

BALANCING POWER

Explorations towards a more decolonial Participatory Design process

Master Thesis

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MSc Design for Interaction

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*Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology*

Master thesis

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To my grandma Alba
Il mio cuore è legato a te, nonna

Acknowledgments

This graduation project has been a challenging and intense experience for me. I think I could not have carried out a research project with a topic I care so much about without the support and the love of the people that I so luckily have around.

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Executive Summary

Participatory Design (PD) has been used as a medium to democratize the design practice and include in the process the people intended to use the outcomes. When working for social change and justice, the practice intends to maintain its democratic nature by giving voice and agency to the most vulnerable in society. However, when engaging in complex societal problems PD can perpetuate systemic oppression and reproduce in the design process the same harmful mechanisms that are intended to be changed. For this reason, it is crucial for the PD practice to engage in matters of power dynamics so more socially just processes can be developed. Acknowledging this urgency, the research project in this report has the aim of proposing an alternative understanding for a decolonial¹ PD process that accounts for more power balanced and socially just dynamics between designers and members of marginalized communities. To accomplish the alternative understanding, the project was performed in three main phases. A research for design phase, a research through design phase (RtD) having as context the neighborhood of Afrikaanderwijk in Rotterdam Zuid and a last design phase.

The first phase was formed of a literature review and interviews with design practitioners familiar with participatory processes with oppressed communities. With these activities, it was found that the PD practice can reproduce systemic oppression in three different levels (individual, communal and systemic). This oppression comes from the role of the designer that entails advantages in decision making, project ownership and process control among others. To overcome these oppressive practices, the work of the philosopher Paulo Freire was studied. His proposition of a pedagogical program that seeks for the liberation of the people in the process of learning but also from the systemic forces was compared to the PD practice. In the study of Freire's theory, it was learned that to create more horizontal relationships, it is necessary to create the space for a co-learning process based on dialogue between the designer and the members of a community. This new understanding of the process would lead, according to Freire, to collective actions towards the liberation of all the social actors in the process guided by the oppressed.

¹ In this project decolonization or decolonial design is intended as the process of delinking the design practice from the normalized assumptions and dynamics that reproduce oppression at different levels

The second phase of the project started by proposing a detailed structure of a process to be carried out with the community. However, earlier in the initiation of the phase, it was realized that in order to decolonize the PD process also the PD designer inside the process needs to be decolonized and that the process structure could emerge if and only if it was developed together with the community of Afrikaanderwijk. Accordingly, the second phase of this research was reframed to be based on non-structured explorations in the neighborhood allowing different moments of engagement between the designer and the community based on horizontal relationships and dialogue. In this way, the RtD phase was informed in two different levels: the level of the designer having empirical experiences in the context and the level of the designer-researcher reflecting and drawing conclusions about the process from those experiences. In this phase was found that a decolonization of the designer and the design process entails a constant re-evaluation of the designer's role that can move in a spectrum from facilitator to participant in the context. Other statements about the alternative understanding of PD processes were drawn including the need to see the process as a collaboration instead of just participation and to intend the project as something bigger than just what design is able to frame.

The last phase of this project intended to make the insights of the research practical and useful for other design practitioners. In this way, the final findings were translated into a series of reflective questions to challenge assumptions and biases in the initiation of a PD process. However, more research should still be carried out in order to understand the power dynamics in the rest of the process between the designers and the members of the community involved.

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1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

In the next pages the research project in this report is introduced. The chapter starts by explaining the project initiation and the relevance for the practice of design followed by the project's context. Finally, this chapter reviews the project approach by explaining the project goal, the research questions, the structure of the process and the methodologies utilized.

1.1 Project initiation

For several decades already, the design practice has recognized the need to address social causes and issues of politics (Papenek, 1972). As a discipline with the capacity to mediate in our realities and relationships, design has increasingly been understood as a socially relevant activity that can support societal transformation (Manzini, 2015). In particular, Participatory Design (PD) is understood as an approach to democratizing the design practice, and when used for social change, this practice attempts to address inequality issues and intends to have a “positive impact” in our society and in particular the most vulnerable.

However, in PD processes with societal ambitions, these good intentions are not always easy to accomplish. In this type of processes, by engaging different stakeholders with different social identities and different access to power, political agendas and power imbalances still play a fundamental role in decision making and the reproduction of inequalities (Akama, 2008; Keshavarz, 2015; Vink et al. 2017). As such, without being conscious of systemic inequality and the relation between PD and structural power, the designers involved in the process may have practices, attitudes or assumptions that perpetuate oppression towards the most vulnerable while affirming the power of the privileged.

Even if being conscious of these dynamics seems crucial especially if design continues to engage in social matters, research has shown that power dynamics and politics are a weakness in the design practice and designers are lacking the means to address these issues in the design process (Julier, 2013; Manzini, 2016; Vink et al. 2017). By acknowledging the importance of tackling this gap, this research project investigates new design practices where the dynamics between the designer and the community can be levelled, and liberation from oppressive systems can be tackled. This attempt to propose a new understanding of PD processes delinked from the normalized practices and dynamics between designer and the community is what in this report is going to be referred to as decolonizing and decolonial PD.

To investigate means outside the design domain that can support PD processes to be more socially just and power balanced, this project adopts concepts and methods from the social sciences and explores how they can support the practice of design. Likewise, the project looks for inspiration on social theories that have already tackled the matter of systemic power dynamics and the liberation from oppressive systems. In particular, this research takes as inspiration the legacy of the philosopher and pedagogue Paulo Freire who developed a pedagogy program centred in the liberation of oppressed peoples from systemic power structures. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2000), the author conceives a new relationship between the teacher and the students (the oppressed) in which the latter are empowered to shape the course of their own education and address themes that matter the most for them in order to change their reality. This project aims to find analogies between Freire's proposal for liberation and the liberation from oppressive power dynamics in the design process. To find these analogies, the project compares the Freirian relationship between the teacher and the students with the relationship between the designer and community.

The research complements the theoretical findings with a practical example in the field by conducting a series of explorations in the context of Afrikaanderwijk wishing to extract broader lessons that can be relevant for the design practice. However, it is also acknowledged that this project is a very personal exploration of the designer's identity in the social and participatory design practice that is dependent on the context and the community encounter.

1.2 Project context

1.2.1 Participatory City Making Lab

This project is part of the PCM (Participatory City Making) Lab of the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering of Delft University of Technology. This Lab “uses the city as a space for transition to experiment with systemic design approaches and to explore the next role of design in a transforming society”¹. For this project, Afrikaanderwijk will be approached as the context of this project, a neighborhood in Rotterdam Zuid in which previous projects of the Lab have already been developed (Mulder et al. 2018).

1.2.2 Afrikaanderwijk

To better understand the nature of a more power-balanced and decolonial PD process, a series of explorations are carried out in the neighbourhood of Afrikaanderwijk in Rotterdam Zuid. This neighbourhood was one of the first multicultural areas in the Netherlands, where the majority of the population has a non-Dutch background. Afrikaanderwijk has relatively low levels of education and income when compared to the rest of the city (Gemeente Rotterdam, n.d). However, the neighbourhood is also a very lively and open community in which local initiatives are constantly working for social change. In the case of this project, working in a context like Afrikaanderwijk by developing in-situ explorations enriches the theoretical research with empirical experiences. As this project is being developed under the lens of social justice, it is crucial to engage with citizens in a way that their voices can be amplified and social issues can be tackled. This is the main reason why Afrikaanderwijk is chosen as the place this project could learn from. More information about the neighbourhood and its inhabitants is going to be given as the report advances and the interactions with the community become central in the project.

1 (<https://delftdesignlabs.org/about/>)



Figure 1: A photo of Afrikaanderplein, the building of the school and the Klooster. On the right, some girls having a walk after school.

1.3 Project approach

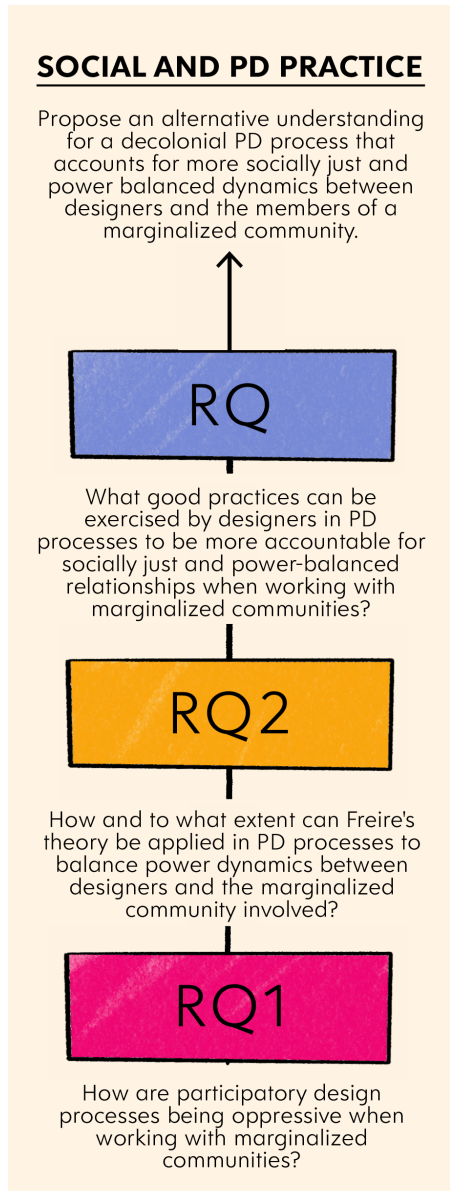


Figure 2: The three research questions of this project build on each other to finally reach the goal of the project. This goal can inform the social and participatory design practice.

1.3.1 Project goal and research questions

Current PD processes that engage in social issues can reproduce, in conscious and unconscious ways, oppression against the communities designers are working with. By considering this affirmation, *this research project aims to propose an alternative understanding for a decolonial PD process that accounts for more socially just and power balanced dynamics between designers and the members of a marginalized community.*

Having this goal in mind, the main research question for this project is:

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

As mentioned in the project initiation, PD processes can reproduce systemic oppression because of the engagement of different social actors. So, to be able to exercise good practices, it is first required to understand how PD processes are already being oppressive toward vulnerable communities and in this way be able to tackle those practices. Accordingly, a sub research question for this project is:

RQ1: How are participatory design processes being oppressive when working with marginalized communities?

Moreover, as this project takes as an inspiration the work of Paulo Freire in PO as a way to enrich the alternative understanding, another sub research question for this project is:

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied in PD processes to balance power dynamics between designers and the marginalized community involved?

1.3.2 Project structure

To answer the three research questions (RQ, RQ1, RQ2) previously mentioned, this research project was divided into three main phases with different approaches. First, a research for design phase, then a research through design (RtD) phase and finally a design phase. The three of them are represented as the black rectangles on top of the Figure 3 in the following page.

During these three moments, the project combined theoretical research with empirical research as a way to enrich the findings and give more complete answers with both types of input. In Figure 3, the theoretical research activities are represented in the top part of the arrow while the empirical ones are at the bottom.

The research for design approach focuses on improving the design practice itself. Usually, this type of research leads to frameworks, methods or even philosophies that help the designer to reframe the problems they are addressing (Zimmerman et al, 2010). In this case, the research for design helped to develop a conceptual framework and set up the next phase of the project in which a new understanding of a decolonial PD process was expected. In the second phase, a research through design approach was chosen to engage in activities to gather insights and create new knowledge (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2017). In this project, the activities and interactions developed in Afrikaanderwijk were the material for analysis and conclusions for the design process. The last phase of the project focused on re-interpreting the research findings and translating them into a design useful for other practitioners. Next, a detailed explanation of every phase is conducted.

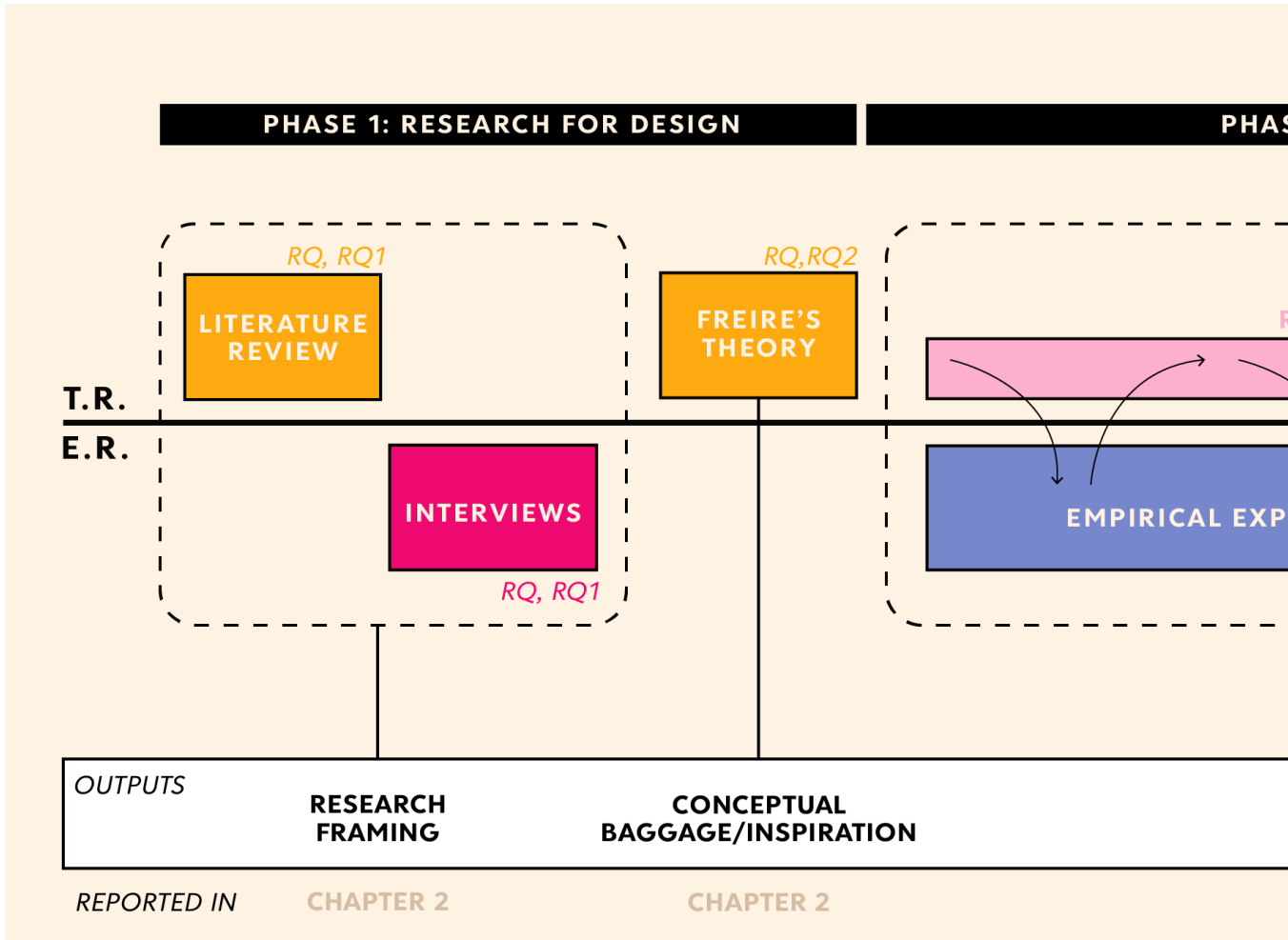
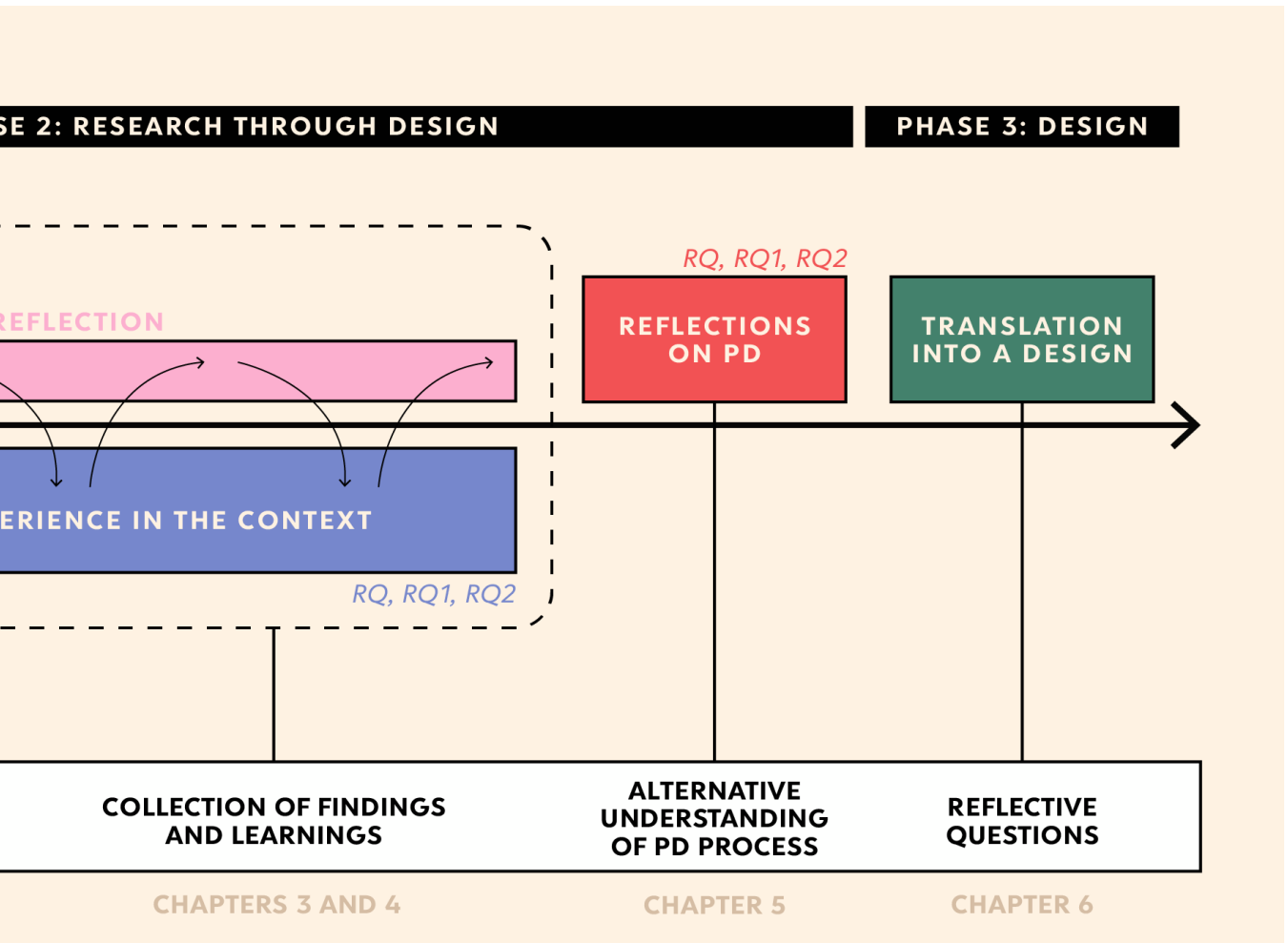


Figure 3: A representation of the project structure. On the top, the main phases of the project, in the middle and colored section the theoretical and empirical activities conducted during the three phases, and in the bottom the outputs of those activities and the report's chapters where they are detailed.

PHASE 1: RESEARCH FOR DESIGN

In the first phase of this project a research framing was developed to answer the research question 1 (RQ1: How are participatory design processes being oppressive when working with marginalized communities?) and also inform the main research question of the project (RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?). The framing was developed by conducting a theoretical research through literature review and complemented with an empirical research based on a number of semi-structured interviews with design students and practitioners. Once



the conceptual framework was developed, additional theoretical elements were unveiled by studying Freire's theory and understanding how it could be used as an inspiration for the next steps of the project, answering to the research question 2 (RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?). The three activities in this research for design helped to set up the next phase that looked for more empirical answers by engaging with the context of Afrikaanderwijk (see Figure 3).

PHASE 2: RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN

The second phase of the project had a research through design approach. In this case, based on the findings of Phase 1, the project developed an empirical research in the context of Afrikaanderwijk. This research was conducted to investigate what practices in the design process could help to develop an alternative and decolonial PD process. The empirical experience was complemented with a reflective work in which what happened in the neighborhood was interpreted and translated into findings to answer the RQs of this project. In this sense, this second phase of the project was informed by my work as a designer inside the new understanding of a process and by my work as a researcher of that same process. Figure 4 illustrates this dynamic in which the project is divided into two different levels. On one hand, I assumed the role of a researcher that analyzes the empirical data and draws conclusions by reflecting on the process and the interactions that were taking place (top-level). On the other hand, I had the role of the designer in the process, aiming to develop more power-balanced and socially just interactions with the community in the context and documenting them on a personal level (bottom level). As such, in this phase 2, I constantly moved from an insider position in the context to an outsider of the project stepping back and analyzing the process on a metalevel.

PHASE 3: DESIGN

Finally, to make the findings of phases 1 and 2 more accessible and useful for other design practitioners, the project entered into a design phase where the reflections were translated into a document that can support other designers interested in developing decolonial PD processes. The end result is a series of reflecting questions that the readers can use to reflect in their own practice before starting any PD process.

RESEARCHER OF THE PROCESS

Analyzing and reflecting on the explorations to draw conclusions



DESIGNER IN THE PROCESS

Engaging with the community in a PD process, documenting on a personal level

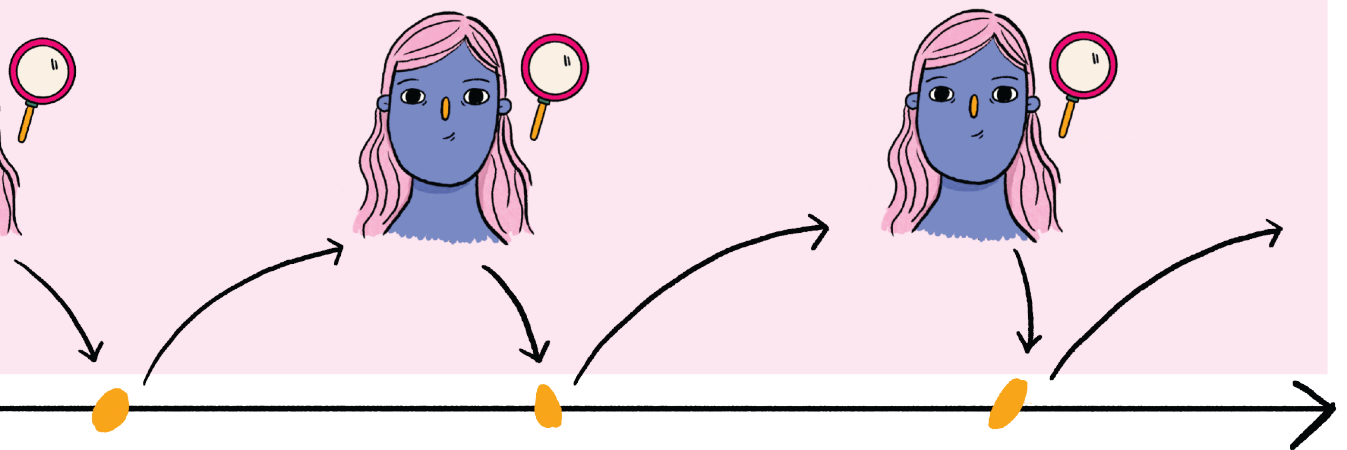
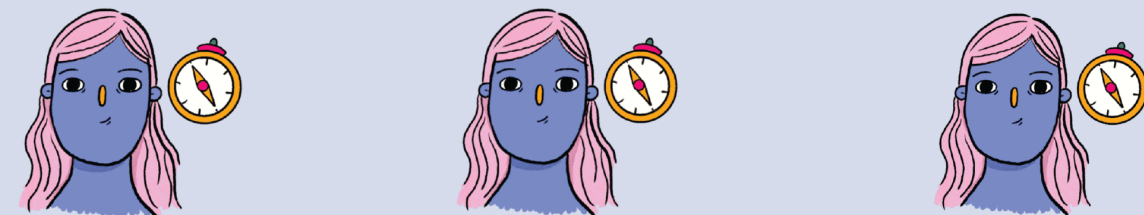
PHASE 2: RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN**REFLECTION****EMPIRICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT**

Figure 4: In the figure, the two levels in which I was constantly moving during the R+D phase of the project. The researcher analyzing on a metalevel the interactions in the design process happening in the context. In the lower level, the designer in the PD process with members of the community of Afrikaanderwijk.

1.3.1 Methodology

After having a general understanding of the structure and the approach taken in the project, this section explains the research methods utilized in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to develop activities, and collect and analyze the data from them. For a visualization of the methods please refer to Figure 5.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review surveys, synthesized and analyzes published work on a specific topic. It supports the researcher in having an in-depth understanding of a topic and articulating the relevance of her/his own work. In this project, a literature review was conducted as the first research activity of phase 1 to create a conceptual framework to support the rest of the phases of the process.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

During phase 1, semi-structured interviews allowed to have reflections with the design students and practitioners about their experiences in PD processes that aim for social impact. Even if the interviews were planned with a fixed structure, depending on the discussion the questions were adapted to gather more relevant information.

ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is a qualitative methodology that comes from the social sciences (anthropology and sociology) and it focuses on the investigation and description of “people, cultures and subjects in local settings” (Robben & Sluka, 2015). Ethnography was used as empirical research in phase 2 by immersing in the context, personal observation, establishing rapports with members of the community and engaging in dialogues with them.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Aligned with the research questions, autoethnography is a research method that “uses the researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences” (Adams et al, 2015, p. 1). Different from the ethnography method, autoethnography focused on my own experience and interpretation of the situations as a designer in the context. Since this project is aiming to explore socially just ways of doing PD, the experiences described in the second part of this report are my personal experiences as a person (who is also a designer) in relation to the community of Afrikaanderwijk. Moreover, autoethnography is a method that acknowledges and values the researcher’s relationships with others and how to maintain those relationships in time (Adams et al, 2015).

UNSTRUCTURED OBSERVATION

Very close to ethnography and autoethnography there is the observation method to collect data. By being inserted in the context, the researcher is able to extract learnings through involvement in the day-to-day activities of the community in a way that is not predetermined. In this project, this type of observation was complemented with photos of the context and the daily life in the neighbourhood.

DIALOGUES

Dialogues are a way of social discourse created by the use of language. In the words of Banathy and Jenlink, a dialogue “suggests community, mutuality, and authenticity—an egalitarian relationship” (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004, p. 13). A dialogue is different from an interview because it is a discourse that is not guided by one person (the interviewer) but it aimed for a reciprocal sharing in which it is possible to build relationships and mutual understanding. During the explorations of this project, dialogues were held as casual conversations in the context, text messages or phone calls.

