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Collaborative Archaeology, Relational Memory, and Stakeholder Action at Three Henequen Haciendas in Yucatan, Mexico

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Abstract: In the Mexican state of Yucatán, the Industrial Revolution is intimately linked to the cultivation and commercialization of henequen (*Agave fourcroydes*). The second half of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century are most often referred to as the region's Gilded Age. Some local families accrued immense wealth, while many peasants were essentially enslaved. The city of Mérida saw the construction of magnificent mansions, and the new port of Progreso was connected through thousands of kilometers of railroads. At the same time, the rural landscape experienced the foundation of countless new and the expansion of existing haciendas. In this article, we provide a comparison of the relational memory of local communities regarding three of these historical settlements: San Pedro Cholul, San Antonio Nohuayún, and San Antonio Sihó. We present the circumstances leading to the historical archaeology project at San Pedro and recount our efforts at involving its descendant community. In the face of the recent destruction of San Pedro's core buildings, we end with a discussion about the potential fates of Yucatan's henequen haciendas and a series of suggestions on how to safeguard related material remains, while allowing stakeholders to benefit from historic preservation.

Keywords: historical archaeology; Yucatan; descendant communities; tangible heritage

1. Henequen Agroindustry in Nineteenth Century Yucatan

Although haciendas have been established on the Yucatan Peninsula since the seventeenth century, their numbers and economic importance increased significantly over the second half of the nineteenth century as part of the local expression of the Industrial Revolution. This development was spurred by a series of sociopolitical, techno-economical, and environmental factors. After the Mexican Independence in 1821, socioeconomic differences in the Yucatecan countryside became more acute as the Spanish Creoles began to occupy political positions and claimed vacant land in the rural area, thus increasing their landholdings and promoting peonage. The disruption of native leadership and way of life resulted in a considerable number of indigenous people being subjected to the hacienda system. In combination, growing disparity and the lack of farmland served to exacerbate the mood of rebellion and led to the armed uprising known as the Caste War in 1847 [1,2]. During the rebellion, indigenous communities in the eastern and southern regions of the state reorganized and were able to resist debt peonage.

There, rural populations continued occupying lands extensively in a more dispersed settlement pattern, without significant changes to their indigenous ways of life. For example, Alexander [3] (p. 333) points out that peasants promoted litigation to preserve their land at the expense of the establishment of numerous haciendas in Ebtun. Similar processes, however, are not evident in Yaxcabá, a more centrally situated municipality studied by the same author [4].

Among the consequences of the Caste War in the core zone of henequen production, centered on the state capital of Mérida in the northwest, was a marked demographic decrease and the reorganization of indigenous communities [1]. A landscape of agro-industrial production facilities emerged as an architecture appropriate to the promoters of the nascent Industrial Revolution. Following Farris [5], Meyers [6] (p. 125) underscores the neocolonial character of the design promoted by landowners with the goal of accelerating the assimilation of Yucatecan peasants within the capitalist project. Paredes [7] specifically points to the architecture of hacienda main houses as an expression of hierarchy and domination by the groups in power. The machinery houses, the administrative buildings, and the chapels, on the other hand, were important as means of ideological control and subjection.

The Yucatecan haciendas of this period are the main examples of the exploitation, forced labor, and ideological manipulation to which the peninsular communities were subjected by an oligarchy of wealthy landowners. However, they were also the scene where different strategies of resistance were developed by indigenous people, who sought to subvert the living conditions of a highly restrictive system [8]. Based on his research at the haciendas Tabi, Dolores Aké, and Xucú, Meyers [9,10] argues architectural and settlement designs are part of a neocolonial effort to control the aesthetics of the landscape and the built environment. The author stresses that the standardization of hacienda village layouts decreased with respect to the distance from the henequen core zone. However, he also draws attention to the fact that the persistence of the indigenous styles of vernacular architecture and house lot layouts within the haciendas expresses a form of cultural resilience among the Yucatec Maya [6] (p. 142).

In addition to the restructuring of Yucatecan society, the rise of henequen production was also firmly tied to technological developments and the growing connectedness of international markets. The invention of the first steam-driven decortication machines for henequen leaves, locally known as *pencas*, transformed many of the existing as well as the newly founded hacienda settlements into booming agrobusinesses. Local agaves had been exploited for their fibers since the pre-Columbian era and Colonial manufacturers exported sacks and rigging to nearby Cuba. However, the extraction of *sisal* fiber from the thick leaves had always been powered by either human or animal muscle. Thus, the ability to process thousands of *pencas* per day allowed for mass production and opened new export markets. The most significant market for Yucatecan *sisal* arose in the United States, where the invention of the McCormick Harvesting Machine in 1834 led to a staggering demand of binder twine.

The relatively dry northwestern plains of the Yucatan Peninsula were especially suited for the landscape transformation required for henequen monocropping. The omnipresent low spiny forests were relatively easy to clear, and plantations were exposed to regrowth only during the rainy season from May to November. By 1885, 42,000 ha had been converted to henequen [11]. Continuously booming over the turn of the century, the extension of its cultivation eventually ascended to 202,000 ha in 1916. This number accounted for more than 70% of all land under agricultural production in the state of Yucatán [12]. In addition to the rapid technological development of decortication machines, the arrival of railroads and their adaptation to local agro-landscapes through Decauville feeder systems spurred the productive capacities of henequen haciendas.

The economic boom associated with henequen cultivation brought about a Gilded Age for land-owning families, most of them residents of the state capital of Mérida. While this group of oligarchs became rich and politically powerful, displaying their wealth by building European-style mansions in the city, the working-class inhabitants of the haciendas themselves fared less well. Due to a relative lack of workforce in the mostly indigenous rural communities, owners grew increasingly preoccupied with tying labor to their haciendas. The most common strategy to achieve this goal became later coined as “debt peonage” [13]. Workers were encouraged to purchase subsistence goods on credit

at the haciendas' own *tienda de raya* stores. In addition, the owners offered larger loans to sponsor social events, such as baptisms, *quinceañeras*, and weddings. Given their low wages, most peon families were never able to pay off their debts, a fact which bound them to the hacienda. To make matters worse, in case of death, debt was inherited by widows or children, thereby effectively institutionalizing slavery. The exploitation of the indigenous workforce often involved physical abuse, as shown in Figure 1, or even the loss of lives when the lack of protection of laborers led to fatal accidents (see anecdotes below).



Figure 1. Peon with lash marks from hacienda *Noh-nayum* [14] (p. 180).

