cultural memory of the young people of the community. For example, the organisation and annual celebration of the Yimba Cajc Cultural Festival takes place through the agency of the museum, which is also active in the development of projects for the sustainability of basic services and for the development of the museum. Guided tours are also provided by appointment.

In response to the COVID-19 health crisis, in March 2020 Boruca took collective action and demonstrated communal resilience when they patrolled their borders to prevent the virus being imported by visitors. Shoring up against the loss of income and the

⁶ Diquís is a Spanish derivation of the Boruca language voice Di^Cri. It means big water.

threat of a food shortage caused by the pandemic and loss of sales of their native craft goods, the Rey Curré *community* also innovated a community food and medicinal garden in a paddock in the grounds of the school and museum – a collaborative initiative of the school, the museum, and local families. These actions demonstrate the strength of local systems of governance and collective decision-making and action, as well as their ability to adapt to increase resilience (Whitfield et al. 2019). However, this work was badly affected by the hurricanes of November 2020 which brought unexpectedly severe flooding. This disaster, together with the flooding of 2017, when the water reached as high as the school ceiling and flooded the museum, signals an increase in levels of flooding through climate change. In response to the 2020 disaster, the community were able to petition the Costa Rican authorities to reclaim land on higher ground where some families would relocate (Martínez 2021).

While this kind of community-based collective action seems intuitive among the indigenous communities in question, it also aligns with growing high-level governmental concerns and discussions around climate change and traditional ecological knowledge. For example, within both the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES),⁷ there is increased recognition of the need to learn from indigenous traditional knowledge, not only because of their connection to biodiverse areas, but also because of growing respect for their opinions and concerns through meaningful dialogue (Löfmarck and Lidskog 2017; McElwee et al. 2020). This global effort remains at a relatively early stage, however (Petzold et al. 2020). When considered in this context, the community museum alongside researchers, can become an active agent at community (Boruca) and national levels, and help provide financial support and leverage wider political awareness and involvement, thereby opening up new and important pathways for climate change adaptation and mitigation. An ecologically-minded

⁷ Formed in 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an independent intergovernmental body established in 2012 to strengthen the science-policy interface for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development.

community museology, therefore, can and should conceive of how community museums - through their rootedness in the community and intrinsic identity work - have the capacity to articulate local responses to natural, cultural, societal, and environmental challenges through the well of ancestral knowledge, and to address them on their own terms. In this way, when considered in the frame of North-South relations and questions of climate justice, one could even argue that community museums offer the best solutions to address the climate challenge by focusing on human-environment relations with sustainability strategies that are in sympathy with movements in deep ecology and preservation of TEK. However, this paradigm shift necessitates breaking down divides between museum studies, heritage studies and climate science, anthropology, and memory studies, and engaging with endogenous ideas to find common ground in approach and methodology. In this sense, community museums can benefit from exposure to 'outside' ideas and support, such as coping strategies for unpredictable climate stresses that may lie beyond community experience and capability (da Cunha Ávila et al. 2021).

The Boruca *museo comunitario* was founded more than 30 years ago, organised through the women's group La Flor de Boruca Producers Association. It deals with topics associated with the tradition, crafts and history of the Boruca people. It has a space for the sale of its handicrafts that helps to finance some of its projects, maintain the building and pay a person to welcome exhibition visitors. Through the years, the group, by participating in community museum meetings and workshops, has overcome many challenges to make the museum sustainable, including a credit system based on local forms of governance to maintain production activities. Recently, the community museum has also improved access for people with disabilities in compliance with Law 7600 ("The Equal Opportunities Law For Persons With Disabilities"). In the course of the CCC project, Boruca sought to develop new projects to diversify the visitor experience through rural community tourism, allowing visitors to taste traditional foods, live in the home of a local indigenous family, participate in craft activities and enjoy tours on the lifestyle of the indigenous community of Boruca (CCC documentary, 2022). At San Vicente, the ecomuseum (since 2017) has a permanent exhibition about the history, traditions, traditional pottery and territory resources. The main activities

include talks on the history of the community, visits to sites of scenic and natural beauty, walks to the clay extraction sites and demonstrations of pottery making.