REFLECTION

In this project, reflection is understood as a method for qualitative analysis because it allowed the integration between the practical actions of personal experiences and the theory. In this way, reflection permitted the interpretation of stories to create general understandings that informed social and participatory design practices. Reflections were held as a personal activity but in other cases also as a group activity to avoid bias and enrich the learnings.

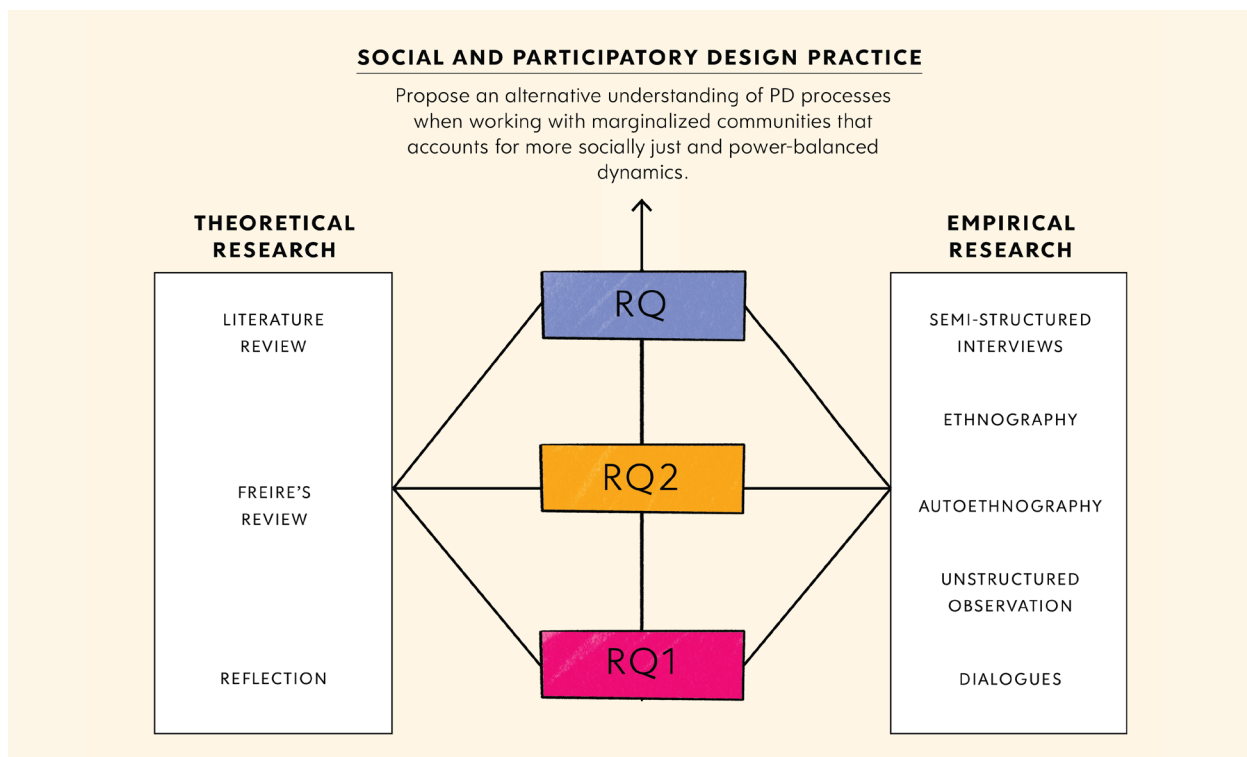


Figure 5: The methods used in this project. On the left, the methods for the theoretical research: Literature Review and Reflection. On the right, the methods used for empirical research: Semi-structured interviews, Ethnography, Autoethnography, Unstructured observation and Dialogue. Both groups of methods inform the research questions.

2

RESEARCH FOR DECOLONIZING PD

This chapter presents the research activities carried out in the first phase of the project to understand how to decolonize PD processes. To elaborate a research framing, a literature review is developed around the topics of power, marginalized communities, and PD process. The findings from this literature review set-up a field research composed by a series of semi-structured interviews with design students and practitioners. After the literature research and the field research a framework is developed to inform the phase 2 of this project. In this same chapter, the work of Paulo Freire is analyzed to use the theories of the philosopher as an inspiration for the alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process. First, a brief introduction to his work in “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” is done to grasp his main ideas about the relationship between students and teachers in his pedagogical program. Then, the relevance of Freire’s work for PD is identified to conclude with the analysis of some of the most important concepts of his theory.

2.1 Research Framing

2.1.1 Literature Research

As was mentioned in section 1.3.1 the main goal of this research project is to propose an alternative understanding for a decolonial PD process that accounts for more socially just and power-balanced dynamics between the designers and the members of marginalized communities. In this goal, there are three important elements that could be explored in more detail.

- The realm of design of this project intended to inform: PD processes related to social issues.
- The subjects the project should work with: marginalized communities.
- The topic that is going to be tackled: power (dynamics)

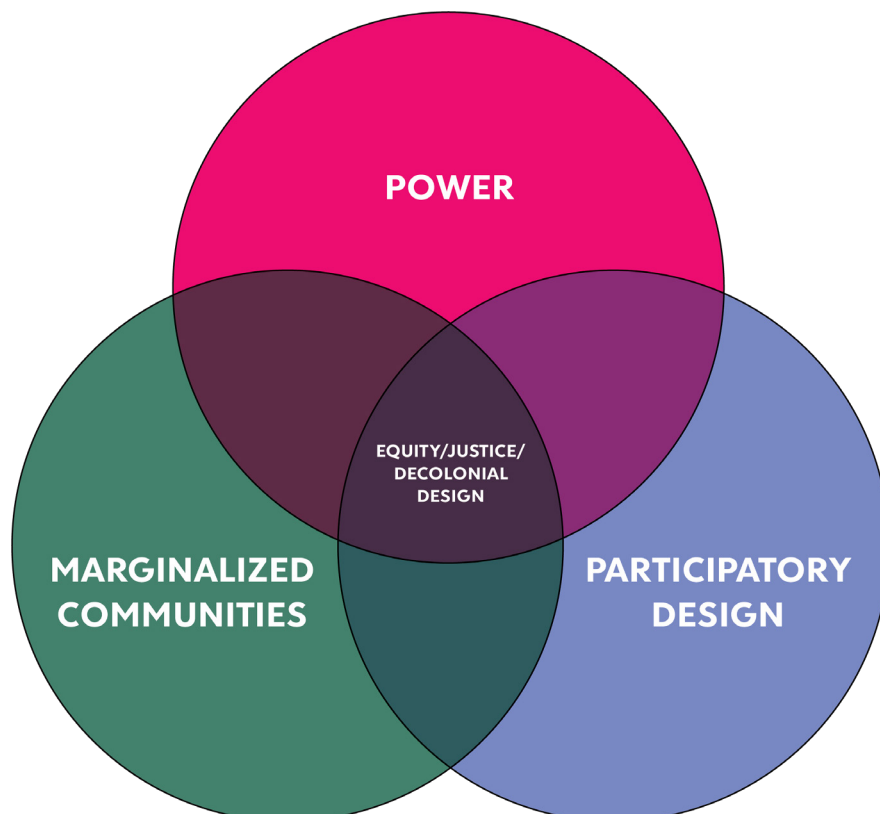
To develop a framework around these three topics, a literature review was conducted to understand their relationship and how they could respond to the RQ: *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* and RQ1: *How are participatory design processes being oppressive when working with marginalized communities?*.

To select a body of sources relevant for this project, it is first necessary to establish the search keywords. These terms were: *power or power dynamics, participatory design and marginalized communities or vulnerable communities*. As the concepts of power and marginalization do not necessarily come from the design realm, work from the social sciences was taken into consideration to understand those themes and have a broader view that could help build the framework. After this, material specific to the design practice was searched in design journals and design conferences. In this case, the texts had to explicitly talk about PD processes with marginalized communities and also mention the topic of power dynamics or terms related to it like oppression, privilege, liberation, etc. This search concluded with the review of 27 readings in the form of papers, articles, and books.

After the research around the three main topics, it was noticed that in the design practice the topic of power dynamics is central for the work done under the name of design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), equity design (Hill et al. 2016), and decolonial design (Decolonizing Design, 2016) (see Figure 6). A general scan was made about the work undertaken in these realms and in this way understand where this project is positioned.

In the next sections, the main understandings around the topics of power, marginalized communities, and PD processes are explained to answer the questions of How are participatory design processes being oppressive when working with marginalized communities? And What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

Figure 6: The intersection between the three main themes explored. The work developed in this project is positioned in the realms of equity, justice, and decolonial design.



UNDERSTANDING POWER

In a general perspective, power is the ability that an actor has to influence an outcome. The more power an actor has, the more chances of making something happen “in ways that favor the empowered actor’s will, interests, and values” (Castell, 2013, p. 11). Even if the concept of power is one of the more disputed in political and social theory, the discussions around this topic relate to the distinctions between *power to* and *power over* (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009). In the case of *power to*, the concept can be understood as the achievement of a specific outcome. The notion is related to the actor’s individual abilities without necessarily involving others (Dowding, 2012). Some authors, like Allen (1999), even suggest considering it a synonym of “empowerment”.

Quite different is the concept of *power over*, as it is intended as the capacity to make someone do what you want them to do, or in Dahl’s (Dahl 1957, pp. 202–203) words: ‘A has power over B to the extent that

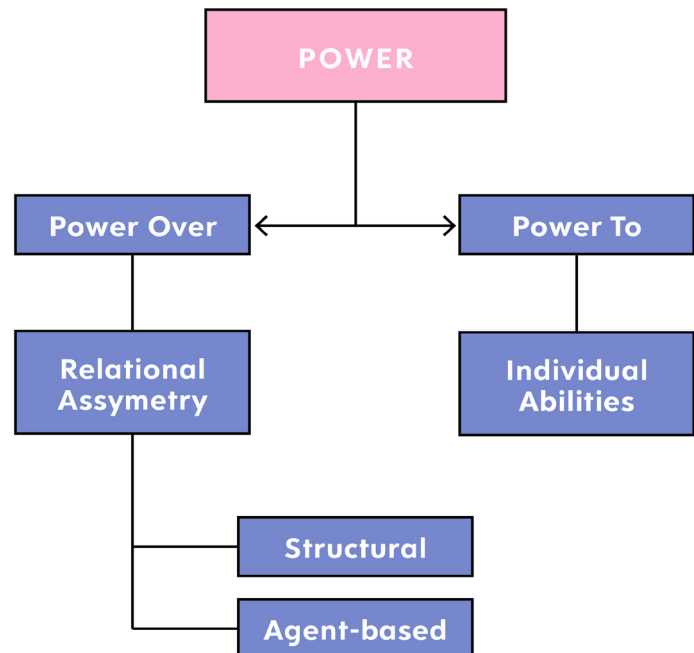


Figure 7: Visual summary of the concept of power explored for this project

he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.' This means that power is, in essence, a social relation because it presupposes the existence of at least two actors (A and B) to be exercised. Aligned to this, Castells (2013) defines power as a social actor's capacity to asymmetrically influence another actor. The more asymmetry there is in a social relation, the more capacity to act there is for one of the actors involved in that relation. This also means that if one of the actors resists the power exercised over them, the power relationships can change, and power can be given to the powerless balancing the asymmetry. Moreover, some authors like Foucault (1980) establish that *power over* is not dependent on the individuals but is a phenomenon exercised by systemic structures that use people as a vehicle. Other theories (Habermas cited in Avelino & Rotmans, 2009) suggest that *power over* can also be agent-based and that individuals can choose to exercise it or not. This quality suggests that social actors have the capacity to reflect and influence the dynamics of the system they inhabit. But as societal systems are also very complex, the systems can not always be controlled by individuals. In this sense, the *power to* of social actors (their capability to achieve an outcome) will be affected by the relationships with other social actors in the context who can exercise *power over* in an asymmetrical relationship (for a visual summary of the concepts just exposed, please refer to Figure 7).

Reviewing the definitions of *power over* and *power to* analyzed, it is possible to summarize the qualities of power in four main ideas that can inform the nature of power relationships in a PD process.

Power is relational

As was mentioned, the ability to influence an outcome and influence others is determined by the social relationships between an actor A and an actor B. This means that power is a capacity that can be exercised based on the relationships and dynamics with others.

Power is contextual

As power is relational, the power that an actor can exercise will depend on the other social actors in the relationship. This means that in certain contexts, a social actor can hold and exercise a lot of power because other agents and the dynamics created permit it, but under other circumstances, it might change.

Power can be structural but also agent-based

Even if power is determined by the system, social actors can also influence and shape the dynamics in the system at a micro-level that can potentially bring structural change.

Power can be conscious and unconscious

As power dynamics are embedded in our system, many times, individuals do not realize about the power they have and how they are exercising it. Being conscious of individuals' possibilities to possess and use power seems crucial to change these dynamics when necessary.

Taking into consideration these four main qualities of power, the next section explores the concepts of marginalization and marginalized communities. The concepts are understood in relation to the notion of power so the takeaways just mentioned can be better detailed.

UNDERSTANDING MARGINALIZATION IN RELATION TO POWER

Marginality is related to power in the way that it is the involuntary position of people that, because of their social identity, are at the edges of power (Fry, 1989). Being at the edges of power means being isolated from any of our social, economic, political, or environmental systems giving marginalized peoples less access to resources, services, rights, and capabilities. Marginalization is intrinsically related to the concept of oppression (as opposed to privilege) where social forces and institutional power create a system that regularly discriminates against some groups of people while privileges others (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). In the words of Frye (1983, p.12)

“The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable but are systematically related to each other”.

Moreover, revising the work of Collins (1990), we can affirm that marginalized individuals experience oppression in three different levels: the personal biography level, the community level, and the systemic level

Laws, policies, education, and other systems that determine where the benefits and resources are distributed

Identity of a whole group of people, that seems to go against the canon, the “normal” and the “right way”

Related to our identities and who we are as a person

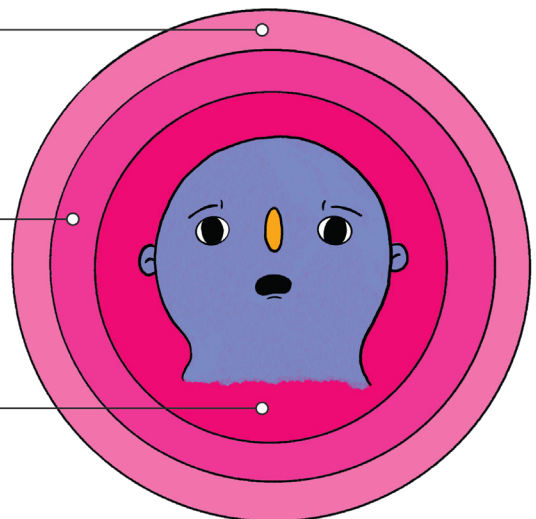


Figure 8: The three levels of oppression an individual can experience.

of institutions (see Figure 8). Oppression on the personal biography level is the one we can experience related to our identities and who we are as a person. Oppression on the community level is related to the discrimination of a whole group of people, that seems to go against the canon, the “normal” and the “right way”. Finally, the systemic level of institutions is referred to as laws, policies, education, and other systems that determine where the benefits and resources are distributed in society.

Another important concept to understand better marginalization and oppression is the concept of intersectionality and the matrix of domination. Intersectionality in black feminist theory states that an individual can experience oppression in different aspects of their identities at the same time. In this way, for example, a black woman experiences oppression for being black and for being a woman at the same time, making her experience different from someone that is just in one of those categories. The matrix of domination “is a conceptual model that helps us think about how power, oppression, resistance, privilege, penalties, benefits, and harms are systematically distributed” (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 20). According to this theory, every individual receives benefits and harms at the same time based on their location in the matrix. Some of the identities in the model relate to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. To see the details of the matrix of domination refer to Appendix B. Intersectionality is an important concept to understand power and oppression because it shows that everyone has a different experience based on their social identities and that trying to define and evaluate others’ experiences through universal theories is not possible. Considering the relation between marginalization and power explored in this section, four main takeaways can be presented as follows.

Our practices can reproduce oppression on three levels

If power is a force that can be exercised over others in conscious or unconscious ways, in this section was also learned that oppression can manifest in three different levels (personal, community, and institutional). Being more conscious about these dynamics can help to change the practices that reproduce structural oppression.

Knowledge and the experience of oppression are situated

Taking into consideration the theory around the matrix of domination, it is possible to conclude that oppressed peoples have unique experiences based on the combination of their identities. This characteristic makes their knowledge situated and unique. Particular and valuable learnings about the nature of oppression can only come from the individuals in less favored positions. Promoting spaces to give voice to less privileged individuals and listen to their experiences helps in finding adequate solutions to challenge systemic oppression.

Privileged people can be allies

Experiencing privilege does not mean not being able to fight against oppression. All individuals are inserted in the structures of power and being in a position of privilege can be used to give the space to others to be seen and listened to. In the same way, by being conscious of how power is exercised, social actors can change attitudes, dynamics, and actions that reproduce oppression. In this way, oppressed and allies can work together to dismantle oppressive systems.

Our position in the system of oppression determines the relations with others

As power is relational and contextual, the different positions of an individual in the matrix will influence the relationships established with others. Understanding the positionality of the actors involved in a situation may help in understanding the dynamics established.

UNDERSTANDING PD IN RELATION TO POWER AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

In the last two sections, the concepts of power and marginalization were analyzed and a number of insights were found based on the theory. In this section, PD is briefly introduced to then see how the notions of power and marginalization can be related to it.

The origins of PD can be found in the democratization of the workplace in the '70s in Scandinavia (Gregory, 2013). It was at this moment that designers started to collaborate with workers to re-design and introduce new technologies in the workplace. Scandinavian researchers developed an approach called "collective resource approach" that allowed workers to collectively explore the consequences and implications of new technologies co-working with researchers, software engineers, and managers (Sawhney & Tran, 2020). Later, PD started to engage with other settings and with different publics always to include in the design process the people destined to use the new technology or system and, in this way, ensure their wants and views helped to define and improve the designed outcome (Gregory, 2003).

Traditionally, PD has taken place in projects in which sessions with participants are typically set up by designers to get input from the users and determining in this way a more appropriate design. PD was a big step to democratize the design practice and open the space to include in the design process the voices of the people intended to use the product (object, system, service, etc). However, many discourses of participation in design fail to understand the ethical complexities of working in a collaborative approach, ignoring that involving users in a project leads to addressing issues of politics and power (Keshavarz, 2015; Pierri, 2016; Vink et al, 2017). Because design encourages people to do new things and interact in new ways, design often produces (and reproduces) social relationships and systemic power dynamics. These relationships are not only created after using design product but they are also reproduced in the process itself where different actors with different worldviews, values and power interact with each other.

In PD, the social structures and power dynamics mentioned before are even more noticeable when working with marginalized communities. In

these cases, because design is embedded in our social and economic systems, the imbalances between the powerful and privileged and the powerless and oppressed can be easily reproduced. This could start from the moment in which an “expert designer” is hired by an institution in the public sector or by a company in the private sector to develop a project. An “expert designer” is a person who had the privilege to study in a design school (being educated is considered an axis of privilege in the matrix of domination) and had the opportunity to develop specialized capabilities that makes him or her a professional. However, in line with the famous statement of Manzini (2015) “everybody designs” design can also be considered a human activity because it “means to make a mark, make a plan or problem-solve; all human beings thus participate in design” (Costanza-Chock, 2020, 73). Nevertheless, being an educated person is not oppressive per se. Taking into consideration what was said in section 3.2, the imbalance in the power dynamics comes when, because of that specific aspect of someone’s social identity, that person can benefit at the expense of someone else. This benefit can be, for example, when a designer is able to make crucial decisions in a design process without consultation with the members of the community who will have direct contact with the designed outcome. If we consider people the experts of their own experience and their contexts, who are also able to design, being professionally certified should not take the possibility of others to determine essential aspects of the project. The expertise of a professional designer are indeed important and should be brought to the table but they should not condition the whole process and outcome of a project at the expense of the capacity of decision making of others.

Furthermore, design education and its practice tend to give more value to certain ways of thinking and designing and not others. Usually, these ways of doing stem from Western and Euro-USA-centric views that can be imposed

on every context where a project is developed, and they are understood as the “right way” of designing (Schultz et al, 2018).

Finally, expert designers are also usually hired by institutions (public or private). These institutions usually have their own agendas and have already defined where to assign their resources. These aspects make the institutions the final decision-makers which adds even more power to the figure of the designer who is representing them. However, knowing that power can be shifted, having a certain type of knowledge, or being part of an institution does not determine that in every case oppression is executed from the designer to the community. As mentioned in section 3.2, educational systems and institutions are part of the systemic level but individuals in those systems can still choose and change the way they relate to others in the micro-level and challenge the normalized power dynamics.

After the previous analysis about the social figure of the designer inside PD processes with marginalized communities, some conclusions can be drawn to understand how oppression may manifest in a PD process at the systemic, community, and individual level. The conclusions are explained as follows and can also be seen in Figure 9.

Oppression in PD at the personal level

A participant inside a PD process can perceive personal oppression when interacting with an “expert designer” who benefits in the design process from his/her educated position. In the same level of oppression, many other designer’s identities could influence the power relationship with the community but it will completely depend on every specific position in the matrix (other factors of privilege could be being white, middle or upper class, male, European, etc.).

CONTEXT: A PD PROJECT

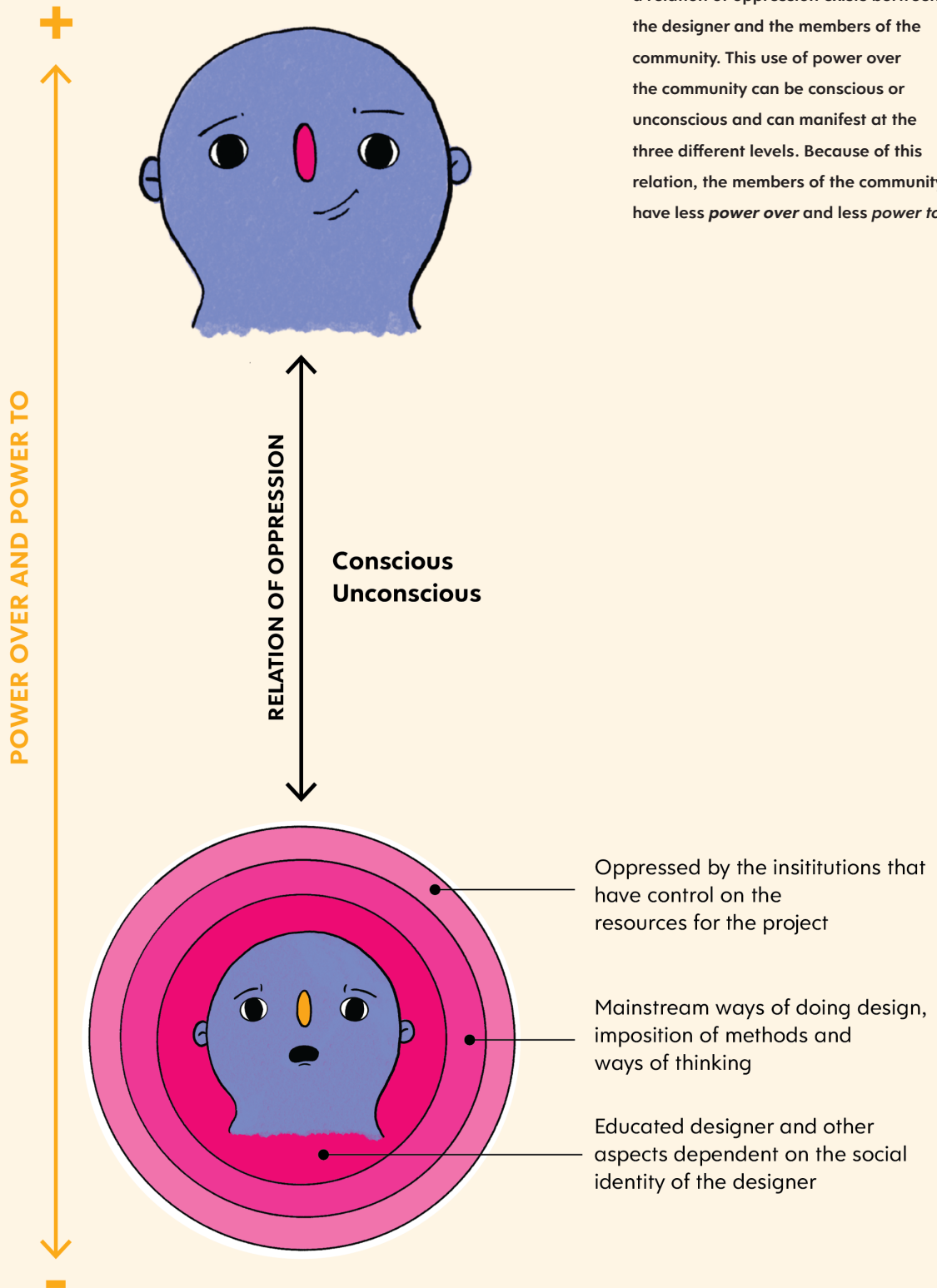


Figure 9: In the context of a PD project a relation of oppression exists between the designer and the members of the community. This use of power over the community can be conscious or unconscious and can manifest at the three different levels. Because of this relation, the members of the community have less *power over* and less *power to*

Oppression in PD at the community level

The community level of oppression can be perceived by the imposition of methods that come from the designer background but that do not necessarily fit the context or the ways of doing of the community. Manipulating the process to reach outcomes that fit the dominant view on “good design” can be also considered a way of oppression at this level. However, many of these acts of oppression can be unconscious and are exercised because these methods and expectations are what has been taught and practiced in the design context.

Oppression in PD at the systemic level

Finally, systemic oppression is perceived by the presence in the project of institutions with their own agendas that determine the distribution of resources from a top-down perspective and that in some cases may be different from the agendas and expectations of the communities.

WHAT IS BEING DONE IN THE DESIGN PRACTICE AROUND POWER AND OPPRESSION

The topics of power, oppression, and its relation to design are not entirely new. In the last years, some leaders in the field have done essential work under the name of design justice, equity design, and decolonial design, among others. The design justice network and Sasha Costanza-Chock are particularly committed to rethinking design processes and outcomes to center people that are usually marginalized. “Design Justice is a framework for the analysis of how design distributes benefits and burdens between various groups of people. Design Justice focuses explicitly on the ways that design reproduces and/or challenges the matrix of domination” (Costanza-Chock, 2020). The design justice community works around several principles including “center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process,” and “work towards sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes”

among others (all the principles can be found in <https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles>).

In the same line with justice design, EquityXDesign affirms that racism and inequity are products of design, and thus, they can be redesigned. This approach claims to be “a practice that merges the consciousness of racial equity work with the methodology of design thinking. (...) designing for the most affected and marginalized, letting their voices and experiences lead, and acknowledging the barriers to engagement are critical for this new process” (Hill et al, 2016). In this case, EquityXDesign acknowledges the need to change design processes, so participants actively recognize and combat biases and inequalities ceding power when it is necessary.

