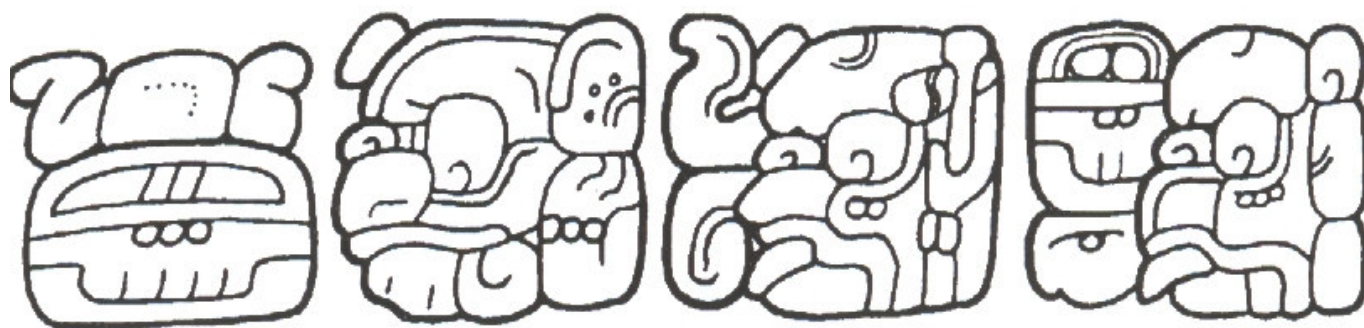


The International Voluntary Service Movement in Mexico



Study made on the EVS Project between Vive Mexico and Lunaria organizations

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November 2003

Oscar, Jaime, Salvador, Ivette, Marbeilla...are only some of the faces you will find in Mexico in this day and age...in Mexico, the new and young are trying to face the problems inherited from the past and set a new course in its history...talking to some of the youth gives us the opportunity to better understand the contradictions and the potential of the present Mexican society – by taking into account the most important political and economical issues of its history.

BRIEF HISTORY OF MEXICO

The history of Mexico is characterized by the constant abuse of the political power in different institutions towards its citizens, causing a significant fracture between the government and the civil society. This tradition started since the centuries of the Spanish colonization, which was based on the exploitation of natural resources of the country and on a very fierce repression of the pre-Hispanic cultures. As the Spanish imposed its European political conventions on Mexico, the existing social and political structures began to collapse – leading to the expression of the original evolution of the Meso-American population. The encounter of the two cultures inevitably led to the oppression of one culture over the other, a common occurrence in the history of colonization. The values, principles, and ideas that so far proved the superiority of European culture and the *European being* represented the common justification of all colonization, not only the ones of the Spanish. Aside from the ideology and, often, the religion, there was also the economic background of Europe during the XV-XVI century, which had an important role on European imperialism.

Nueva Espana, the former name of the colony in the territory of Mexico and the Southwest of present United States of America, was a strategic occupation for it was a vast land of precious natural resources. The territory would also act as the bridge between Europe's and Asia's economical relationship. For example, Acapulco, presently an important tourist center, was a unique port opened to ships coming from the East for a long period of time.

The three centuries of Spanish colonization left profound consequences in the society of all Latin America. In Mexico, the consequences can be summed up by the terms "imaginary Mexico" and "real Mexico." *Imaginary Mexico* is a concept that corresponds to the western cultural and political model, imposed by the Spanish colonization. On the other hand, *real Mexico* signifies the essence of the old ancestral world, whose values, traditions, and religious conceptions remain – and forever live in the soul and in the heart of a true Mexican.

The mixture of different races, cultures, and traditions in Mexico could have the extraordinary potential to enrich the society, however, it presented an obstacle instead in its social development. The deep divisions of classes and discriminations of color (the natives, the African slaves, and mixed races) created such an imbalance among the people which disturbed any possibilities for dialogue and/or participation in the political arena especially. Thus, these gaps between the people provided space for

political abuse of power and great injustice for the citizens. Ultimately, the trust of the people in their government quickly began to diminish.