CCC and its support for communities

Contrary to many studies where researchers instigate or lead conservation and development projects, CCC represents a non-traditional methodology, a partnership where researchers increasingly respond to solutions identified by the community and enable community autonomy and self-determination. The role becomes that of a facilitator, to promote community skills.

A primary income of Boruca and San Vicente in particular is derived from craft sales - hand-dyed weavings and painted carvings using traditional native materials and techniques; pushing back against trends throughout Central America for selling poorer quality crafts, which are often goods imported for the tourist market. However, each community museum has experienced setbacks in recent years, mainly owing to natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, to which the CCC project has needed to respond and adapt. For example: at San Vicente, the ecomuseum has suffered a drop in visitor numbers from an inability to facilitate intergenerational workshops in relation to traditional craft, food and recipes.

In relation to climate change, in February 2018 CCC offered to assist community resilience in the face of annual tropical storms by delivering, with partners from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, ICOM Costa Rica, ICOM Latin America and Caribbean Regional Alliance, a community disaster preparedness workshop in Finca 6 Museum and Archeological Site (listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014). Unfortunately, in March 2020, the Boruca and Rey Curré communities' economic activity declined radically when they closed their territorial borders to outsiders in an effort to mitigate the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their indigenous community. Tourist activity stopped, and the government ordered movement restrictions and closed all public places. This created a new impetus for the CCC project to reflect on and react to the shifting pressures affecting the community. In response, the CCC project was extended to include researchers and practitioners from Scotland and Costa Rica with experience in sustainable development, botany and memory studies. The aim was to

create a collaboration that goes beyond the ‘citizen science’ of today, whereby the public engages in complex scientific debate and action with experts at local level, to a situation where decision-making about a local territory is shaped by community-based values rooted in Intangible Cultural Heritage – cultural or spiritual roots – and not only by economic measurements of value. For CCC, this meant maintaining a focus on community museums as a hub for local identity, knowledge and action, while reacting to immediate and longer-term health and income challenges. Here, the difference between responses to natural and health disasters by well-funded large museums that are focused on collection and conservation and those small, local museums rooted inside the community is clear.

In the face of Covid-19 impacts, a rapid community response to a potential food crisis emerged, owing to the closure of borders: the community in Rey Curré reacted through their collective decision-making processes to develop a community vegetable garden in the paddock beside the local school, involving students, parents and teachers in growing basic grains, fruits, and tubers to complement the propagation of fruit trees and other crops: papaya, mangos, watermelon and melon.⁸ The community also had visions for the transmission of TEK between village elders and youth through a medicinal garden located in front of the museum. By responding to local needs and diversification into food production, the project supported the three communities in 2021 in their efforts to improve food security and to bring in new disciplinary perspectives to strengthen this adaptive response as part of a longer-term sustainability strategy. As a result of community consultation held inside the communities through their local community museum committees, the communities stated their objectives for this research project would be to:

1. “Use the principles of participation and indigenous identity developed via the community museum to strengthen food security”
2. “Develop research led by young people into genealogy to understand how the family origins of the community contribute to a sense of indigenous identity”; and
3. “Rescue information on traditional values to prevent inter-generational erosion of indigenous knowledge”.

⁸ See TV show, 21 May 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7vGEU-CRm8Y&t=6s>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

Initial scoping interviews with key researchers in the MNCR team and lead community contacts determined the most appropriate methods for each of the three research strands identified: food, medicine and genealogy. Workshops, transect walks, and participatory mapping were all envisaged and conducted with respect for strong community feelings on the need to protect ancestral knowledge from outside forces. With women as key tradition-bearers, this aspect was also clarified and reflected in the knowledge-gathering, training processes and project documentaries carried out with the community.