In addition to justice and equity design, decolonial design arises when identifying the need to understand better the politics of the design practices, its methods and artifacts, and how they address systemic issues of power. In the decolonial design statement, the community affirms: “To date, mainstream design discourse has been dominated by a focus on Anglocentric/Eurocentric ways of seeing, knowing, and acting in the world, with little attention being paid to alternative and marginalized discourses from the non-Anglo-European sphere, or the nature and consequences of design-as-politics today” (Decolonizing Design, 2016). The anthropologist Arturo Escobar is one of the most relevant exponents of the decolonial design theory proposing a practice of what he calls autonomous design, a design practice with communities that contributes to their realization and the creation of the pluriverse, “a world where many worlds fit” (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional cited in Escobar, 2018). According to Escobar, design should understand the value of situated knowledge and practices that can lead to possible futures that are outside the oppressive and dominant systems.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE RESEARCH

This chapter articulated some takeaways around the concept of power, the concept of marginalization and the relationship of PD with those notions. In the last section, the realm in which this project is inserted was mentioned by exploring the work of scholars and practitioners who take these topics into consideration.

The takeaways till now gathered are used as a set-up for the next step of phase 1 in which a field research is conducted. In this case, a number of semi-structured interviews with design students and practitioners are carried out to analyze from a practical view how participatory design processes are being oppressive with marginalized communities and what good practices could be developed.

2.1.2 Field research

GOAL AND STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEWS

Considering that the expertise and experience of a design community can offer valuable insights related to practising participatory design with a social impact, these interviews are made with the purpose of expanding the theoretical findings gathered with the literature research. This activity is focused on answering the two research questions RQ1 *How are participatory design processes being oppressive when working with marginalized communities?*

And RQ2 *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* In this sense, the interviews intend to explore the meaning of power and oppression from the perspective and experience of designers involved in these kinds of projects. The interviews also look for a better understanding of how and when designers experience power and reflect on how the power dynamics could be levelled for a more socially just process. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with

design students/practitioners and one anthropologist familiar with design processes. The participants were chosen based on their experience in PD projects with marginalized communities and their disposition to conduct the interview that took 1.5 hours approximately. The interviews were done mostly on a video call due to COVID-19 safety measures and the geographical location of some of the participants. Supporting material was created in the online collaborative tool Miro to give structure to the interviews and facilitate the reflection of the participants while writing the answers in the platform. The questions in the interview were not strictly limited to the material provided and some additional questions were made or changed based on the flow of the conversation. For more details about the material created, the procedure of the interviews and the analysis of the content refer to Appendix C. In the next section, the results of the interviews are explained.

RESULTS

After analyzing the interviews, several insights are found to answer the research questions *How are participatory design processes oppressing marginalized communities?* and *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?*

First of all, all the interviewees related power to having control or influence of some kind. Many of them tied the idea of power to be able to control the matters that affect one's personal life, giving power a sense of self-determination and action upon your world. The concept was also linked to the idea of autonomy and independence and being able to make decisions. Many of the discussions with the participants also led to understanding power as something relational and a capability given in relation to others. In some cases, this reflection led to think about

systemic structures of power in which having a powerful position comes from the privilege associated with a social identity. Some participants also pointed out that being a designer in a project already implies having a position of power, but that power can also be ceded to others when needed. The majority of interviewees felt the community had not enough power during the design process and affirmed that the results and the project would have been different if more power was given to the members of it. In the next pages, the main ideas discussed during the interviews are explained in three main clusters: (1) Manifestations of power and oppression in the design process, (2) challenges when trying to reduce power imbalances, and (3) good practices for a more socially just design process and interviewees' lessons learned from their experiences.

Manifestations of power and oppression in the design process

Decide who participates and how

Participants identified that being able to decide who is involved and in what stages of the project was already a manifestation of power. This goes from the type of PD projects designers choose to participate in, what type of communities are being involved, who is having voice inside the project, etc. Choosing to include the community just in some steps of the process was like taking power from them as it was limiting their capacity in decision making and affecting not only the process but also the outcomes. The degree of participation given to participants could drastically affect the process and the results. In some of the phases of the projects, the community was just being informed about what was being done while in others, the community was also taking action in the design. Some interviewees recall that giving the community higher degrees of participation was giving them also more control, accountability, and ownership of the project. During the interviews, the designers recalled giving higher degrees of participation in the empathize and test phases.

“Power is the place you have in a relationship. All relationships have power dynamics”

“Sometimes, I can feel powerless just for the fact of being a woman, or because of my age. And that is related to our social structures”

“Feeling powerless is not feeling the owner of yourself.”

“A lot of stuff was done with the community, but a lot of work was done without them, and that was already an imposition.”

“Many times, we just convince the communities that our end goal is the right one.”

“Just by being able to be the designer in a project we are already in a power position”

“I think he felt he was being judged or felt not knowledgeable enough to speak up”

Framing the problem

Framing a problem is one of the fundamental aspects of design as it has strong implications for the rest of the process and the solutions. Typically this framing is done without the community and is a step taken by the designers and other stakeholders, giving them high amounts of power and control in the project. Interviewees claim that including the community in the early stages of the process and defining with them what the actual problem is could lead to better results as it would lead to more community ownership of the project and more engagement.

Designer as an expert

During the activity, the role of the designer as an expert in the project was identified as a source of power in the projects. This allows designers to make decisions and define methods without question. Related to the role of the designer, some participants said that their social identities also affected the power dynamics in the process. They recognized that the fact of being educated, their skin color, and other factors of privilege were giving them more power when working with marginalized communities.

Challenges when trying to reduce power imbalances

Exposure to vulnerability

Some of the interviewees recall that in the moments of participation, the members of the communities seem to feel less competent or insecure to engage in activities because of the feeling of not being knowledgeable or capable enough. As a consequence, participants were afraid to participate and communicate their ideas from an empowered position.

Low relationality

Related to the previous point, because of the gap created between participants and the designer, there is also a lack of trust to be open to share experiences. This gap is also augmented by the fact that many times designers and the communities meet for small and sporadic periods during the process and these moments are always related to activities linked to the project.

The complexity of the project

Interviewees recall that thinking about power dynamics during the process could just make it more complicated than expected. Time seems an essential factor that determines many of the decisions during the project, giving priority to some aspects considered more important than others. Some interviewees also said it was hard to completely understand the role of the community in the projects, what degree of participation was expected from them, and what participation actually meant in the project.

The designer in the middle

Because social innovation projects usually have other stakeholders involved, and especially designers are hired by a client with power that handles time and resources, designers can feel in the middle between the client and the community that will be most affected by the outcome. Time, resources, and the client agenda for the project can be very limiting for the designer at the moment of managing power dynamics inside the current processes.

Not sharing the same understanding

Some of the interviewees also found some obstacles when trying to have a shared understanding with the community. In these cases, it was caused because of different life experiences. This difficulty was recognized in the situations where the designers “landed” in the communities to make a couple of hours workshop to gather ideas or have final validation instead of trying to find common values and shared views during longer periods of time.

Good Practices and lessons learned in the projects

Frame the project with the community

Framing the problem of a project determines how the project will be developed later and has real implications for the possible solutions. When the problems are framed with the community, designers can ensure to work with problems and needs that are genuinely related to the most vulnerable. Participatory design processes should promote activities where participants can see their contributions and can propose topics that are relevant for them. In this way, participants will be more

“Solve a problem that has so many requirements is already hard without being power and justice in the list, adding more things will make the project impossible”

“We focused on the requirement of the client, but the community had other values and priorities”

“To support a community in communicating their ideas is also a good way to give power.”

“We should try to stay in the territory longer and not just go for one workshop and then leave again”

connected to the project, enhancing ownership and willingness to be part of it.

Support the community in establishing their own goals

Related to the previous point, some interviewees affirmed that a way to give power to the communities not only in the design process but also at a structural level is to support them in defining their goals and communicating them. In this sense, also, when other stakeholders come to their context to develop new projects, the community can already have a base to communicate their values and expectations based on their identities and their particular stories to guarantee design projects that actually represent them.

Plan the continuity of the project

Some interviewees also mentioned that maintaining empowerment after the project finishes is a key factor in having a real impact on the community when the design team leaves the project. Planning and thinking about how the community can take further action in their context will give them more power, ownership, and control.

Spend time with people

Some participants of the interviews recalled the importance of spending time with the people the designer is working with. Sharing experiences outside the workshops can be an excellent opportunity to explore the context from the inside and also a good way to create bonds with people that will lead to trust and understanding.

Make roles and expectations clear from the beginning of the project.

To avoid mismatches about participation and everyone's role in the project, some interviews suggested that having a moment for working agreements could be a good practice to boost shared ownership.

In this section, the findings from the interviews were explained. Based on the personal and empirical experience of design practitioners, useful information was collected under three main topics: manifestation

of power in the PD process, challenges when trying to reduce power imbalances, and good practices and lessons learned. Next, the takeaways from the literature research and from the field research are combined to define the final framework.

2.1.3 Combining the literature and field research: the final framework

In this section, the findings of how PD processes are oppressive when working with marginalized communities and what good practices could be applied to make this process more power-balanced are summarized in the final framework. The experiences of the designers were compared to the three levels of oppression already mentioned (systemic, community and personal levels) to see how they could fit on those levels and complement the theory already explored. Down below, the three levels are picked up to explain how the PD process is oppressive and what good practices can counter those dynamics. These results are also visually summarized in Figure 10.

SYSTEMIC LEVEL

Power is a systemic force embedded in our economic and social structures but is also an agent-based capacity because it's dependent on the social actors. Based on this dynamic, power is something that can be balanced and shifted at a micro-level and, in this way, generate small changes that can slowly change the system. In the case of PD processes, a systemic levelling of forces can be tackled by designers who actively choose what type of projects they want to be involved with. Promoting and participating in projects that from the beginning are open to collaborate with vulnerable or invisibilized communities will help in shifting the current systemic dynamics.

Another important strategy that can help at a system level is to carefully plan the continuity of the project once the

process is over so the implementation can be maintained over time and trigger more social change in longer periods of time.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

Regarding the community level, it was said that the principal oppression in the design process comes from design education and practice in which the figure of the designer as an expert has the power to control and impose methods and processes as the “good way” of designing that sometimes may not correspond with what is actually needed in the context. In this case, the solutions and the good practices point to open the methods to being adapted to the unique needs of the community in a way that they can properly contribute with their experiences and knowledge. This strategy also involves considering the community in all the stages of the process including the framing of the problem that will also support the articulation of their own goals. To involve the community in the complete process, transparency and clarity in the process are needed. Having a first moment to determine the roles and expectations of the community before the project starts may help in achieving transparency.

PERSONAL LEVEL

On a personal level, it is identified that depending on social identities and the position in the matrix of domination, oppression could be exercised. For a more socially just process, the projects should foster relationality and, in this way, aim to balance power on a personal level. Spending time with the community in the context seems to be a good practice to prompt bonding and a shared understanding between community members and the designer. Acknowledging the positionality that everyone has in the project and valuing individual and unique life experiences seems crucial to understand other's ideas, beliefs, and personal meanings in open communication.

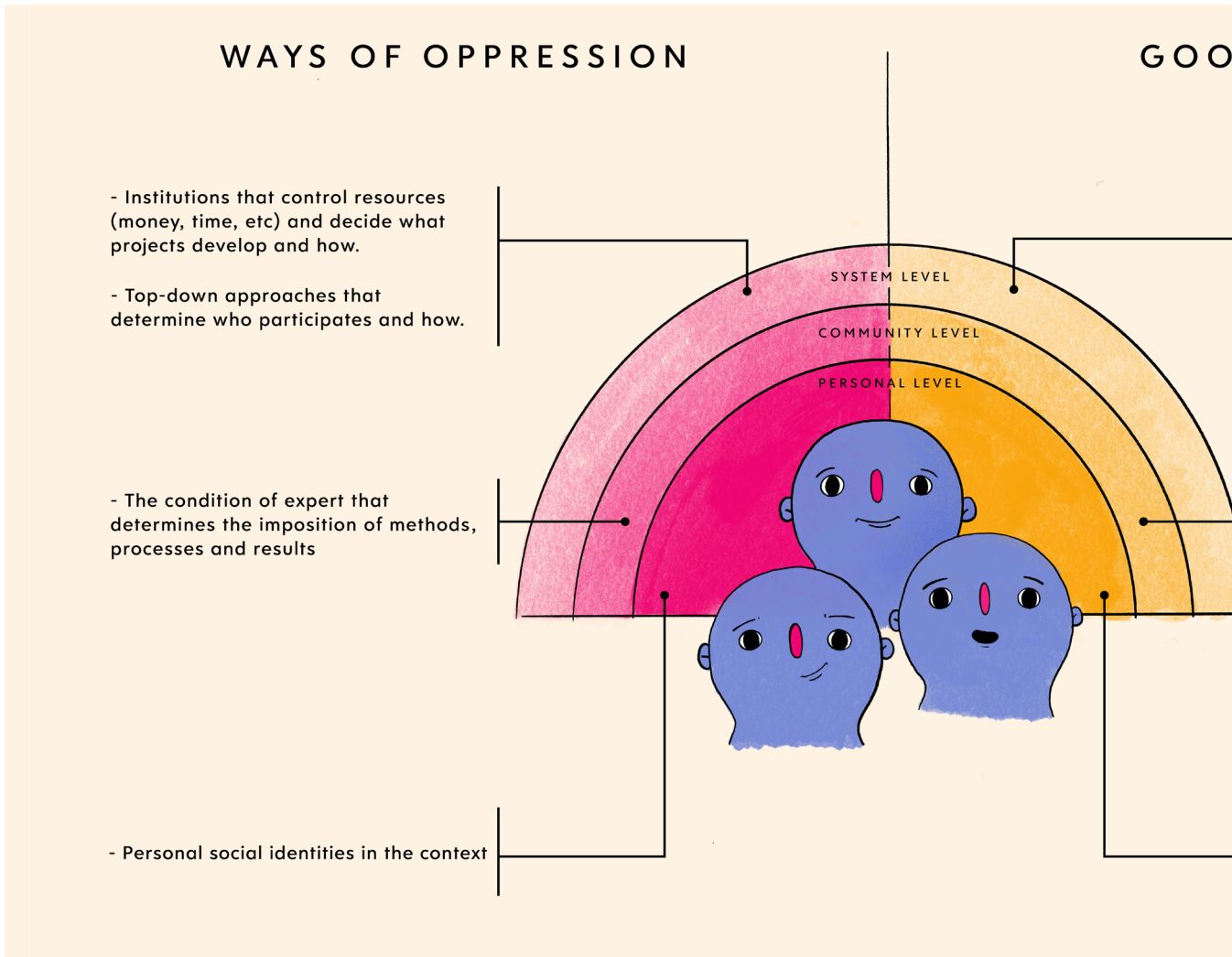


Figure 10: Framework based on the literature research and the field research. The framework represents the three levels in which a community can experience oppression. On the left side, the ways of oppression found in a PD process. On the right side, the good practices that could counter the oppressive elements.

D PRACTICES

- Choose to design with and for the most vulnerable in the system
- Make changes in the micro-level to change the system.
- Ensure the durability of projects by planning the continuity of the project with the community to enhance ownership.
- Being open to re-evaluate and adapt the the methods to the necessities of the community
- Involve the community in all the steps of the process
- Transparency: set roles and expectations from the beginning
- Foster relationaliy
- Spending time with people
- Valuing personal experiences
- Open communication

LIMITATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK

The framework developed in this chapter to answer RQ1 *How are participatory design processes being oppressive with marginalized communities?* and RQ *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* was developed based on literature review and the experience of some design practitioners in the field. This means that the conclusions articulated in here are framed based on the experience and the reflections done by scholars and practitioners who represent the same social actors that have power in the PD process. In this way, the findings gathered till now are considered very helpful in setting-up the second part of the project but it is also acknowledged that they are biased and there is room for improvement in future work. It would be interesting and useful for this research to enrich these findings by comparing the framework with the experience of members of a marginalized community that has been involved in PD process. In this way, the reflection would be open to both points of view (the powerful and the powerless in the process) and new insights could be added.

2.1.4 Conclusions

The research done in this chapter shows how power dynamics and oppression are present in PD processes in projects related to social issues with marginalized communities. Because design practices are inserted in our social and economic systems, the reproduction of inequalities can be manifested in a systemic level, a community level, and a personal level. However, as it was also acknowledged, there are some practices that could balance these power dynamics, and aim for more socially just design processes. Some of these strategies have already been discussed in this chapter based on the personal experience of designers and the literature research done so far. These good practices are going to be complemented in the next section with a theoretical research that analyzes the work of Paulo Freire and how his theory on pedagogy for liberation and critical consciousness can inform the project and the alternative decolonial PD processes.

2.2 Tapping into Paulo Freire's legacy

“Education for domestication divides teaching and learning, knowing and working, thinking and doing, informing, and forming. Re-knowing existing knowledge and creating new knowledge”

(Freire, 1972, p. 177)

“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaul on Freire, 2000, p.34)

2.2.1 Freire and Pedagogy of the Oppressed

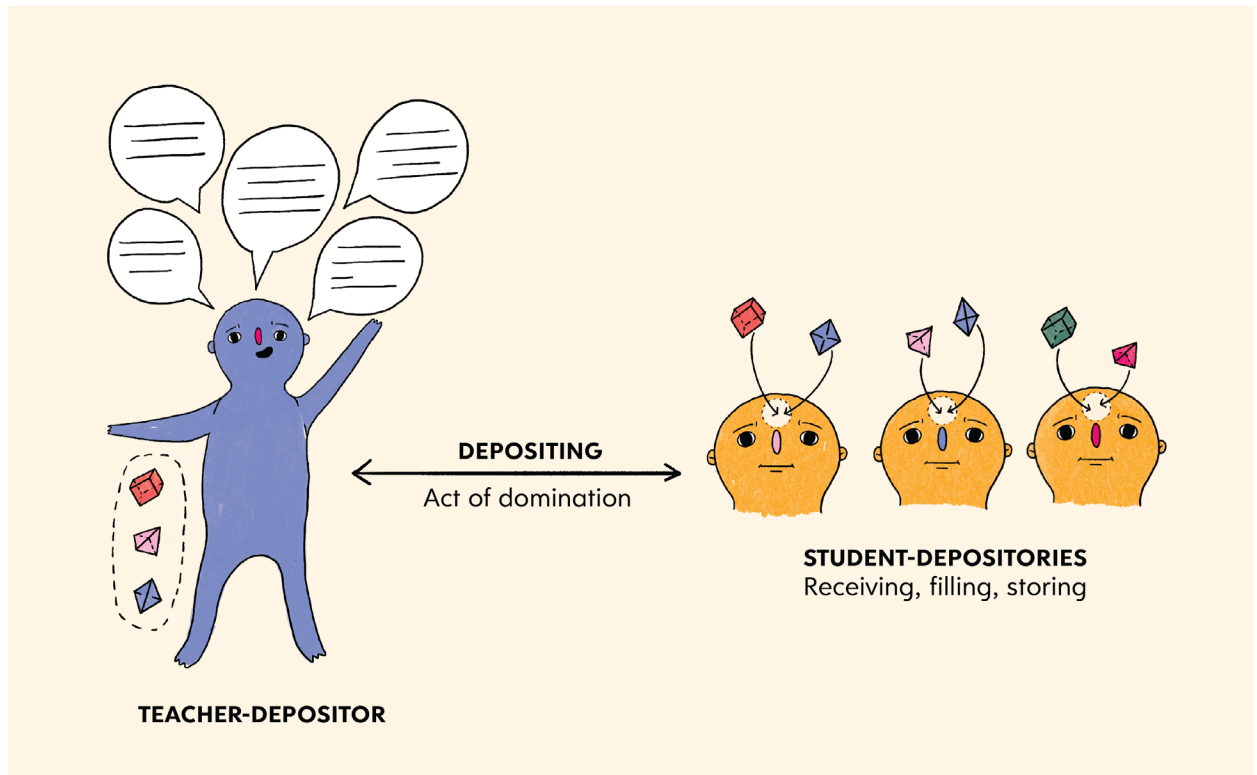
Paulo Freire was a Brazilian philosopher and educator whose work on critical pedagogy had strongly influenced popular education movements and other fields of the social sciences like community psychology, social work, and public health, especially in Latin America (Jemal, 2017).

Before considering the relationship between Paulo Freire and PD, it is necessary first to understand Freire's view on education based on the ideas he exposes in his most famous work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2000).

First of all, it is crucial to understand that for the philosopher, education is always a political act. The educational practice always presupposes concrete values and goals that make neutrality impossible in an educational process as it is intrinsically related to politics and liberation (Freire, 1972). For Freire, social power relationships are summed in two positions: the oppressed and the oppressors, and because education is a political act, it always involves these two actors; hence education supports systemic oppression coming from the oppressors or supports liberation for the oppressed.

In PO, Freire differentiates between two models of education that can support oppression or liberation: the banking model and the problem-posing model. In the first one, the teacher is the subject of the learning process and the students are considered the objects. In this model, the educator, who is seen as an expert, “deposits” information (what Freire calls the cognitive objects) in the mind of the students, as it was empty and needed to be filled (For more details of this process, see figure 11). For Freire, this practice mirrors the power dynamics in society by reproducing these attitudes, among others:

- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting.
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students adapt to it. (Freire, 2000, p. 73)



In opposition to the banking model, Freire promotes a liberatory model called problem-posing which is based on critical thinking and social transformation. In this scenario, the job of the educator is to create the conditions to learn based on the student's existence in the world and how their realities are shaped in their contexts. This model entails a critical process that values learners' self-determination. It has the goal to transform oppressed individuals into subjects who engage in collective action to change their condition of oppression. In this model, students, rather than being spectators with a consciousness that can be filled, are seen as students-teachers emphasizing a non-hierarchical and respectful relationship with the educator (for more details of this model refer to Figure 12).

The main goal of this educational model is the liberation of all individuals from oppressive systems. This liberation can be achieved by developing critical consciousness: a critical understanding of societal

Figure 11: The banking model. On the left, the figure of the teacher who possesses the knowledge and talks to the students. On the right, the students, passive figures who listen to the teacher and receive the information to be deposited and stored in their consciousness. The arrow represents the relationship between these actors which is defined by Freire as an act of domination.

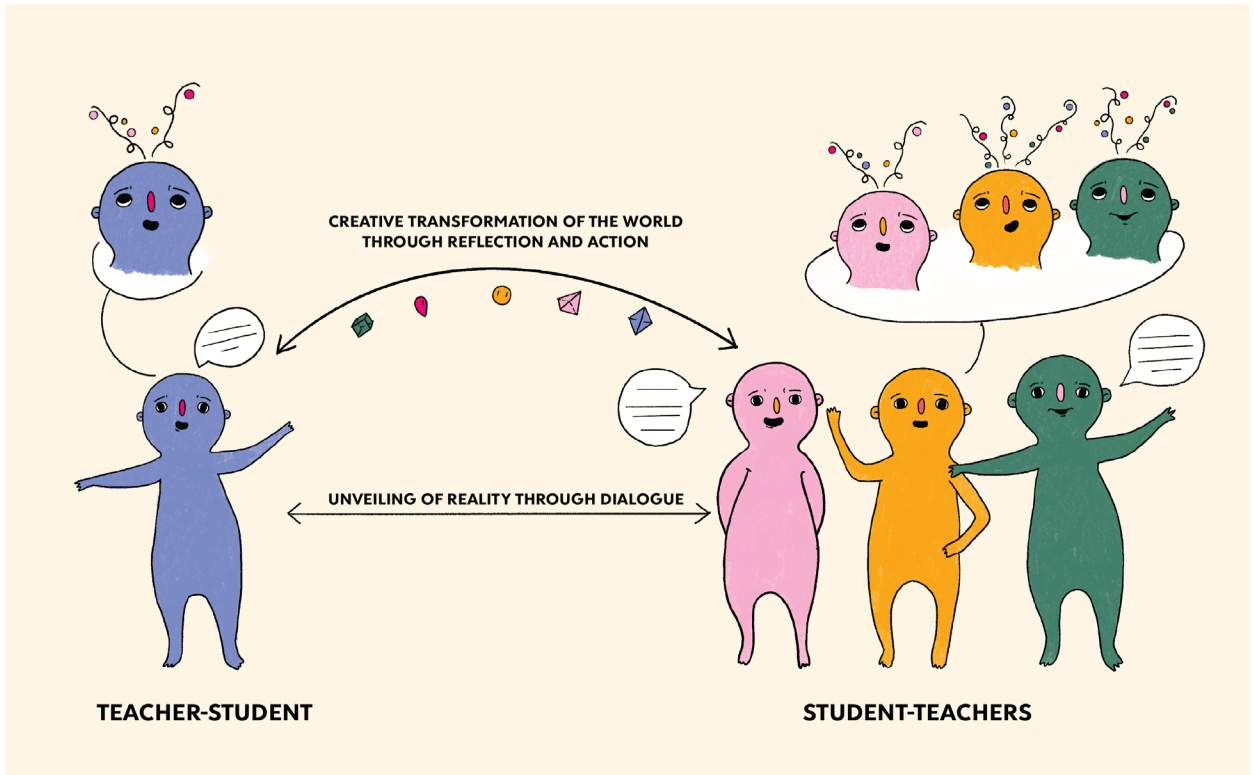


Figure 12: problem-posing model. Unlike the banking model, in this model the relationship established between teachers and students is based on dialogue. In this case, all the actors are subjects in the process of learning and teaching which makes the process an exchange of knowledge based on dialogue. In this model, there is a constant unveiling of reality which takes the social actors to collectively transform their reality in the world, with the world and in relation to others.

and political factors and other issues that are related to oppression in the students' daily life experiences. The process of learning that leads to critical consciousness is named *conscientização* and is based on critical reflection together with action in a cycle that the author calls Praxis (see Figure 13).

As can be seen from this general exposition of Freire's theory, the philosopher developed a whole understanding about education that is related to power dynamics and systems of oppression. The contribution of this new pedagogical model is the proposition of a new non-hierarchical relationship between students and teachers that according to the author will bring transformation of the reality of the oppressed and final liberation from power structures.

In the next section of this chapter, the relation and the relevance of Freire's theory in this project is going to be explained.

2.2.2 Why can Pedagogy of the oppressed inform Participatory Design?

To understand why PO can inform the PD practices and especially this project, in this section the similarities between Freire's theory and the realm of PD are explained.

First of all, Freire saw education as a tool for liberation from oppressive systems which is intrinsically related to matters of and social justice. His educational process included acting in the world to transform it and transform the relationships between social actors in the process. If design "is defined as an inherent capacity of humans to purposefully create things that help us shape and change our world" (Leitao & Marchan 2018, p. 7), a link can be made between Freire's pedagogy and the practice of design in the sense that both aim to shape the world by acting upon it.

