Laidlaw Reflection Summer 2

There are several key learnings that I will take away from the experiences I had when working in Mexico City with the reaction_for_climate project this summer. The project, as described in more detail in my summer 2 report, was full of unexpected twists, unpredictable hurdles, but a valuable education with every new day.

One of the first challenges that we faced in our project with Widu, our MakeSense project partner, was adapting to reality on the ground once arriving in Mexico. We had come up with a preliminary plan in the first two weeks of the program to structure the work that we would do once arriving in Mexico City at the end of week 2. However, within 1-2 days of being in Mexico City, and speaking more closely with our project partner, we almost had to entirely reinvent the plan that we initially had. Furthermore, not working in our project partner's office, but in the MakeSense coworking space with the other project partners posed some challenges. Whilst it certainly boosted team morale, and made the working space more enjoyable and comfortable to foster creativity, it meant we were not in constant contact with Widu, and would often find ourselves struggling to come up with next steps in our plan, having to guess our constraints and limitations given our lack of direct contact. In the first week, whilst this certainly generated some anxiety, it also inspired us to be more pragmatic and independent, and forced us to be resourceful and more independent in coming up with ideas and a more concrete project plan.

The next biggest challenge we faced, which we were fully aware of from day 1 of the project, was our lack of fluency in Spanish. Although I had been learning for a few months, my Spanish was limited to intermediate conversations, and I often found it difficult to think of the relevant terminology on the spot as soon as conversations became more technical. Whilst this was not a large issue in communicating with my project partner, or with our Widu or MakeSense leads, our target audience for the growth of the app was to be majority Spanish speaking consumers. This meant that all our outward marketing and

communication had to be in Spanish, and I knew that it would be difficult to engage with locals or local businesses without a stronger grasp. Prior to having access to our volunteers in week 5 and 6, this certainly slowed down some aspects of the project, and although the Spanish I had learnt made a considerable difference to our project, fluency in Spanish would have made a considerably greater difference, and would likely have improved the outcomes of the project. Given that the reaction_for_climate program was intended to be delivered fully in English, the project taught me the importance of learning a national language when delivering a project abroad, and has given me greater motivation to improve my language competencies.

The next biggest challenge we faced came in week 5, which was to adapt to the availability of our volunteers. We had planned for our volunteers to have a large role in the creative aspect of our project, as well as in communicating with local businesses, and much in person work. However, it became clear in week 5 that our volunteers had far more limited availability than expected, so as opposed to doing work as a group towards the goals we had outlined, we had to adapt my delegating tasks as and when a volunteer was available to do them. This likely reduced the cohesiveness of our group of volunteers as a team, but allowed us to keep the project moving ahead, but in a different way than expected. This recalibration of efforts taught me the importance of remaining pragmatic, and maintaining energy in a project, even when external circumstances aim to deflate your spirit. We pushed through the initial difficulty we had with our volunteers and still managed to achieve a large amount of our objectives, once re-evaluated based on the resources we had.

One of the biggest takeaways from the project was the importance of team morale. There were many days when my patience felt tested, but the presence of my project partner, a supportive group of scholars and a positive and uplifting set of coordinators meant that no challenge felt truly impossible to overcome, or that you were ever alone in the stress the projects would create. Without the people I worked with, or the joy they all brought me, this project would have been much more difficult than it already was. I was inspired by the positivity at MakeSense, and I hope to carry that positivity with me in my future projects.