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Understanding culture as a project

Designing for the future of an Indigenous community in Québec

ABSTRACT

This article argues that, in collaboration with Indigenous [and non-Western local] communities, social designers should approach “culture” not only as a form of heritage that should be preserved and transmitted, but also as a project that weaves together heritage, current material circumstances, and desirable ideas for the future. We therefore examine the notion that every culture is intrinsically oriented towards the future, representing a trajectory that links the past to a projected ideal of well-being. Thus, cultural diversity leads to numerous trajectories and distinct futures, contrary to the colonial ideology according to which only one trajectory is possible: that which adheres to the project of eurocentric modernity. Based on a participatory research action project called Tapiskwan, which focused on the aspirations of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, we propose that the ultimate goal of social designers should be to nurture local communities’ capacity to (re)create their own autonomous trajectories, in pursuit of the good life as their culture defines it.

Keywords: participatory action research, Indigenous communities, self-determination, culture and futurity, design and social innovation.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to examine the role that different cultures might play as driving forces behind future-oriented projects. Understanding cultural diversity as it applies to design has become increasingly important as a growing number of Western designers have embraced collaboration with poor or marginalized social groups to address complex social problems. Most communities with whom these designers work belong to non-white or non-Western cultural groups (Tunstall, 2013). However, in contemporary debates on design, the issues of culture and cultural diversity are often relegated to the periphery (Asino, 2017; Manzini, 2016). Toolkits related to “design for social good,” such as IDEO’s Human-Centered-Design (HCD) or Stanford’s d.school Bootcamp Bootleg, ¹ frequently recommend practicing empathy without offering tools to generate a deep understanding of the cultural differences that often exist between designers and the people in whose lives they intend to intervene. Furthermore, social design methods and toolkits offer few indications

of how those cultural differences could be harnessed to fuel social innovation and the creation of different futures.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues (2004) that one dimension of the concept of “culture” is seldom discussed explicitly: its orientation to the future.

...culture has been viewed as a matter of one or other kind of pastness—the keywords here are habit, custom, heritage, tradition. On the other hand, development is always seen in terms of the future—plans, hopes, goals, targets. (Appadurai, 2004, p. 60)

In fact, approaches to culture do not ignore the future. But they smuggle it in indirectly, when they speak of norms, beliefs, and values as being central to cultures, conceived as specific and multiple designs for social life. But by not elaborating the implications of norms for futurity as a cultural capacity, these definitions tend to allow the sense of culture as pastness to dominate. (Appadurai 2004, pp. 60-61)

He urges us, therefore, to place *futurity* at the heart of our conception of culture. Concurring with Appadurai, UNESCO suggests that cultures should be understood as “trajectories towards the future” (2009, p. 199). When culture is understood in terms of future-oriented trajectories, design serves as an essential instrument of cultural life – responsible for bringing values and ideals into tangible reality (Buchanan, 2001; Tunstall, 2013). However, since the emergence of design as a profession, most design practice has incorporated the values of capitalist modernity; as a result, the influence of culture in future-making processes and practices has been taken for granted — i.e., few studies in the design discipline have focused on the future-making process of translating Indigenous values into tangible experiences (Tunstall, 2013). This article contributes to this endeavor.

We suggest that a designer who works with Indigenous and local populations to create social change should regard “culture” not only as a matter of what one inherits from one’s ancestors, but also in terms of “futurity” (Appadurai 2004). As Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji has affirmed, “culture is not only a heritage, it is a project” (cited in Sahlins 1999, p. xxi). In other words, every culture is a project of that which constitutes “the good life” and the acceptable means to attain it. In this sense, every culture is intrinsically oriented towards the future, as a trajectory that links the past to a projected ideal of well-being.

Therefore, cultural diversity produces numerous trajectories and distinct futures, contrary to the colonial ideology according to which only one trajectory is possible (or at the very least, desirable): the one that promotes the project of eurocentric modernity (Escobar 2015, 2017). This belief in only one trajectory has generated many forms of oppression, violence, and forced assimilation that have placed the futurity of many cultures in jeopardy (Fry, 2017). We propose that, in such contexts, the ultimate goal of social designers should be to utilize their concepts, tools, and processes in the service of local communities’ capacity to create their own trajectories, in pursuit of the good life as their culture defines it.