As was mentioned in the previous section, according to Freire pedagogy is an act of politics. In the case of the design practice, as it determines and shapes the interactions between people and between people and their context through the use of the designed artifacts (objects, services, frameworks, etc), design can also be considered a political act. In fact, it continuously plays with power dynamics and social relationships through the materiality of our daily life. In addition to this, those relationships are not only determined by the artifacts that we as designers create at the end of a design process but also are determined by the process itself that we use to design those materialities.

Moreover, according to Schön (1987), the design process is a process of "reflection-in-action" that means learning by doing and having the ability to continuously learn during the whole process which is again related to Freire as the philosopher is proposing a new model for learning.

It is in this sense, the theory exposed by Freire is related and can inform the PD practices that aim to be more power-balanced when working with marginalized communities because of five main reasons: both (1) have a political character, (2) seek social justice, (3) are based in transforming the world by acting upon it (4) look for non-oppressive processes with the most vulnerable and (5) both can be considered learning processes.

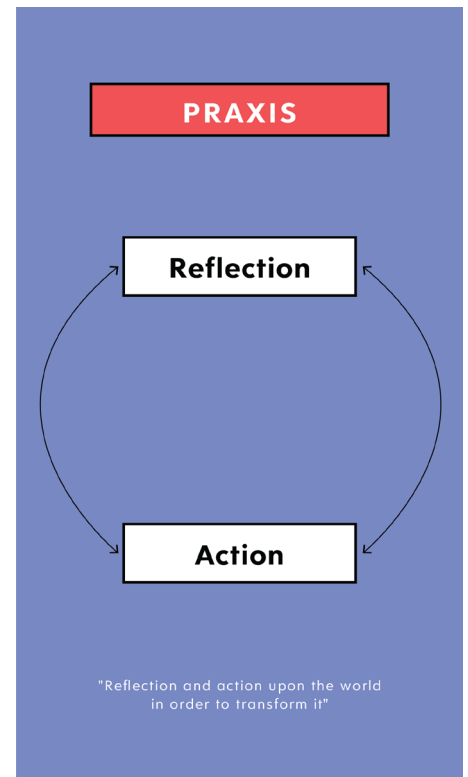


Figure 13: The cycle of praxis, where critical reflection and action cannot be separated.

"Does not separate action from reflection, theory from practice, consciousness from the world, that it is possible to develop a dialectic form of thinking which contributes to the insertion of men as subjects in their historical reality" - (Freire, 1972, p.181)

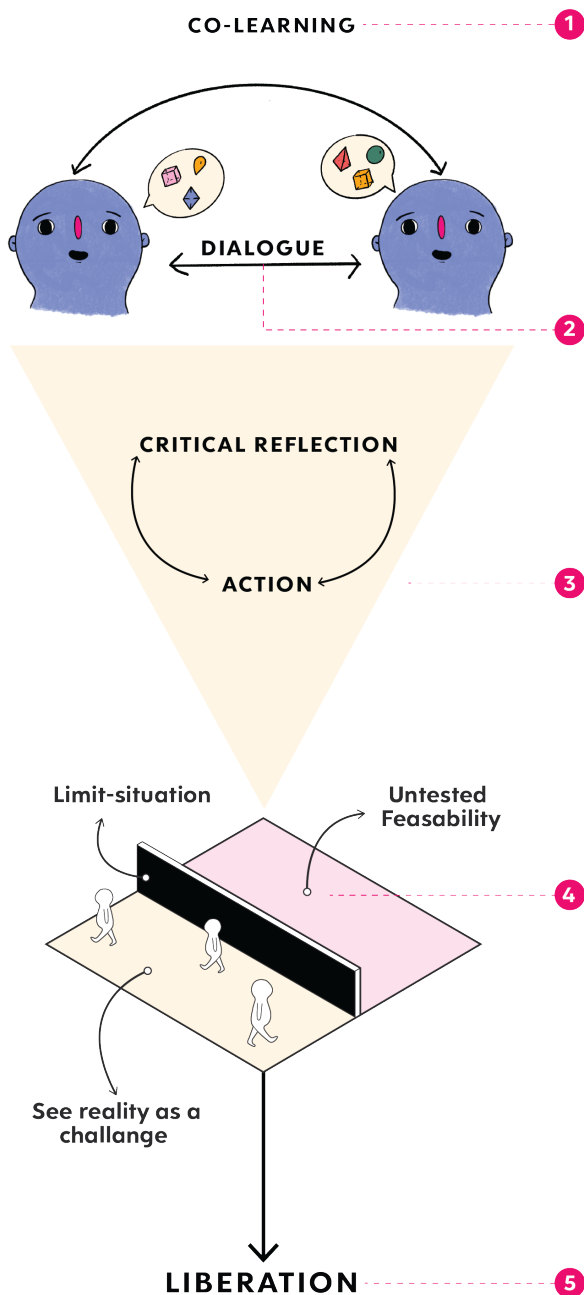


Figure 14: A basic model of Freirian theory

2.2.3 A framework to understand Freire's theory

To see how the work of Paulo Freire could inspire PD a model with the most important concepts in PO was developed. The model can be seen in Figure 14, the numbers corresponds to the numbers in the paragraphs next. For more details about the concepts in the figure please refer to Appendix D.

- One of the most important aspects of problem-posing education is the relationship developed between students and the teacher. In this method, by establishing a non-hierarchical (horizontal) relationship, all participants can learn equally during the process of **co-learning** and co-constructing knowledge.
- Related to the concept of co-learning, Freire specifies that cognition is impossible without dialogical relations (Freire, 2000). According to the philosopher, for students to be co-learners in the process, all the actors involved have to engage in a process of **dialogue**. The result of dialogical spaces is trust between the actors.
- The result of the process of co-learning mediated by dialogue is **critical reflection** which refers to examining everyday realities and to analyze the relationships between individuals in their contexts and structural oppression (Jemal, 2017). Let's remember that for the philosopher there is no reflection without action, conforming the cycle of **praxis**.
- Thanks to praxis the individuals engaged in the process are able to feel **challenged** when they are posed with problems relating to themselves and their context. For the philosopher, it is necessary to first realize one's individual power to then be able to engage in collective action. The **collective action** implies carrying out plans or strategies

never tried before or what Freire calls the **untested feasibilities**.

5. Finally, the ultimate scope of problem-posing education is the **liberation** of individuals from oppressive systems. One of the most interesting concepts in PO is that this liberation can only come from the oppressed who in an act of love liberate themselves and the oppressors.

2.2.4 Conclusions

Taking into consideration the Freirean concepts just explored, it is possible to extrapolate the contributions that this theory can give to the alternative decolonial PD process. PO does not give concrete solutions of ways of carrying out a pedagogy of the oppressed, so the contributions here maintain the abstract nature of his work. In this way, the second phase of this project, which is composed of practical experiences in the context, investigates how these theoretical takeaways can be translated into concrete examples and practices.

An alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process inspired by Freire should ...

- Look for spaces of mutual learning by valuing the knowledge of all the actors involved in the process as equally valid
- Discuss and re-orient the design methods and tools based on the community needs, desires and capabilities.
- Allow the designer to enter the project with a disposition for learning from the community and a curiosity guided by a sense of incompleteness.
- Look for spaces for dialogue in order to build trust.
- Trust in the creative capability of the community involved in the process.
- Look for spaces for critical reflection of the context to unveil the complexity of reality and propose solutions that challenge the status quo
- See the project as a collaborative effort where everyone can contribute from their individuality and personal skills
- Prioritizes the experience of the community by grasping what are the topics the community is interested to work with instead of imposing a framing of the project.
- Support the development of actionable plans never tried before to change the dynamics in the context
- Understands the work with the community as a way to impact the system and the liberation of everyone from the power structures.

In this section the work of Paulo Freire was introduced and partial connections with the practice of PD were established by analyzing some key notions found in PO. The next chapter introduces the initial approach undertaken to design an alternative understanding of a PD process that accounts for more power balanced relationships and that takes as an inspiration the work of the philosopher.

3

THE EPIPHANY OF THE DECOLONIAL PARTICIPATORY DESIGNER

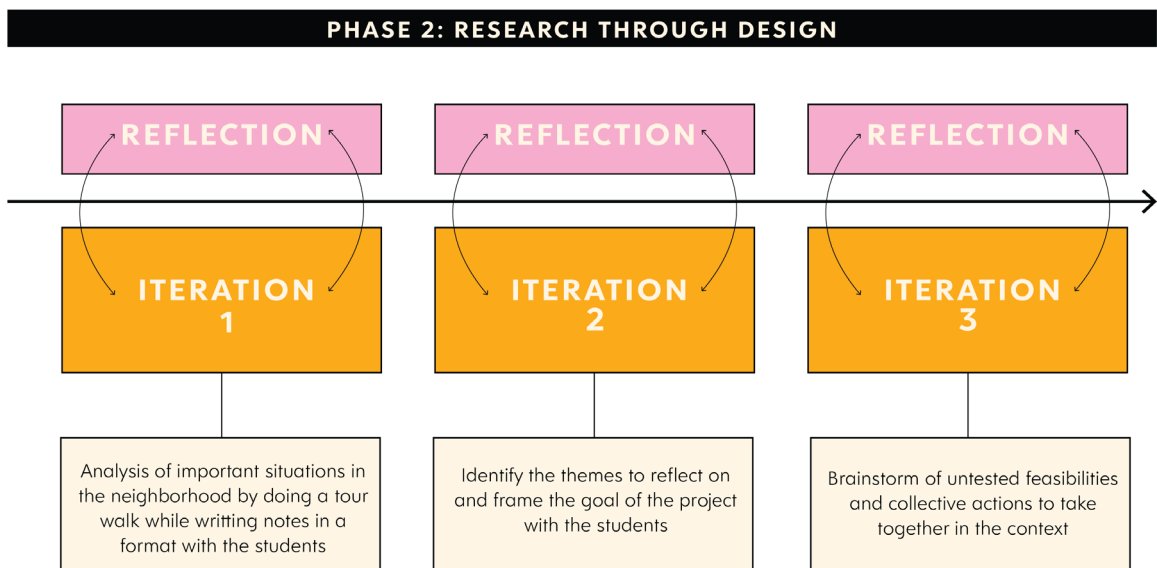
The previous chapter concluded the research for design phase which focused on developing a framework and a theoretical inspiration. Based on those findings, the current chapter presents the two failed attempts undertaken to investigate a decolonial PD process in the context of Afrikaanderwijk. The reflections and learnings gathered from both approaches are explained in detail. Finally, the chapter ends with a moment of realization or epiphany that is going to determine how the rest of the project is going to be addressed.

3.1 The first failure: a Top-down approach

Figure 15: The first fixed plan developed to be carried out with the community. The plan was based on three main iterations with specific tasks to be done. For every task it was contemplated a moment of reflection to understand how the designed process was being implemented.

To have a practical exploration of the theoretical knowledge developed with the research framing and the legacy of Paulo Freire, it was planned to carry out three iterative interventions in the neighborhood of Afrikaanderwijk. These iterations expected to get in contact with a group of young participants who would join the projects thanks to a collaboration with the school of the neighborhood. The activities with the students would be structured in order to analyse situations in the neighborhood, find themes to critically reflect on, frame a problem and finally look for possible solutions (the Freirian untested feasibilities) that involved taking collective action with the students. A visual summary of these iterations can be seen in Figure 14.

Quite unexpectedly, working with a fixed group of students from the school was not possible anymore due to the unavailability of the program to join the project at this moment. This situation necessarily forced a first iteration of the initial plans, but more importantly it sparked a realisation concerning the project's expectations and approach. The unavailability of students showed in fact that even in the process expected to be free of impositions, hoping to have a fixed group of students who had to join



the project thanks to the collaboration with the school was already an imposition in itself.

Thanks to the institutions or companies designers work with, there are normalized assumptions about the availability of participants. When a project is being developed, designers who carry out participatory activities tend to count on some members of the community who are willing (because a third party has already recruited them) to be part of those activities. In this case, even if the project was not expecting to impose any problem definition, framing or solution, the planning and the expectations of the designer were indeed being established with any consultation or negotiation with the students. Thus, from the very start, the project was already unbalancing the power dynamics affecting a relationship that still needed to be developed. The reflection about the situation just described could be divided into two main topics to understand better why the approach had an oppressive nature.

MANAGING COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

By having a top-down approach to engage with the participants, the intentions manifested in the project responded to the designer's goals but not necessarily involved the expectations of the community. The project aimed to develop a power-balanced process but the intentions by which the members of the community would join the project were not clear. In this first failed attempt, the students were going to be recruited for the project from a very top down position and from there find a common goal that could make the designer and the students work together. Thus, the project was starting based on the interest of the designer, but not necessarily out of the interests of the community.

MANAGING TIME AND OTHER INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The time to develop the project and the expectations of the educational system within which this project is inserted (a master graduation at TUDelft) showed to be important elements that were determining the framing of this approach. Having to dedicate time to find the participants

for the project will shorten the days to start any kind of collaborative project, produce knowledge and to propose a valid design solution. Moreover, before starting the project a usual initial requirement for the design student is to develop a plan and a clear timeline of the activities that will be undertaken. Trying to accomplish that plan and deliver what was promised at the beginning can determine the attitude of the designer as the situation can exercise additional pressure.

3.1.1 Results

From this first unexpected turn of the project and the consequent reflection, some main learnings can be extrapolated to inform the main RQ of this project *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* and inform the rest of the activities.

THE DESIGN PROCESS STARTS BEFORE THE ACTUAL PROJECT

When aiming to engage in design processes that account for power-balanced relationships it seems important to spend time and resources on previous stages before the design project itself. Engaging with the context and building bonds with members of the community will lead to develop projects that are truly congruent with the life circumstances of the people in their context. Coming to the context from a bottom-up position will allow the designer to manage more horizontal interactions giving importance to the relational aspects of the project.

For the initiation of a project there are two main steps that according to Freire are important: going to the context and then gathering volunteers that will act as co-researchers during the project (Freire, 2000).

Switching the moments in the proposal and first dedicating time to explore and be part of the context may help in engaging with people and opening up the space for anyone to join with their own personal motives and intentions.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK OURSELVES AS PD DESIGNERS

Learning from this first attempt to develop a decolonial PD process, there are some initial questions that designers can ask themselves when starting a power-balanced project with a community. These questions might make designers reflect on the power dynamics in the initiation of a project and avoid approaching the community from a top-down position.

How is the community contacted to join the project?

Who is deciding who participates?

Under which circumstances are they participating?

What are the reasons they have to participate?

Do they have the possibility to say no?

Why are people interested in participating?

What role are people having in the activities?

Who is making the call to participating?

3.1.2 Conclusions

This first failed attempt of structuring a series of activities with students highlighted that expecting to have a fixed and prepared group of students to join the project was already unbalancing the power dynamics of the process. A reflection on this event brought some key learnings regarding the importance of finding a more bottom-up approaches. This finding leads to prioritize engagement with people interested in working in this project even if it presupposes sacrificing time and resources that initially had another scope. At this point, it is necessary a new iteration based on engagement between the designer and the community without any institution mediating inbetween. The new iteration is described next.

3.2 The second failure: colonization bias

With the new requirement of gathering members of the community interested in joining the project, an modification of the original plan was developed. The structure of having three main iterations in this second phase of the project to answer the main RQ was maintained but the activities in those iterations changed according to the new needs. Thus, a new first iteration was designed to invite citizens passing by to join an activity and hopefully engage in a way by which their recruitment for the rest of the project was possible without the mediation of a third party.

The new activity planned was named “supporting participants to become aware of oppressive systems and practices”. The intervention was conceived as a Pop-up in a public place of Afrikaanderwijk to invite the people passing by to engage with the designer. As the new understanding of a PD process developed till now presupposes a critical reflection of the context and the structures of power, the activity was designed based on the theory learned about power and marginalization as a way to engage with the citizens. As such, the goal of the new iteration was articulated as follows: ***“Support participants to become aware of oppressive systems and practices by developing consciousness of their social identity and reflecting on how it shapes their lives in specific situations/moments in the neighborhood”***.

In addition, the main purposes for the activity were articulated as:

- Have a first approach to the inhabitants of the neighborhood, break the ice from a bottom-up perspective
- Collect data about situated experiences in the neighborhood that could lead to future themes to analyze.
- Gather volunteers that want to engage in the next activities of the project if possible.

Having this goal and purpose, the activity started by having a brief explanation on intersectionality and the matrix of domination. After this, participants were welcome to reflect on their own social identities based on the theory and while entering in a dialogue with the designer they would pick some stamps representative of the different axis of domination (e.g. black, man, bisexual, young adult, etc). With the stamps that represented their social identities, the citizens were invited to make a poster by printing the figures in the stamps in a sheet of paper. As a last step, the participants were asked to think and write down in cards some situations in the neighborhood in which they felt any advantage or discrimination thanks to those identities. At the end of the activity the inhabitants could keep the poster, while the cards with the situations and their contact information were going to be collected for future communication regarding the next activities. To see more detailed information about this particular activity please refer to Appendix E.

After the new activity was planned and before going to implement it in the context, this new iteration received some critiques regarding the way it was being approached. Apparently, the activity as it is explained was still containing oppressive elements despite the good intentions. Knowing there could be oppressive elements in the activity, it was decided to make a session with some peers using the iteration as material for reflection instead of carrying it out right away in the context. In the next section, the co-reflection session and the learnings gathered are detailed.

3.3 Heading towards liberation

The co-reflective activity was carried out with design practitioners to understand better how and why the pop-up iteration was reproducing oppressive structures of power and how it could still be improved. The session ended up being an important moment of realization in the project that informed the research questions and determined a change in the approach crucial for the new understanding of a decolonial PD process.

3.3.1 The procedure of the session and the topics articulated by participants

The co-reflection based on the activity “supporting participants to become aware of oppressive systems and practices” was developed with 3 design practitioners. With one of the participants, this reflection was done online because of her geographical position. Regarding the other two designers, they were invited together to an informal meeting (see Figure 16). In both reflections, the activity to reflect on was first presented and then the designers were invited to comment and think about how the activity was reproducing imbalanced power dynamics and how it could have a more decolonial approach. During the reflection, several different topics were mentioned. The designers analyzed the activity on different levels which could be grouped in the next clusters.

Figure 16: A photo of the two participants in the informal co-reflection session. Some slides with the content of the activity were presented to then reflect on them. In the picture, one of the participants is pointing at something he found interesting in the screen to talk about.



UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

The planned activity to be developed in Afrikaanderwijk had the specific goal of “supporting participants to become aware of oppressive systems and practices”. This sentence presupposes a bias when looking at the activity from a power dynamic lens. In the first place, talking about “support to become aware” assumes that the designer will be teaching something to the members of the community who are also, by assumption, unaware of their social identity. In this case, the activity is not being designed to be a two-way reciprocal relationship but situates the designer in a position of knowledge over the community members.

EXTRACTIVE RELATIONSHIP AND BIASED BENEFITS

The activity could also be considered oppressive as it can be framed as an extractive relationship. In this case, the designer is going to get something out of it (eg. research participants/ research data for the project at TU Delft) but the benefit for the community is not established by themselves but is based on the designer’s assumptions of what would be good for them even before having the chance to meet some of the members.

Even if the activity was planned to be a first approach and was going to be followed up with more interactions, a clear benefit for the participants based on their reality and identities is not defined or is partially defined by the designer.

LEADING THE ACTIVITIES

Going into a context and appropriate a physical space to make people come to the designer can be seen as an imposition. A better approach would be to go to the space and build relationships with the members by joining community activities, volunteering, or offering skills for specific tasks that are needed. Having a first approach that just aims to break the ice and engage in conversations seems a good strategy, the problem in this specific activity is that the tasks developed are too structured so the first intention is lost.

Because of the designer biases and agenda, the activity was totally pointed into a specific result (create a poster and write down situations). In that process, the designer led and dug into the participants’ experiences to get a “useful result”. Considering that this activity was planned after the unavailability of the initial students, which created a deviation from the original plan, this iteration was looking to “save time” and get back the control of the situation and the expected results.

IMPOSING ABSTRACT ACADEMIC THEORY

Even if the activity proposes reflections around intersectionality and oppressive systems as a way of critical reflection, the theory is presented to the participants in a very abstract and academic way. In this case, a more decolonial approach would look to first understand the different situations and experiences in the neighborhood to then see how the process could lead to a critical reflection. In this way, the designer can assure that the process is centering the community and not the abstract theory in the activity. As such, a juster approach would aim to first find a specific situation, and just after that see if there is space for this type of reflection to happen and more importantly if the members of the community perceive it as valuable.

EXPOSURE AND REPRESENTATION

In the making of the poster for this activity, the identities of the participants could be exposed. In some cases, and for different reasons, individuals don't want to share some of these identities with others (eg. sexual orientation, status, etc). In this sense, the activity could be harmful and dangerous for some individuals making them uncomfortable in participation. Regarding the poster and its visuals, the aesthetics were decided just based on the designer's eye and background that maybe is not representative of the identity of the place and its inhabitants. For a more decolonial approach, the visual representations should also be discussed with (or even chosen by) the members who are going to be represented, especially if talking about their own identities.

LABELLING

Starting from an outsider perspective, the designer is not having a complete view of the identities and the experiences of the people in the neighborhood. Defining participants as oppressed is reducing their identities to fit an image needed for the purpose of the activity and the project in general. It is important to keep in mind that people are more than one thing and avoid labeling the people we engage with should be mandatory for a just and balanced process.

MASTER THESIS RESTRICTIONS

As in the first reflection, it was recognized that the academic project in which the context is inserted, made the action developed still susceptible to be oppressive. Consciously and unconsciously the activities proposed were still designed to fit the requirements supposedly expected from a graduation project. Conditions like having to develop a project as a single leader of it, designing objects, using university methods, etc were framing the way the activities were being designed.

THEN, WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER?

When reflecting on this exercise and how it was still an oppressive activity, a very important discussion about the role of the designer came up. The discussion led to interesting questions to which the participants (including myself) did not have a definitive answer. Some of these questions were:

Is it any moment in this type of process that the designer can actually propose something? (e.g. a method, a solution, a workshop, etc)

Under which circumstances can it happen?

Is "what can I help you with" the only question designers should ask in these processes?

Can the tasks of a designer vary depending on the project?

Can infrastructuring be done from a bottom up approach?

If everyone has roles, what is the one of the designers?

What does the designer want to gain?

What does the designer need to obtain so a project is "worth" doing?

How can the designer know if she/he is actually needed in the project?

What are the expected outcomes for the designer in this type of projects?

Does the designer need to be involved in a project from the beginning to the end?

3.3.2 Results of the co-reflective activity

After the reflection and considering the topics just exposed, it was decided that the activity designed should not take place in the neighborhood as it may have many elements that could be harmful for a power-balanced process. However, the reflection around this activity allowed the articulation of a series of insights that inform the main research question ***What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?*** and that can also be related back to Freire's theory, informing RQ2 ***How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?***

The insights are translated into the following results which are determinant for the next steps in this project.

START BY REALLY BREAKING THE ICE

To be able to start a project with a community and its members in a horizontal relationship, the insights gathered suggest avoiding approaching people with activities planned by the designer beforehand and based on his/her assumptions. For a more democratic relationship between the community and the designer, the latter should look for spaces to engage in the context and participate in activities that allow interactions to meet people. This is an approach that may take time and effort but in this case appears to be fundamental for the goal of establishing horizontal relationships.

GO WITHOUT STRUCTURE

Related to the previous insight, not having a prepared activity to break the ice seems like a more natural and engaging way to get close to members of the community. Spending time in the neighborhood and trying to engage with people in conversations without any specific purpose could give the freedom to find and discover situations for future collaboration. In this sense, the designer should wait to meet people and then plan a structure and an approach for the project to be developed. Going into the context with a plan already developed is an imposition coming from

the designer agenda and expectations of the project that should instead be discussed with all the people involved. An approximation related to PO, as in chapter 2 Freire affirms:

For the anti-dialogical banking educator, the question of content simply concerns the program about which he will discourse to his students; and he answers his own question, by organizing his own program. For the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition—bits of information to be deposited in the students—but rather the organized, systematized, and developed “re-presentation” to individuals of the things about which they want to know more. (Freire, 2000, p. 93)

For Freire, the banking-education presupposes a program established by the teacher who, again, imposes this structure to the students. Instead, in the dialogical model, the structure and the agenda of the project should be established by all the individuals involved developing the “things about which they want to know more” that in the case of this type of PD processes is the content and the goal of the project itself.

SHARING AND ASKING INSTEAD OF EXPLAINING

One important aspect pointed out during this reflection is the fact that designers should come into a project with the attitude of sharing their knowledge and their research instead of explaining it. This attitude will put the knowledge of the professional designer at the same level as any other knowledge of the rest of the participants and will be perceived as a contribution to the project and not an imposition that has to be taught. This insight resonates with the words of Freire that affirms that the teacher (designer) should have “the role of student among students” (Freire, 2000, p.75), making clear that designers are collaborators

in a project but do not organize a process to fit information that according to them constitute true knowledge.

WORDING AS A BIAS AND A FRAME

The reflection suggested that being careful with the words used to define the context, the goals, the purpose, etc is very important because they show and determine many attitudes and biases the designers have. As was shown in the results section, using wording like “support” and “become aware” can already place the designer on a different level from the community and frame a problem that perhaps is not even there. Regarding wording and framing Freire states:

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words. (Freire, 2000, p. 88)

In this sense, naming the problem and framing the project (hence naming the world) is a task that should not be specific to the designer in the liberation struggle. On the contrary, is a task that should come from the community as it brings their interpretation and their framings of their contexts to the table. Understanding those words and giving the space to the members to speak their World is what brings the possibility for true action and committed change.

REFLECTION TO AVOID BIASES

During the activity with the designers, they recognized the value of reflection during this type of projects. Doing periodical checks about the activities and actions taken seems a good strategy to avoid biases and overpass unconscious oppressive attitudes. These moments of reflection help to become more aware of power dynamics and the impact they have on the process and the outcome.

As was mentioned already, according to Freire only through reflection and action (praxis) humans can transform reality. In this sense, it is important that the designer puts his/her plans under constant reflection and adapts them or replaces them in case they are harming the power-balanced process.

