



Na Bolom: What we do Translation by Renato Johnson

The yearbook of 1950 and the first property deeds done by Frans Blom and Gertude DUBY after they bought the Museum-House of Na Bolom are the cornerstone that have sustained the association during the last sixty years. The original mission to which it was conceived continues to this day: the protection of the eco-system and the natural resources of the Lacandon rainforest; investigation, conservation and diffusion of cultural heritage; preservation and development of indigenous populations, especially the Lacandon people.

At Trudy's death in 1993 she bequeathed all her belongings to the Na Bolom Cultural Association, which was established for this outcome and which was presided over by her until her death. In her last will and testament she specified with clarity the aims which now govern Na Bolom: to conserve, develop and promote the culture and environment of the highland and jungle region of Chiapas.

Five programmes were established by Trudy in order to accomplish her mission. These have been maintained to this day.

1. **GREENHOUSE:** Na Bolom produces annually 60 thousand saplings of six indigenous species from the highlands of Chiapas, including cypress and oak, which are donated and planted around the city of San Cristóbal.
2. **COMMUNITY HEALTH:** Since 1948 the association has provided medical assistance to the Lacandon community. In 1978 this was extended into a regular program named the "Lacandon Medical Fund" which provides social security to the inhabitants of the communities of Lacanjá Chansayab, Najá and Metzabok. Recently these services include preventative health programs on the topics of infant nutrition and reproductive illnesses and count on the invaluable support of public health organizations, the the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous people (CDI) and the generous labor of doctors from the city of San Cristóbal.
3. **EDUCATION.** This program includes the constant participation of artists and educators in children's workshops in the jungle region. In the highland region of Chiapas this program has established school visits, environmental education, and teaching of photography to

indigenous children (Club Balam) and on “children's Thursday” the house opens its doors to children so that they can learn about the institution and the cultures of the indigenous people of Chiapas.

4. **ROOM AND BOARD FOR THE LACANDON PEOPLE:** Since its inception the house has provided rooms and meals to ethnic Lacandons, as well as assistance in the different activities that they come to do in the city. This program permits the lacandons to stay in their room three days, during which they are provided with breakfast and dinner. In case of illness they can stay the time that their treatment requires and receive three meals a day.
5. **CULTURE AND RESERACH:** In terms of culture Na Bolom benefits from diverse programs, including agreements with academic institutions, the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas library, the Fototeca Chiapas (photographic library), the photographic registry of cultural expressions, the conservation of material, intangible and natural heritage. Additionally there are investigative programs and community development programs that include archaeology, ethnography, anthropology and environmental as well as other studies. Furthermore, since 2002 Na Bolom has supported the artisans of the Lacandon rain forest, from the communities of Najá, Metzabok, Frontera Corosal, and Nueva Palestina, in their development of new techniques and the commercialization of their crafts. This program permits the artisans of the jungle to continue the production of their crafts. In recent years this particular program has expanded to communities in the highland regions of Chiapas and includes 46 important artists and almost 600 artisans.

Library. Research centre. The Na Bolom exhibition space was the first to open its doors to visitors and the general populace so that they could enjoy its exhibits on Maya archeology, Lacandon ethnography, sacred art from Chiapas and Guatemala, popular art from Chiapas and visual arts. Furthermore the Fray Bartolomé library has been recognized as one of the most important bibliographical sources in Mesoamerican studies, containing documentation from the 16th century up to the present, and is visited by researchers and students from different parts of the State, from Mexico and from overseas. The photographic library contains more than 50,000 images of Chiapas from the beginning of the 20th century up to the present. We receive more that 30 thousand visitors annually, of which apporximately10% are students.

Environment.

With the invaluable support of Conservation International, the Na Bolom cultural association promotes the creation of a new ecological reserve in

the Lacandon rainforest. We have also been the coordinator of the Eco-tourism program of USAID and Conservation International. We generate, through the donations and auspices of international foundations, environmental projects in the highland and jungle regions. We promote the protection of the Jovel and Usumacinta basin, as well as the pine and tropical rainforest ecosystems to which Gertrude DUBY dedicated the last 20 years of her life. Since 1970 the Na Bolom greenhouse has been the principal provider of trees to the indigenous communities of the highlight region of Chiapas and of the valley of Jovel.

Cultural Heritage.

The conservation of the built heritage and the promotion and development of the intangible heritage was one of the principal preoccupations of Frans Blom and Gertrude DUBY and the reason for which the association has undertaken a series of actions in order to preserve and promote this. This has attracted the support of a great many civil society organizations, the state government, the chamber of deputies and a great number of researchers.

Na Bolom is made up of assembly of twenty-two people recognised locally, regionally and nationally, who work in an altruistic manner in support of the culture and environment of Chiapas. They are the ones who watch over the legacy of the founders and who ensure the transparency of the use of resources for the programmes.

The administration as well as the maintenance of the Association is financed through the income gained by the hotel and restaurant, while the projects, programs and cultural events are sustained through the support of private donors, income generated, government institutions such as INDESOL, SEMARNAT, CNDI, the State government, and foundations such as the Steiner Foundation, American Express Foundation, Harvard University, Getty Institute, The Embassies of Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, France; Aid to Artisans, Merced-IMPULSO-City-group Foundation, International Conservation ,USAID, Canadian Fund, The Royal Fund of Denmark, Na Bolom Denmark, Resource Foundation, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, besides others.

Additionally the Association counts with an administrative council and six specialized commissions, including on legal issues, architecture, vigilance, climate change and environment, artisan development, and on the Jungle region. They can rely on a group of advisers in distinct

disciplines. The council is an active member of the Citizen's Council of San Cristóbal de las Casas, which promotes the protection of the cultural and environmental heritage of the city and the development of the region of the highlands of Chiapas; the Inter-institutional Environmental Group, which promoted the mitigation of the effects of Climate Change in Chiapas; the Citizen's Observatory, which seeks the democratic development of the city. Recently we have joined the efforts of the Jovel cultural association, an association established by Julio Dominguez that promotes the preservation of the culture and history of the Valley of Jovel, besides others.

In terms of heritage Na Bolom promotes, alongside Friends for San Cristóbal, COPRSEAN, the Citizen's Council, Jovel A.C, and representatives from the three levels of government, the declaration of UNESCO of world heritage status for San Cristóbal and outlying region.