HERITAGE AND PHOTO-DIALOGUE:
AN APPROACH ON ARTS BASED RESEARCH
AND COMMUNITY.

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ABSTRACT

Rioja Alavesa is a region in Basque Country, North of Spain, which has special characteristics: its landscape, its architecture, its traditions, its natural borders... And all of this makes a singular culture, heritage and in consequence, society; nevertheless, it has an identity problem in spite of everything.

These circumstances have created a problematic in our educational and cultural spaces about who we are and where we are moving on (in relation with politics, economic, sanitary and educative system). Because of that, this research focuses our purpose in the huge importance of a new tool to work with communities and their cultural heritage (Fontal, 2013; Gutiérrez Pérez, 2012; Huerta y De la Calle, 2013) and we thought that this tool was Photo-Dialogue (Roldán Ramírez y Genet, 2012).

This project has clarified its relevance in communities with any problems, giving us a practice paid off where our participants have recalled their culture, traditions and more important, their identities. Our findings tell us that Photo-dialogue is an important educational and research tool where their participants can join in, and help our downstream to improve the quality of life.

Therefore, in this article, we describe this Art-Based-experience that develops visual thinking (Roldán, 2012) and helps us to understand our cultural heritage, our region and our society.

KEY WORDS

Cultural Heritage, Visual Thinking, Experience, Photography, Identity.

Seamos, como Picasso en su tiempo, los que "po-nen en duda las certidumbres" (…) Si humildemente sabemos que no tenemos las respuestas, al menos hagamos lo necesario por formular de la mejor manera las preguntas. François Méchain, Arte en la Tierra.

INTRODUCTION & MAIN POINTS

Our principal aim was an active participation of Rioja Alavesa's society for, in this way, achieving an identity re-definition according to the reality of the region, its feelings and its daily routine. Also, it gives us a better understanding of our region's problems and its identity, and Photo-dialogue was the best option because it's an Art based research's tool, which unifies Heritage education and Art education.

We want to define our community, our collective and plural identity with a postmodern revision that forgets the old system of Modernity in many different perspectives: social, educative or cultural ways. For this reason, through this PhD we have proposed different activities for giving voice to life stories that grow in this South region in Basque Country.

The first of all was a collaborative exercise like an *artistic interview* because, in social researches, the interview is one of the most important tools. Nevertheless, our interview is not a typical verbal test; otherwise, it's an artistic dialogue, an opened conversation about Rioja Alavesa through visual processes

and an aesthetic view of working with communities and their heritage. In other words, we proposed to do a Photo-Dialogue collaborative exercise with different agents of Rioja Alavesa.

Thus, it is an educative tool that is used to understand and respond in a visual way among answers and visual questions our reality (Roldán Ramírez y Génet, 2012). This could help us to understand our cultural heritage too. Moreover, we could develop visual thinking (Roldán, 2012), and it's essential for artistic education.

Through the different photo-dialogues we could see that the case of Rioja Alavesa is a particular example of cultural landscape (Pastor, 2013; Velilla y Muntión, 2010), where the vineyard landscape stand out in association with different artistic results: traditional and modern wineries, old constructions related to the wine world like wine press made of rock, vineyard guard huts, necropolis with clay jar where they conserved wine, folklore and traditional dresses, Gastronomy, etc.

Therefore, this bastes Heritage in our region, even our culture, and we work with Heritage Education and artistic knowledge from Arts based Research's view.

METHODOLOGY

So, the Photo-Dialogue (Roldán, 2007) is a type of analysis used in Arts Based Research and, as its name

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Esther**

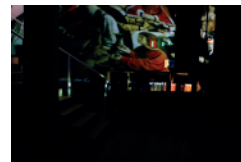**Fig. 3.** *Photo-Dialogue.* **David**
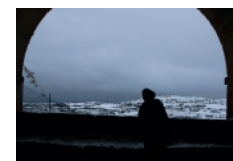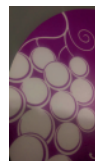

Fig. 4. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Carlos**

Fig. 5. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Kris**

says, it deals with images for engaging about some issue. We start with a photo-question (fig.1). In our case, our issue is Rioja Alavesa: its landscape, its society, its people, its costumes, its traditions, it politics or economics, its culture… Everything that could explain to us our main features as region.