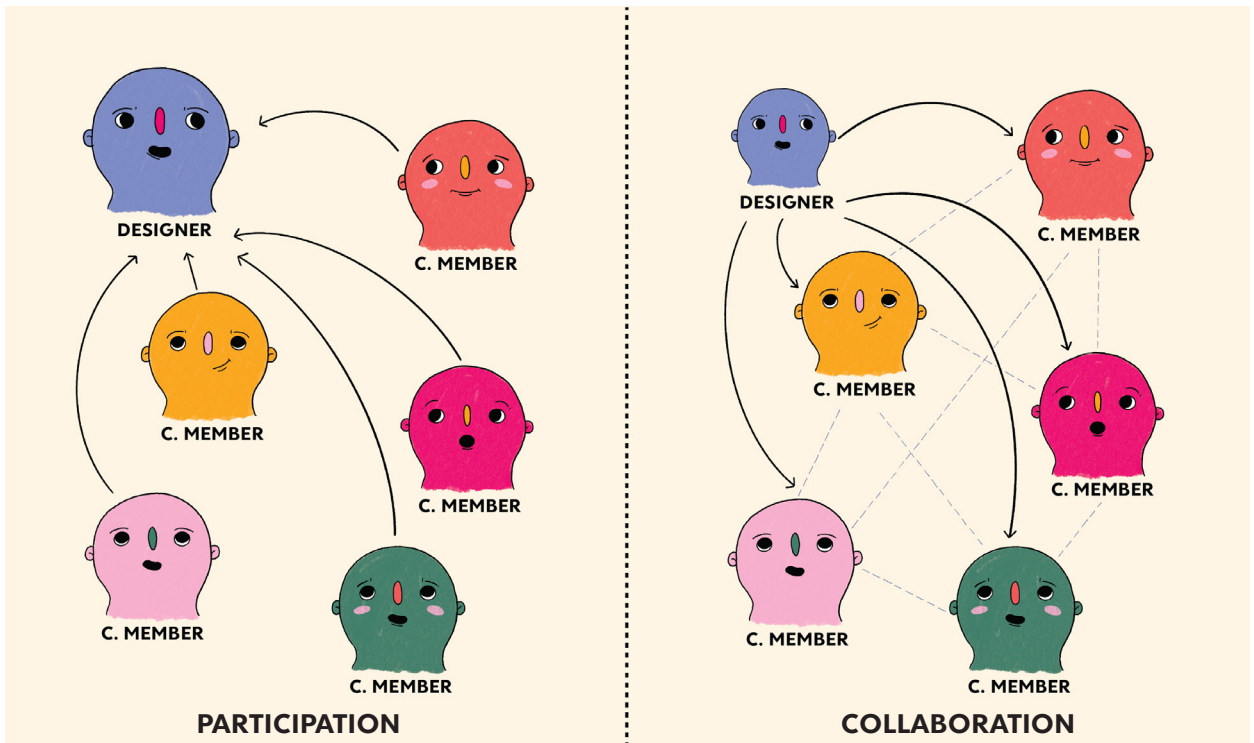
NOT TAKING ACTION IS ACTION

Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action. (Freire, 2000, p.128). Another important takeaway concluded from this reflection is to let go of the fear of inaction. Designers are normally pushed to take action and produce things that can be shown to others as results or as part of the design process. However, for the kind of process explored in this project, deciding to not carry out an activity because of its impact has the same value. As Freire mentions, reflecting critically is already action and if that reflection takes the designer and the community to cancel, postpone, or change an activity that was planned, this is still action. Doing for the sake of doing without reflecting on the consequences could be very harmful to the project and especially for the community involved.

Figure 17: On the left, participation as a call from the designer in which the members of the community are invited to make part of. On the right, collaboration as a search of the designer to create connections in the network of the context. On the left, members go to the designer. On the right, the designer goes to the members to find collaborations.

COLLABORATION INSTEAD OF PARTICIPATION

Another important aspect that can determine a different attitude coming from designers in PD processes is precisely the term participation itself. During this reflection, the term participation presupposed a designer who makes a call for others to join and, of course, participate. It centers the attention again on the designer as the one with a first call, with a project and a plan and he/she is the one asking for action and expecting others to join the quest. Participation means taking part in something being initiated by the designer in a project conceived under the capabilities and the skills a designer has. Instead, collaboration seems a more appropriate term in this case as it is the action of working with someone to produce something meaning that the project can exceed the capabilities of a designer but is because of this that she/he works with others. That is to say, the designer who is looking for more horizontal relationships with communities should first look at what local opportunities there are and join those collective actions in a collaboration with others (see Figure 17).



**THE MOMENT OF REALIZATION:
FOR A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS,
FIRST THE DESIGNER NEEDS TO BE DECOLONIZED**

As just mentioned, to be able to produce an alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process it is required, by its power balanced nature, to develop that same process with the members of the community.

This insight presupposes a shift in the social role of the designer in a PD process who is normally understood as a facilitator who organizes co-creative sessions to work with participants in an attempt to democratize the design process. However, sticking to this role and the tasks it represents, would not allow developing the power balanced process this project is looking for. In this case, recognizing that a decolonial PD process entails changing the social structures inside the process involves redesigning the designer inside those dynamics.

Consequently, in order to propose a decolonial PD process, this project first needs to decolonize the designer in that process who just by de-learning what a normalized PD process entails would engage in a power balanced way with the members of the community.

3.4 Conclusions: The change of approach

In the attempt to give answers to the RQ *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* a crucial learning after the failed approaches demonstrated that in order to decolonize the PD process the designer in that project also needed to be decolonized and that the structure for a new process could be built if and only if it was developed together with the community. Approaching a community with a pre planned structure demonstrated to be an oppressive action that gives control and ownership of the project to the designer. In this case, the designers could fall into the error of imposing ways of doing, frames, and schedules that do not take into account the ways of living in the context. On the contrary, it seems that the key for a decolonial PD process is to build the process itself with the community by allowing a pre-project phase of engagement between the designer and the members. In this way, after these first attempts, the research focused on developing a series of un-planned explorations to engage with the community in an horizontal relationship and in this way re-evaluate the role of the designer in the process. Furthermore, one sub research question is added to the main research question to understand better what does it imply to decolonize the designer in a PD process. Hence, the research questions considered for the next explorations in the context are:

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designers and the marginalized community involved?

RQ3: What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?

The next chapter explains the new approach undertaken after the moment of realization, the different interactions with members of the community and the learnings those encounters allowed to answer the just mentioned research questions.

*To decolonize the process,
I need to
decolonize myself*



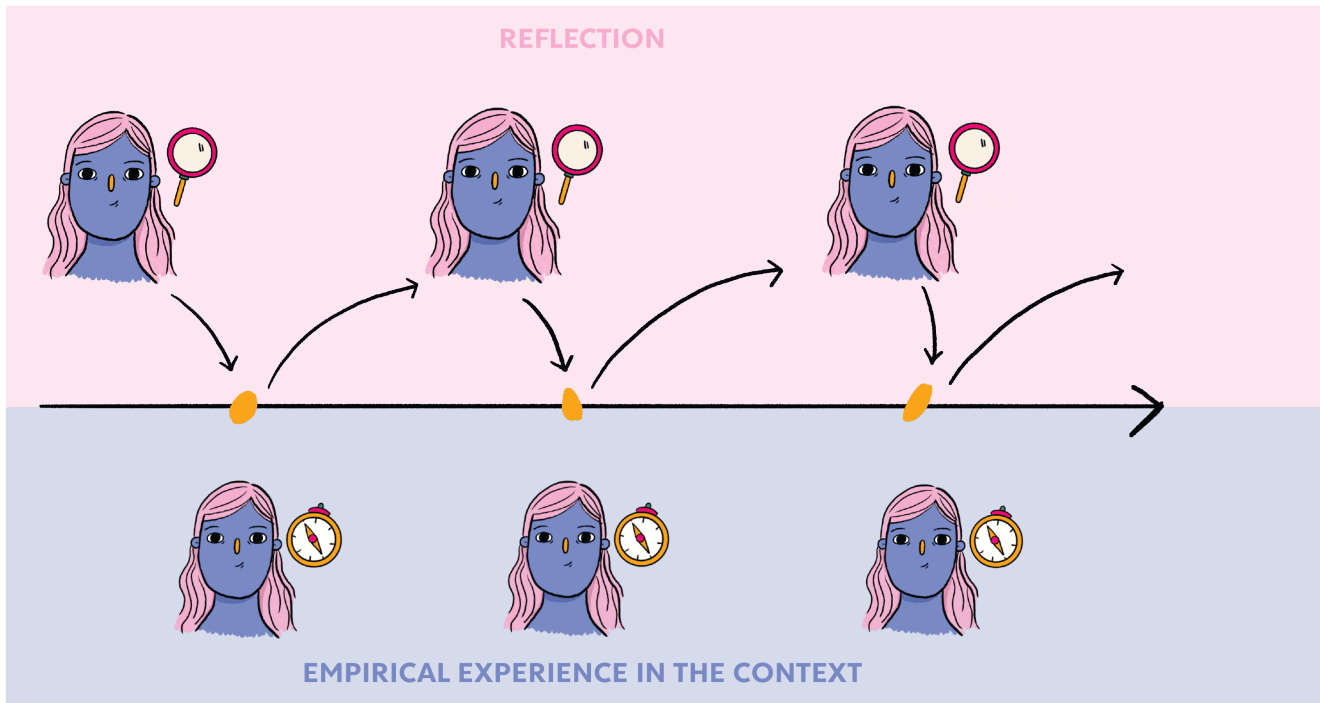
4

LIBERATION PATH FOR A DECOLONIAL PARTICIPATORY DESIGN(ER)

Chapter 3 concluded with the reframing on the approach to carry out a decolonial PD process in Afrikaanderwijk which entails the decolonization of the role of the designer in interactions with the community without a specific structure. The current chapter details the interactions developed in the neighborhood and articulates the main findings that inform the understanding of a PD process where the role of the designer is being decolonized.

4.1 The researcher of the process and the designer in the process

PHASE 2: RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN



As was introduced in the Approach section of this report, the research in this second phase of the project can be divided into two levels. Getting back to the model in Figure 18, this research entails a first level of the designer in the PD process who engages in unplanned interactions with the community in the context of Afrikaanderwijk. On the other level, there is the researcher who reflects on what is happening in the empirical experience and draws conclusions and learnings from the process to inform the RQ of this project. Every personal experience as a designer in the process and in the context informs the work of the researcher who consequently informs back the designer in the next exploration.

Given the fact that in this process of decolonization the designer is being constantly confronted with self-related issues and ways of thinking, there is a potential self-absorption that has to be avoided (Andeson, 2006). To stay away from this bias, the reflections at the level of the researcher, many times done with other mentors and peers, were extremely important to learn about the design process and the role of the designer when approaching projects under the lens of social justice and power dynamics. This cycle of reflection as action is very similar to the Freiran concept of Praxis and it is now represented in Figure 18. By reflecting on the role of the designer to decolonize it, the power dynamics in the process are also affected, changing

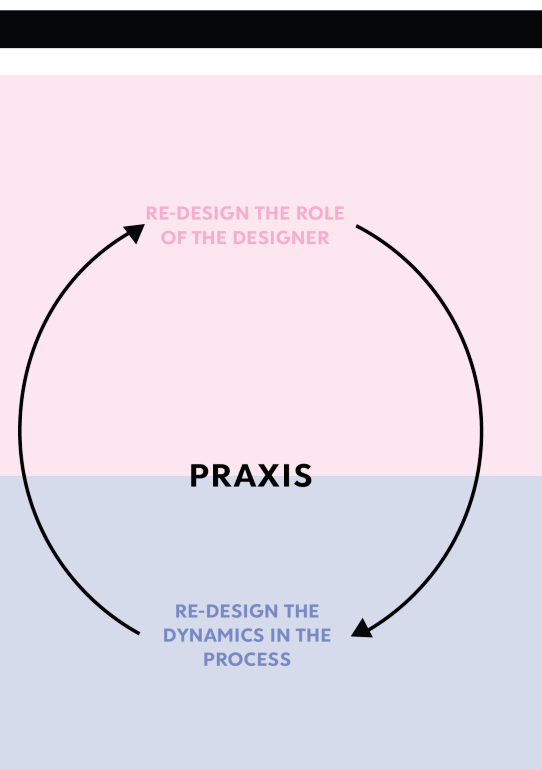


Figure 18: The model already introduced in Chapter 1 compared to the cycle of praxis . In this case, by re-designing the role of the designer by reflecting, the dynamics in the process can be re-designed in action.

the process itself. Because the research at the level of the designer in the process is going to be based on the personal and empirical experience in the context and it needs to be delinked from the normalized methods and processes of the PD practice, a new methodology needs to be used to approach this phase. As such, methodologies like ethnography and autoethnography and other methods like unstructured observation and dialogue will help to engage with the context in a less disruptive way, valuing the relationships established with the members of the community, avoiding biases and reflecting and re-evaluating the designers positionality inside the process.

Hence, the different experiences encountered in this process (called explorations from now on) are going to be described as first-person stories. Understanding that there is an intersection between the personal experience of the designer and the general practice of design, is possible to gather some learnings that aim to inform the PD practice through personal experiences. However, it is also acknowledged that the conclusions of every interaction are also a small part of a complex system and cannot be a neutral representation of a general decolonization of the designer in a PD process. These conclusions rather reflect a partial and situated experience that is affected and determined by the designer's social identity, the interactions with the people encountered and the context itself.

Considering that this phase of the project is explained at the two different levels, this chapter makes a clear visual distinction between them to facilitate the reading. On the one hand, the descriptions of the explorations made in first-person, which represent the designer's empirical experience in the context, are distinguished with a blue background. The findings and the conclusions articulated after reflecting on those empirical experiences, which represent the level of the researcher, are exposed on a pink background.

4.2 Exploration 1: Getting to know Afrikaanderwijk

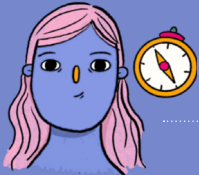


Image 19: When doing (auto) ethnography a diary is an effective tool to collect qualitative data. I used to divide the notebook into two sections. On the left the observable and most objective descriptions of different situations. On the right my thoughts and interpretations. In this case, the photo was taken in a cafe close to Afrikaanderplein.

For the first exploration in this new approach, I visited the neighborhood for a few days without any other expectation than experiencing the context I was trying to work with and, if I had the chance, engage in conversation with people while carefully observing what was happening around me. To avoid looking at the context with the lens of my own subjectivity, I kept a field diary in which I would write down my experiences when going to the context. Based on how ethnographic studies are done in anthropology, on one side of the paper I would write all the observable and objective events happening around me, while on the other side I would depict my interpretations and reactions to those situations (see Figure 19)

This first exploration of the context allowed me to see the place in all its richness and let me identify spots and dynamics that could help me to engage in dialogues later in the project and that I wouldn't have perceived if I filtered my interactions with design activities. Some of the relevant places and activities found to engage in a next explorations were:

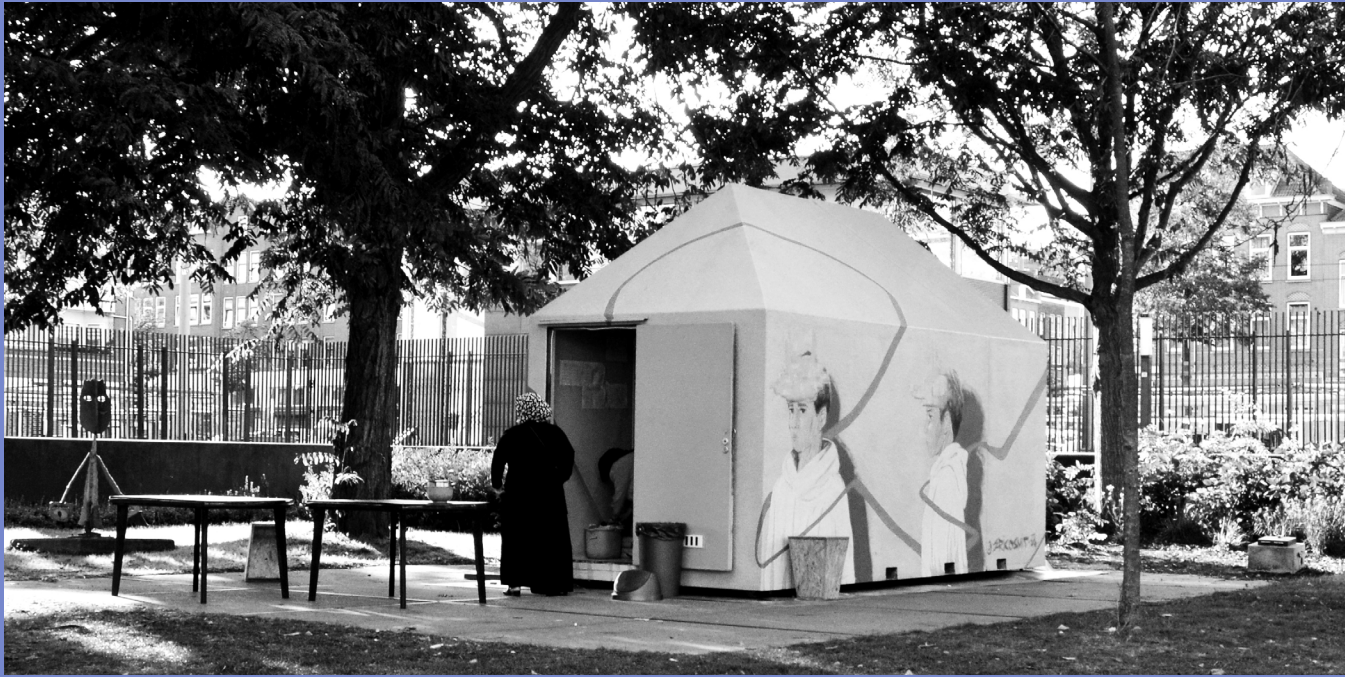
The main square (Figure 20) with the football and basketball courts where youth use to meet and play after school and during the weekends. I realized that when not playing some of the youth will gather in small groups to talk. I noticed that spending time and maybe engaging in some activity could help me to break the ice and meet people I could dialogue with to know more about the context.

The Klooster (Figure 21), a cultural center with daily activities, spaces for meetings, library and a cafeteria. This place in particular is considered “the house of everyone” and it is actually very common to see people going in for meetings, a cup of coffee or a planned activity. During these first days I spent some time in the Klooster and I had the opportunity to meet some of the staff of this place. In particularly Moe, talked to me about the multiculturalism and diversity in the neighborhood. Talking to Moe could also be a strategic move because I noticed he knew several people in the place and was always engaging in conversations with them. Being able to spot people that could introduce me to others seemed to be a good strategy to start my networking in Afrikaanderwijk.



Figure 20: Picture of kids talking in the fence of the football court while others play. The courts are busy places specially during the weekends.

Figure 21: Picture of a man sitting in the bench outside the Klooster





The tea house (Figure 22), a communal place with a small kitchen inside. Some members of the community use this space to sit at the tables and enjoy a cup of a hot drink. I realized in this place some public activities were carried out so I needed to be aware of them and try to join maybe as a participant but also as a volunteer. In this way I could find spaces for engagement around what is already happening in the context instead of looking for a disruptive intervention.



The Saturday market (Figure 23), one of the most important spots in the neighborhood, seems an activity that everybody joins during the weekend. Visiting this place full of richness was important for my reflections because it showed me how complex and diverse the context was. I realized that by developing an activity without first understanding the complexity of the community I was flattening their experiences and limiting their potential for a future collaboration.

Figure 22: The tea house. On the left two women entering the tea house to make some coffee, on the right, one woman doing a massage to another one while waiting for the coffee.

Figure 23: Picture of two women doing groceries in the market. In the back, fruits and vegetable stands.

After this non-disruptive and open first contact with the context , three main results can be articulated that inform two of the research questions of this project.

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

NO NEED TO BE DISRUPTIVE

During these first days it was realized that the practice of PD does not need to be always disruptive. Assuming from the beginning of the project that an “intervention” is needed to carry out the project can be dangerous when trying to develop power balanced relationships. This belief actually implies that the designers are looking and entering the context prioritizing their subjectivity by intervening in the context without first understanding the activities, values, beliefs, etc of the community to enter the context in a leveled way.

JOIN ACTIVITIES ALREADY HAPPENING IN THE CONTEXT

Related to the previous insight, being open to look for what is already happening in the neighborhood could help the designer to find activities to join. This practice may be useful to get closer to the members of the community and spot opportunities to initiate a project.

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire’s theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?



BEING OPEN TO THE UNTESTED FEASIBILITIES

Approaching the context without any specific purpose, without looking for anything in particular besides knowing what is normally happening in Afrikaanderwijk gave a feeling of novelty to the process. In this way, the designer in the decolonial process, by trying new approaches and methods usually not related to the practice of PD, is the social actor open to the untested feasibilities mentioned by Freire. This notion can also apply to the designer who, looking for a more power balanced PD process, explores new ways of doing design outside the normalized actions.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

In this first exploration one of the main aspects to engage with a community in a power-balanced relationship entails avoiding disruptive interventions in the context. On the contrary, looking for opportunities to interact in a more natural way, helps to avoid seeing the context just with the designer lens and subjectivity. This practice could help the designers to be more aware of their preconceptions and biases as they would interact with the members of the community in situations that are not framed by themselves. In this case, it could be helpful for the designer to borrow methods from anthropology and sociology like ethnography and autoethnography to have more conscious interactions with the community and avoid the biases normalized in the PD practice.

4.3 Exploration 2: Basketball for the first talks

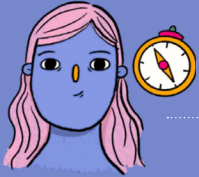


Figure 24: In the picture, Darlin, Johnny, Bryan, Eddie and Alberto (my peer) playing basketball at the court of Afrikaanderwijk

After identifying busy spots to visit in the neighborhood I started looking for opportunities to engage in conversations with some inhabitants. I noticed sports is a popular activity for the youth in the neighborhood so I decided to be part of that activity too.

For two weekends I went to the basketball court with a peer (who is actually a very good basketball player) to spend some time playing. At the beginning it was just the two of us, but it was just a matter of time to start engaging with some people around.

We first met a 14 years old girl. She came to us while playing and she asked us if she could join. Sinjin is a friendly syrian girl who has been living for more than 7 years in the Netherlands. She likes to play sports in the neighborhood even if her dad tells her to not play with boys or talk to strangers. She doesn't remember the name of the city she was born and had to leave because of the civil war in her country. She wants



to be a doctor and live in the United States. After she joined us, more people came. First Eddie, a upholsterer from Dominican Republic who that day was taking care of his nephews in the park. After I said I was from Colombia, we started speaking spanish and I immediately felt how it was easier for me to engage in this case. I think it is a matter of language but it is also a matter of familiarity. Being both from Latin America brings a certain feeling of belonging hard to describe. He told me he had some colombians friends, he asked me about my life in The Netherlands and we exchanged numbers for a possible future encounter. After Eddie came, some other teenagers joined the game and my peer and me were able to spend the whole afternoon in the court with them. With Johnny, I was able to sit for a few minutes on a bench and he told me he moved to the Netherlands just one year ago. He left Curacao with his mom and little brother and after some time his father joined. He was happy to be in this country, and even if he was still adapting to the dutch life and language, he felt his life was better now.

During this exploration the most revealing aspect for me as a designer in the process of to understand that we as designers should engage with communities in situations different from the activities normally assigned to a project (workshops, sessions, interviews, etc). In this case, playing basketball allowed me to get closer to community members and still have the space for dialogue and longer connections (thanks to the exchange of phone numbers). The scenario of the basketball court allowed me to establish a friendly relationship instead of the professional and distant one between designer and participants. The fact that I was a student doing my graduation project was mentioned briefly during these dialogues and was not the central point of the interactions which permitted a different type of bonding in a more "human" level.

Even if the dialogues during this activity cannot be considered a critical reflection about oppressive systems and the way they manifest in the life of the members, it is important to notice that some topics about oppression and privilege were indeed mentioned in the form of life stories and experiences (the war in Syria, prohibitions, moving from home, etc). The fact that these stories came out during the dialogues without any intention from my side demonstrated that a fixed and theoretical activity like the one proposed in the first iteration was indeed not needed at this point.

Some days after this exploration I contacted Eddie to see if I could take this first contact further looking for new opportunities of engagement. However, Eddie did not seem very enthusiastic about being part of some other encounter to talk about the neighborhood and he stopped his communication with me.

Reflecting on the basketball court interactions and the relations developed with the members of the community in these explorations the next findings can be articulated to answer to the research question: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

FIND THE DESIGN BEYOND THE WORKSHOP

For a more power-balanced relationship in a PD process, engaging with members of the community in activities not necessarily related to the design practice gives the possibility to bond in a more horizontal way. Without a design activity mediating between social actors to give control, and hence, power to the designer, the dialogues and the interactions developed are framed under a real desire to connect with others. In this exploration for example, the members of the community were not being invited to participate in an activity that disrupted their everyday life and the way they normally connect with others but all the social actors involved still managed to share and connect. Using scenarios outside the designers domain allows to engage in activities in which the control is shared between the actors as they depend on each other's willingness to play to create those spaces for dialogue that organically flow without a fixed structure.

START THE PROCESS WITH STORIES

The stories shared during the basketball dialogues demonstrated that at this point in the process there is no need for any tool to mediate the conversations. It seems that it is important for the designer to know the theory about power dynamics and oppressive systems from the academical approach but it was not needed to bring that to the interactions with the members of the community to establish a conversation around their lives. Listening and asking with curiosity was enough at this point to already

start perceiving some themes related to oppression and social inequality that could become future themes to center a collaboration.

LOOK FOR OTHER COMMON CARES

This activity in particular demonstrated how it was possible to engage with people of the community by finding a common care (intended as something that both social actors want to do). Even if the "hidden" intention of the exploration was to engage with people in conversations, the designer needs to expand the care (activities, topics of conversation, places, ect) and see how to connect with people on other levels. For this, playing basketball seemed a good activity to share with some members of the community and a good first step to see how to engage in deeper levels like participating in a dialogue or even have a critical reflection about the context. As the intention of the members of the community to share a moment with the designer was the one of playing basketball, engaging in conversations about the context was complicated. For the next explorations, looking for activities closer to the possibility of having dialogues about life in the context could benefit the process to scope down into a specific theme.

SEE REJECTION AS A NATURAL STEP IN THE PROCESS

During this exploration it was realized that as the designer is entering the process in a power-balanced relationship there is always the possibility for members of the community to decide to not collaborate and say no to the designer. In this case, one of the members of the community shared the moment of playing basketball and he even engaged in some personal conversations but when trying to look for spaces to have a moment of reflection about the neighborhood he was not interested anymore. Understanding that the members of the community have the possibility to say no to the designer and don't collaborate in a specific activity

because it is out of their interests seems a valid and even natural situation in a process that aims to be more power balanced.

RQ3: What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?

A PARTICIPANT IN CASUAL NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES

As in the reflection done with the design practitioners, also in this case the role of the designer could be questioned. What was the role of the designer in this activity? If the exploration is interpreted as an isolated moment disconnected with the rest of the project it is possible to say that the designer was not doing any particular action that could be identified as a design activity in a project. However, looking at the bigger picture of the process it seems that the designer in this new understanding of a PD process can have different and unexpected roles depending on every particular situation. The designer playing basketball was indeed being a designer engaging in a specific moment with members of a community but was not doing it under the frame of a design activity or in the common role of the facilitator in PD.

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?

