Living library as a third place: an encounter of generations in times of uncertainty

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Abstract: This paper addresses an ongoing experience with the *Rede Beija-flor de Pequenas Bibliotecas Vivas de Santo André*, a civil society organization, in the field of the right to literature, as a human right for all. Santo André, SP, Brazil is a rich but unequal city, marked by its past working-class identity, though, nowadays, it no longer knows what its identity is. The actors include college professors, young students in training to become primary school teachers, and residents of vulnerable territories. Experience points to possibilities of a relationship between different historical and age generations within a cofigurative cultural order, thus, a temporary one. Everything is open and undefined. The place, living library, is not home, work, or school. It is a third place, where people encounter themselves and others, a place of complete freedom. Thus far, this experience

indicates new ways to act, considering the dyad "intelligent citizens" to "participatory cities" in times of uncertainty.

1. Presentation

This paper presents an analysis of a formative experience around the guarantee of the cultural right to literature, books, and reading among the members of different historical and age generations living in a vulnerable territory. This experience takes place through educational and cofigurative cultural processes that contribute to the architecture of a Brazilian city marked by the history and memory of social struggles of the working-class movement within the industrial sector in the final decades of the 20th century, though, nowadays, it no longer knows what its identity is.

Some notions are required to discuss the guarantee of the cultural right to literature, books, and reading: ignorant master, territory, vulnerable territory, sociological imagination, cofigurative cultural processes, living library, and third place.

This study's setting is a Brazilian city, Santo André. It is a rich but unequal city that composes the industrial ABC Region in the state of São Paulo, where the leadership of a worker who would be elected the country's president in 2002 was forged. A region that once spoke to the country and world is now at a crossroads because it needs to find new paths.

This context is the background of a crisis that has permeated the university and the formative processes of future young teachers, prompting its actors to search for new training paths outside the institution's walls, in a vulnerable territory, reaching out to its residents. An encounter of different generations led to paths of the culture field, more specifically, the right to literature as a human right for all because no one lives a day without fables (Cândido, 2011).

The meeting place could not be demarcated by rules and norms such as home, work, or school, but halfway, a third place, that of a living library: a place of freedom to come and go, freedom to choose what and how to read. A place to live and think about oneself and the city, based on individual and collective desires of those who attend it until new paths are devised for the city.

Literature, poetry, music, cinema, which cross the living library, have announced that there are unknown, undefined places we must discover and bring forth. An example is the tale "*A terceira margem do rio*" by Guimarães Rosa, our most prominent writer, published in 1962 for the first time. This tale presents unanswered questions the reader is supposed to find. A tale that has inspired many other writers, poets, musicians, among them Odilon Moraes, who wrote "Rosa", for children, youths, and adults, referring to Guimarães Rosa's tale: "*Atravessamos de uma margem a outra, oscilando entre o tempo das palavras e o das imagens. Cabe a nós alcançar a terceira margem*" [We have crossed from one bank to the other, oscillating between the time of the words and images. It is up to us to reach the third bank] (Moraes, 2017, p. back cover).

Living Library is a third place where the literature is present all the time, in its most different modalities, in which thinking, dialoguing, listening to others allow us to find answers to what bothers us or what we want; and the territory is within.

> The territory enters each library without asking permission. Alive, pulsating, in the body, thoughts, feelings, and histories of each person who visits it. It appears in their choices, interests, in their relationship with books, with literature. Urgent questions enter the library; dreams too. This is why the territory cannot be considered a mere piece of land. Magnaghi (2003) considers it the most beautiful work of art that humanity has ever produced – because, by transmitting symbolic and affective messages, it interferes with people's identities, language, and culture. Authors of marginal and independent literature express this relationship with the territory very well. A precise example is Mailson Furtado (2017), with his poetry book "*À cidade*" [To the city], written in homage to little Varjota, a town lost in the back lands of Ceará, where he lives. This book was considered the best poetry book and book of the year, which rendered him the 2018 Jabuti Prize. "It was vomited poetry. I only felt good when I put the book out. I was inside the work, and the work was inside me", Mailson described (Nakano, 2019, pp. 11-12).

