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# Dynamic Media: A need for the dynamic use of media to meet organizational goals

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# DYNAMIC MEDIA

*A needs assessment for the dynamic use of media to meet organizational goals*

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PIM 74

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study looks at how media can be used dynamically as a vehicle for study abroad students to create more meaningful engagements with the communities they visit.  It takes a post-structural approach with an emphasis on how media supports participatory community driven initiatives.  It is the result of a 3-month participatory research process that looks at how media is emerging as a resource in some of the most remote communities in Nicaragua.  The study was based on interviews with community stakeholders of the study abroad program, participatory observation, questionnaires, talks with community members, and the results of dynamic media tasks implemented by students.  It found that media is reaching even the most rural of communities and has the potential to be an effective community resource.  Media in itself does not benefit communities, but can be embraced as a tool that contributes to the success of community initiatives.  By doing this it represents a dynamic way that students can participate and understand these initiatives more deeply.

**I. Introduction and Statement of Research Question**

The focus of my inquiry is based on the work I was doing with the SIT study abroad program in Nicaragua. SIT Study Abroad is a program of World Learning a 501C3 non-profit. It currently has an accredited semester and summer study abroad programs in over 30 countries. Its approach focuses on providing an authentic experiential learning opportunity for US undergraduate students studying a semester abroad. In providing that authenticity, reciprocity is emphasized as an essential characteristic of SIT's study abroad program, as it contributes to serving the needs of the communities they visit.

I worked as an assistant program coordinator for SIT study abroad in Nicaragua, which has recently changed the focus of their curriculum from "Globalization" to "Youth Culture, Media, and Literacy". As this change has only occurred within the last five years, the program is still growing and defining itself within this new focus. The program connects students to professionals working in each of the topic fields emphasized in the curriculum, and provides experiences, which offer experiential learning opportunities. Previously, each aspect of the curriculum was presented separately with speakers giving talks on their work in the field as it relates to the topics of the curriculum; Youth Culture, Media, or Literacy. The focus of my research was how the program approaches media as a topic of study. Before, the use of media was static and isolated and there was little focus on media creation as a vehicle to explore the other topics of the curriculum.

Media is a multifaceted concept, which can be approached both theoretically as well as through practical application. The program invites practitioners to speak about their experience working in Nicaragua with media in different ways such as activisim,

filmmaking, and blogging. Previously the only part of the program in which students created media is a Digital Storytelling workshop. Students create 3-minute personal reflection stories as audiovisual pieces. The workshop lasted five days and was integrated with the Spanish language component of the program.

The basis for my inquiry was to assess how the program could broaden its media focus into the Youth Culture, Media, and Literacy curriculum by encouraging students to create media as a way to engage with each topic. Through this inquiry, I was looking for ways in which media can be used dynamically to interact with the different focuses of study in a more meaningful way. I am introducing the term "dynamic use of media" as the use and creation of media enabling students to learn experientially within each of the topic focuses of the curriculum. A dynamic use of media generates deeper student engagement by using the application of media, to contribute to existing community initiatives. Furthermore, it is intended to engage students with the curriculum in a way that creates a reciprocal benefit for both the students and the communities they visit. Reciprocity is a principal component of the program in providing an authentic experiential learning opportunity. It can strengthen sustainable development initiatives, by contributing to communities and by providing students authentic experiences that promote global citizenship.

The experiential learning of the program's work with media generates the relational and a reciprocal dimension, that engages the student as well as the community needs. By engaging with media in this dynamic way, students benefit from the experience of learning and creating media that will generate materials that serve the media needs of the communities they visit.

Research Question:

*How can SIT Study Abroad Program in Nicaragua incorporate a more dynamic use of media to meet the objectives of the program, the students and program stakeholders?* After completing this research, I assert that the dynamic use of media can be applied as a way to promote deeper student engagement and experiential learning, while also working to meet the media needs of the communities and organizations visited.

## II. Literature Review/Authority for Study

In the past ten years, access to Information and Communication Technology (ITC) has been steadily increasing around the world.  The growth in ITC reflects the advancements in broadband and mobile technologies.   More than two billion of us now have access to the Internet and five billion of us have mobile phones (Kelly, 2013). With these advancements, we see a closing of what is called the digital divide.   The digital divide can be described as "the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities and access to the Internet for a wide variety of activities" (OECD, 2001, p. 5).

Mona Dahms argues, however, that as Internet access has increased globally, there is a need to broaden the indicators for measuring the digital divide beyond access and availability.  She refuses to define the Digital Divide by "access" arguing that as a concept, "access" is multifaceted and complex.   She argues that a more accurate indicator for measuring the digital divide is "impact". Dahms states, "The need for not only usage indicators but also impact indicators has been voiced as a necessary means of documenting 'development' - i.e. positive socio-economic impact on people's

livelihoods."(Ferro, Dwivedi, Gil-Garcia, Williams, 2010, Pg. 450)  This discussion of defining the Digital Divide by its impact on peoples' livelihood frames the conversation in the context of Sustainable Development. In a case study on the use of media in an environmental initiative in the Philippines, Communications Specialist Paolo Mangahas argues that: "Given the socio-cultural context of environmental problems, one of the most effective ways to properly address them is through communication — a basic function of culture itself. If properly utilized, communication can serve as a primary vehicle for sustainable development" (Mangahas,2003, pg.10).

