Thesis project
MFA Design for
Social Innovation

Sebastian Barrera Dueñas

Re-imagining the participation
of Colombians who have gone abroad

STATEMENT

The topic I decided to explore for my thesis was the participation of the Colombian diaspora in efforts hapenning back home without the need to come back. A topic commonly reffered as "Diaspora Mobilization".

My goal with this document is to walk you through the research process that supports the questions, findings and insights that shaped the researche otself and the internvention proposed.

Personal standpoint:
I came to this project after a profound reflection on my personal process of migration for professional/academic purposes, but at some point finding myself with a desire of reconnecting with the Latin American context to support efforts in the region through the acquired knowledge. It didn´t took time to realize that it was a general shared feeling.

From this point I set myself to understand how the concepts of diaspora - knowledge exchange - and sense of place are intertwined to define the way we -as Colombians- relate with other Colombians abroad.
My goal from here, was to articulate a new way of thinking this relayionship and set up a specific example to envision a new way of engaging Colombians abroad with efforts hapenning in Colombia, but without the need to come back.

THE ISSUE
(how the conversation around migration has evolved)

BRAIN DRAIN is a concept that entails the geographical movement of people with valuable knowledge beyond their places of origin.
Is a concept that received a lot of attention specially since we talk that nowadys we live in a knowledge economy.

Nonetheless, after a lot of discussion in academic circles of this situation affecting mostly developing countries, in the last few years the conversation has been trying to change into **BRAIN GAIN.** This means that -instead of thinking how the internal institutions of these countries are affected by the migration from high-skilled individuals-, we should be focusing on how can we gain advantage of this situation.

Even though the conversation focuses on the potential of tapping into this knowledge and individuals -and I am talking here specially from the experience of Colombia. The efforts are still focusing on how to gain advantage of this knowledge by creating **Incentives for people to come back.** without aknowledging at any point the possibilities of engaging people in exchanging knowledge, but without the need to come back.

From a personal standpoint

Repatriation and Incentives to come back as the only policy to promote Diaspora engagement in knowledge exchange, is something I don't agree with..

BECAUSE
- In order to exchange knowledge there is no need to move phisycaly anyone.

- Not necesarilly wants to move back

- If they want to come back, the incentives are targeted to specific areas of knowledge and for highly recognized individuals.

As Ronald Skeldon states:

"When you train somebody with global standards, they will move globally"

See: (video) Where Next for Migration and Development? Ronald Skeldon

Data of Colombian migration for academic purposes

50,000

40,000

40,000

30,000

20,000

10,000

0

35,374

47,932

50,923

56,537

2010   2011   2012   2013
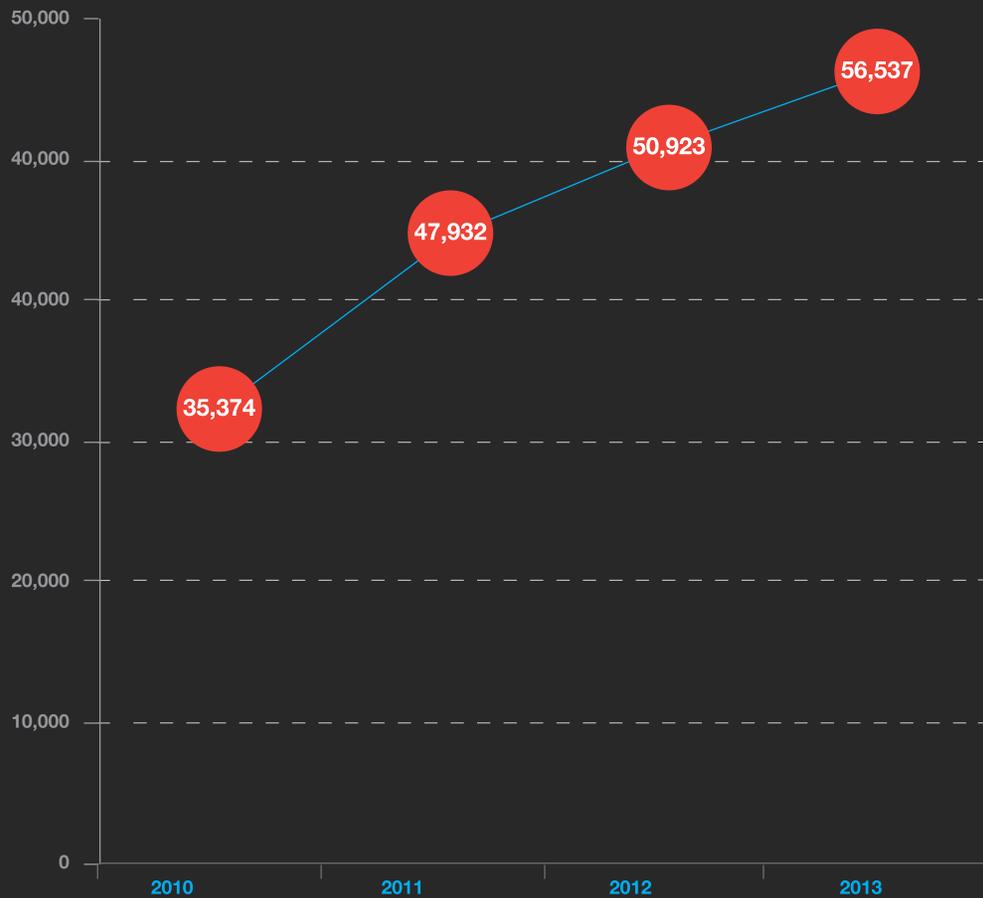
National Institute of Migration Colombia report

In 2010-2013 MORE THAN
190.000
Have migrated for professional purposes

The most common destinies are Europe, U.S. and Canada. Nonetheless, Asia and a few Latin American countrie such as Chile, Mexico and Brasil start to play a significant role as a host country.

The following data shows from a sample of 1000 individuals that were supported through conditioned scholarhships to go abroad for master degrees:

- **People is more dispersed across the globe.** Migration process happens not only from "Global South-to-Global North", but alos "Global South-to-global south".