Working together for sustainability

Museos comunitarios are understood to be community projects of collective development, where consensus-based approaches to decision-making and actions become a permanent principle and practice. On a practical level, this understanding translates into the constant development of integration and motivation activities, requiring local forms of organisation and decision-making (Morales et al., 2009). This perspective makes sense when working with elements of collective property and identity representation of the community, such as historical memory and cultural heritage associated with the local territory. These components build an experience of participation aimed at social transformation and form a particular pedagogical practice. Therefore, for the purpose of the CCC project, *museos comunitarios* and ecomuseums here refer to museums that:

- Are driven by the needs of their local communities.
- Give significance to often-neglected aspects of community heritage such as everyday objects, ‘intangible’ (non-physical or ‘living’) traditions and skills, and relations with the local environment and landscape that are shaped and maintained through practice.
- Act as ‘social tools’ by encouraging community governance, conversation, cohesion, and the formation and preservation of identity.

Historical memory and cultural heritage are elements of collective property, constructed through the historical evolution of a human group cementing identity and justifying ideologies. They come from being present in and belonging to the territory inhabited by particular cultural groups, which in turn make it possible to differentiate some communities from others. The

collective property is, therefore, a resource to reaffirm collective identity and make alternative and counter-hegemonic memories visible (Walsh & Cuevas Marín, 2013; Walsh 2017). This common, local and particular history is evident in the expressions of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, but above all it is recreated in the collective memory, and is especially well appreciated in the testimony of the elderly.

The figure below illustrates these project characteristics, adapted from the core idea of ecomuseums and living heritage as differentiated from ‘traditional’ museums.

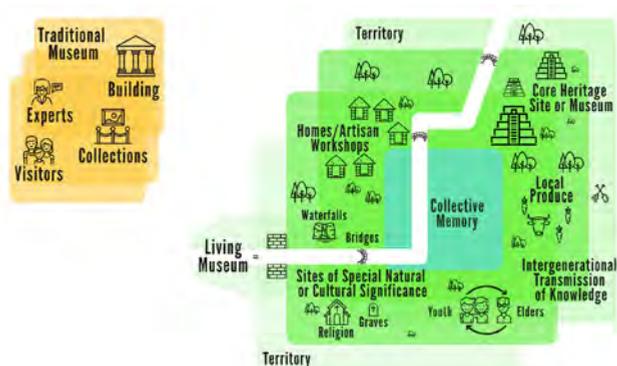


Fig. 2. Illustration showing the project concept of 'living heritage' and the role of intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Adapted from René Rivard's *Subjects vs Objects Museology* drawing (1984) (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

Co-design reflects community needs and allows the community to decide whom they share their indigenous values and knowledge with, since knowledge 'ownership' is a sensitive issue. A participatory methodology meets current best practice-based research on community sustainability. To support community capacity and autonomy, the project's approach to participatory/community ethnobotany, heritage preservation, empowerment and intellectual property were understood to mean allowing the indigenous peoples to take the lead, with researchers training communities to record/formalise some knowledge transmission, but with no expectation that they would necessarily share this data beyond the community. The role of the St Andrews' researchers was to learn from this collaboration to deepen their approach to interdisciplinarity and insight into the connections between sustainable develop-

ment and cultural heritage (tangible and intangible), and at a local level to be merely facilitators and enablers. The communities have stressed this approach in all communications. In the words of Dayana Jiménez, from the committee of Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc, “The main impacts of the projects carried out were working together, being able to establish clear goals and purposes together. [...] the community was impacted and benefited from these processes.”

Progress towards sustainability and resilience at the community museums and ecomuseum

Among the main challenges faced by the CCC project was the coordination between all the entities involved in Scotland and Costa Rica, and especially with regard to the different regulations and standards to reach partnership agreements in the GCRF programme. Another important challenge was preparing work plans, carrying them out and organising activities in a short time frame. These challenges were overcome thanks to collaborative work, as a team and dividing the tasks. In this regard, the communities were able to quickly build their lists of processes and implement them immediately to meet the project deadlines.

The project was implemented in the community museum and ecomuseum sites in 2021, with much of the practical work taking place between June - December. The Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc purchased building materials and held workshops on the construction of a vegetable garden and the cultivation of fruits, vegetables and medicinal plants in various spaces of the Yimba Cajc Lyceum and *museo comunitario*. A “chiquereta” was also built for raising chickens and egg-laying hens. For these activities, training was coordinated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). In an effort to keep the project outcomes sustainable, produce from the garden, chickens and eggs were sold to the parents of students and the wider community. The proceeds from these sales are re-invested, through the purchase of equipment such as a scythe to keep the grass short in the common green areas of the high school and the museum, and a coffee percolator to use in museum events, and it is expected that these funds will sustain production.