This social facet of Yucatan's henequen heritage has received only scarce attention in the academic literature and even less in public discourse. Through the discussion of relevant precedents as well as our own efforts, we will use the remainder of this article to shed the spotlight on community perceptions of historical heritage on the Yucatan, the actions taken by different groups of stakeholders, and the role archaeologists play as promoters of heritage preservation.

2. Localizing Identity and Heritage as Relational Memory

Although a comprehensive discussion of Yucatecan identity is beyond the scope of this paper, in this section we will review models and case studies relevant to the way present-day communities and individuals perceive themselves and their heritage. In the state, the tangible aspect of the latter is under constant spotlight as two UNESCO World Heritage sites—Chichen Itza and Uxmal—attract millions of national and international tourists each year. The monumental remains of these and other major pre-Columbian settlements cause awe and admiration for the ancient Maya civilization. At the same time, surrounding indigenous communities are commonly portrayed as descendants to the ancient Maya. Recent ethnographic studies, however, have shown this essentialist notion to provide a rather incomplete picture of the diverse ways of how local populations in the larger region relate to the pre-Columbian, as well as more recent past [15–17].

In his study of indigenous communities in highland Guatemala, Fischer [18] argues the human condition is based on the conscious and unconscious dialectic reconciliation of received cultural paradigms and changing environmental circumstances. For him, this interplay between stasis and adaptation nurtures the shaping of identities as a dynamic process. In Guatemala, this has led, among others, to the relatively recent adoption of common identifiers, such as “Maya” among indigenous groups which previously distinguished themselves by locality or language [18,19]. The shift in self-perception of individuals and communities across the Yucatan Peninsula and adjacent highlands is of utmost importance for any attempt of discerning peoples' relationship to heritage.

The variability in regional identities stems from historic processes reaching beyond the roughly 500 years of post-Conquest existence. However, colonization by the Spanish, the forced introduction of African slaves and northern Mexican Yaqui rebels, as well as the arrival of migrants from the larger Caribbean, eastern Asia, and the Middle East throughout the Colonial and Independent eras yielded a much more complex demographic mosaic than the ethnic diversity observed among the pre-Columbian populations [20]. The repetitive intermingling of resident and foreign populations, as well as internal migration caused by phenomena such as the Caste War, have blurred the lines of biological descent. In fact, Hervig [21] demonstrates native speakers do not necessarily perceive themselves as descendants of the ancient Maya. The complexities of the issue have gone as far as exposing local communities to claims negating their indigenous status [22] (p. 117). Accordingly, some scholars contend that the concept of “descending communities” is not unequivocally tied to biology. Instead, advocacy focuses on the recognition of self-defined present-day communities who seek association with groups of the past [23,24].

The acknowledgment of self-determination leads to the question of how people's identities are impacted by the remains and memories of the past. Several members of the Chunchucmil Regional Economy Project (CREP), focused on the semiarid lowlands in northwestern Yucatan, have launched ideas relevant to our own arguments. As an associate to the archaeological investigations at the pre-Columbian site of the same name, Breglia [15] conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the present-day villages of Chunchucmil and Kochol. In a challenge to the nationalist notions of heritage in Mexico, she focuses on the non-monumental aspects of patrimony. Breglia [15] (p. 137) contends that peoples' conceptions of heritage are rooted in “cultural and familial legacies associated with particular locales, the inherited beliefs, and the transgenerational practices of taming, cultivating, and respecting the land”.

Consequently, for many communities in the area henequen haciendas are a much more immediate form of heritage than the pre-Columbian monuments. Following the framework of Foucault's [25] activity-controlling techniques, Breglia [15] (p. 145) reports on survivors of the henequen era still

exhibiting “vestiges” of the day-to-day life of this time engrained in gestures and material references. One example is the enacted sweeping motion of cutting *pencas* whenever former plantation workers speak about henequen harvests. She also recounts how the older generation still vividly remembers the strident bell ringing that kept peons on schedule, since the earliest of morning hours. Hutson [16] (p. 171) adds to this panorama, observing that recent use-history related to farming and animal husbandry has a significantly greater impact on the names assigned to Chunchucmil’s pre-Columbian structures than any form of collective memory of ritual practices of the past.

Together, these observations conform to what Ingold [26] describes as the relational model of human existence and historical meaningfulness. Compared to the traditional genealogical model, which places ancestry, generation, substance, memory, and land within a context of an active culture to whom a passive nature serves only as a backdrop, Ingold [26] (pp. 132–133) envisions a dynamic process. Here, situating oneself in the world is impacted by both the cultural and natural environments. While the genealogical model implies the substantive components of personhood to be applied rather than generated, in the relational model, memory is transmitted in a spatial and experiential context providing meaning. Although language furthers, embodies, and transmits knowledge of the world, living in the land assures the continuity of language and, by extension, cultural identity [26] (pp. 135–147). In Ingold’s [26] (p. 148) own words: “(...) objects of memory [such as haciendas] cannot pre-exist acts of remembering. (...) The activity of remembering forges memory.”

Ingold himself refers to Mead [27] (p. 97) when arguing that a landscape must be understood as the “taskscape” in its embodied form. Therefore, human existence is not an imprint stamped upon nature rather than an incorporation interwoven with the lifecycles of organisms and the properties of its constituting inanimate objects and forces. By extension, a landscape is never to be considered complete or “built” but dynamically developing [26] (pp. 198–199). Buildings, like any other feature of the landscape, emerge as part of the dynamic processes and human dwelling of the world [26] (p. 206). Synthesizing Ingold’s model under the term “entanglement”, Hutson et al. [28] underscore the necessity of heritage to be tied to concerns such as income, politics, or personal aspirations and biographies to gain relevance for present-day communities. Weighing the monumentality of sites, such as Chichen Itza, against the spatial proximity of smaller sites, he observes the former absorb virtually all existing attention among villagers who have not been previously engaged with the vestiges surrounding their own communities. However, involvement with an archaeological project, state-wide media coverage, as well as the invitation to reflect upon and present their own notions of heritage to both foreigners and other community members, augmented the perception of local patrimony significantly [28] (p. 13).

Returning once more to Ingold [26], a review of his essay gains further value for this study due to his discussion of Bruegel’s 1565 painting “The Harvester”. This representation of a rural Golden Age Dutch landscape has been argued to be an idealized representation of peasants from a landowner’s perspective [29]. We argue that the painting portrays a situation virtually identical to the generalized perception of Yucatecan henequen haciendas as the splendid monuments of a period of economic and societal progress. Both cases are characterized by a lack of consideration for the real-life hardships and day-to-day experiences of the peasants sustaining agricultural production and economic growth.

