Engaging youth from local communities and indigenous peoples in participatory management and conservation of the Pre-columbian Chiefdom Settlements with Stone Spheres of the Diquís, Costa Rica.
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I. Executive summary

The "Young Leaders of the Diquis" project aimed at empowering the youth of the surrounding communities in the protection of the archaeological sites of Finca 6, Grijalba, El Silencio and Batambal, located in the canton of Osa, in southern Costa Rica. These archaeological sites were inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014, as they are exceptional testimonies of the complex social, economic and political systems that developed in this region in pre-Columbian times. The sites, known as Pre-Columbian chiefdom settlements with stone spheres of the Diquis, are notable for the presence of a significant number of petro-spheres.

This project was implemented by the National Museum of Costa Rica and UNESCO, thanks to the contribution of the German Foreign Office to the UNESCO World Heritage Fund. Its main objective was to increase the participation of youth from local communities and surrounding indigenous territories in the management of these sites. To this end, a methodology was designed to provide young people with knowledge about World Heritage and its importance for the sustainable development of their territories, as well as to strengthen their soft skills, so that they can assume the leadership role that corresponds to them in the management of their cultural heritage.

Training activities were carried out at three levels: basic level, focused on elementary knowledge of cultural heritage and on strengthening socialisation skills; an intermediate level, to deepen knowledge of cultural sites and on strengthening networks among young people; and an advanced level, focused on fostering their capacities for youth organisation. This process involved the organisation of multiple gatherings in which, for several days, the young participants lived together and coexisted with their natural and cultural environment. These activities led to the formation of a youth association named “Leaders of the Diquis”, composed of 60 young people, that will collaborate with the National Museum in the co-management of the archaeological sites.

In the framework of the project, outreach activities were carried out in educational centres and through local media. Also, the young participants had the opportunity to participate in archaeological research activities, a talk with the Director of the National Museum of Costa Rica and also carry out various volunteer activities. More than 160 young men and women from all the districts of the canton of Osa and the indigenous territories of Boruca and Rey Curré benefited directly from the project. While taking into account the outreach activities carried out in schools and colleges, the project benefitted indirectly around 700 young people living in the territory of the Diquis World Heritage site.

In addition to having a strong participatory and inclusive approach, in which the young participants were the protagonists of their achievements, the project incorporated an important focus on human rights, gender and the promotion of sustainable development, so as to contribute to social inclusion in the long term. In this sense, the project contributes to the reduction of gaps in relation to gender, cultural diversity and territoriality.

Through training activities and the strengthening of youth networks, this project has achieved much more than involving young people in the management of archaeological sites. Indeed, it has empowered them and turned them into real agents of change for sustainable development, capable of mobilising the potential of World Heritage to strengthen the social fabric in their communities and to generate new socio-economic opportunities for the future of their territories. In this sense, the project contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals targets 4.7, 5.5, 10.2, 11.4, 12.8, 12.b, 16.7 and 17.3 of the 2030 Agenda in Costa Rica.
Activities of the Project “Young Leaders of the Diquís”

**Introductory Sessions**
- June 10, 11: 6 introductory sessions
  - Virtual
  - 79

**Basic Workshops**
- June 18–19:
  - Uvita
  - Palmar Sur
  - Ciudad Cortés
- June 25–26:
  - Uvita
  - Palmar Sur
  - Boruca

**Intermediate Workshops**
- June 28–July 3
  - Wilson Botanical Garden
  - 60

**Workshop on Group Dynamics**
- October 12
  - Multiple group activities

**Organisational consolidation workshop 1**
- September 24, 25, 26
  - Villa Mills Lodge
  - 36

**Organisational consolidation workshop 2**
- October 22, 23 and 24
  - Boruca Indigenous Territory
  - 40

**Outreach activities in schools in the canton of Golfito**
- October 28 - 29
  - School visits with the MNCR educator

**Outreach activities in schools in the canton of Pérez Zeledón**
- December 6 and 10
  - School visits with the MNCR educator

