

V!RUS

Revista do Nomads.usp
Nomads.usp Journal
ISSN 2175- 974X

desenhando coexistencia | designing coexistence | sem 2-10

How to quote this text: Santos, D. M., 2010. Coexistence: notes for a research project. Translated from Portuguese by Fábio Abreu de Queiroz, *V!RUS*, 04, [online] Available at: <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus04/?sec=6&item=1&lang=en>> [Accessed day month year].

Coexistence: notes for a research project

Denise Mônico dos Santos

Denise Mônico dos Santos is an architect, PhD in Architecture and Urbanism, Post-Doctoral research fellow at Nomads.usp, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Tolerance consists in having beliefs and accepting to dialogue with others who have different convictions. It means to reach a consensus with others to establish a dynamic coexistence and engage in a permanent process of mutual enrichment (Chelikani, 1999, p.30).

During the first semester of 2010, all researchers of Nomads.usp were invited to participate in various workshops in which the research at the Center should be restructured around a wide common theme. The ultimate result of these workshops was the production of a research project, for now called "Hybrid Territories: digital media, community and cultural actions", or T-hybrid, as the acronym used at Nomads.usp. This paper aims to present some theoretical frameworks of this project that, on the one hand, synthesizes many of the paths taken by research works developed by the Center in the area until now; and on the other hand, it signals the interests and concerns that guide various ongoing works.

The central focus of the T-hybrid project is to continue the exploration of the constitution of hybrid spatiality, combining the performance of actions of cultural nature in concrete and virtual instances in urban territories, expanding the possibilities of using digital media in cultural actions, with the public policies as a perspective.¹ This expansion mainly considers the

¹ Such an exploration was initiated under the project "Online communities", coordinated by Nomads.usp and developed with various partners, between the years of 2003 and 2008 in Cidade Tiradentes, a eastern district of Sao Paulo, funded by FAPESP in the public policies funding category.

constitution of hybrid spatialities in urban spaces as a possibility of designing coexistence in the city. In this sense, the issue of coexistence in their different and possible approaches is central to the project, and of great interest to Nomads.usp today. It is the point to which converges the Center's search for interlocutions, expressed in this issue of the *VIRUS* journal.

Coexistence and tolerance seem to be part of a set of concepts that flourish in contemporaneity; primarily in circles of institutions and organizations that perform actions and practices among certain populations, communities and groups subject to unequal conditions, or exclusionary and conflicting experiences, to gain prominence in the academic universe. These are concepts and notions used in specific contexts of relationship between groups, but with very broad senses. They give them a load of inaccuracies and ambiguities that reflections in the field of social sciences seek to manifest, searching to deepen and broaden the practices associated to them. Bar-Tal says:

In essence, they have been mostly used for describing desired states to which societies, nations, or states should aspire. The underlying assumption in developing these concepts has been that the system of intergroup relations currently prevailing in many countries is far from being satisfactory and there is a need to change them completely, or at least to improve them. (Bar-Tal, 2004, p.253)

The quality, condition or state of simultaneous existence is the literal meaning that the term coexistence still takes in several dictionaries (Ferreira, 1986; Houaiss, 2002; Longman, 1995). However, coexistence is a notion that is being consolidated over new bases, associated with the simultaneous existence of opposites, and yet primarily related to situations of conflict, whether they are ethnic, religious, political, ideological, cultural, of class, of identity, of gender, among others.

Coexistence is not a very popular concept among social and educational scientists in the world and, therefore, is seldom used in comparison to other concepts describing positive intergroup relations (Weiner, 1998). One reason for this is the vagueness and indistinctiveness of the concept and another is that it pertains only to minimal positive intergroup relations (Bar-Tal, 2004, p.256).

