

Patching Up the Landscape: Contributions of Design Practice to Situated Learning Theory. Strategies Applied in *Tejiendo la calle*

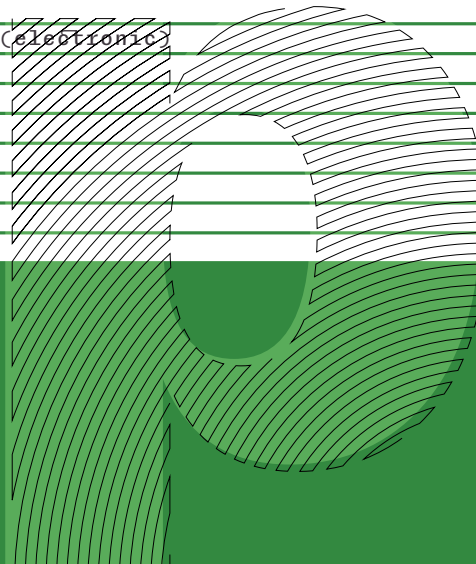
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This article explores the significant potential of public space as a context for collective interaction, where community art processes can promote situated learning. In these circumstances, the boundaries of conventional educational classrooms and museum white cubes are dissolved, expanding the possibilities for generating knowledge in experiential, cooperative, intergenerational, and trans-disciplinary ways. Framed by Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, the article aims to contribute to its practical application in the field of design by presenting strategies implemented in the architectural project *Tejiendo la calle*. These strategies are linked to four essential actions to generate meaningful experiences through creative processes in specific socio-cultural contexts: building community, creating the right circumstances, fostering diversity, and mending the landscape.

Keywords

 public space

 participation

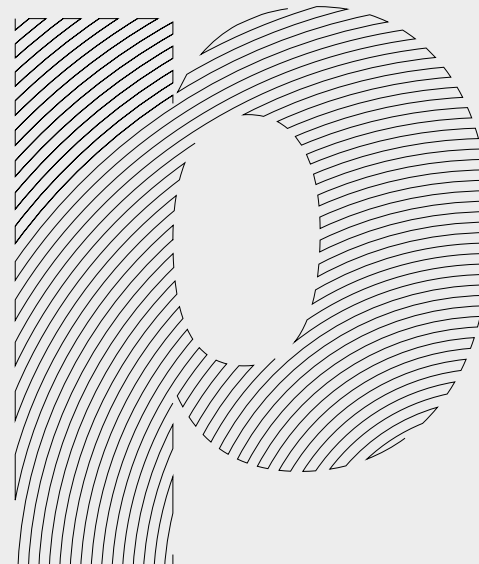
in-gens architecture

 community

 craftivism

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Patching Up the Landscape: Contributions of Design Practice to Situated Learning Theory. Strategies Applied in *Tejiendo la calle*

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INTRODUCTION: *IN-GENS* ARCHITECTURE OF A RURAL COMMUNITY

I write as part of a small rural community in Extremadura, Spain, drawing from my experience with an architectural project we have been developing since 2012 in Valverde de la Vera. The project, *Tejiendo la calle*, is a cooperative initiative focused on neighborhood self-representation through design. It aims to strengthen social cohesion, improve the village's public space, and deepen our connection with the environment. Our practice involves hand-weaving light-weight structures that are installed in the village's streets during the summer. This approach has been previously described as *in-gens* architecture—a concept that reframes the idea of *in-situ* art, emphasizing that the people of the community are as important as, if not more than, the place where the works are installed (Gisbert Alemany et al., 2023, p. 82).

The *in-gens* architecture created in *Tejiendo la calle* is anchored with temporary knots and ties to the Historic-Artistic Ensemble of Valverde de la Vera, producing cultural heritage that draws inspiration from the aesthetics of textile crafts, traditionally performed by women to care for households, now maximized in scale and extended to the public sphere (Figure 1). Textile objects, historically relegated to a position of inferiority, are imbued with new meanings, offering us shelter.

Figure 4: *Tejiendo la calle* installation. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2023.



