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Article

Cultivating Urban Storytellers: A Radical Co-Creation to Enact Cognitive Justice for/in Self-Built Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

We all carry an imperative to imagining collectively more just cities, to engaging more meaningfully with multiple urban actors and their different sensibilities through their stories. Storytelling helps to foster empathy, to understand the meaning of complex experiences, and, most importantly, to inspire action. With the rise of the digital era and new technologies at hand, we have an opportunity to redefine not only the way we tell, connect, and engage with our collective stories, but also how we work together in forming them. Based on the research design project *Patrimonio Vivo | Living Heritage*, grounded in the city of Medellín, this article illustrates the dynamics and potentials of co-creation with cultural organizations and creative teams through learning alliances. Our alliance among a cultural community centre, a cooperative of architects, a grassroots organisation and post-graduate students around the world used storytelling to propel an ecology of urban knowledges. Working online during the global lockdown, we mobilised stories of solidarity, care, memory, and livelihoods through the narrative of people, places, and organisations following their trajectories as the basis for the design of spatial strategies. This collaborative work aimed at contributing to the recognition of everyday spatial practices in self-built neighbourhoods as a form of “living heritage” of the city and a key building block for reframing a more progressive “integral neighbourhood upgrading” practice. I argue that using storytelling as a co-creative methodology, based on learning alliances, we can bridge the ecology of urban knowledges to foster cognitive justice and transform the current stigmatizing urban narrative of self-built neighbourhoods.

Keywords

co-creation; cognitive justice; Medellín; storytelling; urban knowledge(s)

Issue

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1. Introduction

“We are having a conversation with the territory,” says Luz Mila Hernandez, community leader. Orley Mazo, also a community leader, concludes: “We are equal here.”

This article is itself a story of co-creation. The thematic issue that this article belongs to argues that co-creation processes using arts-based approaches can offer a renewed methodological strategy for planners’ understandings of local knowledge production. It suggests that using storytelling as a co-creation methodology, based on learning alliances, offers an opportunity to bridge the ecology of urban knowledges to foster cognitive justice and transform stigmatizing urban

narratives about self-built neighbourhoods. The role of storytelling is pivotal in achieving this aim since storytelling helps to foster empathy, understand the meaning of complex experiences, and inspire action (Ortiz & Millan, 2019). Impressions like that of Luz Mila and Orley on the digital co-creation process signal the potential of engaging differently to imagine just cities. With the rise of the digital era and social distancing, new technologies at hand have redefined not only the way we tell, connect, and engage with stories, but also how we work together. In this context, planners are required to go beyond framing themselves as persuasive storytellers about urban change and embrace the radical potential of digital co-creation with cultural organisations to

bring new repertoires and allies to fight for socio-spatial justice. Harnessing the radical potential of co-creation through art-based methods allows challenging the often northern focussed, depoliticized, and a-spatial perspective on collaborative and communicative planning theory (Ortiz, 2012).

This article addresses the following questions: How can we foster the radical potential of co-creation for urban planning and design using storytelling? How can urban stories and storytellers contribute to foster cognitive justice? Planning scholars often frame storytelling as a strategy of persuasion (Mäntysalo et al., 2019; Throgmorton, 1996, 2003), to gauge power narratives and ideology (Davoudi et al., 2019; Shepherd et al., 2020; Zanotto, 2020), as a pedagogical tool (Baum, 2017; Forester, 1999, 2009; Sandercock, 2003), and to envision the future (van Hulst, 2012) to inspire collective action. Though there is much discussion around the possibilities and caveats of using storytelling for planning, less has been discussed about its potential in cities of the Global South or the potential links with cognitive justice and strategies to work with the capacity of non-planners for storytelling, as well as their own imagination.

This article is based on my experience coordinating the research-based design project *Patrimonio Vivo / Living Heritage* during the global lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through a trans-local learning alliance, the project was anchored in the neighbourhood of Moravia, situated in the city of Medellín, Colombia, and aimed to contribute to the recognition of everyday spatial practices in self-built neighbourhoods as a living heritage of the city. This alliance was made up of partners from the Cultural Centre of Community Development of Moravia, the grassroots collective Moravia Resiste, the architect's cooperative COONVITE, and master's students from the University College London (UCL), from the building and urban design in development (BUDD) programme. This project demonstrated that self-built neighbourhoods are sites of urban planning innovation and collective agency, challenging orthodox urban planning narratives that argue otherwise (Ortiz & Millan, 2019). Moreover, it showed that critical pedagogy is needed for cultivating urban storytellers and that we need to frame urban planning and design as a progressive co-creative process.

The first section of this article sets out a brief literature review on co-creation and storytelling in urban planning. In this section, I also locate the conceptual underpinnings of the nexus between cognitive justice and the ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2014) yet to be brought more explicitly into urban planning debates. The second section sets out the method of framing digital co-creation through trans-local learning alliances. This section illustrates the premise of how to engage with multiple urban actors that operate across built environment scales, and who are placed in an asymmetric power-knowledge constellation. The third section explains the site of engagement. In this section,

I explain Medellín as the setting of the co-creation story. I explain how the city has become a story of best practice in planning and Moravia a story of experimentation on slum upgrading. The fourth section delves into the characters of the co-creation process and the relevance of storytelling for them. The fifth section focuses on the resulting stories narrating the living heritage of the place. It summarises the polyphony of plots that gave the basis for the design of spatial strategies developed through the project. The conclusion discusses the generative nature of the co-creation processes to reframe the stories from and about self-built neighbourhoods. This article aims to contribute to urban planning debates by centring the radical potential of storytelling as a bridge for the ecosystem of knowledges to foster cognitive justice.

