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Teaching International Development Locally: Using Museum Collections to Ground Students' Learning

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Abstract

Sociologists consistently try to activate students' sociological imagination even as they focus on teaching substantive and methodological information and skills. Teaching international development and other global topics pose particular challenges for engaging students actively in the local context while teaching about global and macro processes and outcomes. In this article, we connect international development and object-based learning at a university museum to describe a semester-long project of object analysis of Kuna textiles, the *mola*, in a topical seminar course on the sociology of international development. We detail how the approach can be adapted to local and online museum collections. Using student reflections, open-ended questionnaires, discussions, and student projects and analyses, we demonstrate how this active learning approach can provide important grounding and skills for a sociological approach to international development.

Keywords

international development, museum, object analysis, active learning

Teaching global and international topics may be challenging in ways that topics that are more proximal and personal to students (e.g., family, gender) may not be. To engage students, instructors may employ "hands-on" and experiential, active learning. This, however, is not always directly possible when teaching international topics situated elsewhere. In particular, including a study-abroad component is sometimes not feasible for monetary, regulatory, or other reasons. However, we know that students can learn differently, perhaps better, by "doing." In this article, we provide one such way to have students exposed to experiential and active learning on the sociology of international development in the context of an undergraduate course in the United States. Using student reflections, open-ended questionnaires, discussions, and student projects and analyses, we demonstrate how this active learning approach can provide important grounding and skills for the broader study of international development.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, GLOBAL LEARNING, AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teaching international development may be particularly important in the face of intensifying globalization. Many universities are focused on fostering global citizens and in doing so, seek to incorporate increased exposure to global topics and ideas, including study-abroad and internationalization programs (Anderson 2017; Core 2017;

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Dallinger 2017). However, studying abroad is not always possible, does not spontaneously create global citizens, and is an opportunity only available to a minority of undergraduate students nationally (Baldassar and McKenzie 2016). It remains important, still, to internationalize the sociological curriculum because this not only has disciplinary benefits but also prepares students for the more globalized world they encounter, including in higher education (Sohoni and Petrovic 2010).

In this article, we describe the use of museum artifacts in a midlevel (200-level) sociological course on international development that introduces students to foundational theoretical approaches to the study of international development. In introducing the course, the instructor emphasized that the goal was to have students learn about international development and in doing so, consider and compare the various existing approaches to the topic. In particular, the course is framed as seeking to examine what "makes a developed country" at the national level to what "makes a good life" at the individual level, moving across the units of analysis of country, community, and individual as well as other social units in between (e.g., families, cities) to consider what development looks like.

Using a case study of the Kuna people to ground students' understanding served several goals: First, it introduced important substantive information about an indigenous group in Latin America; second, it provided an anchor for broader discussion of classic theories of development—for example, how would Wallerstein categorize the Kuna and Panama in the context of world-systems theory? Third, it allowed the instructor to introduce subaltern and indigenous perspectives from the global South to challenge and engage dominant development narratives. The course requires students to put foundational theories in conversation with readings and understandings of indigenous cosmologies, colonialism, and Kuna society (e.g., course readings included Fenelon 2015; Fortis 2013; Mahoney 2010; Scott 1998; Sherzer 1994). Fourth, the artifacts or objects, in our case *molakana*—blouses made by Kuna women—became vehicles for teaching international development, providing students physical objects (and visits to the museum outside the regular classroom) to handle in considering international development. In this way, the *molakana* allow students to make connections between the micro and macro and apply their sociological imagination, a core component of sociological teaching (Noy 2014).

We accomplished this via "object-based learning," a pedagogical approach that focuses on the interaction with material culture to enhance critical thinking and the acquisition of key skills (Hannan, Duhs, and Chatterjee 2016). A key benefit of this approach is that although it begins with concrete formal analysis (e.g., colors, shapes), it progresses over iterations that encourage deeper, more abstract analysis (e.g., of designs and themes and in our case, relationship to concepts and course readings on theories of development). This progression directly empowers students, breaking down barriers to an often intimidating scholarly process (Kador, Chatterjee, and Hannan 2017). Through this, students can achieve several goals: object-based learning can underscore how material culture can help students understand abstract ideas, including about international contexts; enhance student engagement with the course material; and allow students to learn important formal analysis skills and ground their understandings in empirical research and evidence. In conjunction with a larger research project, as in this course, object analysis provides an opportunity at active learning: where students are not only reading sociology but doing it (Holtzman 2005; Strangfeld 2013) and applying readings to research and analysis—in this case, museum objects.