Context

This article is based on reflections that arose during a Participatory Action Research project called Tapiskwan, which was conducted collaboratively by a design team of the Université de Montréal² and by members of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation. The Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok are an Indigenous people whose ancestral and unceded territory, the *Nitaskinan*, is located in central Quebec, in the Saint-Maurice River Valley and its surroundings (Jérôme & Veilleux, 2014). The collaboration was initially established in 2011 with the goal of addressing the challenges of revitalizing local craft traditions, enhancing the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage, and producing crafts as a source of socio-economic development in the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw community.

Over the last century, the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok’s semi-nomadic way of life as hunters and gatherers was severely disrupted by their forcible settlement in reserves that correspond to exceptionally small

fractions of their ancestral territory (Gelinas, 2000; Poirier, 2004, 2010). Moreover, the Canadian government sent generations of the communities' children to distant residential schools where using their native language and maintaining their cultural practices were forbidden and severely punished (Jérôme, 2010). Over time, these forced transformations led many community members to become dependent on governmental aid and money transfers, creating severe problems with employment and housing, as well as limited access to the territory's resources (Awashish, 2013). Currently, the environment offered by the three reserves makes it incredibly difficult to maintain many of the activities that are central to Atikamekw Nehirowisiw culture; many community members also lack the basic opportunities and conditions that are necessary to lead a safe and prosperous life.

In terms of material culture, the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw are best known for birch bark basketry and embroidered moose-hide clothing and accessories. In the past, they primarily created these objects for their own use and for everyday life on the territory. Today, out of a total population of close to 8,000, the number of active Atikamekw Nehirowisiw artisans is estimated at fewer than 300 individuals (Awashish 2013, p. 24). While few of them make a living from this work and most instead use it as means of self-expression and as a source of supplementary income, many also value these activities as important opportunities to convey teachings and to cultivate pride in their cultural identity and technical abilities (Awashish 2013). However, some are growing increasingly concerned that limited economic opportunities and a lack of interest on the part of the youth are causing these activities to become neglected, posing a threat to the process of cultural perpetuation. Accordingly, at the beginning of the Université de Montréal's collaboration with the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Council, Tapiskwan's primary goal was to develop design workshops that would (1) nurture participants' appreciation of their culture as a precious resource for self-representation and self-determination; and (2) equip participants with design skills that would enhance their capacity to conceive and realize their own creative projects, including but not limited to, these crafts.

Between 2011 and 2015, Tapiskwan's workshop methodology was developed based on a collaborative and iterative process by which each year's participant feedback and field experience were taken into account when devising the following year's program and the project's overall pedagogical approach.³ In the course of this process, two of the aspirations that were voiced most clearly by our community partners were (1) to find a means to hold Tapiskwan workshops in the community more regularly and (2) to collaborate to develop a market for the products created during the workshops.

Building upon previous years' successes, the enthusiasm that was generated by the 2015 workshop in particular (during which the participants used artisanal printing techniques to reproduce motifs based on Atikamekw Nehirowisiw iconography on textiles) prompted a series of conversations about establishing a printing studio in the community. The following fall, we returned to the community of Wemotaci to meet with the participants of previous workshops as well as our local partners.⁴ During this first round of discussions, we began to explore the possibility of establishing a printing studio in the community, devising an approach that would align with Atikamekw Nehirowisiw ways of life and community members' lived realities. As we continued to organize our yearly Tapiskwan workshops, these discussions continued throughout 2016 and early 2017. They addressed both practical considerations (who would run the studio, for how many people, opening how many days and hours?) and broader issues concerning our collective vision for Tapiskwan's future in the community. These discussions, and specifically the conversations that took place in 2015 at the beginning of this new phase of the project, is what grounds the following reflections on culture and futurity.

Culture: heritage and project

Hountondji's assertion that "Culture is not only a heritage, it is a project" (cited in Sahlins 1999a: xxi) is the statement that inspired this article. The idea of culture as a form of heritage is easy to grasp. But what does it mean that it is also a project? It means that culture is not only what survives from the past into the present, but also that culture provides the matrix on which we build the future.

