

Sahuinto Estudio de Arte Móvil
Bolivia
College of the Atlantic
Anne Kozak, Designated Project Leader
Mariana Orías López, Bolivia, College of the Atlantic, UWC-USA

The aim of this project was to promote environmental consciousness through the arts by creating community conversations with a problem-solving approach in the neighborhoods of Sucre. Initially, the project was meant to be executed in the summer of 2020, but it was postponed to the summer of 2021 because of the pandemic. This project continues to be implemented thanks to the additional help we received by using the Project for Peace funds as leverage. After polishing the project, I applied for a grant from Solidar Suiza and, thankfully I got it. They contributed about 7500 sus. This money is now being used to extend the project for three more months and to make a documentary about the environmental challenges of the communities we worked with.

The idea of Sahuinto sparked three years ago when the fires in the Bolivian amazon became a serious problem. The Bolivian education system does not include environmental education in its curriculum, and I believe this is a capstone for acquiring better environmental conditions and eliminating the extraction of natural resources. I chose to work in Sucre, my home city, since this is the place I am most familiar with and where I earlier started my environmental activism work. There was a lot of uncertainty in the execution of this project; besides the project's being postponed, when it was possible to execute it the sanitary conditions were still unstable. After talking to the communities I was going to work with, we decided to go ahead. After all, this was going to be the first in-person activity they would have from the beginning of the pandemic, and they were eager to engage in community activities. I worked with a diverse group, with beneficiaries from all ages, but the group was mainly composed by members of the Mothers' Association. This allowed us to explore and identify environmental problems from the root and to imagine and plan real solutions that beneficiaries could access. Even though some of the beneficiaries only spoke Quechua, the native language of the region, and we did not, we could face the communication issues when talking about logistics by coordinating translation with other beneficiaries. When it came to making puppets, acting, and painting, language was no longer a problem. I am currently learning Quechua, because I want to continue doing this work.

Amongst the problems we identified in the neighborhoods are: there are no sewage systems; the trash pick up system is insufficient since the trash truck only picks up once per week; the neighborhoods do not have constant access to running water; the neighborhoods are located near landfills that were not properly closed and are now polluting the air. The small springs near these communities are polluted by chicken farms and butchers.

My definition of peace comes from the methodologies I used to execute this project: Theater of the Oppressed and Emancipatory Pedagogies. Peace is the lack of oppression. There cannot be peace if there are oppressed groups. When executing this project, I understood that what is happening in these communities is a matter of environmental justice. As it tends to happen, minorities and isolated communities are the ones that have to deal with the inequalities and disadvantages that are a product of a development model that does not contemplate or take responsibility for the environmental impacts of growth. While it is true that we could not solve the problems that these communities are facing, we could bring the injustice to light, identify the real problems of the communities from their own life experiences, and imagine and explore different solutions. We provided them with tools to be the main actors of the abolition of their environmental oppression.

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Through the arts we could break the ice, experience joy, cultivate our creativity, and have powerful conversations. At the beginning of the summer, the beneficiaries were shy and did not dare to speak a lot. By the end, each and every one of them were more confident and openly shared their perspectives, hopes, and concerns. In two of the three communities these topics were brought up by the mothers into larger platforms, such as the neighborhood meeting and the neighborhood directory. The implementation of environmental education helped to spread the concept of environmental justice, which was a needed first step to lobby for better conditions. We have chosen to stay in touch with these communities, as we continue to work with new ones around the region, hoping that this network will be useful for the communities in their next steps. Some have chosen to organize to talk to their authorities and get better trash pick-up service, some have decided to apply for grants and make their own projects to strengthen the Mothers' Associations and work for better access to water, while some are still choosing what are the next steps.

Having the opportunity to execute this project has definitely affected my vision of the world. I was working with minorities who, besides facing environmental challenges, are also facing economic and social challenges. Looking at these separately is a mistake, especially when communicating why these are problems that must be solved. It is important to meet the beneficiaries where they are, knowing their context, culture, and language as much as possible; only then will we be able to have meaningful communication. Instead of simply offering workshops, I decided to listen to the beneficiaries as much as possible, creating participatory and inclusive conversations where we could learn how the challenges these communities are facing are interwoven. With that knowledge, it became easier to explore solutions.

Communication with the beneficiaries, I believe, is a key aspect for the successful implementation of any project. Only through good communication will we be able to evaluate properly—and constant evaluations throughout the execution are needed to ensure that the goal of the project is not lost. I am grateful that, given the pandemic-related challenges, we were still able to execute this project in person. We put a lot of effort into ensuring the biosecurity protocols were followed and fortunately we did not have major inconveniences. We are now working in the second stage of the project and are excited to see where this continues to go after December.

The opportunity given by the Davis Project for Peace Foundation allowed me to reach the communities I always dreamed of working with, where the work is needed the most. As a result, I learned that art and emancipatory pedagogies are great tools for social transformation, and that it is possible to trigger action and let the people be the main actors in transforming and building their communities.

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The mobile art studio “Sahuinto”



Some of the artwork painted by the Mother's association of the neighborhood of San Simón



A piece of the theatre explorations.