

A Hopeful Environmental Education Resource for Public Schools

Fundación Geovida

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Author: Carlos Martinez, Green Map System



Mapas Verdes charting school buildings and surrounding areas made in 2007 (left). Students created a unique portable mural (below)



Background: Green Maps as Environmental Tools for Low-income Youth

Under the leadership and interdisciplinary approach of Fundación Geovida, a Colombian non-profit organization, the primary motivation for this project was to help low-income youth express their concerns and hopes for the local environment to their peers, educators, older community members, journalists and policy-makers.

Pereira is a traditional coffee growing eco-region facing rapid and unsustainable development. Air and water pollution as well as threats to open and public spaces

are priorities, among other issues.

The project aimed to provide a holistic lesson plan with hands-on environmental activities appropriate for different ages and educational needs, tailored to one rural school, Institución Educativa Gonzalo Mejía Echeverry, and two urban public schools, Colegio Deogracias Cardona and Institución Educativa Suroriental Gustavo Arango Garrido.

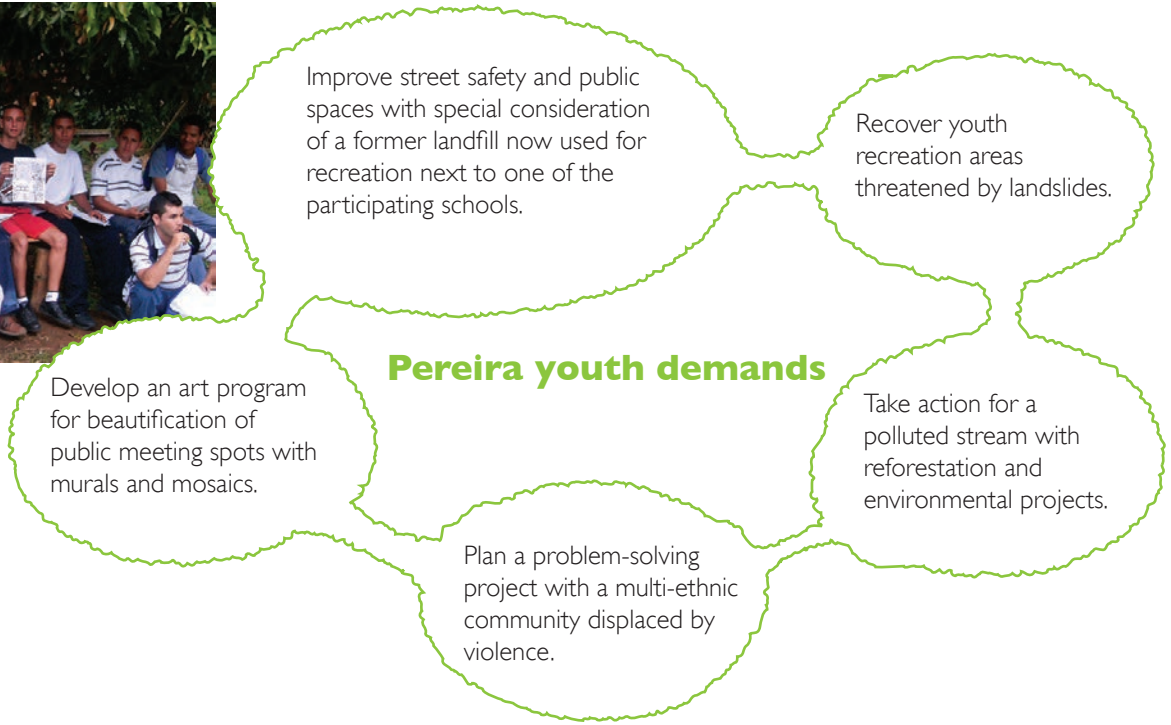
Each school developed a "mobile Green Map mural" that was presented around their cam-

puses and surrounding neighborhoods. They distributed a total of 5,000 printed Green Maps.

As tangible outcomes, these maps offer a message of inspiration that increases the awareness of government and policy makers as to the demands of youth. Each passes on local knowledge as interpreted by the student mapmakers and motivates other communities in Colombia and around the planet to develop projects like this one.



Presenting the maps and findings



Impacts: Creating a Colombian Model for Stronger Public Schools Linking Environmental Education and Community Development Networks

A massive number of young Map-makers participated in experiential trainings, environmental activities and workshops about the sites and situations they were charting. They became engaged in issues related to cartography; sustainable agriculture, food security, reforestation and hydroponics, recycling and waste management; eco-literacy, social responsibility and critical assessment; design and communications; arts and painting, etc.

Their field trips identified elements of natural and cultural significance as well as environmental justice hot spots. Youth became mentors, carrying their first hand experience into their homes and classrooms, multiplying the number of voices calling for action and change.

After the seeds were planted, it was time for harvest. Based on this pilot, Fundacion Geovida began building the foundation for the

adoption of a new contextual environmental curriculum in a growing number of schools, and developing a regional youth mapmaking network that will assist schools with their neighborhood Green Map projects.

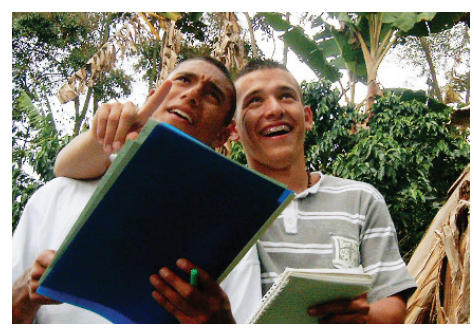
Fundacion Geovida is also planning an exchange program with Green Map projects in the global movement. Their aim is to share youth visions of their local environments, to understand the differences, and to develop solutions to common environmental concerns.

Impacts on the youth involved in this experience included the creation of their own sense of place and the facilitation of dialogue that transformed their views of the environment in both their academic and personal lives.

New skills include painting and visual communications skills, research, advocacy, leadership and

teamwork. The students also became active participants in a delightful online blog that promotes their perceptions and progress using new and traditional media tools.

The power of environmental communication has itself become a movement with a message, framed by the maps and their iconography. The messengers in this particular case are young leaders spreading knowledge and demanding a better, more eco-friendly world for everyone.



Young mapmakers in field research