

Our first field trip, from Austria to Mexico

Being part of the Coalition in a small village in the Sierra Mixteca, Santiago Nuyoó

I had the luck to visit one of our partner projects in Mexico from March 9 to 14, 2026: [Teikei Coffee](#). We had been planning this trip for months, in close contact with Hermann, our partner in Hamburg, and with David, our partner near Mexico City. After interviews with both of them, they invited me to join them for Teikei's 7th anniversary with the producers, in a small village in the Sierra Mixteca of Oaxaca called Santiago Nuyoó. So I went, and I now want to share a snippet of this trip with you.

Agriculture and quartz

Having studied philosophy, I was ashamed to acknowledge how little I knew about Rudolf Steiner. Though I suppose I can imagine why. In many philosophy programs (including mine), Steiner is often regarded as a "peripheral" thinker, sometimes even dismissed as a mystic or esoteric figure. All this, despite his well-established influence in pedagogy and biodynamic practices, particularly in Germany and Switzerland.

As I would find out, this was only part of why I hadn't, and perhaps couldn't, fully grasp his philosophy just yet.

Teikei's anniversary workshop was planned over three days, with one day for getting there and one day for coming back. There were four of us at the beginning: David, Hermann, and Carlos, an educator who would co-lead the workshop the next days, and me, excited but certainly nervous about traveling by myself with people I had only met online.

As we listened to Carlos' incredible music playlist, Hermann began to explain quartz: how, in nature, these crystals grow from their tips, following strict geometries—perfectly straight, almost laser-cut. Cacti, David added later, are among the few living beings that aren't round or softly organic; like quartz, they embody the sheer tenacity of those who can only thrive under the direst of conditions, shaping the beautiful landscape that characterizes this side of Mexico. Under high pressure, Hermann told me, quartz is pulverized and used as a preparation for the fields, the same fields where Teikei coffee is grown.

It took us a little more than nine hours to get there. Ute, a former English teacher, welcomed us with soup in the home she shares with her husband Benito. A home which, thanks to their generosity, became ours, and the workshop's for the next few days. Hermann, David, and Carlos had a plan: we would meet the five Teikei producers at 8 a.m. the next morning. The workshop was meant to be a reflection on Teikei's past, present, and future.



Photo 1: © Sarah Espinosa Flor

Education and lime

We didn't start at 8 a.m., and it was fine. Sometimes more people joined, sometimes fewer. Still, Carlos always made sure everyone felt welcome, that everyone had a place, yet was always free to come and go. As Steiner writes, we are free when we "live in love toward our actions and let live in the understanding of the other's will" (The Philosophy of Freedom, 1894/GA 4, Ch. 9). Hermann and David had come all the way from Germany and the capital after all, so it was expected that people would show up. Yet it never felt forced, never as if anyone didn't genuinely want to be there, or to participate in the activities Carlos had planned. The one boy who briefly came, got bored, and left simply did so.

Still, almost all the coffee producers came, one by one. Some from nearby, others from farther away, all on foot. Some arrived tired, others renewed; some curious, some in pairs. And at some point, all with coffee bags. Herminia and her stepson, Gil and his daughter Nelly, Eliseo, Victorino, another Carlos, his wife, the town chronicler, Secundino; and others whose names I unfortunately can't fully recall.

We sang and we painted; we made ceramics, ate, danced, and played music. We learned the verses: "Only when you are who you actually are, and when you are for everyone else, can the earth be healed", a song Carlos wrote, which we carried with us throughout the week and which still lingers as an earworm. He's now working on a coffee song, as requested by Eliseo.

All these activities and moments, which I thought would be structured almost like a corporate meeting, felt instead like a child's party, where everyone is simply happy to be there, to play, knowing there will be cake at some point. In this case: German beer. Hermann taught me that this kind of "playing" is not incidental to Teikei, it is central to it. Inspired by Schiller, it is not about mere entertainment, but about a state where movement and impulse, as well as form and order, come into balance, where a spontaneous drive allows one to be free.

And yet, the space always felt somehow sacred. Everything seemed special and protected, not only by Carlos, Hermann, and David, but by the stars in the clear night sky, by the sun that

could only be seen from the side, by the women who cooked for us, and especially by all those who came and simply stayed.

I also learned about shells and ammonites — among the most ancient forms on earth — and how they are always wave-shaped, spiraling, perfectly rounded in their own way. Without a fixed direction or plan, it seems at first, they form and endure in shapes that last centuries. In the space Ute had provided for us, everyone shared something that seemed to belong to lives extending far beyond those few days. Each year, I was told, biographies are shared and this time, it was David and Gil's turn. They told us about their families, childhoods, jobs, ventures, and misadventures. But the others, too, shared; through their paintings, the way they sang, and the way they tried to resemble the planets (not quite a metaphor).

As Ludovico told me, it is not only about business with Teikei, it is about being able to open your heart. Something that, without context, might seem odd, but here, it made perfect sense: a group of people speaking a mixture of Mixteco, Spanish, English, and German, ranging from seven to over seventy, learning and talking about the ways of the land, and how to produce coffee through the ways of one's heart.

