Discussant Commentary

Transformative Practices from the Pluriverse

León Staines-Diaz

School of Architecture, Art, and Design of Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey
leon_staines@tec.mx

Marysol Uribe

Faculty of Architecture of Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León
marysol.uribep@uanl.edu.mx

Abstract

This Discussant Commentary seeks to delve into the fundamental principles underlying the study conducted by Miraval and Quintana (2023). Their article explores the concept of adaptive humanism as a means to transition from limiting to quantum narratives, recognizing the profound impact of these concepts on our perception of reality. As Latinos, we highly value research that empowers diverse voices, acknowledging the significance of individuals and groups embracing and expressing their unique narratives. This emphasis on understanding one's "modes of being in the world" deviates from the idea of a singular universal worldview, a perspective that Miraval and Quintana (2023) aptly characterize as endorsing "one-size-fits-all" approaches. It is crucial to underscore the necessity of comprehending the intricacies of the modern

paradigm, challenging conventional notions of centrality to transcend singular perspectives that perpetuate the prevalence of limiting narratives. Furthermore, this paper places additional emphasis on the pivotal role of methodological approaches in empowering individuals to grasp the intricate processes of transformation within their spaces from a decolonial perspective. This involves fostering dynamics of co-creation and proactive participation within communities to create mechanisms for understanding alternative ways of being and relating to the world. Such an approach requires a direct understanding of narratives from their sources, facilitating the construction of individual, distinctive paths.

Keywords

decolonial, co-creation, knowledge production, transformational practices, participatory action research

Introduction

The aim of this commentary is to offer an alternative perspective on the research conducted by Miraval and Quintana (2023). The exploration delves into the process of adaptive humanism through the lenses of limiting and quantum narratives within a group of Latinos engaged in storytelling dynamics. Miraval and Quintana's (2023) research argues that societies have been bound by limiting narratives often rooted in tradition, dogma, and conventional wisdom. While these narratives provide a semblance of stability, they can also act as formidable constraints, restricting the scope of human potential and inhibiting progress (Boje, 2014).

To transcend these limiting narratives and embrace a fundamental shift in how we perceive ourselves, our societies, and the universe at large, the research urges us to question assumptions, challenge preconceived notions, and recognize the inherent interconnectedness of all aspects of existence. Grounded in Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), this transformative "jump" (Miraval and Quintana, 2023) is based on a mental state that requires focus and discipline to create a path of healthy body and mindsets capable of envisioning the desired future and the corresponding course of actions to achieve it.

Theory U can be recognized for its positive impact on mental and future-oriented aspects; however, there is a tendency to generalize experiences, sometimes overlooking cultural background. This perspective places a heavy individual responsibility often neglecting the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which these practices originated and may not account for the oppressive systems that have shaped individuals' experiences; emphasizing the importance of cultural respect, historical awareness and acknowledgment of diverse ways of knowing and healing (hooks, 2014; Mignolo, 2007; Smith, 1999; Escobar, 1995).

In this paper, we build on the ideas and effort invested by Miraval and Quintana (2023), while simultaneously juxtaposing their work with a decolonial

perspective focused on the articulation of a knowledge ecosystem. In this analysis, we aim to move beyond a mere appreciation of their contributions, delving into the integration of diverse forms of knowledge that reflect the richness of perspectives within this field of study.

Two Faces of Limiting Narratives "Keep Us Stuck"

Miraval and Quintana (2023) refer to limiting narratives as everyday dynamics that condition a restrictive future for underprivileged communities and individuals, preventing them from fully expressing themselves or achieving their goals. These narratives disproportionately affect people outside the central networks and institutions of knowledge. Miraval and Quintana elaborate on how an era defined by the values of modernity is confined to established rigid formulas that reject ambiguity and uncertainty. Consequently, communities or individuals developed in peripheral knowledge contexts, diverging from those seeking the replicability of central knowledge and generally valued by central spaces, are affected by these limiting narratives.

The authors delve into the possibility for communities or individuals to overcome the limiting narratives that disadvantage them through Adaptive Humanism—a process involving the transition from limiting to quantum narratives. This process relies on conscious (self-aware) and continuous adaptation to new situations that are more suitable for the current times and contemporary needs of societies. In order to achieve this shift in thought, Adaptive Humanism recognizes the necessity for principles and actions to be applied differently in various cultural, environmental, and technological contexts. This stands in contrast to *one-size-fits-all* approaches.