- **There are a lot of people studying in other fields beyond exact sciences,** event though the efforts of engaging diaspora are always focused on the Colombian scientific community -specially from Switzerland.

Country of origin

Area of expertise

Host Country

Bogota

Narino
Risaralda
Caqueta
Putumayo

Antioquia

Bolivar
Sucre
Huila

Valle

exterior

Atlantico

Caldas

Santander

Tolima
Cundinamarca
Norte de Santander
Quindio
Boyaca
Cesar
Magdalena
Cauca
Casanare
Meta
Cordoba
La Guajira

Derecho

Ciencias politicas y relaciones internacionales

Economia

Administracion y negocios

Artes

Ciencias Sociales

Educacion

Arquitectura y Diseno

Ciencias de la Salud

Ciencias basicas

Ingenieria

Ciencias Agropecuarias y del Medio Ambiente

Estados Unidos

Reino Unido

Austria
Singapur

Francia

Chile

Holanda

Espana

Israel
Finlandia
Canada

Belgica
Mexico
Malasia

Alemania

Australia

China
Argentina
Brasil
Suiza
Suecia
Dinamarca
Noruega

Italia

Data visualization of the migration flows from COLFUTURO scholarships' recipients from 2012

A clear example of these governmental policies

In 2013 a new program the Government (through COLCIENCIAS) put together a program called:
ES TIEMPO DE VOLVER / IS TIME TO COME BACK

According to Gabriela Tejada:

Historically, institutions in Colombia made the projects fail because they weren't able to soak up the knowledge being brought back, due to the lack of capacity and beaurocracy.

This program is focusing on "incentives to come back", with the scientific community as the only group interested in repatriating, and only in highly recognized individuals at international level.

- There is space for 72 scientifics only (the most renowned)
- 8 millions $USD investment

Research

Major Insights

Individuals abroad

Zenaida Osorio
David Escobar
Sanabria
Julieth Granados
Oliver Sánchez
Alex Torrenegra
Andres Barreto
Catalina Matamoros
Carlos Reyes
Helen Bohórquez
OScar Chavarriaga
John Melo
Pedro Mejía
Ana Milena Sánchez
Gabriela Tejada
Jean Baptiste Meyer

Social organizations in Colombia

Conexión Colombia
COLCIENCIAS
COLFUTURO
ECONEXUS IN-SITU

Representants from Diaspora organizations

ACIS - Switzerland
MFPC - United States
CIDESAL - Government program
CONSULATE - New York
SOCIAL ATOM
Ecole Polythecnique Federal de Lausanne
COLEF - New York
PROSOWA - New York
CODERISE
REDesCOLOMBIA

1.
Highly beaurocratic relationships with government are a recipe for failure
Throughout the years, different projects have been created between the Colombian government and Diaspora organizations abroad. Most of them have failed because of the relationship with government institutions.

2.
Most recent individuals don't live up for the idea of "nation" but they do for specific problems.
I realized that this group was reimaining asíde of this experience because:
Some of them were unaware of how to do it because in the place they are, there are not organizations from Colombians.

But almost all of them were staying aside because they want to do it as individual agents and not as an istitution. They don't want to be identified as part of on eof these organizations as they don't share the same values and consider them highly bureaucratic.

3.
Organizations in Colombia need to be involved since the beginning in order to frame the projects, otherwise is highly probable that they won't engage in the process if it doesn't fit their agendas.

The other fact is that the knowledge is not arriving to the organizations they need it the most, the Non-profit organizations. Although they recognize the relevance of engaging individuals abroad, they have to do it through the government (because of the lack of resources)

Hitorically, Colombian diaspora engagement has been a beauracratic relationship

1.

Highly beaurocratic relationships with government are a recipe for failure

Throughout the years, different projects have been created between the Colombian government and Diaspora organizations abroad. Most of them have failed because of the relationship with government institutions.

Red CALDAS — Established in 1996 with Scientists from Switzerland

CIDESAL — Government initiative through the consulate

ACIS — Organization of Colombian Scientifics in Switzerland (1993)

COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Lack of funding to support the diaspora organization

- Ultimate goal from the Colombian government is to repatriate, without realizing that people is not pretending to come back because this might be a setback in their career.

- Relationships with government have to be extremely formal and beauracratic in order to happen. And this requires more committment than possible from part of the individuals/Colombians abroad.

"the rigidity of the organizational structures leaves aside things that are important."

"People, according to their interests can achieve things... you don't need to be an institution in order to do something"

Zenaida Osorio

Based on the interviews with Gabriela Tejada_ researcher in Diasporas at the ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE FÉDÉRALE DE LAUSANNE in Switzerland.

Ricardo Chavarriaga_ Researcher in basic Sciences and former director f ACIS (Association for Colombian Scientifics in Switzerland)

Analysis of case studies

(Analyusis of diaspora organizations attempting to share knowledge back home)

I set out to interview the representants of various organizations abroad to understand how their work happens, what specific patterns I could find and what is common to all of them that could -or not- be useful to engage people in new ways.

