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METHODS FOR INTER- AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND LEARNING BASED ON PAULO FREIRE

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Walking through Time and Territory: A Proposal for Participatory Action Research based on Movement

ABSTRACT Transformative co-educational processes through multi-stakeholder collaboration require methods by means of which differences between participating actors can contribute to building common grounds. Transformative Learning Tours is a method that promotes movement in time and space, creating common grounds through the constant dialogue between collective reflection and practice, or praxis. This method of exchange of experiences is based on a peasant-to-peasant approach and the concept of movement as a means to strengthen human (and non-human) connections, by balancing the senses in the learning process. Inspired by the agroecological caravans in Brazil, the tours integrate art, music, and envisioning as important elements of action research. During this process, peasants and other community members become knowledge experts, opening spaces for more horizontal dialogues. Participants critically read the past and collectively dream about a future. This article describes the Transformative Learning Tours method and how it incorporates Freirean principles. We reflect upon the scope and limitations of this method in the specific context of the Forest Stewards Network in Xalapa, Mexico. We share the method's different stages, principles and conditions, as well as the type of facilitation and context that have enhanced this process, while positioning movement as an epistemic approach.

KEYWORDS Territory, movement, participatory action research, transformative learning, Freire

I. Introduction

It is undeniable that we face a period of multiple socio-environmental crises (alarming biodiversity loss, climate change, freshwater crisis, deep inequalities, etc.), which are mostly expressions of a capitalist system

based on the exploitation of common goods (Porto-Gonçalves 2015). The degradation of ecosystems has caused irreversible damage and places us, humans, as a species at risk (Commoner 1992). The complexity of the crises we endure involves different interlinked social, cultural, ecological and political factors, which together create adverse and unpredictable social and ecological consequences. Ludwig (2001) describes these new confronting dynamics as wicked problems. The creation of alternatives and solutions to these issues represent great challenges to our ways of creating knowledge and acting. Part of these challenges consists in the collaboration between different types of knowledge (scientific, traditional, local, spiritual wisdoms, etc.) and forms of knowledge construction based on collective *praxis* – that is, knowledge-action based research directed towards social transformation.

There is a growing call for collaborative networks from members of social organisations, movements, communities and researchers in order to co-produce knowledge and action for a better world (Jara 2020; Bradbury et al. 2019; Klein 2014). Such collaboration has taken different expressions, depending on the socio-political context in which they arise. While trans-disciplinarity aims at the co-construction of knowledge between science and society (Klein 2014; Scholz/Steiner 2015) and action research builds links between practice and ideas for human flourishing (Bradbury et al. 2019), participatory action research offers a political-epistemic approach based on reflection and action processes for the transformation of unjust conditions (Fals-Borda 1978). Although these approaches have diverse expressions and important ontological, epistemological, methodological and political differences, they share a critique of conventional research, the need to re-construct academic practices, and difficulties implied by the transformation of dominant structures.

“Regular scientists may discover ways to travel to the moon, but their priorities and personal values may not permit them to solve the knotty problems of the poor woman who has to walk each day to bring water to her home” (Fals-Borda 2001: 29). Scientific knowledge has values and limitations, which are important to recognise if we intend to create alternatives to people’s concrete problems. Science is mainly produced in universities, which operate under specific historical and geographical conditions, with their own rules, codes, languages, time frames, values and worldviews. Given those constitutive elements, academia (re)

produces power relations with other communities of practice or sectors of society (Fals-Borda 1970), maintaining or modifying certain social structures (Foucault 1980). Among the many processes that characterise these relations, there is a historical undervaluation of forms of empirical knowledge, such as rural, traditional, experience-based and spiritual wisdoms (Santos 2010). As pointed out by Epistemologies of the South, this “epistemic injustice” in relation to the pluriverse of knowledges, cosmovisions and forms of relating to nature is maintained by dominant colonial forms of knowledge creation and legitimation, contributing significantly to the multiple socio-environmental crises and injustices that we face today (Santos 2010; 2009).

In this sense, academia exerts power *over, with or for* certain actors. It is thus vitally important to recognise power dynamics within multi-actor collaboration processes and to generate methodologies and practices that allow us to transform such historically constructed asymmetrical relations (Turnhout et al. 2019). The dialogue between forms of knowledge emerges within participatory action research from the critique of academic knowledge dominance, generating processes that allow us to establish more equal grounds with different knowledge holders. The intentions to create more horizontal forms of dialogue for the co-construction of knowledge places us on a path that has not been sufficiently problematised. Here, the thinking of Paulo Freire can contribute in important ways. For Freire, research is a process of learning that emerges in *praxis*, that is, in the constant dialogue between reflection and action. Mediated by the world, *praxis* becomes a transformative process for people and their realities. This is how dualities such as education and research, theory and practice, thinking and feeling, teacher and pupils, and researcher and researched subjects, are overcome (Freire 1996b).