Culture orients us towards that which is to come, as it contains a society’s conceptions of what constitutes happiness and a “good life” (Verhelst & Tyndale, 2002). These ideas belong to an abstract realm of values and ideals. They more closely resemble people’s tangible experiences when they are translated into norms, beliefs, and collective aspirations — which frame the acceptable means to achieve that ideal. Moreover, as Kirmayer, Brass, and Valaskakis explain, “a vibrant culture has clear social roles, standards of excellence associated with those roles, and the possibility of one’s becoming a person who embodies those ideals” (2009, p. 465). These norms, beliefs, aspirations, roles, and standards allow for the formation of collective projects of “the good life” that individuals in that society might strive to accomplish. The pursuit of the projected good life is meant to provide direction to human choices and actions — even if individuals might choose to deviate from this direction.

The values, abstract ideals, norms, beliefs, and collective aspirations produce “an aspirational frame,” which must be translated into conjectures [the targets in the model below] of the things and tangible experiences that would allow us to achieve fulfilment and happiness. We use the term “conjecture” because there are no guarantees that pursuing a collective project for the good life would bring fulfilment and happiness to the individuals who pursue it. Moreover, as societies are not homogenous, within the same “aspirational frame,” different projects might be created by different groups of individuals — as the possible roles, aspirations, and standards of excellence vary, as well as the potential achievable visions of how to translate those ideals into concrete reality.

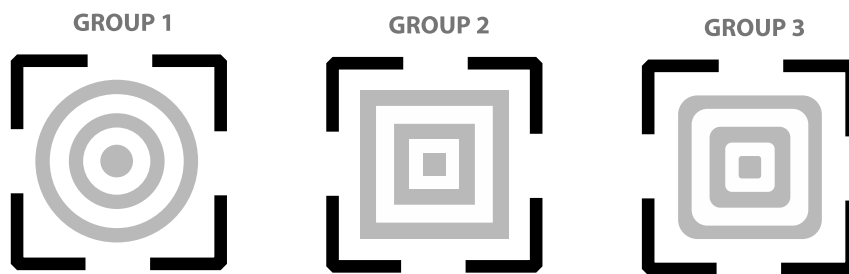


FIGURE 1: Three different achievable conjectures (the targets) of that which is ideal can be envisioned within the same abstract aspirational frame.

Within the aspirational frame, specific attainable visions and projects of the good life must be actively created and re-created by individuals to inspire forward-looking behaviors. Nonetheless, these projects of future accomplishment tend to resonate with the society’s values and the inheritance from their ancestors—which encompasses memories of collective dreams and visions of the future. As Escobar (2018) explains, a living collective memory is directly connected to the ability to envision different futures. From this perspective, culture is not a group’s static starting point, nor is it a monolithic viewpoint; it is a trajectory that links a dynamic sense of memory to the ongoing formation of its members’ diverse, and at times divergent, aspirational projects.

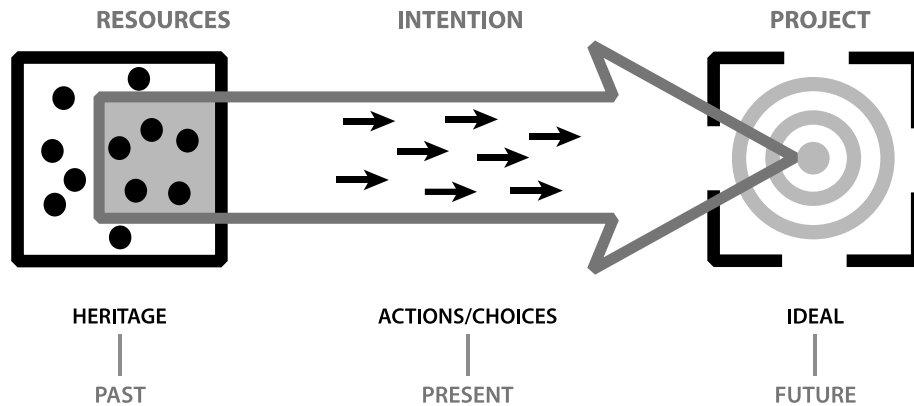


FIGURE 2: The pursuit of the ideal future shapes current practices and motivates the selection of elements from what one has inherited that will be mobilized as a resource to realize an envisioned project [the target]. In this pursuit, a part of what the present has to offer also must be selected and mobilized as a means for materializing an ideal project within an aspirational frame. It is an interactive and ongoing process, as attainable visions of the future become clearer when we become aware of our choices and resources and, even more so, when we put them in use.

