

NARRATIVE REPORT FOR 2007 – 2008

Project:

The *Heart of Gold* Costa Rica Community Empowerment Project:
Enhancing the Community-University Research Alliance Between
Malaspina University College and the Los Santos Region of Costa Rica

Submitted by:

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Malaspina/Nanaimo Project Partners:

Merve Wilkinson, PhD (Honorary) Wildwood Eco-forestry, Nanaimo, BC
Kevin Bell, Manager, Bean Positive Organic Coffee Importers, Nanaimo, BC

Costa Rican Research Partner Institutions:

Earth University
Cartago University College
The Rainforest Alliance of Costa Rica

Costa Rican Community Organization Partners:

The Nubotropica Foundation, Santa Maria de Dota
Sol Colibri Organic Farmers Association, Santa Maria de Dota,
La Alianza Association of Organic Farming Families of Los Santos
Association of Farming Families of the Los Santos Eco-Tourism Trail
Lily Edgerton, Economic Development Officer, Canadian Embassy, San Jose

Final Narrative Report for the *Heart of Gold* Project

I want to live, I want to give ...I crossed the ocean for a Heart of Gold
Neil Young

This report is written by Dr. David Robinson (Project Director in Canada) in conjunction with Mainor Montero (Project Coordinator in Costa Rica) and input and critical feedback from our Costa Rican partners.

Brief Project Background

During Phases I and II [2004 to 2007], the project initiated a community-university research alliance between the rural agricultural communities of Santa Maria de Dota and San Marcos in the Los Santos Region, Costa Rican universities and environmental organizations, and MUC. This collaborative research alliance seeks to create alternative forms of sustainable economic development in the Los Santos Region of Costa Rica. The project has three major research themes: 1. Agro-tourism design/implementation and its link with *Direct Trade* models of coffee production; 2. Sustainable ecotourism development models in rural farming communities, and 3. Forest protection-based models of educational tourism development.

Phase III initiated in spring 2007 began our collaborative work on 'sustainable ecotourism development models in rural farming communities'. This aspect of the Heart of Gold Project will be the focus of the project for the next 3 to 5 years. Through community meetings and dialogue with farming families in spring 2007, the alliance established that the main alternative economic development goal for spring 2007 and the foreseeable future will be:

To research, vision, design and implementation of a world class 50 km. eco-tourism trail through the pristine high cloud forest and remote valleys from Santa Maria in central Costa Rica to Quepos on the Pacific Coast. Eco-tourists will experience adventure trekking, home-stays with organic farming families, Spanish immersion, and opportunities to volunteer on the family farms. This venture will diversify regional economies and create locally owned and operated eco-tourism businesses for local farming families.

Our work in Costa Rica to date has resulted in regional awareness of the empowerment project, linked local communities through workshop and educational gatherings, generated educational materials for local residents on alternative coffee production models and community-driven tourism initiatives, initiated agro-tourism educational tours and home-stay accommodation on five local organic coffee farms, generated forest based economic activities data for the Nubotropica Foundation's rainforest protection campaign, initiated the development of a full risk management plan for operations of the project in Costa Rica, and initiated an ecotourism network for local businesses and home-stay families. All of these outcomes are 'on-going' in addition to the major undertaking of the Los Santos Eco-Trail.

Our method of *participatory action research* is based upon the principles of (a) *participation*: building trust and respect with communities, and then (b) working with communities to identify actions or *solutions* to their community challenges and issues, and (c) the two-way *transfer of knowledge and skills* between our students and faculty and our Costa Rican counterparts.

Part 1: Outcomes of the Activities Supported by the Award 2007 -2008

Itinerary and Contacts: Activity in Costa Rica 2007

In the spring of 2007, I spent one month with one Malaspina University College graduate research assistant, Lyndsey Agar, as my research assistant working in the Santa Maria de Dota and San Marcos areas of Los Santos. During this period the following partners were met with for project work and project planning/visioning:

1. *Association of Farming Families of the Los Santos Eco-Tourism Trail, San Marcos, Los Santos*
Minor Montero Rodrigues [Member Sol Colibri Farmers Association] from San Marcos, Los Santos Region, is now the Costa Rican 'director' for the Heart of Gold Project. Mainor now heads up the Eco-Adventure-Tourism Trail project, which is the main undertaking of our project for the next 5 years. Minor is a strong and passionate 'local champion' for this long-term project. While in Costa Rica, myself and Malaspina students on work placement, work as a 'professional resource' for the Association. Contact: Minor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com

2. *Sol Colibri Organic Coffee Farmers Association, Santa Maria, Los Santos*
Arturo Segura was [but is no longer]is our main contact for our work on organic coffee and agro-tourism activities. Arturo now works independently on organic coffee and coffee farm eco-tourism trail. Due to Arturo's frequent bouts of professional misconduct, which threatened the reputation of the *Heart of Gold* Project [and hence that of Malaspina University College, and our Canadian funding agencies, e.g. AUCC] and myself, and jeopardized the integrity of my students' experiences on the project, I sadly had to remove Arturo Segura completely from the project. As stated above, Mainor Montero is now the Project Coordinator in Costa Rica and contact for Sol Colibri: : Minor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com , solcolibri@yahoo.com