2. The city and its territories: Santo André

The study's setting is Santo André, SP, Brazil. According to the IBGE, in 2020, the city had 721,368 inhabitants[1]. It composes the 39 municipalities that comprise the large metropolitan area in São Paulo, with more than 21 million inhabitants in 2018 (IBGE), the wealthiest and most dynamic region in Brazil. Comparing the city to the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, Santo André occupies the 14th best place considering the MHDI[2] from 2013, of 0.815 (UNDP[3]), though it is highly unequal with a Gini Index of 0.5428 (IBGE[4]).

Poverty and vulnerability coexist with wealth, the city's facet that the Covid-19 pandemic has made even more apparent. The residents of numerous favelas are spread out throughout the city; more than 100 shantytowns, with more than 114,000 people living in vulnerable conditions (Santo André, 2015). Most have no access to drinking water and sewage treatment, live in poor neighbourhoods and inhabit unfinished houses they built themselves. Even where there is basic infrastructure such as water and sewage treatment, precariousness marks their lives.

In the 1970s and 1980s, this same city, together with neighbouring cities that compose the industrial ABC Region, spoke to the country through workers' struggles, and in the early 2000s, elected a blue-collar worker the president of Brazil.

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[1] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE.

[2] Municipal Human Development Index.

[3] United Nations Development Program.

[4] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE.

In the case of Santo André, the city was marked by the imaginary of the workers' struggle due to its history, an imaginary that the crude reality took charge of undoing. From a working-class city, Santo André is currently the locus of the service sector, populated by large shopping malls, even though the industrial sector has retained its importance (Nakano, Villar and Villar & Mariano, 2014).

Hence, it requires resuming the debate regarding intergenerational relationships and each actor's role in this relationship. In 2020, adults and elderly individuals from the two generations that fought against the military dictatorship and played a decisive role in the country's re-democratization, actively participating in the struggle for civil, political, and social rights, seem no longer able to transmit to the youngest the power of their actions and projects to transform the city into a fairer, more democratic, and supportive place.

> Even though our awareness of these transformations is extremely recent, it seems clear that the educational model of socialization, co-founder of the modern order, has entered a state of obsolescence. Instead, evidence indicates a cultural ordering mode that today, if we resort to Mead's (1979) categories, would be more cofigurative, that is, shared learning experienced by different age groups in the face of injunctions of a world that appears to them as fundamentally new, rather than post-figurative, as was the Western modernity model, based on the transmission of past experience as an element of ordering and domestication of the future, or pre-figurative, as was the model founded on the utopias of the sixties' generation (Peralva, 1997, pp. 22-23).

The challenge to finding clues and producing new forms of intergenerational relationships, according to the new cultural order, such as indicated by Peralva (1997), was imposed on some of us who inhabit this city. Nowadays, the city no longer knows what it is, given the substantial changes it has experienced due to the transition from an industrial hub to a place of services and the fading image of a working-class that once drove changes without another actor taking its place (Nakano, Villar e Villar & Mariano, 2014). In this context of uncertainties, the *Rede Beija-flor* was born, a civil society organization working in the field of right to literature, right to reading and books, through the hands of the elderly, adults, and young people. Living libraries are where different generations meet and reflect upon different subjects, like a "third place," in the sense proposed by Oldenburg (1989).

> "third place" refers to the notion provided by R. Oldenburg (1989). He defines "third places" as places that are neither home (First place) nor work (Second place), but intermediate places (third places), informal, welcoming open spaces… People who go to these places value proximity, relationships, being welcome. They want to put in place ways of acting that are non-competitive and meet a social need. They fall outside the classic circuits of social actions or company patronage. (...) These are spaces in which the establishment of social bonds, exchanges, and human relationships counts as much or more than the activity itself (Cléach, Deruelle & Metzger, 2015).

