



DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT / 29 OCT 2008
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA SEMINARS IN GLOBAL HEALTH
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Newsweek Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Oct. 22-23, 2008. N=1,092 registered voters nationwide. MoE \pm 4.

"Which ONE of the following ISSUES is MOST important in determining your vote for president this year? The economy and jobs. Taxes and government spending. The Iraq war. Terrorism and national security. Energy policy and gas prices. Issues like abortion, guns, and same-sex marriage. Health care." Options rotated

	10/22-23/08	10/8-9/08	9/10-11/08
	%	%	%
Economy and jobs	44	48	39
Taxes, government spending	14	10	14
Terrorism, national security	12	8	10
Health care	8	9	7
Iraq war	7	8	10
Abortion, guns, marriage	6	6	8
Energy policy, gas prices	5	8	8
Other/None of these (vol.)	1	1	1
Unsure	3	2	3

NEWSWEEK'S issues that matter poll

When Traci and Jorge invited me this past spring to talk to you about our projects, we shared thoughts on the importance of economic development and how that's a priority for people everywhere. We're seeing it with the election issues and know it's a naturalized part of everyday life for many living in developing countries. Since everything is interconnected, we discussed the importance of communication in development - it can certainly play a role in improving the health of animals, people, and the environment.



I am a graphic designer and my focus is visual (and textual) communication – creating it, analyzing what others make, and as a teacher exploring how we can be more responsible and effective. I'll contend that one thing we have in common is communication, which is inherently political – even if it's subtly so – because information is indeed power. One of the many reasons I work in the Yucatán is because it's a complicated, cosmopolitan space and the politics of identity, economy, and power are constantly at play.



I'll share with you that it's a dream for me because it's such a wonderfully messy place. Messy is analogous to complexity - filled with layers of meaning. So it's the complexity, contradictions, irony, and challenges that I find so appealing. This makes it the perfect space to explore, document, analyze, and construct work on identity and representation. That's one part of what I do.



Returning to the interconnectedness of all things, there are threads woven between everything I do and one naturally informs the many others. The identity research has a direct thread to these didactic, entrepreneurial, and collaborative projects I'll talk about tonight. In these I work collaboratively, with students and disciplinary experts and in partnership with indigenous communities (mostly cooperative organizations) to explore and test how design can be used as a tool and strategy for communication and development.

12 thoughts on working with communities

an unordered list of **lessons learned so far**

I want to explore our work through the lens of lessons learned. In this way I hope you will find it both palatable and resonant and that it provide some insight, based on our experiences, into how you can work in marginalized communities - whether they be in Yucatán or other developing areas - including east Gainesville.

current **projects**

honey.

oranges.

eco tourism.

handicrafts.

immigration.

7

I will share examples from our projects in the Yucatán. These simple names I give them are for quick recognition and certainly don't do justice to their complexity.

honey = 4 cooperatives of approx 600 beekeepers / 25% of Yucatán state

oranges = juice / small cooperative

community tourism = a living Maya community serving as a role model for others

handicrafts = network of women artisans in 9 communities

immigration = 5 communities and immigrants in the US

Each of these projects included, at the very minimum, the creation of an identity system (you might think of it as the logo), other promotional materials, and a website.

3 key concepts

At the very foundation of these projects sit three concepts:

- 1) how can all participants benefit from communication and design (not just the social/economic/cultural development of client communities);
- 2) how can we inform our design practice and become more culturally competent practitioners; and
- 3) how can we foster responsible identity representation in partnership with indigenous communities - one that counters the imaginary of, in this case, 'ancient maya people.'

partnerships = respect

work with people as **partners**, ***WITHOUT*** hierarchies and titles, ***WITH mutual*** opportunities and benefits, create positive and open interactions to **increase potential for success**

Our projects are not charity – they are applied research. We undertake projects as partners and posit that we’re all here to learn and to teach. What we get out of this is something we could not buy – direct access to explore culture, values, concerns, practices ... and develop new ways of thinking about communication and design in various contexts.



