Aesthetic democracy as the roots of sustainable cities and communities

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Abstract

This article[2] is a reflection on the crucial role that aesthetic democracy plays in generating and maintaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN), as summarised in goal 11, pertaining to the development of sustainable cities and communities. The article follows the structure of a three-step imaginary mechanism rooted in a radical perspective (Juguero, 2021). The first step relates to imaginary projection and addresses the concept of achieving the 17 SDGs. The second step relates to the roots of the situation and analyses the current global context and grounded concepts. The third step relates to an action plan, reflects on how to achieve the SDGs, and advocates for aesthetic democracy. The conclusion asserts that emotional evolution through aesthetic revolution is essential to the process.

Keywords: aesthetic education, performing arts, social justice, sustainable development goals, pedagogy of art, imaginary power, theatricality, aesthetic beings, art and education

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Rooting Active Hope through a Radical Perspective

In this article, I invite you to think about what may give roots to our hopes and actions for building a fair world by achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations (UN) as summarised in goal 11 regarding the development of sustainable cities and communities. In this process, I follow the wise observation of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi: "The Earth has enough for everyone's needs but not for everyone's greed" (Chowdhry, 1989, p. 1). Thus, the central questions here are what hinders humanity from building a fair world and how to foster this reality.

Since we live in a hugely unequal global reality and have experienced centuries of international relationships, humanity's discourse on creating a better planetary reality is of many years' standing. However, despite those full of good intentions, the global community, in its embrace of rich countries and people, incredible technology, and sufficient resources, seems more efficient at promoting wars than fostering equity and justice. Our challenge is to find out what it is that constantly generates unfair societies and instead promote transformations at the roots to create effective and lasting social structures rather than fight the consequences while leaving the origins of this in a state of permanent expansion. To focus on roots, I have chosen a radical perspective that understands roots as living structures that are nurtured by the past but permanently transformed by new factors in the present that are essential to building future realities.

A radical perspective understands that all fields of knowledge are intertwined. It considers every part as integrated within the totality and relates theory and practice, emotion and cognition, subjectivity and objectivity. A radical perspective requires an understanding of concepts in order to reflect on the contexts dialectically (Freire, 2016). It recognises the roots that integrate universality and relativity within the particularities of each context. Hence, radicality is contrary to radicalism, which emerges from the fragmentation between concepts and contexts. In radicalism, either uncontextualised concepts (universalism) or the absence of grounded knowledge (relativism) leads to dogmatism and extremism. When fixed "truths" are used to evaluate a person, idea, situation, or behaviour without understanding their contexts, they turn into pre-judgment, that is, prejudice.

On the other hand, the absence of universal dialectical concepts leads to a superficial relativism, which perceives knowledge and ignorance as guesses at the same level. Thus, radicalism intimidates the development of grounded knowledge. In contrast, radicality is rooted in permanent reflection and recognises the particularities of each singularity so as to consider the unfragmented plurality that leads to the collaborations and tensions that generate the complexity of life (Juguero, 2021).

Understanding the roots that have generated the current global situation may provide a basis for our hope of achieving a fair world for all as envisioned in the SDGs of the UN. What is hope? Hope is the ability to imagine a desired condition in a determined reality. Without imagination, there can be no hope. However, hope can mean passively waiting for others to effect a miracle or transformation, or, as Freire (2016) advocates, actively contributing to constructing what we are expecting.

Moreover, diverse people hope for different imagined things in a particular context. Our desires and decisions are shaped by emotions, values, habits, and beliefs that are culturally designed and relate to the available choices in each reality. However, how do we develop and naturalise our cultural perceptions and emotional patterns?

Throughout this study, I assert that humans are aesthetic beings who develop ways of understanding and relating to the world through aesthetic synthesis from early childhood, which is directly related to the person's imaginary power constitution and naturalisation of sociocultural structures. I constructed this understanding through many years of academic research, artistic and educational practice, and self-experience as a middle-aged Brazilian woman of colour from an underprivileged social group. The intersectionality of the factors of my condition (Crenshaw, 2017) is essential to the construction of my perceptions. Thus, I address you directly due to my work's radical perspective, which investigates each issue through its roots, transparently assuming a viewpoint while intertwining contexts and concepts, theory, and practice, reason and emotion. Thus, radicality acknowledges no possibility of neutrality (Bakhtin, 2010), since an alleged political exemption reveals a precise social positioning rather than omits it (Vygotsky, 2007), hindering reflection and supporting the status quo.

Similarly, our imagination is never neutral, and understanding how it works is essential in order to reflect on the paths of humanity's priorities within the complex concrete and symbolic relations of power.

