Project Double-take / Projeto Rever
Patos de Minas – Brazil
University of Florida
Karla Mundim – Brazil – University of Florida – UWC Atlantic College (’09 – ’11)
www.facebook.com/projetorever
www.youtube.com/watch?v=5veRfhpCwC0
Special contributions from: David Gonzalez – University of Florida – UWC Red Cross Nordic
Rainer Sousa – University of Florida – UWC Mahindra College

Section 1.

Project Double-take or “Projeto Rever” sought to instigate a conversation about the role of independent scavengers to the overall policy of recycling in the city of Patos de Minas, in the southeast of Brazil. Currently, the city does not have a formal recycling system, but more than 200 people work independently collecting recyclable waste from different districts and businesses. They contribute to the city’s sustainability and economic growth, yet receive virtually no incentive from our local government and population. Our goal, with this project, was to improve the infrastructure of recycling in the city and raise awareness about recycling not only on an environmental level, but also through a social justice lens.

Although no other official contributions were made to the project, we received an incredible amount of help from local people and organizations, for instance local public school “E.E. Abilio Caixeta’s” principal allowed us to film their students for our documentary (photo below). Of crucial help was also Mr. Civuca Costa from the Environmental Department of Patos de Minas. His help was essential in organizing a public event in the local park, and in networking and garnering opportunities to publicize the project in radio, television, among other media.

Project Double-take had 2 main components: outreach and infrastructure. The first part of the project focused on outreach by working in partnership with the Environmental Department of Patos de Minas. During these first few weeks, project Double-take organized a recyclable art competition (photo below) aimed at students and others from all levels. In total, 12 prizes were given for the best artwork, leaving participants with the clear message that the materials we throw away can have an inherent aesthetic value that we often ignore.

Another main component of our outreach strategy was the production of a mini-documentary that captures the work of our summer project, but most importantly, the work accomplished by the members of APARE, the city’s only recycling association owned by the workers themselves. The documentary ended up becoming one of the project’s most expensive and labor-intensive endeavors, as we began to realize that it could become a very useful resource for advertising the obstacles and opportunities for recycling in the city. At the end of the summer, the documentary was exhibited for more than 100 people at the local theater, and made available online, reaching over 600 views at this point (link above).

Finally, in terms of infrastructure, Project Double-take manufactured 10 large waste containers to be distributed in key points around the city, in order for APARE to reach a wider variety of districts and people. Locations were determined in partnership with the City Hall, and were of public nature. Furthermore, the project paid for maintenance of APARE’s truck (used for collection of materials), the maintenance of APARE’s pressing machinery, and the production of uniforms, new to the workers.

Our main difficulties were in terms of accessing the money abroad. Not only were there many expensive fees, I also could not withdraw more than $100 at a time (day). This made certain aspects of the project extremely difficult since not all vendors accepted card transactions, and withdrawing money little by little is inefficient and expensive ($5 per extraction + 3% of total value). For this reason, learning about the country’s banking services, potential charges, and daily ATM limits is something I would strongly
recommend to future project directors. Dealing with these complications took a lot of our valuable time, as well as our money. Another complication was that some of the topics we wanted to address were inherently political, and because of our essential partnership with the City Hall we had to be careful about some of our positions. On the other hand, the documentary had a clear political message (pressuring the local government to release funds for recycling, as promised), and we see that as a victory.

Overall, the entire city of Patos de Minas (approximately 147,000 inhabitants) has the potential to benefit from this project. In the short term we have certainly kickstarted the conversation about social and environmental issues related to recycling in the city. APARE now has the recognition of hundreds of people who previously did not know of its existence. The local government is under pressure from the population and will hopefully contribute to this important cause in the near future. The project is sustainable because it relies on people who see recycling as their livelihood, and it also depends on a policy that will beautify and increase the popularity of the city. The project’s results will be monitored by me and Tiago Santos, my partner in the city and a professor at UNIPAM, the local university.

Section 2.

Although peace may most commonly be associated with the lack of conflict and violence in general, I believe that it also means engendering an environment of social, economic and environmental justice. Empowering communities to be self-sufficient and to believe in themselves; empowering individuals to seek fair wages and recognition for their work; empowering policymakers to develop ideas that benefit the economy as well as the people; these are all part of my definition of peace.

Project Double-take has done exactly that: it has empowered the city of Patos de Minas by showing that recycling is an opportunity. It has benefited and continues to benefit the lives of the workers at APARE, who live under terrible financial difficulties due to the lack of incentive for their work. The project has contributed to the conversation not only on the environmental aspect but also on the social aspect of recycling. If a formal recycling system were to be implemented in the city, more than 200 workers who currently have no steady jobs would benefit. Project Double-take believes these uncomfortable conversations need to be included in our day-to-day lives, in the context of peace and justice.

This experience has been incredible, rewarding and very life-changing. It was really easy in the past to imagine a better life for the “catadores” or scavengers, but imagining something is quite different from acting on it on the ground. This project has taught me a lot about hard work, about sympathy, and about the unforeseen difficulties that come with attempting to promote change, even on a basic level. Projects for Peace gave me the undying motivation to keep working in the international development arena, being as an academic or a project manager, in the hope that one day “development” will no longer mean what it means today. It is impossible to put into words how grateful my hometown, the people of APARE, and everyone involved in this project are to the Davis Projects for Peace foundation. Without their support, above anything, this project and its long-lasting positive consequences would never have been possible.

Statement:

Karla Mundim - “Project Double-take (‘Projeto Rever’) has had a very clear impact in the city of Patos de Minas. It has placed recycling at the forefront of local policy; it has not only addressed the environmental impact of recycling but also its potential for social change. Empowering our community to be active in changing their lives is ultimately a step towards peace, justice and sustainability.”
Karla with APARE (Patos de Minas Recycling Association) members. These workers were at the center of Project Double-take.

Recyclable art competition - student shows his creation, a little boat moved by vapor made with cardboard and aluminum cans.

Students from “Escola Estadual Abilio Caixeta” tell us about their recycling initiatives.