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Introduction

This chapter explores a partnership between the National Library of Colombia, with its national network of public libraries, and Historypin.org, a global non-profit that seeks to strengthen communities through local history and story-sharing. This project highlights: the potential role of cultural heritage organisations to make lasting social impact through civic engagement, methods for designing digital content creation and community engagement along with technical infrastructure, the democratising potential of placing the power of cultural narrative in the hands of many, and how a digital cultural project allowed us to reach an entire nation during an essential time of peace-building.

Sutatenza, Colombia is a small town several hours’ drive outside of the capital city of Bogota. In September 2017, we visited the public library—a small, white-washed concrete building with a tin roof, located just off a steep, brick-paved street heading towards the town centre. The library was hosting a community memory event, with people sharing stories and snapshots about the town’s history. Inside, the library was filled with bright colours along the walls, and literally hundreds of black and white photographs hanging on strings, like clotheslines across the library. More than 20 people sat around tables that had been pushed together in the centre of the library, with the photographs hanging all around (Figure 1). There was frequent laughter as people shared stories about the photographs they noticed. In particular, they recalled with pride Radio Sutatenza, an educational radio programme that began in the 1970s and became a national phenomenon, using the technology of community radio to run educational programmes throughout the remote countryside of Colombia.



Figure 1 Residents of Sutatenza gather at the public library to share stories of the town's history and provide background on photos that are part of the library's collection.

Source: Historypin.

However, the people of Sutatenza were not alone in these community memory sessions. Across the country, people were gathering at their local public library to participate in story sharing events around historical photographs, while also digitising them, recording some of the stories and digitally mapping the photographs and stories to the very spot the photographs were taken. In 2016, the National Library of Colombia launched a programme to reach over 900 public libraries in all regions of the country, with the aim of providing innovative cultural services to communities and strengthening the use of technology to access information. As part of the curriculum to create these capacities in public libraries, the National Library of Colombia partnered with Historypin to digitise and map community snapshots of history (Comparte Tu Rollo). The project surprised everyone with its success, as the intergenerational workshops struck a nerve with Colombian citizens leveraging personal history to imagine new and more inclusive possibilities for the country.

The role of community-based archives in the path to peace

In the second half of the 20th century, Colombia endured a wave of violence that has been reproduced in different shapes ever since. In the 1950s and 1960s, the main cause of conflict was the politics of a bipartisan country with serious rural unrest that unfolded in systematic attacks, led by partisan militias and terrorists in the countryside. Later, there was a pact between both parties to alternate power every four years for almost two decades, and with it, the exclusion of

other political expressions. It was in this context that—in the early 1960s, after the Cuban revolution—various guerrillas formed and added new elements to the Colombian conflict.

In the 1970s, the rural violence persisted while the nascent traffic of marijuana grew, profiting from the social chaos. The drug trafficking that began during the previous decade evolved in the 1980s from marijuana to cocaine, and with it, Colombia sank into wideranging corruption and a new and dreadful wave of urban violence was propagated by the drug cartels. By the end of the 1980s, four presidential candidates were assassinated during their campaigns for the 1990 elections, the Minister of Justice was murdered in his car in Bogota, and journalists and union leaders constantly disappeared.

However, in the early 1990s, in the midst of their darkest days, Colombians came together in an unprecedented political mobilisation that invited all parties, social movements and ethnicities to sign a new constitution in 1991. Its spirit was to give the nation a new hopeful and collective purpose of which all Colombians could feel a part. Diversity, inclusion and participation became the ingredients to transform the country and help direct it to a desperately needed peace. Since that pivotal moment, it has taken Colombia almost 25 years to effectively reduce violence and sign a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In November 2016, with the introduction of a longawaited truce between the government and FARC, all social actors had a fresh chance to focus their attention on fulfilling the peace promise of the constitution and effectively integrate distant and vulnerable communities into the national project.

Building a cultural infrastructure to celebrate Colombia's diversity alongside the peace process

Colombia has a national network of over 1,400 public libraries. These cultural institutions are coordinated at the national level by the Ministry of Culture, through the National Library of Colombia. At the local level, public libraries depend on secretaries of culture at the municipal and departmental levels.