APPLYING THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL INFORMATION VIA OBJECT ANALYSIS

Utilizing the University Museum to Teach Sociology: The Value of Hands-on, Small-Scale Learning Activities

Research on the scholarship of teaching and learning has consistently noted that small-scale activities can deepen and broaden learning. Primary sources, cultural artifacts, and objects may be particularly useful in grounding student learning (Carini 2009). This might be especially important in instances of global learning (Custer and Tuominen 2017). Visual sociology offers some important insights: images and tactile representations may help students create connections between concepts in course material. Furthermore, a more active approach may encourage participation (Whitley 2013).

Museum collections and exhibitions can then help render topics tangible and help teach students about material culture (Kreps 2015). Academic and other museums have been sources for education, including higher education, for decades. However, "concern for how learning in the art museum can leverage learning outside of the museum (what we

refer to as learning through the museum) is a more recent consideration taken up by museum directors, curators, university teaching and learning centers and individual faculty members" (Milkova and Volk 2014:29). Engaging with museum collections allows for "high road transfer," which is the application of knowledge or learning dispositions used in one domain to solve problems in a different area (Salomon and Perkins 1989).

In this article, we describe a project where students completed several museum visits and learned to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas cooperatively as a group, in pairs, and individually via worksheets, culminating in a research-based final paper relating course themes to analysis of *molakana*. In doing so, the instructor worked with a curator at the museum (the first and second authors of this study, respectively) to design engaging activities with the objects and worksheets and provide technical information (e.g., the sewing techniques of applique and reverse applique) by which students could conduct formal analyses of the *mola*. Students were also asked to connect readings and theories to their analyses. Through this deep engagement with the objects, students were able to slow down for close looking, including formal analysis, but also grow their observation skills (Milkova et al. 2013).

This course, and the project described here, allowed students to go from consumers of knowledge to producers by breaking boundaries in and outside the museum. Students were taught concepts that allowed them to construct meaning from objects and make connections back to course readings, theories, and discussions. Museum objects can be used as data and evidence rather than only as illustrations and examples. As such, they provide an opportunity to teach students research skills via object analysis (Marcketti and Gordon 2019). The instructor discussed the specific learning goals of the course with the curator, and together they identified appropriate objects within the museum collection, then developed targeted, hands-on exercises that employed high road transfer techniques to yield novel and compelling student experiences and achieve course goals.

The Kuna and *Molakana*

Students not only engaged extensively with broad sociological approaches to international development in the course but also read about indigenous people, the Latin American context, the Kuna, and *molakana*. The Kuna are an indigenous group, descendants of an ethnic group in the western Colombian Darien, the majority of whom by the

mid-1800s had migrated to the San Blas Islands, now known as Kuna Yala, which are located along Panama's Caribbean coast (Wickstrom 2003). The 1925 Kuna revolution was instrumental in allowing the Kuna to continue to live in an autonomous territory with their own leadership (Marks 2014). Traditional Kuna institutions persist in the Kuna Yala, which has resisted extensive nonindigenous development, maintaining chief leadership, intervillage government, and general congresses among communities (Wickstrom 2003). In the context of the course, our focus on the Kuna had the additional benefit of decentering methodological nationalism (Hammer 2018) and bringing into sharp relief issues of colonialism, nationalism, indigeneity, resistance, trade, and other central international development themes. In addition, many indigenous traditions persist, among them the making of *molakana* by Kuna women, a skill passed down generations of girls.

The *mola* is a women's blouse made by the Kuna women of Panama and can be considered an art form and economic resource as well as a form of clothing (Margiotti 2013). A *mola* is displayed in Figure 1. The *mola* blouse has evolved over time: changing from a long tunic to a blouse that currently covers the torso with twin rectangular panels, one in front and one in the back. Kuna adult women are constantly engaged in making *molakana* in between daily chores, and these are made in the home and by hand and is a way to enjoy the company of kinswomen (Margiotti 2013, Marks 2014). Some suggest that *molakana* have their roots in bodypainting and that *molakana* developed as a result of trade and commercial relations that allowed for the purchasing of fabrics as well as thread, needles, and scissors (Fortis 2013; Marks 2016). The *mola* then provides an entrée to discuss issues not just of commerce and trade but also indigeneity, culture, gender, intergenerational relations, and identity, among other development-related themes.