One example of this occurred in 2014, as the government of Indonesia teamed up with UNESCO to hold a conference focusing on the relation between media and development for meeting the UN post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.  In a document published as a follow-up to those discussions entitled, *Media in Support of Sustainable Development and Cultural Peace,* experts in the field discuss the key benefits the media has for promoting sustainable development.  They identify five areas in which communities benefit from access to media, including the creation of conditions for legitimate and free elections; promotion of peace and tolerance; empowerment of marginalized people; support for accountable and effective governance; and giving voice to women and youth (Berger, Ahmimed, Idiaquez, 2015, Pg. 10).   While it has been widely recognized that access to Media and ITC contributes to the empowerment of communities, it is not in itself a solution.  Secretary General Kofi Annan declared this sentiment at the first World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) stating, "Information and communication technologies are not a panacea or a magic formula, but they can better the life of everyone on earth.  They are tools to arrive at the Millennium

Development Goals, instruments that will advance the cause of liberty and democracy,

and the right medium to share knowledge and facilitate mutual understanding." (Annan,

Kofi, 2003).

For communities to embrace the use of media as a tool, it must be a participatory.

In an interview I conducted with Cuban Sociologist Armando García Ramos has

developed a model for understanding the characteristics of a participatory process. He

outlines three distinct components that must be present for process to be fully

participatory: Want, Knowledge, and Ability. Each of these factors can be applied to

understand how marginalized communities embrace media. "Want" refers to motivation,

which reflects the communities' interest and needs. This defines how media can be a tool

to serve the goals of the community. "Knowledge" is the technical skills requiring

education and experience necessary to understand the process of production, and

"Ability" is the infrastructure, including equipment and resources used to create media.

This often requires financial resources, and also includes infrastructure resources such as

electricity.

The emergence of new media has been a major factor in realizing these benefits.

One of the palpable differences between the old and the new media is in its interactive or

participatory nature (Livingstone, 1999 p.65). A clear example of the participatory

characteristic of New Media is Social Media. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter

have proven extremely effective in providing a voice to marginalized communities.

Evidence of this phenomenon was seen during the Arab Spring. Toby Mendel, Executive

Director of the Canadian-based Centre for Law and Democracy asserts that "Social media

played an enormously important role in fostering and supporting the Egyptian revolution

and it is even possible that it might not have taken place or been successful without it"
(Berger, Ahmimed, Idiaquez, 2013 Pg. 26).

However, the participatory nature of New Media requires the necessary skills to be able to take advantage of these emerging resources. Deb Baur the director of *Dell Gives* makes this point stating "What we've learnt is that it isn't enough to simply provide the hardware, it's the quality of the wrap-around services – the teacher training, maintenance of technology, reliability of power, which provides the long-term benefits and this is one of the lessons we've been taking forward."(Kelly, 2013). Recognizing this fact, much focus has been directed to training and skills development especially for youth. Richard Zezza a community involvement organizer for the Youth Foundation International states "Technology is an enabler: it becomes more powerful when in creative, free hands. Throughout our Community Involvement projects worldwide, we have seen that no hands are more creative and no thoughts are freer than those of young people."

To approach this issue organizations are engaging people with media in ways that embrace technologies in which they are most comfortable. The organization Text to Change set out on an initiative named Voice Africa's Future, which targets youths to participate in general elections by having them voice their issues through mobile text (Kelly, 2013). Another youth-focused initiative in Mexico named *Cámara Ahí Nos Vamos* project, engages at-risk youth to voice issues that they face through teaching them digital production skills "In providing access to media making, Cámara enables these youngsters to talk about their lives in the context of the family and community (Asthana, 2006, pg. 32)".

The idea of using digital media to give a voice to communities has given rise in the format of "Digital Story Telling". Digital storytelling as a medium has recently gained popularity. The director of StoryCenter Joe Lambert, a pioneer of the art form delves deeply into the process of what it means to tell a story and the unique experience of communicating in a digital medium. Digital Storytelling is seen as a way to effectively reflect and express personal experiences. There is a lot of information published that looks at how this medium of expression can contribute to ongoing conversations within the community at large. To this effect, there are very interesting cases in which digital storytelling has been used within the context of anywhere from social justice, conflict transformation, to language learning and cultural exchange. A book that looks at different applications of this medium in an international context is "Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World".

In conclusion, as a result of mobile technologies, the Digital Divide has been steadily closing when measuring it by access. Although this offers the opportunity to level the playing field in mass communication, its impact is limited to the skills available to make use of information and communication technologies. This has created a new divide among those who have the skillsets to make an impact with them. Much focus has been given to skills development to enable communities to benefit from these resources. Youth are leading the way in adapting to these changes. If this focus continues to be prioritized, we can look forward to the next generation of communities with an empowered voice through digital media.

**III. Research/Practitioner Inquiry Design**

*Research Methodology*

In my research, I am framed my work with media in the context of Sustainable Development. I took a poststructuralist approach grounded in how I define "Sustainable Development", and my theory of change for the way I understand "progress". In unpacking the term sustainable development, it is important to recognize its history as part of a greater discourse of development. The history of development in the globalized world has been an extension of colonization. It evolved from hundreds of years of European exploitation and destruction of traditional societies and knowledge. This destruction shows a disregard for the value of this traditional knowledge. The French philosopher Michel Foucault emphasized this hierarchy of power as an assertion of truth and knowledge. The truth power knowledge complex exercised through colonization established the foundation of the values behind the transition of colonization into development. This bias can be noted dating back to 1949 when Harry Truman coined the phrase "underdevelopment," stating in a speech that the US would, "Embark on a bold new program for making the benefit of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (Truman,in Esteva, 1992, pg. 6). With this announcement, American values were at once generalized over two-thirds of the world's population setting in motion policies that characterized the dichotomy of an underdeveloped world and a developed world. Historically this dichotomy has subjected an "underdeveloped" world to dependency on dominant economies, which has proved an unsustainable development model. Sustainable Development in this regard calls for communities to disengage from this dependency through returning to their traditional knowledge in order to define development based on the needs they establish on their own.

