CHAPTER 10

FROM LOCAL ACTION TO GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

*Casa Pueblo in the Global Network of Model Forests*

Casa Pueblo hosts the Network of Ibero-American Model Forests with representatives from Costa Rica, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, Canada, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. March 9, 2016.
In 2016, we received visitors from the following countries: Spain, France, Guadeloupe, Germany, Australia, England, Sweden, Turkey, Lebanon, Japan, Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hawai‘i, twenty-five states in the continental United States, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Bolivia, Uruguay, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru. In previous years, visitors came from sixty-five countries, among them Norway, Austria, the Netherlands, Kenya, Nigeria, Estonia, Poland, Israel, Viet Nam, and Latvia. How did this happen? How did we go from local action to global connections? The answers are many, but a key factor was our work with forests.

MODEL FOREST IN ADJUNTAS AND ADJACENT LANDS

Adjuntas means ‘adjacent.’ It is an appropriate name for a mountainous region that was successively administered by the adjacent or nearby municipalities of Coamo, Ponce, and Utuado, until 1815, when a group of families was granted royal permission to establish a municipality with its own government and church. I like to think that a similar founding of sorts took place in 2007 when Casa Pueblo joined the International Network of Model Forests, comprising thirty-one countries, as well as the Iberoamerican Network of Model Forests, which includes fourteen countries in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and Spain. Our contribution consisted of approximately 64,000 acres, as described in the Conservation Plan for Adjuntas and Adjacent Plans (2004). With this step, a new paradigm was established in Puerto Rico for the management of our land. It is a paradigm that includes economic development, tourism, and sustainable agricultural development, alongside conservation and management protocols that incorporate communities, academia, the government, and civic, economic, agricultural, and cultural sectors, among others.
IBEROAMERICAN NETWORK OF MODEL FORESTS

In March 2016, the Iberoamerican Network of Model Forests celebrated its annual meeting at Casa Pueblo in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. It began at the plaza with a march and a welcome by the Adjuntas High School chorus. On this occasion, we signed a collaboration agreement with the newly admitted forest, the Chocó Andino Model Forest in Ecuador, and the Network, represented by Inty Arcos. This agreement, exemplifying our principle of connecting local sustainable development with national and global action, would have repercussions in other places. In January 2017, Michelle Dorantes Palacio, a master’s student at the University of Puebla, Mexico, studying Conservation Practice at the Tropical Agronomy Center for Research and Education (CATIE) in Costa Rica, did her fieldwork at Casa Pueblo. She studied the concept of the Forest School, and participated in an intense training process to deepen her understanding of the experience of the Boricua Forest School with the help of its students and representatives. After learning from our experience, Michelle traveled to Ecuador with the aim of replicating our model.

As of this writing, the Boricua Forest School has been replicated in the Chocó Andino Model Forest at five of its reserves: the Inti Llacta, the Pambiliño, a part of the Chocó, the Saint Lucía, and the Yunguilla. We received the following communication on August 28, 2017:

The purpose of this message is to inform you that the Forestry Institute of Chile would like to implement, on a national level, environmental educational experiences through forest schools, focusing mainly on the sustainable management of native forest resources. We are currently in the initial stages of the implementation of our first forest school—in the Panguipulli Commune, Los Ríos region—and the idea is to implement similar initiatives throughout the national territory, and eventually generate a network of forest schools in Chile . . . We know of your ample
experience on this topic, particularly with The Olympia Forest School, and we are very interested in learning from your experience so that we can implement something similar here in Chile.

The Iberoamerican Network of Model Forests has now expressed interest in replicating the model of Casa Pueblo’s Forest School throughout the Network’s twenty-eight model forests in fourteen countries in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and Spain.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

- The Goldman Environmental Prize, considered the Nobel Prize for environmentalists, was awarded to a Puerto Rican for the first time in 2002, when I received it representing Casa Pueblo. The prize was given in recognition of our victorious fight against mining, and the subsequent transformation of the mining zone into a People’s Forest managed by the community.

- The Energy Globe Award, founded in Austria in 1999, is an equally important international recognition for extraordinary projects in sustainable development. On June 5, 2015, the entry *Puerto Rico: Casa Pueblo Initiative* was selected for one of the foundation’s National Energy Globe Awards. Casa Pueblo’s energy model puts Puerto Rico, once again, on the world map of environmental justice. These two recognitions put the spotlight on the community path to renewable energy starting from local development begun in 1999. The community organization at the heart of Casa Pueblo received the two most notable environmental recognitions in the world.
In early 2017, two young French men stayed with us for two weeks to film an episode on community self-sustainability in Adjuntas for their video channel Les Vagabonds de l’énergie. “PORTO RICO- Du local au global à Casa Pueblo” is the title of the episode, available on YouTube.

- *Résistants pour la Terre*, by French author Sébastien Viaud, was published in 2009. He records the experience of “exploring the world for a year and meeting the winners of the Goldman Award, ordinary people who are the bearers of extraordinary struggles,” including Alexis Massol González in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico.