THE STORIES AS CONCRETE SITUATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

This exploration showed the relationship of this new understanding of a PD process and the notion of Freire already explored about finding meaningful thematic in the context. In this case, the stories shared while playing basketball demonstrated to be present and concrete

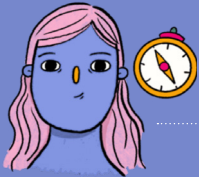
situations of the members of the community that in the future could be the base for a design project. The activity also reflected the aspirations of some of the players and showed how those aspirations can determine if the designer can continue working (or not, like in this case) with those members.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

After identifying moments and situations in the daily life of the context, being part of those activities as an opportunity to connect with people can be a good practice. Looking for spaces for dialogue outside the mainstream activities of PD could benefit the project as it gives the opportunity to designers to experience and learn from situations that could not be reached with a workshop or a session prepared by an "outsider". By participating in common activities of the context like playing basketball on the weekend, the designer could encounter new ways of thinking and worldviews that could broaden the understanding of the context and the people the designer is going to work with. With this way of engagement the designer will give value to people's stories and personal experiences by giving them the opportunity to show themselves as they want and feel natural to do and not mediated by a design activity that could reduce their identities to the aspects considered just by the designer.



4.4 Exploration 3: Joining the brunch and a neighbours meeting



After having the first approaches in the neighborhood, it was needed to find other spaces in which encountering people and engaging in dialogues was possible. For this, I used two main sources. On the one hand I asked Moe (the member of the staff at the Klooster who I met in the first exploration) about coming activities that he knew about in the neighborhood and I also joined a facebook group of the Klooster because I noticed some activities were posted in there. Thanks to this, I realized that a public brunch in the street was going to be held for some neighbors during those same days. Again, even if I didn't know what to clearly expect from some activities I was just chasing the opportunities to meet people in their contexts and engage in conversations.

When I arrived at the place of the brunch I kept my distance from the event as I was not one of the residents of that street. I made some eye contact and said hi to some people but I was not sure about starting a conversation. After some time I saw a woman who was organizing the event and decided to approach her. As other times, I just presented myself as Fabiana, a Colombian student in Delft. I said I was exploring the neighborhood and I was curious about how the life in Afrikaanderwijk was. This was enough information for Margreet to ask me if I wanted to join her in a meeting she was going to have with some residents who were organizing to take legal actions against a case of gentrification in the neighborhood. Margreet took me in the back seat of her bike and after a ride in some street of the neighborhood, we reached a park where the meeting was going to take place.

The meeting was outside, with chairs distancing from each other because of COVID-19 measures. It was held in dutch but luckily one of the members sitting next to me translated everything for me. His name is Subaas, he comes from Mauritius Island but has been living for very long in the Netherlands. During the meeting Subaas told me that the group was worried and angry because the landlord of the houses was continuously asking some residents of the street to leave their places. They were discussing what legal actions they could take and find an agreement with the construction company and the government.

After the meeting, Subaas left but I was introduced to two other members of the group who speak english. Mustafa and Ahmed asked me what I was doing and where I live. When I said I was a student curious about the life in the neighborhood they asked me how they could help me. At that moment, we arranged a meeting to have a talk in the Klooster a week after that. Once everyone was leaving, Margreet took me back in her bike, showed me the houses the government wants to take down and the kind of houses they are now building. She told me about how the residents feel how unfair this situation is taking into consideration that some of the old houses could be considered monuments in the city and people have been living there for decades. After the small tour we stopped in a cafe and we had a drink together. This activity gave us the opportunity to connect on a more personal level and Margreet told me about her life in the Netherlands

and Spain and her four sons. She told me she moved to Afrikaanderwijk more than 20 years ago after leaving in the north part of Rotterdam. "I come from the posh part of the city, but I don't like it there. People here are warmer" she explained. She also mentioned her love for theater, the way it helped her to express emotions and feel free. "There is an open theater activity on Saturday in the park, you should come" she said. We left the cafe taking opposite directions and with a new appointment for that weekend.

Figure 24: People at the brunch in one of the streets of Afrikaanderwijk. The picture was taken from the facebook group of the Klooster.



After this third exploration is the context new different insights can be found to answer

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

IMAGINE BEING IN THE BACK SEAT

Being in the back seat of a bike ridden by Margreet, a bit scared to fall and not knowing the destination but just trusting her and the ride ended up being a good metaphor of how this new understanding of a PD process is being built. Engaging with a community from a complete bottom-up position entails giving power to the members to guide the designer through the experience of knowing and discovering. To let go control in the design process, the designer needs to have trust on the members of the community. This is very similar to the concept of trust in Freire in which the teacher has to have trust in the creative power of the students to be able to collaborate together in a learning process that is liberatory for all the social actors involved. Even if the situation was scary at the first moment, it was thanks to this ride that the designer ended up being in the right place to be.

ACCEPT THE ROLE OF COINCIDENCE IN THE PROCESS

Reflecting on the development of this exploration and the way in which the designer met the different members of the community, it can be said that in a process that gives away control, the structure and content of the project will depend on the interactions designers have with the members of the community, their expectations, plans, desires, etc. This means that depending on who the designer relates with, the project is going to be framed. Especially in early stages of the project, in which the process tends to have an exploratory nature, the people the designer meets could radically

change the findings and the scope of the project. Without the circumstance that led to talking to Margreet, it wouldn't be possible to meet the rest of the members and especially understand their experience with gentrification.

JOIN EXISTING CALLS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

As was noticed in the conceptual framework, a good practice for a power-balanced process entails framing the problems with the community and supporting the members in establishing their own goals. In this exploration I was not supporting the members of the community but I was definitely learning about the topics the community is interested in. Differently from Eddie (the man in the basketball court) these members of the community had a specific call and the willingness to act in their context to change something about it. If this process has a goal to tackle social issues and oppressive systems, most probably the designer will find opportunities to collaborate with social movements and collective actions that are already taking place in the neighborhood. Looking for these spaces from the beginning can increase the possibilities to find faster opportunities to build a project with the community.

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?

DIALOGUE TO DISCOVER THEMES

During this exploration it can be noticed that even without a design activity to understand the context, the designer starts to discover important themes of the neighborhood by just engaging in dialogue with the members of the community. In this specific case, the theme of gentrification in the neighborhood was discovered and it was possible to listen from first hand sources about how the situation is perceived by the inhabitants who were leading the meeting. What

seems interesting about this approach is that the designer is learning about the context without the mediation of any activity which opens the possibilities to experience the context in unexpected ways. At the same time, by joining activities not prepared by the designer, the latter has the possibility to be part of private and familiar activities for the community that could give to the designer a better feeling of the context and the situations in the neighborhood.

RQ3: What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?

THE LISTENER ROLE

By participating for the first time in a meeting planned by the inhabitants, in this exploration the role of the designer was the one of the listener while the control and facilitation of the activity was completely relying on the members of the community. At this point it was not possible to participate more actively in the activity because it required a kind of knowledge unknown at that moment. For sure, designers have been listeners in other situations or activities in our practice. The main difference in this case is that normally designers listen to participants in the frame of activities (workshops, interviews, sessions, etc) designed by themselves. Even if in this exploration the activity was planned by others, and the presence of the designer was not even planned, the task of the designer was not merely observing as an external figure. The designer in this case, is being part of a specific dynamic and integrated in the activity as the fact of having a translator shows.

THE ONE BEING HELPED AND SUPPORTED

During the talk with Mustafa and Amhed the two men showed to be intrigued by the presence of the designer in the meeting. After the brief introduction they asked the designer how they could help and if there was anything they could do to support. These questions are very interesting

because they show a shift on the normal roles inside a PD process. Designers are usually trained to be in the position to help or support others in their goals. In this particular exploration, the power dynamics seem to be changing allowing the members of the community to be in the position to ask how they can be the ones helping and supporting the designer in what he/she is doing.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

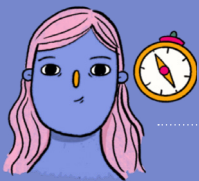
In the third exploration it is acknowledged that this new understanding of the relationship between the designer and the community should be seen as a process of discovery guided by the community in which the designer can choose to sit in the back seat to enter the context. This allows spaces in which the roles of the collaborators (the designer's or the community's) seem to switch from the common understanding in design and open the possibility for the community being the one helping the designer. This understanding also allows the designer to be part of activities that otherwise would not be reached if not guided by the community.

This engagement phase means also that the designer is not focusing on the ways to facilitate activities in the context but is more caring about the relational aspect of the project in which building strong relationships with the community is crucial for the creation of a project that truly comes from the context in a respectful and not invasive way.

In this exploration it is also learned that looking for opportunities to connect with social movements and adhere to their activities (by volunteering, offering support, etc) could enhance the chances to meet people with the willingness for change related to the topics that are more important for the community.



4.5 Exploration 4: Being a participant in the theater



After a few days from my last exploration, I visited the neighborhood on a Saturday again, this time to join the theater activity Margreet invited me to. The activity was going to be held in the park near the square at lunch time. Some BBQ were going to be placed in the site so people could bring their food and sit on a table. When I got in the park I saw Margreet who was also an actress in the event and another actor welcomed me to the activity. Subaas was also joining the activity so we sat at a table together. During the activity there were a number of actors continuously interacting with people at the tables. They would play music, make people laugh, play around with different prompts, etc. One particular activity



during that theater session kept my attention. As participants we were asked to write down in one green sheet the things we liked about the neighborhood or our context and in a red sheet the things we didn't like. After this, we were instructed to make an origami hat out of the sheets and put them in a box. According to the actor, he was going to burn those papers that same night and transform them in good energy for everyone. In between these activities I was able to again engage in dialogues with Subaas. This time he told me about his work with some members of the community who organized to take care of some parks in the neighborhood by taking care of the soil and planting things around. We

Figure 25: A picture of Subaas during an activity in the theater near the coffee house

Figure 26: Picture of the hands of a theater member who sat in my table to play some music and sing

Figure 27: Picture of the sheets of paper to write down likes and dislikes about the context and make a hat afterwards

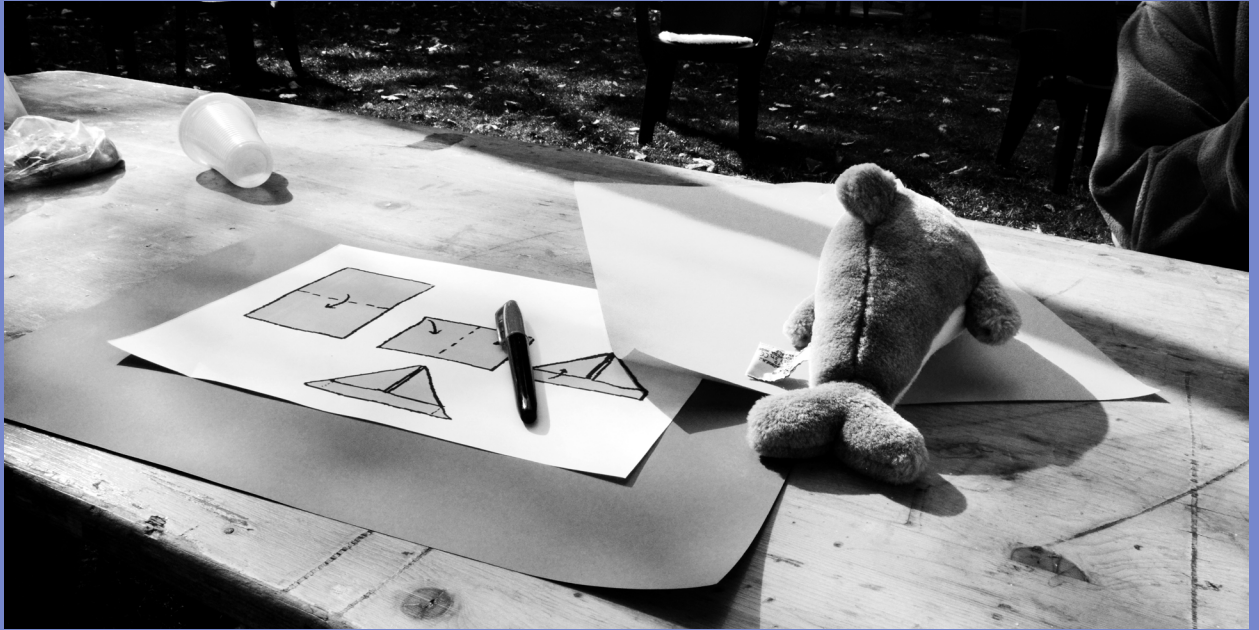
Figure 28: Picture of some members of the theater interacting with the participants sitting on a table.

also had the chance to connect on a more personal level and he told me about the jobs he had in the past and also his beliefs in God which makes him have the certainty that everything happens for a reason and with a purpose.

Reflecting about the theater activity we were being part of, we also discussed how everyone has different talents and skills and depending on that, people can have different roles inside a group. He said he was not a big extrovert and for that reason being an actor was not something he would do, but he actually liked and had some experience building temporal infrastructures and because of that he was also being able to support in this theater activity as well.

The theater in the park took a couple of hours in which some of the inhabitants of the neighborhood were able to engage between each other and the actors. This encounter ended by all the participants putting their hats in a box and leaving the place.





After the theater activity some new learnings about the decolonization of the designer in an alternative understanding of a PD process can be articulated to answer the research questions

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

Look for opportunities to be closer to others as participant During this activity it was easier to interact with Subaas in a very close way as the engagement was at the level of a participant. The efforts in this case were not focused into facilitating a session and the normal distance between facilitator-participant was not present. This situation allowed to have time to engage organically in unexpected conversations with Subaas. As mentioned, a series of topics about his life were mentioned but also some other aspects about the context emerged. Even if the conversation was not being directed to this goal, it was indeed interesting to notice that this process was allowing the members of the community to talk openly about their needs, their worldviews, their expectations and their wishes for the places they inhabit.

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?

SEE A COLLABORATION BASED ON PERSONAL TALENTS

When exploring the theory of Freire one notion was related to seeing the process as a collaboration that starts from individuality. The dialogue with Subaas about the personal talents and how they can be a small contribution for a bigger collective action can be seen as a reminder of

the importance of developing a process that encourages an approach that is talent-based in which the collaborators are motivated to articulate their individual skills and see how they can be part of a collective project as also Freire explains in PO. In this case, this idea could also relate to the good practice of establishing clear roles in the project based on everyone's capabilities and goals. This includes the role of the designers who can probably reflect on their own skills and bring them to the table depending on the project and the phase that is being developed. In a process where the capabilities of everyone are taken into consideration to develop a project, it can be assumed that there may be some phases in which the designer probably will not have a fundamental role as the activity or the phase requires skills out of their knowledge. Willing to accept to step back in certain moments of the process seems to be another important aspect in this new understanding of a decolonial process.

FAMILIARITY WITH PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES

This activity demonstrated the familiarity that the community of Afrikaanderwijk already has with participatory processes. The activity of the hats in which the members could write the likes and dislikes about the neighborhood actually seems familiar to what could be expected as an activity developed in a PD session/ workshop.

For designers trying to engage and join community activities It would be interesting to see how to support these activities to take a step further and go out from the abstraction of ideas in a paper and facilitate reflections to transform those writings into actionables plans taken by the community as long as it is inside the interests of the community to do so.

RQ3: What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?

THE DESIGNER AS A PARTICIPANT

In this particular case, the involvement during this activity was very different from the previous explorations. In this case the designer was actively participating in an activity facilitated by some members of the community, following the instructions and also speaking up in the interactions. This behavior is what it would normally be expected from people participating in workshops designed and planned by PD. In the same way that a workshop is facilitated by a designer, in this exploration the theater was facilitated by the actors who would constantly require active and propositive responses from the audience.

The difference between my type of involvement in the two last explorations (the meeting about gentrification and the theater) due to the fact that the project in this case is being continuously framed by the engagement of people that are participating in different situations in a specific context (e.g. the neighborhood). By not having a specific controlled environment like normally PD processes expect to have, this project has a distributed control of the activities and the facilitation of them. Switching roles and sharing control during different moments of the project seems a crucial aspect to consider when having a more power-balanced PD process.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

In exploration 4, the new understanding of a PD process gives the space for the community to invite the designer as a participant to activities organized by them. These kinds of situations are important for the project as they let participation be framed and understood from the community point of view, their worldview, beliefs, values, etc. Being a participant in community activities brings the possibility to see other ways of expression in participation that might not have originally been conceived by the designers or design itself. Interacting with other members as a participant can also bring the possibility to designers to achieve more personal and closer relationships with

members of the community that cannot be reached in a facilitator-participant relationship as the designer's priority in that case is to carry out and facilitate an activity and not necessarily building up a relationship with the people participating.

One conversation during this exploration also resulted in thinking about the project as a talent-based project in which all the collaborators can contribute with their own skills and capabilities, bring them to the table and enrich a project that evidently goes beyond the design realm.



4.6 Exploration 5: Dialogue to co-reflect about gentrification and other issues



Figure 29: Picture inside the Klooster while waiting for Mustafa and Ahmed



As was mentioned before, during exploration 4, Mustafa and Ahmed approached me at the end of the meeting and arranged an appointment to talk about the neighborhood and their lives in Afrikaanderwijk. After changing the date a couple of times, the meeting took place on a Wednesday at 7:30 pm in the Klooster. Again, I was having my doubts on how to conduct the meeting. I knew I wanted to talk about the neighborhood but I was not sure of how much mediation or support the conversation needed to gain a level of depth that could end on a critical reflection about the neighborhood and could give me some valuable insights. At the same time, I didn't want to prepare a session or a workshop as it would take away the naturalness of our encounter and preparing an agenda for that night would have given me a level of control I wanted to avoid. I decided you have some questions in mind, and bring some support material (papers, post-it, markers, etc) in case it felt natural to talk and interact in that way.

Before going to meet Mustafa and Ahmed I noticed that I was a bit nervous on my way to the neighborhood. It was already dark, I was going to a place I am not completely familiar with and I was going to meet two people I just met a few days ago. I knew I had nothing to fear and I was even feeling ashamed of my discomfort. After some time of thinking I realized that these feelings were coming from my social identity and how it determines my interactions with the different contexts I am in. Being a woman from a country in Latin America puts me many times in dangerous positions and fear is a common feeling under certain circumstances. However, I was able to overpass this feeling and gain my calm back again.

I met Mustafa and Ahmed at the entrance of the Klooster and we sat on the library which allowed us to have some privacy and a comfortable sitting. During our dialogue I realized how little I actually needed to intervene to guide the conversation towards a reflection on the context. Probably because of their engagement with the topic, to expand the discussion I just needed to ask short questions like: why do you think this is happening? How? What do you think the situation is requiring from

you?. At the end the material I had in my bag was not needed to facilitate the interactions we were having. The dialogue flowed organically without the need of a clear script or any particular method at this point.

At some point of this meeting the topics of informing and organizing people seemed a good opportunity to understand deeper how design skills and capabilities could support the community in developing their own goals and how a collaborative process could start around the topic of gentrification. During the dialogue it was very clear to the members that I wanted to participate in what they were doing and there was an open attitude to collaborate in understanding the best way to inform and organize the citizens in the area. Mustafa and Ahmed seemed to be also interested in this arrangement but unfortunately they also claimed they don't have time in this specific period of time to start working on this plan as they were already dealing with legal procedures for some specific houses.

After 1 hour and a half we ended the dialogue as Mustafa needed to go home. Both of them took me to the tram station and we said bye with the willingness to see each other again soon. As this exploration was basically composed by a dialogue of the life in the neighborhood and some contextual themes, downhere the main topics discussed during this meeting are explained to have more details about the activity and in this way contextualize better the findings of this particular exploration.

THE ISSUE OF GENTRIFICATION

As I was expecting, one of the main topics during this conversation was the problem of gentrification. Mustafa and Ahmed explained how this is a phenomenon occurring in several areas of Rotterdam but now is affecting also some streets of Afrikaanderwijk. They claim that the government is constructing new houses with the purpose of attracting high class people to areas of the city where the majority of inhabitants are working class or have low-income. "You have to focus on inequality. If you want to lift people up you have to give good salaries and good education. You have to invest in education. Not taking their houses away and claiming you are mixing people, that is not going to work. The rich tend to surround

"The government is abusing its power and a lot of people are leaving their houses out of fear or pressure"

"We need well informed people, some people live in a parallel universe. We need cohesion, things that tight people together. Make people aware."

"Is the fault of the foreigner, is the fault of the asylum seeker, is the fault of the migrants, it's the fault of the muslims. They are the cause of your problem. But that's not true, because here we are all different but we have the same problems. The truth is way more complicated than that."

"We are a multicultural society and we live together and we are totally happy. This is how it should be. Multicultural society is not death, we are the living proof that it can work"

themselves with more rich people. We are not going to mix, I can tell you". The general program of the government leaves some citizens like Mustafa and Ahmed feeling that there is an abuse of power, that it is an unfair situation where old inhabitants of the area are left appart, "it is like we don't exist anymore"

INFORM AND ORGANIZE AS A WAY TO FIGHT BACK

When I asked the two members what was required from them to solve or fight these circumstances they both agreed that the actionable plan that needs to be taken is to inform and organize people. One of the main reasons people is leaving their houses without any resistance is because they don't know their rights or they don't even speak the language. Informing about the situation in a comprehensive way (simple to understand, using their own language, etc) will make people also more willing to organize as a group and resist "the threads of the government and the landlords".

DIVIDE AND CONQUER: THE FEAR OF THE OTHER

Related to the need to organize, Mustafa mentioned briefly how this is a hard task because of the tendency to blame and fear the other. Both members said that in multicultural contexts like The Netherlands blaming others (the different) for structural and political issues was a strategy to simplify problems and deny the need for structural and social change. They claimed that even in Afrikaanderwijk the inhabitants had very different backgrounds, social issues bonded them together.

MULTICULTURAL AFRIKAANDERWIJK

During the dialogue the members of the community also explained what they considered the advantages of living in a multicultural neighborhood. They mentioned the fact that even if there is a mix of different cultures and ways of living, in Afrikaanderwijk people are willing to help each other because of a general feeling of cohesion. The members also mentioned the fact of being exposed to other ways of doing, other customs, languages and ways of thinking maintained the richness of experiences and the openness to the difference.

In this meeting the findings to answer the research questions can be organized as follows

RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?

HAVING AVAILABILITY FOR TIME AND PLACE

During this exploration the availability of the designer was fundamental to set up the spaces for dialogue. Meeting in the context at a time that is more convenient for the community but not necessarily for the designer allows the encounter with members that in other circumstances would not happen. Being prepared and adapted to meet the community will enable interaction with people that might not be “the usual suspects”. This way of meeting with the community was actually very natural and normal for them while for designers used to plan sessions at certain times and places was a new way of engaging.

DO NOT IMPOSE YOUR WILL: THE AQUARIUM EFFECT

In the meeting it was realized it felt unnatural to take pictures in such a casual activity. As designers, we normally take pictures to better explain the activities that we plan and how people are participating in the controlled environments and in some way justify and show a certain image of what a PD process should look like. Even if in many times these pictures are actually useful to give a better idea or a feeling of what is being done, as the approach to the members of the community was not being done under a process planned and produced by the designer, there was not the need to take pictures to show, to probably other designers, what was happening with Ahmed and Mustafa. Taking a picture that day would be like exposing them (like in an aquarium) doing an activity that felt private at that moment. Taking pictures would have imposed the designers’ will on documenting the process which was not in the interest of Mustafa and Ahmed. As at this point there is still the need to look for topics and moments to truly engage with the community by finding common understandings, taking actions outside that common space could harm the relationship.



STEPPING OUT IF THE MOMENT REQUIRES IT

After this first and somehow broad framing of the problem (inform and organize people) it can be imagined that a next session with some members of the community could be organized. Taking into consideration that informing and organizing people is the main goal, a meeting to develop strategies to achieve that intention would be helpful. To continue having an horizontal process, some members of the community interested in this topic could act as researchers with the designer to understand the best way to develop that strategy in the context.

However, in this moment of the process it was not possible for the designer to join the community in their fight as they were currently dealing with legal activities in which the designer skills are not needed. As it was already mentioned in exploration 4, a new understanding of a PD process entails the awareness that a project with societal ambitions cannot be reduced to the design domain. This realization entails a designer that is willing to step back in parts of the process when certain capabilities are not required.

TO BE AWARE OF BIASES FROM THE MATRIX OF DOMINATION

The discomfort felt before the meeting in the neighborhood is a good example of how understanding our positionality in the matrix of domination makes us more conscious about the ways in which we relate to others and the advantages and disadvantages we can face in that process. When exploring a more power-balanced PD process, there is room for the vulnerability of the designers to emerge as they are not in complete control of the circumstances in which they interact with the members.

RQ3: What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?

THE DIALOGUER: A SHARED FACILITATION

Probably this intervention was the only one that gave some moments of control to the designer. On the one hand, it was the designer who proposed having a meeting to talk after Mustafa and Ahmed reached and some questions were planned beforehand to carry out the dialogue. However, the meeting was not an interview, as questions were not being asked one after the other expecting the members to respond, but it was a reflective dialogue with a shared facilitation in which at some points the designer was asking questions to understand a topic better and in some others the inhabitants were also asking about thoughts and the personal experience of the designer. Having a power-balanced approach creates moments in which the role of the facilitator (hence the control on the activity) is not owned by a single person but it can be shared between the people collaborating in the activity. Having control over a situation or a specific moment doesn't seem harmful depending on the purpose and the agreements established between the members.

RQ2: How and to what extent can Freire's theory be applied to PD processes to balance power dynamics between the designer and the marginalized community involved?

DIALOGUES FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION AND CO-LEARNING

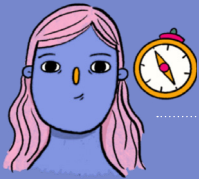
In this exploration three important concepts of Freire manifested during the interaction with Mustafa and Ahmed. In order to have a meeting that was not controlled and framed by the designer, a dialogue was the best way to set and frame the activity. As was already mentioned, during this dialogue it was possible to reflect about different topics in a critical way (gentrification, the fear of the other, etc...) and the three actors in the activity were learning from each other by asking questions and listening.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

One of the main learnings in this exploration is the relevance of finding a common care with the community to work with. In this specific case, the topic of gentrification led to a co-reflection meeting in which we all expressed our opinions and point of view in the form of a dialogue that derived to other important topics. As the relationship is established around a topic that all the people involved care at the level of values (social justice, equality, liberation, etc), some activities like taking pictures during the sessions, which is normal for designers, can feel strange in this case. This happens because with the act of taking pictures in private events or conversations with the community, the bond around the common care is broken and the distinction between researcher and object of research is again manifested.

By finding a common care the designer is also seeing the members of the community as equal partners in the process as the ownership and the attachment to the topic is common. When the community is explicitly understood as a collaborator, and the project is seen as a talent-based process the designer should also be ready and willing to compromise when needed. This means not only to be able to step back when is required or when the skills of a designer are not needed but also to negotiate and cede in case the community's goals and understandings are different. This compromise is also manifested at a logistics level as the designer should ensure spaces to meet that can be available (geographically and in time schedules) to all the members. Finally, the compromise of the designer and the fact that the activities are dependent on all the members can also lead to situations in which the designers might feel mildly uncomfortable as they are circumstances not framed and controlled completely by them, thus, other aspects of their social identities can be exposed. In this case, being conscious about the biases created by our personal experiences and social identities (and how they are distributed in the matrix of domination) can help to overcome that discomfort or can also help the designers to renegotiate the aspect that supposed a barrier for them.

