From people's experience: cultural participation in the arts organisation, Faro de Oriente in Mexico City

Desde la experiencia de la gente: participación cultural en la organización de arte Faro de Oriente en la Ciudad de México

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*Abstract***:** This paper presents the findings of an ethnographic research in the arts organisation, Faro de Oriente. The aim is to understand the distinctions between public cultural policy and ordinary practice in the organisation. Ethnographic research was conducted for 11 months (2011-2012), including participant observation, semi-structured interviews and archival research. This paper argues that while policy makers have configured arts education in an instrumental way, ethnographic research shows disjunctions and negotiations. Participants' motives for undertaking arts practices and their social relations, challenges the expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education. These motives and social relations emerge in a context of inequalities in Mexico City. This paper contributes to understanding the relationships that emerge outside institutional contexts and the reasons for this. It adds knowledge to understanding how public cultural policy plays out on the ground by examining people's sociocultural context and their ordinary relations in an arts organisation.

*Keywords***:** cultural policy, participation, arts education, ethnography.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación etnográfica en la organización de arte Faro de Oriente. El objetivo es entender las distinciones entre política pública cultural y las prácticas ordinarias de la gente. Se realizó investigación etnográfica por 11 meses (2011-2012), incluyendo observación participante, entrevistas semiestructuradas e investigación de archivo. Este artículo argumenta que mientras se ha configurado la educación artística de forma instrumental, la investigación etnográfica muestra disyuntivas y negociaciones. Los motivos de los participantes para realizar prácticas artísticas y sus relaciones retan las expectativas institucionales de educación artística. Estos motivos y relaciones emergen en un contexto de desigualdad en la Ciudad de México. Este artículo contribuye a entender las relaciones que emergen fuera de contextos institucionales y las razones de esto. Agrega conocimiento sobre cómo una política pública cultural se desarrolla en la práctica, priorizando el contexto sociocultural de la gente y sus relaciones en la organización de arte.

Palabras clave: política cultural, participación, educación artística, etnografía.

Introduction[1]

For many years, international cultural policy has emphasised that arts education and creativity promote human development. For example, in 1999 members of UNESCO deployed a policy promoting "arts education" and "creativity" in schools. The justification was the recognition of creativity in "shaping" and in "maintaining" young people's emotions and "harmonious" behaviour (Records of the General Conference, 2000, p. 69). According to the Records of the General Conference (2000) in a context of changing societies, children and young people could face "adverse" effects. In response, the report emphasises the role of schools in encouraging creativity through the arts. In the UNESCO's website, arts education is being promoted as a learning process, stressing cultural diversity and contributing to "engender understanding of the importance of cultural diversity and reinforce behaviour patterns underlying social cohesion" (paragraph 3 line 3). This perspective seems in line with public cultural policy in the United Kingdom, where political expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education are intended to produce social change (Baker and Homan, 2007; Belfiore, 2002; Rhodes and Schechter, 2014). In Latin America, the Latin-American Art Network for Social Transformation, comprising grass roots organisations from various countries, promotes art and culture. Under the notion "art and social transformation", the network seeks to produce "transformation" in citizenship, social integration and inequalities through the work of organisations in communities facing inequalities, exclusion and lack of social participation (Berger, Jones and Browne, 2008). The report, Red Latinoamericana Arte para la Transformación Social (2008), examines the

social contribution of the arts in citizenship, local development and education, health and participation. The report makes strong claims for the contribution of community arts towards social change, particularly in deprived communities. Both in the United Kingdom and Latin American initiatives of arts education is configured as a strategy to produce social impact, and much emphasis has been placed on community arts programmes. Under such an international framework, where the state-organised culture can be described as romantic and instrumental, the case study is aligned.

This paper is based on a case study of public cultural policy implemented in the arts organisation, Faro de Oriente, in Mexico City by the leftist government of Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). I examined policy makers and cultural administrators' expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education and its everyday practice at the arts organisation.

The findings suggest that while policy makers and cultural administrators have configured arts education to "improve" people living in social disadvantage, ethnographic research shows distinctions. Participants' social relations -characterised by solidarity networks- and participants' motives for taking part in arts practices challenge the expectations and desired outcomes of arts education.

These findings contribute to understand that people's social relations and their motives encourage their engagement with arts education; and social relations are reinforced through everyday practice at the organisation. Thus, arts education expectations and outcomes are limited compared to the experience of people. Therefore, if people's stories, agendas and relations were to be considered in policymaking, arts education could be deployed in a less instrumental way, and in dialogue with people.

'Arts education' in the context of public policy.

In the context of public cultural policy, an optimistic perspective of arts education claims that it produces a positive social impact, particularly for people living in social disadvantage and who are at risk. It has been pointed out that community arts programmes produces positive psychological impact among youth offenders (Baker and Homan, 2007); promote wellbeing and social capital (Atkinson and White, 2013; Jensen, 2013;) and that community activities in arts centres foster "resilience" and "can help reduce youths' exposure to violence, drug abuse, gang activity or other stressors found in the inner-city streets" (Rhodes and Schechter, 2014, p. 827).

Criticisms of such perspectives highlight that the state-organised culture is characterised by its instrumentality and the emphasis of the powers of the arts for the socially excluded (Belfiore, 2002; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007). It has also been argued that governmental arts programmes have a "therapeutic role" to 'improve' young people (Mirza, 2005); arts practices are "technologies of creative citizenship" (Grundy and Boudreau, 2008 p. 347) and that arts programmes describe young people in "need of control from the state" (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 21).