Not even with the creation of an independent Mexico in 1824, after 14 years of struggles, managed to overcome the profound fracture between the two worlds: the predominant “imaginary Mexico” and the repressed “real Mexico.” The severe clash made it quite impossible for the two worlds to ever cross. For instance, when the upper class attempted to build a new image of Mexico, they used the old splendors of the pre-Hispanic empires to entice international tourists. They exploited the values of the most illustrious brave warriors to depict a picture of great pride in Mexican history, but the *picture* merely represented the historic memory of the past. The *picture* did not truly illustrate the pride and respect for the population strictly related to that historic inheritance: the *indigenas*.

The construction of the new independent State endured several bloody struggles for power and succession of authoritarian leaders. However, it was not until the Revolution of 1910 that brought the hope for a different social order—one that would be based on equality and justice. Two words inspired that period of hope: *Tierra y Libertad*.

Detrimental to the people, the mission to create democratic institutions after the revolution failed once again. Democracy was supposed to finally facilitate a government for the people, reflecting the will of the people. However, since 1929 the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) took over and established an authoritarian regime, based on corruption and violation of human rights. Far from representing the civil society, the PRI dictatorship exerted a strong repression of any criticism and dissent. An example is the brutal outcome of the activist movement in Tlateloco on October 2, 1968. It was a demonstration for social change, arranged by the students; but tragically ended with the shooting of about 350 people, arranged by the army. Another major event that marked the PRI period is the earthquake of 1985. During this time of great devastation, the government once again demonstrated its incapacity to satisfy the needs of the population, leaving room for strong and organized action of the civil society. Furthermore, a more recent event is the explosion of the “indigenous question” in 1994, with the rebellion of EZLN. This heated controversy caught the attention of the public opinion on the living conditions of Chiapas, a State very rich in natural resources. Questions continued to rise, such as, if they produce $\frac{3}{4}$ of the electrical energy in Mexico, then why did many of local communities lacked electricity in their very own homes.

The year 2000 reached a critical climax in Mexico: the election of Fox and, more importantly, the end of PRI dictatorship. Fox, the candidate of PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional), made tremendous changes politically and socially while altering the mentality and consciousnesses of people. Hope escalated throughout the country for a true transformation of government structures to finally free the people from the abiding restraints of despotism. The new government shall deliver the liberty and the rights the citizens had been without for quite a long time. After more than 70 years of oppression the civil society is now waking up to a new energy and activism that is slowly taking the place of the previous resigned and passive attitude. The society now wants to have a

stronger voice in the political sector and is taking possession of new ways of self-expression in social and political participation.

STEREOTYPES

Everyone must have at least heard jokes *or stereotypes* of different groups depending on their country of origin, their color, their sex, their age, etc. In this way, stereotypes are used to amuse others by generalizing a group of people. As an Italian, it is common for us to hear jokes that identifies us with pasta, pizza, or even worse – mafia. And when the jokes start to paint distorted pictures of a group we may belong to, they become to affect us more personally. In this way, stereotypes are no longer jokes, but barriers that only ignorance can pass beyond.

A stereotype is a notion that is well-defined, generally expressed by a word, a phrase, a sentence, or no words at all. It simplifies a complex reality by reducing an entire group and confining them to trivial categories. And these categories are intentionally distinctive from each other so that there will be no mistake of which group belongs to which category. This fine division then condemns differences and creates distance. This distance consequently prevents any form of learning from each other through dialogue or meaningful interactions. And this lack of education can only lead to ignorance, which is the foundation of all prejudice.

Having presumptions about people before knowing them is likely, it is only dangerous when we do not leave space for new perspectives to add on to our pre-existing beliefs or even to replace them altogether. Before coming here, all we really knew about Mexico were the amazing beaches, historical archeological sites, salvaged jungle, colorful handcrafts, spicy cuisine and that pre-hispanic cultures still exist. And we have to admit that we also had a stereotypic image of “the Mexican” in mind: the cowboy boots, bulky snake-skinned belt, and the grand sombrero. We also had the impression that Mexicans were cheerful and easy-going people, always looking for any reason to party and drink tequila. Even with the limited knowledge we had of Mexico, we quickly became fascinated and excited to experience this country.