3. Collaborative Archaeology and Stakeholder Action

Compared to history, archaeology tends to be acknowledged for its greater potential to look beyond the elites and provide empirical data on the lives of commoners. More recently, collaborative archaeology has contributed even more to a focus on the disenfranchised of the past. This development transcends the excavation of lower-status households and the analysis of their material remains, but instead grows from descending communities becoming a part of the research process in a two-way didactic interpretation of the past. Since the 1990s, archaeologists have become more and more concerned about community feedback and benefits provided to the public [30] (p. 115). Before discussing the nature

of our own approaches to community involvement in the historical archaeology of northern Yucatan, we want to address some of the general challenges accompanying a socially engaged archaeology.

Supernant and Warrick [31] provide two relevant examples of how archaeological research can create or exacerbate political problems within and between groups of stakeholders. In their first example, the authors discuss how their work impacted claims to fishing sites in the Lower Fraser River Canyon between two Native Canadian communities. Here, one group utilizes ethnography, oral history, and archaeology to reclaim their right to define themselves. When conflicts arose, the Canadian government stepped in as an arbitrator. However, state officials lacked the appropriate understanding of time depth, cultural context, and internal systems of governance. Given these circumstances, it was impossible to integrate the local meanings of the landscape into the analysis without alienating one or the other party and the archaeological fieldwork had to be suspended [31] (pp.568–573). A second case involves the Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario and features disputes over land between Native communities and the Canadian government. Here, archaeology figures prominently in negotiations by demonstrating long-term indigenous land-use. However, intra-tribal conflicts hinder both research and development projects in the area. While no permits were necessary for archaeological field crews in the past, administrative processes have recently become more contested. Due to the politically charged atmosphere created by overlapping tribal representative bodies, both developers and archaeologists have become used to work stoppages and costly delays. Consequently, Supernant and Warrick [31] (pp. 576–581) stress the need for explicit discussions and the co-management of stewardship among diverse interest groups.

Parks [22] presents another case illustrating the complexities of community stewardship in a geographically closer setting. She summarizes the struggles of Belizean indigenous communities to gain tenure over lands which have been inhabited by Maya people for millennia. While the villagers of Santa Cruz and Conejo, Toledo District, were primarily suing the Belizean government over the lack of consideration during the establishment of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park and subsequent seismic testing concessions to a US-based energy company, ultimate community goals include rights over the archaeological resources on the same lands [22] (p. 118). Although historians, anthropologists, and geographers testified on behalf of the claimants demonstrating the precolonial relationship between indigenous communities and local territories, the land-claim project was also threatened by the members of neighboring indigenous communities who protested in favor of oil exploration and the promise of jobs [22] (pp. 117–118). Moreover, even though the Belizean Supreme Court granted collective and individual rights to lands and resources used and occupied according to Maya customary practices, communities continue to meet resistance from the Institute of Archaeology regarding claims to archaeological sites. Similar to Mexico and many other nations [24] (p. 289), the Belizean constitution vests the government with exclusive authority over all ancient monuments and antiquities, thereby preventing local communities from any type of control. Most often, direct benefits are limited to custodial employment for a rather small group of villagers.

Returning to Yucatan, Magnoni et al. [32] point out how the work for and with archaeologists can lead to the exposure of otherwise uninformed and disempowered sectors of a given community. As part of the discussion of disagreements within the community of Kochol, which also holds claims to the land the pre-Columbian site of Chunchucmil rests on, the authors underscore varying perceptions across gender and occupational groups, reinforcing the importance of relatedness. However, employment in cleaning and labelling artifacts and the attendance of site tours and presentations organized by CREP archaeologists also caused a noticeable revalorization of pre-Columbian heritage among women and children. Nevertheless, the differences in opinion among residents and archaeologists about a cultural tourism development forced all stakeholders to acknowledge and understand opposing perspectives on archaeological remains and heritage sites [32] (pp. 368–369).

Breglia [15] (pp. 168–169) further reflects on these differences in perceptions between Kochol and Chunchucmil as both communities not only share parts of a pre-Columbian site but also house the remains of two contemporary henequen haciendas. The residents of Chunchucmil are slightly more

enthusiastic about a possible restoration of the historical buildings in their village. This feeling is based on a variety of factors, including the state of architectural preservation, the (temporal) occupation of the property compared to the complete abandonment of the hacienda at Kochol, as well as more frequent communication on part of the owners. Regarding the last point, Breglia also addresses the question of property and belonging. The Mexican land reform and ensuing expropriations of the 1920s and 1930s left hacienda owners with only small holdings, often reduced to the haciendas' core buildings. The largest part of plantations and properties were assigned to the former peons as communal lands or *ejidos*. The devaluation of haciendas, due to the political changes, as well as the decrease in demand of henequen, often led to the rapid abandonment of the so-called *cascos*. After almost a century, present-day communities feel these buildings belong to them and often claim usufruct rights [15] (pp. 159–169).

Study Sites

Over the remainder of this article, we will compare our research and outreach experiences at three ex-hacienda settlements of northwestern Yucatán—San Pedro Cholul, San Antonio Nohuayún, and San Antonio Sihó. Most of the discussions will center on the former, as our entire group of authors participated in research stretching over more than a decade. San Pedro Cholul is part of a larger group of haciendas located on the northeastern periphery of the present-day municipality of Mérida. Its contemporary neighbors are Kancabchen de Cazares, San Juan Dznot, San Antonio Xcuyúm, Yaxché Cazares, Santa María Chí, and Chichí Suárez. Among these settlements, San Pedro was the last to be abandoned, as three families were still living in it by 1980. During initial reconnaissance, we charted over 30 house lots with most of them preserving at least the foundations of the corresponding single-room dwellings. Given the commonly used stipulation of five residents per household [33], this means San Pedro must have housed at least 150 inhabitants during its height. The settlement was articulated through a network of streets with some still preserving vestiges of the Decauville mini-rail system, which originally connected San Pedro to the Cholul train station, located about 1 km to the north.

