

Alex Nading
SKJ International Internship Grant Report

As I stated in my Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Internship Grant proposal, my predissertation research was carried out in conjunction with an internship with the Foundation for Sustainable Development, a California nonprofit organization. I worked in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, a city of about 120,000 people located 7 kilometers north of Managua. Since 1972, the city's population has grown, largely due to an influx of internal migrants seeking economic opportunity or escaping the natural disasters (earthquakes and hurricanes) that have ravaged the country. My original goal was to study the pollution of Lake Managua from a cultural perspective. Although I was able to visit and photograph the part of Ciudad Sandino that lies closest to the lake, as my research progressed, I became more interested in the activities, conflicts, and meanings that surround pollution and waste more generally.

While I spent the money from the grant to cover the cost of international travel and local day-to-day expenses, the Scott Kloeck-Jenson Foundation also provided me with a digital camera for use in the field. This camera turned out to be a wonderful tool not only for documenting my activities but also for developing relationships with the community and making the most of my internship. Digital camera images can be seen immediately after they are taken, which means that the subjects of the photographs can immediately interact with them, criticize them, and share in their creation.

My internship allowed me to go into the streets of Ciudad Sandino each morning with health and sanitation inspectors from the Department of Hygiene at the Hospital Ciudad Sandino, the organization that served as my host for the summer. The sanitation inspectors were not doctors or nurses; rather, they were Ministry of Health officials who collected and dispersed information about the sanitary conditions of foodservice operations, small and large factories, schools, and daycare centers. In my capacity as observer (and occasional helper), I was able to visit all eleven of the city's municipal zones, participating in health inspections of such locations. My co-workers from the Hygiene Department were first-rate tour guides, and I was able to see economic, educational, and household activities from an insider's perspective. I believe that by studying this more preventative side of public health, I received a better picture of the day-to-day discourse about sanitation, pollution, and health than I might have had I studied the work of doctors and nurses, who normally deal with acute health problems of the patients who come to the Hospital or its affiliated Health Centers.

Through photography, I was able to appreciate the role of aesthetics in shaping people's conceptions of the landscape, its history, and the health risks embedded in it. Of specific interest to scholars of global studies is the manner in which corporate logos, as both refuse and as decoration, have become part of the urban landscape in Ciudad Sandino. In many of my photographs, I have tried to show how packaging and labeling has become embedded in the landscape. Of course, I also photographed Lake Managua itself, documenting the continued activity that takes place there.

When not doing exploratory research, I spent my time creating an educational campaign designed to educate women and children about the risks of eating fish from Lake Managua. My goal was to raise awareness about the long-term health effects of pollution, and it relates closely to the concerns I described in my grant proposal. My work plan included the commissioning of three educational murals, the commissioning of educational posters for the Hospital Ciudad Sandino, and the creation of an educational pamphlet for the Hospital Ciudad Sandino.

To design the murals and the posters, I worked with a local artist. Hand-painted outdoor advertising is extremely common in Nicaragua, and the idea of the project was to use this medium to convey a public health message. After the completion of the murals, I was able to discuss them with the directors of the schools in which they were located, as well as with students in those schools. The students were also able to explain the significance of the murals. All agreed that the artwork improved the image of their schools.

The educational pamphlets and posters, placed in the hospital and its health centers, are a way of supplementing the knowledge of both patients and healthcare workers about the relationship between pollution and health. I have included a copy of one of the pamphlets, which features photographs I took using the camera donated by the Scott Kloeck-Jenson foundation. (Digital files of both pamphlets and posters are included with the photos). All of these will be available as part of the new Globalization archive at Global Studies.