

## **Leadership In Action Project in Mexico City with make\_sense: A Deep Dive into Sustainable Development and Leadership Growth**

The Leadership In Action project was an enlightening journey that introduced me to the vibrant landscape of Mexico City. Working with make\_sense on their re\_action for climate programme, I embarked on a six-week exploration of sustainability, leadership, and cultural engagement. During this project, I not only got to further develop my leadership and project management skills, but also explore the rich culture and heritage of Mexico City, learn to communicate with indigenous communities, and certify in design thinking.



*A street in the La Roma neighbourhood, a few blocks away from our hotel.*

### **New Learnings and Skills**

One aspect that stood out was the diverse range of training sessions we received, from design thinking to project management. One of the most impactful facets of this experience was my introduction to design thinking. This user-centric methodology, unfamiliar to me prior to the program, left an indelible mark on my approach to problem-solving. I intend to implement it in every future project.

Equally captivating were the talks by a climate change expert and representatives from indigenous communities. Learning from these individuals and hearing their real-life experiences has left a huge impression and inspired me to act.

Moreover, I thoroughly enjoyed doing weekly reflections on Notion, and have now integrated this technique into my weekly routine. The reflective log enabled me to be more aware of my learnings, setbacks and goals, defining a clear trajectory for personal development.

### **Food Waste Management Workshop**

Throughout this programme, I had the privilege of not only acquiring theoretical knowledge but also putting it into practical use. During the first days of the project, I found out that I would be partnering with Bio Eco for my project, an organisation that provides specialised services in waste collection and pest management with more than 100 000 services performed to date.

Our objective was to create a tangible impact on food waste management, a critical concern in urban centres worldwide, and Mexico City was no exception. To effectively address this issue, we envisioned a food waste management workshop tailored for mid-sized organisations and businesses in the city. For this purpose, we reached out to Nacobre, a leading copper-producing company in Mexico City, who liked the idea and agreed to have an in person workshop. Following that, we structured, prepared and delivered a workshop designed to educate a select group of their employees about the intricacies of food waste management.

The support of the make\_sense team was essential in delivering this project. Their local expertise was instrumental in navigating the complexities of implementing a new initiative in Mexico City. Their dedication was especially important when our team faced challenges with moving the project forward. The team stepped in, assisting us in finding additional volunteers, advising us on how to further develop our project, and ensuring our work had a meaningful impact despite the challenges.

Developing a food waste management workshop, which was my project's main objective, was an insightful and new experience for me. This experience highlighted the importance of addressing food waste to combat poverty and hunger on a global scale. While working on the project, I researched the topic of food waste, in Mexico and globally, as well as its impact and potential solutions for solving the issues that arise as a result of food waste. The research benefited both my personal self-awareness and the employees of Nacobre who participated in the workshop. Based on the analysis conducted by our team after the workshop, our team achieved the following outcomes:

1. Through the content we shared, including food waste information and good practices in food waste management, fifty percent of participants learned about food waste management for the first time.
2. As a result of team work integrated and facilitated by us in the workshop, we enabled the creation of three new achievable ways to decrease food waste in the Nacobre office cafeteria.
3. Sixty percent of participants said that their knowledge of the issue increased compared to pre-workshop, and forty percent said that they are completely confident in their food waste management practices now following the workshop.
4. We statistically analysed food waste management practices of Nacobre employees through an online questionnaire and shared results with Nacobre.

5. We introduced Bio Eco and its mission to Nacobre, facilitating future collaborations between the two companies.



*A substantial aspect of our workshop involved building a knowledge base about food waste.*

I also had the opportunity to get a glimpse into the corporate culture of Mexico City through our workshop at Nacobre's office. Observing their organisational structure, workforce, and motivations deepened my understanding of corporate dynamics.

Moreover, this project reiterated the importance of speaking multiple languages. Throughout the project, I engaged with a variety of stakeholders, such as volunteers who got involved in all stages of the project and were vital in making it happen, Nacobre employees who participated in the workshop and continued implementing changes to food management practices after the workshop, as well as Bio Eco and its employees. Since many stakeholders didn't speak English and I didn't speak Spanish, there were numerous occasions when I had to find alternative ways to explain myself. While I appreciate the role of English as a unifying language in our interconnected world, I was also delighted to discover that linguistic diversity is still preserved.

I particularly valued the opportunities to have a group of volunteers working with us on this project. It was not only an excellent chance for me to learn task delegation but also to

empower those I collaborated with, helping them realise their full potential in the project. I found the passion and enthusiasm that the volunteers have exhibited to be very inspiring.



*After announcing the winning solutions and concluding the workshop, Nacobre organisers gave us participation certificates.*

## **Beyond the co-working space: Engaging with Local Communities**

However, there was much more to the programme than the workshop itself.

The programme has proven to be an invaluable journey, greatly enriching my understanding of Mexico's culture, society, and environment. Importantly, it granted me an opportunity to connect with the indigenous communities of Mexico.

Despite the language barrier, I conversed with individuals from different generations, heard their stories, and posed questions. This experience unveiled the power of communication transcending words. It fostered a profound understanding of Mexican culture and the longstanding challenges confronting indigenous peoples.

What struck me most was the resilience and kindness displayed by the members of the Mazahua community, in spite of the challenges they face. Their unwavering spirit, openness, and warmth in the face of adversity left an indelible impression. Moreover, their sustainable living practices, aligned with nature rather than against it, provided valuable lessons that could be integrated into modern-day sustainability projects.