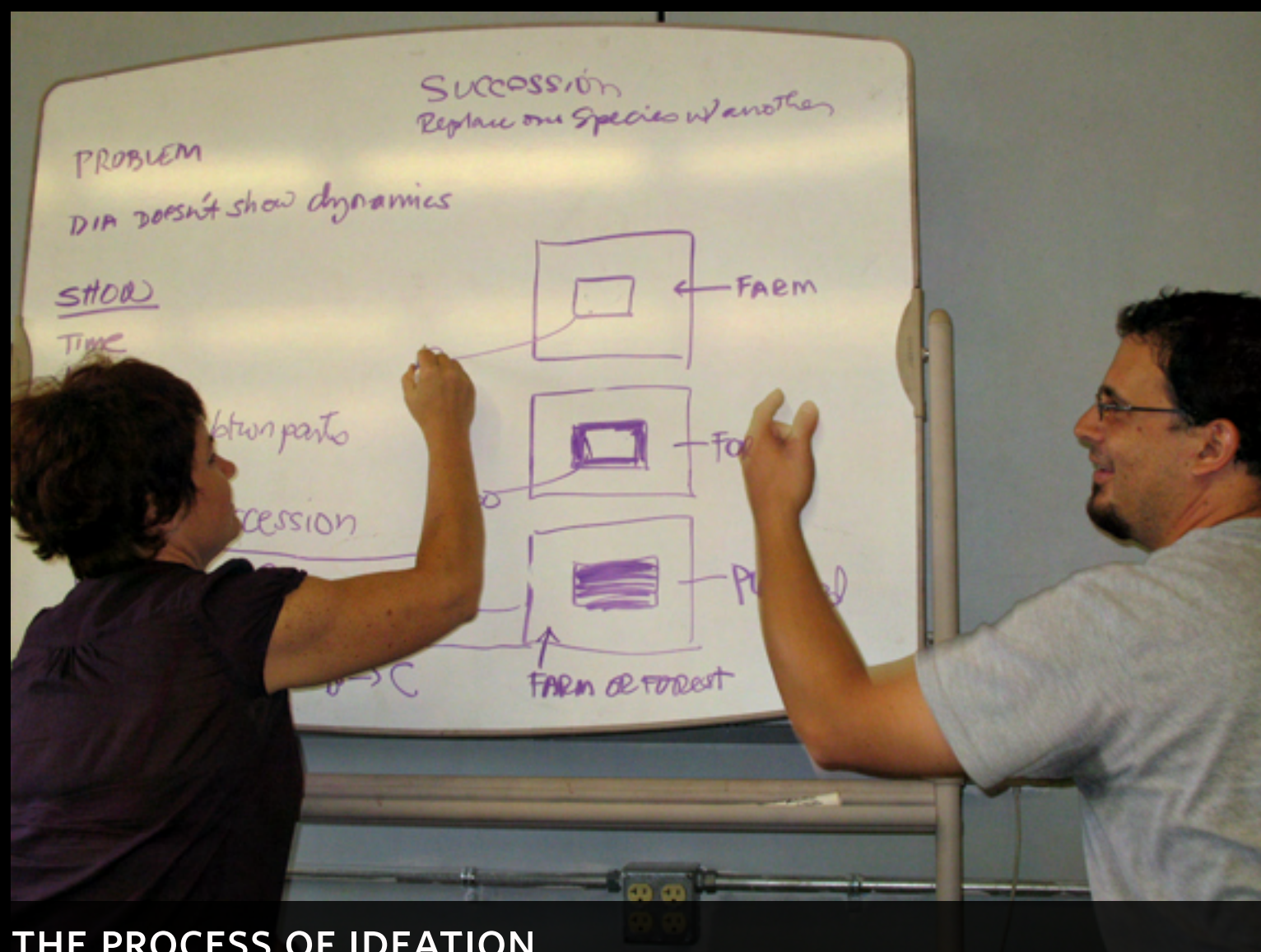
THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY **ecotourism** project

The process, methodology, tools, and documentation of our project work has value for our discipline – graphic design. I would imagine it could have value to you. As a profession, our usual strategy is to work in a studio with other designers on projects for well-off clients – 10% of the world. But the world is changing dramatically and our field needs to as well.