In this article, we will describe the Transformative Learning Tours method, a practice created for the collective construction of knowledge and action. It places practical or empirical knowledge in the centre of collective experience and is inspired by the principles of Paulo Freire. The tours were organised by members of the Forest Stewards Network of the Natural Protected Area Archipelago of Forests of Xalapa (*Red de Custodios del Área Natural Protegida Archipiélago de Bosques y Selvas de Xalapa*, in

Spanish)¹, a collaborative network of multiple actors who jointly contribute to the management of the territory. Many challenges related to transdisciplinary collaboration were identified in the network, some of which relate to the socio-political conditions of a system based on individualism and vertical structures that generate gaps and asymmetries between different social sectors and forms of life (Hensler/Merçon, 2020), corroborating previous findings (Ayala-Orozco et al. 2018). The need to integrate peasants into the co-management of the protected areas that they inhabit had long been identified by the Forest Stewards Network; however, it had not been fully achieved, mainly due to modes of organisation, language use, spaces, objectives and disagreements regarding the conversion of the territory into a Natural Protected Area, a policy that was imposed without proper public consultation (Hensler/Merçon, 2020).

The experience generated by the Transformative Learning Tours was part of a participatory action research process with the purpose of fostering collaborative practices, creating significant individual and collective learnings, as well as territorial management transformation. We, the authors, are participants and active collaborators in the Forest Stewards Network. We are also inhabitants of the territory in question, where we work as activists and action-researchers. We created, facilitated and analysed the experience of the Transformative Learning Tours in direct collaboration with a core group of participants.

The principles of participatory action research that guide this work involve (i) researchers' engagement in the corresponding collective practices towards social justice, by assuming an explicit ethic-political posture; (ii) a refusal to objectify research collaborators, aiming instead to build more horizontal relationships; (iii) the construction of a common agenda; (iv) dialogue between different types of knowledge; and (v) the construction of collective power in order to transform current unjust power structures (Fals-Borda 1978). In this article, we share a reflexive description of the Transformative Learning Tours method and experience. We also analyse the potential of this method and of some of its theoretical tenets for collaborative forms of research. We highlight movement and dialogical encounters as epistemological elements, as well as the importance of cultural identity in transformative learning processes.

2. Transformative Learning Tours

In the following sections, we present the methods that served as significant sources of inspiration for the creation of the Transformative Learning Tours. We also describe their main features, values, and phases, which are derived from a particular collective learning experience. We thus briefly present this experience and analyse its main outcomes.

2.1 Background: peasant-to-peasant exchange and visions

The Transformative Learning Tours are inspired by the peasant-to-peasant methodology (Holtz-Giménez 2006) promoted by organisations and social movements in Latin America to foster learning experiences regarding agroecological practices. Among the specific inspirations for the creation of this method are the following: Brazil's Agroecological Cultural Caravans², which use horizontal analysis to contrast different patterns of rural development in each territory and to create new ways of thinking about agroecology and life; and the Learning Tours promoted by the Andean Change Alliance (Alianza Cambio Andino 2008), based on visits to agroecological experiences that facilitate multi-sensorial learning with which to train specialists for the dialogue between local and external groups (academics, facilitators and other collaborators). Inspiration also came from academic research processes that promote the exchange of experiences with the interest of co-constructing knowledge, such as the *case-based* Mutual Learning Sessions (Ortiz et al. 2017; Vilsmaier 2015). The collective creating of knowledge through experience exchange and cultural interactions between peasants and the society at large are common features of the methods previously mentioned. Moreover, the principle of learning while walking is also an important element in the Transect Walks method (Ganuza et al. 2010). This method includes processes of “systematisation of experiences” (Jara 2020), that is, a systematic description and interpretation of lived collective experiences in order to clarify the logic of the process and create meaningful learning that has the potential to transform practices. As part of this type of process, results are constructed, organised and shared through different media, such as the participants' notebooks, dissemination leaflets and videos.

In the wider field of visions and future scenarios, *visions based on good practices* propose to start from existing experiences to inspire visions grounded in an already constructed present (Bennett et al. 2016). In this case, inspiring experiences termed ‘seeds of the Anthropocene’ take part in workshops to create images of how the world would be if local projects were applied at a wider scale. In this process, different combinations of ‘seeds’ are explored in order to learn from their ability to face diverse challenges and innovate. Radical visions are created, based on experiences that propose transformation from the roots, simultaneously showing that such transformation is possible.

2.2 Features and values

The Transformative Learning Tours are a method inspired by Paulo Freire’s principles, which link peasant-to-peasant experience exchange to the collective construction of visions based on good practices. They are a decentralised practice of collective analysis and co-creation of knowledge around different dimensions of concrete sustainability experiences. The innovation of this method consists of a combination of experiences exchange, transect walks through the territory, participatory methods of analysis, and practices to encourage collective dreaming. Finally, it fosters the creation of bonds, strategies and commitments so that the visions are truly realised. Beyond exchange practices that are defined as “socialisation processes where knowledge is shared, lessons are learned, with successes and failures of an initiative [...] to be reapplied and/or adapted in other context or situation” (PUNAM 2013: 2), the Learning Tours propose a critical reading or analysis of the territory, identifying strategies and collective actions that allow us to move towards our common dreams. The method does not aim only at the replication of good practices, but also involves the collective analysis of common elements, structural problems, absences and other factors that constitute a particular territory. The combination of journeys through inspiring experiences and the creation of visions promotes the identification of desired practices at collective and individual levels. In sum, the Transformative Learning Tours’ main goal is to jointly analyse experiences, to collectively construct knowledge, and to inspire good practices and actions aimed at transformation, creating ties between those who inhabit and defend the territory.