While living in Mexico for almost six months, we toured the ancient ruins, relaxed on the beautiful beaches, gulped tequilas in several different occasions, purchased colorful handcrafts, consumed *tacos ricos*, and met cheerful, easy-going, festive people, but it does not stop there – not at all. We also witnessed the daily life of an ordinary Mexican – it mostly consists of a day of hard modest work in order to lead a simple humble life. We observed ordinary people trying to make a difference in labor activist protests downtown. We worked with ordinary young people who dedicate their time outside school initiating intercultural projects. We have made so many new discoveries in Mexico about its people, its beauties, its traditions, and its problems. Some of the things surprised us while others inspired us. And the more we studied about past Mexico, the more we want to learn about present Mexico. We found all the things we thought we would find here, but we did not imagine that we would uncover so much more!

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

We could never forget the warm atmosphere and the feeling of “home” that the Mexican people gave us since the very first days of our stay here. Thanks to this amazing experience of EVS, we were able to really get to know the people of the society. And little by little, because of the incredible hospitality and openness of the people, we began to feel integrated in the society.

However, we soon discovered that, behind the cheerful and friendly attitude, the Mexican society is more complex than we imagined and is not as simple to understand. First of all, we noticed that the differences in social classes are far more considerable than in Europe. In Mexico, there is a minority of people who are very rich and can afford a luxurious lifestyle while the majority of the people live in extremely poor conditions, suffer from hunger, and cope with precariously hygienic environments. Subsequently, the society is very fragmented as these different worlds coexist. Contact between the different classes then become unfeasible because each group spends their life in the social class of origin, with their friends and their lifestyle consistent with it. Thus, they limit any possibilities of coming across people from different backgrounds. In this respect, the Mexican society can be considered more “closed” than the European one, because of the scarce social mobility. And talking with some of the students, we discovered that even in the educational realm there is still very little integration between the social spheres – unlike the society we are used to.

An important aspect of civil society is the lack of interest in the political issues of the country: years and years of repression and corruption of the political system generated a strong trend of apathy among the people. The majority of the Mexicans still believe that their votes will not make any significant difference that would exert any influence on political and/or social concerns. This conviction of the general public is the root of the great indifference and resigned attitude towards any governmental affairs. Because any form of collective action proved unattainable during the 72 years of PRI control, the people felt driven to find means to resolve their individual problems – corruption being one of the main ways! However, even with the lack of “team work” within the community, there is an overwhelming sense of solidarity within family entities. The family is the only social institution that the people can really believe in. Thus, the familial realm is the only domain where unity and collaborative support exist.

The change in the Presidency in 2000 meant big changes for the people. They hoped to immediately heal from the excessive mistreatment they were subjugated to. However, when new President Fox could not deliver all the reforms he promised the people, they immediately lost their confidence and trust in his quick winds of changes. It is very difficult to delete seven decades of one dominating party in the mind of the people. It is also difficult to refuse such questionable benefits from corrupt public management. The people are left no choice but to accept the ways the system works in order to survive daily challenges.

Another important characteristic of the Mexican society is the controversial relationship between the Mexicans and the indigenous cultures, which represent the roots of their own cultural identity. On one hand, all the Mexicans are proud of their glorious past and of the magnificent pyramids which represent the ancient civilizations. On the other hand, they fail to recognize the indigenous populations as representatives of those cultures: the dominant Mexican society is not interested in knowing their traditions and their way of life and often look down on them. Many Mexicans feel attracted more by the northern American and European cultures than by their original culture. Modern Mexico has to resolve this deep fracture, which is inherited by the colonial past, in order to acquire a real unitarian consciousness as a nation.

