

Collaborative Platform for Mapping Audiovisual Narratives on Concrete Alternatives Utopias

General techno-political development and design principles

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Abstract

This brief text describes the general foundations, characteristics and methodology for the development of the open source platform to build on-top of the GTAMap technology.

The need for this

The informational and documentary production about the processes of Radical Alternatives has become disconnected from the trends, reflections and practices that during the last 20 years have been questioning the hegemonic forms of knowledge production in the so-called “digital age”. There is a large bibliographic and documentary production on the “concrete utopias” and “radical alternative experiences”(Escobar 2014)(Roig 2004), but in general terms they all suffer from a frequent series of epistemic, technical and conceptual-political limitations. We can list and synthesize them, in a non-exhaustive way, in the following:

- They are built from a centralized logic: confining these productions to platforms and watertight reservoirs that do not dialogue with each other(Ernst 2012). Their institutional designs, such as academic editorials, are isolated containers that are not built with a logic of interoperability or cooperation with other similar efforts.
- They are enunciated from monocultural academic spaces, being the actors of these institutions who take or “give voice” to the experiences, reproducing the dialectic of the experts, the forms of “coloniality of knowledge”(Segato 2014) and various practices of plundering of vernacular knowledge and popular(Illich 2000).
- These experiences are presented in isolation, clipped and in a static sense. Documentary records fail to capture the dynamic and changing nature of the processes they seek to understand and present(Doctorow 2008).

- The textual medium is prioritized over other forms of re-construction of the community frameworks that give life and real existence to those processes of “the alternative”, placing oral or visual forms in an order of less importance or valuation.
- It is oriented to the “production of goods for consumption”(Zittrain 2008), in the dominant logic of the “cultural industries”, making these contents “encoded and aestheticized” for its circulation on on-demand content platforms (Kindle, Netflix, Spotify).
- They are framed and sustained in technical and legal mechanisms of “scarcity of intangibles” from various associated mechanisms of intellectual private property, such as Copyright, DRM systems and the business / corporate framework of the academic publications system(Boyle 2010)(Rosnay 2012).

From identifying this gap, the need to promote a collective process for the creation of a platform for the audiovisual documentation of alternative experiences emerges. This tool should consider the issues listed, while implementing a series of design principles that allow us to go beyond these limitations. They will be oriented to the construction of a collective open source platform that promotes a peer production model that conceives knowledge as a “digital commons”(Benkler 2007)(Schweik 2012). At the same time, and unlike most technocratic initiatives, the tool will implement a decolonial conception in its ontological design. These principles will be reflected in a series of central functionalities:

- the open and collaborative production of each content object, allowing the incremental enrichment and historicization of the creative process around each record(Jenkins 2013).
- the centrality of audio and video content, not presented as finished records, but as materials for re-creation and re-signification(Krikorian 2010)
- the inclusion of the artistic / poetic / narrative dimension at the same level as the academic record(Pierson 2011)

Based on the above, this proposal seeks to advance towards the co-creation of a “Collaborative Platform for Mapping Audiovisual Narratives on Concret Alternatives Utopias”.

Built on top of ongoing collective efforts

This development seeks to articulate efforts and resources with other similar documentary initiatives. In particular, the construction of visual cartographies of processes of resistance and re-existence is proposed starting from a collective and distributed process of textual documentation and mapping. This is being carried out from the articulation of various networks and networks that have been connecting from the international effort of the *Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA)*.

From the GTA process, a platform called *GTAMap* has begun to be carried out, which, based on open source technologies, integrates capacities for the systematization of experiences from a collaborative approach, description with semantic data, dynamic processing of properties of informational objects and capabilities allowing also many forms of visual representation of the contents.

This tool, in its primary design, is oriented to the textual and semantic documentation of the experiences. However, as it is an open source technology based on interoperable protocols, it will be possible to develop functionalities and interfaces that integrate audiovisual capabilities. This will allow the construction of a bank of geolocated and themed audiovisual records, possible to be explored from thematic cross-sections and various taxonomic schemes. It will also enable the creation of dynamic interfaces for the creation of personalized exploration and documentation experiences, not only at the level of the “observer”, but for the resignification of the experiences of Alternatives that can be put in a sense of relationship / bonding. This opens up a process for the synergy among various disciplines, allowing forms of convergence between the field of collaborative documentation, the visualization of open data, audiovisual etonography and other fields of interdisciplinary exploration.

Development methodology and design principles

In methodological terms, the process of development and construction of the proposed platform is based on a series of technical-political-methodological principles:

- Reuse and re-appropriation of open digital technologies oriented to documentary and ethnographic production
- Adaptation of semantic video technologies, collaborative content editing that allow dynamics of the remix / mashup type
- Open content production model, where contributions are received in a participatory logic and contributions are processed from an editorial team that applies and safeguards the collective criteria about the content.
- Distributed production of materials, promoting that the groups / organizations / processes themselves are the ones who self-document and carry out their own Audiovisual narratives

The *GTAMap* main characteristics include:

- will be developed and made available under the political, ethical and technical principles of Free Open Source Software
- will operate as a web service
- will be self-installable, allowing multiple distributed implementations
- capabilities to interconnect the implementations and integrate a common meta-network
- support multiple languages
- will work from an asynchronous collaborative dynamic between multiple users applying a commons-based peer production model, similar to a wiki

It will apply the following main general P2P open design principles¹:

- Self-*: Self-organization, self-optimization, self-repair of networks and systems.
- Resiliency: Resilient networks & systems that do not assume an always-online global network, and can recover from network partitions and system failures.
- Minimalism: Minimize software dependencies and hardware resources to reduce complexity and trusted computing base of systems while increasing their security, robustness, and scalability.
- Composability: Design systems as composable and reusable components.
- Data ownership: Users should have full access to and control over their own data and should be able confidentially share it with selected recipients.
- Privacy: Protocols should respect user privacy and minimize the amount of information shared about users to the bare minimum that is required for them to function.
- End-to-end security: Only the intended recipients should be able to read any piece of information stored or transmitted in the network, intermediaries may facilitate communication only by storing & forwarding encrypted data.
- Offline first: Reading, editing, and searching previously accessed content should be possible locally, even offline.

In a more advanced stage this platform would be assume a distributed approach, allowing the creation of autonomous platforms for each network that is part of the Tapestry. Each of the weavers/networks will have its own version adapted to its own identity/need but will have the ability to interoperate and exchange information with the others through the GTA meta-network. This will allow:

- that each network promotes a process to identify, map and document the alternative initiatives that comprise it
- Implement self-training meetings to reflect on the practice itself and produce documentation and systems of territorial policies and then make them available on the platform.
- Compatibility and integration with other mapping efforts, such as EJAtlas, Karten von Morgen or Transiscope.

At the first implementation level and user experience aspects, the main features will include:

- Centered on the documentation in text with audiovisual elements, allowing geolocalization of a diverse datasets, mainly the so called “Alternatives”.
- Possibility of multiple users with the ability to create and edit all contents.
- Record changes of each content, being able to reverse changes and track changes.
- Flexible structure of categorization and semantic data that allow queries of all types of data and represent it in multiple formats (lists, tables, timeline,

¹this is inspired by previous efforts such as P2P Collab

- diagnosis, RSS feed, among others)
- Multiple forms of navigation according to flexible criteria and structures (hierarchical, transversal, sequential, etc.)

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