The Imaginary Mechanism

In the current situation on Earth, the UN recognises the need to create new, fair, and lasting modes of life by achieving the SDGs. Therefore, we must *imagine* possible actions to reach these goals. The imaginary mechanism enables the elaboration of games, tools, science, arts, or ordinary daily solutions, since all human creations emerge from the relations between context, imagination, and creativity (Winnicott, 1975). Indeed, the intention of elaborating or doing something is always based on imagining its achievement. Therefore, reflecting on what generates a determined situation is essential to imagining new possibilities and assuming an active stance through creativity. Furthermore, consciousness, imagination, and creativity are not natural gifts, but human properties developed according to each person's opportunities for expanding their perception, expression, information, and awareness within a dialectic relationship with the emotions and values of the cultural environment (Vygotsky, 2007; Maturana, 2004).

The imaginary mechanism is the oldest, most widespread tool of human creation and basically embraces three steps. The first step, relating to imaginary projection, unveils an idea, a conflict, or a problem to be addressed through a particular viewpoint. The second, relating to the situation's roots, proposes a way to find a solution by developing associations according to the context's possibilities and the people's awareness, values, emotions, and knowledge. Finally, the third step, an action plan, reflects on how to insert those possibilities into reality while relating to creativity, ideas, tools, and concrete possibilities. However, even if human beings base their creations on imagination, the development of new imaginary roots is usually lacking in official plans such as the SDGs. Nevertheless, the hope for a better world and actively acting to build it requires an acknowledgement of the imaginary power that provides the roots for social constructions.

To illustrate this essential discussion, this article is organised by way of the imaginary mechanism and structured by its steps. It discusses the roots that may generate the conditions for achieving sustainable cities and communities and all 17 SDGs proposed by the UN.

Imaginary Projection (First Step)

One day in 2015, the world's 193 UN leaders met in New York to imagine together (UN, 2015). They realised that the situation on our planet was difficult for most of the population. They asked how to build a better world for everybody. Then they established the 17 SDGs to be achieved by 2030 and imagined sustainable cities and communities in which all of these goals would be integrated.

In a context where huge social discrepancies exist alongside the tools that can resolve them, the UN established the 17 SDGs to eradicate the inequality in the world (UN, 2015). These goals are deeply intertwined, especially as concerns sustainable cities and communities (goal 11), the existence of which requires the extinguishing of poverty (goal 1) and hunger (goal 2) while reducing inequalities (goal 10). Moreover, this demands decent work and economic growth (goal 8), quality education (goal 4), gender equality (goal 5), and good health and well-being for everybody (goal 3). The last of these cannot exist without clean water and sanitation (goal 6), which demands affordable clean energy (goal 7). Thus, industry, innovation, and infrastructure (goal 9) developed as climate actions (goal 13) require responsible consumption and production (goal 12), nurturing life below water (goal 14) and on land (goal 15). Indeed, these actions demand partnerships for the goals (goal 17) that are rooted in peace, justice, and strong institutions (goal 16).

The UN affirms that Sustainable Cities and Communities should be "inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" (UN, 2015, p. 1). To make this possible, it established ten targets (Global Goals, 2015), divided into seven "outcome targets" and three "means of achieving" to be attained by 2030. The outcome targets intend to assure that the entire world population has access to safe, affordable, accessible, inclusive, and sustainable structures. In addition, they should ensure housing with basic services (11.1), adequate transport systems (11.2), and urbanisation with participatory management (11.3). They should also protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (11.4), reduce the adverse effects of natural disasters (11.5) and per capita environmental impact (11.6), and provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green public spaces (11.7).

The "means of achieving" are intended to support the transformation process by strengthening national and regional development planning in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas (11-A) and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion,

resource efficiency, mitigation, and adaptation to climate change (11-B). To achieve this, the organisation must support the least developed countries in constructing sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials (11-C).

The UN imagines sustainable cities in a sustainable world where every person has access to housing, education, sanitation, clean energy, potable water, cultural expression, sport, leisure activities, and job opportunities (UN, 2015). The intention is to create this so that it lasts for future generations. As for cultural bases, the UN addresses this issue directly in SDG target 11.4, which ensures commitment to protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage. The UN also affirms that "for all of us to survive and prosper, we need new, intelligent urban planning that creates safe, affordable, and resilient cities with green and culturally inspiring living conditions" (Global Goals, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, the UN recognises that cultural transformations are crucial to creating and maintaining sustainable cities and communities.

Roots of the Situation (Second Step)

When the SDGs were set, half of the world's population was living in poverty on less than eight dollars a day (UNDP, 2020). However, the UN affirms that these objectives are not unrealistic because humanity has made meaningful progress on reducing social disparities (UNDP, 2020). The UN states that in 1990, the number of people living in extreme poverty (less than one dollar and twenty-five cents a day) accounted for more than 30% of Earth's population. In 2015, this fell to around 11%. In the UN's view, the organisation of the global community made this progress possible. However, if humans acknowledge that there are resources for everybody, as Gandhi's words suggest, then why, in 2020, were 800,000,000 people still suffering from hunger (UNDP, 2020)? Unfortunately, the situation became even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic (Goldin & Muggah, 2020) and, as of late 2023, meaningful evolution in social disparity remains to be seen.