4.7 Exploration 6: Staying in distant touch



After the last meeting with Mustafa and Amhed I kept trying to meet the members of the community and participate as much as possible in their activities and in the life of the neighborhood. However, a very specific circumstance in this project made my last interactions with the community very limited. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, traveling to Rotterdam and spending time in the public spaces of the city was not as easy as usual. The activities in the neighborhood were also starting to be reduced so my possibility to look for spaces for dialogue were almost gone. I kept texting the members I met during the last weeks of the project but even if my expectations included at least one more interaction I could learn from, this opportunity was not there for me anymore. Unlike other projects, this process and my spaces of dialogue with the community could not take place in an online platform. Some members of the community like Subaas or Ahmed have limited access to the internet and phone calls which made communication even harder. At this point, even if my expectations were different, I had to compromise as a natural consequence of developing processes that are not controlled by the designer. I still keep in touch with some members of the community who update me with what they are doing and how their life is general is going and even if the explorations for this research need to finish at this point, I am glad to see that my interactions and the relationships developed with the community are not limited to my research as it shows that a process that gave priority to the relational aspect of the project was accomplished.

In this case two main findings inform the research question ***RQ: What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?***

COMMON INFRASTRUCTURE IS NOT ENOUGH

Not being able to use mainstream platforms to keep connected with the community during the times of Covid-19 can be a good example of how the artifacts designed can many times leave some communities and realities outside their scope and create even more marginalization, isolation and inequality. It is probably not an easy task and definitely this project does not have a proper solution for this problem in particular but if a lens of equality and social justice is used in the processes and outcomes designed, a more equal distribution of benefits can be reached. In this new understanding of a decolonial PD process some strategies to cope with the absence of proper infrastructure to reach less privileged communities needs to be developed.

ESTABLISH RELATIONS BEYOND THE PROJECT

As mentioned before, this alternative understanding of PD processes gives particular importance to the relationality between the designer and the community. In this case, this relationality is manifesting even after the research and the explorations have concluded. This situation gives a light about the kind of relationship that was being developed with the community in which the design project is not at the center of the social relation but the designer connects on a more human level to the members of the community. This kind of bond could give the possibility in the future to continue the research and complete the next stages expected from a project.

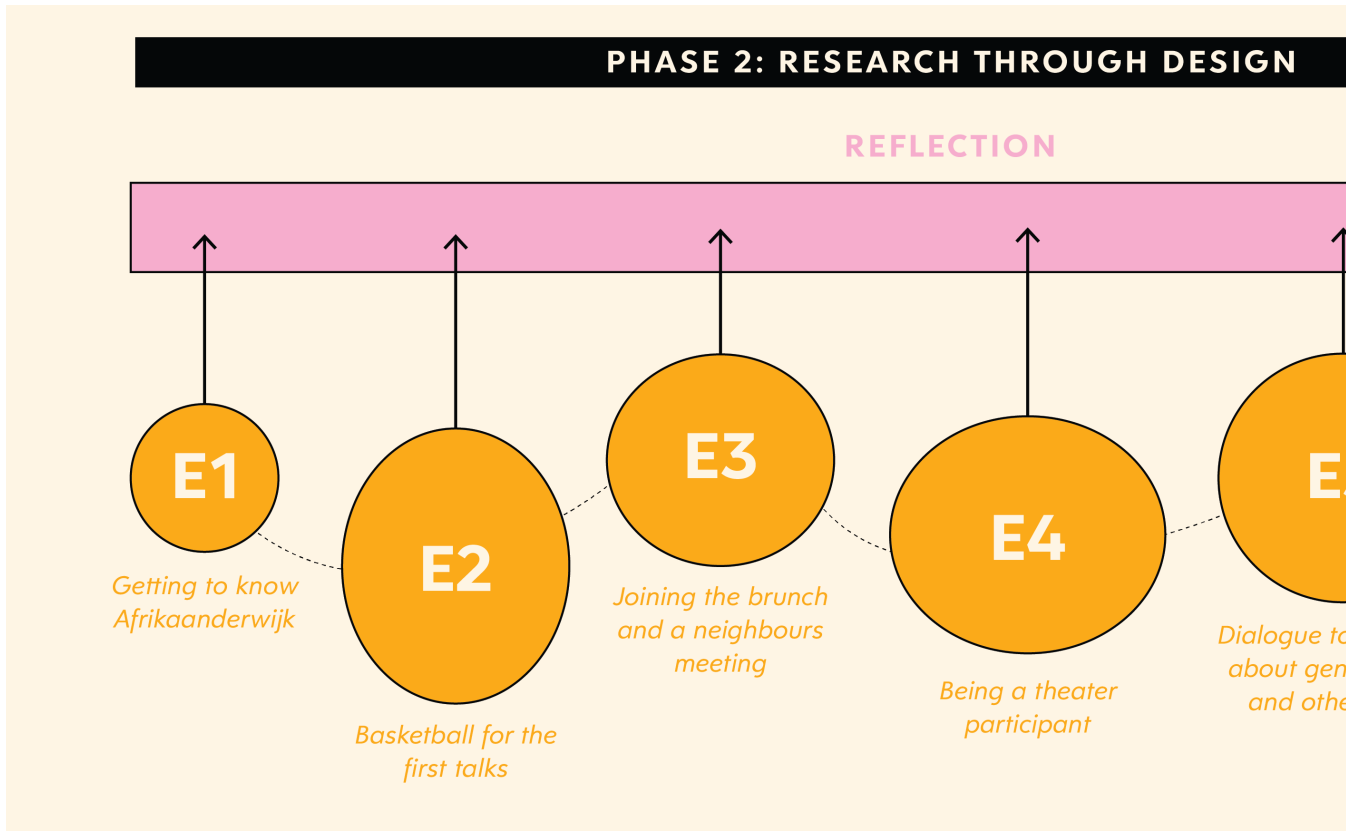
CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPLORATION

In this last exploration it was analyzed the impossibility to meet again with the community. In this case it is learned that when working with less privileged communities challenges about the infrastructure that allows collaboration can also arise. The lack of devices or accessible internet reduced the opportunities to interact with the members of the community previously met in a proper way. Even if this project did not have a solution for this particular problem, the situation can be seen as a good example of how the design practice needs to be more adaptable and reach the realities of the less privileged.

The still going communication with the community demonstrates that during all explorations the relational aspect was indeed prevailing and that an horizontal relationship with the community beyond what a design project can give was indeed starting to manifest.



4.8 The Freirian path towards liberation



In this chapter all the explorations done in the second phase of the project were explained. In Figure 30 a final visualization of this process is shown as the result of having unplanned interactions in Afrikaanderwijk. At the end, the RtD phase ended up being formed by 7 explorations and their correspondent reflection.

The empirical experience as a designer in the process was described from a first person point of view while the reflections done in every exploration were articulated in relation to the alternative understanding for a decolonial designer and PD process. It can be said that thanks to the explorations and the interactions with the members

of the community the designer in this process was being decolonized by relating in unexpected ways and carrying out activities delinked from the normalized notions of a PD process. Going back to Freire and his theory of liberation, it is possible to interpret these explorations as a path for the designer's liberation: in the way that in PO liberation can come only from the oppressed who liberate themselves and the oppressor, in this explorative process the members of the community started to liberate the designer. For this reason, the final structure of the process configured by the explorations is called "the path towards liberation".

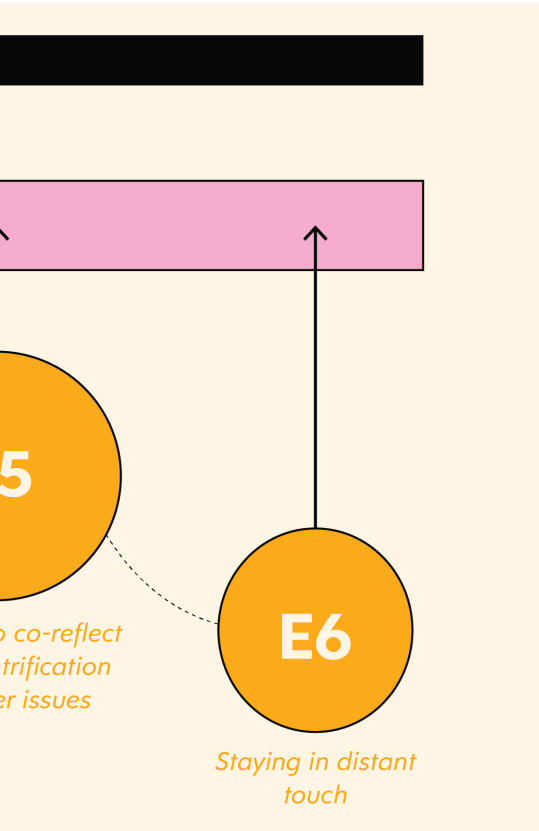


Figure 30: Visualization of the final RtD process. Thanks to the unplanned interactions with the community, this phase is composed by 7 explorations. They are represented as circles with different sizes and shapes to show their unstructured nature. The circles are connected one to the other because what happened in one of the explorations set a new opportunity for the next one.

5

REFLECTIONS ON THE PARTICIPATORY DESIGN(ER)

In the previous chapter the explorations developed in the second phase of this project were described together with the articulation of the researcher reflections coming from each of them. In this chapter, the role of the designer in a decolonial PD process is going to be elaborated to finally end with a series of principles that inform the alternative understanding for this process.

5.1 The designer's role in decolonial PD

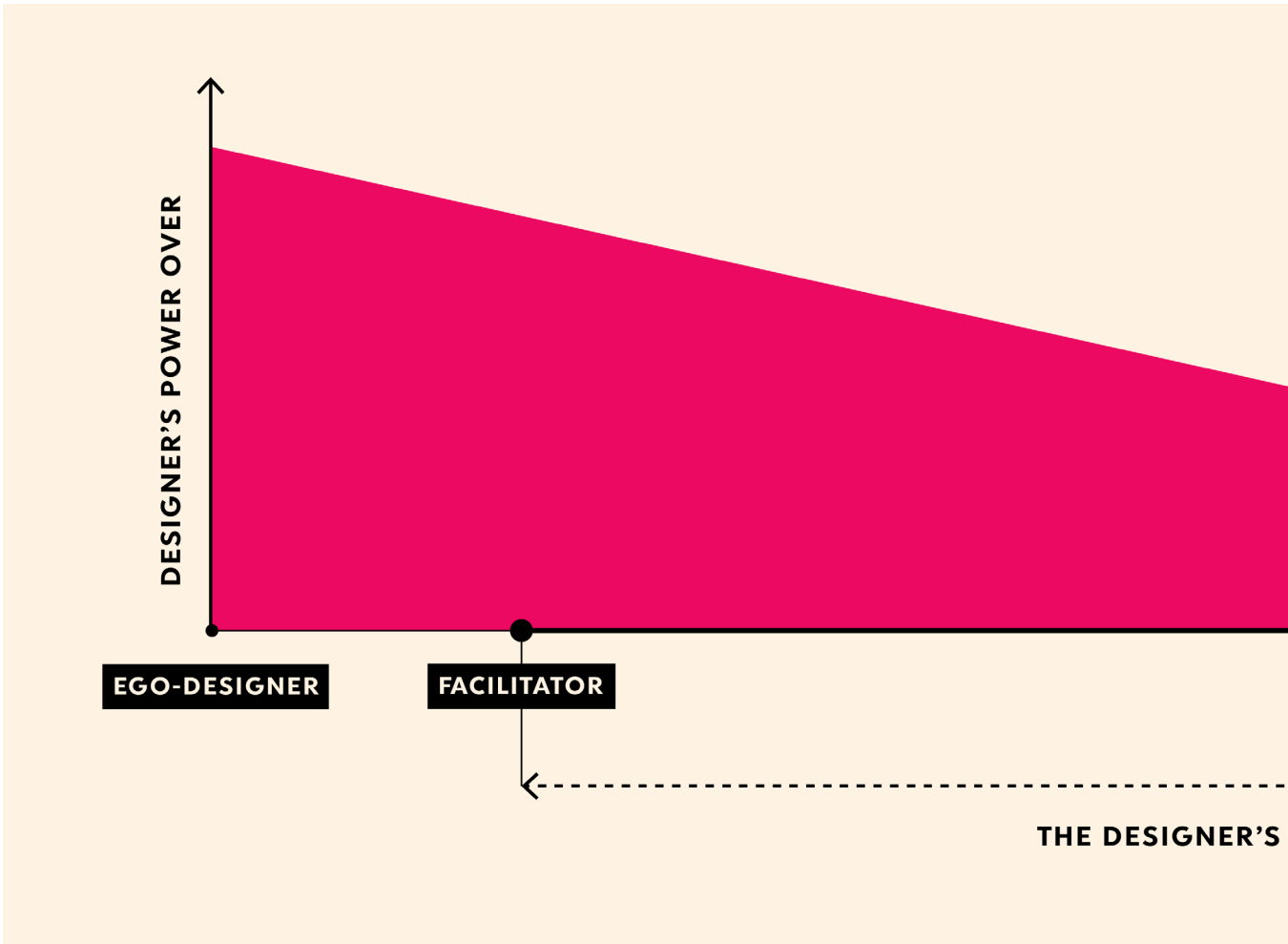
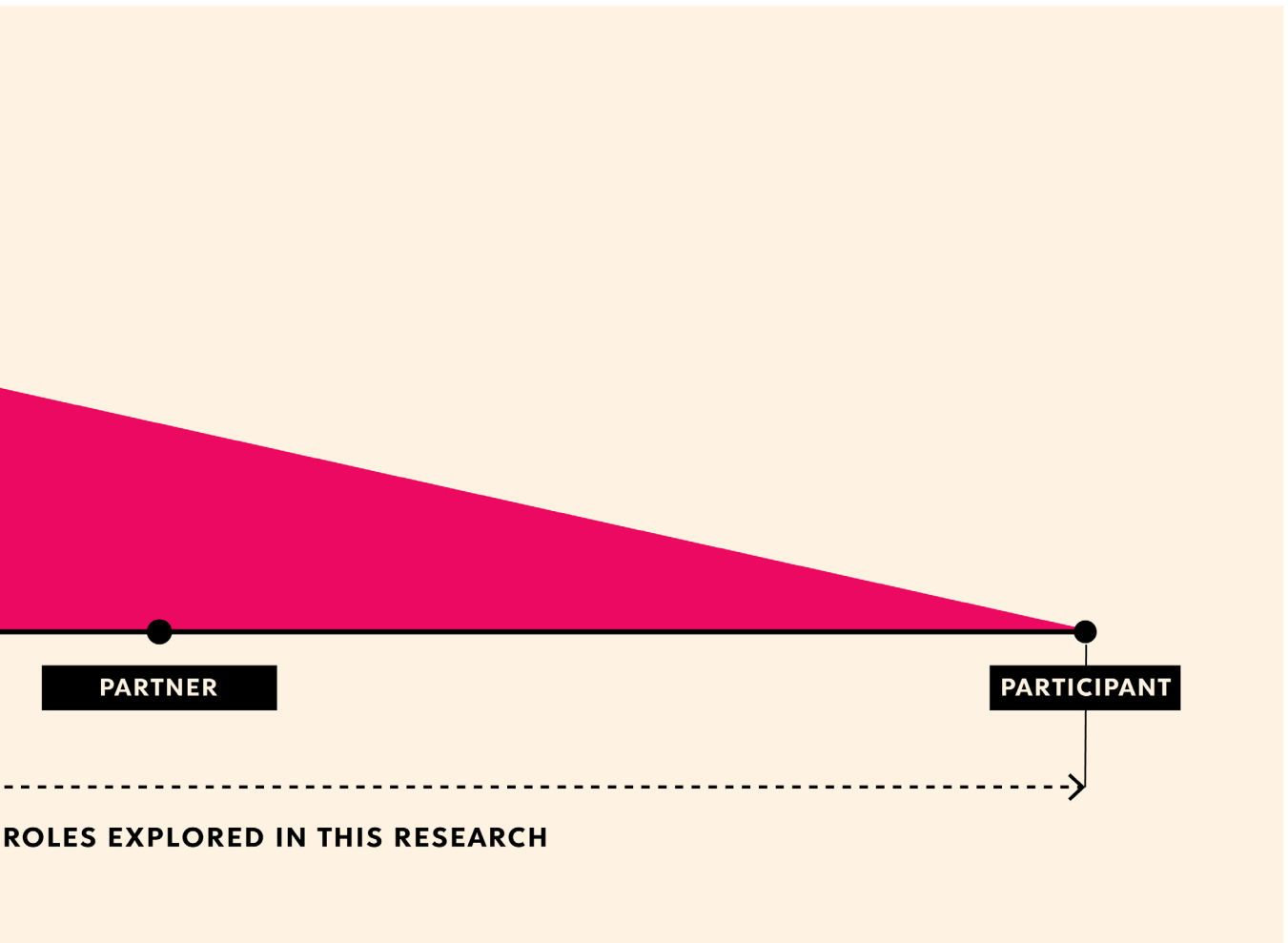


Figure 31: The axis of the designer's role. The spectrum goes from the ego designer to the participant. The more the designer is on the right side, the less power over (the community and the project) is exercised

Having said that the alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process should start by decolonizing the designer in that process, to answer the research question RQ: *What good practices can be exercised by designers in PD processes to be more accountable for socially just and power-balanced relationships when working with marginalized communities?* It was concluded that it is necessary to also answer the question: *What is the role of a decolonial designer and what does it entail in a PD process with marginalized communities?*.



Taking into consideration that PD re-interpreted the role of the “ego-designer” (the gifted designer working in solitude not being in touch with the user of their products) to the role of the facilitator, this project explored how that role can be pushed further by taking out the aspects that in this research showed to give complete control and power to the designer. In this way, the role of the designer was explored till the role of the designer-participant. In Figure 31 the axis of participation of the designer is represented. On the left side, the “ego-designer” while moving to the right side the

facilitator, the partner and the participant. In this particular research, the roles explored went from the facilitator (with the first failed attempt not carried out in the context) to the participant.

As can be seen in the same Figure, in the role of the facilitator the designers have more *power over* (the community and the project) because in that role designers still have many of the decision making, control over the process, framing, etc. As was also concluded in the analysis of the concept of power, this capacity is relational so the

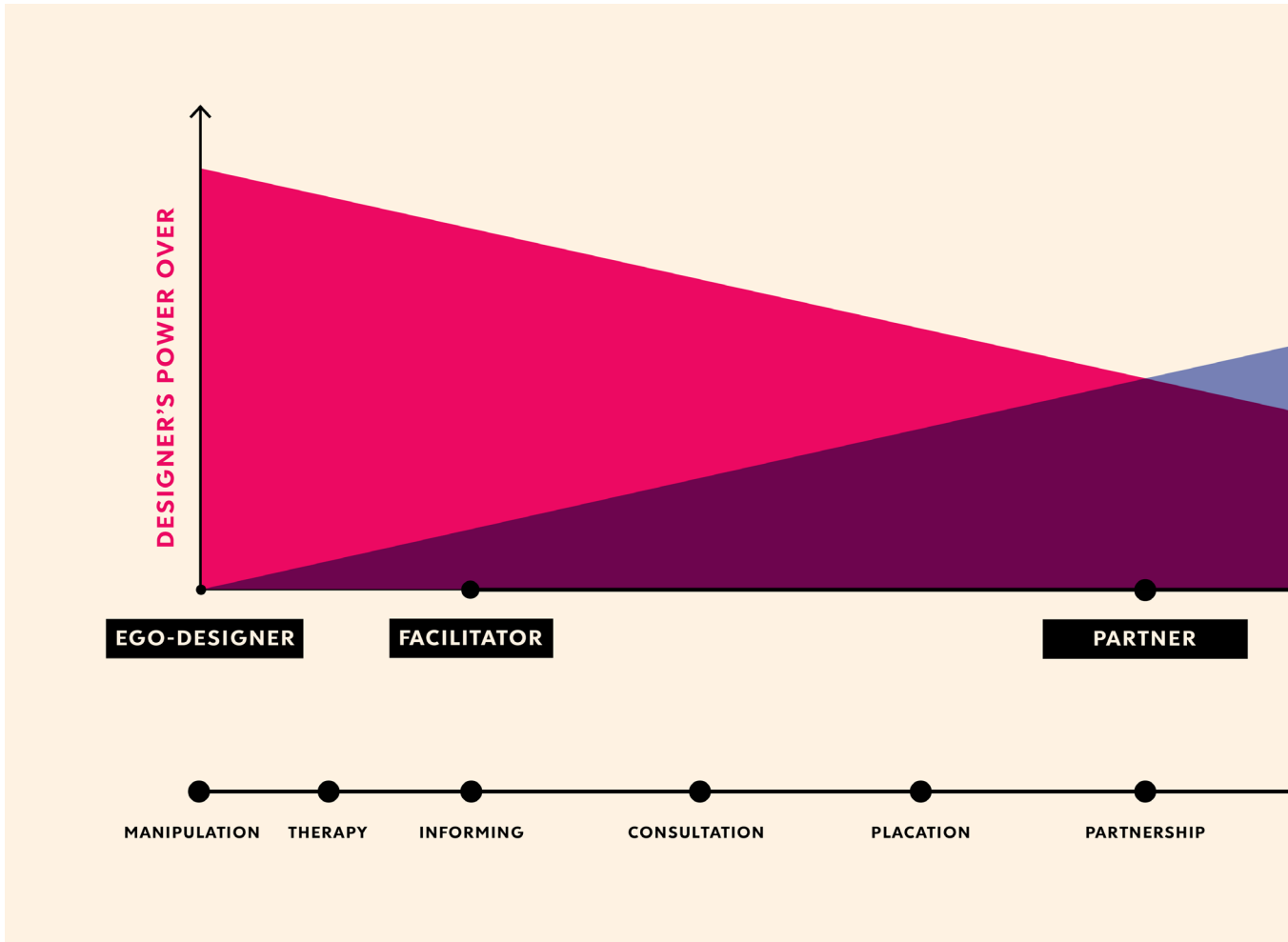
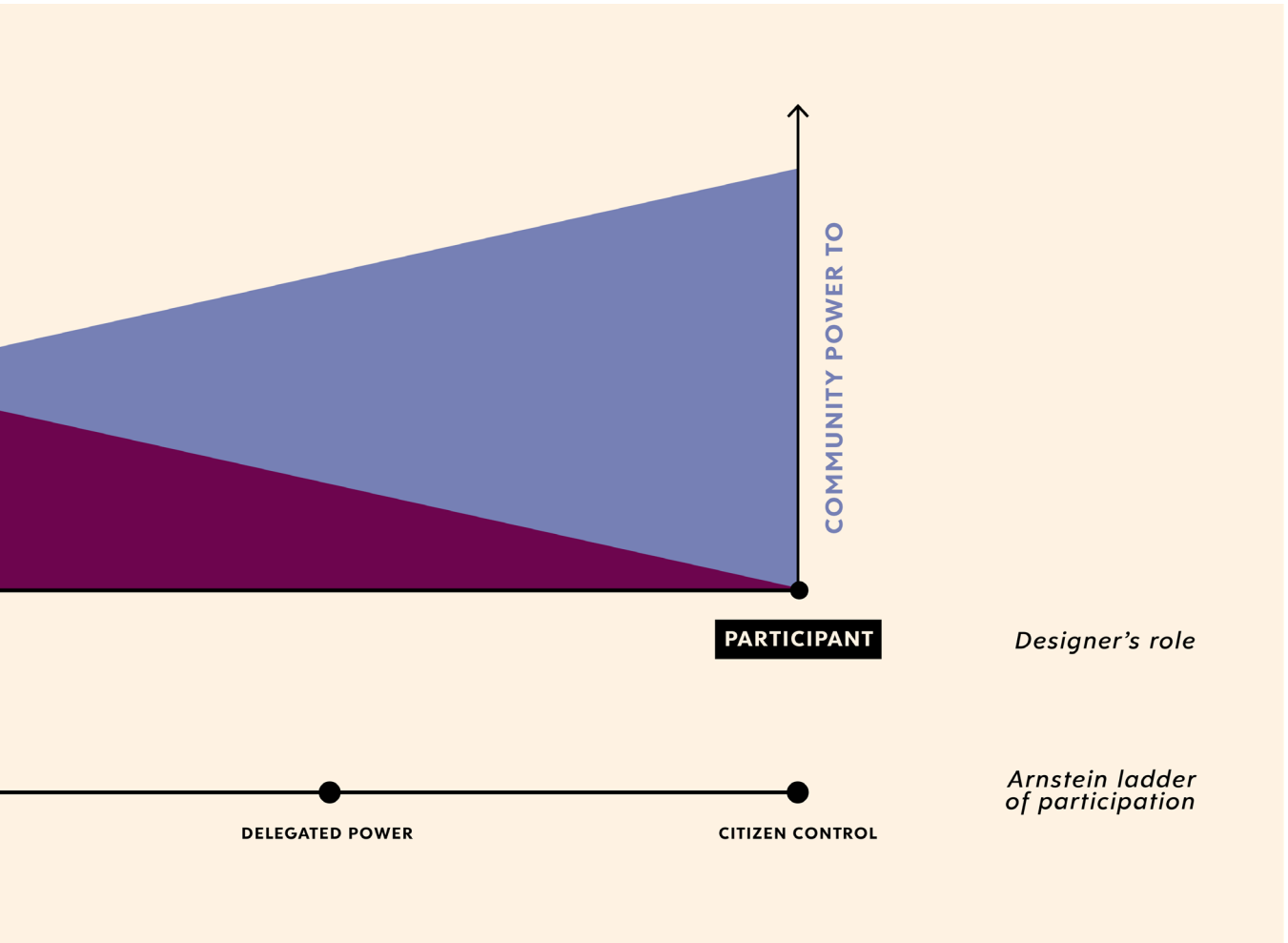


Figure 32: The axis compared to Arnstein's ladder of participation. The level of designer's power over is compared to the community power to when moving in the different roles of the axis.

more *power over* social actor A has to exercise over actor B, the less *power to* actor B has.