The museum has holdings of other Kuna items, including *nuchukana*, Kuna ritual wooden sculptures that cure and protect people and households against malevolent spirits (Fortis 2013), as well as canoes and several other types of artifacts. However, *molakana* were chosen for several reasons by the instructor after several visits to the museum, extensive readings, and conversations with the curator. First, the *mola*s can be seen as "cultural repositories of meaning" (Marks 2015:155) for the Kuna. Although some of their meanings may not be clear to non-Kuna people (and indeed, some meanings are only legible to some people, e.g., chiefs within the community), the designs may be indicative of cosmology, whereas others

Figure 1. Image of a *mola*, DUXX.113. Image courtesy of the Denison Museum.

contain brand names or political messages, and many relate to the local environment, including the natural world and daily life (Marks 2015). Second, the blouses highlight women's work, gender, and family dynamics, including the intergenerational transmission of the craft, centering often marginalized experiences in discussions of development. Third, because this is a midlevel course over a single semester, using only one type of artifact allowed more depth of analysis and engagement as well as background reading than introducing several types of objects. That is, this was a contained approach and allowed an in-depth dive into *molakana*. Fourth, the status of *molakana* as a central income-generating craft for Kuna women since the 1960s (Marks 2015) allows for discussions of trade, tourism, Western influence, and economic development in ways that allow students to critically engage with and consider different understandings of international development. We supplemented analysis of the *molakana* with historical photographs of Kuna life to contextualize life in the Kuna Yala.

An Overview of the Project and Course

The project was part of a seminar-style course at the 200 (mid) level, within a joint department of Anthropology and Sociology at a small liberal arts college, limited to 24 students with no prerequisites.

The course is cross-listed with Latin American and Caribbean studies and was designed to provide students both conceptual and substantive information about the sociology of international development, focusing on introducing them to foundational and classic approaches as well as debates in the field, with a focus on the Latin American experience. The class visited the Denison Museum, a teaching museum at the university with a focus on helping faculty and students integrate objects of historical, cultural, and artistic value into their academic curriculum. The Denison Museum Collection includes cultural heritage, historical, scientific, and artistic objects. The museum has 100 class visits annually from all divisions of the university.

This study draws on data from a dozen students enrolled in the course in fall 2019 who completed worksheets over four visits and further worked in small groups of two or three (students also had the option to work individually) to write a research proposal and conduct a research project that resulted in a paper and presentation. More information and specifics of course materials are available from the corresponding author on request. The course took a scaffolding approach to teaching students about how to analyze both the *molakana* (this is the plural form of *mola*, although *molas* is also used, described in detail in the following section)

and photographs at the museum over the four visits. This was achieved through sustained engagement with the objects in multiple museum sessions that were conceptualized, developed, and taught collaboratively by the faculty and museum staff.

This decision-making process that settled on the *molakana* and photos for this course and the number of visits involved extensive communication between the instructor and curator as the instructor designed the course. The instructor was not a Kuna expert prior to the start of the course but was interested in interfacing with the university's museum after hearing about the Kuna collection and Latin American related holdings. Following several museum visits and conversations with the curator, the instructor read several books and numerous articles on the Kuna to figure out which artifacts might be most appropriate and a best fit with course themes and goals. Therefore, and as we discuss at the end of the article, our approach can be adapted in a myriad of ways across sociological topics and courses (e.g., gender, religion, culture, race and ethnicity, etc.) and with a variety of artifacts (e.g., textiles, clothing, paintings, stoneware, etc.) but requires investment by the instructor, preferably in conversation with a curator when possible, to adapt the approach and the chosen collection given course topic and goals.

During the course, students visited the museum four times to analyze *molakana* and photographs, and each time, students interacted with the objects differently and completed a different worksheet. First, as a class, we all analyzed a few *molakana*. A second assignment had each student pick and analyze a *mola* individually. During the third visit, students were paired and took turns, standing back to back, the first student drawing the *mola* based only on the second student's description. During the fourth visit, students examined photographs of the Kuna donated to the museum, largely from the 1970s and 1980s. These visits began about three weeks after the start of the semester; students had read and discussed broad themes of development and also received some background on the Kuna and *molakana* both in readings and during regular class meetings. The visits to the museum were structured a week or more apart so that students could receive feedback on their worksheets before the next visit and continue to read about the Kuna and development and so we could process the experience of analyzing the museum artifacts individually and as a group.