The Current World

We are in the year 2023. The world is still feeling the echoes of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020 and had substantial consequences for over two years. Furthermore, war, armed and cyber conflicts are occurring on different continents; social disparities and hate speech are rapidly growing and spreading; and global warming is resulting in enormous environmental catastrophes (Maurer, 2022).

On the other hand, many people and institutions are contributing to the development of a better world by imagining new values, perceptions, and structures.

In an effort to address Gandhi's dilemma, mentioned at the beginning of this article, UN world leaders agreed to cooperate on a project called "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", intended to end global poverty and solve social and environmental problems by 2030 by focusing on the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership (UN, 2015). This agreement makes three fundamental assumptions regarding what they imagine is to be achieved. The first assumption is that all leaders recognise that every nation has a responsibility for global social and environmental problems. The second assumption is that the resources and technology exist to create solutions. The third assumption is that collaboration between all nations is essential to this process. Since this meeting more than eight years have passed and less than seven remain until 2030. This means more than half of the previewed time has gone. Is it still feasible to imagine this agenda can be achieved by 2030? What is the situation right now?

According to the UN social report (2020), world inequality keeps growing and affects people primarily in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, migrant, and socioeconomic status. That is, personal characteristics beyond the individual's control keep resulting in disadvantages and advantages that have nothing to do with the person's merits or faults. This happens in all countries, independent of socioeconomic conditions. As regards children, improvements in child health are reducing infantile mortality in some places, and children's access to education has moderated inequalities in some groups, but in an analysis of the pace of progress between the 1990s and the 2010s, the UN recognises that if the pace of improvement does not accelerate, "it will take more than four decades to close the stunting gap related to ethnicity, for instance" (UN, 2020, p. 4). As regards gender, women still have fewer opportunities than men throughout life. The report shows that boys have better access than girls to education, childcare, and nutrition. Women are more likely to be undernourished even in non-poor realities and "do three times as much unpaid care and domestic" work (UN, 2020, p. 39). The COVID-19 has had a devastating impact, amplifying poverty levels for underprivileged groups in particular (Goldin & Muggah, 2020) and exposing the vast global impact of inequality, as disadvantaged groups were the most infected by the virus and had the highest death rate due to the lack of structure (Goldin & Muggah, 2020).

It is relevant to point out the role of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017) in this reality. The more combined unprivileged characteristics, the fewer choices available for the person and the more difficult its life path is (UN, 2020). For example, a poor, disabled black girl faces many more layers of difficulty than a non-poor, non-disabled white boy in the same place. It is also relevant to consider education's role as a broad social action. Building awareness about what generates social disparities is essential. The lack of understanding about the unfair socio-historic paths that have created social disparities maintains privileged social groups' perception of an imaginary superiority based on a comfortable ignorance that distances them from their social responsibility. As a result, these groups have great influence on policies that favour their interests, hinder social mobility, and "ensure that advantages are passed from parents to children" (UN, 2020, p. 48).

It is challenging to change this reality since the more structured is a group, the more time it can spend on organising and building networks that sustain its interests. Moreover, children raised in privileged groups are also trained to accept it as natural that they have advantages not accessible to other people. No sense of responsibility or commitment to others is developed in this context, and "numerous historical examples can be found of economic elites ensuring that the policies and institutions that benefit them are maintained" (UN, 2020, p. 180).

On the other hand, people from different groups and political institutions have been striving to prevent power abuse and reduce inequality. Many policies intend to promote democracy and equal rights by limiting privileges and repealing discriminatory laws. Towards this end, various countries have implemented affirmative action to reduce the damage suffered by historically exploited groups. However, discrimination persists, and "societies continue to make distinctions based on ethnicity, race, sex and other characteristics that should have no bearing on people's achievements or their well-being" (UN, 2020, p. 182).

On this path, establishing quotas for underprivileged groups in key social positions resulted in meaningful achievements. However, these policies must be improved and amplified to make this representation more natural in the social imaginary, by changing cultural perceptions, viewpoints, and structural organisations. Without this aesthetic seed, the roots of a new culture will not grow and generate the fruits of social justice.

Aesthetic Roots of Cultural Perceptions

From a radical perspective, it is essential to reflect on the ontological origins of cultural perceptions and how they ground social structures so as to promote new sustainable modes of life based on fair, naturalised imaginary relations. According to Winnicott (1975), human beings develop possibilities for understanding and relating to the world through the emergence of cultural expressions that result from creativity. For Winnicott, it is only through creativity that a person can recognise its own existence and feel that life is worth living. How, then, does this process emerge and develop?

Imagine a foetus inside the womb surrounded by amniotic fluid. There are no references to promote the baby's perception that its body is separate from its mother's. In this intrauterine environment, the heartbeat and the pulse of fluids are, besides external voices and sounds, the first materialisation of the plurisensitive frameworks recognisable in some of the experiences that follow. The sound patterns of this *elemental musicality* (Verden-Zoller, 2004) enable the recall of emotions and sensations through a sensitive, holistic memory that is culturally rooted in the values and behaviours that guide the modes of life in that context (Winnicott, 1975; Maturana, 2004).