Celi Regina Pinto (2001, p.48) highlights a similar issue writing about the notion of tolerance, "highly associated with the multiplicity of identities, new ones and old ones, that seek spaces of legitimacy to their specific practices". Therefore, in this sense, this question is also of interest when fostering positive relations between groups:

Although there is a sort of widespread goodwill with the notion of tolerance, it does not seem to be an easy category. Instead, such notion is quite complex, is crowded with moral, ethical, and religious implications and relations of power, and can easily be interchanged with the ideas of compassion, understanding, love for others. (Pinto, 2001, p.44)

The definition of tolerance proposed by UNESCO (1995) in its Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, though laudable and of recognized importance is not explicit about such implications. On the contrary, it seems justly stuck to values to be pursued by human beings:

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the richness and diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and creed. Tolerance is harmony in difference. [...] The practice of tolerance means that every person has the free choice of convictions and accepts that others enjoy the same freedom. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally characterized by the diversity of their physical aspect, their situation, their way of expressing themselves, their behaviors and their values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that nobody should impose their views to others. (UNESCO, 1995, p.11-12)

It is important to realize that, by appropriating of these notions, especially in a context that involves practical applications, it is necessary to break with the common sense and superficial definitions, at the risk of engendering in naive and innocuous propositions. The notion of tolerance, when examined more carefully, is still unable to extricate itself from its negative senses related, principally, to the ability to tolerate something – the suffering or the other – or to break with the power relations that constitute the relationship between tolerant and tolerated (Pinto, 2001; Dallari, 2003).

According to Pinto:

[...] the tolerant ones only are because they have power, to change in quality the asymmetrical relationship between the tolerant and the tolerated, the discussion takes another direction: we must redirect it seeking ways to redistribute power in society resulting in the end of the need for some identity groups to depend on the tolerance to ensure even their lives (Pinto, 2001, p.61).

However, there is an effort, nowadays, to bring to the agenda of practices with groups, the tolerance in its positive senses, against the impossibilities imposed by conflict situations to be faced:

[...] The modern use and the philosophical analysis include, in any contemporary definition of tolerance, a number of elements. Tolerance is essentially a personal virtue that reflects the attitude and social conduct of an individual or the behavior of a group. It may be the idea, the ability or the gesture of turning to a reality different of the own way of being, acting or thinking. It may be an indifferent or voluntarily neutral posture of recognition of the existence of difference, or else an attitude of patient endurance merged with disapproval. It may also consist in accepting the difference, seeing in it a source of enrichment, instead of demonstrating permissiveness toward things, good or bad, without judging them (Chelikani, 1999, p.23-24).

With respect to coexistence, the set of definitions seems to be less conflictual, as the notion of coexistence does not carry any aspect connected to negative prerogatives. However both the notions of tolerance and coexistence commune in the sense of bringing with them the risk, albeit veiled, of perpetuating relations of inequality and discrimination (Bar-Tal, 2004; Pinto, 2001).

Khaminwa, from Coexistence International (CI)², presents a definition of coexistence according

² Initiative of Brandeis University, which since 2005 dedicates to "strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and net-works promoting coexistence at local,

to a perspective of practical action, which implies the organization of a policy of coexistence as an antidote to conflict:

Coexistence is a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts nonviolently. [...] At the core of coexistence is the awareness that individuals and groups differ in numerous ways including class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and political inclination. These group identities may be the causes of conflicts, contribute to the causes of conflicts, or may be solidified as conflicts develop and escalate. A policy of coexistence, however, diminishes the likelihood that identity group differences will escalate into a damaging or intractable conflict. [...] Coexistence exists before and after violent conflict. However, it is not static. Like all social environments, it fluctuates, depending on the level of social interaction. Coexistence exists in situations where individuals and communities actively accept and embrace diversity (active coexistence) and where individuals and communities merely tolerate other groups (passive coexistence). Communities that are not experiencing violent conflict can be located anywhere within this range (Khaminwa, 2003).

Interestingly, the author classifies tolerance as passive coexistence, emphasizing the relations between these two notions, as does Chelikani in the passage quoted in the beginning of this paper.

