Different Perspectives of the Public Square in the City of Today

URBAN PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY AS PLACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

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Habilitation thesis (qualification as a university lecturer)
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Mexico City, 2017
Cover figure: “Appropriate your square”, graffiti on Plaza Aguilita in Mexico City.
Acknowledgments

This habilitation project arose from an existing and ongoing collaboration instituted in 2009 between the Technical University of Munich (TU) and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) (Metropolitan Autonomous University), campus Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, where I have had the opportunity to teach and conduct research since 2005. Within this framework, the theoretical bases of the work were carried out during a research stay at TU Munich with a so-called “licencia de profesor visitante” (“visiting professor’s permission”) from the UAM-Azcapotzalco from 2013 to 2014, where the Chair of Landscape Architecture and Public Space as well as that of Urban Design and Regional Planning of the Architectural Department kindly hosted me. Thus, my particular gratitude goes to the specialized mentors at TU Munich, Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Regine Keller and Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Sophie Wolfrum, who always accompanied my work critically and with great expertise, as well as to Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Christian Werthmann, Professor of Landscape Architecture and Design at the Leibniz University Hannover.

The content of the investigation and subsequent on-site field research have been intensively discussed with undergraduate students of Architecture and Master program students in Design and Urban Studies at UAM-Azcapotzalco, whose contributions undoubtedly enriched the work and who deserve my sincere gratitude. Furthermore, I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Elizabeth Espinosa Dorantes of UAM-Azcapotzalco for providing substantive discussions, in order to refine concepts and thematic axes. In addition, I also would like to thank Maggie Brunner, M.A., for her kind and always professional review of the English texts, as well as Mtro. José Daniel Patiño Macías for his generous help in the graphic processing.

My special thanks, however, go to my beloved wife Julietha Aranda Huerta, as well to as our daughter Viviana and our son Bruno, sources of joy of my life, for their comprehension, encouragement and motivation. In addition, I would like to mention my family in Germany, whom I still feel very close by me despite the great geographical distance and who always stand by me with advice and assistance. I am especially grateful to my father, Adolf Göbel, for his open ear and full support, as well as to my sisters Annette Göbel-Lunemann and Christine Peters.

It is noteworthy that the present habilitation thesis implies a plea for lifelong learning, in schools, universities, and also in the public spaces of Mexico City, including an invitation to get out into the streets, benefitting from urban public squares and appropriating these.

Mexico City, September 2017

Christof Göbel
To the memory of my mother
STRUCTURE

Acknowledgements

Preface

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Justification of the subject

1.1.1 Crisis of the city and the urbanity

1.2 Object of investigation

1.2.1 Mexico City, an Urban Laboratory

1.2.2 Urban public square

1.2.2.1 Definition and characteristics

1.2.2.2 General historical overview

1.2.2.3 Transformation of the public square in today’s cities

1.4 Approach

1.4 Hypothesis

1.5 Research question

1.6 Research objectives

2. THEORETICAL BASES

2.1 Space

2.1.1 Space “in transformation”

2.1.1.1 The physical space and the social production of space

2.1.1.2 New spatial paradigms and the idea of a dynamic, “relational” space

2.1.2 “Genius Loci”

2.2 Architecture

2.2.1 Architectural situations

2.2.2 “Affordance”
4.2 Case studies. Learning at public spaces in Mexico City

| 4.2.1 Methodology | 122 |
| 4.2.2 Square with a “traditional” notion of centrality | 128 |
| 4.2.2.1 Alameda Santa María la Ribera | 128 |
| 4.2.3 “Revitalized” squares | 160 |
| 4.2.3.1 Plaza Aguilta | 160 |
| 4.2.3.2 Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution | 194 |
| 4.2.4 “New” public squares | 218 |
| 4.2.4.1 Bajo Puente Juan Escutia | 218 |
| 4.2.4.2 Parque Bolsillo Zócalo | 246 |
| 4.2.4.3 Town Center “El Rosario” | 270 |
| 4.2.5 Results | 297 |

5. CONCLUSIONS. CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF PLANNING

5.1 Call for “possibility spaces” | 316
5.2 El actor as designer of the space. Redefinition of the role of the architect and the urban planner | 321
5.3 Toward an idea of a “pedagogy of place” | 331

References | 337

Appendix: Example of a questionnaire applied at Republic Square | 366

Abstract | 368
Preface

During the last decades, there have been many discussions about a so-called crisis of the “city” or of “urbanity”, manifesting itself mainly in the public space. This is because the emergence of new media forms or technologies in the globalization era, such as the Internet or mobile phones, might refuse the contact and the exchange of people and activities, compelling us toward a new understanding of the public in general. The integration of new typologies expands or substitutes for the functions of the public square in general as well. But what consequences do these transformations of the public square have on the contemporary society, especially in the environment of the megalopolis Mexico City, where physical and social space are separated and phenomena such as the segregation or the fragmentation dominate.

Therefore, the present work intends to investigate the role of the public square as a place for social learning in the social-spatial realities, setting forth the thesis that the public square is a place for social learning, this proposal relying on the appropriation theory by Aleksei N. Leontiev (1980). According to the theory of appropriation by this latter Russian psychologist, the world of social objects reflects different human faculties developed during the course of social and historical practice, which demands of the society the task of appropriation. Appropriation always takes place in spaces, and is in the representational and personal sense that the urban space is also a figurative spatial appropriation. For this reason, the intention is to update the concept of appropriation by taking into consideration the new spatial paradigms based on social production of space by Henri Lefebvre (1974). “Places” become “spaces” through appropriation and concrete uses (de Certeau 1988), i.e., space is always the result of specific actions, and appropriation signifies creating space (“Spacing”).

This thinking leads to a reconsideration of the role of public spaces as places of social learning, including concepts such as space, architecture, and “ciudadanía” (citizenship). At these meeting places and places for citizenship, appropriation is promoted as a specific process of social learning. Learning from the place as well as learning from and with the other(s) convert the public space into a place of learning civic skills. Therefore, this work attempts to show to what extent the urban public space is limited as a place of social learning in today’s Mexico City and what resources and instruments are available to provide architectural and material incentives for its appropriation.
Case studies function in public squares in Mexico City, distinguishing between squares based on a “traditional” notion of centrality, not modified recently in their essence, and “revitalized” squares, into which new attractions have been integrated into rescuing progress in order to stimulate urban life and “new” squares. Methodologically, three stages can be distinguished among each other according to the triad of the production of space by Henri Lefebvres: The concept of the “conceived space” ("l'espace conçu") related with the “thought”, “planned” space leads to an analysis of planning, i.e., the relationship between physical planning and the theoretical ideas, philosophies, accompanied by interviews with those of the public administration with decisive power and with the planners themselves; the “perceived space” ("l'espace perçu"), the result of the spatial practices, of the movement and the interaction, interpreting the public square as a place of active appropriation, elaborating “Behavioral Mappings” or “Activity mappings” in the form of photographic documentation (inventories (24/7, that is, 24 hours a day every day of the week), and the “lived space” ("l'espace vécu"), based on the unconscious relationship between the human being and the space, developing interviews with users.

The research work shows that the function of public squares as places of social learning is limited in Mexico City, a megalopolis of approximately 20 million inhabitants, in which the physical and the social space is separated into an ambiance of segregation and fragmentation and where new “Shopping Malls” are constantly emerging, substituting for the public square as an open, freely accessible space surrounded by buildings. Instead, there is a need to establish “possibility spaces”, creating opportunities for appropriation, therefore for learning, archiving a reassessment of the concept of the architect and urban planner.

In order to substantiate the hypothesis and to achieve the objective, the work is divided into five chapters in total, which are described as follows, attempting to guide the readers adequately. Thus, the first chapter contains the introduction, providing the reader with an executive summary of the investigation. It begins with a justification of the project, discussing the crisis of the “city” and “urbanity”. Next, the object of investigation is introduced, i.e., the urban public square immersed in the urban laboratory of Mexico City, a gigantic megalopolis of about 20 million inhabitants in all. After describing the definition and characteristics of the public square, as well as providing a general historical overview of this urban element, the transformation of the public square in the city of today is outlined. Furthermore, the approach toward the habilitation project is presented in the following material, demonstrating in a chronological manner the steps
carried out, in order to define the hypothesis and the corresponding research question(s), finishing the first chapter with the general and specific objectives of the investigation.

The second chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of the research, which constitutes its hypothesis of public squares as social learning places, including key concepts such as space, architecture, and citizenship. It is noteworthy that the section about space, or rather space in transformation, centered on the new spatial paradigm of the twenties and the twenty-first century based on Henri Lefebvre’s leitmotif that space is a result of social production processes. The chapter integrates a general overview of the related concept of “Genius loci”, introduced by Christian Norberg Schulz (1980). Similarly, the chapter on architecture interpreted space as the physical, material framework, as well as the situation, containing an outlook of the concept of “affordance”, thus the qualities or properties of an object (in space), defining its possible uses. The discussion on the polyvalent Latin-American “ciudadanía” concept, referring to a political movement, actor, or demand, making reference to the institution of civil rights, leads to Henri Lefebvre’s idea and slogan, “Right to the city” (1968). The latter is interpreted as optimal accessibility for all citizens to urban centrality, and is understood as the concentration of public activities, including the “Right to appropriation” (Holm/Gebhard 2011).

Interpreting appropriation as a specific social learning process, the third chapter constructs the thesis of the public square as a place for civic formation, starting with the appropriation theory of human development of Aleksei N. Leontiev and its adaption through “critical psychology”, considering appropriation as an active confrontation with the environment. The term appropriation will be updated and broadened regarding the representation of space and including human action. Therefore, the thesis is based on the idea that human behavior is determined not only by external stimuli nor solely by cognitive predispositions, but also through the interaction of situations, i.e., external stimuli and persons (Rotter/Bandura 1976). Therefore, the public square in Mexico City as a place for social learning is interpreted as a place for encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship) through (spatial) appropriation, including the theoretical concepts of space, architecture, and “ciudadanía”.

Thus, in order to evaluate the research question(s) and to validate the empirical evidence of the function of the public square as a learning place for social competencies in particular (Yin 2014), the first part of the fourth chapter centers on the social-spatial realities of the public square in Mexico City, explaining the role and form of
these public spaces in contemporary society. This commences with a section about the public square as a historic reference, then describing and discussing the actual transformation of the public square in Mexico City and its social as well as spatial implications, leading to the emergence of new spaces and typologies for socialization and extending or substituting the concept of the public square itself. The second part of the fourth chapter contains the case studies of the most extensive part of the habilitation thesis, investigating a square with a “traditional” notion of centrality: the Alameda Santa María la Ribera, one of the recently “revitalized” squares; the Plaza Aguililta, and the Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution, where new attractions were inserted in order to stimulate their appropriation, as well as the “new” squares Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, Parque Bolsillo Zócalo, and Town Center “El Rosario”.

The work ends in the fifth and last chapter, which includes conclusions describing consequences in terms of planning, in an attempt to answer which medium and instruments are available for the planner to provide architectural and material impulses for appropriation, that is, the establishment of “possibility spaces”. Recognizing the unpredictability of urban development and the significance of civic opinions lead to a redefinition of the role of the architect and the urban planner, referring to the definition of an artist as a manufacturer or maker of Helio Oiticica (2007); therefore, any active and purposeful person could generously occupy a proactive role in the environment in which he lives. And finally, there is an outlook on the future and possible investigations, including the construction of a “pedagogy of space”, linking space and place and proceeding simultaneously toward the identification and identity of a square, reinforcing the idea of a collective memory of places and also care and respect for them.
1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Justification of the subject

For as long as there have been cities, there have also been central places and spots where people meet and “make a city”, i.e., they socialize and engage in exchanges among themselves economically, culturally, and affectively. Therefore, the public square is a place where people trade, play, converse, etc., having cultural and civic interaction. But with the transformations of the urban form and urban structure, the public space, understood as an open or free and accessible area for citizens, the character, use, and appropriation of squares have also changed. In consequence, the public square, as interpreted conventionally as a public space, comprises an object-of-study at which converge theories of urban design and the social sciences.

Public spaces and squares assume a public domain, a collective social use, a multifunctionality, which are characterized physically by their accessibility and by the quality of their inherent social relations. As spaces designated for collective usages, they should not isolate or segregate people, but rather provide for them, due to their communal character in terms of social equality in terms of being inhabited. While in many places the square and the public space become places of commerce or of ‘marketing’, the concept of the “public space” is employed in other parts of the world, such as in Mexico City, by social groups to develop standards for the common use of places to construct and protect their own identities. Therefore, the public space becomes a scenario or “theater of social conditions”. Thus, the dynamics of public spaces is determined by mechanisms of exclusion, appropriation, and accessibility (Fig. 1). These comprise areas of difference, visibility, and representation. In the worst case, this leads to the institutionalization of socioeconomic and racial segregation, which is expressed, among other things, by the establishment of sophisticated electronic surveillance systems and the presence of armed patrols. It is noteworthy that, in general, the public spaces of the Western world are more tightly controlled by video surveillance since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Within this context, public spaces also convey the idea of a privatization of the public.
1.1.1 Crisis of the city and urbanity

The dynamics of the “generic city” (Koolhaas 1995) without particularities on the peripheries and the degradation or specialization of city centers could express a crisis of the city, such as a public space, because abandonment and loss of interaction and social exchange not only harm the public space itself, but also the cultural dimension of the city. Marc Augé addresses this context and also that of non-places, while places would be marked by identity, social relations, and history (Augé 1995: 45). Therefore, the central interest of this project is to discuss the crisis of the “city” or of “urbanity”, which manifests itself mainly in the public space, in that today there are forms brought about by the technological influence (mobile phones, the Internet, and globalization), which might give rise to the abandonment of streets, squares, parks, etc., denying the contact and exchange of people and activities.

“Metropolization” has taken place over recent decades. In Mexico, the most accelerated urban development with high rates of population growth occurred from the late forties on, and lasted at least until the eighties. The countryside has been undergoing a huge abandonment, while people flow into the cities in order to search for better employment opportunities and access to higher living standards. In Mexico, as in the majority of Latin-American countries and in addition the rest of the world, this urban
growth, related with the fragmentation of agglomerations along the main thoroughfares, has engendered profound economic, social, and spatial inequalities, producing enormous poverty and exclusion.

Post-modern cities are currently experiencing constant deterioration, which is closely linked with a neoliberal logic in which the capitalistic dynamic has insisted upon the implementation of so-called policies of structural adjustment in favor of private initiatives that speculate with urban land and additionally cause the rupture of the forms of constructing the community. The continued decline of these post-modern cities expresses what appears to be the irrevocable crisis of the urban, representing “precarious urban living conditions, the vulnerability of most citizens, both in the social and economic sphere, the degradation of the natural and built environment, and the reorientation of social policies to combat poverty as well as new tendencies in planning of the urban territory” (Monterrubio/Vega 2009: 9). Today, cities are in constant flux, adapting to the manifold problems that they are facing: mobility; gentrification; privatization of the public space; social polarization, and demographic changes. Thus, cities have arrived at an unsustainable point, damaged in their image through pollution, the chaos of the traffic, the invasion of advertising, disorder in planning, lack of maintenance, and the generation of new infrastructure and services. “Today we do build unjust social cities, economically inefficient and with low competitiveness and complementarity, spatially disordered, rather dysfunctional and environmentally unsustainable” (Munguía 2010: 1).

This evolution includes a number of changes: an increase of the utilization of transport for daily mobility and to cover more and more extensive itineraries; an irrational utilization of common goods, of services, and of the public space, and, above all, a rupture of the political space. Gallegos Ramírez (2011) indicates several reasons in reference to the crisis of the city: deficient, increasingly privatized access to the most basic services (social and urban); segregation; the fragmentation, limitation, or elimination, according to the criterion of a few, of the exchange and social co-existence; the rupture of spaces and the dynamics of the community, marked by dispossession and the speculation of urban ground, concentrated in the abusive hands of large real estate and construction companies; the changes in land use in favor of luxury housing developments or commercial developments and services to channel a new kind of tourism; due to the growing displacement of populations of neighborhoods, central and traditional quarters, toward the suburbs, the semi-urbanized marginal areas, toward the hidden enclosures and toward the more or less nearby dormitory towns or bedroom
communities; the overexploitation and contamination of their water resources, and the destruction of the forests. Borja (2003) adds to this list the exclusive occupation of circulatory routes by the automobile, the closed commercial offer, and civic insecurity, and refers to this throughout the twentieth century. Numerous “gated” areas or communities are built in which precarious security is provided within an environment of great insecurity.

The city, defined as a complex, sociospatial form, a concentration of meeting points, where first there are the streets and the squares, the collective spaces, and only later come the buildings and the streets, these the circulatory spaces, is “associated par excellence to the public sphere, as it is linked historically with the emergence and development of the civitas and of the res publica, in terms of institutionalized forms that make possible the co-existence, the exchange, the encounter, and the dialogue between subjects and different interests” (Duhau 2001: 131). Thus, the crisis of the city is not only a crisis of the urban form, “Urbis”, but it is simultaneously a crisis of urbanity as the art of living together mediated through the city, i.e., urban sociability, mentioned by Ángela Giglia in her essay about the public space and the enclosed spaces in Mexico City (Giglia, in: Ramírez Kuri 2003). It is precisely this ripping of the social fabric of community and solidarity that opens the field to the processes of segregation, fragmentation, isolation, mistrust, and insecurity among the inhabitants of contemporary cities.

Today the society is increasingly individualistic; thus, people isolate themselves more and there is a greater precedence of types of electronic communication compared with direct, personal contact. There is the blurring and rupture of the society’s collective solidarity and community dynamics, and now, we find the prevalence of fragmentation, isolation, distrust, insecurity, violence, everyday criminality, the overflow of the capacity of the State to meet the collective needs, the changes in the use and distribution of the land and public spaces, while the crisis of the public has led to an abandonment of collective spaces where citizenship is exercised (Palladino 2004), thus to a supposed crisis of the public space.

The crisis of the public space and the growing sociospatial segregation refer, on the one hand, to a crisis of integration resulting from the conditions of increasing social inequality and of the consistent exclusion of ever wider sectors of the population (Paugam 1996). On the other hand, it alludes to a crisis of identification, understood as the impossibility of comprising the city and of identifying with it as a whole, hence the need to cut it into pieces within which to rebuild the relationships of belonging and
developing a sense of the urban experience.

The invasion of the private over the public and the consequent privatization, the processes of commercialization and the fragmentation of the urban space, and the bureaucratization and domination that take place in the public space have also led to the rise of a decadent vision of the public space, exhibiting a loss of the aspects of the urban space with regard to its civic and to its symbolic representative dimension. Through disaffection with politics, the degeneration of public opinion, the bureaucratization and modernization of politics, and dereliction in terms of the duties of citizenship, the public space has lost the character of mediation and no longer presents or represents the common or collective. On the other hand, the public space is no longer not only the place of communication in every society with itself, but also the place of communication of the different societies and distances in between. Converting many of these places into places of super consumption for the new global consumer also implies a configuration of the global world and of a multicultural society. Therefore, the concepts of space and the public square acquire importance, in that they have been utilized over the past decades and, foremost, whether one should think about their “death”, their disappearance, or as part of a public policy, of their “recovery”.

1.2 Object of investigation

The research object of this work is the “lifeworld”¹ (Husserl 1936) or urban scenario of the public square in the booming “megalopolis” or “mega-city” of Mexico City.

1.2.1 Mexico City, an Urban Laboratory

The twentieth century was characterized by a rapid modernization process, considered as times of “hyper modernization”, which led to the development of urban agglomerations of huge dimensions. More than seven billion people already live in cities worldwide, and this number continues to rise. This is why megacities such as Mexico City should be understood less as a threat, but more as a challenge. As one of the “largest cities in the world”, Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, characterizes a

¹ Lifeworld may be conceived of as a universe of what is self-evident or given, a world that subjects may experience together. For Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl, the lifeworld is the fundament for all epistemological inquiries representing a pre-epistemological stepping stone for
stereotyped “megalopolis”\textsuperscript{2} or “mega-city”\textsuperscript{3} of the early twenty-first century, which is simultaneously both a successful experiment and a dramatic fiasco, representative of many other megacities and lending to it a special meaning (Ribbeck/Padilla 1997).

However, no one knows whether these large agglomerations are avoidable or inevitable, sustainable or doomed to failure. Their “governability” is questioned more and more, in that questioned since the typical problems of urban life tend to cluster together in them, overloading the transport systems, accompanied by pollution, noise, diseases, unemployment, and vagrancy, criminality – and also a growing tendency toward youth and juvenile delinquency, the formation of squatters, the homeless, etc. Due to their low incomes, one half of the metropolitan population is excluded from the formal housing market, thus they build spontaneously and informally, e.g., outside of official plans and norms.

The city is the most complex, sensitive, and exciting artifact that humans have created over time. Regarding the history of Mexico City, the Mèxica or Aztecs, a warring, nomadic tribe from northern Mexico, arrived in the twelfth century at the Valley of Mexico, where the Aztecs, following their priests’ prophecies, founded, on an island of Lake Texcoco, the city of Tenochtitlán in 1325. Tenochtitlán grew in size and strength. Supported by its strategic location on the lake, a fertile region, and the tribute paid by the subjected neighboring tribes, the city rose to splendor, eventually dominating the other city-states around Lake Texcoco and in the Valley of Mexico. However, with the aid of many of these other native peoples, the city was completely destroyed in the 1521 Siege of Tenochtitlán by Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortes, who landed his forces in the south of the island and they slowly fought their way through the city. The Aztec king Cuauhtémoc surrendered in August 1521, and the Spaniards virtually razed Tenochtitlán during the final siege of the conquest.

Two years later, in 1523, a new city was erected on the ruins of Tenochtitlán, whose characteristic elements were its chessboard plan and its central main square, the “Plaza Mayor”. In 1570, these urban elements were adopted by the Leyes de Indias, a set of laws containing detailed planning and building regulations for Spanish colonial

\textit{phenomenological analysis in the Husserlian tradition.}

\textsuperscript{2} The term “megalopolis” was introduced by the French geographer Jean Gottmann in the decade of the 1960s, in his book “Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States”, in order to describe the merged urban mass of the metropolitan area on the East coast of the U.S. between the cities of Boston and Washington.

\textsuperscript{3} Thus, the terms “megacity” and “megalopolis” refer to an urban system with a population equal to or with more than 10 million inhabitants, whose rapid urban growth led to the conurbation of their areas of influence. Thus, megacities tend to comprise huge urban or metropolitan conurbations.
cities. “La más noble y más fiel ciudad de México” (“The most noble and most faithful City of Mexico”), as the seat of the Spanish vice-king and from which gold and silver was shipped to Spain via the port of Veracruz. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the population increased rapidly; however, the city area spread slowly. Mexico City was transformed from a simple colonial town into the “City of Palaces”, thus named by German traveler Alexander von Humboldt in 1800. At that time, about 180,000 Spaniards, Mestizos, and Native Indians lived in Mexico City.

In this manner, the Colonial city, Mexico City, became the capital of the new Republic after the Mexican War of Independence in 1821. The prospering capital city was equipped with basic infrastructure and splendid buildings in order to compete with the European capitals. The economic and demographic concentration increased and the population of the capital surpassed one million in 1930, while in the 1940s, industrialization took hold of the city and the population mushroomed to three million.

Later, in the 1960s, one was already able to speak of a “metropolization”, because urbanization had spread far beyond the Federal District (D.F.), spilling over into the bordering federal state – the Estado de México. That is why a new term was introduced: the Zona Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México (ZMCM), in which nearly 9 million people lived in 1970. However, during the “lost decade” of the 1980s, the formerly growing ZMVM entered into a severe economic crisis, which considerably reduced public investment and private incomes; thus, this period was marked by stagnation. Since that time, the growth of the capital has subsided and the population increase of Mexico City is not so greatly determined by migration but by natural growth. Later, in the 1990s, the full impact of globalization reached Latin America. New projects, such as Santa Fé in Mexico City, claim an important role in global city competition, while at the same time, the gap between rich and poor, the formal and the informal city, widens.

Today, approximately 21.2 million inhabitants live in the conurban metropolis of the ZMCM of gigantic dimensions, making the “alpha” global or Greater Mexico City the largest metropolitan area in the Western hemisphere, the tenth-largest agglomeration, and the largest Spanish-speaking city in the world (United Nations 2008). The agglomeration encompasses 16 districts in the D.F. and 36 municipalities in the Estado de México, as well as a municipality in the nearby State of Hidalgo.

As in other major cities, Mexico City’s core population is dwindling, while the periphery population grows, so that at present, fewer than one half of the people inhabit the city which is in effect identical to that of the “Federal District” or D.F., while the population on the outskirts is currently more than twice as high that of the core city,
expanding far into the Estado de México. The sprawling megalopolis respects neither natural nor administrative borders. Seen from above, the city materializes as grey magma, giving the appearance of its arising against its topographical boundaries in its outer regions in the surrounding mountains, but which in reality has already grown further yet and lost its outline. While the “fraccionamientos” (housing divisions) of the middle and upper classes occupy the periphery in the city’s Northwest, a gigantic poverty-belt settlement zone has developed in the Southeast, on the edge of the swampy Texcoco Lake bed. The “periphery is everywhere” and the rate of informality is at very high, nearly 60%. At the same time, parts of the border zones are increasing in density, while historic core centers are becoming less dense or are “decompressing”, so that the dichotomy center’s periphery dissolves (Schneider, in: Selle/Havemann 2010: 594). Many reside in the core yet live outside in the periphery, feel the periphery inside them, identify with the periphery.

Thus, the former seascape-embedded Tenochtitlán has transformed explosively in the second half of the twentieth century into a “megacity” of enormous proportions, which many consider, or even abuse, as a “city monster” or as a great Moloch. On the other hand, for others, Mexico City represents a vibrant dynamic metropolis, a fascinating urban laboratory for the study of the future of megacities. The metropolis or current Mexican capital mega-city, with its structural contrasts between historical fragments and modern urban settings, has become an interesting object-of-study in an international environment and provides a challenge for anyone attempting to understand and analyze the city. Within this mega-city, you will find peaceful co-existence as well as a violent clash of different societies, social classes, historical events, infrastructure, and economic, political, and cultural models.

Mexico City is a dense city, overflowing with people, in which practically every square meter is occupied and full of life, epitomizing an enormous, large-scale mosaic, with the horizontal urban growth of its surface and an architectural internationalism, vertically mirroring a metropolitan, cultural disorientation. The city is the repository for vital chaos and exhibits an energetic landscape of contrasts and contradictions of both visual and social fragmentation. At the same time, the city is characterized by a perpetual climate of political tension, as illustrated by the daily protest marches that end up at the Zócalo, the main square of the metropolis, in Mexico City as in many others. Therefore, a permanent effort is required to maintain the balance between extreme positions such as rich and poor, the global city, and the shanty-town squatters’ settlements. In this respect, Mexico City, city of the masses, is another of these cities
that are dual, divided, or segregated in their spatial and social structure (Rubalcava/Schteinberg 2012), but that also function as a political laboratory, experimenting with new forms of participation and decision making.

Simultaneously, the current megalopolis is more than a “structural collage”, an open form of different possibilities for creativity (Krieger 2006b: 52), in which the concept and the characteristics of the public space have changed radically over time. In reference to the public space in Mexico City, as well as to those in southern metropolises and megacities, “scarce, disputed, segregated” (Ribbeck, in: Göbel 2013), urban modernization accompanied by processes of fragmentation and exclusion have led to a physical and metaphysical manifestation, which gives rise to other, novel forms of social life.

1.2.2 Urban public square

1.2.2.1 Definitions and characteristics

In its etymological definition, the word “square” derives from the Latin “platea”, which means street, and similarly from the Greek word “plateia”, referring to the main road of major cities, which was generally constituted of a free outdoor surface with a visibly bounded extension (Bollnow 1976, in: Wildner 2005). Likewise and according to the definition by Vitruvius, a square is limited by public buildings, a space of free circulation and access among constructed volumes (Vitruvius, in: Rowland/Noble 1999). At present, Manuel Delgado Ruiz also defines the public space as an area of free circulation and one between built volumes (Delgado 2013), accessible for the citizens.

In urban planning, the “formal” concept of the square represents a planned, open space within a city, usually or originally rectangular in shape, at which two or more streets meet. In this sense, the majority of town squares are hardscapes, suitable for open-air markets, music concerts, political rallies, and other events that require firm ground. Being centrally located, squares are customarily surrounded by small shops such as bakeries, meat markets, cheese stores, and clothing boutiques. At their center is often a fountain, well, monument, or statue. Many of the areas with fountains are actually denominated fountain squares. Other names for square include civic center, city square, urban square, market square, piazza, plaza, and town green or public square.
Paradigmatically, the public square is an empty space with regard to the ground, trees, benches, monuments, etc., but it in itself is intangible. Therefore, Vitruvius notes that a square also fulfils urban functions. Commonly found in the heart of a community, a square is made use of for gatherings. On the other hand, the public square has been a place of assembly for the people, as well as an area where a public mercantile establishment has been installed. “Piazzas are areas in villages and in cities, free of houses and similar issues and obstacles, and their destiny is to create space or the opportunity that people might encounter; therefore we may assume that the study of the plaza gives us information about the life of the people in this world.” (Berchhorius, fourteenth century, in: Kostof 1991).

Thus, squares always denote an urban element generated by human beings and oriented toward specific purposes (Bollnow 1976: 41), referring to a specific unit whose dimensions are limited, a place where something specific happens. At the same time, the place is an urban element filled with ideas and histories, but one that also reflects social structures and ideologies (Wildner 2003: 53), thus representing a physical, cultural, and historic reference for a city. In many ways, the public square, embodying as it does a multiexpressiveness, is a symbol of our identity, our culture, and a recommendation for locals and foreigners, for which the definition of what is “urban” should be included in the term square.

The square as social support is the place where people engage in various relationships, converting it into a focal point of the public life of the city, a laboratory for public and elementary democracy, and forming a central issue and spatial element of urbanism. The public square “(...) is a place with lots of people interacting face to face (...) A concentration of meeting points, where the first are the streets and squares, the collective spaces, and only subsequently will come the buildings ( ...)”\(^4\), so that the square as well as the street is the public space par excellence. Therefore, the term square is an essential part of the definition of the urban, producing the raw material of the “public”.

Therefore, the existence of a square is inherent to the city, representing the social

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\(^4\) Julio Cortazár, quoted by Daniel Escotto Sánchez, general coordinator of the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority of the Public Space) from 2009 to 2012, on October 13, 2015 during a presentation titled: El espacio público como formador de ciudadania (The public space as generator of citizenship), Seminario Permanente y Jornadas Culturales: “La Metamorfosis de la Merced. Reflexiones sobre el patrimonio cultural y el espacio público disputado” (Permanent Seminar and Cultural Days: “The Metamorphosis of the Merced. Reflections on the cultural heritage and the disputed public space”), round-table: “Espacios de Formación Ciudadana” (“Spaces for civil formation”), organized by the Mexican universities UACM, UNAM, Universidad
space of a community organized territorially. The square is the physical, cultural, and historical reference of a city and simultaneously serves as a structuring element, which gives orientation to the people and that is often based on the relation between gaps and fillings. Squares serve as an articulating spatial element, organizing all of the others, which converge in the city. The square, as such, does not exist without the city, in the same manner as the city does not exist without the square or, paraphrasing Jordi Borja, “The Square is the City” (Borja 2000).

Thus, urban squares are elements capable of expressing the significance of a city, based on the relationship among form, use, and meaning. The significance of a city, as mentioned by Maruja Redondo Gómez, is also inseparable from its culture (Redondo Gómez, in: Göbel 2013: 18). Both the city life and the history of the city constitute the urban culture, and through this process and cultural construction, the citizens develop their identity and sense of belonging. According to Aldo Rossi, the city is the locus or site of collective memory and this, in turn, is linked to events and places. In this regard, the square comprises one of the primary elements of a city, but at the same time, it was the life around which the signs leading to the events that articulated, over time, its cultural identity (Pérgolis 1994).

Thus, qualities are exposed that have characterized these spaces, such as the multi-functionality and the symbolic power that they possess by generating bonds of identity or rejection according to the urban environment in which they are localized and for those who use them (Wildner 2005). For Guzman Ríos (2005), the square is an urban segment molded by the multifunctionality and the proper polysemy of its public nature. It is a physical-social place that exhibits the contradictions, the intermediation of encounters and mismatches, of the exchange of goods and the confrontational imaginary. Thus, the author defines the square as a “symbolic enclosure”. Squares that are described as urban spaces for public access should be designed for people to meet in order to realize individual and collective activities. The centrality of the square becomes a nearly obligatory reference for reviving the moment at which the existence of a series of transformations impacting social and spatially to date are engendered.

The public square is the product of factors of all types: social, political, economic, scientific, geographic, technical, and even ethnological and, to paraphrase Octavio Paz 

5 Quotation by Escotto Sánchez (2015).
groups that converge in physical space. Therefore, it can serve as a pre-structural factor for its use, without in reality determining it, considering that space can only be sustainable and equitable in relation to its users. Thus, the success of a public square can be evaluated by the intensity and quality of the relations manifested in it.

“The city is the place where people go out to meet others who have also come out” (José Ortega y Gasset, quoted by Escotto Sánchez, in: Göbel 2013: 9), defining the city and also the public square as a place for meeting, where people pass by, are detected and are watched, because they like being seen. The square is a space, if not the most important of these, where people make city, which signifies not only the action of inhabiting and co-inhabiting spaces, but also the cumulus and the totality of relations that develop in them, such as socializing, conducting our economic exchanges, attending or performing in cultural activities, and recognizing and identifying with the elements of the space. Additionally, making city is a phenomenon that not only occurs in central squares, but also in the public squares of each colony, quarter, or locality of this megalopolis.

1.2.2.1 General historical overview

Cities materialize in spaces of concentration, becoming manifestations of the community, in which central places have always existed. Therefore, the concept of the square, seen as a historic urban element and as a fundamental part of the city, has also been complicated to decipher, because it has been changing constantly since its creation; the Greek “Agora” and the place of Heron, the tomb of the hero of the foundation of the city. Therefore, during the Hellenistic period in Greece (330–130 B.C.), there was established a city model in which architecture was part of the overall design. Interest in modeling space was focused on the Agora, where the spatial concept of the square was concretized by establishing a centrality. Thus, the Agora was the main urban space in the center of the “polis”, representing an open space, located in the main axis and integrated into the urban grid (Fig. 2). This square was limited by arcades, porticoes, and colonnades, surrounded by temples and decorated with monuments, which constituted the articulation of the environment and of the central open space itself (Pérgolis 1994).
Two types of Agora were defined: a political and a civic one. For the ancient Greeks, the public space of the Agora was where the citizens met in order to discuss issues related with the city government (Ferry 1998), (García Canclini 1996). Thus, this dynamic center of the ancient Greek city represents, for humans, an expression of the center of the democratic city. The square was designated as a meeting place for the citizens, enabling civic encounter with the community, interpreted as a space for the collective or as the “open space par excellence”. However, the public space was accessible only to a few, and this small sector somehow afforded it the quality of being the space for political discussion. But one needed to obtain the quality of a citizen due to its political tone: therefore, only males of the high aristocracy were welcome, resulting that, in reality, the Agora was a rather segregated place. Aristotle noted the following in reference to the Agora: “An Agora for free men must be established, in this place must be excluded any kind of commerce; the entrance of craftsmen should not be allowed... there must be an Agora for merchants, different and outlying... the Agora must be dedicated to the leisure life, while the other must satisfy the needs of commerce.” (Redondo Gómez, in: Göbel 2013: 19)

In the classic city of Roman architecture, the Forum took over this position. However, and in contrast to the Agora, the Roman Forum was a place where activities converged without selection criteria. The Agora had its origin in the squares embedded in the orthogonal street grid of Roman military camps, in which commerce was mixed
with divine services for the gods, the judiciary, and the public life. The Roman city represents one of the most fascinating urban and complex agglomerations in ancient history. It was even apparently chaotic: in this urban complex, the Forum achieved a better articulation of the space, making up the center of the city. Thus, the Forum consists of simple and clear solutions, lacking the artistic refinement of the Hellenes.

Later, in the Medieval City in southern Europe, the organization of the square was characterized by its being a homogeneous element identifiable in all of its parts without splintering the harmony of the ensemble. In the Medieval City, the architectural concept of the courtyard, which existed in castles, moved toward the concept of a square, typical of the new urban thinking. Through the latter, a break-up of the Medieval City was achieved with the urban-space models of the age-old city – the Agora and the Forum. The streets of the medieval city were widened, developing a system of unitary, hierarchical, and interconnected spaces in which squares made up part of it. Thus, the radioconcentric model was dominant in the medieval city, forming a set of high esthetic values.

In the urban plan of the Medieval Age, the market place of large dimensions was located in the center of the city, thus representing the central space and the most important point of the city, where the city hall, the cathedral, and the most significant buildings of the civic organization were situated, surrounded by walls strengthened by compression of the compact urban fabric (Raumlabor Berlin 2008: 10). Colloquially, this space was opposite to “the unity of the construction”, constituting today’s still common idea of the “traditional” concept of a square as reflecting a free urban space surrounded by building. The void, which exalted the buildings, but not even the park, responded to the idea of the square as the main area of the city and, from the entrances to the city, the streets led to the central square.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, European squares were designed in a more complex and sophisticated manner. The square was a vital place and, based on the square, the community organized cities spatially. Therefore, urbanists in the Renaissance possessed three main design elements: the straight principal street; the blocks based on a right-angled grid, and the squares or spatial enclosures; therefore, regularity, order and beauty were the basic main elements of the Renaissance models.

The squares were principally designed in a regular manner to support a monument in honor of the king or prince. They were planned by famous architects and built in relation to the urban plan. The opening of new, straight streets and the flanking of these
with important buildings was a new modality in the structure that began to distinguish the cities. Visual axes and distortions of the perspective played an important role, for example, in the Piazza del Campidoglio on Capitoline Hill projected by Michelangelo (Fig. 3).

*Figure 3: Capitoline Hill by Michelangelo, Rome.*

At the same time, proposals were developed for ideal cities, with streets oriented radially from the main squares in the center. Thus, Vitruvio, in his proposal of radiocentric urban structure, designed the square as the center of the city’s generator structure, in which the idea of perfection of Renaissance cities, whose urban plot was inscribed within a circle, constituted the symbol of the organized and mathematic universe.

In the Baroque period, the desire for discipline and order was a constant. The articulation of cities, the widening of streets, and the design of the squares were realized on a bigger scale, while Italy, with cities such as Florence and Rome, stands out as the country in Europe that best decorated their cities with large squares and well-organized and spectacular architecture.

In the late sixteenth century, Spain was also highlighted for its original creations of royal or noble settings, such as its palaces. However, its main squares represented the most innovative urban planning, emerging as it did in the main squares or “Plazas Mayores”, designed according the criteria of Philip II (1527–1598), a powerful and
influential King of Spain from 1556 on, in his eagerness to praise architecture. The squares were characterized for being civic and were considered public areas due to their shared communal use, situating the main square as a structural element in the city’s center. For example, the rectangular-shaped origins of the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, the city’s central square, harken back to mandates by Philip II, even though the construction did not start until 1617, during the reign of Philip III (1598–1621) (Fig. 4).

Figure 4: Plaza Mayor, Madrid.


In the seventeenth century in Europe, during the late Baroque period, three main urban-design principles were articulated: the straight line; the monumental perspective, and uniformity. The common objective was for the city to impress. Urbanism had just begun to be caught sight of; thus, design was subordinated to pure and sumptuous decoration, and the pictorial became more important. At the same time, there was a concern for “symmetry”, such as for monumental buildings, and obelisks or statues served as endpoints for the perspectives. The squares themselves could be classified within the category of “spatial enclosures”, as spaces destined for the traffic, residential spaces, enclosures, or pedestrian areas.

With the accession of masses, the development of the industrial city and new technologies in their construction articulated the new city and started to define the modern city, in which the phenomenon of urbanization led to an understanding of
urbanism as a new science. Hence, the most important element was the street, and during this period the square lost its centralizing and communal character, the latter relegated to second place. The government became aware of the importance of intervening in the supervision and execution of works in urban and territorial infrastructure; in this manner, the so-called “boulevards” were developed. As an example of European urbanism, we note the functioning of the transformation of Paris, carried out from 1851 to 1870 by Baron Haussmann, leaving a labyrinth of disorder and confusion. The city was organized based on the concept of the street as structural axis and as the route directed to the ideal of the “Linear City”.

However, there were also other concepts of the European city and square in the nineteenth century. Thus, the work of the Austrian architect Camillo Sitte, “City Planning According to Artistic Principles” (1889), for example, is not exactly a criticism of the architectural form. It is more precisely an esthetic criticism of the purpose of nineteenth century urbanism, fearing that urbanism would become a mere technical task without any artistic involvement. For Sitte, of greatest import is not the architectural shape or form of each building, but the inherent creative quality of urban space; therefore, Athens and ancient Greek spaces, such as the Agora and the Roman Forum, were his preferred constructions of good urban spaces. Sitte criticized the regular and obsessive order of the new squares, confronting this with the irregularity of the medieval city. A public square should be observed as a room and should form an enclosed space, defining a square typology as an “enclosed squares’ system of ancient times”. Subsequently, the Berlin architect Josef Stübben mentioned, in his handbook of city planning entitled “Der Städtebau” (“Urbanism”) from 1890, that the modern city should be juxtaposed with relation to the old city.

The public were found in various urban settings: cafes and clubs, which were mainly used by inhabitants of the bourgeoisie salons. So once again, and similar to the Agora, access to the public space was open only to a small segment of the population. Thus, the public space was accessible only to a few, and this small sector that utilized it somehow gave it the quality of being the space for political discussion.

In the modern city, ideas of the “traditional” square were persecuted by functional planning ideas, which refused the traditional city. In the twentieth century, the square further lost its central character and its public usefulness. The street became the integrator of the activities and elements that were situated along it. The square disappeared as a meeting place, so that the street also became a place for encounter and spatial events, leaving the square with the simple function of supplying air. Likewise,
with the increase of individual circulation, the public square became more and more important as a communications knot of sorts in modern urbanism.

Contrary to the traditional city of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the twentieth century the city was created with dispersion of the continuity of the structural voids at the foot of housing projects, disjointed and discontinuous spaces, gaps between blocks without activities represented a “no man’s land”, the concept of “air and light”. At the same time, the square took on gigantic dimensions capable of accommodating huge crowds, such as for political objectives and as an expression of power. A representative example, therefore, is Brasilia, Brazil's new capital designed by Lucio Costa (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Monumental Axis in Brasilia.

Likewise, Jane Jacobs, in her book “The Death and Life of Great American Cities” (1961/1967), enhanced the multifunctionality of cities and criticized modern urbanistic tendencies that favoring large buildings and the car, minimizing social interaction, where the public space plays a transcendental role as an urban scenario for a complex and existing social life, representing a reflection of the city. However, during the decade of the 1960s, reassessment of the traditional city and public usefulness began, in relation to human beings, rediscovering it in the figurative sense, giving rise to the transformation of the contemporary city.
1.2.2.3 Transformation of the public square in today's cities

Hence, for a long time, from the thirties to the seventies of the twentieth century, nothing particular happened with regard to the public space and the urban square. This matter can be explained by the attitude of rejection by the modern movement toward the city and the public space. Another reason could be the widespread increase of vehicular traffic and the consequent importance of the communication routes and transport. In the face of this situation, there emerged interest in the humanization of the urban space. The course of events began to change around 1970, discovering the public square as part of the re-evaluation of the traditional city.

In many places, the idea of the importance of urban spaces increased with the rediscovery of the “European city”, emphasizing its community character. After decades of decline, urban squares were again reassessed as central spaces for neighborhoods and cities, as a form of staying, resting, communicating, for events, and as an important place for local identity. After the rebirth of the square as a central element, the European idea grew, during centuries, as a founding community for identity; its elements are utilized increasingly as guidance instruments by urban planners. With the desire to rescue the vitality and function of the public space, new trends in its use were focused on the diversity of city, based on the cities’ differences.

Twenty five years ago, the worldwide admired “Barcelona model” was created, which justifiably began as a model of urban development according to the citizens, a model that was sustainable and socially balanced. The “Barcelona model” represents a type of urban planning in which different actors are included who are supposedly exemplary in the decision-making processes and urban development. By 1992, the Catalan capital city hosted the Olympic Games. After the end of the Franco dictatorship, Prime Minister Felipe González and Mayor Pascual Maragall wanted to show the world a different Spain: cosmopolitan, close to the citizens, and democratic. The sports events were considered an opportunity not only to build sports facilities, but rather to convert quarries in parks and create attractive spaces even in the outskirts of the city, favoring of vital neighborhoods. The famous slogan at the time was “Opening Barcelona Toward the Sea”.

In the last twenty years, over 150 projects have been carried out regarding the topic “public space”, from the small urban square to the conversion of complete avenues and the creation of parks (Ayuntament Barcelona, in: Paravicini et al. 2002). Thus, efforts to revitalize the public space were particularly intensive in this city, in which urban space
and urban life have undergone significant changes (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000). Today there is no city considered a modern capital that has not initiated a change in the style of the “Barcelona model”, promising a better quality of urban life, and at the same time serving the commercialization of the location and the improvement of the image of cities.

In this regard, the concept of the public square as an enclosed, free space surrounded by buildings, is “revived” during the course of the rethinking of the city in the era of globalization. Nevertheless, there are voices, signaling that these efforts of revitalization strategies are exclusively aimed at reducing of the number of street merchants, hucksters, and prostitutes in the environs of a square or park, “prettying up” existing, vivid urban spaces. At the same time, the public space on the periphery of big cities appears to be obsolete. Instead, here other concepts “govern”, whether this is determined in search of security or oriented toward consumer behavior. Thus, the public space becomes a space of support, or a scenario of private grievances, or a purely commercialized space. New socialization spaces appear, which might reinforce urban segregation processes and give rise to the legitimacy of repressive responses to the construction and maintenance of these socialization models.

These new typologies with public appearance, including exclusive shopping malls, business centers with video surveillance, “gated communities”, segregated residential areas of different social classes, enclosed squares and monuments, etc., entertain a high level of acceptance in the population, the latter deriving from the problem of the lack of public security, which led to the proliferation of more and more large shopping centers, while these “shopping malls”, with varied offers on sale for different social segments, are presented as an expression of the search for a common (U.S.) way of life. On the other hand, the transformation of the public square in privatized commercial areas, such as commercial centers, inevitably entails high costs with respect to democratic accessibility and public responsibility. While in the past citizenship took place in the public space - expressing itself, for example, by a protest march -, today this appears only in commercialized areas. Thus, citizenship is exercised by the power of consumption, “some buy, others just look and admire”. “Shopping malls” present caricatures of the urban center that are solely based on consumer behavior in one-dimensional fashion, including a shift away from authenticity. But people are not necessarily concerned with authenticity, at least not to the extent that it would influence whether they like a space or not.

Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp (2001) introduced, within this context the term “public domain”, in order to distinguish between “public space”, which should be
accessible for everyone, and “public domain”, which can be organized privately, but both of these enable the social exchange of persons with different social backgrounds or interests, thus taking into consideration the most elementary needs of encounter and communication in the public space. Public spaces should enable social interaction, allowing the exchange of ideas, cultures, and identities, while public domain supposes that there is space for everyone. However, this differs from the established urban understanding, based on Habermas and Arendt, of general access to and demands for a “philosophical-sociological essence: for an area in which the society is grounded, collective interests are articulated, the stranger meets, the small circle of friends, colleagues or family is exceeded. Then again, they return to the search for real spaces, where this exchange – in a symbolic as well as on practical level – might happen” (Wolfrum 2007: 8). In turn, Habermas states that the city is mostly the public space where power becomes visible.

