

Migrant living archive: Practice to improve cultural integration in participatory art and design projects

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on the creative process and its image, namely of immigrant citizens and descendants, in the context of community-based art and design projects. This dynamic archive, including photography and video, is part of an ongoing practice involving newly arrived and second-generation immigrants to Lisbon (Portugal) and Cedar Rapids (US). Based on the participant's cultural heritage, the following practice aims to enhance the creative process as a vehicle for dialogue, build artistic objects, and develop social and cultural sustainability. The research mainly explores the methodology and methods of co-creative work developed with the participants, particularly on the expanded notion of archive and heterotopia. This approach is a way to interact with the citizens in question and give visibility to their different cultures, specifically through a living archive. In this context, these aspects are used as tools to promote a reflection about the cultural and social impact of immigrants and descendants and their interrelation with the new places.

Keywords: Community-based art and design, Co-creativity, Immigration, Archive

1 RELATIONAL, COLLABORATIVE AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS IN COMMUNITY-BASED ART AND DESIGN PROJECTS

Through the migrant living archive practice developed in the context of the three community-based art and design projects presented here, we aim to empower and give visibility to undervalued immigrant groups in their communities, promoting social and cultural sustainability.

The relational dimension is imbued with emotions and marked by a collaborative approach among people. The environment is reflected in a greater understanding of the world and an exponential increase in the quality of life among humans and between humans and non-humans. Art should be no exception, particularly the artistic practice developed with immigrants and refugees in the presented projects. In order to highlight the collaborative, relational, and emotional, and rational action between all participants during the living archive practice, we begin this reflection with the appropriation of a concept as a metaphor that governs the behavior of indigenous culture in Colombia.

The philosophy of life of the indigenous community of fishermen, hunters, and farmers located on

the banks of the Rio Grande de la Magdalena, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean, is based on the concept of *sentipensamiento* (feel-think), which is characterized by thinking with reason and emotion combined. This concept was popularized by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda in 1986, during his stay in that community (Borda 2008).

The amphibian culture of this community is characterized by the mastery and combination of techniques for the use of natural resources - water and land, and the development of fishing, agriculture, and hunting. Being in close relationship with the surrounding environment, the amphibian culture of the Rio Grande de La Magdalena recreates the rhythms of climate, sowing, and the unpredictable movement of fish, among others (Borda 2008).

Another symbolic concept of the amphibian culture is that of the turtle-man, embodied by his fishermen. For them, being a turtle-man represents not only being sentient but also being waterproof, one who overcomes life's adversities because he knows how to wait for his moment to act (Borda 2008). The turtle's rhythm is very productive. When there is no water during the summer, it buries itself in the sand and hibernates for a few months. When it feels the humidity again, this animal wakes up and

goes back to its life, with the same energy as before, and reproduces (Borda 2008). In this sense, considering their existence and the environment as a single body, the amphibian culture of the Rio Grande de la Magdalena perceives the territory holistically, with mind and affections. In fact, for many indigenous or non-Western cultures, there is no dichotomy between nature and culture as we know it, nor between individual and community. People exist in constant relationships with each other and between them and the rest of the environment (Escobar 2014). Most often, the relational character implies territorial and communal visions characteristic of many indigenous cultures. This conscious, relational approach understands “territories as vital spaces-times of interrelation with the natural world.” However, this conviction can expand to any human group if one considers that reality is relational and that humans do not exist separate from their other (non-human) surroundings/environment (Escobar 2014, 59). Orlando Fals Borda and, later, the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, appropriate local, empirical knowledge to expand it and produce knowledge globally. The concept of *sentipensar* is a teaching given by the Rio Grande de la Magdalena community to bring awareness of the importance of acquiring and producing knowledge from within, from the “territories, cultures and knowledge of their peoples.” This stance runs counter to the decontextualized knowledge that characterizes notions of “development, growth, and even economics” (Borda 2008, Escobar 2014, 16) conceived in the context of hegemonic globalization.

