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Publishing for Social Change: Migrant Zines



How can we claim to promote a culture of peace and respect for human rights if we in academia don't root our own projects in society and directly benefit vulnerable groups, such as migrants who make their way to the United States in search of a better life?

From September 30 to November 29, 2019, a team within the Center for Research on North America (CISAN) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) took on a project to boost the social appropriation of knowledge, with support from Mexico's National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT). The goal was to create a series of zines aimed at migrants, with suggestions to help those who migrate to the United States to reach their destination safely and know their rights in our neighboring country.

We began our work by compiling brochures published by the Mexican government as well as by civil society. We contacted several institutions in order to kick off the conversation, and we

attended a drawing workshop focused on migrant identity at Casa Tochan shelter. We then drafted our own workshop proposal, which we ended up having to modify heavily upon realizing how little it applied to those housed at Casa Tochan.

In retrospect, I have come to realize that this project may have been the most satisfactory one I've ever undertaken, since we created content and edited in collaboration with the migrants sheltered at Casa Tochan. When we first presented them with the content that we had written, reading and reviewing it as a group, we quickly realized that our proposal was out of touch with reality, and that our goal of protecting those who'd be most vulnerable in transit (women and children) would be impossible to accomplish with a mere pamphlet. Only a social and legal transformation would prevent people from falling victim to kidnapping, human trafficking, and rape throughout this arduous journey. I remember that the sessions in the shelter began with a drawing workshop led by illustrators Amanda Mijangos and Armando Fonseca, who pushed us to reflect upon identity. Later, when we shared our content, we soon understood that carrying a backpack is sometimes impossible, that bringing medicine along or approaching civil society organizations can prove a life-

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threatening mistake, that women are often raped without anybody being able to stop it, and that children are always at risk of death throughout the journey, as the conditions they face are below what any human being deserves.

We created four zines (three of them had a print-run of 2,500, but all of them are available for in printable and downloadable PDF format online):

- *Transit* (this includes recommendations for the journey from Mexico's southern border to its northern one);
- *Destination* (this one includes useful information for migrants who cross the border and reach the United States);
- *Return* (information for deported and repatriated persons); and
- *Mobility* (PDF only, this one contains vital information for people in movement).

These zines, which are all available online¹, were created thanks to intense research alongside students and professional researchers on migration, as well as with migrants (in workshops and focus groups with migrants, deportees, and returnees). Several associations and institutions helped us in the process, such as Casa Tochan and Casa Mambré, which are both shelters, as well as Otros Dreams en Acción, Deportados Unidos en Lucha, the National Human Rights Commission, the International Organization for Migration, and the Scalabrini International Migration Network.

The zines were structured to include the following sections: "Prevention," "Health," "Rights," "Safety," "Vulnerable Groups," "Map," "Directory," and "Remember that . . ." Their design was

¹ <http://www.revistascisan.unam.mx/Voices/Fanzine/index.html>.

also tested out with focus groups to ensure that they'd be easy to carry, could be read without difficulty, and included important information. **MM**

Project Participants

General director: Alejandro Mercado Celis; editorial director: Astrid Velasco; editorial coordinator: Diego Ignacio Bugeda; illustrations and design: Amanda Mijangos and Armando Fonseca; design: Clarisa Moura; design assistants: Miranda Rosales and Zohet Alicia Barrera; content design and specialized advising: Aaraón Díaz Mendiburo and María Cristina Hall; research: Ana Luna and Sandra García; writing: Astrid Velasco, Teresa Jiménez, Marco Ocampo, Nallely Barba, and Ángel Escamilla; copy-editing: María Cristina Hernández.

Institutions Involved:

1. National Human Rights Commission (Fifth Investigative Unit, CNDH)
2. International Organization for Migration
3. Sin Fronteras iap
4. Casa Tochan
5. Casa Mambré
6. Otros Dreams en Acción
7. Deportados Unidos en Lucha
8. Institute for Women in Migration (imumi)
9. Mexican Migrant Coalition
10. Scalabrini International Migration Network

