

THE SPARKING CYCLE
A Culture-Oriented Approach to System Change in Oppressed Communities

by

Antonio Moya-Latorre

Architect, Universitat Politècnica de València, 2013

Pianist, Conservatorio Superior de Música “Joaquín Rodrigo” de Valencia, 2014

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2019

© 2019 Antonio Moya-Latorre. All rights reserved

The author hereby grants to MIT the permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of the thesis document in whole or in part in any medium now known or hereafter created.

Signature of Author:

Antonio Moya-Latorre

Department of Urban Studies and Planning

May 21, 2019

Certified by:

Professor of the Practice, Ceasar McDowell

Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by:

Professor of the Practice, Ceasar McDowell

Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Co-Chair, MCP Committee

*A single word even
may be a spark
of inextinguishable thought.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley

THE SPARKING CYCLE

A Culture-Oriented Approach to System Change in Oppressed Communities

by

Antonio Moya-Latorre

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 21, 2019,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning

Abstract

Planners, facilitators, community leaders and activists committed to building fairer societies need to cultivate profound sensitivity to perceive the complexity of the communities they work with and envision strategic actions that unleash incremental transformative cultural processes. *The Sparking Cycle* explores how culture-oriented projects can catalyze community-inspired change in contexts of oppression. This thesis argues that such projects can be designed to leverage a traumatic experience in order to spark the collective capacity of a community to pursue the lives its individuals have reason to value. Practitioners can conceive sparking projects to support oppressed communities in creating efforts with the potential for scaling up and engendering deeper transformations.

The first movement of this thesis is a conceptual framework that explores how cultural transformation processes built on the interaction between the concepts of *conscientização* and capabilities can generate a sparking cycle of increasing change. Drawing from the art world, I delve into the idea of contemplation as a necessary first step that informs our actions to address system change, which I specifically define as a shift from systems of vulnerabilities to systems of capabilities. The second movement grounds the theory in the story of an inspiring project I became involved in, in the community of Jardim Colombo, São Paulo, that is overcoming structural oppression through a culture-oriented process that started with an art festival. In the third movement, I apply systems thinking to theorize about how the process of transforming oppressed communities into systems of capabilities could look if we start building an infrastructure of change at initial stages of a sparking project. I finally narrow the ideas of this thesis down to a pragmatic set of principles for practitioners working in contexts of oppression.

This thesis is an act of contemplation in itself conceived to inspire practitioners seeking to advance wellbeing among the communities they work with and help them design more meaningful actions. Similar to the stories I share here, which are sparking profound changes among the people involved, it is my wish that this thesis will spark new ideas to plant seeds for more hopeful futures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of uncountable interactions with many human beings. If there are any valuable ideas in the text, they have to be credited to my friends, colleagues, and relatives, who have taught me so much. Especially in moments of personal and professional confusion, there has always been someone ready to light a spark on me and encourage me to move forward. With the risk of not naming everyone who deserves it, I would like to share the names of the people who have been part of this adventure. This thesis is dedicated to them:

To Ceasar and Diane for their intellectual support during this exploratory journey.

To Dayna and Katrin for being a professional and personal reference.

To Lorena for her emotional sustenance and her everlasting positive energy.

To Bish for all the pleasant encounters and conversations.

To Yael and Lotem for taking care of Carla and me.

To Jessica, Mercedes, and Gonzalo for becoming the best company during these two years.

To Patrick, Asmaa, and Karthik for their relevant comments on this thesis.

To La Caixa for making it so easy for me to study abroad.

To Arturo, Andrés, Ana, and Fernando for believing in me long before the MIT adventure started.

To Tomas and Rosa for their humanity and social commitment.

To Ester for being an example of strength and an inspiration.

To the Fazendinha crew for engendering a life-changing experience.

To Pamela and Susan for helping me sharpen my language.

To the DUSP family for being a safe space and allowing me grow intellectually and personally.

To the Latino family at MIT for all the good evenings that made this experience enjoyable.

To my parents for instilling in me the values and sensitivity that make me who I am.

And, above all, to Carla for giving meaning to my life.

INDEX

Prelude. Contemplating Communities	6
First Movement. The Sparking Cycle	9
The two themes of this symphony	10
The sparking cycle	15
Contemplation	18
Systems of vulnerabilities	21
From urban trauma to system change	27
A culture-oriented approach	30
A note on oppression	33
Second Movement. Lighting the Spark	36
The community	37
Some context	40
The challenge	42
The spark: an art festival	43
Crafting the festival	48
Building the infrastructure	54
The team	58
The big day	60
An incremental process...	69
...and an emotional shift	76
Third Movement. Keeping the Flame Alive	78
Infrastructure of change	79
Seizing the momentum	85
Envisioning the scope	90
Finale. A Sparking Urbanism	95
References	97
Appendixes	101
A. The stage: Jardim Colombo	101
B. The players: An increasing network	105
C. The music: A podcast and a piano improvisation	107
D. The concepts: Glossary of terms	108

PRELUDE

Contemplating communities

Communities are made of people and therefore need to be treated with sensitivity and care. Human beings are complex, and when they constitute communities with shared and diverse interests, beliefs and goals—that is, with a local culture that defines their collective ways of living—such complexity increases dramatically. In contexts of structural oppression, understood as an excessive source of pressure that current social systems exert on certain communities, individual and collective transformation processes are highly unpredictable. Consequently, we can rarely expect that projects designed to improve the living conditions of the populations in such contexts will unfold as desired. Hence, planners, facilitators, community leaders and activists committed to building fairer societies need to keep in mind the inherent complexity associated with oppressed communities and pay careful attention to the details and nuances that they encounter along their engagement. Only by cultivating their sensitivity, can practitioners meaningfully contribute to envision strategic actions that unleash incremental transformative cultural processes.

In this thesis, I explore how we can spark meaningful change in contexts of oppression through a culture-oriented approach, which have implications at two levels. On one hand, such approach consists of developing strategies that build on the existing local culture of the populations that practitioners become involved with so as to, first, expand incrementally individuals' and communities' sense of awareness of their surrounding realities, and second, foster collective capabilities to pursue the lives these communities deserve and desire. On the other hand, a culture-oriented approach also implies a shift in the practitioners' mindset through deep reflection that has to occur before and while undertaking such processes of change with communities. In this sense, this thesis elaborates on American philosopher Donald Schön's notion of the reflective practice, through which practitioners expand their awareness of the implications that their own actions bring about to the communities they work with.

More specifically, I use the analogy of the *spark* as an initial set of actions designed to bring community members and other interested stakeholders together to work towards a shared outcome that is valuable for the community. This set of actions is particularly effective when it is conceived so that it focuses on an urban trauma that community members care about—be it a shocking event or an ongoing traumatic experience—giving them a reason to join the initiative. To function as a spark, these actions must not only provoke enthusiasm and generate realistic expectations of deeper social changes, but also unleash more complex transformation processes in the community. The role of practitioners—a category that, for the purpose of this thesis, encompasses planners, facilitators, community leaders, and activists working with oppressed communities—is, hence, to *light the spark* and pave the ground for a longer quest for system change.

Why system change? Many communities have suffered and still suffer today the consequences of extremely unfair and unequal social systems that prevent individuals from enjoying wellbeing. When it comes to communities at the margins, it is not just about solving specific problems, since challenges are often structural and intertwined, and they reveal underlying social patterns that are hindering people from pursuing the lives they deserve and the future they desire. Such oppressed communities—and consequently the world as a whole, which depends on them—are in much need of structural transformations that will liberate them from the dependence they are embedded in and construct alternative and fairer futures for everybody.

I will argue, though, that trying to directly tackle system change from outside is not only presumptuous, but also risky for communities willing to move forward within their own cultural logics. The approach I will take is humbler. It relies on person-to-person interactions and on slowly building strong relationships and creating networks of individuals and organizations working around shared objectives—what I have called a network of change. While keeping in mind the ultimate goal of system change, when it comes to community planning, I suggest that practitioners and community members define carefully, and according to existing possibilities and limitations, targeted challenges that can incrementally lead to more complex transformation processes. Step by step, this network has the potential to build a solid infrastructure of change from which more transformation projects will emerge, gradually reaching to a broader sector of the community and enhancing collective wellbeing.

As an essential element of the culture-oriented approach described in this piece, art is a particularly powerful tool that can enable meaningful change. In this sense, the role of art responds to the two levels of cultural shift introduced before: the cultural transformation processes in a community and the change in the practitioner's mindset, necessary to unleash such processes. Starting with the individual shift that is part of this approach, and drawing from the art world, I suggest that, to better inform their actions, practitioners cultivate a contemplative attitude that allows them to *perceive* the complexity of oppressed communities. When challenges are systemic, contemplation becomes a necessary mindset, both to prevent practitioners from proposing solutions to problems they do not completely understand due to lack of systems thinking, and also to identify an entry point to these complex social systems that can bring about meaningful change.

On the other hand, from a pragmatic point of view, public artworks rely on multiple forms of communication and can therefore be leveraged to convey and exchange ideas within the logics of a local culture. Art facilitates conversations around the thorniest topics, and more specifically, public artworks—that is, artistic creations that occur in the public realm and are accessible for a big majority of a community—enable collective reflection around issues of local culture and identity. Exposing people to diverse art forms is a creative way of expanding their mindsets and sense of awareness about their surrounding reality, which can even lead them to reconsider their vital paths. At a collective level, increasing the exposure of oppressed communities to a greater number of artistic practices contributes to the expansion of their collective capabilities, essential to successfully pursuing the lives they aspire to.

More generally, artists show us how to look at the world around us with greater sensitivity. In the words of English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, “poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (Shelley 1821). Similar to the contemplative attitude we commonly adopt when we confront a work of art—be it a symphony, a painting, a theater play, a poem, or any other artistic manifestation—which allows us to enjoy a fully aesthetic experience, I propose treating community processes with the same attention as if they were fascinating and complex works of art, and not just concatenations of problems that must be solved. As Amartya Sen beautifully puts it, “the battle to eradicate poverty needs not be seen as an exercise of blood, sweat, and tears” (Kabanda 2018, p. X). In this regard, engaging the arts with all human beings, and especially those who have been typically deprived of access to artistic manifestations, is essential to live *meaningful* lives. It is crucial that professionals become sensitized to this need if we want to contribute to building communities whose lives make sense. It is a must.

This thesis is a journey that departs from contemplation to be aware of our current systems and arrives at the aspiration of system change. Like a musical composition, it is structured into three main movements. The first one, titled *The Sparking Cycle*, is a conceptual framework that builds on the relationship between the concepts of *conscientização* (Freire, 1968) and capabilities (Sen, 2000). Then I delve into the idea of contemplation as a necessary first step towards system change, which I specifically define as a shift from systems of vulnerabilities to systems of capabilities. The second movement, *Lighting the Spark*, grounds the theory of the first movement in the story of an inspiring project I became involved in, in the community of Jardim Colombo, São Paulo, that is leveraging the power of art to overcome structural oppression within the logics of the local culture. In *Keeping the Flame Alive*, the third movement, I apply systems thinking, first, to theorize about how the path towards system change could look, and second, to narrow the ideas of this thesis down to a pragmatic set of principles for practitioners working in contexts of oppression.

Overall, it is worth mentioning that *The Sparking Cycle* is built from three different narratives. The first is an examination of the state of art, and it dominates the logic of the first movement. The second is a descriptive narrative, that I take advantage of to share real experiences, mainly about our project in Brazil. This narrative sets the tone for the second movement. Finally, there is a third narrative present throughout the entire thesis: the reflection on my own practice and thinking. I fully explore the potential of this third type of narrative in the third movement.

In short, this thesis is an act of contemplation in itself conceived to help design actions that seek system change. I hope it will be inspiring for others working on meaningful transformation processes among the communities they engage with. Similar to the stories I share, which are sparking profound changes among the people involved, it is my wish that reading this text, as well as listening to the music along with it, will spark new ideas in practitioners so that, together, we can more meaningfully advance towards fairer societies.

FIRST MOVEMENT

The Sparking Cycle

Big changes can start with localized actions. When these actions are designed within the logics of the system they aspire to challenge and change, it is not unrealistic to believe in an incremental process of transformation. Once we acknowledge the limitations of our potential contribution as individuals to build fairer societies, believing in the possibility of unleashing meaningful change through the actions we enhance becomes almost like an existential question that encourages us to move forward. To better understand how our participation as individuals can be most meaningful in contexts of high vulnerability and oppression, this thesis will explore the following questions.

How can culture-oriented actions spark system change in oppressed communities? What considerations must practitioners take into account to increase the chance that targeted collective actions unleash incremental transformative cultural processes that lead to system change?

The first question is at the core of this thesis. I will generate a discourse, first, on the need for more systems thinking when we talk about community planning, and second, on how arts, as a language, and local culture, as a framework, are powerful allies to catalyze deep changes. The second research question is posed to offer specific principles for practitioners and facilitators working for system change: what do we need to pay attention to before, during, and after getting involved with complex communities?

In order to build a conceptual framework to structure the conversation around system change, which I define as the shift from systems of vulnerabilities to systems of capabilities, this first movement will follow an inductive reasoning process. Starting with a simple idea—the sparking cycle—as an elemental unit at the core of the process of systems thinking carried out in this essay, more layers will be added to the model progressively. The concepts of vulnerabilities and urban trauma will be introduced to better understand why we are talking about oppression and why system change is an urgency. The section on culture and public art will then justify why system change is strongly context-dependent. Only after reading through the complete first movement, will we be ready to understand the importance of the *spark* as a strategic set of actions that can unleash meaningful change progressively. The concept of the spark will then be grounded on the real story described in the second movement. Let us now begin this journey.

The two themes of this symphony

The discourse offered in this thesis is built on two main themes: the idea of *conscientização*¹ and the notion of capabilities. These two concepts—which, as in a musical composition, complement and reinforce each other—come from two classical pieces of the literature on development: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968 by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, and *Development as Freedom*, released in 1999 by Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen. Both concepts are profound and, when fully understood, can bring about insightful cultural implications and lead to multiple actions, at both individual and collective levels.

Theme A: Conscientização

As theologian Richard Shaull sharply states in his Foreword to the English version of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the ‘culture of silence’ he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others” (Freire, 1970, p. 14). Many elements of this sentence offer clues about what Freire’s concept of *conscientização* embodies, which is essentially the act of “looking critically at the world”. This idea implies that the first step towards changing our oppressing systems—perpetuated by the “culture of silence” that the oppressors insist on teaching to keep people “ignorant” and lethargic—is our ability to *name* our surrounding reality. Moreover, the act of naming the world, while it can certainly happen in isolation, becomes especially powerful if it takes place collectively, in “a dialogical encounter with others”. Hence, the pursuit of system change ought to be a collective process grounded in interaction with others, which leads to identifying the oppressing structures. Moreover, *conscientização* is not an exclusive act for privileged thinkers or professionals, but aims at reaching “every human being.” It is an inherently universal and democratic concept.

“Provided with the proper tools for such [dialogical] encounter,” Shaull continues, “the individual can gradually perceive personal and societal reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it” (Freire, 1970, p. 14). Again, it is worth parsing this statement to appreciate all the nuances. First, it is fundamental for the purpose of this thesis that *conscientização* does not occur as a miracle and all of a sudden: it is a “gradual” development of perception of the “personal and societal reality as well as the contradictions in it”. As a gradual process, I would add, it is never complete—there is no way in which we can *fully* appreciate reality and all its “contradictions”—so we must settle for “dealing critically” with the system and assume that there is no one single, or correct, approach to system change.

Conscientização is, according to the two previous paragraphs, the first step towards changing the realities that are preventing individuals and communities from pursuing wellbeing. The act of naming those realities is essential to expand our consciousness about situations that we do not like and aspire to overcome then accordingly. The following statement captures the essence of this concept and sets the stage for the rest of this thesis:

¹ An equivalent word in English would be “conscientization”, but I will stick to the original concept in Portuguese.

***Conscientização* is the individual or collective act of *looking critically* at the world in order to *name* our surrounding reality and deal with it consciously.**

What about those “proper tools” mentioned by Shaull? We cannot infer from just this statement what such tools could be, and it is indeed the purpose of Freire’s book—and his philosophy—to suggest a thorough answer to this question. As a pedagogue, Freire’s pursuit of *conscientização* is grounded in an alternative understanding of our education systems, moving away from the traditional teacher-student relationship, where the former “deposit” information into the latter—the “banking” model of education—with little or no room for discussion or dissent. In this regard, Freire suggested that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire 1968, p. 72).

Freire’s proposal about a problem-posing education system is well known and has been comprehensively discussed—it is not my intention to analyze here the Freirean theory of pedagogy. This thesis focuses instead on expanding the possibilities underlying the concept of *conscientização* by exploring creative ways—specifically, through a culture-oriented approach—to spark system change within oppressed communities. Let me then explain how I interpret the notion of what Shaull calls “proper tools”, which can deepen the necessary acts of *conscientização*. This is where Amartya Sen comes into play.

Theme B: Capability

I will introduce this concept with a straightforward definition of Sen’s Capability Approach by philosopher Thomas Wells: “the Capability Approach is defined by its choice of focus upon the moral significance of individuals’ capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value” (2012). The key idea of the Capability Approach is embodied in the expression “lives they have reason to value”, which Sen repeats frequently throughout his book *Development as Freedom* (1997). Sen is very cautious with his language and tries to remain minimally prescriptive when he elaborates on the concept of the Capability Approach. In his view, policy makers, economists, planners, and other kinds of outsiders should not feel entitled to speak in the name of the communities that are the target of development projects or policies. It is the community members, Sen argues, with their sets of beliefs and values, who know the kind of lives that they value the most, as well as the *reasons* they do so. Hence, the Capability Approach, as a proposal for development is, as stated by Wells, centered on expanding the individuals’ capabilities to pursue and achieve the lives they have reason to value.

As Wells captures in his statement, the expansion of individuals’ capabilities is a matter of “moral significance”. In this regard, Sen himself would distinguish between *ends* and *means* of development: “the expansion of human freedom is both the main object and the primary means of development” (Sen 1997, p. 53). He continues: “The ends and means of development call for placing the perspective of freedom at the center of the stage. The people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved—given the opportunity—in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs.” (p. 53) In short, expanding individuals’

and communities' freedom is, first, a goal by itself, a moral obligation which would not require further justification, and second, a powerful strategy to advance development—the more *capable* a community is, the more likely they will find their own paths to lead the lives they deserve and desire.²

What exactly do we mean, then, by “capability?” Sen distinguishes between *capabilities* and *functionings*. While the latter are “states of being and doing”, the former refer to “the set of valuable functionings that a person has effective access to” (Wells 2012). For instance, if drinking water is a valuable functioning, *being able* to drink clean water every day, and *having access* to it effortlessly, is the corresponding capability. To put it in terms of the well-known parable, teaching a man to fish might be a valuable *functioning*, but is useless if he does not have access to the fishing holes. To be described as a capability, this man should not only be taught how to fish, but also guaranteed access to the resources so that he can make use of his fishing skills when he requires it (Whitfield 2013).³ As with the concept of conscientização, I will share here the following concise definition of capabilities as will be understood for the rest of this thesis.

Capabilities are *sets of skills* that individuals and communities need to pursue the lives they have *reason to value* based on their awareness of their surrounding realities.

The obvious question following the above reasoning is how to identify and achieve the sets of capabilities needed for individuals and communities to lead the lives they have reason to value. A follow-up question would also be how to best assess the reasons why people value their lives. There is, of course, no quick answer to such question, and Sen's Capability Approach has been indeed criticized for not providing a step-by-step method for development policies to identify and achieve the capabilities needed by poor communities to overcome poverty and other challenges.⁴ Even though Sen offers many insights on how to detect the most valuable capabilities, he intentionally remains at a conceptual level—critics would say “vague” instead. Sen is aware of the many and diverse complexities that communities across the world are facing, and it would be presumptuous to list specific solutions for all contexts.

² The distinction between “Us” and “Them” is a point of controversy and has been described by some scholars as an act of “Othering” that takes place from positions of privilege. In her article *Working the Hyphens*, American psychologist Michelle Fine (1994) criticizes academic social scientists who theorize about marginality from their comfort zones in the academia: “the elite, with their ‘new class’ academic colleagues, retain a corpus of social science material that fingers Them while it powders the faces of Us” (Fine 1994, p. 73). Even though I do not feel fully comfortable when using third person to talk about oppressed communities, I decided to stick to this language, but trying to remain conscious about the implications of “Othering.” In a way, one of the basic assumptions this thesis builds on is captured in one of Pink Floyd's most famous songs: “Us and them / And after all we're only ordinary men” (Pink Floyd 1973).

³ Another concept that captures the idea of capability is “agency,” defined in Merriam-Webster as “the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power” (“agency” 2019). Both concepts, capability and agency, are tied to the capacity of individuals to act by themselves, as opposed to being passive recipients of other's actions.

⁴ Wells's article (2012) includes a section titled “Criticisms of Sen's Capability Approach” with a paragraph explaining the under-theorization of Sen's proposal that is worth looking at.

That Sen circumvents the elaboration of a too-specific list of policies for development does not mean that he has himself no opinion on the lives that oppressed communities *should* value, nor is he incapable of predefining some sets of capabilities that they would require to pursue those lives.⁵ In her article “Sen’s Perfectionist ‘Reason to Value,’” Swedish philosopher Tulsa Jansson (2016) eloquently argues that Sen’s pretended neutrality is untenable—and one can certainly catch a glimpse of Sen’s political view while reading his book. I agree with Jansson: like Sen, all of us carry a backpack with our own values, and it would be insincere to deny that we form opinions on the communities we meet and also have reason to believe in our criteria about how some social scenarios could be improved or changed. How to balance our position between imposing our principles and over-romanticizing communities’ ways of living, which leads to stagnation, is not an easy task and requires a lot of sensitivity. In the following pages, I hope to offer a convincing approach to community planning that, while remaining conceptual, includes enough specificity for practitioners to undertake actions in the future.

Let me suggest a helpful framework to start thinking about the sets of capabilities that we have reason to consider valuable for communities in general. It is called “The Five Domains of Wellbeing,” developed by the Full Frame Initiative (FFI 2015).⁶ This framework is grounded on the assumption that “all of us [...] share a set of universal needs that are critical to our wellbeing” and should be able “both to decide for *ourselves* what’s ‘worth it’,” (that is, what we have reason to value) “and to navigate life in ways that build our assets and minimize tradeoffs and foster wellbeing” (FFI 2015, p. 1). Policies, projects and services designed to improve the living conditions of “families and communities living at the intersection of poverty, violence and trauma” typically only target one set of basic needs—such as access to proper shelter—but “rarely are set up to take into consideration the tradeoffs that might be an unintended by-product of this progress.” The Full Frame Initiative suggests always looking at “the full frame”, which is nothing other than applying systems thinking. Such full frame consists of the following five domains of wellbeing:

- 1) **social connectedness** to people and communities, in ways that allow us to give as well as to receive;
- 2) **stability** that comes from having things we can count on to be the same from day to day, and knowing that a small bump won’t set off a domino-effect of crises;
- 3) **safety**, the ability to be ourselves without significant harm;
- 4) **mastery**, feeling that we can influence what happens to us, and having the skills to navigate and negotiate life;
- 5) and **meaningful access to relevant resources** to meet our basic needs without shame, danger or great difficulty.⁷

⁵ Sen’s Capability Approach has been thoroughly discussed, challenged, and expanded, but it is beyond this thesis to offer a literature review on it. For a more specific proposal that builds on Sen’s philosophy, I suggest looking at Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Theory, which includes a list of ten basic capabilities—what she calls The Central Human Capabilities (Wells 2012).

⁶ The Full Frame Initiative is a social change organization in Massachusetts founded by Katya Fels Smyth in 1995, although its current name came after the first iteration of the Full Frame Approach published in 2006 as the set of values and principles that guides their mission. According to the description on the organization’s website, the Full Frame Initiative “partners with pioneering organizations, systems and communities across the country to fundamentally shift their focus from fixing problems to fostering wellbeing—the needs and experiences essential for health and hope.” <https://fullframeinitiative.org/>

⁷ Detailed information about each of the domains can be found on the Full Frame Initiative’s webpage.

To continue elaborating on my own approach, I will assume for now that this synthetic framework is reasonably valid for any social context, and I will blend it with Sen’s Capability Approach and the language of systems thinking used in this thesis. Thus, each dimension of wellbeing suggested by the Full Frame Approach corresponds to a *set of capabilities* necessary for individuals and communities to pursue wellbeing. Moreover, the notion of the Full Frame itself can be renamed as the *System of Capabilities* that we all deserve and aspire to. Figure 1 synthesizes the blended framework that I will refer to throughout this thesis. This figure illustrates how all five dimensions are interrelated and constitute a state of equilibrium.

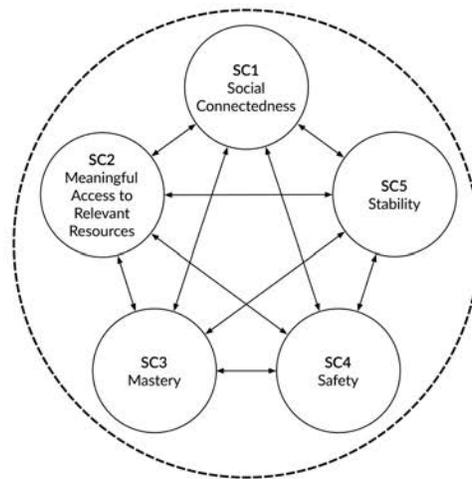


Figure 1. The System of Capabilities consists of five main sets of capabilities, which are interconnected and reinforce each other.

As can be observed, the dimension of culture is missing in this model. However, this absence is consistent with the understanding of culture as a collective *way of live*, as I will further develop in a later section. Rather than an additional dimension necessary for wellbeing, culture is *across* the five basic sets of capabilities as defined in this model. This means that a general system of capabilities has to be suited to each community according to its own cultural logics. For instance, the types of social connectedness that communities have reason to value might differ among communities—some cultures are more collective than others—and the same reasoning goes for the other four basic sets of capabilities. In short, we can define a system of capabilities as follows:

A system of capabilities is a social system whose individuals enjoy wellbeing. A system of capabilities consists of five basic sets of capabilities—social connectedness, stability, safety, mastery, and meaningful access to relevant resources—which are interconnected and reinforce each other. Communities can be described as systems of capabilities when their members can advance wellbeing in each of these five dimensions according to their own cultural logics.

If we are already aware of five sets of capabilities that a community aspires to in order to enjoy wellbeing, why so much emphasis on fostering more sense of awareness? The system of capabilities represented in Figure 1 is so far just a general framework, but the specific capabilities inside each of the five sets are highly context-dependent. They vary *among* and *within* communities and individuals, and therefore have to be pursued gradually through collective transformation processes that advance wellbeing. How then do the concepts of *conscientização* and capabilities relate to each other?

The sparking cycle

It is necessary to apply at this stage a key notion of system dynamics: the “reinforcing feedback loop” (Sterman 2000). Figure 2 illustrates how the notions of *conscientização* and capabilities reinforce each other: by becoming aware of an issue that concerns us—let us remain abstract for a while and call such issue a “challenge”—we are not only able to name and describe it, but also to think of the capabilities that we need to address it. In turn, in the process of acquiring such capabilities, we gain a broader perspective on the challenge, and become eventually aware of more capabilities that we will have to develop to overcome it. Consequently, both our awareness of the challenge and our capacity to tackle it increase *gradually*.



Figure 2. The reinforcing feedback loop between *conscientização* and capabilities.

With this basic feedback loop in mind, we can follow systems thinking to expand the model. In social systems in general, we can assume that in the process of tackling one challenge and solving it, we become aware of a next problem that needs to be addressed. Thus, one challenge leads to another, in a theoretically endless process—like life itself—which I have called the *sparking cycle*, represented in Figure 3. In contexts where there is already extended wellbeing—that is, in systems of capabilities—sparking cycles are typically linear and predictable. For instance, the different stages of education that students pursue in contexts of wellbeing (preschool, middle school, high school, bachelor, master’s degree, doctoral degree) respond to this logic.

