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Article · April 2018

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Emilio Lucio-Villegas

THE RIVER AND THE PEOPLE

An Approach To Memories, Craft And Adult Education

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to describe an ongoing study to recover the memories of the people and the traditional crafts associated with the Guadalquivir River where it passes through a town called C., 12km from the city of S. in the south of Spain. It seems that people are losing their sense of belonging to both a symbolic and geographical territory. The process for recovering it can be considered a generator of experiences and learning. These experiences are related to identity as an element which enables people to understand how individuals establish relationships amongst themselves and with the environment. The paper describes the process of research based on interviewing people to capture their experiences. This is a work in process. The first outcomes are related to a number of descriptive categories such as: the crafts associated with the River; the use of the River to transport goods and people; the family ties associated with the crafts; the cosmopolitanism of the people and the changes ensuing from it; the role of women; and the River as a magical and mysterious place. Preliminary conclusions call on us to consider the importance of recovering traditional crafts as a source of adult education, and of maintaining a cultural identity threatened by globalisation processes.

Keywords: *adult education, artisans, crafts, experience, identity, memories*

REKA IN LJUDJE. PRISTOP K SPOMINOM, OBRTI IN IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH - POVZETEK

Glavni namen članka je opisati raziskavo v teku, s katero poskušamo obuditi spomine ljudi in tradicionalno obrt v povezavi z reko Guadalquivir na točki, kjer teče skozi kraj C. 12 kilometrov od mesta S. na jugu Španije. Zdi se, da tukajšnji ljudje izgublajo občutek pripadnosti tako simboličnemu kot geografskemu ozemlju. Proces spominjanja in obnavljanja je lahko generator izkušenj in učenja. Te izkušnje so povezane z identiteto kot elementom, ki ljudem omogoča razumevanje, kako posamezniki ustvarjajo medsebojna razmerja in vezi z okoljem. Prvi rezultati raziskave, ki še poteka, so povezani z več opisnimi kategorijami, na primer: obrt, povezana z reko; uporaba reke za prevoz blaga in ljudi; družinske vezi, povezane z obrtjo; svetovljanstvo prebivalcev in posledične spremembe; vloga žensk ter reka kot magičen in skrivnosten kraj. Preliminarne ugotovitve nas vabijo, da premislimo o pomembnosti obnavljanja tradicionalne obrti kot viru v izobraževanju odraslih in o vzdrževanju kulturne identitete ob grožnji globalizacijskih procesov.

Ključne besede: *izobraževanje odraslih, obrtniki, obrt, izkušnje, identiteta, spomini*

Emilio Lucio-Villegas, PhD, University of Seville, elucio@us.es

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this article is to describe research dedicated to recovering the memories of the Guadalquivir River where it passes through a town called C., 12km from the city of S. in the south of Spain. Questions are raised about the River and its influence on people's daily life. Knowledge about this could be an instrument of learning and teaching addressing not only the elderly but also the younger generation, in order to explain what the role of the River has historically been, and perhaps still is, for the town. The main research questions are related to the way that people understand the social changes in their surrounding reality and the issue of how adult education can help people to understand these changes better.

At the present time a series of interviews are being conducted in order to reclaim people's experiences in relation to the River. In this article, the focus is on the interviews and specifically on some aspects directly related to crafts, trade, identity, etc. Lastly, some conclusions will be presented.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We are living in a society undergoing an unstoppable process of globalisation. Local identities are confronted with a stream of modernisation processes and pressures to change certain traditional ways of life and work to more competitive ways in order to benefit the market. I have previously studied these processes of change in the case of fishing activities (Lucio-Villegas, 2006). In this previous research two powerful concepts arose: Social Change, and Transition. Social change can be defined "as the difference observed between the previous and subsequent states of an area of social reality" (Giner, 1985, p. 217). According to Rocher (1985), social change means observable changes, and this can be verified within short periods in geographical and socio-cultural areas. It is possible to derive some central elements of interest from such change. On the one hand, there is the temporary space. On the other, it is possible to stress the importance of the physical territory and the culture of the community. It is also important to stress that, according to the author, change goes beyond purely economic phenomena and extends to the way people live, their feelings and relationships. In short, the concept of social change allows us to consider the loss of cultural identities that communities – and the people living in them – are suffering in relation to their way of life and the production system associated with it.