The organizations analyzed were:
- Prosowa
- Coderise
- ACIS
- MFPC

The outcome

How they intend to influence

How they promote the initiative

How they access the local context

How they get finance

What models of organization

Project
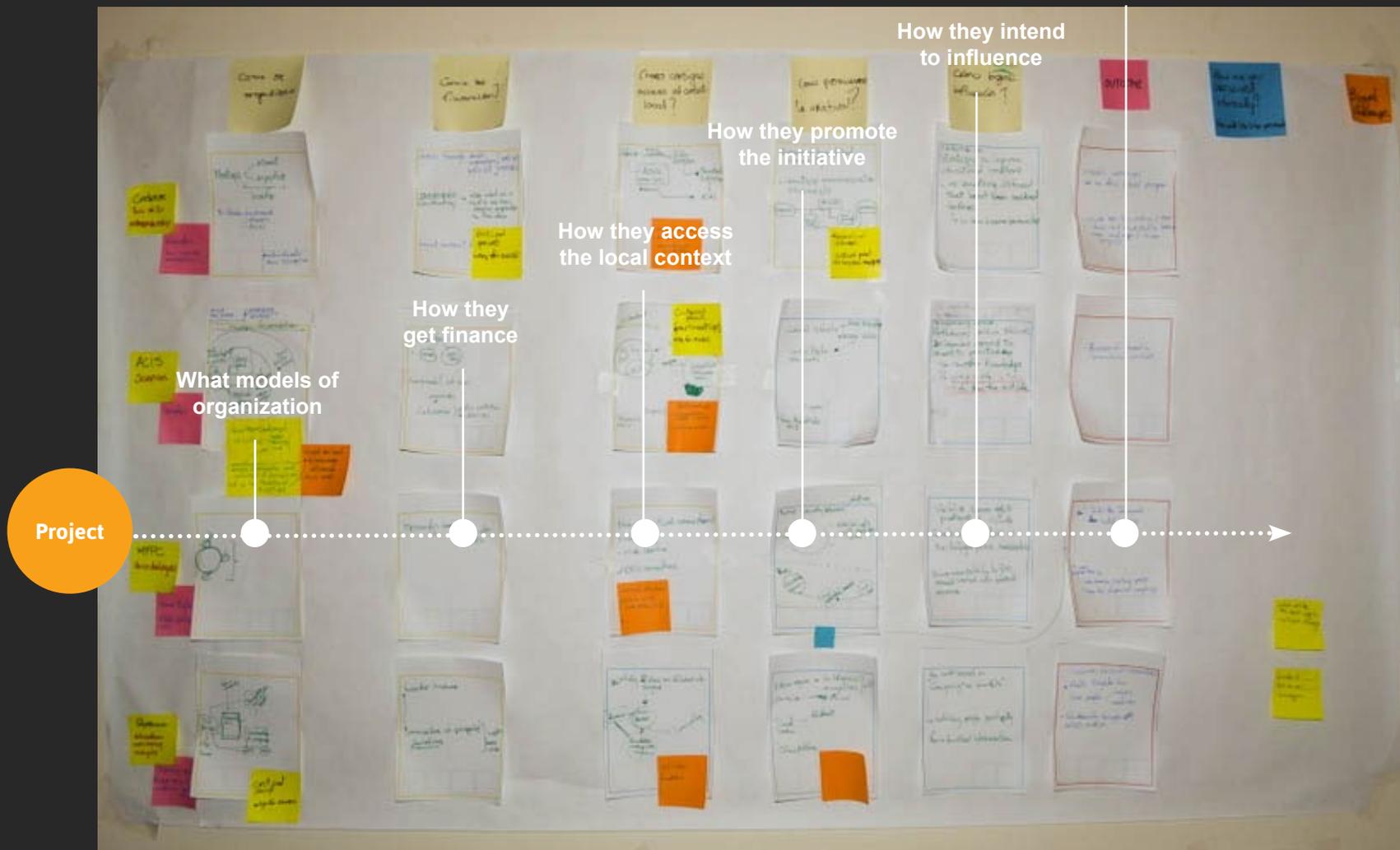
FROM THE ANALYSIS OF HOW THIS ORGANIZATIONS WORK

Organize themselves in groups by area of expertise and geographical area

By focusing only in a specific geographical area and area of expertise, this reduces the capacity of tapping into a vast source of knowledge from the diaspora beyond a geographical area.

They create a project from abroad

The project is defined as a mechanism to transfer knowledge, but the project sometimes is not framed as relevant to the agendas of the organizations that will implement it back home.

They partner with an organization in Colombia (in most of the cases a government institution)

That interest is clear in Public Institutions, but they're really bad at putting in practice the knowledge.

Seek for funding in Colombia and the host country

Funders in Colombia are reluctant to fund this projects.
Is easier to get funding outside the country. (sometimes through crowd funding models)

Implement it locally

Organizations in Colombia are not involved since the beginning building the project. They only play the role of a recipient only. This way is difficult to engage them in the long term.

What is needed ....

Right now
Diaspora is focusing on creating a project outside the country, and sending it to Colombia as the best "mechanism" to transfer knowledge

But
Instead of thinking of creating projects outside the country to transfer knowledge

So...
We need a process to continuously build networks in a more natural way, that can work as a pool of resources for specific issues in Colombia

Then, collective projects can be built with organizations in Colombia and the individuals abroad

UNDERSTANDING THE NIDIVIDUALS

(Insight from the conversations with Individuals abroad that are not affiliated nor participating in any knowledge sharing in the country)

2. Most recent travelers don't live up for the idea of "nation", but they do for specific problems.

I realized that this group was reimaining asíde of this experience:

Some of them were unaware of how to do it because

1) in the place they are located there are not organizations from Colombians that are doing this.

2) But almost all of them were staying aside of these dynamics because they want to do it as individual agents and not through the name of an istitution, which they consider highly beaurocratic.

They don't want to be identified as part of these organizations because at the end they don't share the same values.

3) Instead they have a high commitment with specific social issues which they feel attached to, and a have clear understanding of the country's reality.

"...I tried to reach them [diaspora organizations], but there's always this annoying bureaucracy...so you don't want to be there"

Helen Bohórquez

"They are the hardest to engage. they are not formaly part of any organization... they don't have much time and their first destination may not be the same for an extended time".

Gabriela Tejada

AUDIENCE NEEDS

At this point I decided to work with these two audiences looking for a way to connect them, and based on their needs.

New generation of colombians abroad

They are a group of people highly active in their fields, as well as extremely volatile (In the sense that they are moving constantly through geographies).
Is a group that is higihly invovled into Social Issues and constantly aware of what is hapennign in their country.

These recent travelers are interested in sharing knowledge and extend their networks back home:

But without being identified with the "old ways of thinking" of KNowledge exchange as:
- National duty
- As a mean for repatriation
- Or that the goal is to get incentives to come back

They don't agree with that and want to find new ways of particpating, in a way that fits their plans

Civil Society Organizations in Colombia

The reason of why I focused my efforts towards this type of organizations in Colombia is because they are the ones who will benefit the most with this exchange. Nonetheless, historically every effort has been always funneled through governmental institutions.

They are aware of the amount of Colombians abroad working and generating knowledge in specific areas.

The want to reach them directly in order to make use of this knowledge back home, but they are unaware of where they are and how they can find them.