Twenty people participated in the project workshops: 11 women and 9 men, with young people from the school, teachers, and the Community Museum Committee. Training was conducted on orchard management and poultry development, both on raising chickens and caring for laying hens. Currently, the community is working in shifts to maintain, care for, harvest and manage the birds and crops. Thanks to project resources, it has been possible for the community to establish practices via the community museum that will maintain food production. In the long term, similar integrated training and practice of projects could be expanded at the community level, providing cultural, educational and economic benefits to a greater number of people. A community leader from Rey Curré involved in the project reflected, “As lessons learned, collective work is very important, the commitment of each of the participants is very relevant, wanting to do the task or committing to something and fighting for that is the main thing, it is the engine of a project. For the community to be interested, however, requires a lot of organisation, to be able to involve the community, the families, to be able to inform them and make them feel part of it, it makes things go in the best way.”

*a.**b.*



Fig. 3. Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc, (a and b) Workshop for constructing the garden (c and d) Seedbeds in the garden greenhouse, (e.) Garden during the Final Encounter (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

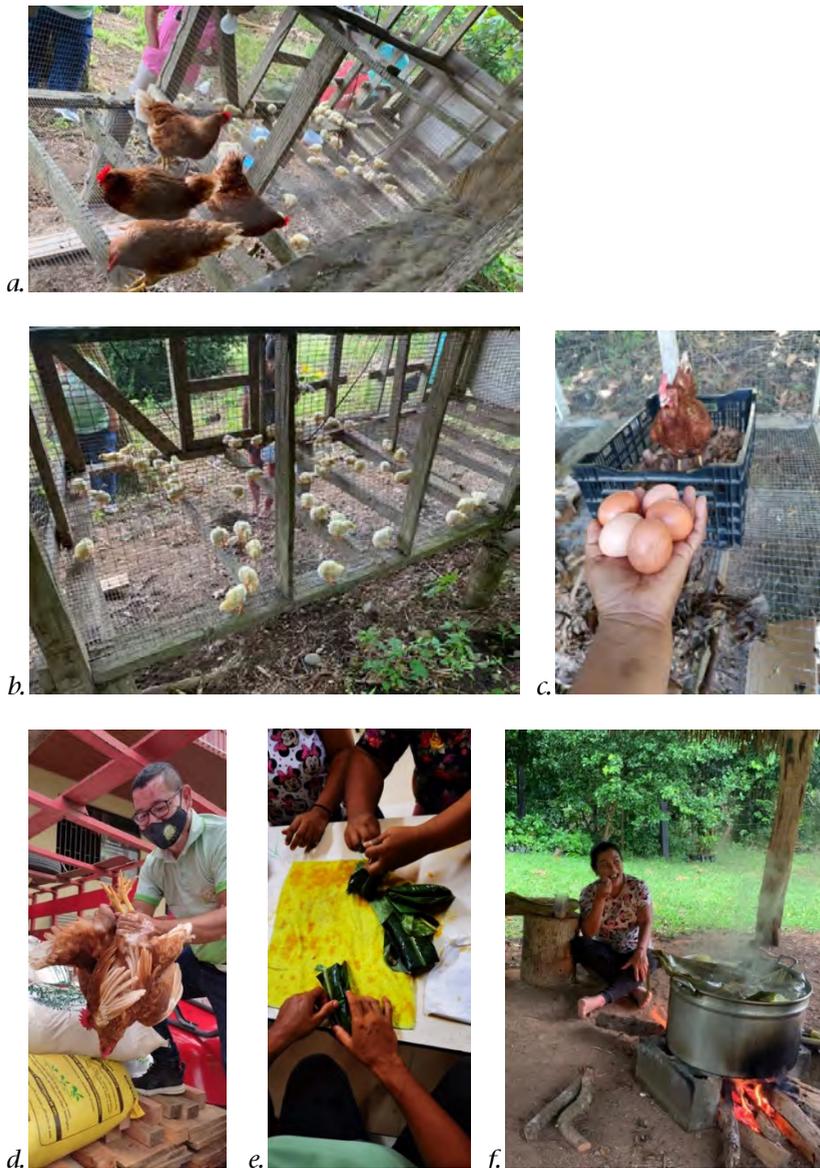


Fig. 4. Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc, "Chiqueretos" (a) egg-laying hens, and (b) chickens for fattening, (c) harvested eggs produced by the project, (d) chicken processing, (e) making tamales, (f) cooking tamales (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