After repeated interaction with many of the *molakana* during these structured class visits, the students visited the museum again to select three artifacts (at least two *molakana* and either a third *mola* or a photograph) and were assigned to write a research proposal with an argument about development using class sources, 10 additional peer-reviewed sources from outside the class, and the three artifacts. In the proposal, students were required to include a detailed formal and descriptive analysis as well as an annotated bibliography of their selected sources. The final paper and presentation integrated feedback from the proposal phase to allow students to make a unique argument about development, scaffolding student learning. Project topics ranged from a focus on work and leisure in the context of Kuna life situated in understandings of development to a focus on Kuna political resistance in historical perspective. Through extended reflection in class and while writing and conducting research, students were able to transfer the readings and discussions in the classroom back to the objects for interpretation and evaluation and draw informed conclusions for the final project. We provide additional details on each worksheet and the final projects in the section on student learning, describing them together with student responses, impressions, and outcomes to provide a fuller picture of the project.

DATA AND METHODS

Our data come from several sources. First, we draw from notes on course discussions about museum visits. Second, we asked students to answer open-ended questions about their experiences in the museum and the course in questionnaires distributed in the beginning, middle, and end of the course; although some questions were repeated, others were not. For example, the first questionnaire asked students to discuss their previous experiences and understandings of international development and their expectations of the course and the museum visits, whereas others focused on their experiences. At each point, we asked students how they would define international development and whether and how the museum visits and reading about the Kuna had helped them process the theoretical approaches and materials we discussed. At the midpoint, students reflected on the first two visits, whereas in the final questionnaire responses they incorporated insights from the third and fourth museum visits and worksheets. Finally, we rely not only on student perceptions of their learning but also draw from examples of students' work and class discussions—that is, evidence

of learning beyond students' own perceptions of such. The data were then analyzed thematically to discern patterns in students' approaches to the material and the utility of museum visits and exercises to their learning of international development. In the following, we detail the themes that emerged.

The university's Institutional Review Board approved this research, and students were informed that they would remain anonymous in discussion of research results. Students were also notified that the instructor would observe their museum visits and take notes on discussions involving the museum visits and their projects involving the artifacts as well as draw from their work in analyzing the utility of this project to their learning about international development. Taken together, these qualitative data, collected over the course of the class, provide evidence of the effectiveness of using museum objects to ground students' understanding of complex theoretical and substantive knowledge of international development, both based on students' own accounts and their work and as assessed by the instructor.

STUDENT LEARNING AND OUTCOMES: PROCESS, EMERGENT THEMES, AND EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Expectations and Previous Understandings of International Development

In the first questionnaire, students were asked about their previous coursework in international development. Most students indicated that they had not taken coursework related to international development, although some students mentioned that they had briefly encountered the concept. For example, one student indicated that it was mentioned in an introductory anthropology and sociology course. Another student indicated they had encountered international development in the context of an economics class. This suggests that this course was most students' first encounter with international development. The instructor also asked students what they expected of our visits to the museum. At this point in the course, we had reviewed the syllabus, and students were aware that their primary project would be an analysis of Kuna *molakana.* We were interested in gauging students' expectations, partly to compare those to their experiences at the end of the course. Many

students expressed uncertainty or wariness about the museum visits. One student reported, "I'm not really a still art person, so it will take some effort to effectively appreciate the art and its significance," whereas another noted, "I expect it to be like any other museum, a large area filled with exhibits. I feel like it's going to get boring after a while"; several reported they were unsure what to expect.

However, some of the students expected the visits to the museum to be illuminating. One student noted, "[I expect] this experience to be eye-opening to the underlying cultural aspects of the Kuna people," whereas another wrote, "we're actually going to look at something we've read about, literally bringing it to life. It's just more fulfilling to see it in person, color, texture, authenticity." A third noted: "I find it interesting to see actual pieces of history from different cultures," whereas another expected "aha moments." Overall, this suggests that students had mixed expectations, and although some of them seemed eager to connect the museum visits to course material and international development, they were more compelled by the physicality of the objects, and most were unsure and uncertain.

Experiences at the Museums: Visits and Worksheets

At the museum, students completed four different worksheets and analyses that were developed by the course instructor together with a curator, and visits were co-led by the curator and instructor. During the first visit, the curator discussed the role of the museum as a teaching museum and explained how we came to have the *molakana* (who they were donated by, what information we had about them) and shared primary resources and accounts written by some of the donors of the artifacts. In this way, the introduction served to give students some background information about the museum and distinguished it as a different kind of place than the standard classroom in which the course met, with the projector, whiteboard, chairs, and tables (although at the museum, students could use stools as needed to sit next to the artifacts). Further demarcating this as a different kind of learning space were instructions to store all personal items in a locker (with locks), and students were instructed to wear provided disposable gloves and only allowed to take in clipboards with pads of paper and their worksheets to make notes— in pencil to avoid staining artifacts accidentally.

