

Sumak Kawsay: Peace and the Writing Experience
Ecuador
Colorado College
Megan Bott, United States, Colorado College
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Section 1: Narrative

B. Project Goals: The mission of this project was to promote mutual understanding, internal peace, and harmony by providing several people from all parts of Ecuador with the necessary space, physical or imaginative, for creative work and collaboration in a safe environment. We wanted our writing workshops to teach community members to use writing as a sustainable tool for resistance and a method of community healing and individual liberation.

C. Additional Funding: There was no additional funding for this project.

D. Our project idea came from each of our experiences and studies at Colorado College. After studying abroad, traveling for a semester in Ecuador, and building connections across the country, Megan Bott recognized an opportunity to address the consequences of the exploitation of both natural resources and humans at a personal level. Concurrently, Jessica Ramos studied abroad in Oaxaca, Mexico, and saw similar exploitation that was occurring in communities there. Through conversations, the two of us realized we could apply to this grant and address these issues through writing. Megan knew the power of writing through her own work as Editor-in-Chief of a campus magazine. Similarly, Jessica had taken courses in psychology, which highlighted the benefits of writing for healing in various capacities. Megan's previous collaboration with community members allowed for the two of us to plan and create workshops that would attempt to foster a sense of peace among community members.

E. Our project exists because current exploitative practices in Ecuador are not only destroying the environment and contaminating the people that rely on it for life, but also because these practices are undermining the relationship that people have to the land, the community, and the self.

F. Ecuador is a unique nation founded constitutionally on the indigenous way of life "Sumak Kawsay," or "good living" in Kichwa. Under Sumak Kawsay and the Constitution, Ecuadorians are guaranteed a right to harmony among nature, the community, and the self. This right, unique to Ecuador, is being violated under current exploitative practices throughout the country. We knew that our project idea placed value and emphasis on the relationship among nature, the community, and the self, and since this relationship is under threat in Ecuador, we felt as though our project idea could actually address this issue in a new way.

G. Considering our host site was the entire country, our project experiences vary vastly from region to region. In the Amazon, language communication problems mixed with disorganized logistical planning on the part of our host organization resulted in a difficult and uncomfortable working environment. Along the coast, however, not only were we able to communicate effectively, but we were working in the hometown of our local project partner. His connections were valuable and instrumental in the success of both the project and the open and welcoming working environment.

H. There were various challenges that arose while working in Ecuador, the main one being communication issues in the Amazon. Not only were we unable to effectively communicate with people before the workshops, but our first workshop was a disaster. When our Wao translator did not show up, we proceeded with the workshops in Spanish. The next few workshops had little to no participants (no one showed up to one workshop) and by the time we returned to Quito we were feeling defeated about

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the project. The Amazon was our first stop, making it a particularly devastating blow considering it set the precedent for all the other workshops. However, instead of letting it negatively affect our vision, we continued in the Andes and the coast and felt as though we had success in those regions.

I. The largest communication challenge arose in the Amazon, where we were working with Wao-speaking communities in Gareno who knew little Spanish. Although we paid a translator to come with us to the sites and to translate the workshops and writings from Wao to Spanish, he never came to our workshops, which resulted in a lot of discomfort and unfortunately negatively affected attendance.

J. Our definition of peace is in line with Sumak Kawsay, meaning it is built on the belief that true peace is achieved when nature, the community, and the self are all in harmony.

K. Our project has contributed to peacemaking at multiple levels. In the short-term, we have created a book that will serve as a tangible testament of how participants' voices are heard and will continue to do so through the sharing of it across the country. The physical book has encouraged harmony both at the personal level and concurrently at a larger community level. In the long-term, our workshops served the community members as a space for writing and healing as they reflected on their own lives. Our prompts in the workshops were aimed at reflection. We focused on reflection in the creative writing process because we believe it has served to promote peace and harmony in our own lives and did so for participants as well through feedback we received. Our project served as a demonstration for how writing is healing for people and now workshop attendees can use the writing skills obtained in the workshops for the rest of their lives.

L. Our project has changed our understanding of the world around us for the better. We arrived in Ecuador with a project idea that we hoped would teach people how to use writing as a tool for processing the world around them. What we learned, however, is that the most powerful examples of healing and peace came after the writing, when we were able to share and connect over the work that had been produced. We came to Ecuador with the idea that writing was the key element to achieving peace, but we left knowing that people and the connections they made through writing and through the workshops were really the most important aspect of the project.

M. "Our Davis Project taught me that true peace cannot be attained without taking into consideration the connections that exist among the self, the community, and the environment. Individual people and their harmony with nature and their communities are the true key to attaining the key to peace that Davis has been striving to create across the globe." - Megan Bott

"This project was valuable because it reminded me of how important healing is with others in community, and that it should not have to be a process to be done alone. I learned that peacemaking does not have to be at a macro-level to be impactful." - Jessica Ramos

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Section II: Photographs

Photo 1:



Photo 2:

