

Soundscape as a Pedagogical and Reflective Tool for the Preservation, Resignification, and Creation of Narratives about the Colombian Coffee Cultural Landscape: visual arts Laboratories of the Ministry of Culture

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the theoretical framework, methodology, and results of a laboratory developed in the Coffee Cultural Landscape, which had as the main objective to positively influence the quality of life of the communities through artistic and cultural practices from its sound dimension. The Coffee Cultural Landscape was proclaimed by UNESCO in 2010 as Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This is a reference framework that defines a region of Colombia from an economic activity that has shaped it culturally. This spatial unit suggests new strategies and tools for the knowledge and appropriation of this heritage. Therefore, the sound dimension as a fundamental expression of the identity of the regions is an essential element in the conformation of a territory.

Keywords

Soundscape, Colombian Coffee Cultural Landscape, Immaterial Heritage, Methodology, Pedagogical Tools, Re-Signification, Sonic Identity

REC-On

This article presents the theoretical framework, methodology, and results of a four-year Laboratory with the communities of the so-called Colombian Coffee Cultural Landscape from its sound dimension. The work was located in municipalities of Sevilla, Caicedonia, Riofrio and Trujillo, and carried out within the framework of the ‘Visual Arts Laboratories’ promoted and financed by the Ministry of Culture of Colombia, through which an interdisciplinary group of teachers and researchers linked to Icesi University developed a series of pedagogical workshops.

Each laboratory has had the participation of very diverse groups: high school students, university students, artists and inhabitants of rural sectors. The diversity of participants has led us to develop particular methodologies that seek to understand the sensitivity of each group in order to appropriate the Coffee Cultural Landscape through listening and the representation

of the sound. The overall objective of the laboratory program is to positively influence the quality of life of the communities through artistic and cultural practices. For the Ministry, it is fundamental to promote “cultural diversity, in the light of the contemporary artistic universe, particularly in relation to the concepts: *artistic creation as a process of knowledge and research; aesthetic experience, artistic practice and interdisciplinarity; pedagogy as a source of criteria of value, management and social and cultural transformation*” (Ministerio de Cultura, 2014).

Proclaimed by Unesco in 2010 as Cultural Heritage of Humanity, The Coffee Cultural Landscape is a reference framework that defines a region of Colombia from an economic activity that has shaped it culturally. This spatial reference unit suggests new strategies and tools for the knowledge and appropriation of this heritage. Therefore, the sound dimension as a fundamental expression of the identity of the regions is an essential element in the conformation of a territory. Leisure customs with own music, accents, sounds of the machinery used in the coffee process, or of the fauna and nature, are unique acoustic manifestations that have molded the aural landscape of the region.

In this way, the definition of sound as part of the landscape, as an artistic material and as a field of study (Schafer, 1994), serves us as a starting point for approaching the landscape of a group of populations of the coffee region. For Schafer (1994), the soundscape is a great musical composition in which all citizens, including composers, architects, sociologists or psychologists, must actively participate in the construction of a balanced environment. In addition to the theoretical contribution, the Canadian composer finds in pedagogy a means of interdisciplinary integration between the scientific and the artistic (Schafer, 1994: 205). He also proposed didactic strategies to raise

awareness about the sound environment (Schafer, 1984, 1992, 2006), opening a path to the integration of art and the environment from a creative perspective.

With this reference framework, two lines of work were drawn: on the one hand the re-signification of the landscape from processes of community participation and on the other, the creation of products mediated by sound. Defined the sound landscape as a unit of analysis and media practice, pedagogy as a tool for participation and creation, and the Coffee Cultural Landscape as a field of action, below are our conclusions and considerations about the challenge of bringing the sensitivity of sound to a significant territory for the Colombian imaginary.

To Make, Participate and Interact

The Visual Arts Laboratories are experimentation spaces that pose a particular way of understanding artistic practices, due to the educational approach and social transmission of knowledge promoted by the Ministry of Culture. In our case, the challenge had a special nuance because we worked the sound as the center of our pedagogical experience, which meant the design of exercises and dynamics more on the sensorial and aesthetic side than the artistic understood as a “production regime” (Ranciere, 2012).

This challenge was taken into account from the design of the call for participants, since it aimed to offer workshops that could connect specific expectations of rural communities with a subject that, despite being close in experiential terms, is little known: the sound-scape. In this sense, the previous recognition of the social characteristics of the territory in which the workshops would be carried out allowed us to set pedagogical objectives for each municipality. At this point, it is important to highlight the interdisciplinarity of the team because sociologists and anthropologists contributed a methodology that was conceived as a field of intervention in individual and collective terms, and not only as an added *contextual reference framework* that should justify artistic and pedagogical practice (Laddaga, 2006).

Regarding the theme of the workshops, (the soundscape and its relationship with the Coffee Cultural Landscape), it was sought to strengthen the community sceneries as a means of encounter between the interested residents. For this reason, we designed experimental activities and sensorial recognition of sound agreed as a physical and social phenomenon that mediates and

reproduces relationships with the environment.