2. Co-Creating Through Urban Storytelling

2.1. Co-Creation and Storytelling

The role of storytelling as a means for persuasion and empowerment in urban planning is not new. Sandercock (2003), in her seminal piece “Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice,” argues about the importance of stories in planning practice, research, and teaching. She explains that stories help planners to expand practical tools, sharpen critical judgement and widen the circle of democratic discourse. The corpus of work of storytelling within spatial planning defines this process as one that can be highly vexed by myriad interests—often incompatible with each other—particularly when it comes to defining the cultural landscape and its meanings (e.g., Devos et al., 2018; Forester, 1999; Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 1996; van Hulst, 2012). Van Hulst (2012) points to two strands of research: storytelling as a model *of* planning (the way planning is done) and storytelling as a model *for* planning (the way planning could or should be done). The first refers to storytelling as an important and everyday activity that takes place in all kinds of formal and informal social interactions, which slowly but steadily finds its way into plans. In the second, storytelling is used as a tool to create spaces of democratic and inclusive co-construction of stories of different lived experiences and emotions. This second reading of storytelling enables actors to share understandings of what their situation is and what can be done, it allows new options they had not thought of before. Nonetheless, the capacity of non-planners for storytelling, their imagination, and the role that non-discursive stories play is often overlooked. This shows the need to innovate on how to amplify the potential of storytelling and resonates with my own interest in using storytelling and urban narratives as a strategy of co-creation to seek cognitive justice and decolonise planning (see also Ortiz, 2022).

Co-creation has its roots in the fields of private sector innovation, social innovation, design, and the communicative turn in planning theory. Co-creation promises

the potential to break down hierarchies between local government, business life, universities, citizens, and other stakeholders for a multi-directional approach to problem-solving (Leino & Puumala, 2021). For Leino and Puumala (2021, p. 783), “the notion of co-creation emphasises innovation and creativity and as such it implies potential for fundamental change in regard to the roles, positions, and relationships between stakeholders.” The framing of this intention is why hardly anyone would oppose its use and why it has become such a large part of the public sector and policymakers’ rhetorical toolbox. It has been translated into the form of experimental living labs, civic hackathons, and citizen juries (Mulder, 2012; Tortzen, 2018) in response to the digital societal turn. Yet its conceptualisation in urban planning and governance remains fuzzy.

Co-creation in urban planning builds on the collaborative and communicative planning approach (Forester, 1999; Healey, 2007; Innes & Booher, 2010). For urban planning, co-creation aims at strengthening social cohesion in polarised, fragmented, and individualized societies to develop better solutions to improve quality of life (Leino & Puumala, 2021; Šuklje Erjavec & Ruchinskaya, 2019). Recent debates frame co-creation as a modality of participation (Lund, 2018), as a co-learning process (Šuklje Erjavec & Ruchinskaya, 2019), and as a collaborative urban knowledge creation process (Seo, 2022). Despite the contributions of recent literature, most authors acknowledge a lack of systematic theoretical development in the “co-creation field.” These studies have shown that main gaps remain in understanding co-creation enabling conditions and impact, how power symmetries are addressed, and how to bridge knowledge creation and knowledge use. Overall, co-creation debates tend to focus mostly on service and/or solution-driven discussions, Global North contexts, and tend not to question the status quo of liberal democracy and racial capitalism.

A more transgressive approach to co-creation can be linked to a different intellectual genealogy. As Degenaar (2014) reports, co-creation was coined in the early 1990s to focus on co-creating shared meaning from a social constructivist, intervention, and narratives approach. Co-creation is key for group psychotherapy and narratives are pivotal for the co-creation of meaning. In the early 2000s, within the context of transformative dialogue, the co-creation of new realities was understood as a precondition to negotiate public controversies. To address the shortcomings of the literature on co-creation, Carpenter et al. (2020), drawing from Mouffe (2013), frame a method for an agonistic practice where art and politics are intertwined. This perspective posits the politicisation of co-creation can be enacted to work together through conflict bringing art-based methods that trigger open interpretations and unlock collective imaginations around city making. Horvath and Carpenter (2020, p. 45) re-define co-creation as “collective creative processes resulting in tangible or intangible outputs in the form of artwork or artefacts, and

knowledge generated by multiple partners that feeds into shared understandings of more socially just cities.” They advocate using this approach as a form of resistance against oppression, referring to de Sousa Santos’ (2014) ideas around southern epistemologies. Since co-creation looks for an epistemic shift, this requires linking it with ideas of cognitive justice that refer to counteracting practices of silencing or devaluing alternative forms of knowing and living that do not conform with assumptions about the authority of scientific knowledge.

