

Title of the Project: *Proyecto Turpial: Diasporic Youth Encounters*

Countries: *Argentina, México and Colombia*

College: *Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut*

Designated Project Leaders: *Daniel Santos Ramirez (Venezuela, Pearson UWC '19, Trinity College), Gabriel Sorondo Guirola (Venezuela, Mahindra UWC of India '19, Trinity College)*

Team Members: *Isabella Picón (Venezuela, UWC Adriatic '08, Northwestern University) and Pablo Duran (Venezuela, IE University)*

Social Media Accounts: *@proyectoturpial on Instagram & Twitter*

Goal of Our Project

The goal of the project was to organise a collection of encounters within the Venezuelan diaspora in different countries to ensure the building of connections between participants, as well as the fostering of desires and plans for a possible revitalization of Venezuelan society.

Context & Historical Background

The project came to be as a result of the diverse range of immigrant experiences that the team had experienced throughout different stages of their life. These experiences ranged from different countries and different continents, to meeting migrants of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic backgrounds including those of different gender identities, sexualities and religions with one thing in common: all, including the members of the project, identified as Venezuelans. The extension of the Venezuelan diaspora is a result of an increasing socio-economic crisis with consequences of delinquency, food insecurity, lack of access to proper healthcare services amongst many other exacerbated conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Said crisis that has been affecting Venezuela for an extended period starting in the late 2000s and the early 2010s. As of August 2022, the crisis in the country has created an influx of approximately 6.81 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants across the entire world¹.

With an extensive number of migrants leaving the country, Venezuela has also been subjected to a staggering and increasing "brain-drain" that has left innovators, entrepreneurs, workers and many without a space, voice or platform in which they are recognised. Therefore, *Proyecto Turpial: Diasporic Youth Encounters* was developed in response to the need for these young migrants to be recognised and given a space for development. These spaces also sought to create a series of encounters that would serve to empower, visibilise and heighten their experiences to allow them to be seen, recognised and celebrated in the context of their migrant experiences.

History of the Project

As a project to visibilise, heighten and empower groups of young Venezuelan migrants, the team looked at different countries across the globe that had high concentrations of the diaspora. Some countries that were initially considered for the project before a proposal was made were The United States, Spain and Colombia. However whilst reviewing the different guidelines for financial approval and planning the budget for the project, it was revealed that the feasibility within the financial guidelines of the Davis Projects for Peace of this approach was nearly impossible with most of the budget being allocated solely in the transportation costs of each member of the team.

As a result of this discovery, the team sought alternatives that would tackle the Venezuelan diaspora in unique ways and yet, reach as many young Venezuelans as possible throughout these small encounters. The process of search led to choosing three Latin American countries in geographically different positions, alongside with different responses to the issue of Venezuelan migration. These countries, as per their unique location and response, were México (the northernmost country of Latin America), the previously mentioned Colombia (neighbour to Venezuela) and

¹ *R4V Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in the Region Report - Aug. 2022.*

<https://www.r4v.info/es/document/r4v-latin-america-and-caribbean-venezuelan-refugees-and-migrants-region-aug-2022>

Argentina (the southernmost country of Latin America). These countries also featured a spectrum of welcoming, unwelcoming and embracing responses to the issue of migration.

Having established the countries, the search for participants also led to including the difference in their professional/personal backgrounds at the back of our minds as an item of development, education and most importantly, showcase of the diversity of the migrant experience. Some of the encounters included a transgender woman, Jessie, who fled the country for her own safety or Karim, whose leftist political alignment strayed away from the usual narrative surrounding Venezuelans. The project took place over the span of three consecutive weekends in the three aforementioned countries, meaning that each group was aware of the intraregional component of the project alongside with an understanding from the team that each country would carry geographical, social and economic components that could be challenging to quickly grasp in the span of a few days between the different encounters.

Our Definition of Peace

We define peace as having a world where immigrants no longer feel unknown by the world, unlinked with their communities and uprooted from their home country.

Peace-Building Within Our Project

We see these as the three main obstacles to achieving lasting peace and we sought to address all three of them throughout *Proyecto Turpial*:

- ❖ We addressed the challenge of being unknown by publishing content in social media about the events, participants and their projects – as well as partnering up with organisations such as *Equilibrium-CENDE* who are going to be producing content (i.e., academic research) related to the participants and their migrant experiences.
 - As well, the creation of an archive of short oral history interviews that seek to maintain and become a first-hand resource towards the understanding of the migrant experience of different groups of Venezuelans across the region of Latin America.
- ❖ We addressed the challenge of being unlinked by getting together a community of like-minded, young Venezuelans to promote collaboration and synergies between them.
- ❖ Finally, we addressed the challenge of being uprooted by having the project take place in weekend-long experiential retreats where, by removing participants from their daily routines, we could have them focus on the days and activities at hand – which helped to develop a spontaneous sense of community and home that was absent from the lives of many of the participants.

Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes of Peace

The most impactful short-term outcome of *Proyecto Turpial*, was one we envisioned would emerge from the experiential retreats: the friendship bonds that emerged between participants. After spending a weekend away from their newly-found hometowns, building a deliberate community alongside other Venezuelans, the relationships that began as that of colleagues and co-participants quickly evolved into one of friendship and trust.

For example, participants have used their projects, spaces and initiatives to highlight the good work out by other participants in their fields. Take the case of Fernando, one of our participants, who has a radio show in his hometown and has invited several other participants to talk on the show about their initiatives. Finally, these retreats have allowed participants to find new friends and people of trust who have undergone similar experiences as Venezuelan migrants and can share a common experience, whilst uniting within their common interests.

Pointing out long-term outcomes of *Proyecto Turpial* is a difficult task to achieve by the very design of the project: the seeds that have been planted in the form of a new, interconnected generation of Venezuelan leaders abroad will take years to grow for them to be ready for sowing. However, there are some long-term positive consequences of the project, when seen through the lense of seeking whatever maximises the potential of young Venezuelans outside of the country. Namely, these leaders now know about the existence of each other and will be clustered in a way that

will make it easier to reach any of them both when Venezuelan migrants need them or when the country is eventually ready to welcome them back and allow them to unleash all of their potential.

Findings About Underlying Issues Within the Topic of Immigrant Communities

- The character of our nationality has not been changed by the migrant process. In essence, leaving Venezuela has not made migrants become less Venezuelan. Perhaps, it may even be quite the contrary: some migrants have opted to deal with the difficulties of the migrant experience by reaffirming their national identity to a much greater extent that Venezuelans still in the country may feel a necessity to do.
- The high emotional charge that migrants and migrant communities are full of conflicting, complicated and deep-cutting emotions due to the intensity of the migration experience. Throughout the activities we organised in the retreats, the participants became emotional when addressing issues such as what they miss from home or when discussing politics and memories from the worst years of the crisis in Venezuela. We as organisers also became emotional during the retreats, even when fully knowing what the schedule looked like and what was contained in each activity in regards to its emotional charge.
- A lesson learned, one that perhaps we did not expect, was the need expressed by participants to have spaces for community-building such as *Proyecto Turpial*. Certainly, we could have expected this need to emerge in a country like Mexico, where the Venezuelan community is both smaller and more recent.

How Did The Project Change The Way We Think About The World?

In an increasingly globalised world, identities are getting mixed as people are exposed to many different cultures and perspectives. The people of Venezuela serve as an example of a nation that is becoming increasingly diverse, by virtue of the vast life experiences that one in every six Venezuelans have experienced when migrating, without this diversity implying that any of its citizens is becoming less Venezuelan. If anything, this process may entail a much more vast understanding of what it means to be a part of the country - especially as many migrants begin families with natives of their new home countries. The world may have some lessons to learn from the birth of a trans-national, national identity in Venezuela.

Personal Reflections

Allowing Venezuelan migrants to overcome the feelings of deracination and removal of their national identity due to the process of migration has always felt, and still feels, as a personal task that must be pursued across the entire diaspora. Not only did the project manage to build communities and change aspects of the lives of some people, it certainly also allowed some of us to understand the pain, grief, humour, power and much more that we as Venezuelans must feel proud of. I believe that, after putting forward this project, my national identity is as strong as ever and my commitment to the unending issues of our migrant communities feels like a lifelong project that can be tackled from any angle related to my work as a writer/oral historian.

- Gabriel R. Sorondo Guirola

My desire to be a public servant in Venezuela has been transformed in that my perspectives of what it entails have changed. Our country is quickly redefining its identity, from one that was profoundly determined by our geography and common physical spaces to a "Republic of the Mind", where we reaffirm some values of our national character to the detriment of others. Venezuela is bound to become a country that is not defined by the physical borders of its territory, and one whose people are exposed to the cultures and ways of living in the many places they've migrated to. Serving and representing Venezuelans will require adapting to this new reality.

- Daniel Santos Ramírez