

Research Line 2: Cultural Resource Use in an Urbanizing Continent

Research theme

In addition to natural resources, also cultural resource use is a major theme defining the role of the continent in an emerging global economy. The different ways to draw models of behavior and designing patterns of living together from the well of local customs, national traditions, and emerging global ways of life will be the focus of the second research line. "Thinking is for doing," the psychologists say. On a certain place and moment, culture is the product of the people present, produced with the resources in their surroundings: information from next of kin, friends, community members, visitors, migrants, information of emigrants, journals, magazines, radio, film, television, and the old material world and the new. As information cultural resources are vulnerable but resilient material and non-material artifacts that reflect patterns of behavior, practices, traditions, beliefs and thought, representing historic and contemporary human life ways. According to recent insights, artifacts are not just material objects but they are simultaneously material and ideal or conceptual. The corpus of artifacts include physical remains of humans like any materials manufactured or modified by people but also narratives, life-histories, communication structures; objects, concepts and stories that have meaning to people in historical and contemporary communities, but also artifacts left behind by past communities. Manufactured cultural resources include tools, images, single buildings, concentrations of structures, and manipulated landscapes. The context is the relationship of artifacts to each other and the surrounding environment in which cultural resources are maintained and exploited.

Researchers depend on context to understand the significance of a cultural resource. Cultural memory develops through the elaboration of complex *artifacts of remembering*, associated with historically new forms of artifact-mediated experience. In an urbanizing world, though not exclusively, this context will lean towards the urban. Beginning with the twenty-first century, the majority of the population in all Latin American countries except Guatemala is now urban. Today, almost eighty per cent of the Latin American population lives in cities and metropolitan areas. This development mirrors the gradually increasing weight of the industrial sectors during most of the twentieth century, which created new employment opportunities, fuelling growth in retailing, services, and the public sector. Or, to say the least, the urban economy gave impoverished rural dwellers the idea that by migrating to the cities, improvements in their livelihoods could be made. Today, the urban landscape of the continent boasts some of the world's most populous metropolises. However, although metropolitan cities with a multimillion population still showed an accelerated growth in the 1980s and '90s, the Latin American urbanisation process is now taking another route. Current urban studies mention that a considerable number of small and medium-sized cities in Latin America have high growth rates and that further urbanisation of the continent is not expected to take place in large metropolitan areas, but in those smaller cities. Currently, the largest share of the population – 37 per cent – lives in urban areas with less than 500,000 inhabitants.

Urbanization has significant implications for Latin America. The rural migrants encountered a life that diverged largely from their traditional homelands. Urban life involves what is called, in the NWO-WOTRO 2007-10 Strategy Plan, "local manifestations of global development". They appear in terms of inequality, lifestyles, cultures and identity formation, problems of social cohesion and social conflict, economic opportunity and survival strategies. The everyday struggle to improve livelihoods, fight poverty or adapt to urban lifestyle engendered new meanings to social life. True, cities are thoroughly modern places, including working schedules according to daily fixed time-schedules and agendas, opportunities for women to work outside the house and for children to go to school, and better access to health care. Cities also include office towers, cell phone technology, satellite television, computers, Internet shops, and video camcorders. But the urban poor live in circumstances of social exclusion, performing full-time or part-time semi-skilled, unskilled, or domestic labour. They are engaged in petty trading or artisan crafts, remaining unemployed or succumbing to criminal activities. Their housing is poor and usually includes the sharing of bedrooms with other family members. Nevertheless, they are not submissive victims. Their activities constitute a local agency of social groups, categories and institutions that are actively pursuing their cul-

turally constituted 'projects' rather than passively reacting, just in order to survive or improve their social, political and economic condition.

The new urban dwellers as agents of everyday life embody a kind of relative autonomy that forces social science research not to focus upon institutionalisation per se. While critical research used to look for the organizers and directors of the opposition, supposing that resistance to globalisation, exclusion, poverty and capitalism needed to be institutionalised to be of any force (and had difficulty in finding them), it now concentrates on networks and groups of people and their strategies to survive, develop or in other ways improve their standard of living, politically, economically, culturally or socially. Sometimes these networks and groups may be identified as examples of collective action that try to achieve a greater individual, group, network or community management over everyday life, perhaps even influencing political agendas. In fact, research into the activities that control everyday life is imperative in order to understand the fate of this struggle in terms of its own "logic" instead of by pre-ordained political or theoretical matrices.

One particular development requires special focus. Everyday life in metropolitan cities may have become so complex that people are trying to find better conditions elsewhere. This raises the question of how local spatial transformations are influenced by larger processes such as transnational migration. Contact with the wider world stimulates the repositioning of actors, either individual, in groups, families or networks. The influence of migration is crucial. At the turn of the century neoliberal reforms put pressure on national and local labour markets and on the costs of basic needs. Although formal employment opportunities have diminished, the costs of daily life have increased and poverty has expanded. Decreased possibilities to make a living at home have resulted in large flows of labour migration to the US and Europe.