Situating her analysis in the 1990s, when New Labour deployed public cultural policy seeking to tackle social exclusion and promoting inclusion through the arts, Bishop (2012) argues that such rhetoric masks inequalities. Combating social exclusion through arts and culture echoes neoliberal agendas, where attention is paid to those whose behaviour needs to be corrected and to be 'included' in society e.g. the reduction of anti-social behaviour, drug consumption, and adolescent pregnancy. This resonates with Levitas, who argues that the political rhetoric on exclusion presents the "socially excluded as culturally distinct from the mainstream" (1998, p. 21). Furthermore, for Bishop (2012,

p.38) a hierarchy between "active" and "passive" people is marked within the social inclusion policy context. For example, policy makers and cultural administrators are those who produce and understand the arts, meanwhile the poor are those that should be engaged with the arts "physically" rather than, for example, critical reflections about the world they live in (Bishop, 2012, p. 38). In this sense, Bishop warns about the possible risks of such rhetoric for people living in social disadvantage, such as stigma.

This literature points out that the state-organised culture configures a perspective of arts education as a body of strategies to improve people, encouraging their human transformation. Furthermore, this reading is problematic because much of the responsibility is placed on individuals in a context where neoliberal agendas propagate individualisation and the privatisation of public services (Hickey-Moody, 2013 see also Yudice, 2003). Another point is that a hierarchical view is constructed by policy makers and cultural administrators who assume that arts and culture lift people who are in need of attention. Miles and Gibson (2016) highlight a logic of discrimination in policies seeking to give access to arts and culture:

> policies that prioritised access to culture in the name of reducing social exclusion were at same time part of a process of discrimination, marking out and marginalising those people and places that did not associate themselves with established culture as passive, isolated and in need of (remedial) attention (p. 151).

Inspired by the above arguments, policy makers' expectations and desirable outcomes on arts education are characterised by being instrumental and part of a process of discrimination. This is because people are seen as vulnerable, and through arts education and creativity, people are expected to improve, particularly those in a position of social disadvantage (Jaramillo-Vázquez, 2016; 2018). The next section examines how the local

government has configured arts education. Attention is paid on the expectations and desirable outcomes.

Arts education in Mexico: a national project of social transformation

Arts education in Mexico has been part of a national project intending to modify people's behaviour and values. Politicians and writers' expectations have sought to tackle people's "ignorance" and "barbarism" through "culture", or rather, the state-organised culture. Arts education is then infused with ideals of social transformation, though such ideals are questionable not only in the light of a thorough examination, but also in examining such ideals on the ground, i.e. people's motives for joining in a cultural project, as well as their social relations and practices. In the case of public cultural policy, its expectations and outcomes echo the arts education project launched soon after the Mexican Revolution.

In 1921, José Vasconcelos took on the directorship of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). Initiating an ambitious governmental cultural project, Vasconcelos intended to "redeem the indigenous for their barbarism" (Nivón-Bolán, 2006, p. 34-35; Rubio, 1978 p. 165) and to unify a national identity (García-Canclini, 2004, Coffey, 2012) through arts, reading activities and educational projects. Vasconcelos supported his arts education project so that indigenous population and lower social classes could leave behind their "limitations" in opposition to "enlightenment ideals" (Nivón-Bolán, 2006, p. 35). Open-air painting schools, support to painters for their works including murals in the streets and musicians, were some projects that Vasconcelos boosted. Vasconcelos's arts education project was not undermined by cultural administrators and policy makers.

In 1997 the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) came to power in Mexico

City, prompting changes in the city, including tackling inequalities and democratic processes for all. For Mexico City inhabitants, the PRD government was a significant event because they hoped that the repression and dictatorship imposed by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Revolutionary Institutional Party) (PRI) would come to an end in the city -and the country-. In order to tackle such situations and show the changes of the government, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas governmental team included writers, academics and representatives of civil organisations who were critical of the repression of the PRI governments. An example of this is the public cultural policy launched in 1997. Directed by Alejandro Aura, the Instituto de Cultura de la Ciudad de México (Institute for Culture of Mexico City) (ICCM) launched an arts education policy that aimed to emancipate and give access to arts and culture amongst people living in social disadvantage. The policy goals sought to open arts and cultural institutions and services in deprived areas of Mexico City and to promote "respect", "tolerance" and to overcome "social problems" among citizens (Rosas-Mantecón and Nivón-Bolán, 2006, p. 62). The ICCM created 12 projects, all of them related to promoting art and culture, including theatre and cinema activities, street music concerts, dance and poetry, painting activities on streets, financial support of music organisations.

The ICCM opened a community arts organisation in a deprived area in the East of Mexico City in 2000, promoting access to arts and culture to local people. Although the organisation was initially considered to be for young people, in practice, children, young people and adults have visited it and joined in with workshops and arts projects. Because of the impact of the organisation amongst people and the interest in maintaining access to arts and culture to socially disadvantaged groups, subsequent leftist governments opened three more community arts organisations in deprived areas of Mexico City.

For cultural administrators, workshops and arts projects were fundamental activities in the organisations because they would contribute to fulfilling certain expectations, including to "increase people's cultural criteria" and to "make up new publics" (Aura 2006, p.19; 2002, p. 286). My examination of policy documents shows this.

The Programa de Fomento y Desarrollo Cultural del Distrito Federal 2004 (PFDCDF, 2004) says that the "formación artística" (artistic formation) should contribute to "new life expectations", "tackle individual and social undesirable behaviour" and "make up publics" (PFDCDF 2004, p. 116). It describes how workshops and non-professional arts courses would be implemented in deprived areas of Mexico City (PFDCDF, 2004). The Programa General de Desarrollo del Distrito Federal 2007-2012 (PGDDF, 2007-2012) states that arts education and creativity contribute to the development of individuals and their communities and promote "access" to the state organised culture (PGDDF, 2007-2012, pp. 51-55). Likewise, the Programa de Fomento y Desarrollo Cultural del Distrito Federal 2014 (PFDCDF, 2014) highlights that arts organisations situated in disadvantaged areas of the city should offer a model of non-formal education conceived as arts education. This type of arts education is part of the teaching-learning processes which aim to promote "creativity" and "innovation" (PFDCDF, 2014, p. 29-30) and as something that "reduces anti-social behaviour" (PFDCDF, 2014, p. 31).