**Participation in Stone Sphere discovery**
- July 20
  - Finding of petro-sphere found in a field at its original site

**Organisational consolidation workshop 2**
- November 4, 5, 6, 7
  - Las Quebradas Biological Centre
  - 33

**General Assembly for the formation of the Youth Association**
- November 14
  - Formation of the Youth Association’s Board of Directors and Support Committees
Based on the proposal made in 2019 by the World Heritage Centre, the National Museum of Costa Rica developed the project “Engaging youth from local communities and indigenous peoples in participatory management and conservation of the Precolombian Chiefdom Settlements with Stone Spheres of the Diquís, Costa Rica”, shortened to “Young Leaders of the Diquís”. The project sought to support a participatory and sustainable process aimed at ensuring that all stakeholders understand the management process of World Heritage properties and incorporate the necessary elements for their protection.

The proposal developed by the National Museum of Costa Rica (MNCR) consisted of the implementation of a programme of training activities aimed at providing young participants with knowledge about World Heritage and, at the same time, strengthening their leadership skills and their local networks, with the purpose of empowering young people, so they are capable of actively participating in the co-management of the Pre-Columbian Chiefdom Settlements with Stone Spheres of the Diquís.

To this end, three phases of workshops have been organised, with different levels of intensity and duration, in which non-formal education mechanisms have been applied to transmit knowledge, enhance soft skills and foster networking among the young participants. 161 young people participated in the first phase, of which 60 were selected to continue to the second phase and, of these, around 40 continued to the third phase. However, all the young people who so wished remained involved in the different phases of the project. At all times it was ensured that young men and women from all districts of the canton of Osa and from the indigenous territories of Boruca and Rey Curré were represented.

The project responds to the concerns of the World Heritage Committee raised by Decisions 42 COM 7B.36 and 40 COM 7B.3, as well as to the common objectives established by the "Action Plan for World Heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean" (PARALC 2014-2024) adopted in Brasilia in 2014 and endorsed by Decision 38 COM 10B.4 of the World Heritage Committee at its 38th session (Qatar, 2014), as well as the Action Plan for World Heritage in Mexico and Central America (PAMAC 2018-2023), which both emphasize the need to ensure the effective participation of local and indigenous communities in the management of properties.

In addition, the project aimed to ensure the development of community participation mechanisms through a sustainable process that allows all stakeholders to become involved in the protection of the cultural property. It also sought to provide general training to local community stakeholders interested in the management and conservation of the property, including local institutions and associations, private institutions, civil society, and the indigenous communities living in the area.
The promotion of the project implied reaching out to the local organisations in order to explain the dynamics and objectives of the project to community authorities, families, school and college staff and young people. To this end, the project mainly approached the Integral Development Associations (ADI) of the six districts of the canton of Osa, namely: Palmar, Ciudad Cortes, Sierpe, Bahía Ballena, Bahía Drake and Piedras Blancas. All parties responded positively to the initiative and expressed their interest in collaborating with the development of the project.

Assuring the collaboration of local community organisations was of vital importance to promote the project in the various localities of the canton of Osa and to bring the information to as many young people as possible. The process involved significant logistical planning, as it required officials from the National Museum of Costa Rica to travel to each of the localities and organise meetings with local authorities and community members. Since this phase was based on face-to-face meetings with the communities, the process was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Overall Performance

The overall coordination of the project was carried out by the Finca 6 site manager. With his support, a technical team in charge of the implementation of the project was formed, which entailed the recruitment of a regional technical coordinator, who, in close collaboration with the local MNCR administrator, assumed the task of planning all phases of the project, as well as defining the contents and activities for the three levels of training, especially in relation to soft skills. The local technical coordinator played a central and indispensable role in the realisation of all project activities. An international expert from ICOMOS was also recruited to develop the World Heritage content with the support of a local archaeological expert from the MNCR. For the execution of the funds, an agreement was signed with the National Museum of Costa Rica Foundation (Fundación Museo Nacional – Anastasio Alfaro / FUNDAMUN).

The implementation of the project formally started in June 2019 through an event in which UNESCO, the MNCR and the German Embassy participated. Since then, taking into account the number of institutions involved and the complexity of the project, a process of defining the roles of the different stakeholders started. This initial process allowed the project implementation to move forward at a steady pace. The project's targeted communities are organized into community-based organizations, indigenous territories and community development associations. The project was promoted through these local organizations in order to reach young people interested in participating.