The main values that guide this methodological practice are the following:

- Placing experience at the centre: in this way, there is a special place for those who are the experts in each experience, most of them being peasants. This allows for significant learning to emerge from concrete practices led by a peasant-to-peasant approach.

- Generating multiple moments for exchange, cultural interaction and dialogue between experiences, and between peasants and other actors (both guided and spontaneous activities).

- Promoting collective critical bottom-up reflections and the systematisation of different dimensions of the experiences.

- Encouraging the construction of dreams, utopias and hopes, and contributing to the creation of the necessary elements to follow up on and strengthen social processes of transformation.

- Generating the conditions for more balanced power relations between the different participants.

- Encouraging movement within the territory and the exploration of different senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch), connecting the mind and the body through collective reflections in connection with nature/territory.

- Cultivating art, games and joy in order to strengthen friendships and social bonds, as a basis for transformative learning and collective actions.

2.3 Phases and methodological elements

In order to create transformative practices, a methodological tool in itself is only a small element; although, paradoxically, it often seems to be the most important one. The conditions that allow for a practice to be transformative are many and complex. This is why it is essential to carefully consider the Learning Tours' preparation and follow-up stages, and not only their implementation. During preparation, it is important to collectively analyse different aspects of the territory, defining, planning and organising the tours – to dream about the experience. In the follow-up stage, social transformations based on learning can be weaved through collective actions and social organisation – that is to say, the experience is 'rooted' in its context. The phases and methodological elements are illustrated in Figure 1.

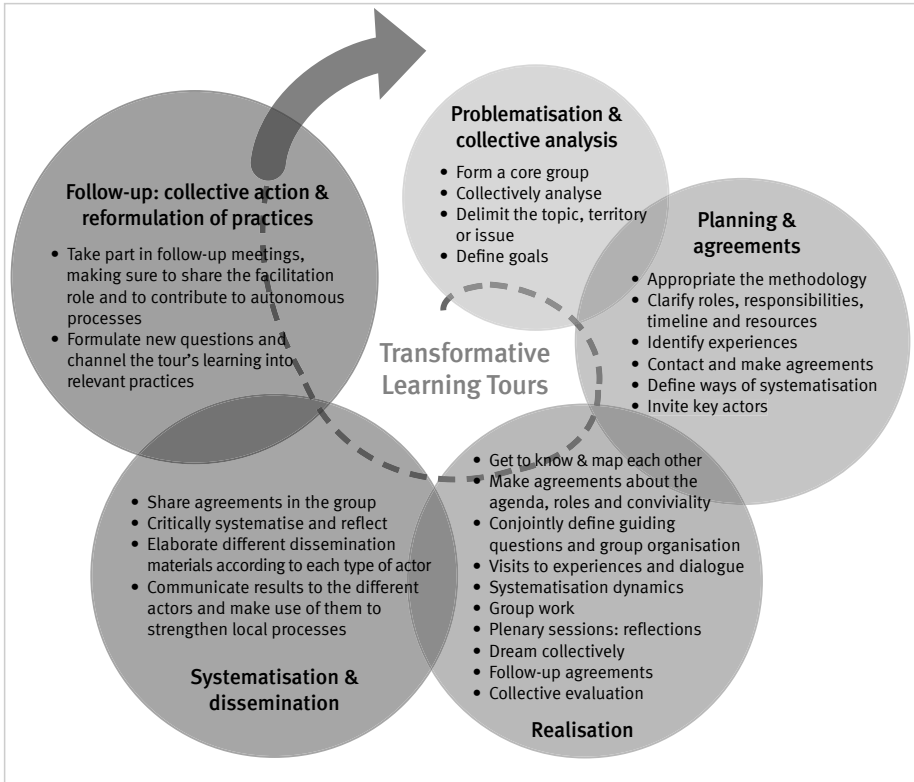


Figure 1: Phases & methodological elements of the Transformative Learning Tours
Source: own elaboration.

It is important to create a core group (Villasante 2015) in order to collectively plan, organise and facilitate the tours, as this promotes a better appropriation of the methodology and capacity to follow up. The quality of the tours relies to a great extent on the preparation phase and analysis of the territory's main issues of concern. Therefore, it is important to allow enough time for this stage and to make use of different analysis tools, such as participatory mapping, flowcharts or actor mappings (see Ganuza et al. 2010). In order to reach more balanced power relations, it is crucial to include the experience experts from early stages, to listen to their interests, and to make collective agreements.

The method's key elements are: collaborative definition of the learning objectives or the questions that guide us; facilitation of the moments and tools that allow for systematisation in the field; field trips to experiences

guided by local experts; and, towards the end, a collective analysis of the answers given to the guiding questions, an exercise to encourage shared visions, and follow-up agreements. In order to balance power relations within the groups and promote everyone's participation, it is important to generate activities that highlight each person's voice and that allow for dialogue in smaller groups before sharing in the plenary sessions. Caring for the diversity of forms of expression so that different abilities are fostered (through body, discourse, writing and games) is just as important as the previous elements. In this sense, an atmosphere of trust and joy within the group can be generated through the facilitation of integration activities with festive components that include music, poetry and other forms of expression to inspire creativity and create a sense of community.