Returning to traditional knowledge does not mean a wholesale rejection of technology. It means utilizing resources to design community driven initiative. Mexican activist Gustavo Esteva describes this as a "new commons" redefining the majority of people on earth arguing, "They are not Luddites. Rather they see their resistance as a creative reconstitution of the basic forms of interaction, to liberate themselves from their economic chains. They have created neighborhoods, villages, and barrios, new commons which allow them to live on their terms"(Esteva, pg. 20). A Community-driven approach to development is a form of resistance. Esteva notes, "Peasants and grassroots groups in the cities are now sharing with people forced to leave the economic center the ten thousand tricks they have learned to limit the economy. To mock the economic creed, or refunctionalize and reformulate modern technology"(Esteva, 1992, pg. 21). Embracing media to meet the needs of community driven development is an example of reformulating technology. Thus, media in this context becomes a tool for resistance.

The second component of my research confronts the contradictions of privilege in study abroad programs. Following a post-structural methodology, it is important to take into account the potential for negative impact in creating this type of exchange. The social science professor Alvin Y. So speaks directly to this idea stating "The periphery has too much harmful core contact already. Since the era of colonialism the political economy of the periphery has been totally restructured to suit the needs of the core, thereby leading to the development of underdevelopment" (So, 1990, pg. 105). Similarly, social science professor Marianne Gronemeyer argues, "(t)he needy person, on the other hand, is not the master of his or her neediness. The latter is much more the

result of a comparison with a foreign normality, which is effectively declared as obligatory"(Gronemeyer, 1992, pg.65).

I understand the potential for these negative ramifications and as a result, emphasize the importance of reciprocity in these types interactions. In focusing on the need for reciprocity within a study abroad program I am making a critique of an unjust power dichotomy that historically has driven top-down value judgments from a privileged world to a majority world. To form the basis of my thinking around this idea I look to authors such as Ivan Illich who brings into question the morality of the privilege exercised when visiting underprivileged communities.  The reality of his assertion reflects on the importance of defining the role students take on when visiting these communities.  An important point to note is students are not coming to communities to help.  The simple notion of what we call helping can be described as perpetuating the air of superiority that subjugates the other to a position of need.

A study abroad program is not a development institution.  It does not proclaim that its central motivation is to help in any way. However, that does not eliminate it from the potential negative impact it can generate through its presence.  In order to embrace the ethical dilemma of daunting privilege to study in these communities, it must be self-aware of the historical context and potential repercussions. This awareness forms the basis in which a relationship of reciprocity is formed, responding to the needs of the communities visited.  It also drives the importance of for the program to assure that student participants include the historical context of poverty in their perspective going into this experience.  This truth can be hard to accept. As Monsignor Ivan Illich reiterates:

> The very frustration which participation in programs might mean for you, could lead you to new awareness: the awareness that even North Americans can receive the gift of hospitality without the slightest ability to pay for it; the awareness that for some gifts one cannot even say 'thank you" (Illich,1962).

Students may not get to see directly the reciprocity of their program; however, what they can do is learn from the reality of these communities, tell a new story to change perceptions of need, and understand the historical context to work for social justice.

In summary, my work takes a post-structural approach in how I define Sustainable Development and my Theory of Change. I arrive here by making the critique that development from the days of colonization has established a hierarchy of values that has held little value for traditional practices. We have seen the destruction of traditional knowledge and livelihoods for the development of a dependency model that has proven unsustainable. Sustainable development is the return of communities to these traditional practices through community development initiatives. Community development represents a form of resistance that involves Esteva's "refunctionalization" of technology in order to meet the needs of communities today.

Within the context of a privileged and majority world, study abroad represents the exercising of the privilege, which in a greater context has created the development of underdevelopment. For students this reality conflicts with the good intentions they have for visiting these communities. It is important that study abroad programs are designed to generate reciprocity, and that students gain awareness of the inequalities that exist. This awareness has the potential to open them up to a new perspective that will inspire them to use their privilege to work for social justice.

*Data Gathering Methods & Analysis*

I used four different methods to collect data: participatory observation, questionnaire, written testimonies, and in depth interviews. My field observations are based on my fieldwork interning as a program assistant. Additionally, I conducted a questionnaire administered to 13 spring study abroad program participants so that I might gain insight into their motivations for choosing this program. I also conducted four in-depth interviews with different community organizers including local media practitioners, a language preservation teacher, a micro-entrepreneur and the director of a community center. Each of these participants is a community stakeholder of the program. The interviews were designed with an initial question in mind to prompt an open explanation of their experience and ask them to describe their interest in media as it relates to community development. The questions were open-ended to leave space for the interviewee to organically express how they feel.

As part of a participatory research process, I worked with Nicaraguan media practitioners to design a Media Literacy course that orients students in the context of media as an emerging resource in Nicaragua. Students were asked to interact with community initiatives through the use of media as a vehicle for experiential learning. I documented the work that students did to become informed as to how media can play a role in contributing to community development initiatives.

For purposes of accuracy and reliability in data collection, I collected audio documentation of the process and used this media was used in my analysis. I transcribed

what participants said verbatim and made memos of their statements, allowing me to then

code responses relating to my research question.

### IV.  Presentation and Analysis of Data

My research focused on how the dynamic use of media can serve as a vehicle to promote

deeper community engagement between study abroad students and the communities they

visit.  I was looking to understand the dynamic characteristics of media in this context.