These expectations show that arts education is a strategy of intervention to do something "good" for people in position of social disadvantage. In line with these expectations, the Faro de Oriente documents echo such policy documents. The Documento Marco justifies the creation of Faro de Oriente as follows:

> this project will be a space for the young people's culture. [By creating the organisation] an oasis will be created: a place for art and beauty within a city

zone threatened by crime and violence; a cultural service for a large zone of housing development and precarious buildings. Very far from the biggest cultural centres located in the South and Centre of the city, a space will be made for young people's creative encounters and exchange of their experiences; for the exercise of tolerance and free time use with imagination and fun (ICCM, 1999, p. 13).

Likewise, people were described as living in situations of "under-development" and facing "unemployment", "illegal jobs", "malnutrition", "illiteracy", "dropping out", "familial disintegration and deprivation" and "high social backwardness" (ICCM, 1999, pp. 14-16). These adjectives were reinforced in the statements of some staff members: "in the middle of barbarism, culture would be a thread for the social fabric and it can contribute to the making up of rules and high habits for coexistence" (González, 2003, p. 47).

The meanings attributed to arts and culture, the geographical area and its residents are problematic because a hierarchy is created by defining arts education as an instrument making something good for the, so to speak, vulnerable people. One of the risks of such meanings is that it constructs a negative social image for people experiencing social disadvantages and denies the "complexities of people's lives" (Fraser, 2000, p. 112) including their stories, struggles and agendas. Fraser (2000) argues that despite political intentions to give recognition to culturally diverse societies, "the problem of reification" refers to a lack of promoting "respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts, but to [instead] drastically simplify and reify group identities" (Fraser, 2000, p. 108). Because public cultural policy overstates arts education as a means to modify individuals' behaviour, an examination of cultural policy and practice is fundamental. Examination of cultural policy on the ground is a bottom-up orientation where people's experience is at the foreground of research. If people's experience is the focus of attention, arts-practice would be examined from the circumstances, social relations and motives

through which people engage with arts-practice. Research that take place on the ground, i.e. from ethnographic research, illuminates the misconceptions of policy makers when formulating policy, as well as the negotiations of people participating with the state organised-culture.

From evaluation to research: public 'cultural' policy on the ground.

Community arts projects, concerning arts education and creativity, have had significant value for governments. Both in Mexico and in the United Kingdom, these initiatives are part of policy agendas. In the case of the UK, since the 1990s (Oliver, 2009; Bishop, 2012) public funding has been addressed to evaluate the social impact of the arts in health, education and social inclusion. Numerous reports have highlighted the "benefits" of the arts on the people (e.g. Matarasso, 1997; Adamson, Fyfe and Byrne, 2008; The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society; 2014), partly because this entails public funding. However, various criticisms have been addressed. On the one hand, it has been said that more quantitative methodologies have been used in search of evidence than qualitative (Miles, 2013; Sanderson, 2000; Walmsley, 2012, 2018). On the other hand, criticisms have highlighted a "causation" research model (Galloway, 2009 p. 127) in which the arts have a cause and effect on the people; and the "rationalist model" (Sanderson, 2000) focusing on whether policy goals have been achieved, using quantitative methodologies. Rational-oriented evaluations are top-down studies evaluating if policy expectations and desirable outcomes have been fulfilled in practice, and if these satisfy political agendas. This approach relies on control and hierarchy because the emphasis is on finding evidence of arts and culture and their benefits for the people.

In the case of Mexico, research examining cultural policy have been developed through García-Canclini and collaborators' works ([1989] 2004, 1991, 1998, 2008) and Rosas-Mantecón (2005, 2007, 2008). These works are empirical research that examine the relationship between publics and the state organised culture in festivals, museums and significant museum exhibitions. However, the importance of more evaluations and studies to understand the state-organised culture and publics has been addressed in recent years (Escobar, 2015; González, 2014; Ortega, 2015). Previous research that examines people's participation within state-organised culture has mostly applied quantitative methodologies and methods instead of qualitative methodologies (see for example the Encuesta Nacional de Hábitos, Prácticas y Consumos Culturales, 2010). While these reports show trends about the cultural activities of people, they say little about the context, relations and motives related to the arts experiences. In this respect, my point is to include more qualitative research illuminating such aspects.

Alternative research models and their inherent questions, rather than examining whether the arts produce social impact or whether a cultural programme is being well designed, instead concentrate on the processes and relations of participatory arts (Galloway, 2009; Oliver, 2009; Walmsley, 2018). This entails to think about theories and questions for rethinking the relations of people with the state-organised arts. Galloway directs our attention to "what types of research approach are best suited to investigating the social effects of the arts?" (2009, p. 126). Oliver asks, "what is happening in the practice and process of a participatory arts project?" (2009, p. 322) and Walmsley focuses on "how people experience the arts and culture and why people want to understand its value?" (2018, p. 272). With these questions, examination is a bottom-up approach focused on understanding people's relations with participatory arts. Inspired by these questions, I

suggest that it is best to continue exploring not only how people experience arts-practices and creativity in institutional context, (Oliver, 2009; Walmsley, 2018) but also to ask, what kind of relationships are done in the non-public space and how these relationships are reinforced in an institutional context? These questions are important because add knowledge to existing literature exploring research on people's participation with arts and culture.

Understanding participation.