In this way, Rioja Alavesa had to be "photographically" checked through Photo-Dialogue, which allows for encouraging the creation of a dialogue in a visual way, in a huge narrative that is based on visual argues (Agra Pardiñas y Mesías Lema, 2007; Irwin, 2003, 2008, 2010; Kind, 2006; Marín Viadel, 2005; Marín Viadel y Roldán Ramírez, 2010, 2014; Roldán Ramírez, 2006; Whiston Spirn, 2014).

Photo-dialogue works as double purpose: 1.- Arts based Research methodology (Barone, 2000; Barone y Eisner, 2012; Marín Viadel, 2003, 2005; Hernández, 2000, 2002; Roldán y Marín Viadel, 2012) and 2.- a knowledge based on experience (Dewey, 1934; Maffesoli, 2003, 2011; Massin, 2013; Torregrosa, 2012).

Arts Based Research stand up for using Photography as a discourse, because it could argue, propose and talk about different issues while we are expressing our stance and thoughts with artistic argument and we are putting up knowledge and sensitive experiences.

The result of this necessity in Postmodern Artistic Education is a collaborative, visual, artistic and aesthetic exercise. Thus, in a Photo-Dialogue each pho-

tograph is a question and an answer, a suggestion and remark. It's really useful inside of classroom and outside, this is, no formal education spaces as museums, ethnographic centres, libraries, etc. Also, Photo-Dialogue could be a participative tool, absolutely personalized, because *each Photo-Dialogue is an only and singular conversation* (Roldán y Genet, 2012: 166)[1].

Guasch et al (2006) say that Photography is an analytic and communicative method that needs an aesthetic quality, and these conversations need it too, even more, need to an aesthetic and profound reflection and a high-quality in visual explanation; because as Bernd & Hilla Becher said, a photographer is when he is an artist too.

For this reason, in an artistic way, these conversations have shown many different Rioja Alavesa(s), many regions, as many regions as participants have helped to create this visual and cultural dialogue about our identity. Describing this land full of vineyards, almost 75 participants (between 20 and 65 years old) took photographs for speak with visual questions and answers. This contributed to developed visual thinking and understand our cultural heritage, our region and our society from a new point of view.

Depending on their answers, Roldán (2012) establish twelve possible typologies as we can see below, divided in three sub-categories.

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1 *Cada Foto-Diálogo es una conversación única y singular* (Roldán y Genet, 2012: 166).

Continuation based on no visual information	Continuation based on visual information	Failed dialogues
Literally topic identification	Simple formal analogy	Plagiarism
Continuation of action, utility or function	Compound formal analogy	Redundancy
Contextual topic association	Style	Substitute
Symbolic association	Report	
	Poetic equivalence	

Continuation subject in Photo-Dialogues (Roldán, J. 2012: 162-195)[2]

When the knowledge about Photography is limited, the results of Photo-Dialogue are worse than when people know about this subject. In the first cases, participants usually used a verbal (or no visual data) continuation that this affects to a limited visual thinking and the development of aesthetic skills. However, in the other hand, when participants have done more than once a Photo-Dialogue (or if they had knowledge about Photography), they give many different visual answer using composition, structure, colour, textures, shape, aesthetic and metaphorical ways, among other things (Mora, 2013). All this makes bonds, links… in a detailed process of understanding. Also, it is important to keep in mind that in Photo-Dialogues we always need to contribute with an answer-image that provides us with some novelty or variation (Roldán y Genet, 2012), bringing something new to the table.

We can see in the different examples at the ending diverse kind of associations or links. Why is this? Photo-Dialogue works as union and miscegenation (Ramírez Goikoetxea, 1985) in a profound process of reflection and in relation with the life and its reality in a specific space, like an intense sense of community.