In the pursuit of what they imagine to be a good life (envisioned in attainable terms), people and communities continuously create things – instruments, symbols, artifacts, policies, institutions, environments, languages, etc. Some of what is produced on this trajectory one day comes to be regarded as elements of “cultural heritage.” However, culture not only encompasses that which is considered worth bringing into the future rather than being left behind. It also concerns the collective project that drives and directs the production, selection, and use of these things in the realization of an aspirational future. The key to futurity is to create visions of this desirable future that can be continually refined and recreated based on changing circumstances, including when these circumstances have taken a turn for the worse. Such is the challenge many Indigenous communities, including the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, face today: using their own cultural matrix to generate attainable projects of a good life, and turning these projects into reality starting with the materials of their current situation, as limiting as they may appear.

From current circumstances to a desirable future

Paulo Freire (1970) has suggested that people who live within oppressive circumstances can avoid fatalism by apprehending their current situation as a historical reality susceptible to transformation through their own agency.

Since people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human-world relationship. Accordingly, the point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now," which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation— which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging. (Freire, 1970, p. 85)

In this regard, the essential contribution of design in such contexts is precisely that it provides processes and tools that enhance community members’ capacity to conceive their own projects that not only align with their cultural matrix but also make use of the materials and resources to which they currently have

access. “Design” refers to the ability to envision a desirable future, create attainable projects and, subsequently, strive to render them tangible reality (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012).

Communities that have been subjected to assimilation processes can struggle to articulate projects for a “good life” as defined by the norms and values that are specific to their societies. In Canada, Indigenous peoples, including the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, experienced the imposition of a drastic reformulation of their ways of life by policies, such as their forcible sedentarization and the removal of children from their communities for the purpose of their compulsory attendance at residential schools, among other factors (Gelinas, 2002; Jerome, 2010; Poirier, 2004, 2010). In relation to this, Kirmayer, Brass, and Valaskakis ask how they can “continue to define a good life – and oneself as a virtuous person within that way of life – when all the social structural features of that life are shattered?” (2009, p.465). The assimilation policies not only impacted social structures, but also radically transformed most aspects of their material lives. This, in turn, has exerted direct effects on community members’ ability to approach their culture as the matrix of future-oriented projects.

In a study concerning Algonquin youth,⁵ anthropologist Marie-Pierre Bousquet (2005) notes that there is a tendency to compare “traditional” culture – that which is in the past, situated in the forest – to “modern” life, situated on the reserve. Bousquet states that, for these youth, the reserve often represents a place that seems incompatible with the ways of life and cultural models that were put into practice by their ancestors in the forest. Arguably, reserves need not be – and are far from always being – places of apathy and idleness, disconnected from the teachings and activities typically associated with living on the land. However, the challenge of envisioning a different future on the basis of present circumstances is all the more daunting when one’s culture is believed to have been abandoned in another time (the past) and another place (the forest). In other words, there appears to be an incompatibility between the aspirational frame of that society (understood as “traditional”) and the current environment in which they live, where the future will take place – what is translated into a project to conceive attainable visions of the good life using the resources available to them in the reserves. Therefore, the projective dimension of culture seems impaired.

