

Transformaciones

TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED CRAFTS AND ARTS AS A COMMUNITY CATALYST FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN ZEGACHE, OAXACA.



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Technology-enhanced crafts and arts as a community catalyst for socio-economic and cultural development in Zegache, Oaxaca.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION FIRST DRAFT 2010-01-03

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ABSTRACT

Transformaciones is a project aiming to enhance sustainable local cultural production and generate sustainable business models for socio-economic development in the rural village of Zegache Sta Ana, in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. The project includes (1) production of new crafts pieces, (2) workshops for enhancing local artisan skills, and (3) cultural business models for socio-economic development in Zegache, Oaxaca. It aims to show how traditional crafts and manual skills can be rendered renewed relevance and commercial potential. It is a local initiative but a potentially global example of how to encourage artistic creation, protect cultural identities and reduce poverty in regions throughout the world.

The third part of the project is an ongoing series of practical workshops in electronics for the community workshop artisans. The methodology will be to add new-media elements as additional layering to traditional media. Traditional crafts and manual skills can be rendered renewed relevance as well as much needed commercial potential for the community, when combined with contemporary materials such as media and electronics.

The project has a strong beneficial social impact of developing new artefacts, reconceptualising them into products, finding new markets, learning new things. One clear spin-off is that the crafts and the practical skill-sets would extend into certain aspects of microelectronics, a skill that in turn could render new types of assignments for the workshops.

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BACKGROUND

The State of Oaxaca, Mexico, is a region rich in historical and cultural sites, but one in which large groups of the indigenous population live in extreme poverty. While all constituent states of the federation have HDI levels similar to European countries, Oaxaca is after Chiapas the last in the ranking of Mexican states' HDI on 0,7336286.

Oaxaca have been characterized by political instability and is the most ethnically complex of Mexico's 31 states. Almost no development projects are planned for the rural areas, which has led to wide scale migration. The target of the Transformaciones project is one of these indigenous rural areas – Santa Ana Zegache – where the 2000 habitants make their living from a scarce agriculture and work in the capital. It is a village struck by emigration, and dominated by children, women and elderly people.

Tourism is the principal Oaxacan industry and provides a vibrant market for a wide variety of artisanal products. This is a region where profitable arts and cultural industries could work as a catalyst for economic growth and regeneration. In past years the Oaxacan village of Zegache has reclaimed its' self-esteem through the community workshops of Proyecto Zegache, while restoring the village church of Santa Ana. The inhabitants are already accustomed to the idea of learning new artisanal and manual skills as a means of social empowerment. By adding technology and media to the vivid mould of traditional handicraft, this project hopes to further the means of sustainable economic support for the community.

With the support of SI, we conducted a trip to Zegache in November 2008, where Transformaciones was conceived in close collaboration with Proyecto Zegache and other local actors. A pilot phase was carried out in Zegache November 2009 (financed by the partners own efforts and means). In 2010 the project partners have been evaluating the results of the pilot in order to create a project plan, which serves as the base for this application.

TARGET GROUP

The project has two major target groups; the impoverished people in the rural area of Zegache on one side, and policy and decision makers, politicians and representatives for the tourism industry - who can help sustain and spread the results of the project - on the other side.

The direct beneficiaries are the villagers of Zegache, Sta Ana. To create new cultural expressions in collaborative processes, with clear references and roots in the indigenous rural crafts traditions is a goal in itself. Connecting this to real means of sustainable economic support for the community is another important aspect. Transformaciones is a locally well-grounded project, reaching and affecting the target group in a direct and immediate way. It has already in its initial stage changed people's life in profound ways.

In order to give the result and outcome of the project a sustainable and long-lasting effect, Transformaciones also needs to address local Oaxacan "change-makers". During the pilot phase important representatives for the target group was identified, and the Swedish Embassy in Mexico City has expressed their support for the project. They will help with diplomatic contacts in the regional and national context. (Lol available upon request). Furthermore, the Alfredo Harp Foundation, which supports the Proyecto Zegache, is an important gateway to decision-makers and politicians. Practical work will include creating presentation material, a workshop and events for this target group, aiming at finding new distribution paths, attracting tourist arrangers to put Zegache on their bus routes etc.



