

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

NADIA KWIECINSKA
7/07 ----- 17/08
2024



HUERTO ROMA VERDE x MAKE_SENSE_CDMX

Going into the LIA project, I mistakenly believed that meaningful change could only be achieved through large-scale efforts, often driven by those in high positions of authority. However, this experience has taught me that impactful change often arises from a **series of small, consistent actions**. It is these grassroots initiatives, embedded in the everyday lives of individuals and communities, that can create long-lasting transformation.



Huerto Roma Verde
Resilab Biosocial



OUR VOLUNTEER TEAM

GENESIS OF THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Choosing a central project that resonated with my core beliefs and the values I hope to develop in my future work was initially a concern, as I wanted to ensure my efforts were meaningful and impactful, not just “for show”. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the level of **independence and professionalism** we were given, allowing me to make a tangible difference. This experience taught me that being a leader involves not just guiding others, but also **leading oneself** with authenticity and integrity. By focusing on the impact I could make, as well as what I could learn and teach, I realized this project was the best decision I could have made.

My primary goal as a leader in this project was to guide volunteers toward achieving the organization's objectives. Throughout this journey, my leadership skills have evolved significantly, not just through directing others but through **mutual learning**. By exchanging knowledge, experiences, and ideas with the volunteers, I've discovered the power of **collective wisdom**.



OUR SCHOLAR TEAM

A key principle I upheld was leading with kindness, but I've learned that trust is equally fundamental to effective leadership. Trust means letting go of the desire to control every aspect and instead empowering others by delegating tasks. This shift has allowed me to foster a more **collaborative and efficient environment**, where everyone feels valued and capable of contributing to the shared vision.

DEVELOPMENT

OBJECTIVES

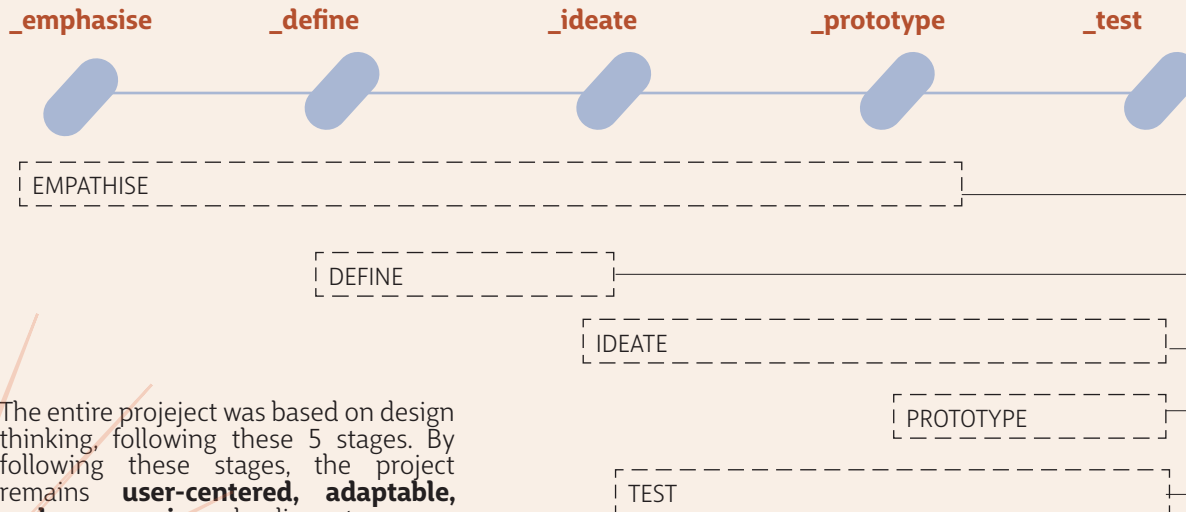
Creating a **user experience in different scales and mediums for visitors and locals to understand the space**, of the bio-social lab that is Huerto Roma Verde, it's activities and events, in order to encourage engagement and awareness. (A Bio-Social lab is a term for a community hub fusing traditional, ecological materials with more innovative technologies.)

11 VOLUNTEERS MOBILISED

To meet the project's objectives, I clearly communicated the vision, delegated tasks based on strengths (enhancing efficiency and ownership), and provided ongoing support. **Regular feedback and promoting a collaborative environment** encouraged innovative solutions, helping us navigate obstacles and stay on track, which ultimately achieving our sustainability and user experience goals.

MAIN RESULTS

- Scripted a guided tour for visitors to understand the purpose and spaces of HRV.
- Designing and construction 12 Graphic Information Boards of the main spaces for the "Self Guided Tour"
- Create bilingual digital leaflets to enable people to actively explore and appreciate Huerto Roma Verde as a whole



While this was just the "first step," reconnecting with the community, understanding its needs, and considering its future was our top priority. Regularly reflecting on the project's progress through the lens of empathy was essential.

In the define stage, we focused on **framing the core problem** clearly and impactfully to guide actionable steps

The ideating stage overlapped the prototype and testing stages as right up until the end, we had to problem solve and quickly adapt any designs that weren't so successful/ efficient.

In this specific project, prototyping took on different forms: prototype of the graphic design, or the narrative text, of the construction itself. This is why the testing and refining based on continuous feedback and discussions was such a big element of the project's development.

The entire project was based on design thinking, following these 5 stages. By following these stages, the project remains **user-centered, adaptable, and responsive**, leading to more meaningful and successful outcomes that are aligned with the community's actual needs and aspirations.

*OUTCOME_1: Information Boards

1.



Balancing the budget was challenging, especially with our high aspirations for lasting results. We had to prioritize carefully to ensure the project was thorough while staying within limits. This experience taught me the value of making thoughtful decisions and adapting plans, reinforcing how important it is to align vision with practical constraints.