For this reason, the Photo-Dialogue is the result of profound reflections and, in consequence, it's a technique that needs long processes of study, analyse and observation. This made that our timing was delayed more months that we had expected. However, this flexibility gave us more interesting results and developed an intense experience with the context, people and ourselves.

In certain way, we are responding to the emergence about new interpersonal coming across, new identity dialogues and social encounters, unifying to community in feelings of joining in, sense of belonging or being in a "*cuadrilla*"[3].

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2 *Translation of the author.*
3 Cuadrilla: Basque name for a social group of friends.

Fig. 6. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Leire**

Fig. 7. *Photo-Dialogue.* **MariCruz**

Fig. 8. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Amaia**

Fig. 9. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Mónica**

Thus, through the different Photo-Dialogues we have shown up a changeable and colourful view of our territory from aesthetic experiences. Here, landscape (and territory) is part of our imaginary and it can be observed and based on many different photographs taken by our participants.

These aesthetic experiences mean the essence of a landscape scent by traditions and works, effort and delight, a landscape where we are talking about our future with a visual dialogue. For this, Torregrosa said that *aesthetic experience makes possible join what we live and what we think about, connecting all dimensions inside of us[4]* (Torregrosa, 2015: 3-4). Thus, this tool offered to our research an approach to heritage and cultural frames, but to identities too, linking life, experience and artistic knowledge. In other words, with visual reasoning and having an experience into a specific context, we could have awareness to our heritage and our identity; thinking up our answers in artistic language and give opinions in visual forms.

Through a sensitive knowledge, deeper than other forms of approach to reality, photo-dialogue could improve our relation with our context and its reality.

A COLLABORATIVE EXERCISE

Firstly, we set out the rules for doing the Photo-Dialogue:

- Themselves must take all photographs. It is not available download from Internet or from another authors. This is due to we want to increase artistic skills and visual reflections. In special cases with quotes, these must be correctly indicated[5].

- Anyway, photographs must be related with Rioja Alavesa: landscape, culture, traditions, festivities, etc.

- Links between images must have a consistent narrative (by colour, by composition, by metaphors…).

- Participants must close Photo-Dialogues completely (8 photographs altogether).

- They must have e-mail or a smartphone for sending images.

In this moment it's important to underline that a high percentage of participants did their photo-dialogues with the app Whatsapp and photographs were taken with their Smartphones. This can be a tendency *transmedia* (Jenkins, 2010), which makes our method a narrative 2.0., and where *Photography has de role of resuming*

Fig. 10. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Sole**

Fig. 11. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Miguel Pedro**

Fig. 12. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Minerva**

Fig. 13. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Mari Carmen**

constantly a life lived in the world (Berger y Mohr, 2007: 287), a sensitive experience of our context and of postmodern *être-ensemble*[6] (Maffesoli, 2003, 2007, 2011).

In this way, the context, the environment, the *terroir* and every experience that people of Rioja Alavesa have lived are corresponding, necessarily inseparable, like a way to know and to be all over the world, and to know and to be specifically in Rioja Alavesa.

Photography and concretely the Photo-Dialogue give us lots of perspectives about the different groups and communities. Rioja Alavesa is a plural society that started an identity and cultural process where they can see and re-interpret the reality. Thanks to photographical action of living the environment, the landscape, the culture, traditions… we could identify and appropriate the spaces that describe social link, integration, reciprocity and daily routine (Ramírez Goikoetxea, 1985). So then, we would enjoy living together as necessary element for social development.

Like it happens with *www.dialogodeimagenes.org* (Roldán, 2007-2011), every participant answered to the same first image in each photo-dialogue (the "question-image"), but although, each one has a different pattern of connection and their dialogues and narratives explain to us their points of view about how is Rioja Alavesa and how they live in these socio-cultural circumstances, linking images, linking ideas in a visual way.