**JUNTE OF GLOBAL ARTISTS**

Casa Pueblo established an agreement with global artists for a cultural project that took place in Adjuntas in the final months of 2016. An opening exhibition featured Baris Tukaman, the renowned painter from Hunter College in New York who is Turkish by birth and an adopted son of Adjuntas as well. Other artists joined us from Mexico, El Salvador, Lebanon, and the continental United States. The gathering of artists in Adjuntas (or Junte en Adjuntas, as we called it), began with strong potential to unite the global and
The concept of eurythmy (rhythmical harmony, from Greek eurythmos, eu- “well, good” + rhythmos “measured flow or movement, rhythm”, a style of dance developed by the philosopher Rudolf Steiner) is part of the Junte. Its goal: to connect the harmonious movement of the paintings and the music with the natural environment.

PATRIMONY OF HUMANITY

The 2003 Quetzal Route, titled Rumbo a las Montañas de Parayso, took place in Adjuntas in recognition of the 2002 Goldman International Prize award to Casa Pueblo. Previous routes have taken place in the Amazon, the Orinoco jungles, and the Mayan, Guaraní, and Kichwa territories. As hosts, we received a delegation of 320 expeditionary youth who camped in the Bosque del Pueblo (People’s Forest) over the weekend of July 4, 2003. After a march through the streets of the town’s center, we celebrated an international party in which the Puerto Rican flag was raised alongside the flags of forty-three other countries. The newspaper *El Vocero de Puerto Rico* covered the event on July 8, 2003: “On Saturday, before leaving for Spain the following Friday, a group of 320 young adults from about forty-three countries who had walked the Quetzal Route through Ponce, Adjuntas, Arecibo, Luquillo, and San Juan . . . signed the Proclamation—The People’s Forest in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, World Heritage Site, Biosphere Reserve—to advocate for universal protection of these lungs of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.”

LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN’S ASSEMBLY

In August 2016, Casa Pueblo hosted an Assembly of Women Fighting for the Environment in Latin America and Puerto Rico in collaboration with The Latin American Mining Monitoring Project, based in Australia. Guests included the Front of Women Defenders
of Pachamama from Peru, Honduras, Ecuador, and Guatemala. The first panel featured Lina Solano, from Ecuador; Elizabeth Cunya from Peru; Loren Cabnal and Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic from Guatemala; Glevys Rondón, director of the Latin American Mining Monitoring Program; and Berta Zúñiga Cáceres from Honduras. Cáceres is the daughter of 2015 Goldman International Prize winner Berta Isabel Cáceres Flores, who was murdered for defending the environmental rights of her community. The second panel featured local activists, including Tinti Deyá of Casa Pueblo; Elena Biamo of Boricua Organization; Myrna Conty of the Coalition of Organizations Against Incineration in Arecibo; Angie Colón of the Northeast Ecological Corridor; Ela Cruz of the Karso and Caño Tiburones Area; Aleida Encarnación from Vieques; Elisa Sánchez of the Playas Para Todos (Beaches for All) Coalition; and Mary Ann Lucking of CORALations in Culebra. Two years later, in July 2017, Berta Cáceres’ dreams were fulfilled with the announcement that the project that she had opposed at the cost of her life—the construction of a dam on the Gualcarque River, located in the Lencas Indigenous zone in Honduras—had been canceled, a significant community victory.

A PUERTO RICAN AMBASSADOR IN SOUTH AMERICA

Julián Chiví lives in Puerto Rico and leaves every September to go to South America. His route covers 10,000 kilometers and reaches deep into the Amazon Basin in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. He was popularly appointed many years ago as Puerto Rico’s goodwill ambassador to the world. Upon his seasonal return, he is received with celebrations of great joy and mysticism, and he takes the opportunity to inform us about the community work being done in our sister countries. He explains that he always returns in February because it is the month of love, his way of expressing the profound sense of patriotism he feels, and of making sure that his progeny is born with Puerto Rican citizenship. He is considered a
great singer and is better known as Vireo Bigotinegro (the Black-whiskered vireo). His singing has inspired Juan Luis Guerra and Danny Rivera, among other famous artists, who mention him in their lively songs. His impact is such that the choir of the University of Puerto Rico campus in Cayey dedicated a song to him. We use that song to mark every hour of every day in our community station, Radio Casa Pueblo. Part of the song says, “Julián Chiví, Julián Chiví, the voice of the forests, the waters, and our people.” Some people report that in the 1980s he organized different marches in conjunction with our birdlife, all of which contributed to our extraordinary victory over the nefarious mining project. They say that as part of the community management team for the Bosque del Pueblo, he was responsible, among other things, for rescuing the Indigenous ceremonial park and moving it to its original location. His extended family is recognized as a symbol of the liberation of our community forest reserve, a sacred social territory protected through community organization. Newspaper headlines annually highlight Julián Chiví’s return to his native land: “Adjuntas Welcomes Its Prodigal Son,” Primera Hora, February 1, 2002; “For Our Land and Julián Chiví,” El Nuevo Día, February 2, 2002; “A Welcoming for Julián Chiví, Puerto Rico’s Ambassador,” Primera Hora, March 25, 2003.

This hero of community self-governance is only about six and a half inches long, has olive green plumage, and his chest is white or cream. His beak is black, straight, and wide; his legs are light gray; and above his eyes are pale stripes like eyebrows that are accented with a dark line. Julián Chiví is the symbolic bird of the People’s Forest.