PRIORITIES OF MEXICO

It is difficult to define which phase Mexico is currently in the developing process. It can be considered one of the main reference in Latin America for its political stability, economic growth, participation in the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) with USA and Canada, and for being the second most populated country in Latin America.

The Mexican administration is doing its best to remain in the forefront on the important affairs of the region. Let us remember the recent meeting between the President Fox and the Brazilian President Lula, the dialogue with Cuba, the WTO (World Trade Organization) meeting in Cancun in September, as well as the firm position against the war with Iraq expressed inside the United Nations. However, Mexican authorities need to confront the pressing problems that still affect a considerable portion of its national population.

In the huge territories of the United States of Mexico, the states and their communities have a different social, historical and economical background. The policy makers need to consider some of the more urgent situations in particular. For instance, the village of peasants in Chiapas and the *maquiladores* (factories of assembling mechanical components, property of US investors) in the north are just some examples.

According to the opinions of the young people we interviewed, one of the main priorities for the development of Mexico is education—meaning both formal and non-formal. The first is especially relevant to the necessity of increasing the percentage of literacy in a country with about 9% of illiteracy. This also includes improving the quality of education in general. Many Mexicans stress the importance of an education, which would guide individuals to a new civic consciousness at all social levels, starting from the family—such as a higher consideration for women. The role of the women should be reconsidered in this new education because though the educated youth are more modern and open to this notion, the country as whole still has a long way to reach real gender equality. Another important purpose of the education should be to diffuse a stronger attachment to the democratic values, which would facilitate a more active citizenship and a strong sense of “anti-corruption.”

Another imperative matter that greatly affects the lives of many people, is the economic fragility of Mexico. The strong devaluation of the *peso* in 1994, the high rate of inflation, and the bankruptcy of many small enterprises, had a very strong impact on the quality of life of many Mexicans, especially the lower and the middle classes. The unemployment and the struggle with finding a stable, well-salaried job became a real menace for people, especially those who were already condemned to a precarious way of life without the possibility of counting on a well-developed system of social security. The low economical growth, which was of about 2.1% between 2000 and 2003, led to the insufficient number of jobs (which has been estimated between 1.1 and 1.3 millions of jobs every year). This high unemployment rate, of about 30% of the active population, is composed of a 3.96% of open unemployment (which only considers the number of people who have looked for a job in the previous two months and did not find one) and by a 26% of sub-employment (which takes into account the people who have odd jobs with informal contracts). These statistics underline the existence of an alarming situation of the employment sector, characterized by a high percentage of the population having under paid jobs and without any social security. This would inevitably generate an overwhelming amount of poverty as well as social subordination.

The difficulty to find a good job introduce another important phenomenon: the emigration to USA. This movement in masses then creates deep social repercussions due to the disintegration of many families and communities.. For a long time Mexican authorities have been trying to create a stable round table with the immigration authorities of USA to try to find solutions that would serve their mutual interests. However, the war to Iraq interrupted any progress in the dialogue concerning this issue because the main priority for the US government is the security of the nation, which includes the border with Mexico.

The local newspapers contain daily articles of people attempting to cross the northern border with USA. Illegal emigration entails numerous struggles and uncertain risks: for example, the dangers in crossing the desert with vicious animals, unbearable weather conditions, starvation, or even having to submit to the abuses of "human merchants" who exploit the desperation and hope of the people. Then the newly emigrated will have to cope with unsafe living conditions in a foreign country, not to mention with the separation from the family. Every year, about 500,000 Mexican try to cross the border with USA, 29% of those are youngsters between 15-25 years, and 90% do not possess proper documents (Proyecciones de población de México 2000-2050). Other sources says that the number of Mexicans who try to enter USA can reach up to 1.5 million (Reuters and Associated Press). Whichever the exact number is, it is significant enough to be recognized as a serious problem. Furthermore, the Mexican President Fox and his staff are trying to find an agreement to legalize the status of over 3.5 million long-term Mexican inhabitants in the USA (Reuters and Associated Press).