Historical documents prove that San Pedro was founded in 1709 as a *cofradía* [34], a communal organization of Catholic laymen typical of Colonial-era Mexico and Central America. Don Gaspar Huchim, elder of the village of Cholul, donated a portion of his property as a cattle ranch in order to raise funds for the cult to Saint Peter and the urgencies of the village itself. Its low production capacities, however, resulted in very low numbers of permanent residents—likely only a commissioner and a rancher—throughout the entire eighteenth century. Following the orders of Friar Luis de Piña y Mazo, San Pedro and many other *cofradías* were auctioned in 1782. After the independence of Mexico and the ensuing liberation from ecclesiastic duties, these small rural landholdings experienced significant growth, yet still remained in possession of local owners. For San Pedro, this was Carlos García, another neighbor of Cholul, who owned a few hundred heads of cattle and employed a small group of resident laborers. In 1875, San Pedro was sold to Juan José Herrera, a Mérida-based lawyer with a medium-sized fortune and good social connections, who converted it into a henequen production facility [35].

Despite our focus on the historical settlement, it is important to mention that the landscape around San Pedro had been inhabited since pre-Columbian times. About 0.7 km to the west of the hacienda's core lay the center of a pre-Columbian Maya site which was given the same name. Resembling many other sites in the Northwestern Plains region, its occupational peak corresponds to the Late Classic period (AD 550–850). However, both Preclassic and Postclassic ceramic types were also found in significant quantities during archaeological excavations [36]. In conclusion, it is safe to assume the land surrounding the hacienda San Pedro Cholul was more or less continuously occupied for more than 2000 years. The abandonment of the hacienda settlement toward the end of this interval led many of its former inhabitants to move to the village of Cholul. Located less than 2 km to the northwest of San Pedro's *casco*, Cholul is currently home to about 6000 inhabitants and classified as a *comisaría* (the lowest entity in the political geography of Mexico) of the Mérida municipality. Regarding notions of

propriety, it is noteworthy mentioning that Cholul men, as *ejidatarios* (holders of usufruct rights to communal lands) decided to sell part of their parcels to the construction company, whose impact on San Pedro will be discussed below.

Our second study site, Nohuayún, is located 36 km to the west of Mérida. Its current population is a remnant of another former henequen hacienda. Similar to San Pedro, the village is surrounded by pre-Columbian vestiges. The historical settlement was also originally established as a cattle ranch, then transformed into a maize and cattle hacienda, and eventually converted into a henequen enterprise. Nevertheless, Nohuayún was considerably larger than San Pedro. A document from 1917 specifies the existence of 80 dwellings for peon families. In addition to the standard productive infrastructure, Nohuayún also included a church, dedicated to St. Anthony, and a school [37] (pp. 66–67). In contrast with San Pedro, Nohuayún was never abandoned. The village currently counts around 800 inhabitants. Following the land reforms of the 1920s, most of the hacienda's land was turned into *ejidos*. However, the core buildings remain in private hands to this day and are used as a garden for the commercial cultivation of vegetables, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Casco buildings at hacienda Nohuayún surrounded by commercial vegetable crops.

Lastly, Sihó is a rural community of about 1500 inhabitants, located 97 km to the southwest of Merida. Historical records describe Sihó as one of the *encomiendas* granted by the Spanish Crown after the conquest of the Yucatan Peninsula. Similar to Nohuayún and San Pedro Cholul, by 1695 it had become a cattle ranch [38], p. 1. However, the parallels among all three settlements stretch into the pre-Columbian era, as present-day Sihó is also situated near an archaeological site. Its size and monuments attracted travelers such as John L. Stephens [39] and early archaeologists such as Teobert Maler [40], who reported on part of the standing architecture and the site's stelae. Excavation projects under the auspices of the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY) from 2001 to 2003, and again from 2013 to 2015, yielded evidence for Preclassic to Terminal Classic occupation [41].

As part of his trip, Stephens, also visited the hacienda San Antonio Sihó, then owned by the brother of Simon Peón, a member of one of the most powerful and wealthy Yucatecan families [39] (p. 187). The buildings of the henequen hacienda are arranged, forming a plaza in the center of the present-day village. Most are either totally or partially abandoned and one of them is in danger of

collapsing. However, the community keeps them painted in red and white, remarking the name Sihó and their respective construction dates. Vestiges of the machinery testify to the fact that the hacienda was still in use three decades ago. For the purposes of this article, it is noteworthy that some of the historical constructions at Sihó have also undergone transformations and are still being used. Among those are a convenience store, as shown in Figure 3, a residence, a vending station for drinking water, and a fourth building, which has been adapted to serve as a venue for community workshops. This shows that the hacienda has been divided into private holdings owned by descendants of both former oligarchs and peons, as well as communal parcels managed by cooperatives.



Figure 3. Former hacienda building at Sihó transformed into a convenience store.

4. Ethnographic Fieldwork at Nohuayún and Sihó

Focusing on community perceptions of heritage and the potential for collaborative archaeological research, Venegas de la Torre [37] conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork at Nohuayún. Similar to the approach towards descendants at San Pedro Cholul, discussed below, he initiated contact inquiring about people's familiarity with local heritage markers. These informal notes were later amplified through participant observation, life history records, focused interviews, and questionnaires. At Nohuayún, young residents are aware of the historical buildings and the pre-Columbian vestiges in and around their community. However, the *casco* is mostly perceived from functional and religious perspectives. Patrimonial values and yearning, on the other hand, are only expressed by older community members who engaged with and both physically and symbolically constructed formerly unrestricted spaces, such as plantations, the machinery house, the garden, and the well.

Middle-aged men remember joining their fathers for work at the hacienda and its plantations. While memories of the latter stages of henequen cultivation are rather fond, the lives of grandparents are described in terms of slavery [37] (pp. 95,115,144–145). The self-identified heritage at Nohuayún resembles the case of Konchol/Chuncumil, discussed above. Again, compared to a rather "mystical" relation to their pre-Columbian past, most collective memories of the nineteenth and twentieth century are articulated in a relational manner, associated with the landscape, its buildings, and the accomplished tasks or activities. Survivors of the henequen era and their children remember the hacienda's own dungeon and, more specifically, the suicide death of one former prisoner, as well as inconsistent

schooldays due to shortages among itinerant teachers for rural communities. Their accounts also feature astonishingly detailed comparisons of vapor vs. diesel-driven decortication machines and comprehensive inventories of workers per station, and their respective daily production dues [37] (pp. 101–111).