THE PROCESS OF IDEATION

We are not decorators but strategic thinkers who create and innovate and pose new and different solutions that are both tangible and intangible. We need to know so much about everything. We have the most value when we work from the inception of projects - this allows us to harness the power and potential of design.



THE PROCESS OF IDEATION

good work requires **empathy**

understanding the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others; being in **someone else's shoes**

Empathy makes all the difference in the success or failure of our projects. It also increases our cultural preparedness and capacity.



entering the apiary

November through April is honey season in Yucatán. When we began working with the Lol-Balché cooperative of 60 beekeepers, we needed to learn about their work process. First, we know nothing about bees. Second, we needed to learn more about the complexity of the work. Observation and participation always inform our practice and aid in seeing things from new perspectives. During our first morning in Santa Elena, we met five members of the cooperative at the apiary where they would harvest honey that day. They brought protective gear for us.



observing honey harvest

Later, cooperative president Manuel Magaña Ayil told me he was impressed and surprised that we were so interested and wanted to learn. He anticipated we might be scared to enter the apiary but soon saw we took the project seriously and wanted to learn about their process. This was the moment that altered some of the preconceived notions we had of each other. They got over this idea that we were spoiled, delicate gringos - not afraid to get our hands dirty. This is common to all our projects.

Students were impressed with the complexity of the process, the difficulty and danger. "The people were really the best, I couldn't believe how hard they work for everything and they're intensely proud of their skills. I admire their drive and personality." Ciara



THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY **honey** project

They had a system of working together and we saw first-hand the teamwork and interdependence of members. It also drove home to us their desire to sell their product direct to market. At that time, they were making approximately 20 cents a kilo selling to wholesalers. Our desire for learn, to create empathy, bred trust and broke down preconceived stereotypes on both sides.

experience **lived realities**

learning about many different **experiences and practices**, including what it's like for a family to live on less than \$5 a day compared to our \$50 a day

Getting down to business - to work - living and working in a place - even for a week - can challenge cultural stereotypes and imaginaries created by the media. One of these is about immigration and the complex issues that are flattened in the media.



dinner juice project

After visiting the orange groves, we met at Don Gualberto's home in Cuauhtémoc to present the prototypes. We had arranged to stay for dinner and then go to the carnival with his family. The house was a traditional Maya style house with a palm roof. The daughters, who were working Mahajual at the time, came home on weekends. Their jobs selling t-shirts to tourists brought in enough disposable income for the new electronics - tv, refrigerator, washing machine, video games, and stereo.



I've met a lot of people who immigrated to the US – most to California. The sign on the highway entering Santa Elena (honey project) reinforces their strong connection to San Francisco, where the majority of Santa Elenenses work. Several people tell me that the majority of young men talk about migrating because of lack of jobs and the perception of fast money. Construction of homes in town has escalated in the past 2 years, contributing to this belief. Crossing costs between \$3 and 5k. The beekeepers argue that there is money to be made staying in Yucatán – one of their goals to provide a reason for young men and women to stay.



immigrant services poster

These posters needed to build trust in a state government organization and speak to citizens who had varying levels of literacy in order to communicate important information on services to immigrants and their families. We customized each poster with the town's name and graphically presented relevant immigration statistics in small, informational chunks. Photographs of community members attracted people to the posters, creating a better understanding of what being here and there is like. Actual poster production was inexpensive - \$35 - given it's size.

exprésate

Este es tu espacio. Comparte tus testimonios, cartas, mensajes, sugerencias o fotografías que quieras publicar en este mural depositándolos en el buzón. Los enlaces de INDEMAYA en tu municipio nos los harán llegar. Muy pronto este mural podrá ser consultado en nuestro sitio de Internet. Así tus familiares en Estados Unidos también podrán verlo.

