



Aly Sayani Project Reflection - Summer 2
Reaction_for_climate

Project Summary

My project this summer was a hybrid leadership-in-action project in collaboration with MakeSense Foundation, Mexico, in their reaction_for_climate program. The program was a 6-week program, beginning July 18th and running until August 27th. The first two weeks of the program were done entirely online, and involved us connecting with our organization, planning our first two weeks in Mexico, and identifying our key goals and challenges throughout the project. We were 16 scholars split into 8 teams with 8 separate projects collaborating with local environmental organizations in Mexico City.

My project partner Victoria and I were assigned to work with Widu, an app that aims to give users quick access to their carbon and water footprint, actions they can take in return for rewards points that can be used for discounts in local organic stores, and promote local community environmental events that users can attend. Our goal was to help increase their number of users and assist them in the launch of their app in Mexico City. We aimed to achieve this goal through a three-pronged approach, that involved a social media campaign, a business recruitment campaign, and the organization of a local community cleanup event through the app.

The social media campaign involved the creation of content to be posted on Widu's TikTok and Twitter pages. We aimed to produce a variety of content, that included raising environmental awareness, working with trends on TikTok to try and produce viral content, interviews with locals on their opinions about the environment and what they believe stifles effective climate action, as well as promotional videos for the events that were being organized on the app.

The business recruitment campaign aimed to recruit local sustainable businesses onto the Widu app by creating them a page, and promoting them through a blog post on ‘Sustainable businesses in Roma Norte’, with a long term collaboration in mind for them to potentially provide discounts too in the rewards section of the app, in return for free promotion.

The local community cleanup event aimed to demonstrate the ability of the app to organize a local community event, which would then also be used to create promotional content for the app after the event. The cleanup event aimed to find a local area with a large amount of rubbish, and would be participated in by local or makesense volunteers.

Responsibilities/Activities Week by Week

In the first two weeks of the project, we used mural to draft our initial goals and roadmaps for the project once in Mexico City. These two weeks were also used to cement our understanding of a ‘design thinking’ process, which would assist us in tackling the challenges that we faced upon arrival in Mexico City.

In Week 3, we met our organization co-founders to discuss our three-pronged approach, which was strongly received. We then began to plan ideas on a social media schedule, including ideas we wanted to pursue. This involved picking the best times to post, and isolating what content would go in which time slots. We also began to plan our volunteer recruitment campaign, which involved creating marketing on Instagram, a volunteer recruitment form, and drafting and sending emails about the project to prospective volunteers. For our business recruitment campaign, we made a list of local businesses that had potential to be on the app that we would then go and speak to directly if they were interested. We aimed to make contact and collect their key contact details to get them on the Widu system. Regarding our event organization, we aimed to identify key potential sites for our cleanup event.

In Week 4, we began reaching out to potential volunteers and creating plans for what we wanted them to do. Regarding the social media schedule, we began to develop an information/research bank that we would use to bolster the environmental awareness side of the TikTok campaign, and continued coming up with ideas for what to do. We began making our first TikTok, and increased the size of Widu's twitter page following. Regarding the business campaign, we began to speak to some local businesses in the weekend bazaars to see if they would be interested, familiarized ourselves with the Widu app system, and made a registration form for any organization that wanted to join the Widu community. We also registered some of our makesense partner project's events onto the app, which we would use to create promotional content for the app. We carried out key site visits to find an area that would be good for a cleanup, and decided on the canals of Xochimilco, where a kayak tour company agreed to take some volunteers on a cleanup of the canals in the final week of the project. Details about this were being discussed.

In Week 5, we liaised with our volunteers to transcribe our TikToks into Spanish. Furthermore, a volunteer and I went out into local areas to conduct interviews with people on what they thought/felt about climate change, and what they would think about an app like Widu. These interviews were then transcribed by our volunteers, and I began to edit them into a promotional video for Widu's TikTok. We continued organizing final details of our cleanup event in Xochimilco, began posting TikTok's regularly, and registered more of our project partners and their events on the Widu app. We also attended two extinction rebellion events organized on our app, that were filmed and used to create promotional content for the TikTok page.

In our final week, we continued with our TikTok schedule, attended La Fiesta de Sostenibilidad which involved 4 of our MakeSense project partners, which we filmed and used for more promotional content for our TikTok. We also attended the Maya Tren protest with Extinction Rebellion Mexico, and filmed it for promotional use on our TikTok. We organized for some volunteers to attend and then executed the Kayak event cleanup on the Thursday of our final week, and filmed the work that we did for use to promote Widu. We presented our final work at the MakeSense closing event on the Friday, and finished the creation of our promotional TikToks.

Outcomes

We produced several outcomes as a result of our work and our volunteers' work over these 6 weeks. Assessing our initial three-pronged campaign, we successfully made several TikToks which promoted events organized on the app, raised environmental awareness and attempted several trends. We gained some followers, but not as many as we had initially aimed for. We failed to sign up as many local businesses as we had initially hoped for, but made QR posters that we stuck up in key locations around Roma for people to scan to download the app. Regarding our environmental cleanup event, this was a great success as we managed to clean organize a community action through the app, which created a positive impact by producing 7 large garbage bags worth of trash we picked up from the canals. Furthermore, Kayak Xochimilco were open to making the event a regular occurrence, which provided the basis for a long term partnership with the Widu app.

A slightly more hidden success, which was not initially aimed for but was produced as a result of our efforts, was the creation of content that showed the power of the app to organize community action. We successfully advertised an activism workshop, a sustainability festival, a protest and our kayak cleanup event all through the app, which was not initially our aim but proved a great success and helped in the creation of some good TikTok promotional content. Furthermore, despite not gaining many followers, we likely got the app around 75-100 more downloads simply through our interactions with volunteers and locals when conducting interviews and discussing the project with businesses.

Leadership Skills

This project was far from straightforward, and we were presented with several challenges throughout the project which allowed for the development of many leadership skills. Pragmatism and

bravery were key skills that were developed through the project, as it was often difficult to communicate with locals and businesses without a strong grasp of Spanish. This required some courage to continue going even when mistakes were made, and there was fear of miscommunication. Having to work around our lack of Spanish to still create an impactful project required resilience and courage that we maybe did not initially expect we would need as much of.

Key time management skills were also developed through the project, as deadlines for posting and content creation had to be met every day, with different aspects of the project having different timelines which all had to be managed simultaneously.

Other key skills that were required and subsequently developed through the project were that of ambition, steadfastness, punctuality, transparency and good communication.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my immense gratitude to the Laidlaw Foundation and the Laidlaw Scholars Program at the University of Toronto for organizing this incredible opportunity and helping facilitate my growth as a leader, both through academic research and leadership-in-action. I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the MakeSense team - Brenda Sanudo, Ailed Ortiz and Davizz Pablos who made the trip an unforgettable experience, and a massive thank you to my incredible project partner Victoria Lynn, without whom this project would not have been anywhere near as fruitful as it was.