The major change, at the present time, seems to be the unstoppable process of globalisation (Giddens, 2007). Opposed to a simplistic view – only global influences over the local – Robertson (1995, 2012) introduced the term *Glocalisation* to explain the contradictory relations between the global and the local. Robertson affirms that "one of the ways of considering the idea of *global culture* is in terms of its being constituted by the increasing interconnectedness of many local cultures" (2012, p. 196). Godelier (1987) speaks of societies in transition. This occurs when they have considerable internal and external difficulties in producing traditional economic and social relations. In the process

of transition, other forms of economic and social relationships appear. This concept is also linked to the processes of modernisation. These processes are associated with the massive incorporation of certain changes – such as, for instance, in the production system because it is considered obsolete. Accordingly, the process of modernisation is based on relegating crafts and other forms of economic trade to a kind of marginal niche – in some ways devoted only to tourism and serving as anthropological objects of curiosity.

But this craftwork is an important part of people's everyday lives and experiences. It confirms their identity and is grounded in their experience, derived as it is from their relationships with others and with the surrounding environment. Experience can be considered one of the dimensions of adult education. It is, in some ways, the result – and the process – through which an individual organises knowledge and shares it with others. Experience, from a Freirean perspective, is related to problem-posing education, and it is the foundation for organising the processes of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970). Sometimes, however, this experience is lost in the 'new' world of business (Sennett, 2000). These experiences have to be recovered as educational tools (Lucio-Villegas, 2015; Olesen, 1989).

From these experiences it is possible to establish relationships between adult education, identities, work and crafts. Gelpi (1990, p. 17) suggests as follows:

The relationships between work and society are not only of economic and social nature. The lack of identity of a community, a country or several countries has consequences concerning the content and the quality of the work.

There is, Gelpi adds, an essential cultural dimension in reflecting on work. Based on this, Gelpi speaks of work cultures, trying to define identities and bonds that people forge around work.

Artisans and communities are intrinsically linked. In fact, as Sennett states, "in the traditional world of the archaic potter or doctor, standards for good work were set by the community" (2009, p. 25). Gramsci maintains that the artisan produces pieces of furniture, or ploughs, or knives, etc., according to the traditional taste of some village, province or region (cited in Manacorda, 1976). Traditionally, Gramsci adds, artisans create whatever they like, while trying to capture the spirit of the people. In short, it seems that these relations between culture, identity, and community life are always present in organising a part of people's everyday life and the system of production. Today, everyday life is homogenised to benefit the big companies that are dictating people's tastes. The artisans' work is lost, because it is unique and follows guidelines based on the interests of the people, rather than subjugating these interests to commercial demands. It is a fact that the organisation of work has been changed. While Gelpi's (2004, p. 111) description that "[t]he time of production is fragmentary and very diverse and the quality of work varies in regard to the content, the development and the aim" holds true of artisanal production, this new organisation throws out some of the characteristics of the crafts and craftsmen's work, such as the innovation that introduces changes in the final product, and the creativity to

adapt the final result to the tastes and necessities of the communities where the artisans work and live.

An important point to reflect on is Sennett's argument related to the loss of pride in the crafts that, in some ways, is equivalent to identity. Artisans are lost in the maelstrom of the new organisation of work, but they are people "devoted to good work for its own sake" (Sennett, 2009, p. 20). Doing a good job is the primary identity of artisans. This means a specific way of organising the work, the learning and teaching of the work, and life. A job well done means "to be curious about, to investigate, and to learn from ambiguity" (Sennett, 2009, p. 48).

The artisans' work challenges us to think about work itself and about its organisation, as well as how to learn both the work and its organisation in a very different way, far from the mainstream view defined by Lifelong Learning policy-making and characterised by the search for skills, competences and competition in order to standardise every procedure, including education, and by adult education focused only on the labour market and competitiveness. Later on, I will present some analytical categories emerging from the interviews that can help us in this reflection.

Finally, I refer to culture. According to Raymond Williams, culture, apart from being a very complicated word (1983, p. 87), is a plural word with diverse meanings. It is not possible to talk about culture but rather about cultures, and this diversity is not only related to different countries or historical periods but also to "social and economic groups within a nation" (Williams, 1983, p.89). In the end, culture is a way of life that includes, among other things, work, intellectual practices or artistic activities. In this sense, it is possible to consider the activities performed by artisans as a part of local cultures that are in danger of disappearing due to the mainstream globalisation processes in the field of production, but not only here.

Culture is also related to the system of meanings that people have to help them understand the world. Following Geertz (1987), culture is a complex system of meanings that enables people to situate themselves in a symbolic universe where things, actions, objects take on significance. When this significance is lost, people are in a society in transition, as Geertz (1987) explained when he talked about Javanese funeral rituals.