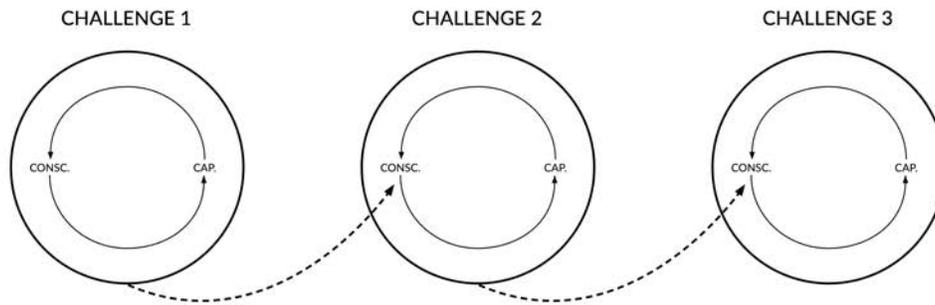


Figure 3. The sparking cycle as a linear set of challenges.

In contexts of oppression, however, challenges are often unpredictable and they rarely unfold in a linear fashion. When carrying out a task that should follow the linear logic described before, many other problems can come in the way, hence preventing individuals and communities from moving forward as planned. In general, sets of challenges faced by oppressed communities tend to be chaotic and prevent their individuals from developing the required capabilities to advance their wellbeing. Following the example on education, we can imagine young people in oppressed communities to be forced to stop their studies due to different causes, such as extreme poverty, domestic violence, unplanned children, and so on. Nevertheless, there is the possibility of embracing such unpredictability in a proactive way. When we are facing multiple problems simultaneously and new ones keep emerging, it can occur that in the process of tackling those, we broaden our perspective on the overall set of challenges and expand our overall capabilities. Hence, planners, facilitators, community leaders, and activists can be strategic in the way they help defining the set of challenges to be tackled. Figure 4 reflects this controlled randomness of a hypothetical sparking cycle in a context of high unpredictability.

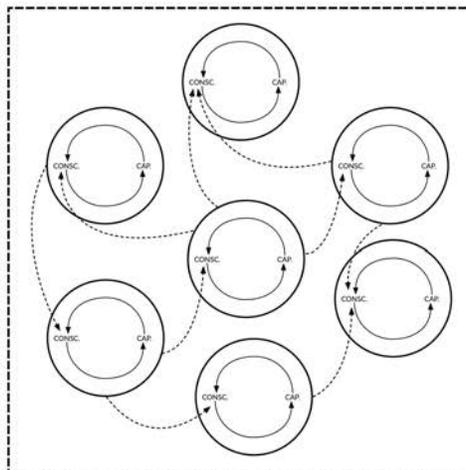


Figure 4. The sparking cycle as a set of interrelated challenges.⁸

⁸ The use of a square responds to two criteria. First, it will later be helpful to differentiate between actions—squares—and systems and its elements—circles. Second, the square implies that the set of challenges has a beginning and an end.

Before continuing developing the model, let me stop to discuss what we can find in the existing literature about this, in my view, fascinating relationship between the concepts of *conscientização* and capabilities. There is surprisingly little bibliography that links directly Freire's and Sen's philosophies, despite being two key authors that have expanded considerably the discussions on development theory. The most notable piece that I found is an article by educators Michael Glassman & Rikki Patton (2013) that remarkably also brings philosopher John Dewey, and his pragmatist approach to democratic education, into the equation. According to Glassman & Patton, there are four aspects that tie all three theoretical approaches together.

“First, recognizing the importance of information that expands freedom of choice in everyday living” (Glassman & Patton 2013, p. 1354)—which is obviously a central element for the three authors, as well as an underlying principle for the current thesis. “Second, access to information that is not limited by any specific social directorate”—the existing and eventually oppressing systems that determine who has access to what type of information. “Third, locating and recognizing relevant information that will afford new capabilities; and fourth, the ability to use that information as actionable knowledge to make free and productive choices in life.” (Glassman & Patton 2013, p. 1354) These last two points relate to the same idea: the importance of increasing our awareness about what we can improve in our lives—*conscientização*—as well as turning it into “actionable knowledge”—capabilities. Regarding this relationship, later in the article, Glassman & Patton add how “a *virtuous cycle* emerges in which the capability to participate in determination of local functionings through shared, informed decision-making leads to greater capabilities” (Glassman & Patton 2013, p. 1359, emphasis added). A specific type of such virtuous cycle—the one that aspires to lead to system change—is what I have called the *sparkling cycle*.

The sparkling cycle resembles the old adage of the chicken and the hen—what comes first within each challenge, being conscious about it or being capable of addressing it? I state, though, that for the sparkling cycle to be effective, some degree of *conscientização* needs to happen in the first place. We can see in Figure 3 how the arrows coming out of each circle always point to the *conscientização* element of the subsequent challenge (and also Figure 4 is drawn following the same criterion). Even without being *fully* conscious about a challenge, we must have somehow thought about it before developing our capabilities to address it.

In this sense, choosing an appropriate first challenge that becomes an entry point to system change is crucial to unleash the sparkling cycle strategically. For practitioners to help set off the appropriate sparkling cycle, it is key to step back and apply systems thinking to widen our perspective on the complete set of challenges that we might encounter along the process—even without being able to name all the challenges at an initial stage. Moreover, to avoid biases associated with our preconceptions, we have to take an additional step back to be *aware of our own consciousness* about a potential set of challenges. Such double state of *conscientização* is a *capability* that needs to be gradually cultivated by practitioners. It is a very special *mindset* that practitioners can train and adopt when pursuing system change among oppressed communities. I call it *contemplation*.

Contemplation

Let me first share a couple of definitions of the word “contemplation.” The Oxford Dictionary defines contemplation as “the action of looking thoughtfully at something for a long time”, as “deep reflective thought”, or even as “religious meditation” and “a form of Christian prayer or meditation in which a person seeks to pass beyond mental images and concepts to a direct experience of the divine” (“contemplation” 2019b). According to Merriam-Webster, contemplation is “an act of considering with attention”; “the act of regarding steadily;” but it also defines the concept as “concentration on spiritual things as a form of private devotion” or, more specifically, “a state of mystical awareness of God’s being” (“contemplation” 2019a). Regarding other languages, the Real Academia Española describes contemplate as “to pay attention to something material or spiritual”; “to consider or keep in mind something or someone”; “to think with intensity about God and considering his divine attributes or the mysteries of religion” (“contemplar” 2019).

Among these definitions (leaving apart the religious connotations) we find several clues to what contemplation means in the context of the current thesis and why it is so important while working with oppressed communities. To contemplate implies to *attentively concentrate* on something, to treat it with *sensitivity and sensibility* (leveraging all our senses), and to have an open-minded attitude while observing it. There is some spirituality embedded in the act of contemplation, for it requires deep reflection. To contemplate is the opposite of to overlook or to look away, to disregard, to neglect or to scorn. Given all these connotations and what I already introduced in the previous sections, I suggest the following more appropriate definition:

Contemplation is both a *mindset* that allows us to appreciate what lies underneath the obvious and an *attitude* towards a set of systemic challenges. Contemplation is necessary to perceive the inherent complexity of our societies and *envision meaningful actions* for social change.

I have taken the idea of contemplation from the art world: this is the first direct connection between the realms of urbanism and the arts that I would like to introduce in this thesis. We find contemplative behaviors among artists creating their works of art, and also among the audience when it is exposed to such works. To fully enjoy an “aesthetic experience,”⁹ we need to adopt a particular mindset: we have to *contemplate* the art work beyond what we see and hear on the surface.

Similarly, I believe that handling communities with contemplation is the only way that individuals can aspire to *connect* with them and perceive many of their underlying nuances. It is almost like treating communities as works of art, as I already mentioned in the Prelude. Building on the set of figures that I have been including so far in this thesis, Figure 5 illustrates how adding the dimension of contemplation facilitates us to observe beyond the obvious

⁹ According to the online dictionary Encyclopedia, “an aesthetic experience arises in response to works of art or other aesthetic objects” (“aesthetic experience” 2019). For a detailed understanding and an historical review of this concept, it is worth reading the complete article, available on <https://bit.ly/2Dxt71b>

challenges and perceive them as part of a system. Even as regards the most distant challenges—the ones we are not able to anticipate at this initial stage before undertaking the project—contemplation facilitates that we be ready for unexpected situations. In short, adopting a contemplative mindset and attitude is essential to *light the spark*—the second movement of this symphony—and initiate the virtuous cycle of *conscientização* and capabilities among the communities we work with.

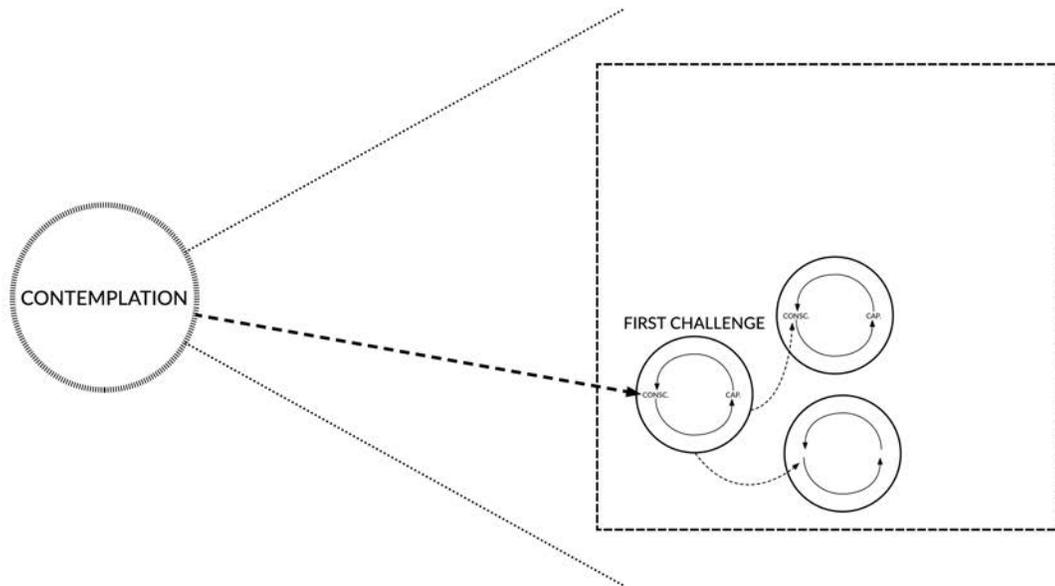


Figure 5. Contemplation broadens the perspective on the full set of challenges and helps to identify the entry point.

As mentioned in the Prelude to this thesis, my conceptual proposal of contemplation as an individual’s mindset builds on Donald Schön’s considerations on the “Reflective Practitioner” (Schön 1983), as well as on Otto Scharmer’s “Theory U” (Scharmer 2016 & 2018). As a critique of an overconfidence in the “technical rationality” that guides academic professionals in general, and social scientists in particular, Schön sharply points out that “with this emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem *setting*” (Schön 1983, p. 40). Why so much need of offering solutions without deeply considering what communities are actually *experiencing* beyond what our data say? “Let us search, instead”, Schön argues, “for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive process which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (Schön 1983, p. 49). He poetically comes up with the proposal of the “reflective practitioner” as an individual with enough sensitivity to reflect *in* and *on* action—meaning, both while designing and evaluating processes and while being “on the ground”, in the middle of the performance.

On his side, Scharmer (a disciple of Schön) developed a whole body of theory that he graphically called Theory U. The “U” at the core of Scharmer’s model is an invitation for individuals, communities, and organizations to undertake deep journeys of change that lead us from repeating what we already know and have learnt from the past—what he calls “downloading”—to the performance of an emerging future that “operates from the whole.” (Scharmer

2016, 2018). Only through the act of “letting go” our “voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear,” will we be able to look at the whole system’s potential. At the bottom of the U, in the middle of this journey, takes place the act of “presencing,” described by Scharmer as “the capacity to connect to the deepest sources of self—to go to the inner place of stillness where knowing comes to surface.”

Moreover, bringing in the idea of contemplation to the particular realm of urbanism is not fully new. Even though with different names, we can find similar approaches in existing literature and real projects. Architect Philipp James Tabb talks about “Serene Urbanism” to describe a holistic approach to urbanism that also takes into account the value of contemplation in an increasingly “tumultuous” world:

Serenity is becoming alarmingly absent from our daily existence, especially within the urban context. [...] The modern world that surrounds us is complicated, contradictory and bewildering. It is complex in its overwhelming response to a world population of more than 7 billion people. [...] It is contradictory because many of the built works and technologies no longer support the solutions to the housing of a contemporary culture. [...] It is perplexing because of the enormity of the problems, and the time and resources necessary to actually overcome them. [...] In response, the concept of serene urbanism is designed to provide an alternative approach for future urban designs that is applicable to both new and existing contexts, and large and small settings. For certain, there is a need for more reflective, engaging, and insightful approaches to creating and sustaining habitation (Tabb 2017, p. 3).

Although Tabb ends up taking a different path in the application of the “serene” to urbanism,¹⁰ his diagnosis towards contemporary urban contexts that are “overwhelming”, “contradictory”, and “perplexing” resonate with the philosophy behind this thesis. Tabb’s claim that more “reflective” and “insightful” approaches need to be taken goes back to the notion of the reflective practitioner coined by Schön.

Contemplation is also present in the development discourse. Organist Patrick Kabanda offers an analogous analysis to the one offered by Tabb. Kabanda talks about “the art of observation” as a skill that practitioners need to develop to undertake meaningful projects. In *The Creative Wealth of Nations* (2018), he offers many insights on how and why to link art and culture to development policies across the world. There is urgency for more observation:

The art of observation might seem just as easy to master. But it requires a clear mind. In this day and age, where we are susceptible to information overload, our minds are easily cluttered. As the neuroscientist Moshe Bar says, we eat food, but we do not taste it; we look at beautiful things, but do not see them. Applying this to development policy, it is remarkable how much gets overlooked, as we clutter our minds with competing interests. We obsess about meeting quotas, for example, regardless of whether problems are solved or not. And we constantly load our thoughts with potential future moves like calculating to get promotions instead of genuinely solving problems (Kabanda 2018, p. 25).

¹⁰ The second part of the cited book is devoted to Serenbe, a new city created recently near Atlanta where Tabb, as the masterplan’s author, is applying the logic of his Serene Urbanism to the urban design and planning strategy.

Reflective practice, presencing, serene urbanism, the art of observation—all these ideas are tightly related to the concept of contemplation as a mindset that can lead individuals and communities to advance wellbeing and pursue system change. After having acknowledged that our contemporary realities are too far beyond the grasp of our analytical thought and not fully explainable with what we already know, I claim that more contemplation can open our minds. In particular, it is a desirable attitude (I hope to have been persuasive enough) that allows us to broaden our perspective on the challenges that individuals and communities face in contexts of oppression.

Systems of vulnerabilities

But what is a *challenge*? Except for some general examples, so far I have remained conceptual and context-free, for the next movement of this thesis will mainly consist of a specific project where I will relate to the ideas introduced in this first chapter. Nevertheless, let me touch ground for a moment and offer some specific examples that will illustrate the next key notion, which I have called *systems of vulnerabilities*.

Here, building on Merriam-Webster’s definition, I explain a challenge as a “*stimulating* task or problem” (“challenge” 2019) that cannot be resolved with the existing means and whose resolution is *meaningful* for an individual and the community where she belongs. In this context, a challenge represents a potential change that the community has *reason to value*, but that cannot be addressed with the existing *capabilities*. For instance, the community of Jardim Colombo, which I will focus on in the next movement, faced the following challenge: the turning of a dumping site in the middle of the neighborhood into a park for the residents. It seemed a realistic goal—it had happened before in other similar places¹¹—but also too far away from being carried out when it was first raised. The *conscientização* phase of this ambitious challenge started in the very moment when some neighbors realized that the area that had been occupied by trash and rubble for more than 10 years could actually be of a much more valuable use for the community. What *capabilities* would they need to pursue that challenge?

As I will further explore in the second movement, the challenge of the physical transformation of such a dumping site turned out to be a much more complex objective than initially expected. Indeed, the proposal of the park falls into the category of what I have called a *set of interrelated challenges* that should be split up into many low-level challenges to be pursued gradually. Tackling each of those sets of challenges is accompanied by an increasing generation of new capabilities, step by step. In this sense, one of the most immediate actions that the community of Jardim Colombo took—the *first challenge* to be solved—was to start cleaning up the dumping site. As a task that could not be carried out by one individual, the community members that decided to start the clean-up process had

¹¹ The experience of Vidigal, a community in Rio de Janeiro that had been able to transform a dumping site into a community park, was the most direct inspiration for Jardim Colombo.

to coordinate a campaign to invite more neighbors to join the initiative. As a consequence of this call, the capability of collective clean-up was partially generated.¹²

Unexpectedly, after finishing the first clean-up, the people involved became aware of a much more complex challenge that had not been as obvious before they started the process. This second challenge consisted of keeping the site clean. In this case, the *conscientização* act allowed the community members to *name* this new challenge and pose the associated question: how to make neighbors stop throwing trash and rubble into the recently cleaned space. Figure 6 schematizes how the sparking cycle operated, as two interrelated challenges, at this initial stage of this project.

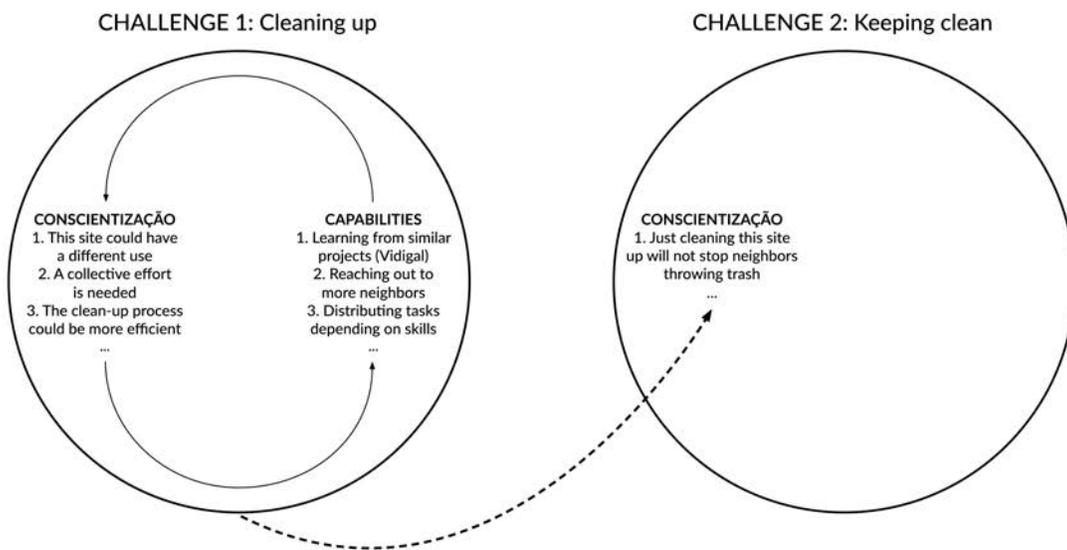


Figure 6. First steps of the sparking cycle in Jardim Colombo's project.

The type of challenges can vary a lot depending on the context and the scope of the changes that a community is willing to undertake. For instance, in a place that has suffered an earthquake, the immediate associated challenges are related to recovery processes, such as rebuilding houses and other damaged places; fostering psychological healing among the affected people; and, more generally, returning to previous life as soon as possible. But what if, through actions and activities that encourage *conscientização*, we can expand the scope of all these *per se* valuable goals? What if it is *not just* about recovering people's usual lives after a disaster nor about just overcoming a specific traumatic situation that plagues the community, like the dumping site? Can we go *beyond* the immediate challenges

¹² In later stages of the project, based on the learnings of this first activity, this capability kept evolving and every new clean-up phase was more efficient than the previous one. This example responds to the reinforcing feedback loop between *conscientização* and capabilities *within* the challenge of the clean-up itself, as reflected in Figure 6.

associated with these traumatic experiences and leverage the momentum to address other systemic problems that are perpetuating the conditions of oppression?

Such questions are at the core of this thesis. They cannot be answered right away, for they require systems thinking. A sparking cycle, as I have argued earlier, is not simply a sequence of challenges—one leading to the next—but rather a set of interrelated goals that can lead to *meaningful change* among oppressed communities if they are carried out strategically. One could argue, though, that individuals and communities are somehow expanding their capabilities continuously in *any* social context, and so the concept of the sparking cycle does not bring anything new to the conversation.

I would partially agree with that statement: the ongoing expansion of individual and collective *conscientização* and capabilities is a natural process in *dominant societies*, which are already *systems of capabilities*. I would even argue that this reinforcing patterns dictate the logic behind the continued dominance of the privileged over the oppressed, for it leads to increasing social gaps,¹³ and also widens what I call, in the spirit of this thesis, the *capabilities gap*—meaning that the difference between how capable one type of society is to solve its own challenges in relation to the other type is getting larger. System change is, hence, not expected to arise within the context of dominant systems that tend to perpetuate the capabilities gap. Unfortunately, nor is it as simple as stating that by expanding their capabilities, oppressed communities will soon reach comparable status of wellbeing. To explain why, I will introduce here the concept of *vulnerability*.

In the planning literature, talking about vulnerability traditionally includes environmental, social, and physical aspects of a country's, a city's, or a neighborhood's exposure to contingencies that can have negative impact on them, being with no doubt the notion of environmental vulnerability the one in the spotlight in the last decade (Barnett et al. 2008). Many reports and indexes have been produced to measure environmental vulnerability in order to facilitate comparisons among countries and regions. As a response, the concept of resilience has become increasingly popular, almost like a buzzword, as the antidote against vulnerability.¹⁴

I am interested here in a more qualitative understanding of social vulnerability in contexts of oppression, both at an individual and at a community level. Again, looking at some dictionaries is helpful to understand the full implications of a word like this one. To be “vulnerable” means to be “capable of being physically or emotionally wounded”, or to be “open to attack or damage” (Merriam-Webster 2019). Etymologically, *vulnerable* derives from the Latin word *vulnus*, which means wound, and from the verb *vulnerare*, to wound.¹⁵ The roots of the word reveal,

¹³ For instance, according to the report titled *The Road to Zero Wealth*, the natural tendency of the racial wealth divide is to increase over time: “if the racial wealth divide is left unaddressed [...] median Black household wealth is on a path to hit zero by 2053” (Institute of Policy Studies 2017, p. 5). To reduce this and other social gaps, there needs to be some policy interventions and other actions that reverse the dominant feedback loops.

¹⁴ Look, for example, at the Environmental Vulnerability Index <http://www.vulnerabilityindex.net/>

¹⁵ A detailed history of the word *vulnerable* can be found on <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulnerable>

hence, that to be vulnerable can mean both, to be *exposed* to damage, but also to be *already damaged*, or hurt. I find this second approach to the word particularly meaningful for this thesis: when I mention that oppressed communities are vulnerable, I am also pointing out that they are *hurt* by the surrounding social systems. It is precisely *the quality of being hurt* what exposes them to internal and external stressors that affect them more strongly than communities enjoying wellbeing.

In a more pragmatic language, vulnerability is equivalent to a *negative* capability, or a weakness. It is not the same to pursue and acquire a needed capability in a context of certain wellbeing and doing so in a context of high vulnerability. In the first case, we are starting from zero or even *above* zero, while in the second context we are usually starting *below* zero. For instance, imagine a child that wants to learn a musical instrument. She has seen other friends playing instruments together in a wind band and having lots of fun. She has become aware of how studying music might bring joy. Fortunately for her, the band is looking for a new musician, with a recently purchased clarinet ready to be played. It seems that this child has actually the capability of learning a music instrument and joining the band—something she has reason to value and can actually carry out. With this starting point for this story, the unfolding of events seems straightforward. But we all know that the story could take very different paths depending on the context where this child has grown up. In contexts of wellbeing, we can expect that most children like this one would belong to a structured family, go regularly to school, and not have to worry about their basic needs. Such children could start learning clarinet right away. In contexts of high vulnerability, though, many children might belong to dysfunctional families; they might often miss school, and they might not have something to eat nor access to clean water every day. Learning clarinet seems not such a simple task. This second child is vulnerable. The following statement captures the idea of vulnerability as understood in this essay:

Vulnerability is a *high exposure to damage* of individuals and communities who have been *already hurt* by existing social systems. Vulnerability prevents individuals and communities from advancing wellbeing.

The idea of vulnerability is already embedded in both Sen's Capability Approach and the Full Frame Initiative's Five Dimensions of Wellbeing—according to Sen, the child in the second example is indeed functionally deprived of the capability of learning music. But I believe that it is worth highlighting that in contexts of oppression, we are not just talking about the lack of important sets of capabilities, but about the existence of structural vulnerabilities. According to the same reasoning, it is not equivalent growing up in a context without much stability—one of the five basic sets of capabilities illustrated in Figure 1—as in a context of *high instability*. Similarly, it is not equivalent to have a poor social connectedness—another basic set of capabilities—and to be surrounded by *extremely problematic* social environments; and so on.

Moreover, the high level of vulnerability that we can find among oppressed communities is associated with big amounts of *uncertainty*. In *Building State Capability*, Andrews and others (2017) provide many examples of social contexts rooted in “fundamental uncertainty” where we cannot simply implement projects and strategies expecting

them to automatically succeed and improve the living conditions of the population. In such contexts, when undertaking projects that seek some fundamental change,¹⁶ the people involved face many “unknowns”¹⁷ that will be progressively unveiled as the project evolves. Some vulnerabilities are well known for people inside and outside the community, and those are the ones that can more easily be addressed when carrying out development projects. Some others are, on the contrary, not as evident or clearly named. Hence, the range of awareness of a community about its own vulnerabilities is wide.¹⁸ Figure 7 is an example of some vulnerabilities an hypothetical oppressed community might be exposed to, as well as the collective degree of awareness in the community about these vulnerabilities, which I have grouped into named, partially named, and unnamed ones.¹⁹ Vulnerabilities are, therefore, highly related to *conscientização* processes: being able to name them is a first step towards acquiring the necessary capabilities to overcome them.

VULNERABILITY	DEGREE OF AWARENESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extreme poverty Violence Drug business Poor infrastructure Unemployment 	NAMED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Machismo Lack of public space Poor cultural offer Lack of attention Unstable leadership Stigmas/preconceptions 	PARTIALLY NAMED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex power relations Identity-related questions Unstated fears Others 	UNNAMED

Figure 7. The degree of awareness about existing vulnerabilities varies: some existing ones might be not clearly named by the community, hence preventing its individuals from overcoming them.²⁰

¹⁶ Andrews and others place these kinds of projects into the category of “Facilitated Emergence” (Andrews et al. 2017.)

¹⁷ In the language of project risk management, the four concepts associated with uncertainty are “known-knowns (knowledge); unknown-knowns (impact is unknown but existence is known, i.e., untapped knowledge); known–unknowns (risks); and unknown–unknowns (unfathomable uncertainty)” (Kim 2012).

¹⁸ It obviously also varies within communities themselves, where some individuals are more aware than others about their own vulnerabilities.

¹⁹ According to the language of this thesis, the concept of “naming” is more accurate than “knowing”, for it is more associated with the act of *conscientização*.

²⁰ It is worth insisting that this list is only an example of vulnerabilities that might be affecting a theoretical community. For instance, when I say that the lack of public space is a partially named vulnerability, it means that most members of this theoretical community might be aware of this problem. However, the transformation process to improve this reality can only start once it is explicitly stated by community members that this lack of public space is a challenge to be addressed. The same

When so many vulnerabilities are present, we are not just talking about a weakened system of capabilities that needs to be strengthened; we are facing a whole *system of vulnerabilities*. As such, vulnerabilities are not isolated weaknesses that individuals could fight against individually—something that is achievable in contexts of wellbeing. Rather, they constitute sets of interrelated vulnerabilities where many of them are associated with and reinforce many others. Oppressed communities tend, therefore, to be stuck in such systems, which replicate existing vulnerabilities due to the insufficient capability to address them and prevent their individuals from advancing wellbeing. I affirm, indeed, that oppressed communities *are* systems of vulnerabilities. Such systems are chaotic and highly unpredictable. In short, a system of vulnerabilities can be described as follows:

A system of vulnerabilities is a social system whose individuals *cannot enjoy nor advance wellbeing*. A system of vulnerabilities consists of sets of unstructured and interrelated vulnerabilities that *prevent communities from leveraging existing capabilities* to pursue the lives they have reason to value.