To do this, I focused on both the media needs of the study abroad program, and the role

media plays as an emerging resource for developing communities.  During the course of

two, study abroad semesters, I had the chance to participate directly in the design of the

program to incorporate a dynamic use of media as part of a participatory research

process.   I present my findings in three case studies that informed my conclusions. The

case studies that I will show in my findings are the following Media & SIT Nicaragua,

Community Initiatives in the Campo, and Garífuna Cultural Preservation.  My work was

intended to find where both the study abroad program and the communities have media

needs that overlap and so find opportunities to promote meaningful engagement.

*SIT Nicaragua & Media*

SIT Nicaragua is a study abroad program that has operated since 1996.  As times

have changed in Nicaragua, so has the program's focus.  Having evolved from its early

years focusing on post-revolution conflict transformation, to a focus on the effects of

globalization, and more recently, to Media, Youth Culture, & Literacy.   This latest

change as described by Academic Director represents the emerging role that media has

become as a tool for social change. Students meet with cyber activists, documentary filmmakers, and community media organizations that operate in Nicaragua.

In addition, media is also described by the Academic Director as an attractive focus to help make the Nicaragua program more competitive amongst the other SIT programs. What makes media attractive is its relevance as an emerging global resource. The Program having only recently made the transition to a focus on media in the curriculum continues to look for ways to use it as a vehicle for students to engage with communities.

The program director and I identified two distinct purposes representing a need for media. One was in how the program documented its activities. A community organizer that has had a long relationship with the program commented on this point. She stated that "Over the years we have had great interactions between students and community members, and nothing to show for what we did." The point that she makes underscores how media documentation can create reciprocity. To embrace the possibility for reciprocity through documentation the program needed to create a way to provide access for the community to the digital media. To make it accessible to communities as well as create a resource for the program we decided to create a blog space that would house digital content. To create a blog space we looked at how we would generate content for it. Generating content for the blog space became a pivotal point in which we could implement media dynamically. It revealed the other media need for the program, which is utilizing it as part of the pedagogy of experiential learning. Requiring students to create digital media as a way to document and interact with what they are learning.

Logistically we looked at the feasibility asking students to create media. It had to be taken into account what were student expectations for working with media, and what previous experience they had. At the beginning of the semester, we had students fill out a media needs assessment questionnaire. From the questionnaire, we found that on average the media component of the curriculum was 59% of their decision to select the Nicaragua program. Looking at what media devices students brought with them to Nicaragua; 69% brought their smartphone, 62% brought a digital camera, 92% brought a laptop, 77% brought an audio recorder, 15% brought a video camera. We found that 69% of students came with at least some previous experience creating digital media. We also found that 100% of students engaged with Facebook, and other social media. These numbers made it clear to us that it would be reasonable to assign media tasks based on the media devices students had. Students who only had a smart phone actually would have the ability use it as a digital camera, video camera, and an audio recorder.

In response to a question about student expectations of media, we found that responses were varied. One student commented, "I expected the media component to be one of the lenses we use to talk about issues related to youth culture, how it is used for activism and communication among youth." Another student stated, "I didn't think we were going to have a lot of accessibility to a lot of different types of resources, but expected to study news media, music, and propaganda." The variation of answers and definitions of media reflected the perception that media would be only a topic of study and not something that students would participate in creating. This revelation demonstrated to us that if we were going to ask students to take part in creating digital

media within communities, it is necessary first to give them a Media Literacy

introduction within in the context of media and development in Nicaragua.

To develop a Media Literacy course tailored to the needs of SIT Nicaragua, I met

with an organization that specializes in community based participatory media named

"Podcast for Peace".  What we came up with, is a lesson plan that focuses on digital

media and the role it plays as a resource for Nicaraguan communities with the working

knowledge that access to digital media and the Internet is growing rapidly.   The course

focuses on participatory media looking at media is used in these communities.  The

principal question we established for working with community media is, are communities

using it strictly as consumers or is it embraced as a tool to influence change in their

community?  Podcast for Peace identified examples from their experience of how media

can serve to empower communities such as initiatives such as cultural preservation,

advocacy, entrepreneurship, and community organizing.  The goal of preparing students

to work with media in the communities was to promote a participatory process that

encourages communities to work with media as a resource.

To orient the students towards creating media in a participatory process, we

designed an ethics component to the course.  We identified three areas in which media

creation process that gives the indication of the level of participation, Idea Creation,

Production, and Distribution.  For each area, we asked students to analyze the media they

created based on what we named an *Ethical Participation Spectrum*.  They have been

invited to identify for each stage of media creation, where on a spectrum their work fell

between two extremes ranging from individual to full participation.  This analysis gives

us a visual framework for measuring the level of community involvement for each stage

of the process. This analysis allows for the reality that certain stages of production would be less participatory than others due to logistical determinants. However, the goal is to create media with as much community participation as possible. In this way, the SIT program is encouraging students to engage deeper with communities, while promoting the development of media as a resource.

*Community Initiatives in the Campo*

The first excursion in which the students leave Managua is to "El Campo", referring to the rural coffee growing regions in the north of Nicaragua. Our entrance to these communities was through an organization that promotes community development in the region. They engage communities to organize on themes ranging from nutrition, youth development, environmental issues, and the facilitation of micro-loans. They have worked with SIT receiving students since 2000. Working with SIT students has become another way that they engage with communities. They use their history working with the communities in this region to choose which communities to receive students. Speaking with the director, they stated, "We looked for communities where the level of organization was more developed than other communities." They expressed the distinction, "There have been communities where the experience we've had organizing with them hasn't been good, cause there are communities that don't want anything". For my research, I visited three communities and found them each to be very different. Each community had a distinct circumstance based on a variety of factors including distance from nearest town, history of the land, family relations in the community, and infrastructure.