The foundations of this initiative have been discussed and analyzed from various perspectives in numerous publications and media (Fernández Ramos, 2015, 2021; Gisbert Alemany, 2022a; Gisbert Alemany et al., 2023). These works form part of a process of practical reflection and, as such, they are analogous to those described by Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1998): processes that reveal how individuals often know more than they can articulate in words. Responding to this issue's editor call, this text aims to recount the story of *Tejiendo la calle* as a process that has allowed me to learn to live with *the others*: the weavers of Valverde.

Regulated creative disciplines often struggle to recognize the knowledge of these women who, unlike me, are not professionals and cannot leverage frameworks like Schön's to assert the value of their expertise. Lave and

¹ For a good overview in Spanish, see Cid García & Marcillo Murillo, 2023.

Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory¹ will allow me to turn this situation around, and position myself as an apprentice to these weavers—a learner who, through her design training, has been able to make a meaningful contribution to the community. While this theory has traditionally been used to explore solutions for training professionals within regulated education, through this text I will try to do something different: contribute to Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory by introducing a new cooperative creative process, where regulated training serves the community.

In the first section, I introduce this theory and outline the methodology that has facilitated the formation of the *Tejiendo la calle* community. Next, I explain how to create the conditions necessary for learning opportunities to emerge. In the following section, I address a key aspect of situated learning theory: how to expand *legitimate peripheral participation*, both within the weaving practice and through complementary initiatives that broaden the repertoire of cooperative forms. Finally, I take textiles beyond the metaphor to show how these strategies not only mend woven fabrics but also fractures in the landscape.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning occurs in a social and situated manner, through the active participation of what they call a *community of practice*. This concept refers to the self-governance of a group of individuals with common interests, challenges, and desires, upon which they learn and deepen through interaction with one another.

In previous works (Gisbert Alemany, 2022a; Gisbert Alemany et al., 2023), the success of *Tejiendo la calle* is attributed to the pre-existence of the community of women weavers in Valverde. Until the beginning of the project, these women had woven as part of their handling of domestic textiles, which were only displayed publicly during certain events, such as those accompanying the Corpus Christi processions, when neighbors set up small altars at the doors of their homes, draped with their most precious textiles. However, in the initial proposal, I focused more on references to textile practices now known as *craftivism*. For a definition of the term, one can refer to the work of Buszek and Robertson, who describe craftivism as the use of traditional crafts to promote political and social causes, where the creation process and community work are more important than the final product (2011, p. 197). Yet, perhaps the change made by the women of Valverde is more akin to the type of subversion Rozsika Parker spoke of in 1984, when she proposed studying the history of embroidery to understand the history of women (Parker, 2019). The literature on the political and public use of traditionally feminine crafts is now extensive, and so are the initiatives by women worldwide. This text does not aim to review multiple cases, but instead, to analyze the success of one of them in the reconstruction of a declining community.²

² For a large review of cases in Bogotá alone, see Sánchez-Aldana et al., 2019.

Thanks to Lave and Wenger's framework, I can better analyze my contribution to this community of practice, which, like those they describe, is dynamic and evolves as its members participate (Lave & Wenger, 1994). For this reason, I must go back to the year I was born, 1980, to introduce the origin of the *weaving community of practice*. That year, my parents, Manolo and Rocío, decided to move to Valverde de la Vera, a small village of about 500 inhabitants with which they had no previous ties (Figure 2). There, they began working as teachers at the public school. Initially, they faced conflicts with some local authorities, who even encouraged the collection of signatures to expel them, because, among other reasons, they introduced a participatory and democratic system in the classroom based on equal opportunities. This turbulent experience of two young teachers arriving as newcomers in an unfamiliar context triggered the formation of the *Asociación Cultural La Chorrera* (Cultural Association La Chorrera), created as a space for civic development. It was founded by Manolo and Rocío, along with other members of the village, with the goal of promoting cultural development and creating an environment where different ways of thinking could understand and enrich each other, fostering mutual understanding through artistic activities such as performing arts, literature, music, and painting.

In Lave and Wenger's terms, peripheral participants of a community build their legitimacy as members through interactions over time. This concept can be applied to the case of Rocío and Manolo, who, despite having official training as teachers granted by educational authorities, initially occupied a peripheral position within the village community. Their ability to transform the community was progressively consolidated through their experiences and interactions.



