



UN VAGÓN HERMOSO

A beautiful wagon,
a project by
Ecoclubes Buratovich
and LoCurativo



UN VAGÓN HERMOSO

Un Vagón Hermoso is a project to restore two abandoned train cars in the rural town of Mayor Buratovich, Argentina with the intent to reevaluate ideas of community development, and to reactivate the voices and historical visions first begun by the immigrants who founded the town at the turn of the century.

The railway wagons will be used as a community workspace with internet access, literature, and supplies (wagon one) and as a residence for visiting artists and other guests (wagon two) linking local youth, free agents, and artists in the realization of social projects via exhibitions, art workshops, outdoor cinema events, access to technology, the creation of small edition literature, interviews among neighbors and new immigrants, group meals/public picnics, and other manifestations that value *public* over *private* and the *collective* over the *individual*.

Un Vagón Hermoso values itself as an 'open' project, that re-invites conversation regarding historical processes and politics that haven't been discussed since the

* Political slogan from the 1900s based on the idea of progress embodied in the railways. Many towns (like Buratovich) were founded alongside the train tracks as result of these ideas.



disillusionment created after ‘progreso y porvenir’*, and gives new meaning to the potential for goodness through community public work.

BROKEN DOWN WAGON

During the 1990s Argentina systematically de-nationalized and dismantled the largest railroad system in Latin America. Built by French and British capital in the late 1800s, the lines were acquired by the country in the 1940s by the government of Juan Perón. The privatization of the railway lines under the government of Carlos Menem left many small towns completely isolated (a result of the closure of all lines ‘not profitable’ to the private company who bought the industry). Train stations were left in abandon and the train cars and wagons were left to decay or to be vandalized. Railway workers found themselves out of jobs.

Héctor ‘Don Gomez’ is an employee of the railway and a local. He says from his experiences living and working in Buratovich that in 1949, ‘there used to be a world of people here,’ and that everyone, everyone arrived by train. ‘Look,’ he says, ‘I can tell you, without exaggeration, that here, on this side, y’see, right here and in that platform there, it was crowded with folks! Magazines, hawkers, everything would come by train an it was quite an event, as you can imagine... You wouldn’t be able to recall, but when the train stopped coming, during Menem, it was like...it was like... a great sadness, a void.’

ABOUT THE TOWN

Mayor Buratovich is a small town, of about 5,000 inhabitants in the southern tip of the Province of Buenos Aires, in the humid plains of the Argentinean Pampas. Its inhabitants are largely European immigrants and the children of those immigrants who arrived by the establishment of the railway network in the early 20th

century. It is a rural area that produces, almost exclusively, onions for export. The new immigrants to the area are Bolivians and migrant workers from the northern Argentinean provinces of Jujuy, Salta, and Santiago del Estero, who work in the fields to harvest the onion. Twenty one percent of the population lives below the level of poverty.

THE WAGONS AND THE PARK

Un Vagón Hermoso is restoring and renovating two *British Hurst Nelson & Co.* train cars that have been abandoned on the tracks of Mayor Buratovich for the last thirty years. They partly survived the 'looting years,' in which three other wagons were completely stolen from the station, and in which, windows, doors, wood, and ironwork were stolen, burnt, or cast off. A forsaken train car represented a forsaken landscape. And so it went, in the area of the tracks, that the town divided in two. On one side is the town square, new houses, and progress. On the other side of the tracks; poor neighborhoods and dirt streets. But these days, there is a park among the tracks, a solitary gardener sows seeds from sunrise to dusk, and there are plants; little trees growing with force, and *rayito de sol* [sunray] flowers. Behind him are the wagons, no longer forsaken.

On Sunday mornings, the people from the poor side of town cross the tracks in order to buy supplies at the shops or to bring their children to the town square. Now that there is a little park here, they come by the short cut past the wagons instead of the long way across the roads. On nice days the park is full of people. There are swings, a slide, and a merry-go-round. Cement benches, placed in the round, are a popular spot for young lovers. The elderly from the town, that can remember back to the times of the railroad, say that this area used to be filled with grains and wood, all set up and ready to load into the wagons, 'the barn of the world.' The days of abandonment came due the day that Dardo Berríos first began to plant his seeds, and so now, amongst the train cars life is vibrant and green.





THE ALLIANCE AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCURATIVO AND UN VAGÓN HERMOSO

During the Argentine Winter Holiday of 2007, the first band of artists and activists arrived in Buratovich. They organized free art workshops for the community and helped in the continued restoration of the wagons. They interviewed locals and Bolivian weavers. For the finale, a big party was held by the wagons at dusk, with a shadow performance, giant puppets made from recycled material, and an exhibition of student woodcuts and pinhole photography.



