

## Ecuador International Workshop Reflection

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As an architecture student, we give architecture our all. We sacrifice sleep, play, and sometimes even our health, just so we can take our design to the next level, just so our project can be better tomorrow than it is today. But because we are often so focused on our project, we forget everything else. We get sucked into the microcosm of our studio and oftentimes it is very difficult to realize or even care about what else is going around us in the world. Oftentimes we are so enamored by what we do that we forget why we do it.

The Ecuador International Workshop allowed me to step outside my usual habitat - my studio - to look at, not just glance at, what is going on in the world and what architecture can do to take part in all these happenings. More importantly, the workshop reveals to us a side of architecture that is so often aloof in architecture school: the human connection.

The workshop has a very real client, the children in the rural village of Pascuales in Ecuador. Although we did not have the opportunity to meet with the client before the project started, we relied on third parties, as well as photographs and individual research, to develop the project to the best of our abilities given our resources. All this time, the client is just that: the client, someone for whom we know the needs and respectively we develop the project to meet those needs. This past IAP we were given the rare privilege, at least for architecture students, to present the project to the clients. We traveled to Ecuador, taking along with us the model and the drawings.

From the very beginning, we knew that the project is of an entirely different world. Most of us didn't quite know exactly where Ecuador is located nor were we familiar with their culture, politics, and its people. Naturally we researched these subjects at the beginning of our project but what we experienced in Ecuador is not something that one can read about on the Internet or in books.

The moment we arrived in the village, the clients ceased to be clients, an ever abstract term that I still find out of place and uncomfortable in the context of architecture. They are just people, but not just any people. These people welcome us like they have known us for the past ten years despite the fact that it was our very first meeting. To be in their village with them, I felt

something that transcended architecture and the client-architect relationship: it was the human spirit and energy that one can never ever experience via just models or drawings. And seeing that they were pleased with and excited about the model and drawings, it brought over me a warmth that can never be felt through architecture alone. In all my experience in architecture so far, I have often been excited, but never been moved. Our meeting with the people we are designing for is a moving experience. Architecture, after all, is more than just space, building, style, or even beauty. It is more than one human being designing something for another human being, but one human being giving the gift of friendship, understanding, and kindness to another human being.

Our trip also brought me renewed hope for the condition of our world today. Opening the newspaper or turning on the TV, one can only inevitably get depressed by all that is going wrong in the world. In a less developed nation such as Ecuador, problems are certainly abundant, street children among them. The people in Pasculaes are particularly concerned with this issue and the workshop's project is a response to this concern. What amazed me was the people's proactive attitude towards the problem they are facing. The women in the village have gotten together to make the problem known and to continue to address the problem. Their willingness to participate, to engage themselves as part of the solution breaks the common misconception that people in the less developed nation are helpless and they need to be rescued. My encounter with the people in Pasculaes proved that people around the world are ready to help and empower themselves and they just need some advice and suggestions.