Our notion of what is real and what is possible assumes that we act as individuals separate from the world. The scientific principles learned during our schooling lead us to conceive the world from the point of view of neutral observers focused only on being objective. This view is because modern Western culture is built on a logic of dualisms, in that it separates subjects and objects, reason and emotion, nature and humanity, facts and values, us and them, among other dualisms (Escobar 2020).

Sentipensar (feel-think), rather, is a way of reflecting, from the personal to the collective, on new ideas about what is real and what is possible (Escobar 2020), namely through a non-hierarchical understanding of knowledge, respecting the plurality and diversity of forms of knowledge, empirical, scientific, Western, non-Western as well as love and emotion. This way of conceiving life reveals the multiplicity of social experience, recognizing the differences and diversity of ways of understanding the world, promoting ecological balance among people and between people and the environment. In the amphibian culture, *sentipensar* creates a unique reality in which human beings are oriented toward a collaborative way of existing, [both among

themselves] and with all non-human beings because it is more sustainable in its relationship to life on Earth (Escobar 2020).

As we can see, the *sentipensar* notion of the Rio Grande de La Magdalena community presupposes knowledge through two inseparable assumptions - emotion and reason combined, as well as the relational approach.

For neuroscientist António Damásio, there is an intrinsic, complementary relationship between mind and emotion and the way people organize themselves socially. The relationship that exists between what goes on in the brain and the social sphere is because our life and our social structure mirror, in a significant way, our basic affective organization. Every creation in the realm of politics, justice, economics, humanities, and the arts has an enormous influence on the life of the affections. Applying logic and reason is not possible if feeling is not taken into consideration in solving a given problem (Damásio 2017). In this sense, we make decisions with our emotions and not exclusively with our reason. The post-cartesian notion of the interconnectedness of all life is central to ecology, insofar as the relational and interdependent being replaces the autonomous and isolated being (Escobar 2018, Gablik 1992). In this context, art can also develop in harmony with the environment through an empathetic approach and interaction between all the actors involved in a given artistic project. The web of relationships based on listening and dialogue promotes reciprocal relationship experiences, which expands from the individual to the community’s collective and leads to the constitution of identities based on the communicative process of our intersubjectivity. Collaboration approaches take intersubjectivity as a means of expression that replaces the subjectivity of the individual experience by the diverse experiences of all the participants involved (Gablik 1992). Founded on relational concepts, communication, political goals and not [exclusively] with a range of artistic means, materials, or spaces, collaboration art develops according to an aesthetic linked to the social dimension. (Lacy 1995, 30). The need for consensus is an underlying issue in participatory art projects since this artistic practice only makes sense if it is inclusive, integrating the diversity of human existence (Lacy 1995, 32). In addition, art critic Lucy Lippard (1995, 128) shares this opinion, stating that “to find the whole we must know and respect all the parts.”

Referring to the importance of practices that make use of collaboration too, through an ethical approach and principles of reciprocity, give voice to difference and, in this sense, contest the autonomous position of the artist, Kester (2001, 4) explains that collaboration “can potentially counter the image of the heroic artist struggling to assert his mastery over a recalcitrant nature, and incite instead a form of artistic practice of an open nature, based on the paradigm of listening and intersubjective vulnerability.” This intersubjective vulnerability is related to the

idea that an artistic project is constructed, not by an artist autonomously, but rather by the interdependent relationship of all the participating elements. We can learn and suppress individual interest through the empathic approach by recognizing a supposed universal view or through an imposed logical reason to redefine being - our perception of being is embedded in our connection with others (Kester 2004). We consider that the empathic procedure promotes communication and understanding between people and is, therefore, a proactive strategy.

Today, the diversity of collaborative practices grounded in local contexts constitutes regional and local struggles with common values such as respect for communities, indigenous cultures, and places. They also include exploiting the market system, the refusal of arbitrary imposition of state power, and a commitment to participatory democracy. These assumptions are opposed to the neoliberal tendencies of hegemonic globalization guided by an exclusively economic vision, which favors the market, disdains local cultures and diverse forms of knowledge, and imposes stereotyped models of an economic or technical nature that have not been studied to serve life in different places.