Thus, every photograph tells us something about their experiences, how they live through the region and its particular reality. In addition, we could define the most important social and cultural aspects in our region, our in another words, our archetypes (Jung, 1970).

RESULTS & CONCLUSION

We have almost 75 photo-dialogues that describe Rioja Alavesa. This collaborative exercise has shown an important union between landscape or geography and cultural-traditional concepts (Febles Ramírez, 2013). For example, they show buildings (as wineries, vineyard guard huts, rock wine-presses or dolmens); artworks and cultural but also immaterial heritage (as dancing, stories and myths) that live on our society and history. In spite of their different nature, Photo-Dialogue always describes environmental element, concretely concepts, and photographs depend on experience of each individual and its context[7] (Roldán y Genet, 2012).

In this way, in our photo-dialogues we've described an interesting approach to the sensitive knowledge and visual thinking. We reinterpret Rioja Alavesa talking about their different community systems and main concepts. Likewise, these dialogues shape

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6 Être-ensemble = to be together. It's a social theory that is described by the professor Michel Maffesoli in his postmodern view of society and people's relationships.

7 Las fotografías realizadas *dependen en gran medida de las experiencia perceptiva del individuo y el contexto en el que vive* (Roldán y Genet, 2012: 178).

Fig. 14. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Monika**

Fig. 15. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Jaione**
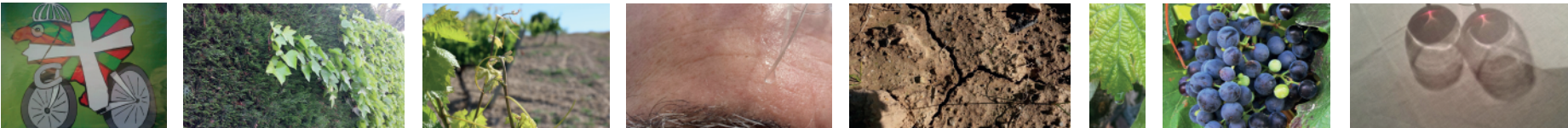

Fig. 16. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Dese**

Fig. 17. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Jesús**

or even make up a collective visual story where we have debated our sociability.

In consequence, these different influences and key aspects in our context are gathered in our Photo-dialogues. They represent the social landscape of our region, playing between the documentary method and nearness to Conceptualism, even more, an approach to the value of photographic images. Along these lines, we could remind to Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer or Gursky (apart from a few big details) among others of the great generation of German photographers (Guasch et to, 2006). As well as,

> *Si en una imagen se comprende su relación con la anterior, esto quiere decir que los participantes comparten significados, modos de representación, cualidades formales, rasgos estilísticos, símbolos, interpretaciones y conceptos estéticos. De algún modo, las diferentes formas de continuidad entre imágenes son informativas de muy diferentes formas. Al mismo tiempo, cuando dos personas reconocen y comparten rasgos comunes en dos imágenes distintas, implícitamente, están aceptando la capacidad de las imágenes no sólo para reproducir fielmente la realidad visible, sino también para enunciar a través de proposiciones visuales una muy amplia pluralidad de ideas y cualidades estéticas, y por consiguiente su solvencia para propiciar aprendiza-*

jes complejos y significativos (Roldán y Genet, 2012: 168)[8].

In other words, if we can identify correctly an interrelationship in the narrative of these images, generally visual metaphors, this means we share similar patterns, expressions and/or languages that are communally decoded. As a result, it's an evidence that we share aesthetic and artistic patterns too and, by the same token, we share cultural, social and identity ones. For all these reasons, our Photo-Dialogues' images are *les représentations identitaires qui constituent le socle du folklore et nourrissent les rêves nationaux sont parties intégrantes de la vie sociale de leurs adhérents* (Campion-Vincent, 2014: 63)[9], where we could find our regional archetypes.

Definitely, this tells us that the simple recognition of a visual image and, of course, its understanding, interpretation and transformation are always a cultural phenomenon, not a reflex action (Hamilton y Marín, 2011).