By breaking the logic of disciplinary society (Foucault, 2014), represented by the education provided at home and school, third places can produce environments of greater freedom and horizontality of relationships. However, breaking the more formatted disciplinary model can lead society to perform based on projects, initiatives, and motivation, which results in a society of fatigue (Han, 2017). The challenge of living libraries is to create spaces of freedom without the commitment to perform and train skills for the society's neoliberal vision.

3. From the university to the vulnerable territory: an encounter between historical and age generations

The initial setting was a university in Santo André, the *Centro Universitário Fundação Santo André - CUFSA*, attended mainly by people from the city's lower classes, children of workers, themselves young student workers. Their professors had a "before" and "after" feeling because they did not find in their students from the 2000s the same characteristics of those they had known in the 1990s, the latter marked by their working-class condition.

> There are two central components in this exchange (from which the "generational bond" emerges): on the one hand, the presence of events that break historical continuity and delimit "before" and "after" in collective life; on the other hand, the fact that these discontinuities are experiences lived by the members of an age group in a specific constitutive connection, when the socialization process was not concluded, at least in the crucial period, and the schemes used to interpret reality are not yet fully rigid or — as Mannheim put it — when these historical experiences are "first impressions" or "youthful experiences" (Feixa & Leccardi, 2010, pp. 189-190).

Faced with this context, the professors decided to cross the school's walls and seek to understand the crisis, taking their young students with them. They sought other places and people who carried the clues on how to act in the field of education to identify and understand ongoing experiences. They accepted the challenge proposed by Sposito (2011), that of incorporating the **non-school**" into the debate about school.

> When examining this apparent paradox at the junction of the "non-school" and school, one needs to consider an important distinction between the analytical category – school – and empirical unit – school – the object of investigation. The analytical relevance of the school institution does not necessarily imply its empirical study, as this is the first aspect of the non-school via in the sociological study of school. The second resides in the idea that even considering the school an empirical unit of investigation; one has to recognize that non-school elements penetrate, conform, and are created within the institution, thus, also deserve to be investigated (Sposito, 2011, p. 25).

Imbued with the fact that the "non-student" had much to say about the crisis in school education, breaking down the university walls that isolate it from ordinary men was essential. It was a matter of going toward the territory, with the young students, and together experience possibilities of general and civic education thus far unknown, under the condition that everyone felt part of the ongoing process.

The study setting became the **territory**, "not only as a unit of social life occupied by certain subjects, among them students who attend a university or primary schools, but as an empirical and analytical category that enables" to apprehend school, the pedagogical practices that take place within, especially in the classroom, the professors, students, and specific requirements for quality education to all (Almeida & Nakano, 2011, p. 118).

It was about incorporating to the debate and reflection, the **simple man**, in the sense of Martins (2011a), from illiterate to higher education graduates, some sort of university of life, open to all, making all those living in the territory, men and women, children, youths, adults and the elderly, its interlocutors. It was about learning the complexity contained in the sociability of this simple man, which cannot be reduced to a separation between private and public life. Finally, it was about comprehending different historical layers, sometimes superimposed, produced by simple men, often misunderstood, so that the university itself could find its paths and train young future teachers differently.

The college students sought to understand the clues these people left on the ground they inhabited, in a close relationship with nature, within power relations, as subjects who carried potencies to be discovered and activated. An understanding that considered the idea that the territory, far beyond the present time, carried in its layers different times of history, associated with actors who give life and meaning to it, making it a unique and, at the time, universal place (Magnaghi, 2003).

In short, it was about looking at school from outside it, with other lenses, with people other than those participating in the academic community. The information we had was insufficient to find clues to cope with the crisis. It was also needed to develop the quality of spirit in each of us – professors, adults, and elderly individuals, students, youths – to use the information and develop reason, understanding ourselves as individuals and subjects in a specific time in the city where we work, within the relationships existing in that place, marked by its history. That is, as professors and students, we exercise **sociological imagination** (Mills, 1969), going beyond the information that clouds our ability to apprehend it, but appropriate information that expands reason and allows us to apprehend with acuteness of sense what happens in the world and ourselves. Imagination that would allow us to understand the threads that intertwine biography, society and their reciprocal relationships, and history, that is,

> the idea that the individual can understand her own experience and gauge her own fate only by locating herself within her period, that she can know her own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of individuals in her circumstances (Mills, 1969, pp. 11-12).