2 MIGRANT LIVING ARCHIVE PRACTICE

In his work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), a methodological and historiographical treatise on discourse analysis, philosopher Michel Foucault compares the archive study to the practice of learning about the past through its material remains left behind by a particular historical period and culture. Using the idea of archaeology as a method, Foucault considers that in reclaiming and rebuilding the archive, the archaeologist of knowledge reveals how the archive influences our relationship to the past and the construction of historical meaning (Merewerther 2006). Described as the conditions of the possibility of its construction, the archive, thus, changes it from a static collection of texts to a set of relations and institutions that enable statements to continue to exist (i.e., to become part of an archive). Thus, for Foucault, the archive is not a set of things or even a set of statements, but rather a set of relations: it is 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.' For Foucault, the archive regulates what is said or unsaid, recorded or unrecorded (Foucault 146).

The idea of archaeology is related to how one perceives the basic structure that underlies the orientation of thought and value systems in any society concerning its people and others (Merewerther 2006). Archives contain the potential of new experiences, experiments, and principles of alternative pasts, traditions, and identities (Eliassen 2010).

Inspired by Foucault's (1972, 130) archive dimension as a set of "formation and transformation"

relations, the archive must be understood as a dynamic body consisting of a variety of perceptions, materials, and actions that inform one another when promoting new meaning and encouraging interrelationships in the production of knowledge. According to Miessen (2016, 11), this kind of archive is a "productive tool, generating a set of spatial and content structures, which produce new works on the basis of the archived material." The idea of the archive within our artistic practice is concerned with the act of accumulating experiences as a form of knowledge, resulting from the interaction between all the participants in the projects.

The three art projects we developed had the objective of using creativity to build alternatives to support vulnerable communities.

The first two art and design projects, Mais Sul and Catapulta were initiatives developed in partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal and occurred between 2017 and 2019 in two cities of the Great Lisbon Area. The Mais Sul was developed in Navegadores and Moinho das Rolas neighborhoods, which belong to the Oeiras Municipality. Catapulta is a project that was created in the neighborhood of Pendão in Sintra municipality. The last one to be developed was the Shifting Ground project, which took place in Cedar Rapids (USA). It was also started from a collaborative platform, namely with the North American artist Jane Ellen Gilmor and the Iowa Ceramic Center and Glass Studio, with support from the City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa Arts Council, St. Paul's United Methodist African Nationals Congregation, and the Immaculate Conception Church's Hispanic Ministries.

The common characteristic of these projects is the fact that the participants were mostly immigrants and their descendants. In the case of the projects developed in Portugal, citizens from Portuguese-speaking countries such as Cape Verde, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea Bissau, as well as immigrants from Senegal and residents belonging to the Roma community, in the case of the projects that occurred in Cedar Rapids (USA). The participants were from two communities: immigrants and descendants from Mexico and Honduras and refugees and immigrants from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The main objective of the

More South and Catapult projects focused on using art and design tools to reproduce immigrant crafts, the participants' skills improvement, and the eventual development of business ideas. Thus, the concepts, ideas, and guidance initially given by the facilitators' team in the co-design process were followed by a free exploration of participants through a collaborative process between them and ourselves (Figure 1). In the More South project, shoulder bags with stamped motifs were made. In the Catapult project, printed fabrics and accessories prepared with cyanotype images were tested (Figure 2).

In the Shifting Ground project, we started with a playful interaction related to each participant's



Figure 1. *More South*, 2017–18, workshop, collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation and locals living in Sintra, Portugal.



Figure 3. *Shifting Ground*, 2019, workshop, collaboration with Jane Gilmor (artist), the Iowa Ceramic Center, and Central African immigrants living in Cedar Rapids, US.



Figure 2. *Catapult*, 2018–19, collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation, Eduina Vaz, Ana Fernandes (both local artists), and other locals living in Sintra, Portugal.