Cuando se fue mi esposo la primera vez fue terrible. Sólo se llevó una muda de ropa porque no sabe uno si va a encontrar trabajo o no. Todos estábamos tristes. Pasó un mes sin saber de él. Ahora la comunicación ha mejorado y es más fácil, pero cuando se fue nos comunicábamos sólo por cartas. A veces me siento angustiada y desesperada porque ya es mucho tiempo el que ha estado allá. Si hemos podido construir nuestra casita poco a poco, pero el tiempo ha pasado. Cuando él se fue éramos jóvenes, ahora ya estamos viejos. Me gustaría que conozca a su hijo como está ahora, solo lo vio de nene.

— MUJER DEL MUNICIPIO DE DZONCAHUICH, 47 AÑOS, SU ESPOSO MIGRÓ A ESTADOS UNIDOS. NO HA VUELTO DESDE HACE 7 AÑOS.

Si hubieran más oportunidades de trabajo en el pueblo ellos no tendrían que irse. La situación es muy difícil, se arriesgan demasiado al irse sin papeles, pasan muchas dificultades para cruzar y encontrar trabajo. Me afectó el ver que se vayan. Aunque nos seguimos comunicando y llevando, no es lo mismo porque aquí nos juntábamos todos a platicar y comer.

— MUJER MUNICIPIO DE DZONCAHUICH, 32 AÑOS. SUS HERMANOS EMIGRARON A ESTADOS UNIDOS. UNOS TIENEN MÁS DE CINCO AÑOS Y OTROS TIENEN 2 AÑOS DE HABERSE IDO. UNO DE ELLOS NO HA REGRESADO.

Quiero agradecer al Club de migrantes de Dzoncauich por su apoyo para hacer realidad las obras del programa 3x1. Estos clubes son los de Dzoncauich en Los Angeles, Notario, California, Bellevue, Washington. Nuestras felicitaciones al Ballet Tradición Yucateca y a todos los migrantes que de una forma u otra han participado”.

— JOSÉ ANGEL COCOM ARAGÓN
PRESIDENTE MUNICIPAL DE DZONCAHUICH

personal statements

For the immigration communication project, we collected personal stories to share.

A 47-year old woman whose husband immigrated in 2000 writes:

When my husband left the first time, it was terrible. He just took a change of clothing because he wasn't sure if he'd find work. We were all sad. It was a month before we heard from him. Now communication has improved and is easier, but when he left we could only communicate through letters. Sometimes I feel anxious and hopeless because he's been there so long. Yes, we've been able to build our house little by little, but time has passed. When he left, we were young and now we're old. I would like him to know his son, how he is now – he's only seen him as a baby.

A 32-year old woman whose brothers have immigrated to the US writes:

If there were more opportunities to work in our town they wouldn't have had to go. The situation is very hard, they risk so much going without papers, and it's very difficult and hard to cross and find work. It really hurts me to see them go. Even though we still keep in touch, it's not the same because here we always talked and ate together.

video: the artisana at xyaat, in señor, quintana roo

video: the artisana at xyaat, in señor, quintana roo



things look **romantic** and **fun** from the outside

Here Kelly and Molly are happily sharing a hammock. The next morning, their smiles were replaced with whining. Even though it was January, it got quite cold at night. This, combined with barking dogs and their first time sleeping in a hammock meant none of the students got much sleep staying in Señor. This initial misery was a part of their lived reality and everyone's daily life.

everyone needs **access**

to education, information, resources, mobility,
and credit – the **internet is a good thing**

the internet equalizes communication – it provides people with the means to communicate in their own words, with their own voice.



marcos learning from gaby to update his website

In August we continued working on the website for xyaat.com. In the afternoon Marcos Cante came into Carrillo and we worked with him for a while to show him how it could work for him. We're using an open-source software so he can create his own message, update the content, and add photos when he needs to. This is our way of empowering our clients, so they don't have to rely on designers or others to make changes that take even more time and money. I added the Spanish plug-in to his site interface so that his user profile loads in Spanish. The first concern he had was that he didn't have this software. The nice thing about this and all of these systems is that you don't need it - it's all installed on the server side. This was one of our summer experiments. By all accounts it's going to have an excellent outcome. Marcos' excitement was visible and he began asking even more questions on what his options were. His observation that this was just like his email was true - if you can send an email, you can add content to your site. The lights were going on and we were learning more of what his interests were for his website. Working on the global health site helped move us in this direction - we want to free people from the need to work with designers and IT people, to enable them to communicate on their own, when they need to. It's a 21st century skill.



marcos learning from gaby to update his website

You know, when I think about all these projects here in Mexico, I start thinking about the first time I learned about the word EMPOWER. It is really difficult at the beginning to understand all the implications of it, but once you start working, it is magic. Empowering people is making people feel better about who they are, about their societies, culture, economy, jobs... It is one of the best ways to help people develop themselves, and that is great, even for the developed countries.