After birth, the baby recognises sonorous patterns reminiscent of the intrauterine environment: "the first known" that will guide it in discovering the unknown. This process, from the known to the unknown, enables communication and broad knowledge development throughout life. It also presents something familiar that the baby can deal with emotionally when facing something new. Hence, babies have a musical need, which is recognisable in many cultural manifestations, such as lullabies and the melodic and harmonious voice that adults use when speaking to babies and toddlers (Verden-Zoller, 2004). In this process, the first baby's babblings gradually lead to the development of oral language, according to the opportunities that each child has to interact socially (Vygotsky, 2007). Progressively, the baby learns to use its sonorous abilities to show its feelings and needs, such as in self-lullaby and sad crying, which present melodic and rhythmic features (Winnicott, 1982).

While recalling certain sound patterns, the newborn begins to experience its body as physically dissociated from its mother and integrated with external stimuli and

situations (Bakhtin, 2010). However, the newborn still does not recognise its singularity, as a human being cannot see itself as it sees others (Bakhtin, 2010). Through body and eye contact, the baby gradually perceives another person while feeling recognised by this person, which could not occur in an isolated individual context. For Winnicott (1975), the apperception of being perceived externally enables inner perceptions of the exterior through emotional interactions with caregivers. Additionally, intimate relations allow the baby to realise its own corporeality through touch contact with others' bodies (Verden-Zoller, 2004). Recognising similarities and differences makes it possible to foresee circumstances and start developing imagination, which is fundamental to gradually raising self-awareness. In this process, the volitional-emotional tones of the baby's intimate people define the baby from the outside and encounter the baby's inner feelings, shaping the first traces of its personality (Bakhtin, 2010). Thus, the baby's recognition of individuality and alterity is constructed through the otherness of *aesthetic activism* (Bakhtin, 2010). This emotional relationship is a condition of survival, happiness, and development (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2004) and is profoundly connected to the aesthetic perception of the cultural environment through imaginary development.

Recognition of the differences between individuality and otherness occurs gradually. To acknowledge the existence of *non-self*, the child starts imaginarily projecting alterity through diverse *transitional objects*, building up an *organisational identity* through creativity (Winnicott, 1975). For Winnicott (1975), this process intertwines subjectivity and objectivity, creating a *potential space* that enables the development of holistic ways of understanding and perceiving the world. By projecting alterity in *transitional objects*, the child develops the human property of theatricality rooted in the *double perception of reality*, which is aware of its own ludic composition (Juguero, 2019, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). This occurs when someone or something is perceived in both its quotidian and symbolic status simultaneously, such as when a child plays the role of a mother holding a pillow as if it were a baby.

Theatricality is essential in cultural constructions since it roots the symbolic games and arts from early childhood. Children create their life understandings by creatively dealing with social signs in their plays (Bakhtin, 2010; Piaget, 2007; Vygotsky, 2007; Winnicott, 1975). Through theatricality, children construct holistic synthetic frameworks composed of emotional, pluriperceptive, multi-sign, cognitive, and axiological structures that give meaning to further experience. These synthetic

objectivations of their subjectivities set values, habits, and perceptions dialectically related to their social context. By pronouncing the world to understand it (Freire, 2016), they embody perceptions of relations, behaviours, beauty, gender, race, etc. and imagine the social places where they can foresee themselves according to their belonging bonds.

Each child relates to the signs and values available in its context. This system embraces diverse social structures and roles, the environment, artistic compositions, and bonds with intimate people. The social places occupied by the child's closest people, their available choices, social ties, entertainment preferences, values, and behaviours are all emotionally communicated to the child. All these signs will be creatively elaborated through imaginative symbolic games. In this structure, the artistic narratives that children appreciate play an essential role (Bettelheim, 2012), especially the ones that create dialogue with the children's ludic logic (Juguero, 2019, 2022b), enabling the child to cope with fears, desires, and new information without realistic explanations that do not engage in dialogue with the infantile communicative specificities (Bettelheim, 2012; Juguero, 2022b).

Theatricality grounds the ability to play symbolically and to relate to artistic discourses. However, artistic appreciation and play have diverse complementary socioemotional roles. In symbolic games, such as role-play, the central focus is on the activity itself, without an external goal. Everyone involved is engaged as a player and concentrates on dealing with inner emotions, situations, and information, creating synthetic frameworks to understand life through imaginative pleasure (Bakhtin, 2010; Verden-Zoller, 2004; Winnicott, 1982). Since the child remains subjectively glued to these playful actions, the games are not aesthetically established for their own sake due to the absence of the perception of alterity (Bakhtin, 2010). They are, however, created under socio-aesthetic references and can be aesthetically perceived from an external gaze as a creative act but not an artistic composition.

In artistic discourse, the primary focus is on an external relationship since it emerges from an appreciative projection (Bakhtin, 2010; Juguero, 2019). In this kind of communication, the audience receives diverse emotionally vectorised signs (Pavis, 2010) that promote axiological paths of understanding through affective-rational models that show what is laughable or laudable, valued or devalued, desirable or

avoidable, powerful or weak. However, the author's intentions are not the only factors determining the meaning of the artistic work (Bakhtin, 2010). An aesthetic event requires the meeting of two consciousnesses and cannot be established without the perception of alterity. So, even if the author is an actor in a play about its personal life, the aesthetic synthesis creates a symbolic relationship that provides a depersonalised identification and possibilities of resignification and reflection. This artistic pleasure differs from the feelings in concrete daily life and promotes the security to face new emotive, perceptive, and rational challenges that are aesthetically designed. Moreover, each artistic creation relates to the sociocultural environment and cannot be fully understood outside a particular context of appreciation (Bakhtin, 2010).

Noteworthily, neither artistic creations nor plays should be romanticised. They are never totally free and innocent concerning their subliminal pedagogies. So, even if symbolic games are spontaneously created or artistic objects are the result of deep inspiration, they are never neutral: they promote specific references, values, and viewpoints that are essential to dialectically establishing a society's culture (Bakhtin, 2010; Boal, 2000; Elkonin, 2009; Giroux, 1988; Vygotsky, 2007). Thus, they may either bring up new cultural values committed to social justice or support relations based on exploitation, racism, and male chauvinism, for instance.

Bakhtin (2010) points out that there is no universal meaning based on objective criteria since discursive emotional and axiological constitutions are distinct in different cultures. However, he emphasises that the creator is responsible for the values its artistic vision promotes in the content-form relation. Bakhtin also emphasises that an artistic composition will never be neutral, even if the author is unaware of or does not care about its meaning. Accordingly, Boal (2008) argues that those who want to separate theatre from politics have a particular political attitude that serves the maintenance of the predominant naturalised values that sustain hegemonic social systems. His ideas follow what Brecht (1967) understands when he recommends distrusting those who claim to ban reflection from their art because emotion and reason are part of an intertwined process. For him, the joy of art should serve the joy of a better life based on an awareness that guides the necessary structural transformations.

Concerning daily social signs, Giroux (1988) highlights the hidden pedagogies in every social-communicative act. Accordingly, Bourdieu (1989) explains that symbolic power sustains preconceptions that naturalise values perceived as unchangeable truths. For him, "symbolic effectiveness" results from ignorance of this system, keeping cultural patterns that promote the maintenance of social structures. Similarly, Fanon (2008) denounces how the white hegemonic culture imposes racism subjectivation, thus deeply harming Black people's self-perceptions and life paths. This system roots structural racism (Almeida, 2019), which subliminally supports the maintenance of racist societies where skin colour deeply influences life paths from the very beginning of life. Still on the subject of cultural abuse, Giroux (1988) emphasises that power-holding groups have greater access to cultural propagation, thus maintaining the values that underlie oppressive social structures. In order to achieve the UN's SDGs by modifying the emotional and imaginary roots that generate oppressive cultures of greed, it seems essential to recognise these mechanisms.

Aesthetic constructions synthesise socio-cultural structures from symbolic games to artistic expressions. In this dialectical relationship, they simultaneously result from and construct social signs. In this movement, they contribute actively to the constitution of different social systems, either to guarantee their maintenance or to promote their transformation (Giroux, 1988). For this reason, it is essential to recognise the aesthetic social relevance and develop aesthetic education and policies. The more opportunities people have to deal with diverse signs, expressions, and perceptions from various perspectives and viewpoints, the better they will be able to recognise naturalised values, question them, and create new imaginary possibilities to build a better reality.

Action Plan (Third Step)

From a radical perspective, it is essential to consider the roots that unite the concepts and contexts previously discussed to suggest aspects for the creation of an action plan to achieve the UN's aims. A sustainable city requires a community emotionally engaged with place through effective belonging bonds empowered by fair imaginary possibilities. At the same time, this city cannot be isolated from planetary reality. Otherwise, these beautiful proposals may turn into demagogy if the city uses any resources from exploiting other lands or if underprivileged groups are subject to

stricter regulations on crossing its borders. Thus, a sustainable city should be within a sustainable world (UN, 2020). If not, the idea may result in even worse global situations, where certain paradisal places are available only for privileged people. In this sense, democracy should not only be understood as a political system with reliable and transparent institutions but also considered from its etymological origin, which means "people sharing power" in a determined social relationship, according to the plurality of each context's diversity (Almeida, 2020; West, 2023).

Moreover, equality should not be seen as "equal people" but as fair chances for different people. I call it *parity in diversity* (Juguero, 2022a): the construction of egalitarian opportunities through the various structures adequate for diverse people and their realities. Promoting the same conditions for diverse people creates advantages for those who are privileged and hinders the establishment of social justice. Democracy may be attained when diverse people have structures adequate for their realities and share the power of decision-making through distinct viewpoints based on fair imaginary empowerment, which enables the naturalisation of non-hegemonic possibilities.