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The basic workshops were held over two weekends in June 2021. On the 18th, 19th and 20th they were held simultaneously in the towns of Bahía Ballena, Palmar Sur and Ciudad Cortés. On 25, 26 and 27 June, they were also held in the indigenous territory of Boruca. In total, 120 young people benefited.

In this first series of workshops, playful group activities aimed at strengthening confidence, teamwork, leadership, self-knowledge and knowledge of the community were carried out. Through formal and non-formal education modalities, the aim was to strengthen life skills and the construction of a shared vision based on cooperation. On the technical side, participants learnt basic notions of cultural tangible heritage and the World Heritage site of Diquis.

The intermediate workshops took place over two weeks between 28 June and 10 July. Each workshop was attended by 30 young people, for a total of 60 young people. On this occasion, the workshop facilitators delved into aspects related to World Heritage, thanks to the pedagogical material developed by the international expert from ICOMOS, and on the archaeological sites with stone spheres of the Diquís, thanks to the expert from the MNCR. Aspects such as community strengthening, the creation of group agreements, the search for creative solutions, critical thinking and some notions of human rights were also addressed.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic forced a review of many operational aspects of the project. As of March 2020, the archaeological sites and the visitor centre of the National Museum were closed, educational activities were interrupted, and all face-to-face activities were suspended at the national level. In this context, the schedule of activities planned for 2020 had to be rearranged in view of the uncertain health forecasts for the following months. In a meeting between UNESCO and the MNCR, it was agreed to make the necessary adjustments to ensure the continuity of the project, postponing and adapting activities as necessary, without significantly affecting the available budget. Taking on the challenge of continuing the project despite the difficulties and uncertainty prevailing globally due to the emergence of COVID-19 demonstrates the commitment of the institutions, communities and individuals involved in the project.

Taking into account that the socio-economic conditions of the young people are disparate and that not all people have optimal and uniform connectivity in the area where the project was implemented, the option of carrying out the activities virtually was discarded. It was also considered that the strengthening of soft skills and the creation of networks require the young people to meet face-to-face.

It was decided that during the remaining months of 2020, the project would focus on the elaboration of the pedagogical material and the conceptualisation of a communication strategy to maintain the commitment of the community organisations and the interest of the youth that had been previously reached. In this sense, both the international expert from ICOMOS and the local archaeologist from the MNCR prepared and presented to UNESCO the contents on World Heritage and on the chiefdom settlements with stone spheres of the Diquís.

For her part, the local technical coordinator prepared the contents related to soft skills and then focused on creating mechanisms to maintain contact with young people, mainly through social networks. In parallel, the project continued to be promoted through local and national mass media.

At the beginning of 2021, the technical coordinator resumed face-to-face visits to some communities, as well as to the sites selected for the workshops. For the basic workshops, four community halls under the administration of the IDAs in different communities were selected. For the intermediate workshops, the Wilson Botanical Garden was selected, which offers adequate facilities to host the young people safely and to do outdoor activities in contact with nature.
The third series of workshops, called *organisational consolidation workshops*, focused on the formation of a youth association to give permanent continuity to youth involvement in the co-management of World Heritage sites. These workshops took place over several weekends between September and November 2021. During the first workshop, which took place on 24, 25 and 26 September in a tourist centre located in an area of high natural value, participants familiarised themselves with the legal requirements for establishing a communal organisation and defined the basis of their future youth association by drafting a statute.

During the second workshop, held on 22, 23 and 24 October in the indigenous territory of Boruca, they approved the statutes of their association and agreed to name it “Líderes del Diquís” (Leaders of the Diquís). In the third session, which took place on 4, 5, 6 and 7 November at Las Quebradas Biological Centre, they focused on consolidating their knowledge of cultural heritage and their leadership and teamwork skills. In addition, they carried out volunteer activities, including planting trees and cleaning the lagoon of the biological station. In total they accumulated 617 volunteer hours.