The systematisation of experiences is a key element that takes place at different moments: before the tours, generating experience maps; in the narration of the experience and the reflections on-site; the collective analysis in the plenary sessions; the later systematisation within the core group; and the systematisation carried out by the researcher. These are all carried out by different actors and in different ways, matching different curiosities, as Freire proposes. Curiosity is a basic condition for learning: 'I can neither teach nor learn unless driven, disturbed, and forced to search by the energy that curiosity brings into my being' (Freire 2001: 80). This permanent movement to question has the capacity to make us take a step back, observe, delineate, compare, ask, and dialogue. Freire (2001) distinguishes between a spontaneous curiosity and an epistemological curiosity. The methodological rigour and critical reflection of the latter is an important difference between the two types of curiosity. Facilitation guides spontaneous curiosity into becoming epistemological. Creative tools, such as participatory photography, song writing and mind maps, can support this process. The researcher circulates between researching *with*, *for* and *about* (Freeth/Vilsmayer 2019), taking different roles and functions throughout the process.

2.4 Navigating Between the Islands of the Archipelago

With the purpose of illustrating the method and highlighting its scope and critical aspects, we now share a Transformative Learning Tour that took place as part of a workshop on Participatory Methodologies for Shared Territorial Management (*Metodologías Participativas para la Gestión*

Compartida del Territorio in Spanish), held in June 2018, in the central region of the state of Veracruz, Mexico (Hensler et al. 2019). The goal of this workshop was to strengthen the participants' capacity to know, reflect on and implement participatory methods that promote the shared management of the territory. The workshop, facilitated by the authors of this article, offered the opportunity for core groups to plan, apply and *systematise* three Transformative Learning Tours. In this way, we, the authors, together with the participants of the workshop, were able to deepen our practical knowledge around participatory methods, collective learning processes and facilitation, according to the needs that were identified.

The preparatory phase created conditions for the 20 participants i. to learn about different participatory methods through praxis, ii. to discuss their main theoretical principles, as well as iii. to collectively analyse the territory and its socio-political context in order iv. to dream about possible tours. To identify the tours, we used participatory cartography to map initiatives and alliances in the region and to form groups according to territorial or thematic interest. Three groups were formed, and each of them mapped the relevant actors, created a collaborative plan and a methodological design adapted to the context and the specific goals. At the same time, we worked on the methodological elements, getting to know different methods for the exchange of experiences and visions. In order to construct the process with the experts of the experiences, we invited them to discuss the methodology and agreed on the dynamics of the tours. During these contacts, there were different ways of accompanying the local experts (peasants and community groups) to generate a graphic representation by means of maps and start thinking about what they would like to learn from the tours.

The Transformative Learning Tours “Navigating Between the Islands of the Archipelago” were dreamed, planned and facilitated by one group with 12 people from rural communities, civil society organisations and academia, most of whom belong to the Forest Stewards Network (including the authors). The network was created in 2015 as a response to the decree of the Natural Protected Area Archipelago of Forests in the region of the capital of Veracruz, Mexico. It is comprised of around 60 active members – dwellers, interested neighbours, academics, members of civil society organisations, peasants, professionals, artists, and some representatives of

the local government. Some of the main objectives of this network are to hinder or diminish destructive urban growth, and to promote actions towards more sustainable socio-ecosystems and a higher quality of life in the region. Currently, this grassroots organisation operates as a polycentric platform, operated by commissions and core groups. Among the actions promoted by the network, there are diverse awareness and dissemination activities (tours, festivals, exhibitions and workshops), dialogues between multiple actors and citizen platforms (citizen encounters, round tables, human rights workshops), sustainable practices (demonstration plots, restoration of landscapes, solidarity economy and workshops), as well as collaborative action-research.

The objectives that guided this iteration of Transformative Learning Tours responded to the difficulties that the network has encountered in trying to connect with other inhabitants of the Natural Protected Area, particularly with peasants from the region (Hensler/Merçon, 2020). The objectives were: (1) To know more about the territory and the people who inhabit it, look after it and manage it; (2) to learn from sustainable practices of every region in order to inspire and be inspired; (3) to exchange experiences and co-construct learnings about the threats in the region and the opportunities and strategies to defend the land; and (4) to strengthen links between inhabitants of different areas and with the Forests Network. After mapping experiences and discussing objectives and criteria for selection, it was decided to carry out a tour that would last for two days, visiting eight family initiatives, cooperatives and other collectives with shared interests, among them coffee producers and horticulturists, women's groups with different productive activities, and neighbours' collectives organised to reclaim bodies of water in urban areas. The tour was self-managed and organised collectively without external funding.

With 80 participants in total, this tour created different ways to get to know and relate to the land. This was done, for example, through a map where the participants placed themselves, an integration game that used the metaphor of the islands in the sea, and a brief presentation. The questions that were defined at the beginning of the first day did not focus solely on sustainable practices but also around economic strategies; the presence of culture, traditions and art; strategies to foster participation; ties between actors in a rural-urban space; the role of children, youth and

women; threats to the land and proposals for its defence. Four locations were visited each day during the assigned timeslot of an hour and a half, which meant that it was important to support the hosts beforehand in the presentation of their experiences through a significant and viable tour for each visit. During the journey from one place to the other, we invited people to write *Son Jarocho* verses – the traditional music of the state of Veracruz. This allowed for the presence of art and inspiration to share with one another what we learned in each location. Finally, the answers to the guiding questions were analysed in groups and, in a final plenary session, we wove our reflections into our dreams for the territory, reaching some collective follow-up agreements.