2.



After designing and finalising the information boards, which aimed to be as **visually and linguistically accessible** as possible, we got to executing the frame in which it'll stand. The idea was to create a distinct shape (decided to be a bird house roof outline) that people will easily recognize as a touchpoint within the Self-Guided Tour of the space. This would allow an easy overview of which order to follow regardless of the space one visits first, or whether they're new to the place.

3.



Creating a brand for the organization not only unified the materials from the optimized user experience project, but also provided a flexible framework for future growth. The brand is designed to accommodate changes, such as the addition of new spaces or boards, by seamlessly integrating them into the existing concept through consistent design patterns we established.

4.

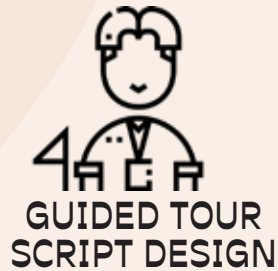


Though we were in the prototyping phase, we had to revisit the **ideation stage** to align with the tightening budget and timeframe. Collaborating as a team, we re-evaluated the design, making critical cuts that ultimately proved successful with a "less is more" approach. Consulting experienced members in construction also allowed us to incorporate additional supports to withstand wind and harsh weather conditions.

1



*OUTCOME_2 : *Self/Guided Tours*



For the guided tour, our group developed scripts that could easily be passed on to volunteers and staff, offering a straightforward narrative for visitors. The tour was **subtly adjusted for two user personas**. For locals, the goal was not only to inform them about the space, its philosophy, and its importance, but also to encourage participation and volunteering, since HRV is a non-profit. For tourists, the aim was to prompt reviews to spread the word or, if possible, donations.



SELF- GUIDED
TOUR SCRIPT

For visitors who preferred to explore the space at their own pace, we designed and installed informative signposts to help them better **understand its purpose and activities**. The main challenge was that many visitors were unaware of what happens in this vibrant, multifunctional space, and these signposts were created to address that gap.



LIA_REFLECTIONS_1

DEFINING SUCCESS AND THINKING LONGTERM

HOW DID THE LIA PROJECT MAKE ME RETHINK WHAT SUCCESS MEANS FOR BOTH ME AS A LEADER AND THE COMMUNITY?

Another way in which I developed my leadership throughout this LIA project was by redefining what success means to me, both personally as a leader and for the community I served. A huge part of being a good leader is honing **emotional intelligence**, which I actively applied by managing team dynamics with a deeper understanding of **individual strengths and challenges**. I focused on fostering collaboration, ensuring that each team member felt heard and valued, and as a result, we achieved a greater collective outcome than any of us could have produced alone. This experience sharpened my people-management skills, particularly in **balancing empathy with accountability**. Moving forward, I will continue to prioritize these skills in my career, recognizing that leadership is not just about driving results but about empowering others to succeed and grow alongside me.

HOW DID THIS PROJECT HELP ME FOCUS LESS ON TASKS AND MORE ON THE BIGGER PICTURE?

As a solution-oriented person, this project challenged me to **shift my focus** from just the **outcome to the process itself**. It allowed me to recognize and leverage the strengths within my team, assigning tasks based on individual expertise through active listening. This shift not only enhanced the immediate results but also ensured a deeper understanding of the project's long-term significance.

Though we didn't complete every final detail, we went beyond the initial goals providing more than just physical outcomes. We delivered a **brand, a vision, and ideas for future operations** that will (hopefully) save time and resources as Huerto Roma Verde continues to evolve.

For example, when new sections or updates are added, they can build on our work, such as updating scripts or information boards without starting from scratch, allowing the organization to focus on more significant developments.

LIA_REFLECTIONS_2

CULTURAL ORGANISATION AND PROGRESSION THROUGH DISCUSSIONS

HOW DID THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, OR ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT INFLUENCE MY LEADERSHIP APPROACH, AND WHAT NEW SKILLS DID I GAIN FROM IT?

Working with this specific organisation truly gave me perspectives and insights I wouldn't have gained anywhere else. This is because of a completely different culture of work. Here, the management and work was much more **horizontal**. There was a fair distribution of work and responsibility, bound together through trust. The whole system was very organised, this being because of a common goal, a **common vision that united** all of the people there.

Everyone was responsible for either a certain area, a role, a task which all arising to strengthen a community in which the whole of the local area and further, benefited from.

From this, I developed my relationship-building skills in a professional setting and adaptability of my leadership in diverse environments, in order to understand the true needs of the organisation and fuse my core values with the organisation's wider ambitions. This freedom-driven strategy helped me to develop my creative skills, driving my ideas through the balance of this freedom but within the boundaries of a **common vision**.

HOW DID COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK SHAPE MY LEADERSHIP AND HELP US MEET OUR PROJECT GOALS?

Feedback from stakeholders and community members taught me the importance of **balancing guidance with independence**—a skill that's essential in client and design-based work. While our stakeholders were enthusiastic about giving us creative freedom, we also wanted to create that same space for the volunteers we led, making sure everyone felt heard and open to share ideas.

The real challenge was balancing our supervisors' goals with trusting my own vision. It was a valuable lesson in knowing when to integrate their feedback and when to stand by my ideas. While their openness and input sparked important discussions and refinements, I found myself in moments where I needed to **clearly articulate and defend my reasoning** behind specific decisions.

This experience helped me grow in **managing stakeholder relationships**, navigating feedback, and making confident, thoughtful decisions. It also strengthened my ability to communicate design choices in a way that balanced both creative autonomy and respect for external input—a balance I'll continue to prioritize in my career moving forward.