Lime, too, the material from which shells are made, is also “dynamized” with water and spread in the coffee fields we were going to visit the next day.

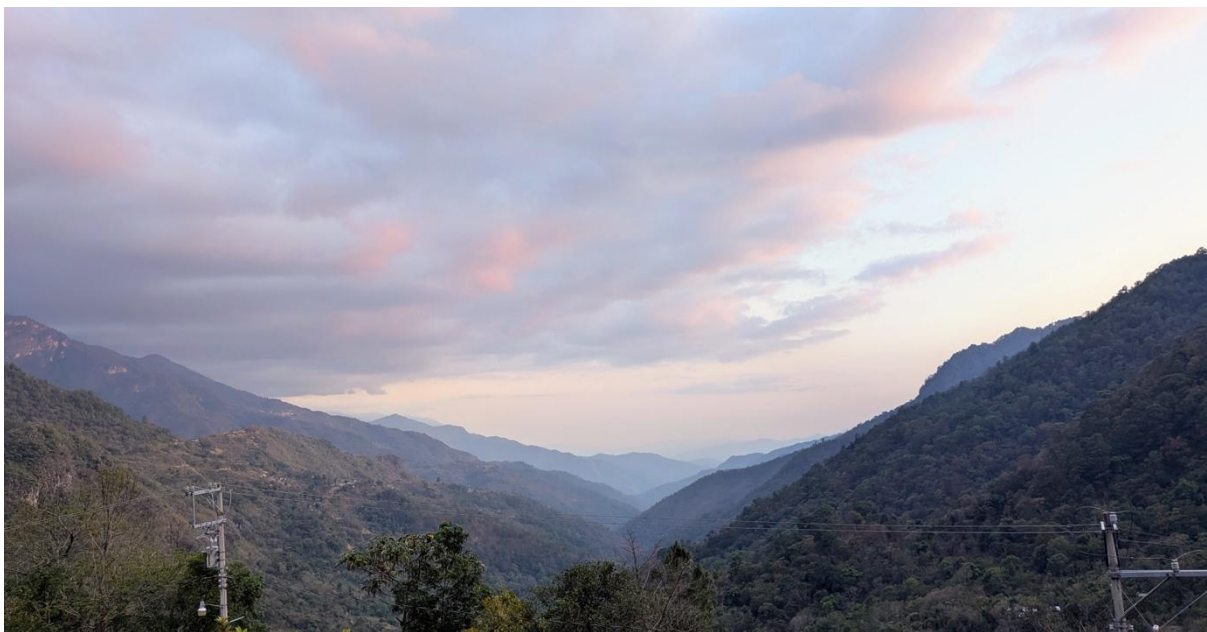


Photo 2: © Sarah Espinosa Flor

Santiago Nuyoó and Teikei Coffee

I was told Nuyoó means “the face of the moon”, though it could also mean “the place of the swamp,” or something else entirely, depending on who you ask. So, I will borrow David's interpretation. Nuyoó could mean the moon looking at its face reflected in the swamp. A swamp is usually a dense and enclosed ecosystem, where even light struggles to penetrate, yet it can hold some of the richest soils, if the conditions are right. Because of this, the predecessors of Santiago Nuyoó would climb the highest hills to get closer to the moon and gather some of its light. But perhaps the moon, too, descends into the valley, searching for a mirror to see herself, and after looking and looking, finds it in the only place where water and earth can hold perfectly still, just before blooming.

On our last day, we went to Ludovico's coffee plot, where I learned to dynamize biodynamic preparations: swirl, swirl until the perfect spiral forms, then break it into chaos, only to begin again. Gil, Ludovico, and David spread the preparation on the plot, while the rest of us stayed where we had first gathered. Hermann was taking pictures, Herminia was sewing, Carlos was playing the guitar, and I was talking to Nelly.

I still don't fully understand Steiner's philosophy, and I certainly can't claim to grasp the complexities of cultivating land to make a living in a world marked by deep and often irreconcilable injustices. But I do know that my study program could not have taught me that, in order to speak about agriculture, you have to be there; to see and learn from those who cultivate and grow food with conviction, not only for business, but from the heart, with joy, and with the hope of healing the places where we all stand and from where we all eat. Eliseo mentioned that it is often believed that the land belongs to whoever works it, but he believes it belongs to those who take care of it.

Quartz and lime, I came to understand, are not only materials used in biodynamic agriculture, but also expressions of structure and substance, form and matter. Perhaps that is why we tried to shape shells and crystals out of clay, and opened ourselves to dancing, singing, and painting the light of the sun, to hold these forces in our hands. I had to come to Santiago Nuyoó and learn about quartz and lime to write about this project.

I arrived as a guest but soon became part of this group or so they made me feel. They allowed me to take part in this "tequio". A Mixteco word for communal work, when the whole town gathers to contribute to a common task. And I felt that this small group, in Ute's home and on Ludovico's plot, was doing exactly that. Thank you!



Photo 3: © Hermann Pohlmann

Partners: [Teikei Coffe](#) and [Marchantia](#)