

How to play the game without selling your soul to the *devil*

2026 | APPLIED REPORT

Practical reflections for Kaleidos

on engaged research,
recognition and strategic
legibility

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This fanzine was created as a small return to Kaleidos after a period of ethnographic fieldwork in Cuenca. It is not meant to be an evaluation, a summary of my thesis nor an institutional document.

Rather, it is a living archive: a space to gather fragments of projects, memories, questions and possible futures.

Throughout my fieldwork, I often heard that Kaleidos was difficult to define. It was a research group, but not only that. It was part of the university, but not entirely contained by it. It was local and transnational, formal and informal, academic and activist, structured and improvised.

This fanzine takes that difficulty seriously. Instead of asking for one definition, it asks: what does Kaleidos make possible?

All the photos in this fanzine were taken by me during my stay in Cuenca.

"KALEIDOS

es un espacio de pensamiento y acción colectiva que me permite sostener ideologías, activar procesos de denuncia y cuestionar la hegemonía del saber y sus instituciones"

...



entrada de la Universidad de Cuenca - Enero, 2026



...

"Es un grupo que hackea sistemas desde el acompañamiento, la sostención y el cuidado, rompiendo con las figuras tradicionales del investigador, del docente y de la 'alta cultura'

...

1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

How can Kaleidos continue to defend experimental, collaborative and public forms of knowledge production within a university system that often does not know how to recognise them?

My main point is simple: Kaleidos is not alone in this struggle. Across anthropology and related fields, many researchers are asking how to make engaged, multimodal, collaborative and public-facing research count as scholarship.

The difficulty is that much of this value appears in forms that the university is not yet trained to read: relationships, exhibitions, platforms, public conversations, community collaborations, experimental methods, and the labour of keeping projects alive.

I heard many times that Kaleidos is hard to describe, because the knowledge you produce exceeds the university's metrics of evaluation (think of how hard it is to describe the social impact of a project such as the exhibition *Ellas en suVida*). It is hard to put into indexes or measurable terms.

Oficina Kaleidos, Cuenca



Finding strategies to go around this problem could be helpful for the future of the Kaleidos.

In this report I therefor suggest a practical strategy:

Strategic legibility

By this I mean finding ways to translate Kaleidos' work into institutional language, when necessary, without allowing that language to define the meaning of the work.



Entrada de la universidad, Cuenca

Protesta contra la minería ilegal, Cuenca - Febrero 2026

**EL DISEÑO ETNOGRÁFICO MULTIMODAL
TAMBIÉN EMERGE COMO UN GESTO CRÍTICO
FRENTE AL LENGUAJE ACADÉMICO
TRADICIONAL, CADA VEZ MÁS
ESTANDARIZADO Y ENCORSETADO.**





EN LUGAR DE REPETIR FÓRMULAS AGOTADAS QUE PRIORIZAN LA PUBLICACIÓN SOBRE LA IMAGINACIÓN, APOSTAMOS POR FORMATOS EXPRESIVOS QUE REIVINDICAN LA REFLEXIVIDAD, LA

SUBJETIVIDAD Y LA EMOCIONALIDAD COMO COMPONENTES LEGÍTIMOS DEL CONOCIMIENTO

2. WHAT KALEIDOS ALREADY DOES

From an outside perspective, one of Kaleidos' strongest qualities is that it does not work like a conventional research group. Its work is not limited to producing articles or reports. On the contrary, Kaleidos produces knowledge through many different forms: academic publications, exhibitions, digital platforms, podcasts, public events, workshops, collaborative meetings, visual materials and long-term relationships with communities and institutions.

This is not just dissemination. It is part of how knowledge is made.