These communities are on the fringe of the media frontier, and each community has a different relationship with the way that they interact with digital media. The most common media device I saw everywhere I visited was the mobile phone. One community I visited only received electricity one month before my visit but has had mobile service for the past five years. Every house I visited at least had one cell phone. Beyond its use as a telephone, it is also used as an entertainment device. People are very proficient with Bluetooth exchange and are constantly passing music, videos, memes & photos. When they purchase pre-pay service on their phone, they can connect to The Internet. Many of the younger people had Facebook profiles and utilized it whenever they got access. A community member expressed concern that with these emerging technologies, "young people prefer to learn computers then work on the farm". This sentiment was shared by other community members and reflects how the way that communities embrace media can influence how it affects change. For media to be a resource and not a disruptor, it has to be a resource that supports the livelihood of the community.

As a participatory research method, I designed a dynamic media task asking students to create a digital media piece that captured and or promoted a community initiative. The goal for this dynamic was to identify ways in which those initiatives could benefit from digital media while providing students a way to interact with the community. The format we recommended as an introduction to digital media is called photo voice. Photo voice seeks to capture the context of its subject with one photo or a series of images, accompanied by a synopsis of what the photos represent. Students were encouraged to analyze the participatory characteristics in which they created their digital

media.  The student work informed my understanding of the way that communities interact with community initiatives, and what role participatory media can play.

 The first community students visited is located 1-hour walking distance from the closest town.  Historically families in the community worked on large coffee plantations.  After the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, Sandinista landform policies confiscated the plantations.  The land was set up as a cooperative and the families worked together and profited off of the yield of coffee and corn.  This system proved short-lived as a result of an inefficient distribution of work and profit.  The cooperative took the decision to separate the land into parcels for each family.   Currently, each household plants their land for subsistence and coffee sales.  The family I stayed with grew an estimated 80% of the food they consume.  In addition to planting, they have a family pig and chickens that provided meat and eggs.  They have two daughters who attend school as well as helping on the farm.  The youngest attends school in the community, and the elder made the hour walk daily to the nearest town to attend high school.  The father takes on the majority of the farming work, and the mother is the only one who has a source of income that covers the estimated 20% cost of food consumption and school fees.

The economic income is the result of a group of women in the community that organized to form a recycled paper making business.  There are four women currently involved, and they divide up the labor of collecting leaves and paper refuse, processing of the paper, and decorating stationary.  Speaking with the mother of the family, she explained: "Previously we depended on economically much more on coffee but then the price of coffee dropped, and we needed to look for another source of income."  Now as a result of a microloan and participation in a workshop to learn the techniques, they have

developed a successful eco business making artisan-recycled paper. They administer a Facebook page promoting their products which is one of the few ways to get in touch with them. Their page has pictures of their work, and their contact listed. The closest Internet access for them is a one-hour walk into town, and they check their site roughly once a week. They only have a very basic level of experience using social networks and created the page with the help of foreign volunteers. Their story represents a community driven entrepreneurial initiative and the perfect opportunity to learn and create digital media that will benefit their business. In my time in this community, I found various initiatives that presented this opportunity. The coffee collective has an ecotourism initiative that promotes a guesthouse and offers visitors a chance to get close to the coffee production. It is an example of a community with a more developed organization.

Sending students into different communities with the same task of looking for community initiatives proved to reflect very different experiences. In the second community students visited electricity has only been available for the past month, and it is very far from the nearest town. They do potentially have access to The Internet through mobile service, but having a smartphone and cost of Internet are a very low priority.

In a student photo voice project, they focused on a community initiative of mothers distributing the work of preparing food for the local preschool. This initiative developed after the food from the school was robbed. Mothers in the community organized to create a schedule to provide food at the school for each day. They had a poster size piece of paper communicating the schedule clearly for everyone to see. The student who captured this initiative with her photo voice made an effort to encourage as

much participation as possible in their work.  They made an analysis based on the Ethical

Participation Spectrum. Their host family didn't identify this as a community initiative

until the student decided to promote it, which speaks to the level of participation in

selecting the topic. The production succeeded in being participatory with community

members taking part in the photography and scripting the voice for the media.  They

struggled to generate participation in the distribution as the community members had

little use for it.  The student states: "there was no way she could be involved because she

doesn't have Internet access. When telling her what I was going to do with it, I was also

confused because I wasn't sure why I was putting it on the Internet. This being an

initiative that is very practical and works well to have a piece of paper that everyone can

see in the main community building, I nor she could see a reason for putting it online."

This example reflected an at times awkward relationship with media as it relates to

community initiatives in rural communities.  As an emerging resource it is not always

obvious how media relates to internal community issues.  There is not a clear

understanding of the was it can serve as a tool. It is not a fully developed literacy because

the resources to engage with digital media are still very minimal.  Only recently has it

become available and it has not had a defined role in the community.  Embracing media

as a tool is part of a media literacy foundation that can only develop through practice.

       The third community was the most remote of the three.  Community initiatives

were less developed and reflected issues directly related to daily livelihood.  Many of the

families in this community dedicated to working day labor wages on larger plantations.