2.2. Co-Creation, Cognitive Justice, and Ecology of Knowledges

A radical approach to co-creation in planning requires grounding on the principles of cognitive justice. Yet the links between urban planning and cognitive justice are less explored in current literature. Visvanathan (1999) coined the term “cognitive justice” to frame the normative principle “the right of different knowledges to co-exist so long as they sustain the life, livelihoods, and life chances of a people” (Visvanathan, 2021, p. 1). Cognitive justice is an invitation to reinvent democracy in a plural, intellectual and playful way (Visvanathan, 2021). This notion not only proposes a framework of connections to respond to the violence of “epistemicide” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 237), as the erasure of other ways of knowing and different forms of knowledge outside the Western eurocentric canon but also to consider diverse communities of problem-solving (Visvanathan, 2009). In this line, in the seminal book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, de Sousa Santos (2014, p. 324) claims that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.” Thus, cognitive justice “points to a radical demand for social justice, a demand that includes unthinking the dominant criteria by which we define social justice and fight against social injustice” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 327). For Visvanathan (1999, p. 3) the principles of cognitive justice are:

- (a) all forms of knowledge are valid and should co-exist in a dialogic relationship to each other;
- (b) cognitive justice implies the strengthening of the “voice” of the defeated and marginalised;
- (c) traditional knowledges and technologies should not be “museumized”;
- (d) every citizen is a scientist; each layperson is an expert;
- (e) science should help the common man/woman;
- (f) all competing sciences should be brought together into a positive heuristic for dialogue.

How can we put into practice cognitive justice in the context of planning? Co-creation can be seen as a strategy to catalyse cognitive justice through engaging with the “ecology of knowledges” (de Sousa Santos, 2014) relevant for imagining just cities. The notion of an ecology of knowledges helps us to operationalise cognitive justice as it “aims to provide epistemological

consistency for pluralistic, propositional thinking and acting” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 232). Engaging with the ecology of knowledges requires direct involvement with counter-hegemonic globalization agents and multiple clashing conceptions of alternative societies against the unequal relations caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. De Sousa Santos (2014) suggests that the type of knowledge central to ecology of knowledges is *knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality* rather than *knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality* starting from the compatibility between cognitive and ethic-political values of the ones involved in a shared endeavour. Learning from feminist and post-colonial thinking, he asserts that all knowledge is context-dependent, local, partial, and situated to challenge universal and abstract hierarchies imposed by colonial history. This acknowledgement points toward an impulse for co-presence and incompleteness as a precondition for co-creation.

Stories are a pivotal means for the circulation of urban knowledges and bridging ecologies of knowledges. Ecology of knowledges recognises that all knowledges are testimonial and have a polyphonic nature that seeks to promote rebellious subjectivities (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Non-hegemonic knowledges based on oral traditions preserve wisdom about wealth, ways of life, and symbolic universes that can survive the hostility of extractivist processes of urban development. The role of orality and storytelling have been accounted for by decolonial scholars and activists such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who urged us to produce knowledge “that recovers subjugated knowledges, that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and ‘listened to,’ and that challenge racism, colonialism and oppression” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 41). Nonetheless, non-hegemonic and hegemonic knowledges are interdependent and can nurture a plurality of conceptions of emancipation and dignity. Stories capture the wealth of knowledge for social emancipation preserved in oral traditions. Storytelling conveys a common sense since it is a non-disciplinary everyday practice that connects with the “enjoyment, the emotional with the intellectual and the practical” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 38). Co-creation through storytelling processes enables a valuing of the testimonial aspects of knowledge and the encounter of diverse temporalities of territorial knowledge as a basis to mobilise alternative interventions.

3. Framing Co-Creation Through Trans-Local Learning Alliances

I frame learning alliances as a collective space for enabling an ecology of knowledges as a learned struggle. The key premise is that all the partners are active learners using the universities’ authority to create and legitimate knowledge that works towards cognitive justice (Gaventa & Bivens, 2014). Learning alliances (Lundy et al., 2005) are based on university-community partnerships in a recognition of the interdependence of scien-

tific and non-scientific knowledge. However, a key challenge for effective co-creation in a learning alliance is the ability to bring together multiple actors operating at different scales and times in asymmetric power relations (Ortiz & Millan, 2019). In the context of urban planning, Moreno-Leguizamon et al. (2015, p. 16) have argued that:

A learning alliance is an innovative methodology that can contribute to multicultural planning by (1) promoting the involvement of new planning stakeholders and the institutionalization of learning alliance outcomes, (2) ensuring capacity-building strategies, (3) emphasizing documentation and dissemination as innovative practices, and (4) strengthening the network capacity of a community.

Drawing on these ideas, we explore how urban design and planning can foster cognitive justice as a necessary condition to advance urban justice.

An integral part of operating in learning alliances that strive for cognitive justice, is an ability to simultaneously operate from multiple places of enunciation where “knowledge aims to turn into a transformative experience” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 25). I call it a trans-local learning alliance to head the joint work of organisations and participants that operate in different locations, whose learning and ability to innovate derives not only from their different interests and backgrounds—but also from the lived experience of the interconnections and singularities of multiple urban trajectories. A trans-local learning alliance problematizes the dichotomic views of a Global North and South and engages with the patterns or resemblance and singularities that cities across the globe encapsulate (Ortiz, 2018). It relates to de Sousa Santos’ (2014, p. 256) invitation “to consult social reality through different cognitive maps operating at different scales.” A trans-local perspective in learning alliances contributes to challenge dichotomous geographical conceptions such as North-South by focusing on non-hierarchic interactions and configurations across scales.