After the tour, we collectively created a number of creative dissemination materials, such as a notebook, a song based on the verses written during the tour, and a video³. Besides that, semi-structured interviews were carried out in order to analyse the learnings generated in this experience. To follow up on the dreams generated during the process, three workshops were facilitated to promote the conversion of the collective agreements into action: (1) mapping ties between groups in the territory and other possible knowledge exchange activities; (2) dreaming mechanisms of a solidarity economy by analysing the existing initiatives; and (3) formulating a proposal for a solidarity economy network.

2.5 What is generated by the Transformative Learning Tours?

As an experience, each tour is a singular, unrepeatable, and transformative event that cannot be generalised (Larrosa 2006). The outcomes of experiences based on significant encounters are usually diverse and complex. The tangible and intangible results that are generated by these encounters move at different levels. From the analysed tours, we here highlight the following effects:

Learnings: transformations that emerge as participants reflect upon practices and enter into dialogue with different social realities;

Ties: networks of friendship, companionship and alliances that are created with affection and admiration for the other, communities that later facilitate exchanges between forms of knowledge and practices, mutual support in social processes and bases to strengthen the different struggles to defend and look after the territory;

Dreams and utopia: images of desirable futures that can function as horizons for orienting and motivating day-to-day action;

Collective actions: processes of social organisation that enact collective proposals and agreements;

Training in methodological tools: participants actively learn principles and methods that innovate the processes with which they are involved;

Reconstructing territories: changes in the relationship, representation and appropriation of territory by individuals and collectives; and

Collective power: the stances and recommendations which arise from the readings of the territory by its inhabitants can contribute to the construction of public policies that are more environmentally and culturally pertinent.

In order to illustrate what can be generated, we share a summary of the learning outcomes of the Transformative Learning Tours “Navigating Between the Islands of the Archipelago” in Table 1. This analysis shows that it is a valuable method for transformative learning with outreaches in values, practices, approaches, thoughts, identities and relations between humans, nature and time. In this particular tour, the importance of alternative and solidarity economies for sustainable practices was highlighted. Attentive listening allowed us to dream and formulate viable proposals, namely a Solidarity Economy Network (*Red de Economía Solidaria la Gira* in Spanish), which today connects 80 consumers and 25 groups of producers (Hensler et al. 2020)⁴. This tour was collectively singled out in the Forest Network’s timeline as ground-breaking for the transformations it promoted in terms of diverse participation, objectives, and activities. Participants also acknowledge how the transformative learning tours prioritise movement as a principle that can be integrated into future experiences.

3. Discussion

In this section, we discuss how the Transformative Learning Tours incorporate principles of Paulo Freire’s theory, as well as the role movement plays in this method. In this sense, we explore the possibility of thinking of an epistemology of movement. Moreover, we present a brief discussion on how appropriate this method is for collaborative research.

Type of learning	The Transformative Learning Tours' participants share their voices*
Overcoming barriers to change	"I learned about Yola's experience because she gives herself the time to grow all kinds of plants. I told my children that we have to work harder as I have seen that it is possible." Maria, peasant
	"What we experienced in the tour helped us to clarify our path, that some of the things we are doing are not contributing to our goals, they are nonsense; I want to spend more time working with local communities." Juan, member of civil society organization
(Re-)value one's place and reflect on the practices and ends in life	"I wanted to live in the city, but after the tour, I feel and value more where I live, here at the ranch, it feels beautiful. I enjoy that I don't need to have money." Guadalupe, peasant
	"We realize what things we do well, what things we do wrong. It helps us in many ways and it is a protection of the territory that strengthens us." Silvia, researcher
Value and enjoy collective action and collaborative work	"We enjoyed a collective action that you do not have to suffer because of your work or learning process (...). And trust again that collective processes can be built from companionship, solidarity, joy." Ana, researcher
	"I recognized that we do not use what we have very well. (...) We saw that the women's group is well organized (...). All that is new to me, it impresses me." Pedro, peasant
Related to time (rhythms and different forms)	"(...) It reinforced this question of taking care of the strategy and rhythm required for this type of participatory work; there are times to be slow and times to be fast, it is good not to pounce all the time." Andrés, researcher
	"The tours reaffirm that collective time is totally different. It contributes to my deceleration process." Elsa, artist and student
Experiential ways of learning through joy, senses & feelings	"Sharing food is super deep, it is about knowledge, how it is prepared in each place, enjoyment, flavors, we are tasting the flavors of the forest, which are pleasantly shared." Cecilia, researcher
	"I see that people enjoy the tour. You do not have to go to a meeting, sit and listen, it is a fun activity; at the same time educational, it involves learning in many levels and will stay forever." Elizabeth, professional
Know, analyze and engage with the territory	"I identified the need to link more actors in each project, I feel that the ones we saw are still alone. It opens doors to possibilities of change." Antonio, member of civil society organization
	"I did not know the people who inhabit these areas. It is very important that we get together, that we get to know the problems, but also the solutions people are realizing; exploring the territory gives you a lot, it sensitizes you. You understand why people are doing what they do." Martha, researcher
Belonging and collective identity	"Through the tours we can identify ourselves with this movement against the flow and do not feel alone anymore. I felt a common body even though we are separated, that was what I liked most." Alejandra, peasant
	"You can make a popular resistance, it's like we've joined forces and continued weaving. It also opened the desire to weave our threads with other groups, see how to fraternize, to live together." Inés, member of civil society organization
Philosophy of life and relationship with nature	"The most valuable thing for me was to understand conflict as something that has a lot of possibilities, it makes me cry. See the living examples, it has a lot of cavities, it's so colorful." Elsa, artist and student
	"I could feel the connection and feel that I am part of nature; that changes the inertia you are used to, because it makes you look at things differently." Alicia, researcher
Revalue diversity and recognize its potential	"The tour allowed me to experience the power of a multi-actor formative space. The challenge of using the academic space to deactivate in ways, times, wherever possible; we need to change." Luz, researcher
	"Before the tours, my vision was: I studied, I own the information and know what has to be done, but it is not true; not everyone sees a problem in the same way. We have to listen to achieve something." Lucía, student
Sustainable practices and solutions	"I learned about water, to be very careful not to pollute it." Ruben, peasant
	"It gives us the opportunity to exchange things. This is what happened, we handled it this way, and maybe someone tells you something you had not even thought about, even with 20 years of experience." Alberto, member civil society organization