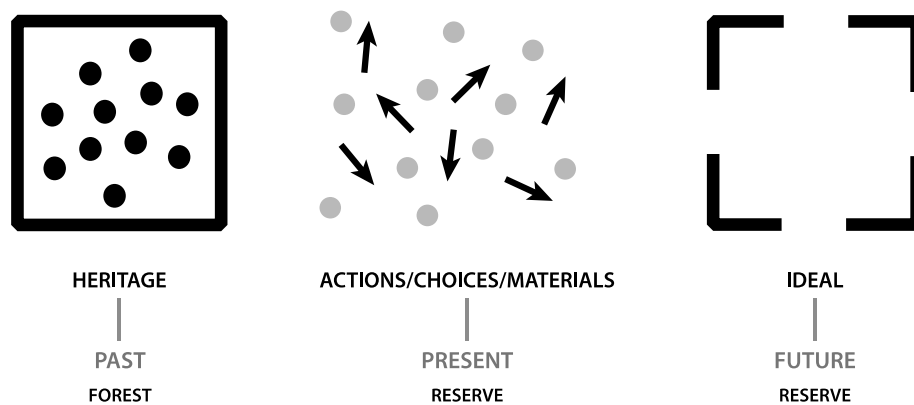


FIGURE 3: In the reserve, it can be challenging to formulate attainable projects of the good life that are envisioned within the aspirational frame of a society that developed its values and ways of life in a vastly different environment such as the forest (*notcimik*).

In contrast, recognizing a culture’s projective dimension makes trajectories towards a more desirable future easier to imagine, even within the constraints of a specific socio-spatial context. In that regard, when Algonquin youth take initiative and create new references for themselves they help transform their reserve

– a place where they like to say “there is nothing to do” – into a place in which they can imagine a trajectory towards a better life. In doing so, remarks Bousquet, they are doing just as their parents did in their time, and their ancestors before them, when responding to their shifting societal and material circumstances (Bousquet, 2005, p. 15). The Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok have a word that conveys this idea very well: *nehirowisi pimatisiwin*. This refers to a way of life that is focused on the ability to adapt one’s life to a changing environment (Wyatt and Chilton 2014).

Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok projects for a good life

Interestingly, while the name “Atikamekw” was inherited from anthropological research (Poirier et al. 2014), the meaning of their preferred ethnonym, “Nehirowisiw” (Nehirowisiwok, plural), refers to a being that can achieve balance with his or her environment and surroundings (Ottawa, 2014). An important aspect of embodying this ideal figure is the ability to make a living by drawing on available resources with ingenuity, a way of life that is known as *nehirowisi pimatisiwin*. For the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, a key requirement for this life involves adapting one’s practices to a cycle of six seasons. Each season corresponds to a state of the land, to the availability of resources, and thus to different campsites and specific activities (Poirier, 2004, Flamand, Ottawa & Labbé 2006), and each involves performing dozens of different, interrelated, tasks. For instance, among each season’s many other activities, *S’ikon* (pre-Spring) is when they collect maple sap with birch bark baskets; *Mirôskamin* (Spring) is when they go hunting for ducks and partridges, pick wild cranberries, and collect birch bark; *Nîpin* (Summer) is the time to fish walleye and trout and pick blueberries; *Takwâkin* (Autumn) is the season for hunting and smoking whitefish; *Pîticipipôn* (pre-Winter) refers to when trapping and beaver hunting begins; and *Pipôn* (Winter) is the time to go ice-fishing and make snowshoes (Flamand, Ottawa & Labbé 2006; Éthier 2014; Wyatt and Chilton 2014). While these seasonal activities continue to be highly important to the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, including as privileged moments of cultural transmission, the reserve system and mainstream society’s emphasis on the pursuit of salaried employment have hindered their ability to center everyday life around these diverse, cyclical practices. As a result, for many community members, these have become mostly means to supplement their income, include traditional foods in their diet, or to walk the land and take a break from reserve or city life. Given Tapiskwan’s mandate to support community efforts to reinforce their cultural transmission processes and nurture the youth’s sense of identity as Atikamekw Nehirowisiw people, it is important to take this seasonal calendar, as well as the notion of *nehirowisi pimatisiwin*, into serious consideration in the plan to establish a printing studio in the community. In our conversations, the idea that we could open such a studio year-round was not only regarded as somewhat unrealistic in terms of funds and logistics, but it was also identified as potentially contradicting the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok’s project for a good life. Our partners explained that, although there are insufficient job opportunities on the reserve and new work opportunities through Tapiskwan would therefore be welcome, it was important to understand that a good number of those who do find employment often choose not to keep the same job for long stretches of uninterrupted time. This is partly encouraged by the government’s unemployment insurance benefits structure, but another important factor is that community members value – and in some cases outright require – constant change in their commitments and schedule to provide and care for their families, as well as to carry out certain cultural activities, sometimes involving travelling many miles away from the reserve.