The project *Patrimonio Vivo | Living Heritage: A Tool to Rethink Moravia’s Future* was based on a living heritage approach, using storytelling, to uphold a different story of Moravia and responded to threats of displacement couched in terms of urban transformation. During the pandemic, our learning alliance was constituted between the Cultural Centre of Community Development of Moravia (CDMC), the Moravia Resiste Collective, the Cooperative COONVITE, and master’s students from UCL, from the BUDD programme, whose students were in over 15 countries across the world. In early 2020 and 2021, we ran a practice engagement module of the BUDD master’s programme based on long-term connections with these organisations based in Medellín. This project was co-funded by UCL and the CDMC, and the time of participants besides students and volunteers was

remunerated. Our shared aim was to uncover the living heritage of the neighbourhood of Moravia to leverage it as a tool to counteract eviction threats by changing the narratives of stigmatization over the place. Our departing premise was premised on an idea that Moravia, instead of being erased, as it was, could be considered a place of “living heritage” of Medellín.

We used the framework of living heritage (Polious, 2014) to challenge narratives about stigmatised communities and places. We had, as driving research-based design questions, the following query: How could the territory of Moravia in Medellín be framed as living heritage and, consequently, what type of socio-spatial strategies can be imagined responding to the current urban transformation?

In addition, we operationalised the notion of living heritage through four thematic lenses selected with our partners according to their challenges: (a) care systems; (b) memory and migrations; (c) recycling landscapes; and (d) community communication. We focused on transformative strategies in which communities are the initiators and drivers of urban development interventions rather than the objects of them. We agreed to produce an “atlas of living heritage” to contain the stories and spatial imprints of the rich legacies of the neighbourhood (see Figure 1).

The digital co-creation work was designed to enhance the richness of the ecology of knowledges present in the alliance. We engaged in three key phases of co-creation: preparation, exchange, and output generation/dissemination. In the preparatory phase, we co-created an organising committee with a representative of each partner organisation to undertake the set-up of the collaboration. We wrote and shared a

bilingual terms of reference, a strategy for communication, and a code of ethics of engagement to convey the scope and operationalization of the joint work. Our master’s students dedicated two months of preparation prior to engaging with partners by devoting time to readings, guest seminars, and workshops to map out the socio-political configurations and the territorial dynamics of the place. In parallel, each organisation in Medellín selected and updated participants on the terms of reference and the expectation about the learning alliance. As a result of the pandemic, we had to include training on the use of digital tools, particularly for senior community leaders, and at the same time address the asymmetries of the digital divide experienced in low-income households making sure community members would have access to digital devices and data.

The phase of engagement relied on synchronous sessions and asynchronous activities during four to five weeks of intense collaboration. Around 120 participants were part of this collaborative process, with 60 members active each year. Each team was assigned a thematic lens and had 15 members on average: Of these, two to three members were community leaders, two to three members were CDMC staff, two were COONVITE members or volunteers, and six to eight were UCL students. Given that participants were spread in different time zones, we had a rhythm of three plenary encounters of two to three hours per week, in which we framed the scope of the phase, providing guests’ thematic inputs and tutorials for each team’s work. The co-design process was built as an incremental progression on understanding the challenge and teamwork dynamics to substantiate the proposal of multi-scale socio-spatial strategies. Each team defined their work plan and a distribution route of the



Figure 1. A re-imagined Moravia for the living heritage atlas, drawn by Miguel Mesa for Patrimonio Vivo | Living Heritage project.

asynchronous tasks. We proposed five stages, one per week, guided by the following questions:

1. What will we do and how?
2. What is our design/research question and method?
3. What is our proposed socio-spatial strategy?
4. How to (re)present our socio-spatial strategy?
5. How to synthesise and communicate our strategy to a broader audience?

Using incremental and simple phases helped the diversity of participants to navigate the teamwork amid the pandemic uncertainties.

The phase of output generation and dissemination involved policymakers and urban planners. To involve influential city-making actors, we organised webinars and invited city councillors, local researchers, local officials, and international guests from the Global Platform Right to the City and Habitat United Nations. These public events served to showcase the living heritage framework to address the upgrading of self-built neighbourhoods but also political commitments to amplify the proposals co-created by the alliance. As a result, the main strategies and priorities raised in the living heritage atlas became part of the debates of the newly formed, in 2021, negotiation board for discussing the urban renewal project. It allowed an encounter of diverse temporalities of territorial knowledge as a basis to mobilise alternative interventions to strengthen the local community assets instead of interventions that erase the existing place and displace its dwellers proposed by the urban renewal project for the neighbourhood.

4. Medellín and Moravia: Stories of Urban Despair Turned Into “Best Practice” and Experimentation on “Slum Upgrading”

The city of Medellín served as the site of inquiry. Medellín has been portrayed in the last decades as an example of best practice on how local states could address in tandem violence and informality after a deep crisis caused by deindustrialisation, narco-trafficking, and extreme urban violence (Ortiz, 2019). Since urban planners rely on best practices to inspire action and based on its lessons speed up effective urban interventions (Ortiz & Millan, 2019); the city's strategies have been emulated in several cities (Duque & Ortiz, 2020) across the world. The city's transformation in the last decades responded to broader shifts in its governance actively involving local government, decentralised quasi-public entities, military powers, economic elites, and grassroots organisations. A decisive convergence of local state public investments in traditionally excluded self-built neighbourhoods of strategic iconic architecture, mobility infrastructure, and strategic urban projects was used as the linchpin strategy to increase accessibility and generate symbolical inclusion under the banner of social urbanism. Notwithstanding the city's achievements and

its international recognition, Medellín remains one of the most unequal Latin-American cities and the territorial control of non-state armed actors still poses challenges to local governability schemes.