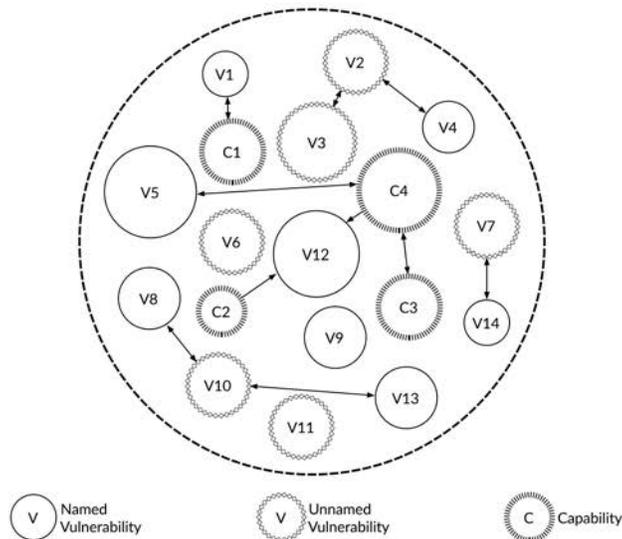


Figure 8. Systems of vulnerabilities are chaotic and unpredictable.²¹

Figure 8 represents a hypothetical system of vulnerabilities. We can appreciate in this diagram how capabilities are not totally absent, yet they are not cohesively working together, for the presence of vulnerabilities dominates the system in an unstructured manner. When we are working with communities whose reality corresponds to the one schematized in the previous figure, it is not enough to generate new isolated capabilities. The relevant question is if we can shape the tendency towards eradicating systems of vulnerabilities and transforming them into systems of

goes for more complex vulnerabilities, such as conversations around identity, power relations, and fears, which require a huge collective act of *conscientização*.

²¹ To simplify the diagram, vulnerabilities have been classified into “named” and “unnamed” ones, omitting the category of “partially named” vulnerabilities.

capabilities that guarantee wellbeing through the five basic sets of capabilities presented before. Moving from one type of systems to another is what I call *system change* (Figure 9). The following statement summarizes the idea of system change:

System change is the transformation process undertaken by a community, from being a system of vulnerabilities to becoming a system of capabilities.

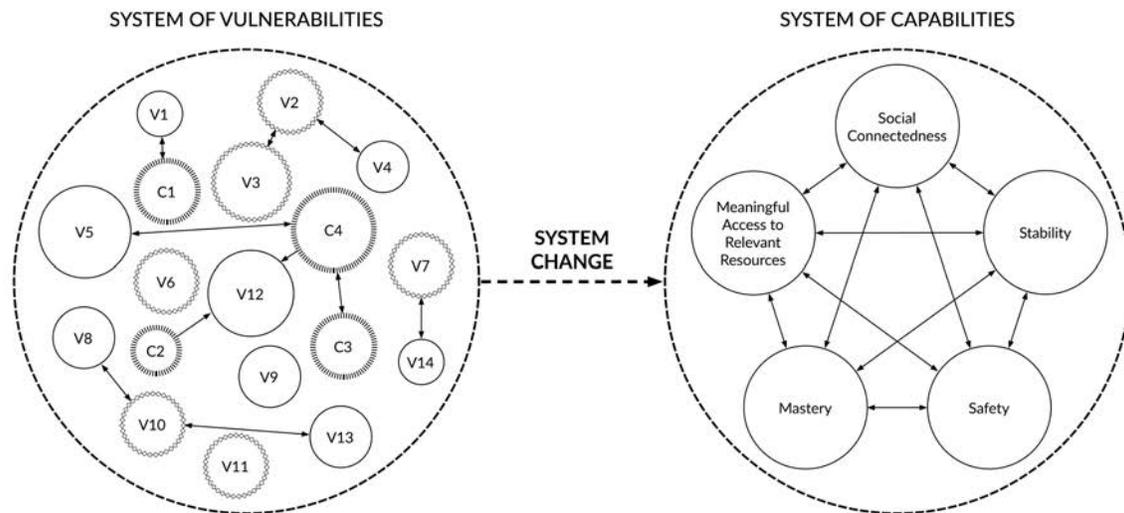


Figure 9. System change consists of transforming a system of vulnerabilities into a system of capabilities.

Communities that function like unstructured systems of vulnerabilities are both cause and consequence of traumatic experiences that, again, perpetuate logics of oppression. Amidst such complex reality, starting a process to significantly improve the living conditions of the community seems an almost impossible mission, and one could easily give in to the overwhelming reality. However, building on the potential of the sparking cycle to unleash incremental change, there is hope—there *must* be hope—to build alternative systems. It is precisely through experiences of collective trauma that we might find the entry point to turn current systems of vulnerabilities around.

From urban trauma to system change

The concept of trauma in the urban context is often associated with natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, which hit a population severely, usually causing deaths, and destabilizes the daily routines of the affected communities: “a disaster is a social situation characterized by a non-routine, life-threatening physical destruction attributed to the forces of nature, regardless of what other factors may seem to be involved” (Stallings 2005, p 253). When it comes to contexts of vulnerabilities, the traumatic impact of a disaster is magnified:

[A disaster is] a process/event combining a potential destructive agent/force from the natural, modified, or built environment and a population in a socially and economically produced condition of vulnerability, resulting in a perceived disruption of the customary relative satisfactions of individual and social needs for physical survival, social order, and meaning (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, p. 4).

Moreover, I am interested here in expanding the notion of urban trauma as a *collective feeling* that can be indeed caused by many different types of shocks. In this regard, McFarlane and Norris define a disaster as any “potentially traumatic event that is collectively experienced, has an acute onset, and is time-delimited; disasters may be attributed to natural, technological, or human causes” (McFarlane and Norris 2006, p. 4).

The notion of collective trauma builds on the psychological, or *emotional*, trauma experienced by an individual after a shocking event. When such event takes place at an urban scale and affects many individuals, the emotional impact becomes collective and shared by the community. Australian cultural historian Maria Tumarkin, who coined the concept of “Traumascape” to define the physical and emotional effect caused by big-scale disasters, describes the impact that traumas often cause on the individual’s mindset:

A traumatized person cannot fully take in or comprehend what has happened to them or what they happened to witness. They are overwhelmed by a traumatic event. So much so that the ways in which they usually experience the world and make sense of their own place in it are effectively shattered (Tumarkin 2005, p. 11).

Let us consider the idea of an *overwhelming feeling* caused by a traumatic experience. While shocks tend to dazzle individuals and prevent them from seeing certain aspects of their surrounding realities, an urban trauma also unveils many other vulnerabilities that were not so obvious before the trauma existed. In particular, when it comes to the collective level, some underlying social structures start to emerge and become *visible*. Even more so if we recognize the affected place as a complex system of vulnerabilities and look at it with a contemplative mindset, trying to perceive all the nuances that the trauma is revealing.

In addition, since I am trying to provoke here a proactive response to trauma, I suggest departing from understanding this concept as something only caused by a very specific and shocking event that takes place in a short moment of time—or is “time delimited”, as quoted before. Trauma can also exist without a punctual shock that causes it. It can be built little by little, through an ongoing process—like trash accumulating on a dumping site—until the problem becomes alarming. For the purpose of this thesis, let me provide the following definition:

An urban trauma is a *shocking event* or *cumulative experience* that negatively affects the routines of a community, and it is also the *emotional state* generated by such event or experience. An urban trauma *obscures* some aspects of the community’s daily lives, and it also *reveals* many of its unnamed vulnerabilities.

Examples of urban traumas as events would be earthquakes, floods, collapses, conflagrations, or social conflicts. Traumas can also be caused by urban renewal processes²² that generate a “root shock” in the displaced communities and break existing social and cultural ties (Fullilove 2004). On the other side, urban traumas as cumulative experiences can be associated to the presence of drug dealers in the area, a permanently noisy environment, or continued violence. The existence of a huge informal dumping site in the neighborhood falls into this category.

Going back to the hypothetical list of vulnerabilities illustrated before, let me share two specific examples of traumatic situations that bring attention to certain vulnerabilities (Figure 8). As for shocking events, the earthquakes that hit the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in southern Mexico, in September 2017 (a context that I have been working on for the last year and a half) put the focus of attention on existing—and obvious—vulnerabilities, such as poverty and a poor urban infrastructure in the region. Additionally, these earthquakes rose awareness of less obvious weaknesses such as the lack of institutional attention on this region, and even revealed the existence of complex power relations within the community that people were not paying attention to before the disaster (Moya-Latorre 2018).²³

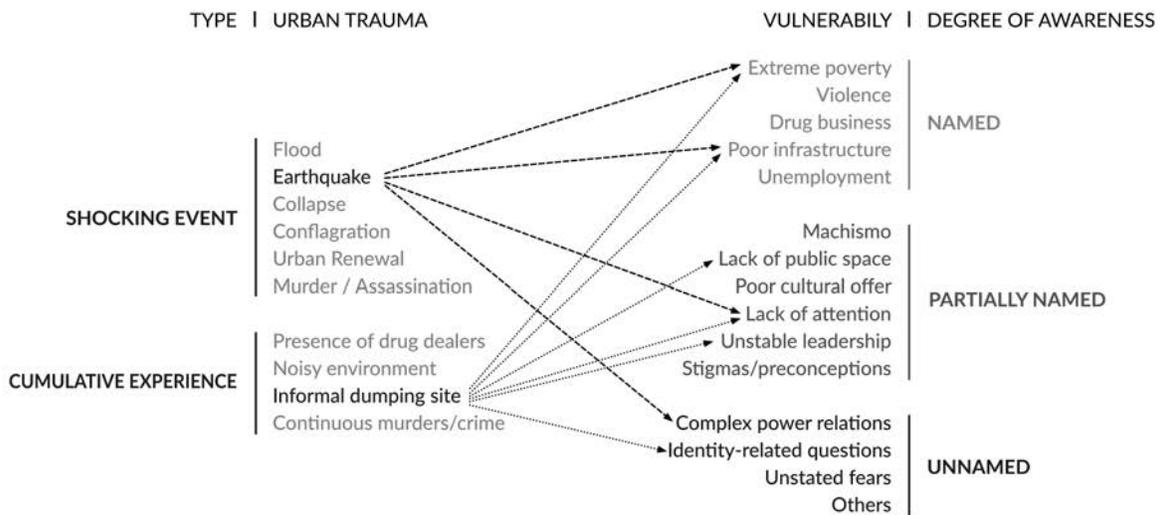


Figure 10. An urban trauma brings attention to several existing vulnerabilities.

Figure 8 also shows how the presence of a dumping site in an informal community like Jardim Colombo ended up putting the spotlight on a different set of vulnerabilities. In this second example, the lack of attention from the public administration was particularly painful for the community, as expressed by most neighbors interviewed during the process that I became involved in. Moreover, the presence of the dumping site worsens the lack of good-quality

²² Such as roads, railways, and other big infrastructures that replace the existing urban fabric and force the displacement of the existing population.

²³ I will refer later again to the example of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. For more context, I recommend looking at Moya-Latorre (2018), available on this link: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1K4Aug299UVnIT5AlBm2-WbhkFIRZMREX>.

public spaces in the neighborhood, and it even brings attention to deeper identity questions associated with the lack of care of many neighbors towards their own community.

Focusing on one or some of the vulnerabilities revealed by trauma can be a tactical entry point to start deep transformation processes in the affected communities. The two examples above show how there are many other vulnerabilities that could be addressed beyond trauma, taking advantage of the public attention that these types of experiences generate. I am by no means saying that we need to wait for an urban trauma before we can take any action in a particular community—there are always challenges that need to be addressed.²⁴ Moreover, dealing with trauma requires deep sensitivity and empathy with the affected communities. However, I am affirming that for those communities amidst traumatic—or posttraumatic—scenarios, focusing on a collective traumatic experience can be a strategic way to bring many community members and outsiders together to work towards shared goals. In this regard, to open up spaces for conversation and agreement around trauma, a culture-oriented approach can generate the appropriate environment to tackle existing vulnerabilities through targeted collective projects.

A culture-oriented approach

Although they are often used interchangeably, art and culture can adopt very different meanings (there is endless literature on both concepts). Since this thesis does not intend to become an intellectual analysis of any of them, but a proposal to make a pragmatic approach to planning that leverages art and culture to boost system change, let me share here a couple of definitions that will be helpful to come up with our own understanding of art and culture.

First, culture can be understood as a comprehensive and collective way of life. According to Israeli philosophers Avishai Margalit and Moshe Halbertal, “what we call a way of life is something that can only exist in a group, in contrast to a life style, which may characterize the particular manner in which individuals lead their lives” (Margalit and Halbertal 1994, p. 497). These authors tie this definition to what they call “the right to culture”, which consists of a community’s right to maintain a comprehensive way of life, to be recognized by the general society, and to be supported by state’s institutions.

Second, there is the idea of culture as an infrastructure that enables actions led by individuals, as suggested by the English organization *Theatrum Mundi*: “Infrastructure as a general category, then, describes a set of conditions both supporting and constraining action, whether physically, economically, legally, etc.” (Bingham-Hall & Kaasa 2017, p. 11). The proposal of culture as an infrastructure becomes even more appealing when it is described as a “modal platform” that enables the transformation of individuals and communities:

²⁴ In fact, one could argue that being a system of vulnerabilities *is* an urban trauma in itself. But, as I have stated before, trying to address the system as a whole is not realistic. From a *pragmatic* point of view, it is more helpful to focus on a concrete urban trauma that is easily describable and relevant for the community.

It emphasizes the subjects of transformative processes and integrates communities in the conception and production of arts and culture for the wellbeing of citizens. From this perspective, it can be understood as a modal platform, i.e. an ecosystem with high added value that increases, transforms itself and integrates new functionalities, new users or new partners quickly and easily”²⁵ (Mbaye & Dinardi 2018, p. 3).

Finally, culture can be understood as a form of resistance against dominant systems, which is particularly important in contexts of oppression. In her dissertation proposal on activism in communities in Rio de Janeiro, sociologist Anjuli N. Fahlberg explains that “the expression of alternative cultures [is] a critical means for challenging dominant groups” (p. 338). Moreover, “resistance through art [promotes] counter-cultures that could both challenge dominant (oppressive) cultural beliefs and also unite oppressed groups” (p. 338). However, these forms of culture as resistance risk becoming arbitrary “unless cultural movements have the capacity to organize around political action or specific types of community development” (p. 341). By combining these three understandings of culture—as a collective way of life, as an infrastructure for transformation, and as a form of resistance—we come up with a pragmatic definition that aligns with the philosophy of the current thesis:

Culture is the *collective way of living* of an oppressed community that both represents a *form of resistance* against mainstream, oppressing social systems, and functions as an *infrastructure* that can enable meaningful change within the *social logics* of the community.

It has to be pointed out that this definition does not imply that current ways of living of oppressed communities cannot be challenged—over-romanticizing leads to stagnation. However, according to this understanding of culture, change has to *emerge* following the logics of the local cultural, and not by the imposition of an external understanding of what ought to be done. In this sense, art, and more specifically public art, becomes a particularly appropriate language to tackle many of the cultural issues that the community might be struggling with and contribute to both reinforcing existing identities (the local culture) and generating new ones. Let me first share a definition of art that aligns with the philosophy of this thesis:

Art refers to all kinds of human *creations*—individual and collective ones—which are ideated to convey ideas in ways that go *beyond* (but without renouncing) verbal, cognitive, and intellectual communication.

In this sense, art is not only reserved for trained artists, but for all humans willing to express themselves in an *alternative* fashion to regular spoken language. Hence, behind an artwork, there is always an idea, or set of ideas—abstract or concrete—which its creator or creators want to have captured in a form that can be transmitted to others. According to this proposed definition of art, the current written version of this thesis would not be an artwork,

²⁵ In their article, Mbaye and Dinardi are opposing two cultural models: the “creative city” and what they call the “cultural polis”. While in the first one, culture is approached as a means for more productivity, in the second, culture is understood as a means for more subjective transformative processes. This second approach is, obviously, more aligned with the central ideas of this thesis.

because it relies *mainly* on verbal, cognitive, and intellectual language (is the exception being the diagrams). On the contrary, the piano improvisation attached to the text, which is described in Appendix C, is an artwork, for it intends to transmit the major ideas of this essay *mainly* through a non-verbal language. Hence, an artwork is simultaneously an *outcome* and a *means* of communication. As I have previously stated, when individuals and communities who have been typically deprived of meaningful access to art are exposed to an array of artistic creations, they can *expand* their sense of awareness, their aspirations, and the tools to achieve the lives they have reason to value.

As for *public* art in particular, let us look at a couple of definitions that are relevant for this thesis. The approach to the concept of public art ranges from mundane definitions—public art is “exactly that, art in public spaces” (American for the Arts, 2017)—to very abstract ones— “public art is a reflection of how we see the world” (Association for Public Art, 2017)—. In between, some definitions extend the concept of public space to the idea of “public realm”, where public art can occur “regardless of whether it is situated on public or private property or whether it has been purchased with public or private money (Tate Modern 2019). This last definition suggests that art can be defined as public if it is *accessible* to the general public.

Additionally, despite the multiple definitions of public art, there is a broad consensus on its effects on societies. In this regard, it has been claimed that public art “can help develop senses of identity [and] senses of place, contribute to civic identity, address community needs, tackle social exclusion, possess educational value and promote social change” (Hall & Robertson, 2001).²⁶ While not easy to measure in quantitative terms, these positive byproducts of public art can be appreciated in many successful culture-oriented projects across the world, including top-down ones—the examples of Medellín and Bilbao—and bottom-up initiatives—for instance, the women’s percussion group Ingoma Nshya, in Rwanda, created to deal with the posttraumatic context after the genocide (Kabanda 2018).²⁷ Taking all these elements into account, I suggest the following approach to the concept of public art, which I consider helpful in contexts of oppression:

Public art are individual or collective *creations* that occur in the *public realm*, are *accessible* for the majority of the community, and induce *contemplation and action* around questions of local culture and identity.

It is necessary to underline the last part of this sentence. First, as I have insisted, encountering public artworks is likely to induce collective contemplative behaviors that spark changes in our mindsets. When the topics touched upon are related to the local culture and to questions of identity that resonate with the community, artworks enable both reflection on those themes and individual introspection. Additionally, this contemplative mindset that public art enhances is even richer if it is also oriented towards *action*—this is an important shift in our understanding of art

²⁶ In their article, Hall & Robertson cast doubt on all these assumptions because these kinds of outcomes of public art are difficult to measure.

²⁷ For a thorough understanding of the positive impact of these and many other case studies, Kabanda’s book *The Creative Wealth of Nations* (2018) is a fantastic showcase of culture-oriented initiatives across the world.

as something passive. Lastly, when the concepts of culture and public art as presented in this thesis are brought together, we come up with a statement that captures the spirit of this piece:

Culture is the *framework* within which system change can arise, and public art is a *language* that can enable it.

These last definitions close the conceptual structure presented in this thesis. I have introduced the sparking cycle of *conscientização* and capabilities as a virtuous feedback loop that unleashes incremental processes to transform systems of vulnerabilities—oppressed communities—into systems of capabilities. Urban trauma opens up the entry point for system change, and contemplation enables narrowing this huge quest down to a very specific first challenge. Public art is a powerful language that can bring many community members together to tackle this challenge, respecting the logics of the existing local culture. Lastly, the role of practitioners is to cultivate a type of contemplation that allows them to identify strategic ways to light the spark for such processes of change. With these definitions in mind, let us now explore how an art-based project can detonate the sparking cycle in contexts of oppression.

A note on oppression

Before moving to the real story, let us pause and reflect briefly on the idea of oppression, which has been present throughout the first movement of this piece. The concept of oppression that Paulo Freire coined when he released his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968 might have specific connotations that are not directly comparable to all the contexts of oppression that we find today, 50 years later. The communities in rural Brazil where Freire grew up where certainly very different from, say, a Latino neighborhood in California or a small village in Mexico under control of the drug dealers today. There are both temporal and spatial differences that we cannot simply overlook. However, I suggest to move away from the idea that oppression only occurs under extreme conditions, for such attitudes hinder the much needed quest for system change. Again, Freire's *conscientização* appears appropriate as a first step: the more aware our societies become of the contemporary structures of oppression, the smoother will be the transition towards less oppressed societies.

In relation to such dissimilarities when we talk about oppression, in particular regarding the distinction between societies in the “Global North” and the “Global South²⁸” (Royal Geographical Society 2015), it is worth reproducing a full paragraph of Davydd J. Greenwood's and Morten Levin's “Introduction to Action Research” (2007, p. 158):

Of course, situations of oppression in parts of the South are terrifyingly bad in many cases. Poverty, oppression, and death under conditions of profound governmental corruption, the use of a national military to oppress local

²⁸ As a reference, look at *A 60 Second Guide to The Global North/South Divide*, published by the Royal Geographical Society. Available on <https://www.rgs.org/>

communities, the interests of foreign and domestic capital in maintaining a cheap labor force, ongoing colonialism, illiteracy, and starvation all make the problems of the North appear less severe. But the racially oppressed, the homeless, the drug addicted, the abused, and the illiterate in the North are oppressed; as are the workers in factories run by executives who use participation as a cover-up for speed-ups, downsizing, union busting, massive executive compensation, and the use of company resources to corrupt the political system; as are middle managers who are being replaced with cheaper labor that is more easily manipulated. Oppression is oppression everywhere it is found, South or North.

In this reflection, Greenwood and Levin are “looking critically at the world”, to quote Shaull again. All the elements on this list constitute a great example of why naming problems—*conscientização*—becomes a necessary act towards system change. Although most readers would certainly understand what the authors mean with all these examples, it is not uncommon that many among us have not consciously thought about them as active systems of oppression. It would be unfair to deny, though, that many people are indeed conscious about oppression in many of its variants and contexts and even work actively towards reversing the living conditions of the oppressed.²⁹ But the act of naming becomes particularly powerful in an increasingly mediatized world, full not only of people unaware of or indifferent towards such situations of oppression, but also of individuals who intentionally generate noise and cast doubt about these and other oppressing realities.³⁰

Oppression is also psychological: it is embedded in the mindset of those who have grown up without being allowed to dream about alternative futures. “Psychologically, the worldview of the oppressed is re-formed to meet what they see as their true capabilities”, as Glasmann & Patton argue. “It would be too devastating to believe that your actual worth is beyond your grasp, so individuals adjust their self-worth and find a false contentment” (Glasmann & Patton 2014, p. 1358). This means that oppression is so inherent in our societies and normalized as part of our daily lives, that it requires a conscious effort of observation to perceive its least obvious manifestations. This act of stepping back and observing—contemplation—is essential to foster *conscientização* and generate expectations of change and ways of life that the oppressed have reason to value.

To finish, it is significant reminding the physical connotation of the concept. In its second definition, the dictionary Merriam-Webster defines oppression as “a sense of being weighed down in body or mind” (“oppression” 2019). In this line, we can even make the exercise of imagining oppressed communities as “bodies” that an external physical force is pressuring on. The feeling of being physically “weighed down” is, moreover, accompanied by an equivalent psychological feeling. Another way of looking at it would be to say that a community is oppressed when the system is exerting *excessive pressure* on it. Under these conditions, it is not hard to understand how extremely difficult it

²⁹ This is the logic underlying the creation of non-profit organizations, as well as the reason behind voluntary work.

³⁰ I am talking here about the Fake News phenomenon. Just as an example, here is a list with dozens of false statements that were made against undocumented immigrants in the US—an example of an oppressed community—to justify certain kind of policies that cut their rights: <https://www.politifact.com/subjects/immigration/statements/byruling/false/>

becomes for individuals and communities to move upwards in society. With these different understandings of oppression in mind, let me share the following definition to set the ground for the project that I will share in the next movement:

Oppression is an individual or collective sense of *being weighed down* in body or mind caused by an *excessive source of pressure* that current social systems exert on certain communities. Oppression makes it *extremely challenging* for these communities to overcome the realities they do not like.

It is about oppression. Although praiseworthy, we cannot settle for solving small problems that hardly improve the living conditions of communities immersed in situations of oppression. With humility, but with ambition, we must aspire to expand the world's awareness of such systems of oppression and allow us to dream about alternative futures. In this regard, the proposal of a sparking cycle of *conscientização* and capabilities is a *pragmatic* framework to think about how to unleash meaningful change among oppressed communities. It is time to tell a real story.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Lighting the Spark

The world is an immense system, full of pain and challenges, but also of reasons for hope and optimism. Meaningful change among those who suffer structures of oppression is never a straightforward pursuit, for they have to overcome uncountable rooted patterns of violence and marginalization. But there are plenty of successful stories that ought to be told—sparks that bring light to this challenging world. Others might find inspiration in these stories for their personal and community goals and generate new prosperous experiences to be shared later. These networks of inspiring stories can indeed become a significant step for co-producing a fairer world—the main global system that we all belong to.

After having offered so far a mainly abstract and conceptual framework, this movement is built on one of these revealing stories, which I had the enormous pleasure to be part of. This thesis would not be pragmatic if the ideas presented were not grounded on the real world. It is indeed this story that motivated me to produce the current essay: it embodies most of the values and practices I believe in, and most importantly, it is bringing about meaningful change to the community where it is staged. Why was the experience so enriching for the people who participated in it? What could we learn from this experience to make it helpful for others taking similar approaches to system change?

This story takes place in the community of Jardim Colombo, São Paulo, with whom I shared the summer months³¹ of 2018. After contextualizing the project, I will describe, in a chronological order, the steps followed by its protagonists since the idea was sparked until the time of delivering this thesis. I will refer regularly to the concepts introduced in the first movement, with the purpose of becoming more aware—that is, expanding our *conscientização*—of the processes of change that are occurring in this community. The notion of the sparking project will be thoroughly discussed in this movement with the ultimate hope of transmitting to the reader the *quality* of the spark.

³¹ Meaning here the summer months of the northern hemisphere, that is, between June and August.

The community

Jardim Colombo is a neighborhood of about 15,000 inhabitants located circa 13 kilometers (8 miles) to the West of São Paulo's city center; just a 30-minute ride or about 1 hour by public transport when there is no traffic—not too far away given the enormity of the city. This neighborhood occupies an area of about 145,000 square meters in the Vila Sônia district. The site was part of a large farming property, Fazenda Morumbi, which in the 1920's was divided into several smaller properties (Mesquita 2016). These remained mostly idle until the population of São Paulo started to expand rapidly by mid-century, mostly caused by a massive rural-to-city migration in the country. Private developers began investing in the area of the old Fazenda Morumbi in the 1960's, which became increasingly populated with middle and high income families (Mesquita 2016). During this rapid expansion of São Paulo to its newly-urbanized areas in the south and south-west, many settlers from other regions in Brazil—most of them already living in São Paulo—started arriving to Jardim Colombo, which was then just an empty and un-urbanized piece of land on a steep hill at the margins of Fazenda Morumbi. These settlers built their houses on their own, more or less respecting a street grid that was marked on the ground, and in just a few decades, by the end of the century, Jardim Colombo was already a vibrant neighborhood with over 3,000 dwellings and all kinds of goods and services (Figure 11).³²



*Figure 11. Jardim Colombo viewed from one of its accesses on the east.*³³

³² Appendix A contains basic urban information about Jardim Colombo to help contextualize this community within the larger picture of São Paulo. Moreover, a detailed description of Jardim Colombo's history and evolution can be found in Mesquita's Doctoral Thesis (2016), available on <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/handle/20.500.11850/155860>

³³ All pictures included in this chapter have been taken by team members of the Fazendinha Project.