The idea of a good life, according to Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok values, is one that involves minimal routine and is driven instead by diversity and movement. Such flexibility can be difficult to reconcile with the rigid, five-days-per-week, 9-to-5 work schedules that have been normalized in most urban, industrialized, capitalist societies. Of course, some community members do value stability and routine, just as many non-Indigenous individuals seek a life of constant change and travel. However, arguably, the mainstream Western model for a good life is most often tangibly translated into seeking a steady, well-paying job to maximize one’s purchasing power and social status (Vezzoli & Manzini, 2008; Walker, 2010). This model stands in contrast with a project based on an Atikamekw Nehirowisiw cultural matrix that

emphasizes seasonality, relies on a changing set of available resources, and requires short but intense cycles of varying activity. Currently, many aspects of life on the reserve are regimented in ways that are unfavorable to such a life. At times, outsiders use this incompatibility to reinforce their negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in relation to purported idleness and laziness. In addition to perpetuating racism, this perspective fails to grasp the specificities of Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok ways of life. While the community undoubtedly faces problems of unemployment, there is nothing idle about a life based on changing seasons, activities, and places across the territory. Tapiskwan aims to be part of what makes it possible to live out aspirations of such a “good life,” including on the reserve, with the specific set of resources and temporalities this space can provide.

Indeed, while the figure of the Nehirowisiw emerged in relation to a seminomadic way of life on the territory, the idea of *nehirowisi pimatisiwin* – the way of life of a Nehirowisiw, centered around the ability to adapt to one’s changing environment – can be applied to any context (Jérôme 2008).



FIGURE 4: The values that frame the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok’s concrete desires and aspirations correspond to a life of movement and diversity. The latter principles, which are part and parcel of a semi-nomadic way of life in the forest (*notcimik*), can also be transposed to a more sedentary life on the reserve. Nonetheless, future projects in the reserves that resonate with Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok’s values still must be purposefully created.

Temporalities of fulfillment

The problem of poverty in Indigenous communities is often framed primarily in economic terms. However, increasing monetary resources or creating economic opportunities alone, without also ensuring that community members can employ these resources and opportunities in pursuit of their project for a good life, seldom improves the situation in a lasting, sustainable manner. Amartya Sen (1999) argues that it is misguided and even potentially disastrous to interpret poverty as merely a *lack* of material resources, because this neglects that what the poor are also denied is their right to fulfillment. In the case of Tapiskwan, developing a market for artisans’ products and showing youth that there are economic opportunities associated with learning more about their culture will likely be in vain if we do not also ensure that these activities can be a means for them to seek fulfillment. To be clear, nothing we do should impede community members whose project for a good life is to have steady, full-time employment. However, since many of the structures already in place in society at large encourage us to perceive the latter as what a fulfilling life looks like, it is important to also consider what must be done to support a vision for the future in which community members can strive to embody the figure of the Nehirowisiw and live according to the idea of *nehirowisi pimatisiwin*, including as it applies to life on the reserve. From this perspective, it is important to incorporate the values of physical movement, diversity of activity, and absence of routine into culturally-driven design initiatives such as Tapiskwan.

The specifics regarding how a Tapiskwan printing studio might operate have yet to be firmly established, and discussions are still under way concerning the roles the projects' various participants and partners will be adopting in the short and long terms. One proposal currently on the table is to organize periods of concentrated activity in which several artisans would collaborate to design and produce a line of products, with support from the design team and youth. For instance, during *Sikon* (pre-Spring) and *Mirôskamin* (Spring), a collective would assemble for short periods of intensive production to create a collection of products to sell during the Powwow season, in *Nîpin* (Summer). In the *Takwâkin* (Autumn) and *Pîticipôn* (pre-Winter), another set of production sessions would take place, possibly with a different collective depending on availabilities, expertise, and motivation, to produce another line of products to sell during the winter holiday season, at the beginning of *Pipôn* (Winter). In this manner, rather than imposing long-term commitments and standing in direct competition with other activities, working in the Tapiskwan studio would become an additional activity among the varied panoply of activities which the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw calendar already contains.