Since the 1990s, artists and curators have produced arts practices based on social relations and collective experiences. Conceptually, such practices are known as "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud, 2006); "participatory arts" (Bishop, 2006, 2012); and "socially engaged art" (Helguera, 2011), in response to the conventional understanding of an individual artist. In her book *Participation* (2006) Bishop introduces a collection of texts that historically explore the notion of participation, which include the collective experiences of arts and a critical perspective concerning community public art. She contends that there are two approaches that relate to the field of participatory arts:

> an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants, and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative. In both instances, the issue of participation becomes increasingly inextricable from the question of political commitment (Bishop, 2006 p. 11).

Applying this view to the study of cultural policy and practice, arts education and creativity implementation is an authored tradition, which can be characterised as interventionist because intends to produce a social effect; whilst the second approach, de-authored, is the space of collective art experiences, which I describe as ordinary, collective and

spontaneous. Bishop leads our attention to the social experience of arts as a response to rigid views of individual and genius artists, and participatory arts, detached from political commitment and critical thinking. However, other perspectives on participation pay attention to forms of cultural participation, emerging outside the walls of cultural institutions.

Miles and Gibson (2016) argue that within the context of cultural policy, "participation" is a concept with a narrow understanding because it focuses on specific expectations and implements from the state's view, concealing the cultural participation that emerges through people's everyday social relations. They argue for a need to pay attention to the rich forms of cultural participation emerging beyond the state-organised culture and how such forms "sustain social networks and define parameters of community" (Miles and Gibson, 2016, p. 151). Taking these into consideration, Miles (2013) shows what is at "stake" in the processes of participation. His understanding of participation is in relation to the mundane, as he argues:

> a far more committed sense of engagement is often expressed in discussions of everyday forms of participation, which in turn conveys the possession of considerable skill, expertise and learning; whether it be in banking, making puppets, choreographing dance club moves, propagating seeds or reading Muslim philosophy' (Miles, 2013, p. 185).

Inspired by these literatures, I suggest that participation concerns not only the relations from arts experiences *inside* the walls of cultural institutions, but also the social relations outside them, which are reinforced through ordinary social interactions. In this respect, arts organisations are rarely a temple where people form relationships in a passive way to transform themselves, but rather, places where people come together, generating encounters, meanings and arts experiences. As Walmsley says: "[arts organisations are]

part of a complex and interconnected cultural ecology" (2018, p. 286).

If policy makers and cultural administrators focus their attention not only on quantitative evaluations and their outcomes, but also on the rich stories of people, relationships and processes that *produce* arts education in practice, policymaking concerning arts education would be deployed less instrumental and more attached to people's experience. Ethnography and its methods enable understanding the circumstances and deep relations inherent in arts-practice.

Ethnographic research.

In order to understand people's participation, ethnographic research was conducted at the arts organisation. I based this research around ethnographic questions such as: Why do people visit the organisation? Why do they carry out artistic activities? How do ordinary relationships emerge through their artistic activities? Although it is widely known that ethnography entails to observe and understand people's points of view, there are broader dimensions of the term. Daniel Miller highlights that to conduct ethnographic research entails a set of "commitments" constituting a "particular perspective" (Miller, 1997, p. 16). I discuss Miller's (1997) ethnographic commitments in relation to this ethnographic research. These are:

> 1.- To be in the presence of the people one is studying, not just the texts or objects they produce.
> 2.- To evaluate people in terms of what they actually do, i.e. as material agents working in a material world, and not merely of what they say they do.
> 3.- To long-term commitment to an investigation that allows people to return to a daily life that one hopes goes beyond what is performed for the ethnographer.
> 4.- To holistic analysis which insists that behaviours be considered within the larger framework of people's lives and cosmologies (p. 16-17).

These commitments point out that ethnography is far from the application of methods to collect data, but a "broader approach" (Macdonald, 2001, p.78) and a methodological attitude. The ethnographic commitments allow for understanding the actions and relationships of research participants. I begin by discussing the first commitment.

In order to explore people's experience at Faro de Oriente, I took the role of an ordinary member (*a peer*), allowing me to be in the presence of research participants. Being with them intended as much as possible to make a friendly relationship and take part in the ordinary activities (e.g. participation in workshops and arts projects). This was useful for examining the relationships and processes that emerged through participant's arts-practice. In some cases, I visited with my peers' places where they were exhibiting their visual works because my intention was to understand their personal context, which I was only able to do by "being in the presence of people" (Macdonald, 2001, p. 78). This commitment is important because while existing studies of cultural consumption focus on surveys and interviews, little work has been focused on the relations, processes and personal context that emerge in community arts organisations. Paying attention to these elements it is possible to understand how and why people engage with the state-organised culture.

During my fieldwork, I was surprised by the social relationships, characterised by solidarity and mutual support; and the production processes when my peers made visual works. These production processes, or rather creative processes, were collective, collaborative and open, showing differences to institutional views on creativity (Jaramillo-Vázquez, 2018). I think that only by being in the presence of people (Miller, 1997), one would be able to see the day-to-day dynamics emerging from participant's processes, including tensions and negotiations. In addition, having moved to the East of the city, I

experienced part of the inequalities and reflected with my peers the negative image constructed in *el Oriente*, or rather, the East. For example, my peers and staff members told me that *el Oriente* is perceived as a place of violence and robbery; the area in Mexico City that experiences the greatest lack of basic services, such as a water supply, and where public transport is highly inefficient. Regardless of this, however, my peers said that "in the Orient of the city, not everything is like that" (fieldnote). They claimed that in their *barrios* there is culture too, emphasising local ceremonies, visits to natural places and *sonideros* (a kind of party where people from different neighbourhoods meet and a combination of music styles are played).