And as long as community or society that share meanings, stories and experiences, the collabora-

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8 If in an image we understood its relation with the previous one, this wants to say that the participants share meanings, representations, formal characteristics, stylistic features, symbols, interpretations and aesthetic concepts. Somehow, the different type of continuation between images is informative. At the same time, when two persons recognize and share common features in two different images, implicitly, they are accepting the capacity of the images, not only to reproduce faithfully the visible reality, but also to enunciate through visual propositions a very wide plurality of ideas and aesthetic qualities, and consequently, its capacity to promote complex and significant learning (Roldán y Genet, 2012: 168). *Translation of author.*
9 Identity representations describe folklore and increase national dreams, as a part of social life (Campion-Vincent, 2014: 63). *Translation of author.*

Fig. 18. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Sara**

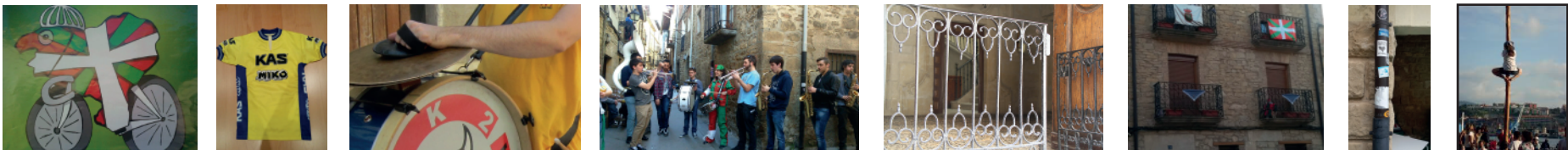**Fig. 19.** *Photo-Dialogue.* **Almudena**

Fig. 20. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Jesi**

Fig. 21. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Ana**

tive exercise Photo-Dialogue has been a relevant and outstanding contribution to our research, because the researcher's point of view has been opened thanks to another perspectives, so many as participants we had. Participants described the region from Aesthetics, Art and photographical narrative, which are inhabitants or nearby Rioja Alavesa's region. Moreover, photo-dialogues have been an interesting debate, an artistic dialogue that defines these main points that we define as archetypes and, which support the basis of this region, this community, the jewel of Southern Basque Country: Rioja Alavesa.

In short, art (Photography) and social interaction allow to holding up "community", from archetypes' definition, from a plural perspective, from a collective trembler, visual thinking and aesthetic reflection. Definitively, Photo-Dialogue, an innovative tool in Educational Research, contributes to *re-build* identities and to dialogue about our sociability in a visual way, in the collective feeling of life together, which unifies us, which we could identify. This is, a short but a intense visual tour though 8 photographs showing our culture, heritage, the real moment and context, our identity roots and our society.

Summarizing, this project has clarified the relevance of Photo-dialogue in communities with any problems, giving us a practice paid off where our participants have recalled their culture, traditions and more important, their identities. Our findings tell us that the Photo-dialogue is an important educational and research tool where their participants can join in, and help to our downstream to improve the quality of life and different systems in the Basque region of Rioja Alavesa.
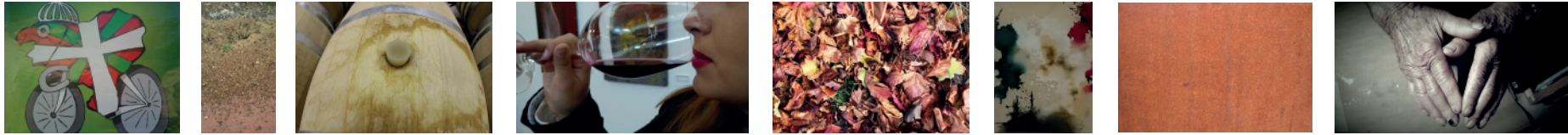
Fig. 22. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Tamara**

Fig. 23. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Aitor**

Fig. 24. *Photo-Dialogue.* **David**

Fig. 25. *Photo-Dialogue.* **Javier**

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