In 2011, the Ministry of Culture of Colombia became a grantee of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries programme. The intention of this grant was to enable at least 1,200 public libraries within the national network to provide innovative cultural services to their communities and strengthen their capacity to use digital tools for that purpose. The source of the funding had a significant impact on the design of the programme because it: (i) secured the financial sustainability of the initiative in the medium-term, (ii) encouraged higher levels of learning and innovation, relative to the traditional restrictions that public funds create in these areas and iii) opened a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to introduce a coordinated nationwide curriculum of activities in public libraries, which disrupted the traditional jurisdiction of local secretaries of culture.

Soon after the pilot programme began in 2011, the government of Colombia, together with a delegation of FARC, surprised the public with an announcement from Oslo—a precise agenda to negotiate peace between the government and the guerrilla movement would be put into motion. As the peace negotiations evolved and provided perspective into the requirements of peace-building in Colombia, the public libraries programme was being designed simultaneously to support these efforts. With a prospective peace treaty in the works, cultural institutions like public libraries were stepping up by asserting their capacity to create inclusive spaces where people could connect and shape a national project based on diversity and participation, priorities that had been long lost in the midst of conflict and violence.

With clear incentives to innovate and broaden the perspectives of what could be achieved in public libraries (Coward, McClay & Garrido, 2018) and an increasing sense of living through a tipping point in Colombian history, the National Library of Colombia began looking for partners nationally and internationally, to facilitate the social change the country required through innovative cultural services.

The National Library of Colombia had an interest in heritage, while building new, powerful and inclusive narratives about the national identity that could transcend the recent conflict and potentially reach out to nearly all municipalities through its national network of public libraries. Historypin has global expertise in crowdsourcing historical information at the community level and had already fine-tuned a set of creative digital tools to encourage people to become involved and interested in the process. The result of the partnership between both institutions was the creation of one of the most important digital community photographic archival projects in Colombia.

Creating simple activities for national community participation

From inception, the overall aim of this project was to encourage as many people from as many parts of the country as possible to attend events at local public libraries to share historical photographs and collectively build the local history behind each picture. By expanding the co-creation of national heritage to include diverse voices, the project sought to build trust and strengthen connections among communities.

The aim was to design a programme that was iterative in nature, with three simple activities that could be adapted locally, have a direct social impact, increase the adoption of digital skills and necessarily result in digital outputs. The National Library of Colombia team had assembled a plan for a systematic rollout to nearly 1,000 libraries in two rounds of training, supported by 29 tutors, or trainers, that would work closely with the project management team to gain a clear understanding of the three programmes. The tutors would then spread out around the regions of the country to train librarians at each library. Together with an international team of programme directors, service designers, digital designers and trainers, there was a need to design analogue guides and tools for facilitators, all of which could be included in a box that was

shipped to each library, and a digital interface that could accommodate many contributions. Finally, there was a need to translate Historypin into Spanish.

By March 2016, the activities had been determined, the materials designed and the training manuals written—all in time for the Historypin service designer to return to Bogota to train the 29 tutors, who would train regional librarians when they received their equipment and programme box. The programme activities were simple:

- 1) Local libraries and community members would share historical photographs and discuss them around a ‘wheel of emotion’, collectively deciding how a photograph made people feel. Was it happy, sad or nostalgic? This activity was strictly analogue.
- 2) A number of photographs that had been discussed would be ‘pinned’ on a map as an optional step. First, they would need to be geolocated—the process of determining where the photograph was taken. If the photograph was taken in a known spot of the municipality, the libraries could choose to form smaller groups to go to the location and take a photograph from the same spot. This introduced a digital component, though most people did not consider it as such (which was a good thing, as it eliminated the risk of technology being a barrier against people, particularly elders, participating in the activity).
- 3) The final step involved returning to the library to write a short story or description about the photograph in a notepad designed for the activity, along with fields for several details (e.g. location, date, etc.). These fields would be used in the Historypin digital interface, which was the last step participants would complete—scanning the photograph and uploading it to Historypin along with the gathered metadata.

From community action to digital preservation

In the meantime, an international team focused on the digital development that would power this project. The National Library of Colombia’s digital team worked closely with the Historypin teams in San Francisco, London and Sofia to design a digital framework that would allow for pinning tens of thousands of photographs across the country by adapting the existing Historypin platform, and create a way to showcase the content. Historypin created a custom user interface for the project, utilising the colour palate and design specified by the National Library of Colombia graphic designer. Historypin simplified the overall website design and use of navigation words to enable translation teams to make the site available in multiple languages.