Paying attention to the ordinary processes of my peers at the organisation and understanding part of the sociocultural processes in the East, the examination of their visual works made sense. For example, the production of a mural, a collective work that was completed over nine months of production, represents a critical perspective of the inequalities and insecurity experienced in the East and a romantic view. One side of the work (a mural) shows semi-built houses trying to depict impoverished areas. This is accompanied with the image of one of the biggest dumping ground in the city and people selecting and collecting rubbish. The other side of the mural, however, shows local nature, ceremonies of the East and images of urban life, such as middle-class people using public transport to travel to work and to study school. The images also include fast food kiosks underneath long bridges.

When I accompanied my peers in the production processes, I asked them why they had decided to include such images and what kind of narrative they intended to provide. I was told that they had decided to include them to represent part of their ordinary and urban experiences, such as, taking the subway and bus very early in the morning for work and

study at school. Likewise, they had decided to represent not only an idealised narrative about the East (e.g. local nature, ceremonies and urban life), but also a critical perspective. I was told that images of poverty were not only from the East, but the country. In this respect, it seems to me that my peers intended to neutralise the symbolic violence that they experienced as Easterners (Jaramillo-Vázquez, 2016). The images were meanings attributed to their experiences and reflected part of their local identity. During the production of the mural, tensions among my peers emerged. This is because some people disagreed with showing impoverished areas and violence. They preferred to emphasise a more positive view of the East, representing natural areas and local ceremonies. However, other people considered that poverty, violence, and I would say, inequalities, were part of the social and cultural life in the East and the country. Therefore, they decided to include them in the visual work. "Being in the presence of people" (Miller, 1997) is important, as it allows ethnographers to examine the ordinary dynamics emerging in organisations, including, processes, negotiations and tensions in the production of projects and activities. In the case of arts organisations, these aspects may remain invisible for quantitative studies (concerning the social impact of the arts) and qualitative interviews (in which analysts collect interesting materials, but do not show the whole picture, concerning actions and context). The second commitment explores this point.

Miller's ethnographic commitment says: "to evaluate people in terms of what they actually do, i.e. as material agents working in a material world, and not merely of what they say they do" (Miller, 1997, pp. 16-17). In order to examine this commitment, being there is crucial, because only by following people's actions one would be able to observe whether and how people's words and actions are coherent -or not- and why.

When I conducted research at the organisation, I had conversations and interviews with staff members who told me about the difficulties in the organisation, including lack of mundane materials for work, efficient internet to carry out their activities, rodents walking in their offices and insecurity of their contracts and payments. I occasionally heard that they had requested the Minister of Culture to pay attention to their demands, though they had received no answer. However, I did not see staff members taking actions to modify their difficulties (e.g. a meeting with the director, an official letter or even to stand up against what they considered unjust) during the time I spent at Faro de Oriente. These examples are material things or actions that are relevant for ethnographers, because they express whether research participants' words are materializing.

When ethnographers listen to the words from research participants, it might be important to examine if they are trying to give us a 'tidy account' about what they say they do. If attention is paid to people's actions, it reduces the risk of being driven to other ideas by research participants. As Macdonald (2001) says:

> Those we are studying may wish to dissemble or at least to tidy up an account. In other words, what they say may be shaped through their own expectations of what they think we want to hear, or what they think we should not hear, or what they want us to hear (p. 86).

In the same way, research participants would highlight what the ethnographer should know, however, examination of actions neutralise research participants' accounts. Another reason for paying attention to research participant's actions is that, as time goes by in the field, research participants are busy with their own activities that somehow naturalise the presence of ethnographers. They forget to show or keep showing particular behaviours to ethnographers. The third commitment explores this point.

The third commitment is to "long-term investigation that allows people to return to a daily life that one hopes goes beyond what is performed for the ethnographer" (Miller, 1997, p. 17). In the interest of producing ethnographic works, anthropologists will be interested in research participant's actions rather than performances. Conducting long-term research allows research participants to naturalise the presence of ethnographers, therefore people's performance reduces over time. For example, when I met my peers, I perceived they kept distance from me and were indifferent. Although I joined the activities they attended (e.g. workshops and arts projects) and participated as another peer, I realised that sometimes I ended up doing activities with the same people and talked more about myself (especially when a facilitator run activities in which we had to talk about our personal lives and places where we lived in). When the workshops ended, my peers walked to the organisation's gardens and usually they sat inside a big tunnel that they used for painting graffiti and listening to music. Only my day-to-day presence allowed me to negotiate my presence with them. This negotiation included various aspects: to suspend recorded interviews for various months and prioritise informal conversations; to keep on participating in the workshops doing the same activities that they did, such as producing drawings, sculpture, performance; to dress the way my peers dressed (trying to produce symbolic identification); to talk about situations that were similar for my peers and I, such as the long distances we travelled to *the centre* or South of Mexico City and our interests concerning painters and museums. These negotiations were important for reducing the sense of distance and indifference from my peers. I came to realise that they had naturalised my presence when I was invited to have crisps or a beer soon after one workshop ended; or when I accompanied them to sit in the tunnel and chat conducting my informal conversations (and note-taking); and when it was fine for them to participate in formal

interviews either at the organisation or at their homes. A long-term investigation allows ethnographers to get through people's fabricated behaviours. In order to achieve this, negotiations in practice are important for establishing a more horizontal relationship with research participants. When I conducted informal conversations and interviews, I received information that was little associated with the research focus. It seems to me that this material is important because ethnographers may want to know part of research participants' personal context and explore it in relation to their aims.