All in all, this cultural experience has equipped me with a heightened sense of global awareness, enriching my perspective on historical events and contemporary issues.



*One of our first cultural activities was a visit to a farm in Xochimilco.*

### **Cultural Immersion and Broader Perspectives**

Upon arriving in Mexico City, I was met with the vibrant energy of a city that is both steeped in history and poised at the forefront of modern change. While the project's primary focus was on sustainability, the cultural immersion was an education in itself. Mexico City, with its rich history, art, and traditions, became a daily classroom. From the ancient pyramids to ballet performances, every experience added depth to my understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics in Mexico.

I really enjoyed the excursions organised by make\_sense. These journeys allowed me to delve into the heart of Mexican culture and history. Visits to places like Xochimilco, the Teotihuacan pyramids, the Chocolate museum, Las Estacas, and the Mazahua community were particularly memorable experiences that broadened my horizons. Moreover, the ample time spent outdoors, whether during the leadership camp, farm visit, or cultural activities, was a welcome change. Even icebreakers on the office terrace offered a chance to bask in the sunlight, breaking the routine of being indoors that I tend to have in my day-to-day life. The excursions, from my perspective, served a dual purpose: while they were undoubtedly educational, they also highlighted the importance of work-life balance, integrating leisure with learning.



*During the leadership camp in Las Estacas, we built a raft using bamboo sticks, carried it to the river and competed for the first place in the river rally.*

What impressed me, in addition to the excursions, was the autonomy we were granted in our free time to explore Mexican culture and Mexico City on our terms. This flexibility allowed me to shape my cultural development according to my individual interests and goals. My perception of Mexico underwent a significant transformation during my time there. I was pleasantly surprised by its rich culture, history, stunning natural beauty, and warm-hearted people. I regret not realising this sooner, as it would have encouraged me to explore even more.

Regarding contrasts between Mexico and Europe, several facets stood out to me. Initially, I was struck by the abundance of greenery in Mexico City. Nearly every street is adorned with trees, offering shade from the sun and enhancing the urban landscape. Furthermore, the sheer number of museums and available cultural activities was impressive. Additionally, Mexico, as a nation, boasts breathtaking architecture coupled with a captivating and at times enigmatic history, especially when delving into ancient civilisations like the Mayans and Aztecs.



*Making chocolate in the La Juarez neighbourhood.*

## **Challenges, Growth, and Leadership Development**

Throughout the project, I also faced some challenges. Language barriers, opposing views, and logistical issues sometimes resulted in unexpected hurdles. Nevertheless, these challenges further facilitated my growth as a leader.

Firstly, I learned to work effectively with individuals whose views and approaches differed from my own. The experience imparted valuable lessons in teamwork, prompting me to pivot towards building partnerships and fostering collaboration with those who held diverse perspectives. This newfound approach has enhanced my self-awareness and my ability to collaborate in various facets of life, building relationships and networks.

Leading a diverse team of volunteers, each bringing their unique strengths and perspectives, was an exercise in adaptability and effective communication. Balancing the interests and talents of the team, while keeping the project's objectives in focus, honed my leadership skills. Through this experience, I learned to listen with understanding and capitalise on the power of diversity in our team. Additionally, the task of explaining our project's background to a non-specialist audience reinforced the importance of clear, jargon-free communication.

The project has had a profound impact on me, especially on my self-awareness. Collaborating on projects and confronting new experiences like building a raft in Las

Estacas, cleaning rivers in Xochimilco, and even making chocolate in Juarez enabled me to explore aspects of my personality previously unexamined. The experience inspired me to learn continually, and effectively navigate new and foreign situations.

### **Tangible Impact and Future Considerations**

The program's duration, in my opinion, was just right. Six weeks provided us with ample time to complete our projects and thoroughly explore the city, striking a perfect balance.

By the end of our six-week tenure, we had achieved significant milestones. Beyond raising awareness about food waste management in Nacobre, we facilitated actionable changes within their office cafeteria practices. Our research-driven approach, combined with hands-on workshops, led to a measurable positive impact. This venture laid the groundwork for future collaborations between Nacobre and Bio Eco, promising sustained progress in food waste management practices in Mexico City.

### **Concluding Reflections**

As I look ahead to my final year of university, including my final year project and post-graduation plans, I carry the wealth of my Mexican experiences with me. Reflecting upon my time there, the most profound realisation is the interconnectedness of our global community. Sustainable practices in one part of the world can inspire and influence positive change in another.

The experiences, lessons, and friendships forged in Mexico will continue influencing my future endeavours and shaping my approach to leadership, research and sustainable development. These experiences have empowered me to become a more globally aware citizen, environmentally conscious, and adept at collaborative efforts. The Leadership in Action has solidified the career aspirations I fostered during my first research period as a Laidlaw scholar. My goal is to become a scientist committed to improving lives globally through inclusive and collaborative international research.

In closing, my journey in Mexico with the re\_action for climate programme has been more transformative than I could have imagined. It has heightened my global awareness, fostered personal growth, and instilled in me a profound sense of gratitude. These lessons will undoubtedly shape my future decisions and continue to influence my choices and actions as I navigate the path ahead.



*Receiving our certificates during the closing event in the make\_sense office.*