It seemed to us that the notion of "sociological imagination" proposed by Mills (1969) over sixty years ago, carried a power as an essential operator to understanding reality because it could open up possibilities to reflect upon the individuals' ability to establish relationships between what it is inherent to the individual experience, what is pertinent to institutional environments, and what is inherent to history in the broad sense.

Additionally, we needed to rethink who we were, professors and future young primary school teachers – concrete subjects working in the field of education. Along this path, the notion of an **ignorant master** (Rancière, 2002) was essential. It required us to leave the university gown.

A territory is not merely a piece of land, inert; instead, it is marked by flesh and blood people, with needs, expectations, and aspirations concerning material and immaterial goods. It was necessary to listen to them. Therefore, the very notion of "professor who knows" needed to be challenged—the classroom image permeated by vertical relations needed to be undone.

It implied that learning acquired through daily experience needed to be heeded through sensitive listening, learning that does not require the presence of a master who explains, who interposes between an author's text and students (Rancière, 2002). Only then, university professors and future teachers could give birth to the "ignorant master" and the possibilities this notion carries, capable of withdrawing from the game and proposing the establishment of a relationship between equals. A master who ignores the inequality that usually marks the relationship between teachers and students, not because s/he is unaware of inequality, but because s/he plays the game of equality between people who are equal in intelligence (Vermeren, Cornu & Benvenuto, 2003).

Acting as an "ignorant master" implied, in addition to discarding the university gown, accepting that we were equal in reason, professors, students, and simple people in the territory. Furthermore, work with the perspective of living an adventure, accepting a certain disorder so that all learned together, within a relationship of equals, with the same capacity for collective reflection. It was about an initial condition that allowed the existence of common, egalitarian, and, therefore, democratic actions (Rancière, 2002).

In this disorder, work became an act of groping, experiencing. It meant accepting the condition of being less sure about things, the first condition to approximate and do something with someone else. It was about "sensitive listening," such as Barbier (1998) proposed, being able to empathize without judging, and letting oneself be surprised by the unknown as part of our experiences.

It meant incorporating the same notion of social experience and accepting the idea that new challenges are posed to all of us because today's society is built concomitantly with its actors' actions and experiences (Dubet, 1994). Much like the African parable, it was about listening more and talking less.

> In Africa, listening is a guiding principle. It's a principle that's been lost in the constant chatter of the Western World, where no one seems to have the time or even the desire to listen to anyone else. (…) It's as if we have completely lost the

ability to listen. We talk and talk, and we end up frightened by silence, the refuge of those who are at a loss for an answer (Mankel, 2011).

It was about professors, young college students, residents of the territory, thinking about teaching/learning together, in a horizontal relationship, perhaps in another cultural order, even if temporary, cofigurative, as proposed by Peralva (1997), learning from each other. What we did not know yet was that the configuration of space was something to be reconsidered. The classroom, an orderly place, the professor's desk, desks, and blackboard could no longer be the standard to be adopted.

4. Paths and tensions in the construction of experience in the vulnerable territory

The process of getting closer to the residents was long and delicate. However, by doing things in common, according to each one's desires and possibilities, all those involved, especially the youths, future educators, and their professors, could learn. It was necessary to abandon the protection of the classroom's four walls, breathe new air, relate with simple people who lived in the university's surroundings, a vulnerable territory. It was about "treading clay" (Martins, 2011b). A difficult, unusual job, especially for those coming from a university institutional environment and the sociabilities it promotes, a universe that nowadays carries more certainties and fewer doubts.

Sensitive listening was an essential requirement for the job. Listening to others, those living in a vulnerable territory, neighbouring the university. People who were frequently observed, through the window, from a prejudiced perspective by the many who teach in vulnerable neighbourhoods, improperly referred to as the poor, migrants, Black people, and dangerous individuals. College professors used to teaching supported by their master classes, and young students, future teachers, were supported by a pre-figurative cultural order as if, at school, they would be in charge of socializing the youngest according to the models they had learned from the elders (Mead, 2019).