In the strict sense, shopping malls or theme parks are not “pseudo” public places, but are experienced as such by the majority of people. This leads to a shift to the concept of collective spaces, and also to the rejection of the public space as a space that is generally universal and free-of-charge, accessible, and located mainly under the open sky. The public dimension turns toward a system of collective spaces (Fig. 6), in addition to that “the society has become an archipelago of enclaves, and people from different backgrounds develop ever more effective strategies, to meet the people they want to meet and to avoid the people who want to avoid” (Hajer/Reijndorp 2001: 53). Although the examples of new types are numerous, the negative utopias of the city in the field of theoretical and intellectual discourses do wield great weight. Additionally, in the development of the city, the negative effects of the new dynamic polarization and privatization are constantly manifested.
The traditional distinction between the private and the public, the basic differentiation for the definition of each of these, has become something precarious, already unusable; thus, it is quite clear that this category should take its place. The public space as a place for expression and social, civil, and collective representation, the democratic space par excellence, is no longer the sole support of collective life. Closed/open spaces of a private nature (shopping centers, social clubs, new leisure areas, etc.), communication and transportation nodes (airports, train and bus stations, etc.), but also the Internet, are currently also spaces of support of the new civic life as well as of the collective life.

The discussion, the demand for, and the use of spaces demonstrate that the raison d’être of the public space is not necessarily in crisis, but its conceptualization and formalization, due to the weakening of the sense of the common and the strengthening of individual demand, the processes of commercialization and the privatization or the crisis of representativeness and fragmentation are indeed in crisis. The public space reflects and crystallizes the most general socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes, the very changes that happen in the urban space. And these are the changes
that have blurred and plunged-into-crisis the aspects of the concept of the public space, but not necessarily the public space itself.

The Catalán urbanist Jordi Borja conceives of the public space as a symbol of the city itself, affirming that the city is the public space as much as the public space is the city, materialized in avenues, streets, squares, parks, and open or closed parking facilities, which do always possess a “relational” character. Therefore, the relevance of the public space for the city and for citizenship is expressed in that in its economic, social, and cultural aspects can be observed, as well as its significance to the practices of a society and a city (Borja 1998). In the same regard, the well-known architect Richard Rogers points out that public spaces comprise the physical realization of a society’s values, while Jan Gehl notes, on his Internet page, that “the public space would be the essence of a city” 6. Thus, paraphrasing the words of Jordi Borja, “the public space and its political implications represent the best instruments to measure the quality of a city”. Directly linked as it is with the quality of life of the inhabitants and the city type, the public space reflects a territory of the sociability of the status quo of the contemporary Mexican society, of a more and more segregated and fragmented city, in which the social space and physical space are separated, i.e., the category of the space mirrors, with its elements and components, the structures of the society.

The topic that discusses the public space and the public square is particularly relevant, because the public space could represent, from a Latin-American perspective, a result of a neo-liberal development model, the so-to-speak last “glue” of an increasingly fragmented and segregated city, in which physical and social space is separated. For these reasons, the research project introduced herein shall represent an analytical platform regarding the social and spatial properties, form, use, and appropriation of the public space in the contemporary megalopolis, addressing the transformation of the traditional concept of public space between the Mexico City Historic Center and the urban periphery.

New concepts and typologies of public spaces in the city structure will be identified and evaluated. In addition, the question will be discussed of whether the urban public space is threatened as a place of the learning of social skills under the current spatial and social developments in Mexico City. In this regard, Michael Sorkin (2004) has stated that, in “public spaces” such as theme parks and shopping malls, public discourse would be restricted; therefore, there would be no protest marches in “Disneyland”, which limits their function as so-called democratic places. On the basis of the
processes of appropriation and learning held in public places, their educational function as learning spaces will be questioned and examined, in addition to remedies and instruments that could enable city planners to stimulate appropriation as synonymous with social learning.

1.3 Approach

Thus, the population increase, as well as the explosive growth of the Greater Mexico City urban sprawl, has undoubtedly exerted a huge impact on the character of its urban public space. In order to understand these social spatial transformations of the public square in contemporary Mexico City, the present research project was associated in a first step with an empirical student research project with participants from the postgraduate design program (Specialization/Master) of the Línea de Estudios Urbanos (Urban Studies), elaborating a graphic-analytical inventory of urban squares and their typologies in the Mexico City megalopolis, to show design, use, and appropriation patterns.

As in no other space, the square is the place where a significant number of people construct various types of relationships. Public spaces are places where the society has the opportunity to interact and identify with the space, representing the right of every resident to the city and to optimal access to all services and activities for their development as human beings, as well as to enjoyment, recreation, representation, and civic demand as individuals against and with others. The square, as a central topic and spatial and fundamental element of urbanism, possesses the ability to provide the integration or exclusion of the different social groups that converge in the physical space.

Public spaces can be perceived as points-of-interest where the public life of the citizenry develops, or can also be observed as routes of passage for passers-by. One may appreciate two types of space within the city: public and private. In turn, these may be divided into commercial and social, which the residents may enjoy freely without the need to consume, with public spaces extending an invitation to full recreation, with urban furniture according to the citizens’ requirements and activities, where social, sports, cultural, and artistic offers can be developed. Therefore, public spaces function as intermediaries between the private spaces of the institutions and power groups, and

of minority groups and the society’s private spaces in their homes. Public spaces represent the connection between residential buildings and the points of work, study, and daily activities of city inhabitants, and in this union of these spaces is defined the sense of the public space as making sense of the articulation of the inhabitants’ daily lives.

The importance of public spaces/squares for the city and the citizenry is relevant because, in the public spaces, economic, social, and cultural aspects can be observed, which give meaning to the practices of a society and of a city. Thus, the success of a public square can be evaluated by the intensity and quality of the relationships that manifest themselves in it. In this manner, the existence of successful places full of people and activities, integrated into a system of urban open spaces, is essential for urban life, providing various forms of urbanity and cultural expression. Thus, the existence of these spaces remains a central task in the city; therefore, it is very interesting and necessary to study changes in public squares, the latter located in the center or on the periphery of cities, through discussing their characteristic dichotomy.

The investigation was limited to the case study of Mexico City. In a first phase, seven urban spaces were chosen as characteristic and representative examples that converge in the city: the Zócalo or Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square), the central square for all Mexicans; the Parque Alameda Central, a popular square for recreation in the City Center; the Alameda de Santa María la Ribera, a typical neighborhood square; the Glorieta de los Insurgentes, an important communication node for individual and public transport; the Shopping Mall (“plaza comercial”) in Santa Fe, a “Mecca of consumption”; the Corridor Cultural Santa Fe, a narrow median strip or so-called green “camellón” used for cultural exhibition, and Plaza San Cristóbal, the administrative center of the district of Ecatepec.

In this context, the characteristics of the morphology and use of urban squares in Mexico City were analyzed according to the following twelve research criteria: history of the place; urban context; accessibility; design of the square; surrounding buildings and the formulation of the corners of the square in particular; relations of power, security, materiality, and vegetation; natural and artificial lighting; exposure; movement, and soundscape or noise pollution, as well as users and appropriation.

These criteria serve to describe the architectural, urban, political, and social peculiarities of the squares-under-study, in order to develop an analytical graphic inventory of urban squares in Mexico City. In that regard, the questions that guided this research were as follows: How has the concept of the public square as an open space
in cities, surrounded by buildings, developed in Mexico City? Which new types are emerging? To what extent does physical space influence the use of the square? What is the role of the architect in this context, and which influences are related with the social environment? To what extent are appropriation and use of the site predictable?

Graphic analytical inventories were published in 2012 in the form of a compilation of the series “Cuadernos del Posgrado” of the UAM-Azcapotzalco in Mexico City (Göbel 2012) and were also presented at the V Seminar-Taller “Cultura ciudadana y espacios públicos 2012” (“Civil culture and public spaces”) at the Universidad de los Andes in Mérida, Venezuela. The elaborated urban ethnographies of the public square in Mexico City crystallized and examined new concepts and certain emerging typologies.

However, and to broaden the perspective on current tendencies and the manner in which architects and designers respond to the new challenges, as well as to analyze the contribution of other disciplines to the study, design, and construction of contemporary squares within different contexts, from September 19–21, 2012, at the UAM-Azcapotzalco in Mexico City, an international colloquium was held that was named “Diversas miradas a la plaza pública en la ciudad hoy en día” (“Different perspectives toward the public square in the city of today”). Academics, professionals, and other specialists who are involved in relevant projects in the fields of architecture and urbanism from different cities in the world were invited, whereby the majority of topics of the symposium that were presented and discussed were registered and published, together with some attributions of selected experts in the field-of-study. One year later, a book of the same title was published (Göbel 2013). Approaches from different disciplines and lines of thought and research were explored, such as the following: history; philosophy; architecture; sociology; anthropology, and psychology: the fields of knowledge that converge in the study of the urban and, properly, of the public space, providing a broad platform for debate, to generate knowledge on the relevance of the public square and its transformation in the contemporary city.

Subsequently, the collection has been extended to other squares: new observations have been generated; questionnaires have been administered; cognitive maps (“mental maps”) have been produced; experiments in the form of urban, architectural, and/or artificial interventions have been conducted in order to obtain a description “as-thick-as-possible” of the social-spatial properties, and of the design, use, and appropriation of public squares in Mexico City.

In the following, some of the intermediate results identified in the studies are indicated in outline form:
The concept of public space and square continues to acquire importance today, as these have been employed over past decades, whether to think about one’s “death”, or one’s disappearance, or as a public policy of “rediscovery”. While the public space in the City Center of Mexico City is engaged in a “successful” revitalization process promoted by the Government of the Federal District, the traditional concept of the public square as a free space found among surrounding buildings has been replaced in other parts of the city with novel forms enhanced with a public appearance. However, it would appear that the efforts of revitalization strategies are exclusively aimed at reducing of the number of street traders, hucksters, and prostitutes in the environs of a square or park; although the “public domain” supposes that there is also space for these groups (Reijndorp/Hajer 2001).

With respect to the new spaces for socialization, these are on an upsurge, especially those the city’s periphery, reinforcing urban segregation processes and giving rise to the legitimacy of repressive responses, referring to the construction and maintenance of these socialization models. New tendencies are distancing themselves from the traditional definition of public places in form and function, in that the public dimension is evolving into toward a system of collective spaces in which new typologies are based on consumer behavior and are determined by the need for public safety (Fig. 6).

The dividing line between the public and the private is blurred, the closed and the open are dislocated, the constant and unmovable are transmuted into temporary, fleeting, or even ephemeral spaces, traditions and customs are displaced by new activities, and the needs of the citizenry are propelled by the speed of twenty-first century life and by the technology that redefines new trends in consumption of the space. The new places allude to the ambiguous, because they mix the public and the private, either by the regulations imposed either by their real owners or by the authorities who are responsible for the citizenry’s care and safety.

In the case of shopping malls, their use is observed as privatized and tending toward the economic offer of a capitalist character. In these spaces are found businesses and services of all types and high-end training. The different shopping centers look like caricatures of “urban centers”, which are predominantly focused on the consumer; thus, we may perceive a shift away from authenticity. To a great extent, this privatization or the dimension of the acceptance of exclusive shopping malls, monitored headquarters or Central-Business-Districts, Gated Communities, segregated residential areas of different social classes, enclosed squares and monuments, etc.,
refers to the problem of lack of security. This is expressed by the ubiquitous construction of sophisticated, modern electronic surveillance systems and the presence of armed “security” personnel.

Proximity, the need for encounter, still prevails. The appearance of cellular phones, the Internet, and globalization have not made the square a superfluous place, but instead has increased its importance as a real, physically tangible space, while digital structures are ubiquitous, i.e., while navigating in real, Euclidian spaces, virtual worlds and digital communications media may be used, whether to meet up with friends, organize purchases, seek unknown addresses, or for an encounter, or to plan actions and events.

The squares continue to represent vibrant and dynamic places and are symbols of great value for the population and the environment. Thus, the potential of the diversity of Mexico City, which is reflected in all districts, should be utilized. However, the “public square for everyone” remains a utopia, because the population’s different socioeconomic sectors mix only in mass demonstrations that unify them under the same ideal, or when the square is employed simultaneously as a transition space, where the coexistence or friction between these sectors is not pursued as an objective.

The results assembled have led to a reconsideration of the role of public spaces as places for learning civic competencies. We should think of the city, and of the public square in particular, as places of learning, which necessarily advances from concepts such as space, architecture, and “ciudadanía” (citizenship) (Borja 1998b) to achieve, as the ultimate goal, appropriation of the public space, expressed in the following hypothesis.
1.4 Hypothesis

The public square is a learning place for social competencies. At this meeting place and place for citizenship (“ciudadanía”) (Fig. 7), appropriation is promoted as social learning process (cf. Borja 1998b).

Figure 7: Research idea.

1.5 Research question(s)

Which possibilities offer the contemporary spatial and social realities for the appropriation of the public square in Mexico City, thus for its function as a learning place for social competences?

Is the urban public space as a place for social learning threatened in Mexico City though the current spatial and social realities?

What is the role of the architect in the appropriation of public spaces in Mexico City?
1.6 Research objectives

The aim of the present contribution includes an extension of the sense of general education and the recognition of the public space as a learning place of social competencies. Human beings are sociable creatures. Therefore, we have to develop ways to communicate messages, thoughts, and feelings with others, interacting both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language, and personal appearance, focusing primarily on the quality of interaction as a component of relationship building and maintenance. Social competences involve a complex, multidimensional concept representing the condition of possessing the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral skills needed to succeed as a member of society, having interpersonal relationships with the ability to manage different situations. Therefore, social competences comprise the personal knowledge and skills that people develop in order to deal effectively with the multiple choices, challenges, and opportunities in life.

Social competences have been conceptualized in six categories, such as self-regulation controlling personal behavior in accordance with societal expectations, acquisition of interpersonal knowledge and skills, development of a sense of positive self-identity, cultural competences, adoption of social values, and planning and decision-making skills (Kostelnik et al. 2002, in: Han/Kemple 2006). This means that social competences also include the capability to assume another's perspective regarding a situation, to learn from the past, and to apply these acquisitions to the changes in social interactions. Social competences from the basis of expectations for future interactions with others and for developing perceptions of the behavior of individuals.

Thus, interpreting public space as a social learning place implies that we not only learn in traditional institutions as in schools or colleges, but rather, we should also take into consideration the existence of places of multiple learning and the urban public space in particular. In this context, the work represents an appeal to promote public squares with urban identities and diverse identifications as places for encounter and the construction of citizenship.

In raising awareness of spatial social characteristics in Mexico City, where the physical and social are separated, the investigation studies the manner in which its proper urban realities might limit the function of public squares as places of social learning, emphasizing, with a critical view, recent projects for public squares of the local government, and how architects and urban planners might intervene.
Research scheme

Hypothesis

The public square is a learning place for social competencies. At this meeting place and place for citizenship ("ciudadania"), appropriation is promoted as social learning process.

Object of investigation

Mexico City
Public square

Space  Architecture
“Genius loci”  “Affordance”  “Ciudadania”  “Right to the City”

Appropriation

Place for social learning
Meeting place and a place for "ciudadania"
2. THEORETICAL BASES
To investigate the hypothesis, first, the research categories characterizing the public square are introduced, i.e., the concepts of space, understood as a space “in transformation”, architecture as material, physical framework, but also as situation, and citizenship (“ciudadanía”), a polyvalent concept referring to a political movement, actor, or demand, in order to discuss, as follows and on this basis, appropriation as social learning process from the perspective of appropriation theory by Aleksei N. Leontiev.

2.1 Space

2.1.1 Space “in transformation”

2.1.1.1 The physical space and the social production of space

In contrast to “place”, which refers to a concrete site, the general category of “space” is not only a physically understandable three-dimensional “receptacle”, but is also an environment for social action to take place. That is, while a “square” is related with a specific unit, a concrete site whose dimensions are limited, a place where something is located and in which something in particular occurs, “space” is referred as a flexible and negotiable structure defined by the social organization and the interpretation of the world by the people (Wildner 2003: 58). Space is therefore not observed as a passive entity, but as a process between the physical environment and the social and discursive practice; i.e., the idea of urban space is constantly changing (Ibid. 2003: 59). In this respect, space represents a dynamic structure that is defined by its physical as well as the symbolic features taking place in it.

Contrary to the definition of “place” as a “current constellation of fixed points”, Michel de Certeau describes a “space” as arising “when one relates directional vectors, speed variables and the variability of time. The space is to a certain extent filled by the totality of movements, which unfolds in it.” (de Certeau 1988).

The spatial concept that defines the “urban space” as a complex interaction of material, social, and discursive properties, therefore distinguishing it from the traditional notion of the “container space” emanating from a space that within this context could also exist independently from the content, the bodies, and objects residing in it. This understanding of a “container space” refers to Isaac Newton and illustrates the idea of an absolute, uniformly progressive time and an absolute, unchanging fixed space (Schuster 2013).

Immanuel Kant also refers, in his idea of space, to the scientific and empirical
The theoretical bases concept by Newton and his physical Euclidean idea of view. The “space”, says Kant, would be “something that people create with their imagination. The sensually perceived converts into a notion called space by being put in order or into a form with consciousness” (Kant, in: Löw 2001: 29).

Describing the inherent separation of the individual and the space (Fig. 8), Löw invented, within this context, the so-called “absolutist concept of space”, and her idea is supported by the culturally traditional imagination of living in space, which is transmitted by the Euclidean thinking taught in schools. “Absolutistic means hereby that space is recognized as a separated, own reality, not as a result of human activity. Space is used a synonym for ground, territory or place.” (Löw 2001: 264).

Figure 8: Dissolution of the separation human being and space.

Additionally, as a theoretical starting point for the increasing social scientific consideration of space, we must especially cite Michel Foucault's celebrated essay entitled “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”. This essay was based on a lecture in 1967, in which the author set forth the “epoch of space”, thus defining space as a variable of the first order in structuration of the society and the initiation of spatial orientation of the present time: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (Foucault 1967: 1).

Likewise, Michel Foucault constructs the concept of “heterotopia”, i.e., beyond the physical. There is spatial interest in the relationships represented by which, through mobility, the power of the steps, the transition, and the move from one point to another is made possible. Further, it is characterized by an extensive transformation principle. This is the space in which our time and our history come to pass. In short, social relations are spatial as well as historical. The space possesses the particularity of being physical, social, historical, and symbolic, representing a social, cultural, and political subject. Every social fact has a locus.

Thus, space may materialize itself in the form of a constructed space built by means of buildings, plazas, landscapes, and architectures, while intangible spaces are
imaginary, the public and political sphere, a temporary community, or the virtual space of cyberspace. Several authors have defined space in two ways: the physical and the social space; between one abstract space and one that is inhabited; between the concrete and the metaphorical, or between the anthropological and the other, non-anthropological space. While physical material space integrates bodies or subjects such as those of passers-by, etc., immaterial space represents a place for encounter, of debates, conflicts, etc.

Similarly, for Marc Augé, the dichotomous definition of the space characterizes it as an anthropological and non-anthropological place. The former is that in which the daily experiences are developed of those inhabiting it live, work, and defend, and it is the result of the traces of the ancestors who have left their spirituality and experience embodied within it (Augé 2005). The ethnological approach of Marc Augé is also closely linked with the concept of collective memory (Augé 1994).

The French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs defined place as possessing a “substrate of collective memory and as its precondition” (Halbwachs 1985, in: Wolfrum 2009: 72). The collective memory, as postulated by Halbwachs for the first time in 1925, holds that spaces are not empty, but are rather associated with myths, history, and memory, i.e., the collective memory is found in historical places and are stored, thereby characterizing them. Halbwachs also wrote that individual and collective memories are enrolled in material places; therefore, all memories are related with space (Halbwachs 1985). Spaces of memory are crucial for the creation of urban identity and the construction of citizenship (Golda-Pongratz 2013: 9) while, according to this approach, places store the specific roots in local history.

The non-anthropological place is the space of transit where the individual does not generate an identity or a sense of belonging. Permanence in it is for a short time, and may or may not be repeated; it is that whose attribute is being public or semi-public. Therefore, according to Marc Augé, “the space of anthropology is necessarily historical, since it is precisely a space full of meaning by human groups, in other words, it is a symbolized space” (Augé 1998: 15).

Like Michel Foucault, another pioneer of a more modern understanding of space is the French Marxist, sociologist, intellectual, and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), who defines “geographical space” as an area of human activities. With the “production of space”, human practice is connected with the levels of the concept of space “itself”. The “geographical space” is considered a social product, which is produced in concrete situations through movement and use (Wolfrum 2012). Therefore, space becomes a product of social and historical practice, i.e., this social
space is produced through spatial practice. Lefebvre’s primordial idea is the following: “the (social) space is a (social) product”. The social space on which Lefebvre reflects, comes to constitute itself during a process of actions between individuals and groups, in a process of using things, in a process of daily and ordinary life. Similarly, the space is a product of the history, in the same way as the city is a result of the production that assigns particular groups that occupy the space in order to administrate it, exploit it (Lefebvre 1976: p. 46).

However, in contrast with the dialectic of Hegel and Marx, Lefebvre’s version is three-dimensional, i.e., he establishes three concepts that are mutually dependent on each other (Schmidt, in Derive, 2015). Thus, his three-dimensional dialectic theory of the production of space understands “space” as a result of the processes of social production, recognized analytically as the interaction of three dimensions. Therefore, Lefebvre defines the “conceived space”, the “perceived space”, and the “lived space”, and superimposes these three phenomenological terms on three corresponding concepts derived from linguistic theory: the “representation of space”; the “practice of space”, and the “spaces of the representation”, while these three dialectically, interrelated production processes in turn imply themselves reciprocally:

That is, the first dimension describes space as the “representation of space” or “conceived space” (“l’espace conçu”), the cognitive registration of spaces in the form of models and plans. From this conceptual perspective, Lefebvre separates the dimension of subjective images and symbolic significances. Thus, the “conceived space” is imagined, thought. It is the form of the manner in which individuals, according to their individual, collective, and historical experience, as well as through the role that they play in society, contrive the constructed space, for example, in buildings, roads, monuments, neighborhoods, parks, gardens, squares, etc., these representing the “representation of space”. “In the representations, the ideologies and the knowledge enter about the space” (Hiernaux 2004: 16).

The second dimension is the “spatial practice” or “perceived space” (“l’espace perçu”), interpreted as a physically experienced space that does not emerge through reflexive spatial practice, but as it is reproduced in everyday life. It is understood as space, which has certain characteristics through the fact that the individuals who use it live, transit through, design, and build it, assigning specific and unique properties. That is, the actions that the society carries out in the space and for the space are described and observed in order to be understood, and this in turn aids in understanding the diversity of practices that are developed within it.

And finally, beyond these longer-term influences and processes, space results in a
“lived space” ("espace vecu"), which is immediately mediated through corporal activity in the here and now. The “spaces of representation” or “lived spaces” ("l'espace vécu") relate to the usage of the space in which each individual, in their daily lives and according to their status and social role, is assigned a significance. Thus, this third dimension describes the complex symbolizations and spaces of imagination and might undermine the dominant social practice of space or order, in that these spaces are connected with the hidden, subterranean social dimension of life and art.

Therefore, the category of the spatial-temporal dimensions of social reality refers to the social context of the production of space, i.e., its historicity and temporality, thus to the fundamental aspects of any social practice: the perceived, the conceived, and the lived. That is, space can be observed (i.e., perceived by the five senses), conceived of, constructed, and also experienced. Space therefore reflects “hyper-socialization”, because it comprises the concrete form that adopts “the encounter and the meeting of all the elements which constitute the social life” (Delgado 2013: 99). According to these different approaches to social reality, the three dimensions of space form a contradictory, three-dimensional or triadic unit (Schmidt, in: Derive 2015). Therefore, according to this trinity of the conceived, the perceived, and the lived or experienced, space is not an object “out there” (materialism) and is also not a pure mental construct (idealism), but is instead the product of specific social practices (historical materialism): space is conceived, constructed, and lived, representing a comprehensive category.

Thus, the starting point here is a “radical critique of the existing” that, with the possibility, opens from a practical modification (Schmidt, in: Derive, 2015). In this manner, Lefebvre’s theory is not simply a structure or an analytical framework, but rather it becomes a generating power. Its practical value responds to the social abstraction of exchange, but it realizes itself only in use, in its consumption. Michel de Certeau (1999: 129) mentions that space is a practiced place, interpreting space as produced by the practice of the place. Thus, social relations are “enrolled” in the space, while, for Henri Lefebvre, “the society is inscribed in the ground”. Likewise, space is, as well, the social construction of significance, considering space, rather than a physical space, as a space of the experience of human action, so that the principle of concrete abstraction integrates historical evolution from the absolute to the abstract and finally to the differential space (Schmidt, in: Derive 2015).

Thus, Henri Lefebvre’s work formed the basis of the Marxist theory of space, which has been developed further by David Harvey and Manuel Castells, among others. In the U.S., Lefebvre’s work is particularly approached by the interpretation of the
geographer Edward Soja, who continues to emphasize Lefebvre’s triad of the terms “Firstspace”, “Secondspace”, and “Thirdspace”, and extends, in particular, the concept of “Thirdspace”. Opposite to the physically experienceable space (“Firstspace”) and spatial structures determined by the prevailing power relations (“Secondspace”), the author understands the “Thirdspace” from the perspective of the marginalized, as a space of resistance characterized by “radical openness” and “swarming images”. Spaces are, at the same time, real and “imagined” or “presented”.

Soja developed his theory of the “Thirdspace”, in which “everything comes together: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imaginary, the recognizable and the unimaginable, the repeatable and the unique, structure and function, body and spirit, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, daily life and the never-ending story” (Soja 1996: 57). A different mode of critical spatial awareness would be adequate to understand the new breadth and importance of re-balanced, spatial trialectic space - historicity - to capture sociability, a cumulative trialectic that is open to an additional radical otherness. The process of cultural hybridity allows the emergence of something else, something new and not recognizable, a new zone of negotiation of significance and representation.

In consequence, the rekindled interest in Henri Lefevbre’s spatial theory demonstrates that space is understood as being continuously produced, as is the social space of the city as well. Furthermore, regarding the social aspect, space is defined at present as physically produced. Marxist spatial theories, based on a structural, i.e., capitalist or global determinacy of spaces and a growing homogenization of the space, are confronting action-theoretical concepts, which emphasize the importance of the physical placement and perception of spaces, although as habitually preconceived, but as subjective construction.

In the action-oriented perspective, a distinction between space and place is construed in such a way that space is always a concrete, social, lived place. The place is thus occupied by people with significance and emotional attitudes and provides symbolic instructions for interpretations of everyday life. For this reason, the contemporary central theme of daily life in urban places is situated in the foreground, whereby the social everyday reality is characterized by intersubjectivity: “Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience” (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 25). Reality is in this fashion socially constructed, while signs and language would furnish the interoperability for the
construction of everyday reality.

Hence, space must also be understood as a framework for social interaction, a "container for signs and objects", whose analysis only makes sense in conjunction with social action. The conception of space is beyond that of its appearance, interpreted by Sergio Tamayo Flores-Alatorre (2013) as an ethnographic space as well. So, space is common in both perspectives of thinking as the result of social relations.

2.1.1.2 New spatial paradigms and the idea of a dynamic, “relational” space

The shift of perspective or of paradigm toward a socially and culturally shaped perception of space and construction is denominated, in the cultural and social sciences, as a “topological turn” or “spatial turn”. Thus it was that numerous linguistic turns, mostly brought about by the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ferdinand de Saussure, i.e., iconic turns, cultural turns, etc., were followed by a spatial turn. Space or geographical space is again observed as a cultural size, implying elevated sensitivity for the space in order to have a better comprehension of the social phenomenon (Castro Resendiz: 2015). A shift of paradigm is present insofar as, no longer alone, time stands in the center of cultural science researches, as in the case of the modern age, but now space is also supplying time.

The supremacy of time in the modern age is relativized. There is a shift of temporality aspects toward those of dimensionality: even historians are turning toward space. “In Space We Read Time” is the title of a well-known book by the historian Karl Schlögel. Within this context, places are not static and conserving, but rather closely interwoven with events and fields-of-action; therefore, the city might be read and interpreted as a history book (Wolfrum 2009: 72). The past, the present, and the future take place in one space and inscribe themselves in it. According to Bruno Latour, “space has replaced time as the principal system of order. Thus, space is characterized by the ability to entail complexity: philosophers define time as an ‘order of succession’ and space as one of ‘simultaneity’” (Latour 2005).

In accordance with the aim of overcoming the division of spatial theoretical thinking in absolutist and relativist positions and the dualism of space and objects, i.e., the assumption that a space exists independently of the action, Martina Löw developed the idea of a “relational” model of space, which proceeds from a “dynamic spatial term” that overcomes the separation of subject and space. Not only is space derived from the structure of human and social goods, but also spaces arise by means of the interaction of people and can be created by the latter in very different ways. Therefore,
THEORETICAL BASES

space is a “relational (ar-)rangement of living beings and social goods in places” (Löw 2001: 271).

The basic idea of the “relational” model of space is that individuals act as social actors, thereby producing spaces, but their actions depend on economic, legal, social, cultural and, ultimately, spatial structures. This means, the “relational” space is produced through activities of individuals interacting among themselves and within the physical structure, characterized by its conditions. In this manner, in Löw's relational theory of space, the focus is on the process of the creation of space, which reflects, in the order of things and bodies, why the sociologist speaks of a procedural concept of space (Stutz 2008: 124).

Space as a container, in which we live, was long ago discarded as a conceptual model. Consequently, space is not to be understood as independent from people and their actions. Rather, these are part of space, i.e., part of the production of the social and physical spaces that we experience, perceive, and imagine on a daily basis. Therefore, spaces can be constituted through their actions and behaviors, concerning which Löw particularly emphasizes the importance of movement and the processual constitution of space in the course-of-action, leading to the term “space in transformation” (Fig. 9).

Figure 9: Space “in transformation”.

Spaces are the result of actions in which social relations take place and become clearly visible. The context of space as a product of activities is linked with the idea of space “in transformation”, leading to the notion of space as social (urban) scenery, a recent theoretical conceptualization by Lindón (2010). A very abbreviated definition of urban
scenario is that of Buttimer (1976, quoted in: Lindón 2010): “...bubbles of space-time in which certain characters perform in different ways, manage the space, use it, conquer it, appropriate it, defend and explore it”. This conception is far from the emblematic places or landmarks of cities, in that there is no exclusivity or pre-establishment of place, a location or a particular burden, in the sense of being socially recognized, particularly through the collective memory. Lindón summarizes this urban scenario as an observable place at any instant; encounters are come into play among different actors, from which emerges the social, constituting the social construction of the place. The latter therefore, the author insists, possesses a given circumstance within a fragment of time, which can be constituted as a different scenario, with other actors or even under the same circumstances.

The urban scenario represents a physical structure, conceived of as an integrator of spatial forms, differing here from the following: a) constructed urban forms, the architectural context; b) forms afforded by various objects that are incorporated in a certain manner into the place, this being something temporary, such as a car or the presence of street vendors and the objects themselves that are sold; c) other, smaller material forms, such as the objects that the actors carry, and d) finally, within this typology, corporal movements are considered as present ephemeral forms (ibid.).

In a scenario, highly valued by the practices of the actors intrinsic to it, the actors, and actions, are the spatial practices and the actor is a character in the scenario, by means of the actions performed, which reveal an identity, with the possibility of reconfiguring other identities of the remaining persons participating in the scenario. In summary, the unfolded actions constitute forms of the uses of urban space, these uses ephemeral or long-lasting. According to the geography of movement, the urban scenario highlights spatiality at the expense of temporality. “The movement is produced in spatial forms, which contain it and can condition it. Although at the same time, the movement can transform them: thus, spatial forms and movement are mutually constituting” (ibid.).

Therefore, space is both “in transformation” through the practices of dancers, counters of shoes, etc., but also “transforming”, representing a dynamic object. Spaces structure actions, i.e., they may limit as well as enable actions. Physical space, thus the manner in which a place is planned and designed, can act as a pre-structural factor for the use of this space, without planning and design, but nonetheless, determining the space in a deterministic manner. At the same time, space can only be as socially and equitably sustainable as its users and users. It is noteworthy that, unfortunately, the spatial dimension is often ignored in the study of the social, as if it were a separate
category. However, space is not separated from the social. It is not a simple "container" within which social life happens; rather, the spatial constitutes the social and cultural processes, highlighting the importance of the physical space through the study of symbolic squares such as landmarks, streets, or architectures.

Rizo (2005: 210) notes that the public space, has as its main virtue, its being a space for the representation of space as well as a space for socialization, i.e., of civic co-presence. In addition, the public space is the area where meanings and the sense of belonging are constructed, which lead to the abstract conception of the public space, stating that the discursive and symbolic space is the space of images and of words (Wildner 2012: 100). The symbolic space refers to symbols and codes that are created discursively and visually as fundamental parts of the constitution of the place's identity. It refers to everything that deals with the space, to the narratives and imaginaries, to the myths, histories, and representations of which it is construed and that remain in a permanent process of construction.

Lindón (2010) points out the difficulty of knowing the entire city under this perspective: one would have to stop anything that moves. “City consists of a network of spaces and places, and not just of a collection of buildings, objects or territories. But obviously this is an urban and architectural understanding of the city, which needs to be always revived. That ‘in-between’, the space between the architectural objects, the tension which builds up between the bodies of the city, is the real ‘material’ of urbanism” (Wolfrum 2007: 11). The public space is, at the same time, urbanism’s main space, the space of the urban culture and of citizenship (“ciudadanía”), interpreting it as a civic space for citizens. It is a physical, symbolic, and political space (Borja/Muxí 2000: 8-9).

Studying space and the particularities of the public square leads to a short review of the related concept: “Genius loci”, commenting on an update of the conception within the philosophical field of “phenomenology” based on an idea by Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980).
2.1.2 “Genius loci”

“Genius loci” usually refers to a location’s distinctive atmosphere, representing the genetic footprint of a place. A “place”, in the geographical sense, describes a position on the earth’s surface or within an appropriate geometrical frame of reference, i.e., a localizable, often also identifiable, special location or place in terms of its composition in which someone stays, something is situated, something has, or something shall happen. A place can be determined by marking a particular location on the surface of the earth. Etymologically, “place” goes back to the Greek “topos” and is a term of mathematical categories, while in the humanities, a “topos” is understood as commonplace, a stereotyped phrase, a precharacterized verbal image, an example, or a motif.

Although a “place” can thus be determined through marking a specific location on the Earth’s surface, it cannot be experienced in its purely geometric definition (Janson, 2013). Michel de Certeau describes “places” as “momentary constellations of fixed points”, which only become “spaces” through appropriation and concrete use (de Certeau 1988: 217-218). Additionally, after Pierre Nora, the term “place” can manifest itself in different ways; first, as a geographical location, as well as a mythical figure, as an event, institution, or term, as a book or work of art, etc. These “places” process a particularly charged, symbolic signification, which possesses an identity-creating function for the respective group (Nora 1998).

In the way, the anthropological “place” was characterized by identity, relation, and history. Thus, Marc Augé (1994) defines a space that has no identity and that can neither be described as relational nor as historical, as a “non-place”. He describes a juxtaposition of places and non-places, spaces of the built environment, especially in urban areas, denying their properties as places in the anthropological sense due to their functions as transit areas and lack of human interaction. However, for someone who works in an airport, this supposed non-place might become a place and provide him with an anthropological system of reference. Hereby, the social importance of the space, which a place has to fulfill in the anthropological sense, appears to be important, i.e. “its ability to pick up the relationship, to evoke and to symbolize” (Augé 1994: 16). Marc Augé, therefore, describes a place as a “place of the social”, “in which relations are established”, thus a place, “in which the stories, the social classes and individuals are connected with one another or clash” (ibid.: 19).

In contrast to, on encountering the mention of “genius loci”, the spirit of a place, there arises in the majority of people an inner, mental image of the atmospheric quality,
the design, and the nature of this specific location. Scents, colors, sounds, shapes, the characteristics of the foundation ground, the perspective, the specific light—all of these weave together a figure that is perceived as a whole and influences what people feel, think, say, build, and create at this site (Brönnele 2009). Thus, the individual character of a place, known as the “genius loci”, reflects the concept of a specific ambience that determines a given space (Wolfrum 2009: 132). The idea of the “specific” is related with the peculiarities of each place.

While in the classical Roman religion a “genius loci” was the protective spirit of a place, often depicted in religious iconography as a figure bearing attributes such as a cornucopia, a patera (libation bowl), or a snake, in contemporary Western usage, “genius loci” usually denotes a location’s distinctive atmosphere or a spirit of place, rather than, automatically, a guardian spirit. Within the context of modern architectural theory, “genius loci” is endowed with profound allegations for place-making, falling within the philosophical field of “phenomenology”. This branch of architectural discourse is explored most significantly by the Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book “Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture”, published in 1980.

Thus, the aim of the philosophical concept “genius loci” by Norberg-Schulz was to develop a phenomenology of space, a theory able to explain architecture, cities, and more general places, including public urban squares. To the theorist Norberg-Schulz, a site or “space” is nothing more than the definition of three dimensions: a Euclidian space according to the absolutist concept of space, including the inherent separation of the individual and the space (Löw 2001), while a “place” is a space with significance, with history. And it is a “place” that has a special character, a “genius loci” (Fig. 10). Thus, the concept “genius loci” primarily incorporates the transformation of a site or space into a place.
According to Norberg-Schulz, a “genius loci” is determined by the relation of the interior and the exterior (this idea is based on the work of the philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow), the orientation (originating with the ideas of Kevin Lynch), and the identification. Its essence is the connection with the aspect of living - “residence” or “dwelling”: In the center of the theory of “genius loci”, we find the house as the “place (most) existential”. This idea of existential places by the philosopher Martin Heidegger provides the foundation for the concept of “genius loci”.

Places in general exert on humans an effect in different ways. The processes of perception -very important for understanding the ideas of Norberg-Schulz- are possibly influenced by small details, but operate in an “imago mundi”, a microcosm of the world, and an impression of the totality. Therefore, according to Norberg-Schulz, a place
Norberg-Schulz distinguishes between natural and artificial landscapes. At each place, there is something akin to the natural, pure nature, even though it might be hidden in the construction, destruction, and reconstruction without reference to the specificity of the landscape. Therefore, it appears to be quite common in modern urbanism to carry out urban projects without taking into account the deep roots of a place that conceal the presence of “genius loci”. Thus, comprehension of a place depends on the concord between the natural and the artificial place, the latter not subject to current transformations or activities and other spontaneous actions. Therefore, it depends more strongly on the history of the place, the historic identity, and the continuous temporal, and behind these factors that influence “genius loci”, there are natural elements, in particular the topography (such as the horizontal factor) and the relationship of earth and sky (the vertical).

Norberg-Schulz divides landscapes (the condition of nature, usually the statuses that have less human influence) into four categories, i.e., three archetypes, and a type of mixture: the romantic landscape in its microscale, furnishing the impression of a low sky; the classical landscape on an intermediate scale, a balance of human nature, and the cosmic landscape on a macroscale with endless skies, while the complex type landscape comprises a mixture of at least two of these archetypes (Fig. 11).

Based on the understanding of a place and its idea of “genius loci”, it is interesting to examine concisely the opinion of Norberg-Schulz concerning the function of architecture. Architecture may express, in a compact manner, the natural and artificial characteristics of a place in order for it to be experienced sensually, but constructions or buildings and human activities generally cannot change the “genius loci” of a place. This is in diametric contrasts with Lefebvre’s triad of space, and the “perceived and lived space” in particular. Contrariwise, human transformation can counteract or hide the “genius loci” of a place.

For Norberg-Schulz, architecture, and as evident in his work, -this principle also applies to the handling of and the playing with the space more for the most part- does have a clearly defined role: thus, the “existential purpose” of building, architecture, and urban design, notes Christian Norberg-Schulz, is to transform a site into a place, to “uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment” (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 23). Through the sensitive integration of the features of a place within the architectural concept, its character can be forged in vivid fashion. By concentrating on, strengthening, and completing, as well as by contrasting settings, the existing (local) structures of the place can be clarified (Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 54). This suggests that
a site should not necessarily be reshaped by urban-planning architecture, but that the intervention should rather deliberate upon its inherent qualities. At the same time, referring to Aldo Rossi (1966), “not the adaption to varying functions, but the permanence of constructions, in which like in a collective memory the history is focused, concludes the nature of a city and the identity of the inhabitants” (Nerdinger 2009: 76).

On the other hand, application of the Norberg-Schulz concept regarding the idea of a space “in transformation” may appear to be something in conflict, in that the behavior of the inhabitants, the human activity, is an indispensable factor for this. Hence, although the aspect has to do with the activities not being very important for the “genius loci” of a place according to the understanding of Norberg-Schulz, the notions of nature and aesthetics do play a preponderant role.

Following this idea, in the best case, the history of a place is its auto-realization and its architecture (more an art than a science) must refer to and express the “genius loci” by means of “enclosure” in and concretization of the main strategies in order to visualize, complete, and symbolize. Consequently, these are the processes implicated in translating “genius loci” into constructed forms. For Norberg-Schulz, the elements that define the “genius loci” of a place can be interpreted by way of three aspects: orientation; identification of the “genius loci” (without it, agreement with the place is impossible), and memory. Identification of these three dimensions allows for understanding of the place.
Figure 11: The natural spaces (three archetypes).

Romantic.

Classic.

Cosmic.

Source: Own elaboration based on sketches by Florian Strenge.

2.2 Architecture

2.2.1 Architectural situations

Architecture comprises the production processes planning specific places, representing a product of design. Its purpose is the creation of urban architectural scenarios, contributing to their identity. In a broad figurative sense, architecture refers
to a methodical construction through which the parts of an arrangement form a whole, for example (Wolfrum/Janson, 2016: 19), or the organization of a successful complicated collaborative contract. More specifically, architecture comprises the process as well as the product of the planning, designing, and constructing of buildings and other non-building structures, often perceived as cultural symbols. Therefore, the art and science of designing buildings and additionally physical structures is based on the knowledge of art, science, technology, and humanity. In consequence, architects, as well and city planners, have the responsibility for the shape of the city, designing the urban space and ambience, whereby the design activity of the architect, which departs from the macro-level (urban design, landscape architecture) to the micro-level (construction details and furniture), reflects functional, technical, social, environmental, and aesthetic considerations.

Architecture is often described as a heavy, immovable medium, as “fixation in the ground, indentation of space” (Delitz 2015, in: Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 38), territorialization, solid and permanent, persisting as immobile in its structures. But architecture should not only be reduced to the spaces and the construction of houses. Instead, it should be generally understood as the “design of spaces”, as the design of spatial situations. This began in the late 1950s and 1960s, when an architectural phenomenology arose as an important movement in the early reaction against modernism, with the participation of architects such as Charles Moore in the U.S., Christian Norberg-Schulz in Norway, and Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Vittorio Gregotti in Italy, who collectively popularized an interest in a new contemporary architecture whose intent was to expand human experience.

Architecture develops in situations, the design of complex spatial circumstances, which consists of the interplay between social and individual actions with structural concrete things. Thus, it basically deals with no less than the design of all concrete spatial relationships of the society by architectural means (Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 15), i.e., similarly diverse, such as the notion of “space”. In addition, dynamically, architecture can be understood both as a material, physical context, but also as an architectural situation. There is a dialectical interplay at work between the architectonic material and its usage and action, taking into consideration the everyday urban life of the city, with all of its potential and conflicts, which represent the urban reality. Therefore, architecture is always experienced in the mutual interaction of structural and spatial elements with the activities of all those who inhabit, live in, and move in the

2 Ibid.
However, in particular, architecture is part of the space, in that a spatial relationship is only produced by living and experiencing it within an architectural situation. Space is produced when the architecture is in use, and not by the architectural form itself. The concrete space is nothing without life, and will be constituted through the practice of everyday life practice (Wolfrum 2006). Instead, architecture represents the built, "material structure which is made habitable by movement and use" (Janson/Tigges 2013).

In the “Wesensbestimmung der Architektur” (“Essential definition of architecture”), which the art historian Dagobert Frey elaborated in the essay of the homonymous title, the situational character of architecture becomes obvious as well: “We can say (...) that in architecture we are ‘fellow players’, while we remain ‘spectators’ in the visual arts” (Frey 1925/1992: 98). Architecture unfolds in its use, creating spatial situations, and only then it achieves social and aesthetic relevance. Thereby, comprising a constellation of spatial situations, the material structure, the thing, the haptic, and the atmosphere are not incidental.

In terms of the core competence of cultural technology, architecture is understood for the last hundred years as the "art of articulating space", as stated by Umberto Eco (1972: 326). “Architecture has to create the appropriate spatial situations for movement and action for the stay in (different) places. Hereby, the crucial role plays the interaction between the spatial properties of structural elements and the conditions under which they can be perceived, used and experienced.” (Janson/Tigges 2013)

“Architecture is an open social and cultural process and not only focused on the design of specific objects as the result of creative search for an author” (Cooperativa Palo Alto⁴). It is generated as a spatial experience and as complex situations of a social discipline in which, on the one hand, we participate with our different sensitivities and motivations and through individual and collective action. On the other hand, architecture articulates and reflects situations through their shapes and spaces (Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 24-25). Architecture is also an expression of social preferences, claims, and challenges. Its projects are perennially the products of the social forces that constitute them, in their final form, as an exercise. In this respect, architecture is an expression of the politics, economy, and culture, and is understood as a dynamic form of contemporary culture. In additionally, architecture is always under

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⁴ Social collective for housing, which fights for the common good in the Delegation Cuajimalpa in order to resolve the problem of land under the threat of eviction, presented in the exhibition Weltstadt Mexico: Who creates the city? Who decides about its future? Goethe-Institute Mexico/
Architecture develops its specific reality only when it is used, in this manner becoming socially relevant. A recipient experiences architecture with all of the senses within a complex situation. Architecture acts as a platform for public and private life in such a way that the possibilities of individual experience must be included, such as isolation and connection, inclusion and openness, integration and exclusion, alignment and confrontation, exposure and introversion, or scattering and centering (Wolfrum 2012).

Nearly always, architecture is required to meet comply with practical and technical functions. However, this does not mean that it must program particular uses, but rather, re-develop spaces in such a complex fashion that it offers an option for different uses. Nonetheless, the aim to be open to a variety of significances should not lead to the fallacy that the less architecture, the more open it will be to usefulness. Instead of architects linking their profession with the articulation of spaces, the ability of architectural spaces exhibits, at that very juncture, whether or not they are concise and characteristic, i.e., supplying frictions as signifiers, thus furnishing a capacity (Janson/Wolfrum 2006). Werner Lindner describes the loss of the characteristic force of concrete spaces in favor of symbolic behavior (Lindner 1998: 157). In this respect, Sophie Wolfrum and Alban Janson developed the idea of a capacity of architecture, describing the faculty of architecture to enable variability in use and over the course of time. Capacity refers to the aptitude of attachment, which architecture can offer offensively, the competency for different meanings, behaviors, uses, for social processes, concrete situations, and social events.

Even through its distinctiveness, architecture may satisfy a variety of tasks; thus, absolute conciseness in design corresponds to a high degree of adaptability to various functions (Rossi 1966/1973, epilogue: 174, in: Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 43). For example, the Zócalo or Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square) (Fig. 20) in the Historic Center of Mexico City demonstrates such a wide range of uses, ranging from small-scale street trade and folkloric dancing up to gigantic cultural and political manifestations, due to its centrality and the strong and ubiquitous presence of history, converting it into a reference for all Mexicans. But it also requires its impressive largeness, surrounded by important religious and administrative buildings such as the Metropolitan Cathedral (of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven), the National Palace (Palacio Nacional), and the antic City Hall with its
government offices (Antiguo Palacio del Ayuntamiento), hosting that huge variety of usages.

Therefore, the functional capacity of architecture refers to the interaction between the specific character of a space, which determines its usage or, preferably, its openness to different opportunities of concrete uses. In this regard, capacity exhibits the interplay between the scope of flexible factors and conciseness, while “systems in which everything is possible, make a priori any intervention meaningless” (Schneider 1971: 17, in: Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 44), generating arbitrariness. Thus, architecture should accommodate the appropriation of the use that the participants, require in terms of, contrariwise, a high degree of aesthetic complexity and of capacity in the architecture.

