



Youth Inspired by Knowledge

# IBEROAMERICANA'S "RECOLECTON" IN COLLECTING WASTE & SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

*By Philo Magdalene*



The 21<sup>st</sup> century rise of consumerist culture, driven by massive efforts and expenditure on global advertising, stand against the very concept of sustainability. All of this would increase the risks from the impacts of climate change in the future. The splurge that individuals are pursuing towards escalating material possessions has not been balanced with a reverence for nature, which would require equal efforts to handle and focus on judicious waste management. While many may attribute this behavior to willful ignorance, the real reason lies in mindless inertia and lack of awareness about reducing waste and possible disposal solutions. With educational institutions taking the lead in implementing innovative eco-friendly solutions, Universidad Iberoamericana, a private institution of higher learning based in Mexico has recently joined the bandwagon. Their novel initiative known as “Recolecton” amplifies the call for youth-led climate action that begins from one’s home.

“Recolecton” deserves accolades for its phenomenal work, having collected 4 tons of recyclable materials from around 125 students in a mere span of 5 days. Aside from bringing together students from different departments, this project succeeded in arousing consciousness about the amount of trash each student produced on a weekly basis.

After the collection of materials which took place from November 5, 2018 to November 9, 2018, the team handed over part of the collected materials to “Grupo Promesa” which in turn gave it to a recycling center. The remaining materials were utilized by a local artist named Ana Woolrich, who created sculptures and paintings that were later showcased on the university campus.

Originally conceived by ‘Cambio’, the student group of Iberoamericana, the idea evolved in collaboration with ‘Ibero Sustainability Congress’, a congress of students from the field of Chemical Engineering. “At first, the idea was only to collect materials, give them to the organization and give away prizes to the people who collected the most,” says Ana Hanhausen Domenech, a Chemical Engineering student who is a part of this initiative. Later, through collaboration with the organizers of the Sustainability Congress, it was decided that some materials could be used by the artist for art installations. Apart from this, part of the money collected from the recycled materials was donated for the restoration of the Axolotl habitat, a native Mexican species that is critically endangered.

While the collection was initiated by spreading the word through posters and social media, the large scale participation was the result mainly of the active support by the teachers from the department of Chemical Engineering, who agreed to offer extra credits to students who brought in the largest quantity of materials. This feature can be a unique provision for replication of “Recolection” in other institutions. The project was also popularized by offering eco-friendly gifts like bamboo toothbrushes to winning participants which motivated many more to bring materials from their homes. The degree (department) that collected the highest amount of waste won a free trip to PetStar, which is a PET recycling company based in Mexico. Due to such continued encouragements, “Recolecton” has achieved heightened reception on the university campus.

The impact of the project was significant at different levels. Along with the collection of great amounts of recyclable materials, “Recolecton” also succeeded in making the students conscious

about the weekly accumulation of recyclable materials in their homes that they discard without any consideration for constructive reuse or expected impacts on the environment. The team believes that, with the initiation of this kind of awareness, people can slowly transition to a way of life that adopts recyclable materials, reduces demand and statistically reduces the waste generated.

For an eco-friendly behavior pattern to emerge in a community, measures that are taken need perseverance, and must remain consistent and non-isolated. Staying true to this belief, "Recolecton" has planned to continue its journey henceforth every semester with the goal of reaching out to the entire college community and collecting more materials for recycling. The team feels that this endeavor will also make the organization better known to the students who can then recycle even when it's not "Recolecton" week, and thus ultimately inspire everyone to work together towards a greener future.

The unprecedented magnitude of success that "Recolecton" has achieved is a great reflection of how educational institutions hold immense potential in spearheading the drive against climate change. With students and their laudable team efforts being the primary reason for the success of "Recolecton", the world can take a lesson from Iberoamericana in spreading knowledge about recycling and reducing impacts on the environment through sustainable consumption. Youth can, therefore become effective agents of change and lead a campaign through evidence-based advocacy.