Figure 4. *Shifting Ground*, 2019, exhibition, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, US.

personal experience to stimulate the creative process, followed by two ceramic sculpture workshops. In the beginning, we asked the participants to think about three things: a life story, a significant object, and what they consider their main talent. In this game, each participant would have to share a memory, a talent, and an object that were supposed to be related to each other and represent each participant's personal experience (Figure 3). Subsequently, the participants began writing about their own concepts, which they pitched to each other. After this process, they started working on their own sculptures collaboratively, and each participant shared their opinions about the others' ideas and forms. The workshops culminated in an exhibit celebration organized at the Cherry Building in Cedar Rapids, a space dedicated to the arts, where the Iowa Ceramic Center and Glass Studio that supported the project is based. Project participants came along with friends and family (Figure 4).

The notion of expanded archive is also considered within our practice specifically because it incorporates the praxis dimension that precedes the archive as factual material. Based on a set of actions within

the workshops with immigrants and descendants, all participants create this praxis.

Through its performative structure and formal approach, the migrant living archive in question was built through an empathetic approach based on dialogue, on the recounted of life stories to engage participants and stimulate the creative process, and on the creation of objects in a participatory way. Therefore, this practice was a means to develop social and cultural sustainability. The set of videos representing the entire process and, particularly, the developed artistic objects within the workshops document each culture in a very unique way. Thus, the archive material is both a process and artwork because it is based on an archiving practice. According to Giroud (2016, 311), "the archive is no longer the source, the rough copy of the finished work, the archive has become the work as labor...it is the permanent creation...".

3 MIGRANT LIVING ARCHIVES AS A CONTEXT OF HETEROPTOPIA

Another dimension incorporated in the expanded archive is that of heterotopia. It is an original concept

created by Michel Foucault, in 1967, in his text "Other Spaces," through which the author intends to explain the confluence of the various existing spaces in a society marked by the age of simultaneity - of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side and the dispersed -, and by a time experienced in the network (Foucault 1984, 1).

The history of space in Western culture shows us that during the Middle Ages, there was a hierarchy of places: First, places immediately associated with the real life of man - the sacred, profane, protected, exposed, urban, and rural; in the context of cosmological theories, there were supercelestial places, which were opposed to the celestial and these in turn to the terrestrial. Finally, there were places where certain things were placed because they had been displaced, in turn, in a violent way, and, on the contrary, places where things found their natural basis and stability. These intersections and dualisms of places constituted a hierarchy that, in a sense, can be understood as medieval space: the space in which each thing is placed in its specific place, the space of disposition (Foucault 1984, 1). The medieval, fixed space of disposition was dissolved by Galileo, above all, by creating the concept of infinity and its implication in consideration of infinite open space. The place of a thing was, after all, but one point of its motion, just as the stability of that thing was, after all, but the infinite deceleration of its motion (Foucault 1984, 1). Galileo, the entire 17th century saw the replacement of location by extension, later replaced by site. Site is defined by proximity relations between certain points and elements, whose formal description may have the configuration of series, trees, or grids. (references missing) Another significant aspect of the site, in the context of contemporary societies, has to do with the capacity of storing data or the results of a calculation in a memory; the circulation of distinct elements with a random output (simple examples: car traffic or the sounds of a telephone line); the identification of marked and coded elements that are part of a whole, built randomly or according to classifications, whether simple or multiple (Foucault 1984, 2). In fact, the problem of place or site arises with demography. For Foucault, in addition to the importance of the "human site or living place" in ascertaining the existence of space in the world for all human beings, it is fundamental in detecting relations of neighborhood or proximity, of types of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements that must be adapted in certain situations to achieve certain ends. The age of simultaneity transforms sites into a form of site relation, that is, into a network.

Taking up the concept and, in particular, the root of the word heterotopia, the prefix hetero - is from Ancient Greek ἕτερος (héteros, "other, another, different") and is combined with the Greek morpheme

τόπος ("place") and means "other place" (Wikipedia contributors 2020).