The authors of this Discussant Commentary acknowledge the importance of underserved communities finding a way to overcome situations that limit their possibilities for personal and collective advancement. This is crucial for them to fully engage in a globalized society, achieve better social positioning, and access comprehensive goods and services. Such aspirations are entirely legitimate within the socio-cultural and political-economic context in which we live.

Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, this stance appears to accord preferential treatment to the knowledge and ways of life inherent to central societies, potentially marginalizing the knowledge and livelihoods originating from peripheral societies. In our view, this position tends to overlook diverse and critical perspectives that challenge the development model advocated and propelled by the societies and governments of the Global North. The imposition of these models on societies in the Global South by their governments, in pursuit of modernity and development, often seeks approval from the North.

In the upcoming section, we will explore how an epistemological imposition has occurred in countries and societies of the Global South. This includes migrant communities originally from the Global South, who now find themselves

residing in and adapting to realities that are unfamiliar to them in countries of the Global North.

Limiting Narratives or Different Ways of Producing and Reproducing Knowledge

We argue that the uncritical pursuit of societies valuing the same knowledge, techniques, and ways of living can create a homogeneous society where differences and diversity may be viewed as a symbol of backwardness and consequently stigmatized as negative. In recent years, with the rise of conservative or far-right governments, we have witnessed the oppression of racialized minorities. An exception may be those individuals from minorities who choose to mimic the ways of the communities that oppress them. This homogenizing behavior has its origins after World War II when a series of policies were initiated by the Global North on the countries of the Global South to "develop" them (Escobar, 1995). It continues today through initiatives promoted by international institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

Aligned with the way capital and knowledge are produced and reproduced by central institutions, governments have relied on technocratic approaches throughout the 20th century to establish a very specific production and reproduction of knowledge and productive activities. This approach assumes that the only valid practices for accessing knowledge and growth are those conducted by experts formed and shaped by central institutions. This top-down access to knowledge and growth practices has been particularly harmful in contexts of underrepresented populations as these approaches have failed to capture and enhance underserved communities' agency, skills, and resources. These communities have developed important social abilities as they rely on community organization and deliberation to address threats and challenges (Staines-Díaz, 2022).

Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge perspectives that recognize cultural, social, and economic underprivileged backgrounds, along with their capacity to overcome their limiting social structures independently. As elucidated by Miraval and Quintana (2023) through the concept of *limiting narratives*, Paulo Freire's (1968/2018) approach becomes particularly significant when engaging with a group of *campesinos* and *obreros* in rural Brazil. Initially perceiving themselves as inferior and ignorant, Freire responded by guiding a transformative educational process. This process involved using the local language, rather than an academic one, given its irrelevance to the local cultural context of the community. This pedagogy aimed to lead their liberation through participants' self-realization, not as an imposed idea from outside. Freire emphasized conscientization as the pivotal process for individuals to recognize and analyze the structures contributing to their oppression. By raising awareness, individuals can take transformative action. This is where praxis

comes into play, transforming theory into practical application, involving individuals with their realities as they take action to effect change. The concepts of conscientization and praxis are key to the emancipation of the oppressed, emphasizing that this liberation is a task that can only be undertaken by the oppressed themselves. In Freire's words, "The pedagogy of the oppressed . . . must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed . . . This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation" (Freire, 1968/2018, p. 48).

Regarding the relationship between the desire for production driven by global inertia and its connection with local culture and modes of production, Borda (2001, p. 27) notes that capitalism and modernization possess the ability to dilute the cultural and biophysical aspects of diverse social structures. In response, he argues researchers need a radical critique and reorientation of social theory and practice. In contrast to the previously fixed conception of knowledge that prevailed in the social sciences, researchers must now appreciate science as a socially constructed process subject to interpretation, revision, and enrichment. Borda referred to this convergence between popular knowledge and academic science as Participatory Action Research.

The Decolonial Perspective of Quantum Realities: Praxis and De-Linking From the Matrix of Power

Miraval and Quintana (2023) assert that Adaptive Humanism provides a platform for delving into alternatives and possibilities, facilitating the transformation of these potentials into tangible actions and realities. Based on the realization of three pivotal elements intrinsic to quantum narratives: superposition, characterized by events existing in multiple states simultaneously; entanglement, signifying the interconnectedness akin the concept of oneness; and uncertainty, encapsulating the unpredictable nature inherent in quantum mechanics (Boje, 2014). The concepts of time and space have been explored through an appreciation of time as nonlinear, reflecting our actual experience where the past exists as memory, the future as a plan, and both unfolding within the immediacy of the present moment (Wilber, 1979).