Urban space is induced by architecture, and space is produced while architecture is experienced within a situation. Thus, an architectonic situation can be interpreted as performative in the sense of performativity, as it has emerged in the discourse over the last decade, in reference to the transformative power of an action. Architecture may be interpreted as an expression of social lifestyles, similar to festivals, ways of speaking, fashions, or local economies, but architecture, actualized in a performative incident, is also retroactive, enabling the occurrence of something (Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 54). Just as openness can only be proven in the performative process, just as necessary is the substance of the architectural repertoire.

Therefore, an architectural situation cannot be completely anticipated by the planning practice. Architecture is then understood as a space constructed of and constituted from cultural and social practices based on subjective relationships, leading to the definition as architecture as a socially shaped space (Rosa 2011: 19). Julia Maier and Mathias Rick agree that architecture might be defined in an expansive, generous mode as an “articulated space where cultural and social life can be unfolded” (Raumlaborberlin 2008: 21) and describe the architectural as a space open to intervention.

Urban planning is the result of spatial planning intelligence. Thus, a city is more than the sum of its streets and houses; so, an “architectonic turn” would be required in urbanism⁴, interpreted as the recollection of the spatial qualities of a city; therefore, the “spatial turn” in the cultural sciences would follow the “urbanistic turn” in architecture. Architecture, as the culture of spaces, should create cities again. Not only spaces, but

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instead, city spaces.

2.2.1 “Affordance”

Since the pioneering work of Jane Jacobs (1961) and William H. Whyte (1980), the spatial dimensions of public spaces and squares and their characteristics have been the object of research covering such topics as producing spaces, spatial design, and how space impacts social life. The idea that architecture is related with the generation of spatial situations, thus obtaining its social relevance through its use for the potential of architecture to comprise the stimulation of events and actions, leads to the concept of “affordances”. First exposed in the article entitled “Theory of ‘affordances” in 1977 by the psychologist James J. Gibson, the concept of “affordance” could be translated as an opportunity or availability to be used. It is similar to an invitation that makes an object for its use in some activity according to our needs. These requirements are changing, just in case people adapt the objects to be used in a different way from the one for which it was originally designed. “Affordance” is also this ability of an object to possess a variety of uses; for example, a belt designed to hold up trousers could be used as a leash for a dog, or one could open a bottle of beer with one’s belt buckle. Therefore, its original definition refers to all of the possibilities of action that are materially possible for the process of using things in general and using architectural objects in the urban space in particular. On the other hand, a second definition, this from 1979, a purification of the previous one, focused on the possibilities of action that the user is aware of being able to perform. Therefore, “affordance” is the quality of an object or an environment that allows an individual to carry out an action, translated as the opportunity, availability, or invitation of an object to be used. By perceiving these opportunities of actions offered by the environment, individuals come to act.

However, prior knowledge of the objects in order to be able to use them by means of our body is required, because the object itself is not able to communicate its use through its own formal features. This is where the concept of affordance becomes more extensive and might explain the ability to learn the use of objects through others. One could use an object that one had never known of before or regarding which one had no information; in this case, its use would probably not be optimal, because full advantage would not be taken of the complete potential of the object and the physical abilities of the body.

In this respect, ten years after the psychologist Gibson developed the concept of “affordance”, it was picked up again and expanded by Donald A. Norman in his book
“The Design of Everyday Things”. “Affordance” not means the relationship of objects with the human body and its physical capacities, but also the ability to be nourished by the former experiences, objectives, plans, or estimates of other experiences, etc. (Norman 1988). In this manner, “affordance” represents the capability to learn from each other, to learn from the experience and vivacities of others. By observing, not only do we learn the use of objects from others, but also we learn from the others who are accumulating the experiences, permitting us to develop ourselves within a sociohistorical environment according to the culture in which we are immersed. For example, the lateral walls at Republic Square architectonically limit the space, but through watching other people, these also invite visitors to sit.

Gibson itself employed the concept of social affordance in his own work and defined it as opportunities offered by the presence of others in the space, rather than a social construct of space or social conventions governing actions. If people did not learn from the experience and former vivacities of others, they would not know how to utilize objects. Had they lived isolated in a “bubble” without any correlation and interaction with the exterior, without family, school, friends, and television, they could not discover a meaning and use for such common objects such as ball or chair. Perhaps they would sit on the ball and play with the chair, as this is also physically possible. The culture to which we belong and with which we identify allows us to have our own experiences based on the vivacities of others, akin to members of our family creating the storage of references, leading us in this manner to the utilization of objects and of our body.

Since the introduction of Gibson’s theory, many scholars have explored the concept of affordance, and the definition of the latter has become more sophisticated. Among others, Chemero (2003) defines affordance as the relationship between specific aspects of the environment and specific aspects of the individuals who produce specific behaviors. We learn how to use a spoon without spilling the soup, by holding it horizontally, through observing our parents executing this action. Thus, “affordance” also signifies the ability to learn from the vivacities of others, to learn in and from the environment. “Affordance” permits us to subsist in a society by presenting to us the necessary abilities for using the objects located in our surroundings as we conduct our daily activities (Dávalos Ramírez 2011).
2.3 “Ciudadanía” (citizenship)

2.3.1 “Ciudadanía” as a polyvalent concept

Society should involve a sense of “ciudadanía” (citizenship) in people and support them realize their role in a democratic society. Encouraging this sense is crucial in building an inclusive, participatory democracy. Thus, the term “ciudadanía” is of central importance in Latin American discussion, and it only can be translated imprecisely, in its complexity, as “citizenship” or “urban sense”. The idea represents a polyvalent concept that is understood, according to the context, as a political movement, actor, or demand (Fig. 12) and similarly refers to the English term “citizenship” and also to the institution of civil rights. Because the word city, “ciudad”, is included in Spanish as well as in the English “citizenship”, a direct relationship with the “city” can be established (Wildner/Hufschmidt 2013).

Figure 12: Representation of the idea of “ciudadanía”.


Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzøe (2000) believe passionately in the importance of “citizenship” (“ciudadanía”) and the vitality and the humanity that it foments. “Ciudadanía” reaches beyond the scope of communities or collectivities and is constituted of, first and foremost, urban practices, as Sergio Tamayo Flores-Alatorre
(2013) detects in his concept of “ciudadanía”-spaces. In these forms of urban socialization, one might say, the work of civil society is (re-) territorialized. Thus, individualism and community reconcile in public spaces, the main space of the “ciudadanía”, i.e., the space is also constituted of collective action, thus constructing an ideal of responsibility and of the collective, and not solely individual representation, interpreted as the collective production of space.

There are the people, the citizens, who give meaning to the city, generating, in this fashion, the public. Therefore, participation is a central dimension in the construction of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), for urban space can be understood as a context for participation, serving for both cohesion and debate. These citizen spaces are characterized by the social struggles among the different collective identities, in which the use of space represents a symbolic form of collective action (Tamayo Flores-Alatorre 2013). The power relationships of their societies and the processes of inclusion and segregation of their people are reflected; therefore, the public space is an area of conflict and, in fact, could even be a “battlefield, on which real struggles for the urban area are carried out” (Baumann 1999, in: Tamayo 2013). As a result of the plurality of these disputes, there arise the so-called “ciudadanía”-spaces, in which the practices afford a city one or more identities and in which the city itself furnishes a stage for such practices. Additionally in this respect, the “contemporary witness”, former German president Richard von Weizsäcker, stated that democracy would be always linked with conflicts, and not with harmony.

Public space represents a linkage among social movements, and citizenship departs from the political culture, as Sergio Tamayo Flores-Alatorre (2015) states. Therefore, the dimension of spatiality would be subdivided into the conditions of the public sphere, i.e., the physical space functioning as a medium for transporting the values inserted in the actors themselves; the protest as a scenario of the performance supplying significance to the social space as a political strategy; and the performance or dramaturgy itself: the social use of the citizen representing the public life. Thus, the social world becomes a public stage based on the corporeality of the actors.

According to Georg Simmel (1858-1918), conflict is always an integral and necessary part of societies and of human relations. It is an integrating factor, a form of socialization without which societies would not survive (Simmel 2010). And these

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conflicts are (re-) territorialized, situated in the public space or square, i.e., there is no society without public space and no public space without society, in addition to that there is no citizenship without public space and vice versa. Public spaces are always spaces of conflict, representing a struggle over the one who controls it, the one who has access to it, and the one who determines its image and constitution (Van Deusen 2002). Conflicts regarding the diversity of land uses are characterized by the tension between the expectations and the perceptions of the residents and the commercial uses and services that render that diversity possible (Duhau/Giglia 2004). Therefore, the possibility of “conflicts” is also a particularity in the analysis of the urban scenario, which can be defined by exclusion or rejection by some actors. However, the same spatial utilization may imply the removal or rejection of other actors without generating conflict, by means of an unnamed, unacknowledged negotiation, but one that is understood among the subjects-in-question (Lindón 2010).

Thus, the thesis by Sergio Tamayo (2013) is in agreement with the “confrontational” perspective of Neil Smith and the idea of Edward Soja, whose Thirdspace reflects a space of resistance that, among other things, would be characterized by a “radical openness”. Also, other authors, such as Mark Francis, emphasize, within this context, the importance of conflicts as active confrontations with the society in the sense of basic democratic understanding. Thus, Francis claims, in his ten elemental theses for the design of successful public spaces, that a well-functioning public environment would include a number of controversies and political conflicts. Democratic space would arise when people take responsibility for a place, would be involved in the debate over its future use and its design; thus, urban planning requires a diverse, public process as well (Francis, in: Selle/Havemann 2010: 618). Therefore, the public space, its infrastructure, and equipment within enclosures comprise an important mechanism for social redistribution and integration.

Active civil participation would not only be necessary in the planning of public spaces, but rather, throughout the entire process, i.e., also in their construction and administration. Claims are made, proposals submitted, alternatives offered, but also, duties and responsibilities are distributed in order to stimulate and accompany social and cultural projects and programs for economic development or solidarity, as well as urban planning itself. So it is that the rediscovery of the civil city and the public space as an organizing urban element and of city planning as a producer of meaning would be the monopoly of nobody (Borja 1998b).

“Ciudadania” (citizenship) has an effect on the individual action of the urban inhabitant, and democracy represents the legitimate community aspiration (RUA 2014).
In view of that the public square is perceived as a learning place for social skills, interpreted as a meeting place and place for citizenship ("ciudadanía"), the terminus of the emancipator or democratic space also appears to be interesting. This means spaces in which, based on the concept of the public sphere as introduced by authors such as Hannah Arendt or Jürgen Habermas, individuals become citizens and participate actively in political life (Deutsche 1996). So, the universal discourse of modern democracy includes the access of all people to politics (Balibar 1993), i.e., being democratic space and open public place. In turn, the importance of the public space is not only determined by being open and democratic; its importance consists being the place where citizenship is built, as José Antonio García mentions (Rojas 2007: 28).

But, “being able to appreciate democratic spaces and encouraged by the citizens, requires a radically broader conception of citizenship” (Moll 2016), in addition to that we might need greater democratic knowledge of who owns what, as well as who tots up the figures for those who own what (Merrifield, in: Derive 2015: 9-14). Accordingly, the relationship among the public space or square, “ciudadanía”, and democracy represents a challenge, but also a possibility for urban justice; i.e., the projects and management of public spaces as well as of community facilities in general are an opportunity to produce “ciudadanía” and a test for their development. Projects of public space must always be based on the ethical values of freedom, tolerance, and solidarity in order to form, in the sense of “ciudadanía”, places of civic participation.

According to Borja (1998), resistances arise and initiatives develop that construct proposals to influence the public, these distinguishing between civil and political participation and claiming that there would be no political changes without civil movements. Only if political pressure were applied from outside on the social and cultural institutions to change the established equilibrium, could these opinions find expression in legislative amendments and in the practices of institutional life, in which the new communications media and also the socialization of information play a major role.

Because the Latin word “civitas” also literally means “ciudadanía”, in that this status guarantees civil and political rights, “ciudadanía”-practice derives from the

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6 Sebastian Moll is the Weltstadt correspondent in New York, cited in the exhibition Weltstadt Mexico: Who creates the city? Who decides about its future?, organized by the Goethe-Institute Mexico, which took place in the German Pavilion, Col. Roma, Mexico City, from July 14 to September 11, 2016. Weltstadt is an initiative to engage urban innovation projects through some Goethe Institutes and local partners, distributing self-managed and civic projects that affect urban development processes.
relationship between the state and the civil society. Social “ciudadanía” is to be understood as a collective practice that is characterized by strong integration and the indivisibility of rights. In this regard, “ciudadanía” is part of a dual process of constant renegotiation of (civil) rights that, according to Oliver Frey, additionally implies the struggle for rights to appropriation (Frey 2004: 229). The demand for the equality of all human beings leads to a direct link between the concept of “ciudadanía” and the claim of “Right to the City”, as making city means to acknowledge this for everyone, a claim that is legitimate, natural, but one that, nonetheless, continues to be denied to many.

2.3.2 Integrating the “Right to the City” (Lefebvre)

“Right to the City” is a concept coined by the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre in the mid-1960s, which derives from Thomas Paine’s “The Rights of Man and of the Citizen”, published in 1791, positing that popular political revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people. Employing these points, Paine defended the French Revolution, including a claim for the right to petition, for freedom of the press, for the civil rights of actors and Jews, in an attempt to archive a balance between the bourgeoisie and the worker. In the twenty-first century, Lefebvre’s topic has become an important element in the discourse of urban public policies.

First raised in his eponymous book “Le droit à la ville” (1968), Lefebvre drafts the “Right to the City” as a right to a transformed, renewed urban life, one therefore responding to the social problems that were caused by the rapid urbanization of the post-war period, particularly through mass housing. Lefebvre complained of the numerous degradations of quality, which accompanied the urbanization process. At the same time, he identified in urbanization an enormously positive potential as well, which could lead, within the context of an urban revolution, to the emergence of an emancipated urban society. Thus, “Right to the City” represents the universal societal appeal of the urban qualities embedded in the process of urbanization, which lie, for Lefebvre, in the encounter, in the exchange, in the celebration, and in the collectively designed and used urban space.

Thus, the “Right to the City” includes the following: the right to housing; right to the place; right to quality services; right to the beauty of the environment; right to mobility and accessibility; right to the new technologies; right to local and global justice; right to a quality environment; right to difference and equal status of citizenship; right to civic participation, and the right to centrality, public space, and monumentality, among others.
THEORETICAL BASES

(Borja 2004, in: López Roa 2012). Therefore, Lefebvre’s “Right to the City” is a “cry and demand for urban life, for the right to centrality” (Merrifield, in: Derive 2015: 9-14).

Likewise, urban researchers Dirk Gebhardt and Andrej Holm summarize the multifaceted idea as the “right to centrality, as access to places of social wealth, the urban infrastructure, and knowledge; and the right to difference, which stands for a city as a place of encounter, of self-acknowledgement and recognition and confrontation (...) It is not limited to the specific use of urban spaces, but also includes access to political and strategic debates concerning the future development paths. The ‘Right to the City’ is oriented toward the utopian promises of urbanity and reclaims a right to the creative excesses of the urban”. Elsewhere, Andrej Holm differentiates Lefebvre’s rather vague “Right to the City” into various specific rights that, apart from the previously mentioned right to access and centrality and the right to the “creative surpluses of the urban”, the right to presence, and the right to the usefulness values, the right to difference also includes the right to appropriation, which in turn contains a direct reference to the current research project and explicitly to the next chapter (3.1 Appropriation as active confrontation with the environment).

Furthermore, the “Right to the City” should serve as a guarantee that any citizen would have the opportunity to live in territories equipped with appropriate public spaces, for healthy conviviality, and individual and collective development, which will promote greater social cohesion, thus, identity (Lefebvre 1968). Recapturing the approach of noting the “Right to the City”, Lefebvre refers to the democratic and dignified use of space, giving way to a place of common and collective use by working under the same conditions, instead of producing spaces only for the privileged. Therefore, the public space represents a manifestation of the “Right to the City”, in order to achieve a responsible and informed civic consciousness of our “Right to the City” through the right to public space, created collectively as part of politically participatory cities. That is, “Right to the City” includes the claim for a more democratic administration of the public space and square in terms of the decisions on the transformation of their use, occupation, and production.

Regarding the formerly discussed concept of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), Henri Lefebvre states, in the final line of his last essay, entitled “Quand la ville se perd dans une métamorphose planétaire” (“When the City Is Lost in a Planetary Metamorphosis”) (1989), that “the ‘Right to the City’ implies nothing less than a revolutionary conception of citizenship” (Merrifield, in: Derive 2015: 9-14). Emphasizing the right of centrality and the right of deference, Lefebvre appears adamant concerning the need “to reformulate the framework for the citizenship”, proclaiming the full realization of “ciudadanía”
(citizenship) in the sense of a democratization of cities, including human rights in particular. As a struggle for these rights, when all rights are denied, "revolutionary citizenship is not a right; it has to be taken, recreated anew, struggled for - not rubber-stamped" (Ibid.: 9-14). Accentuating the social function of the city, it makes reference to a public space or square interpreted as a space of conflict. According to Lefebvre, a new paradigm is required, a new way of conceptualizing urban society or, that is to say, a new citizenship for urban society.

On the other hand, Lefebvre also immediately inspired a muddled debate, confusing things while simultaneously demanding rights to the city, determining a certain type of political hysteria. Thus, since the turn of the millennium, Lefebvre’s demand has been increasingly assumed from very different angles. Thus, “Right to the City” has been converted into, among other things, a highly discussed subject at academic conferences and debates. In particular, representatives of critical urban research, such as David Harvey, Peter Marcuse, or Margit Mayer, hereby took advantage of Lefebvre’s approach as the basis for a radical critique of the society and of the system. At present, the Right to the Public Space is mainly understood as a response to the search for a better quality of life for all citizens, which promotes equity, cohesion, and reinforcement among them to foster the identity that differentiates them and recognizes them among others. “Right to the City” is an urban paradigm of how to conceive, feel, and make the city that is a permanent collective construction.

Presently, when public urban space is affected by major modifications, debate on the spatial changes has also already seeped out of the academies. Under broad headings such as gentrification, displacement, and segregation, the catchword found its way into critical publicity, because the use of the urban space by people from different sectors, social groups, and cultures, as well as their communication and exchanges, do form part of the elementary aspects of urbanity. Not only is a high quality of public space desired for daily use but, in terms of “Right to the City”, optimal accessibility for all citizens to urban centrality, understood as the concentration of public activities, the right to difference, and additionally, intimacy and the choice of personal ties are required (Borja 1998b).

In many cities, social protest movements have been forged under the rallying cry of “Right to the City”: city for everybody. Especially in conurbations, more and more people are joining together in interest groups and in criticizing current urban development from their specific angles. Under the maxim “Right to the City”, the various interest groups are have come together and joint action is coordinated (Struck 2011). As a response to the urban problems of the global South, such as the formation
of slums with the corresponding precarious housing and living and legal conditions, non-governmental organizations have also integrated Lefebvre's demand into their work. Thus, for example, today this is anchored in the pronouncements of urban social movements, such as the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), as well as in other national laws and constitutions. It has been retaken by intellectuals and activists such as by a union of numerous NGOs; a World Charter for the Right to the City has been drafted. In such a diversity of scenarios, there have emerged a variety of applications and interpretations. Ultimately, efforts such as these were supported also by United Nations (UN) organizations UN HABITAT and UNESCO, which in turn postulate a “Right to the City”.

These multiple references to “Right to the City”, however, differ significantly and considerably and have been repeatedly criticized due to their distance from Lefebvre's intentions, whereby the popularity of “Right to the City” might also have led to a trivialization and corruption of the original approach (Lopes de Souza 2010).
3. PUBLIC SQUARES AS PLACES FOR CIVIC FORMATION
His assertion that “places” become “spaces” through appropriation and concrete uses proves Michel de Certeau (1988) to be a progressive thinker for action-oriented space appropriations, thus leading to a linkage between “space” and “appropriation”, including the concepts of space “in transformation”, “genius loci”, architecture, “affordance”, “ciudadanía” (citizenship) and “Right to the City”, comprising the idea of an urban scenario.

3.1 Appropriation as social learning process

Today, the term “appropriation” forms part of many psychological developmental approaches as an ambiguous equivalent of identificatory, subjective learning, as “to-own-making”, in which its signification as a specific social learning process assembles the basis of the present research project. Thus, that and the concept of “appropriation” are essentials for the construction of a social theory of learning and for understanding of the public square as a place of learning of civic competences. In everyday language, the term is mainly used as a synonym for the active acquirement of certain human behaviors, while in legal linguistic terms, “appropriation” also denotes acquisition of ownership of unclaimed properties or animals or a rather unlawful occupation (Keiler 1983). Other meanings include, for example, acceptance, supposition, adoption, seizure, usurpation, assumption, possession, and empowerment, as well as annexation, usage, or occupation.

Through these different interpretations, it is rapidly evident that it is impossible to speak of “the” appropriation concept, in that the concept of “appropriation” is employed in different theoretical references and different conceptual manifestations. Within this context, however, “appropriation” focuses on the origins of the term as it has been developed in the so-called cultural-historical school of Soviet, Marxist-founded psychology. According to the Marxist perspective, social relations and the specifically human expressions of life and forms of existence are materially justified and determined in their development and movement through dialectical regularities. The evolution of humans and of nature, of the individual and society, is a dialectical unity that is characterized and directed by the increasingly available external conditions, which in turn are again produced in social work through dialectic processes. This dialectical unity finds its concrete expression in the active confrontation of the people with their environment, which intervenes in bringing about a change in their environment (Deinet 2009).
The external conditions of life are therefore products of human labor. In these, the achievements (experiences, significances) of historic-social work are representationally cumulative. “This objectification of human capacities and human labor in their products now faces the process of appropriation as the individual side of the representational process of production” (ibid.: 29). Objectification and appropriation thus appear as two parts of the same socio-historical process.

According to Marx, specific human appropriation is characterized in three ways: in their lifestyle, individuals do not simply extract substances of nature, but they produce from these new, appropriate things (form-changing aspect); with the production of things, people extend their skills and abilities (inner nature) simultaneously (learning aspect); the transformation of simple objects into ever more complex ones is finally only one of possibility, because individuals produce in a cooperative manner, i.e., based on division of labor (aspect of cooperation) (Nohl 1980).

3.1.1 The Aleksei N. Leontiev theory of appropriation (and its adaption through “critical psychology”) (cf. Deinet, “Aneigung” und “Raum” (“Appropriation” and “Space”), in: Deinet 2009)

Based on the views of Marx, the Russian Psychologist Aleksei N. Leontiev1 developed the appropriation theory of human development, which is described comprehensively in his key work “Problems of the Development of the Mind” (Leontiev 1980). This is an anthology of his works from the years 1933-1959, and on which, and sequentially, this research project is extensively based. But while Leontiev’s concept is focused on the development of children and youth, the concept will be subsequently transferred to lifelong learning, in the conviction that appropriation theory can not only be applied to the particular age groups of children and young people, but also to adults, thinking of learning as a lifelong, continuous process.

The appropriation theory has been experienced to date in Western countries only through punctual inclusion and, with the profound political changes, has moved nearly completely into the background. In Germany, the appropriation theory was taken up for consideration in the 1970s by environmental psychology studies or Ecopsychology: the relationship between humans and the natural world through ecological and

1Aleksei Nikolaevich Leontiev (1903-1979) was a Soviet Developmental Psychologist and the founder of activity theory, who also collaborated on the development of a Marxist psychology as a response to behaviourism and the focus on the stimulus-response mechanism as explanation for
psychological principles (Nohl 1980; Hellbrück/Fischer 1999, et al.) and environmental socialization research. In social education, it was particularly addressed by the German Psychology professor Klaus Holzkamp, founder of Critical Psychology, and later by the Educationalist Ulrich Deinet, who resumed Leontiev’s work and developed it further on a selective basis. However, after the decline of the Soviet Union, this revolutionary theory fell into oblivion, due to the capitalistic system’s logic and the general lack of interest in materialistic Marxist approaches.

3.1.1.1 Appropriation as active confrontation with the environment

The fundamental idea of this approach is to understand the evolution of the human being as an active confrontation of the individual with his environment and as an appropriation of the material and symbolic culture. According to Leontiev, the “real world, which most determines human life, is a world that has been transformed by human activity. As a world of social objects which embody the human skills formed in the course of socio historical practice, it is not immediately given to the individual; in these properties it reveals every human to be a task” (Leontiev 1980: 281). The world of objects is not one of dead objects, and appropriation is the most important ontogenetic development principle of the people.

Leontiev views appropriation as a process through which the individuals’ properties, skills, and behaviors that evolved over generations are reproduced. In appropriation theory, the special insight of importance is that the cognitive development of a person substantially takes place through active confrontation with the learning object, i.e., it happens through actions. Leontiev emphasizes the intrinsic activity in the appropriation process as a creative performance, as the “most intensive form of the appropriation of experiences and what they mean” (Rolff/Zimmermann 1985: 171).

Therefore, “appropriation” is to be understood as the activity through which a learner acquires knowledge of the characteristics and purposes of the objects created in the socio-historical process. Beyond this acquaintance, an individual also, with the execution of appropriate activities, acquires specific skills that reflect human labor performed in the production of the object. Thus, “appropriation” also represents one of the conditions for the acquisition of the collected experiences from previous generations.
In the context of appropriation theory, the concept of the “signification of objects” is considered as that which is the most theoretical, because an object is to be understood from its becomeness. The method of scientific acquisition of knowledge is, therefore, “in a certain sense a historical method. To explain an object of scientific means is hereby to understand it from its becomeness” (Holzkamp/Schurig 1973: XXV), appropriating in the objects the human characteristics and abilities embodied therein. That is, the aspect of the objectification of human labor is reflected in the products of its activity. In turn, this corresponds to the so-called “reflection theory”, which postulates that everything could be attributed to the material conditions of its creation.

“Consciousness (Bewußtsein) can never be anything else than conscious being (bewußte Sein), and the being of humanity is its actual life-process” (Marx/Engels 1845/46 (The German Ideology), in: Marx/Engels, 1932:15). Ultimately, it is structured and determined by what one knows of being, of the reality (Nohl 1980: 18). However, according to Rubinstein, this leads to “the original path not from consciousness to the object, but rather from the object to consciousness” (Rubinstein 1972: 31, in: Nohl 1980: 24). Thus, this understanding corresponds to the conscious reflection of the world (Nohl 1980: 25).

From the theory of “appropriation” arises consciousness and objects and the symbolizations from which these acquire their meanings and significances (Rolff 1985: 171). Objects and spaces created by humans reflect their phylogenetic development, i.e., the significations of human capabilities acquired through active labor. The dialectical-materialist orientation also indicates that psychological practices would be the internal activities that result from external activities and conditions.

Transfer to the inner level, however, is denominated "interiorization"; according to the concept of interiorization, the “individual initially appropriates the social, in the social-historical process thus created, by means of tools, verbal terms, or other symbol-transmitted forms and types of activity at the external level, and later, the external form-appropriated processes become internal, mental processes” (Keiler 1983: 93).

Leontiev sought to conceive of psychological procedures as internal activities by their structure, which derive from external, practical activities, interpreting these, as does Berger/Luckmann (1966), as "a social world as a comprehensive and given reality". By actively confronting individuals with reality, making practical-concrete contact with this reality, this external activity is transformed into internal, mental images. However, prior to arriving at such internal processes, a person must acquire the object significations of the easiest items. Thus, the human being is in contrast to the animal,
open to the world and producing himself socially. “The objective reality of institutions is not diminished if the individual does not understand their purpose or their mode of operation… He must ‘go out’ and learn about them, just as he must learn about nature…” (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 59-61).

3.1.1.2 Appropriation as process

Thus, “appropriation” is understood as a process, which would not be possible without the specific human form of reflection, rather than starting at a certain “final state” of a successful appropriation, the latter then described as identification (von Seggern 2004). Identification as a target of appropriation is an almost unquestioned notion in spatial planning. Considered psychologically, identification means, however, that it is held in something or someone. Identification expresses a wish to hold on to, a wish to be one, and it is not autonomous. Instead, identification is a necessary first step in which only independency can follow. A successful appropriation in a development process means, therefore, that identification is repeatedly being touched upon, always taking place, and then released.

Hille von Seggern refers, in his interpretation of appropriation, to it as a continuous process, such as Chombert de Lauwe. For the latter, appropriation is the “result of the possibilities, moving freely in space, relaxing, feeling something, admiring, dreaming, learning something, doing something in accordance with their own needs, requirements, expectations and concrete ideas and producing these” (Lauwe 1977: 6). To appropriation as a process belongs the interactive social process, the relationship between human beings and space, and transformation over time.

3.1.1.3 Appropriation as the individual side of the representational process of production

As an activity-theoretical approach, the appropriation concept was further developed, especially by Klaus Holzkamp, and transferred to the present social conditions. In the individual’s development, it deals in terms of this perspective with two dimensions, among others, which are never biographically determinable: the abilities of “generalization of significations” and that of the “exceeding of immediacy” (Holzkamp 1983: chapter 8). Leontiev’s term “object signification” (as the objectification of social experience, which must be exploited in the appropriation process) has been abstracted
by Holzkamp up to the societal level of complex social relationships. In addition, Holzkamp emphasizes the class-specific differences in the perception and communication of object signification above the intermediary adults in the appropriation process. While Leontiev calls the relationship between child and adult “cooperation”, Holzkamp speaks of the "helping adults", to whose activities the child or adolescent is oriented.

Therefore, learning occurs as an individual appropriation. Although it deals with an individual process, it is determined by the social relations of the individual with the persons of his environment (Fig. 13). Nearly always, learning processes take place within a direct, or at least an indirect, social context (Deinert 2004: 11). Stefan Sting (2002) emphasizes the integration of the appropriation process in collectivity. He is concerned with common activity, with the experience of immediate collectivity and sociability. The process of appropriation is initiated for Sting in the form of a group and in social practice.

Figure 13: Individual and/or collective appropriation and learning.

3.1.1.4 Appropriation in contrast with adaptation

Creative human labor, at whose end stands the finished product, is determined fundamentally according to this view by the essence of the human being, which distinguishes him from the animal. “In the process of appropriation, however, human qualities, skills and behaviors historically formed are reproduced by the individual. Through appropriation takes place (…), what is obtained in animals by heredity”
Therefore, it becomes clear that the further development of the modern human being does not occur as it does for the animal by means of genetic adaptation, but rather, within the appropriation process by the reproduction and further development of the historically developed skills and behaviors within the society. Production and objectification of the human being, as well as active appropriation of social experience by the individual, are two aspects of the same process, which does not exist in the animal. Appropriation is thus understood as a categorical antonym of the objectification of human beings.

3.1.2 Appropriation takes place in spaces

“Appropriation” does not take place in vacuous space, but in the environment, in space, in the everyday lifeworld, under specific spatial conditions created by the structures of the society, which is determined and directed by the structures of real requirements and possibilities. “Because spaces, especially in urban areas, are not natural, but rather entirely elaborated, modified and structured, by human beings, they must appropriate these spaces and the significations embedded in them should be just like the objects and tools of the immediate environment” (Deinet 2009: 35).

This implies the possibility of fulfilling the conceived but, not explicitly explained by Leontiev, the direct relationship between appropriation and social environment. Holzkamp speaks in this context of different “locations” and “perspectives”, which are understood as “real spatial; the different object significations, through their appropriation surge different functions of perception and which are bound to the sensual presence of the perceptual object, therefore to a specific place in space and are consequently always and necessarily perceived through a certain perspective” (Holzkamp 1973: 267). Appropriation of the objective and personal signification of the object in urban space is also always spatially representational appropriation.

Hereby, we can distinguish between the marking of places and a “volatile”, ephemeral or temporary appropriation, in which users leave, if possible, no physical “footprints”, simultaneously acting as catalysts for larger and long-term changes or enrollment “only” in the memories of the persons present, taking part in the social production of space according to Lefebvre. The increased need of such a temporary appropriation of public spaces, including, for example, the public “showing off” of private
life settings exemplified by love-parades, marathons, and Christopher Day parades in the sense of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), certainly represents an opportunity for the democratic community (Frey 2004: 232).

Although appropriation theory refers only to the space with the idea of human action beyond the existing space, i.e., space is neither meant as a process nor as one to be constructed, but one that is rather provided. But, space is currently experienced as discontinuously constructed and moved; thus, at one place different spaces could evolve. Space manifests itself uniformly rather than non-uniformly, continuously rather than discontinuously, rigid rather than movable.

Consequently, the concept of appropriation as human realization for today’s social circumstances can only become significant if more recent evidences of spatial concepts or situations find their way into architectural spaces, especially when regarding the understanding of the appropriation concept as a learning concept. “The in space or spatial conditions (in terms of physical-material, social and subjective conditions of action) embedded in social significations are decrypted in the appropriation process, spaces are reinterpreted, thus, appropriation is to be understood as educational process in space, based on a broad understanding of education” (Deinet 2004: 8). The transfer of the activity-oriented concept of appropriation leads to a connection of appropriation and place, or of appropriation and the public square, as an essence of space, architecture and “ciudadanía”.

Nor can the applicability of the concept of “appropriation” be questioned for today’s “separated”, segregated, and fragmented cities. The colonization of the lifeworld in unconnected “islands” whose boundaries cannot be overcome without external assistance has, at present, limited the appropriation of each lifeworld considerably. Socio-spatial action problems within the urban context of cities such as Mexico City with difficulties, such as concern for public safety or the presence of exclusion processes in general, the enforcement of consumerism associated with lavish on-site monitoring systems, and promulgation through the mass media of experience and the growing dominance of visual culture influenced by new technologies in the age of new media, have resulted in a loss of self-activity but, at the same time, in the desire for social and in-the-system integrated spaces.
3.1.3 Appropriation through transformation of spaces (“Spacing”)

So far, and in accordance with a thesis of Ulrich Deinet, the term appropriation can be updated, in that it continues to refer to the active confrontation of the individual with his environment, but it could also simultaneously be the term applied to current theoretical changes regarding space, in order to create space through our own activity spaces (“Spacing”) and not only appropriating existing ones representationally (Fig. 14). The creative process of appropriation as an activity in the sense of the extension of the action area, the transformation and design of pre-existing situations and arrangements, as well as the testing of the extended repertoires of behavior and new skills in new situations, may serve to connect the “islanded” spaces of the lifeworld (Deinet 2009).

*Figure 14: “Spacing”.*

Source: Deinet 2009: 56.

Therefore, the spatial socialization of today comes into being as follows: An “islanded” socialization arises, which renders space experienceable as a single functional-bound island, which is connected by fast movements such as by driving a car or using public transport, i.e., it is linked and related with spaces through services of synthesis. The constitution of the space, which ideally happened in concentric, always growing circles, no longer exists in this alliance because, apart from the experiences of “islandization”, the forms of communication are changing as well (Löw 2001: 265).
In the field of urban design, within this context of an “island urbanism”, the term appropriation certainly fits into the prominent importance of movement and the processual constitution of space in the course of action, particularly emphasized by Löw (2001). “Appropriation” of the lifeworld means creating spaces. Then, we make spaces and spaces make us.

Appropriation always simultaneously includes affective, cognitive, symbolic, and esthetic processes in relation to other individuals or groups, as well as to objective relations of power, which are associated with the respective forms of appropriation and possession, in which identification, also understood as emotional appropriation, affiliation, social skills, motivation, and creativity are characterized above the active form of experience. Motoric, representational, creative, and media competences will be expanded.

Appropriation of urban space implies that the urban space is read, interpreted, and appropriated through moving in its own manner, without its appropriation. However, appropriation of public spaces may, in addition, lead to the exclusion of others, applying to all different social groups. But the facilitation of social participation, the chance of a more successful and fairer, democratic life is without alternatives. Appropriation strategies need to be discussed sociopolitically and represent more than being concrete, on-site. Only in this way can they contribute to the development of a real democracy (Lauwe, in: Arch+ 34 1977: 12, 6).

This approach tends to understand the public square as space for appropriation, therefore a learning space, as a place of encounter and citizenship (“ciudadanía”), in which appropriation is promoted as social learning process, and the process of actions derives in social competences, as well.

3.2 Place for encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship)

3.2.1 Social learning theory

Thus, we have seen that appropriation, based on the theories of Leontiev, can be used synonymously for a specific learning process. But what does “social learning” mean, what is “social learning”? The adjective “social” is considered, in the extended sense, as a synonym for “non-profit, helpful, and compassionate”. In colloquial language, “social” indicates the reference of a person to another or to various persons. This
includes the ability to care for others and to be able to empathize. It also means helping others and not just thinking of oneself. In contrast, someone who is antisocial acts and experiences everything as unimportant and asocial, this is one who lives unconnectedly, “on the edge” of society, one who cannot or is not willing to “integrate” himself into it.

We understand “learning” as the individual or collective acquisition of mental, physical, and even social knowledge, skills, and abilities, in which we distinguish between the deliberate (intentional) and casual (incidental) and implicit learning. Implicit learning is described in Psychology as the often unconscious or playful appropriation of skills and knowledge during the realization of an activity, for example, learning a language or acquiring the asset of the social behavior. From a psychological perspective, learning is seen as a process of the relatively stable transformation of behavior, thoughts, or feelings based on experience or newly gained insights and understanding. The perception of the environment is processed and one becomes aware through one’s own emotions.

The ability to learn is a prerequisite for being able to adapt to the conditions of life and the environment, to act in these meaningfully and to modify them if necessary according to one’s own interest. Therefore, the ability to learn is, for individuals, also a requirement for education, thus a reflected relationship with themselves, to others, and to the world. Consequently, social education is understood by “social learning” as the process of the acquisition of “social and emotional competencies”. It concerns the development of the ability of perception (for complex social connections), the strengthening of judgment, skills, developing contacts and communication abilities, empathy, and capacities for discretion, skills for cooperation, and conflict resolution, as well as the courage of one’s convictions. The capacity for social anticipation is considered an objective of social learning.

The term “social learning” was characterized in Psychology by Julian Rotter and Albert Bandura. In this, and especially in the investigations of Albert Bandura, his social learning theory and learning from the model during the course of social-cognitive learning theory are significant for the present work (Bandura 1976). The two theorists have in common the attitude additionally known as interactionism, according to which human behavior is determined not only by external stimuli nor solely by cognitive predispositions, but also through the interaction of situations, i.e., external stimuli and persons, whereby interactionism departs both from the behavioristic paradigm as well as from Cognitive Psychology. With the reintroduction of a cognitive perspective in the 1950s, researchers began to seek ways to integrate the behavioral and cognitive
Behaviorism denominated an epistemological concept or systematic approach, in order to study and explain human and animal behavior by scientific methods, i.e., without introspection or empathy, developing technoid social and cultural techniques. The initial impulse for behaviorism is based on John B. Watson's famous article “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It” (1913), relying exclusively on the so-called “objective method” through disassembling all behavior in stimulus and response, considering any activity as reaction. Behaviorism assumes that all behavior comprises either reflexes produced by a response to certain stimuli in the environment, or the consequences of that individual’s history, particularly including reinforcement and punishment, together with the individual’s current motivational state and controlling stimuli. Behaviorism not only offers classical or operant conditioning, with its emphasis on the application of consequences to influence behavioral change, but also a positively intended social utopia, as was, for example, planned by Burrhus Frederic Skinner in the novel “Walden Two”. Although Behaviorists generally accept the important role of inheritance in determining behavior, they focus primarily on environmental factors, while the physiological processes, which underlie observable behavior, are uninteresting for them.

On the other hand, Cognitive Psychology is a branch of Psychology that studies the cognition of humans, i.e., their mental processes that affect their behavior, dealing especially with cognition and knowledge such as attention, language use, memory, perception, problem solving, creativity, and thinking. Centering on the epistemological basis of cognostivistic approaches to cognition and concerned with the analysis of human processing of information, Cognitive Psychology emphasizes states and processes that are situated between reception of stimuli and subsequent experience and behavior. These include, for example, functionalities of neural representation or the adopted principle of the interdependence between intuition and reflection. Therefore, a basic knowledge of the field of Neurobiology is required for an explanation of relationships in Cognitive Psychology.

Based on the book “Social Learning and Imitation” by Miller and Dollard (1941), which still focuses on the behavioristic learning theory, Albert Bandura developed his theory of learning by means of the model (1962/1976) and learning through observation. There are several learning theories of observational learning, while the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura (1963) is considered the most prevalent, proposing that social learning first occurs cognitively through imitation and is then modified through the
application of consequences. In contrast to a purely behavioral approach, the social
cognitive theory proposes that individuals are active participants in their own learning.

Modelling is generally defined as observational learning, that is, one perceives the
behavior of other persons and projects and applies it with regard to one's own behavior,
this constituting the social learning theory, considered the third form of human learning,
developed chronologically after instrumental and operant conditioning as well as
classical conditioning. Other names for this manner of learning include vicarious
learning, imitative learning, identification learning, or role learning, whereby individual
designations may be employed differently, depending on the author.

Consequently, social learning processes are based, as is the concept of
appropriation in the sense of Leontiev's corresponding theory, on the observation of the
behavior of human examples. Thus, modeling or observational learning denotes a
cognitive or cognitivist learning theory (1979), in which, according to Bandura, the
human being recognizes, by modeling or observational learning, the behavior of role
models. The importance of observational learning consists of helping individuals to
acquire new responses by observing the behavior of others, in other words, people's
behavior could be determined by their environment, as Bandura believes in reciprocal
determinism in which the environment can influence people's behavior and vice versa.
First the human being perceives the behavior of other people, whereupon he projects it
into his own behavior (appropriation phase), and then applies it (execution phase),
imitating the observed, whereby the personal presence of these models is of secondary
importance. Thus, the learner transforms the observed into memory structures, also
structures new schemes, or accommodates and assimilates or extends these,
whereby he can activate the learned later through memory again. Therefore, the learned
can emerge within different contexts and be transferred to other areas.

Based on a series of studies during the 1960s and 1970s, Albert Bandura's social
cognitive learning theory stated, in 1977, that four stages must occur in the individual so
that learning through observing others' behavior can take place at all (Fig. 15):

1. Attention: The individual notices something in the environment. Observers cannot
learn unless they pay attention to what's happening around them, so that, in the first
place, what has been seen can be received. The attentional processes are influenced
by characteristics of the model, such as how much one likes or identifies with the
model, and by the characteristics of the observer, such as the observer's expectations
or level of emotional arousal.
2. Retention: The individual remembers what was noticed, so that memory processes are required to reflect a memory track that is seen and can be remembered afterward. This means that observers must not only recognize the observed behavior, but must also remember it at some later time. This depends on the observer’s ability to code or structure the information in an easily remembered form or to mentally or physically rehearse the model’s actions.

3. Initiation: In order for the observed to be reflected in an action, motoric reproduction processes are required, copying what was noticed. However, in order to realize this creative act, the observers must be physically and intellectually capable of producing it. In many cases, the observer possesses the necessary responses. But sometimes, reproducing the model’s actions may involve skills that the individual has not yet acquired: for example, it is one thing to carefully watch a circus juggler, but it is quite another to go home and repeat those kinesthetic acts.

4. Motivation: An action occurs only if the individual is accordingly motivated, i.e., the environment delivers a consequence that changes the probability that the behavior will occur again, such as reinforcement and punishment. This means, Bandura demonstrated that individuals modify their own behaviors based on the consequences that others receive. Individuals tend to model their behavior on persons who are similar to themselves, persons who are of a higher status than themselves, and persons who are either reinforced for their behavior or not punished for it.

*Figure 15: Four subsystems of social learning by Albert Bandura (1977).*

Thus, Bandura clearly distinguishes between learning and performance. Unless motivated, a person does not produce learned behavior. This motivation can derive from external reinforcement, such as the experimenter’s promise of reward in some of Bandura’s studies, or a parent’s bribe. Or, it can come through vicarious reinforcement, based on the observation that models are rewarded. High-status models can affect performance through motivation. For example, girls aged 11 to 14 years performed
better on a motor performance task when they thought that it was demonstrated by a high-status cheerleader rather than by a low-status model. Recognizing the importance of motivational and reinforcement processes, coaches also give pep talks, for example.

Through the careful observation of others, individuals learn numerous new behaviors, such as emotional reactions and how to use tools in their environments. However, according to Bandura’s social cognitive learning theory, observational learning occurs through observing negative and positive behaviors, which can affect the human conduct in many ways, with both positive and negative consequences. For one, it can teach completely new behaviors. It can also increase or decrease the frequency of behaviors that have been learned previously. Observational learning can even encourage behaviors that were previously forbidden, for example, the violent behavior toward the Bobo doll that children imitated in Albert Bandura’s study, or it can motivate the application of the method of contrasting. Observational learning can also influence behaviors that are similar to, but not identical with, those being modeled. For example, observing a model excel at playing the piano may motivate an observer to play the saxophone.

Likewise, in the mode of thinking of Historicism, which assigns major significance to a specific context, such as a historical period, geographical place, and local culture, human beings internalize the subjective reality through socialization within the framework of a specific environment, confronting themselves with spatial and architectonic situations. According to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, primary socialization (mostly through the parents) provides norms, roles, language, etc., and ends when the generalized concept of the other has been established in the consciousness of the individual. That is, the child learns from its significant others as mediators of the reality; thus, the process of the reference to significant others is important, the latter becoming the generalized other. Secondary socialization usually clings to the institutional context and to this generalized others as an institutional employee, based on “sub-world” institutions also, acquiring or appropriating role-specific special knowledge and other aspects of values, norms, and language. Processes at this level are highly diverse and sophisticated (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 201). The internalized “sub-worlds” in secondary socialization are generally partial realities that contrast with the “world of base” acquired in primary socialization.

Berger and Luckmann also introduced the term “social construction” into the social sciences, propagating a new beginning in the sociology of knowledge, examining how knowledge is developed, transmitted, and preserved, which would be performed by
analyzing the social construction of reality. By dealing with the concept of everyday knowledge, their work was strongly influenced by Alfred Schütz and his Lifeworld-concept, in addition to the appearance of references to the early anthropology of Karl Marx. Thus, from Marx proceeded the initial idea of the sociology of knowledge, in which the consciousness of the people is determined by their social being, bearing in mind that human thoughts are based on human activities (“work” in the broadest sense of the word) and also the social structures that result from this activity. Thus, one might understand “base” and “superstructure” most probably when viewed as continuous interaction between human activity and the world, which is solely produced by this activity (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 6).

Their central concept is that individuals and groups interacting in a social system create, over the time, concepts or mental representations of each other’s actions, that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other, and that these reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. In the process, meaning is embedded in society (Berger/Luckmann 1966), while the awareness in the everyday world becomes subjectively meaningful, intentional, and object-related.

The general body of knowledge is socially distributed and classified in semantic fields, and theoretical knowledge would be only a small, and by no means the most important, part of what passed for knowledge in a society. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world, the human organism will be further remodeled. In this dialectic, the humans produce reality - and themselves (ibid.: 195). “Society as part of a human world, created by human beings, inhabited by people and in incessant historical process creating again the people” (ibid.: 201).

Regarding the exposed social learning theory, shapes and dimensions, as well as the spatial boundaries, are extremely important, also, for Christian Norberg-Schulz, who refers to the psychological and pedagogical theories of Jean Piaget, his ideas of learning schemes, and of perceiving “Gestalt” (forms) (Piaget 1966). One of the most important learnings would be the esthetic value and, for designers and architects, to learn to read a place, to connect with it, in order to continue with its original spirit, its “genius loci”.

Today, social competence represents one of the key qualifications for the globalized world of the future, because more and more persons on the planet occupy rights, justice, security, and prosperity. We do live in a planet of information and learning through accumulation, as well, whereby social competence will assist in individual
democratically conscious development and in the evolution of the society. Consequently, social competence represents a prerequisite for the success of an “open society”, so that social learning can be understood as encouraging active and responsible participation of the society. Here, we also find the interface for “Democracy Learning”, a form of learning that has been promoted recently as “Civic Education” or “Education for Democratic Citizenship” by the EU within the framework of “lifelong learning” (Lisbon-objective) and the European Foundation of Identity (the construction of a European sphere).