Foucault uses the term "heterotopia" to describe spaces with multiple layers of meaning or relationships to other places that immediately meet the eye.

The participatory art and design practices with immigrants can be understood as a context of heterotopia insofar as it constitutes a peripheral body to everyday spaces. These "other spaces" and "other places" that are nevertheless connected with all others are spaces of alterity relations regarding the existing reality. The tension that characterizes these "other spaces" is associated with how they counteract or neutralize the other spaces (Foucault 1984, 3-4).

During the workshops, the participatory action developed with immigrants is a confluence space of several, sometimes antagonistic spaces. In it converge the vulnerability of immigrants to their condition in the new places, the wills, their interest in participating in the project, the sharing of experiences and knowledge, the cultural heritage, the willingness to empower immigrants, the production of diverse artistic objects, the archiving practice through video and photographs, and so on. However, these are also spaces of invention, imagination, and transformation (Foucault 1984, 3, 9), particularly through the reactions and ideas generated by the participants' perception giving rise to impulses for action. As a context of heterotopia, which corresponds to the intersection of the spaces situated within society, participatory art and design practices can contribute and promote the recognition of social space, including the human relationships that contaminate the common spaces and the transmission of community knowledge among all the people involved.

This dynamic space of workshops with immigrants is where the archival praxis is carried out. As a full exercise of citizenship, it affects all participants and the possibility of new experiences in a space of plurality. The praxis also consisted of collecting and selecting information, life stories, interaction approaches, creative processes, pieces produced. This factual material was previously observed, chosen, and interpreted by us and became an archive. The set of videos and photographs were part of the organized exhibitions/encounters and the pieces produced in the workshops. These events brought together participants and their families and some friends, local artists, and representatives of public authorities and academics. In the third project, we highlight the performance of a gospel group. In this sense, the installation of objects worked as the support, structured by us, that made possible the transmission and communication between the "voice" of immigrants in specific contexts and those who "listen" to it.

The migrant living archive practice emphasizes the interdependent relationship between people, as it considers the multiple identities of all participants. In addition, it reinforces the political dimension as

a tool for the empowerment of displaced communities and their social and cultural sustainability.

The videos and photographs constitute an archive and a heterotopia simultaneously. In the first case, as they contain the potential of new experiences and principles of alternative pasts, traditions, and identities (Eliassen 2010), reflecting possibilities of new futures. In the second case, as a heterotopia capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible (Foucault 1984, 6). Inspired by the concept of heterotopia that Foucault applies to cinema, we can intersect in a single real space the exterior or interior spaces, of various configurations, where people can perceive the photographs and videos, and the two-dimensional space where a three-dimensional space is projected.

The migrant living archive dissemination, as a space of otherness, amplifies the network of relationships to other antagonistic spaces through the decentralization of knowledge production, thus empowering these communities.

4 CONCLUSION

The art and design projects presented here are based on an empathetic approach enabling the development of co-creation work. The relational paradigm that presides over the migrant living archive practice promotes a collective reflection, with our connected emotions and reasons, about new futures, by sharing a community's living experiences, respecting differences, and the plurality of ways of knowing.

The collaborative dimension of the migrant living archive, like the collaborative way of existence of some indigenous communities, promotes a more ecological artistic practice insofar as it is governed by the interdependent relationship of all the participating elements, that is, by principles of ethics and reciprocity. In this sense, we can affirm that this way of being in the world provides the production of knowledge from the crossing of knowledge of all involved in a community, on a local scale, to expand to a global scale and foster the production of new knowledge.

The participatory migrant living archive process is characterized by the notion of migrant living archive, which is understood as a dynamic body that links perceptions, materials, and actions producing new meanings and stimulating interrelationships in knowledge production.

The practice in question is also seen as a context of heterotopia since it is a space of alterity relations regarding the existing reality. The migrant living archive activates and articulates the relationships between creativity, identity, knowledge, and empowerment

concerning the immigrants who participated in the art and design projects. Therefore, a migrant living archive can be a useful tool for social transformation, positively impacting immigrant lives and society.

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