



Urban
Studies
And
Planning



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Collaborative research in pandemic times: virtual labs, dis-placed co-presence and knowledge co- production

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Key challenges and how we confronted them in our project

- Sharing a research process means engaging in ongoing negotiations within a collective space for dialogue and friction (Sjöberg 2018)
 - What happens when collaborators cannot be together?
 - How can meaningful relationships and some sort of co-presence be established in such a context?
- Our proposed solution:
 - Combine synchronous and asynchronous virtual and face-to-face interactions with multi-modal methods to generate “co-presence” between collaborators in a context where access to a shared space is limited, differentiated, or displaced

Presentation structure

Background to the project

Unpacking different components of our methodology

Lessons for collaborative research in pandemic times

Background to the project



Economic
and Social
Research Council

Indigenous Development Alternatives: An urban youth perspective from Bolivia

www.alter-nativas.net

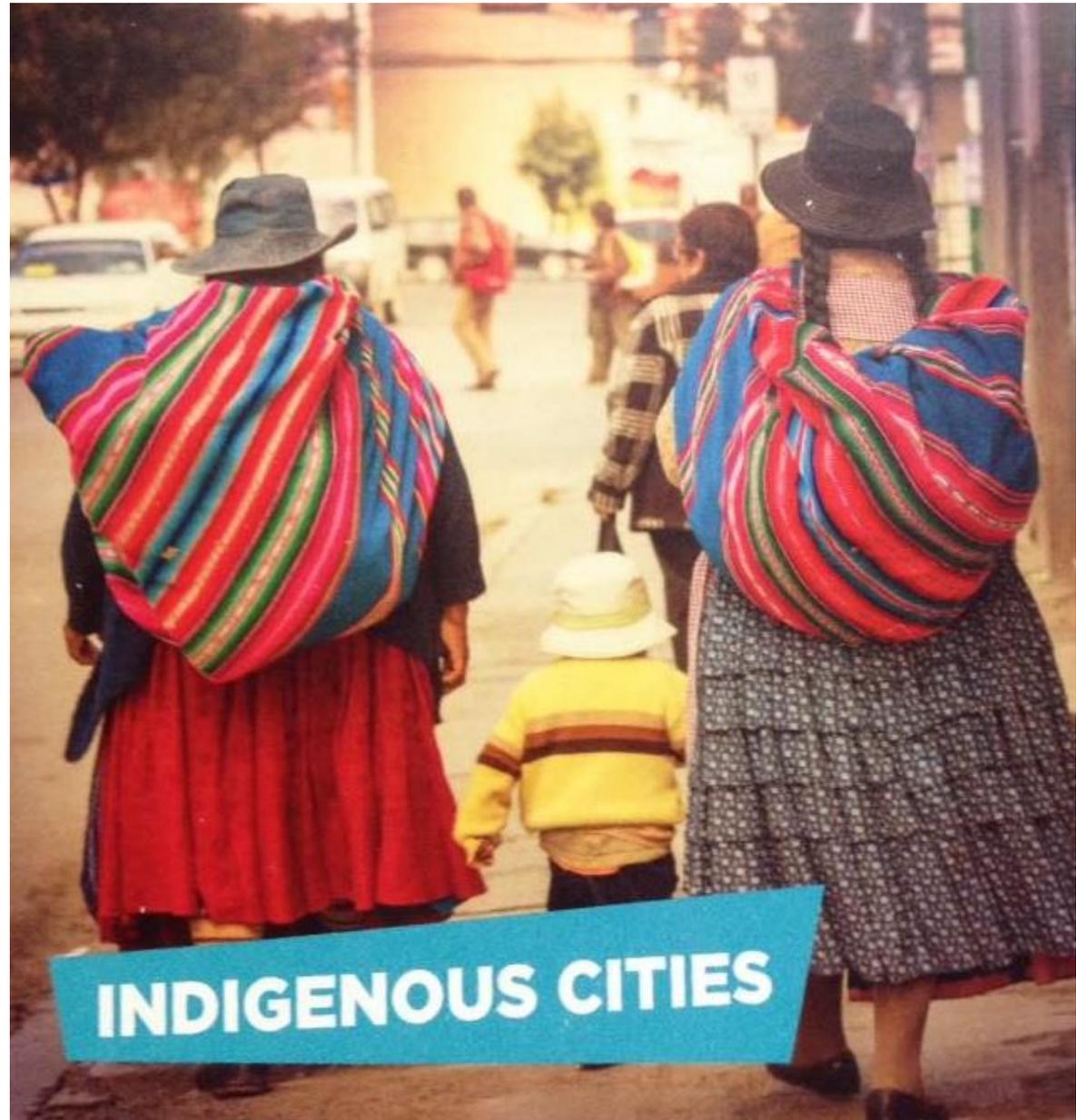
Project's objectives and key questions

Little is known about whether differentiated processes of urbanisation and youth activism promote indigenous development alternatives, defined here as "discourses and practices that break down intra/inter-ethnic inequalities and transform human-environmental relations". In our project we work on these issues. In particular, we ask:

1. What are the driving forces behind the urbanisation of indigenous territories and why are indigenous peoples, especially youths, increasingly moving to cities?
2. How do indigenous youth experience everyday urban life?
3. What development alternatives do urban indigenous youths enact/imagine/propose?