Table 1: Results of the Transformative Learning Tour "Navigating Between the Islands of the Archipelago"

Source: Analysis of 15 interviews, 2 evaluation forms, a session of collective analysis using photographs with the organisers of the tour, a timeline workshop and participant observation. *Fictitious names

3.1 Paulo Freire and the epistemology of movement

The Transformative Learning Tours method, conceived as a proposal and experience, encompasses significant relationships with the thinking of Paulo Freire. Some of these connections were mentioned above, but here we further explore them through the following principles:

- The centrality of experience: The knowledge associated with the participants' experiences is the basis for the learnings generated in the tours. As with the "culture circles" created by Freire (1970), knowledge built through real life experiences – or the "corporified word" (Freire 1996a) – is central for the exchanges, while abstract knowledge loses prominence. Likewise, the role of the expert is not limited to a single person, since everyone teaches and learns. The Transformative Learning Tours themselves constitute collective experiences from which new world readings, new critical knowledge and potential transformations arise.

- The transformative *praxis*: The tours are part of broader collective processes with a previous history and a follow-up. The integration of spirals between reflection and action into broader processes strengthens the capacity for critical learning and collective transformation. This transforming or liberating potential of *praxis* is based, according to Freire (1970), on criticism, commitment, solidarity and dialogue.

- Dialogue as a driver for change: For Freire (1970: 71), "dialogue is the encounter that grounds reflection and action". Therefore, teaching and learning for autonomy and transformation require a disposition for dialogue. Critical and liberating dialogue depends both on deep listening, which positions the other as a knowing, historical and transformative subject, and on the shared word based on experience, curiosity and commitment to change. Dialogue is the basis that defines and guides the tours in all stages, from the initial problematisation and planning to the realisation, systematisation and follow-up.

- Recognition of cultural identity: The Transformative Learning Tours promote dialogue through different forms of expression, including artistic and cultural manifestations of the participants. By promoting creative and critical thinking in connection with local culture, this methodological proposal fosters conditions for people to assume themselves as thinking and communicating beings, creators and transformers of their own socio-historical and cultural reality. Freire (1996a) considers this recognition of

cultural identity a key aspect of liberating educational practices and the beautification of the world.

- Curiosity and research: In dialogical education processes, naive curiosity becomes critical curiosity through rigorous thinking and research. This type of process contains, for Freire (1996a), the greatest potential for generating autonomy and social transformation. In the tours, everyone's curiosity is nurtured through the construction of generative themes, guiding questions and the constant inquiry into topics of collective interest. The systematisation of experiences constitutes a method for organising reflections and investigating them collectively, strengthening learning and the power of social change.

Paulo Freire (1998) was called 'the rambler of utopia' (*o andarilho da utopia* in Portuguese). His life and work inspire us to move reflectively and actively towards a better world. With this inspiration in mind, we explore possible relations between knowledge and movement, as we experienced them through the Transformative Learning Tours. This method allows us to renew our views on Freire's principles and establish novel theoretical articulations between knowledge and movement.

Movement as an epistemic element has not been widely considered in the literature, even though it has a significant presence in non-formal education, in rural communities and social movements (Rockwell 2012). "Just walk, walk questioning and asking" is Freire's advice (quoted in Walsh 2014), a thought that resonates in the worldview of the Zapatista indigenous communities with their 'walk questioning' philosophy. Movement, as an epistemological component, is as old as the experience of the peripatetic philosophers in Ancient Greece. Among its contemporary roots, are the ideas around nomad science developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1992). These authors propose an itinerant and wandering epistemology based on a type of thinking that seeks singularities, the unique and the subjective, rather than generalised rules. The authors highlight the great transformative capacity of movement, because it challenges the fixed dominant order of languages, discourses and perspectives that explain our world. Furthermore, movement can inspire stories, concepts, and alternative explanations of the *status quo* (Deleuze/ Guattari 1992).