METHODOLOGY

This section includes a description of the place, some notes about the research team and the research itself – including both the main aims and research questions – as well as the methodological tools used.

Brief description of the context

C. is a town 12 km from S., the fourth most populated city in Spain. At present, C. has 30,358 inhabitants (Junta de Andalucía, 2016). The place is now a dormitory town – due to the expansion of the nearest great city. Its history, and the history of its production

system and the culture associated with it, is closely linked to the river. In fact, around 800 BC, the village was at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River, but today it is around 40 km away. Another important historical event related to the River and the history of C. is the so-called *Hasekura Expedition*, which in the 17th century brought Japanese people to the village. This event is still celebrated today and some bonds have been created with Japan – specifically with the city of Sendai.

The traditional production system was based on fishing, pottery, the fabrication of bricks, shipbuilding, trade and other activities closely linked to the River, which defined a cultural identity almost lost today. At present, C., as pointed out above, is a dormitory town with only a single brick factory in operation, and only a fraction of the population lives off fishing and other related activities.

The research team

The research team is composed of people coming from diverse backgrounds: retired adult education teachers, civil servants working in the City Hall, people coming from Social Movements and from the university – teachers and students – or from the adult education school – also teachers and students. It is important to stress that the diversity of people in the research team is, at the same time, a valuable resource and a disadvantage. Some of the members were already involved in the original project and certain problems arose during the research. These issues were dealt with thanks to a very slow process of dialogue and to a participatory approach.

Aims and research questions

As indicated above, the main aim of this research is to recover the memories of the River Guadalquivir where it passes through a town called C. The research questions are summarised as follows: How do people understand the changes in their surrounding environment, and how can adult education help people to understand these changes and recover/maintain their identity – in this case associated with crafts.

Methodological Tools

The major methodological tool used is interviews. To date, a number of interviews have been conducted – mainly with men; this imbalance will be addressed in the continuation. The people interviewed were selected by local members of the research team. The main criterion for selection was extensive knowledge of the river, the city and the crafts associated with it. According to these criteria, the individuals interviewed were, amongst others: sailors, fishermen, net manufacturers, the owner of a brick factory, and, finally, an older woman with ample knowledge of the river. The interviews were always audio recorded and, in some cases, video recorded. They were also made by the same person in order to unify the questions and discourse. The interviews were transcribed, and analysed first using speculative analysis and then by classifying and categorising the information (Woods, 1986).

FINDINGS

The research is focused on systematising a number of categories that allow us not only to classify the interviews but also to organise diverse materials such as pictures, artefacts, etc.

Below are some categories that can be extracted from the analysis of the interviews conducted.

The lost words

At the very beginning of *The Age of Revolution* (2001), the historian Eric Hobsbawm explains how this time of profound changes in Western societies can also be remembered for the new words that appeared and today are common in our languages – words such as industry, railways, working-class, etc. Similarly, traditional crafts in C. have a number of specific words for designating specific tasks. For instance, the owner of a brick factory explains the reason for calling the mud ‘fish’.

[The mud] *was collected on boards where it was cut with an ‘esteron’*. [a kind of big box to recover and transport fish] *This ‘esteron’ was the same used to extract the fish from the boats and this is the reason that the mud [extracted from the river] is called “fish”*.

These kinds of expression are being lost. “*Will there be things lost with the passing of time?*” wondered another person being interviewed. Thinking in terms of crafts, it is possible to find similar situations. An example could be the word ‘barranquero’, which referred to a man who knew how to cut the mud, making holes and extracting the mud from ravines near the river. The loss of this craft is also the loss of this word. As Saramago (2015) states, first the people leave, then the craft leaves, and finally the word is gone.

In other cases it is not possible to understand the discourse without additional explanation.

‘Chupones’ [suckers/dredgers] are boats, or rather, only one boat, we are going to talk about only one... so one or two, it is like a big steamer and it is ready to suck sand.

According to Gelpi (2008), diversity is a broad concept with a lot of meanings, one of which is related to language. We have lost languages and expressions and this means, among other things, that there is homogenisation of the language, which means homogenisation of thought. It is also consistent with Labov’s work (1987), which demonstrates that the use of the language in some specific contexts can also change the language. This issue will be developed further in the conclusions.

Crafts of our fathers

This could be considered the central category for analysing social changes, because the most important things are related to craft and identity, but also the confusion and

complication that family relationships cause not only in transmitting the craft but also in the organisation of the work. In traditional societies, crafts can be seen as transmitted in familial networks, e.g., “*that have been passed from fathers to sons, you know?*” This process also establishes close relationships between different crafts. “*I started to work as a carpenter with my uncle,*” a fisherman explained. In some ways, we can consider crafts as bequeathed by fathers to sons.

