"Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: The Mobile Bilingual Library"
Jardin-Colombia/ June-August/ University of Oklahoma / Juan Andres Tobon O. (UWC Dilijan)

The issue and the background

The peace agreement signed in 2016 by the Colombian state and the guerrilla of las FARC puts an end to almost fifty years of civil war and pretends to transform and lay down the conditions for stable and lasting peace for all Colombians. The agreement acknowledges the importance of the rural communities and their key role in the fight against unemployment, food insecurity, and the development of Colombia. As a result, opportunities for economic development, expansion of the industry sector, and social change have spread across the country. At the same time, new issues have risen to the surface. Many rural communities previously dedicated only to agriculture began to have a new income alternative: tourism. However, the rapid shift of social dynamics created a range of distinct realities. It obliged rural communities to address infrastructure issues to keep up with the growing tourism while forgetting about the social and human preparedness that the new source of income implies for those communities.

This is the case in the municipality of Jardin, Colombia, the community which I come from. A community nestled in the mountains to the southwest of Medellin and made up of 13,541 inhabitants. Its mountains, water resources, architecture, fauna and flora, coffee crops, sugar cane fields, and avocado trees, offer national and foreign tourists with multiple possibilities for recreation and enjoyment that have positioned Jardin as a relevant destination to visit. With a highly dynamic population and the lack of social preparedness to face cultural shocks and language barriers, Jardin’s locals and visitors do not get to have proper spaces to have meaningful relations and intercultural exchanges.

This issue drives me to ask myself whether creative, inclusive, and accessible solutions for bilingual literacy can serve as a tool to bring Jardin’s locals and visitors together to share, grow, and learn from one another in deeper and meaningful ways. In my personal experience as an international student, creating a safe space for the exchange of ideas is key to growing peace and fostering understanding. Through the sharing of unique experiences, stories, and knowledge, we are challenged to move out of our comfort zones. This process increases skills, abilities, and knowledge while creating a lens through which we gain wider perspectives. For me, becoming bilingual has been key in my process of sharing my story and learning from others’ stories. Equipping Jardin with English language skills will empower members of the locality to share the beauty and richness of Colombia, seek opportunities to develop abilities, gain a competitive edge, and share personal and communal stories.

The project.

The central point of my project is bilingual literacy, with a focus on the English language as a tool to create dialogue among the people of Jardin and its visitors. My project seeks to implement a traveling bilingual community wagon, which the very own community will officially name as the project develops. This wagon will be equipped with educational material: general and specific. The general material will be aimed at people who are interested in learning English. The specific one will be oriented to the needs of the main sectors and actors of the municipality such as the unions of transporters, hotel owners, restaurants, tourist guides, supermarkets, teachers, and students at the different public schools. The wagon will aim to promote common peaceful spaces centered on bringing diverse sectors of the community together with the goal of exchanging knowledge and stories with visitors. This wagon will become a tool to foster intercultural exchanges through the empowerment of the community members across Jardin, stimulate better relationships with foreign tourists, and find an opportunity to improve the quality of the services Jardin offers and with it, its inhabitants’ income.

The resources available in the wagon will be selected and curated by the community after identifying and analyzing the particular needs of Jardin. As the wagon travels across the rural and urban territories of the town, the contents and resources will vary and adapt according to the needs of each of the community’s sectors. From the educational needs of Jardin’s students and the business community to the tourism industry, the wagon will be an accessible resource for all.

Proposed design for the wagon (might change)
“Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: The Mobile Bilingual Library”
Jardin-Colombia/ June-August/ University of Oklahoma / Juan Andres Tobon O. (UWC Dilijan)

Partners
For this project, I will partner with the Smile Education Foundation (SEF), a private, non-profit organization that is dedicated to providing aid to impoverished communities. SEF’s mission centers on education, literacy, leadership, personal growth, and community development. With the foundation's help, I will have the professional human resources needed to identify the needs of the community. Furthermore, leaning on the well-established connections and network of SEF, I will employ program methodology that will guarantee the project’s growing success through monthly follow-ups with local partners. Additionally, Smile Education Foundation is eager to contribute to the advancement of this project by providing further funding and English-speaking volunteers with the goal of increasing the scope of impact of this project.

Methodology
This proposal has a co-creative approach. The proposed activities, as well as the executing parties involved, will act as facilitators of a process where the final beneficiaries, that is, the community of Jardin, will take ownership of the result. This guarantees the viability and sustainability of this proposal.

A) I will head to Jardin, with a professional volunteer from SEF to engage in a needs assessment session with those interested in getting involved in the process from the following sectors: education, tourism, commerce, and rural agriculture.

B) Co-creation. This implies identifying the specific needs of the different actors in the territory, in such a way that the educational material that will be in the wagon, is very consistent with the needs.

C) Construction and implementation of the traveling bilingual community wagon, equipped with the necessary resources and in accordance with the expectations and needs identified from the previous step.

D) I, along with an extra volunteer, will deploy the wagon in various areas of the municipality. We will have workshops to have a closer approach to the English language through different strategies such as printed materials supported by online asynchronous courses, and ongoing synchronous course sessions.

E) Generate and transfer skills to the leaders who will receive the result of this proposal, so that they make the tool their own and guarantee its use and deployment on a continuous basis.

F) Work sessions with partner institutions and organizations to outline the strategies that allow the sustainability of the proposal.

Expected results.
- Contribute to the ongoing peacebuilding process in Colombia through alternative pedagogic strategies that aim at bilingual literacy.
- Foster spaces for intellectual, communal, and intercultural exchange while promoting self-confidence and interest in personal achievement.
- Provide free access to resources that enhance education and illustrate its power as a tool to achieve tangible social transformation.

Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D/E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>