This work was seasonal and during off seasons, life becomes extremely difficult.  Most of

the families I talked with did not grow their food and relied on their working wage.  The

families had parcels of land however they found it difficult to subsist on and very few produced their food.  One of the students worked with a family that dedicated themselves to producing coffee. They engaged with the family to identify a community initiative, and they decided to show the process of making coffee.  The student took on the production documenting the process.  The family had little interest in distributing the media, but there were commitments to share on the Facebook wall of the younger family members who had profiles.  The student envisioned that the documentation could be used to advocate for fair trade by showing the reality of the coffee industry.  The photo voice digital media, in this case, reflected a community initiative that related directly to their individual family livelihood.  The student created the work with her production skills. The family had little interest in distributing the media.  However, the younger family members who had Facebook wanted I shared on their wall.  The student coming with a different worldview became cognizant of how the Photo Voice could potentially serve to advocate for rural coffee producers.

Each student's project interacted with both media and the idea of community initiatives differently.  Complex conditions proved to factor in how each family and community related to these two topics. However, it was very clear that media and communications have become part of the worldview in these communities and has defined a generational divide. Each of these communities has different circumstances, what is notable is that when they are more organized, media has more specific use in the community.   However, access and technical skills still create a barrier.


*Garífuna Cultural Preservation*

The second excursion the students make is to the South Caribbean Autonomous Region of Nicaragua. This region is characterized by its multiethnic identity and political autonomy.  An important characteristic of that autonomy is the right given to each ethnic group to promote their cultural traditions and to speak in their native language. The study abroad program visits a Garífuna community in which this right has been central to their development.   As explained to us by a local history professor, the Garífuna people have a unique history that is the result of a shipwreck carrying enslaved Africans.  They escaped to the island of St. Vincent and established themselves mixing with the Arawak Indians. Through time colonists came to know them as Black Caribs.   With the development of St. Vincent by colonial powers, the Garífuna people migrated to Central America where they lived indigenously maintaining many of their African traditions.   Historically in Nicaragua, the Garífuna people have faced discrimination for their cultural identity including their religious practices and their language.  As a result, many of their traditional practices have been nearly lost with the passing of generations.   A community member recalled, "When we used to travel to other communities to go to school, other kids would make fun of us for our culture, it was shameful to speak in our own language".  There are currently only a few living elders that can still speak Garífuna. Another cultural practice that has suffered from stigma is the use of traditional medicines and religious healing.  The Garífuna people have a religious practice for healing called a Wala gayu, in which they drum and dance to communicate with their ancestors. They also have extensive knowledge of natural medicines from plants that grow naturally as part of the flora and fauna.  These cultural practices have been characterized by outsiders

as black magic, or voodoo, and over the years have begun to disappear. Years of being shunned and facing discrimination have threatened the Garifuna identity.

With the passing of Nicaragua's Autonomy Law for the Caribbean coast in 1987, the Garífuna now had a legal framework for their ethnic rights. A high school teacher from the community commented: "It was the first time that I had ever heard that we as Garífuna have rights before we were just considered part of the black population". With the Autonomy Law, revitalizing these traditions has been an integral development initiative undertaken by the community. They have embraced this work in a variety of different ways including music, dance, cuisine, & language preservation.

The study abroad students meet with community members who dedicate themselves to rescuing cultural traditions. Students were given the task of creating digital profiles for each person they met with from the community. The profiles included personal information about the speaker and the work that they are engaged. Additionally, they were asked to create digital media that captures the community initiative. These profiles will be published in a way so that the community has access to the material. The intention is that students identify ways in which the digital media they create will be beneficial to the community initiative. One of the clearest examples of this is the Garífuna language preservation initiative.

The loss of the Garífuna language represents the most urgent cultural preservation initiative facing the community. However they have begun working to revitalize and rescue their language. They started by sending one teacher to Garífuna communities in Honduras where the language is more prevalently spoken. The teacher now gives classes in Garífuna to the children and adults in the community in Nicaragua. They are the

only teacher who is qualified to teach the Garífuna language in the community. Having

one teacher for everyone presents obvious logistical challenges. Students identified the

opportunity to create digital media that could serve as teaching materials. I collaborated

with two students matching photos with audio recordings of different vocabulary, which

resulted as a simple way to execute those materials. The group made a short video that

matched the teacher holding up their fingers with the Garífuna word for each number

counting to ten. This project inspired one student to work more in depth with this idea,

and during their independent study phase they created digital audio for an entire

vocabulary workbook. This work can be implemented for many of the cultural

revitalization initiatives, including medicinal plant identification, documenting drum

songs and dances, and culinary recipes.

Working with digital media to support Garífuna cultural revitalization

initiative is only viable if the community has access to these resources. Currently

Internet access is very limited in the community. However, it is likely that access to it

will increase rapidly. There are limited computer resources in which files can be stored.

Currently, these resources can be made accessible with DVDs. With computers and

Internet becoming an evolving resource, having a web space for these materials can make

them a resource for years to come.

**V. Discussion**

My experience during this research has given me a more complex understanding

of how media can dynamically serve to facilitate experiential learning and benefit

community development.  We live in a time in which media is playing an unprecedented role in influencing change around the world.  New technologies are providing access to Internet communications in some of the most remote communities.  Participation with social networks by young people in these communities is broadening their worldview.  This increasing access to Internet has the potential to be a powerful tool for marginalized communities to express their voice and promote their identity.  It can also have negative effects promoting consumerism and disrupting the livelihood of communities.

Embracing Media as a resource requires the ability to participate in its creation. Communities benefit from media when it is a participatory process, which requires the want or perceived benefit of those involved.   Media itself is not a benefit; it is a tool that can be used to support existing community initiatives.   The more organized a community is, the more likely that there will be motivation to engage in participatory media. Working in this way with communities is a vehicle to understand the initiatives that inspire their participation.