Current models that arre trying to be implemented are traditional volunteer or repatriation models. But these experiences fall in the same situation of bringing people physically to Colombia, which as the research suggested is not what Diaspora individuals want.

My goal at this point was to propel a change from an extremely rigid and beaurocratic model, towards a more flelxible model that connects people abroad -that hasn't had the chance to be part of exchanging knowledge before.
Even as small as this implementation could be, the idea was to elucidate new ways of thinking of how this exchange can be experienced, what kind of things we should be thinking as a country and what things we are not aknowledging their migration process.

Current state   ......➤ ## Desired state

Switzerland

Dlaspora organization

Colombia

Government

Colombia

ECONEXUS

Social sector

Abroad

Individuals
(non-affiliated to any organization)
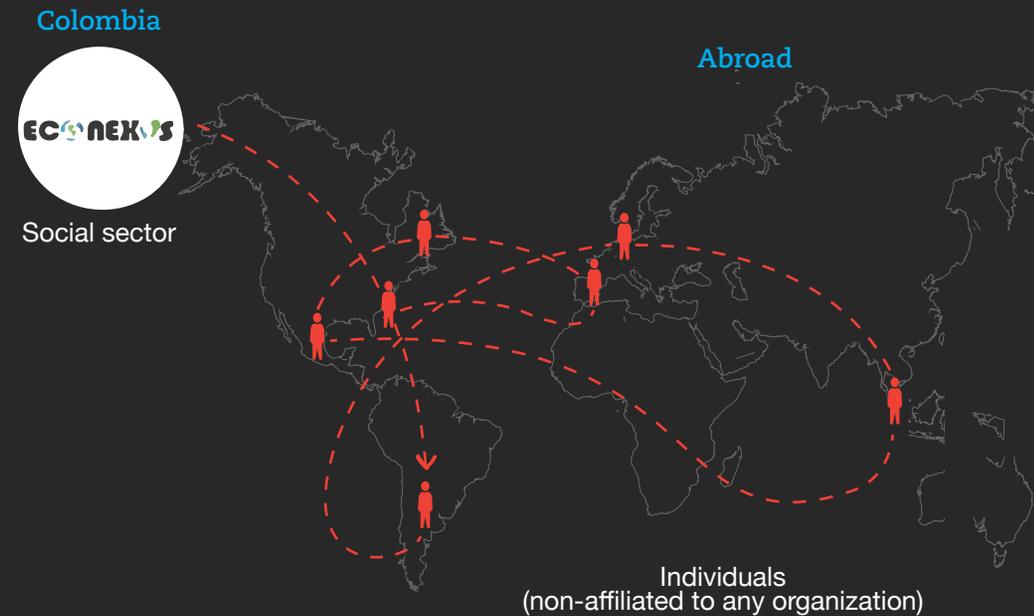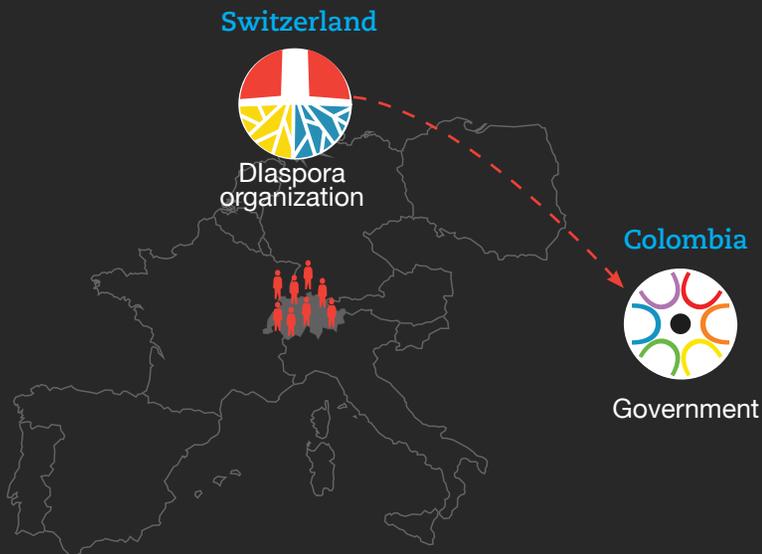
An experience that is too rigid

- Too rigid
- Public institutions as recipients
- Their goal is brain repatriation
- One way relationship
- Happening in specific geographical areas
- Based on a specific expertise

An opportunity for recent travelers/new generation

- Entry point is the social organization in Colombia
- People participate as individuals, not institutions
- Goal is sharing knowledge and connecting people who is not being part of existing institutions.
- A process that is engaging and memorable

I am creating a channel for new generations of colombians abroad to engage with social organizations in Colombia in a direct knowledge exchange, to support projects back home

By "Creating a channel"

a public experiment as a memorable experience to increase participation of the new generation of colombians abroad in a way that fits their needs and their perspective.

By "direct knowledge exchange"

leaving aside the beauracracy and unnnecessary formalities, and engaging social organizations since the beginning, and directly with individuals abroad.

By "initiatives back home"

bringing knowledge they've been exposed and their perspective by living abroad, to use in the work of social organizations.

BRAINSTORMING

The goal of this exercise was to explore a vast array of possibilities of how the process of exchanging knowledge can happen based on the findings from the research.

1. Brainstorming
2. Clustering
3. Visualizing the possibilities with most potential to be deployed

Send

Knowledge

Home

Airport/Leaving a trace

Virtual Feral Trade

Piggy backing

Flying Notebooks

Geocaching (reference)