This idea is grounded through the principles and methodology of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), a meta-process designed to guide individuals to a transformative path, changing from the inner place where we operate, individually and collectively; this creates a shift from habitual patterns to a more open and intuitive mindset, that allows a connection to visualize the emerging future; co-creating a future that it is not determined by the past (Scharmer, 2009).

While Theory U is an extremely powerful and important methodological approach to help overcome the limiting narratives imposed by cultural and personal constraints aiming to fully engage in the professional and formative

spaces of central societies, we argue that it is equally important to understand how the past and our social contexts can contribute with significant guidance for the future from people's resources and within the context of communities own values. This section introduces a critical perspective on the access and validity of knowledge. In other words, we believe that the epistemology of the Global North is in contrast to that of communities from the Global South, creating an epistemic clash (Roy, 2006). Although this clash may not be fully overcome, there are possibilities for dialogue so that both epistemologies, that of the South and that of the North, can find fertile ground in contested spaces (Wallace & Staines-Diaz, 2022).

As presented in Quantum Narratives (Boje, 2014) and Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), this tendency leans towards a forward-looking perspective, emphasizing a deliberate distancing or endorsement of letting go of past experiences or limitations. This approach holds promise when the matrix of power, as articulated by Mignolo and Walsh (2019), operates in one's favor. However, challenges arise when confronted with the apparatus of coloniality, manifested through structural inequalities, historical injustices, ongoing power dynamics, and the complexities associated with intersectionality (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; hooks, 2014). In other words, quantum narratives could be employed as a tool to advance the vision and perspective of the powerful.

While we acknowledge the critical importance of "the present moment," true empowerment arises from a heightened awareness of praxis—the conscious integration of action and its consequential impact is where the quantum essence resides. Here is where an epistemic de-linking from coloniality (Mignolo, 2007) introduces a different perspective. It is not a call to forget the past, instead, it calls for a consciousness and intentional action in response to it, this is what gives power to those who attempt to change their narratives. Such epistemic de-linking creates a recognition and respect for the coexistence of various ontologies, epistemologies, and cultural expressions. This is recognized by Arturo Escobar (2018) with the Pluriverse idea, encouraging dialogue and mutual respect among different ways of interpreting and generating knowledge. This approach emphasizes inclusivity, recognizing that there are multiple valid ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Embracing the idea of a Pluriverse encourages a richer and more respectful engagement with the diversity of human experiences and perspectives, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and equitable world.

The marginalization of specific communities has fostered an inherent resilience, firmly rooted in the cultivation of robust and distinctive communities that defy replication. Ginwright (2022) explores how community support, cultural identity, and transformative practices contribute to the ability to overcome challenges. He proposes the concept of radical healing emphasizing the importance of addressing the deep-rooted injustice in marginalized communities; supported by community-based strategies that empower local residents and organizations to create positive change and collaborative efforts that center the

voices and experiences of those directly affected. Transitioning from a problem-solving mindset to a future-oriented and re-imaginative approach marks a crucial shift in Ginwright's perspective on the subject.

Eduardo Gudynas (2011, p. 441), on the other hand, has been a prominent advocate for integrating a post-development perspective, *Buen Vivir* is a "way of being in the world" of the Andinos communities. An alternative to the development paradigm, that reflects a holistic approach to well-being that goes beyond an economic perspective, and emphasizes aspects like harmony with nature, comunal dynamics, and cultural identity. The alignment with *Buen Vivir* principles, supports the recognition of rights of nature, asserting that nature has intrinsic value beyond its utility for human needs and reproduction of capital.

There are transformative practices that can ignite change. For instance, Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer (2001, p. 238) describe the approach to building knowledge for transformational change as vital collaboration and joint knowledge-building. In this approach, competition must be replaced by cooperation. Building knowledge emphasizes fostering relationships and collaboration among diverse organizations, consultants, and researchers. This goes beyond leaving the past behind; instead, it involves drawing on the past critically to construct new possibilities.

Transformational practices focus on addressing society's structural problems by constructing images and visions of a preferred outcome and determining how to implement them. This theory transcends the usual boundaries of 'reasonableness,' rejecting the current way of doing things. It seeks discontinuity by changing concepts, structures, and ideas that result from continuity. Additionally, it considers a conception of 'futures' that goes beyond mere feasibility, emerging from judgments and choices primarily influenced by the ideas of *desirability*, *betterment*, and good social practices (Albrechts, et al., 2020). Transformational theory is connected to the idea of how knowledge should be considered in addressing social problems.