3.2.2 Place for social learning

Cities are products of experiences, i.e., they are lived, condensing physical, intellectual, and creative energy. Thus, cities represent centers of communication and learning, contributing to the production of (social) knowledge. Therefore, people learn and form themselves not only in the traditional institutions such as the school or the university, but also in their prevailing living environments, especially in public spaces and urban squares, in addition localizing or territorializing the social learning. These areas are places of informal and “wild” learning, as they are denominated by Lothar Böhnisch and Wolfgang Schröer (2001), or “chaotic forms of learning” according to Karin Bock (2003), which significantly characterize the intentional learning processes. Therefore, informal forms of learning in non-institutionalized learning places move more and more into the focus, and the social environment is perceived as a learning field. In this manner, currently, terms such as experiential learning, learning in socialization, indirect learning, implicit learning, etc., i.e., forms of learning that take place outside of educational institutions, are recognizing the existence of multiple places of learning as well.

A “social learning place” represents a space for adventure, experience, and action, which implies learning processes at different levels: from motoric skills to political education; recognition, self-efficacy, self-esteem. A place of social learning is a place where one can observe, evaluate, and transform social conditions and social communication and study different attitudes, social processes, and cultural differences. Such as at the latest since Georg Simmel (1993), cities have been regarded as “tolerance machines” in urban sociology, because urbanity enables being strange or
different, leaving established roles\textsuperscript{2}, tolerance and dealing with otherness can be encouraged in public spaces, whereby acceptance of strangeness and difference might be processed reflexively. Thus, a social place of learning is also a place of learning of civilization, consideration for the weaker, as well as the getting-to-know of unequal speeds. Individuals learn to seize space, to position themselves in space, to appropriate space (Frey 2004).

In dealing with unfamiliar life situation, a place of social learning offers opportunities for the observation of behaviors and possibilities of contacts outside of the family, socially significant fields-of-action. The development of social competences, therefore, occurs in alternating groups or in dealing with strange people in more recent situations, and leads to an expansion (or limitation) of the space-of-action and the behavioral repertoire (3.1.1 Appropriation through transformation of spaces ("Spacing")).

Independency can be learned, contacts can be independently and creatively established. Thus, for example, relationships of urban life and therefore a connected public responsibility for the place can be learned through events, demonstrations, or similar parts of public life. A “social learning-place” offers new perspectives for one’s own life situations and social patterns of interpretation, processes of reflexive comparison, and new interpretations of stocks of experience.

“Education arises from motion” (Janson/Wolfrum 2008), i.e., the discovery fields of social learning places are, therefore, in the movement of people and the transport of goods. Thus, a place of learning is a place where social conditions and social communication can be observed, evaluated, and transformed, or where different attitudes, social processes, and cultural differences can be studied. In a manner of speaking, spaces and territories are understood as learning opportunities, because in these are embedded social meanings that have to be revealed by the subject and, respectively, provide places and spaces with a sense to children and young people as well as to adults, therefore opening up their lifeworld.

Referring to the pedagogic function of public spaces, Mark Francis speaks, in his manifesto for the design of “successful” public spaces, of a “learning effect through the environment” (Francis, in Selle/Havemann 2010: 615-618). Therefore, the public space would function as a “master-teacher”, in which we could collect life experiences. Here, competences could be purchased for the use of our environment and trust could be recovered in order to cope with other aspects of life as well.

Thus, our cities should offer more pleasure and challenges once more. The public square should take care of the “ideas of expanding one’s intellectual horizons, of experiment, adventure, discovery, surprise” (Bianchini/Schwengel 1991: 229). According to Francis, the discovery, pleasure, or challenges offered by street musicians, extravagant facades, and objects may arise through the use of a space. Also, Kevin Lynch impressively describes the costly attempt to make streets in the city short and elevators and escalators as comfortable as possible. Meanwhile, office workers at lunch time visit fitness clubs to keep themselves in shape (Fig. 16).

Figure 16: Barrier-free drive to a fitness club.


In addition, a space would be good if users would have direct influence on it and if it can be adapted to their needs, in that it would then be “their” space. This is based on a personal relationship and its appropriation could be intensified when users are constantly involved participating in the decision-making processes. The users themselves designing and supervising parks and gardens opens up a realization of “ciudadanía” (citizenship) has proved far more successful than those without participation. Further significant would be incorporated that the users could modify the space.
In conclusion, and in reference to Mexico City, a “social learning place” is defined as a “place of encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship)”, freely translated a first step toward a (urban) citizenry or civic culture, i.e., a meeting place and place for the confrontation of social actors, in which the diversity of groups is reflected, as well as the exchange of experiences and the tolerance of the other. Therefore, such a place of encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship) represents a place for the learning of social conditions and relationships, while promoting a democratic culture of learning, thus, democracy.

“The city is primarily square, agora, discussion, eloquence (...) People builds the house to live in it and people founded the city to leave the house and meet others who have also come out”\(^3\). “Life between the buildings offers the opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and comfortable way. (...) Being with other people, seeing them and hearing them, and receiving stimuli from them are positive experiences, alternatives to being alone. We are not necessarily with a determined person, but nonetheless, we are with others.”\(^4\)

Thus, the city is a place for encounter and the public space is a place that should make this possible: Figuratively and paraphrasing Jan Gehl, urban public squares become our “living rooms”\(^5\), so that a successful public space is a place where people “see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers” (Project for Public Spaces (PPS) 2015). Therefore, for Jane Jacobs 1993, i.e., the urban public square should provide social exchange and communication between people who know each other and between those who do not. Therefore, a condition of freedom is that you can meet in public, possibly even have to (Janson/Wolfrum 2008), whereby the diversity of a city is reflected in its public spaces, where exchange is produced and values transmitted.

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\(^3\) José Ortega y Gasset, quoted by Daniel Escotto Sánchez at his presentation: El espacio público como formador de ciudadanía (The Public Space As Generator of Citizenship), Seminario Permanente y Jornadas Culturales: “La Metamorfosis de la Merced. Reflexiones sobre el patrimonio cultural y el espacio público disputado” (Permanent Seminar and Cultural Days: “The Metamorphosis of the Merced. Reflections on the Cultural Heritage and the Disputed Public Space”), Round Table: “Espacios de Formación Ciudadana” (“Spaces for Civil Formation”), organized by the Mexican universities UACM, UNAM, Universidad Claustro de Sor Juana, and the UAM, at the Centro Cultural Casa Talavera, October 13, 2015.


\(^5\) Quotation from the Danish documentary film from the year 2012: The Human Scale, based on the urban design conception of the Danish architect and city planner Jan Gehl. The screenplay was written by Andreas Dalsgaard, who also directed the film. Available from: https://vimeo.com/162029805 (Accessed October 31, 2016).
Encounter is considered as the first step of informal, casual (incidental), or implicit, social learning; a learning within a connections of life. Informal learning is produced through the experiences of everyday life. “Every encounter is randomized,” notes Louis Althusser, in his beautiful, mysterious essay entitled “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” from the late 1970s. The encounter bestows “reality”, the yearning to change the order of things. The day after the swerve, after the encounter, nothing’s ever going to return to what it was, so that a “punctuating encounter” occurs (Merrifield 2013, in: Derive 2015). This is impossible to know in advance. So, the urban public square is a place for (coincidental) encounter and interaction, a space of cohabitation or coexistence, for exchange, for communication, as well as for manifestation, representing, on the one hand, a physical, tangible space for meeting and socializing, and on the other hand, a symbolic and intangible space full of symbols and imaginary, conforming the identity and culture of the people (Rojas 2007: 28). Therefore, the public space can function as a constructor of the identity of the society.

As a place for “ciudadanía”, the urban public square is a site where the full realization of citizenship is possible, either by coincidence or the divergence of interests, hopes, and social aspiration, applying models that privilege social diversity and the local culture, in order to provide democratic access to the city. Through its social dimension, the urban public space may be the scenario where citizens not only share their daily lives, but it also be where they can organize themselves and implement actions for the common good. Therefore, the public square comprises one of the fundamental urban elements for promoting urban justice, a factor of social redistribution and, in turn a computer of urbanism with a vocation for both physical and social association and integration (Borja 2004).

On interpreting the urban public square as a place for appropriation, in which appropriation is promoted as social learning process, the public square could represent an excellent learning-place thanks to the social conditions and circumstances that are generated there, and where deep democratic notions related with personal responsibility and self-help are also produced, these reflected in the behavior of the citizens who utilize the urban public square (Grzimek 1983), learning or rather “teaching” in the sense of the realization of “ciudadanía” “constructing citizens”. According to Henri Rousseau, the human being has three “master teachers”: nature (the environment); things, and people, whereby all of these master teachers come together in the public space. Thus, learning occurs “situationally, locally, temporary, is performative, participatory” (Schuster 2013), so that different forms of learning are
distinguished (Fig 17.):

Figure 17: Scheme of social learning forms in the public space.

Learning from the other(s)
- Handling of strangeness
- Tolerance

Learning with the other(s)
- Contact and communication skills
- Cooperative competences
- Conflict management
- Empathy, solidarity, civic courage, social anticipation

Learning from the place ("genius loci")
- Taking space
- Positioning in the place
- Extension of practical competences
- Identification and identity

Learning from the other(s)

The basic model of social interaction in the everyday world is the vis-à-vis situation, in which people in action, reaction, and counter-reaction, interact with each other (reciprocity). The other is to be perceived simply as another subject in its subjective character, and is the model for their self-perception as a mirror image. Vis-à-vis interaction is dynamic, fluid, and flexible. The reality of everyday life is maintained because it is concretized in specific routines, which constitutes the essence of institutionalization. Beyond this, however, the reality of the everyday life is continually reaffirmed in the interaction of the individual with the other (Berger/Luckmann 1966).

A “social learning place” implies that one can meet the other because, only then, can one also learn from the other in terms of intercultural learning and understanding, as also Simmel emphasized the role of the stranger as an importer of new ideas (Simmel 1992: 765). Promoting the diversity of a city and open, democratic access to its public spaces, or the concept of the square as a place of encounter and for
“ciudadanía" (citizenship) includes “the concrete, physical experience of the presence of other, different cultural manifestations and confrontation with the different and, in the same physical allocated space, opinions are important for the development of a social intelligence and for the formation of a judgment. Personal perceptions and direct confrontation are an antidote against role clichés and stigmatization" (Reijndorp/Hajer 2001: 12). By dealing with the other(s), observing, listening to the other(s), to different opinions and perspectives, cultivating the handling of strangers and of strangeness, which should be made possible in the square, tolerance can be learned, regarding of the differences existing in a society.

Learning with the other(s)
Social interaction, developing something in community, i.e., collaborative actions, leads to social learning with regard to a cooperative and participatory learning. Dialogues and discussions facilitate communication, but also, so do struggle and conflict among residents, policy makers, or professionals from the building sector and architecture. This is because an interdisciplinary approach in the realization and planning of projects with cooperation among professionals in urban and landscape planning and architecture, the administration and contractors (and the residents) is desirable, identifying needs, activating, winning people over to projects, discussing problems with them, and developing possible solutions are provided. In addition, it fosters participation in projects regarding the design of the entire public urban space, planning with “everybody”, but also in everyday life, it facilitates communication, in order to create contacts, as well as cooperation, are generated, in addition to empathy, discretion, awareness of the solitary individual in the society, helping the other(s), the weaker, to arise, and the development of civic courage and social anticipation as well.

Learning from the place
Places do have their own life and specific character, which make them recognizable and distinguish them, and from which we can learn by engaging in confrontation with these characteristics, with the self-logic of places or their “genius loci". By identifying the peculiarities of a place, people learn to situate themselves through staging, localization, or self-expression. Thus, there should be various possibilities for individual and groups to position themselves in the public space and to stage themselves, for example, through the creation and the unlocking of niches, platforms, “audience spaces”, protected areas, etc.
Through observation, individuals may detect physical spatial elements for assembly, meeting, and monitoring at appropriate places for encounters or peer meeting points in the urban public space for communication. People learn supporting motoric, figurative (representational), and creative forms of the usage of a place, for example, in the socially integrative selection of a site, or through participation in the planning and construction or reutilization of meeting places as physically tangible spatial segments for sportive, creative, and design patterns of usage.

Positioning in the place constitutes space by means of a variety of possibilities for placement, for example, through structural elements that allow rational positioning and linkages. On the other hand, positioning, locating, or placing enable communicative processes among the members of a society. In this fashion, individuals learn to live with the space and transforms or adapts it to their necessities. Thus, the space also “teaches” in relation to its inhabitants or users, leading to an extension of practical skills in the sense of “Spacing”. (3.1.3 Appropriation through transformation of spaces (“Spacing”).) Further, the designability or mutability of a space leads to identification and identity, modifying, designing, the creating of a place, so that flexibility, variability of the spatial offer movable and versatile, usable physical-material space segments are welcome.

As a result, learning from the other(s) (intercultural learning and understanding), learning through common actions (social interaction, collaboration, and participatory learning), as well as learning from the place (confrontation with the peculiarities of the place, “genius loci”), convert the urban public square in a place for social learning, based on the spatial appropriation of a space (Fig. 18).
Figure 18: “Appropriate your Square”, graffiti, Plaza Aguilta.

Source: Courtesy by Joaquin Aguilar Camacho\textsuperscript{6}, 2012.

\textsuperscript{6} Cultural promotor of Casa Talavera/ UACM.
4. PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY
4.1 Social-spatial dimension of the public square in the Mexico City megalopolis of today

4.1.1 The urban element of the public square in Mexico City as a historic reference

In contrary to the Agora or the Forum in Western civilization, in early pre-Columbian cities in America, such a square did not exist. Consequently, it is more accurate to speak of a “ceremonial center” characterized by its outstanding ceremonial function, responding to economic and social needs. The ritual and the place comprised a duality representing the harmony between heaven and humans. Therefore, this center was characterized by two main functions, religious and political, as well as a third, less important activity, economic, while the configuration of the physical environment was a determining factor for rooting people to the place. Thus, the unique element of the “ceremonial center” is based on the mythology of the Mesoamerican settlements and consisted of an outdoor place confined by walls. The ritual of the place together with the nearby temples and buildings represented the order of the universe.

An outstanding example of the pre-Columbian, pre-Hispanic epoch in Mexico is Tenochtitlan, an Aztec “altepetl”\(^1\), the precursor of today’s Mexico City. It was the largest city in Pre-Columbian America, founded by the Aztecs in 1325, captured and, for the most part, destroyed by the Spanish in 1521 (Fig. 19). Tenochtitlan consisted of a majestic balance of Mesoamerican typology and included the ensemble of temples and buildings with pyramidal bases that integrated the so-called “Templo Mayor”, with a central void that signified the square. This sacred enclosure was also used for ball games, determining the intersection of two major urban axes and forming two large roads that divided the city into four sectors. In this fashion, the large central square conjugated the built space and lent harmony to the whole.

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\(^1\) The “altepetl” is one of the most important cultural concepts of Mesoamerica. It is understood as a territorial, ethnically based political entity, in which Mesoamerican indigenous peoples were organized socially and politically in the Post Classic (1200–1521), representing a city-state.
After its demolition, the reconstruction of Mexico City such as the majority of cities in Latin America responded to the “Laws of the Indies”, dictated by King Philip II of Spain during the time of the colony in 1573, regulating the foundation and design of new cities and the squares themselves in the process of colonization and its consolidation in America. These ordinances subdivided the city into diverse social stratifications, regulating the selection of the site, the right-angled grid layout based on squares formed by streets and blocks, the orientation, the shape of the walls, the distribution of the building plots in the countryside and in the city, the style of the buildings, and even the shape of the central square, representing a practical manual for rapid implementation of the model.

In the model, the “Plaza Mayor” was the geometric, vital, and symbolic center of Latin- American cities in the sixteenth century. The square was well inserted into the urban grid, so that, usually, it was simply the result of leaving one block undeveloped. Naturally, there were some variations in the location of the square in the different cities; for example, even if the city was located next to the seashore, the square was always considered the generative element defining the form and the trace of the city, respecting the reticulated urban grid of the pattern shaped by streets and blocks. At the same time, the square was the center, where all urban life came together. It was the meeting place for the city's residents and the fundamental structural element for all of the social functions, an open space converged by roads and the point of maximal accessibility at which all of the city's inhabitants came together in an exchange, deriving from the exercise of power, to those of diversion and recreation. Thus, there
were two parallel dynamics of convergence, corresponding to users of different social strata, and also to users with different motivations: that of entertainment and another of the cultural identity accompanied by traditions, and that of consumption and the encounter.

Therefore, the condition of the “Laws of the Indies” was represented morphologically by a concentric belt around a central area. At the beginning, squares functioned as centers of colonial control, supports for expansion, and linkage with ruling monarchies in their phase of primitive accumulation, serving as the scenario for the location of other architectural elements employed for structuring and sociospatial prioritizing (cathedral, city councils, housing, and convents). Under this criterion, the structure of the Iberoamerican city emerged from the center, where the main square of the settlement was positioned; its growth was centrifugal and free outward the exterior (Camacho 2009, in: Espinosa Dorantes, in: Göbel 2013: 34).

In this respect, around the square, public administration buildings, such as those for religion, were located. Here governing was conducted, justice served, business carried out, and all of the festivities celebrated, bestowing the square with the character of the community center. Therefore, the typical arrangement of urban elements in the city included the church, the (bishop’s) palace, and the convents situated opposite the town hall (council), the royal houses toward the north (tribunals, customs offices, mints, arsenals). The south of the city was occupied by the palaces of the most distinguished citizens, thus providing an orientation from the center toward the periphery, where the families of lower social strata resided. It is noteworthy that major squares or “Plazas Mayores” in America were always larger than those in Spain, and the Zócalo or “Plaza de la Constitución” (Constitution Square), Mexico City’s main square, was the largest of them all (Fig. 20). No square in Europe could be compared with the Zócalo in terms of extension.
In eighteenth-century America, the colonial model was completed, remodeling the squares, so that the Spanish city maintained its overall plan, its urban fabric, and landscape as well as its dominant features, until the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large investments were made, and consequently, the urban situation also begun to change in Latin America: new elements associated with production appropriated the city, transforming urban structure and image and a new concept for the city arose as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The urbanization process of diversifying cities marked some new concepts of urban life in Mexico as well, changing the conception of the square in the nineteenth century. Thus, commerce was multiplied and many celebrations, formerly held in the central square, were relocated to spaces destined for each of these, for example, trade, supply, bullfights, etc., yielding place and space for other types of financial, administrative, and communal activities, affording a new character and image of the square. Therefore, transformation of the square consisted mainly of liberation from some of its functions and the improvement of its image in its esthetic and ornamental appearance. The creation of fountains, kiosks, benches, gardens, and the planting of trees was required to designate space exclusively for walking and the enjoyment of the community, making use of the so-called French style.
In consequence, forty new residential neighborhoods appeared, such as the colony Santa Maria la Rivera, built on urban-design principles, which included the widening of streets in order to insert tramlines, and “traditional” kiosks emerged in their centers, this characterizing the city’s colonies until the present time (Fig. 21). In this manner, kiosks generated an attractive focal point for coexistence and relationships, the music of diverse groups delighted the ears of the municipal audience, and the walk around the square became the obligatory ritual for observing, for being seen, and for social initiation. Thus, the square became the community’s affective element, representing a physical and cultural reference, which also provides orientation and reflects history.

Figure 21: Kiosco Morisco in Santa María la Ribera.

4.1.2 The public square of contemporary Mexico City

As a consequence of the widely vaunted “Barcelona Modell”, recently the public space has gained great strength in public policy in many Latin American cities as well. The urban public square in Mexico exhibits its particular expressions, and its history proves it. Three stages are notable in the existence of the public square, which derives from pre-Hispanic and ceremonial centers of pre-Colonial civilization: its different expressions, and its presence and specific role during the Colony and subsequently in contemporary times.
The existing process for recovering public spaces in Mexico City, the so-called “revitalization” of the public space in the Mexico City Historic Center, first began with programs in the 1990s. Between 1997 and 2001, the Plan Estratégico para la Regeneración y Desarrollo Integral del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México (Strategic Plan for the Regeneration and Integral Development of the Historic Center in Mexico City) was developed, which proposed a series of actions for the regeneration of housing in the Historic Center. Among others, we find the amplification and diversification of housing offers, the revitalization of residential usage in patrimonial buildings, emergency interventions on buildings of high structural risk, and the rehabilitation of public parks in popular sectors. These also included the expropriation of uncultivated land and empty, ruinous buildings in order to constitute a territorial reserve assigned to housing programs for the middle class and social housing for the lower-income population (Monterrubio 2011).

In August 2001, the Consejo Consultivo del Centro Histórico (Advisory Board for the Historic Center) was established to promote planning actions for the recovery of the city’s Ancient Quarter. In this manner, through the cooperation of the Government of Mexico City, the Federal Government, the universities, the private sector, and the civil society, projects for the area’s revitalization, such as the rehabilitation of buildings and the recovery of public spaces and social housing projects were undertaken. In consequence, the original appearance and use of the zone have changed very significantly.

The revitalization process of the Mexico City Historic Center is now in a consolidation phase. To facilitate this, the Plan Integral de Manejo del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México (PIMCH) (Comprehensive Management Plan for the Historic Center of Mexico City) was installed in 2011 and last until 2016. In fact, the PIMCH is budgeted to 2020 under the following rubrics: conformation of pedestrian zones; rehabilitation of streets, squares, and public parks; maintenance of public spaces and green areas; cleaning; rehabilitation of emblematic buildings; rearrangement of facades; supervision, and evaluation and execution of the plan. Revitalization of public spaces is being realized in a progressive manner, and renovation of the Historic Center includes the intention to maintain the spaces and keep them alive in permanent fashion.

Thus, the so-called city “to rethink”\(^2\) in globalization led to, in Mexico City, a

\(^2\) Daniel Escotto Sánchez, General Coordinator of the Authority of Public Space (Autoridad del Espacio Público) (AEP) of the Government of Mexico City during the administration of Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, in his lecture “Buenas prácticas urbanas en la Ciudad de México hoy” (“Good Urban Practices in the Mexico City of Today”), presented on September 20, 2012 within the framework of the Colloquium “Diversas miradas a la plaza pública en la ciudad hoy en día”
“successful” revitalization of the public space in the Historic Center as a result of the Programa de Mejoramiento (Program to Improvement) promoted by the Government of the Federal District. Recent examples include the following: rehabilitation of the Plaza de la República (Republic Square) (Fig. 22), comprehensive renovation of the Alameda Central, and the rehabilitation of Plaza Garibaldi and Calle (Street) Regina as the first successful case of pedestrianization, demonstrating a broad spectrum of recovery of public spaces that takes effect as a catalyst for the gentrification of the adjacent areas.

Figure 22: New public life in the Plaza de la República (Republic Square).

Currently, the supposed “revitalization” to reactivate the sense of the square as a meeting place rather devitalizes the Historic Center by removing the lively street stalls - of informal tradespersons, who had in fact appropriated the space urban – in order to be more decent uses, which would be convenient for the bourgeoisie or the tourists, but less lively. Thus, many revitalization efforts appear to be directed only toward minimizing the number of demonstrators, street vendors, street performers, and other

("Different Perspectives on the Public Square in the City of Today") held at UAM-Azcapotzalco, Mexico City.
“vague” individuals to polish up the city’s image, despite that “public domain” implies that there should also be space for these groups (Reijndorp/Hajer 2001).

Cities, buildings, and landscapes are adapted to satisfy the “tourist’s eye”; thus, cities literally intend to refine their image through such a social political revitalization, reorganizing the public space. Motivation for this is based on the understanding that the public space would be more pleasant for spending time in if it were less disorderly. But, on the other hand, this process of “touristification” implies a displacement of “undesirable” groups.

At the same time, the concept of the public square as a free surface between buildings has been transformed and was replaced in the process of the “megalopolization” of Mexico City. The great metropolis has passed from a “compact model”, involving spatial organization around a clearly defined centrality, to the configuration of a diffuse urban fabric without well-defined limits organized around “several centers” (Duhau/Giglia 2004: 168). The urban reality no longer represents an autonomous unit, a recessed center ensconced between the surrounding fields, but it now rather specifies a condensation zone around crossing points or “links” of communication routes (Fig. 23). The set of these communication paths - by land, sea, air, roads, as well as electric cables or telephones, and even Hertzian waves -, which currently transport people and goods as well as energy and information, forms a spatial network whose flows comprise the principal structures of the city (Dupuy 2014).
The explosion of the New Technologies of Communication (NTC), the modern telephone and its many derivatives, the computer and its ability process information instantly, telecommunications and its huge streams, and electronic displays and their inter-relational function transform the relationship of humans with the space and with the territory, generating a new organization of space based on the territorial notion of the network. In this city of networks, telematics (mobile phones, the Internet, etc.) allow all types of relationships (with everybody and everything). Furthermore, in many cases, these relationships are instantaneous, representing an island of order in a metropolitan chaos of improvised and juxtaposed networks, in which city centers have in fact disappeared from everyday life and its experiences.

At the same time there arise the problems that are of concern today, such as overpopulation, lack of resources, the increase of crime, and urban and ecological deterioration, a problematic promoting the privatization of the public space. From that moment on there emerges what several authors have denominated the “crisis of the city” (1.1.1 Crisis of the city and the urbanity) and the public space, as a result of the economic, political, and commercial interests of the global society.

Consequently, the dividing line between the public and the private is blurred, amplifying the margin of the space conventionally understood as “the public”. The closed and open is dislocated, the constant and the immovable is transmuted into
temporary, fleeting, or even ephemeral spaces, the traditional and the customs are displaced by the novel activities and requirements of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), all due to the speed of life in the twenty-first century and the technology that redefines new tendencies for the consumption of space. The new squares approach the ambiguous, because they do mix between the public and the private, either by their regulations imposed by their real owners or by the authorities responsible for their care and safety.

So, the evolution of the concept of public spaces involved the transformation of an open, free, exterior space, suitable for mobility and development for collective needs, a complementary and one in dialogue with the private space. All this conspires to generate the scenario for public life, up to a set of public buildings and architectural and natural spaces of private properties, destined through nature, uses, or affectation for the satisfaction of collective urban needs that transcend the limits of individual interests of the inhabitants. Thus, the urban public square of today represents an urban area that is spatial, social, cultural, organizational, communicational, and environmental that, treated systemically, promotes the achievement of civic integration for the collective benefit.

In Mexico City as well as in the majority of the metropolises of Latin America and the rest of the world, rapid urban growth in the second half of the twentieth century related with fragmentation of the agglomerations has presented profound economic, social, and spatial inequalities, engendering enormous poverty and exclusion. The processes of inequality, injustice, and inequality possess a spatial dimension, resulting in a fragmented, chaotic, disperse city that lacks of a figure of itself. In view of this, Fernando Chueca Goitia said that the contemporary city is characterized by its disintegration (Redondo Gómez, in Göbel 2013: 30). Likewise, the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND) (National Development Plan) 2013–2018, under its Objective 2: “México Incluyente” (“Inclusive Mexico”) ratified a diagnosis of territorial and socially fragmented cities provided by urban expansion, which would imply problems of accessibility for certain sectors of the population, high levels of exclusion and social inequality and an abandonment of property within the cities, and social disintegration.

Based on the urban model described in the Charter of Athens, which was heavily criticized over time given its spatial and social fragmentation, urban projects implemented in the metropolises have fragmented the urban space of the cities in the

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3 Evolution of the concept of the public space by Maritza Rangel Mora of the Centro de Investigaciones sobre el Espacio Público (Center for Research on Public Space) (URBIS) of the Faculty of Architecture and Design, Universidad de Los Andes (University of Los Andes) (ULA), Mérida, Venezuela, shed of the presentation “Aproximaciones a los lugares indentitarios urbanos para la formación ciudadanía” (“Approaches to Urban Places of Identity for the Formation of Citizenship”), April 6, 2016, VI Seminario Espacios Públicos y Cultura Ciudadana 2016 (VI Seminar Public Spaces and Civic Culture 2016), ULA Mérida.
contemporary context regarding the tendency of the concentration of specialized places; this is due to the presence of external factors such as globalization, giving rise to increasingly fragmented, confused, and privatized territories. Similarly, about 60% of the urban area is localized on the periphery of the Mexico City Metropolitan Area (MCMA), occupied by periurban areas, where mainly residential-type buildings are located (Fig. 24), whose purpose is to accommodate the majority of the population residing in them. Therefore, “a lot reside in the core yet live outside of the periphery, feel the periphery inside themselves, identify with the periphery.” (Merrifield, in: Derive 2015: 9-14).

Figure 24: Arial view of the city of Nezahualcóyotl.


The periphery of today with its peripheral housing, built spontaneously by autoconstruction or the newer “fraccionamientos” or residential housing units for different social segments of the population, built by private housing developers, will be “the center of the future”, forming part of the new, previously explained centralities. The center-periphery dichotomy dissolves. City centers are no longer necessarily the core within the field, but the “condensations” are comparable with the new concentrations (Hajer/Reijndorp 2001: 32). An important part of the urban dynamic has shifted toward the edges of existing cities and those of completely new concentrations being established there.

Exclusion is a rather dramatic term that includes, as paradigm, poverty covering many levels, including economic, social, political, or cultural. The social inequality gap
excludes the majority of the population living in Mexico City from the opportunities that a city should offer equally to all. Thus, exclusion is understood as segregation, “the degree of spatial proximity of the families belonging to a same social group and its distance from other (ethical, racial or socioeconomic) groups” (Rubalcava/Schтеingart 2012). The relationship between global urbanization and the traditional city is nearly non-existent, which causes inequality, economic exclusion, and local culture (García Canclini 2000), leading to dual, divided cities with respect to their spatial and social structure, the latter dramatically reflected in the use of public space. Social inequality prevails, and opportunities appear to be limited to certain social groups. Because of spatial social segregation, a vivid space is “purloined” from the city’s inhabitants.

Aside from the phenomena of privatization, fragmentation, polarization, and territorialization, this highlights the insecurity, combined with the sensation of exclusivity and the exclusion of certain sectors of the population, exacerbated over the past three decades, promoting the appearance of new physical forms in Mexico City, primarily in the construction of housing. It is this atmosphere of insecurity that has consolidated this trend of edification, not only regarding housing, but also of spaces destined for recreational services, leisure, and even sports. “A fear of the other is perceived, a sign of insecurity in the city, whereas the middle, upper middle and upper classes began cloistering themselves in residential complexes and shopping malls, in order to live a limited life-style restricted on the inside, with the imaginary to be safe, and the outside, understood as unsafe”, affirmed Jesus Enrique de Hoyos Martínez (2011). This tendency is the result of a very strong social imaginary: The danger, caused by violence and insecurity, and fed by the mass media, which daily repeats that the idea of going outside into the street, the park and the garden is dangerous.

Therefore, the process of the transformation of public space has generated countless reflections regarding the conditions developed through the interaction of different factors and actors, which constitutes the public life. The lack of security leads to the need to hide out in the house in a search for protection, the house preferably only a fifteen-minute distance from the city. Meanwhile, the social inequality and the societal structure, as well as the insecurity, become the best sale pitches for real estate speculators who sell safe places. Therefore, an image is created that interprets the public space as a “container” filled with everything that is not desired, i.e., a place where the bad, the dangerous, and the unsafe are located and that is defined by the failure of others. Thus, public spaces appear to intimidate the population with fear.

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4 Professor and researcher at the Faculty of Architecture and Design of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (Autonomous University of the State of Mexico).
Private housing developers, for whom segregation is the rule, plan squares only as areas for traffic and preferably for the automobile. Housing constructors, infrastructure companies, financial systems, banks, security cooperatives, and governmental agencies have, together, in reality built anti-cities. It seems that the policy seeks to institutionalize the abolition of social interaction and to counteract social democratization. The method is simple, in that rejection of the public space and the urban square is the norm (Fig. 25). However, the abandonment of interaction and social exchange not only harm the public space, but also the cultural dimension of the city. Therefore, security is observed by urban sociology as the first requirement for accessibility toward spaces of public utility (Siebel 2006, in: Selle/Havemann 2010: 24).

Figure 25: Closing up public space.

In cities of today such as the Mexican megalopolis, there exist forms that deny the contact and exchange of people and activities. The lack of diversity excludes any possibility of interaction: uniformity without mixture, monotony without differences, expansion without urban points of references, and density without areas of compensation are characteristic of speculative urban growth. Urban public spaces are advertised as demonstrative cultural-consumption spaces. The boundaries between public and private spaces are blurred and are marked by the actors involved.

5 General coordinator of the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority of the Public Space) from 2009 to 2012.
However, it appears that the cell phone, the Internet, and globalization have not made of the square an unnecessary place, but they have rather increased its importance as a real, physically experienceable, and relatively static place, while digital structures became ubiquitous: “This virtual space does not replace the physical space, but will function as an interface of it” (Mäenpää 2002, in: Selle/Havemann 2010: 55). This means, by navigating in real spaces, virtual worlds and digital communication are employed, either by arranging an appointment with friends, ordering purchases, finding unknown addresses, and organizing actions and demonstrations.

4.1.3 New typologies

We live today in a completely different world. Thus, novel phenomena have appeared and new concepts are needed as well. With the transformations of form and urban structure, the public space has also been modified, defining new roles for and forms of the public square in contemporary society. While “traditional” squares were closely linked to a use, whether for presentation of a religious or political power or for commercial market activity, today many squares do not completely possess a specific use any more; the function or the shape does not characterize the squares, but rather the “place” itself. Incompletely limited spaces can be interpreted as squares as well, i.e., both historically created squares in the classical sense as well as so-called “new” squares, which share the aspiration in common to create a pleasant atmosphere for assembly and the encounter, the desire to build decent places where people can meet or just be. This was possible thanks to the shift of planning toward the pedestrian, a global tendency currently shifting slowly to Mexico City, as well. This means, the reassessment of the individual over the suffocating and noisy street traffic.

Therefore, on the one hand, the alleged loss-of-function, evacuation, abandonment, and withdrawal of the private are lamented and, on the other hand, people speak of a “new positive attitude toward the city”, the spaces required, an animated urban life, an “exodus to the public”, and much more, which is reflected in Mexico City through the “successful” revitalization of public space with a “traditional” notion of centrality (Dupuy 2014) in the Historic Center. The latter is the result of 15 operational years of the “rescue” of public space, promoted by Mexico City governments headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Marcelo Luis Ebrard, and Miguel Ángel Mancera of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) (Party of the Democratic Revolution), all of these with a leftist political ideology.
During this time, a multitude of urban remodeling projects were carried out, generating “new” squares and parks. These projects were based on the existing, reordering architectural or functionally public space, rather than cleaning it, inserting additional unique attractions in order to improve the image of Historical Center and create “new public spaces for a new public life” (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000, Escotto Sánchez 2012); among others, we may observe the rehabilitation of Plaza de la República (Republic Square), the project of the Rehabilitación Integral (Comprehensive Renovation) of the Alameda Central, the rehabilitation of Plaza Garibaldi, and the transformation of streets in the Historic Center into a pedestrian system, with the improvement of streets and sidewalks. Therefore, streets such as Corridor Francisco A. Madero or Calle Regina became cultural commercial axes or “linear squares”, focused primarily on consumption, which led to the zone’s gentrification.

At the same time, the Programa de Recate de Espacio Públicos (PREP) (Program for the Rescue of Public Spaces) (SEDATU 2013) also includes these spaces that, due to their character of abandonment, are considered “urban voids”. Places are marked by identity, social relations, and history (Augé 1995: 45), and “non-places” possess no real properties and are difficult to define in social or historic terms: “The space of ‘non-place’ creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.” (ibid.: 103). “Non-places”, “empty spaces”, or “urban voids” are also a matter of great significance and importance for urban studies. “Urban voids” are understood as “the spaces that are the involuntary result of destruction, cleaning and abandonment, which can be described as open, empty or unoccupied; these inadvertent spaces possess a high degree of flexibility, as well as a high degree of public visibility for the activities inserted into the surrounding environment (these empty spaces open steps for opinion and creativity in discernment regarding their most optimal and appropriate use)” (Smith 2008: 217).

These “urban vacuums” tend to deteriorate the overall condition of the welfare of the locality by being used as clandestine garbage dumps or improvised housing units for homeless persons, with the lack of adequate surveillance and security, and they even present highly noxious proliferated vegetation. Therefore, projects to rescue empty (residual or unused) public spaces were installed, such as Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) or Parques de Bolsillo (Pocket Parks).

Thus, the project Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) emerged in 2009 as part of a program of the Federal District for recovering abandoned public spaces for the benefit of the population. Based on a new model of occupation of the urban space, “Public-Private Partnership” (PPP), it was intended to recover 71 of the 74 Bridge Underpasses
of the Circuito Interior, which currently exist in Mexico City, with the Bajo Puente Juan Escutia pilot project of the program in general (Fig. 26).

*Figure 26: Bajo Puente Juan Escutia.*

In the same manner, in order to transform remaining or underused urban spaces into recreational and enjoyable areas for the citizens, the Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda (SEDUVI) (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing) and the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority for Public Space) initiated the program denominated “Parques de Bolsillo” (“Pocket Parks”) for Mexico City (Fig. 27). Public Pocket Parks are defined as “small remaining, urban or vial spaces, underused or abandoned (that are) converted into spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the community” (SEDUVI 2014: 16) and are characterized by small dimensions of less than 100 and not exceeding 400 m². They entertain the main objective of improving the quality of life of their users and of the area where they are located, generating enhancements to the urban image on a smaller, but visible, scale (SEDUVI 2014: 15). In this respect, there emerged, for example, Parque de Bolsillo del Zócalo (Pocket Park Zócalo), an area formed as a peninsula located in the immediate periphery of the Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square), the central square par excellence for all Mexicans in the Historic Center of the megalopolis. It was inaugurated on April 15, 2013 as the first of 154 planned parks to be constructed in the Federal District.
Further, this has been established with commercial centers or plazas ("Shopping Malls"), a model for North America in the incipient globalization of Mexican society, which operates with the power of images, generating, with an elevated effort, the atmosphere of a successful global economic model. Therefore, this has transformed the role of the public space into that of a workplace, which includes the market or the famous “tianguis” (open-air, temporary flea markets) as a specific feature of Latin America, although coexistence between client and merchant is undoubtedly reduced in the malls. The latter appeared in Mexico in the 70s and 80s as a result of globalization. Today, their goods for sale are no longer confined only to the middle and upper social strata. This means that the phenomenon of the so-called commercial centers or plazas can be seen as a typology for all social classes of the city, with different commercial orientations and sizes, with a trend toward economic offer of a capitalist character. In these new spaces of socialization of privatized use, there are shops and services of all kinds and entertainment for varied incomes.

Besides, these plazas or malls operate as a substitute for the public space even if the architecture does not exhibit any relationship with its urban environment with respect to shape and size. They are like the airports of the “generic city” described by Rem Koolhaas, abstracted from the place, “without distinctive features” and the same worldwide, i.e., in Japan, the United States, or Mexico. Therefore, the corporate identity of international inspiration is in the foreground; thus. The modern commercial centers
of our times not only contribute to the spatial fragmentation, but also to the loss of the social and architectural identity of the cities.

Undoubtedly, the transformation of the public square in semi-public or privatized commercial spaces does possess clear social costs in terms of democratic access and public responsibility. However, the level of acceptance of these exclusive shopping centers, monitored business cities (Central Business Districts(CBD)), gated communities, residential areas segregated by social classes, squares, and enclosed monuments, etc., are largely due to the problem of insecurity. Thus, Shopping Malls are imitations of the public (Fig. 28), while the population perceives and uses them as such in substitution of the “traditional” parks and squares. Therefore, in the strict sense, these “new public squares” are not really public, but rather “pseudo” public spaces; nevertheless, they are experienced by the majority of people as such. The decline of public open space - the plazas, squares, parks, and streets that are the “classic” elements of the traditional public realm - and the public life (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000) or their artificial reconstruction in commercial centers (“Shopping Malls”) “is very representative” of the present times.

*Figure 28: Reinterpretation of the public spaces in the interior of the Shopping Mall Town Center “El Rosario” in form of a street or passage, flanked with shops.*

The urban public spaces of today are advertised as demonstrative cultural consumption spaces, so that the commercial centers create caricatures of “urban centers” purely orientated to the consumption. These are collective spaces with the
appearance of a public space marked by the actors involved; therefore, a shift from authenticity could be mentioned as a characteristic of the contemporary urban public square (Fig. 29). On the other hand, people do not seem to be necessarily concerned about authenticity, or at least not to a degree that would impact on the fact of whether they like a space or not, because apparently the commercial offer and esthetics of the place play a preponderant role in the concept of authenticity.

Figure 29: Urban Imaginary, Mundo E, Mexico City.

To a great extent, the dimension of the acceptance of these exclusive shopping centers, supervised headquarters, or Central-Business-Districts, gated communities, segregated residential areas of different social classes, country or golf clubs, enclosed squares and monuments, etc., are based on the problem of public insecurity, which takes place in large cities. This proliferation of "new places for insertion" is expressed by the ubiquitous construction of sophisticated and modern electronic surveillance systems and the presence of private security guards. The new forms of life have appeared in order to support the urban phenomenon, forms that are closely linked with
the transfer of power to the private sector and globalization. Therefore, the new
typologies are based on consumer behavior and determined by the desire for security.

Although in parts of the periphery of Mexico City, where public space is limited,
such as in the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl in the State of Mexico with more than
three million inhabitants, built primarily by self-construction or self-organization, new
forms of interaction, recreation, and sports were sought for creatively, transforming the
“camellones” or green median strips of the avenues into parks with trees and plants or
squares with playgrounds, outdoor fitness areas, or even improvised boxing centers. It
appears that the public square in some suburban areas is as an outdated model that is
no longer produced. This impression that the “classical” concepts of the public space
and the square may be obsolete on the outskirts of Mexico City is reinforced by
observing other examples in the city, such as the new housing units of the “Ara” or
“Casa Geo” type, new settlements constructed by the promoters of private homes.
Here, people prefer closed private streets in front of their homes for communication
with their neighbors or for their children to play with other children, while the central
square of the division remains empty.

Commercial areas reproducing streets and squares and which no longer represent
closed and exclusive spaces, i.e. (railway) stations and hospitals, which are also
multifunctional equipment, university and cultural facilities that have left forsaken the
concept of separate campuses, and palaces – fortresses, in order to become animators
and articulators of urban areas, are creating transitional spaces with their surroundings.
Although the examples of “new” public spaces and urban squares such as Bajo
Puentes (Bridge Underpasses), Parques Bolsillo (Pocket Parks) or commercial centers
are numerous, the negative utopias regarding the city continue to wield considerable
weight in the field of theoretical and intellectual discourse, and additionally, in urban
development, the negative effects of novel polarizing and privatizing dynamics are
constantly manifested.
4.2 Case studies. Learning at public spaces in Mexico City

4.2.1 Methodology

The present research project intends to demonstrate in which manner, in the continuous, social production of urban public spaces in Mexico City, and focusing particularly on the typology of the square, these generate, encourage, and stimulate relations of social learning among the inhabitants of and visitors to a city who dispose of the respective spaces. In order to corroborate the central questions of “what”, “how”, and finally, “what for”, learning of social competences occurs in the urban public square, or whether this function of urban public spaces as places for social learning is limited in contemporary urban projects, which on occasion are promoted by the public administration, in an increasingly fragmented and segregated metropolis such as Mexico City.

Therefore, the correlation between social environment; space, and architecture and "ciudadania" (citizenship) and social behavior has been examined by case studies, in order to understand forms of appropriation as social learning processes. For the description and understanding various appropriation patterns, quantitative and qualitative methods are used to achieve, based on the activities observed in the sociospatial context of the public square in Mexico City, an understanding by analyzing different life-worlds. The term appropriation is applied through specifically selected evaluation cases (Case Problem Method, Stated Problem Method) (Deutsche 1996), and also the new paradigm of space.

Accordingly, the sociospatial properties or “valences” of squares as a places of active (spatial) appropriation, as well as the spatial equipment, architectural situations (protection, surprise, etc.), and social practices, among other factors, are compared with activities as indicators of appropriation needs. These include, for example, relaxation, creative activeness, social experiences, play, etc., interpreting the appropriation process as synonymous for subjective learning through identification, and one that takes into account the dimensions: confronting these with the other(s). This learning collaborates with learning from the place and what tools and instruments are available to stimulate the appropriation of public spaces in Mexico City.

Selection of the case studies (“settings”)

Different concepts of squares are investigated in order to determine the objective of establishing the appropriation ability, thus the possibilities for social learning in the public square in Mexico City, taking the current sociospatial realities and social
conditions into account. Similarly to Oliver Frey (2004: 170), who adapted ideas developed by Nissen (1998), different types of public spaces were distinguished for the purpose of responding to questions regarding the social learning capacities of urban public spaces within the sociospatial context of Mexico City of Mexico, analyzing representative example of public squares that converge in the contemporary sociospatial context of the Mexico, a mega-city of gigantic dimensions that presents a challenge for anyone attempting to understand it. This is to due to that in this capital city coexist - and sometimes clash - the most diverse communities, social classes, historic moments, infrastructure, equipment, and economic, political, and cultural models. Therefore, in some cases, the objects-of-study comprised emerging spaces or areas of common interest.

Accordingly, the objective is to perform a representative selection of illustrative, explorative case studies (Yin 2014) within the spectrum of public squares in Mexico City. In order to describe empirical evidence of validation, field research differed by studying squares with a “traditional” notion of centrality, and “revitalized” and “new” squares, representing current characteristic and significant examples of the current Mexico City.

While Alameda Santa María la Ribera serves as such a “traditional”, historically grown square that has not been recently modified in essence, in that is located geographically in the heart of one of the oldest, formally planned neighborhoods or colonies, with one of Mexico’s characteristic kiosks in its center, the “revitalized” squares Plaza Aguilita and Plaza de la República (Republic Square) with the Monument of the Revolution, distinguished by the integration of new, purposefully attractive elements, function as detonators for a new public life.

The Aguilita Square, situated in Colonia Centro in the La Merced neighborhood, was investigated as an example of such a “revitalized” square. It was remodeled between 2008 and 2010 and its process of recovery has been accompanied since 2005 by a “loudspeaker radio” denominated “Radio Aguilita”, serving as a bridge of dialogue between government agencies and the community. Likewise, the Republic Square represents another outstanding example of a “revitalized” urban public square in the Historic Center, which in recent years remodeled in the process of recovering public spaces as a result of a respective improvement program in the context of celebrating festivities pertaining to the Bicentennial of Mexican Independence and the Centennial of the Revolution in 2012.

In the case of “new” squares in the sense of “public domain” (Hajer/Reijndorp 2012), which have been completely rehabilitated over the last ten or twenty years, studies were conducted of Bajo Puente (Under Bridge) “Juan Escutia” and Parque de
Bolsillo del Zócalo (Pocket Park Zócalo), both promoted by the City Government and designed under the coordination of the Authority of the Public Space (Autoridad del Espacio Public) (AEP), as well as of the recently constructed commercial center (“plaza comercial”) or Shopping Mall Town Center “El Rosario”.

While the project Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) “Juan Escutia” was categorized as a “new” square because of its being based on the new model of the occupation of urban space called “Public-Private Partnership” (PPP), the program “Parques de Bolsillo para la Ciudad de México” (“Pocket Parks for Mexico City”), and the Parque Bolsillo found in the immediate periphery of the Zócalo in particular, was similarly developed in order to transform or “recover” remaining, abandoned, or underused urban public spaces and to convert them into areas for the recreation and enjoyment of the population as well. Furthermore, the Shopping Mall Town Center “El Rosario”, located in Delegation Azcapotzalco in the North area of Mexico City, represents another of the “new” typologies utilized as a substitute for urban public squares, whose orientation is merely directed toward consumption. It is a space of power or of domain in which commercial interests of land use and commercial interests of private enterprise are imposed, affecting the development of “ciudadanía” (citizenship).

**Application of the field studies**

Focused on the idea of a constantly changing, dynamic space that is produced through its physical aspects as well as through the interaction of the users themselves, the case studies are structured methodologically in three stages according to the triad of production of space of Henri Lefebvres (1974), integrating documentary research and “in situ” observation. As Lefebvre’s theory have an empirical background and is constructed for its empirical application (Schmidt, in: Derive 2015), the aim here was to confront theory with practical experience within an interdisciplinary vision and to develop it further in dialectical interplay with practice, to test it, to experiment, to immerse the theory into the reality, and to allow it to become fruitful. Thus, it in the end it also transcends Lefebvre’s ideas as well as Leontiev’s theories of appropriation.