3. *La Alianza Association of Organic Farming Families of Los Santos*
This was our first formal meeting with the Alianza, the farmers' association of 34 families, of which the Sol Colibri farmers (6 families in total) are now members. Bean Positive (an import company formed by former students on placement in Los Santos) will now purchase their organic coffee from the Alianze for distribution in Canada. Arturo Segura is the contact for Bean Positive only [Malaspina University College students affiliated with selling the Alianza coffee on campus no longer import directly from Sol Colibri, rather we now use the newly created Bean Positive, a local business in Nanaimo, BC]. Contact: Minor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com , solcolibri@yahoo.com

4. *The Nubotropica Foundation, Santa Maria, Los Santos, Costa Rica*
Pablo Bolanos, [Director and Founding Member, Nubotropica Foundation] from Santa Maria De Dota, Los Santos Region, is our main liasion person for this not-for profit research/conservation organization. The Nubotropica Foundation are a partner on the eco-tourism trail, and the foundation grounds and cabina may become a stop-over poin on the trail. The foundation works to protect the major watershed through which the eco-trail will be located from logging. Contact: Pablo Banos, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 200-0013 jpbalanos@racsa.ca.cr

5. *Home-stay families: Elba Monteros and Myela Mata*
Our two main home-stay locations for student researchers and volunteers, as well as faculty, are with (a) the Mata family in Santa Maria and (b) the Montero family in San Marcos. Contacts Montero family Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 541 1960 minormontero@hotmail.com; Mata family 011 506 541 2839

During the spring/summer period, two graduate students working on the project [Lyndsey Agar and Melody Gaborou] in the Los Santos Region for one month periods. These students lived in home-stay accommodation with the Mata famiy: the costs associated with these home-stays were in-kind contributions from the farmers' association with who we work in Costa Rica.

6. *The Canadian Embassy* in San Jose is the main government body with whom we meet each year when in Costa Rica. Our main contact is Lily Edgerton, the Economic Deveelopment Officer. The embassy supports the project with office supplies, promotion of the *Heart of Gold* Project, and promotion of Los Santos Tours (a recent graduate of Cartago University and local operator who markets the newly created agro-tourism tours of the Sol Colibri farms) and the Alianza organic-shade-grown coffee. Our meetings focused on project

growth and development, and identifying how the Embassy can support and resource the project's Los Santos Eco-Trail . Contact: Canadian Embassy, San Jose, Costa Rica, Lily Edgerton, Public Affairs Officer and Political Economic Assistant, Oficentro Ejectivo La Sabana, Edificio 5, Tercer Piso, Sabana Sur, SanJose, Costa Rica Tel: 506-242-4400 ext. 3252 Lily.edgerton@international.gc.ca www.sanjose.gc.ca

7. *Partner institutions with whom we met:*

Colegio Universitario de Cartago faculty to establish a scholarship (funded for three years by the BC Government and Malaspina University College) for their best students linked to the *Heart of Gold* Project to study free at Malaspina University College in Canada and to create an alliance between our two institutions. The first scholarship student, Jefferson Salazar (a recent graduate of Cartago University) attended Malaspina University College on an all expenses scholarship from August to December in 2007. His studies were a huge success, the highest GPA in his class, and he was a major credit to his country and region. Contact: Colegio Universitario de Cartago, Ana Lasolano, Professor, Empresas y Actividades Turisticas, Avenida 7, calles 9 y 11 Cartago, Costa Rica Teléfono: (506) 591-3363 Fax: (506) 591-3364 lsolano@hotmail.com

8. *Tourism Businesses Affiliated With the Project*

Representing Malaspina University College in support of the *Los Santos Tour Company's* (a local operation affiliated with our coffee agro-tourism farm tours and community tourism initiatives in Santa Maria) efforts to secure an eco-tourism contract (for our Sol Colibri organic coffee tours and other Los Santos community driven tourism activities) with *Horizontus* [San Jose], the largest eco-tourism clearing house/company in Costa Rica (this was successful). Contact: Jonathon Salazar, Los Santos Tours, San Jose, Telephone 506 855 9386, www.santostour.net, email info@santostur.net

Assessing the risk management aspects of the Los Santos Tours' *Extreme Forest Park Ropes Course*. This community eco-tourism initiative we are liked with in an advisory capacity, in the hills of Copey, Los Santos Contact: Jonathon Salazar, Los Santos Tours, San Jose, Telephone 506 855 9386, www.santostour.net, email info@santostur.net.

Itinerary and Contacts: Activity in Costa Rica 2008

In 2008, I traveled to the Los Santos Region on a research leave to work on the project during the months of February, March and April. During this time, Brad Goodwin [senior undergraduate student, Malaspina University College] acted as my under-graduate research assistant on a 4 month cooperative education placement. Also volunteering as research assistant for this 4 month period , Andrew Kuzma [graduate in Marketing, Calgary University] worked as part of our research team. Maddy Koch [senior undergraduate student, Malaspina University College] on a directed studies placement worked with us February through April. Kevin Bell [manager/owner of Bean Positive Coffee Imports] spent 2 months, February through March working with us as a volunteer and working with the Alianza on coffee import expansion into Canada. One high school student, Jaime Robinson, from Oak Bay High School, Victoria, also volunteered during the month of April. Also involved in the project for one to two week periods as volunteers were 4 graduates from the University of Calgary.