This international collaboration resulted in the improvement of the Historypin platform. It reduced costs due to the use of an existing platform and avoided the creation of yet another one-off digital humanities project. While the digital build clearly had to meet the needs of the project, the Colombian team achieved their digital goals while also making a valuable free resource more easily accessible to the Spanish-speaking world (which was soon after followed by translations in French, Greek and Bulgarian thanks to volunteer translation teams).

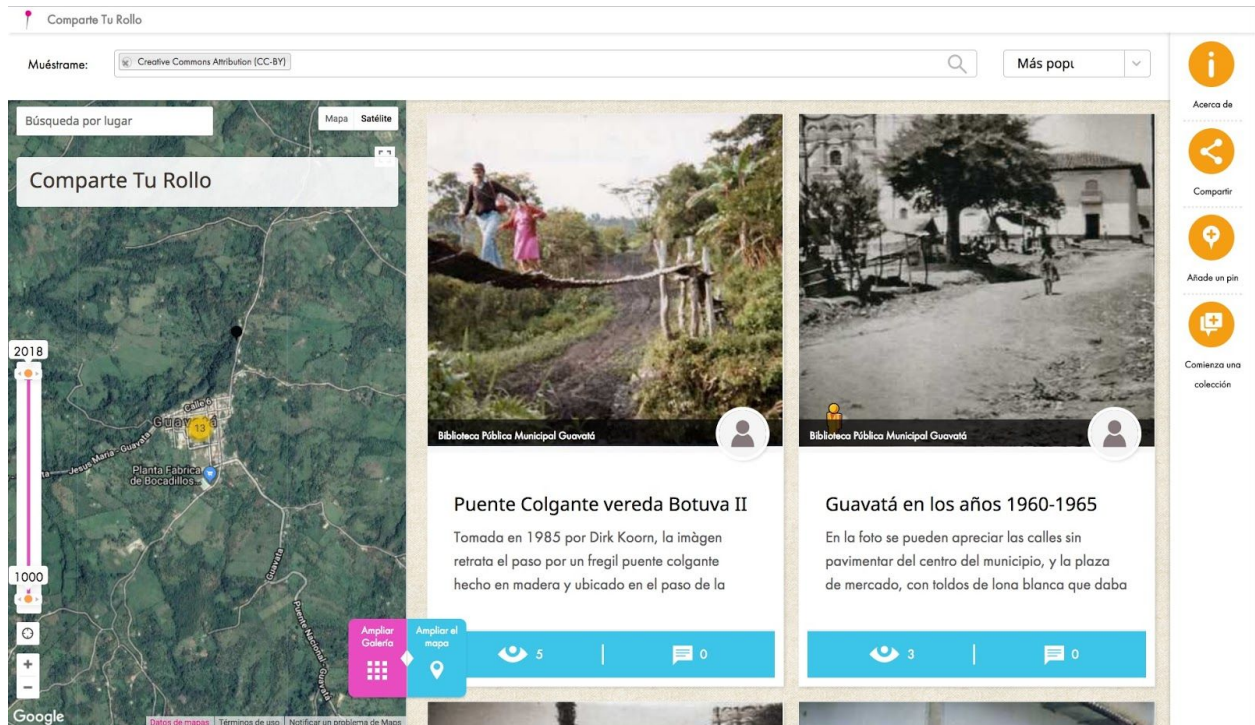


Figure 2 Community photographs shared on the Comparte Tu Rollo/Historypin site by Biblioteca Pública Municipal Guavatá.

Source: Biblioteca Pública Municipal Guavatá, CC-BY.

To facilitate the long-term preservation of the community content generated in this national project, two things were necessary: that contributors understood their options for licensing text and media content, and that the National Library of Colombia had a way to harvest this information and map it appropriately to their catalogue.

The Historypin platform already enabled contributors to choose any Creative Commons licence, although it was necessary to contextualise this information to ensure that librarians and individual contributors understood the implications. The digital platform defaulted to Creative Commons by Attribution, though that could easily be changed to appropriate licences. Further, it was made clear that this was a national project that was in participation with the National Library of Colombia and would be contributed to the national archives.