The path involved acting and thinking together. It demanded the territory's inhabitants to come and go to the university and demanded those who attended the university to go to the territory to meet its residents. It was about building imaginary bridges between these two territories, enabling people to circulate without fear of entering "someone else's home", to dialogue, talk about desires, act together to fulfil dreams, those dreams they could concretize with the resources they had, to reflect upon power relationships and how history had impacted everyone.

In acting and thinking together, two initial movements took place. First, the residents wanted the students and college professors to collect the garbage, clean the town square, and paint the concrete benches. Afterward, they wanted to fraternize around a table with collective meals to celebrate their accomplishment and concretization of a dream. The clean town square carried with it more than cleanness; it represented the possibility of having a place to meet each other, a place

other than home, work, or school. Sweeping, cleaning, painting, and cooking, simple things in life, were collectively determined and carried out as proof that everyone was available. These actions were much appreciated by those who participated and those who only observed. Even though these are not immediately seen as "pedagogical" actions, as they are considered "minor," these activities proved to be essential for establishing bonds; these actions had an effect on everyone.

Professors and future educators were encouraged to enter a field of action to prove that they were willing to be together with the residents of that territory they had not planned, a field not included in the curriculum. They were learning a type of knowledge that is born from experience: the establishment of bonds. Nothing new, but it seemed that it was a secret the school had forgotten.

The territory's inhabitants learned that college students are people who could sweep the floor, clean a town square, and cook like them. Moreover, the residents learned that the university was open to them as people and citizens.

The university actors went further, as they could conduct quantitative and qualitative research with the residents' consent and participation. The residents guided the researchers to the houses, even around the most challenging places. For one month, the actors in the territory allowed researchers to stay in the town square, where drugs sale takes place during daylight, to observe what children do in that space.

The lessons learned with this experience included the concrete practice of a set of categories and notions discussed within the classroom. Moreover, these categories and notions gained objectivity given concrete life dimensions and uncertainties we faced. Hence, everyone could perceive the bonds established by non-students with formal education, ignorant master, sensitive listening toward simple people, facing a "cofigurative" cultural order.

In the relationships established with the residents, we learned that vulnerable territories should not be seen as a piece of land, with rigidly delimited physical and spatial boundaries, interpreted only by quantitative metrics, translated into socioeconomic indicators and development indexes, which lead to standardization that fails to reveal interactions and ways of life, emphasizing poverty even more.

We understood that social vulnerability is a multidimensional territory as multiple variables contribute to it, including precarious jobs, poor support networks, the position of certain social groups within the world of work, personal attributes, education, whether one is included in the job market, household characteristics, and access to services. The ability of actors to act, their histories, and repertories of actions also contribute to social vulnerability, making it impossible to lessen vulnerability to poverty. These same actors can produce wealth, not necessarily measurable, but often loaded with hope, with future projects (Cançado, Souza & Cardoso, 2014). Some of these projects are still based on the past, on the dreams of the eldest, and unfinished projects with no deadline, marked by uncertainty. Finally, the territory carries layers of history produced by different generations of residents and a set of layers of experiences and memories that engender new paths to be laid down and trodden.

All this strongly impacted many of the college students who took part in the experience, enabling the conditions for them to engage in civil actions, together with

other actors, in the process of creating a civil society organization to carry out work in the city where they live, pointing to elements that allow reflecting upon the central assumptions of the study *Smart citizens for smart cities* (Belando-Montoro, Blanco, Noguera, Almeida & Pérez, 2020). Note that the study above includes two sets of terms that deserve to be discussed here. The first dyad, "smart citizens," is about acting so that young people would engage in actions within and outside schools. Youths, considered as intelligent as any professor, would be in a relationship with an ignorant master who does not disregard equality from the very start; experience indicated it was starting to happen. The second dyad, "Participatory cities," leads us to infer that the city demands the participation of its citizens as a "place of political participation" (Oliveira, 2014). This also started to happen, as the following reports illustrate show.