Most of the success story of Medellín derives from the local state interest in social infrastructure and the creation of a public aesthetic through a particular kind of slum upgrading. In this context, Moravia has been an exemplary case of the state's experimentation with neighbourhood upgrading approaches. Moravia is a centrally located territory of 42 hectares occupied by over 45 thousand inhabitants mostly living under precarious urban conditions and high population density. It is adjacent to the Aburrá River and was built on top of the former public garbage dump in the late 1970s. Some areas of the neighbourhood were built by a process of incremental land squatting in the early 1950s because of processes of rural-urban migration and the intensification of violence in the country. Moravia has experienced different periods of urban change. The first period was from 1954 to 1982, when an incremental process of land occupations accounted for the neighbourhood's formation and subsequent consolidation. The second period was from 1982 to 1993, when the state established a relationship and began negotiations with the neighbourhood's social organisations due to increased interest in its land. The third period, from 2004 to 2011, was characterised by a multi-sectoral slum-upgrading urban initiative known as the Integral Improvement Plan of Moravia (PPMIM) and aligned with the social urbanism policy of the city (Ortiz & Yepes, 2020a).

Moravia, despite the upgrading efforts, has endured long-term eviction threats. In 2014, the municipal strategic spatial plan declared the neighbourhood as an urban renewal site. Its strategic location and the increased pressure to densify the lowlands of the valley have prompted resistance and social discontent among Moravia's inhabitants. For urban planning, the so-called informal settlements have been considered a nuisance, something invisible, a set of places that need to either be evicted or comply with state standards for the built environment. Some slum upgrading programmes have dignified the life of its dwellers while others have fallen short to address the social and symbolic dimensions of urban marginalisation. The PPMIM included seven programmes which considered issues of housing construction and upgrading, public space, tenancy and legal rights, socio-cultural development, strengthening of local economies, and health issues. Moravia inhabitants claim the urgency to continue to implement the agreed upgrading plan. This highlights how the long-term nature of processes of upgrading risk the continuity of territorial interventions and often become a legitimisation strategy of removal. Thus, official narratives of urban change mask the multiplicity of urban knowledges and people's stories. Beyond these stories of best practice, we need to involve a plurality of voices, the adaptation to local idiosyncrasies as well as the collective memory of people, places, and institutions.

5. Characters: Learning Alliance of Urban Storytellers

A learning alliance grounded in the ecology of urban knowledges frames its participants as storytellers and learners. For a co-creation process to contribute to cognitive justice it requires trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility—the characteristics of an ethics of love (Sweet et al., 2019). Our learning alliance’s main characters are four organisations: two are anchored in the neighbourhood (Moravia Resiste, a collective group that brings together various social organisations of Moravia for the protection of their territory, and the Centro de Desarrollo Cultural Moravia [CDCM], a semi-public organisation devoted to supporting cultural and educational activities); the other two, operating across different geographies, are COONVITE, a cooperative of architects working on the social production of habitat and the construction of the commons for good living in places where the architectural practice usually does not reach, and the BUDD students.

We agreed to bring participants of different ages to enable an intergenerational learning experience, particularly with the more experienced community leaders and the young generations of inhabitants of the neighbourhood and undergrad students from Medellín.

Moravia Resiste is a collective that advocates the protection of the right to stay put. They focus on expanding the public debate about urban development, questioning who is benefiting from the urban renewal projects and strengthening their leadership to keep up the constant struggle to live with dignity. Their aims to engage with the learning alliance were: (a) to showcase their spaces of encounter, co-creation, negotiation, and struggles; (b) to exchange lessons from similar international experiences; and (c) to enable dialogue with the Moravia communities that were leveraging cultural expressions to inform their collective strategic action. As community leader Luz Mila Hernandez put it in our online interview of 2021, when asked about the alliance:

We believe communication with the state is broken. They use technical words, do not know the community, and don’t understand that people need to learn about the territory daily....This co-creation process using storytelling reaffirms the trust we have with each other. It helps us resist and reframe Moravia’s legacy to the city.

Her testimony highlights how the “technical” planning language contributes not only to the disconnection between the state and its citizens but also prevents learning about the visions of urban transformation. In this sense, storytelling can play a significant role to translate and reframe urban knowledges and aspirations.

The CDCM is a cultural state-owned space run by a non-governmental organisation and Moravia’s inhabitants. The construction of the CDCM in 2008 was one of the territorial interventions negotiated with the inhabi-

tants as part of the PPMIM. In essence, they are a cultural development centre with a community approach, connected to the world, and envisioned by themselves as *la casa de todos* (“everyone’s house”). CDCM operated as a strategic enabler of the alliance. Their aims to engage with the learning alliance were (a) to co-create a reflexive approach that builds relations with the past in relation to everyday use of memory and artistic expressions and (b) to explore ways for communities to appropriate their knowledge based on narratives about their territory. As Maria Juliana Yopez, CDCM knowledge manager, put it, in our online interview of 2021:

For us, cultural management usually focuses on artistic practices, but in this co-creation process, we focused on the everyday practices of the inhabitants. We inquired about the territorial interventions in the neighbourhood since they have also shaped the culture of the place. A place that has been auto-produced and self-managed.

From this testimony, it is relevant to highlight how the co-creation process opened the perspective on understanding territorial interventions as a shaping force of cultural expressions. Moreover, the use of storytelling to bridge with collective memory and everyday practices helped to grasp the role of self-management in the living heritage of the place.