Such a description does not say much about the *quality* of this neighborhood. It would have been much easier, probably, to introduce this place as a *favela*, not only because that is its official designation by the municipality of São Paulo, but also because this word can be immediately associated with lots of different meanings and ideas. Describing a community as a *favela*—a term that originally comes from a plant³⁴—is a way of *stigmatizing* it.³⁵ It invokes negative preconceptions—stigmas—of a neighborhood and the people who live there without even knowing anything specific about them. In the words of former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “the common view, fed by the media portrayal of the favelas and their residents, is based on a long list of shortcomings”—or vulnerabilities, according to the language of this thesis—“violence, poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, corruption, early pregnancy, disrupted families, and inadequate public services” (Perlman 2010, p. X).

I wonder how the development discourse would change if *favelas* were described in a different way, with emphasis on their strengths and capabilities rather than on their shortcomings. Sociologist Janice Perlman, who has been living, researching, and experiencing *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro since 1968, chooses to focus on the aptitudes that she has encountered throughout all these years of cultural exchange with communities in Brazil:

From the beginning, I found the favelas visually more interesting and humanly more welcoming than the upper-middle-class neighborhoods. They could be seen as the precursors to the “new urbanism” with their high-density, low-rise architecture, featuring facades variously angled to catch a breeze or a view, and shade trees and shutters to keep them cool. The building materials were construction-site discards and scraps that would now be called “recycled materials.” They were owner-designed, owner-built, and owner-occupied. And they followed the organic curves of the hillsides rather than a rigid grid pattern. (Perlman 2010, p. XVIII)

What a beautiful way to look at these kinds of neighborhoods! As Perlman ironizes, *favelas* even portray many of the most desired elements by contemporary urban planners and designers—mixed uses, recycled materials, organic design—which of course seem less appealing in contexts of extreme poverty. Building on the previous definition, not only did Perlman find fascinating urban qualities in the communities with which she interacted, but she also witnessed how skilled and qualified neighbors are in such environments and how much creativity they develop to overcome both daily challenges and structural conditions of oppression. In this regard, it is worth sharing here a poem-like description about *favelas* that was recorded from a talk by Perlman:

³⁴ The Brazilian monarchy signed the Golden Law in 1888, which abolished slavery after more than 300 years. This law left “thousands of former slaves wandering around the interior backlands of the Northeast with neither occupations nor resources” (Perlman 2010, p 24). One of the resulting communities settled, under the guidance of a leader known as Antonio Conselheiro, in Canudos, a hill in Rio de Janeiro full of favela bushes. From this outpost, this community resisted against the republic of emperor Don Pedro II, who had taken charge after a military coup in 1889. The community lived outside the formal laws and became arguably one of the first consolidated informal communities in Brazil. The fact that the hill where this community settled was rich in favela bushes ended up associating this kind of communities with the word *favela*.

³⁵ This video, for instance, puts the spotlight on what the author calls “the five most dangerous favelas in Brazil”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iL2vhSf4gA>. What is the purpose of such a video but the morbid fascination around violence as something attractive?

Favela is life, favela is love.
Favela is freedom, friendship and *feijoada*.
Favela is people persevering.
It is laughter and tears, life and death—only a hair’s-breadth apart.
It is a place where the unexpected is expected and spontaneity is the norm.
It is not all pain, poverty, and passivity.
It is people living their lives amid a civil war.
People who would prefer to work and to study.
People trying to be recognized as people by other people
For whom they are invisible and inconsequential. (Perlman 2010, p. XXIII)

It is not my intention to offer here an overly romanticized vision around the concept of *favelas*—there will be space in this chapter to focus on their vulnerabilities, both from the perspective of outsiders and insiders. However, the poem above illustrates how adopting contemplative attitudes towards the communities that we work with can prevent us from undesirable preconceptions. In any case, we are still far from over-romanticizing *favelas* as ideal communities. Quite the contrary: when carrying out any task in a community defined as a *favela*, the starting point is often of great disadvantage. All the existing stigmas ought to be taken into account in addition to the task itself, as a sort of inherent burden to these communities that would not be present in contexts of wellbeing. Acknowledging structural oppression of *favelas* and shifting the discourse towards a more proactive description of these communities is, hence, a fundamental act in our search for system change. In Fahlberg’s words, “there is much that can be done to balance our collective imaginaries about the urban poor: we need to publish less about violence and more about non-violence” (Fahlberg 2018).³⁶

Jardim Colombo—the protagonist of this second movement—is a *favela* that embodies all the elements offered in the above descriptions, full of shortcomings and structural problems, but also constituted by a vibrant and diverse community of skilled and persistent individuals with their own ways of living. Structural oppression causes, nevertheless, in Jardim Colombo, as in most other *favelas*, the number of vulnerabilities to exceed widely the existing capabilities. Its reality as a community at the margins³⁷ and its symbiotic relationship with the wealthy area of Morumbi,³⁸ among many other factors,³⁹ forces this neighborhood to remain in a permanently vulnerable status where harmful social behaviors are perpetuated year after year. Using the terms introduced in this thesis, Jardim Colombo is, then, a *system of vulnerabilities*—or, to be more accurate, it *was*.

³⁶ In her dissertation, Fahlberg explores how activism is contributing to overcome structural violence and poverty in communities in Rio de Janeiro.

³⁷ As can be seen in the satellite image in Appendix A, Jardim Colombo seems to be “pushed” towards the cemetery on the edges of Morumbi. It looks, literally, like a community at the margins.

³⁸ Many women and men from Jardim Colombo work as housekeepers of luxurious dwellings in Morumbi. There is a clear symbiosis between the two neighborhoods unique to this particular community.

³⁹ The list of vulnerabilities in Figure 7 was actually inspired by this neighborhood’s reality.

Some context

I shared nine weeks of my life over the summer of 2018 with the community of Jardim Colombo. As part of a two-year program in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, I worked with ArqFuturo in São Paulo thanks to a fellowship from the MISTI Brazil program at MIT. ArqFuturo is a unique case in Brazil: rather than a traditional architecture and planning office, it can be better defined as a content platform that fosters the conversation around informal urbanism and development in Latin America in the 21st century. ArqFuturo has also been involved in several projects on the ground, offering support and advice to local communities facing various challenges. After five years facilitating the creation of a park in the community of Vidigal, in Rio de Janeiro,⁴⁰ ArqFuturo came into contact with the community of Jardim Colombo, which was struggling, since many years before, with the presence of a huge dumping site in the middle of its neighborhood: the Fazendinha.

Managed by neighbor Sr. Francisco⁴¹ until he passed away in 2017, Fazendinha used to resemble a little farm.⁴² Some neighbors even remember to have seen animals on the Fazendinha site until around the turn of the century, when Sr. Francisco became too old to continue taking care of the space. With no one in charge of keeping Fazendinha clean, the site entered a spiral of abandonment and degradation. Other neighbors started throwing trash and rubble there, both new settlers of Jardim Colombo building their houses and also established families who found in Fazendinha a practical space to get rid of their own waste. Fifteen years later, the accumulation of trash seemed irreversible, causing despair among many residents in the area.

Early in 2017, community leaders Ivanildo de Olivera and Ester Carro (father and daughter), representing the neighborhood association in Jardim Colombo, decided to take action on the Fazendinha site. Ivanildo had recently met Tomas Alvim, from ArqFuturo, in a public meeting. Inspired by the stories he listened to about Vidigal, in Rio de Janeiro, Ivanildo invited Tomas and his team to visit Jardim Colombo and Fazendinha. After the first site visit, which turned out to be just the first interaction of a fruitful and long-lasting partnership, together they came up with the idea of transforming the dumping site into a park for the community. Based on what they had witnessed in Vidigal not so long before, the ArqFuturo team led by Tomas knew that this was not an unrealistic expectation. It was just a matter of identifying the appropriate entry point to address the process.

The first step towards such transformation seemed, at first, obvious: a thorough clean-up of the site. Moreover, the moment appeared to be just right to start raising awareness of the potential use of Fazendinha as something other than a dumpster. The new team formed by the community leaders of Jardim Colombo and ArqFuturo decided to

⁴⁰ Although I will be referring to the project in Vidigal in several occasions—one of its protagonists, Mauro Quintanilha, is also part of the project in Jardim Colombo—its complete story, full of successes, but also of difficulties, is beyond the scope of this thesis. For detailed information on the genesis of this project, this video provides good background:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XLYcD-IPM>

⁴¹ I am using the verb “manage” here because the site did not legally belong to this neighbor, but to the Secretaria de Habitação (the housing office).

⁴² *Fazendinha* means, literally, little farm in Portuguese.

organize a collective clean-up process that involved more neighbors from the area.⁴³ In the meantime, they would also put together some events for the community, including presentations about the experience in Vidigal told by its protagonist Mauro Quintanilha, the community leader from this borough in Rio de Janeiro.

The clean-up was successful. Between December 2017 and January 2018, more than 40 trucks⁴⁴ were filled with rubble and trash. The change was remarkable: after just a few weeks, Fazendinha looked again like an earth hill, with just some debris still scattered over the surface (Figures 12a and 12b). With the site reasonably clean, it was surprisingly easier to dream of a different use for this area, as many neighbors observed. It was time to start building the actual park. Mauro was confident about the landscaping project and had already an idea for the design in mind: he suggested recycling tires to start building walls that would contain the terrain and generate flat surfaces to accommodate the uses of the future park. Together with Ester, who had recently graduated as an architect, they designed a first proposal for the park that was later shared with the neighbors. During the following months, the team would focus on finding the necessary resources to start the construction. Everything was going properly.



Figures 12a and 12b. The Fazendinha site before and after the cleaning.

⁴³ In Brazil, the word *mutirao* describes a collective and voluntary activity that seeks an improvement for the community.

⁴⁴ The regional mayor's office of Butantá facilitated some trucks from the garbage collection service to take the rubble to its corresponding official landfill.

The challenge

The path towards the future park was not going to be as straightforward, though. Despite the huge effort to remove all the garbage, Fazendinha continued to accumulate rubble and trash, and the problem seemed, again, irreversible. That the site looked clean was not sufficient to *keep it clean*. Many neighbors still had reason to continue littering in Fazendinha. Some of them had likely witnessed how much effort a team of volunteers from the community and ArqFuturo had put into the clean-up process, yet that did not stop them from repeatedly throwing garbage.⁴⁵ While the team was striving to get the necessary resources for the future park, it caused enormous frustration to witness how little impact had generated the huge collective action to clean up the site on the community. Somehow, Fazendinha was not just an informal dumping site; it was a deeper *urban trauma* associated with rooted social logics in Jardim Colombo. Building a park here was not going to be like building a park elsewhere.

Some important lessons were learned, though. Looking at this initial stage of the Fazendinha project through the framework offered in the previous movement, we could affirm that the initial challenge (the clean-up) had enabled the act of *conscientização* about the second challenge—how to keep the site clean. Despite the good intentions of the people involved in the clean-up process, Jardim Colombo as a collectivity was not ready to address the transformation of Fazendinha. Since many neighbors still had reason to use the site as a dumping site, just cleaning it up was not going to change their behavior, and nothing could ensure that building a new park would do so. No real change of this site was going to be possible—that is, it would not last and be *meaningful* for the community—without a change in the neighbors' *mindset*: they needed to *believe* in the possibility of a relevant change (Figure 13).

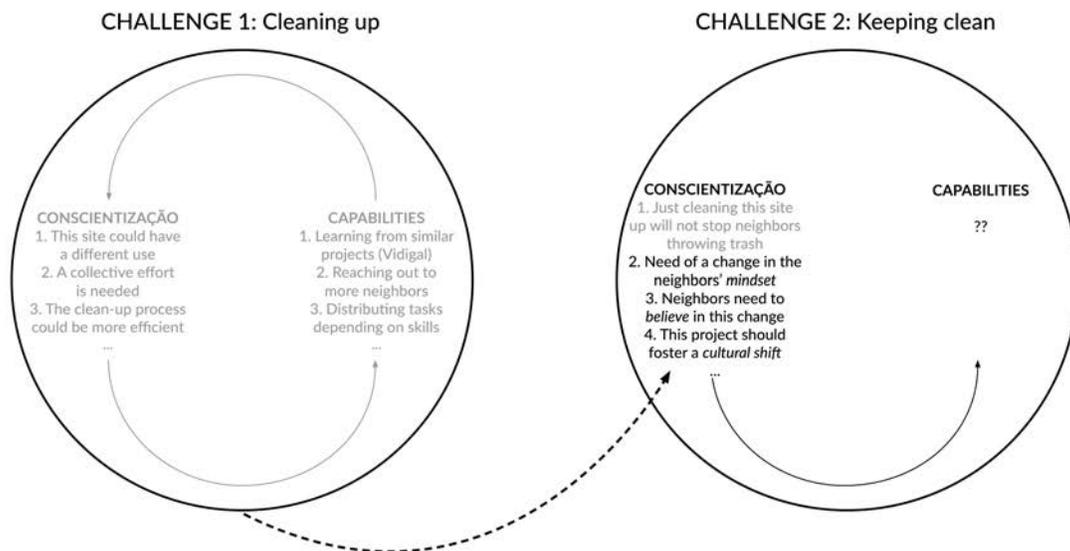


Figure 13. The *conscientização* process on the second challenge.

⁴⁵ There is an obvious analogy between this dumping site and climate change at a global scale. While many of us would wonder why neighbors in Jardim Colombo simply choose to throw their trash away instead of keeping their neighborhood clean, we tend to overlook both our own contribution to pollution in cities and human impact on the environment at a planetary scale.

Moreover, Fazendinha was not the only challenge that Jardim Colombo was facing, nor was it the most urgent. The neighborhood was struggling with problems such as “depreciation of the landscape, irregular occupation of private lands, fragmentation of the urban fabric, environmental risks, [...] a polluted stream causing flooding in the surroundings in periods of rain and degraded free spaces” and, overall, extremely poor urban infrastructure (Carro & Leite 2018.) Also, Ivanildo and the neighborhood association were dealing with regular requests and complaints by the neighbors on individual daily issues, as well as with larger systemic problems such as the presence of drug dealers and consumers in the area. Amid this chaotic reality, however, the team became aware that the Fazendinha project could function as a point of union to bring many neighbors together: a project of collective *hope*.

In short, the complexity of Jardim Colombo extended far beyond the fact that Fazendinha was accumulating trash. This complexity could have caused the project to die, but thanks to the good will of Ivanildo, Ester, Tomas and the rest of the team, there was much more to come. To succeed in this feat, the transformation of Fazendinha into a park should come along with deeper *cultural shifts* within the community of Jardim Colombo that would bring along behavioral changes (Figure 13). What capabilities had to be generated to move forward? It was time to bring the arts into play.

The spark: an art festival

My engagement with the project started at this stage. I was fortunate that my supervisor, Tomas, was aware of my interest in the role of art and culture to advance development among vulnerable communities. From the very beginning, once my nine-week internship in Brazil between June and August was confirmed, his request was for me to work on a “cultural program” for Jardim Colombo. Tomas knew about my background as a musician, and smartly perceived that my contribution could be more meaningful if I focused on the “content” around the Fazendinha project, rather than on its physical design. The proposal of a cultural program was generic enough to not look like an external imposition on Jardim Colombo, but also specific enough to indicate that the project would need to foster some sort of cultural shift in the community (Figure 12). It was, also, an *appealing* challenge for me.

After my first call with Tomas and part of the team in April 2018, I was contacted with Ester. We immediately started exchanging ideas about the impact that certain artistic interventions can generate on individuals and communities. Ester shared with me a recent presentation she had prepared for a class about this topic, and I shared with her some art-related projects I had been involved with in the past in Spain, Mexico, and Colombia. The partnership had just started. Again, neither Ester nor I had an idea about how fruitful our interaction was going to be.

I arrived in São Paulo on June 2nd 2018, a Saturday, and I visited Jardim Colombo for the first time on Monday, June 4th, with Ester and Silvia Pedreira, another volunteer helping ArqFuturo with its engagement in Jardim Colombo. Despite the obvious urban deficiencies, I was amazed to see so much life going on in the streets, with kids playing all

around, and many stores and businesses open. My first impression of Jardim Colombo was indeed that of a vibrant community, and not as a threatening or dangerous *favela*. Of course, my perception would evolve over the next weeks—I had to go through my own *conscientização* process in this regard. I would develop different, and even contradictory, feelings about this neighborhood, but I would never feel unsafe there, which I think is worth pointing out given the widespread stigmas attached to such communities.

The Fazendinha was, I will not deny, shocking. I had already seen pictures, including the ones taken before the clean-up, yet I felt stunned: that was *a lot* of trash. I also realized how steep the terrain was,⁴⁶ as well as how difficult to access it was, only from a narrow and meandering alley from the bottom and another narrow and long alley from the top, both of them connected by a very irregular staircase that Ivanildo and Paulo da Silva, another neighbor,⁴⁷ had built a few years before (Figure 14). I was positively surprised, though, when we walked to the top area of the site and took a look around: those were amazing views (Figure 15). From that spot one could see most of Jardim Colombo, as well as three huge towers at one of its edges that delimit the neighborhood on its west side.⁴⁸ It was certainly a privileged viewpoint that the community should take advantage of.

When I was standing there, literally *contemplating* the community, one of my first thoughts was the possibility of organizing a music show right at this place, on top of Fazendinha: we could bring attention to this fantastic viewpoint through music and performances. As an unconventional classical musician,⁴⁹ I am used to performing music shows in the most random places, from tunnels to public squares, where music is not expected.⁵⁰ From my experience, music is always a powerful tool to reclaim spaces that have lost their humanity. Therefore, visualizing some music groups playing on top of Fazendinha was thrilling, almost like a public protest which would put the spotlight on the landfill as a societal failure, as a reality that should not be there—a result of structural oppression. I shared the idea with Ester, and she seemed as excited as I.

Later that day, we discussed the value and the viability of this proposal and reflected on the challenges that it might bring along. How would the proposal of a music show respond to the project for the future park and also align with the request for a cultural program for Jardim Colombo? Beyond the show, what could we arrange within two months that would start shifting the neighbors' perception of Fazendinha as just a dumping site? It took Ester and me only one day after our first meeting in Jardim Colombo to come up with the idea we were looking for. It *felt like a spark*: we would organize **the First Art Festival in Jardim Colombo**.

⁴⁶ The dimensions of the site are around 50 meter (150 feet) long, 20 meter (60 feet) wide, and almost 15 meter (45 feet) of height difference between the lowest and the highest point.

⁴⁷ Paulo, another neighbor of Jardim Colombo, had been already involved in the clean-up process before and became later one of the key persons in the project.

⁴⁸ For a detailed description of Jardim Colombo's urban setting, see Appendix A.

⁴⁹ I have gone through all stages of musical education in music schools and conservatories.

⁵⁰ For instance, in this project in Valencia (Spain), we performed a music show in a dark and uncomfortable tunnel crossed daily by thousands of citizens. <https://www.amaseme.net/viajeiv>



Figure 14. Picture taken from the bottom of Fazendinha during my first visit on June 4th.



Figure 15. View of Jardim Colombo from the top of Fazendinha.

As simple as it was, the proposal of an art festival seemed to respond naturally to all the previous questions: by providing some use for the Fazendinha site, we believed that neighbors would start appreciating its value and developing reason to take care of it. The project pursued three goals. First, we wanted to celebrate Fazendinha as an open space with a huge potential for the community. Second, we would take advantage of the event to collect ideas for the design of the future park. Those ideas would be later transformed into a formal project proposal. Finally, with the help of Mauro, we expected to start the actual physical transformation of Fazendinha. We anticipated that a landscaping intervention would generate a lot of expectation among the neighbors.

Suddenly, we had come up with a new—and self-defined—challenge that would help expanding our understanding of Fazendinha and Jardim Colombo's reality. Focusing on the capabilities we would need to develop to organize the festival seemed a much more tangible approach to the project of the future park. Having now the perspective of time and applying the framework that I am developing in this thesis, I can affirm how the art festival would function as a *spark* for meaningful change in the community. As such, it would shed light on previous and future challenges that the community was struggling with, both in Fazendinha and elsewhere in the neighborhood. Let me share at this point a definition of the spark based on the lessons learned later through the experience of the art festival:

A spark is an *initial set of actions* designed to bring community members and other interested stakeholders together to work towards a *shared outcome* that generates *realistic expectations* of deeper social transformations and paves the ground for a longer quest for system change.

This spark helped the team envision the park project as a longer-term process that had to be pursued gradually and through different angles. The original plan—clean-up, design of the park, and construction—was no longer a feasible approach: there were many more steps before undertaking the actual construction. The proposal of a park would fall into the category of a much more complex *set of interrelated challenges*, as described in Figure 4, and therefore needed to be split up into more specific and achievable challenges that the team could address independently. The complete set of challenges was still undefined—and continues to be by the time of writing these lines—yet we hoped that the art festival, as a spark, would open up new possibilities to fulfill the creation of the park. In this line, I suggest understanding the whole set of interrelated challenges that constitute the park project as a *sparkling project*: its materialization has the potential to become a significant tipping point in Jardim Colombo's history (Figure 16).⁵¹ More generally, we can define a sparking project as follows:

A sparking project is a set of interrelated challenges that can be gradually tackled to expand the community's sense of awareness and capabilities around issues they have reason to value. Once realized, the sparking project can become a significant tipping point in the cultural transformation of the community.

⁵¹ Following the same logic, the clean-up of Fazendinha was also a necessary step to facilitate the envisioning of the art festival as a spark. However, the clean-up was not a spark itself, since it was lacking of important features that make a spark function as such and unleash other transformation processes, as I will explain in detail later.

THE SPARKING PROJECT:
A PARK FOR JARDIM COLOMBO

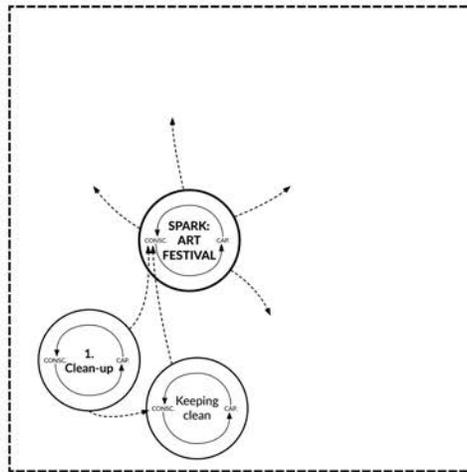


Figure 16. The park project as a sparking project: a set of interrelated challenges that can become a tipping point in Jardim Colombo’s cultural transformation. The art festival, as the spark itself, can shed light on future steps of the process.

Later that week (my first week in Jardim Colombo), we were already asking some residents if they would like to participate in the festival, which would take place in July. Nothing was planned, yet we were inviting more and more people to join our initiative. We even came up with an inspiring name that captured the essence of the proposed festival, *Fazendinho*, which played with the site’s name and the notion of collective doing.⁵² It seemed surreal, especially once we agreed on the date for the festival: Sunday, July 22nd (Figure 17). We had six weeks ahead of us to organize an art festival on a dumping site.



Figure 17. Festival poster designed with a group of children to announce the big event.

⁵² In Portuguese, *fazendo* means “making” or “doing”, and so the name *Fazendinha-ndo* embodies the idea of “making the Fazendinha,” or “making the little farm,” collectively.

Crafting the festival

From the first days, one of our main concerns was how to engage the neighbors in the festival. There was no point in organizing an art festival if neighbors were not interested. Ester, myself and the other team members knew how difficult it is to engage a community around any initiative, independently of how important its organizers believe it to be. Everybody is consumed with their daily lives, especially in places like Jardim Colombo—a system of vulnerabilities—where people need to overcome extreme difficulties. Just as a matter of respect, we could not make neighbors waste their time on something we were unsure about. We had to give them a reason to join us.

We came up with the proposals of a series of workshops before the festival. Instead of concentrating all the activities on a one-day event, we decided to start engaging the neighbors incrementally through workshops during the previous weeks. This approach proved later to be satisfactory. Without denying that not all the workshops had the participation we expected—the number of attendants ranged from 4 to almost 30—overall we were able to attract more than 50 neighbors to participate *actively* in one or more of the workshops. We were hoping that these participants were spreading the word about the festival across their own social networks in Jardim Colombo, eventually reaching out to hundreds of people. Some of the participants ended up even joining the coordination team for the festival and are still today part of the leadership group moving forward with the Fazendinha project.

When we were structuring the plan for the six weeks of work between the ideation and the celebration of the art festival, we discussed the importance of taking advantage of the workshops not only to engage neighbors, but also to start raising awareness—*conscientização*—about certain challenges around Fazendinha. Some of the questions participants would be asked to reflect on had to be related to the importance of taking care of their built environment: what was the Fazendinha like some years before, when there were animals on it? Why were neighbors constantly throwing trash and rubble on this space?⁵³ What else could this open space be used for?

Moreover, because of the short amount of time, we had to be pragmatic. We thought it would be smart to use the workshops' time to start deploying the necessary infrastructure for the festival. To do so, the team members and other participants would need to acquire specific skills that would allow us to install all the necessary elements to accommodate the activities on the big day. In short, the workshops were about fostering our collective *conscientização* and capabilities around a specific challenge: organizing the art festival on the dumping site.

With a list of potential workshops in mind, on the second week we started publicizing the program across our networks, mostly through word of mouth and in-person meetings. Once they started taking place, we would realize how each workshop would shed light on the approach we were taking for the art festival, paying attention to new aspects before moving forward and eventually reconsidering some aspects of the proposal. It was an iterative process that allowed us to look critically at Fazendinha with the lessons learned every day and to expand our overall

⁵³ It is worth pointing out that there is a semi-formal dumpster less than 100 meters away from the Fazendinha site, where São Paulo city services pick up trash on an almost daily basis. An aerial picture of both sites can be found in Appendix A.

perception of the challenges faced by the team—we had entered the *sparkling cycle*.⁵⁴ It was a six-week long spiral of simultaneous learning and doing that was leading to a very specific outcome: the art festival. Figure 17 schematizes the virtuous cycle of change that was unleashed during the following weeks. To better understand the preparation for the festival, let me briefly describe at this stage the workshops that took place between June 22nd and July 22nd.



Figure 18 A schematization of the virtuous cycle of conscientização and capabilities that took place in preparation for the art festival.⁵⁵

Image Design

The first workshop engaged a group of around fifteen children between ten and twelve years old from Projeto Viver, a fantastic educational facility situated on the northern edge of Jardim Colombo.⁵⁶ The main purpose was to produce with children the advertising campaign for the festival. We took a walk together with the group of children through the Fazendinha site and the other areas of the neighborhood (Figure 19), where we discussed with the children problems and opportunities in Jardim Colombo, as well as the importance of recycling and keeping Fazendinha and the community clean. After the walk, children were invited to design individual posters and a collective banner that would be hung in the neighborhood to announce the festival (Figure 20). The workshop was coordinated by Ester, Veronica Vacaro (an architect volunteering with ArqFuturo and who was the one to come up with the idea for this first workshop), Patrick (a teacher from Projeto Viver) and myself. This workshop was overall a fun activity where children envisioned Fazendinha as a future public space for the community, full of life and activity (Figure 21).

⁵⁴ We were obviously not using any of these terms while working on the project. But once I have had the time to step back and reflect on the Fazendinha project, I have come up with a terminology that describes the transformation process that took place. By theorizing about a process that was very intuitive and highly relied on the team members' embodied knowledge, we can advance, again, our own awareness about this particular case and make its learnings generalizable for other contexts.

⁵⁵ Again, this is just a *pragmatic model* designed to help understand the mental processes that might have taken place among team members and provide valuable insights on the complex process.

⁵⁶ <http://www.projeto viver.org.br/>



Figure 19. A conversation with children at the bottom of Fazendinha.



Figure 20. The posters were later hanged on the street to announce the festival.



Figure 21. Group picture after finishing the activity.

Carpentry

As soon as we decided that we would install some sort of platform on the Fazendinha for the day of the festival, we realized that we needed a carpenter's help. Through our networks we found Guga, a carpenter from São Paulo who offered his workshop in the northern area of the city for us to learn how to build benches with recycled pallets (Figure 22). This time, the team was joined by Rubens Costa, a young neighbor from Jardim Colombo who had recently received an important fellowship to study architecture at Mcackenzie, a prestigious university in São Paulo. Rubens's participation later turned out to be key for the festival's success. In the days before the festival, Rubens, who had experience in construction, showed other neighbors in Jardim Colombo how to replicate the bench model that he had learnt in Guga's workshop (Figure 23).