Figure 2: Manolo and Rocío in La Vera. Photograph: Rocío and Manolo, 1980s.

The experiences of the cultural association, carried out for more than thirty years in the village, have built an immaterial fabric of interpersonal relationships. They make up the foundation of trust that embraced the *Tejiendo la calle* initiative when I proposed it in 2012. Without this foundation, my contribution would not have been accepted. *Tejiendo la calle* seeks to continue the space for

3 *Tejiendo la calle* has become a highly valued entity over the years, both within the local community and beyond, making it possible to interact with people with whom daily life is shared. Numerous groups contact us because they want to carry out similar initiatives in their own contexts, some of which are featured on the map available at <https://submarina.info/comunidad-community>

Figure 3: Part of the *Tejiendo la calle* community in La Vera. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2023.

4 Evidence of the process and the results of implementing the strategies mentioned in this article can be found at <https://submarina.info/galeria-galeria>, where extensive photographic documentation of the project is available.

citizen interrelation initiated by *La Chorrera* thirty years ago, addressing the need for communication and recognition among different people who share life in a small place, where anonymity does not exist, and encounters are constant.

According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework, the evolution of the community of practice is activated by artistic activities, through which peripheral members not only acquire knowledge but also transform themselves into different people, depending on the possibilities enabled by the system of relationships. This has been true in my case: I have learned to live better in Valverde through my contributions as a designer. For this reason, *Tejiendo la calle* aims to create a space for the conscious, joyful, and affective articulation of coexistence, welcoming new members and offering alternative roles to existing ones, through a slow and ongoing process.

Most of the participants are elderly women. *Tejiendo la calle* is formed, through an open call to all people, by a *weaving community of practice* who share affection for both the act of weaving³ and the place they inhabit (Figure 3).



CREATING THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES

In a context with no regulated and permanent cultural institutions, where initiatives focused on the development of personal and collective creativity that make local cultural processes flourish are scarce, it is essential to create the conditions for them to happen. Here below, based on a review of the specific tasks we carry out in the project, the aim is to explicitly explain how to create the circumstances for learning opportunities to emerge through cooperative creative processes in a context like ours.⁴

1. Energizing and Motivating the *Weaving Community of Practice* with Regular Meetings

One of the most important activities for the dynamics of the project is the biweekly workshop, which was initiated after the global lockdown in 2020. Until then, we held workshops every one or two months in the town square to showcase each other's work and generate motivation (Figures 4 and 5). After the isolation, several companions—led by Rocío, my mother—requested that the meetings be intensified, as they serve both as spaces for artistic production and opportunities for creating closer bonds among participants (Figure 6). This space



Figures 4 and 5:
Encounter. Photograph:
Luis Ragel, 2014.



Figure 6: Workshop. Photograph: Rocío Ramos, 2024.

→ → **Figure 7:** Meeting. Photograph: Manuel V. Fernández, 2019.



fosters *legitimate peripheral participation*, welcoming newcomers to the village, younger individuals, and anyone who wishes to participate, even if they do not live in the village year-round. In this way, participants with no prior experience are introduced to both the weaving practice and neighborhood coexistence. Each session is planned according to the knowledge, skills, and interests of the participants, with the goal of ensuring that everyone feels fulfilled. In the workshop, we enjoy each other's company while weaving together. And, using terminology from the teaching-learning process in design, we acquire relevant competences⁵ for the development of personal and community life (Figure 7).

⁵ According to some of the competences defined by official training in visual arts and design: organize and plan work efficiently and in a motivating manner; solve problems and make decisions that respond to the objectives of the work being done; use communication skills and constructive criticism in teamwork; develop ideas and arguments in a reasoned and critical manner; seek excellence and quality in their activities; contribute through their activities to raising social awareness of the importance of cultural heritage, its impact on various fields, and its capacity to generate meaningful values; establish relationships between formal language, symbolic language, and specific functionality; reflect on the positive social influence of design, its impact on improving the quality of life and environment, and its capacity to generate identity, innovation, and production quality (Decreto 34/2011, de 2 de junio, del Consejo de Gobierno..., 2011).

