

## Leadership in Action Project Report with Make\_Sense Americas in Mexico City.

### **Project overview and methods:**

During the past six weeks I conducted my Leadership in Action (LiA) project with Make\_Sense Americas in Mexico City, Mexico. For this project I was paired with Cacalli; a business that focuses on turning pet faeces into fertile compost to improve Mexico City's waste management. Our primary task was to raise the profile of this business through a social media campaign and an in-person event.



This project mainly hinged on volunteer work to create and translate our posts and videos into Spanish and man our stall during our in-person event. However, Make\_Sense were kind enough to advertise and provide 25 volunteers for us to get started. First and foremost we divided our volunteers into 3 subgroups: a Drone Footage Team, a Content Creation team and an Event Management Team so those with relevant experience or a specific desire to engage with a certain subproject could get the most of our volunteering event. We mainly communicated to our volunteers through WhatsApp texts and our Trello page which contained both a project timeline and specific task delegation for volunteers, as well as a step-by-step goal page for the team leads aka the scholars. We supplemented this information through zoom meetings to summarise/update all the subgroups of the status of the project and in person meetings to create physical products for the event. In total we had 6 zoom meetings and within the event management sub team we held two in person meetings to create posters and physical content. We hosted our in-person event at MakeSense's Impact carnival, wherein we; alongside 7 other NGOs and sustainability-oriented companies, advertised and set up workshops in the Huerto Roma Verde community space.

Across the six weeks we produced the following outputs for Cacalli:

- Two x 30 second videos and one x 2½ minute video of the composting facility and brand ethos of Cacalli for Cacalli's new website
- We had 40 people follow Cacalli's Instagram as a direct result of our in-person event.
- And 5 people immediately sign up to the service.
- We produced 40 individual content posts to make 20 'multi-posts' for Cacalli's Instagram.
- We spoke to 60+ people about the benefits of Cacalli during the impact carnival.
- We produced 1 slogan and 3 posters for the in-person event.

This project has a proposed sustainability of 3 months as we have produced enough Instagram content for this period as well as matched one volunteer to potentially work with them full time on a formal basis; in the chemical reactions of their waste department. Furthermore, as Cacalli is a startup, and as communicated by themselves, they have had previous difficulty with managing their social media and producing media outputs. Through our work we have provided them with a great jumping off point to expand their social media presence with work that is not only refreshing but cohesive with their current brand image.

**How has the project you have been undertaking been impactful or important:**

Our project is important as Mexico City does not have a strong municipal waste management programme, meaning that household waste is often incorrectly or inefficiently disposed of, moreover, as over 82% of Mexicans own a dog, about 500,000 kgs of dog faeces is produced per day compounding this waste management issue. With no public waste bins for dogs and cats, residents are forced to leave their pet's waste on the street, dispose of it in municipal waste bins or flush it down the toilet. If faeces are left on the street the faeces will dry up and be carried by the wind to contaminate both the air and water throughout Mexico City. And as the city is known for their amazing street food, this unfortunately can have secondary ramifications for contaminating street food, in turn acting as one of the leading causes of street food related illnesses. If a pet owner does instead to dispose of their pet faeces in a municipal bin to be taken to landfill, as the matter breaks down, it will respire anaerobically, greatly increasing their methane and carbon dioxide output, in turn increasing the carbon footprint the average pet has. Ergo, all current solutions to pet waste have a negative effect on both the local environment and community.

However, as a result of Cacalli's chemical sterilisation process 2 kg. of pet waste can create over one kilogram of fertile compost that can be deposited in gardens throughout the fertile breadbasket that is Mexico City. In turn, reducing the environmental and social impact dog waste has as well as increasing the number of waste management jobs within Mexico city. Their composting facility is in Mi Palta, approximately 2 hours outside of the city and is situated away from schools and does not damage any water system subterranean or otherwise, And as a result has lower impacts than traditional waste management systems. Not only are Cacalli creating a circular economy by improving local nutrient recycling, their product reduces your pet's water consumption by 12 to 20 litres - highly pertinent for a community at risk of aquifer salinization. This desire for reducing water consumption was reaffirmed as highly pertinent for the Mexico City community within our event management focus groups.