In addition to these workshops, which are the main activities planned at the origin of the project, the networks created among the young people in the framework of the project, as well as the assistance and willingness of the National Museum of Costa Rica, made it possible for them to participate in multiple additional related activities. For example, when in July 2021, archaeologists from the National Museum discovered a new buried stone sphere in a field close to the World Heritage sites, 27 young participants of the project were invited to visit this archaeological site together with an expert from the National Museum. Several young people also had the opportunity to take advantage of the visit of Mrs. Rocio Fernández, Director of the National Museum of Costa Rica, to have a group discussion with her. Similarly, a group of young people were involved in setting up a temporary exhibition at the National Museum's visitor centre in Finca 6.

Two young participants of the project were also invited by UNESCO to participate in the Virtual Forum “Culture, Youth and Sustainable Development”, organised by the UNESCO Office in San José and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN). This event was held on 16 September 2021, in the framework of the celebrations of the Bicentenary of the Independence of Costa Rica and the commemoration of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the aim of raising awareness of the cross-cutting role of culture in the 2030 Agenda and the importance of youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

"Young Leaders of the Diquís"
The Forum allowed to present the experiences and testimonies of young participants in four projects that UNESCO has recently implemented with various institutions in Costa Rica in order to harness the benefits of culture to advance the 2030 Agenda. In their interventions, the young people pointed out how the project “Young Leaders of the Diquís” contributed to raising awareness in the communities of southern Costa Rica to take advantage of their cultural heritage in a sustainable way, for the benefit of their cultural, economic and territorial development, contributing directly to SDG 11, sustainable cities and communities.

In the framework of its Regional and Community Museums Programme, the MNCR regularly carries out outreach activities aimed at children and young people. For this purpose, the MNCR has a specialised educator who visits schools in many areas of the country. Once the activities of the Young Leaders of the Diquís project have been completed, some of the most qualified young participants have had the opportunity to accompany this teacher on his visits, to share their experiences and knowledge. This activity is fundamental to strengthen the capacities of the young participants to transmit the knowledge acquired, thus ensuring the sustainability of the project’s results and turning the young leaders of the Diquís into authentic multiplying agents.

The last activity of the project was the closing event. It consisted of a ceremony held at the Palmar Sur Community Centre and was attended by authorities from UNESCO, the MNCR, the German Embassy in Costa Rica and the local government of the canton of Osa, as well as the young participants of the project. This ceremony allowed to share the impressions of the institutions involved, as well as those of the young participants and also of the key persons for the implementation of the project, such as the local technical coordinator and the MNCR archaeologist. In addition to formally closing the project, the ceremony served to publicly announce the results of the project and, above all, to present to the community the board of directors of the Leaders of the Diquís Youth Association, composed of 10 young people who will represent the 60 members of the association.
In Costa Rica and around the world, youth, women and indigenous populations are among the most vulnerable sectors of the population, less represented in decision-making spaces and more exposed to the lack of opportunities to develop economically and socially. One of the main challenges faced by communities in southern Costa Rica where World Heritage sites are located is the lack of youth leadership and participation, mainly due to the high rate of migration to other areas of the country for study or employment. It is, therefore, necessary to empower youth to increase their capacity to influence community issues that concern them and to contribute to local development.

The project “Young Leaders of the Diquis” sought to address these problems by involving young people in the management of one of the most important resources for the development of the area: its cultural heritage. The pre-Columbian chiefdom settlements with stone spheres of the Diquis are cultural elements widely recognised nationally and internationally for their outstanding historical value, which materialises the link between modern societies and those societies that occupied the territory in ancestral times, symbolising permanence and exalting the richness of the nation's indigenous cultural heritage.

At all times, the project has sought to highlight the link between the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and the strengthening of society through universal values such as appreciation of cultural diversity, gender equality, cooperation, teamwork and the formulation of creative and joint solutions. In the same way, the project activities emphasised the inherent relationship between the protection of cultural heritage and environmental protection, which is particularly close in a territory as rich in biodiversity and natural resources as the canton of Osa.

From the planning phase of the project, a gender approach has been applied, ensuring that the project is also a platform for local young women to empower themselves and take on their rightful leadership role. In addition, inclusive language is used to demonstrate sensitivity to gender and non-discrimination issues, and constant care is taken in drafting the various documents and deliverables that are prepared.