Commissioned coffee

Mix & Match

Tracking tokens
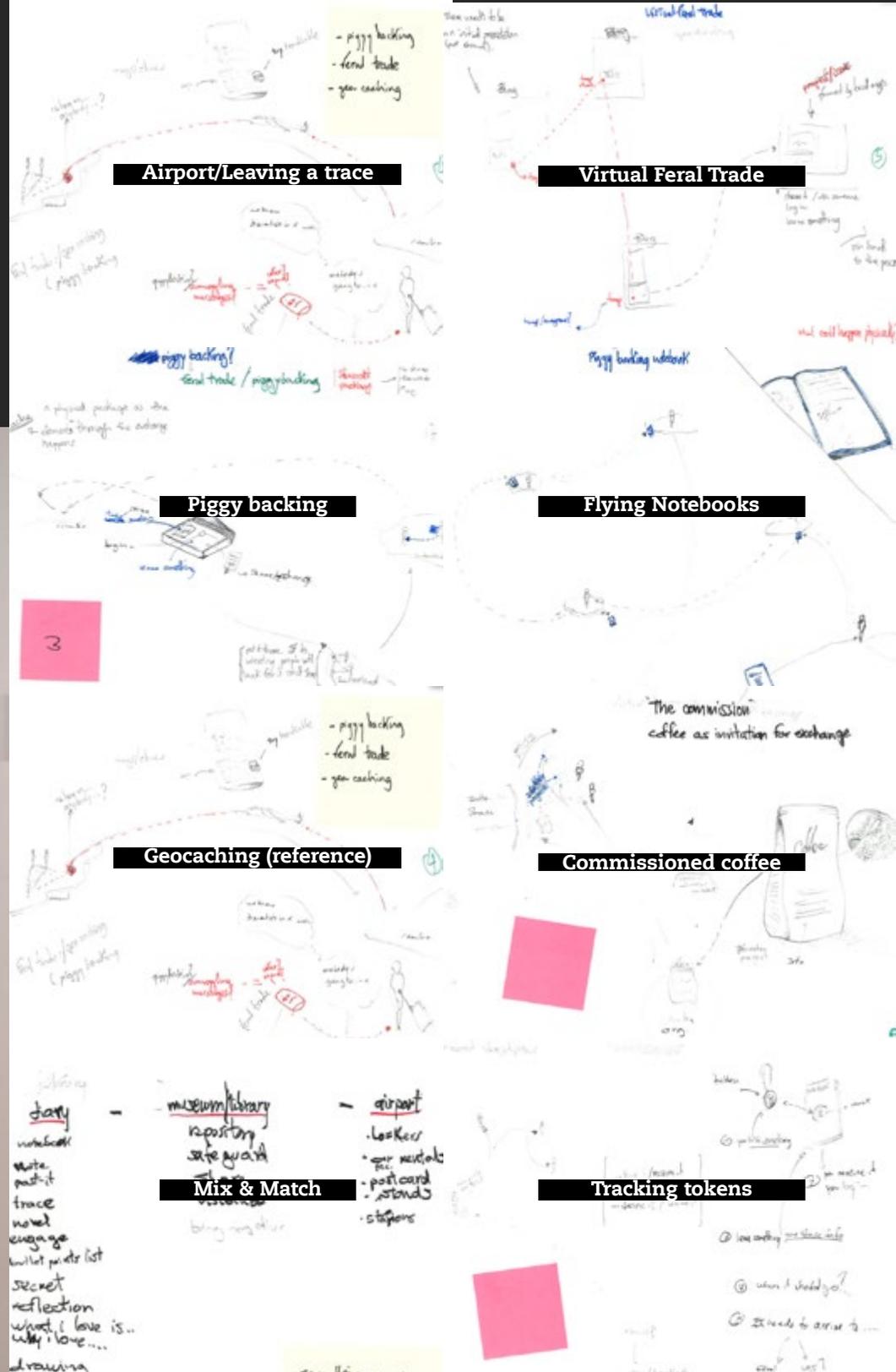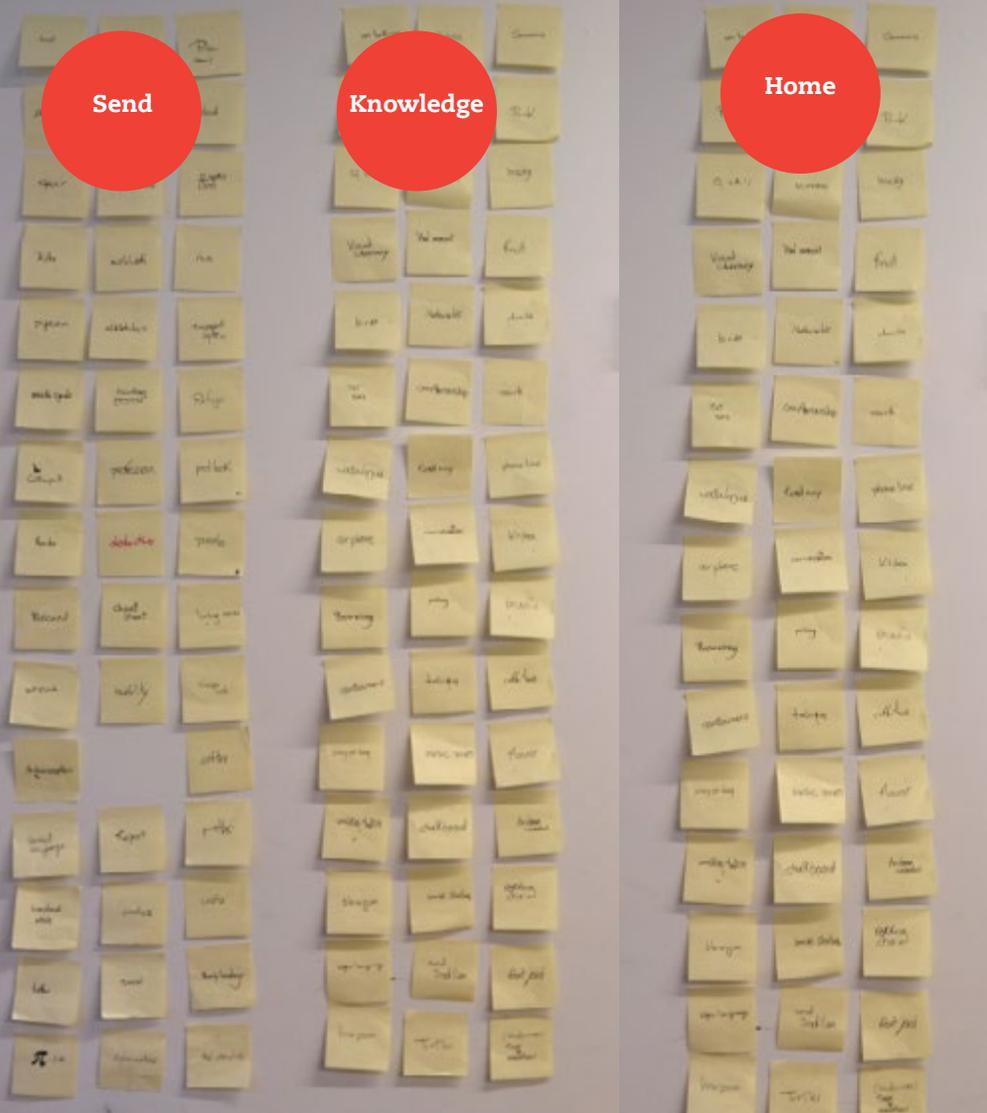
The previous proposals were informed by a secondary reserch exploring alternative models for exchange based on people's social networks