This dialogical system requires a democratic structure from the roots that generates cultural perceptions in every powerful position. In this construction, imaginary power has a significant role. It designs the social places and opportunities where people can foresee themselves from a very early age, according to their belonging attachments as related to the social signs surrounding them. This process is rooted in the empathic and multi-significant structures of aesthetic properties and provides a base for the naturalised perceptions about the social environment.

Rooting Sustainability in Aesthetic Democracy

Aesthetic manifestations integrate, build, and modify society in a significant way. This does not mean that they determine behaviours and values in isolation. Instead, they are part of a complex social system and act effectively in the constitution of subliminal pedagogies that serve different interests through a complex semantic and heterogeneous emotional network that sustains specific imaginary possibilities. The absence of representation of society's diversity in key social positions hinders the possibility of constructing a plural aesthetic perception and promoting democracy as regards the imaginary empowerment of diverse groups through their belonging bonds related to race, gender, age, cultural identities, socioeconomic status, personal

features, and type of education. Without an aesthetic perception of plural representation in society, as naturalised in symbolic games and artistic objects, it is complicated to establish democratic structural and emotional opportunities where everybody can fairly develop the fundamental imaginary power that gives roots to dreams, actions, goals, and trajectories.

The absence of aesthetic democracy (through the representation of diversity in key social roles and artistic creations) is an effective way of exclusion through the symbolic power of social imaginary, endorsing subordinative structures. In this sense, even countries with remarkable achievements in social assistance, such as Norway, still struggle to create a democratic society as a result of balanced power-sharing. Aware of this, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture directly noted this point in its recommendations to the parliament (2021). The document recognises that the diversity of Norwegian society is still practically absent in key positions and artistic creations. The recommendations also declare that this lack of representation leads to exclusion and social injustice. They emphasise the urgent need to create cultural, ethnic, and gender representativeness through various artistic expressions as these are essential to the development of an effective democratic society. For example, the Council of Europe (2020) refers to the struggles of Stavanger municipality to achieve its proposal of a "we culture" that integrates the people from 181 countries who live in the city. In the view of the council, the idea cannot be effective because it focuses on palliative actions targeting people with foreign backgrounds. On the other hand, they do not create educational programmes for the original local population, which is unaware that Stavanger would not be a wealthy place without foreign knowledge and labour (COE, 2020).

As regards the global situation, the UN social report (2020) points out that discrimination and inequal opportunity are directly related to lack of representation. The document states that special measures are needed to promote structural reform while addressing the causes of discrimination rather than just fighting its consequences. This process requires awareness of the cultural roots of the violent socio-historic path that created extreme wealth and poverty, the two sides of the same imbalance. This discrepancy can be easily recognised when relating race, gender, and other intersectional characteristics to various social roles. Generally, privileged people occupy the valued positions as the result of choice, and disadvantaged people embrace the devalued positions offered to those who do not

have the same opportunity to choose (UN, 2020). This reality turns into repeated aesthetic perceptions that naturalise and sediment this structure, as typically reproduced in the most widespread artistic creations. This absence of aesthetic democracy has a considerable impact on people's emotions, fantasies, desires, values, and comprehension of social realities and personal roles. Thus, a sustainable society must be rooted in aesthetic democracy where all people feel represented, both in key social roles and in artistic expression based on distinct viewpoints.

Aesthetic democracy is essential to change the naturalised cultural perceptions that permanently sustain the generation of substantial social disparity since humans are aesthetic beings who use aesthetic properties to build their values throughout their lives, as previously explained. In the absence of aesthetic democracy, a culture of exploitation is brought about by stratified imaginary patterns and supported by the lack of awareness, shame, and responsibility of privileged people.

Since our imagination generates our hope and originates action plans, it is urgent to promote aesthetic democracy to transform the cultural roots of social injustice and so build sustainable cities and communities.

Sustainable Cities and Communities in the Year 2130
The three steps of the imaginary mechanism do not function linearly. During the process, consciousness of the context and concepts that generate the roots of the situation in focus results in a more complex perception of the imagined paths and goals. Hence, it forges imaginary transformations based on further details that will support the analysis of all the factors and create a feasible, qualified action plan. The evolution of this dialectical operation is essential to generate strong roots and create and maintain the desired reality. Thus, on the basis of the previously presented goals, context, and concepts, I invite you to imagine how sustainable cities and communities could be once they become a reality, should humanity successfully achieve the SDGs by 2030, as proposed by the UN.

Imagine it is the year 2130, one century after the implementation of the UN's 17 SDGs. Sustainable cities and communities are establishing themselves as a new natural reality. In these societies, everybody feels secure, valued, and free to make decisions that respect the common good. Thus, people can develop their projects, counting on infrastructure that is adequate to the needs of the context. In these cities,

everybody is welcome, and the rules to cross its borders do not differ just because someone comes from a specific place. Therefore, privileges and disadvantages originating from a person's origin and characteristics are considered a shame of the past. Here, the primary behaviour is to respect the modes of life established in each place. Thus, indigenous communities and new social organisations are free and safe to maintain their habits and values in accordance with the human rights of each individual.