In Miller's fourth commitment he emphasises that "behaviours be considered within the larger framework of people's lives and cosmologies" (Miller, 1997, pp. 16-17). Instead of knowing my peers through informal conversations and interviews, my intention was to examine their personal context. This was useful for understanding how their personal context was related to their mode of participation at the organisation. In this respect, I visited places with my peers where they were exhibiting their works; as well as museums and attending public conferences about arts. Although ethnographers do not necessarily need to explore every single aspect of people's lives, examination of their actions in connection with their context, shed light on *why* their actions carried out at the organisation are relevant for them. My suggestion is not only to focus on relationships and processes of people inside organisations, but also focusing on the context as this will illuminate how and why people engage with the state-organised culture. The role of a peer provided rich materials for understanding the stories, agendas and relationships of research participants.

My role as a peer was useful for establishing a more horizontal relationship with research participants. A performative ethnographic approach in the field (Fabian, 1990 in Alhourani, 2017) responds to hierarchical power relationships between researcher and

participants because the role of an ethnographer is not one of a "questioner, but rather, a provider of occasions, a catalyst in the weakest sense, and a producer (in analogy to theatrical producer) in the strongest" (Fabian, 1990, in Alhourani, 2017, p. 212). Taking the role of a peer allowed me to experience and engage with the relationships and creative processes of people, rather than being merely a bystander. In addition, this position allowed me to build a friendly relationship and reduce a hierarchical relation between researcher and participants. I suggest that I made a friendly relationship because during the field I conducted interviews at participants' homes and ordinary interactions allowed me to realise that I was being perceived as peer. For example, when conducting interviews with them, I was invited to enter their homes and those who painted showed me all their visual works, telling me part of the context and their motives for doing it.

Although the ordinary relationships and processes were studied, other aspects were considered. Ethnographic knowledge was obtained from key cultural administrators' interviews and examination of policy documents, revealing a complex grid of practices and discourses about institutional views on arts education and people's ordinary experience. This type of examination echoes Macdonald (2011), arguing that "being in place means that our knowledge does not just rely on one source -it comes through an untidy mix of what we observe, what people say, how they say it, what they do next, what they experience" (Macdonald, 2011, p.5). Attention paid to institutional perspectives of arts education was useful for understanding the "polyphony" (Gellner and Hirsch, 2001, p. 9) or diverse voices implicit in the process of the ethnographic work, which may reveal power relationships. In addition, paying attention to institutional voices and people's experiences in an arts organisation allows us to see the negotiations and contradictions. My role as peer allowed me, on the one hand, to form a direct relationship with participants and staff members. On

the other hand, to conduct interviews with cultural administrators and examine policy documents.

From 2011-2012, I conducted fieldwork at Faro de Oriente and joined six workshops: painting, performance, community journalism, plastic recycling sculpture, graphic design and graffiti, which lasted 12 weeks. I conducted participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with 33 research participants (19 male and 14 females). Observational fieldnotes and notes after informal conversations were collected. Semi-structured interviews were useful to elicit biographical data from my peers, to examine their motives for participating in the workshops and their reasons for coming to the organisation. Furthermore, living near the organisation and conducting five interviews at participants' houses enabled me to examine people's solidarity networks, which I understand here, as a response to deal with inequalities. Research participants I met were working class people from a humble background.

In this paper I seek to offer an "understanding of the processes (rather than the outcomes) of arts engagement" (Walmsley, 2018, p. 274), emphasising the sociocultural context, participants' motives for participating in arts education activities and their ordinary social relations. The following sections describe ethnographic accounts, focussing on three aspects: a) the solidarity networks of people (stories), b) people's motives for visiting the organisation (motives) and c) people's social relations within the organisation (mutual support).

Stories

In my interviews and informal conversations with participants and their relatives, I was told that their relatives created networks to build their own neighbourhoods as result of the local

government's indifference. Since the 1950s, people coming from the southern states of Mexico gradually populated the East of Mexico City. From a working-class and peasant background, they moved to Mexico City in search of job opportunities. They settled in sparsely populated areas of the City where public services were lacking, including pavements, electricity, running water and public institutions. I was told that the first neighbourhoods were long extensions of land with loose soil that turned into mud in times of heavy rain. This situation produced tensions for their relatives in that they got their shoes dirty by walking in muddy areas when travelled to their work; and residents from other areas of the city changed the name of these neighbourhoods to incorporate the word 'mud' as part of an ironic joke.

Despite such tensions, participants' relatives kept working in their jobs in other areas of the city, set up informal businesses and organised themselves to build their neighbourhoods. They took positions as labourers, cleaners, bakers, waiters and sellers. Those who opened businesses (e.g. bakeries and stalls in the streets) had economic stability and established *organizaciones vecinales* (neighbours' organisations). Thanks to these solidarity networks, they improved their neighbourhoods: building primary schools and repairing existing churches.

Despite their efforts to tackle inequalities, the participants I met still experienced them. Compared to other areas of the city, there were fewer universities in the East and consequently, participants travelled to other areas to study and work. They could travel for up to two hours one-way to study for a degree matching their personal aspirations, such as Social Sciences and Arts programmes. Those with an undergraduate degree in Humanities worked in areas totally distinct from their disciplines and worked part-time. Some worked informally in public bazaars as c*omerciantes* (sellers), or as *bicitaxi* and *mototaxi* drivers, (a

form of public transport where drivers use bicycles and motorcycles to carry passengers for short distances). They earned money according to the journeys made over the course of the day and how many passengers they transported. These experiences show disjunctions with the expectations of arts policy. Policy expectations and outcomes have highlighted a set of strategies to improve the youth, however in practice, participants experience inequalities and deal with precarious jobs. The next section examines participants' motives for joining arts activities at the organisation.