**What impact has the LIA project had on you? Have you achieved the SMART goals as set out at the beginning of the project? (Please give examples of how these SMART goals have been achieved):**

I think the most important impact the programme had on me was on my ability to collaborate and not commandeer situations. What has been surprising over the past six weeks is the level of calm I have when I am conducting difficult leadership tasks. I have always believed that

when I take on leadership roles I get frustrated easily and as a result become too direct and difficult to work with. However, during this time on the whole (or I would like to believe) I was not. Typically, I take a leadership role quite quickly, but this is normally in communities that I have knowledge of or are in myself. Ergo, I am able to make informed decisions quickly. But because I knew little of the Mexican waste management and the climate change issues faced by Mexico City residents I had to take a more guided approach to leadership; conducting more preliminary research and listening rather than acting. I think this skill of conducting a leadership role on the basis of support and amplifying voices e.g. the social media campaign rather than trying to convert the project into what I want it to be was highly beneficial as it makes me a more ethical leader. This experience was great for me to put into practise what Laidlaw has previously taught us in our first-year workshops.

**What activities you've been involved in to disseminate your project, including but not limited to attending conferences, producing posters, and promotion of the project and programme:**

I am planning to attend the 2023 Dublin Conference to discuss my project and experience in person with other scholars. Wherein I will be able to have more informal yet in depth conversations about my experience. For digital outputs I have completed a report for Makesense, this own project report and recorded my initial weekly experience on the Laidlaw network so scholars can understand if this project is for them, or to engage potential Laidlaw scholars to apply to this programme. Moreover, as a student within the Sustainability and Environmental Management programme: students are taught about community empowerment, climate change impacts and how to be an ethical researcher. I hope to be able to share these experiences as and when appropriate during the upcoming term.

**Cultural experiences and differences I have learned about during my LIA:**

What I have most enjoyed was the ability to speak and engage in meaningful conversations with people of all different backgrounds/faiths etc. What I most valued was the ability to see how other people operate in times of stress, navigating working in a group dynamic to demonstrate their own strengths and weaknesses. It was incredibly insightful to learn how to do the same task in different ways so I could emulate better and easier ways of operating and engaging with our projects.

Secondly, operating in a second language no matter how rudimentary my Spanish was, was challenging in the best way possible as I could engage with others differently and more spontaneously than before, pushing me out of my comfort zone. Especially learning about Mexican millennial culture through Spanish slang and during our focus groups. It was awesome to learn about the differing values between the Mexican and British populace.

Individually, I took some time to take part in cultural activities so I could better understand and experience local culture. Between the street food, museums, and park visits my two favourite activities were watching the Mexican folklore ballet and an authentic Mexican cooking class! First, I watched the ballet in the famous Palacio de Bellas Artes and it was so stunning! From the building to the dancing, seeing such a strong appreciation for the

arts, and especially traditional music and dance was so beautiful to see. In my opinion as English music and dance are quite mainstream in the West, it has also taken a more lackadaisical position within Western society. But as Mexican traditional dancing is so different to English dancing eg ballroom, foxtrot etc it was incredible to see such amazing storytelling through the mode of dance. Furthermore, this undercurrent of appreciation for the 'traditional' way of doing things was also seen in the cooking class I undertook. During this class I was able to visit traditional tortilla shops and markets, make a 3-course meal and see and hear the reasons why a certain method of preparation was preferred over another. Overall this aspect to learn and engage with cooking was so lovely after not cooking for six weeks. If any of you happen to go to Mexico, I would highly recommend this experience, as I felt like I was back at my own home baking with my grandparents. It was so heartwarming to see the desire to connect over food is true the world over.

**What are your future career or educational plans? Have these changed during your time as a scholar?**

My ideal next step is to apply to be a Sustainability Architect at the University of Leeds, where if accepted, I can work on climate related projects. More specifically working on the logistical sustainability of the food prepared and consumed in Leeds' cafeterias. I want to utilise my new skills in design thinking so I can emphasise the importance of non-linear project management when there are setbacks. Furthermore, I would like to employ more collaborative thinking through the engagement of stakeholders, focus groups and preliminary research, to produce more nuanced and sustainable solutions.

Further down the line, e.g. after I have completed my university degree, I plan to apply for graduate jobs and hopefully, if I am successful, I will be able to work in the agricultural field in supply chain management or logistical issues. What Laidlaw has provided for me is clarity in what I want to go into as my career. In my first year as scholar I worked with George Holmes on the quantification of the killing of Beavers in Scotland, and this time in the field has cemented for me that I want to be within A) the environmental sector, B) have hands-on experience through working with key stakeholders to devise new solutions or uncover new information and C) that I would like to incorporate a more socio-political lens environmental issues than only the pure data side of ecological work. Before this I was unsure of what field I wanted to delve into as my career progressed. But as I wrote previously, I learned that I enjoyed delving into socio-political facets of ecological work then only working with ecological data, primarily as I am able to access immediate responses and reactions of stakeholders, rather than more passive positive or negative results of an environmental test. But most importantly Laidlaw has made me realise I would like to undertake a PhD due the ability to dedicate myself to a topic and explore different avenues of thought. But has given me the confidence to delay engaging in this project so I can explore a more corporate experience.