

Thesis in cooperation with the indigenous Masetén people in Bolivia (OPIM)

About the Masetén people

The Masetén people are an indigenous, Bolivian group and consists of a population of about 5 000 people. The group is living in the TCO Masetén, in the Bolivian Amazon, six hours from La Paz, in the municipality of Palos Blancos.

Since 2001, the area is classified as *TCO, Tierra Comunitaria de Origen*, which is a term for autonomous and collective-owned lands among indigenous people in Bolivia.

TCO Masetén is divided into two sectors and fourteen communities. Each community has its chief, *cacique*, who is elected each year by the population. Most communities can be reached by car from the village of Palos Blancos on 1-3 hours. The most remote communities have no road access and can only be reached by canoe or a walk on about eight hours through the jungle.

The Masetén group has historically suffered from social, cultural and economic discrimination. Their situation is slowly improving, but there are still substantial needs in the area. In most communities there are serious deficiencies in education and health care. In some communities, there is no access to water in the houses, instead it has to be brought from the nearest river.

There are no toilets or functioning garbage disposal in several communities. There is also a shortage of electricity, telephones and Internet. Moreover, mining and oil extraction projects in the area have led to water pollution and other environmental damages.

About OPIM

OPIM stands for the *Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Masetén* and is the organization that represents the Masetén people. The organization also works for their social and political rights. The organization was founded in 1994 and is led by a president who is elected by the population every two years. OPIM is the highest authority in the TCO Masetén and all issues relating to the TCO Masetén must therefore go through the organization.

What OPIM is looking for

OPIM is looking for students for thesis projects at bachelor, master and PHD level in a wide range of topics. The thesis should be beneficial for both the student and the Maseténes. Here below can you find a list of some thesis suggestions. OPIM is also positive about further ideas and suggestions from students regarding perspectives and research topics.

Engineers, geologists and architects

Water and sanitation project

- Examine the status of the area's water resources, such as groundwater, lagoons, ponds and rivers
- Identify water pollution and its origins
- Plan and implement water treatment projects
- Plan and implement training programs for the population about water pollution and other environmental damages
- Plan and implement projects for the expansion of sewage systems and toilets
- Plan and develop a garbage disposal for solid and organic waste
- Identify funding partners for these projects and apply for grants

Electric Power Development

In many communities there is no electricity. Some communities do have a couple of solar panels from previous projects in the area. Solar panels and other energy sources is something OPIM wants to expand in the communities.

- Investigate the possibilities and create projects for electric power development

Architecture and Construction Management

- Design and plan the construction of health centers and schools
- Identify funding partners for these projects and apply for grants

Timber Exports

In the TCO Mositén there are a large amount of trees and some are very rare

- Identify the trees in the area for sale
- Identify and develop a future market for timber exports

Trade and Innovation

- Identify products from TCO Mositén for sale, such as local handicrafts, textiles and art objects
- Identify and develop future export markets for these products. The emphasis should be on fair trade

Production Projects

OPIM wishes to create a market of products of fruits and cereals from the area, such as different kinds of juices, wines and flours

- Identify and develop products for sale
- Identify and develop future export markets for these products
- Identify funding partners for these activities and apply for grants

Tourism and Marketing

OPIM is currently planning to create a tourist market in the area. The plan is to build tourist cottages, renovate the existing tourist cottages as well as offer activities for tourists.

Suggested activities are jungle trekking, mountain climbing, tours to see exotic animals such as jaguars, monkeys and birds, participate in typical activities such as craft-making.

- Plan and develop a tourist market in the area. The emphasis should be on ecologically and sustainable tourism
- Promote the tourism activities internationally, such as via the Internet

Archaeology

In the TCO Masetén there are several archaeological sites to be found that are not yet investigated. For example, there are hieroglyphs and unexcavated areas where bone fragments and other items can be found.

- Investigate and document the cave paintings and hieroglyphics
- Plan and carry out excavations and examine the archaeological finds
- Create a memorial/museum to preserve the archaeological finds

Identity, history, dance and music

The Masetén group has a large number of oral traditions, containing stories and myths. A large part of these are undocumented. Also other traditions such as culture, music and dances remain to be documented for future generations. Furthermore, there is an ongoing change in the identity, today's young people do not identify themselves in the same way as previous generations. The group's language, Masetén, is nowadays almost exclusively known by the oldest generation. OPIM therefore works for the young people to learn the language. One project has been implemented together with UNICEF on the issue.

- Investigate and document the Maseténs oral traditions, such as stories and myths, as well as cultural expressions such as dance and music
- Investigate the identity change between the younger and older generation in the area
- Develop and implement projects with children and teenagers about the culture identity and the importance of preserving the language Masetén

Film, sound and photography

- Document the cultural expressions of the Maseténes, such as dance and music, in film, photography or audio formats
- Create for example a short film about the Masetén people and their way of life

Terms

The student is responsible and fund his/her travel to and from Bolivia, as well as travel within the country, vaccinations, insurance and visa application. No compensation is offered to the student. A suggestion for the funding is to apply for a Minor Field Study scholarship through a Swedish university (for Swedish citizens).

The students should be able to communicate in Spanish orally and in writing. Otherwise, the student is responsible for an interpreter.

There is no final date for the application for thesis projects, the applications are accepted continuously.

OPIM provides

Write a thesis in cooperation with OPIM provides an invaluable opportunity to learn more about one of Bolivia's indigenous people in the field.

OPIM offers a contact person who is going to be present during the whole research process.

The student can choose to either stay in the TCO Masetén or in a hotel in Palos Blancos.

If the student stays in the TCO Masetén, OPIM provides and pays for a basic accommodation and meals.

If the student stays in a hotel in Palos Blancos, he/she must pay for accommodation and meals (hotel costs approximately 30-100SEK/night and meals approximately 10-20SEK).

In Palos Blancos there is a small selection of hotels, restaurants and shops.

If you are interested, please contact Olver Canare, president of the OPIM
(in Spanish): tco.opimbolivia@gmail.com

For further questions, please contact Ellen Svensson, who wrote her master's thesis (a Minor Field Study) in Political Science in cooperation with OPIM the during autumn of 2015
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