During this 4 month period the following partners were met with for project work and project planning/visioning:

1. *Association of Farming Families of the Los Santos Eco-Tourism Trail, San Marcos, Los Santos*

This major undertaking covered most of the 4 month period in Los Santos. Minor Montero Rodrigues [Member Sol Colibri Farmers Association] from San Marcos, Los Santos Region, my students and myself visited [by forest trail or back road travel] and inventoried [script and photograph filed] each of the 10 family home-stay farms and accommodation settings involved in the north end of the 50 km eco-trail. The families involved in the south end of the trail will be inventoried by my three Malaspina University research assistants

during their placements in May through July. Contact: Mainor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com

2. Video Documentary Production: Turbo Video Productions, Alajuela, Costa Rica

Meetings with Tim Other, owner and production manager of TurboVideo Productions, in March led to Tim offering to create a mini/documentary on the Heart of Gold project for expenses only. Shooting took place in the second week of April and editing and full production will be completed by June 2008. This mini/documentary will be used for grant applications to private foundations. Within the next year, we hope to create a full length documentary on the project for educational purposes. Contact: Tim Other Tel: 506 2430 762 Turbo Productions website <http://www.turboproductions.org>

3. La Alianza Association of Organic Farming Families of Los Santos

Kevin Bell, [former graduate of MUC, manager and co-owner of Bean Positive], as project representative for the organic coffee aspect of our project, negotiated for all coffee imports to Canada to be handled by the Alianza in the future. Contact: Minor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com , Kevin Bell, Bean Positive, Nanaimo, BC, Canada Tel: 250 818 2881 beanpositive@hotmail.com

3. The Nubotropica Foundation, Santa Maria, Los Santos, Costa Rica

Our project team met with the Foundation Steering Committee to build a future relationship that will have the Foundation be the lead 'home-stay and accommodation' setting for the eco-trail. Pablo Bolanos, [Director and Founding Member, Nubotropica Foundation] from Santa Maria De Dota, Los Santos Region, is our main liaison person for this not-for profit research/conservation organization. The Nubotropica Foundation is a major partner on the eco-tourism trail, and the foundation grounds and cabina accommodations will be pivotal to the project vision. The foundation works to protect the major watershed through which the eco-trail will be located from logging. Contact: Pablo Banos, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 2200-001 jpbalanos@racsa.ca.cr

4. Home-stay families: Elba Montero and Myela Mata

As always, our relationships with our main home-stay families flourished: this is very much the 'heart' of our project. All 18 of the students and volunteers on the project from May 2007 to 2008 have lived in home-stays with these two wonderful families during their work periods on the project. Our two main home-stay locations for student researchers and volunteers, as well as faculty, are with (a) the Mata family in Santa Maria and (b) the Montero family in San Marcos. Contacts: Montero family Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 541 1960 minormontero@hotmail.com; Mata family 011 506 541 2839

5. The Canadian Embassy in San Jose is the main government body with whom we meet each year when in Costa Rica. Our main contact is Lily Edgerton, the Economic Development Officer. The embassy supports the project with office supplies, promotion of the *Heart of Gold* Project, and promotion of Los Santos Tours (a recent graduate of Cartago University and local operator who markets the newly created agro-tourism tours of the Sol Colibri farms) and the Alianza organic-shade-grown coffee. Our meetings focused on project growth and development, and identifying how the Embassy can support and resource the project's Los Santos Eco-Trail. Contact: On April 14, our team made a formal presentation on the project to the Canadian Ambassador. Canadian Embassy, San Jose, Costa Rica, Lily Edgerton, Public Affairs Officer and Political Economic Assistant, Oficentro Ejectivo La Sabana, Edificio 5, Tercer Piso, Sabana Sur, SanJose, Costa Rica Tel: 506-242-4400 ext. 3252 Lily.edgerton@international.gc.ca www.sanjose.gc.ca

6. Partner institutions with whom we met:

Earth University: our formal partnership with this prestigious institution is well established, but to date funding has been insufficient to allow combined work of an extensive nature. Contact: Karla Pérez Fonseca, Área de Desarrollo Humano, Programa de Desarrollo Comunitario, Universidad EARTH, Costa Rica Tel:

011-713-0000 ext. 5008/direct 713-0251 kfonseca@earth.ac.cr

The Rainforest Alliance: our formal partnership with this prestigious institution is well established, but to date funding has been insufficient to allow combined work of an extensive nature. Contact: Ronald Sanabria, Director, Sustainable Tourism Rainforest Alliance, P.O. Box 11029 – 1000 San Jose, Costa Rica Tel/fax: 011-506-234-8916 ext 128 rsanabria@ra.org