The reports thus far lead us to reflect upon the youths and their relationship with other generations and how capable they are of devising actions within the university. Furthermore, reflect upon their potential to reach spaces outside the university, building bridges between those within and outside it, indicating that reflecting upon "smart citizens" and "participatory cities" implies considering the multiple dimensions existing in these dyads given the complex life of any city and any citizen, living in a city that no longer knows its identity.

5. *Rede Beija-flor*, civil society organization: the third place in institutional and everyday interstices

The ties of trust established between the territory's residents and university actors, among them the youths, revealed that the material poverty that surfaced during the many visits to the territory was accompanied by a different sort of wealth, that of the residents' ability to act; they were able to change their living conditions by getting the local government to urbanize the favela where they lived.

At the same time, we realized another dimension of this place's vulnerability: the residents were confined to the narrow boundaries of their territory, especially the children. Confinement was marked by the presence of TVs occupying people's free time as a way to kill time, and play in the town square mediated by those selling drugs (Santos, 2015). There was a lack of activities within the fields of arts and literature. Approximately 50% of the families did not have books other than textbooks donated by the government (Nakano, Daniel Filho, Villar and Villar, Mariano & Santos, 2015)[5].

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[5] The study that refers to the Report aforementioned was only possible due to the participation of countless people who: a) applied the questionnaire, including all the students attending the Pedagogy Program and 2nd and 3rd year students from the Psychology program enrolled in 2015; and b) tabulated data, including 3rd year students attending the Mathematics Program, also enrolled in 2015. In addition to these students, the following professors from the Pedagogical Program also participated: Sebastião Haroldo Correa Porto (coordinator of the program – 2015), Marli Vizim, and Odair de Sá Garcia. Professors Ricardo Silva (Geography) and Ligia Cecilia Buso Senagiotto (Psychology) also contributed to the questionnaire application. Professor Karen Moreira Dias from the Mathematics program provided statistical support, and Professor Ligiane Gomes from the Pedagogy Program organized the infrastructure necessary to apply the questionnaire. Finally, Daniel Montanari, 3rd year student from the Mathematics Program, actively participated in the development of the questionnaire and database, from its initial draft up to the final version when inconsistencies

Thus, material poverty coexisted with experiences of objective denial of civil and cultural rights, despite all the wealth each people carried within.

Given this context, will more classical repertoires of action or new ways of acting be generated? (Fuentes, Vázquez & Nakano, 2020, p. 88). Seeking answers to this question, Canclini emerges as an inspiration.

> What is a city? (...) Cities do not exist only as of the occupation of a territory, the construction of buildings, and material interactions among its inhabitants. The sense and nonsense of the urban are formed, however, when books, magazines, and cinema are imagined, by the information newspapers, the radio, and TV provide every day about what happens on the streets. We do not act in the city based only on orientation provided by maps or GPS, but also on mental and emotional cartographies that vary according to personal ways to experience social interactions. When referring to his place, Granada, Luis García Montero used to say, "every person has a city that is an urbanized landscape of their feelings (García Montero, 1972; p. 71)" (Canclini, 2008, p. 15).

The anthropologist goes further by saying that he is part of a "current of urban thought that sees cities in tension between what they are and what we wanted them to be" (Canclini, 2008, p. 15).

It is amid this tension that we decided to find a place where it would be possible to reflect upon it all, collectively and/or individually, without separating the dreams for the entire city produced by the collectives, from the individuals' dreams, dreams from the individuals' most intimate sphere. In a city marked by profound inequality, poverty, violence, and cultural entities considered noble, such as the Santo André Symphony Orchestra, this place could not be home or work (or school). It had to be a place where one could freely meet others and oneself. It had to be a third place, a place in which different generations could meet.

All these reflections led the group to decide that the field of action would be that of culture in its anthropological meaning.