2 references came to light at this point

Feral Trade: a grocery business that trades goods over social networks

See interview Kate Rich

Geocaching: A community of practice and treasure hunting game where people hide and seek containers around the world (through GPS)

This analysis informed structures for protocols and documentation when people interact without any intervention form a central agent (in this case myself).

1. Login

2. Take something,
   Leave something (of more value)

3. Share it, or pass it on

El encargo

Is an expeirment that welcomes individuals abroad to share their knowledge with an organization back home (Colombia) through notebooks that travel around the globe, connecting people by topic of interest and in a more personal adn physical way.

EL ENCARGO is inspired by the way people around the globe self-organize to send things to their closed ones, through a dear-friend luggage and beyond transnational boundaries.

LEARN MORE BROCHURE

NOTEBOOK

MARKERS

¿Quiere saber más?

Visite —
http://elencargo.diaspora.wix.com/elencargo
elencargo.diaspora@gmail.com

Este libro es un experimento público que parte de una investigación sobre la "movilización de diásporas", específicamente sobre la participación de colombianos que han decidido salir al exterior en busca de oportunidades académicas o profesionales y continúan radicados fuera del país. Sin embargo tienen la intención de contribuir con conocimiento a temas específicos en Colombia desde el exterior.

El encargo

HOW DOES IT WORK ?

Based on the analysis of the work fro Diaspora organizations and what research established as the needs to be covered for most recent travelers to enage into knowledge exchange, I set up a plan for implementation in 4 basic steps.

I reached an organization in Colombia

Defined a question with them and synthesized their work

Colombiands working in **clean energy** abroad

Compile it in a crafted -achordeon book

Sent 5 books to fly
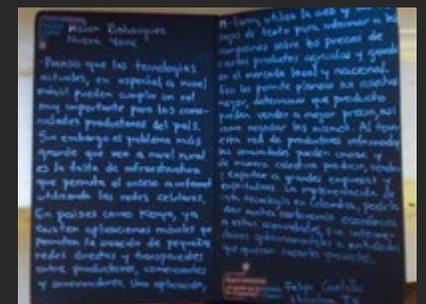
I established a protocol for participating

Instrucciones

1 Documente la llegada del libro

Tómele una foto a la portada del libro y envíela a:
elencargo.diaspora@gmail.com
Incluya su nombre y ciudad a donde llegó el libro.

2 Ráyelo

Escriba la información que quiera compartir sobre el tema (proyectos, expertos, investigaciones, su trabajo, etc)
...y sus datos
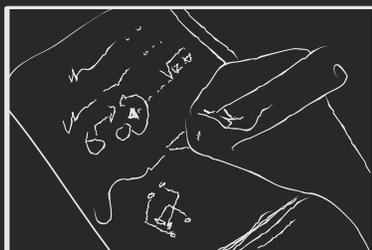
Recuerde solo tiene:
2 páginas para llenar
3 días para hacerlo

3 al 3er día... páse el libro al siguiente

...a algún colombiano fuera del país que haya mostrado interés en compartir conocimiento en Colombia y que usted crea tiene información relevante que aportar al tema de este libro.

.. mandelo como quiera y a donde quiera por:
a) Correo certificado
b) en el equipaje de un amigo
c) Con el amigo de su amigo
d) Por un conocido que va de paso

libro

Apenas el libro salga de sus manos, envíeme otro correo electrónico avisando a manos de quién va y a qué ciudad se dirige. Copie al que recibe el libro en el correo.

Si el costo del envío le preocupa y no puede costearlo, no se desanime. Envíeme un correo con foto del recibo del envío y yo le reembolso el dinero.

Translation

Instructions

1. Document the book's arrival
Take a picture to the cover and send it to……@…..
Include your name and city.

2. Sketch on it
Write all the information that you want to share int his topic (projects, experts, research, your work, etc)
… and your contact info

Remember, you only have:
2 pages to fill
3 days to do it

3. in the 3rd day….. pass it on to the next one
to any Colombian who is abroad and has shown explicit interest in sharing knowledge back home, and that you think it has relevant information to include regarding this topic.

Send it however you want, wherever you want
a) Certified mail
b) "Dear friend's luggage"
c) with a friend of a friend
d) with a known someone who's passing by

As soon as the book flies from your hands, send me another email making notice of the person receiving it and what city is going.
(CC the receiver in the email).

If the courier fee makes you hesitant to participate, let me know.
Send me a picture with the receipt and I'll reimburse you the money.

¿Quién es Econexus-InSitu?

Es una organización en Colombia que desarrolla alternativas para el mejoramiento de ingresos de organizaciones de base comunitaria (especialmente poblaciones indígenas, afro descendientes y mujeres cabeza de familia) a través de la creación e implementación de estrategias de acceso a mercados diferenciados, fundamentadas en la sostenibilidad social, ambiental y económica.

Atienden 2.470 familias y su modelo de intervención se basa en seleccionar comunidades emprendedoras con productos orgánicos que sean manipulados de acuerdo a la vocación cultural de la zona y generar proyectos productivos enmarcados en el comercio justo y el alto impacto social y ambiental. **Lugar de Operaciones:** Sierra nevada de Santa Marta y Comunidades cercanas.