In the context of the continued closures due to confinement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the community of Rey Curre Yimba Cajc, has expanded their orchard in anticipation of future need for community food security. This aspect was already in-

creasing as a result of land takeovers in recent years⁹. Growing vegetables and fruits, and raising chickens and eggs has had a domino effect: the school now also has a garden, extending the original project area from the community college and museum. The community has also been drawn into this effort, as more families now have developed their gardens to produce food.

At Museo Comunitario de Boruca, the kitchen and dining areas were renovated and fully equipped for use in the preparation and sale of traditional meals during end of the year parties and the traditional celebration “Juego de los diablitos”. The funds from these will be used to continue with the museum’s renovation plans, including an area repurposed as a “soda” or small restaurant providing traditional food to museum visitors. For its official operation, the permission of the Ministry of Health is in process, and expected for 2022.

At the same time, the museum is in the process of remodelling the store and the exhibition area, to grow and develop this community museum. The CCC project included the renovation of the previous construction, replacing weakened structural timbers and replacing the roof as well as the electrical system. The kitchen was fully equipped, and traditionally built tables and chairs were purchased from a member of the community. As traditional construction involves covering the roof and walls with palm and cane (highly flammable materials), security measures for the prevention of fires or other threats were also installed. This remodelling of the space “is a dream for us, it made us cry with emotion for what we achieved” shared a Boruca community leader and member of La Flor de Boruca women’s group.

The cooking workshops included sharing recipes for rice tamales and guaraco. “Sapitos” (fried sweets made from corn dough, coconut and sugar cane) were also prepared for workshops transmitting ancestral knowledge to the young people (see CCC project

⁹ Costa Rica indigenous communities have worked on reclamations to recover lands inside their territories in recent years, where lands had been taken for non-indigenous owners. In some cases the takeover is a violent process, in other cases the process is fluid and accompanying with legal authorities. Rey Curré recovered around 500 hectares in peaceful terms in the last three years”. See: <https://www.kerwa.ucr.ac.cr/bitstream/handle/10669/81965/Senti-pensarnos-tierra.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

See also: https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/costa-rica-ind%C3%ADgenas_costa-rica-espera-avanzar-en-construcci%C3%B3n-de-pol%C3%ADtica-para-pueblos-ind%C3%ADgenas/47235572. Accessed 15 June 2022.

documentary, 2022).¹⁰ At the end of the workshops, a closing party was held, sharing “chicha de mujer” - a corn-based drink whose fermentation does not produce alcohol - and other foods cooked with ingredients grown in-community. The intergenerational workshops involved children and young people from school and college, as well as members of the La Flor de Boruca, amounting to a total of 44 people participating, 31 women and 13 men, aged from 8 years onwards. A woman leader shared, “children and young people learned that the museum has its doors open for them. [...] The main impacts of the project are human warmth, human relationships, interacting with children of different ages, with the same adults. Feeling one that at least something is doing on this earth. For me that is the greatest impact, the relationship that exists with the community, with young people, children and meeting people, making alliances, making friends. At the infrastructure level, then, rejoice in so many beautiful things that we have, which are already assets of the museum.”



a.



b.

Fig. 5. Museo Comunitario de Boruca (a) new eating area, (b) students at the final workshop on traditional cooking (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

¹⁰ See: <https://communitycc.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/documentary/>. Accessed 20/08/2022.