Personally, working with Xyaat has been one of the best professional and educational experiences of my life. All the work pays off when you see people's faces, showing pride and satisfaction about the collaboration.

There are a million possibilities in this business. Graphic Design is one of the most useful tools for developing communities, and I know that now. Politics, leadership, organization, planning... you can empower people by helping them to turn on engines and start the trip by themselves. It is easier that it sounds, really.



manuel at the centro de acopio

When Manuel gave us the tour of the almost-finished center, he explained their position – that members of the honey cooperative had no other choice but to sell their honey at low prices to wholesalers who kept the market price low.



lol-balché's honey collection center

Since they were just completing their honey processing plant, they hoped this would provide momentum to bring their honey direct to market. This is how our project with them began. What problems have they had since completion? Getting proper electricity. Since some members of this cooperative were political, and another party won the municipal and state elections, they're access to government resources is more difficult. They need access to credit to buy honey from their members and store it until the prices increased as well as to purchase materials to bottle their own honey.

communication = **culture**

figure out how people communicate {LANGUAGE, MEDIUM, TONE}
and what they want to share and know in order to
create **effective exchanges** and **communication**



listening to needs

When you open up lines of communication, you discover how many misconceptions and fears there are. It's really the only way to figure out what people think, need, and want. What works.



good design = good communication

The internet is not the only thing. Taking advantage of the public space has its benefits in reaching people you would not otherwise communicate with - there's a sense of viralness to it.



identity is important

We discovered it was important for labels to be in Spanish and English. Even if they were going to sell only to tourists who spoke English, for example, they wanted to be able to read what they were bottling. This map was important because they wanted others to know that people live “here” too - not only on the coast. A sense of place, roots, and community are major considerations in representation.



Referencing ancient Maya Gods or names was not an option for the honey producers. As they described to me – we don't have the same belief systems. After months, we decided on a Maya name that suited them and was not already trademarked – strangely close to the orange juice product to westerners. Hach = pure/true Kaab = honey.

video: marcos canté canul, cooperativa xyaat, "change is beautiful"s

commitment builds **trust**

trust is necessary to work effectively and hard to earn;
show people a return on their investment **{ROI}** when
they work with you - **delivering** is a good way



prototypes / round 1 / MARCH 2007

Initial prototypes. The cooperative chose one with no changes. At first. We had to teach and encourage them to provide feedback - reluctant because they were not paying us and we had already done so much work. We had another conversation on the value of exchange and how this was a learning experience for all of us and that in order to get the most learning from this, we needed to do more work and needed their input. This communication shifted everything. The next day, Manuel visited with three prototypes they wanted us to explore, different ideas they had and we were able to continue from there. We would often have to reiterate how there are different ways to "pay" for things than cash. This exchange was something we could not buy.



honey project deliverables

Returning time and time again with new ideas and products built trust.



PRODUCTS: **artisan** project

Changes and miscommunication happened. Patience was key.

collaborations = the unexpected

you can't possibly know everything; so build an **interdisciplinary team** of experts to enable you to **work holistically** on a problem or project



The cooperative benefits from technical training and assistance to keep their hives healthy and take advantage of new processes. Without this engagement, we would not have come together with the other cooperatives or have connected with government agencies.