> In the anthropological dimension, culture is produced through the individuals' social interactions, through which they devise their ways of thinking and feeling, constructing their values, managing their identities and differences, and establishing routines. This way, each individual builds in their surroundings, depending on different determinations, small worlds of meaning that allow them relative stability. Therefore, culture provides individuals what Michel de Certeau calls "symbolic balances, compatibility contracts, and more or less temporary commitments" (Botelho, 2001, p. 74).

Being guided by the anthropological dimension of culture did not mean leaving aside the sociological dimension, i.e., concerning the "workforce living from what in one way or another, with or without conceptual reservations, can be called culture

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were verified; and b) Danilo Santos Righeti was responsible for the qualitative research, which composed his Final Paper presented to the Pedagogy Program in 2015.

(arts, music, theatre, dance, cinema, and TV productions, fashion, architecture, advertising)" (Coelho, 2008, p. 65), but privileging the way of life of the territory's residents, with all that it entails. Moreover, the right to literature as a universal human right proposed by Cândido (2011) was linked to all dimensions of the lives of the subjects with whom we related.

> I will call literature, in the broadest possible sense, all the creations with a poetic, fictional, or dramatic touch at all levels of society, in all types of culture, from what we call folklore, legend, and wit to the most complex and difficult forms of written production of great civilizations.
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> From this perspective, literature clearly seems a universal manifestation of all men in all times. There are no people and no man who can live without it, that is, without the possibility of getting in touch with some sort of fable. As everyone dreams every night, no one can spend the twenty-four hours of a day without a few moments surrendering to the fabled universe. During sleep, dreams ensure the indispensable presence of this universe, regardless of our will. And during the vigil, the fictional or poetic creation, which is the spring of literature in all its levels and modalities, is present in each one of us, illiterate or erudite, as an anecdote, tale, comic book, police news, popular songs, or Brazilian country music (Cândido, 2011, pp. 174-175).

Our encounter with the residents of vulnerable territories resulted from a choice that considered the city's existing inequalities and another choice that concerned the space, the living library[6].

The **living library** needed to be differentiated from the school library, a silent place where books are kept; books students consult most of the time when their teachers demand school assignments. Hence, a school library is often a closed, unpleasant place marked by obligation.

A living library is a place where people go freely and willingly, whenever they can and wish. It is a place marked by the freedom to choose what to read, according to one's interest and desire, a democratic, pulsating, and lively place.

A living library, a meeting place surrounded by books. An accessible, inviting, friendly, comfortable, airy, and beautiful place, collecting all adjectives describing a place that welcomes and integrates the territory's residents – a place where books, videos, and all culture and knowledge material are easily accessible, without any bureaucracy.

As a third place, a living library is a "home outside the home" (Azan, Chauvac & Coutier, 2015). A library as a third place is where one finds life in words, where one can be with books shamelessly, in other words, where books are not intimidating or tedious objects (Petit, 2009).

A place where readers are respected in their intimacy, desires, knowledge, and questions, where a book is an object, reading is the experience, a place that goes beyond four walls. This third place incorporates an action that reaches out to children, youths, adults, and older people wherever they are. The aim is to ensure access to

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[6] All the ideas concerning "living library" can be found in SP-Leituras, 2013.

literature, opening opportunities for these individuals to enter the vast, borderless, diverse literary world. A place of many readings, not a single one. A place of many stories, not a single one. A place of many interpretations, not a single one. A place of much pleasant reading, to study, to read for someone else, to learn to write with others, to get informed... (Patte, 2012).

Living library with these configurations was a project that dialogued with the desires that inhabited the imaginary of young adults, college professors, and those living in the territory. It opened a possibility to access one of the fundamental rights of any citizen, the right to literature.

> Each one of us has cultural rights: the right to know, but also the right to the imagination, the right to appropriate cultural goods that contribute, at all ages of life, construction, self-discovery, to open oneself to others, to exercise fantasy, without which there is no thought, to the development of a critical spirit. Each man and woman has the right to belong to a society, a world. Through what those who belong to it produced: texts, images, in which writers and artists try to transcribe the deepest part of human experience (Petit, 2013, pp. 23-24).