Finally, at the Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega, the ecomuseum kitchen was destroyed in a 2012 earthquake, so the project allowed the purchase of construction materials and kitchen equipment. A new kitchen represents a resource for the sustainability because it be used to attend visitor's groups and offer food service to generate museum incomes. A series of traditional cooking workshops were carried out between elders, children and youth to exchange ancestral knowledge. In the activities, refreshments and lunch were bought in-community and provided to the participants, with the parents in charge of its preparation, ensuring they were also part of the activities. A total of 32 workshops were held involving 39 children and young people between 4 and 17 years old. 12 workshops were for traditional cuisine, 10 for ceramics, and another 10 for pre-Columbian ceramics. Among the recipes learned in the kitchen were: corn rice, tamales, the local pujagua corn atol, and rice with chicken and tortillas. In these last workshops, for safety reasons (the use of knives and other potentially dangerous objects) only young people between 12 and 17 years old participated.

According to a facilitator of the Chorotega Ceramics Ecomuseum, the children and young people were very motivated by the workshops: "they expected it to be the day of the workshop on Saturdays, and they did not want to leave [...] so they were assigned tasks so that they will continue practicing during the week." Some children did not know and had never tried some of the recipes that were taught in the workshops, and in the pre-Columbian ceramic workshops "you can see very talented children," he added.

In a similar fashion to Rey Curré and Boruca, the cooking ingredients and materials for the Chorotega pottery workshops were purchased from community residents, thus expanding the project's range of impact at a local level. The parents of the students who participated in the project helped with the preparation of food. The workshops have generated an enhanced closeness between the parents and families, and with the museum's actions, and the trust of the community in general with the museum. In the future, it is planned to give continuity to the workshops, both for cooking and for making and painting ceramics. The success of these activities is reflected in the interest of children and young people in continuing to participate, while the new facilities and equipment facilitate this work.

At a general level, for the three community museums, the CCC Project process has been enriching since it has provided necessary and important resources and community skills, promoting the transmission of intangible culture and TEK. It has brought children, young people, parents and the local community together, providing confidence and a positive projection on the part of *museos comunitarios*. It has also facilitated a challenge and learning at the internal organisation level that will serve as the basis for the implementation of future projects.



Fig. 6. Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega, (a and b), workshops on traditional cooking (c) cooking tamales (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

A facilitator and member of the Ecomuseo de la Cerámica Chorotega testified, “We did an excellent job so that all the workshops could be developed with the kids from the community. Everything we have developed has been a success, and that is what we have as a proposed organisation. As the main challenges we face, the issue of the pandemic has set these processes back a bit. The number of people, of students, had to be reduced. We have limitations to obtain certain things, for example having the distance, the space, the capacity, the number of students ... this was something that really put us to work because we could not have all the students in a single classroom, they had to be different. But finally we saw the motivation of the different young people in the community, boys who wanted to participate in this process, in these training and educational workshops, and the number was great. But thank God we managed to handle it, and to be able to give space to these young people. We organised ourselves with alcohol gel, with masks, with sinks, distancing ourselves to be able to opt for this process. It was an improvement that when we could count on that we were able to develop the workshops as they should be.

As for the lessons learned during this process [...] we already have the knowledge and experience to be able to develop to continue presenting other projects. I think this is a lesson learned from these projects, we stay calm, but not only do we stay there but we are going to continue working with the boys, with the community, with the companions of the board of directors to continue developing and presenting other projects to different institutions to continue fulfilling our objective.”

Final meeting

The Final Gathering of the CCC project took place between 12th and 15th December 2021, bringing all three communities together with the Yimba Cajc community as the host and organised by the Committee of the Museum and the Yimba Cajc Lyceum. Several social and cultural exchange activities were carried out among the participants, and the event also provided the opportunity to visit the homes of important elderly people of the Yimba community, where the group was received with traditional food and talks about aspects of the culture of the place. During this important moment for the project, over the four days the participants, community project facilitators, com-

munity museums committees and CCC representatives had the opportunity to exchange experiences with other communities. In addition to presenting their projects, the participants of the Final Encounter worked together on topics such as heritage and cultural identity, traditional food, festivities and way of life.



Fig. 7. Final Gathering in Museo Comunitario Yimba Cajc (a) visit to the house of an Elder and archaeological site (b) group activity between children and young people of the 3 communities (c) presentation by students on the theme of cultural identity (d) group work between the students of the 3 communities (courtesy by the Project Researchers).