Colegio Universitario de Cartago faculty to establish a scholarship (funded for three years by the BC Government and Malaspina University College) for their best students linked to the *Heart of Gold* Project to study free at Malaspina University College in Canada and to create an alliance between our two institutions. The first scholarship student, Jefferson Salazar (a recent graduate of Cartago University) attended Malaspina University College on an all expenses scholarship from August to December in 2007. His studies were a huge success, the highest GPA in his class, and he was a major credit to his country and region. Contact: Colegio Universitario de Cartago, Laura Solano, Professor, Empresas y Actividades Turisticas, Avenida 7, calles 9 y 11 Cartago, Costa Rica Teléfono: (506) 591-3363 Fax: (506) 591-3364 lsolano@hotmail.com

7. Tourism Businesses Affiliated With the Project

As a team, we re-visited and re-assessed the risk management aspects of the Los Santos Tours' *Extreme Forest Park Ropes Course*. This community eco-tourism initiative we are liked with in an advisory capacity, in the hills of Copey, Los Santos Contact: Jonathon Salazar, Los Santos Tours, San Jose, Telephone 506 855 9386, www.santostour.net, email info@santostur.net.

8. Worldwatch Institute Affiliated With the Project

In April, a knowledge sharing and resource sharing affiliation was created between the Heart of Gold Project and the international non-governmental organization Worldwatch Institute [WWI]. The WWI, through its director of conservation, Mark Chandler, will provide GPS and GIS mapping resources from their research laboratory in San Marcos for the mapping of the eco-trail. Contact : Mark Chandler Tel: 978-450-1227 mchandler@earthwatch.org

Itinerary and Contacts: Activity in Canada 2007 and 2008

1. First Costa Rican Scholarship Student at Malaspina University College

In the fall of 2007, Jefferson Salazar became the first scholarship student from Los Santos to attend Malaspina University College. Jefferson has worked on the project with our students for two years now, and was selected by the farm families. From August to December Jefferson, a tourism graduate of Cartago University College, excelled in his English Language program at Malaspina. Jefferson returned to Costa Rica to take up a position with a prominent tourism operator company in San Jose, and his company supports our eco-trail project while Jefferson now also acts as the project English-Spanish translator. Jefferson's success at Malaspina, the depth and breadth of his experiences in Canada, and his successful return to a good position in his home country is considered to be a major project achievement of the past year. Contact: Jefferson Salazar Telephone 506 8250 875.

2. Costa Rican Farmer in Canada and Malaspina University College

In the fall of 2007, Arturo Segura [Director of Sol Colibri; also at that time Director Heart of Gold Project in Costa Rica] spent time in both Seattle, Washington State, USA and Nanaimo, BC, Canada on the project. His month in Canada during October-November involved him working primarily Bean Positive (project partner in Canada), as well as local environmental activists, media outlets, making presentations in Malaspina University College undergraduate classes, and meeting with senior administrators at our institution on project development. Contact: Arturo Segura, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 541 1960 solcolibri@yahoo.com

3. *Media Promotion of the Heart of Gold |Project*

Bill Robinson, a prominent BC journalist, and his partner from Malaspina University College, volunteered on the project during the months of December 2007 and January 2008 for the purpose of writing case study articles for national magazines and newspaper, and book chapters. Contact: Bill Robinson 250 741 7499.

4. *Creation of Private Coffee Import Business: Bean Positive*

Bean Positive - the coffee import business created by former Malaspina University College students [Kevin Bell and Colten Vandermoden] in September 2006 to import and distribute the organic direct trade coffee from Sol Colibri – initiated their business and marketing plan in Nanaimo and in various communities on Vancouver Island. This activity is directed is now run independently of Malaspina University College. This is also viewed as a major achievement to expand into the private sector of the coffee industry, which also 'frees up' my own time commitment to the coffee importation and allows me to give emphasis now on eco-tourism development in the Los Santos region). Bean Positive are still supported by Malaspina University College students involved in the *Heart of Gold Project* and coffee is still sold extensively to campus faculty and staff. Contact: Kevin Bell, Bean Positive, Nanaimo, BC Tel: 250-741-0844 beanpositive@hotmail.com

5. *Direct Trade Coffee Sales in Canada*

We continued to engage numerous media outlets for 'awareness and educational' purposes for the Heart of Gold Project and the promotion of Bean Positive coffee sales and marketing, including print media, television and radio, and website promotion (see Dissemination section below for details).

6. *Second Costa Rican Scholarship Student at Malaspina University College*

In the fall of 2008, Mainor Montero will be our second scholarship student from Los Santos to attend Malaspina University College. Mainor has worked on the project with our students for five years now, and was selected for the scholarship by the farm families. From August to December 2008, Mainor will study in an English Language program at Malaspina. Mainor is the 'local champion' of our project and has made incredible efforts on behalf of his local communities. We are most pleased that he will be with us in Canada for 4 months. Contact: Mainor Montero Rodrigues, Project Coordinator, Costa Rica Tel: 011 506 546 7869 minormontero@hotmail.com

Goals and Objectives

The Heart of Gold project is now in its fifth year. During this time, we have created a very successful community empowerment research undertaking and now have very well established collaborative research partnerships with Costa Rican institutions and organizations and local Los Santos communities organizations.