The first worksheet involved all students analyzing the same few *molakana*. First, the whole class looked at the same *mola*, with the curator

explaining how to use the language of formal properties to analyze the *mola.* We all collected around the table with the *molakana* and discussed it together, touching it (wearing gloves) to examine texture and layers. This formal analysis language was also included in the worksheet: color, line, shape, texture, and space. We discussed the use of space, noting that a unique feature of *molakana* was that there was very little empty space, particularly as contrasted with the students' own clothing, which often featured blank space and a central logo. To connect this first introductory visit to course content beyond *mola*-making techniques, the instructor asked students to reflect on the theme and topic of the design, following their reading of the section "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" of C. Wright Mills ([1959] 2000) *The Sociological Imagination* earlier in the course. In it, Mills ([1959] 2000) notes that a topic is a subject, whereas a theme is an idea, and the students were asked to think about how the subject or topic displayed in the *molakana* related to themes of development, gender, and other ideas discussed in the course. During this first visit, we focused on formal analysis and a group "close look" with discussion, including sewing techniques that are particular to the *mola.*

Students noted that the panels were filled edge to edge and had bright colors, layering, and textures. The worksheet asked students what a *mola* is, who makes a *mola*, and how a *mola* is made. Students were also asked about the craftsmanship of the *mola*: the use of sewing techniques such as applique, reverse applique, embroidery, and so on. Specifically, in this first worksheet, we included questions about who and how *molakana* are made, a detailed description of technical aspects (e.g., embroidery, fillers), and asked students to describe what we could learn about the maker and what questions they had for the maker of the object. To accomplish this, during each visit, we had an excerpt from Marks's (2016) work on *mola* sewing techniques and terms available to all students on tables where the objects were displayed. An example of a technique used in *mola* making that we expected students to identify and reference in their projects is *bisu-bisu*, an overall geometric maze or pattern filling a large part of the *mola* with sharp changes to angle, a snake-like or labyrinth pattern, which is central to the design in Figure 1.

The second visit involved having more than 20 *molakana* laid out in the observation room on tables several feet apart from one another (each table contained two to four *molakana* side by side).

Students were each asked to sketch their chosen *mola* and, once again, provide a formal analysis. This accomplished the goal of allowing students to not only analyze a single *mola* but also, when selecting their *mola* of choice, view many of the *molakana* available at the museum. This was important for exposing students to the variety in the collection as they began thinking about their final research projects. Furthermore, students were encouraged to chat with the curator and the instructor, who circulated as students sketched and worked on their worksheets, during visits as they thought about the topic of their final project.

During this second visit, the goal was to have students deepen their thinking not just about the techniques used to make the *mola* as well as the materials (underscoring the materiality of the object) but also the design, scaffolding their learning. For example, in this worksheet, we asked students about whether there was a narrative and what any particular objects, shapes, or figures featured communicated. Students were also asked to think about development and tradition (key concepts in many international development theories) based on the *mola* they examined, elaborating using specific examples. In this assignment and in class discussion, students clearly thought critically and carefully about the *mola* and were able to connect it to theoretical and conceptual ideas discussed in class but also substantive knowledge. The students were asked to write a short essay at the end of this second worksheet. The prompt was: "Drawing on class readings (this can be one or more), what can we learn about development and tradition based on the molas you've examined today? Be specific and elaborate, be sure to define development and tradition and cite the source." Students noted that although some *molakana* featured nontraditional Kuna motifs, for example, Christian themes, they were done in a traditional style and often involved other figures and objects that were traditionally Kuna. In this way, students critically reflected on and challenged linear understandings of international development that pit tradition and modernity on opposite poles of one-dimensional axis, particularly that identified by classic modernization theory, which they had read about (Rostow 1990).

The third visit pushed students to consider some of the same issues but also asked students to think about how to verbally describe the *molakana* carefully to others, which would become important in writing about these objects for their final projects. This was particularly important because during the first and second visits, students varied in the depth

and detail of their formal analysis, and it was an important goal of the course that students understand that these objects were data, which required visual literacy via detailed and careful attention. This was also discussed and reinforced in the regular class periods, that is, outside the museum visits. To accomplish this, during this third visit, students were asked to get into pairs prior to entering the exhibition area, where the first student led the second, who kept his or her eyes closed, into the observation area.

Then, each pair positioned next to a *mola*, chosen by the first student from a variety of *mola*s on display, organized by the curator. Then, the second student in the pair was asked to sketch the *mola* with a catch: they stood back to back with the first student, who was the one facing the *mola* and describing it to the second student. After about 10 minutes, the first student covered his or her eyes and was led to another *mola* by the second, and the process was repeated. We then spent some time discussing, as a class, whether students found this challenging, and each student went to the *mola* they had sketched first without seeing it and filled in details. The rest of the worksheet asked students to compare and contrast the two *mola*.