January 2021 - December 2022

Conceptual framework





Concentrated, extended & differential urbanisation
(Horn et al 2018; Monte Mor 2005; Revilla 2019)

Ciudad sin fronteras

Multilocalidad urbano rural en Bolivia



Ciudad sin fronteras

Nelson Arboquena Durán • Cristina Diez

...from rural-urban dichotomy to multi-locality & multi-activity

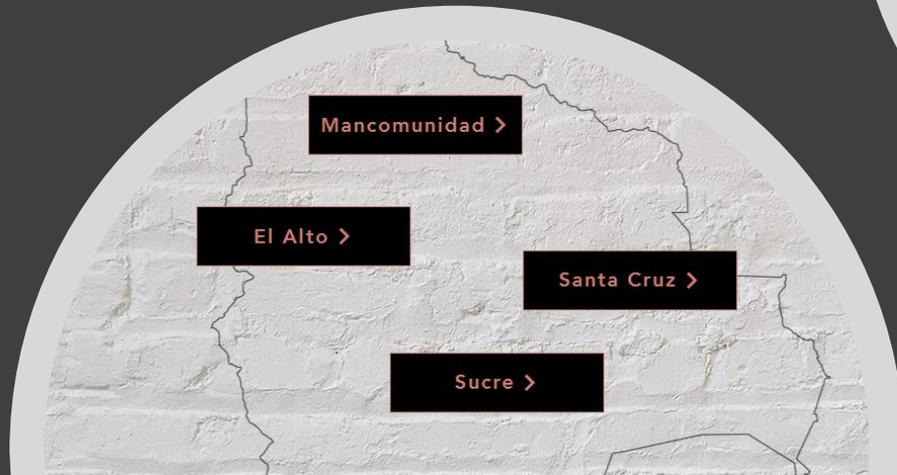


Focus on the multiple and important links that indigenous peoples establish and maintain with families and communities across urban and rural areas.

A **comparative** methodology for **collaborative** research in pandemic times

We compare cases of indigenous grassroots organizations in different contexts in the country.

Our project develops an emerging tradition of youth participatory action research that "provides young people with opportunities to study the social issues that affect their lives" by being co-researchers in the project. (Camarotta y Fine 2008: 2)



Four mini-projects defined by our young co-investigators from four collectives:

- *Documenting the visions of indigenous youth in a context of a multiple crisis (El Alto)*
- *Strengthen the role of young indigenous women in public spaces and indigenous territorial organisations in Santa Cruz.*
- *Exploring the involvement of young people throughout history in the struggle for territory and self-determination for the Qhara Qhara Nation.*
- *Exploring the causes of changes in identity and territoriality as a consequence of rural-urban migration and other socio-territorial processes. (Mancomunidades of the river Beni, Tuichi y Quiquibey)*

The different mini-projects focus on different urbanisation sites and showcase various examples of youth activism promoting different pathways for indigenous development alternatives focusing on issues such as identity and organisational reconfiguration, struggles against displacement, gender equality, as well as novel models on housing and service delivery, land management, and governance.



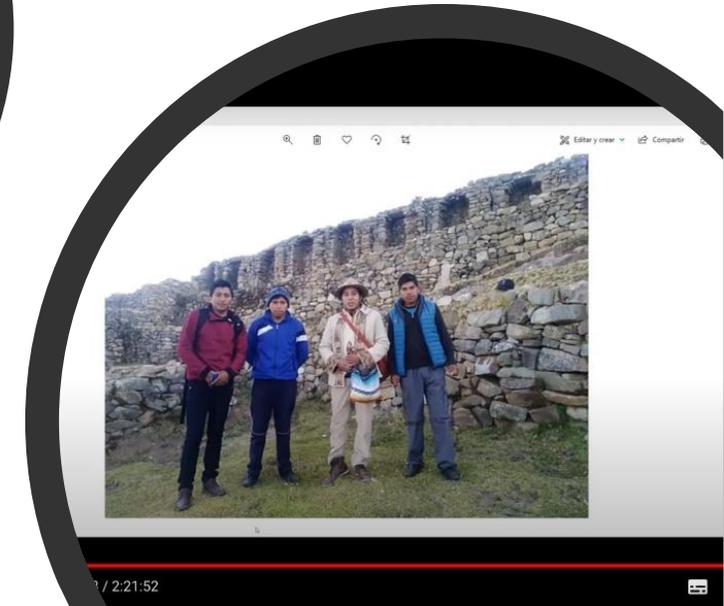
Methodological challenges and responses in pandemic times