The project has established a very clear ethic and mission, and the alliance has identified very solid guiding principles for the project's future:

1. Tourism and agriculture can best be combined to empower organic farmers through the development of educational agro-tours and eco-tourism inter-cultural home-stay programs for volunteer and 'smart-traveler' type tourists. Our work has resulted in the development of a guided hiking/educational trail and corresponding interpretation schedule, both of which are currently being used on a regular basis to facilitate educational tours for the Organic Farmers Association in Santa Maria de Dota, Los Santos.

2. The most effective strategy to promote and market direct-trade coffee in Canada is through partnerships with activism-based community groups. By supporting collaborative events with one another, Heart of Gold Project participants have interacted at various community and institutional events raising awareness regarding the project goals. Two former Malaspina students involved with the project have started their own

business, Bean Positive Direct-Trade Distributors, importing and distributing coffee under the direct-trade model. Canadian project activities are closely linked with these distributors, and their creation has allowed the project to support a working economic model of a direct-trade partnership [that of the one between Bean Positive and Sol Colibri]. The Heart of Gold Project raised over \$10000 for the De Dota and San Marcos communities in the past year through coffee sales in Canada, and over \$35000 over the past five years.

3. The project is benefiting by expanding its alliances and collaborating with similar activism-based research projects in the region. Los Santos tourism stakeholders have identified their ability to connect with a specific type of tourist [those that respect the environmental and cultural health of the community, while contributing a fair and agreed upon economic exchange- currently identified in the form of the volunteer or smart-traveler -tourist] as a significant challenge. Linking with similar activism-based research projects presents an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences through established educational institutions, while also connecting to a network of desirable tourists.

4. The partnerships with the Santa Maria and San Marcos communities are now well established. The integration of two-way travel within the partnership is intended to increase understanding of each other's cultures. Malaspina University-College has built good working relationships and trust with the key community representatives [Minor Montero, Pablo Balanos, and Mayela Mata] and local farming families]. Mainor Montero will become our second scholarship student in August, 2008. Two-way exchange is considered as essential ingredient to our 'mutual learning' alliance.

5. We have also created an excellent working relationship with Lily Edgerton, the Public Affairs Officer and Political Economic Assistant at the Canadian Embassy in San Jose. The embassy has offered administrative support for the project with an emphasis on the creation of a 'Community Empowerment Handbook' that will have application in the embassy's other major countries of concern in Central America (Panama and Nicaragua).

6. As a result of the Heart of Gold's past work in Los Santos, MUC has allocated three scholarships to be awarded to Costa Rican community activists involved in the project. The scholarships will be used to maintain a steady flow of knowledge transfer between MUC and the Los Santos community which will guarantee a greater collaborative element during the next stage of the project. The scholarships will allow the awarded candidates [students from Colegio Universitario de Cartago, or community members from Los Santos community] the opportunity to study at MUC for one semester periods over the next three years in the Department of Recreation and Tourism Management/

7. Regional workshops have been acknowledged as a successful activity for raising community awareness about tourism impacts, and for identifying project goals and priorities. Workshops have been conducted annually with the key farm families. As the eco-tourism trail project unites the communities and families along the trail, we will conduct similar educational to help local people understand 1) the importance of locally-owned tourism that benefits local communities, 2) major pitfalls that plague local communities looking to develop tourism businesses, and 3) strategies to maintain local control of growth and development. Lily Edgerton (Canadian Embassy) supports community workshops by providing workshop resources and translation liaisons.

Particular Successes

As described above, the Heart of Gold Project has achieved a number of tangible outcomes that all project participants – both Canadian and Costa Rican – are very proud of. However, as our project matures, it becomes increasingly apparent that the area in which the project is most successful is the deepening nature of our cross-cultural interactions/relationships, particularly those between the activist farmers and the home-stay families in Costa Rica and our work placement students and myself. Our cross-cultural learning/understanding and the depth of friendships that have developed and continue to develop are

hugely important and extremely satisfying. The reason behind our 'tangible successes' and our 'very solid cross-cultural network' is based – I think – on the nature of our project [i.e., it has a very clear ethic based on 'social equity and empowerment'] and the type of people who are attracted to this kind of project [i.e., good-hearted people who want to 'care and share' and interact with other ethically-minded people]. This is essentially why our students named the project The Heart of Gold [with a nod to well-known Canadian musician Neil Young's lyric: "*I want to live, I want to give ...I crossed the ocean for a Heart of Gold*"].

To date, our project has operated with minimal funding and consequently faculty and students pay substantial project costs out of their own pocket; while the farming families and our Costa Rican counterparts are extremely sharing of their homes and what little they actually possess. We want to live and we want to give: it's a beautiful thing!

Particular Challenges

Regular travel to Costa Rica by faculty and students and to Canada by our Costa Rican counterparts is critical to the long-term development and sustainability of the project. Faculty and student research involvement in Costa Rica is essential for the purpose of strengthening the relationships with our research partners - Earth University, The Rainforest Alliance, and Universitario de Cartago – and collaborating on identifying project goals, research methods, research outcomes and the transfer of knowledge generated. Essential to this project is regular face-to-face contact with local representatives and local farming families.