2. Collaborating with the Municipal Administration

Collaboration with the town council is essential to secure dedicated spaces equipped for meetings and conducting design and production workshops, as well as for the proper storage of the pieces. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that the street installations count with municipal liability insurance.

3. Using Waste, Recycled, or Environmentally Certified Materials

The manual transformation of these materials fosters collective reflections on the community's relationship with the environment. We began by reusing plastic sheets collected by the weavers and other individuals. This peripheral task allowed many residents of Valverde who did not know how to weave to participate in the project. Over time, we acquired recycled plastics with special colors and higher strength, as well as fabrics made from PET plastic bottles. In 2024, we introduced recycled cotton cords with environmental certifications.

4. Encouraging *legitimate peripheral participation* in Various Formats

Some weavers prefer to create their pieces independently at home rather than attending the biweekly workshops. To stay connected, we communicate through our WhatsApp group, where we share images of our work and obser-

6 Topics such as personal matters, the cleanliness of the town's streets, local administrative processes, the care of architectural heritage, the state of the territory, and changes in the lifestyles of new generations often emerge.

7 Nuria de Padua, for example, knitted purple pieces for the 2024 edition as a tribute to her admired South Korean K-Pop group, BTS, which is represented by the color purple.

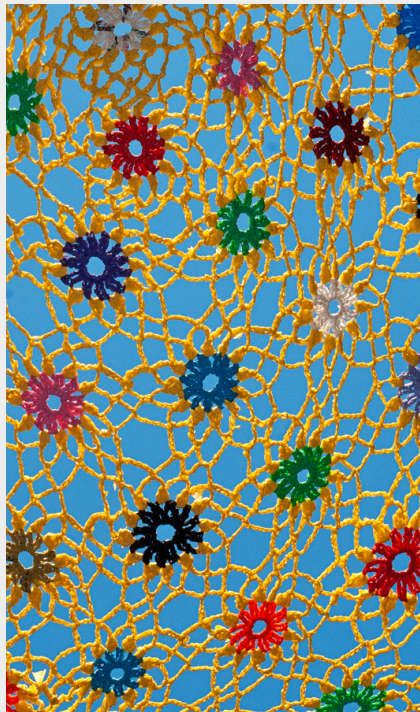
versations via text messages. Those who face difficulties with writing—either because they do not know how to write or cannot use mobile devices— participate through voice messages.

Alongside the weaving practice, both in face-to-face and asynchronous groups, the group's interaction sparks conversations about various topics affecting daily coexistence.⁶ In terms of Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework, these informal spaces structure peer learning opportunities that extend beyond the apprentice-master relationship. Some ladies, even without any academic training, have proven to be exceptional creators — individuals with remarkable intelligence who have not had access to formal education. Seeing their pieces displayed in their town's public spaces fills them with pride, boosting their self-esteem as well as that of the entire community. For this to happen, these pieces must be recognized and valued as works of art.

We encourage each person to freely express their subjectivity through their weavings,⁷ providing a personal perspective to a complex narrative formed by an amalgamation of pieces that reinforce one another within the inhabited environment. In this way, both abstract and figurative motifs emerge, reflecting patterns found in textile arts and decorative traditions from various cultures. Personal symbols or representations of issues related to village life or current events also appear (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Flower field in Ukraine, by Nuria de Padua. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2022.

→ → **Figure 9:** Installation in Valverde Square. Piece by Juana Gironda in the foreground. Pieces by Justa García in the second and third planes. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2022.



The weaves created by Justa García in 2022, depicting a pastoral scene with human figures in the foreground, and animals, water, and mountains in the background, is remarkable, both for its size and its technical and projection complexity (Figure 9). This piece is larger than the space where she weaves. The depicted motif, along with the structure of varied patterns that compose the piece, existed in the author's imagination throughout its creation, involving a complex process of simultaneous visualization and weaving. She was only able to view it in its entirety once it was completed and installed in the town square, which, thanks to the documentation and dissemination of the results in media related to design and contemporary creation, became an artistic exhibition space. Unlike the 'white cube' of the museum, this exhibition space operates by articulating globally legitimized artistic communities with the local community of practitioners.