The villagers also acknowledge the maintenance and restoration work conducted in several of the historical buildings since the hacienda's *casco* last changed ownership. Nonetheless, the creation of gardening jobs is considered to be an even more important positive outcome [37] (pp. 109–129). These feelings contrast with the uneasiness inhabitants express about the recent construction of a higher perimeter wall which detaches the hacienda's core buildings from the rest of the community. Previously, the abandoned *casco* was accessible to everybody and open spaces were used to play baseball, as animal pastures, and playgrounds for children. A notable exception to this divisive development is the Catholic church, which was donated to the community by a previous owner. Here, it was the congregation which moved ahead and raised a delimitating wall [42]. Venegas de la Torre's ethnographic work also demonstrates that heritage privatization is not necessarily considered to be an issue, as its inhabitants acknowledge the *casco* as always being in private hands rather than communal property [37] (p. 146). Regarding the possibility of a tourist enterprise, most current inhabitants do not have a clear opinion. Nevertheless, one informant expressed his doubts regarding any positive impact on the community itself. As long as the development does not involve the villagers in any way—granting they are not yet trained for specialized tasks/jobs—the only beneficiary would be the owner [37] (p. 109).

Regarding the latter, an interview request was refused in the same way that access to the private premises is denied to all non-employees. In a particularly striking example, Venegas de la Torre reports the case of a local pre-school teacher asking to be allowed to teach a group of four of her students about the germination of plants at the vegetable garden. This request was also denied by the hacienda's administrator [37] (p. 99). The author concludes that there is a lack of willingness among privileged stakeholders to interact eye-to-eye with communities. The exclusive focus on the economic value of historical buildings at Nohuayún also becomes evident through the selectiveness of restoration. While the main house and its above-ground rooms were rehabilitated and even embellished by new archways for occasional visits by tourists, storage facilities and dungeons in the basement were left unattended.

At Sihó, ethnographic data have been recovered in different ways. As director of the 2013–2015 field project at the pre-Columbian site, Fernández Souza hired a significant number of workers from the community. In order to avoid claims of favoritism, open and persistent lines of communication with authorities of the *comisaría* and the *ejido* were imperative. As some members of the workforce had already participated in the 2001–2003 UADY-led excavations, acquaintance between archaeologists and participating villagers was strong and on-site dialogues were characterized by mutual trust. In addition, both Fernández Souza and Hernández Álvarez directed undergraduate theses based on ethnoarchaeological research in the present-day community [43,44]. Lastly, Fernández Souza has conducted several collaborative projects with local schools since 2011 [45].

In this community, the hacienda continues to be an intrinsic part of village life. Some of the main public edifices (kindergarten, primary school, municipal and *ejido* offices, clinic, and the chapel) are within two blocks of its *casco*. Thus, men, women, and children habitually walk by the chimney which, much like a burnt-out lighthouse, is visible across the community. The center square or *plaza*, surrounded by the historical buildings, is also the venue for community celebrations, such as the Catholic *gremios*, the festivities dedicated to Saint Anthony, and school graduations. Withal, despite its modest size, Sihó is a complex community and the identities and perceptions of its inhabitants are diverse. This certainly applies to the relation with the hacienda. Both older men and women keep vivid memories of the hacienda's functioning days. Many current inhabitants are sons or daughters of men who used to work on the plantations or in the factory and still remember the way in which the henequen leaves were cut and tied up to be taken out via Decauville tracks. There are also memories of (at least) two accidents occurring over the second half of the twentieth century: a fire in one of the

plantations and the explosion of one of the boilers in the factory. In both cases, men were injured and/or died.

On the other hand, as part of the “Museos Cercanos” project, Fernández Repetto and Fernández Souza [46] conducted a series of talks and questionnaires with local middle school professors and students in 2017. The objective was to ascertain the interests and questions of students regarding their own community in order to develop a virtual museum. While the project is still underway, it is possible to say the way of life of the ancient Maya was a more popular topic than the history of the hacienda. This might be due to the closeness of the archaeological site or because Sihó’s children are aware of recent excavations at the site. Nevertheless, questions about the hacienda were oriented toward the machinery, its uses, and fiber processing. This, again, suggests that present-day Yucatecans conceptually connect physical vestiges with tasks performed by their former occupants.

5. Heritage Protection and Archaeological Research at San Pedro Cholul

The hacienda San Pedro Cholul first caught the attention of archaeologists due to a salvage project in 2007. In accordance with federal laws, the residential development project, “Gran San Pedro Cholul”, required a permit from the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in order to proceed with any change in land use. The corresponding request was submitted by the construction company and, after an initial inspection in June 2005, led to the observation of both pre-Columbian and historical remains, INAH determined a salvage project would be required. The main objective for the ensuing intervention consisted in the protection of the pre-Columbian archaeological remains associated with the aforementioned Tier IV site center located to the west of the hacienda. However, a study of the historical settlement was listed explicitly as Phase VI [47].

From a general perspective, an archaeological salvage project can be perceived as one of few possibilities to understand and protect endangered buildings, materials, and information considered part of a given community’s patrimony [48,49]. While most such enterprises in Mexico focus on the preservation of pre-Columbian sites, occasionally historical remains are front and center. Specifically, the rapid growth of cities threatens buildings such as convents, churches, aqueducts, haciendas, and ports. The ensuing procedures determine which measures could be put in place to avoid the destruction or alteration of tangible heritage. Development projects might be postponed, while archaeological materials are recovered, or might be forced to adapt to the presence of cultural remains by redirecting roads, back-scale building renovations, or by incorporating vestiges into protected green spaces. As examples of Mérida-based salvage projects focusing on historical haciendas figure San Agustín de Pacabtún [50] and Anikabil [51].

Initial surveys at San Pedro reported the presence of a main house, a machinery house with its diagnostic chimney, an administration, a warehouse, and a chapel, as well as a significant number of single-room residences distributed along several former streets. The original project plan also stipulated the excavation and restoration of standing architecture for their future integration into cultural spaces available to the neighborhood’s new residents [47]. However, as the hacienda’s core was included into a conservation zone (similar to the core structures of the pre-Columbian settlement), which prevents developers from building, the company eventually declined funding of any intervention in the corresponding area. Fortunately, San Pedro’s spatial proximity to UADY’s Department of Anthropological Sciences—campus buildings are located 1 km to the west of the hacienda’s core—led to public awareness regarding the presence of archaeological and historical remains. As several students were involved in the INAH-led salvage project through their social service, eventually contact was established between Pantoja Díaz, then project director, and a group of UADY faculty, including Hernández Álvarez and Fernández Souza. Given the lack of private-sector funding for more extensive work at the hacienda, it was agreed a UADY-led historical archaeology project would be beneficial both in terms of heritage management and field school for the department’s archaeology students.