For the study abroad program, it is important to orient students in the context of working with media in Nicaragua.  They are coming with an understanding of media from a very different perspective.  Students come to the program with different expectations.  It is important that they understand the ethics of creating media within the context of marginalized communities.  The measure for ethics is the level of community participation in the creation of the media.  Study abroad programs create an opportunity to promote the participatory use of media in communities where it is just emerging as a resource.  In such communities there may be limitations to the level of participation community members can provide.  However, the act of engaging communities with the

production process opens up a new perspective for approaching media as a resource.   In this way the study abroad program is contributing to empowering community driven development initiatives.

This research is only the beginning of a process to develop methodologies for study abroad groups to work dynamically with media.  This process cannot be implemented in one visit to a community.  It is something that needs to be developed in partnership with the participating communities.  It needs to be created in an ongoing relationship that develops the technical skills of community members and establishes a model for the distribution of digital media that provides access to the materials.  The development of this process will open the door for further research into how participatory media contributes to the success of community initiatives.

**SIT Nicaragua Media Plan**

In this document I am outlining five recommendations that are focused on the dynamic use of media by the SIT Study Abroad Nicaragua program.  These recommendations are informed by my research and reflect key points that speak to the sustainability of including the dynamic use of media as part of the program curriculum.  They are designed considering the educational needs as well as the needs of the communities the program visits.

1. *Promote a more hands-on media experience in program materials.*

Student expectation is an important factor in designing media tasks as part of the curriculum.  Calling on student's interest in media creation as part of their decision to choose the Nicaragua program encourages those who have and/or want to gain experience, engaging communities with digital media.  It will also prepare them to bring their own devices.  It is an important step in defining media as part of the brand of the program and how it relates to the curriculum.

2. *Create a blog* space *to archive and document digital media created by the program.*

    The blogspace will become the hub for the program's use of media.  It can be used as a platform for archiving student work also making it accessible to the community members who participated in its creation.  Through the archiving of material the blogspace will become a growing resource for the program.  Future students can reference these materials, to develop a deeper understanding of the communities.  It will increase the value of these interactions and contribute to an ongoing relation with the people and places the program visits. The blogspace will be an online presence that will help to brand the program's use of media.

3. *Coordinate with Podcast for Peace to have a more integral role in from Media Literacy, Digital Storytelling, Digital Profiles*

In order for the use of media to be sustainable someone needs to provide the expertise.  Students may come to the program with previous experience working with

digital media, but it is still new to them to apply it in this context. Before asking

students to go into communities and create media there needs to be a foundation for

media literacy oriented towards working in Nicaragua. Podcast for peace who

currently work with the program to implement the digital storytelling workplace

would be ideal as they have an understanding of how SIT works, and they specialize

in creating participatory digital media in Nicaraguan communities. Creating an

institutional partnership with Podcast for Peace will provide the expertise necessary

to engage with digital media as a way to engage with community initiatives.

4. *Work with community coordinators to identify community initiatives and develop*

   *processes for providing access to media*.

   The goal of working with media in developing communities is to promote

   participatory media processes as a vehicle for learning about community

   initiatives. For the media to be a resource, there has to be a mutual understanding

   of how media can support community needs. Developing an ongoing relationship

   around the use of media is integral for generating reciprocity through this process.

   The community coordinators that the program already works with are ideal

   connecting students to community initiatives that could most benefit from a

   participatory media process.

   5. *Purchase a base of quality media equipment*.

Some students bring their own media devices, however having a base of media

equipment for the program can guarantee the quality of the production. A simple media

kit can include an SLR digital camera that has still photography and HD video

capabilities.  Adding a mountable shotgun audio microphone will ensure quality audio for

interviews.  For high quality audio recording I recommend a portable handheld audio

recording device with stereo condenser microphones.  This will be a powerful tool for

recording room discussion as well as up close interviews.    This equipment can be

purchased for less then two thousand dollars and will serve as a solid foundation for

ensuring the media capabilities of the program.