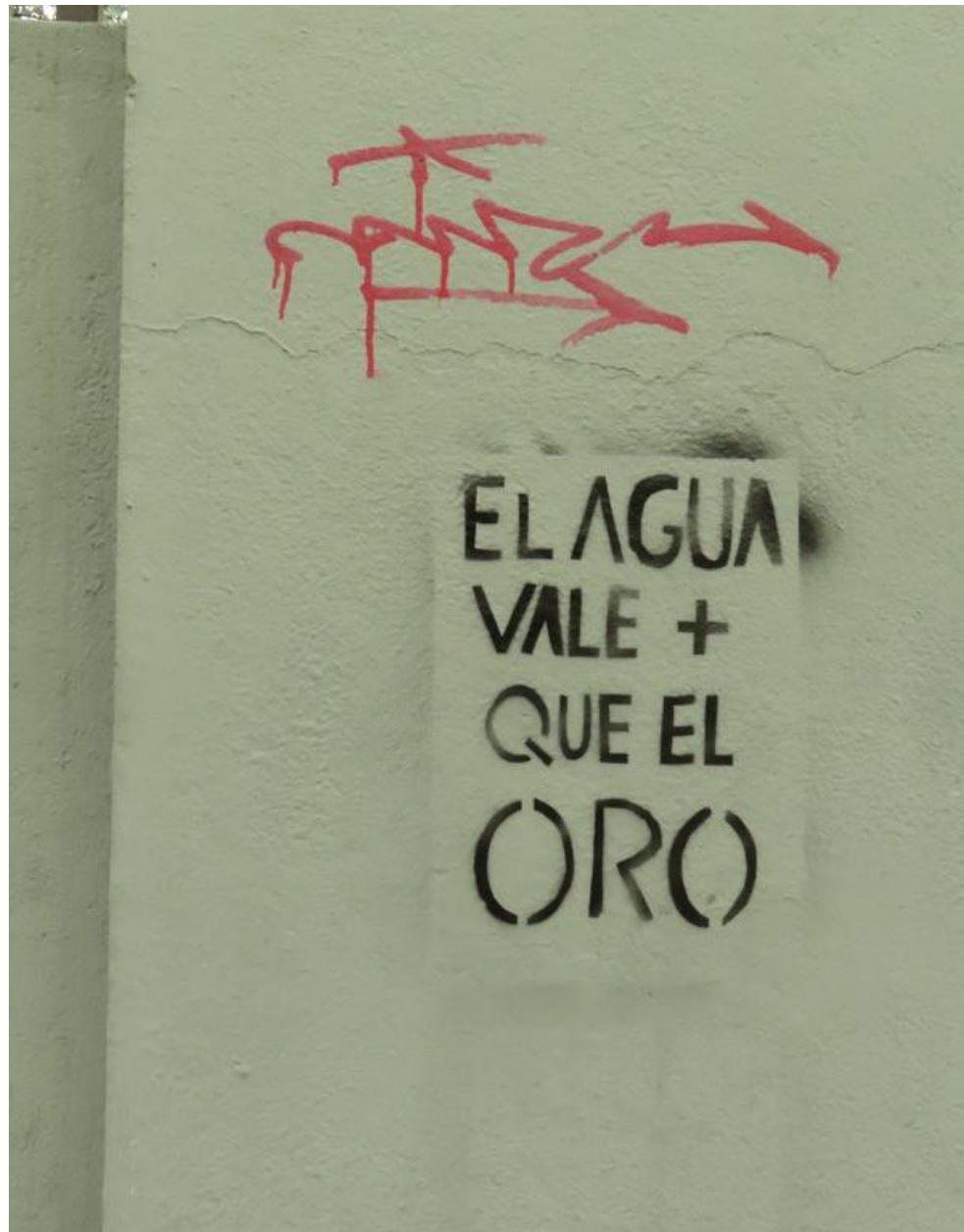
In many academic settings, research is imagined as a linear process that begins with data collection, continues through analysis and ends with publication. Kaleidos works differently.

In its projects, the form of knowledge matters as much as the content.

A museum exhibition, a digital platform, or a public conversation is not simply a way of communicating findings after the research is finished. It is part of the research process itself. It shapes who can participate, who can understand, who can respond and who can use the knowledge produced.

This is one of Kaleidos' most important contributions:

Kaleidos expands what research can look like.





Manekineko en un restaurante en la Calle Larga, Cuenca

3. THE MAIN TENSION: *institutional illegibility*

Valuable work that is hard to count

The problem is that universities often recognise only certain forms of academic value. Articles, indexed publications, grants, rankings, measurable outputs and formal project results are usually easier to count than collaborative processes, public engagement or the maintenance of relationships.

This creates a tension for Kaleidos:

- On the one hand, the collective is committed to producing knowledge that circulates beyond the university and responds to public problems.
- On the other hand, it operates within institutions that often measure value solely through narrow indicators of productivity.

This does not mean that publications are not important. Kaleidos know that articles, grants and reports do matter. The issue is that they do not capture the full value of the work. A project such as a museum exhibition or a platform like EthnoData can have scientific, public, pedagogical and political value, but still remain difficult to translate into the categories used by academic evaluation systems.