In this sense, the “Young Leaders of the Diquis” project has managed to position the management of cultural heritage as a factor that allows for the promotion of human rights through the effective inclusion of young people, women and indigenous populations, thus contributing to closing historical gaps based on gender, ethnicity and territoriality.
V. Describing and Measuring Results

The most evident outcome of the project is the strengthened capacities of 161 young people from all the districts of the canton of Osa and the indigenous territories of Boruca and Rey Curré.

**Strengthened World Heritage knowledge**

Thanks to the participation of the international expert from ICOMOS, and the accompaniment of the MNCR archaeologist, they learnt about World Heritage. Specifically, the following topics were addressed:

- Introduction to the notion of heritage
- Local, national, world heritage: a range of protections and recognitions
- Other local and national heritages
- The Convention and the Guidelines
- Types of World Heritage properties
- The OUV of the site and its valorisation
- World Heritage Management: Processes, Structures and Tools
- The role of local communities
- World Heritage in Costa Rica
- The Diquís case

According to the international expert, the young people showed interest in the subject and throughout the workshops they asked very varied questions on all sort of topics related to world heritage, but also on wider subjects such as archaeological sites management and protection, or illicit traffic of cultural goods.

**Strengthened Soft Skills for Leadership**

During the 3 phases of the project, multiple activities were carried out aimed at building capacities for self-knowledge and life skills; all of them aimed at strengthening the leadership skills of young people and teamwork.

According to the local technical coordinator, in general, these activities were conducted under the premise that teamwork is built from the contribution that each person can give according to their knowledge and skills to collaborate in the construction of a collective proposal.

During the basic workshops, activities were carried out along the following axes: trust, conflict resolution, negotiation, creativity, observation, decision making, strategy, cooperation.

The intermediate workshops focused on the following topics: community building, group agreements, Human Rights, innovation, creative thinking, reuse of resources, project thinking, personal expectations and challenges, interpersonal awareness, communication.

The three organizational consolidation workshops were focused on building capacity for the formation and management of a youth association. During the first workshop, the legal regulations for forming associations were examined. Subsequently, a secret ballot was held to determine whether the participants wanted to proceed with the formation of a youth association. The young people voted in the affirmative and immediately proceeded with the drafting of a statute.

During the second workshop, this statute was revised and approved by the participants. The name of the association was also chosen: "Líderes del Diquís". In addition to this, the following topics were addressed: self-management and organization, phases and characteristics of human development.

The third workshop focused on volunteering: its aims and objectives. During this workshop, which took place at the Las Quebradas Biological Center, various volunteer activities were carried out: trees were planted, the biological center’s lagoon was cleaned and the facilities were maintained.
Impact of the project on young people at a personal level

The technical coordinator has collected multiple testimonials via Whatsapp in order to get feedback from the young participants and their parents. These testimonies reflect that overall the project had a very positive reception in the community.

The most recurrent comments refer to the transformational effect it had on the young people in multiple ways. The life and soft skills training made them more social and communicative. It also gave them new perspectives on community life.

In addition, many young people especially value the bond created between them, sometimes referring to the group as a family.

"It changed my way of thinking, my way of looking at life; it took me out of my comfort zone. I am grateful because now I am more sociable and more communicative. I like knowing more about my past and the history of my town and city. I am grateful because now I see the world in a different way."
(Karla Ruiz, Palmar Norte, 16 years).

"The lessons I learned helped me to see beyond my community not only as the place where I live but also to help and contribute to future generations to have a welcoming community that cares for the environment as well as the need for communication between neighbours."
(Raquel Fernández Vargas, Ojochal, 18 years).

"I found new things that I liked, new knowledge, new friends, new personalities, I learned a lot from all this process. New goals came into my life and increased my love for my land, my culture, and my roots, it was a wonderful and unforgettable experience. Thank you for making me part of this beautiful family."
(Ketsy Guerrero Gómez, Uvita, 16 years).

