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Research project

> “at a time when you want to calm down, it is impossible to breathe fresh air, I had to give up walking. From time to time I suffer from a lack of clean air, I have to close the windows”.
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> “as an ordinary citizen, I am unable to assess all the damage without analyses and samples of air, water and soil, for example, I do not know whether hazardous substances are entering groundwater, how much of them remains in the ground. Is it possible to eat food from a field or garden where missiles and debris fell?”.
>
> “It is hard for me to imagine how many more years people will accidentally find this and blow themselves up.”

My research project was titled ‘Ecocide in Ukraine’ and was focused on the lived experience of ecological destruction caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I am glad that I was able to contribute even on a small scale to maintaining focus on the crimes currently being committed in Ukraine and to preserve the words of Ukrainians. However, in terms of personal reflection I am quite disappointed in what I created, especially since this topic was so important and because I feel a lot of responsibility to my participants. Since I first proposed and completed this research I have matured personally and became more knowledgeable in my subject, and so if I was to complete the research now there is a lot I would do differently. In terms of my takeaway from this into the future, I know that the reason I feel guilt for the report not being as good as it could have been is because this is a very meaningful topic, and if everyone waited for themselves to be the perfect person to tackle an issue then we would never progress. It is always more useful to try and fail, than to never try at all.

Additionally my experience of research has given me more confidence in contradicting people in positions of authority, which is important for making change. While prior to this experience I did have the ability to think critically there was a part of me who felt unqualified to critique people who were smarter and more experienced than me, and who also wanted to trust that there were people who knew how to solve all the issues the world is facing. But actually doing research ingrained in me the idea of the researcher as a person. *I* chose the research project, *I* chose the methods of finding participants, *I* chose the questions, *I* translated the answers and drew out key themes from them, guided by literature *I* chose to

read, which *I* was able to access because of my privilege of being a student at the university of Cambridge.

Leadership in action project

My LIA was a centrally planned project in Mexico City with Makesense Americas. I worked with Hagamos Composta, a composting organisation to create a funding guide and operational recommendations to help them scale upwards and professionalise. One of the most beneficial things about the experience was the separation from places and activities, where I have developed habitual patterns of thinking, as this allowed me to be more reflective and logical. I have spent most of my life in academic environments so working on a project focused on the logistics of collecting and creating composts and especially the finances involved was very different. There were lots of times where I made mistakes, or worked too slowly, but there were also times where I came up with new ideas or was good at project management. I have always been very self critical and the separation from my 'normal' life gave me space to recognise where I did well and was successful. The result of this is that rather than the self criticism being paralysing, I was able to actually pinpoint specific areas of improvement and work on them. This helped me realise that I was using my judgement of myself as an excuse to not live up to the values I hold. Similarly the positive culture of Hagamos Composta really inspired me because I also have a tendency to use the idea of the world being a bad place as an excuse to not try to make it better, but in Hagamos Composta I saw people who were making a positive difference to the world.

As my LIA was centrally planned I got to live and work with Laidlaw scholars from other universities. I learnt a lot from them about what it is to be a good leader and am very grateful for the memories I have with them.