In 2007 members of Vagón Hermoso sufficiently renovated one of the train cars. This May, Un Vagón Hermoso will hold more workshops in this newly renovated space, including Printmaking and Photography workshops that the artists of LoCurativo first introduced to Buratovich.

THE NEXT STEP

The remaining wagon will be converted into an artist's residency, where invited artists can produce their work and both teach and learn from the community. The space will also serve to host people and collectives for the development of artistic, social, environmental, technological, and educational projects. The wagon will be equipped as tiny house with a sleep space, workspace, and library. It will incorporate ecologically friendly components into its design, including a garden of sustainable and useful vegetation and an outdoor compost toilet. The Residency Wagon will build bonds of friendship and knowledge through shared experiences of working together for common goals.

NEEDS

There are many things needed in order to realize Vagón Hermoso's Residency Wagon. Funds are needed to cover the costs of repair, materials, equipment, furnishings, and power for the space itself; alliances need to be formed with other organizations and people in order to inform and fortify its operations; and efforts need to be made to spread information about the project, relaying the project's objectives, and inviting new collaborators. As of now, the project does not have any sponsorship or government grants, nor has it received support from any companies or the private sector. It has sustained its self solely through community work. Un Vagón Hermoso is open to receive support and aid from others, from other places and with distinctive ideas and interests in the establishment of public space.



DARDO

I would like to see, and not because of the money I could make out of it, a nice garden in every house, with a nice big tree next to it for shade. It's a different kind of living. You go to a house and you find a tree orchard or a grapevine. My sister is married to a Chilean and I went to Valparaíso to visit her. It's really unbelievable: every house there has its garden, it's like a duty; people care. Everything is green, green, green. Even the sides of the streets are green. It's beautiful.

I started out early on. In 1958, my family came here to Buratovich. I was ten years old, and so we stayed. I began working on extensive agriculture from a very young age; I cultivated pepper and tomato beds. Because I met people working on the land, I began getting involved as well. I've always liked learning, and so I've always liked observing people who know how to work the land. A Paraguayan taught me how to make planting beds — how to prepare the bed properly to make the plantings grow, making little furrows with tiny stalks and handling tiny seeds. It's quite complex, as it's not just taking the seed and making a hole and burying it. Everything has to be very neat, down to the little strings; everything has to be very straight. The organization and details of the beds are very important.

I came to work at the Municipality in 1994 as a park manager. I worked with them for ten years until they finally put me on the payroll ['mensualizaron' — people here are usually paid with no written contract and no health benefits, which means you can get fired anytime, etc. until you are put on the payroll].

I started out without really knowing what to do because no one told me what needed to be done. The government never said, 'Look, you have to do it this way', but I figured out what had to be done anyway. During specific times of the year, you grow vegetables. One season ends and another starts, and you have to keep going. It's all about continuity. Because if you stop the cycle, then you have to find another line of work. You can't say, 'I'll close down tomorrow' and that's it,





because you cannot give all these resources away, and you can't sell it either. I started thinking, 'It's been so many years since I've been doing this. What else am I going to do? I think that when my time comes to retire, I will keep on doing this as a hobby. Because, what else could I do? Intensive farming? No, that's already been done.'

THE GREENHOUSE

When I started out, the municipality put me to work here to create a park, where the old train station is. We had to produce plants because there weren't enough existing plants to create a park. I built a greenhouse smaller than this one, out of nylon, to begin production. That same year, an agricultural engineer came to give a workshop at the town's public school. I happened to be there; it was perfect timing because at that moment I needed someone to guide me, and explain to me how heating works and how to germinate seeds — the whole universe of giving birth to a plant. So right there I signed up, and I took the workshop.

We had a plan for a community garden here funded by *Plan Trabajar**. The first couple of months, everybody came to work, but then when they figured out that they could get paid without working, everyone stopped coming. Afterwards there was a project with a delegate, because over here things work or don't work according to whose delegate or politician happens to be around — it's all very complicated. You could have a project that you work on and put all your efforts into, and things get going. But then a new delegate comes along and nothing gets done anymore. Things are left undone. It's very hard.

With the community gardens, we were doing very well. We knew that by the end of the year we would have vegetables, and suddenly, in the middle of the year, the

* Subsidies granted by the Government for unemployed individuals, developed during the '90s. In exchange for money (about 50 U.S dollars, monthly) people were to be enrolled in courses to learn crafts/skills for future re-insertion in the working force. Most of these plans — involving community gardens, sewing workshops, cooperatives, etc. — failed.

government changed and that was all over. No more vegetables, tractors, nothing. I never get involved in politics; I stay quiet, because if the current government knows you're with another party, it may not be beneficial. So I go out and do my job without complaints. But I don't want to get involved beyond that.