## VI.  References

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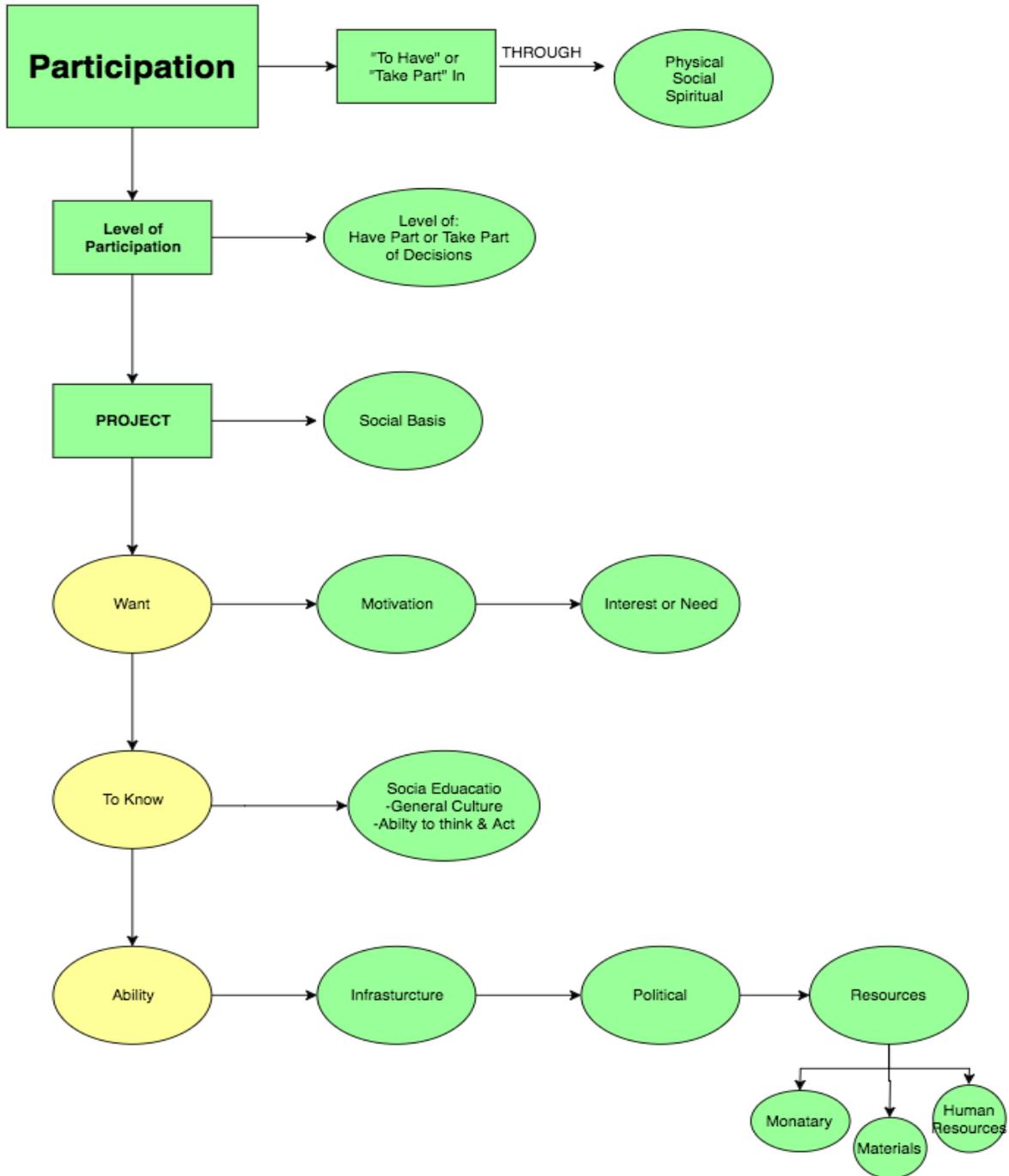
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*APPENDIX I*



Participatory Project Development Model
by: Prof. Armando García Ramos

*APPENDIX II*

| SIT Nicaragua Media Literacy Workshop | | |
|---|---|---|
| Intro:<br>What is Media?/ Que es Media? | Discussion:<br><br>Ask students to give definitions.<br><br>Proposed Definition:<br>*Messages that are created through a process of production for the consumption of others.* | 10min. |
| Forms of Media Transmission<br><br>Medios de Comunicación | Make a list of different ways media is transmitted.<br>*Radio, Television, Print, Internet, Mobile etc.*<br><br>Propose Three Categories<br><br>Traditional/Conventional/New Media (Digital Media)<br><br>*Define New Media<br>**Defintiton: New media** most commonly refers to content available on-demand through the Internet, accessible on any digital device, usually containing interactive user feedback and creative participation. Common examples of **new media** include websites such as online newspapers, blogs, or wikis, video games, and social **media**.*<br><br>**Organize communications list into the categories | 10min. |
| Multimedia/Digital Media production | *Ask students to list examples<br>Examples of media production<br>*-Digital Storytelling*<br>*-Photo voice*<br>*-Digital profiles*<br>*-Radio vinettes*<br><br>***Examples of different digital media<br>Watch/Disscuss: What elements of production are used* | 45min |

| BREAK | | 15 min |
|---|---|---|
| The Development of multimedia in Nicaragua | **Presenter gives context as a practitioner**<br>-Closing of the Digital Divide/Disigualdad Digital<br>-Necesidades/Usos emergentes en iniciativas comunitario<br><br>Examples of different types of community<br>*Media*<br>*Cultural Preservation*<br>*Advocacy*<br>*Entrepreneurship*<br>*Community Organizing*<br>*Promotion of messages* | 45 min |
| {Ethics in Media} | -Possible Mal efectos<br>     *Subjectivity and Objectivity<br>     *Informed Consent<br>     *Protection of Identity<br>     *Create tensions within the community<br><br>Ethical media Spectrum<br><br>Productor----------------------------------Author<br>-Passive use of internet vs active voz<br>1.  Select what you are going to create<br>     *Decide to make a Facebook page for a community initiative, but there is no way for the community members to continue with its development.<br><br>2. Participation of production<br>     *Show someone how to do it and they do it.<br>     *Collaborate and help them do it, they have final say<br>     *Work side by side with equal input<br>     *Do the project for the community with some input and approval<br>     *Go to a community and produce a story you want to do<br>3. Distribution of Media<br>     *Use the video to make a gofundme for your next trip money. | 45 min |

*APPENDIX III*

SIT NICARAGUA MEDIA QUESTIONAIRRE 2016

1. On a scale from 1-10 how much did the MEDIA Component of the curriculum influence your choice to join this program?

## Not Much 1_2_3_4_5_6_7_8_9_10 Very Much

2. What expectations did you have for the MEDIA component of the program?

_____

_____

3. What experience do you have with MEDIA coming into the program?

_____
_____
_____
_____


4. What MEDIA devices did you bring with you to Nicaragua?

___ Digital Camera    ___ Video Camera   ___ Audio Recorder


___ Smart phone     ___ Computer(PC/MAC_____)

Other_____

5. What social media platforms do you use? (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)

_____