I was born in a fishing family, in C. My father died when I was young, my mother became a widow with 8 sons. My oldest brother became responsible for the family. We inherited a little fishing boat from my father. Of course, my brother started to work in it. I was 11 or 12.

In these familial conditions the learning of a craft is a hard process without salary.

My father took me out [of school] to learn the craft with my uncle, without earning anything and I told my father, ‘Dad, I work more than my cousins and much more than everyone but I don’t earn anything.’

There was also confusion about the role of father and the role of boss – which can be judged different compared to that in our societies: “*I went to work with my father. My father was the master and I was the sailor.*”

Other individuals tried to escape from this situation through specialised training. “*I got a diploma as a second naval mechanic*”. It seems that this enabled people to get away from the pressures of family relationships, but it can also be considered one of the reasons for the death of the village and the birth of the city as I will present in the next section.

To conclude, it is also important to stress that the fact that crafts were linked to family relationships also means the loss of traditional crafts when these bonds are broken.

Look! There is my son [...] I am the end [the son is coming] he is an industrial engineer, and doesn’t want to know anything about it.

Or

No, my sons didn’t want. They didn’t want... So [sigh]

Cosmopolitanism: the death of a village, the birth of a city

In ‘What is Globalisation’ (1998), Ulrich Beck talks about cosmopolitanism as one of the characteristics of globalisation processes. Cosmopolitanism is related to, among other things, the ease of changing the place of residence, i.e., moving from one place to another. In the case of C., cosmopolitanism becomes relevant between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, and it is related to the construction of an important shipyard in the city of S.

The Gutierrez Perez neighbourhood was born from this, was it not? This is in relation to economic growth and dormitory towns, right?

This cosmopolitanism is also related to the accreditation of some skills and competences as valid diplomas enabling movement to a wider labour market, as we have seen above. “*I left the river and went to Cadiz*”, explained a person who specialised in naval mechanics. Another: “*I was in Iran, then I was in Israel too, with dredging too, I have been in France and in Morocco*”. And another one explained: “*We were in Iran, we did work in Algeria, and we were in Israel.*”

There was a sort of exodus of craftsmen – mainly affecting the shipyard, but also other places – that could be one of the reasons for the death of the traditional village and the traditional society – based on a local economy focused on the River – and the birth of a dormitory town where traditional identities are under threat.

The Twilight Zone

In geographical and social terms, the River is an unknown space. This can be analysed from diverse standpoints. For instance, taking into account both commerce and transportation across the river, the River has been a waterway with a high volume of people from C. going to the nearest beach at SB at the mouth of the River, or workers from C. going to the ‘Island’ when the rice is harvested.

People travelled more comfortably, you know. In those times, not every worker had money, the most important thing was to go to SB, to spend two or three days... eh! And then they returned again in the boat. You know how transportation was in the past!

However, the most important thing was the movement of goods. In this connection it can be said that there was important trade from SB to S. – mainly salt, and goods and food going from S. and C. to the nearby ‘Island’. Sometimes commerce and transportation went beyond S. further up on the river. In fact, some individuals changed their work from fishing to transporting sand or gravel.

Yes, it was a boat that... in the past there were no roads to the Island and then there were some little boats to take food and everything they needed on the Island because it was not possible to go by alternative means [than the river] ... it was... I don't know... rice growers managed everything by way of the river.

Nonetheless, in C., the River is responsible for contradictory feelings. Although it was one of the main sources of wealth and work – brick, pottery, agriculture, fishing, ship-building – people usually turned their backs on the River because it is a mysterious place causing diseases and death:

There were mosquitoes... so, they must work in the river to sow the rice and some tourists died because of mosquito bites, they became swollen.

Another aspect is related to the sense of a frontier with the unknown: the marsh.

Here began a physical border. From here on down the river it was the marsh [...] of the mosquito diseases.

This unknown element enabled people to create a magical consciousness about the River that is fatalist and beyond control. For instance, when the River flooded almost every winter.

Here you have your thirty cows in winter and then a flood came, and when you could get there [to the place where the cows were], there were no more cows.

Perhaps the most interesting demonstration of this fatalistic view is related to the fear of the River itself. A kind of reverential fear that is present in the prohibition of bathing.

Sure! Of course, you had a sure beating.... If your father knew that you had gone to the river to have a swim, if a friend [of your father] saw you [bathing and told him,] 'I saw your son in the river,' the beating was certain.