The problem, then, is not lack of productivity;

it is a mismatch between what Kaleidos produces and what the university is prepared to recognise.



prisma etnográfico caleidoscópico

**"INVESTIGACIONES
QUE INFORMAN
PROBLEMAS
LOCALES A TRAVÉS
DE MECANISMOS
SOCIALMENTE
COMPROMETIDOS**

**Y MEDIANTE LA
COMBINACIÓN DE
PERSPECTIVAS
MULTIDISCIPLINARIAS
PARA DESARROLLAR
MANERAS
INNOVADORAS DE
ABORDAR DESAFÍOS
GLOBALES"**

**"SITUADO EN LA CIUDAD,
GENERA GRIETAS AL
ESNOBISMO Y A LA
TECNOCRATIZACIÓN
DEL PENSAMIENTO,
ABRIENDO OTRAS
FORMAS DE PRODUCIR
CONOCIMIENTO DESDE
LO SENSIBLE, LO
POLÍTICO Y LO COMÚN".**

Jose - Abril 2026



Cerca del Mercado 9 de Octubre - Cuenca, 2026



Kimsacocha en pie de lucha - Calle Larga, Cuenca, 2026

4. KALEIDOS IS NOT *alone!!*

THIS STRUGGLE IS NOT SPECIFIC TO KALEIDOS. IT IS PART OF A MUCH BROADER DEBATE IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE UNIVERSITY.

Engaged researchers in many contexts face similar problems. Universities increasingly say they value public engagement, social impact, interdisciplinarity and collaboration. Yet, in practice, they often continue to reward individual publications and short-term project results more clearly than relational or public-facing work.

This means that many engaged researchers are caught in contradictory demands.

They are expected to produce socially relevant research, but they are not always given the time, recognition or institutional support needed to do so well.

Oficina Kaleidos, Cuenca

Recent discussions around ethnography labs, multimodal anthropology and experimental research spaces are important here. Scholars such as Fiona McDonald[1] argue that

the work of building and maintaining research spaces should itself be recognised as scholarship.

This is directly relevant to Kaleidos:
■ The labour of creating collaborative infrastructures, sustaining relationships, designing multimodal outputs, and keeping projects alive is not secondary administrative work. It is part of the intellectual and political work of research.

Seen from this perspective,

Kaleidos is not marginal to current debates in anthropology. It is already doing the kind of work that many people in the discipline are now trying to name, defend and make recognisable.

5. TENSIONS

las tensiones que atraviesan Kaleidos

The fragility of Kaleidos does not come from a lack of ideas or commitment. It comes from the fact that much of the work depends on unstable conditions. Several tensions emerged during my fieldwork:

1

Temporal

1. Collaborative research needs time: time to build trust, follow up, coordinate, return to communities and maintain projects. Yet academic time is often divided between teaching, administration, applications, reporting, and publication pressure.

2

Funding

Projects often depend on grants or temporary opportunities. When funding ends, the relationships and infrastructures created by the project may continue to need care, but there is not always paid time to maintain them.



3

Recognition

Some of Kaleidos' most meaningful outputs are not easily recognised as academic work

4

Coordination

Because Kaleidos is transnational, interdisciplinary and partly dispersed, coordination becomes a form of labour in itself. Keeping people informed, connected, and involved requires time and attention.

5

Affective

Kaleidos is held together not only by projects, but by commitment, friendship, political motivation and "amor a la camiseta." This is powerful, but it can also become exhausting when personal commitment substitutes for institutional support



protesta contra la minería ilegal, Cuenca - Febrero 2026

These tensions should not be seen only negatively. They also create spaces for creativity, improvisation, and reflection. The absence of active projects, for example, can open time to think about the future of the group (as it has done). Fragility becomes dangerous when it makes valuable work depend too heavily on unpaid or invisible labour.

6. STRATEGIC LEGIBILITY

The long-term goal should be for universities to change how they recognise knowledge. Institutions should learn to value engaged, multimodal, collaborative and public-facing research as legitimate scholarship. However, this transformation is slow.

Oficina Kaleidos, Cuenca

Strategic legibility means making Kaleidos' work visible in terms that institutions can understand, while refusing to reduce the work to those terms.

It is not about becoming more bureaucratic. It is not about accepting the university's narrow definition of productivity. It is about strategic translation. It means showing the university what Kaleidos already does, using language that can secure support, funding, time and recognition.





Kaleidos' difficulty in being recognised is not a weakness. It is connected to what makes the collective important. Kaleidos is difficult to classify because it works across categories: academic and public, institutional and experimental, local and transnational, analytical and creative, critical and collaborative.

The task is not to make Kaleidos fit perfectly into the university's existing boxes. The task is to make the university better able to see the value of work that does not fit those boxes.

Until that happens, strategic legibility can be a useful survival strategy. It allows Kaleidos to show the university what it already does in terms the institution can understand, while continuing to defend forms of knowledge production that exceed those terms.

Kaleidos does not need to choose between playing the game and refusing it entirely. It can play strategically, without mistaking the rules of the game for the meaning of the work.



*cuestionar
experimentar
dialogar
crear*

*reir
abrazar
acompañar*