To that end, Historypin used an application programming interface to make on-demand data downloads available to the National Library of Colombia. The National Library of Colombia archives and cataloguing team mapped the fields to their own collection management system, retained the licensing information and all other metadata and added the entirety of the collection into the permanent archives of Colombia. This addition to the archives offers a never-before-seen snapshot of community life spanning many decades of Colombian history, from the local ceremonies of rural communities, to portraits of early jazz musicians, to a national love of cycling and much more (Figure 41.2).

As the project came to a close in April 2018, more than 10,000 photographs and stories had been contributed, with digital collections created in more than 900 libraries. Nearly 70 per cent of all Colombian municipalities were represented, including every region of the country. The project recorded more than 200,000 visits to approximately 6,600 workshops nationwide. Due to social media training as part of the technology programme, these photographs were shared even more broadly, inspiring far-reaching conversations on platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

The digitised content only scratched the surface, with many hundreds more photographs shared and proudly displayed on the walls of libraries across Colombia. Importantly, the digital collection process did not extract or remove these important physical artefacts from the communities, nor was the process meant to meet archival standards. These photographs and stories belong to the communities from which they came; it was left to them to decide which photographs and stories they wanted to share with the nation and the world. While there was certainly debate among the archivists on the team, there was a consensus that there was much more to be gained by gathering a sampling of the community-based archives in existence than to demand high-resolution archival-standard scans of photographs that would have greatly reduced the contributions. This also provided the opportunity for journalists to go back and further explore the content with those that shared it, creating another website featuring those stories (Nación Revelada).

Measuring social impact

To evaluate the impact of the nationwide innovative cultural services on public library users, the National Library of Colombia conducted: (i) an extensive qualitative assessment of the perception of these activities and (ii) an experiment to assess the impact that the workshops had on creating trust and facilitating connections between people—building social capital. The theory of change that laid the foundations for the impact evaluation model argued that cultural institutions have an especially high potential to mobilise social capital. Cultural activities bring people together, are excellent mediators for dialogue and tend to facilitate connections (Gaitán and Merizalde, 2016).

To rigorously measure the effect of the curriculum on the social capital of users, the National Library of Colombia hired the Centro Nacional de Consultoría, a Colombian consulting firm with extensive experience in programme impact evaluations. The first step of the evaluation was to build a social capital index, through which a baseline could be drawn. The baseline could then evaluate the changes that users showed in six different, equally weighted dimensions: (i) empathy, (ii) leadership and empowerment, (iii) participation, (iv) peaceful conflict resolutions, (v) sense of belonging to the community and (vi) positive expectations about the future.

The impact of the curriculum on each of these areas was evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative results, based on 15 different focus groups in public libraries,

before and after implementing the curriculum, showed how working with historic photographs made: (i) a deep impression on people and expanded their sense of belonging to their towns, and (ii) opened new opportunities to participate in community life. Figure 3 shows some of the stronger drivers that explain how the history co-creation workshops affected these two dimensions.