We have to say that the emigration, legal or illegal, relieves the critical social balance in some Mexican communities. The financial income flows by the remittances of the emigrants are a crucial source for a lot of families. Remittances, money sent from the immigrants working in the United States, have become one of the most important sources of income for Mexico. The Mexican government estimates remittances at \$10

billion a year, second only to income from Pemex, the national oil company (The Herald Sun, 2 Ago 2003).

The relations between USA and Mexico are complex and on different levels. The northern American companies (also Canada in this case) have the major part of the advantage for the economic agreement between the three country, while the Mexican companies do not have the power to compete at the same level. Also if the exports to NAFTA partners and the production have grown since 1994, the employment did not have the same dynamic. In general the positive effects are concentrated in the northern states of Mexico, while the southern ones suffer the strong competitions for more economic agriculture products of USA, where the efficiency of the mega farms is six time higher than the little Mexican ones. This competition affects the domestic production of corn in particular.

Due to the strong dependence on the US economy, the Mexican export economy is very vulnerable to the effects of domestic cycles in the US economy. NAFTA accelerated the dependency of Mexican economy on the US capital. In Mexico there are isolated voices, especially in the southern-eastern states, who are asking for reconsiderations of the NAFTA agreement.

On a social level, the northern American lifestyle has a big impact on the youngsters who come back in Mexico. It is really difficult to accept the more traditional model of the Mexican communities, especially in the countryside. Thus, this lack of re-adaptation create social tensions and carry new problems such as early-pregnancy out of the marriage for young girls and viral sickness coming from abroad.

The economic fragility and the deficiencies of the social system are at the base of a dispersed social insecurity. In a big town, such as Mexico City, it has a strong impact on the quality of life of the inhabitants, especially women, who do not feel safe in their every day life: as a matter of fact in 2001 there were counted 912 murders, 1460 violations and about 80 thousand thefts only in the capital city. Or another example of insecurity is what happened in ciudad Juarez in the last decade, where about 300 women were killed on their way to work, a few kilometers from their houses and there were never any suspects found and prosecuted of these mass murders.

Another element which contributes to the heightened sense of insecurity among the people is the constant infringement on human rights. During the 90's the government began to aggressively repress those who demanded any form social justice. In order to achieve such enforcement, the State increased its military services to deal with social dissent such as the utilization of armed forces and police bodies, as well as paramilitary organizations. Among the most recent brutal cases were the massacre of 17 peasants in 1995 in the State of Guerrero by the hand of the police, or the massacre of 45 indigenous people in 1997 in Chiapas, by the hand of paramilitary groups, or the acts of torture inflicted to the peasants in Oaxaca and Guerrero.

Although the new President Fox promised accurate investigations about such human rights violations, and also recently approved Federal Law of transparency and access to the archives of the secret services to the public, there is still a long way to go in order to set things right and make the real criminals take full responsibility. As a matter of fact the military army still denies its involvement in any criminal acts. Nonetheless,

article 23 of the Mexican Constitution guarantees its substantial impunity: the article affirms that crimes towards civilians, such as sexual violence or murder, committed by the military during their duties cannot be persecuted by a civil court, only by a military one. This in turn presents a huge obstacle in the preservation of the human rights in Mexico because those who perform the violations have the power to them. Moreover, they are protected under the same constitution that should be protecting the people's rights. In this way, there is little hope of the victims to seek any real form of justice. Another example of this controversial topic is the death of prominent human rights lawyer, Digna Ochoa, last October in her very own home in Mexico City. Despite of all the evidence, which proved that she had been murdered, the investigations ended with the conclusion that it was a case of suicide – demonstrating, once again, the difficulty of realizing full justice, due to the strong interests opposed to it.

REALITY OF THE ORGANIZATIONS IN MEXICO

The international voluntary service is quite a recent phenomenon in Mexico, compared to other geographical areas. For example, Europe has a consolidated tradition, dating back to the end of the first world war, as a way to strengthen international solidarity after the violent events of the previous years.