We encouraged students to examine not only color, texture, and design but also age, whether the *mola* appeared worn or not, level of detail, and so on. Finally, students were asked to think about similarities between the two *molakana* in relation to development-related themes, with instructions for them to think broadly but use specific examples from the *molakana*. This assignment was particularly effective because it underscored for students the importance of rich and deep description so that someone could make sense of the *mola* without seeing it and also how much description and analysis was needed to accurately convey the contents of a *mola*. Furthermore, students were asked to connect themes across two different *molakana*, which foreshadowed the work they were required to do in their final projects. Specifically, we asked: "What can some differences between the *molakana* tell us about tradition, modernity, and development among the Kuna? Use at least TWO specific examples from the *molakana* you examined today." Focuses ranged quite a bit in this worksheet; for example, some students noted similarity in whether there was a central figure or of themes, for example, depictions of nature, connecting it to traditional ideas of economic development as associated with infrastructure as compared with traditional subsistence-reliance on natural resources (Rostow

1990). Another student, for example, discussed Christian motifs (some of the *molakana* depict crosses, Jesus on the cross, Adam and Eve, and Noah's ark) displayed in traditional styles, citing readings on colonialism and indigeneity (Fortis 2013; Mahoney 2010)

Finally, during the fourth visit to the museum, students were exposed to a variety of photos of Kuna life, and each student was asked to select a photo of interest. This time, the students were guided through photographic analysis. We asked students for their first impression as well as what type of photo this was (where students could check all that applied): portrait, landscape, aerial/satellite, action, architectural, event, family, panoramic, posed, candid, documentary, selfie, and other. Students sometimes had some questions about what these meant, so as during previous visits, the instructor and curator circulated around the room, answering questions and thinking through the photo with the students. Students were once again asked to draw the photo, but in four quadrants to force attention to detail. We then asked students to list and observe the parts including people, objects, and activities (each in a separate column). Some students found difficulty with this aspect, for example, not sure if their photo displayed people playing basketball or soccer, and we discussed what other clues (how many people, the presence of a hoop, the size and location of the ball) might give us additional insight. The worksheet included additional questions about what they might infer from the photograph and, for example, what other documents could they use to help them make sense of the scene or topic. Students cited books, interviews, diaries, media reports, and other types of sources that could help them fill in the gaps in understanding the photograph. The last question in the worksheet provided the following prompt for student reflection: "How does this link back to topics or themes in class? Please provide a definition and citation for ONE concept that helps you think about the photo in terms of development!" In this way, we gave students significant leeway in thinking about the classic, foundational as well as critical approaches to development we discussed in class (including classic and cultural modernization theory, dependency and world-systems theory, the capabilities and freedoms approach, colonialism, and indigenous perspectives) and how they related to the *molakana* they analyzed.

In the last few weeks of the course, students wrote a proposal for a research paper and subsequently completed a research paper and presentation—the

latter to share findings with the rest of the class. This project could be completed alone or in groups of two or three (depending on student choice). They had to craft an argument related to development and based on a formal and thematic analysis of three artifacts (at least two *molakana* and either a third *mola* or a photograph from the museum's collection) as well as cite and review relevant literature. The topics ranged quite widely, with, for example, one group of students focusing on work and leisure, arguing that work and leisure became increasingly differentiated among the Kuna following integration into the capitalist world-system and under colonial systems, drawing on Wallerstein's (2011) work, which we covered in the course, and their own research. Their argument was supported by the analysis of a *mola* featuring a soccer player, a photo of children playing basketball, and a *mola* featuring a political council meeting. The students also thought about the process of *mola* making itself, which may be considered both work and leisure in contemporary understandings.

Another group examined political resistance among the Kuna, doing substantial research to identify the political figure in a *mola*—depicted as a chicken or rooster. They argued that both the themes and designs of *molakana*, but also *mola* making itself, reflect women's political participation and the preservation of tradition and Kuna politics as separate from national politics in Panama. Connecting it to international development, they drew not on a classic modernization approach or on world-systems theory but, rather, situated their argument in another approach covered in the course: the capabilities approach (Sen 1999). They integrated understandings of development as enhancement of freedoms, including of diverse political participation, in their project. The projects demonstrated not only analysis of the objects but also critical thinking and connections between the theoretical and conceptual understandings of development and, for example, tradition or politics, and the objects. In this way, the introduction of these objects clearly grounded these more abstract, theoretical perspectives for students and allowed them to apply them empirically.