Of course, such an approach requires careful planning and flexibility since, in practice, seasons do not always abide by the dates assigned to them in the Gregorian calendar, and other changing obligations – including those relating to jobs and education – have to be taken into consideration. In that respect, we will be able to draw upon our experience scheduling other Tapiskwan activities according to the principles of modularity and seasonality. Until 2016, Tapiskwan workshops with the youth were typically held during the summer break⁶ and had to be scheduled around several other activities, such as a two-week youth canoe expedition across the territory held every year, Indigenous youth games (“Jeux interbandes”) which are held every other year, blueberry picking season, and key dates of the Powwow circuit. Particularly since the latter activities represent opportunities for youth to travel and to spend time on the *nitaskinan*, it would be antithetical to the aim of supporting community members' projects of a good life to force them to choose between participating in Tapiskwan and pursuing these other activities. While overlapping opportunities at any point in time of the year is inevitable in any situation, the stakes of integrating the activities of a Tapiskwan studio into the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw calendar are quite high. Indeed, this is one of the ways Tapiskwan will ensure that it approaches culture not only as a form of heritage that needs to be preserved and transmitted, but also as a project that weaves together heritage, current material circumstances, and desirable ideas for the future.

CONCLUSION

The essence of colonialism is the idea that only one trajectory is possible, idealizing “Western civilization” as humanity's evolutionary destiny, the only and universal pathway of development guided by the project of “modernity” (Smith 1999). The term *development* became synonymous with advancing this modernist project; those not already aligned with this linear and evolutionary process were thought to need “help” to catch up (Escobar, 2012; Verhelst & Tyndale, 2002). This worldview is what John Law (2011) calls a “One-World world” – “conceived of from the perspective of the Euro-American historical experience and exported to many world regions over the past few hundred years through colonialism, development, and globalization” (Escobar 2015, p. 14). As Escobar explains, the colonization of the Americas represented a key moment in the effort to create such a “One-World world” (OWW), operating a “distinction and boundary policing between those who function within the OWW from those who insist on other ways of worlding” (Escobar, 2015, p. 14).

Critics of the colonial project reject this ideology and instead embrace the notion that multiple trajectories can, and should, coexist. Escobar believes that we can initiate a transition from the ideology of OWW toward “a world in which many worlds fit”⁷ – a *pluriverse* (2015). In turn, we argue that one way designers can support this idea of a *pluriverse* is by regarding *culture as a project*, and by perceiving cultural diversity as offering a path towards a world that contains numerous different trajectories whose encounters

may alter one another, but not in a manner that is governed by one specific order or sense of superiority.

Indeed, if a marginalized group is to avoid being subjected to the choices and projects of a more dominant society, then community members must root their decisions in themselves, as well as the ability to imagine and achieve their own projects for the future. By interpreting culture not simply as what a peoples' past has to offer them in the present, but as a project ripe with potential for self-determination, designers can nurture the capacity of the people with whom they work to create their own pathways in pursuit of the good life as they define it.

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¹ The toolkits can be accessed at: <http://www.designkit.org/> and <https://dschool.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/BootcampBootleg2010v2SLIM.pdf>

² This team is directed by Dr. Anne Marchand (École de Design – Faculté de l'Aménagement, Université de Montréal). At the time of writing, the two authors of this article had worked in this project for a total of six and four years, respectively.

³ The development of Tapiskwan's approach and the outcomes of the workshops held between 2011 and 2015 were described and examined in several articles (Leitão, Marchand & Sportes, 2015; Leitão & Marchand, 2017; Leitão et al., 2017; Marchand et al., 2018).

⁴ Christian Cocoo of the Atikamekw Nation Council, and Jacques Newashish and Christiane Biroté, two of the community's better-known artists, who act as mentors for the youth during Tapiskwan workshops.

⁵ The Algonquin and the Atikamekw are neighbors, and both belong to the Algonquian language group.

⁶ In 2016 and 2017, workshops with youth were held during the school year, as part of programs preparing students for life after secondary school.

⁷ "A world where many worlds fit" is a Zapatista dictum (Escobar 2015).