The idea of transformation based on reality is explored by Blanco (1994), who describes pragmatism as a strong voluntary element with an emphasis on action, and on the person's ability to bring out change. "For the pragmatists, freedom of the will is an unproblematic feature of our experience; hence, the world is plastic enough for the human purpose and action to have an effect" (Blanco, 1994, p. 62). Pragmatism is entangled from experience, as it is the source of knowledge; hence, epistemology takes as a starting point the subjective experience as the process of acquiring knowledge. "The concept of science is transformed by the pragmatist from the traditional concept of 'systematized knowledge' to a process of inquiry" (p. 63). This process is fallibilistic, as opposed to dogmatic. In other words, "it refers to an attitude of humility and openness toward beliefs stemming from the provisional, inexact, and error-prone nature of knowledge" (p. 57). This recognition of ignorance becomes a stimulus to learning from a particular subject, as every situation is new, unique, and special.

In the *Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön (1991) develops a model of professional practice that is influenced by pragmatism. The main difference between the rational and the pragmatic practitioner is best described by the influential and broadly cited work of Argyris and Schön (1997), who wrote the definitions of Model I and Model II, which are antagonists. The former model is characterized by control and evasion, in which the participants act defensively, discussions are private, attitudes and strategies used by participants are those of mystery and mastery, seeking to have control over the situation. Practitioners presume that they are dealing with win/lose situations, an unemotional stance as a condition of effectiveness, and testing assumptions openly, which are considered too risky (Fischler, 2012, p. 321; Blanco, 1994, p. 65; see also Wilson, 2019, p. 6). Whereas in Model II, the dialogue is primordial. To maximize validity, information should be transparent, including values, interests, and objectives. By doing so, the possibility of making good, free, and informed decisions are going to be maximized (Fischler, 2012, p. 321).

Ultimately, these transformative models aim to generate new knowledge while acknowledging diverse and even contested perspectives. It's not about forgetting the past but building upon it, recognizing the oppression generated by certain groups with the power to impose a common and overarching knowledge, labeled as scientific and technical. This knowledge is often distant from that originating in underrepresented communities and created from spheres less recognized by central spaces.

Discussion

Based on our experience working with vulnerable communities, we believe it is important for future research to explore the values and soft skills that already exist in underserved communities. While it is undoubtedly important for everyone to have access to the opportunities they desire, seeking to impose the same bodies of knowledge on everyone can lead to a homogenization of society that disregards non-traditional but legitimate and valuable knowledge. This is crucial because such knowledge represents a significant portion of the population, and non-traditional knowledge is at risk of being lost simply because it exists in spaces of difference (Lefebvre, 1974).

We argue that one way to ensure that no type of knowledge is given more value is to embrace differences and integrate them into the processes of knowledge production and reproduction. We propose that the bridge between knowledge generated by peripheral and central channels can be achieved through action research methodologies, given their transformational component. This reflection aims to explore creative paths to enhance the relationship between contrasting knowledge bearers, aiming to maximize well-being, understanding, and mutual collaboration beyond traditional vertical power dynamics.

A participatory action research process has the potential to foster and enable a new relationship to emerge between knowledge created in and by underserved

communities and the knowledge shaped by central institutions, thereby articulating diverse knowledge(s) in place. Action research is often utilized in community-based knowledge generation and change efforts. On the other hand, it is also employed as a tool for organizational change efforts within local government. However, there is less clarity on how to effectively bridge the two. Exploring these nuances would be valuable for future researchers.

Conclusion

We acknowledge and express our gratitude for the scholarly contributions made by Miraval and Quintana (2023) in their recent publication. Drawing upon our academic and personal experiences, we have encountered the formidable challenges associated with navigating contexts characterized by diversity. Particularly within Latino communities in the United States, the intricacies of assimilation manifest bidirectionally—emanating from employers towards migrant populations and reciprocally from migrant communities towards employers. These challenges often stem from language barriers or a lack of conventional academic training.

In recognizing the significance of Miraval and Quintana's (2023) work, we view their research as a pivotal bridge essential for the advancement of underserved communities within the socio-cultural and socio-economic-political landscape in which their investigation is situated. It is noteworthy to highlight the commendable nature of Miraval and Quintana's efforts, considering the arduous community work, largely undertaken through voluntary initiatives, aimed at serving their community. This endeavor represents a concerted effort to improve the material conditions of underserved communities.