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OBJECTIVES

Transformaciones is all about generating strong beneficial social impact of developing new artefacts and activities, reconceptualising them into products/services, finding new markets, learning new things.

The motives behind the project are artistic as well as idealistic and pragmatic: to create universal images that build upon the relation with the spectator, and at the same time uphold cultural uniqueness through translations of a traditional expression into new media.

The objectives of the project are:

- to create long-term collaborations and creations in contemporary practices merging expertise in media technology and electronics with traditional artisanal traditions.
- to let the people of Zegache reinterpret their historical, ecological and cultural heritage and put it in relation to their social reality.
- to create a number of venerative artefacts in the Community Workshops as crucial contributions towards making the entire project self-sustaining.
- to create local jobs in the process; and to integrate the community in all aspects of the work.
- to research holistic and resilient approaches to living & working for SMEs and cultural collectives, looking at transforming a culture of wasteful consumption to a culture of responsible participation of all ages and cultural groups.
- develop models for social entrepreneurship & innovation for a more resilient cultural economy and livelihood of cultural operators.
- to provide professional development and collaboration opportunities in the field of contemporary media-/design artefacts for Mexican artisans.
- to ensure broad influence and take-up of projects' results before and after the project's end date.

Following this path Santa Ana Zegache can become a desired and deserving destination for international travellers, representing and promoting Oaxacan culture worldwide.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

The project activities is divided into three parts: 1) production of new crafts pieces, (2) workshops for enhancing local artisan skills, and (3) cultural business models for socio-economic development i

1. PRODUCTION OF TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED CRAFT NOVEAU PIECES

The core of the project is to produce a number of technology enhanced 'craft nouveau pieces', merging media technology and traditional crafts into a new form of art works. We will develop a "product line" of objects based upon the video shrine completed as part of the pilot carried out in November 2009.

The motif and content of the artworks are the product of social processes, namely aesthetic preparations and ritual-theatrical transformations; in itself the ground of the origin of drama. The emigration struck village Zegache, and its church Santa Ana, is an established arena for ongoing socio-cultural changes through Proyecto Zegache, employing contemporary art and traditional crafts as the means of social empowerment. Transformaciones build upon this existing tradition of community workshops, which has played a significant role in the development of the village.

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share scientific advancement and its benefits." (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris 1948, art. 27)

The project renders additional tools both conceptually and technically, whereas it introduces contemporary adaptations of traditional expressions. To combine the old with the new is crucial for the survival and resilience of cultural identities.

OAXACA



The Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca is one of the 31 states of Mexico, located in the southern part of the country, Oaxaca borders the states of Guerrero to the west, Puebla to the northwest, Veracruz to the north, Chiapas to the east, and the Pacific Ocean in the south.

The state is named for its largest city. With an area of 36,820.2 mi² (95,364 km²), Oaxaca is the fifth largest state in the Republic. According to the 2005 census it had a population of 3,506,821 people. Oaxaca is the historic home of the Zapotec and Mixtec people, and contains more speakers of indigenous languages than any other Mexican state. There are 16 formally registered indigenous communities, some of which are culturally diverse themselves.

According to the UN, Oaxaca is after Chiapas the last in the ranking of Mexican states' HDI (Human Development Index) on a level of 0.7336286 (which is far beneath the federal average – on the same level as Syria). The State of Oaxaca have been characterized by political instability with the start in a teachers' strike in 2006, with demands of the governor's removal, followed by the shooting of protestors and an America journalist.

Oaxaca's principal industry is tourism, with over 250 kilometres (155 mi) of beaches, colonial architecture, archaeological treasures, crafts and folk art. Major festivals include the día de los muertos ("day of the dead") and noche de los rabanos ("night of the radishes"). Oaxaca has a number of native crafts, including the production of alebrijes, weaving and black clay objects. Alebrijes are popular wooden figurines of mythical beings, animals, and fantastic combinations of both, usually painted with very vibrant colours.

