The Pachaysana Institute
Research Project Description
Summer 2017

Sites: The project is carried out predominantly in the Quichua community of Pañacocha on the border of the provinces of Sucumbios and Orellana, approximately 2.5 hours from the city of Francisco de Orellana (El Coca). Student researchers will also live briefly in the Quichua community of Tzawata in the province of Napo, as well as in the capital city of Quito.

The Pachaysana Institute: a collective of Ecuadorian and international scholars, artists, community organizers and development specialists who develop educational models to bridge the divide between international and local development. We are an Ecuadorian non-profit, legally recognized through the Ministry of Culture, and partnered with numerous organizations in Ecuador and abroad to carry out our mission. In practice, we work with marginalized communities, most especially the Ecuadorian Amazon, which face intense challenges due to the pressures of globalization. We employ innovative educational programming to assist with conflict transformation and inspire grassroots community development.

The Fair Trade Model: International students have the privilege to travel the world and be part of research projects like the one proposed. We believe this privilege implies a social responsibility to seek equity. In essence, for each international participant, we create an equal opportunity for a local participant. In practice, the international student’s participation funds the participation of a community counterpart, with whom the student will conduct the research jointly.

Description of our Community Partners: The research project will be carried out jointly with counterparts from the Quichua community of Tzawata. A small community of 20 families (107 inhabitants), Tzawata sits on the beautiful Ansu River almost exactly between the small cities of Puyo and Tena. Due to the pressures of globalization and accelerated development on its doorstep, the identity of the community’s youth is drastically different than that of their parents. What’s more, Tzawata is engaged in a legal battle for its ancestral lands, which are also claimed by an international mining company. The community has been working with Pachaysana for a little over 3 years in order to develop strategies for resilience and adaptation to such rapid and powerful changes.

Because of the participatory nature of the research, we also refer to Pañacocha as a partner community. A Quichua community, Pañacocha is about 4 times the size of Tzawata; however, they have traditionally lived spread out in an area of several thousand hectares. In 2014, the community inaugurated a “community of the millennium,” which was built in exchange for handing over extraction rights to the state-operated oil company. In this project, all the families received a house in a newly constructed small urban center along with the basic services of water, sewer, electricity, etc. Over the last two years, most families have since abandoned this project and returned to their previous rural lifestyle.

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The Project: The designated research project is one part of a larger research project, which is partially funded by a Fulbright-Hays grant. This larger project is called “Redefining territories of oil extraction: Quichua adaptive strategies to secure livelihoods and territories.” Its objective is to understand how natural resource extraction and the adjoined development infrastructure affect indigenous communities. More specifically, it seeks to understand how the communities adapt their traditional lifestyles (and thus how they alter their identities) when confronting the ever-increasing infrastructure such as roads, urbanizations, pipelines and increased navigation along main rivers.

The proposed Research Project is an encapsulated “mini-project” that will study how development complicates indigenous community adaptation via an examination of changing infrastructure and perception of geography in the community of Pañacocha. Specifically, student researchers join counterparts from Tzawata to engage in participatory action research (PAR)* and learn about how Quichua livelihoods have changed in the last 10 years as Pañacocha adjusts to oil-related infrastructure and modernization.

* Note on how we will apply PAR: In this case, PAR refers to a transparent sharing of observations and stories in a mutually agreed-upon time and space. Tzawata shares a similar history to Pañacocha – both are Quichua communities who have experienced significant interventions from natural resource extraction companies and governments. Their participation is integral, as it represents the axis point for our dialogue. International students share in the history of the global commodity of oil, since they represent the global north where the vast majority of Ecuador’s oil is consumed.

Timeline: 1 week for orientation and training, 4 weeks completing field work (conducted over two time periods), 1 week organizing and analyzing raw data, 2 weeks will be used to process findings and disseminate the results with local indigenous populations.

Training: The principal researcher will train international students and counterparts for approximately one week. During the training, they will be provided reading material and be required to write short essays to assure they understand the context in which they will be doing research.

Methodology: Participant Action Research, semi-structured interviews and surveys. If time allows, GPS data collection

Importance and Application: These small research projects will contribute directly to the larger project that is estimated to eventually benefit 20,000 small-scale farmers and indigenous community members, all of whom are struggling to adapt to ever-growing oil-associated infrastructure all around them. In essence, it is developing consciousness of how geographies are changing and how such consciousness can serve strategies in adaptation. In practice, via user-friendly presentations of the findings with local communities, these mini-projects will allow locals to better grasp how resource extraction and resource allocation translate into socio-economic and cultural differences. Of course, these small projects will also inform the principal research, showing the extent to which cash and market relations have increased between rural and urban areas along the Napo River.

Student profile: The students should have an advanced level of Spanish, especially in speaking and listening comprehension. Additionally we seek students with at least a basic background in qualitative research methodologies and development theory. Finally, students should demonstrate high levels of cultural sensitivity and able to live in very basic conditions (similar to Peace Corps Volunteers). For example, there is running water, but bathing is either in an improvised shower system or the river. Additionally, students will need to regularly apply insect repellent and sunscreen for optimum health.