In common with Khaminwa, Bar-Tal highlights the issue of non-violence in his definition of coexistence. However, the author gives a psychological dimension, of state of mind, to the condition of coexistence and its dynamic, which is at the heart of his defense of the possibility of education for coexistence:

Coexistence, in my view, refers to the conditions that serve as the fundamental prerequisites for the evolvment of advanced harmonious intergroup relations. It refers to the very recognition in the right of the other group to exist peacefully with its differences and to the acceptance of the other group as a legitimate and an equal partner with whom disagreements have to be resolved in nonviolent ways. [...] But the core of coexistence refers to a state of mind shared by the members of the society. In this sense, coexistence is primarily a formative process of the psychological repertoire of society members. The accompanying acts of cooperation, integration, or exchanges are direct behavioral derivations of the coexistence (Bar-Tal, 2004, p.245-257).

The author also highlights in that text, as major components of coexistence, its basic conditions, beyond the principle of nonviolence, the recognition of the legitimate existence of the other group, the personalization of the members of the other group and the equality of partnership.

These two notions, coexistence and tolerance, treated yet under a initial form in the scope of T-híbridos project, seem to indicate ways to think about the meaning of constituting hybrid spatiality as design of coexistence, mainly, indicating strategies and possibilities for actions, opening perspectives to be explored. These are concepts treated and applied to situations of

national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas" (CI, 2007).

multiple dimensions conflicts, prioritizing, however, the most extreme, that bring with them the desire to embrace the differences in relations between groups and communities and, further, by expliciting them, building a rich process of matching and transformation. Pinto (2001, p.51) notes that "[...] we must rid ourselves radically from a kind of naive euphoria about the proliferation of differences. Noting them, tracing their emergency conditions and their potential, rather than simply celebrating them, seems to be a good path". It is expected, in the scope of T-híbridos project, the possibility of treading this path of fruitful effectuation of potential for coexistence of differences in urban areas.

References

- Bar-Tal, D., 2004. *Nature, rationale and effectiveness of education for coexistence*. Journal of Social Issues, 60(2), pp.253-271.
- Chelikani, R. V. B. J., 1999. *Reflexões sobre a tolerância*. [online] Rio de Janeiro: Garamond. Available at: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001314/131427por.pdf>>. [Accessed 18 November 2010].
- CI., 2007. *Sobre Coexistence International*. In: Foco em Coexistência e Recursos Naturais. [online] Available at: <<http://www.brandeis.edu/coexistence/linked%20documents/Coex%20and%20Nat%20Resources%20PORT-FINAL.pdf>>. [Accessed 19 November 2010].
- Dallari, D. A., 2003. *Cotidiano e tolerância*. In: Seminário de Cultura e Intolerância, [online] São Paulo: SESC Vila Mariana. Available at: <<http://www.sescsp.org.br/sesc/images/upload/conferencias/7.rtf>>. [Accessed 18 November 2010].
- Ferreira, A. B. H., 1986. *Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*. 2nd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.
- Houaiss, A., 2002. *Dicionário eletrônico Houaiss da língua portuguesa*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva.
- Khaminwa, A. N., 2003. *Coexistence*. In: Beyond Intractability, Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium. [online] Boulder, University of Colorado. Available at: <<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/coexistence/>>. [Accessed 18 November 2010].
- Longman., 1995. *Dictionary of contemporary English*. 3rd ed. Harlow Essex: Longman Group, 1995.
- Pinto, C. R. J., 2001. *Para além da Tolerância*. In: Zelia Biasoli-Alves, Roseli Fischmann. orgs. Crianças e adolescentes: construindo uma cultura da tolerância. São Paulo: Edusp, pp.43-63.

UNESCO, 1995. *Declaração de Princípios Sobre a Tolerância*. [online] Available at: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001315/131524porb.pdf>>. [Accessed 18 November 2010].

Weiner, E., 1998. Coexistence work: A new profession. In: E. Weiner (Ed.), *The handbook of interethnic existence*. New York: Continuum, pp.13–24.