These activities constituted exercises of conceptual appropriation, in which the own experience had to serve as individual support to understand the soundscape as an inspiring element of symbols around a territory. Such conceptual appropriation should lead the participants to the development and creation of proposals that would account for their meditations about sound. From this perspective, cartographies, mobile applications, chronicles, sound drifts, radio tables and other experiences that basically built narratives and alternative discourses to the predominant communicative and aesthetic forms in this type of pedagogical and aesthetic practices (Ladagga, 2010).

For the above mentioned, our work focused on facilitating methods to *make, participate and interact* with the soundscape from a natural listening or mediated by technology, from the recognition of the signs that shape the relationships of each of the territories visited (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Recording at Riofrio

This process completed its cycle at the end of each laboratory when the participants presented their work to the community to show it, that is to say, that they were the ones who finally materialized the aesthetic and pedagogical experience within their territory.

Re-signify and Create

Some of the municipalities belonging to the Coffee Cultural Landscape have been affected by the Colombian armed conflict and are associated with violence scenarios. This fact conditions the representation of its inhabitants and the imaginary that Colombians have about these places. One of the main objectives of the laboratories has been to promote the re-signification of the territory

through art and its relation to cultural practices. Through sensitization and recognition exercises, the workshops have sought to make the dwellers of the Coffee Cultural Landscape identify the cultural richness of the place they inhabit and appropriate their territory in order to reconstruct their history. Given the differences and particularities of the participants in the workshops, the pedagogical tools were designed to exploit the knowledge that each group possessed about their territory and to introduce them to an aesthetic dimension little explored in their daily life.

One of the tools used to achieve this objective was the collective creation of social cartographies as a way of sound-spatial recognition of the territory (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Participant presenting cartography

At first, the participants graphically represented the limits of the space they inhabit daily, appealing to their imagination and to the individual and collective referents. In this way, it was possible to identify key places, actors, and objects in their relationship with space. Then, they were asked to locate within the map those sounds that they considered pleasant, upsetting and representative. Finally, they were invited to remember and capture the sounds that had disappeared with the passage of time. This activity sought to deepen the group in the sound dimension of the place they inhabit so that, through memory and their daily experiences, they could recognize that the landscape of which they are part manifests itself in various ways. The familiarity with the environment may result in a lack of awareness.

Another tool of recognition and dialogue used to make a first real and audible approach to the environment was the sound walk. This collective exercise was the starting

point for the participants to perform sonographies of objects and landscapes. Technological mediation offered a new type of listening that helps to distance them from the everyday allowing them to initiate a cleaning of the ears. The diversity of microphones and recording techniques exposed the participants to new perspectives on the sounds that make up their landscape.

During the walks, the inhabitants were identifying sounds that caught their attention, and at while recording, they were also encouraged to comment on the meaning that these sounds had within the territory. The exercise resulted in a sensitization to the soundscape of the place and recognition of acoustic manifestations of their daily life worthy of rescuing or representing. After the exercises and to great surprise, the participants discovered that the territory is not mute, that it has a soundtrack that accompanies their daily life and that is the hallmark of their cultural legacy. They were also aware that the landscape, as a relational unit with great aesthetic power, expresses with sound other elements of cultural dynamics worth preserving.

One of the most interesting cases was the laboratory in Trujillo. This municipality carries with it a strong historical load of violence and terror as it was the scene of one of the largest massacres in the country's history. Our aim with the workshops was to offer participants the opportunity to build a different narrative of their territory focusing on the natural diversity, cultural practices and human quality of their people. Through the creation of sound chronicles, the participants showed a different face of their municipality, a version that few know, given that the narrative that has been imposed is that of violence.

While we are aware that a process of re-signification of the territory is something that takes time and constant work with the community, we can attest that these laboratories serve as a starting point so that the inhabitants of the Coffee Cultural Landscape can perceive and recognize their territory in various ways, and can discover that behind episodes of violence and conflict there is a cultural treasure that prevails, which manifests itself in many ways, and can be used to tell a different story.

For this reason, the development of creative proposals, another of the specific objectives of the laboratories, has found in the exercises of recognition of the soundscape an investigative instance. The sensitization processes, developed from the pedagogical part, seek to stimulate a wider appreciation of the landscape in order for the participants

to construct new representations of the coffee region.

In this group of participants, there have been artists, university students, musicians and communicators among the most common profiles, which enable a great variety of creative exercises. Within these practices, we find several types of works that cross the musical, the artistic and the anthropological. In the first instance, we find sound compositions that use sonographies of the landscape or that use audios as samples to integrate them into musical pieces. This type of creations deepens in aesthetic qualities of the sound, combining them with cultural aspects that enrich the meanings of the pieces. Delicate sound textures of nature collected from natural parks at dawn, everyday sounds or melodies and rhythms typical of the region are examples of the materials used.