In Mexico there are only three association related to IVS. Vimex, being the first, was founded in 1985 after the terrible earthquake which almost destroyed Mexico City. Later, it became one the first attempt of the civil society to assemble in order to face common problems. It was not until 1997 and 1998 that two other organizations were established: respectively, Vive Mexico and Nuestra Tierra. Although the missions of these associations are quite similar (cultural exchanges, international solidarity, peace, ect), each association cannot seem to find any incentives to collaborate and use each other for additional support. In the past, there has been attempts to create a platform of cooperation among the Mexican association but they often did not accomplish any terms of agreement. It would have been ideal to present a strong united front to the other international nets which operate in the international voluntary service. However, that cannot occur until the associations achieve a common ground that would bring together mutual interests.

Mexico has a lot of potentiality with its vast possibilities for the intercultural learning based on its traditions, ancient civilities, and 57 different ethnicities of *indigenas*. Mexico's population is mostly comprised of the young, the population under 15 years of age represents 34% of the total while 50-60% consists of those under 25! However, only a small minority of the youth can afford a trip abroad and besides, traveling to participate in international voluntary projects is not very high in priorities when saving money to most of the young people in Mexico.

All these associations have their headquarters in big towns like Mexico City, Morelia, Guadalajara, Cancun and Puerto Vallarta, so their presence is not well visible in the major part of the immense territory of Mexico. The communication and

information technology extend only to the big cities, so it seems necessary to organize a several workcamps to reach a large number of communities. This strategy responds to the need to create an image of the association to find partners for the organization of workcamps and, on the other side, create a good reputation in order to attract the interest and curiosity of the youth. In Mexico, there is a lack of trust in the third sector movement and the dialogue with the young adults and their family can be difficult due to the vagueness of the opportunities in participating in voluntary work.

The lack of financial support from public institutions and the little awareness of the importance of voluntary work weakens the development of a strong third sector in Mexico. This is especially evident in the low percentage of people (about the 0.4%) working in this field. A very strong will is necessary in order to dedicate oneself in such a challenging field that is not particularly highly recognized as a “professional” career – such as for-profit businesses. As we illustrated before in the priorities, the improvement of international project is not really considered important by the local, state, and federal authorities which have to face poverty, basic educations health care assistance, just to mention some of the main issues. In this situation, it is really difficult to build a dialogue and collaboration between the institutions and the associations who are trying to develop the international voluntary service in Mexico. To be specific, it is quite arduous to obtain financial support in the organization of an international project: the advantages for the community given by the work of the volunteers, the opportunity for an intercultural learning based on the non-formal methodologies, and the increased recognition of values in volunteering are not considered important enough to justify an investment in such projects.

Aids as *una-tantum* contribution can be agreed by the authorities to recognize the effort of the association in specific fields, but they are material contributions which do not produce a long and planned collaboration to improve the movement. Thus, due to insufficient funding, the organizations in México require an extra-fee. In Mexico is really difficult to plan events, because something can happen in every aspect of the process. Sudden changes of ideas is a common reality. A meeting does not guarantee any certainty of the agreements. In these situation also the change of the government is a big issue, because the policies can be changed without honoring of the past agreements. The only way to carry on is to work to create a good and serious image among the people, in order to make more and more people trust the association and not feel insecure about participating in workcamps which takes place very far from home. With only three associations and no other institutions to promote the movement, the only way to involve the people is to show them the opportunities that international volunteering offers and to educate them to international issues. This the reason why Vive Mexico tries to develop activities with other youth organizations, to organize seminars, to participate in events. The training is considerably very important to prepare the volunteers will have any sort of responsibilities in workcamps.

In Vive Mexico the involvement of the volunteers to the activities of the association goes beyond the participation in workcamps. On the first level there is a Working group composed of young people here in Morelia, where we are, that are in

charge of outreaching to other youngsters and promote the activities through their own experience.