Grounding Development: Definitions and Applications

The course and project were focused on helping students think critically about what development means across levels of analysis: drawing on readings, class discussions, worksheets, and independent research. Overall, the students showed increased mastery of

the material and that analyzing the *molakana* helped them more fully understand development and varying approaches to it. Based on in-class discussion, student work, and the questionnaires, we observed progress in identifying and understanding themes in the course, student ability to define and conceptualize development, formal analysis skills, and critical thinking. From the student perspective also, the museum visits helped accomplish several goals: First, it helped them understand, using the physical artifacts and understandings of the Kuna, how to *challenge* broad and theoretical, particularly foundational, scholarly definitions of international development, demonstrating critical thinking skills and engagement with the sociology of development. Second, students noted that analyzing the *molakana* provided interaction with material culture, which in turn provided tangible insights into change and development among this society. Third, and related to the first, in challenging traditional understandings of development, students were able to activate their sociological imagination and take the perspective of the other, embracing a Kuna-centered, global South and developing world views, especially important in a U.S.-based course.

By the final questionnaire, all of the students were not only confident in providing a definition of international development but also were able to reflect on how the artifacts contributed to their understanding of development. This is compared to the second (midsemester) questionnaire, where less than half of students could clearly connect understandings of development to the artifact analysis and define development. For example, in the last questionnaire, several students noted how the Panama Canal facilitated trade and tourism, which affected the designs of the *molakana*, with a student noting the shift from geometric *molakana* to those featuring sports, political, and other themes. Another student noted, "applying them [theories] to Kuna artifacts helped strengthen my understanding of international development . . . and making connections [of the theories] with the artifacts." Therefore, beyond the instructor's assessment of their increased understanding via student submitted work, students themselves identified that our class engagement with the *molakana* (and photographs) helped challenge and ground theories of development. Another student noted that the Kuna are a case study of how globalization and global commerce affect *mola* making, whereas a different student noted that "by directly consulting primary sources it allows us to know how they [smaller communities] changed [as a result of development]."

Second, the physicality of the artifacts provided an important learning resource and opportunity. One student noted that applying the different theoretical approaches to Kuna society "has helped me understand how different development theories can label the Kuna 'developed' or 'underdeveloped.' The museum's artifacts are physical evidence of a society," whereas a different student noted that "learning theory is all very well and is necessary. However, theory is useless unless applied to a real-world scenario...since the Kuna express their culture through *mola*[*kana*] it is especially useful [to my understanding of international development]." Another student also pointed to the applied nature of the artifact analysis and issues of scale: "having the opportunity to examine the Kuna artifacts and their way of life I was able to understand international development on a small scale." In this way, this analysis helps bridge grand theories and narratives, national and global statistics, and localized experience via material culture, and student excitement served to increase engagement and learning.

Third, students appreciated that the artifacts highlighted perspectives from the global South, historically ignored by dominant scholarly understandings of development. As one student noted, "the examination of Kuna life and artifacts helped to give me the perspective of someone in a developing society on how development has affected them." Analyzing the artifacts and reading about the Kuna challenged traditional notions of development; as one student noted, "the theories we learned do not fit perfectly when looking at the Kuna, prompting us to think about the ways indigenous communities act against dominant notions of development."

ADAPTING THE APPROACH TO OTHER CONTEXTS: SOME SUGGESTIONS

Scholars suggest that many museum collections are underutilized in university settings (Marcketti and Gordon 2019) even though there are over 650 university museums in the United States (Clark 2011) and many more museums that can be utilized for educational purposes. One of the primary challenges is that many faculty members are unaware of or misperceive the types and content of collections at university museums (Marcketti and Gordon 2019). For example, museums may be viewed as the purview of fine arts rather than of use to social and natural scientists. Partly this is the result of

lack of information and suggests that using museum collections may be a promising avenue for faculty, including and perhaps especially sociologists seeking to enhance classroom experiences. The approach discussed in this article may be especially useful in settings where instructors seek to engage students' global sociological imagination and promote active learning but are limited in their ability to facilitate student travel. Furthermore, having students engage with indigenous artifacts in particular can help students think critically about how museums themselves and other public educational institutions define knowledge (Trofanenko 2006).