Through the Transformative Learning Tours, we realised that movement gives rise to more pronounced senses and feelings, connections between the cognitive, corporal and emotional, which are not valued in formal education due to the assumption that the senses hinder rationality and destabilise authority (Martín-Barbero 2003). This integral experience also plays an important role in reinforcing practices of care towards nature (Gioacchino 2019). Looking, smelling, tasting, listening, touching and feeling allow us to further know the complexity of an experience. By walking on a particular territory, we place our body, and connect and engage with ourselves, with our experiences and problems. As one participant states: “It is very clear to me, that all this collective learning is very valuable and deep, because it is full of playfulness, food, sharing of walks, places”.

Movement in a learning process allows for a very lively presence of the world. Aspects that are not usually considered in theory and that cannot be ignored by one’s body are acknowledged and incorporated into *praxis*. What Freire (1970) names “mediated by the world” becomes literal and we can even think of a pedagogy that is generated in dialogue, not only with the people who inhabit a place, but together with nature and territory. It can be thought of as a radically different way of constituting a pedagogy that “is not centered on the human but based on the interrelation of all dimensions of nature, of which humans are only a part”, as practised by many indigenous peoples (Walsh 2014: 20). When moving, there is a different rhythm and connection with the body and the environment, as one participant mentions: “We were all slowing down and feeling the connection, (feeling) that we are part of nature. This makes you see the crisis we endure differently; if you slow down, you can see it with all its potential”.

In this sense, knowledge is shifted from the desk and classroom to a place of movement, also shifting organisational dynamics, daily practices, failures and experiences. As an elder peasant mentions: “I was surprised to understand that we were doing research”. He then explained that he has always had the desire to study and thought that schools and universities were the only places of knowledge. What enhances collective learning in the tours is the connection of movement with tools of collective analysis. It is a practice that favours a complex analysis of the territory more than an in depth understanding of isolated cases or aspects. Other experiences

become mirrors by means of which values are reconfigured, as another participant indicates: “I was able to redimension what coexists in this protected area, the value of ecosystems, the magnitude and value of people with their ways of relating to the environment”.

Moving collectively through a territory becomes an experience of construction of friendships and ties that go beyond the experience itself, generating the desire to be connected and collaborate beyond. In the words of another participant: “It is about identifying ourselves in a common movement against-the-flow and not feeling alone anymore. In general, there were many ephemeral moments, which suddenly lit like fireflies, and we felt a common body even though we are all separated”. The Transformative Learning Tours in this sense are encounters in movement, through dialogue held with trust and affection.

Since movement is always in construction, it represents a fertile space for dreams and utopias. “The nomad is not in the past or present, but in the becoming” (Gaggiotti et al. 2015: 6); thus, nomadic practices are ingenious, creative, open and imaginative ways of knowing. The tours were full of spontaneous dreams and proposals, such as what occurred when we were surprised by rain in a coffee plantation and took refuge in some rooftops, taking advantage of the situation to share food and collectively dream of building economic ties based on solidarity. Accompanied by organised people who can act upon dreams, these utopian thoughts can become truly attainable.

Finally, Braidotti (2006) invites us to think that movement can be an existential condition of the human being, perhaps similarly to the “vocation of being more” that Freire proposes. This is so because movement brings different knowledge holders and forms of life into a common ground, and while it excites, entertains and seduces us, we are co-constructing significant knowledge. In this sense, we can think of movement as a key aspect of an epistemology of nomad science, social movements and those who ask while walking.

3.2 Potentials and limitations of the method in collaborative research

The potentials of the Transformative Learning Tours include the co-construction of learning between actors, the transformation of power relations, the participation of all actors as researchers, and the participa-

tion of academic researchers in social change processes, among others. The particularity of movement as an epistemological element generates learning that is connected to a specific territory, problematising the present and announcing a future to be built. The social fabric that is woven by the tours contributes to new knowledge that goes hand in hand with changes in practices, power relations and future policies. In this way, it contributes to merging research, education and action, as proposed by Freire (1996a), with the potential of promoting significant individual, collective and territorial transformations, towards a more just and sustainable world.

At the same time, the characteristics of the tours as a method based on movement, experiences and encounters, imply various limitations as a tool for collaborative research approaches. The experience itself depends on the commitment of the facilitators-researchers to a broader socio-political process and their opportunities to collaborate from planning and implementation, to systematisation and follow-up activities. Rather than facilitating a specific research method, it is about sensitively engaging with a group and opening spaces for dialogical encounters. Contributing to “building the common from differences” (Merçon et al. 2018: 12) requires a political position that explicitly seeks to balance voices and powers. The potential of the tours is also limited to the capabilities of the researcher or the facilitation team, since the link between research-education-action implies a diversity of parallel roles and activities. It is thus advisable that one is already involved in collaborative processes in order to generate strategies for the implementation of the methodology.

It is important to clarify that the tours do not constitute a method to deepen our knowledge of a specific disciplinary theme. Instead, they are meant to open up new questions and the amplitude of what can be known, connecting different perspectives, elements and dimensions, while interconnecting themes through different stages. Moreover, it is impossible to control the process, the register of all happenings and the research conditions, what makes it a type of research *in vivo* (Nicolescu 2008). In this sense, the method is limited by the disposition of those who implement it to collectively construct the research questions and to be guided by the curiosities and problems defined by all participants. Besides, the method is not suitable for the dissemination of abstract scientific knowledge, as this would reaffirm unjust power relations and not allow more inclusive

dialogue. A peasant woman compared the learning tours with other field trips: “This time it was different because we could express what we like and what should be changed; we learned a lot. In similar visits, there were people who felt very different from us; if you have studied, you are more important, and if not, they ignore you. Here, we felt confident, our voice was important.”