Challenge 1: Difficulties to access shared spaces for collaboration

- Our experience challenges existing literature that advocates for a shift to the virtual when f2f interactions become impossible and less desirable (Marzi 2021; Howlett 2021)
- We instead call to consider different priorities and needs of distinctly positioned collaborators:
 - Access to shared spaces is **limited** by time and geographical constraints
 - Access to shared spaces is **differentiated** because of variation around personal circumstances, availability, and access to resources
 - Some are completely **displaced** from synchronous virtual and face-to-face connections due to lack of connections, remote location or personal circumstances

The case for mixing synchronous and asynchronous virtual and face-to-face interactions

- Coordination team meetings (weekly synchronous Zoom call accompanied by WhatsApp group)
- Team plenary workshops (every three months, mainly via Zoom but once f2f, accompanied by WhatsApp group)
- Case study labs (fortnightly synchronous meetings via Zoom or f2f, accompanied by WhatsApp groups)
- In-situ fieldwork in case study settings (accompanied by asynchronous WhatsApp discussion)



Challenge 2: Constructing co-presence together and apart

- Co-presence – defined as the relational construction of a self-other interconnection (Beaulieu 2010; Mollerup 2017) – is key for collaborative research but should not be equated with co-location.
- **How to achieve this in a context of (partial) loss of embodied knowledge via fieldwork?**
- In a context where engagement in shared spaces is limited, differentiated, and displaced, we argue that co-presence can best be achieved by relying on multi-modal methods that creatively combine textual, visual, and audio material capable of generating a multi-sensory experience for everyone, independent from how and when they participate.



The potential of switching to creative multi-modal methods to generate data and discussions and to develop a shared ‘sense of place’

- A collaborative use of the smartphone
- The use of fiction, improvisation, storytelling
- The use of interviews and visual methods

Final products (in preparation):

- 2 documentaries (El Alto, Rurrenabaque)
- 1 photo expo + 1 book (Santa Cruz)
- 1 multimedial representation (timeline with photos, videos, podcasts, interviews)

Challenge 3: Managing power relations

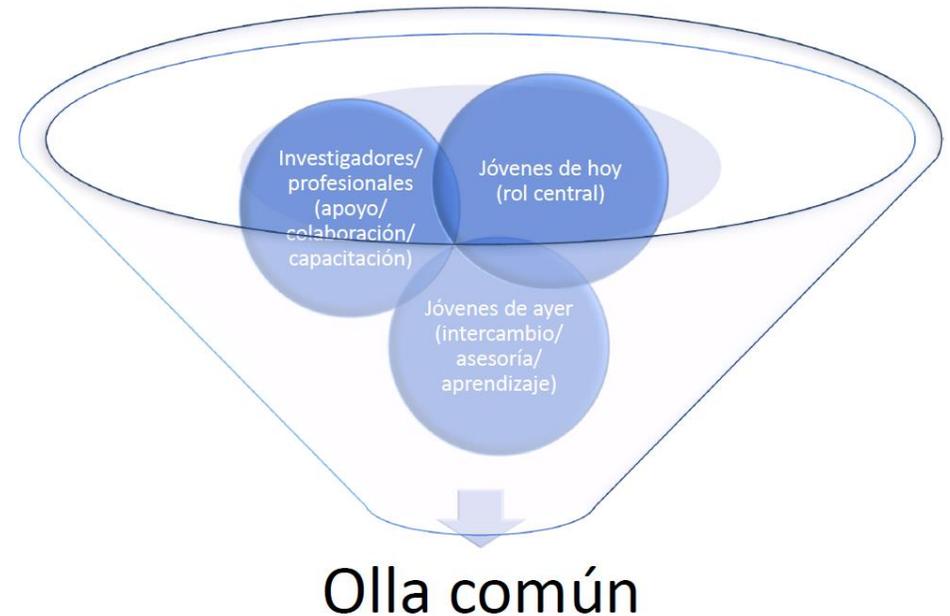
- Our discussion on limited, differentiated, and displaced access to shared spaces sheds further light on the ineliminable power relations characterizing the politics and geographies of knowledge production
- Moves to the “virtual” do not eliminate but, from our experience, exacerbate this problem

How we addressed some of these issues

(1) incorporation of flexibility and process-oriented methodological approach within grant application set the basis for experimental, shared and horizontal knowledge co-production in subsequent stages.

(2) establishment of internal work procedures that prioritise a situated construction of mutuality via the olla común.

(3) shifting resources to collaborators based within the physical setting in which the research takes place but where it is difficult to engage with other research team members.



Concluding thoughts

Being together in shifting configurations by re-centring the research process

Towards a methodological approach grounded in intersectionality thinking that embraces the diverse needs, priorities and positionalities of co-researchers (including aspects of gender relations, ethno-racial dimensions, patriarchal violence, class relations with a team)

A call for incorporating the very concept of 'indigenous alternatives' (defined as related to the access, use and control of cultural, political, economical, material and social resources and the potential of collective organisation for fairer ends) within a research process.

Working with an expanded understanding of indigenous territoriality understood through a multi-local lens
(Accessing and interacting with people in these spaces via synchronous and asynchronous virtual and physical means).



Thank you!
Questions?