In multicultural cities, the diversity of cultures, features, viewpoints, and backgrounds is understood as part of humanity's beauty. Thus, contradictory perceptions generate deep and grounded dialogue that is rooted in respect for and awareness of the other's freedom to express and make decisions. The paradox of this construction reveals the limit of possibilities, since tolerance of intolerance would lead to the overcoming violence of the past. Here, people of diverse cultures, genders, races, features, ethnic origins, and social roles feel represented and build genuine belonging bonds that are in dialogue with their ancestry and knowledge. Thus, everybody cares for the entire place and community, because they are all deeply integrated from the very beginning of their lives. As a result, all children have the same emotional opportunities to be happy and feel proud of their characteristics and groups.

Moreover, raising children is a dialogical process which respects their right to be treated according to their maturity level. Thus, children feel loved and secure knowing that somebody with more experience is helping them to understand limits and possibilities through the profound bonds of mutual confidence. In this relation, all children are considered active citizens but are not required to make decisions that they still need to prepare for. They also have the right to foresee themselves in any social role, living in a present of cooperation and imagining a future with plenty of opportunities. They are able to create these perceptions because they can aesthetically perceive a society with diverse people in key social roles in politics, education, the arts, communication, administration, security, health, the basic necessities, and so on. Thus, aesthetic democracy is fundamental to the social balance of and education in these sustainable cities and communities.

Significantly, education is considered in its broad sense, and all elements of life are recognised through the potency of its internal signs, subliminal pedagogies, and

symbolic power. Thus, the school system values diverse knowledge and techniques, in addition to creativity, critical thinking, pleasure, self-confidence, and community sense. The focus is more on learning how to learn than on accumulating memorised information (Freire, 2016). Moreover, aesthetic education is essential for holistic development, serving to enhance sensibility and critical reflection rooted in emotional and pluriperceptive competencies.

Based on a profound aesthetic sense, people do not perceive their experiences in a fragmented way. Thus, fun, commitment, emotion, thought, expression, reflection, and perception are all diverse ingredients in the same recipe and cannot be separated from each other without destroying the flavour of life. The result is that no dogmatic common sense or negationism can spread because people develop their knowledge through a scientific excitement rooted in the dialectic relation between concepts and contexts (Juguero, 2021).

Through these broad perceptions, people respect each other and the environment as part of a naturally correlated process. It is thus impossible to consider clean energy and better environmental conditions without having social justice as a seed that can promote the roots of this sustainability as an entire balanced structure. Because of this balance, each city is considered in a world that is abundant in fair communities that are able to collaborate, support, and help each other through cooperative international networks. This is feasible because these diverse cultures are based on emotional values that do not allow anybody to justify the unjustifiable. The people thus feel incapable of understanding why many past populations lacked food, housing, education, and a structure to express themselves when there were sufficient resources for everybody. In this new reality, nobody feels proud of plundering others' lands and abusing other people.

Furthermore, disparity in opportunity would be a shame on the entire society. Thus, nobody feels proud of having better chances than others because of their birthplace or personal features. They know that past advantages arose from the violence of weaponry and the culture of greed rather than from any superior capacity.

In these societies, people encourage generosity and avoid benevolence, as Freire (2016) warns, because benevolence is based on the privileged people's self-satisfaction about their own good intentions, keeping subordination and the

imbalance of power. Instead, generosity is rooted in a genuine desire to have dialogue and learn from alterity so as to create collaborative structures where everybody plays a role in developing and maintaining sustainable cities and communities.

Conclusion: Emotional Evolution through Aesthetic Revolution

It is impossible to create a plan embracing all of the complex aspects of constructing sustainable cities and communities in one brief article, and I do not intend to do so here. My purpose is to call attention to and contribute to reflections on the profound relevance of imaginary power and aesthetic construction in rooting cultural perceptions and social structures.

My final reflections are intended to emphasise that, without cultural transformation rooted in new emotional bases (Maturana, 2004), it is impossible to create new and lasting modes of life. Hence, empower the imaginary through aesthetic democracy is essential for any plan targeting social evolution and a better world for everybody.

The role of aesthetic properties in sustaining or transforming sociocultural structures has been neglected in many educational, political, and strategic plans and discourses. Thus, the emotional roots of our choices in various contexts are usually omitted from official speeches and policies. Moreover, the imaginary power that grounds people's perceptions of their roles and opportunities has been ignored due to a lack of awareness and interest, the result being that most social actions focus mainly on consequences rather than the reasons behind the situations we would like to transform.

The UN's SDGs are intended to create lasting solutions for socio-environmental problems. This requires transforming the roots that permanently create the current situation. Thus, sustainable cities depend on sustainable communities rooted in a sustainable culture of genuine love. This emotional evolution requires an aesthetic revolution since the signs and symbols present in the social structures are aesthetically perceived and organised from the beginning of life (Bakhtin, 2010) through holistic pluriperceptive-emotional-axiological frameworks that generate our values, viewpoints, and behaviours (Juguero, 2019, 2021, 2022).