1. The concept of the “conceived space” (“l’espace conçu”) relates to the “thought”, “planned” space; it is also characterized by ideas, ideologies, and scientific assumptions; “the space of scientists, of space planners, urbanists, technocrats” (Wolfrum/Janson 2016: 27). This leads to an analysis of planning, i.e., the relationship between physical planning and theoretical ideas, philosophies, accompanied by interviews with the individuals invested with the decisive power of the public
administration and with the planners themselves.

Additionally, the characterizer was analyzed in the (architectonical) objects, those located within the space, offering different opportunities for or availabilities of usages with regard to “affordances”, encouraging the appropriation of urban public squares in Mexico City. The organization and distribution of the objects in the space bring to light the different possibilities for occupying or using the space, contributing to the codification or classification of the social space while it recodifies the physical space.

2. The “perceived space” ("l'espace perçu") arises through various communicative relations and through spatial practice, representing the result of spatial practices, of movement, and interaction. Space is also produced through activities; therefore, the public square can be interpreted as a place for active (spatial) appropriation and the so-called “Behavioral Mappings” or “Activity Mappings”, These were elaborated in the form of photographic documentation (inventories (7/24), seven days a week, 24 hours a day), making inquiries by means of the distanced, covered, or non-participative observations of activities, which led to a “dense” description of the behavior of users in the space, examining “who does what and where” (Tostado 2005).

The ethnography, interpreted as an intense and prolonged observation within a particular location, is a process in which the researcher observes, registers, and agrees to closely commit to the daily life (of another culture) - a experience labeled as the field-work method - and, in continuation, to write a report (of this culture), with emphasis on descriptive detail. Thus, while “in-situ” observation has been utilized as the main tool to collect data, different periods of observation were planned at different periods of the day and the week, in an attempt to elaborate protocols representing a week in full, accompanied with photographic series (24/7) with snapshots taken every five minutes, capturing or reproducing the activities observed in the selected squares. The times during a day, the seasons, the weather, the relations of (political) power, social and cultural events, the customs of different groups passing by, - all of these conditions can change in a very short time, from situation to situation. Thus, a slight shift of the social context may change an urban space significantly.

Therefore, these “Behavioral Mappings” or “Activity Mappings” expose and summarize the sum of movements and activities. The majority of these trivial and casual, but their sum is not at all what theorists, shortly after chaos theories and of the complex systems beyond forming linearity, denominated a “emerging system” (Delgado 2013). But as mentioned in the “Man Without Qualities”, an unfinished, modernist novel in three volumes and of various drafts written between 1930 and 1943 by the late
Austrian writer Robert Musil, “Cities can be recognized by their walk, like people. You just have to look persistent and interested enough”; “squares”, too.

3. The “lived space” (“l’espace vécu”) is based on the unconscious relationship between the human and the space, i.e., the subjective personal relationship of the inhabitants with the place. A qualitative investigation in the form of user surveys has been developed through interviews with users. Applying a prepared questionnaire centered on the activities with the mobility, and the physical characteristics of the respective square (“affordance”) was carried out, including the urban furniture. Indirect interviews or narrative interviews were also performed, which studied in which manner, to what intensity, and by means of which forms of activities urban public squares in Mexico City are experienced.

The field research was accompanied by a search for information in the literature and on the Internet. Additionally, plans and 3-D models (in Sketch-Up) of each square and its surroundings were developed. These were employed as the basis for the presentation of diagrams of the densities of occurrences with the particular layers of the offered (architectonical) objects, activities, and movements or flows. In addition, the use of triangulating data sources was also attempted, Thus, similar to the triangle of the social habitat: “urbs” (focused on physical characteristics), “civitas” (related with “ciudadania” (citizenship) and the “vivid space”), and “polis” (concepts for administration and economy), the central field-research categories are the (material) place, the activities, and the (social) actors (Fig. 30). This means that by observing the activities, as well as interviewing the (social) actors, their unfolding in everyday life in different urban scenarios is interpreted as indicator for appropriation in the sense of a process of learning social competences. The determined objective and subjective categories should be subsequently submitted to a systematization, classification, and relativization, qualifying possibilities, actions, and experiences that inspire people to discoveries and interventions, stimulate collaboration with other persons and motivate the testing of new abilities, which benefit to development of the entire person.
Figure 30: Principal concepts for appropriation as a specific social learning process.

Place

Activities

Actors
4.2.2 Square with a “traditional” notion of centrality

4.2.2.1 Alameda Santa María la Ribera

(Abstract)

Alameda Santa María la Rivera is a square in the “traditional” sense of centrality, remodeled recently by the City Government without modifying its urban essence. Alameda Santa María la Rivera Park, with its emblematic Moorish Kiosk, is located in the center of the Colonia of the same name. This Colony was one of the first “modern” colonias created north and west of Mexico City in the late nineteenth century by the influential Flores family, constructed as a home for the wealthy. At present, the Colonia is confronting the effects of a deterioration process, which began in the 1950s when the city grew up around it and apartment buildings were constructed, accelerated growth due to the disastrous 1985 Mexico City earthquake. While abandonment and lowering of the socioeconomic level have given the Colonia one of the highest crime rates in the city, which indubitably hinders learning with the other(s) due to its being a highly segregated space. Currently, articulated artists and other collective groups have come together in order to restrain this process, converting the Colony and Alameda Santa María la Ribera into more of a family area, typically for wandering around on during Sundays. Therefore, Alameda Santa María la Ribera represents a space for co-existence, a meeting place, in which communicative and cooperative competences are learned, forming an important element in the construction of the identity of the (local) society.
1st Stage: “Conceived space” (“l’espace conçu”). Analysis of the planning

Historical aspects

Santa María la Ribera is a Colonia located in the Cuauhtémoc borough of Mexico City. Its history goes back to the pre-Hispanic period, during which this area was under a very shallow part of Lake Texcoco and was unpopulated. After the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan, and soon after the Spanish retraced this island city into Mexico City, the zone proved to be too small for the growing population. Various projects began to drain Lake Texcoco and reclaimed more land from the former lakebed. The first areas to dry sufficiently for habitation were north and west of the city, where Colonia Santa María, Colonia Guerrero, and others are still located today. Thus, the terrain then occupied by the Colony was finally dried out in 1545. It was considered, up to its urban division (“fraccionamiento”) in the nineteenth century, as the outskirts of the Novohispana capital, and at that point was placed in Garita de Tlaxpana of the Río Consulado riverside. The Colony’s land was part of Hacienda de la Teja and later of a farm called Rancho de Santa María. In the late nineteenth century, many smaller farms and ranches were again broken up, this time into housing subdivisions, as Mexico City started to grow outside of its traditional confines.

Santa María la Ribera was one of the first planned colonias, in conjunction with Colonia de los Arquitectos (Colony of the Architects), created north and west of Mexico City, representing a modern, avantgarde plan. Its urban design was elaborated for the first time in 1858 by the surveyor Francisco Jiménez, arranging 56 blocks with 20 lots each, with spaces set aside for a park, a church, and a market. The setting of the streets and blocks, as well as of the Alameda, imitated the reticular form of the ancient metropolis. According to Salvador Novo, the nomenclature of the streets was due to the following: “... the forest botany alternated in Santa María La Ribera with its floriculture: poplars, cedars, oranges, pines, walnuts” (México desconocido 2015). The Alameda itself was thought of as a medium to increase appreciation through public space, in order to sell the lots at higher prices, similar to the urban private housing developers today, such as GEO, still do.

One year later, in 1959, the Flores family, namely “Los Hermanos” (“The Brothers”) Flores and their mother Juana Casillas, founded the first social real estate company in the city, headed by Don Estanislao, taking advantage of the economic movements by

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1 Much of the information was derived through an extensive sightseeing walk through the district together with students of the UAM-Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, and Jorge Baca and Ángel Badillo of the “Acción y Cultura Santa María” (Action and Culture Santa María), formerly “Consejo Cultural Consultivo Ciudadano” (“Cultural Civic Advisory Council”) on June 1, 2015, as well as by a series of encounters throughout 2015 only with Jorge Baca).
selling numerous properties and promoting lots of land through the application of the land confiscation of church properties in, among other Colonia Santa María la Ribera. It was Don Estanislao, as well, who asked for permission from the City Council to establish a Colony in Rancho Santa María for the affluent who wanted homes outside of the city limits, intending to extend the city toward the shore of San Cosme, so that their inhabitants would live a “healthier” life.

One of the billboards in Colonia Santa María La Ribera justified its creation as follows: “Because Mexico without any doubt needs to grow, everything is announcing that it will grow on the western side, where the beauty of the landscape, the abundance of the drinking water... and a thousand other circumstances will attract the people” (ibid.). Not only did it grow to the west, it extended toward the four cardinal points.

From 1860 to 1930, Colonia Santa María la Ribera was home to the wealthy, with either country homes, or later, city homes, but all of these large with spacious gardens (Fig. 31). While this zone was practically born without any services: no water, no paved roads, no sidewalks, no electricity; only numerous artesian wells abounded, but the plan also foresaw a system for electricity, drainage, etc. Additionally, the neighbors came together to pave some of streets and to embank them and, in 1866, a large cistern was installed below the poplar grove (Alameda), supplying the neighborhood with water, so that the cost of a square yard of land (0.64 square meters) increased from 12 reales in 1886 up to $15, presenting the Colonia with a comprehensive “modern” development of the late nineteenth century.
In the center of Alameda Park we find the Kiosko Morisco, designed and built from 1884 to 1885 by Engineer José Ramón Ibarrola for its participation as the Mexico Pavilion at the 1886 World’s Fair of 1886 in New Orleans and at the Saint Louis Exposition of 1902. After these events, the structure was brought back to Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century and installed on the south side of Alameda Central at Avenida Juárez, in front of Corpus Christi Church. While it remained there, it became the site of the national lottery drawing. Later, during the celebrations of the Centennial of the Mexican War of Independence, President Porfirio Díaz gave the command for the erection of another monument at the site: the Benito Juárez Monument. For this reason, and in response to a petition by the inhabitants of the new residential development Santa María la Ribera, the Kiosk was moved in September 1910 to its current location, converting it into the heart of the Colony, both for its inhabitants as well as for national and foreign visitors.

During the Porfirato period, several streets had already been paved and had electric lighting, so that at the time of the celebration of Mexico’s Centennial in 1910, wealthy residents competed to outdo each other in decoration and events. Some went as far as having exotic animals in their gardens and many famous persons lived in the Colonia at that time. From 1910 to 1930, the Colonia reached its height, so that in the 1920s, the La Rosa Trolley passed through the area, connecting it with the Zócalo.
Alternatively, and due to its outstanding localization among three rivers, including Río Consulado, pipelined since 1944, a pier was planned to link the area by ship with the city center as well\(^2\).

However, the Mexican Revolution triggered a backlash against the wealthy of the city and, in some cases, residents of this neighborhood had to flee, leaving their properties, but the area remained affluent during the first third of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, the middle class, consisting of small business owners, professionals, and government employees, began to move in and a new era of construction began. Construction in the Colonia accelerated, although these newer homes continued to be private family homes. The entire Colony Santa María la Ribera has been paved since then, and several exclusive schools operated in the zone, such as Frances de San Cosme.

In the second half of the twentieth century, in the 1950s, the district began to deteriorate, in that the city had grown up extensively around it and apartment buildings were constructed. Wealthy residents began to move out and, because of the emergence of new, rich colonies in other parts of the city, especially in the west, and lower classes began to take over, transforming the Colonia into a more popular neighborhood. With the entry of television, the stages and movie theaters in the neighborhood gradually lost their audiences, with the Rivoli and Majestic Theaters eventually closing and being demolished, in order to build a parking lot and the Plaza Morisko, the city’s first shopping mall.

The next wave of new residents was a consequence of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. While the structures of the Colonia were not heavily affected, the area received a large influx of new residents, victims from more damaged areas. Poorer residents moved in and inexpensive housing was constructed, due to the pressure to build more affordable housing for the increasing population, causing conflicts with older residents, who complained that the new low-income housing do not fit in with many of the traditional structures, in their desire to retain the older mansions and other constructions.

The arrival of lower-income residents has caused much of the middle class to leave and to abandon many properties. This has brought in squatters and homeless persons. Therefore, the Colonia has one of the highest crime rates in the city today, especially in relation to drug dealing. On the other hand, since 2000, the remaining inhabitants

\(^{2}\) According to Jorge Baca, originally the name of the Colonia differed by its location referring to these rivers, as well. Thus, for the sites on the inland the name Santa María la Ribera was used, while the lands next the banks of the three enclosing rivers were situated within Santa María de la Rivera.
began to rebel because they had “had it up to here” (“hasta la madre”)³ with the situation. They initiated, through the undertaking of various actions, a rescue process consisting of small steps. Many, primarily artistic groups or collectives, have been established; these persons are interested in the community, such as those of Santa María la Bicicletera (La Bicicleta Verde 2015). Additionally, the life of the inhabitants of this Colonia has benefited with the construction of the “Fórum Buenavista” Shopping Mall, on the opposite side of Avenida de los Insurgentes, which is close by. Therefore, many residents have been favored in finding large and small businesses near their homes. Thus, the district has been transformed into a more familial area, typically for wandering around on Sundays, where one can still experience the more traditional feel of the Colonia, with the authentic atmosphere of an “old neighborhood” where family businesses are mixed with old houses and monuments. Because of this, the area was designated as a “Barrio Mágico” by the city in 2011⁴. At the same time, large construction companies started to promote new housing developments oriented to a medium and high social economic level (departments of more than 2 million up to 6 million MXN), in view of a possible gentrification process.

**Urban aspects**

Colonia Santa María la Ribera is situated in the northern part of the Mexico City Federal District in the Cuauhtémoc borough, bordering the Colonia to the north with Delegations Gustavo A. Madero and Azcapotzalco, to the west with Miguel Hidalgo, to the east with Venustiano Carranza, to the southeast with Álvaro Obregón, to the southeast with Iztacalco, and to the south with the Benito Juárez Delegation. The limits of the district are marked by the following streets: Avenue Ricardo Flores Magón to the north, Ribera de San Cosme to the south, the important north-south axis Insurgentes Norte to the east, and Circuito Interior to the west. It consists of 116 city blocks in total.

³ Quotation by Jorge Baca (2015)
⁴ Throughout its existence, Colonia Santa María la Ribera has been home to several important personalities of the history of the capital and the country. Here there have lived writers, artists, athletes, revolutionaries, and intellectuals, who have transformed the country. For example, in the district resided Mother Conchita (Alamo 51), accused of the intellectual authorship of the assassination of Álvaro Obregón by José de León Toral, who also lived in this area. Highlighted also is Chucho el Roto, the Mexican Robin Hood; the members of the band “The Grey Car” (film directed in 1919), who were criminals but became famous in the early twentieth century, dedicated themselves to kidnapping the rich; Dr. Gustavo Baz (Carpio 111); the leading painter Dr. Atí, Gerardo Murillo (Pino); Joel Zúñiga Ávila, legendary bolero in the Alameda; the inspired composer José Alfredo Jiménez, whom they called “Fello”, catalogued as the simplest man imaginable; the great writer Mariano Azuela; and Don Facundo, the trimmer of rats who became an artist in the Alameda, among many others. It is noteworthy that no other colonia has housed so many former presidents as the Santa María la Ribera: Manual González, Emilio Portes Gil, Adolfo López Mateos, Miguel Germán, and Manuela Camacho (including General Porfirio Díaz, who had a home at Narjano 111, although it is not known whether or not he occupied it).
While the neighborhood was established as an upper-class country getaway over 100 years ago, today it is fully absorbed into Mexico City’s Center. Now, the city’s public transport system offers different possibilities for linking the district and its park. So, there is a suburban train connecting the apparently endless northern periphery of the megalopolis with the city center, with Estación del Tren Suburbano Buenavista on the other side of Avenida de los Insurgentes, the southernmost endpoint (formerly Railway Station 86, remodeled between 2007 and 2008 in preparation for the launch of commuter rail service), and coming from Cuautitlán in the State of Mexico (Fig. 32). There also exists the opportunity to arrive by the underground/subway, with Metro Station Buenavista (Line B Buenavista-Ciudad Azteca) or San Cosme (Line 2 Cuatro Caminos-Taxqueña) located at a distance of about 500/600 m from the Alameda, with the Line 3 Indios Verdes-Universidad Metro Station connecting the two previously mentioned subway lines. Additionally, Buenavista Railway Station is also a stop for three lines of the Metrobús, Mexico City’s rapid-transit bus system, while, unfortunately Colonia Santa María la Ribera is not integrated into the Ecobici system, a public bike-sharing system implemented by the Mexico City Government. One the corner of the pavement next to the shopping mall there is also a taxi stand.

Figure 32: Accessibility by public transport.

Today, the Colonia is considered to be a traditional neighborhood, where family-owned businesses mix with old houses and monuments. There is a combination of old mansions and homes, small shops, and businesses, tenements, and abandoned buildings. The oldest structures are mansions built in the late nineteenth century. These and a number of buildings constructed until about 1930 make up the 1,040 structures categorized as having architectural or historic value and registered by Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes.
Structures built since that time, such as apartment buildings, have been constructed for the lower classes. Therefore, the neighborhood has a mix of middle- and lower-class residents, as well as squatters and persons who are homeless. There is a problem with abandoned properties. The abandonment and lowering of the socioeconomic level have given the Colonia one of the highest crime rates in the city. Most crime consists of robbery, assault, and drug trafficking.

The square known as Alameda Santa María la Ribera represents the heart of the Colony, even though it is not strictly the geometric center. Nevertheless, it is located in the central part of the district, at the intersection of Dr. Atl and Salvador Mirón Streets, just west of the Historic Center. The Alameda represents the only major park in the Colonia, measuring approximately 130 meters in width and 150 m in length, i.e., an extension of nearly 20,000 m². In its center, there is the emblematic monument of the Moorish Kiosk, which has been the most important point of reference of the Colonia, despite its rather late arrival in 1910.

The buildings next to the park are mostly three-story buildings with apartments, with the highest buildings, up to eight floors, are located to the north, mainly in the second row, where Plaza Morisko, a modern shopping mall, is located. The urban context that envelops Alameda Santa María la Ribera is diverse with regard to its inhabitants and buildings, having developed various activities ranging from commercial and cultural uses, to housing and, as well, “cantinas” dating from the creation of the Colonia, reflecting the high architectural value of their constructions.

Because of its proximity to one of the busiest avenues in Mexico City, the México-Tacuba Roadway, commercial use is of great importance in the streets surrounding the square. Thus, there are several commercial premises, such as barbershops, Internet cafés, grocery stores, restaurants, cafés, and other food stands. Additionally, there is a cultural center, a Catholic church, a museum, schools, and residential buildings, giving rise to the district’s reputation known for an interesting diversification of uses and old buildings.

Next to the Plaza Morisko, on Manuel Carpio Street, there are buildings with different uses, such as outdoor cafés, residential buildings, shops, a high school called “Centro de Estudios Superiores Francés Mexicanos”, and an “El Globo” Bakery. Thus, some of the buildings meet diversified functions. For example, on the ground floor, there are commercial businesses such as ice cream parlors, as on Dr. Atl Street, where the ground floors of many buildings double as food businesses, Internet cafés, etc. In addition, on the same street, the “Colegio Hispanoamericano” High School is also situated.
On the south-western corner of Alameda Santa María la Ribera stands the famous cantina “La Paris”, located at the intersection of Salvador Díaz Mirón and Jaime Torres Bodet Streets. Noteworthy also is the very pleasant Librería Bodet, with theatrical events, workshops, and readings. Along the Jaime Torres Bodet Street, there is a cultural center (Casa de la Cultura), surrounded by buildings of various uses and of different architectural importance, including housing, a kindergarten, preschools, restaurants, and the Museum of Geology. This Geology Institute is a sober building, completed in 1906 as one of the many projects mandated by Porfirio Díaz to celebrate the Centennial of Mexico’s Independence. Today, the Institute is part of the UNAM. It contains a collection of fossils, minerals, and flora and fauna from various parts of the world and a small collection of landscapes done by artist José María Velasco.

Worth mentioning is the well-known gasoline station at the intersection of Manuel Carpio and Jaime Torres Bodet Streets, the third gas station constructed in 1934 and an important meeting point for the community, which recently has been demolished. Here, where according to a widely spread story, the elephant Judy was shot in 1958. It was night and none of the neighbors could believe what they saw, because there was an uncontrolled elephant who had escaped from the Buenavista Train Station. The elephant had crossed Avenida de los Insurgentes to reach the Alameda (El Universal.mx 2011). Currently, another apartment building is going to be erected.

Something else of import is the buildings of historical value that still remain from the era of Porfirio Díaz, in addition to Moorish Kiosk and the Museum of Geology, we may visit Museo Universitario del Chopo and Casa de Mascarones in the immediate vicinity of the square. The Chopo University Museum, located on Dr. Enrique González Martínez Street, is an Art Nouveau ironwork and glass construction that stands out due to its two large metal towers. Because of its appearance, it has been nicknamed the Palacio de Cristal or the Crystal Palace. Formerly used as the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (National Natural History Museum), the building was re-inaugurated as Museo Universitario del Chopo, which specialized in modern art and experimental projects for marginalized groups and young artists, while Casa de Mascarones was the summer home of the Valle de Orizaba family built in the seventeenth century on Ribera de San Cosme, the main road connecting Mexico City to the then-separate Tacuba in early colonial times, with the family’s official home being Casa de Azulejos in the historic center. Today, Casa de Mascarones also belongs to UNAM.

Outstanding, contemporary buildings in the adjacent zones next to the Colonia, just across Avenida de los Insurgentes, are the recently remodeled former passenger-rail Buenavista Station, converted into a huge shopping mall or Centro Comercial “Forum Buenavista” as an integral part of the terminal del Buenavista Suburban Train Terminal
, anchored by a Cinépolis Multiplex Cinema and a Sears department store, opened in 2012, as well as the “Megabiblioteca” (“Megalibrary”), dedicated to José Vasconcelos, the philosopher, presidential candidate, and former president of the National Library of Mexico, inaugurated earlier in 2006.

Areas near the district for reaching by foot from the square are Tlatelolco neighborhood with Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Square of the Three Cultures) to the northeast, Plaza Garibaldi to the east, Republic Square with its Monument to the Revolution, Alameda Central, Palacio Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Palace of Fine Arts), and the Zócalo at the very City Center to the southeast, as well as the Chapel of San Rafael, Aldama Theater, and the University of the Army and Air Force to the south. Something that might arouse our attention is that there is nearly no graffiti or other forms of urban street art on the walls, in contrast with the neighboring Colonia Guerrero, located to the east and across Avenida de los Insurgentes.

**Architectural aspects**

Alameda Santa María la Ribera was designed from the establishment of its urban furniture with all of the important elements, among which we find its fountains and the historic Moorish Kiosk. The square has a rather spacious appearance based on a rectangular shape with rounded corners. It is subdivided into four basic parts, where a fountain is located in the middle of each. Each part is connected by straight and diagonal walkways made of flagstone that intersect at key points, such as the fountains, giving rise to 16 gardens in triangular form altogether. The internal walkways have the same width as the external ones. Precisely in the geometric center of the Alameda is located the most popular attraction of this site, the Morisco Kiosk, with a wide entrance with nine steps toward the south. At the Kiosk, the parking facilities for leaving and padlocking bicycles for visitors are located in strategic places, while all of its corners have access ramps for persons who are physically challenged.

The Moorish Kiosk is elaborated in Mudéjar-style artwork (Fig. 33). It is denominated Morisco (Moorish) because it resembles Moorish architecture in which the arches, the columns, and the dome are prominent in the construction, as well as the detailed decoration with different lines and shapes. Its form is octagonal with 44 columns in the exterior and eight columns in the interior supporting the cupola, while the filigree distinguishes the Kiosk architecturally. Inside the Kiosk, the details of the roof and the perfectly formed circles are highlighted, with thousands of different geometric figures. The internal floor is fashioned of staving, while its etchings are executed in various directions in order to form a visual texture.
The structure is completely made of wrought iron, which was fashionable at that time. It is thought that the iron came from the Carnegie Steel Company of Pittsburgh. It consists of panels that can be disassembled and a glass cupola topped with a bronze eagle. Since its installation in Alameda Santa María la Ribera, a number of myths have grown up around about the Kiosk, such as that would finally be moved to its originally indicated place, back to where it belonged, next to the Museum of Geology, because of the usage of the natural resources iron or steel. Also, it is said that the Kiosk was donated by an Arab shah and that it entertains astrological and magical aspects due to its octagonal shape and large number of geometrical decorations.

Over time, the Kiosk deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and even to the theft of some pieces of it. In 2003, the Kiosk was completely restored by the McCartney International Company in a three-month effort involving 85 workers and artisans. The restoration included the stripping off of old layers of paint, repairing the damage to the Kiosk, and painting the Kiosk in its original colors. Modern additions included a film to block ultraviolet rays in the cupola and a Teflon coating to protect against acid rain. A number of pieces of the original Kiosk had broken off over time and many of these wound up in private homes. Many of these pieces were recovered as part of the restoration project.

Behind the Kiosk was erected a Monument to Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753–1811), made in bronze, which shows the figure standing in 1810, carrying a banner in the left hand and with the right hand held high (Fig. 34). The four previously mentioned
fountains located in the center of each quarter of the square are water jet-operated, each with a first level that is in hexagonal made of masonrywork. The base is a circle covered with flagstone. In terms of the floor, the orientation of the flagstone forms circles around the fountains in order to generate hierarchy.

*Figure 34: Monument to Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.*

Next to the fountains, the measurement station is placed, in which the pumps for the fountains' operation are installed. Within the square, there are two buildings as well: the machine room at the north of the square, where services, built with traditional materials, are managed, and another building situated west of the square, presenting the recycling module constructed only of recycled materials.

The green areas are well-defined, with a surrounding adornment of about 30 cm in height above floor level, offering varied urban vegetation with trees such as “jacarandas”, ash, eucalyptus, “colorines” bushes, and palm trees, these species the most common to be found in urban areas and additionally the most resistant. Because the Alameda is a public space, created with the aim of people spending free time in it, there is as certain kind of harmony between the green and the urban areas as well as
the furniture, and the grassy zones and bushes around them alternate with the grey floor and the physical elements of the square, in an attempt to achieve a relationship between the environment and the city: the trees overshadow the benches; thus, vegetation and urban elements match in a unique manner. Within the garden areas, extreme care is taken in the planting of trees, so that the roots do not raise the level the cobblestones. Metal trash cans are placed at strategic locations, fixed with nails, so as not to touch the floor of the square, i.e., the cans are elevated on a support in order to maintain them at a higher level.

With respect to the lighting system, the lamps are arranged in a uniform manner at a distance of about 18 m between each beside the paths, laterals, and internal roads, as well as around the small squares with fountains at the paths. The single lamp is about four meters high and has a pronounced simplicity. Its filigree post is painted black and topped with a crystal lamp shaped like an upturned cone of about 40 cm placed on a black lamp-holder. Around the central Kiosk, there are a number of extra reflectors next to these lamps, illuminating it slightly at night. In addition, the dome itself is lit with dim lights, causing the effect of its flying (Fig. 35).

It is noteworthy that the most recent rehabilitation of the square took place from July 19 to October 29, 2010, and was conducted by the National Institute of Fine Arts (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), Delegation Cuauhtémoc, and the Authority of Public Spaces (AEP). Over the years, the Kiosk has undergone normal and natural damage, inclement weather, and vandalism. Damage is caused in the roofs, the rainwater gutters, and the reinforced concrete elements, mainly based on acidified water penetrations. There were also massive corrosions of the metal structure, maltreatment, and the theft of elements such as sections of the handrails and the columns; deterioration and stains are appreciated in the upper dome, the wearing of the marble floor inside the Kiosk, and the life expectancy of the installations.

This renovation respected the urban setting from the nineteenth century, paving over 10,600 m² of walkways and the internal area of the Kiosk. The Kiosk and its scale were restored, preserving all of the elements of the historical architecture, such as proportions, materials, and the construction system. The metallic elements of the columns, the dome, and the stairs were repaired and painted in their original colors, the roof was cleaned, the rainwater gutters were fixed, missing metal elements were replaced, the interior floors in marble were exchanged for Camarú wood for the exterior and a wooden ceiling was set in place.

Stone benches on the perimeter ring of the Kiosk were installed, and the existing benches of wrought iron were restored and painted. A total of 15,200 m² of green areas and plant arrangements were also rescued, adding an organic and vegetal substrate
and an aeration process. Two wastewater-treatment plants were constructed and a sprinkler system supplied with treated water was established. The four fountains were renovated, including the addition of the installation of a new hydropneumatic system for the fountains. The damaged brickwork of the surface fashioned with Talavera Masonry was removed. The lighting system of the square was improved additionally in order to encourage the use of the public space, offering better illumination conditions and, consequently, better security. The amount invested in the restoration was approximately eight million MXN in total.

*Figure 35: Urban architectural configuration.*

**Functional aspects**

Historically, in the early twentieth century, Colonia Santa María la Ribera was one of the most elegant, exclusive, and aristocratic areas of the city, and the park was constructed as a leisure zone for its wealthy new residents, with fountains, walkways, benches, and green areas, so that the inhabitants could promenade there or walk with their pets, mainly dogs. The famous Moorish Kiosk was named an Artistic Monument of the Nation by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) (National Institute of Anthropology and History) in 1972, because of its hosting neighborhood meetings as well as cultural activities, such as popular bands, chamber orchestras, and dance classes.
Today, the Alameda remains a typical neighborhood square and a place of great vitality. Because of its location next to the City Center, as well as the architectural historic value of the Kiosk, many tourists come to this place, converting the Alameda in an important tourist attraction for the city. In that it is very frequently visited focal point, this small square does boasts security cameras, installed in the corners as well as next to the pavilion, for the security of the pedestrians crossing through the spot. The Kiosk is recognized by and recommended for the inhabitants of the Colonia, as well. It is said that the Colony attracts about 500,000 visitors each day, not necessarily reflecting the Colony’s inhabitants, but rather passers-by.

At present, Cuauhtémoc Delegation grants permits for different types of uses, such as those already mentioned for the Moorish Kiosk. Other activities promoted in the Alameda include various fairs, such as book fairs and an agriculture fairs. The book fair usually is established in some tents around the Kiosk with books for sale for the interested public, representing a good proposal that encourages residents to read. In order to stimulate urban agriculture, the Delegation additionally provides an agricultural fair offered in seven modules, at which workshops are offered to the public in general. Thus, on Saturdays and Sundays, producers and farmers from the countryside offer seeds and other organic products that are traditionally elaborated by them at very affordable prices.

In the same regard, there is also a photographic exhibition mounted in the square, opposite to the Museum of Geology, at which are presented photographs taken by the inhabitants of the Colony themselves. This photography exhibition is an idea that was widely accepted by the inhabitants, showing a part of the heart of the Colony and its people. In addition, on weekends, along Dr. Atl Street, various trailers or remodeled buses are parked, offering food and drinks, such as cakes, coffee, and tea for the visitors (Fig. 36).

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5 Today, approximately 40,000 people live in Colonia Santa María la Ribera, i.e., nearly 13 times more than the number of inhabitants in 1882, a peak time during which residential use dominated primarily in the district, an identity difficult to find at present (http://es.slideshare.net/germinalia/ciudad-en-ruta-no-1-santa-mara-la-ribera (Accessed October 31, 2015)).
On the other hand, it is important to mention that there are several groups in the Colony who are interested in activities to improve the same and its inhabitants. For example, “Consejo Cultural Consultivo Ciudadano” (“Cultural Civic Advisory Council”) installed a public compost pile in the Alameda in order to rid the area of the feces left on the ground by the numerous pets, mainly dogs, which play there. There is, unfortunately, a need for this and it works well, because the inhabitants of the Colony do not act responsibly and pick up after their pets. Further, according to the testimony of Jorge Baca⁶, the Delegation has recently restricted the distribution of permits, because a certain “chaos” has arisen, with the occurrence of many more clandestine-like activities, such as unwelcome street traders (“ambulantes”) and street performances.

2nd stage: “Perceived space” (“l'espace perçu”). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

In order to understand the behavior of the users in Alameda Santa María la Ribera, graphical and analytical documentation based on the observation of activities was elaborated between Monday June 8 and Sunday June 14, 2015, installing a photographic camera in the ground floor of the adjacent Casa de la Cultura at Calle Jaime Torres Bodet 160. In the developed photo series, as well as during visits carried

out to the square, different activities and functions were registered, identifying common activities and defined hours, these leading to general discoveries regarding the spatial experience. The happenings and eventualities must also be discussed in order to understand to what extent daily, on-site activities are flexible, always with the intention of detecting the ideological, cultural, and physical and/or social reasons that determine the behavior and relationships of users of the space.

Apparently, an increase has been registered of various commercial businesses and of cultural and other features since the last renovation work; thus, the square has acquired greater significance in recent years. Alameda Santa María la Ribera has become a landmark immersed within the modal shift, converting it into an attraction that is not only locally important, but also nationally. Thus, Alameda Santa María la Ribera is a public space with a strong symbolic onus in terms of the residents and the users who congregate, day by day, in the space for recreation, exercise, rest, movement, and meeting with the community. Many events are carried out, such as environmental, agricultural, or book fairs (Fig. 37) and, in particular, activities for children or elderly persons. It is a place for neighborhood meetings and cultural activities, providing the Colonia with a stimulating neighborhood life. It is noteworthy that the square has never lost its predominately local, “popular” character.

Figure 37: Book Fair using tents for sales to the public.

Therefore, throughout a typical day, from before dawn until dusk, several worlds were intertwined in and around the square, where the great Morisco Kiosk presides over all of the events, being an architecturally relatively beautiful and very significant element in which multiple recreational activities were performed, such as the concerts of chamber
urban public squares in Mexico City as places for social learning

orchestras, popular bands, workshops, lectures, neighborhood meetings, or ballroom dancing classes, affording great vitality to this place. Sometimes the space was rather empty, as well, and the children used it to play tag, which became quite amusing. Some clandestine-like theater performances even took place. The intensity of the Kiosk’s use increased over the weekend, and activities-of-interest also overlapped into the areas of the vicinity around the Kiosk.

But first of all, the square is a rather pleasant transitional space for workers, students, housewives, neighbors, and visitors, reflecting a great influx of persons going from one point to another, without looking around much. Especially in the mornings before 8:00 a.m., as well as in the afternoons, students passed by on the way to the schools located on both sides of the park, while parents waited for them, contemplating the Kiosk or passing through it after picking their children up from their schools. After 1:00 p.m., the square presented its greatest amount of activity during the week, as this is the departure time for schools located around Alameda Santa Maria la Ribera.

Another common activity was going out for a walk with pets in the square. While people usually kept to the intended walkways, the dogs also used the green areas, easily jumping over the recently erected fences, for example, to fetch the balls thrown by their owners. Two major problems could be noted because of pets entering the green areas: leaving their feces, and mistreating the plants. Thus, unfortunately, owners did not collect their pets’ feces despite the installation of the new compost area, not knowing of the existence of the latter or their unwillingness to utilize it.

The square served as space for coexistence. Some of the visitors were local residents, comprising families walking and playing in Alameda Santa Maria la Ribera, others came from diverse parts of the city, and yet again, others were tourists. There were individuals who simply attempted to get some fresh air, others were resting, sitting on the benches (Fig. 38), watching the scenario, or reading the newspaper or a book. Any bench is a good place to wait and to read. Also, observing other people here was the number one activity in the square (Whyte 1988).
Young people on dismissal from their schools used the square to come together and coexist; others appeared to play ball on one side of the Kiosk. Children playing, young people gathering, “chatting”, adults conversing, elderly people resting, Alameda Santa María la Ribera was visited by people of different ages. With persons returning from shopping, parking their bicycles, or leaving them at the Kiosk or on the bicycle fences surrounding the gardens, on a break resting at the square, couples flirting while sitting on the benches in the shade under the trees or walking in the square, others sitting in contemplation, tourists taking photographs, etc., a harmonious coexistence was evident, whereby in the afternoon more people came to enjoy the square.

Thus, the public square is an important urban element that provides space, which people need to coexist. People use the public square on a small and large scale as a point for encounter, representing the meeting place of the community. It is a very pleasant space in that peaceful neighborhood meetings were held, in which several groups of inhabitants of the Colony interested in activities to improve the same gathered to discuss the opportunities and problems of the zone. The function of the square as a living space continued to nightfall and, less vividly, up to around midnight. Nevertheless, the majority left the area of the Kiosk in the late afternoon to reduce any encounter with any type of risk.

On the other hand, Alameda Santa María la Ribera was also used by a rather numerous amount of people who turned up to the place to exercise, stretch, cycle, run, or just walk. Some sportswomen and sportsmen came regularly, others more infrequently, but nearly everyone predominately employed the Kiosk’s outer perimeter. A few also utilized the internal areas for sports activities, such as the individuals who
performed yoga at the base of the Kiosk. At approximately 7:00 a.m., people were already beginning to arrive to do exercise, and this number diminished around 10:00 p.m. In the afternoons, the quantity of physical activities increased again, although it might be somewhat less than the activity in the early morning. Although the Colonia is widely known as a relatively dangerous area, some single joggers still came to run at 11:00 p.m., even some women, mostly accompanied by dogs.

At around 9:00 a.m., usually the street vendors (“ambulantes”) of the informal economy usually arrived, installing their small mobile stands mainly in the middle of the square in front of the Kiosk and, to a lesser extent, on the edges, where they sold, for example, chewing gum and sweets of all kinds. In the early afternoon, when it got warmer and the climate more pleasant, the proprietor of a stand of shaved, scraped fruit-flavored ice set up its wares in front of the Kiosk, inviting the people to a cooling snack, because the frozen and other refreshments obviously represent good business. “Bon ice” is also offered, while a few shoe shiners set up trade on the sidewalks.

In the mornings, local employees of the Delegation cleaned the square, removing the waste of the place, while services were delivered to the adjacent houses and businesses, supplying them with gas, water, etc. In addition to the security cameras, the police patrolled the zone throughout the day, allegedly attempting to guarantee the security of the population after dark.

Saturday is a day on which people normally rest and sleep longer in the morning. Thus, only a few people were found in the square early, some out walking their pets or engaging in sports with the family, some resting and/or arriving in their cars to have breakfast in nearby restaurants close to the square. At 3:00 p.m., the maximal level of occupancy was reached, and people started to buy foods to refresh their stay. In the later afternoon, the amount of people began to decease as they go to their homes or to the businesses close by, which are warmer inside in the afternoon than Alameda Santa María la Ribera.

On Sundays people were observed running in the morning, although there were fewer individuals, due to its being the weekend. At approximately 9:00 a.m., the maximal number of people was observed who run around the square. Sunday is the day with the greatest influx of visitors and longer stays were noticeable, with people of all ages arriving from noontime on. This day appeared to be more commercial as a consequence of the increased influx of people on Sundays.

With respect to movement, the flow of individuals and groups passing through the main square of Colonia Santa María la Ribera was as dynamic as the users were, moving all around the area, with no obvious, predominate pattern (Fig. 39). Because the Kiosk is the main attraction for the majority of visitors, part of the flow of people
consequently converged, accumulating at the center of the square, where there is wide entrance connecting the Kiosk to the south toward Salvador Díaz Mirón Street. Other poles of attraction within the square are the four fountains located to the southwest, northwest, southeast, and northeast, respectively, of the Kiosk. While some users were exercising in circles around the perimeter of the square, others utilized it as a transition zone to go from one street to another; therefore, their flows tended to be rigid and their direction is usually straight. Mostly older adults crossed the square as they stroll, looking for protection from the sun and seeking the ideal place at certain hours. In the afternoons, an equally abundant flow was observed, the zone a very important transition space in the Colony for those returning to their homes as well.

In terms of discrepancies in the flows of people between weekdays and the weekend, from Monday to Friday these flows might be rather unidirectional because, in coming from the San Cosme Subway Station and going to one of the schools, the visitor has to cross the square and as well when their activities end. On the weekends, the movements of the users appeared to be more varied, in that people came to the Alameda mainly for a walk and for recreation. Thus, many persons arriving by means of Santa María la Ribera Street walk directly toward the Kiosk. Afterward, they usually head for the street vendors’ food stands and the craft workshops at the western part or the area, subsequently initiating a walk around the perimeter of Alameda Santa María la Ribera.
Figure 39: Objects, activities, movements.

**OBJECTS**
- Surveillance camera
- Exposition panels
- Fences
- Monument
- Trees
- Fountain
- Walkway
- Lamps
- Moorish Kiosk
- Trailers

**ACTIVITIES**
- Jogg
- Informe
- Relax
- Read
- Flirt
- Compost
- Walk (with dogs)
- Exercise
- Perform
- Sell
- Skateboard
- Eat
- Play

**MOVEMENT**
- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” (“l’espace vécu”). Interviews with users. (Social) Actors

In order to investigate the unconscious relationship between humans and space, i.e., the personal subjective relationship with the inhabitants of the place, interviews with different actors of the square were carried out at different times of day between the June 8 and June 14, 2015. Thirty six interviewees in total were conducted, 21 of these with women or girls and 15 with men or boys (Fig. 40); i.e., the majority of users were women, even if their use of the square might be predominately transient due to the location of the schools within the perimeter of the Alameda. Among the interview respondents, there were five girls and three boys between the ages of 12 and 18 years, four women and five men between 19 and 25 years of age, eight women and four men between the ages of 26 and 35 years, three women and one man between 36 and 50 years of age, and one woman and one man between the ages of 51 and 50 years, as well as one woman aged 60 years or older, this in an attempt to reflect to age distribution of square users.

Twelve of the interviewees were students, there were eight employees, four teachers, four homemakers, and three businessmen (street vendors), while and one interviewee was unemployed. It was also detected that the users of the site mainly came from the surrounding schools, the offices, and other workplaces in search of venues to eat and rest; many of these were neighbors and a few others are visitors from other colonies and other parts of the city. In greater detail, there have been the following numbers: 30.55% of respondents, i.e., 11 persons, came to Alameda Santa María la Ribera because of their work, 27.77%, and 10 persons were passers-by on their way to school, which underscores the square’s function as a transitional space. Oriented mainly in terms of its understanding as a meeting place, 25%, i.e., nine persons, lived in the neighborhood, while another 16.66%, i.e., six persons, were visitors from other colonies.

With regard to activities, the most mentioned of these during the interview was focused on the residents’ pets. Thus, 35% visited the square to walk their dogs, while 20% attended cultural activities, 15% went for neighborhood meetings, and 12% went to the square to coexist, with the result that 27% of the activities in total were related directly with an encounter. Other users, mostly students, employees, and homemakers, made use of the place to relax and rest, i.e., 8%, with 5% exercising in the mornings, walking, or just “hanging out”, and 5%, to wait. As a result, Alameda Santa María la Ribera appeared to be to the huge majority (97%), a space of encounter, a highly recommended and recommendable meeting place, while to another 78%, it seemed to be a place of transition as well.
The users of the place generally perceive it as quite nice and quiet. Twenty four of the 36 persons interviewed in total declared the Morisco Kiosk to be, obviously, the biggest attraction of the square. Four referred to the gardens, despite that these are enclosed by recently installed fences, while three visitors mentioned the location of the square in the vicinity of the City Center as its most important feature. Two preferred the tranquility of the space, as did another three inhabitants of the Colonia, creating a rather familial neighborhood atmosphere. Therefore, and despite the ‘official’ high crime rates, 87% considered the place to be a healthy environment, and only 35% regarded it as “not safe”. One hundred percent would recommend the place and invite others to visit to the square. Therefore, the square would exert an influence on 78% of the individuals questioned in terms of the decision they made regarding it as the place of residence.

However, Alameda Santa María la Ribera does have some deficiencies, and the persons surveyed shared their concerns about the changes that have been requested for the square, too. Fifteen persons noticed and complained about the huge amount of trash, mainly generated by the students, mentioning this as a priority aspect in terms of modification, such as setting out more trash cans and promoting more appropriate collection times of these. Ten persons responded that the presence of the dogs is overwhelming and should be reduced. This is apparently a controversial subject for people, as some persons are in favor of pets and others against them. Others, six persons altogether, have been concerned about the existence of destitute persons or gangs in the Colony, groups of young people gathering and practicing skateboarding among other activities, catalogued by the users of the square as “inappropriate” or “strange”. Their presence should be restricted in order to increase a sense of security in the population. Five persons have been concerned with the quality of the green areas, arguing further restriction of these instead of opening up the garden zones.

Elaboration of the census of users of Alameda Santa María la Ribera lead to the conclusion that this space is appreciated by the people as an important meeting place of high historical value and as a transition place. On the other hand, the square has undergone a gradual devaluation by the inhabitants. Despite the constant and conscious utilization of the square, the new generations have not created roots with the Alameda in order for them to respect its historical significance.

Thus, very few or nearly none of the interviewees were aware of the heritage of the place and its importance for the Colony and even for the city. The value of the Kiosk, because of its history and its complexity as an architectural element, has been devalued over the years, to the extent that the assignment of police officers for its vigilance had to be resorted to, causing displeasure among visitors and residents, who
think that the zone should provide complete freedom and the right to make use of the area as it is, without taking into account that many of the activities carried out at this site have physically damaged the Kiosk. However, there are also people interested in rescuing the historical value of the place and raising awareness among users about their current use of the Kiosk. One example is Pedro Chávez, who shares the Alameda’s documentary archives every weekend at no cost, his being a promoter of the place and an example for the Colony and its inhabitants.

One of the main problems regarding the site is that the residents have used it for quite a while to walk their pets, which has resulted in the need for taking measures in this regard, such as the placement of special trash cans for the pets’ feces, and the delimitation of the green areas to prevent the passage of these animals, among others.
Figure 40: Results of the questionnaire applied at Alameda Santa María la Ribera.

- **85%**
  - Moorish Kiosk
  - Gardens
  - Tranquility
  - Familiar neighborhood atmosphere
  - Healthy

- **15%**
  - Not safe
  - Huge amount of garbage
  - Presence of dogs
  - Skaters
  - Green areas

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**% Why did you choose to come here?**

- 30 Because of work
- 28 Go to school
- 25 Meet someone
- 17 Live there

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**% Activities**

- 35 Walk with dogs
- 20 Cultural activities
- 15 Neighborhood meetings
- 12 Coexist
- 27 Encounter
- 8 Relax and rest
- 5 Exercise
- 5 Wait
Conclusions. Learning at Alameda Santa María la Ribera

Alameda Santa María la Ribera is catalogued as a merely “traditional” square, i.e., a square with a “traditional” notion of centrality, which was not modified recently in its essence. As a typical neighborhood square, it stands against the current trend of using private spaces, such as commercial centers or shopping malls, as if they were public spaces. The neighbors use the Alameda as a point for social encounter, a meeting place, and a place of interaction, with activities such as relaxing, walking, or promenading and exercising, resisting the globalized offensive aimed at introducing consumption into the society as the only way to relate to each other and the private space as the indicated place for encounter.

Aside from its utilization as a place for transition, the “real” public space of the main square of Colonia Santa María la Ribera represents a scenario for encounter and interaction (Fig. 41); therefore it is also a place for social learning, even if its function as place for the formation of citizenship (“ciudadania”) is mainly based on the inhabitants themselves, because huge public demonstrations do not take place here, and there are more likely cultural or artistic manifestations, such as urban interventions. It is not necessarily known as a space of resistance; however, the square offers the capacity of a place in which members of the society can interact with each other as well as with the space.

Learning from the other(s)

The idea of learning from the other(s) is based on the concept of a democratic and open public space for everyone, enjoyable for all social classes. Even if the square is physically open to everybody and no borders are visible, meeting with the other(s) is restricted due to the problem that exists regarding public safety. Due to stigmatization of the Colonia and the generalized idea of going outside into the street, park, garden, or public square as being something dangerous, the users of Alameda Santa María la Ribera are merely neighbors and tourists, with persons from other parts of the city corresponding to middle or upper social strata rarely frequenting the zone. This means that the urban circumstances of the place foster conditions of segregation and fragmentation, and thus, possibilities for dealing with “the different”, “the other”, are reduced. Instead, there is significant coexistence with a high number of pets, with the residents employing, usually dogs, as personal guardians providing security for the people.

