

APPLYING CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY TO FUTURES STUDIES

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL CHANGE USING ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

GABRIELA RÍOS LANDA

a. definition of the research

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHOD

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How can the deep understanding of people's culture and cultural change –obtained through cultural anthropology– enrich the task of futures studies?

- Subquestions:
- (1) What are the tasks of futures studies?
 - (2) What is culture and how does it change?
 - (3) How does cultural anthropology study culture?

RESEARCH METHOD:

The results of this research stem from two research processes:

1⁰ Theoretical
Relevant literature was revised and analyzed. [See section "b"].

2⁰ Empirical
To test out anthropological methods within the context of futures studies, an ethnographic *pilot study* was conducted [See section "c"].

b. theoretical foundations

FUTURES STUDIES

PURPOSE:

To contribute to the betterment of humankind by improving the world in which we live in –for both present and future generations.

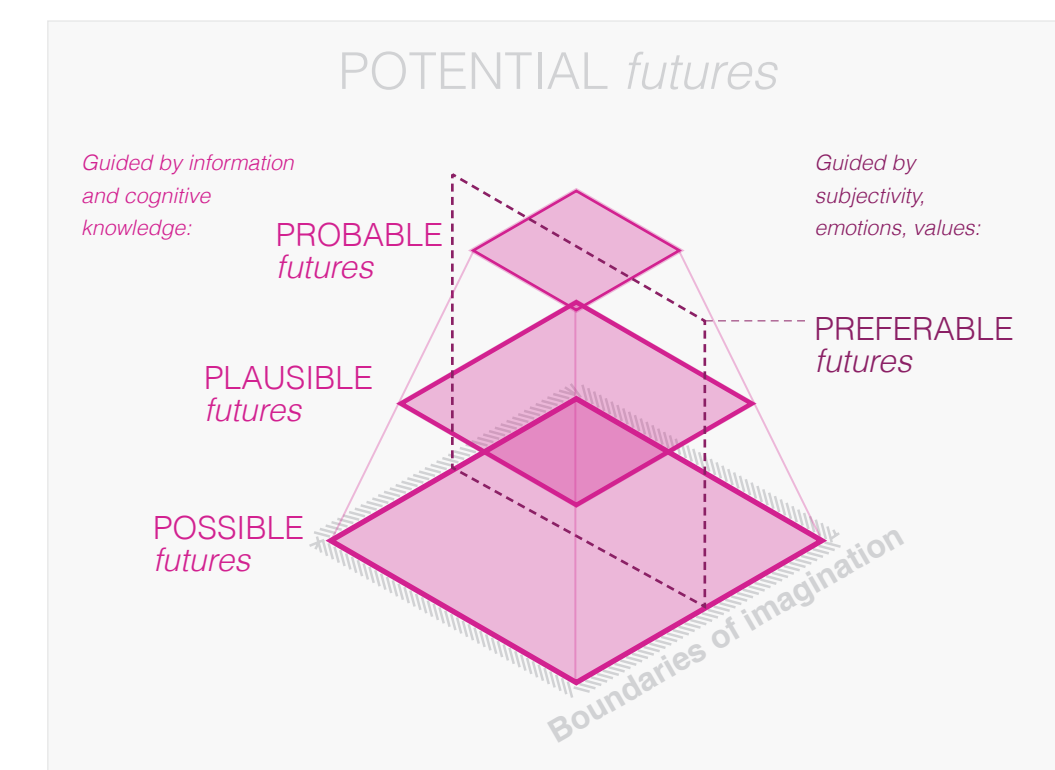
THE FUTURES IS...

...open, not deterministic, not possible to predict, complex.
...inhabited by ordinary people who apprehend reality from distinct points of view (perspectivism).

THE PLURALITY OF FUTURES:

The aim is to explore and envision multiple futures.

- The focus is the realm of the preferable.