In 2009, UADY archaeologists and students conducted a first field season at San Pedro as a research-oriented extension of the previous salvage project. By then, it had become clear that at least the peon's homes surrounding the hacienda's core would eventually fall victim to residential development. Consequently, mapping, surface collections, and small-scale excavations centered on this working-class segment of San Pedro's population, as shown in Figure 4. Despite the relative urgency to complete labor, this particular investigative focus caused a lot of interest among participants of the Proyecto Arqueología Histórica en la Hacienda San Pedro Cholul (PAHHSPCH). As mentioned above, the henequen era has been extensively studied by historians. However, most written sources provide information first and foremost on the owner families and economic facets, such as production capacities. Data on the day-to-day lives of the *peons*, on the other hand, are largely absent.



Figure 4. Remains of one of the former peon homes at San Pedro, including control grid used for surface collections and test pits.

Over the first field seasons, PAHHSPCH produced evidence for socioeconomic differences among peon families, which were expressed, for example, through quality of housing [52], available infrastructure [53], and access to imported goods [54]. In addition, we were able to reconstruct the subsistence strategies in place during the region's Gilded Age [55]. Successive projects, launched in 2013 and 2016, respectively, moved the focus to the *casco* buildings and eventually to the position of San Pedro within the larger henequen landscape, comprised within the Mérida, Conkal, and Progreso municipalities [56]. To this day, our research has shed light on the quotidian lives and household activities of San Pedro's inhabitants [57], the health conditions which characterized peon families [58,59], and the technological innovations which occurred as part of the industrial revolution in rural Yucatan [60,61].

6. Oral History and Community Outreach at Cholul

As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of the former inhabitants of San Pedro moved to the village of Cholul when San Pedro was gradually abandoned over the latter half of the twentieth century. After our first field season, PAHHSPCH staff approached the civil registry offices in Cholul and learned that some of the former inhabitants of San Pedro who moved to the village were still alive. This fact represented an opportunity to supplement our archaeological and documentary sources of information with oral history. It was also the first time survivors and descendants got engaged with the archaeological salvage work conducted just across the highway that connects the village with the state capital. Following Díaz Ruiz [62], historical memory can be defined as a conscious,

collective effort of communities to entrench with their past—real or imagined—through the assignation of special value and respect. Communities select the facts, which will be imbued with importance and perpetuated through time, thereby creating a sense of identity. Due to its subjective character, collective memory cannot be “recovered” and is instead “constructed”, between interviewee and interviewer, between past and present [63]. Moreover, the recovery of life history accounts was not only a research tool but aimed at contributing to the rescue of the descendant community’s heritage and historical memory [64].

Our commitment to reach out and work to the benefit of survivors and their families grew even stronger after an initial group of three informants agreed to join us on a visit to San Pedro. Returning to the place they grew up in made them feel “as if we were 15 years old again”. However, the walk around overgrown streets and buildings also brought sorrow and the desire to be informed about the fate of San Pedro [65] (pp. 286–288). In addition to former San Pedro residents, we later interviewed present-day inhabitants of Cholul whose relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances provided them with accounts of life at San Pedro. A team of students distributed posters and flyers with the call “Reconstruyamos juntos la historia de Cholul [Let’s reconstruct the history of Cholul together]” across the village. In informative meetings, several interviewees expressed pity over the recent passing of community members who had lived at San Pedro. These neighbors were communally perceived as prime sources of information, as transmission across generations appears to be inconsistent.

In this regard, interviews demonstrated that young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 years do not know about the hacienda. The group of 30- to 40-year-olds was able to identify San Pedro but did not carry own memories, either because they never lived there or because they moved very early in their lives [64] (pp. 274–275). Neighbors beyond the age of 50 did share personal memories and experiences. In the end, a group of seven key informants provided a perspective on the day-to-day lives of the last inhabitants of San Pedro. These interviewees remembered it as a big hacienda; they highlighted the beauty of its chapel and the tranquility of life. Personal accounts also included information on the owners’ families. For example, while San Pedro was a property of the Sánchez family of Mérida, the patron saint was honored every year with celebrations, including a music band, prayers, and *novenas* (Christian tradition of devotional prayers for nine successive days or weeks). However, when ownership was transferred to the Xacur, a family of migrants with roots in Libanon, the festivities were downsized significantly [64] (pp. 275–280).

As to the growth of San Pedro during the Gilded Age, our informants remembered in-state migrants looking for stability and fix wages due to the uncertainties of rain-fed *milpa* agriculture across the region. However, work on the plantations was hard. Working days started as early as 3 a.m. and were concluded at noon. The labor was so strenuous that newcomers struggled mightily. One informant remembered a fatality on a first day of work [64] (pp. 276–278). Our interviewees also stressed the strong gender division of labor present at San Pedro. While men were responsible for all steps in the processing of henequen, women stayed at home preparing meals and tending to children and animals. While boys went to school at Cholul for three years, girls had to stay home too [64] (pp. 278–279). Only Sundays were off and used for trips to Cholul or Sitpach. Mérida was too far for a journey on foot. The majority of San Pedro’s inhabitants did not grow *milpas*. Most of the food and other articles of domestic need were acquired at the hacienda’s own store or the market in Cholul. Soda drinks were considered a luxury and reserved for weekends or special occasions [64] (pp. 279–280).

Consensually, our informants called for San Pedro’s history to be acknowledged and valued. Both younger and older adults were in favor of conserving the hacienda, either as a reminder of the history of the people of Cholul, or as an anchor of personal memories and family histories [64], pp. 280–281. This perception reinforced our motivation to make the results of our research known not only among colleagues in the anthropological realm, but also the general public, and especially the descendant community in Cholul. Among the dissemination activities we have carried out throughout the years figure talks, conferences, and lectures in Mérida schools of different educational levels. Particular strong connections were created with students of the elementary and middle

schools at Cholul. As part of the anniversary celebrations of the Anthropology Department at UADY, PAHHSPCH staff organized a symposium featuring preliminary research results in the fall of 2010. The symposium was directed toward the general public and presentations were specifically intended to reach a non-specialist audience. In addition, we assembled a museum-style exhibition with historical artifacts recovered during the first field season at San Pedro. Different types of materials, such as coins, glass bottles, pieces of machinery, ceramic fragments, metates and grinding stones, metal containers, and various kinds of tools, were displayed together with advertisement documents of the time. Both events were attended by diverse audiences, including university authorities, teachers, and students, as well as Cholul residents and other visitors, as shown in Figure 5. The presentation of the book “Sendas del henequén” [66] during Yucatan’s international book fair in 2017 was similarly successful in terms of attracting Cholul residents as part of the audience.