However, regular travel is currently restricted due to (a) funding constraints and (b) faculty are committed to teaching at Malaspina University College from September to April each year. Ideally, the solution to this challenge is to attract more funding from government agencies and not-for profit organizations such that two-way cross-cultural travel occurs regularly and faculty can defer teaching obligations for a period of time during regular fall and winter semesters.

Good Practices for Cross-Cultural Understanding and Research

We have identified a number of guiding principles when interacting/working with our Costa Rican counterparts:

1. Our institution's role is not that of 'expert', rather we seek to be a 'research resource' to the communities in need. A parallel perspective is that our Costa Rican counterparts are also sharing their knowledge and skill sets with our students and myself. 'Mutual learning' means that our students return to Canada passionate about sharing their new skill sets, equity ethic and philosophy with Canadians: the ripple effect has proven very powerful with regard to our students returning 'changed' and directed. Similarly, our project is effecting the lives of Costa Ricans [young and old] who are involved in the project, and slowly additional farm families and communities are becoming aware of and involved in 'the Costa Rican – Canadian Direct Trade project'].

2. Our model of participatory action research is based upon the principles of (a) deep participation: we first spend a significant amount of face-to-face time building trust and respect with individuals, families and communities, and only then (b) working with these people and their communities to identify actions or solutions to their community challenges and issues. Integral to the solutions aspect is the transfer of knowledge and skills from our students and faculty to the farmers, and vice versa.

3. We are 'good listeners'. This principle is key to our successes; we listen and then focus our energies on helping to identify and apply solutions that meet the needs of the people we are working with. Our work in Costa Rica to date has resulted in regional awareness of the empowerment project, linked local communities through workshop and educational gatherings, generated educational materials for local residents on alternative coffee production models and community-driven tourism initiatives, initiated agro-tourism educational tours and home-stay accommodation on five local organic coffee farms, generated

forest based economic activities data for the Nubotropica Foundation's rainforest protection campaign, initiated the development of a full risk management plan for operations of the project in Costa Rica, and initiated an ecotourism network for local businesses and home-stay families. All of these outcomes are 'on-going' and will be further developed during 2008-2009 based upon the priorities identified by our Costa Rican counterparts.

Improving Understanding on Development Issues in Costa Rica

Our project has shed light on the sometimes very negative side of economic globalization as a development issue in Costa Rica (and others LAC countries). Development challenges in rural Costa Rica where we conduct our work are primarily associated with disenfranchised and dis-empowered farmers. The Heart of Gold project focuses on the profound challenge posed by the globalization of coffee production and its impact on forest, water and human health degradation. The project is seeks to identify and support the development of viable alternatives models of agricultural production that create environmental, social and economic health for local farming communities.

The project goals are to provide practical approaches – focused on community-owned-and-operated eco- and agro-tourism as alternative forms of economic diversification and supporting organic-in-the-shade coffee production - for enhancing forest and water supply health, as well as increasing democratic participation and social equity in rural settings. The project's long-term aims are to effect policy change in Costa Rica and neighbouring countries by strengthening community long-term capacities to carry out, manage and disseminate new pro-poor approaches to coffee production that can be supplemented through small-scale locally owned and operated agricultural tourism activity.

Central to rural community development in Costa Rica (and LAC countries) is an understanding of the need for social equity that generates economic, social, and environmental local level benefits. Our project supports civil society organizations in rural Costa Rica to facilitate community empowerment through public awareness, education and debate, and grassroots involvement on the critical national policy issue of coffee farming and the impacts of globalization. In pursuing these long-term goals, the project also creates exceptionally rich learning and cultural experiences for MUC students and faculty, and a depth and breadth of cross-cultural sharing that is very unique to higher education settings.

New Networks and Partners

Our activities in Costa Rica over the past year have created a healthy partnership with Colegio Universitario de Cartago. This relationship will be further developed over the coming year with the goals of (a) working together in assessing the impacts that tourism has had on the Los Santos region to-date, and identifying the issues that Los Santos community members associate with the emergence of tourism, and (b) implementing the scholarships that will allow students from Colegio Universitario de Cartago to study at MUC for one semester periods over the next three years in the Department of Recreation and Tourism Management, and (c) formalizing the relationship such that Malaspina students and faculty and their counterparts in Costa Rica can do academic exchanges. Our new affiliation with Worldwatch Institute [a very prestigious environmental NGO] will also be further developed over the coming year.

Unexpected Outcomes

Media exposure of the Heart of Gold Project led to the creation of a new community empowerment project in Nicaragua. As director of the project, I was approached by representatives of PanaPana [a Nicaraguan organization representing the Mesquitos Native People in that country] along with Partners for Prosperity [a not for profit Canadian international NGO located in BC, Canada] to represent them on a fact finding mission into hurricane-devastated northwestern Nicaragua. As part of ma team I completed this assignment in February while en route to Costa Rica. Malaspina University College's Heart of Gold project is now partnering with the two previously mentioned organizations to undertake community development work [funded by the federal government] in the coming year. We are also now linked with institutional projects in

Ghana and Korea.