While, therefore, the possibility of obtaining a democratic public space of interaction of all social groups offered by the city on an equal basis in order to decrease
the inequality gap, which excludes the majority of the population living in Mexico City, is lost. The accumulation of the various groups or collectives of artists present in the square, who belong to populations known as “crazies”\(^7\), leads to a certain approach and openness toward an alternative culture.

**Learning with the other(s)**

According to the learning with the other(s), the square functions as space for coexistence, a meeting place, in which communicative and cooperative skills are learned. Thus, the neighborhood encounters that take place are conducted peacefully. People train, do exercise, ride bicycles, or simply walk in the company. Others meet to dance, and young people practice skateboarding, among other activities. Cultural events such as the photographic exhibition held opposite the Museum of Geology that exhibit the characteristics of the Colony and its people, the concerts, workshops, and fairs, are educational in character. In this respect, many collectives in the Colony engage in activities to improve the environment for its inhabitants, creating a sense of community, therefore identification and identification, in an attempt to achieve a responsible and informed civic consciousness of the Right to the City through the Right to Public Space experienced collectively.

**Learning from the place (“genius loci”)**

As a physical, tangible place for encounter, a meeting and a place of socialization, as well as a symbolic and intangible space full of symbols and imaginaries that constitutes the identity and culture of the people that could not be produced individually in the world of the interior, Alameda Santa María la Ribera is a constructor of the identity of the society. Learning from the place (“genius loci”) succeeds, for example, by means of the relationship between the Museum of Geography and the Moorish Kiosk, an emblematic icon of Mexican development rendered in steel, people can be aware of the historical importance of the place.

Additionally, the Book Fair, which is held temporarily in tents, is a good proposal to encourage people to read, while the Agriculture Fair brings the population closed to urban agriculture, with the offering of seeds up to elaborated organic products. And in one of the gardens along Jaime Torres Bodet Street, a public compost area has been erected for raising the awareness of the people about the cycles of the nature, even though it had not functioned very well up to date.

\(^7\) Baca (2015).
Figure 41: Typical week at contemporary Alameda Santa María la Ribera.

**MONDAY**

7:00 a.m. People arrived for exercising, and its number diminished around 10 o’clock.

9:00 a.m. Children were taken to school.

9:50 a.m. Housewives, elderly people and neighbors, passed by the Square admiring the Kiosk.

11:00 p.m. Still some single persons ran around the Alameda, most of them accompanied by their dogs.

**TUESDAY**

7:40 a.m. The square already looked alive. People arrived to exercise, i.e. running, dancing or practicing yoga.

9:00 a.m. Street vendors ("ambulantes") set up their mobile stands in front of the Kiosk, where most people passed by because of its central location.

9:15 a.m. People waited on the benches or the stairs. At the same time, policemen guarded the Kiosk, and several people crossed the Square.

2:45 p.m. Some people were resting, others passed by.

10:00 a.m. Local staffs employed by the Delegation, cleaned the Square, taking away the waste, while services were delivered to the adjacent houses and stores, supplying them with gas, water, etc.

4:30 p.m. There was still mobile commerce present in the Square.

**WEDNESDAY**

4:00 p.m. A stand of shaved, scraped ice settles in front of the Kiosk. At this time, the weather was hot.

8:30 p.m. At night, police officers watched the zone. This gave a sense of security to the users of the Square.

**THURSDAY**

3:00 p.m. People were watching the exposition panels at the Museum of Geology.

3:00 p.m. The Alameda is a meeting point for the neighbors.

Some people just passed by without contemplating, nevertheless prevailed a harmonious atmosphere.
FRIDAY

7:40 a.m.
People crossed the Square, walked their dogs, exercised or practiced yoga by the base of the Kiosk.

11:00 a.m.
People waited for someone reading the paper or chatting with others. Most of the visitors just passed by.

SATURDAY

10:00 a.m.
Some people went out walking their pets or realizing sports with the family, some arrived in their cars to have breakfast in the nearby restaurants.

3:00 p.m.
At this time, there was the highest inflow of the day, representing the peak hour to eat and drink at the Square. Most of the people came with their families.

SUNDAY

9:00 a.m.
In the morning, the Square became the jogging scenario for many of its neighbors. The weather conditions were adequate to go running. Some of them trained by their own, some were accompanied.

12:00 p.m.
In general, Sunday was the day with the highest influx. Longer visitor's stays were noticeable, with people of all ages arriving. As a consequence, more informal commerce appeared.

6:00 p.m.
In the later afternoon, people started to address their homes.

Alameda Santa María la Ribera represents a local landmark, serving as a space for coexistence for the inhabitants.
4.2.3 “Revitalized” squares

4.2.3.1 Plaza Aguilita

(Abstract)

Plaza Aguilita is a square with a “traditional” notion of centrality, as well, but it was remodeled recently and revitalized through a loudspeaker radio called “Radio Aguilita”. The square is located in the heart of the La Merced Market District, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the Historic Center of Mexico City. Its official name is Plaza Juan José Baz. For many years, the Square was neglected and became a rather dirty and unsafe place immersed in a historically important commercial area. In 2007, the authorities, with the collaboration of the residents, worked on a diagnosis for the Historic Center Authority, the Historic Center Trust, and the Community Program of Neighborhood Improvement, in order to physically reshape the public space. During the following years, the square underwent several transformations that have modified the uses and ways of life of its residents and passers-by. Actions that were taken included the rehabilitation of public lighting, sanitation and cleaning, asphalt renovation, the installation of surveillance cameras, renewal of street furniture, and the placement of a replica of “La Aguilita” in the main fountain. Nevertheless, it is probably “Radio Aguilita”, an initiated integrative project in 2005 with the aim of contributing to the transformation of the stigma of the La Merced neighborhood, whose artistic and cultural program has changed the lives of the residents and passers-by of the district most, stimulating different forms of social learning.
URBAN PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY AS PLACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

1st Stage: “Conceived space” (“l'espace conçu”). Analysis of the planning

Historical aspects
While its history dates back to early Colonial times, Plaza Aguilíta is situated in the historic barrio of La Merced neighborhood, located in the eastern part of the Mexico City Historic Center. Since before the arrival of the Spanish, the territory now occupied by the Venustiano Carranza Delegation has always been an area of intense trade.

Aguilíta Square is in reality denominated Plaza Juan José Baz, presumably named after nineteenth-century liberal Governor Juan José Baz, an advocate of the confiscation of church property (Palomo Ortega 2015). Other versions of its designation refer to a liberal official of the same name who, in 1861, led the destruction of the Convents of Santo Domingo, La Concepción, and La Merced, or to the Governor of the Federal District, Juan José Baz (1820-1887) (Filigrana AC 2010). The Square’s official name, Plaza Juan José Baz, could also have been constructed in the memory of a fiery popular orator who lit up the populace of the city with his speeches in favor of liberalism and against polkas and conservatives (Batiz 2009). Although some of these versions are related in some manner, there is no way of identifying the “real” version: due to the antiquity of the place, much of what is known has come down through oral history.

The La Merced Market District represents one of the oldest of the Historic Center’s neighborhoods, which was founded in between 1312 and 1318. Established over 700 years ago by the Mexica natives as part of the founding of Tenochtítlan, the Square also is well-known because there, according to the omen that led to the foundation of Tenochtítlan, the Mexica found at its center an eagle eating a snake on a cactus plant. The tribe encountered the awaited sign that this was the place to establish themselves, and they settled in the Mexican highlands (Palomo Ortega 2015). Thus, “La Merced” translated into English signifies “the beneficiary” or “the graced”, and refers to a place in which, figuratively, God is at home. Thus, the Square represents the cornerstone of Mexico-Tenochtítlan.

Throughout its history, the La Merced area was associated with commerce, first as a major docking area for boats bringing goods to Tenochtítlan/Mexico City on Lake Texcoco and later via canals as the lake was slowly drained. In the later nineteenth century, the La Merced market was established in the area replacing the massive La Merced Monastery, which was nearly completely destroyed in the 1860s. This market was established to centralize the sales of foodstuffs for the city in one area. In 1867, Juan José Baz Square was inaugurated, whose adjoining streets were Danza Alley, Jurado, Blanquillo, Manito, Puente de Curtidores (Bridge of the Tanners), and Muñoz.
Thus, this Square already existed, although it was very small, and it was already known as La Aguilita (Tovar de Teresa 1990).

The first La Merced market was built in 1890 and was then replaced by the current building in 1957, one of the largest traditional Mexican markets in Mexico City. The La Merced district remained a street market until the 1950s. By the 1940s and 1950s and fifties, it had become the most popular food market of Mexico City (Ruvalcaba 2015). But in the 1980s, the wholesale function of this market was taken over by the newly constructed Centro de Abasto in the south of the city, with the barrio then going into economic and social decline.

However, the public space always has been up, and to date is, a traditional space for work.

Additionally, on April 9, 1980, the territory with the highest density of monuments and listed buildings due of its heritage and artistic values was declared “Historical Center” through a presidential decree, ordered by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) (National Institute of Anthropology and History), and the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) (National Institute of Fine Arts) for the purpose of the protection, conservation, and restoration of urban and architectural expressions. The Historic Center occupies an area of nine km² divided into two perimeters: “A” and “B”. Perimeter “A”, in which the district La Merced district is located delineates the highest concentration of catalogued buildings and public spaces of patrimonial value, whereas Perimeter “B” possesses a lower density of listed buildings that are also dispersed, functioning as a buffer zone of the first (Fig. 42). Furthermore, in 1987, the Historical Center would be declared a World Heritage Site of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), establishing the bases for its future conservation.

In terms of its population, the Historic Center was inhabited in 1990 by 195,416 inhabitants. In contrast, twenty years earlier, in 1970, 295,727 persons lived there. By 1950, there were about 500,000 occupants in the now-denominated Historic Center. Thus, a significant reduction in the number of inhabitants was registered.
Recently, the Square itself has undergone several transformations that have modified the uses and ways of life of its residents and passers-by. Since Plaza Aguilita unfortunately has been utilized for many years as a parking lot, as well, and many of the surrounding houses are employed as storerooms, so it was that, in general, the Square was in a rather dilapidated state. Therefore, it was remodeled in the years between 2008 and 2010 by the authorities of Delegations Cuauhtémoc and Centro Histórico. The renovation of Plaza Aguilita was focused predominantly on the “sanitation” and cleaning of the Square and on the construction of two green island-blocks, lined with surrounding benches and potsherds, which represent the “Alas de Talavera” Collection (wings in the so-called Talavera style), consisting of 42 handcrafted artisanal tiles that depict the 400-year iconographic development of the Mexican national emblem.

The surrounding streets were renovated, as well as the urban furniture, the pavement of the Square was renewed, and the central fountain was restored, its shape
and architecture highlighted and equipped with a replica of the “La Aguilita” eagle. In addition, about 80% of the public lighting was replaced and the trees and bushes were trimmed in order to improve the visual accessibility of the Square, thus to convey a sense of safety. Furthermore, surveillance cameras were installed by the City Government. Notwithstanding this, there continues to be a high criminal rate in the La Merced district, which still oriented to street trading and where even nowadays there is a large number of often vacant storage rooms. The district is often avoided because of “street gangs” that rule there.

However, the most significant event in the past years was probably the arrival of the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM) (Autonomous University of Mexico City), which assumed the administration of the alternative cultural center “Casa Talavera” nearby in 2001. Consequently, and with the aim of contributing to the transformation of the stigma of the La Merced neighborhood, the integrative project of the loudspeaker “Radio Aguilita” was introduced in 2005 on the initiative of Cultural Commissioner Joaquín Aguilar Camacho⁷, and an artistic and cultural program was organized. By expanding cultural activities, social processes, therefore appropriation, should be motivated in the public space as well as in joint activities outside of the daily business, which are encouraged and for recovery of the identity of the space.

“Radio Aguilita” is institutionally affiliated with the relatively new, public university UACM, which should contribute a strong conducive element in the construction of a program for the public space of the “Casa Talavera” and will complement other community initiatives serving for the consolidation of the vicinity of Aguilita Square. In this manner, connection to the neighboring community of La Merced and its approximation toward art and culture represent the priorities of this cultural center. Accordingly, “Radio Aguilita” should develop as a vehicle of the linkage among the community, the public administration, and the universities to form an important part of the urban regeneration process.

Additionally, the initiative was supported by the Programa Universitario de Estudios de la Ciudad (PUEC) (University Program for City Studies) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) (UNAM) (National Autonomous University of Mexico). This program was conducted by Professor Dr. Alicia Ziccardi Contigiani, who stated in 2007 that the project “Radio Aguilita” had generated social cohesion in the neighborhood of La Merced. Work began on a diagnosis for the Autoridad del Centro Histórico (Historic Center Authority), the Fideicomiso Centro Histórico (Historic Center Trust), and the Programa Comunitario de Mejoramiento Barrial (Community Program of Neighborhood

⁷ Joaquín Aguilar Camacho is a musician and cultural manager, representative of the “Casa Talavera” of UACM.
Improvement)\textsuperscript{2}, from which finally the design for the renovation of the square emerged, elaborated by the Fideicomiso (Trust). This in turn led to the statement by Joaquin Aguilar Camacho that “Plaza Aguilita today is the first space of intervention and public art not imposed by an institution, but requested by the community that lives and works in this space. This fosters the use of art as a tool to build values, ethics, and human processes in citizenship” (Aguilar Camacho 2012).

In the practical implementation of the radio sessions, a table, six chairs, an audio console, three microphones, cables, and two large loudspeakers were brought each week in a small handcart, and a three-hour long artistic and cultural program was initiated, whereby the audience can only be as large as the reach of the sonic waves of both active loudspeakers. In this respect, the motto “La radio que se ve” (“Radio that is seen”) is for understanding, because the radius extends as far as the loudspeakers can be seen.

The artistic and cultural program includes talks with invited guests and offers a stage for young as well as established talents, street artists, and passers-by, who spontaneously take the microphone (Fig. 43). Subjects regarding the fields of art, culture, and education, such as environmental and human rights, gender questions, or sexual customers, as well as the social, urban development of the district, e.g., the possibility of a gentrification process of the zone on the basis of an announced master plan, are publicly discussed. Pieces of music are inserted, linked with the issues; therefore, the debates are between these.

\textsuperscript{2} The Community Program of Neighborhood Improvement is based on the Neighborhood Improvement Plan (Plan de Mejoramiento Barrial) generated by the Federal District Government, the Secretariat of Social Development (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social) (SEDESOL), with the Secretariat for Citizen Participation (Subsecretaría de Participación Ciudadana) and the Sub-directorate for Evaluation (Subdirección de Evaluación). The main objective of the program, according to its rules of operation, is to develop an integrated process, ongoing and participatory, for improving public spaces in towns, neighborhoods, and “colonias” in Mexico City.
Figure 43: Aguilita Square is converted, through the radio, into a forum for public opinion.

Source: Courtesy of Joaquín Aguilar Camacho, 2015.

Through the development of artistic and cultural projects, the public space of the Square is transformed into a symbolic laboratory of the new dynamics of citizen participation as well as for innovative and integrative transformation processes of the public and symbolic space that, in the sense of encounter and coexistence, strengthens identification with the place as well as individual and collective identities. In a second step, the creation of a process of “appropriation and self-responsibility” by the population itself was the objective, which, according to Joaquín Aguilar Camacho (2012) had unfortunately not been carried out as desired to date.

However, the experience in the public space, initiated by “Radio Aguilita”, has become a stage for public opinion and has acted as a catalyst for an urban transformation of La Merced district, whose inhabitants of today loudly resist a feared gentrification. Thus, the place represents a scenario for a transformation process, which refers to the spoken word and as such serves as the means of this change. Consequently, the dialogue moves toward the center of the community, and the radio becomes an instrument for the politicizing of people into a motor of social change, which Joaquin Aguilar Camacho described as the “metamorphosis of the urban district of La Merced or Meche” (Aguilar Camacho 2012). In addition, the radio would use the tools of art in to generate values, such as ethics or those regarding human processes within citizenship (“ciudadania”).
Within the framework of this model of an approach toward art, the radio becomes a bridge to the people and, at the same time, an alternative to the classical cultural institutions such as museums, art galleries, or even forums. Therefore, the place, which usually serves merely for transition, operates during these hours as a meeting place, as a place of encounter with “the other(s)”. Likewise, “Radio Aguilita” has been consolidated over the past more than eleven years into another form of cultural communication in the urban public space. The new forms of civic association and the involvement of instances such as “Casa Talavera” and UACM have also led to the rethinking of the use of public space in other places. Thus, the radio is currently expanding into different sites within the urban district. In addition, initiatives from other colonies, such as Santa María la Ribera, have been in contact and have requested advice in order to install such a loudspeaker radio in their respective quarters. So, “Radio Aguilita” has become a “social-cultural experience” (ibid.) and an issue that has extended beyond the distribution of “Casa Talavera”.

It is noteworthy that, during the years when the rehabilitation took place, “Radio Aguilita” did not operate in the Square. When Joaquín Aguilar Camacho returned, the neighbors mentioned several aspects to him, including that the Historic Center Authority and the Trust did not take them into account for many modifications and “that he, as representing in a way the link between the authorities and the community”, had in effect abandoned them. Joaquín Aguilar Camacho returned to “Radio Aguilita” and other projects with the purpose of recovering the space were carried out, such as “Galería Nocturna” (“Night Gallery”) and the “Pintando con luz” (“Painting with Light”) Project, in search of cohesion in the community and the appropriation of space through art and culture. Although there have been efforts to revitalize the area and the La Merced market remains important, the area continues to have problems with poverty, population loss, and prostitution.

**Urban aspects**
The Square belongs to the Venustiano Carranza Delegation that is associated to the Colonia Centro on the southwestern edge of Historic Center of Mexico City in the “barrio” La Merced, an unofficial city division, between Mesones and Misioneros Streets. It covers a territory of 106 city blocks or 121 hectares, accounting for about 13.5% of the city's Historic Center, with about 40% of the area's historic buildings, reflecting its political and cultural importance throughout the history of the area. Officially, the La Merced neighborhood is divided into two of the boroughs of the Federal District of Mexico City, located within the limits of Cuauhtémoc and Venustiano Carranza Delegations. In addition, the La Merced neighborhood is divided into
“colonias” or official neighborhoods denominated Merced Balbuena (in Venustiano Carranza) and Colonia Centro (in Cuauhtémoc).

The square is zoned as a neighborhood center, conceived under the old ideas of self-sufficient- and immediate-service neighborhoods (Rossi 1966). According to the Programa Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano Centro Histórico (Partial Urban Development Program for the Historic Center) included in the Programa Delegacional de Desarrollo Urbano (Urban Development Program) for Cuauhtémoc Delegation, published in the Official Gazette of the Federal District on September 7, 2000, the Square is situated within an area of urban land used for housing and commerce on the ground floor (classification HC). The Square is zoned with the EA nomenclature, corresponding to open spaces (parks, squares, and public gardens). Given the historic and architectural importance of La Merced and in addition, to its high concentration of urban facilities, it is considered an area with high value for housing, on that is has schools, kindergartens, hospitals, health centers, sand spaces for recreation and sports, with four public squares, a sports center, cultural centers, plazas, and arcades.

The La Merced District is a geographical demarcation in which the project “Rescate Integral de La Merced” (PRIM) (“Integral Rescue of La Merced Project” (PRIM) takes place. Therefore, the dynamics of the Square is part of a pedestrian-commercial-tourist corridor named Alhóndiga-Talavera, which extends from San Pablo Avenue to República El Salvador (Fig. 44). The rehabilitation of this pedestrian corridor was made possible by the Fideicomiso Centro Histórico (FCH) (Historic Center Trust), within the framework of the program for control of street vendors in 2007. The director of the Historic Center Trust, Inti Muñoz Santini, emphasizes that this corridor is the longest in the Historic Center, in that it covers more than one km² of pedestrian streets that connect the most important areas, from San Pablo to the Church of La Santísima, and it will soon be linked with the Moneda Street Corridor (Fig. 44). He mentioned that the pedestrianization of this corridor “has a cultural character given the importance represented by the set of historic buildings ranging from Guatemala Street to Izazaga Avenue in a line that connects places like Plazas Aguilita and Alhóndiga. Thus, the work of revitalization in the area involves the integral renovation of the entire underground urban infrastructure and surface, facades, and the lighting system, as well as planting vegetation according to the environment”.

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The Secretariat of Economic Development (SEDECO) (Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico) of the Federal District Government, through its electronic portal, unveils the Master Plan for Integral Rehabilitation of La Merced, whose purpose is to guide, harmonize, and engage the human will and efforts, and the material and economic resources of different levels of government and civil society, for the improvement of the quality of life of residents, visitors, and workers in the territory and zone-of-influence of La Merced.

Inside the La Merced polygon, several aspects are contemplated: the economy (commercial area and public markets); the index of social development; current land uses, population density; transportation infrastructure; schools; nurseries, and cultural centers, as well as health and care centers, hospitals, recreation and sport facilities, security and justice buildings, and the identification of buildings with historic or artistic value, plus available land and underutilized buildings (with potential for recycling), which make sense to and interest the governmental, social and private organizations in recovering the economy and cultural-heritage features.

Given this plan, the streets’ asphalt was rehabilitated, and two Metrobús lines were introduced, so that there are currently various options for accessing the Square and the La Merced Corridor. Vehicle access is through Axe 1 North and 1 East, Congreso Avenue, and Fray Servando Teresa de Mier Street. Public transportation provides access by means of Metro Lines 1 and 2, Metrobús Routes 4 and 5, and Trolebús Routes 6 and 5 (Fig. 45). As part of the socioeconomic revitalization of the area, the La Merced District Project proposed themed walking tours.
Architectural aspects

Thus, the Square is inscribed within Perimeter “A” of the Mexico City Historic Center, where there is the highest concentration of culturally and historically important monuments, constituting the most extraordinary cultural heritage of the country. Plaza Aguilita forms part of the pedestrian corridor North-South Pedestrian Corridor from Venustiano Carranza to San Pablo Street, representing distinctive buildings along the Square. Its morphology is found in a large, clear rectangle oriented from north to south, which is bordered on the North by Mesones and Ramón Corona Streets. On the east, the Square is limited by a block of buildings constructed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, while on the south, it is bordered by Misioneros Street and to the west, by another block consisting of more contemporary buildings, from the first half of twentieth century and later.

In the center, there is the fountain with the replica of the historic Aguila consuming a snake while sitting on a cactus on the top, residing above a stony column. Unfortunately, and since its construction, there has never been water in the fountain, giving a relatively sorrowful impression. Nonetheless, the circular stone balustrade, which should technically be filled with water, is used actively, offering (“affordance”) central seating accommodations for young couples, children resting from their play, or other people who are relaxing, taking in the hustle and bustle of the place. The area surrounding the fountain is paved differently from the remainder of the Square, with bright paving cobblestones in the shape of an overlapping circle and a rectangle, emphasizing the Square’s determined orientation.

The remodeling of Plaza Aguilita also involved the construction of two “islands” in the northern part of the place, meaning two benches covered with ceramic pieces. These constitute the “Wings of Talavera“ Collection, which consists of 42 handmade
plagues that reveal 400 years of the iconographic evolution of the Mexican coat of arms; this collection was developed by Talavera de la Reyna workshop in Puebla, which is responsible for the historic research and design of the pieces (Fig. 46). At the southern end of the Square, there is located another, rather large, garden area, again with circumferential seating steps and a ramp at the southern flank that is adapted to the needs of the disabled, as well as a neglected green area on the top with an apparently isolated chess table and a two trees of different sizes. Next to the three planter boxes, there are arranged four refuse bins at the corners for hygiene, although not the often-announced divided ones.

Figures 46: “Alas de Talavera” in Plaza La Aguilita.

The rest of the Square is fashioned from comparatively dark stone, with little brightness at the laterals. With regard to the pavement of the Square, Architect Michel Manuel Trejo4 reported that the materials are intended to not contrast with the irregularity of space, in an attempt to give unity to the compound with floors made of stone materials, such as concrete and “chiluca” stone blocks, to ensure durability and low cost.

The vegetation and ornamental proposal for the Square embraced as its main factor the climate of Mexico City, defined as “CW”, i.e., temperate to sub-humid with

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rains in summer. The second criterion for their choice was its Mexican origin, or preferably as close as possible, in addition to presenting visual appeal. Nevertheless, the lack of green elements is evident, even on the surface of the Square, with low maintenance and few singular trees along the sides of the Square, highlighting two rather voluminous trees: one in the southern garden area and the spreading tree with overhanging branches under which “Radio Aguilita” normally takes place. Additionally, there were arranged some protectors were set in place for trees, planters, and pots.

Furthermore, there are some singular benches on the Square, as well as in the following pedestrian corridor and a clock as well as a flagpole located at the northern entrance of the Square, marking its starting point. Telephone booths were installed opposite to large, garden area in the South, such as two series of lampposts at regular intervals on both sides of the Square, which also pass over into the adjoining pedestrian zone (Fig. 47). Infrastructural equipment such as manholes, electric power, water, sewerage, and drains have been distributed satisfactorily in the place, while signs referring to roads, sidewalks, and walkways for restrictive, preventive, informative, vehicular, and commercial issues. In order to provide greater security in this zone, which is known as very dangerous, surveillance cameras at the north-western edge of the Square have been installed through the Centro de Comando, Control, Cómputo, Comunicaciones y Contacto Ciudadano de la Ciudad de México (CAEPCCM) (Center of Command, Control, Computation, Communications and Civic Contact de México City).

Several other elements, announced primarily by the estuary of Contenido del Mobiliario Urbano (Content of Urban Furniture of the Secretariat) de la Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Secretariat of Social Development), have not been set in place in Plaza Aguilita to date, such as bus stops, parking places with parking meters, and other units for multiple support, shoe shines, furniture, car rental, and moving transport sites, conical poles, lighting with (extended) lamps, traffic lights, common manholes for the infrastructure, and mailboxes for communication, in addition to children games and bike racks.

The opening-solid relationship in the facades indicates a dominance of the solid, which is characteristic among buildings of Colonial origin and those constructed up to the first half of the twentieth century. The buildings analyzed do not show a tendency toward verticality, and a low perspective prevails, with buildings predominately between three and five stories high, implying low utilization of the existing infrastructure. At night, the mighty metal shutters are lowered on the ground floors, and shops are thus properly “barricaded”, so that a rejecting impression emerges. The buildings have
neither vehicular access nor surrounding parking lots according to demand. This problem has a tendency to worsen.

“Affordance”, i.e., the possibilities of action that are materially possible or of which the user is aware, is limited in Plaza Aguilita, despite having furniture designed for the enjoyment of a place conceived as a public square; the place is mostly used as a passageway. The view offered by the flower beds to visitors is toward the shops and the fountains (sculptural and in the ground), which are not working, “since the day of their inauguration”\(^5\). At the west border, there are located two small chess tables, which obviously are not used often for this purpose.

![Figure 47: Urban architectural configuration.](image)

**Functional aspects**

La Merced is a barrio or a neighborhood of Mexico City defined by its socioeconomics and history rather than by an official designation. The dominant use of the surrounding buildings is commercial on the ground floor. Among the commercial uses, there is the much frequented taquería “Tipolandía”, “Café Bagdad” (*Fig. 48*), many stationary stores, and small grocery shops, as well as old, traditional public toilets, while housing is located on the upper floor(s).

\(^5\) Testimony of Mrs. Vera, an employee of a store selling seasonal items for festivities.
For many years, Plaza Aguilita was utilized as a parking place for trucks and, as well, the surrounding houses were employed as warehouses. In recent years, the Square has been renovated and its fountain restored, thus revealing its design and architecture. Therefore, since the renovation, the design of the Square, according to Architect Michel Manuel Trejo Mujica, merely provides it with general use as a transitional space. Within this condition, the space is organized by the creation of small “islands”, each with a specific use, providing landscaped areas with benches grouped in pairs, forming an “L” with the intention of offering areas for passive activities such as rest, meeting, contemplation, etc.

Accesses to the Square remain free, in order to create the pedestrian corridor, where historic buildings “Casa Talavera” and “Casa de la Mujer Indígena” (“House of the Indigenous Woman”) are located. The transformation was marked by the change of the flooring materials in order to emphasize access to Aguilita square.

It is important to mention that the Square has currently been characterized by receiving buyers who come to stock up at stationary stores at the site, using the garden to accommodate their goods, looking as if they need something, and further resting for several minutes. Regularly, the Square is a place of passage, connecting it with the surrounding shops, but also the Square is considered by the locals as a place of recreation, predominately in the evening, due to the area’s mixed land use.
2nd stage: Perceived space (“l’espace perçu”). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

The study regarding the perceived space (“l’espace perçu”), interpreted as the result of spatial practices of movement and interaction, was subdivided in several periods of observation. Thus, together with students of the Master Program in Design and Urban Studies of the UAM-Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, a first observational work was conducted between Saturday March 10 and Sunday March 11, 2015, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Activities were also registered meticulously from Sunday October 18 2015, 2:00 p.m., to Monday October 26, 2:00 p.m., together with students of the elective, optional Subject XII “Taller de experimentación en el espacio público” (“Workshop Experimentation in Public Space”) of the UAM-Azcapotzalco. Taking into account that the space underwent a transformation process after its refurbishment in 2008-2010, the activities that unfolded in giving life to this place were recorded and mapped, showing how the space is dissected according to the activities taking place in it, describing the functions that were present in this public space and the flows of people (Fig. 50), in an attempt to highlight the observed patterns.

Various sessions of “Radio Aguilita” were attended, for example, on Wednesday March 25, 2015, with self-participation in the form of an interview focused on the contemporary functions of the public square, as well as on Thursday October 15, 2015, during a so-called “Jornada cultural” with the participation of an UAM-Azcapotzalco theater group. Furthermore, an on-site urban intervention was held with students from the UAM-Azcapotzalco and inhabitants of the “Colonia” on Saturday November 26, 2015, with the intention of revitalizing or animating the space and community life, using the source as a metaphor for life in general, which was documented and discussed actively on “Radio Aguilita”, as well.

As mentioned previously, Plaza Aguilita presents intense commercial activity, so that the flows or movements of people (traders, “diableros”7, customers, and suppliers) as well as of goods were rather constant throughout the day. Each of these actors participates in the conception of her/his own perceived space. With information deriving from the surveys, we understand that there are two large groups of users in the

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6 This event took place within the framework of the Seminario Permanente y Jornadas Culturales “La Metamorfosis de la Merced. Reflexiones sobre el patrimonio cultural y el espacio público disputado” (Permanent Seminar and Cultural Sessions “The Metamorphosis of La Merced. Reflections on Cultural Heritage and Disputed Public Space”), organized in conjunction with members of Mexico City’s universities UACM, UNAM, Universidad Claustro de Sor Juana, and UAM.

7 Chargers, porters or “diableros”, as they are popularly known, are workers who, for an established fee, move bulky goods through the streets of the Historic Center of Mexico City.
Square: the residents (mainly tenants, vendors, and “diableros”), and passers-by (shoppers, tourists, and occasional pedestrians).

For the first group, the inhabitants, the Square is a place of struggle, debate, and resistance in the sense of “ciudadanía”-spaces (Tamayo Flores-Alatorre 2013)\(^8\) and roots to avoid changing the commercial avocation of the place. It turns out that the initiative to clean the streets of the Historic Center by the authorities and the restoration projects undertaken in the area that are supported by the omnipresent Mexican-Lebanese investor Carlos Slim did not consider the activities of the intense trade that is generated there, as well as the activities of the “diableros”. These “revitalizing” projects also did not take into consideration sufficient parking space for visitors and suppliers, a situation that has created tensions between the shop owners and the Federal District authorities. Urban interventions conceived of at the halls of the powers-that-be are aimed at altering the usage of these streets, from trade to only tourism and services, under the logic and efficient practice of generating large profits for invested capital, but to the detriment of social and environmental aspects.

The other large group of users, the passers-by, perceptibly feels rather violated in their activities, in terms of their failing to make use of their cars because of the lack of parking spaces and not being able to use the “diableros”. Through the ethnographic field research, the most frequent uses of the space could be recorded: pedestrian traffic; areas for resting, eating, and trading, and, to a lesser extent, for recreation and relaxation.

There is a place to eat tacos called “Tripolandia”, whose owners have set up tables and chairs that occupy the public space on the Square. People sat there while enjoying their lunch in the shade of a tree (Fig. 49). Another gastronomic spot offers “carnitas”\(^9\) and is located at a corner of the Square on Misioneros Street. In some way, this also contributes to the dynamics of the Square, as people order their tacos to take away, consuming them seated at one of the gardens or at one of the planter boxes, which were used as tables.

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\(^8\) Accordingly, the term was intensively exposed by Sergio Tamayo Flores-Alatorre on October 13, 2015, during his presentation held at Centro Cultural Casa Talavera: Apropiación simbólica y política del espacio público (Symbolic and Political Appropriation of the Public Space), Seminario Permanente y Jornadas Culturales: “La Metamorfosis de la Merced. Reflexiones sobre el patrimonio cultural y el espacio público disputado” (Permanent Seminar and Cultural Days: “The Metamorphosis of the Merced. Reflections on Cultural Heritage and Disputed Public Space”), Round-table: “Espacios de Formación Ciudadana” (“Spaces for Civil Formation”), organized in conjunction with the UACM, UNAM, Universidad Claustro de Sor Juana, and the UAM.

\(^9\) “Carnitas”, literally “little meats”, is a dish of Mexican cuisine. In Mexico, different portions of pork are called “carnitas”, including meat fried in lard.
Some of the interactions or activities that were generated in the Square seem to be very familial. Many tenants have known each other for years, and some services, such as public restrooms, have functioned over one hundred years. “Café Bagdad” represents one of the oldest commercial uses at the Square, as well. Therefore, some of the people’s relationships were very close, creating an atmosphere of nearly being at home. However, due to this commercial dynamic, many other interactions were fleeting: people entered the premises, consumed, and left.

On this manner, in the early mornings, young adults usually passed through the square, accompanying their children in uniforms to the nearby schools or heading to work. Also, in March 2015, at 8:30 a.m., “Café Bagdad”, as well as neighboring stationery shops, began to open. The first activity that took place was the sweeping from the inside of the business to the outside and finishing watering the sidewalk, generating an odor of damp earth and floor cleaner. Up to 10:00 a.m., the Square remained with the vast majority of business still closed. Very few people were seen, and those who transited were riding bikes or were persons called “diableros”. A few persons were also sitting and sunning themselves on benches or on planters, mostly elderly people, drinking “atole” and watching the time go by.

Later, sounds of metal curtains were heard as some stationary stores began to open, and the “Tripolandia” taco stand set up its tables and chairs, occupying the public space. Other businesses conducted their cleaning and accommodated their wares at their front doors with the objective of attracting customers. Shade was on the side of
“Café Bagdad”; yet passers-by who came to the Square walked under the strongest sun rays. At this time of the morning, two workers from Federal District Government (GDF) cleaned the square (sweeping and removing the trash in bins).

At 11:24 a.m., a large truck of the Coca-Cola beverage company parked on Mesones Street and remained there for four hours each Tuesday, because it supplies grocery stores located in the blocks around the Square. On the other hand, more stores opened and accommodated their wares.

The first round of policemen on the Square was observed around mid-day. These officers walked around slowly and supervised that businesses did not demonstrate any abnormality that was out of sync with the harmony and the code of conduct that has maintained this place as it is since its rehabilitation. The Square partially emptied after a greater influx of people between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., who passed through the Square and bought products. At the same time, the garbage collection truck passed by and carried off the garbage that the GDF employees initially swept and left in the Square. On the Square were seen, shortly thereafter, the arrival of supplier of goods, who left merchandise at various establishments around the Square, as well as at others outside. Youngsters went by the square on bikes and scooters, while the traffic police officers went down Mesones Street and reviewed vehicles that were parked on the side of the street.

As happens every day, two persons arrived around 1:00 p.m. at the Square and installed a “trampoline” very close to the planters toward “Casa Talavera”. The time to install the trampoline is 40 minutes. Once it is installed, one can watch a child paying five MXN to jump on it. Around 4:00 p.m., when the sun has already lowered in intensity, more children were seen either in the “bouncy” or in the fountain, running through the Square, while boys used the Square to play football or basketball.

In the early afternoon, some customers, who had purchased stationery goods, came to the Square to accommodate their goods according to the list they had in hand. Again, the Square became a transit passage, as mothers walked with their children from school. Also, a group of teenagers with secondary- school uniforms were observed quietly roaming around the Square, adding to the fluency of the public space. Furthermore, some individuals were seen eating and others were carrying trays with food for the tenants in the area. On the weekends, especially on Sundays, there was a rather peaceful coexistence on the Square, with people relaxing and children playing in the garden zones. All types of businesses were open, even on Sundays.

It can be concluded that the main activities carried out in this Square included transit, eating, shopping, relaxing, and playing. Regarding the passages, these mainly occurred at the edges of the Square, specifically on the east side of it, because there is
more shade there, either due to the presence of trees or through the projection of the adjacent buildings upon the movement of the sun; after 1:00 p.m., it seems that there appears to be an “invisible” sidewalk used by passers-by.

With regard to parking, this was constant on Misioneros Street. Suppliers’ trucks, such as those of Coca Cola, Danone, and other local businesses, often used that street to park for an indefinite amount of time, while distributing their products, not only to nearby businesses and those in the Square, but to other stores in the surrounding blocks. As the spaces became fewer in number, cars were also parked in front of the southern garden areas.

The log reflects that this public space presents various activities and moments of larger influx of persons, but there were also periods of up to 40 minutes without anything happening or someone being in the Square (Fig. 53). It was noteworthy that when the rays of the sun were more intense, two or three people were sitting at the fountain, either just watching or even drawing in a notebook. Also, it is important to note the presence of dogs lying down and sleeping under the fountain or in the shade of a tree.

The presence of one or two “street people” formed part of the landscape of the Square, and they have taken over the garden facing Mesones Street. These individuals were apparently harmless and, due to the police presence, they were not allowed to remain for long in this space. In conclusion, and in addition to the fact that the Square presented various activities, the persons who inhabited or transited the space were children, youngsters, adults, and seniors, as well as public security agents and cleaning personnel, suppliers of goods, dogs, and even vehicles parked on the public square.
Figure 50: Objects, activities, movements.

OBJECTS
- Benches
- Trees
- Surveillance cameras
- Garden
- Light
- Trash cans
- Radio Aguilita
- Fountain
- Metal curtains/dors
- Chess table
- Telephone box
- Trash cans

ACTIVITIES
- Sell/buy
- Play
- Eat
- Performe
- Rest
- Transit
- Park

MOVEMENT
- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” (“l’espace vécu”). Interviews with users. (Social) Actors

Thirty six face-to-face interviews were applied to different types of users of Plaza Aguilita, in order to analyze the “lived space” (“l’espace vécu”) based on the unconscious relationship between the human being and the space. The interviews were conducted in the form of an informal chat, with the support of a series of questions that allowed the interviewee to provide information on their experiences in the Square and to provide their opinions about it. Additionally, a cluster sampling was performed, so that a certain percentage was covered for each user type identified as predominant. According to the responses obtained from the interviews, the following graphics were prepared to condense the main results (Fig. 51).

On average, the majority of people who visited the Square were adults or elderly persons, this perhaps due to that the adults were engaging in their customary occupations and that the elderly people have more leisure time. The majority of the respondents were men over the age of 50 and women over 45 years, since these were the features of the most frequent users. At a smaller percentage, people within an age range between 25 and 45 years were interviewed. Many of the people who visited the Square were persons engaged in trade (56.25%), such as micromerchants and the employees of local or nearby shops, delivery persons, “diableros”, and shoppers. Some were students (12.5%), homemakers (6.25%), or professionals (6.25%). Although the Square is surrounded by houses, there were no important daily presence of teenagers or children; that occurred only at certain times, predominately during weekends.

The majority of users were from the Federal District of Mexico City (62.5%), as well as from the Metropolitan Area (18.75%). On the other hand, the Square was also visited by people from other states of the Republic (18.75%), such as Oaxaca, Hidalgo, and the State of Mexico, while there were no foreigners among the interviewed persons. The origin of nearly 100% of the micromerchants interviewed included colonies distant from La Merced, such as Ecatepec, Zaragoza, Iztapalapa, and Atizapán, while a few came from other places outside of the Metropolitan Area such as Tlaxcala, Chalco, Guanajuato, and Pachuca. These informants had their own business, coming frequently to this area in order to find stationery stores, teaching and decorative materials, etc., and purchasing merchandise for their business. They mentioned the convenience of these stores, because of the low prices offered, the service, the good relationship with the proprietor, as well as taking advantage by making personal purchases and of other products.

Considering that the Square is located very close to the Merced Market District, many traders as well as housewives passed by in order to engage in their activities.
Primarily, people came to Plaza Aguilita to buy or sell things (37.5%), while others occupied the place mainly for recreation (37.5%), remaining for a while to rest before continuing their walk. Another important group of users simply used the Square to move from one side to the other, i.e., as a means to get to another place (25%), with the exception of some artists. Therefore, the Square does not present a final destination: it is more likely a place of transition. People used it to sit and take a little rest, to accommodate their merchandise or to eat something, but it was just one stop on their “agenda”.

The interviews opened the opportunity of coming to know the emotions or sensations of the tenants, too, regarding Aguilita Square before and after its remodeling. Other opinions consulted were those of the workers who cleaned the Square, suppliers, and other merchants who came to buy goods and spend a couple of hours in the Square. Regarding the tenants, some of them live around the Square, above their own business. Therefore, the combination of business areas in the ground floor and dwellings on the upper floor(s) is rather common in the buildings around the Square, being an area denominated as mixed use. Tenants perceive the Square as an advantage for business, because it motivates people to stop, thus providing the possibility for more sales. However, since its revitalization, the authorities have imposed new regulations related to the use of facades to exhibit goods, which has generated various types of discontent. These informants temporarily used the space for social purposes, with the intention of communicating with the neighbors, but predominately for casual chats related to their businesses. Perhaps the strongest moment of collaboration takes place during the time that “Radio Aguilita” was located in the square and motivated people to participate in activities outside of their business routines. For employees, the situation is different, in that the Square represents only part of their workplace; in many cases, these employees come from some distant colonies. Then, they use the Square to eat, to talk to their own colleagues but, in the majority of cases, only for transit. Plaza Aguilita does not have an important significance in their daily lives; it only represents a space that tired shoppers use to take a break. “I don't like it, and it does not mean anything special, it is just another place to sell merchandise”\textsuperscript{10}.

Both tenants and employees were the most frequent users, as they visited the Square nearly every day. However, they did not seem to have an emotional relationship with the Square, but only a functional linkage; thus, only a few inhabitants considered the Square as “their” place. However, it works having a Square in front of

\textsuperscript{10} Quotation from a vendor on the Square, March11, 2015
the shops, because the place attracts people who come and buy. A favorable aspect of Aguilita Square is that it is located midway between the area of La Merced (part of zone 5) and zones 6 and 1 of the first block of the Historic Center, where streets such as Pino Suárez, 20 de November, and 16 de September, etc., are located, these streets having great commercial weight. Thus, the Square has a temporary and transitional use, predominantly because of its location, and the people in general thought that the commercial as well as some cultural activities conducted resulted in a very adequate match with the place. The vast majority of people felt at ease with their experiences in the Square, as well.

Therefore, the reasons to visit the place were not due to its structure or its environment that, in the afternoon, were perceived as dirty, neglected, noisy, and even unsafe. They derived mainly from its location, the convenience of its basic urban furniture for sitting down a while, and that the Square is surrounded by shops for dispenses, restaurants, cafés, and other services, such as public restrooms and stores for purchasing vegetables and tortillas. Likewise, the verbalization of an informant in terms of inviting someone to the Square included the following: “I would invite a person to buy, but not to use it as a recreational place”

Thus, many people said they would invite someone to get to know the Square. Those who denied this did not consider a great lack of the attraction of the Square, but mentioned that they would miss something of greater interest.

Average time of usage of the Square was 15 to 30 minutes, mainly by micromerchants; while longer uses were related to employees and tenants during working hours, but who do not necessarily live next to the Square or experience it. People did not plan to go to this place as a final destination for leisure, solely reaching Aguilita Square by chance or convenience. Therefore, there was hardly any altercation among the users, since they were not in search of that experience. Therefore, such a social interaction occurred mainly among users who were becoming recurring visitors and who also had the free time for and interest in exchanging experiences with others.

In general, people felt rather safe (43.75%), but nearly the same amount of persons examined expressed a certain distrust (31.25%), while others considered the atmosphere in the Square as “normal” (25%). Some others have been even victims of or witnesses of assaults in the area. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the majority of people said that they would like to change things in the square (87.5%), constantly demanding modifications for Plaza Aguilita regarding the improvement of urban furniture, such as children’s games and benches, since its ceramic material is

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11 Distributor and supplier.
uncomfortable and very flat, as well as the restitution of the damaged tiles and the deficient illumination in general. In contrast, there were also those who mentioned removing the seats that the "street people" uses for sleeping. The central fountain should be repaired, because it regularly does not have any water. In reality, as it has never functioned, some even would remove it. Furthermore, persons would like, for the purpose of better maintenance of the place, cleaning the area and the placing of sufficient trash cans. Other main requests were centered on providing more shade and offering larger green areas, since there are only a very few large trees in good condition.

Taking into account its history, the modifications and revitalizations of this space have led to the substitution of some actors who moved away with the passage of time, although there are others who have stayed, continuing to experience and learn from this space. The questionnaires applied indicated that revitalization of the Square has generated in the users various ways of utilizing the place. Depending on the approach or the relationships with the Square of the interviewees, the physical or architectural aspect had a great influence on the uses of the place, such as that the floor type and the vegetation somehow determined the activities that took place there and how each activity was carried out.
Figure 51: Results of the questionnaire applied at Plaza Aguilita.

- **Men**: 60%
- **Age range**: 12 - 80
- **Women**: 40%

30% 🟢 Shops
- Furniture
- Food
- Tranquility
- Comfort

70% 🔴 Dirt
- Neglect
- Insecurity
- Abandonment
- Little shade
- Noisy
- Dangerous

**Activities**
- Transit
- Commerce
- Rest
- Eat
- Others

**Frequency**
- Once a week
- Sporadic
- Everyday
- Once a month
- 2 or 3 times a week

**Stay time**
- 15 - 20 min
- 30 min
- 1 hour
- 2 hours or +
Conclusions. Learning at Plaza Aguilita

By researching throughout the triad of space by Henri Lefebvre (1974), outstanding elements within the space could be determined, specifically through the observation of features of social relations existing in Aguilita Square and about the place, concluding that the way in which the Square is conceived and perceived is the way in which it is lived or inhabited.

In general, there is no recognition by the users or persons of locations surrounding the Square, with the realization that many citizens, despite their being close to the place, ignore or are unaware of its location, because to them it is not a significant element in their imaginary, because the real needs of the users of the Square, visitors as well as nearby residents, were not met, even with the equipping of the place adequately for activities such as meetings or other tasks that require spending a longer time in it. That is why there is a lack of use of the site, with the occurrence that because of this, the square is an unrelated place to its actors and their daily activities.

Morphologically, Aguilita Square does not have resources to provide a feeling of “comfort” to the user, because of the lack of shade or the use of flooring materials that generate too much heat and brightness during clear days, creating acute dissatisfaction for the senses. The few seating spaces are scarcely ergonomic, as well, and do not allow the user to remain and rest for long.

Another common use in the public square is commerce, both formal and informal. The second case comprises an activity that largely determines the environment perceived within the Square and its environment. The new rules deriving the renovation included the prohibition of any type of informal business, which is why a significant deployment of public security agents was observed for nearly the entire day. This creates a hostile atmosphere and one of harassment for many users.