Motives

Participants' motives were diverse. Those who had studied at university, or were planning to, joined workshops and arts projects to reinforce their previous knowledge. Two excerpts will clarify the educational motives:

> I already learned a bit of graphic design, but I had so many classes and my knowledge is basic, then, I came with the teacher to reinforce my knowledge (Miriam, Graphic Design workshop).
> I had already taken a graphic expression course in another school which was about painting and sculpture. Then, I decided to come to Faro to see if I could complement what I had already learned in the previous school (Juan, Painting workshop).

For Miriam and Juan (the names of participants have been changed to conceal their identity), their participation at the organisation is part of their ongoing educational experience, to reinforce and complement their knowledge. Showing that they join in with the activities to improve their knowledge of the arts, their motives challenge the view in which policy describes the population as people who need to be improved. Other

participants said they visited the organisation seeking to put into practice their own projects. For example:

> [I came here] because there are issues at the *colonia* (neighbourhood). [I] do not like some of the actions of specific political groups. I needed a tool in order to make documentaries about my municipality and its socio-political situation (Francisco, Community Journalism workshop).

After finishing his undergraduate degree at a public university, Francisco's interests were related to the socio-political life of Mexico and especially his municipality in the State of Mexico. Francisco told me that the purchase of votes (i.e. when people from a political party give money or groceries in exchange for an individual's vote) had been part of the corruption that occurred in the area where he lives. His dissatisfaction motivated him to document such activities and to understand people's reasons for doing this. Francisco decided to attend the community journalism workshop to develop the skills necessary to write peoples' stories or to produce a documentary about this topic (the purchase of votes in his area). He said that during his university studies, the social and political context of Mexico was part of academic discussions. For that reason, he was interested in exploring the political context in his municipality. For Francisco, his participation in the community journalism workshop would give him the skills needed to approach his neighbours and to write an article. When I met Francisco, he lived with his mother and two siblings studying for an undergraduate degree at a public university in the South of the City. As he had not yet found a job in his professional area, he worked in a bakery from seven in the morning to midday and carried out soldering services. This allowed him to cover his living expenses and contribute to the family budget. For Francisco, his participation in the journalism

workshop was associated with audio-visual learning to point out acts of corruption, mainly during political elections.

Other people joined the workshops and arts projects in the organisation because painting and performance activities produced a gratification:

> I started to come to the organisation in 2002 and I loved the idea of taking workshops. Well, in my case, I need art, otherwise I become mad with the everyday routine. I need art to clear my mind up. I knew that at the organisation there were workshops and I came (Camila, Art and Performance workshop).

When I met her, Camila was 30 years old and had a university degree. She took part in the performance workshop because she felt anxious about not having a permanent job. She had a flexible job working as an assistant in a theatre collective. Aside from the gratification produced when participating in the workshop, Camila made sculptures with recycled materials in her house, which was for her a "dialogue" with her own ideas and personal emotions. Dario's motives are similar to Camila's, as he said: "I came here because I wanted a place where I could feel relaxed and fine" (Dario, Painting workshop).

When I met him, Dario was in his late twenties and had a part time job as a messenger at a private courier company. Because he commuted for two hours each way to his job, he said art helped him relax after his work. As he said, "I feel relief when I paint. It comes as something I needed to let out. The point is to let out the many issues that I have. I wanted to change them into another thing" (Interview 15/05/2012).

Dario had developed an informal career in painting throughout his life. His aunt taught him to paint as a child and since then, he has painted informally at his home and at arts organisations. Before becoming involved with the organisation, he had already

exhibited his works in various spaces including a university library, a collective exhibition in a government office, and a gallery. Examination of people's personal context is important because it tells us how people rarely are those that need to be improved, but people whose previous experiences with arts are extended and reinforced at Faro de Oriente.

Solidarity networks

Joining in the workshops and activities at Faro de Oriente, I was able to understand the dynamics between the facilitators and my peers. I came to realise that the facilitators intensified their relationships with my peers through their solidarity. Before or during the workshops, I heard my peers talking with the facilitators about their personal ambitions and difficulties, and in my informal conversations with them, I also learned about their personal struggles and long-term expectations. Facilitators listened to my peers attentively and tried to give support and advice. The next excerpt shows this relationship:

> Seated inside a classroom, a participant (whom I will call Elizabeth) was unsure about whether she should leave her job to study for an undergraduate degree. She told the facilitator and her peers (myself included) that her father did not agree with Elizabeth's intentions of leaving her job, because her income contributed towards the family expenses. Working as a seller in a shopping mall for about eight years, her income was generous and contributed to support the family's everyday expenses. Elizabeth's father was a seller and had studied only at primary school. Thanks to his work, he had been able to maintain some economic stability. Because his work as a seller had been satisfactory for him, Elizabeth's father found no reason for her to leave her job to study for a degree. A facilitator listened attentively to Elizabeth and gave her reasons for studying at university. She encouraged her to be self-confident so that she made her decision and highlighted the opportunities she would get if she studied. Elizabeth's peers motivated her to take new opportunities that would allow her to progress educationally. As the conversation went on, they argued that difficulties in studying at university were not just the student's responsibility, but a problem with the low-quality education received in secondary and high school, the high cost of studying at a private university, and the lack of

universities in the East. A peer said that most of the schools are *escuelas técnicas* (technical schools) and in this sense, she said 'here in the Orient, you are being prepared for being a labourer' (Fieldnote June/28/2012).

It seems to me that the talk contributed to Elizabeth's decision to study for an undergraduate degree in Pedagogy. For Elizabeth, her relationship with the facilitator and peers motivated her to achieve her goals and to raise her ambitions. As she said: "personally, Antonia's workshop has allowed me to see that there are many things to do and to undertake real personal projects. The workshop has encouraged me to enter university" (Interview 10/09/2012). Towards the end of my fieldwork, Elizabeth was studying for her undergraduate degree at a university in the South of the City. Travelling for around two hours each way, she said that despite feeling tired, she was managing not only to study at the university but also to have a part-time job as a receptionist at the weekends.