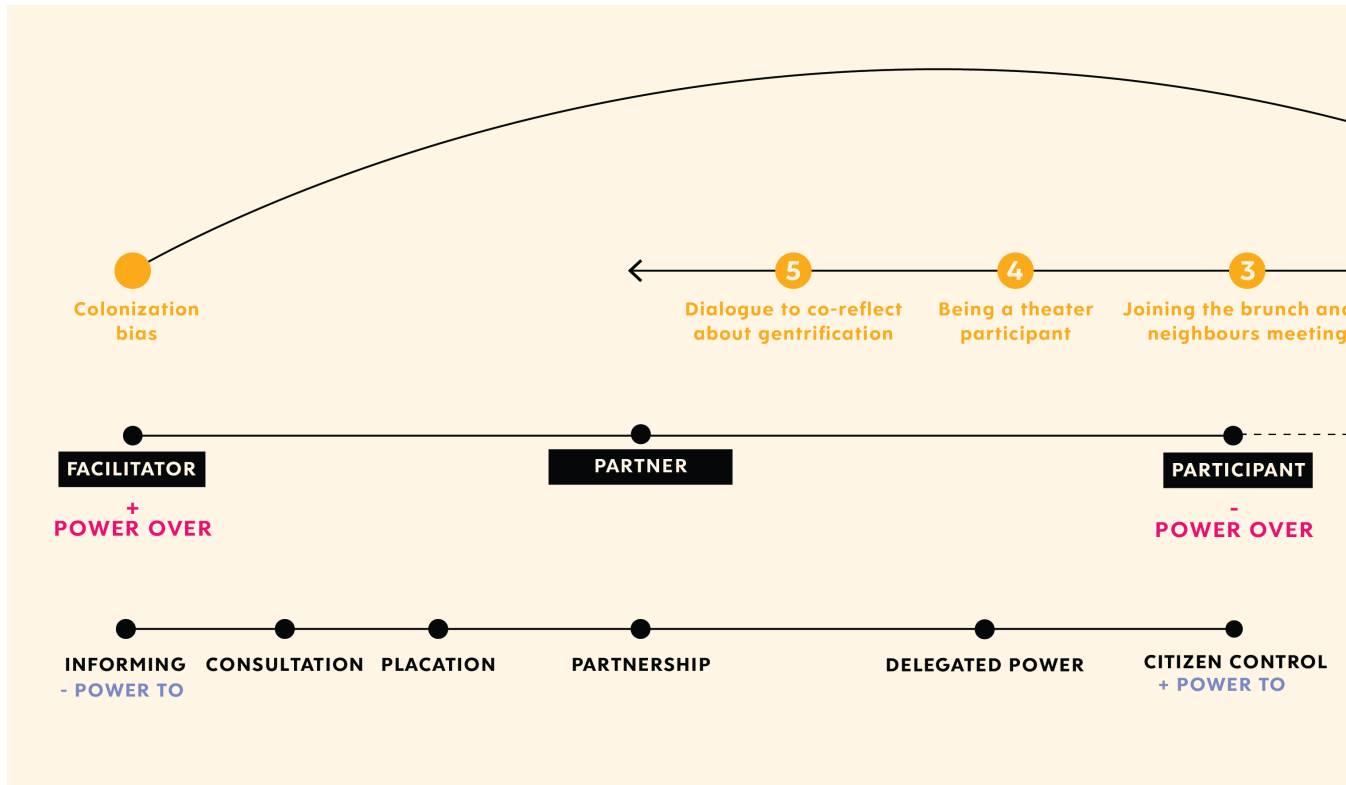
As shown in Figure 32, the axis of the roles of the designer were compared to the Arnstein ladder of participation (1969). The less *power over* the designer has, the more *power to* the community is capable of exercising as they are not limited by design impositions. In the ladder of participation that power translates into more citizen control in the process. In the figure, the role of the ego-designer is added just to compare it to the first steps of Arnstein's ladder but, as was mentioned,



this research explored the different transitions in the axis between facilitator and participant.

In the next section this axis will be used to map the different explorations done in this research to better understand when and why the designer's role in this process was being changed and re-defined.





5.1.1 Mapping the explorations in the axis: dialogical spaces for re-evaluating the role of the designer with(in) the community

In figure 33 the different explorations were mapped in the axis. On the left, the first intervention planned but not carried out while in the right the rest of the explorations are shown. Exploration 1 and Exploration 2 are positioned on the *participant* side of the spectrum but they are outside the axis, as they can be considered participation in the context but not necessarily in an activity of the neighborhood facilitated by the members. In exploration 1 the designer participated in the context as a careful observer

while in exploration 2 the participation was related to a basketball game as an activity closer to a method popular in anthropology called participant observation. In this method the researcher aims to gain familiarity with the members of the community by engaging in common activities of life in the context and the community culture. In this case the participant observation was conducted not just to understand the people in their context but to find the possibility to engage in dialogues with them. The next explorations 3, 4 and 5 start in the participation side but chronologically moved to the center closer to the partner role. Analyzing this behavior it can be said that the first explorations started on the complete opposite side of the ladder of participation and gradually moved to the center with the final meeting in exploration 5 in which a

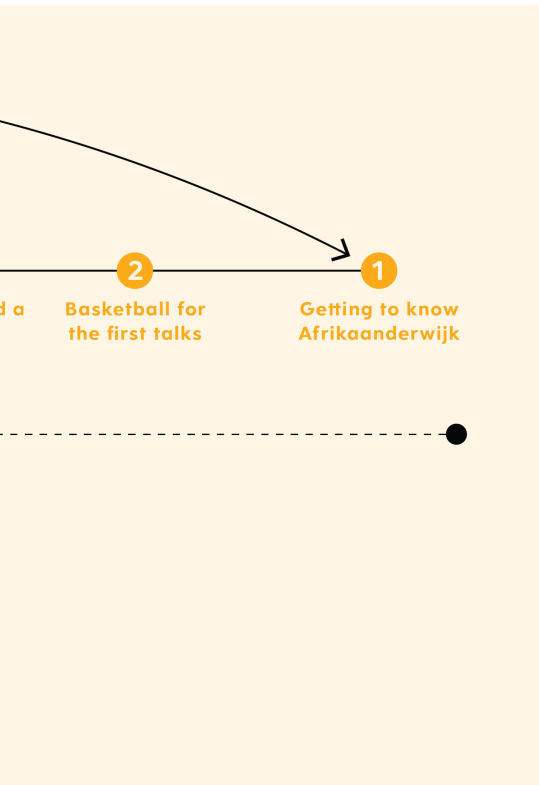


Figure 33: The explorations mapped in the axis. Iteration 1 is considered an activity where the designer was completely the facilitator. After that and taking a new approach, the first explorations consist of participation in the context. Later, explorations 3, 4 and 5 the designer took the role of a participant and moved to the left but without achieving complete collaboration. For a Figure that maps the explorations together with the findings for each of them refer to Appendix F.

co-reflection allowed a shared control of the situation. This transition of the explorations from the right to the center might have happened because in the first contacts with the context the designer needs to be as less disruptive as possible so less power is exercised. Once the first interactions are established, the project can start being scoped down so a more active participation from the designer is needed to engage in relationships and dynamics with the community that can lead to the framing of a project. However, the findings of this research also show that for these changes in the role to happen, there is the need for dialogue between the community and the designer. Only by creating those dialogical spaces the role of the designer can be re-evaluated and negotiated with the community in mutual understanding.

By understanding the members of the community as collaborators in the process and not necessarily as users, the designer cannot design an artifact (workshop, framework, activity, product, etc) and imagine how it is going to be used by a potential user. Being reduced the gap between designing and using/testing, the designer is only designing when entering in collaboration and dialogue with the community. This new way of entering in a relationship does not mean that the designers cannot use their design expertise in the projects. What it means is that the role of the designer may and should change depending on the moment and what the situation is requiring, understanding that a project for social justice can be more than just what can be framed and managed by Design. As such, the designer can move between being a facilitator, a partner or a participant depending on what the project (done with the community) is requiring. This constant re-evaluation of the role of the designer can only be accomplished by looking for spaces for dialogue with the members of the community and, by defining the process together with them, also the roles will be defined.

5.1.2 Assumptions of the designer's role in next phases for a decolonial PD process

As was mentioned, the explorations in this research focused in what was called a pre-project phase which is centered in the engagement with the community and possible set-up of the project. For this reason, the explorations tend to be on the very right side of the axis as the designer is entering the context in a non-disruptive manner looking for spaces exiting in the context that could allow new connections. As the designer is able to establish this power balanced connections and the project starts to be scoped down, the role of the designer can transition from the one of a participant to the one of a partner.

The explorations till now developed didn't show how the facilitator's role could be established in a decolonial PD as the project did not reach different phases besides the engagement. However, it could be assumed that having the possibility to be a facilitator (avoided in the first explorations) should not represent a problem in itself for some of the next steps in the process. What represents an abuse of power is to take the facilitator's role without any consensus or previous dialogue with the community. The same argument applies for the role of the community as a participant, in which the designer cannot assume their role in participation without a consensus.

It would be also interesting to explore in this decolonial process, under what conditions the role of the "ego-designer" could be re-interpreted. In this case and especially because the project is a collaboration, the "ego-designer" would have a space not as a gifted person working in solitude but as an actor that should use the expertises of a designer after assigning tasks with the community. As everyone is bringing different skills and capabilities to the table, also the designers, as experts in their field, can contribute to the project by developing tasks that have been assigned to them by all the collaborators.

As can be noticed, this section was dedicated to identify some assumptions that are based on the experience and the knowledge developed in this project but are not corroborated by an empirical experience. For this, the research should carry out more explorations and see how they can be understood inside the practice of PD. As such, the research till now developed cannot claim the decolonization of the the design process but just the way of entering into the project in relation with the community and the implications it has in the role of the designers and their own decolonization.

In the next section, some of the findings already mentioned are going to be posed as statements to contribute to the alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process. The statements are going to be linked back to the *research for design* developed in the first phase of the project to explain their contribution.

5.2 My statements for a decolonial PD process

After exploring the notion of the designer, some of the analysis done can be translated into statements to have a clearer view of what an alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process entails. These statements are framed as “my statements” as they are interpretations of my own personal experience. Proposing a single answer or generalized guidelines would go against to what a decolonial PD process means and against its own nature.

A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS IS BUILT WITH THE COMMUNITY

A decolonial PD process entails giving relevance to the relational aspect of the project and gives space for the designer to enter in close and horizontal relations with the community. In this way, comprehension of the members and trust can be built to develop a project structure and plan that aligns and respects the identities of all the social actors in the process.

When developing the conceptual framework and linking the design practice to the theory of design, it was said that a more power balanced process needed to adapt the methods and tools to the requirements of the community and include the members in all the steps of the process. Going back to the interviews with design practitioners developed in phase I, they presupposed a clear plan developed by the designer and inclusion of the members of the community in that plan. With this statement the research takes that idea even further and suggests that for a power balanced process not even the project structure should be developed by the designer without consultation. In this case, a fundamental aspect to develop a plan with the community is the notion of trust already mentioned by Freire. As was explained in the philosopher’s theory, the teacher-designer should enter in a project trusting the creative capabilities of the community. In this statement, this kind of trust is needed not just to carry out the project together with the community but to build the plan of that process together with them. In next stages of the process (not explored in this research) would be interesting to see if some design methods and tools are useful inside the decolonial process and how they can be adapted to the ways of doing of all the collaborators.

FOR A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS THE DESIGNER NEEDS TO BE DECOLONIZED TOO

To be able to develop a PD process that is more power balanced and socially just not only the process itself needs to be changed but also the normalized notion of the designer inside that process needs to be questioned. As was already conceived by Freire, just by changing the notion of the teacher the pedagogical program can change too. In this research the decolonization of the designer implied de-learning the normalized ways of developing a PD process and engaging with a project and a community in a completely different way. In this new search of the role of the designer, methods from other knowledge realms can be useful to avoid biases and impositions. In the explorations researched in this project, the decolonization of the designer implies a constant re-evaluation and negotiation of the role of the designer that can only be accomplished by looking for spaces for dialogue with the members of the community. As such, some practices mentioned in the conceptual framework like spending time with the members of the community outside the activities of the project are fundamental to be able to establish those horizontal dialogues. In this way and in line with Freire's theory, dialogue becomes the tool for the liberation of all the social actors involved in the process. More interesting, as Freire affirms, liberation can only come from the oppressed whom in an act of love liberate themselves and the oppressor. In the same way, the designer can only be liberated from the oppressive role inside the PD process thanks to the community that permits that change when dialoguing with the designer.

THE DESIGNER IS DESIGNING JUST IN COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

A PD project that is more power balanced entails seeing the project as a collaboration and not just as participation. As mentioned, this type of process does not conceive an end user to design for but considers the community as equal partners in the process. In this sense, by reducing the time between designing and using, the designer seems to design just when being with the members of the community. This statement however, seems to be true at least for early stages in the process in which not even a process structure is previously designed or a problem is framed. An assumption is that for future stages in the process the

designers may indeed design “alone”, as some tasks in the collaboration may be assigned to them based on their skills. Still, even those possible moments of designing without the community have to be intended under the frame of a collaboration in which everyone is working towards a common goal defined with the community.

A PROJECT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IS MORE THAN WHAT CAN BE FRAMED BY DESIGN

Related to the previous statement, intending a project as a collaboration means seeing it as a process in which everyone works together and contributes from their own skills and capabilities. Especially when developing projects that aim to tackle complex social problems seems crucial to recognize that the project itself is more than what design can manage and frame. Understanding that the design practice and the design skills are one more thing brought to the table is acknowledging that to reach social change it is necessary to work with others but not in our own terms and views but by considering all types of knowledge as valuable as ours. As was seen with Freire, a collaborative action will be possible just if the value of the individuals is first recognized inside the process to then act collectively. This statement also presupposes the recognition that a PD process maybe is not going to be developed by designers in all the stages and tasks. This again entails trust in people to be able to step out when needed so others can work from their expertise.

A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS NEEDS TO BE BUILT IN REFLECTION AND ACTION

During this research it was acknowledged that to decolonize the PD process it is needed a consciousness about the power dynamics inside of it and how they affect the relationships between the social actors in the project. As such, the notion of praxis developed by Freire seems a useful practice in a process that aims to be more power balanced. Doing periodical checks about the activities and actions

taken seems a good strategy to avoid biases and overpass unconscious oppressive attitudes. Just by constantly critically reflecting on the roles and actions undertaken inside a project as social actors it is possible to redefine and redesign the dynamics inside the process that will affect the individual back again in a constant loop.

As was seen in this research the personal or group reflection about the way the projects are being undertaken can trigger changes in the activities carried out or even postpone or redesign an activity that can harm the process and the community.

5.3 Conclusions

In this chapter it was analyzed what does entail to decolonize the designer along with the PD process in an alternative understanding that aims to be more power balanced and socially just. It was explained how the designer can transition in different roles thanks to the dialogical spaces inside a process with the members of the community. The statements done afterwards entail a new understanding of PD design that is built with the community, detached from the normalized ways of doing, in action and reflection and that considers other types of knowledge equally valid.

The next chapter describes the final design phase of this project by exposing a design outcome that intends to make the findings in this research more practical and useful for other design practitioners interested in this topic.

6

LIBERATING QUESTIONS FOR A DECOLONIAL PD

The previous chapter described the main findings of this research and the contribution to the design theory. In these pages, the last design phase of the project is explained. In this phase the insights of the research are translated into a series of questions with the purpose of making the research more accessible and useful for design practitioners. The process to create this communication piece and the main structure of it are reported next.

6.1 Procedure to define the liberating questions

Understanding that a power-balanced PD process that aims to be more socially just cannot be structured in only one way because it depends on the context and the community the designer is working with, this project cannot give a specific way to do a power balanced PD process as it would go against its own nature of being a decolonial approach. However, what can be done to make this research more useful for other practitioners interested in decolonial PD is to share the matters that were constantly questioning assumptions and the role of the designer in this process. As such, the questions that I (with my mentors, peers and members of the community) continuously posed to myself during this project and the findings that could be also translated into questions, are collected in a document that aims to prompt reflections and challenge assumptions. Having again the theory of Freire as an inspiration, the questions can be seen as a tool to enter the cycle of reflection and action and reduce the prejudices embedded in the design practice. The document is intended to be used as a support for other designers to become aware of their own colonization and oppressive attitudes and in this way start developing a new understanding of a PD process .

To be able to gather valuable reflective questions, a review of all the findings in the second phase of this project was conducted. This included the initial reflections about the failed activities and also all the results in the explorations. By carrying out an analysis on the wall (Sanders & Stappers, 2012) the different insights were clustered under several topics that go from the designer aspirations to engagement or even setting up an activity with the members of the community. After these main clusters were established, every insight was interpreted and was transformed into questions that could make other designers consider or think about that particular insight for their project. The analysis on the wall can be found in Appendix G and the final questions can be seen in the communication piece but a couple of examples are going to be shown in this section to better grasp this procedure.

6.1.1 Example 1: Insight “Managing community expectations”

In section 3.1 one of the results of the reflection done after the unavailability of the participants was that the process planned was not considering the circumstances or the reasons for the community to join a specific activity or the project in general. In the way the process was framed, the intentions in the project responded to the designer’s goals but not necessarily involved the expectations of the community. The project aimed to develop a power-balanced approach but the intentions by which the members of the community would join the process were not clear. Having this insight as a reference, the questions posed aim to make other designers aware that for a power-balanced project, assuming the presence of the community in the activities planned without considering the motives they have to join can be an imposition in the process. As such, some of the questions that can be extrapolated from this insight are:

How is the community contacted to join the project?

What are the interests of the community?

Is the project/activity supporting the interests of the community?

Under which circumstances is the community joining?

Does the community have the possibility to say no?

6.1.2 Example 2: Insight “What is the role of the designer?”

Section 3.3 discussed the reflection done with design practitioners about an initial activity that was not carried out in the context. In this reflection many of the insights showed how the activity planned had oppressive elements. It was also said that during the discussion, the participants posed some interesting questions about the role and the expectations of the designers in PD processes that aim to be more power balanced. For the guide, some of those questions were taken into consideration for a section in which the designers reading the guide can reflect on their own stand and expectations in the project and remember them through the process.

Some of the questions are:

What do I want to gain with this project?

What are the outcomes I expect from this project?

Why am I joining this project?

How am I needed in this project?

How can I contribute with this project?

After doing this exercise with all the findings of the research the questions were compared and were reduced as some of them could be similar to each other. Afterwards, the questions were clustered under certain topics to have a final structure for the document. In the next section the general structure of this piece is going to be presented and explained.

6.2 Structure of the liberating questions for a decolonial PD

The final document is divided into several sections to guide the reader into the topic and analyze different aspects that could affect the power dynamics in a PD process in the first stages of engagement with a community.

Introduction: A general explanation about PD and the relation with power dynamics is done in this section. The purpose of the questions and the target group is also made explicit.

The process before the actual project: In this chapter some of the findings in this research are made clear. The reader is introduced to the idea that a decolonial PD process involves developing the project structure and the planning with the community. To accomplish this, a previous phase before the actual project is needed to dedicate time to the relational aspect of the process. In the same way, the questions share the idea of reflecting on the role of the designer as a way to change the dynamics in the process.

In this section it is also explained to the reader that the document is divided into three main topics:

1. How to conceive an alternative understanding of a PD process
2. How to position myself as a designer in this process
3. How to engage with the community

How to conceive an alternative understanding of a PD process:

In this section the designer is going to be guided into seeing the design project from another perspective. Taking into consideration the findings about a new understanding for a PD process, the reader encounters some questions to think about the project as collaboration instead of participation and understand design as a support for a more complex process.

How to position the designer in this process: This chapter invites the readers to think about their own positionality in the project, what are their stands, their conceptions of participation and what other social actors in the process can be influencing them.

How to engage with the community: This last chapter of the guidebook is based on questions to think about power-balanced ways to relate with the members of the community in their context. Taking into consideration the experience and the strategies developed in this research, the chapter suggests ways to know the community better, look for spaces for dialogue and join activities as a participant. Furthermore, the document adds some questions to reflect when planning activities with the members of the community so biases and other mismatches can be avoided.

Conclusion: The last section of this document is dedicated to a small closure for the guide, inviting the reader to reflect on these topics but mostly to build their own understanding and liberation with the communities they work with.

To see the complete document please refer to Appendix H.

6.3 Conclusions and limitations of the questions

This chapter explained the most important elements considered in the design of the series of questions in the attempt to make the findings of this research project more accessible and useful for other design practitioners interested in a decolonial PD. As the communication piece is based on the research done so far in this project, it is limited to the pre-project phase and at this point cannot be extended to the whole design process. However, it can be envisioned that if this research continues to investigate the alternative understanding of a decolonial PD process, the document can also expand to new phases and topics.

As the questions are intended as a means to show the findings of this research and not necessarily as a final product, the document and the questions on it have not been tested or evaluated. If the piece in the future is intended to be developed as a final tool for designers, space for improvement and iterations is needed.

7

CONCLUSION

This last chapter of the report includes a final recap of the project carried out. Afterwards, some limitations of the research and recommendations for future work are made explicit. Finally, this chapter ends with a personal reflection about this research project.

7.1 Recap of the project

The main goal of this project is to propose an alternative understanding of a PD process when working with marginalized communities that accounts for more socially just and power balanced relationships. To meet this goal the project was divided into three main phases, one research for design phase in which a literature review and a series of interviews were conducted to investigate how PD processes are currently oppressive with marginalized communities and what good practices could be developed. In this same phase, Freire's theory was analyzed to have a theoretical baggage and inspiration of how to better develop a good practice.

In the second phase, the project was carried out with a RtD approach and it started by proposing a fixed structure for a new PD process. However, before conducting the activities planned in the context, it was realized that going to the community with a fixed activity before even knowing them was already an oppressive practice and that to decolonize the PD process, the structure and the agenda needed to be planned with the members. In the same way, it was said that for this new decolonial understanding of PD, first the figure of the designer, the role and the activities normally assigned to it needed to be decolonized too. As such, this stage was carried out by having a series of unstructured explorations in the neighborhood of Afrikaanderwijk in which the research was informed in two different levels. On the one hand the interactions documented in first person as a designer inside the new way of approaching the process and the second level as a researcher of that process by reflecting and drawing conclusions from the empirical experience.

The second phase of the project concluded with the main findings in which the role of the designer was analyzed. In this analysis it was acknowledged the role of the designer as a participant in the context and how that role may change once the project starts to be scoped down thanks to dialogical spaces with the community.

In this analysis 5 main statements were made about the alternative understanding of a PD process which are: 1. A decolonial PD project is built with the community, 2. For a decolonial PD process the designer needs to be decolonized too, 3. The designer is designing just in collaboration with the community, 4. A project for social justice is more than what can be framed by design and 5. A decolonial PD process needs to be built in reflection and action.

Finally, to make the findings of this research more useful for design practitioners, the main takeaways and the learnings in the research were translated into a series of questions. The questions are meant to be a support to reflect and challenge the assumptions and biases that designers may have when entering into a PD process with a marginalized community

7.2 Limitations and recommendations for future work

As highlighted already in the findings of this research, one of the biggest limitations in this project is the fact that it is narrowed to the initial stages of the process, even before a framing of the problem could be done. More time dedicated to research would allow to expand the findings and see how the decolonization of the whole PD process can be carried out. Some assumptions in the findings were made about the role of the designer, but they still need to be corroborated. A recommendation for others interested in learning about how a decolonial PD process can be done is to maintain the practice of reflection and action and the ability to step in and out from the project in order to be the designer and the social actor in the context but also the researcher outside of it. Moreover, to see how these kinds of projects can boost collective action, it would be very informative for the research to see the work of activists with different backgrounds that can provide examples of how to work in collaboration with others.

A second limitation in this project is that it is mainly focused on the relationship between the designer and the community without taking into consideration other third parties. It was not the intention of the project to include other social actors, even if the university was mentioned as a determinant actor in the dynamics. However, it would be helpful and enriching to analyze how other agents with power could affect even more the dynamics. It was mentioned in the interviews with the design practitioners that design projects have already so many variables and limitations that thinking about power dynamics would add another level of complexity. This affirmation is most probably true. However, for how these topics are framed in this project, power dynamics is a notion that needs to be urgently addressed in PD processes if designers want to dismantle the many biases and reduce the prejudices of the practice. The question would be how to make others (companies, institutions, NGOs, etc) join the same call.

Additionally, this research acknowledges that the process here developed, thus the findings, aims to be generalized so they can be helpful for the design practice but they are born from a very specific empirical experience. My own identity and positionality together with the community and their particular context are strong variables in the outcomes of the research. Most probably this work can be improved and enriched by other designers who together with other communities can build their own decolonial PD process.

Finally, the aim of this project was centred in the findings and the knowledge created from the research. The questions were intended as a medium to make those findings more practical and accessible. For this reason, the document was not treated as a final designed product and was not tested with potential designers interested in using it. If the idea of the communication tool is welcomed in the future, certainly it needs evaluation and iteration phases.

7.3 Personal reflection

As a conclusion for this report I would like to make a last general reflection about the project and how I experienced it during these months of work. I think the most important aspect for my learning experience is that this project didn't go as I conceived it at the beginning of this journey. And I am so glad it didn't. Thanks to the surprises in the way I was able to learn about the designer I am but mostly about the designer I want to be. What I mean with this is that the process reaffirmed my care for social justice and showed me new ways to work for it with my profession and revealed how much I still have to learn. However, it also showed me my flaws despite my good intentions. I can't deny it, the project was sometimes painful because it was continuously exposing my biases, my contradictions and the inevitable gaps between thinking to know something and actually doing it. Trying to develop a decolonial PD process by decolonizing the designer felt like peeling out layers of myself till there was nothing left but my true self who still needs to learn a lot about how to be a designer for social justice.

I was the designer of this project but also the prototype so I was obligated to look at myself in the mirror constantly and especially when I didn't like what I was looking at so I could actually learn from it and do better. And when the aspect of your project that needs to change is actually yourself and how you are approaching the project, it is very hard to not take it personally. Of course, the first times I realized how much an oppressor I was they were harder than the rest. Over time, accepting the fact that I had to de-learn and relearn how to design was easier and once I was able to notice the value of the relationships and the encounters I was having with the community helped me to let go my old ways of doing.

To be able to detach from expectations and the pressure of doing a project inside the processes and ways of doing taught to me, unexpectedly COVID-19 came out to be very handy. Because of the restrictive measures, for a few months I worked outside the university context and even if I missed working with my peers, I think these circumstances also gave me the opportunity to get a bit far from those expectations coming from the outside and just focus to fight my own mental structures about what a design project should be. And I think this is not an easy task. This project showed me how conditioned I still am and how much work is still needed. Even by writing this report I needed to do several iterations and be careful with the language I was

using and the positions I was taking. As could be noticed in a second read of this document, at the beginning of the process I tend to talk about participants and interventions but after the realization of having to decolonize myself, even those words needed to change. In the second part of the report I feel that terms like explorations instead of interventions, verbs like collaborate instead of participate and subjects like members of the community and their names instead of participants or users are way more accurate in this new understanding of PD. Even so, I hope that anyone that reads this document and spots errors and misunderstandings will bring them up to me so we can enrich these discussions and learn from my mistakes.

Acknowledging there is still a lot of work to do to decolonize the designer and the PD process, and that this project leaves me more questions than answers, I would like to look for new opportunities to continue this research. I hope I can keep developing this research in a practical way, by doing things with people in their context, but I also hope I would like to contribute to the theory of PD by doing some publications regarding this project and the learnings I had from it. So if you, reader, are also interested in using the design practice as a means for collective liberation please contact me, let's do it together!

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