Don Lucio Poot, **natural medicine** and Alison Brovold, **biologist**

Don Lucio Poot es el médico tradicional del pueblo. Tiene 75 años y enseña a los visitantes y locales la importancia de las plantas y su uso cotidiano para curar enfermedades. En la visita usted conocerá como curar dolores de cabeza, calvicie, artritis, dolores musculares y muchos otros padecimientos con la simple utilización de las plantas adecuadas.

being **there**

personal interactions build deeper, more meaningful relationships; **working together** in the field fosters dialogue and understanding



Don Lucio Poot, **natural medicine** with Jessican Vernick

Avery Smith writes his experience “has made me a lot more open minded in my work. It really made me realize that you have to communicate to many sorts of people” (Kays:17)

video: the medicine man heals jess, cooperativa xyaat, in señor, quintana roo

video: the medicine man heals jess, cooperativa xyaat, in señor, quintana roo

forget what you **think** you know

explore first and suspend natural instincts to
analyze and evaluate **people and situations** –
things aren't always what they appear to be;

{THINK ETHNOGRAPHICALLY}



learning about stingless bees

Ethnography relies on first-hand research of practices of everyday life. At its best it is multi-vocal, and reaches towards authenticity of experience by including voices of researchers and members of communities—in this case partner communities. For purposes of our research, ethnography is both a process to inform designers as well as an ideal way to generate content. Thinking ethnographically, students are asked to observe, interact, and document without making premature judgments in this complex environment.

In Cuauhtémoc, partners explained how difficult the economy was and why they wanted to pursue this project. Many people migrate to the Costa Maya or Maya Riviera because there is no way to make a decent living in rural areas. This, they hoped, would bring work to the town as well.



learning about orange production

In Cuauhtémoc, partners explained how difficult the economy was and why they wanted to pursue this project. Many people migrate to the Costa Maya or Maya Riviera because there is no way to make a decent living in rural areas. This, they hoped, would bring work to the town as well.



don gualberto's **back garden**

Hurricane Dean had a devastating impact on the region and wiped out most of the small farms, as well as the infrastructure of Majahual, where Don Gualberto's daughters work. Not only did they have to look for new jobs somewhere else on the coast, but we lost one of the major points of sale we were hoping to take advantage of. A few weeks after the hurricane, all of the oranges dropped off the trees. This was an apparent aftermath of the hurricane. And while the oranges might have fallen, the label doesn't go bad. As Alex said, that's the life of the campesino in Mexico - living in a hurricane zone with no agricultural insurance.

work from the **ground up**

nothing works unless the people you work with will participate – they know best what they need

video: visiting the orange groves in cuauhtémoc

video: visiting the orange groves in cuauhtémoc



referencing **aztec** culture

We avoided some disastrous mistakes early on. In this example, the face of the sun appears menacing and is visually reminiscent to the pre-Columbian Aztec forms, different from pre-Columbian Maya art. While the sun was positive, its face conveyed the Maya as violent, which is a narrow representation. It just plays into the pre-existing stereotypes and a tendency to lump all “indigenous” groups together.

show tangible **results**

people understand what they see and feel – the
tangible thing helps them **“get it”**