COONVITE is a cooperative of architects working on unlearning formalist dogmas and unfriendly visions of architecture and valuing ancestral and popular knowledge. Their aims in joining the learning alliance were: (a) to explore an exchange of experiences between popular and academic knowledges; (b) to identify ideas of memory of the neighbourhood in tangible and intangible projects to make its territory known; and (c) to narrate and document what Moravia means and enable spaces to continue nurturing and expanding the idea of memory for a promising future. As Juan Miguel Gomez, COONVITE lead, suggested, in our online interview of 2021:

To work around living heritage in a city like Medellín is important to start to value and love the diversity we are. A city where converge many longings, processes, pains that the institutions are indifferent about....To frame the living heritage of Moravia is not only what we want to remember but also what we want to become, to generate new narratives.

His testimony brings attention to the role of generating new narratives as a precondition to imagining a spatial prefiguration of the place. It also renders relevant the power of living heritage stories to counter local state indifference to the cultural richness of the neighbourhood.

The BUDD programme is a master’s course that works at the intersection of critical urban theory, critical design studies, and Southern urban practice. The main aims of the programme to the learning alliance were: (a) to

offer a pedagogic experience that could enhance learning processes by connecting teaching, research, and real-world communities; (b) to address research-based design that has an impact on the city decision-making process inspired by popular education and critical pedagogy; and (c) to enable an overseas practice engagement that seeks to ground applications of abstract concepts and furthers critical thinking through a sequence of inter-subjective encounters. As I expressed in conversation with fellow partners in my role as academic and lead of the project:

We need to recognise the living experience of each one in the territory but also the diverse sets of backgrounds, expertise, and leadership to sustain a co-creation process....The stories of the trajectories and continuities of community practices allow us to grasp the living heritage of the neighbourhood as a step to achieve recognition.

Here I point toward the interconnectedness between recognition processes and the pedagogical angle to deepen the ability to identify and trigger potential spaces of opportunities for a just and inclusive socio-spatial transformation.

6. Polyphony of Plots: Narrating the Living Heritage of the Place

The ecology of knowledges is polyphonic. We embraced a polyphony of plots to convey Moravia's multiplicity of stories. We co-created stories of solidarity, care, memory, and livelihoods. We decided to focus on a research-based design process to produce an atlas of living heritage. We felt that an atlas could contribute to "create realities, allow us to make visible certain territories and to mobilise imagined geographies" (Ortiz, 2020, p. 4). We portrayed some practices of living heritage that deserved to be protected and departing from them we proposed strategies of socio-spatial interventions that enabled us to tell another story of Moravia to the city. The different strands of work allowed us to bring to the co-creation process students, musicians, anthropologists, children-books storytellers, social communicators, community leaders, and graphic designers, and liaise with a youth-led audio-visual collective—RedTina—from Moravia to portray relevant stories of characters, places, initiatives, and other interconnected things. I will present some excerpts of the stories co-created by different teams combining people from each organisation of the learning alliance:

6.1. Stories of Memories and Migration

Memories are central to understand the living heritage of Moravia. Using life stories of inhabitants, located in different sectors of Moravia, the team traced the trajectories of migration and forced displacement. Deep listen-

ing was required as well as co-developed networks of trust with the members of the team living in the territory. In Figure 2 we can see excerpts of some of the stories and the main causes of the interviewees' journeys and their relationship with memory. Getting at the spatial imprint of collective memory can be hard to express working remotely, yet, for locals, it has a very different approach. As El Chino, a male Moravia's inhabitant, forcibly displaced from the Pacific coast explained:

You can read memory everywhere you look in Moravia, it is reflected in each corner, in each house, in the destitute, in the people that have been part of the struggle. However, we need to really try to have a concerted idea of memory that installs itself within the larger memory of the city and serves as a platform on which to build the continuity of the neighbourhood. Moravia knows about politics but hasn't instituted itself as a political body.

This testimony allowed us to understand how memory is carved in every corner and has a very political meaning. Also, the tensions between individual and collective memory are key to addressing the integration of the rest of the Medellín's narrative. For the ones working remotely during the pandemic, the focus on life stories gave an emotional texture to the spatial analysis of the place, compensating for the sensorial deprivation.

6.2. Stories of Solidarity and Mobilization

Community connections are central to revealing the living heritage of a place. In the case of Moravia, these connections were mostly based on solidarity and social mobilization. In contrast to the above examples, the team working around community connections decided to document the story of the Moravia Resiste collective itself. You can read their conversation (and see also Figure 3) prompted by the question: How were they born as a collective?

Orley: Moravia Resiste appears from the misinformation about the urban renewal process, arising from this reality the need to inform the community in a clear way about what was happening.

Luz Mila: Moravia Resiste is a means of conversation between the state and the community. Communication was lost in Moravia. The state [would] not enter the territory and, if it did, it was in a conflictual manner. But after opening the doors of communication through the dialogue tables, agreements were reached at the community level, [which brought] recognition to the territory by opening the conversation to the outside.

Julieta: I received Moravia Resiste as an inheritance when I was growing up. I was interested in the



Figure 2. Life stories of migration. Source: Drawn by Memory and Migrations Team cohort 2019–2020 for Atlas of Living Heritage.

Moravia Resiste struggle after completing a workshop where I learned what the urban renewal proposal meant. Moravia Resiste, for me, is a platform of resignification where you question all the things that are taken for granted. We try to find that meeting point where we rely on the academic part to deconstruct what has been built and review what exists. Within this process, Moravia Resiste became my family.