Figure 5. PAHHSPCH staff with Cholul school children at the 2010 exhibition of historical artifacts from San Pedro.

7. The Fate of Henequen Haciendas

Since the INAH-led salvage project started in 2007, there was concern about the eventual destruction of the hacienda San Pedro Cholul. PAHHSPCH’ early research focus on the peon house lots was motivated to a substantial degree by the belief those peripheral remnants would disappear sooner rather than later. We did not conduct exploratory excavations in San Pedro’s *casco* before the 2013 field season. In order to obtain funding for more extensive interventions, Hernández Álvarez submitted a proposal for a three-year research project to the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) in 2015. The project was authorized by both CONACYT and INAH the following year and granted funds in excess of MXN 1,000,000. However, despite this shift in attention and the necessary financial support, the chapel was the only larger construction for which the project goals were met, as the core buildings of San Pedro were almost entirely dismantled by heavy machinery in March 2018 [57], as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Aerial photo of San Pedro after almost complete destruction of *casco* buildings. Foreground: Machinery house and chimney. Background: Residential development Gran San Pedro Cholul.

After the hacienda's destruction was reported, INAH officials immediately proceeded to verify the infraction, assess the damage, and seal off the affected areas. The following administrative process entailed a formal investigation regarding the destruction of built historical heritage. A request was sent to the construction company to submit a statement and a series of meetings and appearances were held to clarify the purported acts and to plan damage compensation. As no agreement was reached, INAH turned the case to the Procuraduría General de la República (Mexico's offices of the attorney general) where expert opinions have been solicited and the first hearings conducted. Although both INAH and UADY staff have been trying to persuade developers to preserve and protect the remains of the hacienda for almost a decade (for example, delivering copies of all reports and publications), their position remains without change—the presence of historical remains decreases the surface area for new residential buildings and therefore diminishes revenue. While we argued San Pedro would generate added value to the new residential neighborhood as a park, recreative area, or cultural center, architects and engineers had found the buildings to be too damaged to warrant a reconstruction. To our knowledge, the descendant community did not engage with the developers either before or after dismantling.

The decision to demolish most of the buildings of San Pedro's *casco* is even more difficult to comprehend in view of the company's advertising strategy for the residential development. Gran San Pedro Cholul not only adopted the name associated with the former hacienda but is also promoted under the slogan "Grandeza de Tres Culturas"—the grandeur of three cultures. The official website [67] opens with a video describing the development of a neighborhood where the past and the present fuse together. Potential buyers are courted with the perspective "to live among the vestiges of a millenary pre-Columbian civilization and the nostalgic presence of hacienda *cascos* from times of henequen splendor (translation by first author)". A click on the "Tips y Artículos" tab on the same website clarifies some of the perceptual differences. Among the heritage sites recommended to new neighbors are the archaeological zone of Aké and the hacienda San Pedro Ochil. The former is a public heritage site under the direction of INAH, located 27 km to the east, while the latter is a restored henequen

hacienda in private hands, which houses a restaurant, is rented for social events, and is situated 45.5 km to the southwest.

8. Discussion

This brief review of our own and other colleagues' experiences studying Yucatan's industrial heritage from an anthropological perspective has brought to light the complex relationship between present-day stakeholders and the material remains of former haciendas [68]. Recreating a neocolonial pattern observed on a global scale [24] (p. 294), tourism promoters and, truth be told, many archaeologists portray the region's patrimony as a static entity firmly tying Yucatec culture to the pre-Columbian Maya civilization. However, a closer look at more recent time periods tells a different story. Until the early 1990s there was arguably no pan-Maya identity among indigenous communities of the Yucatan Peninsula and adjacent Guatemalan highlands [18]. Although few, the cases presented in this article demonstrate that present-day communities might be more or less aware of the remnants of pre-Columbian settlements in their surroundings. Moreover, consciousness of what is technically known as tangible heritage depends heavily on a person's occupation, his or her age and gender, and possible contact with professionals of the area.

This perceptual variation regarding heritage extends into the industrial era and its vestiges. Communities do not ascribe value or perceive themselves as heirs to a given culture or society of the past simply because of the existence of nearby architectural or other material remains. As Ingold [26] puts it, the landscape, natural and cultural, does not impose on people. Instead, people build a relationship with their environment through interaction. Memory and the perception of heritage are part of this dynamic system. Ethnographic work shows how this relational memory is driven by physical experiences and the embodiment of interactions with natural and social forces. Eyewitness accounts of Yucatan's Gilded Age converge on the arduousness of labor on henequen plantations, the rare taste of soda beverages, the isolation of holding cells, or the joy of religious festivities. The heritage of Yucatan's henequen haciendas does not lie in their buildings, but the lives lived within them.

Acknowledgement of this fact is crucial for any effort toward heritage preservation. If stakeholders are not somehow related to a given site, they will not imbue it with a symbolic patrimonial or any other value. The example of large-scale developing enterprises indicates the greater the resources and the access to land, the bigger the potential threat. As evidenced by San Pedro Cholul, in extreme cases, this can lead to the outright destruction of material markers of heritage, even though the glorious moments of an abstract past are seemingly being celebrated. However, the dismantlement of entire buildings by heavy machinery is not the only factor in the disappearance of pre-Columbian or historical vestiges in the region. The small-scale yet pervasive extraction of stones for construction purposes originated during Colonial times and continues to be one of the most common forms of looting, specifically in rural Yucatan [69] (pp. 20–21). Nonetheless, the relationship between human communities and their patrimony is not characterized by dialectic opposites. The examples from Nohuayún and Sihó exhibit how material remains are often neither completely destroyed nor reverberated. Rather, they are transformed and continuously imbedded into the daily lives of surrounding communities. The conversion of a Gilded-Age construction into a drinking water dispensary might not cause delight among archaeologists, historians, or tourism promoters, yet at the end of the day the building persists. Similar to the destruction of historical buildings in order to increase the surface available for new developments, here the economic value outweighs a merely ideational consideration. The difference is that, in one case, almost an entire hacienda was destroyed, while only a few walls were modified in the other.