Figure 22. Ester and Rubens learn how to build benches.



Figure 23. More benches were built in the last days before the festival.

Pot Design

The Fazendinha team was aware that some decoration would be needed for the dumping site. To help with this task, Gorete da Silva, a self-taught artist from Jardim Colombo, volunteered to organize a workshop on pot design, where she would teach how to create simple and beautiful pots for plants out of old towels and cement.⁵⁷ Gorete had invented this original technique and was excited to share it with her neighbors (Figure 24). Taking advantage of her social networks in the community, she drew around 30 people to her workshop on a Saturday morning and engaged in a creative session of pot design (Figure 25).



Figure 24. Gorete, with a white T-shirt, shows her technique to the attendants.



Figure 25 A dozen of flower pots were produced during the workshops.

⁵⁷ The technique consists of wetting old towels in liquid cement and placing them on cubes, where they dry and harden until they acquire the shape of a pot.

Landscaping

Mauro Quintanilha could not wait to start the transformation of Fazendinha. Inspired by his previous experience in the community of Vidigal, he had in mind a clear idea of how the landscaping intervention should be addressed. We came up with the idea of turning the first construction works into a workshop where neighbors would learn from Mauro's talent and become co-designers during the process. We got started as soon as we had collected enough materials and basic tools (tires, shovels, hammers, gloves) and had received the first donations from our sponsors (cement, sand and gravel). Eric Luan, a young Public Health student at University of São Paulo, became one of the most active participants, along with Paulo, whose presence always made a difference in the transformation of Fazendinha (Figures 26a and 26b).



Figures 26a and 26b. Ivanildo, Rubens, Mauro, Paulo and Eric during the first working days on site.

Photography

The last workshop was guided by André Basquete, a multi-talented artist from Jardim Colombo who also worked as a photographer. André took a group of children and showed them some basic notions about photography with cellphones, and he also brought his professional camera to let the kids experiment with it. The group climbed to the top of Fazendinha and shot some pictures from that fantastic viewpoint, from which they could *contemplate* the community they live in (Figures 27a and 27b).



Figures 27a and 27b. A group of children taking pictures of Jardim Colombo.

Getting ready

Engaging the community through the workshops was just one of the necessary tasks to prepare the festival. There was besides a whole logistic infrastructure that had to be created in order to make the festival possible. Something essential was finding donors who could support the festival—it was going to be done with little resources, but we needed something to hold on to. Simultaneous with the actual execution of the project—meaning the workshops and the landscaping intervention—the team had to create a whole story around the Fazendinha project that could be easily shared with potential sponsors and participants. Such preparation work consisted of five different tasks.

Plan & Budget

We first structured a time plan with several milestones, which included the dates for the different workshops. All the activities that were programmed were budgeted along with other resources necessary to create the physical infrastructure on Fazendinha. The budget also included a minimum economic compensation for the volunteers running the workshops. Once we presented the plan and the budget to Tomas, he pointed out that we had to be not only creative with the content for the festival, but also in the way we would collect the resources. We needed to offer potential donors a reason to co-sponsor the festival with whatever they could. This strategy allowed us to reduce the final budget to less than 10,000 Brazilian reais (around 2,500 USD), almost three times less than the original estimation.

Webpage & Presentations

Once the action plan was structured enough, all the information was organized into slides that we could start sharing with people outside the team. The original presentation⁵⁸ was constantly updated with the latest pictures of the activities that were taking place in Jardim Colombo⁵⁹. The Fazendinha project also required a webpage where we could advertise the festival and all the workshops planned⁶⁰ (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Screenshot of the webpage created for the festival.

⁵⁸ The first presentation that was put together can be found on this link:

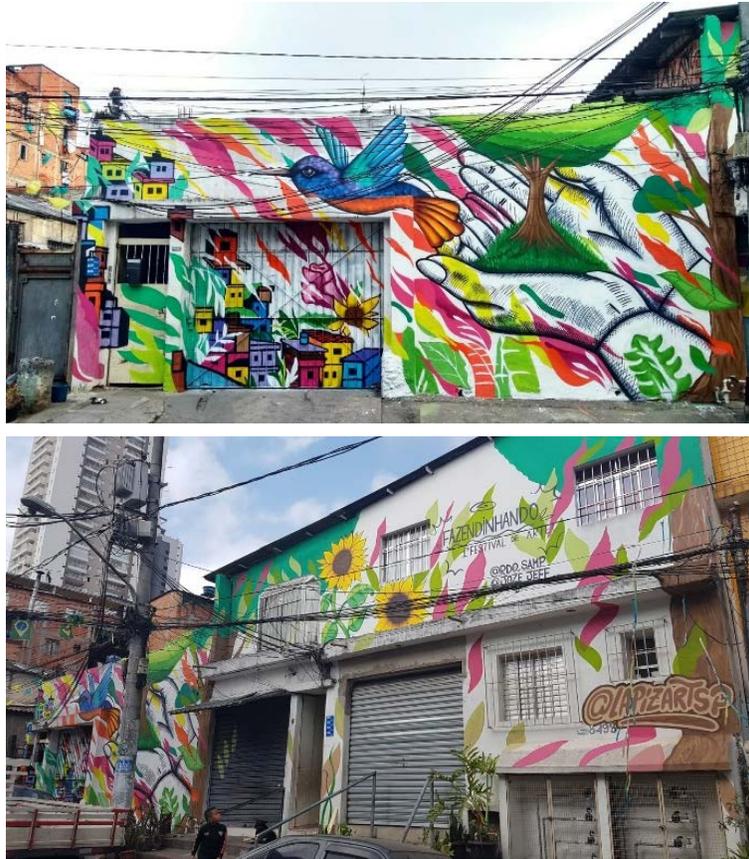
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ueMRRvpl46jFEPBDjwrW_wKPMLjd4f8CeUSgw9YCBY

⁵⁹ Still today, every time I talk about the project, I have to update the presentation with the newest information that arrives from Jardim Colombo. The Fazendinha project is vibrant, dynamic, and alive!

⁶⁰ <https://parquefazendinha.wixsite.com/festival>

Street Art

From the first week, Rodolpho Viera (@rdo_samp) and Jefferson dos Santos (@jozejeff), two street artists from Jardim Colombo, volunteered to contribute with a work of art that would highlight the spirit of Fazendinha as a future space of nature and cohabitation. Thanks to Ivanildo's persuasive ability, these artists got permission to paint a big mural on one of the most visible facades in Jardim Colombo's main street. The simple act of painting the mural generated curiosity and excitement among the neighbors who passed by during the days leading up to the festival. The result was worth looking at (Figures 29a and 29b).



Figures 29a and 29b. Street mural painted by Rodolpho and Jefferson capturing the essence of the Fazendinha project.

Cleaning & Building

One of the toughest preparation works would be, without doubt, adapting Fazendinha to make it a usable space during the day of the festival—and later on. The place was going to welcome many neighbors, including children. It should not only be a safe space to accommodate all the activities during the festival, but Fazendinha should be worthy of the people's presence during the big day. And so, starting the last weekend before the festival, the team coordinated several collective clean-ups of the site, targeting specifically the areas where we envisioned the activities to take place. In parallel, and thanks to the donation of forty pallets that we had received from one of the sponsors, we were able to build a temporary installation that consisted of several platforms, accessible through stairs made of

tires. In just seven days, with more and more people stopping by and helping, the Fazendinha site radically changed. The collective effort was enormous. Each person contributed with ideas, skills, and resources—everybody wanted the festival to be a success. The transformation of the Fazendinha site became an unbelievable act of *co-generation*—a concept I will return to later—and the result was astonishing. Jardim Colombo had, all of a sudden, a temporary park for the community (Figures 30a, 30b, and 31).



Figures 30a and 30b. The team cleans the Fazendinha up and builds the temporary platforms.



Figure 31. Four platforms were built in preparation for the festival.

Finishing touches

Until the last minute before the opening, even the morning of the festival, all collaborators did their best to dignify the space that would host the big event, improvising with whatever tools and materials we had at hand. Every small action helped, from painting tires and walls to decorating the platforms. Fazendinha should look like a high-quality public space for celebration and hope (Figures 32a and 32b).



Figures 32a and 32b. Fazendinha being filled with color.

The team

Finally, before describing the day of the festival, let me stop for a moment and describe the structure of the unbelievable team of volunteers that joined the initiative within the 6-week period of preparation. Fortunately, the proposal of the festival was *concrete* enough to start attracting people willing to participate in the project, as well as donors and sponsors ready to contribute with whatever they had at hand, from plants and paintings to pallets and boxes. The *appeal* of the project also turned out to be a key element of the project's success—concreteness and appeal are indeed two of the features of a spark.

Six different groups of participants became active parts of the team, the first being the community, led by Ivanildo and Ester as the instigators of the Fazendinha project. Second, ArqFuturo and its incredible network, which easily attracted more volunteers, brought the organizational capability to the team under the leadership of Tomas Alvim and Vladimir Santana. Third, other organizations offered different kinds of support, with Rede Paper Solidario as the one helping with legal aid and other proposals for increasing the team’s capabilities. Fourth, the Catholic University of São Paulo, and in particular the Media Lab São Paulo, came into the game with the intention of amplifying the academic impact of the Fazendinha project. Fifth, the project was presented to different areas of the public sector—such as the housing department and the regional mayor’s office Jardim Colombo falls under—seeking official recognition of the project, as well as a change in land use of Fazendinha from public housing to public space. Finally, the donors were key to both finance the project and collect the necessary materials for the urban installation in Fazendinha.⁶¹



Figure 33. Group picture with part of the team on the central platform of Fazendinha the day before the festival.

The art festival became a highly co-generative process. The team expanded naturally. The word of mouth worked surprisingly well—that each of us was talking about the project with so much enthusiasm certainly helped to spread the word. Everybody was thrilled about the final outcome after so much effort. Only when we met in Jardim Colombo the day before the festival to coordinate each one’s roles for the big day did we realize how many people were part of the team: over 30 volunteers!⁶² With such a crew, it was not possible that the festival would not be a success (Figure 33).

⁶¹ A full list of all the volunteers and participants, can be found in Appendix B.

⁶² It is difficult to know the exact number of people because even the day of the festival more volunteers showed up to help setting up everything. The reference number I am using is 30—the number of T-shirts that were printed with the project’s logo, which turned to be insufficient for all the volunteers.

The big day!

Everything evolved so rapidly and the exchange of ideas and emotions had been so intense thus far, that we hardly believed that it was already July 22nd, the date we had agreed on six weeks before for an art festival that we were not prepared for. The emotion flooded the atmosphere, with all team members and other last-minute volunteers waiting for the residents to arrive and participate in the activities that had been planned. The schedule was structured into four parts: art and participatory workshops during the morning; a community lunch; performances on Jardim Colombo's main street during the afternoon; and a music show on the central platform of Fazendinha in the evening—the music show that was only a vague idea less than two months before.

Morning Workshops

Continuing with the workshops that had started four weeks before, Fazendinha had been set up to accommodate six more activities for participants to reflect on the future of this site. We hoped that the temporary architecture installation and the landscaping intervention would be inspiring for the residents. While the first participants were arriving—it was a Sunday morning and many families were in church—Laura Souza, a volunteer from Media Lab São Paulo, had prepared an origami workshop for early risers. Children learned how to design flowers, which were later planted on Fazendinha as a metaphor for the future of the community (Figures 34a and 34b).



Figures 34a and 34b. Origami workshop with the first group of children.

It was time then to get our hands dirty. Rafael, from the nonprofit organization Recicleiros,⁶³ coordinated a dynamic activity with an increasing group of children about the importance of recycling and being aware of our own waste. This workshop was followed by another one on community gardening, right on the platform below the central one. Barbara Cordovani, an expert in organic food who had joined the team with a lot of intensity a few weeks before, was in charge of teaching children how to plant seeds and take care of vegetables that could produce healthy—and cheap—food⁶⁴ (Figures 35a and 35b).



Figures 35a and 35b. Workshops on recycling and community gardening.

From trash and earth to colors, through two simultaneous activities facilitated by artists Jefferson, Rodolpho, and Gorete, children experimented with paint. On one hand, they were making good use of the power of graffiti to embellish a white wall, which became filled with all kinds of designs about nature and community building. On the other hand, they decorated the flower pots that Gorete and her crew had created a few weeks before, which were placed on the wall made of tires that the landscaping team had built the previous weeks (Figures 36a and 36b).

⁶³ <http://www.recicleiros.org.br/>

⁶⁴ Nine months later, these plants keep growing thanks to the residents around Fazendinha, who take much care of them, and to Babi, who comes to check them regularly and offer more gardening workshops.



Figures 36a and 36b. Graffiti and pot design at the bottom area of Fazendinha.

Finally, the main activity of the morning took place: a participatory design charrette. Coordinated by the urban consultancy firm A Terceira Margem,⁶⁵ residents were invited to imagine the design for the future Fazendinha park. First, on a scale model of the site, participants explored different designs in three dimensions. Second, on a big paper portraying the ground plan, they collectively defined potential uses for the future park. Everybody who stopped by was invited to create their individual designs on small sheets of paper (Figures 37a and 37b). Participants were told that all that information was going to be collected, analyzed and transformed into a formal project for the future park. In less than one hour, dozens of designs and proposals were shared—and none of them suggested keeping the dumping site.

All the workshops that took place during the morning constituted a special moment of collective creativity (Figure 38). Ideas flowed almost magically in an atmosphere full of fun, joy, and hope. The experience was being *real*, and the expectations for a future park were *realistic*. It was just the beginning of a deep transformation process that would last for months—time will tell if for years.

⁶⁵ <https://www.aterceiramargem.com/>



Figures 37a and 37b. Groups of residents work on the 3D model and share their own designs for the park.



Figure 38. An intense morning!

Lunch time

In parallel to the morning activities, the neighborhood association had been giving free popcorn and cotton candy to the neighbors who were stopping by. For the little ones, a trampoline was installed while their older siblings and their parents took a look at what was happening at the Fazendinha site (Figures 39a and 39b). Meanwhile, a crew of five women—from inside and outside the community—were cooking a massive community lunch, which would take place on the main street of Jardim Colombo.



Figures 39a and 39b. Popcorn for all, and a trampoline for the little ones.

The lunch's success exceeded our expectations. Thanks to our donors, we had purchased food for about 400 people, and there were no leftovers. Hundreds of neighbors had lined up patiently waiting their turn, and once they got their lunch, they took a place at the tables that we had set up on the street. We were aware that most of the attendants had little idea about the Festival, but were there just for the food and would vanish after lunch—it was difficult not to find an analogy between this scene and a shelter. Nevertheless, the effort was unquestionably worth it: the group of cooks on one side, and all the volunteers arranging and decorating the tables and serving the food on the other—everything worked out. Again, the team showed its perfect coordination and commitment with the project, and everybody got lunch. The Fazendinha project was capturing a lot of attention among hundreds of residents who were just passing by (Figures 40a and 40b).



Figures 40a and 40b. The cooks and the diners.

Afternoon performances

After lunch, Jardim Colombo's main street became a stage. Once the tables were removed, the residents were invited to take a seat or find a space at the wall to watch three performances that had been arranged. The owners of the local businesses kindly made their own chairs available for the public while the groups were preparing their shows. First, the karate team of Projeto Viver, under the coordination of Patrick (who had helped with the workshop on image design four weeks before), had put together a beautiful choreography with around thirty children executing karate movements to the sound of music. They were followed by the local Capoeira team, whose show was accompanied by the rhythm generated with traditional Brazilian instruments. For about one hour, Jardim Colombo's main street was filled with the energy generated by all these local athletes showing their skills to their neighbors (Figures 41a and 41b).



Figurea 41a and 41b. The karate and capoeira groups perform in front of their neighbors.

It was time for a more contemplative situation—and I was particularly excited about it. Since the idea of the festival came up, Tomas suggested to contact Elisa Fingerman and her theater group Cia Contraponto, who volunteered to perform a theater play in Jardim Colombo. As an alternative theater group, Cia Contraponto is interested in exploring ways to bring more theater to public spaces in order to foster culture among communities with little access to cultural venues. The play they had been working on for the past months under the direction of Paulo Faria was “The Former One-On-One Basketball Champion,”⁶⁶ by American playwright Israel Horowitz. Fortunately, it only needed two actors and a basket to be performed on the street. While the actors, Antonio Destro and João Barletta, were getting ready to perform, Rubens installed a basket made of a recycled bike wheel on the wall.

For almost one hour, an audience of over 100 people were paying careful attention to the performance—a story of a young man and a middle-aged man who engage in an intense debate while they play basketball (Figure 42). The plot touches upon issues of father-son relationships, ambitions and sacrifices, violence and losses, optimism and hope. Jardim Colombo’s main street—a usually noisy environment—remained silent during most of the performance. There had been some concern about the length of the piece; we were unsure if neighbors would find one hour to be

⁶⁶ The title was translated to Portuguese as *O Jogador de Basquete*, or *The Basketball Player*.

too long and if the play should have been replaced by lighter performances. But it turned out that we had underestimated the community's capacity for concentration: the attention was maintained until the end.



Figure 42. João and Antonio perform in front of a big audience.

Overall, the afternoon sessions on the street were, again, successful, and even more crowded than the morning activities. The team had also planned a discussion session on Jardim Colombo's urban challenges in parallel to the performances, but we decided to postpone the conversation for a later occasion given the interest that the shows were generating. Of course, the conditions to carry out all planned activities were far from ideal and the team had to improvise often while the performances were taking place. But the overall feeling was positive, and the team was optimistic about all the energy that was emerging from the community (Figure 43).



Figure 43. Some of the participants of the performances in the afternoon.

Music show at night

Lastly, the music show would take place. The equipment, which had been arranged by the crew from the local radio station, was being installed while the afternoon activities were taking place on the street. Long cables emerged from a house nearby, whose owners had been of great support since the last days before the festival. There were many technical difficulties, though, and all the musicians wanted to test out the sound. It was late and getting darker. We gained some time thanks again to the cooks, who had prepared a giant chocolate cake for the last break before the final show. Despite some sound problems, the music started and the four rap groups that we had invited could play: two were from Jardim Colombo and two from Grajaú, a community in the Southern region of the city.⁶⁷ It was going to be a moment for celebration, cultural exchange, and acknowledgements—the icing on the cake after an intense art festival. Because it was already late, participation had decreased considerably, both because many neighbors were returning to their homes and because attendants from outside had to drive back to other neighborhoods in São Paulo. There were still some dozens of people, though, including most of the volunteers, who wanted to celebrate together that the art festival had finally taken place. We felt exhausted, but deeply satisfied (Figures 44a and 44b).



Figures 44a and 44b. Music and celebration on the *Fazendinha* site at the end of the festival.

⁶⁷ Denise Alves (@denisealves_oficial) and Raphael Gomes (@Mmoneis) had been working in ArqFuturo's office since a few months before on a program to make economic discussions accessible for people from the periphery. Besides the festival, the three of us collaborated on another project before I left, the song *Pouso*: <https://youtu.be/4uuG7i72s0s>

An incremental process...

The day after the festival, things *felt* different among the team members. In the morning, Ivanildo sent a long voice message to the team to recognize the good work and the magic moment that we had co-created. He was talking slowly, exhausted, and full of gratitude to everyone. Other team members replied, touched and savoring the calm after the storm. We were experiencing the *quality* of the spark. In order to light the process of change, we had all spent a lot of our own energies, and we were running out of our individual batteries.

I felt empty. I had put so much vigor into the project during the last few weeks that I was not only physically exhausted, but mentally worn out. That sensation was partly motivated by the realization that Jardim Colombo's reality was way too complex for me to understand it. I knew that the festival had been a great success, yet I could not avoid thinking that all that huge effort would mean, by itself, very little for the whole community—again, a system of vulnerabilities—if it was not followed by a thorough and intense transformation process. I did not want to resign myself to the project being something that would just leave a good memory among the participants. I was sure that it could become just the first act of a meaningful story for the community and the people involved. But in that case, the toughest part was about to start. We all would need to do much more than we had done so far, but I was fatigued and could not visualize any next steps.

The team evolves

Fortunately, things quickly started to move forward. The art festival had indeed planted something real that would start growing smoothly. The first sign was the nice crew from the community, and also from outside, that the Fazendinha project had brought together. Not only were the volunteers already thinking about what to do next, but also new neighbors who had contributed tangentially to the festival now wanted to take more leading roles. The week after the festival, it was not only Ivanildo and Ester anymore, but a dozen other residents offering support to the neighborhood association (Figure 45).



Figure 45. Part of the new leadership of the Fazendinha project.

I left Jardim Colombo 10 days after the festival. In the last days, Veronica and I put together a report to document the whole process that had taken place so far so that could be shared with institutions for next stages of the project.⁶⁸ Since then, more and more people have been joining the initiative. The WhatsApp group that was originally created by Ester, Veronica, Vladimir and myself to coordinate the logistics for the festival has, today, over 30 participants, most of them very active. Its members continuously share pictures and other updates about Fazendinha and Jardim Colombo. Different subgroups are regularly created to coordinate the activities and logistics that come up, and emails are exchanged frequently to ground the evolution of the project. Under the main leadership of Ester, the Fazendinha team is strong and keeps growing.

Monthly events

One of the first challenges that we discussed while I was still on site was how to take care of Fazendinha to avoid it starting to accumulate trash and rubble once again. It would have been too devastating for the team to witness all our efforts vanishing. We had to keep the park and the project alive. To do so, we relied on the temporary architectural installation that had been built for the festival to remain standing for a few more months on site until it became clearer what was going on with the landscaping project.

And so we came up with the idea of the monthly events. Similar to the workshops that were designed to generate excitement about the first festival, taking advantage of the infrastructure to put together other activities on a regular basis was a smart way to *seize the momentum* around this initiative. The team took this idea so seriously, that between July 22nd and Christmas of 2018, four more festival-like events took place in Fazendinha: first, a forum on women empowerment, with an entrepreneur from the community sharing her business in the recycling industry; second, a graffiti festival, joined by artists from all around São Paulo, which brought more colors to the facades surrounding the future park; third, a workshop in which an old freezer was transformed into a portable library for children to exchange books; and finally, a formal presentation of the park project that was designed based on the community's proposals (see section below) to receive feedback and collect more ideas (Figures 46).

January was even more special: a full program with events every other day was put together under the title *Férias na Fazendinha* (vacation on Fazendinha). Children were on vacation for the whole month, and so Ester and her team came up with the idea of offering all kinds of activities for the little ones, such as games, sports, carnival, etc. Also adults were invited to join from time to time for activities such as yoga or dancing. In preparation for all these events, Mauro and his team had already finished the lower platform, which was now a safe surface for people to gather and play. The Fazendinha park was ready to be used as such.

In February, the first Fazendinha carnival took place, and it was followed next day by another big collective clean-up. In March, the park hosted a family day for children and their parents to enjoy the space together. Every new

⁶⁸ The document can be accessed on this link:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=19KHptwPIB32a1tSODTsxR7ZpBDKpfHLW>

activity represents a step forward in the transformation of Fazendinha, which is bringing about significant cultural shifts in the community as a whole. For the next months, more events are planned, and I am convinced that by the time of delivering this thesis in May 2019, new fascinating stories will have already taken place in Jardim Colombo.⁶⁹



Figures 46. Images of four events that took place between August and December 2018.

⁶⁹ That is part of the beauty of talking about a project that is so alive.

Park design

As had been anticipated, all the ideas collected during the participatory workshop on the day of the festival were carefully analyzed. In the next weeks after the big day, Ester and Veronica—the two architects of the team—worked hand in hand to put together an exhaustive and poetic document about the park project, which included a formal proposal for its design. The uses for the future park were grouped into different categories that encompassed all the proposals collected during the festival. Additionally, the designers were keeping in mind the construction technique started by Mauro and Paulo, and so the park was structured into four big platforms delimited by walls made of recycled tires. The first formal proposal for the future park was now printed on paper—it was a significant step towards the transformation of Fazendinha⁷⁰ (Figure 47).

Most remarkably, the document included artistic references in the design. In particular, Gilberto Gil's poem *Refazenda* was carefully parsed into specific proposals for the park, matching its verses with the ideas suggested by Jardim Colombo's residents. It is surprising how well this project predicted the current stage of the park project through one of the verses: "We will wait, we will play in the stream until your love brings us fruit, your heart." This verse was associated with the lower area of Fazendinha, where the first finished platform is hosting today all the activities, waiting for the rest of the park to be built.



Figure 47. Rendering of the first formal proposal for the Fazendinha park.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The full document, which is worth *contemplating* given the sensitivity with which it was produced, is available on this link: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WFYJK0ErBz0bgKrHIxMMBud39X0k6Xlv>

⁷¹ Architect Veronica Vacaro must be credited for this rendering.

Landscaping

Mauro, Paulo, and a bunch of other residents have been working hard to materialize the project. The landscaping team is now following the project designed by Ester and Veronica, which in turn is being readjusted while the construction progresses. From time to time, teams of engineers show up to do soil probes and check that the building process is evolving properly, without any risk to the neighbors. By the time of this writing, the first platform of Fazendinha has been already created (Figures 48a and 48b) and the construction team is working on the next level thanks to a big donation of construction materials that arrived the third week of April.



Figure 48a and 48b. Construction process of the first platform.

Formalization & Capacity building

In terms of logistics, the project has also evolved significantly. Thanks to the legal advice of Fernanda Aidar, an ArqFuturo volunteer who had been part of the Fazendinha project since we started organizing the festival, it has now been institutionalized through the Sports & Culture Association of Jardim Colombo. This small organization did exist before, but was regularized after the festival in order to be able to operate within the legal framework of São Paulo.⁷² Ester was appointed president, along with Ivanildo, Erik e Kamilla Bianca as board members. While the current neighborhood association was in the middle of legal processes, the Sports & Culture Association could be easily adapted to respond to nascent and future community needs.

The team has been expanding its capabilities enormously. Through many workshops on capacity building, such as the ones Silvia coordinated to design marketing strategies, the Fazendinha project is being consolidated. Responsibilities are distributed accordingly, and meetings take place regularly to make sure that all team members are aligned and feel comfortable with their work. Moreover, thanks to several fundraising campaigns, the project has raised enough funding to compensate for the work that is being done. That way, volunteers facilitating most of the activities are being paid. Also, Paulo and the rest of the crew have been formally hired through the Sports & Culture Association to continue working on the construction process. The more *capable* the team becomes, the more likely the project will evolve positively.

Public presentations

The project has generated a lot of expectation, even before the first art festival took place. From politicians to TV representatives, all kinds of people have stopped by Jardim Colombo to visit Fazendinha and learn more about the community. Ester and her crew have been invited to share the project all around the city of São Paulo. The more people talk about the future Fazendinha park, the closer it is to becoming a reality (Figure 49).



Figure 49. Ester, at the top of Fazendinha, is being recorded for a TV show.

⁷² The association's by-laws were formally withdrawn from the registry on May 10th 2019.

All in all, it is now evident that the construction of a park in Jardim Colombo could have never been a straightforward quest, as it would be in contexts of high capabilities and wellbeing. All these different challenges that I discussed—evolution of the team, monthly events, park design, landscaping, capacity building, and public presentations of the project—started being addressed independently, and almost simultaneously, in the months following the art festival. All of them are key elements for the park proposal to function as a sparking project. Each challenge has to go through its internal sparking cycle of *conscientização* and capabilities and also contribute to expand the team’s understanding of the overall approach to the park project. Today, the question about the capabilities needed to keep the Fazendinha site clean—which were not obvious by the time this challenge was raised—is now being informed by many new insights that the whole process is bringing about. Keeping the Fazendinha alive with monthly activities, having more leaders controlling the space, weekly landscaping interventions—this multilayer approach to the park project is, at last, preventing neighbors from throwing more trash (Figure 50).