"The project as such and the creation of the association led me to reflect on the different ways of helping the community. Each of the activities encouraged teamwork, which is very positive for each of our communities, to work efficiently for the benefit of society."
(Alisson Arauz Salas, Palmar Norte, 21 years.)

Some young people point out that they had a negative perception of youth itself, but that the project has encouraged them to see youth as something positive:

"Since I was a child, I heard people say that youth were only vices and rebellion, but they never imagined that when these young people came together they could raise their voices for everyone. This project proved it: it showed that we are young people with voices, of all shades, intensities, and colours, and that together we give hope for those who cannot be heard."
(Marimar Torrens Valverde, Ciudad Cortés, 18 years).

"(...) many people today turn their backs on young people, thinking that they are useless, but you saw more than that, you saw that young people are the future of tomorrow."
(Giovanni Acuña Duarte)

"I had a different perspective on young people, but the project has taught me that there are young people with incredible, potentially great minds and similar thoughts on leadership."
(Bayron Fabrizio Lázaro Campos, Palmar Norte, 18 years).

Other comments highlight the lessons learned about World Heritage and the importance of promoting the cultural value of these sites within the community. (the young woman explains that her family is originally from another country)

"Cultural heritage is not only for those who are born near it, but for those who feel identified with it, the archaeological sites near me are my culture, my ancestors, my heritage and with these I feel that I belong to them, and they taught me that we all have a past and that we must respect and preserve it."
(Marimar Torrens Valverde, Ciudad Cortés, 18 years).

"I had always appreciated the universal value of the heritage we have in our communities but with the lessons we have learned, I value it much more today, I wish that everyone in our region would realise the legacy we have and that we must take care of it."
(Bayron Fabrizio Lázaro Campos, Palmar Norte, 18 years).
VI. Direct Beneficiaries, Key Partners and Other Stakeholder

**Beneficiaries:**
The main beneficiaries of this project were the young participants in this capacity building process. In addition to the nearly 200 young people who were directly involved in the workshops, multiple visits were made to schools and colleges during different phases of the project. Many of these visits took place during the initial phase, in order to raise awareness of the initiative in all localities of the canton of Osa and to promote the participation of young people. However, they also took place at the end of the project, in order to start the process of disseminating the knowledge acquired by the young participants. Taking these visits into account, it can be considered that the project benefited more than 700 young people.

At the general level, the six districts that make up the canton of Osa benefited, as well as two indigenous territories, Boruca and Rey Curré, located in the canton of Buenos Aires de Puntarenas.

**Key Partners:**
The main partners in the implementation of this project were the following:

**National Museum of Costa Rica:**
The MNCR is the administrator of the archaeological settlements with stone spheres. The Museum’s facilities in Finca 6 are the only decentralised MNCR headquarters in the country, which reflects the importance that this institution gives to the protection and valorisation of these sites. In addition to collaborating from the beginning of the planning of this project, the MNCR contributed decisively in all phases, both operationally and through in-kind contributions. In this sense, the MNCR provided the following resources:

- A staff member who worked part-time for the entire duration of the project.
- For the execution of the organisational strengthening workshops, two buses were provided for the transportation of the participants. In addition, a pick-up and a bus were made available throughout the project for the promotion of the initiative in the communities, for which a driver was always available.
- Two projectors, two speakers, two sets of microphones, two projection screens, a printer and three tablets.
- Administrative offices for the technical coordinator of the project, including technological appliances such as computers, telephones, internet, water, and electricity.
A contract was concluded with the National Museum - Anastasio Alfaro Foundation (shortened as FUNDAMUN), which is a private agency created by the National Museum to administer funds from donors and manage the implementation of specific projects in the site such as this one. FUNDAMUN assumed the following responsibilities:

- Manage the funds drawn for the implementation of the project, ensuring that these funds are used only to cover the expenses of the project.
- Coordinate the contracting of food services, transport, accommodation, materials, facilitators and other expenses necessary to meet the needs of the participants during the workshops and the proper execution of the project.
- Manage the rental or loan of adequate facilities for the execution of the workshops, meetings in the communities and other associated activities.
- Manage the purchase or rental of equipment and materials necessary for the realisation of the socialisation meetings in the communities and workshops and activities related to the project.
- Ensure that all suppliers contracted for the implementation of the project fulfil their responsibilities properly.