In our specific experience, we faced difficulties in sharing the role of facilitation, achieving joint agreements on the planning, and communicating with some of the peasant families who live in remote areas. Moreover, some participants perceived that there was some ‘rushing’ between activities, what could indicate the reproduction of power relations, since the relationship with time is different in rural areas. Collaboration always implies a great number of challenges, thus constituting a great learning opportunity for all participants.

4. To keep moving: concluding remarks

The Transformative Learning Tours method is inspired by the principles of Paulo Freire in a creative and innovative form. It contributes to a highly experience-based and situated knowledge co-construction, where all participants define together the learning objectives, and culturally sensitive forms of communication and art are implemented. Moving in the field opens multiple opportunities for encounters and for positioning the experiences of local initiatives and communities in the center. *Praxis*, the dialogical reflection on action, is key here as it may contribute to significant changes in participation and legitimation in knowledge co-construction. Movement as an epistemic element can contribute to creating more horizontal relationships and to dislocate learning from institutionalised spaces. In this sense, the Transformative Learning Tours is a practice that challenges dominant forms of research, counteracting epistemic injustices and creating reflexive and active networks. Its potential is mainly situated in participatory action research, action research or transdisciplinary research with a collaborative, critical and creative approach.

The relationship between research, action and learning is not sufficiently considered in collaborative research, as the dominant approaches

tend to separate these aspects and limit the role of researchers to the co-construction of knowledge. It is important to critically acknowledge the presence of power relations in every social process, with special attention to how they are manifested through the institutionalised behaviour of researchers. We, as researchers, can use the socially constructed power relations in order to transform them; by sharing important roles and decisions about forms and content, as well as through the creation of disruptive settings where different voices and ideas can emerge.

In the case of the Transformative Learning Tours held in Xalapa, Mexico, this transformative potential was higher than expected, with significant outcomes in terms of knowledge co-construction, as well as in terms of territorial changes led by strengthened community relations, social processes and collective power. This potential depends, however, on how the method is implemented, as well as the collective capacity to realise the proposals that emerge from it. In this sense, not all the tours had significant transformative effects over the participants and their territories, even though they were generally perceived as highly positive.

To keep moving, we invite you to think of methodologies as inspirations for experiences that are not generated by a series of stages and steps, but by people linked to social groups and territories. Methodologies in this sense do not exist in any immutable or absolute way, but depend on the subjectivities that rebuild them. Therefore, one can always be inspired, adapt and innovate, generating experiences that are sensitive to specific socio-cultural contexts. From this understanding of methods, we reaffirm that, in order to effectively respond to the multiple injustices and socio-environmental crises that we face, it is essential to change our ways of relating to knowledge, to each other and to the place we inhabit. Changes in how we engage with people and the land correspond to changes in how we create knowledge, actions, and the very world we live in.

- 1 For more information about the Forest Stewards Network, see www.custodiosanpxalapa.org and www.facebook.com/custodiosdelarchipielaigo (in Spanish)
- 2 <https://agroecologiasudeste.wordpress.com> (in Portuguese)
- 3 The dissemination materials of the Transformative Learning Tour can be consulted here: <https://youtu.be/-7jydrzGHxk>; https://issuu.com/reddecustodios/docs/cuadernillo_gira_rdc_digital (in Spanish)
- 4 For more information on the Solidarity Economy Network: <http://custodiosanpxalapa.org/nuestras-actividades/economia-solidaria>

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ABSTRACT Transformative koedukative Prozesse durch Multi-Stakeholder-Zusammenarbeit erfordern Methoden, mit denen Unterschiede zwischen den beteiligten Akteuren zur Bildung von gemeinsamen Grundlagen genutzt werden können. Transformative Learning Tours ist eine Methode, die eine Bewegung in Zeit und Raum fördert und durch den ständigen Dialog zwischen kollektiver Reflexion und Praxis, gemeinsame Grundlagen schafft. Diese Methode des Erfahrungsaustauschs basiert auf einem ‚campesino a campesino‘-Prinzip und dem Konzept der Bewegung als Mittel zur Stärkung menschlicher (und nicht-menschlicher) Verbundenheit, indem die Sinne im Lernprozess ins Gleichgewicht gebracht werden. Die Touren sind von den agroökologischen Karawanen in Brasilien inspiriert und integrieren Kunst, Musik und Imagination als wichtige Elemente der Aktionsforschung. Während dieses Prozesses werden Bauern und andere Angehörige der Gemeinschaft zu ExpertInnen, sodass Räume für mehr horizontale Dialoge entstehen. Die Teilnehmer stellen sich einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit und denken gemeinsam über eine Zukunft nach.

Dieser Artikel beschreibt die Methode der Transformative Learning Tours und wie sie freireanische Prinzipien einbezieht. Wir reflektieren die Reichweite und die Grenzen dieser Methode im spezifischen Kontext des Forest Stewards Network in Xalapa, Mexiko. Wir berichten über die verschiedenen Phasen, die Grundlagen und Bedingungen sowie über die Art der Durchführung und den Kontext der Methode, die den Prozess begünstigten, und verorten Bewegung als einen erkenntnistheoretischen Ansatz.

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