Women in Development

While Costa Rican is a patriarchal society, the Los Santos communities involved in our project are seeking to empower women and encourage them to participate in and take on lead roles in creating change within their region. Our project has directly supported the important social equity activism roles that women are adopting in their communities. The women (both mothers and daughters) of the organic farming families in Los Santos play lead roles in both the Nubotropica Foundation steering committee and the Sol Colibri Organic Farmers Association. To date, our project has placed 8 female students on 3-to-5 month cooperative education work placements and 4 female student volunteers on 1-to-3 month placements in Costa Rica. These smart, creative and out-going Canadian female students present an alternative 'model' of what young Costa Rican women can aspire to.

Two of the young women from Santa Maria were supported by our project through free home-stay accommodation in 2006 in Canada with MUC faculty families to learn English for the purposes of local entrepreneurship in their home towns and to assist with language translations for our project. These young two young women and the other activist women involved in our project are role models for gender change within their rural communities.

The project's community educational workshops in Los Santos attract an approximately equal number of men and women from across the region, and our mixed-gender teams of visiting faculty and students also provide models of gender equity. Our lead partner researchers - from Earth University (Karla Perez Fonseca) and the Rainforest Alliance (Silvia Rioja) – as well as our main embassy contact (Lily Edgerton) are also women. Our project activity embraces gender equity and our presence in Costa Rica presents a well received alternative gender model. Our wish is have Los Santos female students (drawn mainly from our farming family contacts) attend MUC on the scholarships we have recently created through our Faculty of International Education.

Graduate Student Involvement

We are an undergraduate program only at Malaspina University College. As the project matures, it is intended that we will involve graduate students from neighboring Royal Roads University (Victoria, BC) where I currently supervise two graduate students per year as an adjunct professor. We have an MBA program at MUC and these students have been tentatively targeted for future involvement when local tourism-related businesses request resource support from our institution.

Part 2: Sustaining the Research Dialogue

Continued Collaboration

Our project is 'long-term and for a long time': this is the agreed upon perspective of ourselves and our Costa Rican counterparts, and is due to the 'win-win' situation we have created through our research collaboration. Significant on-going funding would certainly allow us to have year-round activity and to engage our Costa Rican partners more fully, but to date we have achieved significant [but 'slow'] successes with little funding.

Our partners – both academic/professional [Cartago University College, Earth University, Rainforest Alliance] and non-academic [e.g., the Association of eco-trail families, the Alianza, the Organic Farmers Associations, the home-stay and farming families, the Nubotropica Foundation] - have little 'hard cash' to offer our project; most of their contributions must be made 'in kind'.

The collaborations with these partners will continue 'as is' if new funding sources are not attracted to the project. If funding is attracted, then we will expand the project in terms of both human resource allocation

from MUC (students and faculty involvement) and partnerships with Costa Rican research organizations and rural communities. It is also our wish to take the Heart of Gold project into 1. Cuba to link with organic sugar cane farmers and 2. Nicaragua to create a direct coffee trade network.

We are most grateful to the funding provided by LACREG to date, and the funding provided by our own institution, Malaspina University College.

New Sources of Funding

New sources for our funding applications in the coming year include:

United Nations Environmental Protection Program [alternative economic development grants]

SSHRC International Opportunities Grants

The David Suzuki Foundation in Vancouver, BC

The Neil Young Foundation

Local chapters of the Rotary Club of BC, and

Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC, 'International Community Development Project'.

Graduate Student Involvement

We are an undergraduate program only at this time, but are currently designing a new masters graduate degree in 'Tourism Management and Development'; we will certainly involve graduate students when the degree is implemented. Graduates from our program are currently involved in the project but only as volunteers [not as 'studying masters students' per se]. As an adjunct professor of Royal Roads University I supervise graduates on an annual basis, and intend to involve their graduate students in the Heart of Gold Project in the near future. This year our project involved 3 graduates from the University of Calgary as volunteers on the project.

Formal Institutional Agreements

The research collaboration is formalized with the (a) organic farmers association, (b) the Alianza, (c) the Association of Eco-trail Farm Families, d (d) the Nubotropica Foundation through formal letters of agreement and formalized mission statements for the Heart Of Gold Project.

The new partnership with Colegio Universitario de Cartago is 'formalized' to the extent that our institution has developed policy for Cartago students to attend Malaspina University College on students.

Cartago University College, Earth University and the Rainforest Alliance have provided formal letters of support for the Heart of Gold project with a commitment to provide resource and faculty support as required within their capabilities. At the time of writing this final report, formal meetings are scheduled with our 3 main academic institutions during a field tour April 21+--- 24.

Dissemination of Results

The projects results and activities have been disseminated in a variety of ways:

1. Meetings with Tim Other, owner and production manager of TurboVideo Productions, in March led to Tim offering to create a mini/documentary on the Heart of Gold project for expenses only. Shooting took place in the second week of April and editing and full production will be completed by June 2008. This mini/documentary will be used for grant applications to private foundations. Within the next year, we hope to create a full length documentary on the project for educational purposes. Contact: Tim Other Tel: 506 2430 762 Turbo Productions website <http://www.turboproductions.org>

2. Published as a case study chapter [updated for 2007 – 2008]entitled The Heart of gold Costa Rica Community Empowerment Project: A Case Study of a Community-University Research Alliance in Vaugeois, N. (2008). Informed Leisure Practice: Cases as Conduits Between Theory and Practice, Volume

2. The Tourism Research Institute, Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, British Columbia. Link to be added here.