En el eje de -Gestión responsable del territorio- como una de las 3 líneas de acción, Econexus está buscando recoger toda la información relevante sobre Colombianos en el exterior expertos en desarrollo de energías limpias y recopilar todo el conocimiento relevante que sea posible, que la comunidad colombiana en el exterior esté acumulando y en el que esté participando. Este conocimiento puede surgir como ideas, proyectos, expertos, temáticas, organizaciones, modelos de financiación, entre otros. Lo que se le ocurra.

El objetivo de éste libro

1

Ubicar y empezar a crear una red de colombianos en el exterior, que tengan conocimiento relevante que compartir en temas de energías limpias.

2

Crear un canal inicial para capturar, documentar e intercambiar este conocimiento y empezar a establecer conexiones.

Translation

Who is Econexus -In Situ?
Is an organization in Colombia that develops alternative income generation models for grassroots social organizations in indigenous, afro-descendant communities.
Their goal is to create strategies to access new markets, based on social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Works with 2.470 families, chosen by their entrepreneurial endeavors with organic products. The help them create productive projects framed under "Fair Trade" agreements and social and environmental impact.
Operations: Santa Marta - Sierra Nevada

One of their guidelines is **"Responsible management of the territory"** as one of their 3 lines of action. In this context, Econexus is trying to capture and document relevant information coming from Colombians abroad, with particular knowledge in **"Clean Energies".**

See what they are participating, begin exposed,etc. It can be ideas, projects, experts to talk with, organizations, financing models, among others.
Whatever comes to your head.

The goal of this book
1. Point out and start weaving a network of Colombians living abroad, that want to share knowledge relevant in this topic.

2. Create an initial channel to start capturing, document and exchange this knowledge with Econexus back home.

INSTRUCTIONS

ORGANIZATION'S BACKGROUND

QUESTIONS

Signal to start writing

Aquí empieza
Nombre:
Ciudad:

Signal to stop and inform where the book is going

Aquí termina:
¿A quién se lo Nombre:
va a mandar? Ciudad:

How the books were sent ?

Before sending the first books, I set up my own rules.

Sebastian → Someone from research → A colombian around the globe
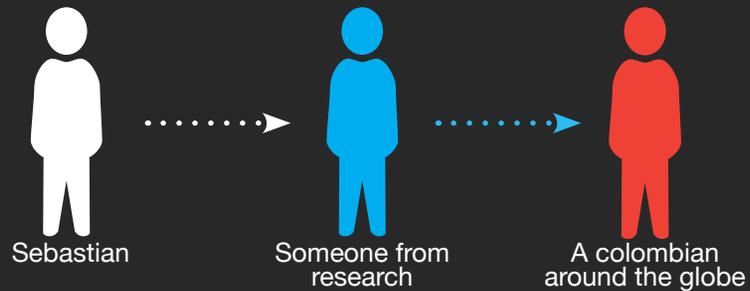
1. It can't be received by someone I know as a friend.

2. The people that will lead me to the first person receiving the book will be someone from research that is not related to the traditional diaspora organizations.

3. The decision of who the book will be sent to, is up to the individual that has the book in his hands. I have no control on it.

1. The people that touches the books have to be Colombians that have manifested an interest to share knowledge back home.

2. that they are not part of Diaspora organizations or government institutions.

5 books were sent

David Sanabria

Helen Bohórquez

Julieth Granados

Alex Torrenegra

Belgium

Minnesota

New York

San Francisco

Houston

Miami

Mexico City

Thailand

Lucho Molina

?

Pending

Sebastian Restrepo

Buenos Aires

Oliver López

John Melo

Ana Milena
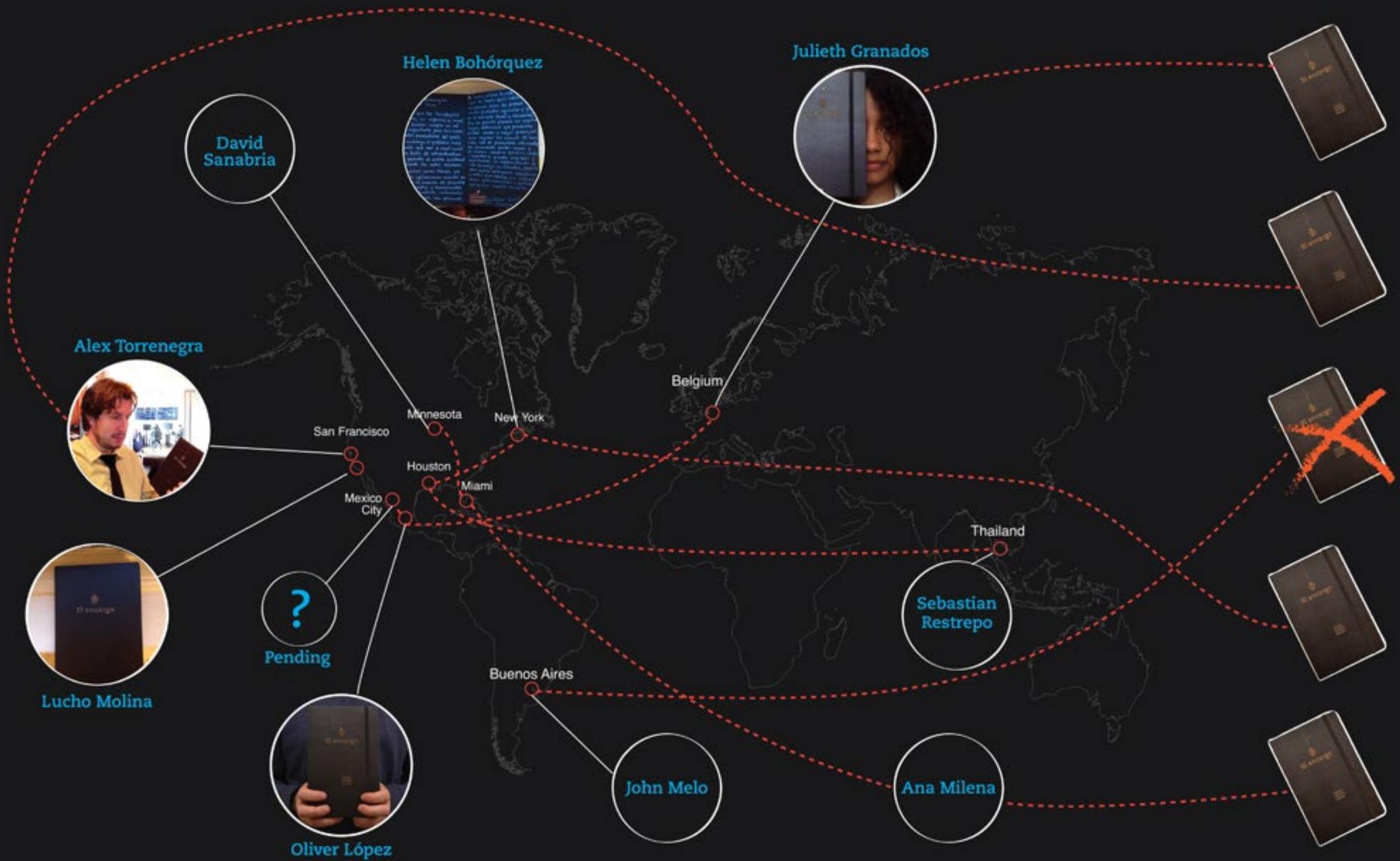
Snapshots of the information collected