5. Documenting and Disseminating the Processes and Results in Legitimate Design Environments

The project's diffusion through various media⁸ has led to it receiving numerous awards in several countries. The latest is the crQlr Award 2023 for design and circularity, awarded in Japan.⁹ As a result, a piece by Nuria de Padua is being exhibited in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Nagoya on behalf of the project. These recognitions from global communities of practice have been transforming the identity of the weavers as community members (Lave & Wenger, 1994). *Tejiendo la calle* has brought significant changes to the existing communities in Valverde. After discussing the shift from domestic to public practices, the next section will explore how this public space has been able to welcome other creators.

⁸ Since 2019, photographer Asier Rúa has been carrying out his photographic project as part of the *Tejiendo la calle* community, capturing the weaves, the installations, the environment, and the weavers themselves. His work is crucial for documenting the processes and results, while also extending the project into the realm of photographic art.

⁹ See <https://crqlr.com/crqlr-awards/2023/winners/tejiendo-la-calle>

6. Conducting the Artistic Direction of the Installation of Pieces in the Public Space

The installation of parasols is comprised of a hand-woven structure created without plans or calculations—fragile and unstable—that degrades over time due to the impact of solar radiation. It serves as a soft interface, connecting the current state of architectural heritage with the memory and imagination of the weavers, through their hands, using reused and polluting material (Figure 10).

The artistic direction of the project involves planning the installation and removal of textiles with municipal workers, ensuring the necessary health and safety conditions. The composition of the pieces is decided during the installation, reworked on-site, on the ground, and the works are hung by the workers (Figure 11). For each edition, new shading systems are designed using lightweight structures, tested during implementation, and iterated for their evolution and improvement.

¹⁰ Such as the leaf of the Montpellier maple, the asperilla flower, the clavelino, or the *Vitaliana primiflora* flower, species essential for biodiversity and the balance of ecosystems included in the *Catálogo Regional de Especies Vegetales Amenazadas de Extremadura* (Regional Catalog of Threatened Plant Species of Extremadura) (2008). In 2024, we crafted flocks of common swifts, the bird of year 2021 according to Seo BirdLife (Berzas, 2021), a species protected at national and international levels (along with its nests, chicks, and eggs) that once cohabited with villages and is now disappearing.

→ **Figure 40:** Installation. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2019.

→ → **Figure 44:** Installation process. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2019.



The theme addressed by Justa García in 2022 is one of the most recurring in the pieces created by the weavers every year: the representation of landscape. In an effort to broaden collective reflections on our relationship with the environment and our coexistence with more-than-human beings, I propose including this new typology of shading structures to be crafted by anyone who wishes to join. By proposing to *make visible the web of life that sustains us* and to *place life at the center* (Herrero, 2024) as strategies, we ensure that the most vulnerable species are represented, present in the streets, and become part of the town's architecture. As if we were sewing the landscape close to the built environment, in an act of patching or architectural repair that seeks to generate continuity in the territory, we integrate species that are disappearing. Since 2023, we have transformed PVC advertising banners into large collages. Silhouettes of flowers (Figure 12) and protected birds (Figure 13) now take presence in the village as still lifes of precarious nature suspended in the air.¹⁰