An aesthetic revolution demands a dialectical relationship between the social system and artistic representations. New generations should have the opportunity to perceive a collaborative, democratic world to be internalized in the synthesis of their symbolic games. Additionally, artistic elements play a crucial role in developing the pluriperception and comprehension of the world throughout life. This results from the emotional attachments of this synthetic and powerful depersonalised empathy in connection with perceptions of belonging. Therefore, artistic creations assume a fundamental role through subliminal pedagogies that generate ways to understand, perceive, desire, thrill, and relate to others.

Aesthetic democracy is fundamental to a society's maturation through a process that enhances people's self-confidence and values their diversity, promoting new axiological bases from its emotional roots for the next generations. In this process, it is critical that children and adults from different realities can feel positively identified and represented through artistic creations that empower their imaginary self-perceptions. It is even more relevant concerning ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, and gender groups, as well as diverse family configurations and children with disabilities who have been historically excluded or stigmatised in the predominant artistic creations.

Different dialogical viewpoints are essential in this process. However, it is necessary to dissolve intolerance and extremism, since these impede the reflection that divergent perspectives may bring to permanent dialectical evolution. Therefore, an approach rooted in transformative dialogical radicality may deconstruct exploitative, racist, sexist, and other violent principles, exposing their internal contradictions as they are based on superficial dogmatism and the absence of empathy.

It is noteworthy that access to different aesthetic compositions is a powerful way to promote the perception of the possibilities of transformation. They foster recognition of the existence of multiple expressions, viewpoints, and opportunities, thus denaturalising adherence to hegemonic culture and developing critical perspectives and new imaginary paths.

It is also noteworthy that this complex process requires continuous construction through effective and lasting actions that must be constantly improved and revised. Thus, aesthetic democratic relations must be in a state of permanent development

and committed to promoting cultural roots that provide subliminal affective ties through the multi-signs of their pluriperceptive discourses.

A broad aesthetic education may ground a recognition of synthetic pluriperceptive discursive imaginary operations. Additionally, the understanding that emotional engagement and critical perception are intertwined enhances aesthetic pleasure instead of hindering it (Brecht, 1967). At the same time, such an awareness calls for responsibility and for coherence between official speeches and the signs aesthetically promoted in a determined environment.

This transformative path requires awareness and engagement from all people, embracing the beauty of diversity (West, 2023) from a position of reciprocal generosity rather than the imbalance of benevolence, which is grounded in unfair power relationships (Freire, 2016). Through collaborative and grounded action, new emotional perceptions may result in a naturalised fair culture rooted in aesthetic democracy. This construction may serve to avoid the predominant culture of comfort, whereby people from different political perspectives are separated into homogenous groups and repeat similar internal discourses focusing on opposing external stereotyped enemies, thus creating the opposicionism warned by Freire (2016). The culture of comfort avoids facing internal contradictions and is unconsciously comfortable in the collective emotional engagement of the common senses, which are rooted in either weak benevolences or superficial dogmatic criticism. Instead, we can accept the culture of discomfort, where each person assumes responsibility according to the context. That is, for each privilege, there is a responsibility. The culture of discomfort is not unpleasant but requires the effort to keep the ability to reflect on the complexity of each situation without memorizing fixed truths or embracing the superficiality of relativism.

In the flow of cultural conviviality, a community naturalises emotions, values, and behaviours as unchangeable (Maturana, 2004). Only the development of awareness can promote the recognition of internal contradictions and possibilities of transformation (Maturana, 2004; Freire, 2016). This recognition results in new imaginary opportunities that generate new modes of aesthetic synthesis, grounding the necessary changes so as to create sustainable cities and communities from the roots of a sustainable culture based on collaboration, knowledge, creativity, organisation, fun, and love.

The world has witnessed cultural transformations throughout human history, even if most people are unaware of them as they occur. Different generations gradually develop awareness of various topics. This alters their perceptions and emotions, and consequently modifies the ways of raising children and creating new emotional bonds capable of transforming their sociocultural systems. An innovative structure is gradually established through the symbolic power of novel aesthetic constructions that promote the subjectivation of new cultural patterns through imaginary systems. Therefore, it is urgent to recognise imaginary power and create an aesthetic revolution to bring about an emotional evolution that will result in lasting cultural changes. Thus, we may actively hope for a better world by building sustainable cities and communities through a challenging and exciting culture of discomfort nurtured by the democratic aesthetics of love.

Acknowledgments

About the author

Dr. Viviane Juguero is a theater and audiovisual artist, professor, and researcher. She is the author of plays, films, books, songs, and articles staged and published in Brazil and abroad in several languages. She holds a master's in theater for Children (UFRGS- Brazil), and a Ph.D. degree in dramaturgy (UFRGS-Brasil/UW-Madison-USA). Juguero has worked as a postdoctoral fellow in art and education at the University of Stavanger (UiS-Norway). She is the director of Bando de Brincantes (Brazil) and teaches dramaturgy at the Nordic Black Theater (Norway). https://www.vivianejuguero.com/

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