Work sessions were also held with the facilitators and those in charge of the project of the 3 communities, where the main results, and the challenges and impacts of the project were discussed. The future vision for the development of new projects can be summarised as follows:

1. During the last session of the Final Gathering, the interest to maintain periodic communication between the 3 communities was raised. The group will communicate via the 'WhatsApp' application that was created for the organisation of the meeting. Also, the communities will hold virtual meetings and manage resources to be able to hold face-to-face meetings at least once a year; touring the different communities is planned, thereby supporting each other in the development of their goals and giving continuity to the work in the Community Museum Network.
2. As a result of the project and Covid-19 pressures, activities that were intended as an immediate problem-solving issue have allowed new exchanges (training, food culture, inter-generational learning) that are allowing the communities to discover a renewed sense of indigenous identity. The 3 communities see the need to continue carrying out the cooking workshops and transmission of traditional knowledge. The high motivation of the children and young people who participated in the workshops, as well as other residents of the community who did not participate this time, is seen as an indicator of the success of the project. The infrastructure and equipment provided by the project will facilitate this continuity.
3. From now on, all the communities plan to continue proposing projects along these lines and to deepen issues around the intangible heritage of each community. It is considered to continue opening spaces to create new alliances and contact with organisations such as Slow Food Costa Rica, for example, on the issue of food security and sovereignty.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of collaboration between USTAN, MNCR and the network of community museums of Costa Rica in 2015, the territories have encountered some very difficult global challenges, including massive flooding at Rey Curré school and community museum during Hurricane Nate in 2017, and most

recently, the food security and economic impacts of COVID-19 and the country-wide lockdown since March 2020. The shocks created by climate and the pandemic gave impetus and focus to the most recent CCC efforts, which responded directly to such crises to enhance possibilities for sustainable livelihoods by working alongside the communities to develop needs-based resources that they have identified themselves. These included a community and medicinal garden, genealogical research, and intangible heritage transmission between generations, all of which are strengthening their identity and “roots”, thereby managing heritage as, “a non-renewable but creative resource by the community itself as a whole, and by each one of its members or groups of members.” (de Varine, 2019 op. cit.). In this sense, the project strengthens community preparedness or resilience for future climate and environmental challenges (Whitfield et al. 2019) by creating a more structured process through which they were able to use the existing museum-based networks to coordinate initiatives, and connect intangible and practical knowledge across generations. The long-standing relations between the project partners considerably improved responsiveness, including the ability to leverage new sources of funding and rapidly co-design the activities to meet the urgent needs of the community. This generated a responsiveness not always associated with conventional research project timeframes.

Increasingly, sustainability agendas are focusing not only on innovations in climate science, but also on the human dimension to account for the fragility of cultural identities and memories at risk of being lost. Today, in the context of a time fraught with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic has never seemed more prescient and necessary. As this project has demonstrated, at their best, museums rooted in their communities can offer community cohesion and resilience. They can bring people together from multiple generations to share and celebrate their history and heritage, and they can ask questions of society and government that a large, national institution cannot. Significantly, in the face of the pandemic, as described above, certain small, local museums are also demonstrating remarkable self-determination, creativity, and adaptation in the face of the health crisis and rapid change, born out of their habit of collective voluntary action, such as the actions of Museo Comunitario Rey Curré in Costa Rica.

Therefore, to understand what a community museum is and what its prospects and potentials are, while it is helpful to trace the possible origins and history of a movement in museology, we also need to recognise these small but powerful museums in multidisciplinary and discussions around colonial matrices of power. With modest investment, community and ecomuseums can be the hub for climate change adaptation and conscious effort to maintain and reinvigorate indigenous identity and cultural heritage (Aswani et al. 2018). Our experience also emphasises the value of sustainable development partnerships that focus on community autonomy as a means to strengthen indigenous identity and agency, rather than on externally-led development projects, which are often not self-sustaining (e.g. Ohl-Schacherer et al. 2008). By responding to local needs in a processual way and by relying on local systems of decision-making, such museums and the discourse of ecological community museology required to frame them have much to contribute to knowledge not only in museology, but also for decolonising the agenda in sustainable development and South-North relations.

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