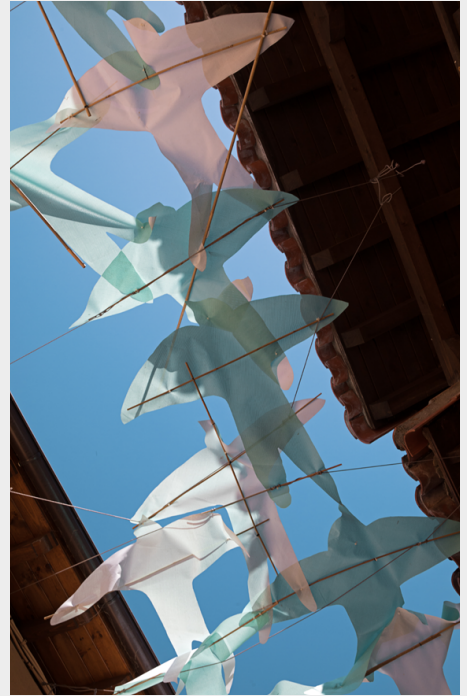
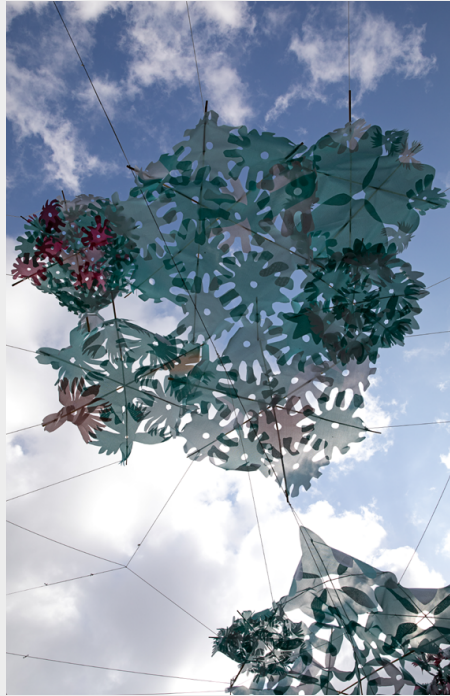
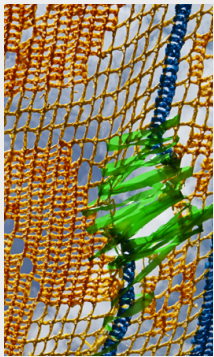
FOSTERING DIVERSITY

As we have seen, a key concept of situated learning theory is that of *legitimate peripheral participation*, which illustrates how new members joining a community of practice start by engaging in the more peripheral tasks of the group, gradually becoming involved in the core of the task by gaining experience over time

→ **Figure 12:** Flowers. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2023.

→ **Figure 13:** Common swifts. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2024.

Figure 14: Parasol with patch. Photograph: Asier Rua, 2020.



¹¹ This issue presents significant challenges. Securing the necessary budgets requires considerable effort, and achieving continuity over time is nearly impossible. Thanks to professionals like María Ángeles López Amado and her team in public administration, funding was allocated, allowing for the implementation of the public art program *Supertrama* (2017-2019) and the *Programa de Accesibilidad y Creación Contemporánea en el medio rural de Extremadura, Filare* (Accessibility and Contemporary Creation Program in Rural Areas of Extremadura, Filare) (2021-2023) in various towns across the region. While the regulatory frameworks that structure *Supertrama* draw from the experience gained in *Tejiendo la calle*, those of *Filare* aim to improve the model. The first edition of *Supertrama* took place in Valverde in 2017.

(Lave & Wenger, 1994). The project aims to include as many participants as possible, which is why the idea of patchwork or quilting is key, as it allows us not to turn our backs on differences in skills or interests. Consequently, we preserve pieces with tears and repairs (Figure 14), as well as those made by people who are still learning to weave.

One of the great collective challenges is to make public space inclusive in every place and circumstance. As a society, we have not yet fully constructed a plural public space: we need to continue building it. Institutions, managers, and specialists must consider the criteria of individuals and support them in their personal and collective processes to improve together (Guirao Cabrera, 2019). One of our strategies to foster diversity is to invite creators from different disciplines to intervene in Valverde, alongside our installation, through community art projects.¹¹

In the fall of 2023, we carried out *Cultura en vivo* (Live Culture) within the framework of *Tejiendo la calle*, in collaboration with the city council, inviting creators to carry out three interventions alongside the textile installation.¹²

One of the actions was *Rocío y las margaritas*, designed by Raquel Buj. An artist, designer, and architect, Buj conceives fashion and architecture as designed skins or coverings, where fashion is the closest to the body.¹³ Buj designed a fashion show inspired