On a more structured level there are ex-volunteers who operate in other cities and towns of Mexico which collaborate in the activity of the main office. In a situation where the associations don't have other kind of external support but their own image, open the structure is a really important source of communication and promotion. The training also in this case is basic, that is why since the foundation of Vive Mexico, any suggestions have been really appreciated by the staff, especially from the most experienced volunteering systems of Europe. Also today the contribution of foreign volunteers as leader of Mexican workcamps is really appreciated!

During our time spent in Vive Mexico, we tried to know what the other associations in the world think about Mexico and its organizations. We prepared a survey ("A survey to understand and develop the cooperation with Mexico") for that matter. We really thank the people that spent time on it to answer the questions!!!

As we could imagine the most discussed issue is about the extra-fee.

In Mexico all the associations which organize workcamp ask for an extra-fee, it means that all have same situations of financial resources to organize projects. As we said before, it's really difficult to have partners which provide part of food/accommodation.

HOW TO IMPROVE THE COOPERATION BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE OTHER COUNTRIES

Inside the association Vive Mexico there is the strong feeling that more could be done to improve the cooperation among partners associations, in order to realize a more efficient work and to achieve more durable results.

A deeper knowledge of the Mexican social and political situation is, without any doubts, an essential tool to understand the reality in which Mexican association have to operate and constitutes the base of a dialogue based of mutual respect. This article is not meant to be a complete essay about Mexico (which would require deeper researches and a considerable number of pages!) but has only the aim to be a first step in this direction. Vive Mexico is trying to adopt the modalities of work of its foreign counterparts, but this requires a strong effort of adapting them to the very completely different context of Mexico: a country which has a different scale of priorities in comparison to other countries and the international voluntary service or any kind of youth policies is not among them.

We think that it is really notable that Vive Mexico is an association made by Mexican leaders, developed around the international voluntary services ideals, and constantly growing on its own. It would be really remarkable if all the other countries of Latin America could experience a lot of these cases!

New instruments could be utilized to exchange information about its own country...such as establishing a telematic bulletin to give to all the associations periodic information about the internal situation of the different countries or the creation of a web site where the associations and the volunteers can exchange their experiences and their opinions related to the voluntary service or the organization of special meetings to debate about common problems and find common solutions. For example Vive Mexico is going to organize a seminar in Mexico as a space for an open confrontation among the different associations and an occasion to make them discover the reality of Mexico and change the stereotypes which derive from its scarce knowledge.

The association is already trying to make the foreign volunteers appreciate better their experience in Mexico by, for example, giving them the possibility of attending intensive Spanish courses before their workcamps, provided that the language is the most important tool to understand a different culture; besides there is the idea to organize similar courses about the history and civilization of Mexico, and to create, in every workcamp, the occasions to know ancient rituals and traditions of the local folklore in order to have a real taste of the Mexican culture.

It is also very important that the volunteers come to Mexico having already some cognitions about this country, and in this sense the associations of their countries can have an important role, by providing them with all the necessary information.

Another way that the associations could utilize to help Mexican associations to overcome its difficulties is to make pressure on the Mexican government (for example through own institutions) by emphasizing the importance of the international civil service and of supporting the associations implied in it.

We spent almost six months in Mexico and we think that improving the number of the projects as Action 1 and Action 2 would be the best way to show up the international voluntary service. We had the opportunity to participate in a conference in Morelia and we spoke about the opportunities that the Youth Program gives to the youth community, we had also Mexican testimonials who talked about their past experience in Action 1 projects. The truth is that it is really difficult to make them understand the importance of intercultural exchanges. Here a lot of youngsters cannot figure out which kind of contributions an international projects can give. For this very reason it is important to improve the quantity of the projects to create a visibility of the phenomenon: this is the only way to open the minds and to show that solidarity and cooperation are close to them. It would be good to create a dialogue to plan multilateral exchanges, in this way the local authorities would be more involved and aware and they would be more likely to accept the establishment of more convenient possibilities for the International Voluntary Service.