2. Published in a variety of popular magazines and newspapers as articles and news release stories, e.g. Dialogue: Canada's Independent Voices Magazine Vol. 20, No. 5 Feb-March 2007; The Navigator, March 2007; and The Star April 4, 2007.

3. Brochure materials for coffee marketing purposes of the Heart of Gold project and promotional materials for Bean Positive coffee imports and sales in BC.

4. Case study slide presentations for Malaspina University classroom courses in Community Planning and Environmental Stewardship degree students.

5. Case study slide presentations for Malaspina University faculty and staff, the Nanaimo community, Lakehead University faculty, graduate students and staff (Dr. Robinson was invited as a guest speaker to the institution).

6. CBC Radio interviews : 1. Dr. David Robinson, 2. Arturo Segura and 3. cooperative education work placement students on the Heart of Gold Project.

7. Aired through fall 2007 and to July 2008, Shaw Cable Television Channel Four documentary on Heart of Gold Project and Bean Positive [see web-broadcast at <http://nanaimo.shawtv.com/>].

8. International academic research conference presentations, e.g., The Society and Natural Resources Annual Conference in 2008.

9. International research journals e.g., Society and Natural Resources; Environments.

10. Web site disseminations - Current and planned:

A Heart of Gold Project website is currently under construction. This will be our main internet based form of disseminating information on the project and our research results and project accomplishments. This site is being developed as a senior undergraduate project.

The Bean Positive website is currently under construction. This will be our main coffee distribution website.

The Sol Colibri website is under construction but available at <http://www.solcolibri.com/>

We are linked to a number of activist business websites that promote 'alternative business models, e.g., Promoting World Peace/Visionary Leadership: Sol Colibri, Going Beyond fair trade http://www.worldpeaceemerging.com/articles/publish/article_104.php

Justus Coffee www.justuscoffee.com

Canadian Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship www.ccsbe.org

Part 3: Views on the Potential for Canada-Latin America Research Cooperation

Key Barriers to Greater Research Collaboration

English-Spanish language is a constant challenge, but not a major barrier. The language challenge is primarily resolved by the number of our partners and contacts in Costa Rica who speak good English.

Canadians involved in our project are required to have basic spoken conversational Spanish and are further encouraged to develop both spoken and written Spanish skills to at least intermediate (Level II credit courses at MUC).

Written communications (e.g., emails, sharing our dissemination materials) are a challenge when dealing with non-professional contacts in Costa Rica, but again this has been resolved via students at MUC who are affiliated with the project and have LAC family backgrounds (e.g., Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, Ecuadorian and El Salvadorian) that include written and spoken Spanish skills: they act as willing translators.

Funding - as outlined above - is a constant challenge, particularly for covering the travel expenses of our Costa Rican partners to visit Canada. We make regular funding applications from different sources, and hope that as our projects matures and our achievements are more broadly disseminated, we will attract significant funding to support cross-cultural exchanges and greater collaboration.

Research Sharing Between Canada and LACs

Based upon our learning in Costa Rica and trends in Canada, we believe the Canadian research community can offer 'expertise' in two main areas of expertise.

First, the Canadian research community can offer 'expertise' in progressive agricultural practices (e.g., non-corporate models of food production) that maintain social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities. This is a growing trend within Canada - particularly in western BC and Vancouver Island - that gives emphases to organic and integrated farming methods and community based farming approaches. This level of expertise is not necessarily housed solely in traditional higher education institutions, but rather - in our opinion - is best build through a combination of both academic researchers and local 'agricultural practitioners' (i.e., alternatively informed and passionate farmers), which is the model we have helped promote in our project.

Earth University, a project partner in Costa Rica, is a world renowned agricultural practice university, which - as part of its larger delivery system - gives emphasis to small locally driven and integrated farming systems. Their models are cutting-edge and provide potential models for rural farming communities in Canada.

Second, the Canadian research community can offer 'expertise' in the areas of eco-tourism development for rural communities in LAC countries. This sector of the tourism industry - when appropriately developed and managed - provides and maintains social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities. Eco-tourism - which is primarily a non-corporate form of tourism - is now incorporated into the higher education curriculum of many Canadian degree programs (e.g., Malaspina University College, BC; Thompson Rivers University, BC; Lakehead University, Ontario). This form of tourism potentially blends very well with agricultural practices as promoted by the Heart of Gold Project and related activities conducted on 'eco-agro-cultural tourism' by Earth University in northern Costa Rica.

In sum, there is a significantly untapped pool of 'expertise sharing' between Canadian and LAC researchers in the matching areas of agricultural practice and eco-tourism development. This area of research and practice matches very well with the broad aims and objectives of the LACREG.

Many thanks

Dave Robinson, PhD, Heart of Gold Project director, Canada

Mainor Montero, Heart of Gold Coordinator, Costa Rica