¹² See <https://submarina.info/cultura-en-vivo>

¹³ See www.buj.studio

by the ornaments, species, traditions, and contemporaneities of the place, which “recovers the ritual space where we dress and adorn ourselves, a place to tell stories, to celebrate, to take care of ourselves” (Buj, 2023, p. 22). She crafted garments using flowers, legumes, fruits, plant fibers, and bioplastics. These pieces were presented as skins hanging in the arcades of the town square, accompanying our parasols. Some weavers, along with several of their daughters and sons, took the garments down and draped themselves with these new skins made from material collected from the environment (Figure 15), wearing them through the square to the amazement of the attendees. Trinidad and Concepción wore a kind of *mantilla* for two, feeling the body and the movements of one another, harmonizing their step (Figure 16). Omar paraded with a large cardboard fan, making him move his torso and arms across the town square as if he were a bird with one wing (Figure 17). The final look was a skirt with which we enveloped more than fifteen of us, becoming a single being, scattering flower petals and leaves between us (Figure 18).

Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18:
Rocio y las margaritas,
by Raquel Buj. Photographs:
Asier Rua, 2023.



These interventions integrate emerging content from contemporary agendas into the real life of the *weaving community of practice*, broadening the spectrum of possibilities for *legitimate peripheral participation*. They facilitate the exploration of alternative ways of doing in creative disciplines, promoting learning and enabling us to transform roles and everyday habits. They also expand the ways in which we understand and project the world.

CONCLUSIONS: PATCHING UP THE LANDSCAPE

The history of the formation of *Tejiendo la calle* may be valuable for those interested in situated learning theory and seeking to understand how to recognize and contribute to the formation of a learning community. Through the

review of the project, the theory's principles are exemplified, showcasing strategies applied to foster the active and legitimate participation of its members in a dynamic community of practice. Learning is not only a process of acquiring competences and skills, but a continuous transformation of individual and collective identities, facilitated by an inclusive and cooperative social environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Tejiendo la calle builds upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theories by integrating creative processes and environmental criteria, revitalizing both local practices and public spaces. The project begins by expanding traditional domestic practices into the public sphere, establishing a shared space for creative exploration and community engagement.

In the first section, we could appreciate that the pre-existing social fabric, strengthened over decades of cultural initiatives, allowed for this to happen. In this context, I was able to learn that communities of practitioners are dynamic systems shaped by the contributions of their members, offering a rich environment for peripheral participants to transition into more central roles, such as the one I have acquired with this project.

In the subsequent sections, I discussed how my role, along with that of others, involves creating conditions that facilitate the participants' creative learning by providing and diversifying opportunities for *legitimate peripheral participation* while integrating differences in skills, experiences, and personal narratives. Future research should focus on identifying evaluation criteria or analyzing the impacts of the community's dynamics, as well as the outcomes of its learning processes.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), a community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, partly because it provides the interpretative framework needed to make sense of its heritage. Throughout this text, we have seen how various heritage and environmental considerations permeate *Tejiendo la calle*, integrating them into the community's reality through design.

On the tangible level, we aim to collaborate through design to improve our material culture, which is articulated by the invention, production, and use of materials surrounding us, and is inherently connected to the materials that define it (Tripaldi, 2023). We believe that by manipulating used and polluting materials and imbuing them with new practical, aesthetic, and symbolic functions—through a creative process of thought and action—we foster awareness of our production and consumption dynamics, which in turn enables the modification of harmful habits. At the same time, we collaborate through design to mitigate the impact of solar radiation by filtering sunlight, providing shade, and thereby reducing summer temperatures.

On an intangible level, we seek to make visible the imaginary of the *weaving community of practice* through the pieces crafted by each participant. These pieces allow individuals to express, represent, signify, and project themselves through the textiles, shaping an *in-gens* architecture that emerges from the unique dynamics of the people inhabiting the place (Gisbert Alemany et al., 2023).

Tejiendo la calle not only revitalizes public space but also transforms it into a place of collective memory and creative expression. The project extends the theory further, demonstrating how situated learning can contribute to mending the landscape, understood as a *taskSpace*: the set of tasks by which a community, including the more-than-human, sustains itself (Gisbert Alemany, 2022b). **D**

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