Ensuring the rights proposed by Petit (2013) and Cândido (2011) did not mean to save those living in the vulnerable territory. Instead, it was about creating bridges between people and books because actions similar to the living library can support this population's access to reading, despite the constraints imposed by their social context.

> But if the readers' experience is not radically different depending on one's social environment, the obstacles differ. For some, everything, or almost everything, is given at birth. For others, geographical distance adds to economic hardships and cultural and psychological obstacles. When one lives in a poor neighbourhood on a city's outskirts or in the countryside, books are rare, unfamiliar, invested with power, or cause fear. They are separated from them by actual borders, visible and invisible. And if books do not go to them, they will never go to the books.
> (...)
> And this is where "reading promotion," that this expression regains its meaning. When one was not lucky to have books at home, see his/her parents read, or listen to them telling stories, things can change after an encounter. (...) it is necessary to multiply the opportunities of mediation, the occasions to promote such encounters (Petit, 2013, pp. 23-25).

The previous discussion and experiences that took place between 2015 and 2017 resulted in the *Rede Beija-flor de Pequenas Bibliotecas Vivas de Santo André*, which was officially created in 2018 by young students, college professors, and the residents of the vulnerable territories, and other actors of civil society and public authorities.

All this experience seems to coincide with what the youths signalled in a study conducted in the scope of "Smart Citizens for Participatory Cities" in its first phase.

Among the issues they raised, we verified that the meanings of participating in the city were broader than classical meanings, such as taking part in unions, parties, and student unions.

> ... se observa la importancia de las salidas al parque para conversar, practicar deportes, acceder y ser usuarios de áreas del espacio público, lo que para ellas y ellos significa también participar. En otras palabras, estas incursiones suponen una salida de la esfera familiar y de la vida escolar que es interpretada como una participación sin el control de los adultos. En este caso, los espacios públicos son valorados por representar lugares de libertad en los que se pueden ver personas, intercambiar ideas y discutir temas de interés. Asimismo, ellas y ellos mencionan como relevantes algunos eventos promovidos por ONG, Iglesias, activistas del hip-hop o las veladas literarias, esto es, encuentros en los que presentan poesías. Estas actividades en espacios públicos son organizadas por diferentes agentes, ya sea por el propio poder público que se encarga de convocar y abrir estos espacios para los jóvenes o directamente por las y los jóvenes, que se organizan y ocupan espacios públicos como territorios a los que tienen derecho. Llama la atención la poca vinculación con actividades colectivas en los barrios de residencia. Las extensas jornadas escolares, los tiempos de traslado y el trabajo o las pasantías, restringen la circulación, participación o el uso del tiempo libre en el barrio, en las ciudades que tienen o han tenido políticas municipales destinadas a jóvenes, como parques y plazas públicas. Sin embargo, incluso cuando estas políticas han presentado discontinuidades, las y los estudiantes sostienen que poseen fácil acceso a estos dispositivos y a su uso. Por lo tanto, muchas y muchos han mencionado que la participación puede suceder en cualquier lugar, sin que haya un espacio privilegiado." (Fuentes, Vázquez & Nakano, 2020, p. 84).

6. No final considerations, open possibilities

Living libraries encrusted and rooted in vulnerable territories seem to fulfil the role public spaces have played among youths in the field of participation within and for the city. It has been a challenge for the *Rede Beija-flor de Pequenas Bibliotecas Vivas de Santo André*: to set its roots in the city's vulnerable neighbourhoods, involving young people in this management. A cofigurative cultural order temporarily characterizes this involvement because it is where different generations meet to discuss possibilities for an open future for the city of Santo André. A city that currently, more than in the past, faces the task to restructure its architecture in an attempt to reach for a less unequal, and more plural, and democratic city, to create public spaces for everyone by producing and fostering culture, leisure, and sociabilities, based on social actions that involve an encounter between generations around the right to literature in its broader sense. A sense that considers that "no one can spend the twenty-four hours of a day without a few moments surrendering to the fabled universe" (Cândido, 2011, p. 175).

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