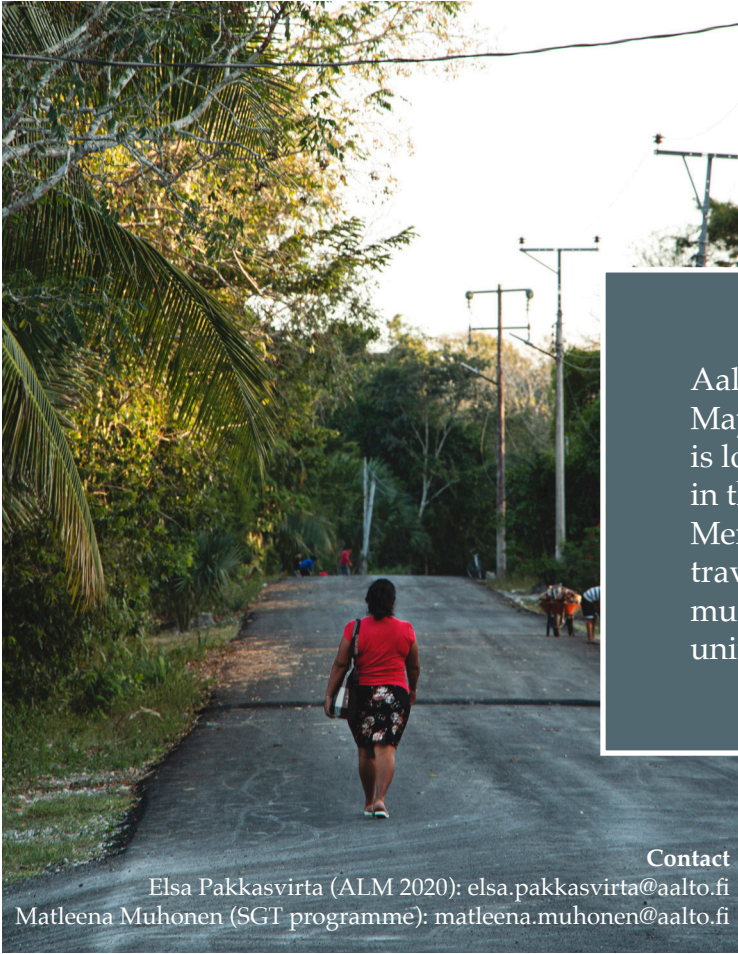


From the field to the table:

A multi-university development collaboration invites you to explore Mayan food culture



Aalto LAB Mexico takes place in an indigenous Mayan village called Ejido 20 de Noviembre. It is located in the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve in the southern part of the Yucatan peninsula, Mexico. This year's labbers from Aalto University travelled to Mexico in March to take part in a multi-disciplinary collaboration between several universities from Finland and Mexico.

About Aalto LAB Mexico (ALM)

ALM is part of the Sustainable Global Technologies studio course (SGT) at Aalto University. It was founded in 2012 by Claudia Garduño García. This year's project builds on the work of previous student teams, and sees a collaboration with National Autonomous University of Mexico, Universidad Modelo and Universidad Tecnológica de Calakmul.

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The Aalto LAB Mexico 2020 concentrates on different aspects of food culture in the Mayan community of El 20 de Noviembre. The objective of this year's project is to design a kitchen and dining space for an eco-tourism complex, La Casita, which is yet to be constructed. Another outcome of the project is a book about the culinary traditions and stories of the women in the community.

La Casita complex needs a functional kitchen which could be used as a facility for tourism purposes, but also for the community's needs. This kitchen could then function as a model to be replicated in other local buildings. The main challenge was to figure out a way to get the smoke out of the kitchens to avoid respiratory issues caused by the traditional wood fired stoves. This year's ALM team will produce the architectural drawings for the kitchen.

The book aims to preserve and bring forth the value of the local culture. Ideally, the book would be a source of empowerment and income for the local community and especially the indigenous women of El 20. The book will be written by a group of the students who took part in the field trip. The printing of it will be financed through a crowdfunding campaign and the book will be sold both

online and in the community. All the profits of the book will be directed to the community's health care fund.

The team interviewed and cooked with the local women and found that the ancient Mayan culture can still be seen in some of the traditions, especially in the ones related to food. The milpa, a Mayan way of crop-growing, is still practiced. The men work in the milpas, whereas the women oversee the domestic sphere. It is a long process to get the corn from the field to the table, often in the form of tortillas. It takes days and requires various phases, tools and utensils which have to be taken into account in the design of the kitchen building.

*"Even if we don't have anything else on the table, we will always have tortillas."
- Ofelia, a woman from El 20*

The number one priority of the project was to align the work with the locals' values and to ensure that the project is beneficial for the community. This was pursued with a holistic approach. To understand the kitchens, it is essential to understand the people in them. This way it was possible to work simultaneously on the two outcomes of the project.

Read more about ALM 2020

Instagram: [@el20journey](https://www.instagram.com/el20journey)
Website: aaltolabmexico.wordpress.com
Course site: sgt.aalto.fi

