

Regnier Traveling Fellowship

Monthly Report: August, 2006

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SUMMARY

I've arrived in Spain! It's great to be back in this country. I spent yesterday recuperating from the jet lag and today I've continued my search for buildings, and places to stay in my trip to the northern part of Europe. This trip is coming up on Sept. 15th. I'll spend 5 weeks traveling around Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Germany. Very exciting.

My last month in Mexico was very busy. Between visiting a project in Matamoros, long days at the Green Building Council, working on my website, speaking at the Tec University, and planning my 5 week trip around the north, I was made aware of the vast amount of work necessary for this project. It seems like everything is going extraordinarily and I'm happy with my time spent in Mexico. I learned a lot about the work involved in non profit organizations just getting started. I'm definitely looking forward to returning for the Sustainable Building Conference in November.

I'm in Madrid until Monday, then I'll be in Barcelona for 10 days before I head out to Stockholm to start my 5 week trip.

MEXICO GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

This month, I continued with the companies we have online to purchase expo booths at the congress. I also met Lourdes Salinas, another volunteer and architecture student from the Tec University. She had been visiting, researching, and helping with the construction of low-income housing in the South Pacific all summer. I brought her up to speed on all the contacts we have made, as she is taking over where I leave off. We finished the Master Schedule of speakers at the event, so we've been moving full time sending out mass emails to publicize the event among those companies who would likely want to participate. We're seeing interest and everyone has been in good spirits.

Two nights before I left Monterrey, Ulises and Estela had a going away party for me at a restaurant downtown. They say you can't leave Mexico without trying fried crickets, so I tried one... not bad with guacamole.



EARTHSHIPS IN MATAMOROS

I spent all day with Juan Pablo Rodriguez, a city planning administrator, visiting the earthships in La Isla Mano de León. It was an hour drive out to the project. The idea behind this pilot project is to create low-cost, hurricane resistant, sustainable housing for the fishermen and their families who live on the coast outside of Matamoros. The design comes from Michael Reynolds, who's based in Taos, New Mexico. The original idea behind it is to create buildings mostly out of material that would generally be sent to landfills. This can be seen through the use of tires for the foundations and lower walls. Aluminum cans and plastic or glass bottles take up space in the concrete walls, allowing for high strength walls with less concrete.



The tires are then covered with an adobe plaster and these form the interior walls of the houses. The dome roofs and thermal mass provided by soil around the exterior walls help maintain an even temperature inside the houses. In this way, residents can enjoy a cool interior during the hot day, and a warmer interior when it's cold outside.

This is an unfinished project. Michael Reynolds and his crew visited the site for a week and demonstrated the building technique by building the first room of the pilot house along with volunteers from Matamoros. Juan Pablo worked on the second room and is now finishing up the project.

A very ecological and practical component of these houses is their highly efficient use of water. Rain-water that falls on the dome roofs is directed around a channel, through a passive filtration system, and into a 5000 liter cistern to hold all the water that will be needed for a year. This water is used 3 times. Juan Pablo is still working out the details on the water treatment system that will be implemented in the houses of this project.

The goal is to build 60 houses, but the plans that Michael Reynolds offered the DIF and the funding foundation "Solo Por Ayudar," were misinterpreted and the cost increase has forced the project to look for less expensive solutions to some systems implemented.



OTHER NEWS

In a visit to Cd. Victoria, I got the chance to finally put up my website. With my buddy, Bacha, at the helm, we got hosting for my domain name, and built a starter page in Publisher, which is what's on display right now. After a number of functionality problems, I've been slowly transferring everything over to html so I can work directly with the code in a program such as Dreamweaver. I'm happy to say though, that the website is up, with one case study, more soon to be posted, and in English and Spanish. I'm hoping to translate the page to French as well when I get a chance to catch my breath. Visit the site at www.greenbuildingworldwide.com.

I was talking to Toño Garza, head of the architecture department at Universidad Tec. He asked me to give a lecture on my senior thesis project, the Oak Park Revitalization Proposal, as well as my research investigation and the Mexico GBC Conference. So I agreed to speak in his architecture design workshop. Then Edmundo Reyes and Annette Arámbula, two more architecture professors, asked me to speak in their classes that day as well. So I gave three lectures from 7am to 7pm. The first two, one in Spanish and one in English, were an hour each. The last lecture was in Spanish and went from 5 - 7pm. It was an incredible experience to see so many students really interested in sustainability. Afterwards, I received a number of emails from students with further questions and interested in volunteering at the Mexico GBC.

Edmundo Reyes' brother, Eugenio, took me to a plant where fiberglass forms are being constructed to create low-cost houses out of a product very similar to gypsum, called anhydrite, that forms as a byproduct in the fabrication of hydro-fluoric acid. The forms, which can be re-used many times, allow for the construction of a house in a week. The houses are very simple and usually lack plumbing and electricity. However, for homeless people, they are an economical step away from homelessness.

TRIP AROUND NORTHERN EUROPE

On Sept. 15th, I head out for a 5 week tour around Sweden, Denmark, Holland, and Germany to visit as many sustainable buildings as possible before winter sets in. My itinerary is pretty much set with visits planned in Stockholm, Gothenberg, Malmo, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, and Freiburg as the main stops on the journey. I also hope to explore some of the countryside in each of these countries, and have planned to visit some projects outside of Rotterdam in Zoetermeer.

I'll fly to Stockholm, then take the train all around and finally fly back to Barcelona from Karlsruhe, near Freiburg. I can't wait!