

Colorado College
Sumak Kawsay: Peace and the Writing Experience
Jessica Ramos '20 and Megan Bott '20
July 3rd-August 18th, 2018
Ecuador

OUR MISSION

In 2008, Ecuador adopted a constitution rooted in the ancient indigenous way of life *sumak kawsay*, or “good living” in Kichwa. The Constitution reads that “We women and men of Ecuador ... Hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living, the *sumak kawsay*.”¹ However, the continued exploitation of both natural resources and humans in the coast, the Andes, and the Amazon is clearly incongruous to the promises of the 2008 Constitution. Marginalized Afro-Ecuadorians along the coast face the destruction of their mangrove forests as a result of unsustainable shrimping practices while indigenous communities in the Andes and Amazon fight the devastation of their natural environment due to mining and oil production, respectively. All of these communities are isolated by their suffering and exploitation and thus discount the power of their voices and stories. Communities become severed from the experiences of marginalized people in other regions, who are going through the same rupture of community and natural environment.

Our vision of uniting these three regions through writing workshops arose from a conversation with project partner and Ecuadorian singer and writer Melissa Mourelle in addition to a class on politics and development in Ecuador taught by Portoviejo native María Arboleda. María taught that although the regions share similarities in their fight against exploitation, they are not yet in dialogue with one another. Despite the 2008 Constitution, the *sumak kawsay* way of living is still disrupted by various forms of natural resource exploitation. Our goal is that the writing workshops will empower people to use storytelling as a platform to demonstrate the role of *sumak kawsay* in their lives and how the exploitation of their lands is disrupting the peace between the self, the community, and the environment.

QUALIFICATIONS

While studying at the Institute for Ecuadorian Studies (IEE) last year, Megan Bott met María Arboleda, former secretary of the state anti-corruption committee and professor at Universidad Central, and Melissa Mourelle, a recent college graduate, community organizer, and singer. Collaboration with each of these women resulted in the project idea and the establishment of relationships that make this project feasible. Melissa will even be joining Megan and Jessica, both Spanish-speaking, in conducting the writing workshops in Spanish throughout the three regions.

Jessica became involved after returning from work with grassroots organizations in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her work with the indigenous communities in the area led to her interest in combating the isolation that results from exploitation. Passionate about this subject, she discussed it with Megan, who introduced her to the parallel exploitation that exists in Ecuador. Jessica immediately became passionate about addressing the same suffering in a different country.

Now, Megan and Jessica are in the process of developing writing workshops with Lighthouse Writer’s Workshop (LWW), a non-profit that boasts the status as the largest literary arts center in the Rocky Mountain West. LWW conducts *Hard Times Writing Workshop* in Denver for writers experiencing homelessness. Jessica will work with the coordinators of this workshop to develop a curriculum for Ecuador centered around emotional and personal storytelling and healing. While Jessica works in Colorado, Megan will work for Volcán Azul, a creative writing organization based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Megan’s work with Volcán Azul will give their group experience in the delicate positionality that they will be in as foreigners. After her internship, Megan will go to Quito and meet with the organizers to continue the development of both the workshops and the relationships between the organizations and the project. Upon Megan’s return to Colorado, the two women will conduct a pilot version of one of these workshops at Colorado College.

OUR PROJECT

The writing workshops in each of the three regions follow the same schedule: Melissa, Jessica, and Megan will spend the first day training community leaders in conducting writing workshops, and then the following four days will be spent co-leading these workshops. This will take place in the coastal state of Manabí, the Andean state of Imbabura, and the Amazonian state of Orellana. Our workshops will take the form of two 2-hour sessions, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, at the organization site over the course of four days. By offering the workshops multiple times, community members with conflicting schedules will have various opportunities to attend; we expect 20 participants maximum for every location. These participants will be recruited by the organizations prior to our arrival. The workshops will open with

¹ <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>

introductions, followed by readings of poetry and prose by Latin American authors that deal with emotional trauma and exploitation. We will only allow participants above 15 years of age attend due to the emotional trauma and exploitation that will be discussed. After the readings, there will be a 30-minute writing session with an optional prompt, encouraging people to write in whatever medium and language they see fit. The workshops will conclude with a discussion of the excerpt, an optional sharing of the writings, and an invitation to a symposium in Quito for cross-regional story sharing and dialogue.

When all workshops have been completed, Melissa, Jessica, and Megan will return to Quito for the last two weeks of the project. During the first week, they will work with a Quiteño publisher on assembling a book of the writings and photographs taken during the workshops. 400 physical copies of the book will be published in addition to a free online version available on each organization's website. During the final week, Megan and Jessica will fund travel for the book contributors to Quito, where writers will convene to unite in cross-regional solidarity through artistic exchange. Writers will stay with Quiteño families organized by the IEE as they meet with community organizers and establish a network of writers and leaders across the country. The project will conclude with a celebration of community organizers and writers brought together under the principles of *sumak kawsay*. The contributors will return to their respective regions with 100 copies of the book to distribute in whatever way they see fit.

PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Due to the immense scope of this project, we will work with organizations all over Ecuador to both train community organizers in conducting future workshops while working with them to institute the workshops over the summer. Megan Bott was first introduced to the project idea, which came from two of the organizations, while studying and working with them in the fall semester of 2017. We are in communication with the IEE in Quito, Runa Tupari in Imbabura, and Ecological Action in Orellana.² We have collaborated with them on our project proposal and are looking forward to working together for the benefit of the community and the empowerment of their people through writing and *sumak kawsay*.

Working with these organizations will be key in implementing our project because our proposal centers around community empowerment and development. These organizations have expressed their interest in the writing workshops as an approach to train and empower community members to utilize writing as both a sustainable tool for resistance and a method of community healing and individual liberation. Ultimately, our project goes hand-in-hand with the principles of *sumak kawsay*: the workshops serve community members in voicing their experiences and finding peace in the self while the physical book functions as a tangible, sustainable, and long-lasting testament of cross-regional peace among communities and the natural environment. The workshops, the inter-regional linking of networks, and the collaboration with Melissa all come together to promote peace by addressing the harmony between nature, community, and the self.

TIMELINE

Spring 2019: Writing Workshop Preparation – Work with Colorado's Lighthouse Writers Workshops on conducting respectful workshops conducive to the creation of works dealing with emotional and personal trauma.

July 3rd: Arrive in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Take bus to Manabí.

July 5th - August 9th: Spend next five weeks conducting workshops in three locations – Manabí, Imbabura, and Orellana.

August 10th - August 15th: Condense edited volume of writings and photographs to produce the book.

August 16th - 18th: Host symposium in Quito with writing contributors resulting in cross-regional solidarity through dialogue and shared experience.

SAFETY AND CONTINGENCY

As American women, we understand the safety issues that come when traveling through South America and looking like tourists. We wish to ensure our safety and the safety of those who attend our workshops by taking precautionary measures. We do not anticipate any issues relating to safety since the organizations we are working with are local and familiar with the area. Our familiarity with the cities we are traveling to and our connections in each of them will be useful resources in order to ensure our safety and allow for a contact in case of an emergency. Both Jessica and Megan are up-to-date on all of their vaccinations and even already have the yellow fever and typhoid shots. The State Department website says that Ecuador has a Travel 1 advisory, stating to "take normal precautions." We will register our trip with the State Department and be prepared by planning emergency exits from each city.

² We are still talking to María Arboleda about organizations in her home state of Manabí.

Names: Jessica Ramos & Megan Bott					Project Name: Peace and the Writing Experience				
School: Colorado College					Location: Manabí, Imbabura, Orellana, & Quito, Ecuador				
Dates: July 3-August 18, 2019									
Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food	Miscellaneous	Symposium Expenses	Direct expenses of workshops	Staffing costs	Book publication costs	Miscellaneous
\$1,614	\$455	\$40	\$1,365	\$144	\$603	\$414	\$900	\$4,320	\$145
Total Student Expenses:					Total Project Expenses:				
\$3,618					\$6,382				
					Total Expenditures:				
					\$10,000				
Travel:					Communications:				
Flights:					Movistar \$20 Traveler's SIM for 50 minutes of calls, 2.5 GB of Data,				
Oklahoma City - Guayaquil, Quito - Oklahoma City: \$918					unlimited WhatsApp and Facebook x 2 = \$40				
New Orleans - Guayaquil, Quito - New Orleans: \$564									
Buses:					Food:				
Guayaquil - Manabi: \$6 x 2 = \$12					\$15/day/person = \$210/week (for 2 people) = \$1,365 (6.5 weeks/2 people)				
Manabi - Imbabura: \$12 x 2 = \$24									
Imbabura - Orellana: \$10 x 2 = \$20					Miscellaneous:				
Orellana - Quito: \$8 x 2 = \$16					Laundry: 5kg/week/person = \$24/week x 2 = \$144 (6 weeks/2 people)				
Local Bus Transportation: \$1/day x 5 days x 6 weeks x 2 = \$60									
Total: \$1614					Direct expenses of workshops:				
					Refreshments: \$20/day = \$100 (5-day workshop) = \$300 (three 5-day workshops)				
Lodging:					Paper: \$2/pack = \$10/workshop = \$30 (3 workshops)				
Guayaquil with Leandro Saavedra: \$0					Writing utensils: \$6/pack = approx. \$24 total				
Manabi, Hostal Senador, 7 nights: \$210					Miscellaneous (copies, printing, etc.) = \$60				
Imbabura, Hospedaje Kuna Wesi, 7 nights: \$56					Staffing costs: \$900				
Orellana, Planeta Azul, 7 nights: \$189					\$150: staff helping produce book				
Quito, Jose Cuellar Yunda, 14 nights: \$0					\$375: Melissa travel, lodging, and staffing				
Total: \$455					\$375: staff helping lead workshops (\$25/day/person) = (3 people, 1 for each workshop)				
					Book publication costs: \$10.80/book (400 copies)				
					Miscellaneous: \$145 fund for any unforeseen emergency				