

Nä Mutä: Root of Advocacy for the Renewal of the Sabinal River

“Building community to rebuild territory”



Introduction

The Sabinal River runs through Tuxtla Gutiérrez both visibly and invisibly. It flows between avenues, neighborhoods, and parks, but also through memories, familiar rhythms, and silences the city learned to normalize. What we see today as a stormwater channel was, at another time, a living, fertile, community river. Its transformation not only changed the urban landscape; it also altered our relationship with the territory. Today, however, something is beginning to change.

New perspectives, new questions, and new ways of being in community are restoring the Sabinal's capacity to convene and to unite. This dossier documents that process: how it began, what it mobilizes, and where it is headed.

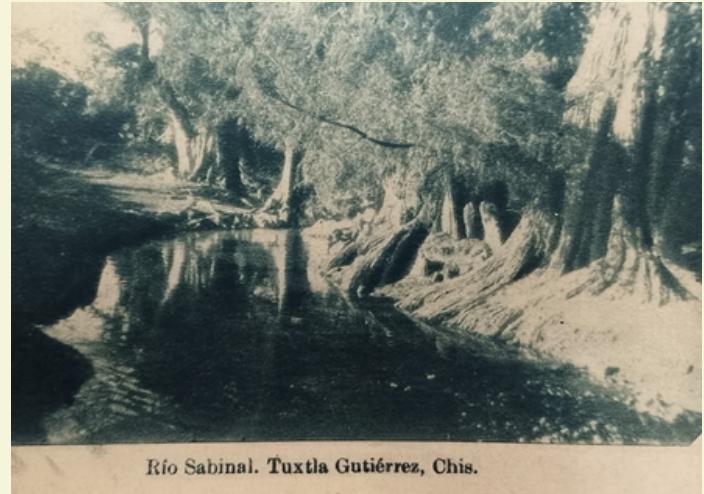


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Tuxtla Gutiérrez sits within the Sabinal River basin, which feeds into the Grijalva River. The city is crossed by 33 streams that form the Sabinal River, 21 of them major. Their channels and banks, which cut across the urban area, have been lined and covered almost entirely by housing and buildings.

H. Ayuntamiento de Tuxtla Gutiérrez. (2024).

For years, this channel—once fertile and community-centered—was reduced to a stormwater canal, an urban boundary, and a dumping ground for what the city wanted to forget.



Río Sabinal. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chis.

But something is changing.

And that change begins with a simple yet powerful gesture: looking at the territory again through one's own eyes.



The **Nä Mutä Green School**, which is part of the *British Council's "Climate Skills" program*, has played a very important role in the renewal of the Sabinal River, because people who have participated in these schools have gotten to work—using the tools learned during these trainings—to advocate in their territories and confront climate change.

For participants, Nä Mutä became both a starting point and a turning point.

Through mapping exercises, personal narratives, and critical readings of the territory, an honest conversation opened about the Sabinal River: a river that is present even when it cannot be seen, a river that shapes the urban landscape and everyday routes of life, a river whose degradation reflects—like a cloudy mirror—the social, economic, and environmental tensions of Tuxtla.



What emerged from the Green School was more than just diagnoses: **a climate identity emerged**



Nä Mutä's tools, from the Advocacy Apothecary (Botica de incidencia) to the Ñimin, enabled young people, students, neighbors, and professionals from different disciplines to begin speaking a shared language—an identity that recognizes that risk is not a number but an experience; that vulnerability is written in stories of floods, accumulated trash, extreme heat, and the lack of safe spaces to walk.

The Nä Mutä Green School has had an impact on sectors of the population such as





That shared language opened the door to a larger exercise: **people positioned themselves in relation to their territory and could recognize themselves within it.**

That moment—when participants identified themselves in the landscape and read it from their own experience—sparked a deeply political reflection from which shared fears and desires emerged.

Fears:

- insecurity

- urban inequality

- lack of mobility

distrust in authorities

and the difficulty of bringing together different ways of thinking and working toward a common objective

Desires:

- to build community

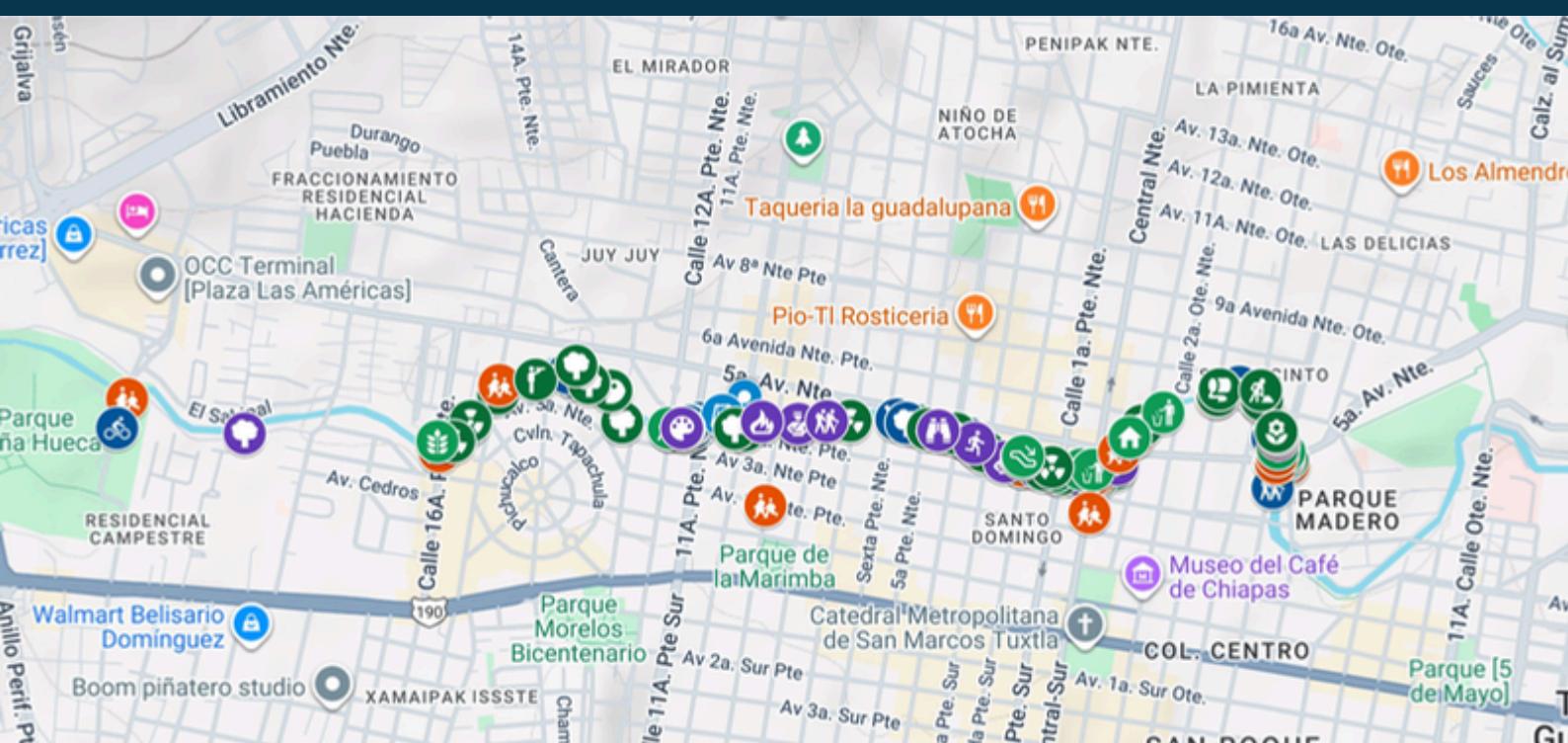
- reclaim spaces

- imagine a living river

This **reading of the territory** was not external; it was situated, embodied in **the experience of living in Tuxtla**.

From there, advocacy pathways and new ways of explaining the city began to take shape: not only as a set of problems, but as a network of possibilities.

In that network, the parks aligned along the Sabinal's route—**Jardín Botánico, Caña Hueca, Joyyo Mayyu, Parque Bicentenario**—appeared as “green footprints” that still remember the river's ecological potential.



Places of interest for impact identified by participants on the Sabinal River during the placemaking workshop on 04-11-2025

Subsequent organization into committees gave shape to a participatory architecture that embodies the spirit of **Nä Mutä: diagnosing collectively, imagining together, proposing from the territory.**

- Basin Vision
- uses and activities
- sociability
- Access and connections
- comfort and Image

These committees were formed during the Plenary Meeting of the Sabinal River renewal project on April 29 at UNICACH, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez:



The participatory architecture consolidated through the committees found its moment of public exposure and strategic articulation on August 8 with the Festival “Roots for the Sabinal.” This event went beyond celebration, becoming the direct application of the Climate Change Skills developed by the Nä Mutä Green School. The festival materialized the central objective of “Recovering the Sabinal River as an ecological, cultural, and economic corridor” by projecting the project’s potential through a Sustainable Tourism and Orange Economy approach. Nä Mutä’s tools were essential for this leap: the Critical Reading of the Territory and Climate

Narratives made it possible to reframe the river, attracting key secretarits (Tourism, Economy, Public Works) and articulating the proposal as a new model of development.

“The Green School taught us to transform complaints about flooding and trash into an advocacy plan for the city.”



Although challenges persist—continuity, institutional coordination, budgets, governance—the process has already achieved something invaluable: **building community**, a community that understands that advocacy is not decreed, but woven. And in that weaving, Nä Mutä is the common thread:

because it provides **language**,  **it opens questions**,  it **recognizes local knowledge**  it **enables critical reflection**  it teaches that **public policy can also be prefigured from below and from the river, from the street, from everyday life.**".



Today, the Sabinal River is more than an urban channel: **it is an ecosystem of climate action**, a space where participants of the Green School rehearse—with creativity, technical skill, and hope—the public policies that could transform the city tomorrow.

What began as a pedagogical exercise is now a living advocacy platform. A reminder that resilience is built collectively, step by step, among people who decide to look at their river again to look at their city again.





Grabados: Carito Moroqui

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Information compiled through participant observation and digital ethnography.

References:

H. Ayuntamiento de Tuxtla Gutiérrez. (2024). El Río Sabinal, nuestro río mayor. H. Ayuntamiento de Tuxtla Gutiérrez.