Integral Development Associations (IDA):
IDAs are organisations that exist in each community and are entities of public interest, governed by private law, authorised to carry out all types of actions aimed at the social, economic, cultural, and environmental development of the inhabitants of their community, in collaboration with the municipalities, institutions, and any other public and private bodies. In the context of this project, they played a very important role, not only in promoting the project in all the communities, but above all in establishing a relationship of trust with the young people and their families. Through the IDA of Palmar Sur, it was possible to make available the local community hall, which was used for multiple activities, including the closing ceremony of the project.
Many programmatic aspects of the project had to be rethought due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, a meeting was held between the UNESCO San José Office team and the MNCR implementation team. On that occasion, it was decided to revise the schedule and to dedicate the months between April and June to work exclusively on the development of materials and content for the workshops. At that time, it was not clear how long the health restrictions would last, so it was decided not to change the closing date of the project for the time being.

In July 2020, a new meeting was held, in which it was decided to suspend the implementation of the activities for at least 6 months. It was determined that it would not be possible to carry out the workshops during 2020, as the IDAs were not authorised to use the communal spaces. In addition, the young people and their families were consulted on the subject, with many of them expressing doubts and fears about the possibility of holding the workshops in the context of a health emergency.

At the same meeting, it was agreed that the project would not be carried out virtually. The main reasons for this decision were that the digital divide is significant in this area of the country and is associated with differences in the socio-economic conditions of the young participants, so that it would be a serious factor of exclusion. In addition, the activities to strengthen soft skills require the young people to meet face-to-face, get to know the archaeological sites and, in general, relate to the natural and cultural environment.

Considering all this, it was agreed to amend the terms of the local technical coordinator's contract to focus on maintaining communications with the youth and the communities, so as not to lose the progress made so far in promoting the project and engaging the youth in the initiative. In the meantime, the ICOMOS specialist kept an eye on the project to address any possible concerns on the part of the coordination team, which was tasked with finalising all the content and materials needed to resume the project as soon as possible in 2021.

In September 2020, a new timetable was established (available in Annexes), which included a major reorganisation of activities and a readjustment of the number of participants for each activity, taking into account the health restrictions on the use of space.

In this regard, the following was decided:

- To limit the number of participants for each of the 6 basic workshops to 30 people. This implies reducing the number of beneficiaries from 240 to 180.
- To limit the number of participants in the intermediate workshops to 60 instead of 90.
- Change the approach of the intermediate workshops; the methodology is maintained, but the focus is changed to combine it with training for organisational strengthening. Thus, a three-day workshop was planned, focusing on youth organisational training, strengthening of soft skills for leadership and virtual sessions to address cultural heritage issues.
- The closing ceremony of the project, including the formal formation of the youth association and the presentation of results to the community, will be held in person.
VIII. Exit Strategy and Sustainability

The formation of the youth association “Líderes del Diquís” is the main sustainability factor of the project. This association, made up of 60 young participants, seeks to maintain a close relationship with the MNCR. Through this association, the young members will not only be able to maintain links with each other, with the archaeological sites and with the managing institutions, but will also be able to pass on their knowledge, skills and abilities for the protection of the cultural heritage to the next generations. To this end, the training in soft skills included at all times the perspective of making the young people multiplier agents, capable of transmitting to a future generation of leaders the learning acquired during this process.

The MNCR has applied for this project in a call launched by Ibermuseos, the cooperation programme of the Ibero-American Cultural Space for museums in Ibero-America. Through this competition, the MNCR hopes not only to gain recognition and notoriety at regional level, but also to win funds to support the consolidation of the youth association.

The Integral Development Association of the indigenous territory of Boruca requested assistance from the MNCR to replicate this project within the territory. The possibility of implementing this initiative will be examined during the second half of 2022.

The MNCR has stated that it would be ideal to be able to establish soft skills building in relation to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage as a permanent programme for youth by the institution. However, this possibility should be proposed and examined by the MNCR in the light of available resources.