It appears that the vocation of the Square is in line more with the visitors than the residents. Much of use given to the traffic, due to the role of the Square is localized within the pedestrian corridor between Circunvalación and Pino Suárez Avenues. On becoming only a passageway, historic elements and symbols within the Square, such as the fountain or coat of arms on the benches, became unnoticed.

Notwithstanding this, Plaza Aguilita does have strong potential for the presence of an active “genius loci”, understood as an open and at the same time designed, tangible connection of nature and architecture. Therefore, at the center of the Square a representation of an eagle is located, eating a snake and perched on a cactus, in remembrance of the historic importance of the place and, with this, linking it to its urban landscape and imaginary. So, there still exists a “genius loci”, as well as an urban
memory, too, and this memory is reflected directly in the Square. In this respect, the zone has maintained its commercial dedication up to the present, so that the area, as well as the Square with the adjacent housing, block continues to be characterized by intense trade as its main function and, even in the recently debated Master Plan of the revitalization of the La Merced District, this characteristic is respected (even though a different interpretation includes modern shopping malls).

This trend in construction and the rethinking of public places targeted only to visitors and especially tourists focused on consumption. This is a recurrent theme in the projects of recent years within the margins of the capital’s Historic Center. This phenomenon can also be observed in the projects of Francisco I. Madero Pedestrian Street and those of other commercial corridors near the Zócalo, as well as in new projects Bajo Puentes (Unter Bridges) and Parques de Bolsillo (Pocket Parks) promoted by the City Government, and even in signage and advertising displays set for the areas.

Learning from the other(s)
In conclusion, the stigma of the La Merced neighborhood, pointing out the Square as a relatively dirty, loud, and unsafe place with “intangible” borders in a figurative sense, promotes the existing segregation and fragmentation processes in the city, limiting the “learning from the other(s)”. Furthermore, the lack of sense of the usages and the failure to meet the residents’ needs have generated places that the inhabitants do not consider significant within their imaginary, therefore leading to different uses from those planned or conceived. While the fact of not having recurring activity could have caused learning to be rather insignificant, undoubtedly there are different types of social learning that do occur in Plaza Aguilita, but the short periods during which people remain in this place of transition render the learning ephemeral and inconsequential; so, only a few social experiences were exchanged in the space. In consequence, learning from other(s) primarily takes place in the Square through “Radio Aguilita”, stimulating issues related to the coexistence in this urban public space.

In this context, “Radio Aguilita” can be understood as a trigger of different appropriation and learning processes of Aguilita Square. While the Square is usually perceived as a place of transition, the loudspeaker radio invites, during afternoons of its transmission, to linger in it. Guests and local residents discuss together topics of art, culture, and politics and learn by confronting themselves with different ways of thinking. As a result, tolerance, or dealing with otherness, can be learned. Nevertheless, “learning from the other(s)” had also existed regarding the users who remained, such as the businesspersons of the zone, learning from their peers different ways of setting
out their merchandise, ways of selling to and treating the customer, maintaining and cleaning the work area, as well as distinctive behaviors in public space.

**Learning with the other(s)**

“Learning with other(s)” entails a dynamic of interrelationship, exchange, and socialized learning in order for people to obtain skills regarding conflict resolution, as well as contact, communication, and cooperation competencies. Empathy rises, solidarity among neighbors might arise, but also antipathy occurs, evoking social expectancies. While socialization processes tended to occur, due to their durability normally and predominantly among local traders and their customers, the children and the elderly also learned by talking while resting. Others improved their competencies by playing soccer or riding bicycles.

The artistic and cultural program of “Radio Aguilita” as well, as the musical performances of the invited artists, inspired the residents. With simple, mostly “low-tech” means, a spatial situation was generated, which temporarily utilized “playing” the entire Square and motivated specific behaviors in the public space. Thus, sometimes musical cues stimulated the residents and passers-by to test out dance steps, too (*Fig. 52*).

*Figure 52: Residents dancing to music from loudspeakers.*

*Source: Courtesy of Joaquín Aguilar Camacho, 2012.*
Learning form the place

In terms of “affordances”, the offer-oriented character of existing urban architectonic objects led to “learning from the place” ("genius loci"), as listeners came to recognize the adequate physical elements, such as fountains and small walls, in order to rest. In addition, there are, of course, also the benches alongside the green, and planted island blocks, which also appear suitable for laying out the street traders' goods. People also learned to identify places to throw out their trash. And the actors of “Radio Aguilita” have, as a matter of course, almost naturally chosen the strategically favorable tree in the center of the Square in order to lay out their apparatuses.

On an emotional level, the radio leads to a combination of space and place and, at the same time, identification and identity with the square, which increases the concern and respect for the place and also generates self-responsibility that which, for example, is reflected through the cleaning up of the Square before various radio programs by the neighbors themselves. In particular, the topics relating to the district, such as those regarding the dispositions of the City Government or the announced implementation of a Master Plan for the district, have caused intensive public discussions, strengthening citizenship ("ciudadania"). Strategies are developed together, but occasionally, the neighbors argue predominately on an emotional rather than on a non-factual level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Many persons used the place as a step toward their activities, while others enjoyed the “affordances” for resting for a while.</td>
<td>11:24 a.m. A large truck of the beverage company Coca-Cola remained parked on Mesones Street around four hours, because it supplied grocery stores located in the blocks around the Square.</td>
<td>1:00 p.m. “Radio Aguilita” started its session on the Square, inviting storytellers and musicians, with local spectators listening. Thus, the radio contributes to the transformation of the neighborhood’s stigma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite of the early hour and the starting rainy weather, young people, mainly between 15 and 35 years old, accompanied their children to school or headed toward work. Other persons came to the Square for having breakfast and enjoyed observing the movements.</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. Cleaning staff and store owners swept the Square before people arrived.</td>
<td>1:30 p.m. A “diablero” accessed the square, who also rested, only in the gardening area at the other end of the square, right where a large congregation of homeless or “vagabonds” were.</td>
<td>2:00 p.m. On a quiet afternoon, people sat and rested by the fountains, while others passed by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 p.m. Children played soccer using large parts of the Square as their pitch, others learned skating.</td>
<td>12:00 p.m. By midday almost all stores were open, and the amount of people started to increase slowly.</td>
<td>“The Square is dirty, having garbage in different points.” (Cleaning staff)</td>
<td>3:00 p.m. Many charging devisers parked there for periods of approximately half an hour, complaining loudly about the lack of shade in the Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 p.m. Traders started to close the shutters of their shops, so that up to 8:00 p.m., normally the Square remained rather empty.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Friday

7:30 a.m. The majority of the businesses were closed, while only little movements of people existed. Children passed by with their uniforms, other persons were rushing to get in time to their jobs.

9:00 a.m. Most of the businesses opened their curtains. At the same time, people sat at the planter boxes and drunk “átolos”, or were just waiting, watching the time rolled by.

### Saturday

9:00 a.m. Most of the businesses had opened their curtains. At the same time people sat at the planter boxes and drank “átolos”, or were just waiting, watching the time rolled by.

### Sunday

2:00 p.m. On Sundays, people coexisted peacefully, creating a rather relaxing atmosphere. Children were playing at the gardening zones, even if it seemed to be very dangerous for them, because of metal rods sticking out.

“However, On the weekends, there is much less commercial movement. I stay at home.”

(Street vendor and folkloric dancer)

At Plaza Aguilita many products can be found, from food to grocery, in just a few steps.

8:00 p.m. There was still a lot of movement in the square, mostly by young people.

11:00 p.m. Some strongly perfumed girls appeared, dressed in mini-skirts and very tight blouses and plunging necklines.

10:00 p.m. By this time most of the stores were closed. There was still movement by the fountain. Young people were chatting and joking.
4.2.3.2 Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution

(Abstract)
Plaza de la República or Republic Square is one of the large open spaces in Mexico City where huge cultural, artistic, political, and civil events take place. This Plaza divides Avenida Revolución between the major thoroughfares Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida de los Insurgentes at the western border of downtown Mexico City. Recently remodeled by the City Government and the Authority of Public Space (AEP), in particular to form the framework of the celebrations of the Centennial of the Mexican Revolution and the Bicentennial of Independence, Republic Square represents a very good example of a social learning place where encounters and public interactions, in the form of civic and political discussions and demonstrations as well the material and symbolic construction of citizenship, occur, with a coexistence generated among of the area residents, visitors, and demonstrators. Tolerance, solidarity, respect, or friendship can be learned through interacting with the other(s) and physical competencies are developed by means of skating, playing, and juggling, making use of the architectural and urban characteristics of the site, converting Republic Space into a varied social learning place.
1st Stage: “Conceived space” ("l'espace conçu"). Analysis of the planning

Historical Aspects
Republic Square is a large open space of Mexico City located on the western edge of the Historical Center. In the very center of this Square is found the Monument to the Revolution, one of the most magnificent architectural works of the city and commemorating the Mexican Revolution. Its construction can be classified by three phases: the construction of the structure of the former Federal Legislative Palace, the phase of its modification to convert it into a monument, and its current phase, which includes the restoration of the Monument to the Revolution and the rehabilitation of Republic Square and its urban environment.

Its origin and original setting correspond to the solar in the early twentieth century that had been assigned to construct the new, large building of Palacio Legislativo de México (Legislative Palace of Mexico) designed by Émile Bénard, who won the competition that was organized and announced in 1897 by the then-President of the country, General Porfirio Díaz. The order from the President was to create one of the most spectacular buildings in the world in order to place the Mexican capital at the height of the modern metropolises oriented toward the design of new legislative building in the Capitol in Washington or the Congress in Vienna. President Díaz had raised a huge part of the structure when the outbreak of the Revolutionary armed movement in 1910 forced the suspension of the work.

Due to lack of resources, the enormous metal structure remained unused for several decades. Dismantling of the aisles began and complete demolition of the structure was considered. To avoid this, Mexican architect Carlos Obregón Santacilia proposed, to the then- Secretary of Treasury Alberto J. Pani Darqui, the reutilization of the central part of frustrated Legislative Palace for the erection of a monument to the recently concluded Mexican Revolution, celebrating in this manner the anonymous masses that had rendered the changes achieved possible. This proposal was accepted and the Monument’s construction, commissioned by both architects, took place between 1933 and 1938.

The property was converted in 1936 into a mausoleum at each of the four columns that constitute the base of the monument; the remains of some main actors in the fight for a “New Mexico” are conserved there: Francisco I. Madero; Venustiano Carranza; Francisco Villa; Plutarco Elías Calles, and Lázaro Cárdenas. In 1985, restoration work was carried out because of the effects of earthquakes, i.e., maintenance of the Square and of the foundation of the Monument. At the same time it was decided to make use
of the galleries in the basement of the Monument, installing in them the National Museum of the Revolution itself, which was made available to the public in 1986.

During the past decades, Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution has undergone considerable degradation in view of the repercussions of the abandonment of the part of the city where it is located. Therefore, a deteriorated, disordered, and historically incongruous urban-architectural image came into being prior to their renovation. Broken sidewalks, flanked by abandoned spaces utilized as parking lots, mediocre building facades, and the exclusive use of a predominantly red-light district at night materialized due to the influx of inexpensive hotels in the area.

Today, the Square, representing an ambitious project of urban planning and renewal that transcends the commemorative framework of Mexico’s Bicentennial of its Independence and the Centennial of its Revolution, was opened to the public on November 20, 2010. It is noteworthy that the extensive celebrations during the “Year of the Fatherland” or “Year of the Nation” were accompanied by a so-called “revitalization” of the public space in the center of Mexico City promoted by the city government that dated back to the 1990s. This process of revitalization of the Mexico City Historic Center led to, among other projects, a transformation of Republic Square into an urban space of large dimensions for recreation, culture, and their artistic manifestations, renewed for pedestrians in particular.

The so-called “Comprehensive Project and Construction of Republic Square” (“Proyecto integral y obra de la Plaza de la República”), designed by the Authority of Public Space (AEP) and the Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing (SEDUVI) of the Government of the Federal District, included the development of a civic ludic environment in relation to the Square in terms of the spreading of the population and the restoration of the Monument though works that included cleaning and structural and ornamental reparation. Likewise, the Monument’s spatial characteristics were accentuated with an advanced lighting system, providing security for the public in general. The installation of an emphatic and reversible element, such as a panoramic elevator in the center of the Monument, attracts visitors, who are allowed to climb to the lookout, to appreciate the city. And finally, the amplification and modernization of the Museum improved the correlation of the Square and the Monument by extending the area of the foundation as usable space and permitting the opening of a café and shop at the top.

**Urban aspects**
Republic Square is a public space situated in the western end of Perimeter “B” of the Mexico City Historic Center, which is localized within the boundary corresponding to
Colonia Tabacalera in Delegation Cuauhtémoc. The Square is inserted among Valentín Gómez Farías, José María Lafragua and Ignacio Ramírez Streets and is surrounded by Avenida Revolución (Avenue of the Revolution), linking the Square with Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Juárez, heading toward Plaza de la Constitución (Zócalo) (Constitution Square) by Francisco I. Madero Street.

Prior to its “revitalization”, the Square presented different problems related with accessibility due to its dissociation in reference to the urban structure of the Colony Tabacalera. Also, the segregation of the Square in relation to the system of squares in the Historic Center, the short memory of the people concerning their interest in the squares, and the lack of investment and maintenance in the surrounding buildings, transformed the Square into an alternative parking lot, thus hindering mobility in the area.

At present, Republic Square serves as an urban pole of a recently renovated urban historic axis that linearly connects this Square with the political heart of Mexico, the Zócalo, including Alameda Central (with the Benito Juárez Hemicycle) and Madero Corridor (Fig. 54), to create a well-transited pedestrian corridor between these two points. Additionally, it allows the linking with two of the most important thoroughfares of the country: Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Insurgentes, connections that guarantee accessibility from other areas of the capital. Around the Square, there have emerged some Art Deco buildings, typical of their epoch, which highlight good examples of that style, such as Frontón Mexico.

*Figure 54: Urban axis: Republic Square-Alameda Central-Zócalo*

![Figure 54: Urban axis: Republic Square-Alameda Central-Zócalo](image)

*Source: Courtesy of Daniel Escotto Sánchez¹, 2012.*

¹ General coordinator of the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority of the Public Space)
Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution

It can be reached via public transport through Subway Line 2 Taxqueña-Cuatro Caminos from the Revolution Subway Station in the north and walking a couple of blocks southward. Furthermore, it is accessed by the homonymous Line 4. Buenavista-San Lázaro-Aeropuerto Metrobús Station, which crosses the city from East to West, circulating on Avenue of the Revolution around Republic Square, while Metrobús Line 1 passes by from North to South on Avenida de los Insurgentes at the west, and Line 3 Eje 1 Poniente, from North to South, at a distance of 400 m at the North-East. In addition, a significant effort by the part of Mexico City’s public administration is noted that encourages alternative mobility systems, such as the Metrobús and the use of bicycles. Therefore, so that the Ecobicis 270 De la República-Ponciano Arriaga Bicycle Station is located in the northern part of the square (Fig. 55).

Figure 55: Accessibility by public transport.

Architectural aspects
The current design corresponds to architects Carlos Obregón Santacilia and Mario Pani Darqui, who considered, in their project carried out between 1936 and 1938, the dimensions of the existing site, giving rise to the creation of the Square. After its reopening in 2010 in time for the celebrations of the Centennial of the Mexican Revolution, the space was “revitalized” under the slogan “less is more”\(^2\), respecting the spatial characteristics of the place and focusing on the existing program. In fact, nothing was invented; they just “associated the public with quality”, rearranging or

\(\text{from 2009 to 2012.}\)
\(\text{\textsuperscript{2} The quotations in this section derived specifically from an extensive interview on March 23, 2015 with Daniel Escotto Sánchez, General Coordinator of the Authority of Public Space (AEP) of the Government of the Federal District (2009-2012).}\)
rather “cleaning up” the square and sensitively connecting the old and the new, integrating very few, singular attractions in order to create a “new public life”.

The priority in the design of the Square’s surfaces and pavements was to achieve continuous planes, eliminating changes of level, steps, and any object that would interrupt the continuity of the surface. The original tiles of the Square and of the sidewalks were recovered; new urban street furniture was set in place, together with a modern lighting system. Additionally, the four spaces were rehabilitated that, by way of courtyards at different heights, complement the Monument in order to offer to the visitor illuminated spaces at night as well as spacious and shaded ones during the day. Therefore, rows of palms trees were planted in relation to the existing trees, and a ramp leading to the underground level of the remodeled Museum was created as a tool of attraction. The pavement work added 72,701 m² in total, including those of the surrounding streets (Fig. 56).

Figure 56: Urban architectural configuration.

At the center of the Square, there is the Monument to the Revolution, a memorial landmark to the heroes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, with a colossal appearance and outstanding architectural quality, considered as the highest victory or triumphal arch in the world with its height of 67 m. This Monument represents an indispensable milestone in the mega-city of Mexico, which stands out because of the mass and
geometry of its construction referring to pre-Hispanic architecture. At the same time, it is also a faithful representative of one of the architectural trends at the time of its construction: Art Deco.

The Monument is “revitalized” by a glass elevator leading to an observation platform, which provides an unobstructed panoramic view of the metropolitan city. The dome was reconstructed by means of a modified eclectic Art Deco style combined with Mexican socialist realism. On top of the four pillars, figures in relief, designed by sculptor Oliverio Martínez de Hoyos, were attached, representing the Independence, the “Reform Laws”, and agricultural and labor actions.

Another new attraction of the renovated Republic Square (Fig. 57) are the dry fountains lately set in place on the eastern ramp of the Square’s Esplanade, which proposed a show of lights and movements, the fountains throwing up their jets to the beat of the music. Small walls laterally limit the slope of the Esplanade while simultaneously offering, in the sense of “affordances”, the possibility of people sitting on them while observing the aquatic spectacle, meeting with friends or flirting with prospective suitors. The show at the fountains lasts about 20 minutes and generates visual attractions predominately during the night, lighting up the Monument and the Square. The fountains are the creation of Ecofenix Fuentes and count with 100 vertical water jets illuminated under pressure and with 100 sprayers. Worth mentioning that actually the fountains do not function any more.
Even if the massive agglomeration of the tents of political demonstrators, erected between 2012 and 2016 in the western part of the Monument, might negatively affect the impression, the renovation crystallized the historical importance of the site through preservation in valuable fashion, transforming Republic Square into a more pleasant urban space, employing light colors, in order for "visitors to feel more comfortable". The result is visible, so that people have confirmed that, prior to the renewal of Revolution Square and the Monument to the Revolution, they had never actually visited the site, only going by it, due to its lack of attractiveness and chaotic appearance. However, after renovation of the site, people qualified the Square as "pretty". Thus, perhaps "the revitalization can detonate the promising beginning of a new architectural-spatial culture able to compete with other cities, especially in Europe, such as Paris, Barcelona, Berlin" (Krieger 2011).

Functional aspects
Republic Square has always been an emblematic and disputed place where the revolutionary spirit has been kept alive. However, before its "revitalization", large parts
of the Square functioned as a public parking lot for buses and vehicles of all types, while around the Square, the presence of informal trading stands has expanded (Fig. 58).

Figures 58: Plaza de la República before its revitalization.

Today, in the wake of the site’s remodeling, the Square has been transformed into an open space for recreation, culture, and their artistic manifestations. Various cultural activities are held, among these the Elt, one of the most important electronic music and multimedia art festivals on the American continent, which assembled nearly 200,000 people in 2003. On the other hand, Republic Square is not only a place for diversion, in that a great amount of political demonstrations and assemblies of different types are produced there.

At the same time, the Authority of Public Space (AEP) and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (SEDUVI) have intended to create an oasis of calm and relaxation within the semantic networks offered by the center of Mexico City, i.e., a breathing space within a dense and polluted megacity. Therefore, automobiles passing along Avenue of the Republic have been restricted to one lane, freeing up sufficient space for pedestrians. Thus, little space remains for bus traffic, in an attempt to establish a pedestrian culture in the Historic Center.

In order to (re-)connect people to the site, new attractions were planned, considering that apparently the existing “catalysts” or “attractors” were not enough
Although the arrangement of the space in its essence remained unmodified, highlighting the glass elevator, which transports visitors to the viewing point in the dome and the dry fountains in the esplanade.

This elevator constitutes a symbolic structure of access to a new experience of the urban landscape. Dozens of people use it daily to climb up to the scenic cafeteria and to the panoramic viewing spot, from where one can enjoy an unusual perspective of the city, the same one that artist Juan O'Gorman drew in his famous work “La ciudad de México” (“Mexico City”) in 1949 at this point (Fig. 59). The elevator itself allows experiencing a transition between the actual city and the “pantheon” of the Revolution. It is noteworthy that the Mausoleum was recovered as well; therefore, some of the heroes of the Mexican Revolution are entombed there.

Figure 59: Mural “La ciudad de México” (“Mexico City”) by Juan O’Gorman, 1949.

The dry fountain, cat hare delivered to the citizens, has become a great visual experience in its being a digital musicalized element. Every day, hundreds of people come to splash and get wet or to play or watch the musicians play. Thus, the esplanade has been transformed into a kind of urban beach. And in the evenings, the Square is used as a center for aquatic recreation: people do not need to wear a swimsuit to run amid the sparking water from the fountains, providing fun for kids and adults.
2nd stage: “Perceived space” (“l'espace perçu”). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

On referring to perceived space, reference is made to the result of spatial practices, of the movement and of the interaction that people generate in the space, this being as close as possible to everyday life. For this, “Behavioral” or “Activity Mapping” in form of a (photo)graphic-textual documentation or a 24 (hours)/7 (days) inventory similar to a diaries focused on the activities as an indicator for (spatial) appropriation was elaborated, leading to a “dense” description of the behavior of the users in Republic Square, in contrast to conceived space as “dreamed” space (Delgado 2013).

For this purpose, from Friday, January 16, 2015, at 5 p.m. until the same time on the following Friday, January 23, 2015, a photographic camera was installed on the roof of the School of Artistic Initiation No. 4 building, National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) of National Council for Culture and Arts (CONACULTA), located at Avenue of the Republic on the corner of Arriaga Street. Thanks to the permission for placement of the camera, kindly conceded by Lic. Gustavo Nogueira, the person in charge of the installation, a registration of the activities that took place in the Square was obtained through photographs taken every five minutes. Additionally, this photographic inventory was accompanied by a logbook in the form of a written protocol of the activities observed, as well as photographic shots from the perspective of the pedestrians.

It may be noted that the activities taking place in the Square were very random throughout the week. Contrary to the conception of the planned square, in the western part of Republic Square a giant demonstration was located (Fig. 60), in which teachers from Oaxaca, as part of the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) (National Coordination of Workers in Education), a massive organization composed of workers for the democratic education of the country, have permanently manifested their dissatisfaction with the educational reform proposed by the Federal Government. They maintained their movement in Republic Square from September 2013 to spring 2016, after an agreement had been reached between the Government of the Federal District and CNTE leaders in November 2015. However, there were apparently other arrangements in general with the public administration for political mobilizations in three public squares in the city, i.e., the Zócalo, Plaza of the Three Cultures in Tlatelolco, and Republic Square.
The activities of the CNTE were marked physically by tents, in which the demonstrators remained full-time for up to three months and sometimes even more, organizing central roundtables or marches both to the Zócalo and to some offices of the Secretaria de la Educación Pública (SEP) (Secretariat of Public Education), providing information on their activities, debating, broadcasting radio programs through huge erected loudspeakers as large as their memories of the struggle, etc., and even organizing visits to their homeland in Oaxaca. It is noteworthy that the lay-out of the tents did not change, their tenants only moved sporadically, while each week a new individual in charge of the campaign was appointed.

In general, the activities in the Square began at 6:00 a.m. and last until 11:00 p.m. During the remaining time, the individuals who came to use the Square were counted. From 6:00 to 8:30 a.m., Republic Square was only occupied as a place for transit transition because this was the time that office workers at nearby company’s arrived at work and that students at nearby schools started morning classes. The most popular place during this time was undoubtedly the mini-super “7 Eleven” found at one of the sides to the west opposite the Square. At this same time, the first shift began of the maintenance workers who cleaned the Square and its physical borders; other work shifts were in the afternoon/evening.

At 8:30 a.m., persons in sports attire came to the Square to exercise alone or in groups. Sometimes very large groups arrived, as happened during one week on two occasions when fire brigades, made up of more than hundred people, showed up at the
Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution

Square to practice their marches military-style, as well as fitness. There were groups of policemen engaging in sports, as well.

Between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., one was able to observe persons arriving for group visits to the Museum, especially during the week. The viewing point was busier in the afternoon and before nightfall. Starting at 11:00 a.m., many different activities took place in the Square, such as conversations, running, playing soccer, roller-skating, etc., or just crossing the Square either by bike or walking. Many passers-by crossed the Square alone. And the use of the eco-bikes was apparently the preferred means of transport to cross the Square in order to reach their destination or to transfer to another means of transport.

Workers selling mattresses met in the esplanade during another morning, while the physical edges of the Square with shade served as points of sale for street traders. However, the number of street vendors was quite low at this place because, according to a candy seller, the Delegation would only keep elderly vendors or disabled vendors who “lack an arm, a leg, etc.” For that reason, the candy seller would not be entitled to a permit and would have to “hide” while selling his wares to avoid being arrested for approximately thirteen hours and/or paying a fine ranging from 350 to 500 MXN in court. His situation would not be “easy”.

In the afternoons/evenings, especially during the weekends, the vast prominent esplanade with the dry fountains turned into an exciting “urban entertainment center” (Fig. 61). Young people jumped through the water, splashing and getting wet, while significant amounts of persons observed them, either from nearby, on foot, or sitting on the side walls. So, the number one activity at the Square was undoubtedly watching other people. At the same time, other young people used the slope of the Square to slide along with their skateboards or to ride bicycles; their acrobatics again were admired by the crowd, who were engaged in gossiping, attracting girl- or boyfriends, or just resting. Thus, the Square acquired a familial and public atmosphere of conviviality and relaxation.
The lateral Squares were employed as spaces for alternative activities. One example were the dancers ("danzantes") with their drums. Similarly, these squares served as private spaces for lovers. Additionally, on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, juggling workshops and classes for other types of cabaret shows were held, while in the adjacent areas of the Square, people gathered in bars and cafés, watching the events happening from afar.

It is noteworthy that Republic Square is one of the extraordinary spaces in this megacity, in which diverse social strata are integrated, including citizens and tourists. After its “revitalization”, the Square still is a place for sheltering the homeless, who seeked it out for refuge from 11:00 p.m. on, especially in the sunken, lateral parts of the Square to spend the night, as soon as the floodlights, which illuminate the Monument to the Revolution, are switched off and pedestrian traffic becomes scarce. Only on occasion did the police remove the homeless near the Monument on their morning rounds.

Therefore, Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution remains a landmark, a symbol for citizenship, a meeting place for different groups (such as for the motorcycle clubs that started their ride throughout the city every Saturday after 2:00 p.m.), either for having fun, to relax, to meet or to get together. Thus, the place has not
lost its revolutionary spirit, and its memory is still tangible. Although there were voices who argued that the fountains only functions as a distraction for the people, eliminating the importance of political struggle, others argue that the police should teach people to respect the struggle’s symbols and not repress them. This is because “people urinate a lot in the Square”, denigrating the space without taking into account that more than one million individuals lost their lives in the Revolution.

Therefore, it appears that Republic Square functions both as a place for transition as well as for final destiny, with people crossing the Square on approaching from different directions, while the Monument to the Revolution itself operates as a magnet (Fig. 62). Most people arrived at the Square from Avenue México-Tacuba, exiting from Revolución Metro Station and headed directly toward the huge office buildings along Paseo de la Reforma. Others, often tourists, went by to move on to the City Center. Regarding movements on the Square, it was notable that the flows were very varied, as well. Many persons moved freely around the Square by skating, going on their bicycles, or just wandering, strolling around. Contrariwise, on the side of the Square, the flow was less strong, with people resting for a longer time, or workshop participants juggling or acting, people reading and relaxing, or the homeless persons, even staying for the night.
Figure 62: Objects, activities, movements.

**OBJECTS**
- Vegetation
- Palms
- Sidewalk
- Trees
- Panoramic elevator
- Observation deck
- Pavement
- Fountains
- Museum
- Dome
- Tents

**ACTIVITIES**
- Demonstrate
- Rest
- Sleep
- Read
- Look
- Transit
- Skate
- Bike
- Play
- Observe
- Kiss
- Train
- Get wet
- Sunbathe

**MOVEMENT**
- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” ("l'espace vécu"). Interviews with users. (Social) Actors

The field research culminates with the section on “lived spaces”, the wrapping of physical space provided by complex symbolic systems, in which images and imaginaries take refuge, the qualitative space of subjections to the dominant representations of space, but also in which desertions and disobedience are drunk and inspired (Delgado 2013).

For that reason, the task of conducting a series of interviews based on a questionnaire divided into three parts was engaged in: activities, movements and flows, as well as physical characteristics and urban street furniture (Fig. 63). Among the 20 persons interviewed, 13 were women and the remaining seven, men, with the age of the respondents ranging between 17 and 68 years. With regard to the proximity of the users’ homes to the Square, only 3% lived within the vicinity of one kilometer. Thus, the great majority arrived at the Square from a distance of more than one kilometer (80%) and 17% resided within an average distance of five kilometers.

Republic Square is much more than a transition place: it is so open that it allows for the integration of users seeking any activity, whether contemplation, recreation, and/or leisure. Given the location of Republic Square, it is pertinent to mention that activities with varied order are carried out, which denotes specific areas within the space of the Square, as well as areas in the immediate proximity, among which we highlight the main avenues located in the four cardinal directions with respect to the Square.

Of the activities performed in the Square, recreation is prominent (31%), primarily through observing the people occupying the slopes of the fountains. Another activity that acquires a predominant position within the site can be described by the term “play” (24%), in that the population is mostly young. So, it is the young people who engage, in different areas of the square, in activities such as skating, getting wet in the fountains, practicing with their skateboards, playing ball (soccer), juggling, cycling, or just walking their pets, with entertainment or transit following in rank as mentioned because, especially in the mornings and evenings, the Square is transited due to work and academic activities. Other persons noted that the Square is used for exercising (6%); a few mentioned that the Square is used for work, such as selling candy and cigarettes, or as a meeting point.
URBAN PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY AS PLACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

Figure 63: Results of the questionnaire applied at Republic Square.

Age range
- Men: 35%
- Women: 65%

17 - 68

82%

- Quiet
- Invites to relaxation
- Security

18%

- Too much transient space
- Few space for staying

Why did you choose to come here?
- Diversity of activities
- Go out with the family
- There’s no other square near by

Activities | %
---|---
Recreate | 31
Play | 24
Have fun | 19
Transit | 19
Excercise | 6
Work | 1

Stay time
- 30 min - 3 hrs

Distance from the square
- Near: 3%
- Far: 80%
- Intermediate: 17%
Many of the interviewed people agreed to visit the Square because of the diversity of the activities, to go out with their family, and because there is not another square nearby that offers what they would need. The geographical location determines that, within the circumference of the Square, there are different office buildings, restaurants, banks, parking lots, shops, hotels, schools, among many other types of businesses, which make the present Republic Square a fairly busy place, offering many spaces for interaction. On the other hand, these interviewees were also in agreement that the Square is a very quiet place that invites relaxation, and in that regard, should have provided a greater number of the dynamic activities that mainly attract young people.

On average, the users stay in the Square for between 30 minutes and three hours, but each for different times. The respondents emphasized a sense of belonging, a feeling of being completely justified for acquiring an emotion of safety, pleasure, and well-being within the area of Republic Square, especially those who were accompanied by their families or couples with children, who commented on enjoying a space of a size sufficiently large to accommodate the huge amount of visitors to the Square on weekends. It is an appropriate place to relax and coexist with the family.

In the sense of cohabit the same place, even temporarily, it is pleasant for the users, who agreed that the properties that provide a framework for the characteristics of the Square are appropriate for the development and human unfolding of verbal and physical communication, although perhaps there was too much transient space and too little designed for staying, since the user associates greater time lapses for successful advances of communication.

**Conclusions. Learning at Republic Square**

While the public space increasingly disappears in the process of spatialization of social inequality, marked by the prevailing phenomena, such as segregation and fragmentation, new types of public appearance emerge and replace the public square. At the same time, there is a desire for a social space, integrated into the system, thus reflecting the need of the people to have places of conviviality and socialization with free and easy access (Göbel 2013). In this respect, Republic Square has become only one of a few public examples of an urban scenario for meeting, for discussion, for interaction, for demonstration, revealing intensive use and material and symbolic construction through “ciudadanía” (citizenship). Possibilities, activities, and experiences are offered promoting discoveries and interventions, such as skateboarding, joggling, or protesting, interacting and collaborating with others, examining new skills and
behaviors. Nowadays, a huge variety of actions takes place in the Republic Square, stimulating to appropriations oriented to people’s evolvement.

Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution is becoming a symbol of Mexico City, an urban pole for identification. Currently, people can appropriate the square and they do this extensively, after having been used in earlier times as a public parking lot, with informal food stands along its sides and other street vendors situated among these (Göbel 2015). There is coexistence among inhabitants, visitors, and demonstrators, fulfilling in this way the aim of the planners: to reactivate the sense of the square as a meeting place for everyone and for citizenship, in which dispute is also welcome.

Therefore, the demonstrators have not been expelled from Republic Square, where a multitude of protests and public demonstrations are take place still today, and even now, they have more space, while there is also less commerce. It is noteworthy that the demonstrators were not displaced during the redesigning of the Square; rather, street vendors, street performers, and other “street people” continue populate the place; therefore, Republic Square is a public domain representing a model of coexistence. Likewise, beautification of the Square led to its “revitalization” in order to foster appropriation through improved accessibility.

Consequently, there have been observed in Republic Square various forms of uses and appropriations as synonyms for the learning of competencies by learning from the other(s) with the other(s) and from the place.

Learning from the other(s)
As there is a wide range of users, residents, visitors, tourists, demonstrators, street vendors, performers, and other “street people”, among other actors, Republic Square represents an urban “scenery, in which every human being develops his skills as a social being who is situated at a particular time and place” (Delgado 2013: 2). This means that, in this space, one could meet and live together with others, so that various kinds of learning of civic or social character come to take place, such as tolerance, solidarity, respect, or friendship.

Learning with the other(s)
In addition to the faculties of communications and the cooperative social skills of coexistence learned in Republic Square, people acquire certain behaviors of discussion, as well. Sr. Mario, for example (Appendix), learned in this square, by coexisting and debating with the teachers from Oaxaca, what they think about the government (Fig. 64). Thus, Republic Square is certainly a suitable place to politicize
the people. In addition to organizing and demonstrating, and by contemplating and engaging in dialogue with the city, the present-day citizen may ask himself “what to do in it, what to do with it, which is, after all a civic exercise” (Authority of the Public Space (AEP): 62).

Learning from the place (“genius loci”)

Therefore, on acting in Republic Square, one learns diverse physical competencies, such as roller-skating, playing, and juggling. The Square invites discovery, observing the large number of children and young people playing in the water of the fountain in conjunction with the music from the same, so that one can understand and feel the characteristics of the water. In the same manner, on learning from the place, the demonstrators came to understand how to position themselves properly in the space, they were allowed to develop and expand physically in the western part of the Square, which could be also be seen critically in some ways as a “domestication” of the public protest and a limitation of free expression. Also, skateboarders in Republic Square have learned to use a small slope when performing their acrobatics, the same slope which was initially implemented to highlight the majesty of the Monument of the Revolution.

In order to educate the people, Daniel Escotto Sánchez explained that the Authority of Public Space (AEP) of the Federal District disregarded the installation of new trash cans, expecting that, through the redesign and reassessment of Republic Square the people themselves would begin to take care of the space, avoiding the accumulation of waste, the latter apparently working out. It is obvious that people like and respect the Square and appreciate its new architectural aspect; notwithstanding this, perhaps the project would have even better served as a medium for provide identity if the people would have been involved more in the planning. However, this would have diametrically opposed the intentions of the project because, for many years and in a very popular way, the people had already appropriated and transformed the Square, to the displeasure of the planners, architects, historians, and/or owners. Therefore, the population was not integrated into the recent renovation project. To the contrary, it was authoritarian planning by local government. Nevertheless, public participation in the organization of a place and in the conception and the management of public spaces represents a symbol of identification and identity in the sense of emotional appropriation, understood as an example for a meeting place and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship), thus as a social learning space.

Figure 64: Typical week at contemporary Republic Square.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30 a.m. Office workers and students occupied the Square as place for transition.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. Persons in sporting suits assisted in the Square to exercise by their own or in groups.</td>
<td>11:00 a.m. Every day, the dry fountains were working between 11:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Many people came to see the show, and some of them, to get wet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m. Fire brigades formed by more than one hundred people showed up at the Square, in order to practice their marches in military-style, as well as their fitness.</td>
<td>3:30 p.m. Juggling workshops for cabaret shows were held in the lateral squares.</td>
<td>4:00 p.m. Some people chose the Square to take a walk with their dogs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. The Republic Square functions as an “urban entertainment center.”</td>
<td>8:30 p.m. The Square is used by various events because of its centric location, and the size space of the esplanade.</td>
<td>8:30 p.m. By this time people passed by from work to their homes. Other people started to leave while some arrived to see the illumination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. In the afternoons, many people just pass by, others go to the fountains. The Square is a meeting place, a reunion point. Some people did some acrobatics, others skated.</td>
<td>8:30 p.m. The Square is used by various events because of its centric location, and the size space of the esplanade.</td>
<td>8:30 p.m. By this time people passed by from work to their homes. Other people started to leave while some arrived to see the illumination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**FRIDAY**

11:00 a.m.  
Before noon, groups of people from the police force used the Square to exercise or to practice for upcoming events or parades.

6:30 p.m.  
By sunset people hung out with friends at the Republic Square. The places to sit were occupied. Some young people showed off their skateboarding or riding bicycle skills.

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**SATURDAY**

9:00 a.m.  
The National Museum of the Revolution opens from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., two more hours than on weekdays. Many people visited it Saturday.

2:00 p.m.  
Motorcycle clubs started their route throughout the city every Saturday, either for fun, to relax, to meet, or to assemble.

12:00 p.m.  
More people visited the Republic Square to get wet in the fountains. Afterward, they sat on the esplanade to sunbathe or to wait for their clothes to get dry.

**SUNDAY**

10:00 a.m.  
On Sunday morning, a group of people used the Square as a meeting point, to organize a bicycle tour for the city.

7:30 p.m.  
When the night falls over the Square, a beautiful light show at the fountains, combined with the Monument’s own illumination emerged.

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“The fountains only works as a distraction for the people, sweeping away the importance of political struggle.”  
(Demonstrator from the CNTE)
4.2.4 “New” squares

4.2.4.1 Bajo Puente Juan Escutia

(Abstract)

This Bridge Underpass is located at the crossing of Circuito Interior Avenue and Juan Escutia Street, within the limits of the Delegations Cuauhtémoc and Miguel Hidalgo. The Bajo Puentes Juan Escutia Underpass was an underutilized space that served for storage of materials and waste. Its poor lighting and general neglect created unsafe conditions for residents and passers-by. In 2009, the “Bajo Puentes” (“Bridge Underpasses”) Project was created by the Federal District Government for the reclaiming and recovering of abandoned public spaces for the benefit of the citizens. To carry out this project, there was the participation of the private sector in the form of concessions for businesses within the space, representing a new model of “Public-Private Partnership” in the city. The design allocated 50% of space to outdoor activities, with children’s playgrounds, benches, tables, and fitness machines, 30% to commercial and 20% to pay for parking. In terms of urban planning, the proposal meets some needs and provides new activities for the residents and a new use for valuable land within the city. However, because it is a place where interactions only sporadically aroused among its social actors and where interaction was controlled in exaggerated fashion, its function as a social learning place, including its significance as a site for “ciudadanía” (citizenship), has been modified. It is only on occasion that learning occurs through observing the environment and considering its functionality and the activities of the occupants.
1st Stage: “Conceived space” (“l'espace conçu”). Analysis of the planning

**Historical aspects**

In tune with the tendency of introducing green areas, the Government of Mexico City is developing a program of converting vacant lots under motorways into public spaces made up of squares, cafés, and playgrounds. The lack of green areas and recreational areas in overcrowded cities such as Mexico City has led to the emergence of innovative proposals for public and private urban interventions in recent years: orchards, parks, swimming pools, libraries, works of art, and outdoor cinemas represent some of the projects designed to convert abandoned areas into collective spaces, “transforming Bridges Underpasses into urban squares” (ABILIA 2016), the latter of which, over the years, had become centers of illegal trade, the accumulation of garbage or places to sleep for the homeless.

Therefore in 2009, the project “Bajo Puentes” (“Bridge Underpasses”) was initiated, aiming to recuperate abandoned public spaces, compatible with the so-called “non-places”, as a governmental program of the Federal District, in order for these underpasses to become safe and illuminated sites for the citizens, therefore reintegrating them as “new” squares into the urban pattern. Projects such as the Corridor Francisco I. Madero and the rehabilitation of Republic Square (Plaza de la República) or Plaza Garibaldi are significant examples of these policies designed to dignify or rearrange urban public spaces for social encounter and to rescue landmarks as part of cultural and urban identity. Starting with the premise of housing as a key element in shaping the city and taking advantage of areas that are “accessible” to the inhabitant, the main objective of these recovery and rehabilitation projects has been to raise the quality of life of the inhabitants in order to build an accessible and inclusive city.

The Government of the Federal District (GDF) delegated certain administrative power to agencies and departments, which are required to manage resources and revitalize public spaces within the city for the benefit of citizens, their daily activities, economy, for their safety, and for the promotion of culture. Institutions such as the Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda (SEDUVI) (Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing) and the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority of Public Space), created by decree of the head of GDF, are responsible for formulating programs and urban development plans, assisting in design and planning of these, and implementing and monitoring of public works. The main objective of these agencies has been implementation projects aimed at areas of sub-utilized urban fabric and the introduction of these into the “Program of the Federal District Government” for the
recovery of abandoned public spaces, thus improving their conditions, safety, illumination, and the building of new options of mobility, entertainment, and improvement of the city’s image.

Therefore, SEDUVI and AEP planned the design of a scheme to allow for the recovery of such spaces and to build economic, cultural, social, and legal relationships for the use and benefit of these spaces, developing guidelines for the execution of these projects for the rescue and rehabilitation of public spaces, the use of existing infrastructure, the improvement of the urban image, the protection of green areas, and the implementation of policies focused on improving spaces for pedestrians, with Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia the pilot project for achieving safe and useful public spaces for the community (SEDUVI 2015). Prior to this, this Underpass had been defined as an area within the city's urban fabric that had been formerly subutilized as a warehouse for the storage of materials and waste, in addition to its being employed by informal commerce (Fig. 65), with its poor lighting and abandonment creating unsafe conditions for those who transited through this site. However, the Underpass was considered to have the ability to obtain high potential as a trigger of investment and pole of economic and social development.

Figure 65: Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) before the project implementation.

To carry out the project, SEDUVI and AEP have integrated Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpass Juan Escutia) within the budget for neighborhood improvement programs and the rescue of urban public spaces, and have initiated collaboration with the private sector in the form of a new investment model in Public-Private Partnership (PPP). This new model of the occupation of urban space includes concessions for businesses within the space. The system is based on the idea that the government should not invest money in maintenance, i.e., officials made the proposal to entrepreneurs or business owners for the latter to settle in the area with rental prices below those of the market. In return, new owners entering the project through Permisos Administrativos Temporales Revocables (PATR) (Revocable Administrative Temporary Permits) must pay taxes to defray the costs of cleaning, construction, and maintenance. Some of the companies that have obtained such authorizations to offer services in the public space for the purpose of the rehabilitation of Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) include Operadora Integral Urbana, Proyectos Estratégicos Bicentenario, Bajo Puentes IQ, Grupo Soac, and Consorcio JIT. These procedures guarantee legal rights to the occupation of the space.

According to the outlining of the project, up to 2015, four “Bajo Puentes” (“Bridge Underpasses”) projects have been recuperated and rehabilitated. Furthermore, the project includes the underpasses located at Juan Escutia and Circuito Interior, Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, Universidad and Circuito Bicentenario, and Moliere at the corner of Río San Joaquín. These are spread over an area of 24,000 m². The intention is to replicate these cases in different parts of the city, with twelve projects in total being reviewed currently. In 2015, two Bridge Underpasses were fully operating: the one located at Juan Escutia at the corner of Circuito Interior, and one at Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas. The idea of the authorities is to continue developing this proposal and to recover 24 more Bridges Underpasses, transforming other vacant lots into community spaces, which tend to strengthen the identity of the neighborhood and regenerate the social fabric.

According to the program, only thirty percent of the land can be used for shops or offices, while fifty percent should be used for public space and twenty percent for parking. The investment generated by the projects amounts to 72.2 million MXN, as informed by Eduardo Aguilar, General Coordinator of Public Space of the Federal District Government. Aguilar also notes that per m², the estimated investment in these projects is between 3,500 MXN and 4,000 MXN.
Urban aspects

The Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square is located within the administrative area of the Federal District, situated at Circuito Interior Mtro. José Vasconcelos Avenue, with surrounding buildings of up to 15 stories high, while the normal height is between two to four stories. It is worth mentioning that Circuito Interior Bicentenario (Bicentennial Inner Loop) or, as it is more commonly known, Circuito Interior, or even more simply, Circuito, is a 42-km-long urban freeway (in parts) and at-grade boulevard (in others), forming a loop around the central neighborhoods of Mexico City. Its construction began in 1961 and, according to Daniel Escott Sánchez, it initially was intended to recover even a total of 71 of the 74 Under Bridges of Circuito Interior that currently exist in Mexico City (Fig. 67).
In particular, Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia is situated between Colony Condesa in the Delegation Cuauhtémoc on one side and Colony San Miguel Chapultepec in Delegation Miguel Hidalgo on the other. The flow from Constituyentes Avenue arrives from the west, and that of Juan Escutia Avenue begins at the east. The street as well as the bridge is named after Juan Bautista Pascasio Escutia y Martínez, one of the combatants who died 1847 in the Battle of Chapultepec and who is remembered as one of the “Niños Héroes” (“Child Heroes”) who gave their lives defending their homeland.

As a public square, there is a huge advantage to its being localized rather close to Colonia Condesa, a neighborhood located west of the Zócalo as well as to the east to Bajo Puente “Juan Escutia” and Avenida de los Insurgentes. The Colony is considered to be fashionable and popular, especially among younger businesspeople, artists, students, and intellectuals. The Colony is a very attractive place to gamble or play in one of the two big parks of the neighborhood (Parque México and Parque España), to have a rest. Despite the fact that it is mostly residential, it features a large number of international restaurants and very trendy cafés and nightclubs. Thus, its character has been compared to that of SoHo in New York and the Latin Quarter in Paris.
Regarding public transport, Metro Line 1 Observatorio-Pantitlán passes parallel to Circuito Interior Mtro. José Vasconcelos in the north-south direction, with the Chapultepec Square Station the nearest in the north and Juanacatlán Station in the south (Fig. 68). Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia functions as an important communication node, as well, because many autobuses pass by from north to south and vice versa, as well as from west to east, linking the site with Colonia Condesa. Other people park here their public Ecobici or rent it here in order to go by bike to the Condesa or toward the City Center. In the north of the place, there is also the possibility of renting modern motorbikes.

Architectural aspects

According to information obtained from the Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing (SEDUVI), Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia occupies an area of 5,527 m² (SEDUVI 2015) and is subdivided into two parts by nearly equal in size, surrounded by about four-m-wide sidewalks and separated by Avenida Constituyentes (Constituyentes Avenue) and Calle Juan Escutia (Street) (Fig. 69). On the northern side of the Square, there are two circular metal structures at both sides of the Square and a playground on a plastic floor, for the children’s safety. Tables cover one third of ground space, where people sometimes come to rest for different periods of time, with constant natural light and shade provided by the bridge and artificial lighting that is used at night.