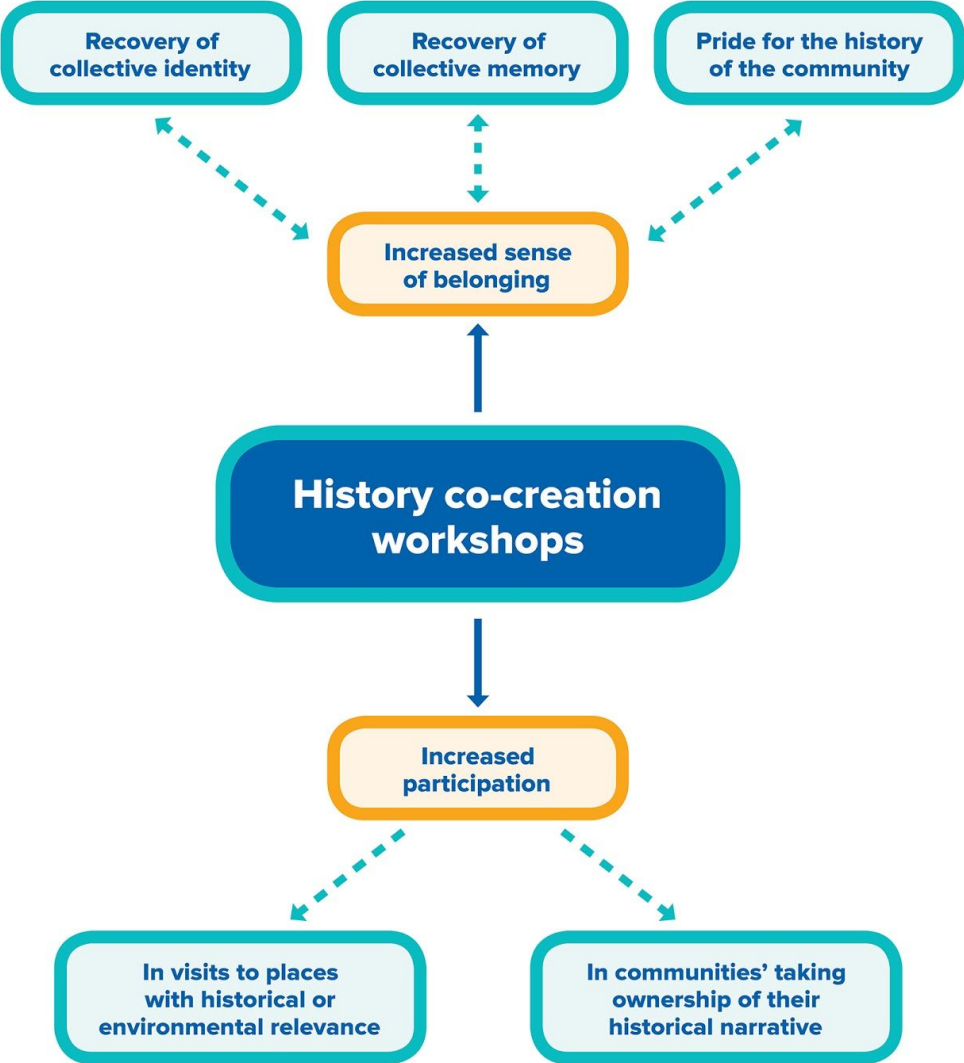


Figure 3 The theory of change illustrates the potential of history co-creation workshops to increase social capital in local communities.

Source: Historypin

The quantitative research was conducted through a questionnaire, performed in a sample of 129 public libraries—half were users who participated in the workshops and half were users who did not—before and after the programme came to the libraries. The experiment used a ‘differences-in-differences’ approach, which assumes that the group that did not participate in the programme will behave the same as the participants would if the programme did not exist. In other words, the differences observed after the intervention between the two groups of users, participants and non-participants, shows actual impact.

The results were impressive. In less than one year, the programme had a significant 12 per cent impact on the social capital indices of the participant users (the treatment group), especially in adults, relative to library users who did not participate in the programme (the control group).

Conclusion

It is in the historical context of Colombia that the digital community-based archives organised through the partnership of the National Library of Colombia and Historypin acquire their full symbolic value. After a painful and long conflict, the country has built a collection of historical photographs with the participation of thousands of people and voices from across the country. Colombian history has never before had a richer and more diverse contribution from communities. That in itself is an inspiring symbol of peace and a compass on which other cultural projects can focus their peace-building efforts.

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Bios

Diego Merizalde studied business administration in Bogota and has a Master’s in Public Policy

from the London School of Economics and the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Diego was the director of the project described in his chapter, which originated from a grant given to the Ministry of Culture of Colombia by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. He has also been a consultant for Deloitte, Professor of Economics at the Colegio de Estudios Superiores de Administración in Bogota and has conducted investigations for institutions such as the International Labour Organization.

Jon Voss is the Director of Shift (US) and Strategic Partnerships Director for Historypin, where more than 4,000 cultural heritage organisations are working to strengthen communities through intergenerational and intercultural story-sharing and local history. Jon co-founded the International Linked Open Data in Libraries, Archives & Museum Summit in 2011 to help build an open ecosystem of historical data across libraries, archives and museums worldwide. In 2016, he co-founded the Cultural Heritage and Social Change Summit to bring together cultural heritage professionals to address issues of cultural equity in our collective narrative of history.