Aside from the relationships between facilitators and participants, the relationships among participants were built by mutual support in their activities to sort out everyday tensions. For example, staff members told me about the few economic and material resources they had available for facilitators and participants to carry out their activities. Governmental funding cuts and lack of budget increases had affected the functioning of Faro de Oriente, including the provision of ordinary materials. The lack of materials affected the day-to-day arts practices of people, and in response to these circumstances, they *improvisaban* (improvised). This meant that they brought in alternative materials to compensate for the lack of the original, as the next excerpt exemplifies:

A group of participants, whom I will refer to as Laura, Miriam, Guillermo, Manuel and I, created illustrations based on the content of letters received from our counterparts living in the US. After making approximately 20 illustrations,

these visual works were exhibited at the organisation's closing event of 2012. However, before the exhibition I participated in a meeting where we discussed strategies for displaying the visual works in a less conventional way. Alonso, Guillermo, Laura, Miriam and Manuel were not happy with hanging the illustrations on a wall. They were brainstorming ideas to exhibit the illustrations in a more attractive way for viewers.

I suggested that the illustrations could be hung from long threads coming down from the ceiling, allowing people to touch and move the visual works rather than only to look at them. My peers and the facilitator accepted that suggestion. However, he said that the images should be backed to avoid any damage. He suggested buying in cardboard to make the layers. The group disagreed with his idea, saying that buying new cardboard would be very expensive. Instead, Manuel proposed bringing in cardboard boxes as this form of cardboard would be cheaper. The group accepted Manuel's suggestion and commented that "when there is no money, improvisation is our talent". Following this, Miriam also said, "well, the less [resources] you have, the more creative you become". After a couple of days, the group brought in some recycled cardboard while Alonso bought some new. Using this material, the workshop members backed the illustrations and laid out the exhibition as they initially had hoped (Fieldnote, December 2011).

The ethnographic descriptions presented above highlight the disjunctions and negotiations of public cultural policy concerning arts education and practice. In the first case, the population was characterised as vulnerable, as people who need to be improved. In practice, participants' motives for joining the activities at the organisation challenge such policy assumptions. The ethnographic materials show that participants' experience (within the organisation and their personal context) faces misconceptions, inequalities and difficulties. Despite this, however, their motives and actions offer a reading far from romantic views on arts education which highly highlights "social transformation".

In the same way, their everyday relationships show that these are reinforced through mutual support and solidarity in response to ordinary tensions and personal difficulties. In the second case (negotiations), participants use the activities on offer at Faro de Oriente in line with their motives. They engage with the activities as complementary to their previous

knowledge, seeking to make real their personal ambitions. Thus, rather than going to Faro for learning or to illuminate themselves through arts and culture (as policy rhetoric assumes), participants reinforce their previous experience with the arts and their social relationships.

Despite the inequalities they experience, the participants engage with the state-organised culture in accordance with their personal agendas, motives and reinforce their social relations. In this respect, the richness of the day-to-day social relations in arts organisations demonstrates the negotiations and tensions in relation to policy makers and cultural administrators' views on arts education and creativity, including their views on the public and the expectations and outcomes of arts education. By examining cultural policy on the ground, "what is at stake" (Miles, 2016) for understanding how people participate with the state-organised arts is also people's agendas, personal context and ordinary relationships. Ethnographic research offers rich materials for examining and understanding the relations that take place in public cultural spaces. It tells us the complexities, negotiations and tensions on the ground.

Conclusion

In this paper I have examined how policymaking has configured arts education and its ordinary, everyday practice in the arts organisation Faro de Oriente, in Mexico City. The findings show that local public cultural policy echoes international views on arts education, where it is viewed as an instrument to improve people being described as vulnerable. This view is problematic because a controlling notion is constructed concerning definitions, expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education, excluding people's sociocultural context, motives for participating with the state-organised arts and their social relations.

Nevertheless, examination from people's experience show distinctions. People's sociocultural context, agendas and ordinary relationships challenge policy makers' expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education widely diffused in policy documents and reports about the social impact of the arts.

The ethnographic materials above examined show how people engage with the state-organised culture, particularly in the organisation Faro de Oriente. In this respect, their participation is far from romantic views of arts education (claiming for social transformation), but a type of participation as part of their course of their lives. From the experience and motives of participants, their participation with Faro is part of a process in order to reinforce their social relations and motives. In this respect, people's social relations and motives are not generated in community arts organisations (through arts education and creativity), but rather, reinforced and maintained thanks to their personal context, motives and actions previously developed in their own practices.

Ethnographic research in this paper shows that wider dimensions are involved in people's arts participation with the state-organised culture. Participant's personal context, motives and ordinary relationships provide materials for understanding not only the experience of people (Walmsley, 2018) and the processes of arts practice (Oliver, 2009), but also the relationships made outside institutional contexts and how these are connected to people's arts practice at Faro de Oriente. In this sense, this paper adds knowledge to the literature investigating the relations of people with the state-organised culture. In response to research investigating the social impact of the arts from a quantitative orientation, this paper is an invitation to include qualitative research, where questions are centred on

people's experience in the arts and culture. Paying attention to these questions, the expectations and desirable outcomes of arts education are challenged. As this paper shows, people's relationships are not learnt through arts education, as policy makers and cultural administrators may expect, but are instead reinforced and maintained through ordinary interactions. Thus, the findings of this paper are an invitation for policy makers to rethink public cultural policy concerning arts education. If people's agendas, stories and ordinary relationships are at the centre of research and considered in making public cultural policy, policy will be deployed in dialogue with people's voices and experience.

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