It's been eight years of all of this, and sometimes I don't know why I keep on doing it, because everyday you have to renew yourself spiritually. It's like, 'get-up-and-get shot'. You have to give to yourself everyday because no one is going to say, 'Relax, I'll take care of it.' I've just had a 28-day vacation from work, and I spent all of it here. Who'll take care of it, if not me? Even if you have only five flowers, you still have to come and water them. You can't just say, 'I'm tired, I'll come some other day...'

There is a commitment to your community. You see people coming in looking for a plant or a nice flower to look at. They like it. They need it. It's necessary. The town needs a place to come look at plants. Places like this should be everywhere, but unfortunately, they aren't. These things should be done and taught in schools. Forestation is a crucial issue, vital to the human race. It's one of the most important activities there is, because if we don't have clean air from the forest, then we're done. It's really catastrophic what has been done with the cultivation of soy — too many trees have been cut down. A couple of years from now, when the sun starts to give sun stroke to the cattle, people will realize that there aren't enough shade areas. That will happen because no one thought it out. Now that the sun is getting harsher and harsher, the time will come when shade is needed. And even if a tree grows quickly, you still have to wait at least four or five years until it yields some shade.

I don't have money, I haven't made much of a profit. This isn't the kind of thing that will bring you high profit. I can say, though, I have a lot of plant capital. The onion growers are the ones that make money; they put two onions in two bags and sell it for ten pesos.



'These beams I had over there. The Acacia ones (not these; these are from Alamo which I chopped in the fields) are eight years old, the ones that are down there, like columns...others I used as roofbeams, others...well, they are all over the place. So...the course was very useful for learning these things... I learned...well, you know...you never really stop learning with these things, you see?'



'This is a nice setup, because you can make a dirt pile anywhere, even in your house; you make a pile and then dig out a hole and cover it with nylon and that's it, you're all set.'



GROWING ONION

Monoculture is bad, because in the end it betrays you. I say that the blond onion is an important type of onion because it gets exported. It doesn't have an internal market, the same that the wheat and meat does, it goes to other countries. The only problem is here in the land, when they've finished with the harvest, they desert it. They don't say, 'Okay, now we are going to sow pastures here for eight to ten years to re-enrich the soil.' No. And due to not planting anything, the fields are becoming useless. You can revitalize an onion field after the first year (you put a lot of urea on it) then you will be able to plant corn, any kind of grain, anything. But generally they don't do this...because you can find a diseased, sick bulb in one year and the next it spreads to 40, 50% of the crop, this is the problem. In the past, ten or fifteen years ago, they would plant the crop two to three years in a row. But now, every time, the plants are more susceptible. I don't know if it's an infestation or if it's the chemicals. The same chemicals give me the impression that they are it, and the same seed can have a little infection that spreads to the other seeds, perhaps not, but the germ is in the seed.

To cultivate the crops more conscientiously would mean suffering economically, so it's not the custom. We haven't incorporated the habits to do it other ways. As far as the organic thing goes, I tend towards the organic, which is the most natural, you see. It's the best there is. The organic way you can design from the beginning with the intention of continued crops, by using animals, leaves, compost, all these things. It takes time, and you have to be able to see the return you will get because it'll take a lot out of you.

The fields of reforestation and of agriculture are something I really like. It's passion that gives me the will to finish this. Because there are some days when I want to give it all up to the devil, you know, gather it all up, but that would hurt, as it has cost me so much.

WEAVING FOR DANCING

Fidelina Bedoya Llanos was born in Culpina, in the province of Sud Cinti, in Chuquisaca, Bolivia. The region of Culpina is a small valley located 3,000 meters above sea level. Some years ago, she and her family emigrated to Argentina to work. She lives in Buratovich with her husband and their three children, in a house with big windows and much sunlight that they built by working in the onion fields. Like many women in her family, Fidelina has been weaving since she was a child.

Where I used to live, it is the custom that before being allowed to go out to dance or to the parties, the peasant woman needs to learn how to weave, tiny things, but using the loom.

Then like this, you have to weave this way, first something little, then a bigger one ... there is this thing called aguayo, later you go for a cama... it is like a bed cover, a blanket... this is what we use... you have to make two, three at the least. After two you are allowed to start going out to dance. Then you belong, but if you don't do these things the same community will criticize you.

My mother taught me when I was...because I was so...since I wanted to learn to dance so bad, I started weaving when I was thirteen, fourteen years old.

CULPINA

It was a small town then, that seems so strange to me now, it grew... the town. Now everyone has cars, trucks or vans... When I was young, only a single person would pass by, by bike or walking. Now there're buses, roads.