IX. Visibility

The project was promoted among the beneficiary communities through multiple means, with the support of the Integral Development Associations, including actions such as visits to schools and colleges and even knocking on doors house-to-house in the neighbourhoods of the communities. In this first phase, a television interview was held in the local TV Channel 9, during the TV programme Temas Comunales, which was a significant contribution to publicize the project in the canton.

The project also had visibility through social media. Digital tools were essential, especially during the months when the project activities were suspended due to COVID-19 restrictions, as they made it possible to maintain the link with the young people and reassure them that the project was still running. To this end, the local technical coordinator created and managed accounts in the name of the project on Facebook and Instagram. In addition, constant communication was maintained with interested young people through Whatsapp groups.

In September 2021, four young participants of the project were invited by the UNESCO San José Office to participate in the virtual forum “Culture, Youth and Sustainable Development” which was organized together with the SDG Technical Secretariat of the Ministry of Planning and Economy to promote the role of culture in the 2030 Agenda in the framework of the celebrations of the bicentenary anniversary of Independence of Costa Rica. The activity was broadcast live through social networks and allowed to present the experiences and testimonies of young participants in multiple projects that UNESCO has implemented together with Costa Rican institutions to foster the benefits of culture in the 2030 Agenda. At this event, young participant Marimar Torrens described the project as innovative, as it has managed to bring together young people from different localities, with different mentalities, to strengthen the community and to boost their education through soft skills. For his part, the participant Daniel Barrantes Barquero, pointed out the importance of youth presence in the spaces of community participation. Both highlighted the impact of the project on their personal development and their relationship with the territory they live in.

UNESCO also made efforts to maintain a constant visibility of the project. In this regard, press releases were published for each of the activities carried out since the beginning of the project. The full list of press releases is available in the Annexes.
X. Lessons Learned

Among the most valuable lessons learned was that the project was able to highlight the capacity of cultural heritage to strengthen the roots of the community and the territory. The testimonies of the young people and other members of the community all agree on this point. There is a need and interest among local youth to get involved in the development of their territory through learning and volunteering actions that also allow them to interact with other young people.

According to the project's technical coordinator, the learning methodology based on participation through a gradual process of intensive workshops, in which young people live together continuously for several days, helps to generate close ties, familiarity and self-knowledge. This methodology encourages participants to get to know other people, to get to know their environment, to believe in themselves as young people and to empower themselves. These are factors that foster commitment, perseverance, and confidence.

Non-formal education is fundamental to provide useful tools to young people, where formal education, focused on academic learning, sometimes tend to neglect interpersonal skills. Through soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, volunteering, self-esteem, community organisation, the transformational impact on current and future generations is enhanced. Working at the micro level in the communities was key to raising awareness of the project: taking the information from house to house, person to person, helps to become familiar with the community, to get to know the diverse realities where the project beneficiaries live and to achieve the greatest possible outreach.

It is highly desirable that the technical coordinator be a young and local person, who not only has experience in soft skills and theoretical knowledge on the topics addressed in the workshops, but also has the sensitivity to understand the social context in which the project is developed and the learning processes that the project seeks to trigger.

In this regard, the technical coordinator of this project, Karol Zúñiga, states the following: "As a technical coordinator, being from the region, having been trained and having experience in the specific topic of the project has been of great help in transmitting and generating confidence in the project to parents and participants. Being a young person creates a bond of trust and respect with the young people, which helps to foster communication and motivates them to follow the established rules".

“Young Leaders of the Diquís”
UNESCO press releases:


Forum "Youth, Culture and Sustainable Development":
https://www.facebook.com/UNESCOsanjose/videos/1008635676600100/

Local press publications:

- https://www.tvsur.co.cr/noticias/presentaran-el-proyecto-jovenes-lideres-del-diquis/
- https://semanariouniversidad.com/cultura/esfera-precolombina-sera-objeto-de-hito-conservacionista/

- Museo Nacional continúa con el proyecto de jóvenes líderes del Diquís - YouTube

Social networks of the project

Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Youth-Organization/J%C3%B3venes-Lideres-del-Diquis/

Instagram:
@lideres_diquis
https://www.instagram.com/lideres_diquis/?hl=es