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This project aims to put the tools for adaptation in the hands of the people themselves, instead of just using samples of its culture for its own winning. Through the collaborative artistic creation, the community members will be able to reflect upon, question and discuss their current social and political reality; issues such as migration, poverty and domestic violence.



LEFT: EXTERIOR OF ZEGACHE'S ST ANA CHURCH AFTER THE RESTAURATION. RIGHT: REPLICAS OF THE MIRRORS FOUND IN THE CHURCH.



LEFT AND RIGHT: ARTISANS WORKING ON THE GUADALUPE SHRINE OUT OF CEDAR WOOD, ZEGACHE 2009.



LEFT AND RIGHT: SHOOTING OF THE FILM MATERIAL FOR THE GUADALUPE SHRINE IN THE DESERT OF STA ANA, S009.



LEFT: WOOD ARTISAN AT WORK IN THE COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS. RIGHT: THE ALMOST FINISHED GUADALUPE SHRINE

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2. WORKSHOPS FOR ENHANCING LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS ARTISAN SKILLS

The second part of the project is a series of practical workshops in microelectronics for the people working in the community workshops. We believe that traditional crafts and manual skills can be rendered renewed relevance as well as much needed commercial potential for the community when combined with contemporary materials such as media and electronics.

The project has a strong beneficial social impact of developing new artefacts, reconceptualising them into products, finding new markets, learning new things. One clear spin-off is that the crafts and the practical skill-sets would extend into certain aspects of micro-electronics, a skill that in turn could render new types of assignments for the workshops.

The project will further the existing skills of the Community Workshops to include:

- knowledge of basic electronic components
- assembly of simple analogue and digital electronic circuits
- fundamentals in microcontroller programming

These skill sets will facilitate the production of the craft nouveau pieces, and extend the type of productions made by local craftsmanship outside of the realm of traditional crafts.

“Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris 1948, art. 26)

Our personal experience is that the interest for technology greatly increases when people get the opportunity to use technology as building blocks and create things. Transformaciones has the inherent potential to be a recruiting force for technical educations for people that usually wouldn't consider such a path in life.



FITTING OF COSTUME DURING THE 2009 PERFORMING PICTURES VISIT TO ZEGACHE. THE MANTEL WAS EMBROIDERED WITH 89 LED LAMPS - GIVING THE SEAMSTRESS WOMEN OF THE WORKSHOP ADDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF MICRO-ELECTRONICS.



AS PART OF THE TRANSFORMACIONES PROJECT, THE ARTISAN WORKSHOPS OF ZEGACHE WILL ADD SKILLS IN MICROELECTRONICS.

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3. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BUSINESS MODELS

Parallel with the other activities, a business and management expert will work with finding relevant new markets, methods and tools for how cultural industries can work as a catalyst for economic growth and regeneration.

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris 1948, art. 22)

The project's main goal is to create job opportunities with decent revenues on sold artefacts. This kind of work builds upon craftsmanship and manual skills and as such it renders self-esteem for the practitioner. The decency of work should thus be twofold: both in terms of economic compensation and personal engagement. In our project we will set up a Community Workshop Fair Trade standard, following The Fairtrade Standards developed by the FLO Standards. Our mission is to offer income-generating opportunities to the craftspeople of the Zegache by following fair trade practices and developing long term sustainable business models.

GENDER EQUALITY

The Swedish, Mexican and Belgian organisations are led by women, with a female external business expert, setting an inspiring example. However, it is important to stress that for this project, it is equally important to allow the single women of Zegache to support themselves and their families as it is to provide work for the young men. This in order to prevent the men from having to seek work abroad, and to decrease the high rate of domestic violence following in the footsteps of unemployment.

SUSTAINABILITY

From the initial meeting in 2008, the organisations have been in close contact on a regular basis. A successful pilot phase of the project was carried out in Zegache 2009, which resulted in an interactive video shrine, exhibited at renowned gallery Casa Lamm in Mexico City. In 2010 Mexican and Swedish partners have been evaluating the results of the pilot in order to create an implementation plan and apply for funding.