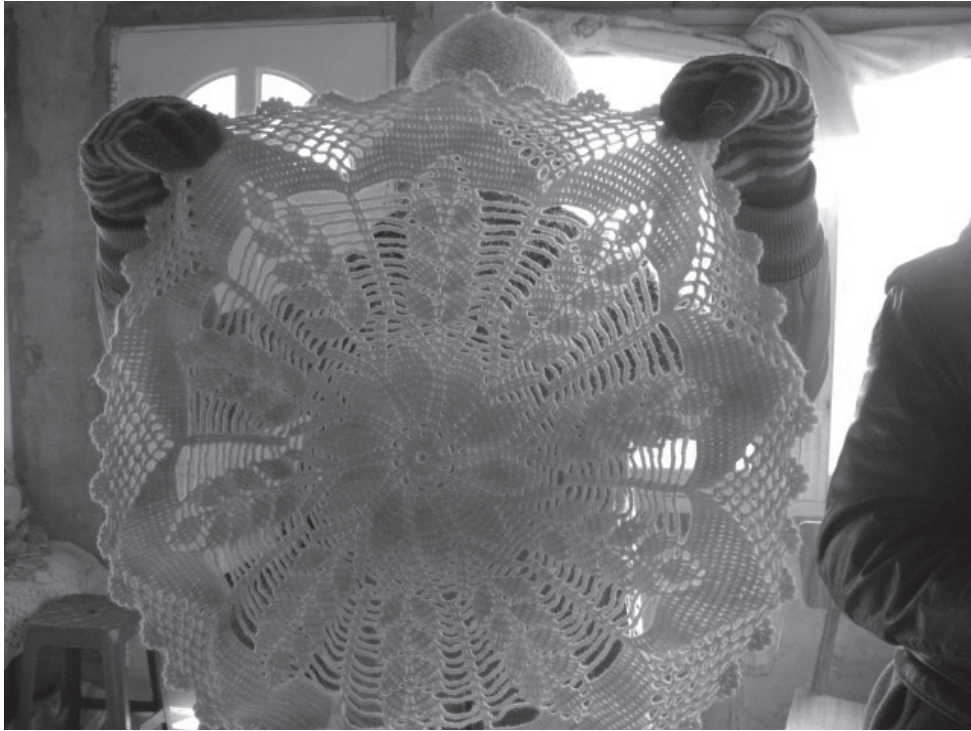
After I came to Burato I found some other people from Culpina that already wove, crocheted, the things we did there. I began to look at it more closely, I began to like it... I also began to feel more confident...the more I made, and so I continued to do it.



Here in Argentina the tradition of weaving has almost been lost, you can still do it...but even among us, no one uses the loom anymore.

Our culture is already getting lost. People from Culpina don't speak Quechua anymore. If you speak it, then you get criticized. By Argentines and by people of our own community as well. This is due to a lack of information, and ignorance. It's Ignorance.

Lately, women in Culpina are more invested in working the land, in having produce and living off the land. They work like we do here. It's not like it used to; I remember my mother, my grandparents, my uncles; we all did cortes, that's how it was called.



They made fabric from scratch, spinning the wool of the sheep first. Very, very fine at first; then by weaving that they made a huge fabric that I think was sold by the yard...as cloth, they did that with the same loom. And well, for many years people lived off that.

I would like to live that way. It's a job I enjoy, something you can do from home. It's a job you can feel comfortable doing if you know how to do it.

If you have someone who is going to buy it, what ever article you are doing, then you know you have to complete it, because you know they will pay well, and that makes you feel good because you know you are going to, lets say, receive. This is what my mother made us do. Everytime there was a party, she would make us weave until very late at night so we had something to do.

ONION AND WEAVING

My sons know about it. They know because I tell them, and their father also tells them, that when he wasn't studying he'd have to go work in the field. And I also tell them. And they ask me:

Mommy, if I were a woman would you teach me the things you are doing?

Yes. Yes because Marcelino's wife has a girl who knows how to weave. Zulemita knows how to weave, and crochet, and knit. And they ask me:

If I were a girl, mommy, would you teach me?

In fact, they know how. Joni and Cristian know how to do crochet. Because there are times when it is so cold, when there is one here that cant go outside, it's too cold to go outside and so I take charge and give them needles.

My husband here is very sexist. He says, 'Why!...you'll make them sissies.' But that's not true I tell him because here in Argentina I see men doing the same

things as women, they teach, and they are in public, on television, like the teacher who came here, I went to his classes... and he was a man! And he knew as well as a woman... I can't make him [my husband] understand; but no, when my sons are here with me, they sit and do it with me because they say it makes them feel relaxed.

They were asking me one day:

Mom, do you also feel relaxed when you are doing that?

Yes. Is something that relaxes one, when you have problems, when you are going through something. I sit and work. I always have something to knit or crochet.

It's like that, it's... therapy. Weaving is therapy. For me is therapy. My children feel the same way. 'how at ease, mommy, ' they say, 'how you relax with these things!' Because you have to concentrate.

If you are interested in buying some of Fidelina Bedoya Llanos weavings,
you can communicate directly with her by her phone number: +54 0291 155 778 699



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