Research studies specific to the country to be consulted

Approaches used in other parts of the world

Potential partnerships with other NGO's

Tips to access funding and donation of technologies
i.e. (Danish gov. gives away wind turbines for free that have been used. You just have to ask them)

Trends & Examples to revise in other cities and countries

A digital platform to support the physical experience

In the long term, the physical experience can't happen in a sustained by being physical only.

_ After having engaged this group of people with the books flying around the globe, I am envisioning a virtual platform (in this case a website only) that will play the role of tracking and documenting the infromation collected in the books.

_ Secondly, the website will be a place and an entry point for organizations to create their own books with their own questions.

_The second section is an entry point for individuals abroad to pitch their interests in specific books traveling around or potential topics of interest for the future.
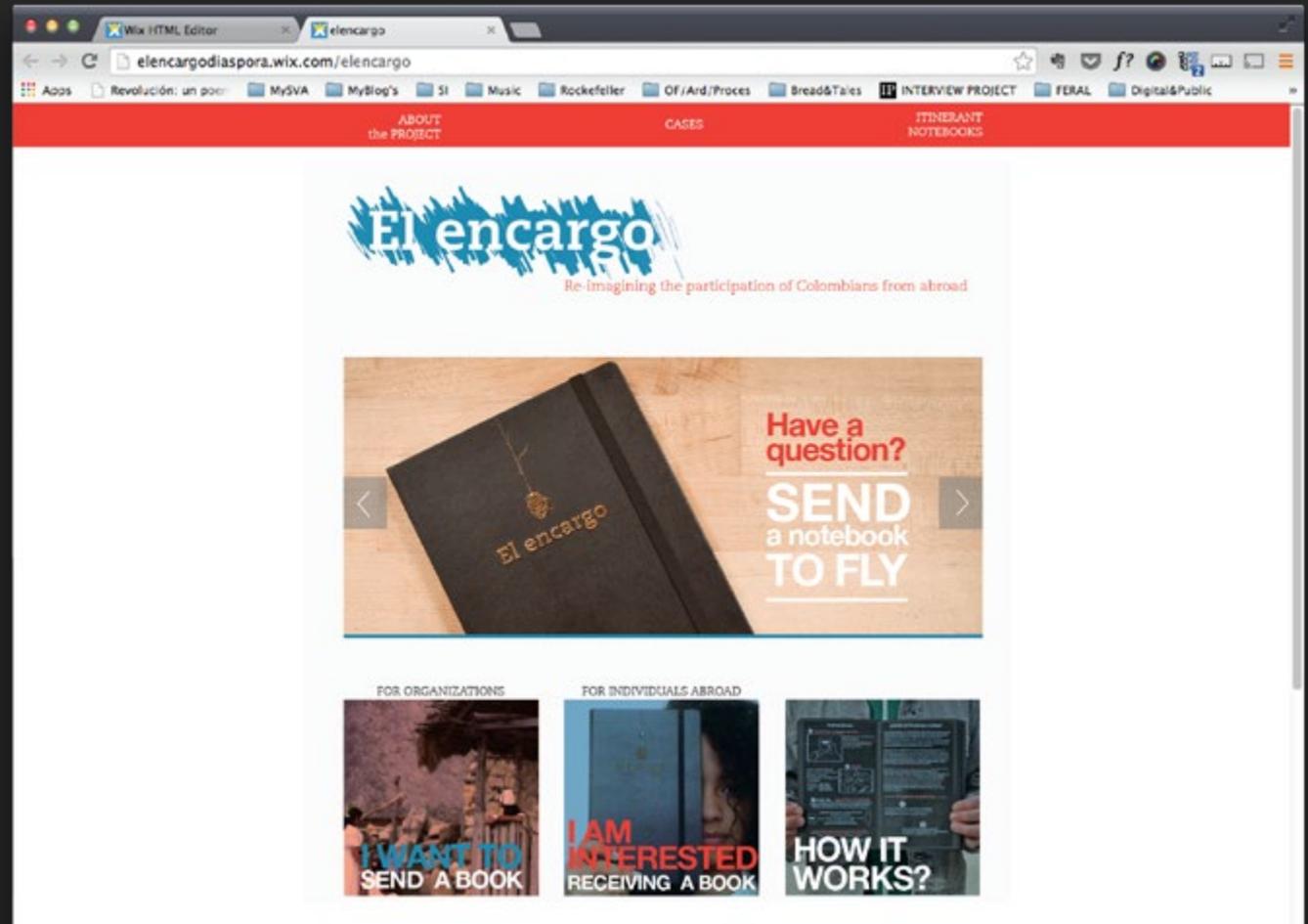
A digital platform to support the physical experience

Section intended for organizations interested in sending books to connect individuals abroad

Tracking the books and people connected

Section on the website intended to document the books that are currently traveling and the people who is getting connected.

This information from will be delivered and discussed with the organization in Colombia.

But first, I want to make sure that the books touch everyone who wants to be part of it

Re-imagining the participation of Colombians from abroad citizens