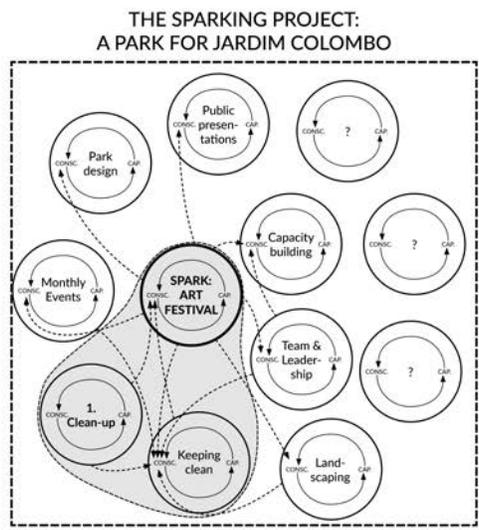


Figure 50. As a complex sparking project, the construction of a park in Jardim Colombo is a set of interrelated challenges.

The three highlighted ones represent the initial stage of the process shown in Figure 16.⁷³

Among the challenges that constitute the sparking project, the art festival was the spark itself, which illuminated the way forward. It opened up new possibilities to tackle the complex project from multiple angles and helped *name* other challenges that needed to be addressed to ensure the project’s success. The complete set of challenges cannot be fully modeled at this stage, since there is still significant uncertainty associated with the park project. However, the stronger the sparking cycles within each challenge and the reinforcing connections among challenges become, the more Jardim Colombo advances in the realization of its cherished community park.

⁷³ Again, this model does not intend to be exhaustive, but just a helpful graphic reference to make the ideas of the text clear. For the sake of clarity, only the most significant connections have been drawn.

...and an emotional shift

During the days following the art festival, I interviewed ten community members that had participated in the organization of the event. It was evident how touching the preparation for the festival and the big celebration had been for all of us. Gorete expressed how rewarding it was to see so many children enjoying the public space; Eric was particularly amazed by the powerful atmosphere generated during the theater play (“art is a powerful weapon,” he said); Alex pointed out the extraordinary coexistence of so many people from the community; Ester was very pleased by the pedagogical impact of the whole process.⁷⁴ All of them recognized having enjoyed the process—the festival would have not been a spark without joy associated to the project.

Besides the intense emotions that were exchanged before and during the festival, some deeper shifts have started occurring in Jardim Colombo along with the Fazendinha project. These were perhaps not obvious at the beginning, when everybody was still immersed in the magic aura generated by the collective feat. But little by little, more profound emotions have been emerging among Jardim Colombo’s neighbors. Social networks, and in particular Instagram (@parquefazendinha), are good testimony of how the project is being perceived and sensed by the community (Figure 51).



Figure 51. A neighbor of the Fazendinha shares with Ester her gratitude about the project, and Ester replies, touched.⁷⁵

The art and participation festival, as a spark, generated realistic expectations of a meaningful *physical and emotional* transformation in the community of Jardim Colombo. Those expectations are being fulfilled *incrementally*, and residents are becoming increasingly convinced that the festival was not just another one-day event, but only the first step of a process that is changing the daily realities of Jardim Colombo in a longer term. Children are the ones that

⁷⁴ All interviews were recorded and are available for later research on the Fazendinha project.

⁷⁵ This neighbor, Mari, is expressing how proud she is about the project and how happy she feels every time she opens the window and witnesses how the space is changing and the community is making use of it. Esther responds full of joy, honored to be able to represent Jardim Colombo through such a motivating project that is uniting so many people.

are benefitting the most: Fazendinha is a safe space for them to go and play with their friends. As Rosinha, a neighbor from the area, recently shared in an interview, it is highly motivating to hear children say that they are going to Fazendinha to participate in activities, workshops, and community lunches that are being scheduled on a regular basis. Every new collective activity that takes place in this park in progress reinforces the emotional shift (Figure 52). And there is still much more to come.



Figure 52 A group of children and grownups sitting and conversing on the first platform.

The Fazendinha project is an extraordinary process of change that is shaking the roots under Jardim Colombo. We are certainly far from talking about system change. But the impact of the project is being, without doubt, already significant for the community, particularly for those who have been somehow involved. The Fazendinha project is a *sparkling project*: if the park transformation becomes materialized and is accompanied by a long-lasting cultural program for the neighborhood, I am convinced of its potential to bring along many other transformative projects and processes in Jardim Colombo, and the experience could become a reference to spark change in other marginalized communities in the region and elsewhere. To better understand how this sparkling project could evolve and eventually unleash deeper change, it is now time to contemplate the whole process from a broader perspective and reflect on the lessons that can be generalized and emulated in other contexts of vulnerabilities.

THIRD MOVEMENT

Keeping the Flame Alive

The story in Jardim Colombo is inspiring. It sheds light on the approach that processes of change can adopt in oppressed communities. But it also reveals the extreme complexity that prevails in these contexts—as long as the vulnerabilities “exceed” the capabilities, and these are not structured, any sparking initiative risks falling apart, hence perpetuating conditions of oppression.

I have been often referring to the idea of *meaningful* change. It is worth insisting that meaningful change is the one that fosters individual and collective *conscientização* and capabilities to pursue the lives communities have reason to value. Changes are meaningful if they enhance *agency* among the people involved and make them more capable of advancing their own wellbeing. As the story of Jardim Colombo illustrates, processes that make these types of transformations possible are long and often can give the sense that they generate little or no impact in terms of quantitative changes. However, when meaningful change is prioritized over big-scale impact, chances are that the aura of these cultural transformation processes will reach, over time, community and even society levels, and their effects will last longer.

In this movement, I will approach the second question raised at the beginning of this thesis: what considerations must we take into account to increase the chance that targeted collective actions unleash incremental transformative cultural processes that lead to system change? Through systems thinking, and looking back at Jardim Colombo’s example, I will expand the perspective on the challenges faced by this and other communities to theorize about how sparking projects can evolve over time, from the first days of their conception to a generational change. In the gradual pursuit of this ambitious quest, the spark occupies a tiny, but extremely relevant, moment of the long-term story.

Continuing with the inductive reasoning started in the first movement, I will add some more layers of complexity to the models presented so far. I will introduce here the notions of network of change and infrastructure of change to envision how the sparking cycle can operate across scales, from localized actions to complete systems. I will finally narrow down the theoretical model to a set of principles for our professional practice to better understand how we can address, as reflective practitioners, cultural processes of change in oppressed communities.

Infrastructure of change

When analyzing general responses to traumatic situations, the most natural reaction consists of focusing on the main vulnerabilities that the trauma has revealed or generated. For instance, after a natural disaster that damages the built environment of a community—a shocking event—institutions will concentrate efforts on the physical reconstruction as the most urgent matter and lose interest shortly after the momentum vanishes. When it comes to urban trauma as a cumulative experience, these institutions tend to adopt a straightforward problem-solving attitude—such as sending more policemen to a violent neighborhood—often dodging the rooted causes of these problems. At a different level, grassroots organizations and other spontaneous individual actors and artists feel often constrained by the lack of resources and time to address meaningful change in their communities. Despite their high commitment to improve the situation of the affected communities, the impact of their actions is highly limited.

Such approaches to communities dealing with trauma show a worrying lack of systems thinking. While acknowledging that every action is valuable and all sincere efforts to improve peoples' lives have to be recognized—both when they come from institutional and from grassroots level—the lack of systems thinking usually prevents these initiatives from generating the meaningful impact they could aspire to.⁷⁶ Figure 53 schematizes how bottom-up responses to urban trauma (UT) commonly unfold: the momentum generated by the shock—or by the proposal to address an ongoing traumatic situation—raises a lot of attention among artists, activists, and individuals in general with a natural social commitment. Groups and teams of volunteers are spontaneously formed to help tackle, through localized actions, vulnerabilities in the spotlight (Vs). These kinds of actions can even reinforce each other and catalyze localized synergies among grassroots groups. Nevertheless, once the momentum vanishes, the number of responses decreases quickly. Despite the relevance of bottom-up responses, the impact of these actions tends to be minimal, as if there was a mental barrier (represented by a double line in Figure 53) that prevents grassroots initiatives from moving beyond obvious vulnerabilities and addressing deeper cultural transformations.

⁷⁶ There are notable exceptions from both top-down and bottom-up interventions that have addressed traumatic scenarios in oppressed communities in a highly successful manner. The story of Medellín, one of the most violent cities in the world during the 1980s and 1990s, is a relevant example that combined both approaches. Under the umbrella of a policy known as “Social Urbanism” promoted by the city government, new high-quality infrastructures and public facilities were built in different communities of the periphery, and they were paralleled by the invaluable ongoing effort of grassroots organizations producing all sorts of cultural programs for the communities they served. Together, the spiral of violence in Medellín was dramatically reduced, and today neighbors share full of proudness how they felt part of this meaningful shift in the city's history. I had the chance to witness firsthand the work done by one of these organizations in the northeastern area of Medellín: Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente was created over thirty years ago as a local theater company and is now a cultural center of reference in the city. To learn more about these and other inspiring stories in Latin America, I recommend taking a look at Justin McGuirk's essay *Radical City* (2014).

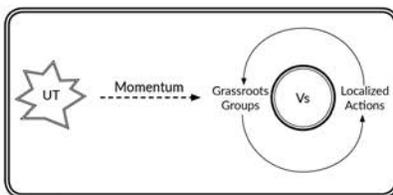


Figure 53. Usual responses to urban trauma (UT) are characterized by grassroots groups working on localized actions around the most urgent vulnerabilities (Vs). An invisible mental barrier constrains their impact.

To illustrate this idea, looking at the reactions to the 2017 earthquakes in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which I mentioned in the first movement, is revealing. The response of artists, activists, and other volunteers from all over Mexico was massive, and their contribution was, without doubt, very appreciated by the affected communities. Workshops, fundraising campaigns, murals, and many other initiatives—the Isthmus felt heard by its country (Moya-Latorre 2018). However, most of these responses took place within the first weeks after the shock and did not spark meaningful actions later. In this particular case, another event sadly accelerated the disinterest in this region: less than two weeks after the earthquake that hit the country’s south, another big seism shook Mexico City, which immediately captured most of the national and international efforts (Moya-Latorre 2018). The momentum generated by the urban trauma vanished in just three weeks.

When it comes to top-down responses, the story typically looks slightly different to the one illustrated in Figure 53. Big institutions possess relevant resources and can therefore cause bigger impact on the affected areas, but their interventions risk not being meaningful for the communities they act on, who can feel how these projects are being imposed—again, meaningful change and impact are fundamentally different ideas.⁷⁷ This sequence is typically more linear due to bureaucratic and hierarchical logics of big organizations, which do not make a lot of room for spontaneous actions and on-the-ground collaborations that could complement and add meaningful value to top-down interventions. If that had been the case in Jardim Colombo and, say, the regional office of Butantá, which this neighborhood falls under, had taken a top-down approach to dealing with the dumping site, any park would have been built there with little or no community engagement, and after the celebration during the day of the opening, the public administration would not care again about it. This story could have taken place in a relatively quick manner, according to the political agenda of the regional mayor. No meaningful change would have been sparked.

Let us, then, explore how the usual responses to trauma illustrated in Figure 53 can be replaced by sparking projects that unleash more complex and meaningful cultural transformation processes. Since the sparking cycle is, by definition, a process that starts at a grassroots level, I will develop the previous model from the bottom-up

⁷⁷ I was particularly struck by a conversation with of a woman in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca, whose house had been rebuilt by the state government according to the architecture standards and norms of Mexico. While we could appreciate that the house had been properly rebuilt, this woman confessed that she did not feel comfortable living there because that house did not resemble in any way her living conditions before the earthquake. There were hundreds of similar stories in the affected region.

perspective.⁷⁸ The first step consists of *envisioning the scope* of the sparking project. The initial groups that are formed to respond to a traumatic context have to *break the mental barrier* that limits their actions and streamline a more ambitious project of change, even if it seems unrealistic at this early stage. This is the moment to adopt the *contemplative mindset* described in the first movement and apply *systems thinking* to not forget the complexity and the logic of the local culture they are operating in. In Jardim Colombo’s story, understanding the Fazendinha park as a long-term bet was an essential move forward. The project could have stopped after the first clean-up if the initial team members had not pushed to make the project happen by reflecting on all the challenges they would encounter along the way. Figure 54 illustrates this step: envisioning the scope of the sparking project is a fundamental idea of this thesis that has to be the result of profound reflection among the practitioners involved. As will be discussed in the next section, there is a series of principles to consider during this scoping phase.

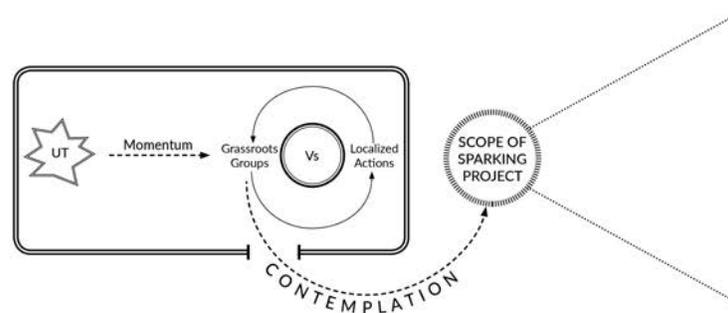


Figure 54. Through contemplation and systems thinking, the mental barrier can be broken and the scope of the sparking project can be envisioned.

Once the scope of the sparking project has been defined, the team needs to put all efforts in *lighting the spark* as a quick first step towards relevant changes in the future. Figure 55 illustrates how the scoping phase leads the team to identify the entry point to the sparking project (that is why the right half of this figure is very similar to Figure 4, in the first movement, which captured the act of contemplation). The spark needs to generate realistic expectations of those changes and spawn a *reason* for the community to believe in a better future and join the initiative. Moreover, while it would not make sense to perfectly plan the complete sparking project at this stage, the spark itself requires very specific goals. Even though the first actions have to leave space for improvisation and adaptation—planning and doing have to take place simultaneously—the spark is necessarily associated with a *clear outcome* that needs to be delivered in a span of several weeks or a few months. My proposal is that the spark takes advantage of public art

⁷⁸ There is no space in this thesis to discuss how top-down policies can incentivize sparking projects, although I am convinced that, in order to truly aspire to *system* change, bottom-up processes need to be spurred through institutional support. I will briefly return to this point in the Finale of this essay, and it is also my intention to undertake further research in the future around the need for combined bottom-up and top-down sparking projects.

to find the most appropriate ways, through different languages, to bring attention to the thorniest topics that the community is struggling with. The art festival in Jardim Colombo fulfilled all these requirements.

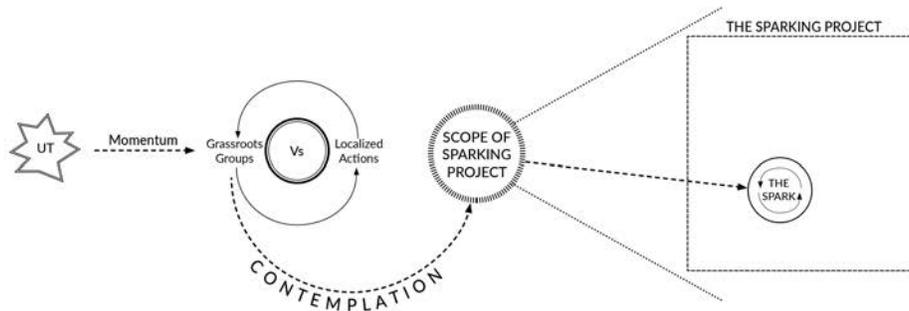


Figure 55. Identifying the appropriate spark will unleash the necessary virtuous cycles to pursue the sparking project.

The spark is a necessary first step of any sparking project, but it is not sufficient. Once it has been lit, the project of change enters a more complex and longer process. The duration depends on many specific factors in each context that cannot be generalized here, but we can expect the realization of the sparking project to last several months or even a few years. During this stage, the goals for the sparking project have to be more clearly specified, as well as the inner challenges associated with these goals and the steps required to achieve them. In the meantime, it is also important to leverage the wake generated by the spark and take advantage of the opportunity to *activate other projects* in the community. These projects have to be proposed so that they continue tackling issues of cultural importance for the community. In this sense, a sparking project is characterized by an ongoing questioning of the current social realities followed by an expansion of individual and collective agency in the community. In Jardim Colombo, the materialization of the park—which will hopefully occur within the first two years after the art festival—will become a significant tipping point in the transformation of the community. Along the way, other initiatives are being realized, such as the Sports & Culture Association, formalized shortly after the art festival was over, which will spark more projects and cultural activities in the neighborhood.

Additionally, in the process of working on such a common outcome, not only will the existing groups be reinforced, but more actors will likely join the initiative and ultimately generate a *network of change*. In our story, the team that came out of the preparation of the art festival and became consolidated in later stages of the project can be described as such a network. Thanks to the energy of the young leaders that took over the project—Ester, Eric, Rubens, André, and later also Kamilla, among others—the flame of the project is being kept alive. More generally, a network of change can be defined in these terms:

A network of change is a consolidated group of diverse stakeholders—community members, public and private organizations, and external facilitators—committed to overcoming structures of oppression in a

particular context. The leadership of such network of change corresponds mainly to *young community leaders*.

Figure 56 captures the stage of the change in the system, as described in the two previous paragraphs. In this same figure, it is worth highlighting that an important feedback loop has been closed: the process of consolidating the sparking project has generated a network of change that reinforces the initial grassroots groups, enables more collective contemplation and widens the perspective on the sparking project. It is a *higher-level sparking cycle* built out of the characteristics of the local culture.

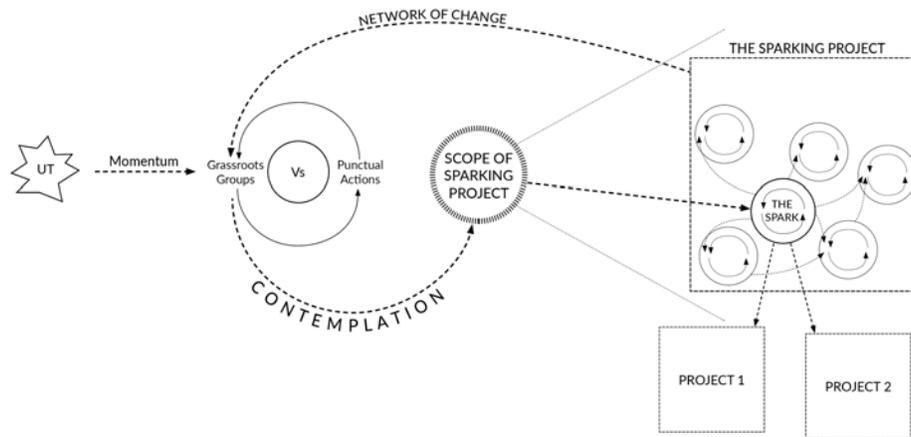


Figure 56. Consolidation of the sparking project and the network of change, paralleled by the activation of new projects.

The complete materialization of the project is, ultimately, the last leverage point to build the necessary *infrastructure of change*. This infrastructure encompasses everything described so far: the sparking project has been consolidated and has activated more projects that advance cultural shift, and the original grassroots actors have evolved to a network of change that works on these projects, while still giving space for punctual actions to take place. Once the infrastructure of change exists, the community can advance firmly towards their desired future—the future they *now* have reason to value, based on all the lessons learned and the experiences lived during the process (Figure 57). Again, this revisited aspirational future is defined according to local cultural conditions. In a nutshell, the idea of an infrastructure of change is the following:

An infrastructure of change is a set of projects, processes, and ideas, that, enhanced through a network of change, can meaningfully advance wellbeing in an oppressed community according to its local culture. An infrastructure of change allows the community and its individuals to pursue the future they deserve and desire.

It is through this firm infrastructure of change that the community can strengthen existing capabilities and advance towards the consolidation of the basic sets of capabilities described in the first movement of this thesis. Generating such infrastructure is a process that can last for years and consequently depends on uncountable uncertainties that might arise along the way. It can even end up adopting a totally different form than initially expected. For instance, in Jardim Colombo one would expect the Fazendinha park to become a significant and permanent element of such infrastructure. But it is not unlikely that this park ends up being only a temporary public space that the community leverages to produce more significant and long-lasting spaces of change in the future. While the materialization of the sparking project is an essential step towards the creation of an infrastructure of change, it is, again, not sufficient.

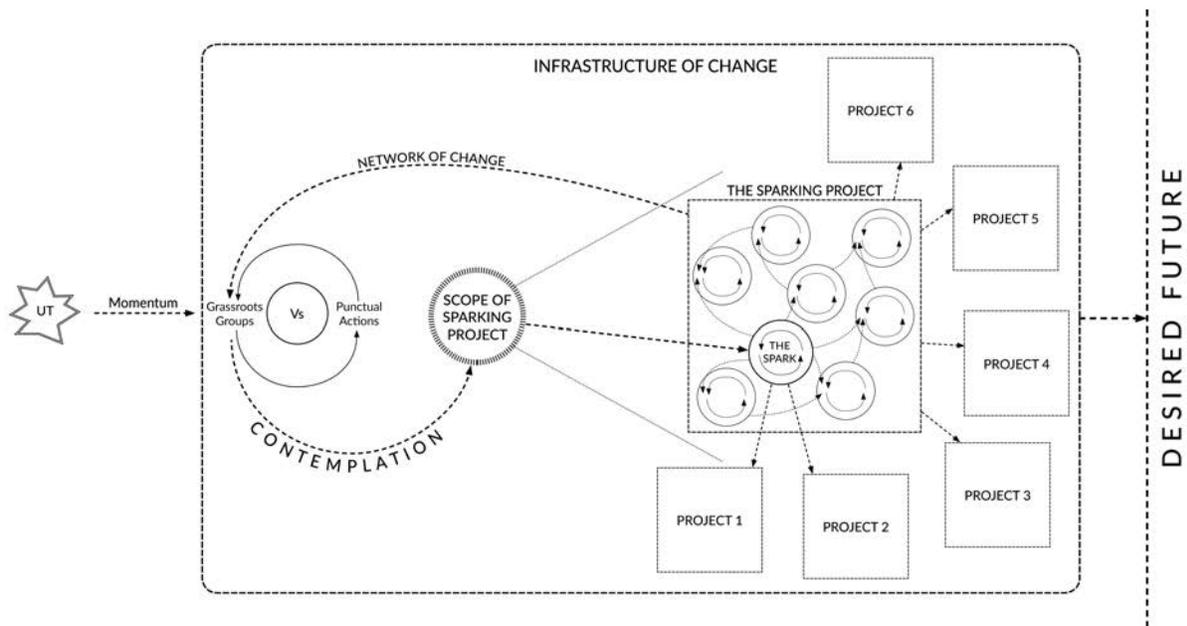


Figure 57. Building an infrastructure of change can lead the community to its desired future.

In this section, it has been discussed how the spark can leverage the momentum generated by a traumatic experience that is affecting a community. The spark itself leads to a more complex sparking project that consists of different and interrelated challenges. This project consolidates a network of change, which articulates the infrastructure of change that is going to enable a community and its members to pursue the lives they have reason to value. Let us now place both concepts within the broader perspective of the system to reflect on how such infrastructure can more specifically contribute to developing the basic sets of capabilities necessary to significantly advance wellbeing.

Seizing the momentum

Continuing with a similar reasoning, this section looks at the different stages of system change—from a system of vulnerabilities to a system of capabilities—of a community that has experienced urban trauma. The left side of Figure 58 represents the hypothetical system of vulnerabilities that was shown in Figure 8. In this case, the system (that is, the community) has been hit by an urban trauma or is experiencing an ongoing traumatic situation (UT) that has brought attention to a very relevant vulnerability (V12). This trauma has also revealed, or made more visible, some other vulnerabilities (V13) that were present in the community, as well as some capabilities that were not as obvious before (C2).

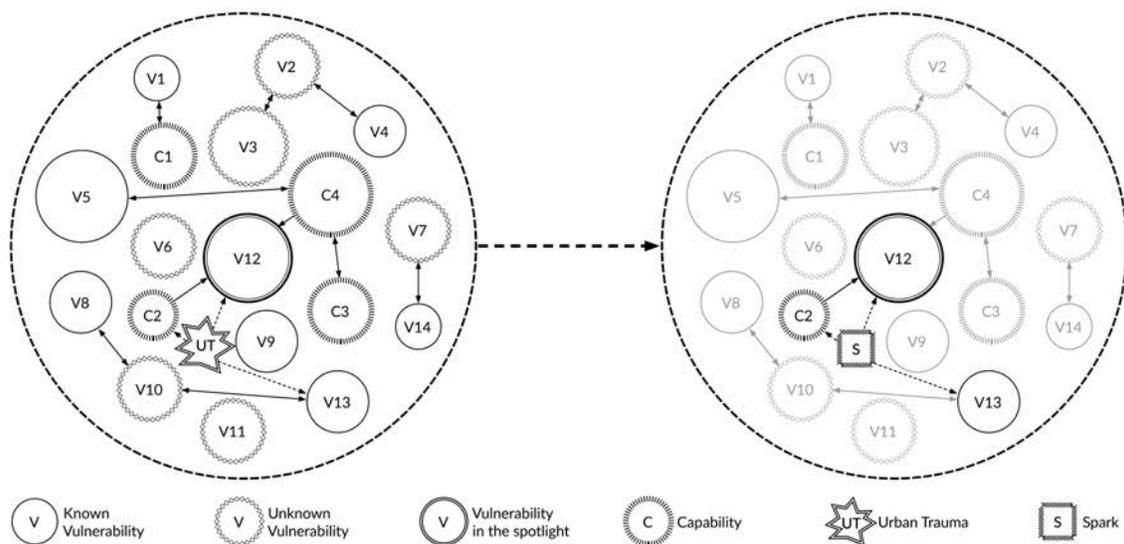


Figure 58. A system of vulnerabilities hit by an urban trauma highlights certain vulnerabilities and capabilities.

The spark is most effective when it acts there where the traumatic experience has brought attention to.

In the example of the communities in southern Mexico hit by the earthquake that I mentioned before, the most obvious vulnerability that everybody paid immediate attention to after the disaster was the poor construction quality of most dwellings and public buildings, which had not been built to resist such shock. This vulnerability would correspond, according to the previous model, to vulnerability V12. The natural response of artists, on the other side, can be described as an important capability that the event revealed—that is, C2. In our story in Jardim Colombo, the presence of the dumping site (the urban trauma) reflected, first, the residents' lack of care of their own neighborhood—or at least deep resignation and acceptance of their precarious living conditions—which is a very relevant vulnerability that was not being properly addressed for many years (V12). When the neighborhood association decided to undertake the first clean-up, an important capability emerged: the collective willingness to

change the use of this space (C2). Another vulnerability associated with the difficulty of keeping the Fazendinha clean would be, for instance, the unstable leadership in the community (V13).⁷⁹

My proposal for practitioners working with traumatized communities is that the first set of actions that they carry out, which I have called the spark, focuses on these obvious vulnerabilities unveiled by trauma and leverages existing capabilities to address them (Figure 58, right side). This spark can quickly illuminate a community dealing with trauma and give neighbors a reason to work collectively on a shared objective. However, to be effective and unleash meaningful change—that is, to function as a spark and not end up being just a punctual intervention—the conceivers of the action have to *keep the whole system’s complexity in mind* and envision the spark so that it fosters more actions later that will bring about deeper cultural shifts in the community. As mentioned in the previous section, a spark has to be compressed in several weeks or a few months to avoid losing momentum. In the context of Jardim Colombo, the spark that started catalyzing change was the celebration of the art festival.⁸⁰

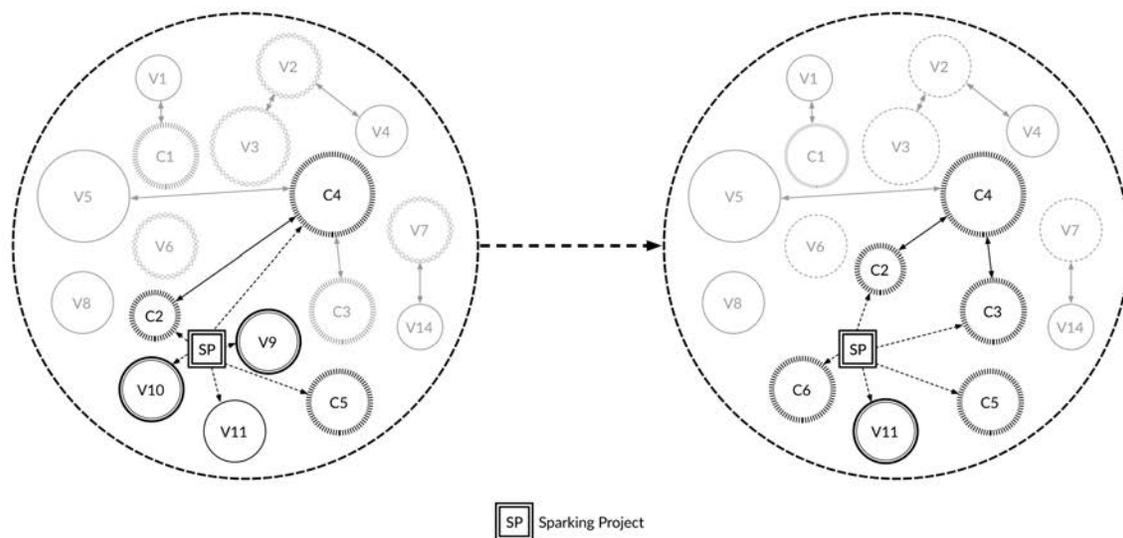


Figure 59. Once formalized, the project can tackle more vulnerabilities within the system, create new capabilities and leverage and connect existing ones.