The conversations with the members of Moravia Resiste highlighted the intergenerational dynamic of the collective. Moreover, it was important to understand the mobilization strategies through their trajectories of communication dynamics, places, activities, and even objects (the bicycle and the megaphone, the pot and the spoon, the audio mixer, etc.). Thus, the co-creation process needed to allow for collective stories to emerge.



Figure 3. Moravia Resiste Collective. Source: Drawn by Community Connections Team cohort 2020–2021 for Atlas of Living Heritage.

6.3. Stories of Care and Intergenerational Responsibility

A core element required to recognise when delving into living heritage was the tracing of the continuity of care of a place. In Moravia, care is made up of people’s efforts, their bodies, gestures, habits, and unwritten rules. Particularly, the role of women has been pivotal to sustain collective life (see Figure 4). We talked with five community leaders, mainly women, about their long-term struggles and how they have cared for the neighbourhood while their main needs were not being taken care of. Irma, one of the senior leaders, said: “When one feels like you’re being taken care of, you can take care of others.” The stories around care also revealed various visions and aspirations, as Cielo Holguin, a young leader, explained:

The proposal we have is having leadership schools that never disappear from the territory. A leadership school that aims for a generational relief but with a powerful strategy, where older leaders share with the younger ones, because under the guidance of the older ones, the new leaders may grow stronger. It should be a place to gather, where the knowledge and the experience of all are valued.

In Moravia, care is embodied through collective and continuous action; in fact:

The sheer act of reproducing and maintaining life stood as an act of resistance against violent power dynamics. The active will of preserving life under these circumstances, through a matriarchal social structure, engendered an increase in the political agency of the community. (Ortiz & Yepes, 2020b, p. 45)

Care is the beacon to maintain community networks throughout various displacement, eviction, and change trajectories. Care has been linked historically to defending its right to have decent housing and to remain in this self-built sector, which is mainly managed by the community.

6.4. Stories of Livelihoods and Circuits of Things

Stories about the continuities of use of a place are central when employing a living heritage approach. The teams working around livelihoods focused on how the practice of recycling moved and circulated through Moravia as a tradition of recycling that should be celebrated. A core element of challenging the stigma around recycling was to frame recyclers as essential workers whose knowledge is crucial in the fight against the climate crisis. For instance, the story of Yessid, a young male inhabitant who works as a recycler, was shared in an online interview, illustrating part of his journey with the recycling cart and expertise:

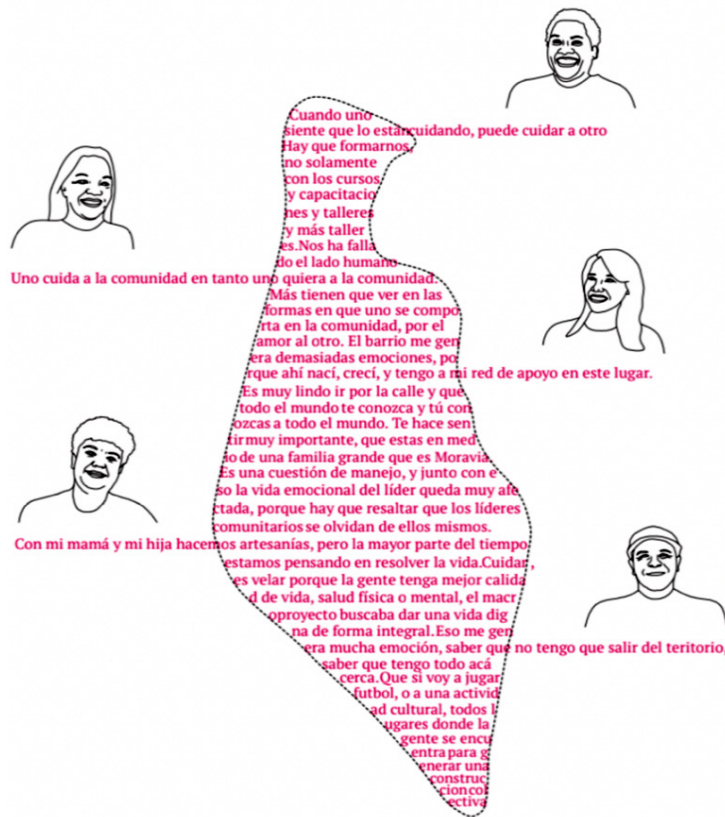


Figure 4. Moravia’s map weaved with community leaders’ stories. Source: Drawn by Care Team cohort 2020–2021 for Atlas of Living Heritage.