We recommend that any faculty engagement with museum collections incorporate conversations with curators. Especially at university museums, academic curators are experienced and interested in working with faculty to utilize the collections, even among faculty beyond their institution. Most colleges and universities have collections of art or cultural objects in some form, and interesting things can often be found within individual departments or libraries. In absence of those resources, education staff at nearby institutions, be they local historical societies, municipal museums, or peer schools, are generally happy to help connect instructors with resources, even virtually. The basic framework of our approach could be applied to any number of topics, theories, and materials. For instance, for a different topic or geographical focus, other objects in the museum's collection include other Kuna artifacts but also Burmese clothes and textiles representing dozens of ethnic groups, which could be used to discuss religion and spirituality, ethnicity, colonialism, gender, and other sociological topics.

In schools and contexts where physical access to a museum is not possible or feasible (painfully relevant in the time of COVID-19), digital collections also provide an exciting resource. The Museum Computer Network maintains an extensive curated list of virtual museum resources, e-learning, and online collections that is regularly updated.[1] This curated list gives access to numerous collections and resources for developing individual faculty projects. As another example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) has high-quality photographs of many of its exhibits and collections as well as audio tours of current collections.[2] At the time of this writing, for example, there is a an exhibition on British Galleries at the MET, with a variety of artifacts including teapots, paintings, and more, which could be used in sociological courses or modules on consumerism, food, material culture,

family, gender, and colonialism, to name just a few examples. In this way, there are nearly limitless opportunities to engage with museum collections, although these might require various levels of research and preparation by the instructor—as noted, the instructor read several books and many more articles to prepare to teach this course and select artifacts for engagement.

Although the project described here draws on a specific collection, the approach can be adapted for use with other collections and types of artifacts. Based on our experience, we recommend incorporating specific readings about the objects and cultural (national, indigenous, religious, etc.) context from which they are drawn to deepen student understanding, provide appropriate background, and facilitate connections between the course's substantive topic and the analysis of the objects. Second, we recommend repeated (three or more) visits and interaction with the objects, again, so that students can engage fully and in depth rather than treating it as a "one time" casual visit. This is likely particularly feasible at institutions with an associated museum or engagement with digital content but may also be possible at other museums within walking distance or smaller exhibits, although this will likely require additional coordination. Third, we recommend a scaffolding approach, where each visit builds on the last and requires students to more carefully and fully integrate formal analysis of the artifacts with substantive and theoretical information from the course. For more introductory-level courses, the worksheets, developed over subsequent visits without the final project, can still provide important engagement and information. It is also important to explicitly engage how museums have come to own these objects and give context that highlights the provenance of objects and any ethical and other issues in their procurement. That is, museums do not simply come to "have" objects: they come from places and people, and there are decisions and processes, often violent and colonial, that lead to collections being present and available.

CONCLUSION

Scholars of teaching and learning are increasingly recognizing the physicality of teaching. This includes not only how teaching is itself a physical effort and act but also how space and material surroundings shape teaching and learning and the utility of active learning. At the same time, universities and instructors alike are interested in globalizing and

internationalizing their curriculums. This might be especially important to sociologists because cultivating students' sociological imagination, the relationship between biography and history, often draws from comparative approaches both across time and space. Teaching international development locally is particularly challenging. Seeking to educate students about classic development theories (in English) often means engaging Western perspectives from the global North (and often white, male perspectives). However, many sociologists are eager to challenge students to consider other perspectives and realities. This can be accomplished by drawing on diverse scholars and sources in readings, lecture, and discussion.

We propose an additional way in which instructors can help students think critically about international development: drawing from museum collections over the course of a semester. It is important to contextualize the collections and artifacts themselves because this provides another important teachable moment about context, history, and power. Our project highlights the promise of interdisciplinarity in drawing from visual literacy and academic museum literatures, multiplicities of theories and geographies, and creativity in having students, for example, sketch in pairs back to back to facilitate close looking and object analysis and thoughtfulness in engagement with objects. Our analysis shows that students were able to draw important and critical insights from this approach. Furthermore, we found that student learning and engagement improved over the course of the class, with students being able to increasingly weave complex arguments and clearly tie abstract theoretical information to physical evidence by the end of the course. Our approach provides a comparatively low-cost approach to grounding international development in physical experience and material culture, allowing students to apply information and engage different perspectives, enhancing their learning and understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Emily Cabaniss, Rachel Core, Diana Graizbord, Cynthia Pelak, and Stephen Scanlan.

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NOTES

1. https://v21artspace.com/news/2020/3/17/the-ultimate-guide-to-virtual-museum-resources-e-learning-and-online-collections
2. https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16028coll14/search and https://www.metmuseum.org/visit/audio-guide/current-exhibitions

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