In addition to registry possibilities provided by re-cording technology, some participants discovered their power as an extension of the ear thanks to the field recording practices performed in the workshops. This is the case of an exercise of sound drift guided by a powerful shotgun microphone that as a sonic telescope explored details of the soundscape to scrutinize interesting resonances of the aural horizon in Caicedonia (Figure 3). The practice was accompanied by the photographic record that presented images of the places where the sounds were identified and tagged. Subsequently, in an exhibition held in the best-known coffee shop in the municipality, the inhabitants were able to hear and see images of their family environment from a new perspective.

Other works explored the identity of the places of the region, deepening in the daily life from two main approaches. On the one hand, the sound recognition of the material culture represented by the various processes that the coffee suffers from its collection



Figure 3. Art practical in Caicedonia

until reaching the cup. This sound story exposes different timbres from the moment the grain is dried until it is milled, processed in the coffee machine and drunk. All these sounds belong to the daily life of the municipalities and symbolize traditional routines. On the other hand, are the anthropological approaches that investigate in the social narratives looking for the acoustic expression of the interactions that occur through the conversations, the coffee trade, the games of chance, and drinking a coffee. These common acts are modeling traditions that are repeated for generations and leave a mark on the soundscape.

However, creation, as an essential dimension of laboratories, is not limited to the production of sensitive experiences through sound compositions or the creation of art objects, it has also stimulated projects that use ICT. An example is the development of a cell phone application consisting of a sound map of the municipality of Caicedonia. The application, connected with Google Maps, allows future users a relationship with the intangible heritage in a playful way and proposes to listen, identify and record their own sounds.

The projects reviewed above have been identified as results of a methodological exploration that, by insisting on creative stimulation and the production of sensitive experiences around sound, has identified the potentiality of collaborative work. Sensitization exercises become collective pieces of creation as when all members of the laboratory chose pieces from a collection of antique objects housed in our meeting space. Old typewriters, autochthonous percussion instruments, bells, tools and so on, an infinity of fragments of past material culture, were reconverted into musical instruments to extract sounds from another era. Altogether a score was written in which each participant chose his place of intervention as well as the rhythmic pattern of his contribution. The piece started on the count of four.

The collaboration scheme in which participants and we worked hand in hand was also used for the construction of platforms for dissemination of the laboratory results. In the last edition (2016) a socialization strategy called “radio table” was implemented in which, in addition to transmitting the work done (musical podcasts, chronicles, soundscapes and sound postcards), the microphone was opened to all people present with the purpose of constructing a plural narrative and close to the passers-by and people who that day was in the main plaza of Sevilla.

Based on the traditional format of live radio broadcasting, the possibilities of interaction that can be generated in the public space once the daily routine is intervened were tested. A new amplified soundscape was superimposed on the Sunday square for *broadcast* the creations and, especially the reflections that can arise from asking what it means to relate and live in a territory denominated Coffee Cultural Landscape.

REC-Off

After four years of work, it became clear that the public participating in the different laboratories showed two predominant profiles. One group was represented by young artists or students with a high level of schooling and the other by inhabitants of the municipalities and their rural sector, with a strong community relationship (Figure 4). This social division led us to consider two aspects: on the one hand that the group of artists and university students would start creating processes with products of a symbolic character while the inhabitants with more roots in the community would be receivers of the pedagogical tools designed for the sensitization and resignification of the landscape.

Even so, it is important to try to blur the division, and although it is true that the products of each of the groups make evident the type of relationship with the landscape, in the last laboratory it was sought that the processes of signification and creation were integrated. This was achieved by turning the group into a manager of radio content created by them. Through the recording of soundscapes and podcasts about the cultural practices of the region, the participants worked collaboratively in what would be a radio program presented live in the main square of one of the municipalities, Sevilla.



Figure 4. Listening exercise in rural area

The use of sound as a pedagogical tool offers the possibility of articulating cultural values from different perspectives. In the first instance, as a dynamizing agent of daily practices of re-signification and appropriation of collective memory by the inhabitants of a territory. From another perspective and as a reference of artistic production, it allows the development of creative methodologies that derive in transmedia and collaborative projects, focused on creating aesthetic experiences localized and attuned to specific cultural practices.

From the evaluation processes conducted with the participants at the end of each laboratory, we can conclude that the new landscape readings, suggested by the sound and its technological mediations, make visible patrimonial values that have been hidden by daily life and by globalization. However, hardware shortcomings make it difficult to take better advantage of quality sound recording technologies. It is a reality that these pedagogical processes should be accompanied by programs of equipping since the use of recorders and microphones is restricted to the duration of the laboratory leaving a gap difficult to fill.

Finally, in terms of community processes, sound as a communicative medium drives the emergence of stories, formats, and narratives that include other ways of expression and memory. To the extent that these stories are disseminated, thanks to digital diffusion tools, and to foster similar experiences by the participants as replicating agents, we can say that the objective of the visual arts laboratories has been fulfilled. To verify this, it is important to return to the municipalities after the track that the laboratory has left in those communities.

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