The outflow of people has been accompanied by the inflow of remittances. For many Latin American countries labour remittances have become the primary source of incoming devices. Overall, Latin America has turned into the top remittance receiving region in the world. In 2006 remittances on the continent amounted US\$ 52 billion, a sum comparable to foreign direct investment and six times larger than international development aid. For individual households it has become a new coping strategy to send a family member abroad. Needless to say, the increase of divided and recomposed families has been accompanied by emotional and social stress, as well as by labour shortages in specific branches such as in the construction market. On the other hand, remittance spending has boosted local consumption, which has had a positive effect on retail and real estate markets. Although macroeconomic figures are now clear, at the same time the social reality of migrant and non-migrant families has generally been overlooked. Several of the proposed projects pay attention to people's experiences with the ebb and flow of remittances and migration.

Everyday cultural resource use in a multi-disciplinary perspective

Following these theoretical considerations and in connection to the picture sketched above, the central question for the second research line is:

Considering the significant transformations in the Latin American context, how do Latin Americans, especially though not exclusively the urban middle classes and poor, construct their daily lives, which solutions are found to manage their cultural resource use within the urban context, and what does it mean to them?

Based on six case studies, "everyday cultural resource use" will be explored in Latin America as a way of both recognizing the importance of ordinary practices and theorizing the relationship between aspects of the personal and the socio-cultural. Therefore, a major research goal of the research line is to establish the multidisciplinary perspective of everyday cultural resource use as a key theoretical and empirical theme for investigating the autonomous Latin American manifestations of global development.

The theoretical framework encompasses, first, an historical perspective, which reveals processes of interactions among actors and motivations underlying their behaviour in the recent past. The historical context is important to learn about the dynamics of the studied solutions through time. Second, the geographical, cultural and gender perspectives of the case study are important to learn about the agency of the actors. Third, recent research has established the "everyday" — cultural resource use on a daily basis — as consisting of a relatively autonomous agency, basically

motivated by the pursuit of happiness – including self-esteem, status improvement, economic advancement, and a liberated identity. Furthermore, although the “everyday” is characterized by the singular, it is mainly understandable as an overarching structure common to larger groups of people. This means: the general in the particular, the structure in agency, the power of (possible) resistance, the experience and feelings involved in institutions and discourse, and, the macro in micro-analysis. To understand aspects of the general macro world of institutions, discourses, power, and structure in Latin America as pictured above, the researcher might go micro and investigate resistance, agency, experiences, feelings, and other qualities of the Latin American particular. Considering the theoretical interpretation of the global/local nexus, this means that the agency of individuals, groups and networks simultaneously incorporates and transforms global processes.

One basic initiative is to fill in the human detail that is missing from abstract representations of human beings and their societies. The research team wishes to emphasize the intimate, local living of ordinary life. At the same time the questions being posed are: what counts as “ordinary” and, to whom do these definitions of “the ordinary” serve? In short, addressing how actors position themselves in a local, everyday context allows for an interpretation of their subjectivities and the spatialisation of social difference. By focusing on actors as incorporating and redirecting the structures of global development, everyday life research can lead directly to the development of a theory grounded in intimate knowledge of the specimen cases, but oriented toward placing them in the largest possible context, generating a micro-macro theory.

The analysis of each case study is drawn on a multidisciplinary methodology and theoretical framework with now the urban and then the rural way of life as its critical context. In Latin America, urban life is global and local at the same time, and, as may be expected, includes its direct hinterland. Whereas the six studies in the first research line have different scopes, which are brought together in a multi-scale approach, the studies in this research line mainly focus on trans-local networks. The scale of analysis thus includes individuals, groups and communities, as well as members of trans-local networks. In the everyday life of our research subjects, micro and macro are intertwined: residents in cities are connected to people in the hinterlands as well as to their migrant relatives abroad and vice versa. It involves activities from the individual through families into transnational networks.

The research programme is based on the following cases studies, each from a specific multidisciplinary focus:

- 1) Changing social landscapes in medium-sized cities
Coordinator: Christien Klaufus
- 2) Poor families, the metropolitan city and new gender challenges
Coordinator: Annelou Ypeij
- 3) The use of cultural resources in the moving image
Coordinator: Arij Ouweneel
- 4) Incatourism, new livelihood opportunities and gender
Coordinator: Annelou Ypeij
- 5) PhD project: Identity construction of organizations of victims of political violence in Peru
Researcher: Mijke de Waardt (2008-2012)
- 6) PhD project: Indigenous rights and legal consciousness in Ecuador
Researcher: Marc Simon Thomas (2008-2012)