The last issue related to this is the visible lack of women in this process. In fact, in a previous piece of research on fishing villages (Lucio-Villegas, 2006), I stressed the importance of the role that women played in social and economic activities. It was very strange, in this case, that those women were invisible. When I asked individuals about relations I could interview, there were no women. I insisted and the response – including the response from people working in a municipal women's centre – was that historically women only worked in olive warehouses and factories in a nearby city called H., on the other side of the river.

There were, however, women who worked as net manufacturers.

The nets that were made, they were made by women... Then men assembled the nets because women did, maybe, the net piece by piece, and then you have to put the 'trallas', [ends] put the weight, put the float, and mount them. These things were done by men.

And also related to the selling of fish,

I remember that fish were taken to the fish market. We referred to the slaughterhouse [matadero] in C. as the fish market, where we took the fish to sell. Perhaps you were not able to sell all the fish and some fish was left over. So, the women would go out to the streets [to sell fish].

However, there are few testimonies from women up to now. Most importantly, they are not invisible anymore and it is possible to start knowing something more about their role during this time.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the current stage of the research, some conclusions can be presented.

First of all, it is significant that there are contradictory feelings that people face with regard to the river. The River is the source of life but, at the same time, it is a dangerous place and it is better not to go there. In some ways it could be affirmed that the production system is dissociated from everyday life in the sense that the River is considered an enemy more than a source of work and wealth. Perhaps this could explain the reason why the inhabitants abandoned their life on the river. Investigating these beliefs may help people to shift from a magical consciousness to a critical one (Freire, 1970) and recovering memories of the River serves as a way to recover their own history and their own identity as members of a community.

A second issue could be related to modernisation processes. It seems that some of the most profound changes that the village underwent are related to the shift from a rural society to an industrial and urban one. The involvement of the artisans in working in the shipyard in S. and in other jobs around the world was a possibility for people to position themselves in more secure jobs, increase their salaries and, in economic terms, to improve their quality of life. Now and in the past, in rural areas of Spain to have a job was one of the most important things in people's lives, because this enables individuals to escape poverty and opens other horizons not only for them but also for their families. The lack of acknowledgement, either in social or economic terms, can be considered one of the reasons for abandoning the crafts that were the pillars of the 'archaic' society.

The challenge here is to determine how to preserve a traditional production system while simultaneously guaranteeing both jobs and quality of life; and this in a globalised world that seems to have swept along the past of this community as the River would in a flood. This is additionally connected to processes of social change that have occurred in the village in the last 60 years. These are mainly related to industrialisation processes – the construction of a shipyard in the city of S., or the pollution of the river; *“fishing ended when washing machines appeared,”* explained one person.

Culture is closely linked to language. A subordinate culture is reflected, among other things, in language (Diaz Salazar, 1991). If words are lost, we lose an important part of this widespread culture that, in this case, is represented by a specific and technical oral language. But the most important thing here is that these words are in the collective memory and in the cultural identity of the communities. To preserve these words and the language associated with it is also to preserve the creativity of the community and their identity because words express the world of individuals and communities. And the question here is, how do we preserve orality in a society that always reinforces reading

and writing? And yet, grammar seems to be a political fact linked to dominant culture. As Gramsci (1985) stated: “Written normative grammar thus always presupposes a ‘choice’, a cultural orientation, and is therefore always an act of national-cultural politics.” (p. 182). To preserve the language is to confront these hegemonic tendencies.

The processes of Popular Education have to be rooted in the interest and curiosity of the people and should produce really useful knowledge for individuals and communities. In this case, really useful knowledge is related to knowledge of history that allows individuals to preserve the present by knowing about the past. I think that this may make it possible for people to be situated in their community and society in a stance of resistance and transformation against the major tendencies of globalisation: the homogenisation of culture and the focus of the whole society on economic issues.

In a society where every procedure is increasingly standardised, to safeguard creativity seems to be an important element in guaranteeing people’s development. In this sense, this research attempts to recover the creativity that is present in traditional crafts because it is a creativity that resides in the community too. Crafts are always associated with a community.

By recovering and maintaining these traditional crafts, maybe only for leisure, it may be possible to augment traditional knowledge and people’s resources. This kind of adult education is totally opposed to a model of Lifelong Learning policy-making focused only on the individual as a worker or future worker without memory or history – personal and collective. To react against these policies that dehumanise people, as Freire (1970) affirms, we have to reconstruct local cultural identities that allow people to become protagonists of their life-world and their community life.

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