Challenging the constricted perception of tangible heritage as a display of itself [70] (p. 7), we acknowledge that soccer or baseball games in the yards of former haciendas do not conform either to the largely contemplative relation which defines visits to most official patrimonial sites in Mexico. Nonetheless, we also recognize that communities continue to maintain ties to these locales and assign

recreational value. In comparison, the transformation of San Antonio Nohuayún's open spaces for horticultural purposes appears to be closer to historical reality. The detailed mapping of San Pedro's *casco*, for example, led to the identification of an enclosure with hydraulic infrastructure, such as feeder channels and reservoirs, indicating the existence of a vegetable garden [71]. Together, our case studies suggest that the preservation of Yucatecan henequen haciendas does not depend as much on the structural integrity of their standing architecture, but their potential value to the communities which interact with them.

As mentioned by Meyers [6] (p. 143), “engagement with descendant communities and other stakeholders will bolster the strategies that are brought to bear on (...) questions [of heritage preservation].” In this regard, we have to consider that the tensions between the vestiges of the past and the actors of the present in the context of haciendas or other patrimonial sites are still largely mediated through the control of neocolonial elites over the aesthetics of economically valuable landscapes [24] (p. 279). For example, in seeking to integrate tangible heritage into new residential developments or other private landholdings, proposals to turn them into museums, restaurants, or spas might be a more viable option than advocating for their preservation as part of green spaces. This argument aligns with Hutson et al. [28] (p. 8), who express no a priori conflict over the support of economic interests, specifically when they favor heritage preservation. On the other hand, rural settlements, linked to their past as remnants of former haciendas, see the emergence of actors who defend their built heritage more pragmatically by giving it value through their daily actions and recreational use.

In order to reach sustainable agreements, it is imperative to identify all parties of interest [28], p. 4–5. So far, this paper considered professionals in charge of heritage preservation, developers, and descendant communities. However, the case of San Pedro is exemplary for the limitations of such coarse, non-inclusive categories. Given access restrictions to residential developments, such as Gran San Pedro Cholul, once the construction of houses is concluded, many new neighborhoods become walled-off. Unless they own a residence or are involved in a neighborhood business, the descendants of the former hacienda would not be granted access to whatever historical remains will be kept in place. This is yet another clear example of what has been framed as communities being “legislated out” of the opportunity of being managers of their heritage [24] (p. 289). Despite our unconformity with such policies, we also want to stress that the new homeowners will be in constant proximity to the land and everything on it. It is very likely that some kind of relationship will be established between this community and the remains of the hacienda (and the pre-Columbian site).

It is here where efforts toward heritage preservation must be more inclusive and aware of the multiplicity of stakeholders. Without denying the compelling and primordial claims of descendants, we believe the presence of new residents in an area presents an opportunity more than a threat to heritage sites. However, for this to become true, these communities must also be actively involved in the decision-making process. Without a previous relation to the landscape and its constituting elements, it is unlikely (yet not impossible) that newcomers will acquiesce to merely contemplative uses of the land. It is more plausible for transformative proposals, such as recreational spaces or small-scale businesses, to find appeal. Withal, the creation of ties between new groups of stakeholders and the landscape does not have to wait for preservation concepts to be put in place. One strategy, which has been increasingly implemented in recent years to raise awareness, is place-based education [24] (pp. 237–275). For example, after developing a series of outdoors archaeology workshops for Native American youths in the state of Wisconsin, USA, Reetz and Quackenbush [72] (p. 500) contend that this approach possesses the potential to improve environmental stewardship. Their indigenous students appeared to benefit more from science and ecology-related lessons and were more encouraged to be the “tellers of their own existence, of their past, present, and future”.

Residents of the city of Mérida have been able to partake in similar experiences, thanks to the efforts of the municipal government, UADY, as well as NGO's, such as *Xiímbal K'áax* and AYERAC. The municipality's summer program “Taller de Arqueología para Niñas y Niños” [73] and the “Arqueofest 2019” [74] have received particularly strong public appraisal. Both are tailored toward

elementary school audiences and aim at reinforcing regional identities and promoting the appreciation of the region's (bio)cultural heritage. Although the objectives include a challenge to the perception of an archaeology dedicated exclusively to the discovery of ancient masonry buildings in remote locales, both events are held in city parks with partially restored archaeological remains. Here, children are encouraged to participate in educational activities which are fun and, at the same time, cause appreciation. The hosting groups of archaeologists also invite both kids and their parents on guided tours through the respective sites. Given the multiethnic character and the accelerated growth of Mérida, most of the families who attend these events might not consider themselves direct descendants of the pre-Columbian or historical settlements serving as venues. They are, however, part of the neighboring communities of the present and, therefore, hold both claims and present the potential to be acknowledged as stakeholders.

9. Conclusions

This review exposed the importance of establishing links with descendant communities and other groups of stakeholders regarding the preservation and management of historical heritage in Yucatan. PAHHSPCH sought to provide San Pedro's descendants with opportunities to express their visions of a heritage site with which they had related for generations before its eventual abandonment. Nevertheless, we failed at broadening our perspective on the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in the preservation of tangible heritage by not acknowledging the new residents of Gran San Pedro Cholul. Of course, there is no guarantee that a neighbor's appeal could have prevented the destruction of the hacienda, but developers would have had to negotiate with an additional interest group. At Nohuayún, villagers convinced owners to donate the hacienda's chapel to the community. At Sihó, residents continue to find ways to adapt historical architecture to their current necessities. It is likely the new homeowners at Gran San Pedro Cholul would have appreciated exploring the possibilities of relating to a neighborhood with historical remains.

In conclusion, we believe in the social responsibility of institutions, specifically those funded by taxpayers, to collaborate with and disseminate knowledge to the communities who sustain them. Regarding archaeological projects in Mexico specifically, this includes INAH, state governments, as well as public universities, such as UADY. Research objectives ought to include helping present-day populations, descendants or newcomers, to turn into co-managers and protectors of their own heritage. We realize that the mechanisms for the community stewardship of tangible heritage have yet to be articulated. Similar to many other countries, in Mexico monuments have historically been prioritized over the people who lived and continue living in and around them. In order to transfer more rights and responsibilities to communities, a collaborative perspective must be incorporated into the academic discourse of those in charge of training new generations of archaeologists. It is only when professionals and other stakeholders are comfortably seeing eye-to-eye that sustainable ways of heritage preservation can be agreed upon.

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