On the other hand, our commentary aims to respond by challenging the necessity for underserved migrant communities to conform to narratives of power. While we acknowledge that our approach may not be immediately achievable or realistic within the context of Miraval and Quintana's (2023) current research, from a critical perspective, it is imperative to establish new ways of valuing divergent epistemological approaches in contexts of difference.

Building upon the substantial changes to foster harmonious coexistence on our planet, we emphasize the importance of minorities dedicating time and effort to gain a profound awareness of the systemic power structures that have historically constrained and continue to impact their lives. Only through this understanding can meaningful praxis emerge.

León Staines-Díaz obtained a Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin, in the United States, studying community and regional planning. Originally from Monterrey, México, his work focuses on Latin America around spatial justice and community-led participatory processes to improve informal communities. He is a professor at the School of Architecture, Arts, and Design at ITESM in Monterrey, Mexico.

Marysol Uribe Pérez-Coeto holds a Ph.D. from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, studying Architecture and Urban Affairs. Her interests revolve around the decolonial perspective on the spatial embodiment of consciousness, and the material impressions. She is engaged in transformative projects that bridge the gap between academia and the community. She serves as a professor at Faculty of Architecture at UANL in San Nicolás, México.

References

Albrechts, L., Barbanente, A., & Monno, V. (2020). Practicing transformative planning: The territory-landscape plan as a catalyst for change. City, Territory and Architecture, 7(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-019-0111-2

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1997). Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. Reis: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 77/78, 345–348. https://doi.org/10.2307/40183951

Blanco, H. (1994). How to think about social problems: American pragmatism and the Idea of planning. Bloomsbury.

Boje, D. (2014). Being quantum: Ontological storytelling in the age of Antenarrative. Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Borda, O. F. (2001). Participatory (action) research in social theory: Origins and challenges. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), The Sage handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice (pp. 27–37). Sage.

Escobar, A. (1995). Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World (Vol. 1). Princeton University Press.

Escobar, A. (2018). Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds. Duke University Press.

Fischler, R. (2012). Reflective practice. In B. Sanyal, L. J. Vale & C. D. Rosan (Eds.), Planning ideas that matter: Livability, territoriality, governance, and reflective practice (pp. 313–331). MIT Press.

Freire, P. (2018). Pedagogy of the oppressed (50th anniversary ed., M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1968).

Ginwright, S. (2022). The four pivots: Reimagine justice, reimagine ourselves. North Atlantics Books.

Gudynas, E. (2011). Buen vivir: Today's tomorrow. Development, 54(4), 441–447. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2011.86

hooks, b. (2014). Feminist theory: From margin to the center. Routledge.

Lefebvre, H. (1974). The production of space. Wiley

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2017). Frantz Fanon and the decolonial turn in psychology: From modern/colonial methods to the decolonial attitude. South African Journal of Psychology, 47(4), 432–441. https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246317737918

Mignolo, W. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. Cultural Studies, 21(2–3), 449–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647

Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C. (2019). On decoloniality: Concepts analytics and praxis. Duke University Press.

Miraval, F., & Quintana, H. (2023). Adaptative Humanism: Moving from limiting to quantum narratives to connect with the emerging future. Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change, 3(2),197–219. https://doi.org/10.47061/jasc.v3i2.6565

Roy, A. (2006). Praxis in the time of empire. Planning Theory, 5(1), 7–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095206061019

Scharmer, C. O. (2009). Theory U: Learning from the future as it emerges. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Scharmer, C. O. (2013). Leading from the emerging future: From ego-system to eco-systems economies. Berret-Koehler Publishers.

Schön, D. (1991). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Ashgate.

Senge, P., & Scharmer, O. (2001). Community action research: Learning as a

community of practitioners, consultants and researchers. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), Handbook of action research: The concise paperback edition (pp. 195–206). Sage.

Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies. Zed Books.

Staines-Díaz, L. (2022). Living in uncertainty: Challenging the planning practice in and around informal settlements in Monterrey, Mexico [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas]. Texas ScholarWorks. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/items/e877131b-f320-4d20-8f4d-39946e46a88f

Wallace, R., & Staines-Diaz, L. (2022). Sustaining practices and 'progress' over people: Identifying the potential consequences of communicating sustainability to the Global South. Journal of Environmental Media, 3(2), 155–161. https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00079_1

Wilber, K. (1979). No boundary: Eastern and Western approaches to personal growth. Shambhala.

Wilson, P. A. (2019). The heart of community engagement: Practitioner stories from across the globe. Routledge.