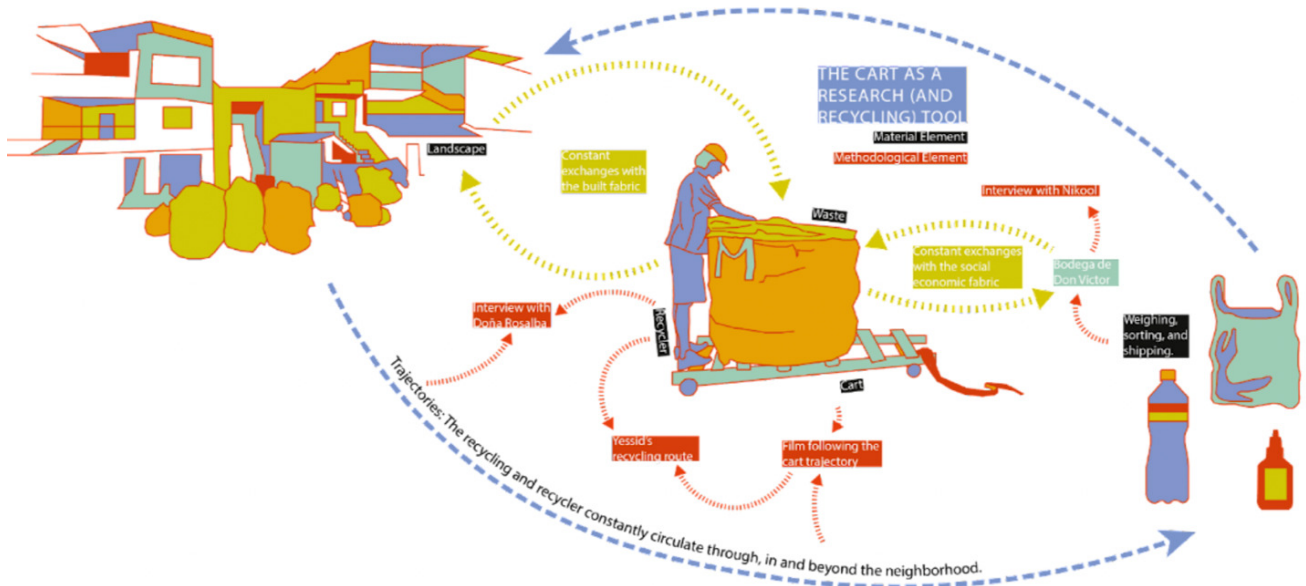


Figure 5. Circuits of recycling in Moravia. Source: Drawn by Livelihoods Team cohort 2020–2021 for Atlas of Living Heritage.

Yessid, a young man who began recycling out of necessity, continues to recycle today, and through this practice has managed to contribute to his family’s livelihood. He keeps his roller cart in the warehouse, from here he begins and ends his daily work routes, manoeuvring the roller cart he built himself. Along the way, he stops at waste collection points and occasionally stops to greet recycling co-workers and assist them, if necessary. Yessid’s knowledge ranges from the task of choosing the ideal material, designing, and building the best *carro de rodillo* to manoeuvring it and successfully transporting material in *tulas* [large bags made by joining several sacks together] around the city, to collecting, separating, and categorising the collected material.

As shown in Figure 5, The story of Yessid and his cart became a research tool to understand the trajectories and materiality of the recycling process. Along with this story, the team also gathered other stories from important local characters to understand how each of them works in tandem and represents much more than their individual selves while being equally important sources of recycling knowledge. Telling their stories is one of the starting points toward making recycling knowledge in Moravia visible in a different way. Their stories gave us insights into how recycling knowledge moves around and what role it plays in the larger network of actors across Moravia.

7. Final Reflections

This article has argued that spatial justice also needs to be addressed in tandem with cognitive justice. In doing so, planning requires decentring expertise to embrace co-creation with storytelling as a key methodology to

bridge the vast ecologies of urban knowledges. It has contributed to addressing the gaps identified in the co-creation and storytelling literature in planning.

The project Patrimonio Vivo | Living Heritage has shown two key lessons for planners in response to the following guiding question: How can we foster the radical potential of co-creation for urban planning and design using storytelling? The answer is that planning education requires pedagogical interventions to cultivate how urban stories and storytellers can contribute to foster cognitive justice. Since non-hegemonic knowledges are based on oral traditions, storytelling is an important tool for propositional thinking, driving research-based design. Urban planning and design need to find more creative ways to value the testimonial aspect of knowledge. This project demonstrated that to foster the radical potential of co-creation in shifting the narrative of stigmatized places, such as self-built neighbourhoods, there is an urgent need to centre the living heritage aspects contained in stories of care and intergenerational responsibility, stories of memories and migration, stories of solidarity and mobilization, and stories of livelihoods and circuits of things. In this way, storytelling contributes to the recognition of everyday spatial practices and the agency of dwellers in neighbourhood upgrading as a path for progressive urban planning and design.

How can urban stories and storytellers contribute to fostering cognitive justice? The answer is that the use of trans-local learning alliances frames a more egalitarian modality of co-creation. It requires engaging with the plurality of knowledge-as-intervention with partners that share similar ethical-political commitments. This approach, rather than flattening power asymmetries, allowed us to create atmospheres for “asymmetrical reciprocity” (La Caze, 2008) in the ecology of knowledges. New affective cartographies emerged among participants

despite the sensorial deprivation and digital inequalities of digital literacy and connectivity experienced in the project as explained in the description of the preparatory phase. As Gloria, a community leader, said when asked about the main learnings: “There are other ways of communicating and doing things, and that distance and language are not barriers when you want to get things done.”

The trans-local approach also was valued as crucial for learning, as Leslie, one of the younger community representatives, put it: “Inhabiting a territory does not make you know all the knowledge of the context; it is important to listen to the voices, the different visions, perspectives, and imaginaries. The external view is fundamental to make sense jointly.” In this sense, co-creation needs to be underpinned by an embodied and reflective ethics of engagement. In summary, this article has shown possible ways to foster the radical potential of co-creation for urban planning and design linked with a more radical genealogy of co-creation as a practice that stems from an aspiration to generate shared meaning and navigate transformative dialogues of the ecology of urban knowledges.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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