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To receive the Foundation Hans Manneby's Memorial Fund for Museum Development Prize for 2010 was a very special and unexpected gift. It was unexpected because our work is community-based, and such efforts usually go somewhat un-noticed. It was special because of the international scope of the foundation, and the very high quality work in museum networks carried out in Sweden.

It is difficult for me to take credit individually for the work I have been involved with, since I have always worked alongside my husband, Cuauhtemoc Camarena, and every project I have carried out has been sustained by his dedication and vision. But moreover, the work we have both done cannot be considered our achievement alone. The community museums are built with extraordinary efforts by community members who contribute their inspiration, their ideas and hard work over many years, sharing this task with their peers; they are by excellence a collective effort. For this reason I must give my heartfelt thanks to the Foundation for this prize, not only because of the stimulation and encouragement it brings to my husband and me, but on behalf of the community members we work with, who will be very glad to hear this news; it signifies that our projects are gaining in recognition and strength, and new perspectives will unfold to better respond to community needs.

Our task for the past 25 years has been to help create and develop community museums in the state of Oaxaca in the South of Mexico, in Mexico nationwide, and throughout Latin America. We consider this an important task, because community museums can be important tools to develop community awareness and creativity. We consider that the community museum is a process, rather than a product. It integrates complex processes of constitution of the collective community subject through reflection, self-knowledge and creativity; processes that consolidate community identity by legitimizing its own histories and values; processes that improve the quality of community life, through multiple projects for the future; and processes that strengthen the community's capacity for action through the creation of networks with similar communities. This is a collective process which comes to life within the community; it is a museum "of" the community, not built from the outside "for" the community. The community museum is a tool to foster self-determination, strengthening communities as collective subjects that create, recreate and make decisions that shape their reality.

Community museum networks are important to generate a broader field of action, in which communities can collectively develop and appropriate projects of regional, national and even international scope. In 1991, the Union of Community Museums of Oaxaca (UMCO) was founded, which today comprises 15 communities. UMCO participated in the creation of the National Union of Community Museums and Ecomuseums of Mexico in 1994, and in 2000 it fostered the formation of the Network of Community Museums of America, which brings together grassroots representatives of communities and organizations in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico.

The networks of community museums are significant because they have strengthened the participating communities. Exchanges provide points of reference for each one to contrast and analyze their specific situation, while they clarify and enrich their vision of the museum. Each participant learns from the others, is inspired by the best examples and develops ties of mutual support and solidarity. Through the network multiple relationships can be expanded, establishing collaborations and alliances with other organizations and institutions. Negotiations can be carried out in more favourable terms, as communities are capable of proposing and executing increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated projects. Collective projects can address the needs of all the communities involved, and approach these needs from their own resources as an organized network. Thus networks project the capacity for community self-governance to higher levels, expanding the reach of their organized action. In this sense, both community museums and their networks are tools that local communities can appropriate to help them face the future.

Since 2004 UMCO has acted on behalf of the Network of Community Museums of America to establish the Training Center of Community Museums of America, and it has developed a program to train facilitators in this field. In the process to create and develop community museums, the facilitator has an extremely important role. A facilitator is someone who is prepared to provide tools to community groups that stimulate and strengthen their initiatives, offering consensus-building methods instead of imposing their own opinions. They are agents who are capable of catalyzing local organizational processes. Their training helps them to act as guides, offering orientation and follow up for community projects in diverse contexts.

At present, one of the most significant projects of the network is to continue to expand the training of facilitators. Since 81 people from 14 countries have participated in facilitator's workshops, we hope to build on their experience and enthusiasm in order to offer greater support for the creation and development of community museums throughout the continent.

The prize for 2010 of the Foundation Hans Manneby's Memorial Fund for Museum Development will help further this effort.

Teresa Morales