presenting prototypes

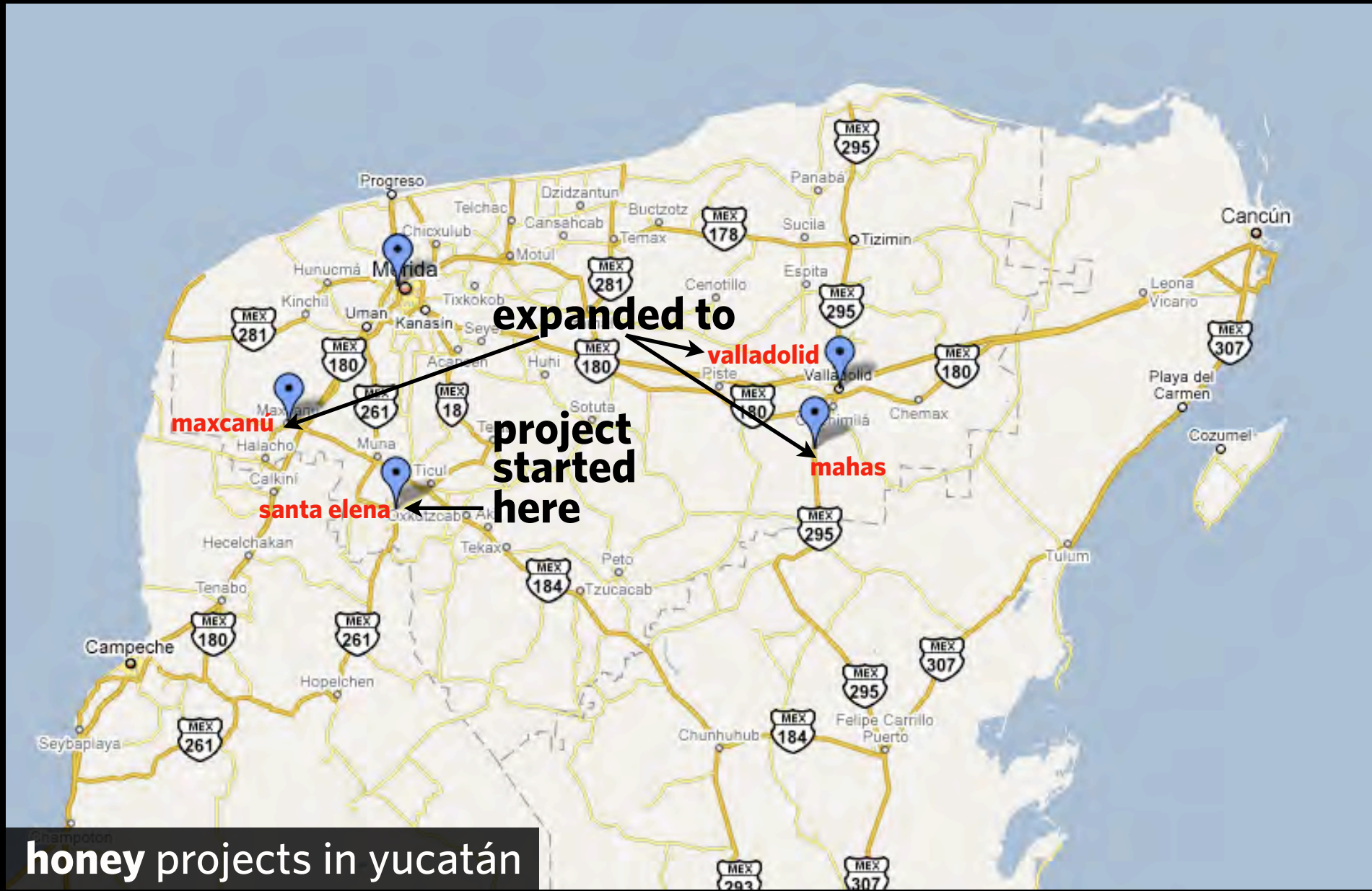
Don Gualberto told us how this work - seeing and holding the prototypes of five labels presented on bottles - inspired them to work hard towards their goal. It was real instead of just another unrealized dream. Cooperative Cuauhtémoc is using the design brief we presented in their proposal to secure funding for the construction of a juice factory.



Manuel and I shared the design project with the three other presidents and several advisors. Seeing the products, the values, and ideas that we developed through the course of the project opened their eyes to the possibility of combining forces to bring their product to market. They had already formed the union to sell their products in wholesale to vendors. This project provided the impetus to develop another aspect to their business.



sample bottles / JUNE 2007



empower everyone

and you build **new capacities** for all involved;
raise people's expectations of themselves and
they can rise to meet them



bottling samples / JUNE 2007

Cassie McDaniel writes: Collaborating with people of two other cultures outside of my familiar language, customs, and traditions, and the difficulties we encountered in doing so, has made me realize that design is very much embedded in culture and has a significant role outside of visual problems and aesthetics.



asking **open questions** to artisans

Being able to visit the community for which we were designing for was an experience that cannot be reproduced in books or photographs. ... Getting to meet our 'client' made responsible design even more of a prerogative for us. We often questioned our decisions and our very identity as designers, striving for a humanistic and inclusive solution to this visual and cultural problem

projects website

designshares.com

+

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