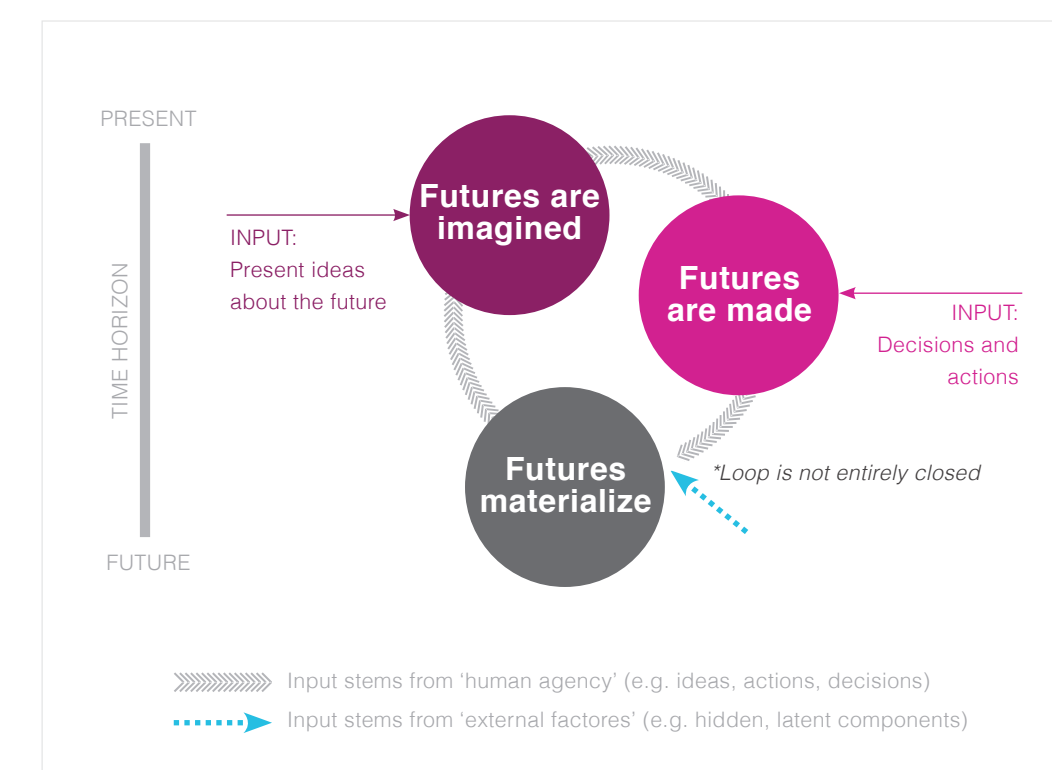


Taxonomy of the realms of alternative futures [1].

FUTURES CREATION:

The future is not only imagined but also produced.

- The future is a domain of change and action.



The continuous feedback loop of futures-creation [2].

THE ANTICIPATION OF CHANGE:

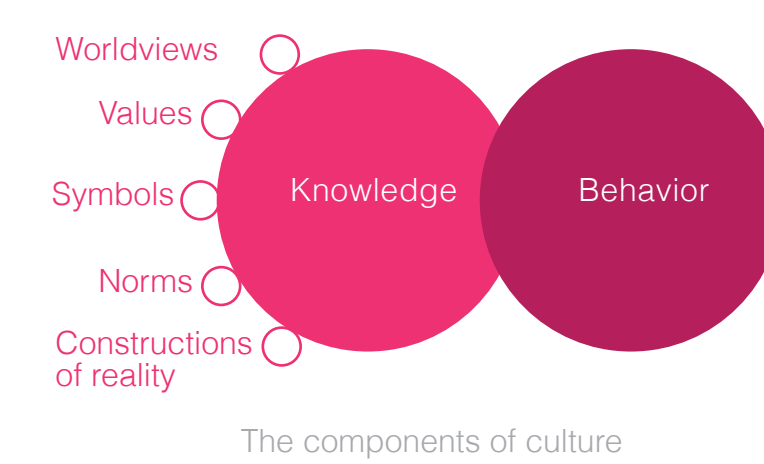
A threefold cognitive strategy to cope with the open future.

- Futures are imagined: (1) regarding something as possible, plausible or probable, (2) holding a preferable expectation about the future.
- Futures are made: (3) acting in order to materialize the desired future.

CULTURE + CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

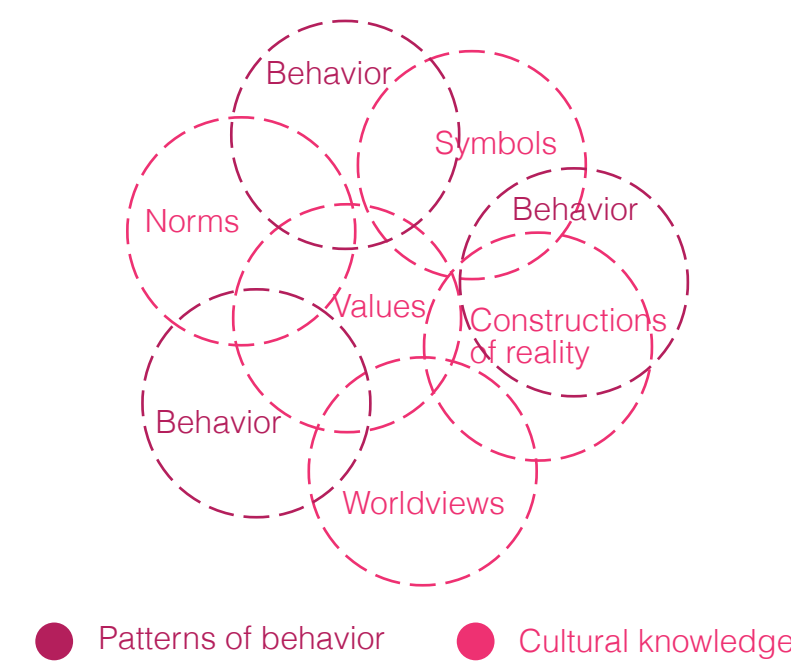
CULTURE IS:

"The socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior shared by some group of people" [3].



The components of culture

An open system with interdependent components.



CULTURAL CHANGE:

Culture is permanently changing.

- It is a dynamic dimension that allows us to adapt to new social and natural environments.
- It changes when new knowledge, behavior or technology is introduced into the system.

TRADEMARKS OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY:

Holism, relativism, critical, interconnectedness.

ETHNOGRAPHY:

"A research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture" [4].

- *Research design*: The framing of the scope and definition of techniques.
- *Fieldwork*: The recollection of data (e.g. through in-depth interviews, participant observations).
- *Analysis and interpretation*: The theorization of cultures. Through the interpretation of culture, researchers gain access to the conceptual world of the subjects in order to "converse" with them [5].

SALIENT LINKS BETWEEN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND FUTURES STUDIES:

- ✦ Anticipatory anthropology
- ✦ Experimental ethnographic systems

c. pilot study

ENVISIONING A BETTER COMMON LIFE IN MEXICO CITY 2025

Understanding Inequality and its Impact in a Common Life among its Citizens

OBJECTIVE:

To understand the ongoing effects and meanings that arise –and will continue to arise– from the daily experience of *inequality*, in order to construct a long-term *preferable* image that counteracts the negative effects of persisting inequality and portrays a better *common life* in Mexico City.

METHOD + SAMPLE:

- 7 In-depth interviews (men and women, between 19 and 29 years old from different socioeconomic levels)
- 2 Participant observations (on busy streets)

d. results

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY TO FUTURES STUDIES

The revision of literature and the empirical experience gathered throughout the pilot study suggest that the anthropological study of culture and cultural change can enrich the task of futures studies in the following ways:

DESIGNING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH FOR FUTURES STUDIES:

1 Uncovering new connections over time and eliciting new –previously unconceivable– questions about the future

CONDUCTING FIELDWORK FOR FUTURES STUDIES:

2 Experiencing and understanding present realities through the eyes of ordinary people

3 Setting the tone for the construction of preferable futures

ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING CULTURE FOR FUTURES STUDIES:

4 Understanding the conceptual world of meanings of a particular culture or subculture

EMBEDDING THE TRADEMARKS OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY INTO FUTURES STUDIES:

5 Making sense of an entangled and complex world

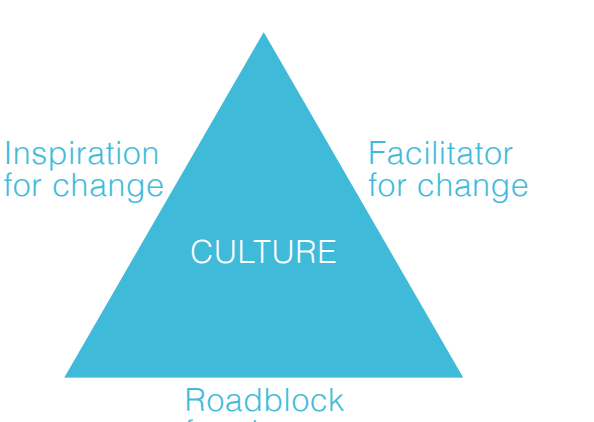
6 Opening up the boundaries of imagination through a critical engagement with the world

7 Identifying *the* articulated and unarticulated (e.g. needs, expectations) to shape the open future

8 Recognizing commonalities and discerning particularities to manage perspectivism and build inclusive futures

9 Identifying and anticipating cultural change

10 Using culture to conceive and effect change



The three sides of culture

Contact: gabylr@gmail.com

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[1] Based on information by Voros (2003, pp.16, 17). [2] Based on the information by Voros (2007, p.2, 5). [3] Peoples & Bailey 2014, p.23. [4] George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1999, p.18). [5] Geertz (1973, p.24).

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