Once the spark has been lighted, we enter the longer phase to consolidate the sparking project, which has to allow the community to keep tackling previous vulnerabilities while opening up new spaces of intervention (Figure 59).

⁷⁹ Note that the systems represented in this and the following figures are just theoretical models and can only be paralleled with Jardim Colombo’s and Mexico’s examples in a limited fashion.

⁸⁰ It could also be argued that the first clean-up actions that had taken place months before, without which the festival was not possible, constituted the actual spark. However, while the clean-up was, indeed, a commendable first approach to the park project, it was still not taking into account the whole system, which is a key characteristic of a spark.

In this process of months, and eventually years, many meaningful capabilities ought to be created to leverage the potential of the local culture. In Jardim Colombo's example, once the art festival was over, the team came up with a more complex project that included a plan with medium- to-long term goals, as described in the previous movement. And so, the art festival—which was named *Fazendinhando*—resulted in the proper *Fazendinha project*: a formal design proposal for the future park along with an ongoing cultural program full of activities to keep the initiative alive.

We can observe in Figure 59 how some vulnerabilities have disappeared, in relation to the previous figure, and new capabilities are being created. V12, which I associated before, in Jardim Colombo's example, with the neighbors' lack of care of their own community, is no longer part of the system. The sparking project can, as a result, take advantage of capability C4—a huge innate desire to improve their community. V13 (Figure 58) is now C5 (Figure 59)—the previous unstable leadership in the community has evolved into a team of young community leaders. New vulnerabilities are in the spotlight (V9, V10, left side), for instance related to the lack of access to basic resources to build the park. Those vulnerabilities are either replaced by new capabilities (C6, right side), such as the access to a network of donors willing to contribute to the *Fazendinha project*, or eliminated, so that the sparking project can now take advantage of other capabilities (C3, right side), like some neighbors' ability to be extremely productive with very little resources.

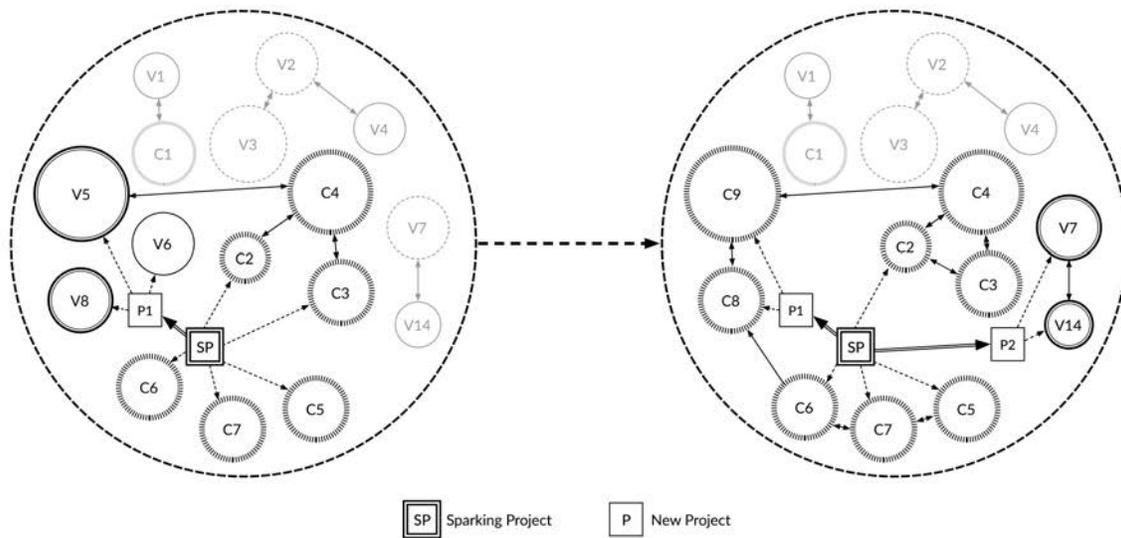


Figure 60. Two new projects (P1 & P2) emerge from the sparking project, increasingly tackling more vulnerabilities and generating new capabilities.

If the spark and the subsequent sparking project are capable of engendering more projects in the future, the system's overall vulnerability can be addressed from multiple angles simultaneously. Left side of Figure 60 shows how a new project (P1) is tackling a different set of vulnerabilities (V5, V8, V6) and transforming them into new capabilities

(C8, C9). Right side of Figure 60 shows how another project (P2) is also focusing on a different set of vulnerabilities (V7, V14). In the meantime, the original sparking project keeps strengthening and bringing together the sets of capabilities that have been already created (C5, C6, C7). Continuing with our story, the idea of these new projects could be exemplified with the formalization of the Sports and Culture Association in Jardim Colombo, an institution that will start focusing on other cultural events in the community, in addition the Fazendinha park, once it acquires enough organizational capacity. It is too soon to speculate about other projects that will emerge out of this experience, but we can imagine, for instance, some new public spaces in other areas of Jardim Colombo being adapted so that they enable more collective activities in the community.

Finally, the multiple projects that the sparking project enhances, which last for longer periods of time, could constitute the emerging *infrastructure of change* that was described in the previous section. The left side of Figure 61 represents such infrastructure as a combination of the sparking project and the two other projects that emerged from it, as the previous figure shows. We can observe the size of the infrastructure in relation to the dimension of the whole system: it is still small, but notable. The right side of the same figure helps us perceive how throughout the process of generation of the infrastructure of change, several capabilities have been progressively grouped into different sets—three in this case—which I have called emerging sets of capabilities (SC1, SC2, and SC3). The more significant these sets of combined capabilities become, the more capable will be the community to advance wellbeing substantially. In Jardim Colombo, all the capabilities associated with the willingness to change the Fazendinha and the community’s reality as a whole would constitute an *emerging social connectedness*, which was described in the first movement of this thesis as one of the five basic sets of capabilities. Moreover, it is important to insist that these sets of capabilities are unique to each community: they have to emerge from the local culture and respond to the social needs that community members have reason to value in each context.

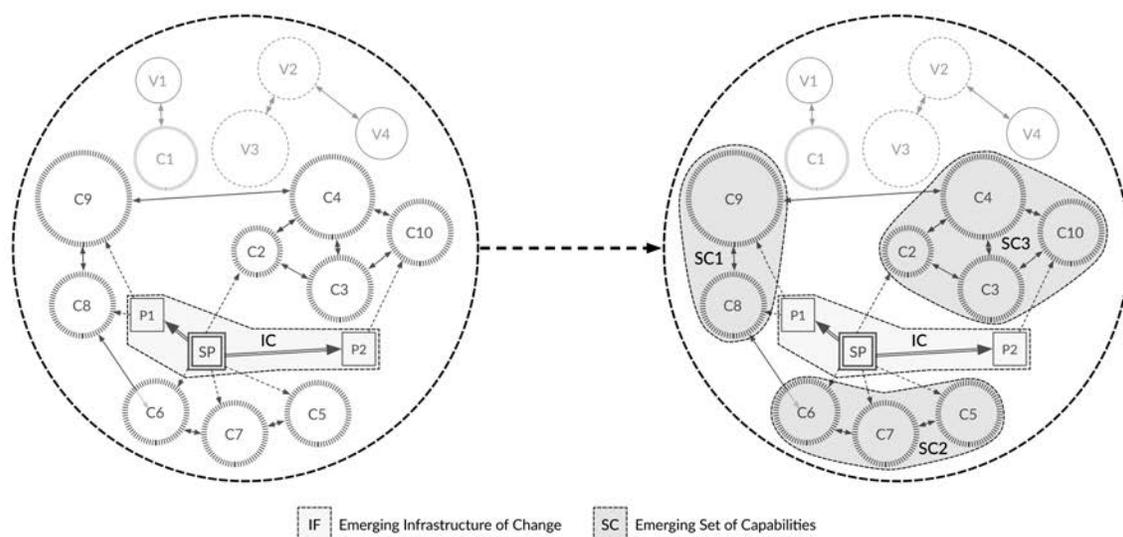


Figure 61. An incipient infrastructure of change enhances the emergence of the basic sets of capabilities.

The consolidation of the infrastructure of change is a process that can last for many years, but once it exists, the path towards system change is practically irreversible. Again, even with a solid infrastructure, becoming a system of capabilities would take the community many additional years. System change is a *generational change*. If the overall process has unfolded in general terms as expected, such infrastructure of change would be the result of internal cultural shifts that have emerged according to existing social logics of each community. The infrastructure of change would then act as a *cultural infrastructure* that is enabling those shifts. Consequently, we would expect the community to be significantly advancing wellbeing according to what its members have reason to value. Figure 60 retrieves the original system of capabilities made of five basic sets of capabilities (Figure 1) that communities in general aspire to, and places the infrastructure of change—which is unique to each community—at its center, like a beacon that enhances the interaction among the basic dimensions of wellbeing.

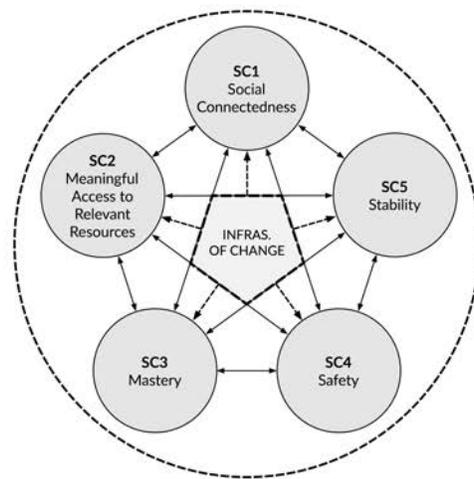


Figure 62. The infrastructure of change, at the center of the system of capabilities, produces the five basic sets of capabilities and enhances the interaction among them.

In short, as I have argued, taking advantage of the momentum generated around a specific urban trauma, a spark can lead to incrementally building an infrastructure that enables system change. The first steps of change are intense and quick—a few weeks—and the last stages are long and slow—many years, and eventually one generation or even longer. There is obviously high uncertainty associated with any of these steps, and we can never be sure that the project will unfold as desired. Hence, pretending that an initial and localized project will unleash system change by itself would be naive. However, there are several strategies that can be taken into account to *significantly increase the chance* that meaningful change takes place in the longer term. Practitioners that make efforts to cultivate their sensitivity through deep reflection on their own practice can develop some tools to make their contributions to processes of change more meaningful. For the sake of pragmatism, let me share now a set of principles that I suggest practitioners take into account when addressing projects of change in contexts of oppression and high uncertainty.

Envisioning the scope

The process of scoping a sparking project is, as has been stated, a crucial step in the quest for system change. This is the phase where contemplation is most important: at this moment, practitioners make an effort to observe the whole system of vulnerabilities before undertaking actions that they expect will lead to meaningful change. The following list includes twelve principles to help structure such moment of *collective contemplation*, when a team of practitioners—including planners, community leaders, activists and other facilitators—is envisioning the scope of the project. Some of the principles have been already introduced in previous sections of this thesis, while others are explicitly stated here for the first time. This list can be interpreted as a *manifesto for reflective practitioners* working in contexts of oppression.

1. *Leveraging the momentum generated by urban trauma*

For better and for worse, traumatic events bring a lot of attention to the affected communities, both from local residents and outsiders. I suggest that the sparking project, starting with the first actions that characterize the spark itself, address clearly one or few of the vulnerabilities revealed by trauma. That way, it is more likely that those actions will attract a bigger network of volunteers, sponsors, and participants than if we tried to tackle deeper systemic issues from the very beginning. A quick improvement of a visible challenge that the community is struggling with due to obvious trauma contributes to generating *optimistic expectations*. Hence, leveraging this momentum becomes an agile *entry point* for system change. In the Fazendinha project, the temporary architecture installation built for the festival was essential to show that the transformation of the site was not unrealistic. The day of the big event became a showcase of activities that could take place in the future park.

2. *Compressing time*

Projects seeking meaningful change require a lot of collective effort and time commitment. To leverage the momentum generated by trauma, it is crucial to concentrate energies on actions that bring about visible changes in little time. Understandably, individuals fighting many battles each day—particularly when they belong to oppressed communities—can only invest so much energy in any project. Hence, I recommend appointing always a team member, or a small group of them, to work at full throttle on the initiative and spend a significant amount of time *on the ground*—no spark can be lighted from the office. With someone in the team assuming the role of catalyzing change and bringing the team together to a shared outcome, the project will soon throw results. This is one of the most relevant lessons I learned in São Paulo. The fact that I was going to be on the ground for just two months somehow forced the engine of the system to produce clear outcomes. Many teammates expressed how the limited time we had was “accelerating” activities in Jardim Colombo.

3. *Bringing together insiders and outsiders: the co-generation process*

As for the team, in the literature on Action Research we find a distinction of two types of co-researchers: “insiders” and “outsiders” (Greenwood and Levin 2009). While the distinction is not always clear, we can assume

that insiders are the ones whose daily lives and routines might end up being affected by the project, whereas outsiders will not necessarily be impacted by those changes. With such distinction in mind, I am convinced of the importance of including, during the scoping phase of a transformation project, as many points of view as possible through a team composed of various insiders and outsiders. The *embodied knowledge* of community members—that is, insiders—will ultimately bring the keys for meaningful change; and when it is combined with the experience and ideas—some would say *expert knowledge*—from outsiders, the potential of the co-production process expands enormously.⁸¹ Co-production is at the core of the Fazendinha project; the art festival was an example of how powerful a highly diverse team becomes when all voices are heard.

4. *Enhancing multiple leaderships*

All communities have several natural leaders willing to respond in the name of their people. It is also often the case that those potential community leaders are not engaging in any activities if there is no reason to spend their time and effort on them, and consequently only a small number of individuals take all the responsibility. My proposal is that the first team members of the sparking project look for those leaders among local networks and bring them together around an exciting initiative that makes them believe in meaningful change. The goal of enhancing a strong leadership made up of several individuals builds on the idea of collective memory: any initiative has greater chance to endure if it does not depend on just one or few individuals, but is rather supported by a numerous group of them. In Jardim Colombo, thanks to the Fazendinha project, young leaders like Erik, Rubens, André, Jefferson, Rodolpho, and later also Kamilla and others, joined the leadership of the community and are today regularly participating in many actions for the betterment of their neighborhood.

5. *Weaving a network of collaborators*

The pursuit of system change is only realistic if it becomes a *collective aspiration*. Hence, the team lighting the spark has to bring together a network of collaborators who *believe* in the project and contribute according to their availability, capabilities, and willingness to commit with the initiative. The collective excitement around the art festival was probably one of our greatest successes. From the very beginning, when the festival was announced, everybody started talking with enthusiasm about what was being planned in Fazendinha. By sharing the proposal with friends and colleagues, we created quickly a fantastic team of over 30 volunteers, as described before.

6. *Recognizing the system of vulnerabilities*

When defining the scope of the sparking project, the initial team members and the ones joining later have to undertake deep acts of *conscientização*. Through processes of collective reflection, the team needs to understand

⁸¹ I even think about the park that is being created in the Fazendinha site as a “co-generative arena” that enables the creation of the infrastructure of change. For a thorough understanding of this concept, Greenwood & Levin’s *Introduction to Action Research* (2007) is an excellent reference.

the complexity they are facing: the act of *naming* challenges and vulnerabilities is a powerful step towards change. It is necessary to also acknowledge the limited impact of the sparking project that is about to start on the whole system of vulnerabilities, while also identifying the future possibilities that it might open up. In our case, there was some lack of collective reflection. The team itself was being built as we approached the festival and needed to expand our capabilities, and so it was hard to find a moment to meet and discuss issues that went beyond assigning roles and tasks. A more conscious agenda for team building and collective reflection would have probably contributed to have a clearer structure of the network once the festival was over.

7. *Specifying the challenges*

When vulnerabilities are better understood, they can be addressed through specific challenges that the sparking project can tackle independently and simultaneously. To solve such challenges, the team and the community need to develop the necessary capabilities, which will allow them to move forward in the process of change. It is important to insist that the proposed actions try to be oriented towards reflecting on and overcoming specific vulnerabilities. By reflecting on vulnerabilities—*conscientização*—and transforming them into capabilities, the community would be advancing system change. That was the logic behind the workshops planned before and during the festival, through which participants were invited to talk about systemic problems in Jardim Colombo that would be addressed, one by one, in later stages of the process.

8. *Balancing physical and emotional transformations*

Transformations need to happen quickly during the spark phase and also regularly during the consolidation of the project. However, not only *physical changes* are necessary; paying attention to the *emotional shift* of the community is also key for succeeding. On one side, physical transformations are the most visible and therefore attract more easily those with less interest in the project. Moreover, since in contexts of oppression the urban infrastructure is poorer than elsewhere, deploying a high-quality infrastructure contributes to bringing dignity to these neighborhoods.⁸² On the other side, the sparking project must bring light to the contexts of oppression where it is carried out: communities at the margins who continuously experience system failure grow up surrounded by much suffering, which encourages distrust towards outsiders. Hence, the sparking project has to provoke *reason to build trust*. The first art festival in Jardim Colombo accomplished this goal: the celebration of the temporary park was accompanied by a positive emotional impact on the people who were part of it, making everybody feel equally committed with the community.

9. *Cultivating introspection and empathy*

Taking care of our own and others' emotions can be tough, especially when we are submerged in intense experiences like the ones described in this thesis. To manage those emotions, team members with facilitating roles have to undertake acts of introspection to ensure that they have control over the emotional impact of the

⁸² This was the philosophy that guided the social urbanism principles in the transformation of Medellín (McGuirk 2014).

sparkling project on themselves, so that this does not consume too much personal energy. Introspection enables empathy: facilitators have to develop the capability of perceiving the project from the others' perspective. Accompanying the process with psychological and emotional support is, hence, necessary for the project to survive. In this regard, I acknowledge that the organization of the art festival became perhaps too intense a process from the emotional point of view, as well as psychologically demanding. More self-awareness about our own emotions would have resulted in a more balanced process and avoided several moments of peak tension.

10. Crafting and Tinkering

Not only the proposal of the spark itself, but all the necessary steps taken to materialize it have to be addressed in a creative way and *crafted* with care. Since each community is different, we will hardly be able to come up with a systematized formula for system change that can be replicated in all kinds of contexts. Therefore, facilitators need to leave room for experimentation; or, as pedagogue Michael Resnick calls it, “tinkerability” (Resnick 2017). In the literature of participatory planning and participatory design, we find equivalent concepts such as “prototyping,” “testing,” or “searching”. The notion of tinkerability stands out because it is also associated with the idea of play. Such an attitude helps finding alternative paths for achieving the same goals, particularly in moments when the team and the project feel stuck. Tinkering also permits reducing the emotional burden that we commonly feel when an activity does not happen as expected. As regards the art festival, we tinkered, for instance, with the financing of the project, which ended up relying more on in-kind donations than on cash funding. That way we reduced the initial budget three times, and in the process we won over new collaborators.

11. Planning and doing simultaneously

There does not have to be a precise moment when the scoping phase leads to the actual spark; when there is little time, it is smart to undertake the first actions as soon as there is enough specificity to move forward.⁸³ Indeed, too much planning leads to stagnation. By applying the previous principle—tinkerability—practitioners should feel confident enough to explore different options with their teams and communities before committing to a formal project proposal. The Fazendinha team planned the first action (the workshop with children on image design) for the end of the third week. Having that first activity in mind helped us design an overall timeline for the rest of the workshops and tasks that needed to take place before the festival. The plan was then regularly adjusted based on the evolution of the project.

12. Accompanying the process of change

Getting involved in a sparking project is a long-term commitment. We cannot simply expect the process to evolve positively once the team has lighted the spark. From the perspective of external practitioners—that is, outsiders—it is not uncommon that we are inclined to get out of the project after this first stage with the

⁸³ I resist to give a specific timeframe here. But I am convinced that in almost every sparking project, the first actions can take place as soon as the first week of engagement.

satisfaction that our participation was already meaningful enough. However, outsiders have to understand that there might be a different, but necessary, role for them during later phases of the project to support the transformation processes. In this sense, outsiders need to consider the different ways in which they can be most supportive for the community. Such support can adopt the form of emotional sustenance, intellectual resources, ongoing conversations, and everything else that community leaders and other team members find valuable for the positive evolution of the project. To anticipate this phase of support, practitioners—particularly if they are outsiders—have to put efforts, during the scoping stage, on building trust with community leaders and other team members in order to accompany them later along the long journey that they are about to start. It is a matter of care and responsibility.

Overall, these twelve principles aim to unleash the sparking cycle by fostering *conscientização* in the community about their own reality and generating the first capabilities needed to start the engine. There is something magical and encouraging in believing that this initial moment could catalyze a process of profound change in the community that will last for years—this aspiration gives us *reason to keep going* in a highly unequal world. The sparking project, and especially the *lighting-the-spark* phase, should spawn excitement across the community and funnel significant energy towards the nascent initiative. It is essential that the people involved *become part of the energy* generated by this initiative so that it does not vanish once this outcome is achieved—collective energy is an essential quality of the spark. Only if community members and the facilitating team join forces around a shared outcome at this stage can we expect this initial set of actions to unleash deeper cultural shifts in the future.

Planners, facilitators, activists, and community leaders have the complex task of bringing all the necessary elements together for this collective excitement to be possible, and they can only succeed by cultivating profound reflective practice. When engaging in highly co-generative and intense processes of change, practitioners committed to overcoming structural oppression can meaningfully contribute to light the spark and opening up paths for deep transformation processes. During this vibrant and magical stage that I have called the spark, chances are that, amidst a general context of uncertainty and instability, the nascent initiative will enlighten the first steps of a generational quest and pave the ground for system change.

FINALE

A Sparking Urbanism

This journey started with contemplation and has arrived at the aspiration of system change. Along the way, we have discussed how vulnerable communities dealing with urban trauma can incrementally produce their conditions for wellbeing by activating the sparking cycle—a virtuous cycle of *conscientização* and capabilities that enables meaningful transformative processes leveraging local culture. In the act of contemplating the system, facilitators, planners, community leaders, and practitioners in general can identify tactical entry points to the project through urban trauma and bring people together around a shared goal. The spark accelerates the initial steps of the transformation processes and leads to a more complex phase in which the sparking project, as a set of interrelated challenges, slowly, but firmly, starts building an infrastructure of change in the community. Once this exists, the path towards system change is practically unstoppable.

Lighting the spark is, I admit, not a straightforward procedure; there is no generalizable formula that ensures the success of these types of initiatives. It is a highly context-dependent process that requires taking into account many different kinds of knowledge, intentions, and values—that is, local culture. The initial vulnerabilities and capabilities are different in each community, and even though we can find many commonalities when it comes to structures of oppression, the sparking project must be suited to the specificities of each context—there will hardly ever be, in my view, a step-by-step methodology for meaningful change that can be generalized for all contexts. Nevertheless, I hope that the conceptual framework constructed here becomes an inspiring lens through which practitioners can look both at previous experiences—why did some projects unleash more significant changes than others?—and at future initiatives—what do we need to keep in mind to ensure that our actions will be relevant?

Sparking projects are bottom-up processes by nature, since they are built on the assumption that meaningful change has to emerge from individual and community levels. But this approach does by no means imply that these processes have to be disconnected from top-down initiatives. Quite the contrary: the impact of sparking projects can be significantly magnified when they are not only accompanied, but facilitated and incentivized through top-down policies and projects. Public institutions, non-profit organizations and philanthropists have the responsibility to create a fertile ground where sparking initiatives can be more easily planted so that they grow more quickly and stronger.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ I plan to elaborate on this idea in future research and explore concrete ways in which institutions can contribute to coordinate multiple sparking initiatives.

The challenge is huge. We must learn to live in a world where the structures of oppression and injustice will never completely disappear. However, I am convinced that *believing* in the possibility of fairer societies than the ones we live in today is in itself a driver for change. As the famous adage by Martin Luther King, Jr. says, “the arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”⁸⁵ We must hold on to that hope and pull hard from where we are standing to help align this arc of justice. It is essential, hence, to acknowledge and *name* the oppressive systems that condemn uncountable communities, minorities, and underrepresented groups across the world. Once we become aware of how interrelated and interdependent oppressing and oppressed systems are—and have always been—we can start looking for a breach through which to open up our own path for building fairer societies.

I have found in the arts my own language to address change. The proposal of sparking change through contemplation and action has been the most helpful conceptualization about my own practice so far. I have developed here the idea of the spark in a way that, I believe, is both conceptually strong and workable in practice. In the process of formulating this new concept, I have also become more aware of my own limitations and challenges—*conscientização*—and feel now more confident about tackling similar projects in the future—that is, I have generated new capabilities. Additionally, this thesis has been conceived with the hope of inspiring others, almost like a spark itself that others can build on. I would feel satisfied if all these ideas are helpful for other practitioners to reflect on their own practice and make more meaningful contributions to social justice.

In a nutshell, throughout this thesis I have discussed how to spark wellbeing through targeted collective actions. As the experience in Jardim Colombo illustrates, when the sparking project targets a traumatic experience that the community cares about, is framed within the logic of the local culture, and uses public art as the main means of communication, chances are that the project will scale up and engender deeper transformative cultural processes for an increasing number of neighbors. If these kinds of initiatives are promoted simultaneously in different contexts and the approach becomes institutionalized, changes could go beyond communities and reach society level. This model for societal system change is what I have called a *Sparking Urbanism*.

Sparking Urbanism is perhaps not the definitive approach to system change. However, be it through this or any other framework, it is worth reminding one last time about the almost ontological assumption behind this thesis: everybody should aspire to live a *meaningful life*. I have no doubt that art needs to play a crucial role to fulfill this aspiration, and so a culture-oriented approach to system change that starts among oppressed communities and reaches society level is crucial to plant the seeds for more hopeful futures.

⁸⁵ According to Garson O’Toole (2012), Unitarian minister and American Transcendentalist Theodore Parker should be credited with formulating this metaphor in one of his sermons published in 1853.

REFERENCES

- Aesthetic Experience. (2019). In *Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/aesthetic-experience>
- Agency. (2019). In *Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency>
- American for the Arts. (2019). What is *Public Art*. Retrieved from <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/public-art>
- Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2017). *Building State Capability*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/building-state-capability-evidence-analysis-action>
- Bach, P. B. (1992). *Public Art in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art>
- Barnett, J., Lambert, S., and Fry, I. (2008). The Hazards of Indicators: Insights from the Environmental Vulnerability Index. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 98 (1): 102-119.
- Bingham-Hall, J., & Kaasa, A. (2017). *Making Cultural Infrastructure*. London, United Kingdom: Theatrum Mundi. Retrieved from <https://theatrum-mundi.org/library/makingculturalinfrastructure/>
- Carro, E., & Leite, M. A. (2018). Remaking the community's memory: The Fazendinha park at Jardim Colombo. *Tapete*, 2018 (2) Retrieved April 25, 2019, from: <http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus17/?sec=5&item=93&lang=pt>
- Challenge. (2019). In *Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/challenge>
- Contemplan. (2019). In *Diccionario de la lengua Española*. Retrieved from <https://dle.rae.es/?id=AUC5lbB>
- Contemplation. (2019a). In *Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contemplation>
- Contemplation. (2019b). In *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/contemplation>
- Fahlberg, A. N. (2018) *Activism Under Fire: Violence, Poverty, and Collective Action in Rio de Janeiro* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University.

- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing the self and other in qualitative research. In N. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Freire, P., & Ramos, M. B. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum. Full Fram Initiative. (2015). *The Five Domains of Wellbeing*. Retrieved from <https://fullframeinitiative.org/resources/about-the-full-frame-approach-and-five-domains/>
- Fullilove, M. T. (2004). *Root shock: How tearing up city neighborhoods hurts America, and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: One World/Ballantine Books.
- Glassman, M. & Patton, R. (2014). Capability Through Participatory Democracy: Sen, Freire, and Dewey. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46 (12), 1353-1365.
- Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (2007). *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hall, T., & Robertson, I. (2001). Public Art and Urban Regeneration: Advocacy, claims and critical debates. *Landscape Research*, 26 (1), 5-26.
- Institute of Policy Studies. (2017) *The Road to Zero Wealth. How the Racial Wealth Divide is Hollowing out America's Middle Class*. Retrieved from https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Road-to-Zero-Wealth_FINAL.pdf
- Jansson, T. (2016). Sen's Perfectionist 'Reason to Value'. *Public Reason*, 7 (1-2), 67-80.
- Kabanda, P. (2018). *The Creative Wealth of Nations. Can the Arts Advance Development?* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, S. D. (2012). Characterizing unknown unknowns. *PMI Global Congress 2012—North America, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/characterizing-unknown-unknowns-6077>
- Margalit, A. & Halbertal, M. (1994) Liberalism and the Right to Culture. *Social Research*, 61 (3), 491-510.
- Mbaye, J. & Dinardi, C. (2018). Ins and outs of the cultural polis: Informality, culture and governance in the global South. *Urban Studies*, 1 (16). Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042098017744168>
- McGuirk, J. (2014). *Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*. New York, NY: Verso.
- De Mesquita, H. C. L. (2016). Popular Urbanization in São Paulo 1970-2014: A Morpho-Typological Field Study of Selected Inner-City Squatter Settlements (Published doctoral dissertation). Zürich, Switzerland: ETH Zürich. Retrieved from <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/handle/20.500.11850/155860>

- Moya-Latorre (2018). *The Earthquake in Juchitán de Zaragoza: An Art Catalog* (Unpublished master project). Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1K4Aug299UVnIT5AlBm2-WbhkFIRZMREX>
- Oliver-Smith, A., & Hoffman, S. M. (2002). Introduction: Why anthropologists should study disaster. In S. M. Hoffman & A. Oliver-Smith (Eds.), *Catastrophe & culture* (pp. 3–22). Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Oppression. (2019). In Merriam Webster Online. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>
- O’Toole, G. (2012). The Arc of the Moral Universe Is Long, But It Bends Toward Justice. *Quota Investigator*. Retrieved from: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/11/15/arc-of-universe/>
- Perlman, J. (2010). *Favela*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Resnick, M. (2017). *Lifelong Kindergarten. Cultivating Creativity through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Royal Geographical Society. (2015). *A 60 Second Guide to: Global North/South Divide*. Retrieved from <https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/60-second-guide-to-global-north-south-divide/>
- Scharmer, O. (2016). *Theory U: leading from the future as it emerges. The social technology of presencing*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Scharmer, O. (2018). *The essentials of Theory U*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Sen, A. (2000). *Development as freedom*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Shelley, P. B. (1821) A Defence of Poetry. *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14*. Retrieved from <https://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>
- Stallings, R. A. (2005). Disaster, crisis, collective stress, and mass deprivation. In R. W. Perry & E. L. Quarantelli (Eds.), *What is a disaster: New answers to old questions* (pp. 237–274). Philadelphia, PA: XLibris.
- Sterman, J.D. (2000). *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World.*, Boston, MA: Irwin McGraw-Hill
- Tabb, P. J. (2017). *Serene urbanism: a biophilic theory and practice of sustainable placemaking.*, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tate Modern. (2019). *Public Art*. Retrieved from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/public-art>

Tumarkin, M. (2005). *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.

Vulnerable. (2019). In *Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulnerable>

Waters, R., & Wright, R. (1973). Us and Them [Recorded by Pink Floyd]. On *The Dark Side of the Moon* [LP]. United Kingdom: Harvest Records.

Wells, T. R. (2012). Sen's Capability Approach. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/sen-cap/#SH3a>

Whitfield, E. (2013). Ed Whitfield on why the 'teaching a man to fish' parable is a lie [Video File]. *New Economy Coalition*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPcIumnhB8I>

APPENDIXES

A. The stage: Jardim Colombo

This appendix contains geographical information about Jardim Colombo along with some sociodemographic data that might be relevant to better understand the context in which the Fazendinha project took place. Figure 63 locates this neighborhood in relation to São Paulo's city center. Despite being 13 km (8 miles) away, we cannot consider Jardim Colombo to belong to the periphery of the city, since it is located near some of the wealthiest and most vibrant neighborhoods of the city (Morumbi, Pinheiros, Vila Olímpia, etc.). As a reference, from west end to east end, the metropolitan area of São Paulo exceeds 50 km.

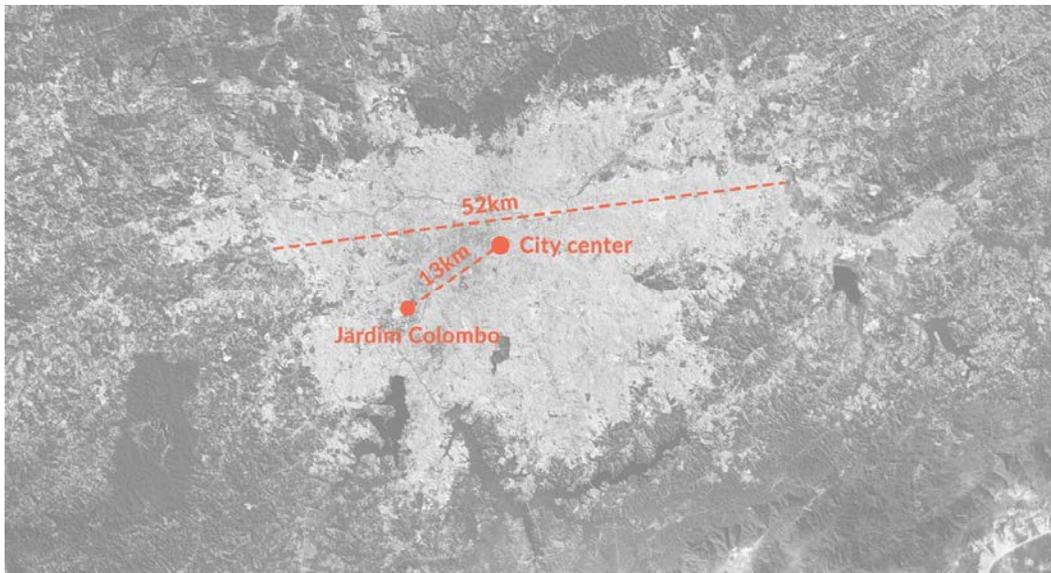


Figure 63. Jardim Colombo's location in relation to São Paulo's city center.⁸⁶

The next two images zoom in to the area of Jardim Colombo. In the first one (Figure 64), we can observe how the neighborhood grew from east to west, first occupying some of the previously urbanized blocks that structure the streets on the east side in a grid-like fashion. The neighborhood seems to be “pushed” against a huge green area on its west side that almost equals Jardim Colombo's surface. This green area is the Gethsêmani cemetery, which is limited by a 5-meter-tall wall that prevents any physical relationship with Jardim Colombo at a human scale, except for the emerging treetops. In the north, the community borders with Santo Américo High School, identifiable by its sports facilities. On the south, a small natural reservation marks a more organic contour of Jardim Colombo. Finally, we can appreciate how the Fazendinha site adjoins the cemetery, to the west of Jardim Colombo.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ All pictures have been retrieved from Google Maps and edited for this thesis.

⁸⁷ The exact coordinates of Fazendinha are 23°36'28.1"S 46°43'45.3"W

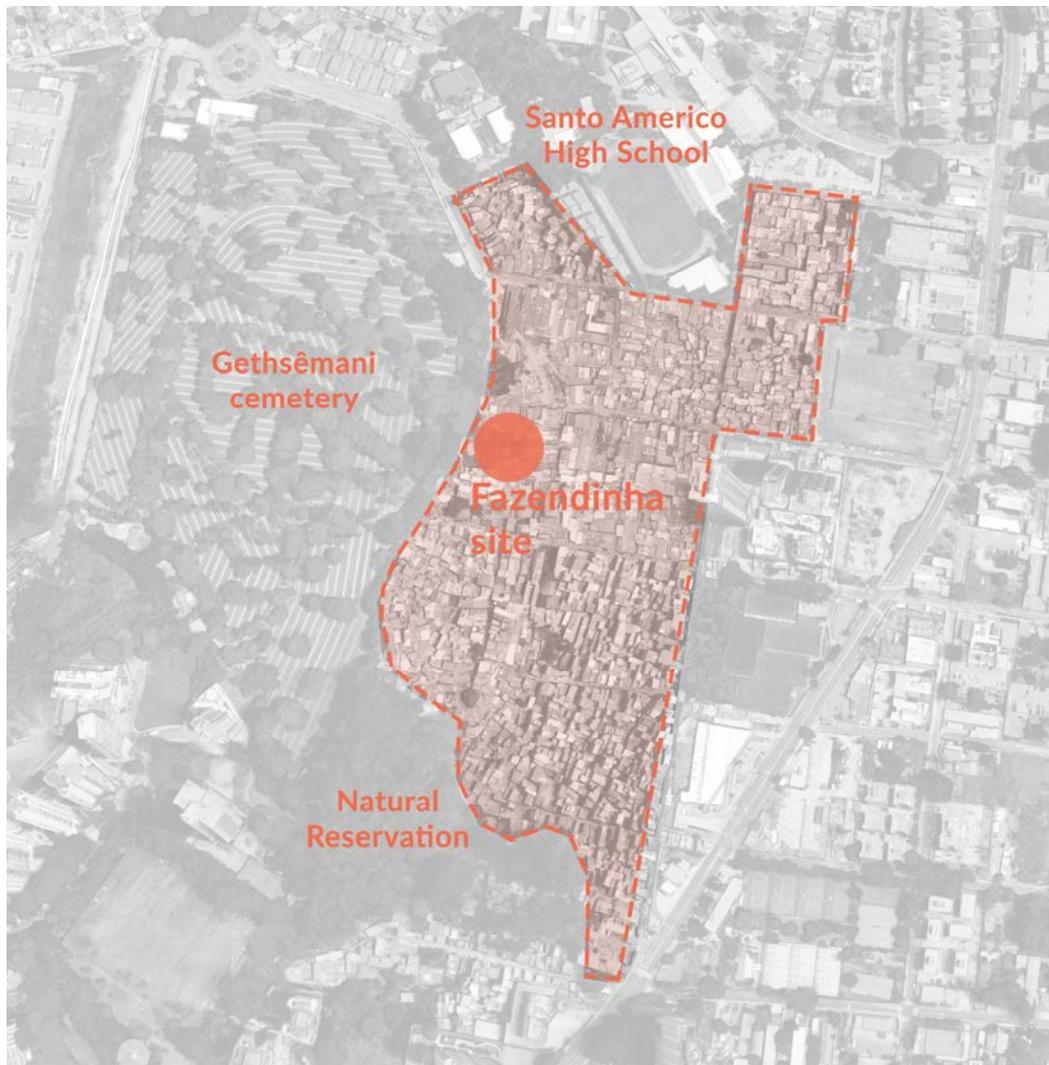


Figure 64. Jardim Colombo's contour and the Fazendinha site.

The last picture (Figure 65) is an aerial view taken looking north. From this standpoint, we can better appreciate how tightly packed is Jardim Colombo's urban fabric, with almost none open spaces between the dwellings. It can also be partially appreciated how steep the Fazendinha site is, with a height difference of about 15 meters between the lowest and the highest point, near to the cemetery's wall. Less than 100 meters to the north of Fazendinha is located one of the few other open areas, which is today being used as the most formal dumping site and recycling area, where municipal trash trucks come regularly to pick up waste. In the image, the stream that crosses Jardim Colombo from north to south has been also highlighted. It runs uncovered near to the recycling area and becomes covered with constructions once it approaches the densest area of Jardim Colombo. Indeed, the construction of many dwelling above this stream has been cause of many floods and hygienic problems in the community, and the neighborhood association is still today trying to open up the stream again and relocate the families who live there. The park design for the Fazendinha park includes an extension to the east and a connection to the stream at its bottom area.

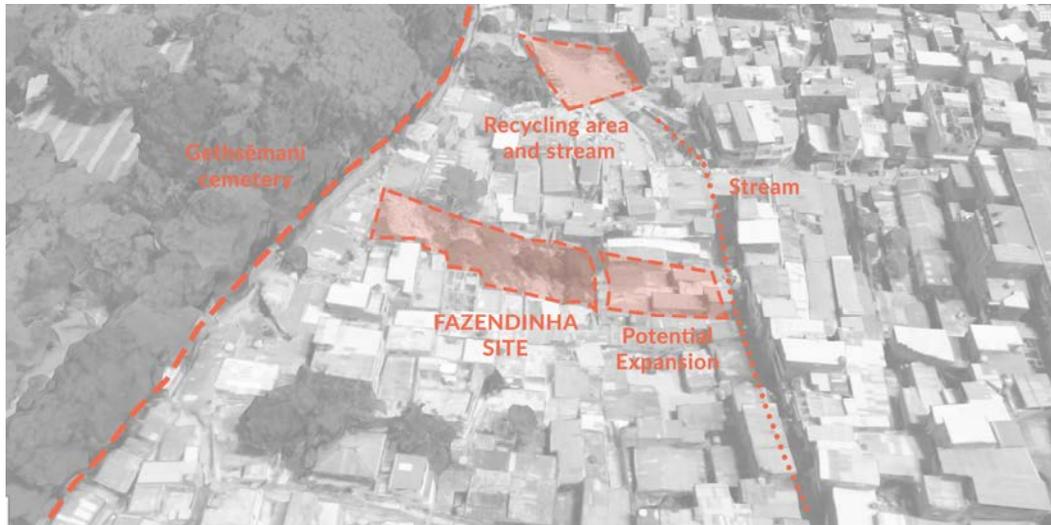


Figure 65. Aerial view of the Fazendinha site, looking north.

In his doctoral thesis titled *Popular Urbanization in São Paulo 1970-2014* (2016), Portuguese architect Hugo Carneiro Leão de Mesquita describes how Jardim Colombo today is the combination of two favelas that originated separately. Together, they occupy an area of around 150,000 square meters and have a population of over 10,000 people living in 3,250 dwellings (according to Ester and other community members, the population is today closer to 15,000 inhabitants). To better understand the origin of this neighborhood, below are reproduced two full paragraphs of Mesquita's research.

Distancing circa 15 Km from the city centre, the site currently occupied by this case study had been part of a large farming property (Fazenda Morumbi) that occupied most of the district. During the 1920's, as São Paulo expanded to the semi-rural periphery, the Fazenda Morumbi was divided into different smaller properties, on which private developers aimed at creating new middle and high income neighbourhoods at the fast expanding southern edge of São Paulo. Remaining mostly idle until the 1960's, when private developers initiated the commercial urbanization of the territory following common urban modulation patterns used throughout São Paulo. The whole district was then divided into a grid-like structure of urban blocks measuring 200m length and 100m wide, which were then subdivided into standard plots measuring 10m wide by 50m deep. Such plots were commercialized by formal real estate agencies and were targeted at middle-income sector families immigrating to São Paulo, as well as high-income families that were slowly moving out of the overcrowded city centre.

However, only a few buyers of the plots ever managed to move in: although the allotments had been created on paper, the slow implementation of street infrastructure and land demarcations made it impossible for many buyers ever occupying their properties. As squatters started occupying the area, the majority of formal owners were discouraged from moving in and, despite the various contentious attempts to recover their plots, land squatting outpaced the speed at which property owners were moving in, the majority of which eventually gave up on their properties. Nonetheless, already during the early 1970's, a small number of middle-low class families that had officially bought their plots from

commercial developers settled in the area, immediately initiating the construction of their houses as permanent structures. The whole site would thus begin being developed under different property arrangements, mixing commercial urbanization with illegal land squatting. (Mesquita 2016, p. 130)

The first settlers arrived in the 1970s and started occupying the grid-like street structure built by land developers, although the whole area was still highly underdeveloped (absence of water and sewage, unpaved roads, wild vegetation, etc.). This first group of settlers came mostly from poorer states in northern Brazil, having previously stayed in different areas of São Paulo before moving to Jardim Colombo. By the end of the seventies, there were still only a few dozens of dispersed wooden buildings.

The first boom occurred in the 1980's during the fast development of the high-income neighborhoods in the area, which offered plenty of job opportunities for "unskilled" (I prefer to say not formally trained) laborers. The empty urban grid became rapidly filled in less than one decade, still dominated by single-story wood structures. Attracted by this buoyant environment, more families kept arriving in a second wave of quick expansion in the early 1990's, spreading the neighborhood now in multiple directions beyond the original grid structure. An informal real estate market emerged, spurred by an increasing construction know-how of local builders. As quoted in Mesquita's piece, neighbors expressed how "there was always someone in the family that worked as a mason somewhere and would co-ordinate construction. People helped one another" (Mesquita 2016, p. 134). A slum upgrading program was finally implemented by public authorities during the late 1990's and early 2000's, which fostered densification and verticalization of the neighborhood. This improvement ended up making possible accessing the last vacant spaces of the area, which were finally occupied by a last wave of settlers.

Besides all the residential buildings, an increasing number of businesses have been opening along the main streets of the neighborhood, making today Jardim Colombo a highly self-supplied community as regards the basic, daily needs. "With a diverse economy, easy access to public transportation, plentiful job opportunities in the region and the proximity to the wealthy Morumbi neighborhood, Jardim Colombo has evolved today into one of the most coveted settlements in the region (Mesquita 2016, p. 135). Nevertheless, many basic living conditions are still today far from being a reality in most areas of Jardim Colombo, preventing its neighbors from living the dignified lives everyone deserves. Along with other rooted vulnerabilities such as structural violence and extreme poverty, there are many other nuanced aspects of this favela's daily reality that cannot be captured through the words and historic description offered in this appendix.

B. The players: An increasing network

In this appendix I will acknowledge the participation of the people who made the festival possible. I found an appendix to be the most appropriate way to share all the names of these protagonists so that they do not get lost in the main text of this thesis. I have already mentioned many of them when the narrative of this essay required to share some particular stories; now I wanted to offer a full disclosure of the names of the players that made this orchestra sound tuned and produce a magical music. I have listed all the people who participated actively according to the six groups introduced in the second movement of this thesis.

Community Members

Without doubt, the main protagonists of this story were the community leaders. Ivanildo and Ester, representing the neighborhood association, were the instigators of the *Fazendinha* project, joined later by Rubens and Eric as two key co-organizers of the art festival. Also André and Alex, coordinators of the community radio, became increasingly involved, along with artists Rodolpho, Jefferson, and Gorete, whose art contributed to the betterment of the most visible face of Jardim Colombo. From an older generation, Paulo and Barão were undoubtedly the most committed residents—their expertise in construction was a really valuable skill that the team needed to materialize the physical infrastructure. In the two weeks prior to the festival, the team was joined by Vania and Ale, from the nearby community Porto Seguro, who have remained active participants of the *Fazendinha* project since then. Soon after I left, more neighbors have been joining the leadership team, including Kamilla, whose presence is contributing to the natural rotation of the leadership roles.

ArqFuturo + Volunteers

As I mentioned, ArqFuturo offered the organizational capability to make the project move beyond just another dream of change. Tomas, directly supervising the *Fazendinha* project, and Marisa, partner of ArqFuturo, have to be acknowledged for their vision and commitment to Jardim Colombo. Vladimir's peacefulness was key to calming down the team when the fire was too strong, and his embodied wisdom was always welcomed. Silvia moved the threads of her networks in the search for funding and other resources. The team was also joined by Fernanda, who was not only essential for her background in law and politics, but also because of the wide perspective and empathy that she brought to the project. Veronica's enthusiasm continuously brought new ideas to the project design, and she also attracted more volunteers like Babi, whose energy boosted the initiative during its last stretch. Pedro and Tatiana from ArqFuturo also contributed in different and significant ways to the project. Denise (@densisealves_oficial) and Raphael (@mmoneis), two fantastic musicians from Grajaú who work in ArqFuturo, immediately empathized with Jardim Colombo's community and shared their art on the day of the festival. Finally, Luiz, Ana Paula, Alex, and other members of BEI Editora were always there to support the project in any way they could.

Other organizations

Rede Papel Solidário and her founder, Leila Novak, had been supporting Ester, Ivanildo and the neighborhood association in different ways since months before the art festival. Leila immediately believed in the potential of the Fazendinha project and joined the organization meetings several times during the process. Another essential organization was Projeto Viver: its director Gládis was always friendly and open to cooperate in all workshops and on the festival day. Finally, the urban consultancy firm A Terceira Margem, led by Breno and Bruna, was in charge of facilitating and documenting the participatory design workshop.

University

The Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, and in particular the Media Lab São Paulo, has been a key academic branch of the Fazendinha experience since the conception of the art festival. Under the leadership of Marcelo and Patrícia, the Media Lab provided significant infrastructure and resources for the project to be possible, along with a number of colleagues and students interested in volunteering in Jardim Colombo. FIAM-FAAM Centro Universitário also offered Ester the opportunity to undertake research and publishing the first findings of the projects in her community. The network is expanding and more universities have been strengthening the Fazendinha project. The role of Insper and Escola da Cidade is becoming increasingly important, thanks to ArqFuturo's efforts to win them over. Finally, my engagement would have never been possible without the infrastructure of MISTI Brazil and its director Rosa, whose sensitivity encouraged me to be experimental during my internship in São Paulo.

Public Sector

The Fazendinha project was presented on different occasions, both before and after the festival, to public institutions, including the regional office of Butantá, São Paulo Housing Office, and even the state government. All of them expressed interest in the project and have been easing the development of the process at different stages.

Donors

Finally, the Fazendinha would have never changed without its donors, who both contributed with cash funding and in-kind donations. The most relevant donors during the preparation for the festival were Bei Editora, Claudia Moreira Salles, Fundação Aron Birmann, RL hygiene, Instituto Auá, Recicleiros, Sabor de Fazenda, Luiz Augusto, and A Especiarista.

Most of these actors, or players, not only participated during the two months of the art festival, but have been part of the network of participants in the Fazendinha project since then. The network will continue growing: some new members will jump in and some other will eventually leave. But the overall team *capability* is becoming stronger every day, along with a sincere belief that system change in Jardim Colombo is a realistic expectation that needs to be approached *collectively*.

C. The music: A podcast and a piano improvisation

On the morning of May 1, 2019, Professor Cesar McDowell and Master in City Planning candidate Ayushi Roy came to the room where I had been practicing piano at MIT for the last two years with a set of mics, cameras, and recorders. They were there on behalf of The Move, an initiative launched in April 2018 to discuss democracy-related issues through interviews with contemporary thinkers. Each program is live streamed and recorded to make it later available in the form of a podcast. That day was my turn; I had defended my thesis two days before, on April 29, and Cesar and Ayushi were interested in listening to the sounds behind the concepts that I explore in *The Sparking Cycle*.

Since I started writing my thesis, I had been imagining how some of the concepts I talk about in my thesis would sound like. Contemplation, urban trauma, *conscientização*, capabilities, the spark—I wanted to be able to express all these ideas in a non-verbal manner; that is, in the form of an artwork. Even though at the time of writing these lines there is no complete piano score that captures the entire story told in *The Sparking Cycle*, there was enough material to *improvise* about it.

In an interview that lasted 45 minutes, Cesar, Ayushi and myself talked about the importance of being reflective practitioners today. Planners tend to make decisions in name of large groups of individuals and communities, and so it is crucial to be aware of the consequences that our choices can have on these populations. At different moments during the interview, we stopped talking and put music to the ideas we were discussing—art can sometimes become the most powerful language to express some thoughts (Figure 66). The result was a highly co-generative conversation in which the three of us connected simultaneously in intellectual and emotional dimensions.⁸⁸



Figure 66. A conversation and a piano improvisation on some of the topics discussed in *The Sparking Cycle*.

⁸⁸ The complete podcast is available on this link:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1DIVBmog_mOnGWMECgI-vN1b9GH-aHEyKrVUVv4-T1hA

D. The concepts: Glossary of terms

This thesis is built on several abstract concepts that can adopt different meanings depending on the context where they are used. All the concepts exposed here, most of them in the first movement of this piece, are properly defined in the text according to existing literature and adjusted to the current conceptual framework. Nevertheless, I found appropriate to list the most meaningful ones in an additional appendix to ensure that the reader can refer to them at any time.

Art refers to all kinds of human creations (individual and collective ones), ideated to convey ideas in ways that go beyond—but without renouncing—verbal, cognitive, and intellectual communication.

Capabilities are sets of skills that individuals and communities need to pursue the lives they have reason to value based on their awareness of their surrounding realities.

A **challenge** is a stimulating task or problem that cannot be resolved with the existing means and whose resolution is meaningful for an individual and the community where she belongs.

Conscientização is the individual or collective act of looking critically at the world in order to name our surrounding reality and deal with it consciously.

Contemplation is both a mindset that allows us to appreciate what lies underneath the obvious and an attitude towards a set of systemic challenges. Contemplation is necessary to perceive the inherent complexity of our societies and envision meaningful actions for social change.

Culture (I) is the collective way of living of an oppressed community that both represents a form of resistance against mainstream, oppressing social systems, and functions as an infrastructure that can enable meaningful change within the social logics of the community.

Culture (II) is the framework within which system change can arise, and **public art** is a language that can enable it.

An **infrastructure of change** is a set of projects, processes, and ideas, that, enhanced through a network of change, can meaningfully advance wellbeing in an oppressed community according to its local culture. An infrastructure of change allows the community and its individuals to pursue the future they deserve and desire.

A **network of change** is a consolidated group of diverse stakeholders—community members, public and private organizations, and external facilitators—committed to overcoming structures of oppression in a particular context. The leadership of such network of change corresponds mainly to young community leaders.

Oppression is an individual or collective sense of being weighed down in body or mind caused by an excessive source of pressure that current social systems exert on certain communities. Oppression makes it extremely challenging for these communities to overcome the realities they do not like.

Public art are individual or collective creations that occur in the public realm, are accessible for the majority of the community, and induce contemplation and action around questions of local culture and identity.

A **spark** is an initial set of actions designed to bring community members and other interested stakeholders together to work towards a shared outcome that generates realistic expectations of deeper social transformations and paves the ground for a longer quest for system change.

A **sparkling project** is a set of interrelated challenges that can be gradually tackled to expand the community's sense of awareness and capabilities around issues they have reason to value. Once realized, the sparking project can become a significant tipping point in the cultural transformation of the community.

System change is the transformation process undertaken by a community, from being a system of vulnerabilities to becoming a system of capabilities.

A **system of capabilities** is a social system whose individuals enjoy wellbeing. A system of capabilities consists of five basic sets of capabilities—social connectedness, stability, safety, mastery, and meaningful access to relevant resources—which are interconnected and reinforce each other. Communities can be described as systems of capabilities when their members can advance wellbeing in each of these five dimensions according to their own cultural logics.

A **system of vulnerabilities** is a social system whose individuals cannot enjoy nor advance wellbeing. A system of vulnerabilities consists of sets of unstructured and interrelated vulnerabilities that prevent communities from leveraging existing capabilities to pursue the lives they have reason to value.

An **urban trauma** is a shocking event or cumulative experience that negatively affects the routines of a community, and it is also the emotional state generated by such event or experience. An urban trauma obscures some aspects of the community's daily lives, and it also reveals many of its unnamed vulnerabilities.

Vulnerability is a high exposure to damage of individuals and communities who have been already hurt by existing social systems. Vulnerability prevents individuals and communities from advancing wellbeing.