It is our aim to also prepare an application for further collaboration through the EU Cultural Programme's call for collaboration with Third World Countries 2011, which targets Mexico. With the experience of having worked in three EU Cultural projects, as well as Interreg and IST-projects, Performing Pictures have a wide network of long-time collaborators to work with, and find contexts outside of the Transformaciones project for knowledge transfer and spreading of project results. One such example is the Resilients Guild, which has as a long-term goal to establish a support structure for resilient creative practices. The guild builds on nearly ten years of collaborative history between European cultural organisations. This provides a stable base, where new collaborative methods & constellations can be explored and best practices spread.

Furthermore, as the main goal is to create a sustainable business model for economic support for the community, future collaborations will be ensured by the production of new technology-enhanced artefacts, hopefully expanding to involve other Swedish organisations, artists and cultural workers.



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PARTNERS

Performing Pictures is an independent platform for experimental processes and knowledge production. PP develop projects and productions that in an artistic way deal with research and development in the area of film and moving images. Exploration in and of moving images based on limitations such as time, technology and spatiality is our focus. Performing Pictures continuously work with artists, cultural practitioners and researchers, as well as commercial clients nationally and internationally.

Kungliga Konsthögskolan (Stockholm) Robert Brecevic of Performing Pictures is a part-time lecturer at KKH, and will prepare a series of public as well as informal lectures based on the work conducted in Transformaciones.

Proyecto Zegache is a development project in Zegache, Oaxaca. In this socially challenged village, mainly populated by unemployed women and children, Oaxacan artist Rodolfo Morales created the Talleres Comunitarios (community workshops) in the year 2000, with the purpose of creating sources of employment, preserving artistic heritage, and recovering some of the artisan trades which were almost extinct at the time.

Cordial Business Advisers (Stockholm) is a management consultant firm, who has helped clients in Sweden and internationally to improve and develop their business for more than ten years. Cordial helps clients analyse, innovate and transform their business models. They will work pro-bono in the project with a holistic approach to management development that support the strategic renewal for sustainable success and flexibility.

FoAM (Brussels) is a transdisciplinary laboratory and a research group committed to developing a holistic culture, by actively propagating resilient cultural forms. FoAM's members include artists, gardeners, cooks, technologists, designers, writers and scientists from all walks of life. FoAM's activities arise from the gaps between traditional disciplines, to uncover and strengthen links & interdependencies between them. They include a creative research programme (research initiatives & residencies), professional development (workshops & seminars) and knowledge preservation & dissemination in the field of transdisciplinary culture (publications & documentation). FoAM is dedicated to advancing and supporting a community of generalists, people who live and work in the interstitial spaces between professional & cultural boundaries, operating under the motto "grow your own worlds".

In addition to the above mentioned partners, Performing Pictures is investigating which two other European partners would be the most beneficial to include in the project. Among the candidates in our network of long-time collaborators who have expressed an interest for the project are:

Tirana Institute of Contemporary Arts, Albania (contact person: Tina Finnäs)
Textile Futures, Central St Martins College, London, UK <http://www.csm.arts.ac.uk> (contact person: Carole Collet)
Projekt Atol, Ljubljana Slovenia <http://makrolab.ljudmila.org/atol> (contact person Marko Peljhan)
Time's Up, Linz, Austria www.timesup.org (contact person Dr. Tim Boykett)
Nadine, Brussels www.nadine.be (contact person: Ms Loes Jacobs)
Scene Thinking www.scene-thinking.com (contact person: Anna Maria Orru)
Potential new partners (discussions in initial state or haven't started yet):

Notre-Dame, Paris France
Ann Magnusson AM Public – Konstkonsult & projektledare <http://www.ampublic.se>
Världskulturmuseet, Göteborg
Uppsala Domkyrka
Stockholm Resilience Center
Handelshögskolan
Svenska Slöjdföreningen

In addition to this we need to further investigate and map out possible competencies and skills that needs to be added to secure the success of the project.