Three rectangular green areas of about 30 m² are arranged predominately next to the street in order to prevent the enormous vehicular noise level. To the north, the northern part of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia is limited by a flank of one-storey-high container-style shops with generous glass facades, which appear to be
pushed down under the predominate, monstrous bridge. Only on the eastern edge, in front of the “OXXO” store, is there a small terrace with extra benches. Behind this block, further to the north, there is a public parking lot covering one half of the surface, with approximately 30 parking spaces, as well as a place to rent electric motorcycles.

On the south side, other children’s playgrounds paved with plastic have been implemented, where children can play in full view of their parents. The games in these playgrounds include three colored slides, a staircase, a balcony, and a mountable horse ride (attached in the floor) for children aged between three and ten years. In this space, there is also a fitness area consisting of three exercising devices: one to do crunches; another to strengthen the arms, and the third, for conditioning of the legs and hips. This outdoor gym should attracted people to them by their primary colors (red and yellow), while the exercise machines of this mini-gym are scarce and the area occupied is rather minimal. There is also a module for paying taxes that has been set up by the Government of the Federal District (GDF) on the edge eastern edge of this part of the Square, in the form of a glass box, where people comfortably pay their taxes with automatic services. As a point of mobility, an Ecobici station close by allows residents and visitors access to economic and ecological transportation, with spaces for 30 bicycles.

The vegetation occupies an important part of this part of the Square, as well, although the green surface is limited, with only the two areas located in the southern half. Another part of the Square is occupied by a food court in the form of a terrace, limited to the exclusive use of “El Huequito” Restaurant, where tables with umbrellas and an outdoor television for the users eating at the restaurant hung over to the surrounding shops. These are, again, accommodated in a rather rigid, large, one story-high box, which borders this part of the Square. Behind it, another parking lot also serves for overnight parking. Finally, there is the urban multi-use “Multiforo Bajo Circuito” Stage, where movies, plays, artists’ workshops, and other cultural events are presented.

The urban furniture in the square features benches, trash cans, and artificial lighting poles. These are made of the same metal materials and painted blue-grey, which were designed to adapt to the green areas located on the edge of the Square and sidewalk. The artificial lighting is supplemented with reflectors on the roof of the bridge, and there is a Closed-Circuit TeleVision (CCTV) in the upper part of the commercial premises. Finally, there is a waiting station for minibuses and taxis, as well as a collector area for used batteries.
Functional aspects
Among private houses, which occupy the majority of the adjacent blocks, in one of the surrounding buildings located in Delegation Miguel Hidalgo, we find the hotel of Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social (SNTSS) (National Executive Committee of the National Union of Social Security), a twelve-floor-high skyscraper at the corner of Circuito Interior Mtro. José Vasconcelos and Constituyentes Avenue. Delegation Cuauhtémoc highlights a large-scale building of a relatively new housing megaproject at the northern corner at Juan Escutia Street, as well as some rather deteriorated buildings with businesses on the ground floors.

The spatial distribution of the Square is divided into two sections, one on each side of the crossing at Constituyentes Avenue and Juan Escutia Street. This road prevents the free and safe use of pedestrians from one side to the other, establishing a border, a spatial-functional division of the Square in the north and south sections. The space is divided into three different uses that make up the Bridge Underpass: one half of the space is dedicated to public space with playgrounds and fitness equipment, which are divided in both sections of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass). The project should improve pedestrian circulation as a safe resting and transit point 24 hours a day, with mobility through Ecobici stations, the economy by the renting of shops, and the provision of services including tax-paying stations, outdoor games, and the promotion
URBAN PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY AS PLACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

of culture with the inclusion of a forum for artistic events provided as a space for young emerging artists (Bajo Circuito 2015).

Notwithstanding this, an important functional problem of the Square derives from its accessibility: there are traffic lights and zebra stripes at the crosswalks of its four accesses, all of which barely control vehicular traffic (Fig. 70). Being between an avenue of great flux and crossings with traffic lights, pedestrians are prevented from comfortably accessing or leaving the Square. The crossings lack safety for pedestrians, who have to wait for a long time at any point of access. Among those that cross the Square, cargo vehicles are required to pass with difficulty and large trucks encounter problems in turning at intersections under the bridge. These vehicles often do not reduce their speed by much, engendering lack of safety in pedestrian crossing points. Therefore, there are many accidents, despite the presence of police officers who are mainly present at the northwest access.

*Figure 70: Man crossing the avenue coming from Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass).*

![Figure 70: Man crossing the avenue coming from Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass).]

*Photographs: Courtesy of Efrén Camargo*.¹

However, thanks to the new project, pedestrians can cross streets with a little more safety, because this area was, for years prior to its "rescue", a favorite spot for crimes and informal trade. Likewise, the accesses provide ramps for people with reduced mobility, such as wheelchair users, parents with carriages, and individuals with disabilities. In addition, the ground level of the Square unfortunately is found several centimeters below the sidewalk, forcing the disabled in wheelchairs to improvise the use of the latter, leaving marks on the ground with wear and tear on the pavement’s edges.

The functions on the Square were distributed among public areas, shops, and parking places. Fifty percent of the terrain was allocated to outdoor space and 30% to

commercial uses, while the remaining 20% was dedicated to controlled paid parking. This equipment was observed as an improvement of the space, allowing sustainable economic growth and daily activities for the surrounding residents.

The public space is equipped with children’s playgrounds, one on each side. Additionally, the space provides an outdoor fitness area, a food court with outdoor tables at the “El Huequito” Restaurant, as well as other tables and benches for resting, an Ecobici station with 30 bicycles available, and a kiosk of the Government of the Federal District (GDF) for paying tax, carrying out bureaucratic procedures directly on a screen. The electronic payment services is one of the most popular pieces of equipment in Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, offering services including drivers’ licenses, driving permit rights, birth, marriage, and death certificates, current and past-due car property taxes, water bills, fines for extemporaneous vehicle verification, traffic violations and contamination check fines, vehicle rights proceedings, payroll taxes, issuance of certificates by the General Comptroller, and property taxes. Furthermore, a waiting station for taxis and minibuses is found on the south side of the Square.

Aside from the tax-payment kiosk and the Ecobici station, commercial uses are predominately situated on the flanking one-floor glass installation. Among the commercial establishments to be found, there is a 24-hour convenience store (“OXXO”), a national-international parcel service (“UPS”), as well as “El Huequito” Restaurant with outdoor tables and bathrooms for customers. In 2015, there also was business with home delivery of pet food (“+Kotas”), a Telcel shop, and an ATM, as well as a CFE public service area, which are currently out of service. Instead, in 2016, “La Barberia Shop & Spa” was inaugurated at the southwestern corner, in addition to a new gym called “CrossFit”. Other business localities have been momentarily abandoned, testimony to a rather high flux rate.

The sparse vegetation in the Square is distributed equally on both sides and is maintained daily by employees specifically hired for this. The main function of the vegetation appears to be to block, if only slightly, noise and air pollution, to provide a visual esthetic to the constructed space, and to delimit the space between the Square and the sidewalk (Fig. 71). It also serves as a protective barrier if a vehicle were to lose control toward the interior of the Square.
Controlled parking lots operate behind the shops; the lots accommodate about 40 cars each and are distributed in both sides (north and south). The parking spaces are aligned at 90 degrees, and each entrance has a small pay booth to collect fees. Therefore, parking in the lots is charged at an hourly rate, and a discount is applied if a purchase is made at “OXXO” or “El Huequito”. “OXXO” offers 15–20 free minutes of parking, while at “El Huequito”, two hours of parking are free, and after that, four MXN every 15 minutes. In general, the parking fee comes out to be 24 MXN an hour, and a 15-minute fraction after the first hour is six MXN. An overnight parking rate for cars of the Colony is also available, because neighbors may not find sufficient parking places on their streets or consider it safer to leave their cars at the parking lot. There is also a recharging station for electric vehicles with 24-hour services and security. At the southern end, behind the parking lot, there is a Cultural Forum, “Multiforo Bajo Circuito”, with a multiuse stage, with the presentation of movies, theater works, or musical acts, as well as art exhibitions. The multiple subdivisions of the site could give rise to a certain confusion.
2nd stage: “Perceived space” (“l’espace perçu”). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

In order to study the activities carried out in the Square, first, “Behavioral” or “Activity Mapping” was elaborated on Tuesday, March 10, and Wednesday March 11, 2015, within the framework of the Unidad de Enseñanza Aprendizaje (UEA) (Unit of Teaching Learning) Seminario de Diseño II (Design Seminar II) of the Master Program in Design and Urban Studies at the UAM-Azcapotzalco, Mexico City. Another extensive photographic documentary inventory was undertaken between Friday, February 19 and Friday, February 26, 2016, with a photographic camera installed in the Hotel SNTSS on the part of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social (National Executive Committee of the National Union of Social Security), taking pictures every five minutes. More visits have been performed by undergraduate students of the elective, optional subject XII entitled “Taller de experimentación en el espacio público” (“Workshop Experimentation in Public Space”) of the UAM-Azcapotzalo during the 16-O trimester of the degree program.

The Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) is a mixture of public space and commercial or private areas, combining shops and services contained within closed plazas, with safety and internal security, cleaning and maintenance workers, paid parking areas, and a cultural forum for a variety of events. But there are also open spaces, including playgrounds and like in a park, outdoor gym, tables, benches, and an Ecobici station. People can eat at the restaurant, read at one of the tables, talk, or do exercise. Parents can have a rest while watching their children play in the designated areas. Commuters can rent a bike or wait for the bus, buy merchandise, or just relax on a bench before continuing on their way.

However, at the observed times, very few movements or activities could be registered. At late hours, the Square was were empty, and stays by the passers-by were mainly fleeting, from a few minutes to nearly an hour. The majority of people just went by, taking the shortest route between shops and tables, interpreting the Square as a place for transition. Rarely would a person stop for longer, predominately because of the Square’s difficult accessibility and its aggressive noise level, combined sometimes with weather conditions affecting the Square. Thus, the roof provided by the bridge itself is not always sufficient to cover passers-by from the rain, while providing protection on a sunny and hot day.

Being located in between avenues with intense vehicular traffic, Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia is constantly bombarded by engine noises, sudden tire screeching, ambulance and police-car sirens, and trucks containers crashing into
each other at the intersections, with the sounds of automobile and trucks horns, among others. Perceived as an aggressive factor, environmental noise is always present and hinders any conversations between colleagues, friends, or couples, creating a very uncomfortable ambience. The is no other surrounding sound, no musicians, organ grinders, street vendors, people’s conversations, or background music from a music player or speakers inside the Square that could mingle and compete with the external noise. Furthermore, noise pollution continues to be a health problem and continued exposure to noise high frequencies can be harmful, permanently damaging the ear and affecting the psychosocial behavior and growth of persons, among other side effects (headache, insomnia, hypertension, chronic fatigue).

Therefore, the Square was seen by visitors as a place of passage, i.e., the users of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) consume this space mainly temporarily, as environmental conditions do not encourage longer stays. Before 10:00 a.m., there were nearly no activities on the Square, except for a few workers having a quick breakfast, as well some youngsters (about 14 years of age) wearing school uniforms from the adjacent secondary school passing by, occasionally accompanied by their parents, coming back around 4:00 p.m. Throughout the day, people came more regularly to rent or to leave one of the public Ecobicis on their way to Colonia Condesa or to head toward the City Center. Others appeared to pay their taxes, being advised by a courteous employee (officer), who helped them to use the automatic pay booth installed in the glass pavilion of the Government of the Federal District office.

Apart from the service kiosk and the Ecobicis, constant commercial activities are only observed at the “OXXO” convenience store, which is visited by neighbors and workers, officials, and occasional passers-by, even at night. The new “CrossFit” gym did have rather fair attendance, as did “El Huequito” Restaurant at lunchtime, but it was rather empty for several hours a day, too. The also-quite-new barbershop was visited only sometimes, even it looks fashionable, and the UPS courier service, rarely.

Some of the activities offered on the Square itself were of a recreational or sports character. However, nearly no one used the exercise machines at the outdoor gym, while the indoor, and costly, “CrossFit” gym is relatively frequently in use. Only some youngsters and adults used the outdoor gym for about a half-an-hour’s exercise, as well as a few children, who came to play, perhaps attracted by the outside gym’s primary colors. Sporadically, some persons sit on the benches and around the tables with umbrellas to relax, talk, and listen to music with their earplugs, enjoying the shade, especially between noon and 3:00 p.m. Couples kept their distance from others to enjoy a little privacy, while employees of the surrounding office buildings took a break from their work to read and smoke. Others had breakfast or lunch at “El Huequito” or
“OXXO”, or had a little snack on the benches. Still others observed their children from some distance playing in the playground, sometimes accompanied by their pets. But their visits were rather scarce, as not more than one or two children used the playground a day, even on weekends (Fig. 72). Thus, the Square was used mainly at key moments of the day, being most busy during the afternoons between 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., i.e., around lunchtime.

Figure 72: Abandoned children’s playground

On the weekend and late at night, the “Multiforo Bajo Circuito” Cultural Forum took on a more important role, since the majority of the artistic-cultural events, such as concerts, films, and theater presentations, take place at night. Therefore, the parking lot in the south side was used by visitors who left their cars there. But normally, movement reduced significantly after 8:00 p.m. After 11:00 p.m., nearly no one was in the Square, although the lightning and the surveillance cameras remained active at all times during the day and night.

In general, it seemed difficult to determine, by observing the activities whether Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia was predominately perceived as a public or private place (Fig. 73). But its regulations forbid certain actions, such as taking photos or the usage of the space by social groups such as skaters or urban artists, or the presence of homeless persons and street vendors. Security personnel prevented these activities and invited these actors to leave the Square. Therefore, comprising an area of the city that has been denominated as “public”, outdoor or “open”, segregation mechanisms were imposed by authorities, as if it were a private space distributing the
right of admission. Also, no demonstrations were allowed in the Square, in that “there are no manifestations in Disneyland” (Sorkin 2004). On the other hand, while the safety in the Squares is well-regarded, the urban scenario became intolerant in terms of dealing with cultural or artistic expressions. The rules of conduct imposed avoided the exchange, mix, and greater enjoyment with regard to the perception of the place.
OBJECTS

- Parking lot
- Gym
- Shops
- Tables
- Children's playground
- Surveillance camera
- Sidewalk
- Vegetation
- Kiosk
- Multiforo Bajo Circuito

ACTIVITIES

- Monitor
- Pass by
- Cross
- Exercise
- Pay taxes
- Shop
- Play
- Eat
- Perform
- Park

MOVEMENT

- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” (“l’espace vécu”). Interviews with users. (Social) Actors

Of the 17 respondents, ten were women and the remaining seven were men, providing a quantitative framework with respect to the uses and appropriations of the “new” Square, Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia (Fig. 74). The samples showed a dividing line in the use, appropriation, and learning of the new Square, yielding a first conclusion of a space evaluated and legitimized by the users themselves. In the analysis of the interviews, the importance of this space was noteworthy because its location, more than any other feature, showed the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) as a place of transit that offers certain possibilities for rest and recreation. These features identified by the residents suggest that it is not a place to stay, but rather a temporary distraction between the activities of the respondents.

As a transit place, identity vanishes for moments: shooting, passing, transient, intimate, comfortable, and secure are only some of the aspects that identify the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) and they are in contrast to its past prior to its recovery from being a depot and garbage dump. Local people recognize, instead, the change and participate in cultural events. Some artists take advantage of this space and in being acknowledged by society in a new and purposeful space. It is thus that “Multiforo Bajo Circuito” has presented art exhibitions and new musical groups (Bajo Circuito 2015, Páramo/Ramírez 2013, Indierocks 2015, Ballesteros 2015).

The ages of the respondents ranged from between 18 and 63 years. People between 20 and 40 years of age made up 60% of all respondents. Regarding the proximity to the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass), just 24% lived nearby, while 47% (nearly one half of those interviewed) came from far away, and 29% inhabited intermediate zones. The occupations of the respondents are varied. The majority of the respondents were employees (94%): a carpenter, researcher (CFE), public servant, designer, another public servant, administrative assistant, candy vendor, architect, security guard, professor, gardener, sociologist, nurse, police officer, and there was only one student.

Of the respondents, 47% have been able to relate to someone, either with their friends, or the people who use the exercise equipment, or an Ecobici. However, most people (53%) have not related to other people because they are just passing through or do not remain long in the Square.

The interviewees pointed out that their predominant activity performed in the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) was eating (47%), either on the benches or in the restaurant. Another activity carried out there was been spending time or waiting for someone. Also, among the activities observed by the respondents, eating was that
frequently mentioned (22%), followed by the use of the exercise equipment (19%), service payments at the kiosk (19%), and utilization of the Ecobicis (14%). In contrast, observational work had shown that the primary activity taking place was use of the Ecobicis, followed by eating, either in the restaurant located there or on the benches. Coexistence as an activity was only indicated by 3% of the respondents, supporting the thesis that the Square prioritizes mainly temporary, ephemeral activities.

Thus, the reasons why people go to Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia were proximity to their home or work (35%), followed by its convenience as a passageway to work or another place (29%). Eighteen percent of the interviewees said that they would go the Square because of its urban furniture. However, the majority of respondents (88%) agreed that the activities developed in the Square were in accordance with the place, but one of the respondents said that there was bound to be a lack of security in the playground, while another individual mentioned that the location of the place would be not favorable because of the surrounding vehicular traffic, which makes access to the Square difficult. But, despite the location of the place and its tremendous noise level, the majority of respondents (71%) related the place to positive experiences. Surprisingly, some even felt “tranquility” and comfortable in being there. They found it nice, clean, and useful, while only 29% were left demonstrably with a bad experience, considering the Square as noisy, polluted, and dissatisfying. Of the people interviewed, just over one half (53%) agreed that they would invite another person to the Square, some specifically to eat at “El Huequito”, others to do exercise on the equipment found there. Notwithstanding this, others said no, since there would be no reason to go there except for the Ecobicis or to pay their taxes.

Of the total sample, the constant answer regarding “How often do you come to the square?” was “occasionally”, describing the Square again as a place of “passage”, which refers precisely to the randomness of their visits. Therefore, many people just passed by in order to move on further to another site, considering the Square as a place of transition (70%) and not as a final destination (30%). Very few persons went to the Square for distraction or recreation. Furthermore, usage of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia was provided by its functionality, in that the characteristics of the physical space were directly and specifically oriented to the activities associated to the commercial offers, the playground, the exercise equipment, and the GDF tax module. Institutional political discourse directed to the rescue of public spaces makes sense when space is occupied as designed, but might lose the essence of being “lived” in an expanded sense (Lefebvre 1974).
Finally, the concept of public security is a key element for active use of the space. The majority of the respondents stated that they felt safe or even very safe in the Square, which reflects that respondents are aware of security elements such as the omnipresent guards or the surveillance cameras installed by the Government of the Federal District (GFD). Ninety four percent of the persons interviewed declared that they like the place, highlighting its being well cleaning and maintenance (47%). Furthermore, people appreciated the aspects regarding public security (24%) and comfort (18%). However, a high number of respondents considered Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia to be “noisy”, well, so that certain environmental characteristics, such as problematic accessibility, noise level, and the resulting temporary use of Square do not foster human interactions. Contrariwise, the usefulness of the place was associated specifically to the gap of time in people’s daily activities, exemplified by the quotation of one user: “I’m there, to the extent that I have to join two moments in time”.

Thus, 50% of the respondents denied that the place would facilitate coexistence in the sense of a place for encounter. Ten percent note that, more or less, it might be a place for encounter and another 10% considered the place adequate for spending time together sometimes. Likewise, the fact that many users aimed at changing the Square in order to meet their needs, such as more implements, better access, more vegetation, etc., might represent a natural resistance to the imposition of a material structure, planned without the collective involvement of the citizen.
Figure 74: Results of the applied questionnaire at Bajo Puente Juan Escutia.

- **Men**: 47%, **Women**: 53%
- **Age range**: Men 22 - 74, Women 22 - 74

- **Stay time**
  - 5% Short time
  - 12% 15 min
  - 35% 20 min
  - 6% 40 min
  - 18% 60 min
  - 6% 8 hours
  - 6% 9 hours
  - 6% 12 hours

- **Frecuency**
  - 12% Once a week
  - 12% Sporadic
  - 16% Everyday
  - 24% Once a month
  - 12% 2 or 3 times a week
  - 12% First time

- **Why did you choose to come here?**
  - 40% Near my house / work
  - 18% It is on the way
  - 12% Shopping arround
  - 6% Like it
  - 6% The stalls
  - 6% It is quiet
  - 6% Historical context
  - 6% It is downtown

- **Activities**
  - 49% Rest
  - 11% Work
  - 5% Wait
  - 5% Eat
  - 5% Coexist
  - 5% Train
  - 5% Cultural dance
  - 5% Take pictures
  - 5% Talk
  - 5% Wifi

- **Activities you see**
  - 28% Rest
  - 17% Talk
  - 17% Sit
  - 7% Read
  - 7% Tourism
  - 3% Wait
  - 3% Drink coffee
  - 3% Coexist
  - 3% Drink water
  - 3% Smoke
  - 3% Text
  - 3% Games for children
  - 3% NC
Conclusions. Learning at Bajo Puente Juan Escutia

In space, appropriation, and therefore social learning, is realized through activities, and people both propose and show using the space in a direct-indirect relationship with the others, interacting in and with the place, transforming it (Fig. 75). The experience studying Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia allowed the understanding of some phenomena related to the transformations that, at present, the urban public space in Mexico City manifests in relation to the forces exerted on it, either public, private or civil. This balance, provided by policies of public development, is leveled by the increasingly dominant participation of private capital, in the form of an investment model based on the administrative concession of public space denominated Public-Private Partnership (PPP), i.e., the government transfers its responsibility by delegating administrative functions to private interests. In this context, human interaction takes place in an apparently public “urban scenario” (Lindón 2010), where “actors” were subjects to the requirements and rules referring of a private space.

Since the City Government has promoted the rescue of neglected spaces and their revitalization with various development projects and implicit supporting budgets, the Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) should recover abandoned territories for the benefit of citizens and improvement of the urban identity. Those old residual or void spaces are now fields of work with proposals and offers for the service of society and their surrounding residents. However, several problems have come about, such as that businesses could not keep up the cost of rent or could not make sufficient profit and they were consequently forced to abandon the place. Only particular commercial enterprises, such as the “OXXO” convenience store, or “El Huequito” Restaurant, the UPS delivery business, and the tax-payment services, as well as the Ecobici station, appeared to function, benefiting from the new measures. Parking possesses a successful function, but only the “Multiforo Bajo Circuito” Cultural Forum presents increasing importance as a platform for new ideas and a closer relationship between the area’s neighbors and emerging artists.

Therefore, Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpasses) projects might represent a failure of the City Government (Ciudadanos en Red 2013), but the recovery and revitalization of abandoned urban spaces can also be a possibility to benefit the people. Similarly, Jordi Borja said, “the history of the city is that of its public spaces” (Borja/Muxi 2000: 9). But, turning Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia into a semi-public space focused on different social sectors, who doubtlessly engaged in critical effects regarding the construction of “ciudadanía” (citizenship). No free controversial expression is permitted in public, as the guards would immediately intervene. In this regard, on December 5,
2016, one police officer even told a student from UAM-Azcapotzalco that “no (such) activities are permitted”, while the students attempted to organize a rather harmless urban intervention, inviting visitors to play with, integrating the Square’s urban furniture. Furthermore, the Square is obviously not a place for encounter, in that it is characterized predominately by transition; therefore, its function as social learning place is restricted. However, and as Daniel Escotto Sánchez (AEP) noted, it might not have been “one of our best projects, but surely it improved the preexisting situation”.

Therefore, the recovery of that abandoned and marginal urban space satisfies certain needs, creates a clean environment, and provides public services for the inhabitants of the zone. It also offers a resting point for passers-by. The constant 24-hour surveillance inhibits crime and radically changes its former urban image from an unsafe to a more comfortable and reliable space, even at night, being well illuminated and protected up to late hours of the night. In consequence, the Square experiences different attractions, keeping the place alive during the course of the day and night, such as “OXXO” and the public parking lots.

In between the circumstances of a so-called crisis of the “city” and “urbanity”, in which Mexico City does have a lack of public spaces of quality and every day loses valuable land to powerful real estate developers who literally devour and consume the city, the recovery of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia has benefited the living conditions of inhabitants. While the lack of and conflict over space in the city comprises an uneven struggle between private and public interests, the idea of recovering abandoned places seemed to be a viable compromise in order to offer space for the citizens, even if its public character is limited, as well as its value in terms of the reconstruction of the social fabric or “ciudadanía” (citizenship).

Learning from the other(s)

Therefore, the participation of the Federal Government in the rescue and reuse of residual spaces is a right that a society should demand. But it should also be a priority of governmental agencies with respect to encouraging the use, participation, and offer of these new spaces for all citizens, as well as redesigning them in order to remedy their deficiencies. And these “new” types of urban public squares and hybrid places might serve as an example for the future. In this, users learned from other(s) to observe the environment by engendering a relation between its functionality and the needs of the occupants of that space. Persons who usually occupied the place for transit observed that they could perform various activities, such as eating, paying their

2 Quotation by Daniel Escotto Sánchez from an interview with him at his office on March 23, 2015.
services bills at the kiosk, or using the Ecobicis, as well. They noticed shops through people entering them. Parents carrying their children realized that the place allows them to take a break, while the children use the playgrounds, and the guards guarantees their safety as well. Others frequented the place because their children enjoy the playgrounds as well as the outdoor gym.

Couples may find a clean and partially intimate space where they are not disturbed by other people, even if there are no isolated areas that are out of the sight of other users of the Square. People can observe the usefulness of services such as those offered in the module for paying bills and taxes, and those of the Ecobici station, in order to make use of these in the future. Others could see people exercising and learned how to use the outdoor gym apparatuses and to include them in their sport routines.

Even if the environmental conditions do not allow long stays, some passers-by sat down to take a break in Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia). On watching others reading a book, going to the restaurant, or listening to music through earphones, they realized that it can be possible to spend time and enjoy the place momentarily, while the vegetation absorbs a bit of the vehicular chaos. Individuals and groups have learned to live with the noise level and aspects derived by means of the new Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model by observing other people. Furthermore, they may notice the recreational facilities, and the home-delivery and parcel services that are offered, as well as the cyclists using or returning their Ecobicis, taking all of these into consideration as future possibilities. However, over time, the users noticed that other individuals did not remain in the Square for long.

Learning with the other(s)
As Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia is not characterized as a place for coexistence, “learning with the other(s)”; establishing relationships of learning through interactions of users within the space, does not exist to a great extent. Nevertheless, in the playground, the relationship observed between parents and their children manifested learning based on the protection of one by the other. Also, these individuals, who can endure the enormous noise level, realized that it might be possible to spend time with others there and enjoy the coexistence.

Learning from the place (“genius loci”)
“Learning from the place” (“genius loci”) happens when a space configures a (physical) frame for uses, which determines its functionality, thus the users’ interaction and social learning within it. Nevertheless, because Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia
is not at all related to the notion of the natural, historic, and esthetic landscape, its architecture has hidden or even destroyed its “genius loci”. Therefore, it can be stated that this revitalization project does not manifest any specific spirit of a place. Moreover, it appears that this Square not only does not express a “genius loci” but, according to Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980), neither does it represent a “place”.

The Square exhibits openly commercial, food, services, and recreation areas, as well as security and the Ecobici station. “El Huequito” food place was one of the busiest spots, and the majority of its customers came to eat in the company of others. The Square did not require a map, since most shops were close and visible. Surveillance cameras, security staff, and car parking at night provide frequenters of the Square with trust, whether they be pedestrians passing at all times of the day and night, car owners who leave their cars overnight or for a few hours, individuals or groups who stay to take a break, families with children, couples, customers, workers, cyclists, consumers of public or private services, and audiences of the cultural forum. All of them became new users of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, a place that they had previously never approached when it was deteriorated and abandoned.

Therefore, the Square might only represent a place for temporary, short encounters, a momentary break; thus, people did not identify with the Square, where no particular urban memory was experienceable. The lack of noise reducers or buffers should be considered and included within the development of the Square in order to enhance its usefulness, converting it into a place for encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship), therefore a place for social learning.
**Figure 75: Typical week at contemporary Republic Square.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30 a.m. Besides the policemen and the cleaning employees, the only open places were the “CrossFit” Gym and the “OXXO”.</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. There was no activity on any of the islands, “El Huequito” opened, but no one even came close to interacting with space. Nevertheless, only a few minutes later the treasury kiosk retighten, as well.</td>
<td>10:30 a.m. People followed an initiative of the “OXXO”, recycling PET bottles. At the same time, one little girl used the playground, staying for about five or ten minutes before leaving.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 p.m. One of the most attractive services in the Square is the tax-payment system of the GDF, where an employee supported the realization of payments.</td>
<td>9:00 a.m. Nobody used the exercising equipment. At the same time, people were training in the “CrossFit” Gym. One is characterized as open, freely accessible, the latter is closed.</td>
<td>14:00 p.m. A motorcycle from the +kotas shop drove out for about 30 minutes to realize deliveries.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m. During the regular mealtimes of the office workers, users assisted at the tables of the Square.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. During the next few minutes, some people came to sit outside the “OXXO” eating something as the first activity since arriving.</td>
<td>2:50 p.m. Heavy trucks constantly circulated around the Square increasing noise pollution. The people outside the “OXXO” were the only ones who used Bajo Puente Juan Escutia so that the place appeared abandoned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 p.m. Very little influx of people, provoking the disuse of some premises.</td>
<td>12:00 p.m. The children’s playground was unused, such as almost during the whole day.</td>
<td>3:00 a.m. At early morning there is not activity at all.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**At the task-payment kiosk, approximately every five minutes someone was searching for a service.**

*The little influx provokes the disuse of premises.*
**FRIDAY**

10:30 a.m.
The Bridge Underpass showed very little activity at the early hours of the day, practically there were only cleaning staff, office workers and policemen.

11:30 a.m.
Employers of the GDF began to place Ecobicis for the public use.

**SATURDAY**

12:00 p.m.
The Square was almost empty, while only cleaning personnel swept the floor. More activities occurred in the “CrossFit” Gym, and at in the “OXXO”. People sat down and rested for short moments, not more than 15 minutes, before retiring. Ladies passed by with their children, who used the playgrounds.

**SUNDAY**

7:30 a.m.
There were very few occurrences, with only some local passages and floating transit, not lasting long.

12:00 p.m.
The Ecobicis were continuously in use, while the most popular commercial establishments were the “El Huequito” Restaurant and the “CrossFit” Gym. Few people entered the “OXXO”. The children’s playground equipment were not required also on Sunday, just like the exercise devices. There were still too much vehicular flow, which did not favor the access to the Square.

“During the night, nothing is going on at Bajo Puente Juan Escutia”.
4.2.4.2 Parque Bolsillo Zócalo

(Abstract)
Pocket Park Zócalo is located in the Historic Center of Mexico City, facing the old City Hall building. In 2013, this park was inaugurated as part of a program implemented by the Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing (SEDUVI) and the Authority of Public Space (AEP) to transform small spaces in urban remnants and in underused or abandoned roads into spaces for recreation and to improve urban image. Pocket Park Zócalo includes tables, benches, vegetation, and playground and exercise machines. This space has been successful since it serves the purpose of recreation and enjoyment for workers and visitors. Even at a small but very visible scale, this type of park contributes to the physical recovery of space and generates activities that promote social harmony and the conformation of community life, and renders it possible to improve the security and welfare levels of the people. Representing a place for relaxation, coexistence, and meeting, learnings from and with the other(s) and from the place occurred in Parque Bolsillo Zócalo, so that communication skills and faculties for creating contacts could be acquired, as well as, in a restricted manner and due to the proximity to the Zócalo, also values such as empathy or solidarity. Additionally, people also noticed that place “afforded” certain urban elements that do not exist in Constitution Square, such as vegetation and umbrellas for protection from the sun and opportunities to sit down.
1st Stage: “Conceived space” ("l’espace conçu"). Analysis of the planning

Historical aspects

Parques de Bolsillo (Pocket Parks) are small accessible parks for the general public, which are also known as “parkettes”, “mini-parks”, “vest-pocket parks”, or “vesty parks”. These parks provide greenery, places to sit down outdoors and, sometimes, children’s playgrounds. Following international examples from around the world such as Australia, Chile, the U.K., or the U.S., and in order to transform residual or underutilized urban spaces into recreational areas for the enjoyment of the people, the Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda (SEDUVI) (Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing) and the Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP) (Authority of Public Space) also launched the “Parques de Bolsillo” (“Pocket Parks”) Program for Mexico City. It was created from the need of big cities to obtain more green spaces, with the Pocket Parks representing the only viable option for creating new public spaces without large-scale redevelopment. Thus, Parque Bolsillo Zócalo comprises the first of 154 parks planned for construction in the Federal District.

“Parques de Bolsillo” (“Pocket Parks”) are small spaces in urban remnants and in under-used or abandoned roads with high pedestrian affluence that are converted into spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the community. They are open areas with a modality of a neighborhood park, occupying areas of 1,000 m² and intended primarily for the recreation of children and senior citizens. “Pocket Parks” can be installed in small urban plots, but also in spaces that are often wasted by cities such as the rooftops of public buildings, the courtyards of governmental offices, “camellones”, traffic islands, or median strips in avenues, and stops for public transportation. The need for these parks in a city with problems of overpopulation such as Mexico City appears to increase from day to day. Thus, these parks could, to all appearances, be an effective way to take advantage of all of the urban spaces and at the same time to improve quality of life and urban image. They are built in a short time, are temporary in character, and at a relatively low cost (SEDUVI 2011).

Therefore, for the Program’s pilot test, it was decided to start in the Colonia Centro and to recover the area located in front of the Federal District Government building at the southwest corner of Plaza de la Constitution, the gigantic central square for all Mexicans. The area selected, of approximately 300 m², was apparently being sub-utilized as a parking lot (Fig. 76). It was a space that had high potential for its conversion into a remnant peninsula road park, that is, a space for pedestrians that is connected with a sidewalk. Investment for the realization of this prototype was about 500,000 MXN. So it was that on April 15, 2013, Pocket Park Zócalo was able to be
inaugurated by City Government Head Miguel Ángel Mancera. The park was constructed entirely with recycled materials, and has benches, a small playground area, and pots with different types of plants, as well as free public Wi-Fi access (Reporte lobby 2013).

Figure: 76: Selected place before its recovery.

Source:
http://www.ciudadverde.sedema.df.gob.mx/nuevas_areasverdes.html#.WHl17fnhCUk

But on August 25 of that same year, the square was overtaken by some protesting teachers, who destroyed the pots, umbrellas, swings, and even ripped the benches and chairs out of the ground. Therefore, on November 14, total restoration of Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo was proposed. Taken together, with an investment of approximately six million MXN, twelve “Pocket Parks” had been built in the Federal District by the end of 2014, with a total 14,000 m² for coexistence in the city, located in the following demarcations: Álvaro Obregón; Azcapotzalco; Benito Juárez; Cuauhtémoc; Gustavo A. Madero; Iztapalapa; Miguel Hidalgo; Milpa Alta; Venustiano Carranza, and Xochimilco. In November 2016, the surface of the Square plaza was replaced and the colorful preexisting floor pavement substituted by gray asphalt. Furthermore, a metal sheet was installed referring to an existing collaboration between the City Government and Bloomberg Associates, in the framework of a program called “Capital Social Por Ti” (“Social Capital For You”).
Urban aspects
Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo possesses a unique location: it is situated in downtown Mexico City, in the heart and the first grid of the city, representing the Historic Center of Mexico City, which is the largest and one of the most emblematic places in Latin America, and one of the most visited focal tourist points in the world and the main destination for cultural tourism in the country (Conaculta 2010). The Square is located in the direct vicinity on the southwestern flank of Plaza de la Constitución, the Main Square and the most public one in central Mexico City, informally also known as the Zócalo. Plans were made to erect a column as a monument to Independence, but only the base, or “Zócalo” (“plinth”) was built, which was demolished long ago but whose name has lived on. The huge square and its surrounding blocks have played a central role in the city’s planning and geography for nearly 700 years. The site is just one block southwest of the Templo Mayor that, according to Aztec legend and mythology, was considered to be the center of the universe.

This square, besides being the seat of the political, economic, and religious power of Mexico, as well as being a space where the indigenous and vice regal past mix, with more than four centuries of history, is also the place where the people of Mexico meet for celebrate festivities or to carry out realize demonstrations. Thus, the adjacent Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo includes the centrality of and accessibility to users-in-transit, as all surrounding streets flow toward the center, toward the “Zócalo”, which does not exempt the Pocket Park from its problems, such as meetings, protests, vandalism, and damage to urban equipment and furniture. Being a space conceived from a remaining road space, there is a high concentration of cars and people; thus, the waiting time to cross the street is high, as well as the risk of accidents. It can be accessed through 16 de Septiembre Street, as well as from Avenida Circunvalación through Correo Mayor Street. A third way to access the Zócalo is from the north on Avenida 20 de Noviembre and from the south from Venustiano Carranza Street, both of these leading directly to Plaza de la Constitución. In addition, Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo is highly visible from the esplanade of the Zócalo.

Various forms of transportation connect the Square. The Metro or Underground Line 2 Cuatro Caminos-Taxqueña, which crosses Mexico City from the south to the City Center and then to the west and vice versa, do have a proper Metro Station at the northeastern part of the Zócalo, while Metrobús Line 4 North passes along Avenida República de el Salvador three blocks to the south of Plaza de la Constitución, with Republic of Argentina Station the closest by. Microbuses 1, 2, 9, and 18 link the Square from all directions. Furthermore, Servicio de Transportes Eléctricos del Distrito Federal (STE) (Electric Transport Service of the Federal District) in 2009 inaugurated its first
“Corredor Cero Emisiones”, or Zero-Emissions Corridor, in which all public transport services along one of the city’s major traffic arteries is provided by electric trolleybuses, such as Eje Central (Central Traffic Axis, formerly Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas), integrating the Auditorio-Zócalo Route as well. Bicitaxis use the Square, in addition to their being Ecobici stations at Avenida 20 de Noviembre and at the northern edge of the Zócalo, next to the City’s Turibús Station, at the corner of Tacuba and República de Brasil Streets. Large parts of the Historic Center have recently been transformed by the City Government into pedestrian zones, such as Regina Street or Corridor Francisco I. Madero, which daily leads large crowds toward Plaza de la Constitución, while automobiles access by means of 5 de Mayo and 20 de Noviembre Streets, where parking lots are located (Fig. 77).

Hooks for crutches, tactile guides, disabled parking spaces, handrails, and signs in Braille are present to allow transit and permanence in the urban environment (streets and public spaces). These elements also fulfill in general the basic principles of accessibility for people with limited capabilities. However, in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo there is a certain lack of clear and accurate signs, and the entire area is not accessible for the transit of individuals with disabilities; one ramp is not sufficient for this, and there are differences in pavement levels, as well as irregular and slippery floors. Additionally, planters serve as obstacles and interruptions in the pedestrian pathways.

The urban context of the Square is clearly defined by the importance of the surrounding buildings and the activities developed around it. To the North of Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, we find Plaza de la Constitución, an open space of 57,600 m² (240 m by 240 m), making it one of the largest city Squares in the world. There the streets are lighted around the esplanade. The center is equipped with a flagpole and an enormous Mexican flag that is ceremoniously raised and lowered each day. Furthermore, there is other urban furniture, so that the Square could mainly be described as a huge asphalted area without other physical, static elements or features, offering the possibility for the development of mass activities, ranging from huge concerts to political demonstrations. It is a reference point for location and orientation in terms of social gatherings. At its northern end, it is bordered by Catedral Metropolitana de la Asunción de la Santísima Virgen María a los Cielos (Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven), the largest cathedral in the Americas, the religious center of the country, and seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico. At the northwest corner, the Nacional Monte de Piedad building is located, with the Templo Mayor site to the northeast, just outside one’s view.
On the south side of the Zócalo, divided by Avenue 20 de Noviembre, we find the Antiguo Palacio del Ayuntamiento, two buildings that house offices of the governing authority of the Federal District of Mexico City. While the building to the west of 20 de Noviembre is the older one, representing an example of baroque construction and which has been the site of city administration since the Conquest, the edifice to the east is newer, built in the nineteen forties and replicated in the adjoining building.

Palacio Nacional (National Palace) to the East is the Federal Executive Seat in Mexico, a palace for the ruling class of Mexico since the Aztec empire, whereby many of the present building materials belonged to the original edifice of Moctezuma II. It is a construction of approximately 40,000 m² and is one of baroque architecture. It is also a cultural space with public access, exhibitions, and guided tours offered to the public. Its flanking streets, Moneda and Corregidora, are partly open to vehicular traffic and are mainly dedicated to formal and informal commerce. Therefore, it is considerably busy with pedestrians from Wednesday through Monday.

Finally, to the west, there is the Old Portal de Mercaderes (Merchants), built in 1524 and characterized by its set of arches extending from Madero Street to 16 de September Street. On the ground floor there are shops, mainly offering jewelry. It also houses the Grand Hotel Mexico City.

**Figure 77: Accessibility by public transport.**

**Architectural aspects**

From an architectural point of view, this urban space is delimited as a plane. Its dimensions and contents are based on the straight line, and the boundary between the perimeter and the outer elements is simply limited either by a painted line or by a change in the texture (material) on the ground. Therefore, delimitation of the area is achieved by means of a bi-chromatic or monochromatic graphic pattern in the
pavement, in contrast with the perimeter’s asphalt, made of epoxy non-skid resin, while with regard to the ground, there is low-impact pavement (rubber) on the playground, and the exercise machines areas have springs and treadmills (Fig. 78). Furthermore, there are polyethylene platforms, with planks made of recycled polyethylene.
Figure 78: Details of playground and exercise machines.

Figure 79: Furniture Details.

Figure 80: Detail of plant containers within the Pocket Park.

Photographs: Courtesy of Gisell López García¹.

Regarding the urban furniture provided, there are metal benches, as well as bush hammered concrete bucket seats and benches in gray for sitting, and metal tables to eat at, with steel and tarpaulin umbrellas for protection from the rain and sun (Fig. 79). Metal bollards or cleats 90-cm-high in gray graphite have been installed, limiting the Square, as well as steel trash cans 50 cm in diameter and 90 cm in height, in steel gray. In addition, there is an information board with information on the “new” project, and a bicycle rack of 16 mm steel in graphite gray and green. Additionally, recently a 90-cm-high metal column was added, with various tools for repairing bicycles at the eastern end of Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo.

In terms of vegetation, various species of plants, such as everlasting, elephant bush, iceplant, and magnolias have been positioned, and pots about 1.50 m height contain small trees and others of various dimensions, which are found on steel plates and in graphite gray. Vegetation and containers were distributed rather equally over the available area, separating the functional zones and protecting the Square from the vehicular traffic (Fig. 80). Therefore, with respect to urban image and the installed furniture, undoubtedly the measurements represent a substantial improvement over their previous use as planters and an improvised parking lot. The urban furniture has afforded recreational areas, representing a positive element in the generation of “new” public spaces in the city (Fig. 81).

Figure 81: Urban architectural configuration.
**Functional aspects**

Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo is a space designed for rest and relaxation, “a small-sized area recovered for the enjoyment of the immediate community” (SEDUVI 2011), in order to increase quality of life and urban image on a small but very visible scale. But above all, it is a space designed for the user to contemplate the history of the great Zócalo Square and its important surrounding historic buildings, offering characteristics that do not exist in the Zócalo, such as protection from the elements and seating facilities.

The recovery of residual spaces in Mexico City, located next to the largest public square in the country, and the adaptation of a remnant road as a resting and recreational area just inside this place, reinforces the tourist profile of the City Center based on its historic and political significance. It is a symbolic site of power and the main destination of the majority of the demonstrations and mass social mobilizations regularly registered in the capital.

However, the definition of park relates rather to introspection and forgetting of the urban reality to a greater degree than to a direct contemplation of it. Conceived as an idea to develop a perceptive relationship between user and environment, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo does not correspond to the imaginary of park. Possibly the adjective “pocket” attempted to dignify the idea of park as a “small urban bubble” that separates the space from the city, or at least blurs it. Thus, it appears that the place has been conceived under the conceptualization of a “pocket” due to its physical characteristics, aiming to protect what is stored there, instead of a “park” that citizens can fully enjoy.

Thus, the functionality of the pocket park was divided and compartmentalized into four sections (**Fig. 82**): The first section, “eating”, is adapted for the consumption and enjoyment of food, while the second section, comprises an open area for pedestrian traffic and serves as a stop for public transportation. At the center of this “transit” area, there is a bench for short pedestrian breaks. Following this, continuing toward the east, the third section, “sitting”, is designed for contemplation and resting for a longer time. And, to conclude, the last section, “recreation”, is dedicated to sports and an entertainment area.
2nd stage: “Perceived space” ("l'espace perçu"). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

For the purpose of studying the “perceived space” as a reference to the result of spatial practices, movement, and interaction, “Behavioral Mapping” was developed, identifying and meticulously documenting activities carried out in the Square. In a first attempt, a photographic documental analysis could only be performed for ten hours on Wednesday, March 11 and on Tuesday, March 17, 2015, together with students of the Master Program Design and Urban Studies of UAM-Azcapotzalco (UEA Seminario de Diseño (Design Seminar) II, due to that permission for installing a fixed camera was refused. Therefore, in order to elaborate a description “as dense as possible” of user behavior at Pocket Park Zócalo, another intensive observation was carried out between Monday, October 17 through Sunday, October 23, 2016, together with undergraduate students in architecture, within the framework of the elective, optional subject XII “Taller de experimentación en el espacio público” (“Workshop Experimentation in the Public Space”).

In Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, the main activity is relaxing, taking a little break during or after the workday, while conversations arise among visitors. Being so close to the Zócalo, the main square of the megalopolis Mexico City located in its very center activates takes place from early in the morning up to late at night. So even before 7:00 a.m., people came to have breakfast at the tables with umbrellas. Some of them apparently brought their own food because of the strict ban on street vendors in the area and the lack of establishments open at this time. At the same time, in the Zócalo esplanade, a crew of approximately ten cleaning workers arrived with tool carts and containers, wandering into Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) afterward.

Likewise, the place is monitored around the clock, with surveillance cameras and policemen with bicycles or patrol cars guarding the perimeter, asking single street vendors who appeared with vehicle parked in the Square to leave, these complying immediately with this request. Before 8:00 a.m., a military formation is also initiated
surrounding the flagpole to hoist the flag, while at City Hall’s main entrance, movements were observed of media reporters, security personnel, and other officials. Both activities were watched by six to ten persons in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. When the raising ceremonies of the National Flag take place, a drum roll resonates and produces an echo in the buildings around the Square, and the bells of the Cathedral ring with melodies for several minutes.

Later, the people in the Square began to carry out various activities, such as chatting, texting, and talking on the phone, spending time with their partners, friends or colleagues, applying makeup, looking around, reading, or waiting (impatiently) (Fig. 83). In the morning and after sunset, people also rested, lying on the benched. Then, when this resting involved short breaks or waiting for someone, users mainly chose the concrete benches on both sides to sit on, with the part overlooking the Metropolitan Cathedral the most frequently selected. There, people could observe an enormous variety of activities, for example, representatives of residents from the Gustavo A. Madero Delegation appearing on the esplanade of the Zócalo in order to protest against the Metrobús. Similarly, in October 2016, when the International Book Fair (FIL) took place in Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square), persons sitting on the concrete benches “studied” the hustle and bustle taking place on the Square and around the installed tent structures.

*Fig. 83: Resting at the Square.*
Instead, when it came to longer breaks, the metal benches were favored, some reading while others embraced and contemplated the panorama. Likewise, the area with the tables and umbrellas is also one of places most employed, occupied by people who arrived with food, eating there, often fast food or other snacks and drinks, staying for about 20 minutes before leaving. However, the table area had highest occupancy between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m.: since the Square is surrounded by shops and offices, and this is the time that workers normally take a break for a meal, many of the workers, apparently office workers, wearing jackets and ties. On the weekends, the office workers disappeared.

Contrariwise, the exercise and playground areas remained rather unoccupied throughout the day. Thus, in the entire elapsed time, there were only a few persons who visited this section, being curious about it and testing the exercise machines such as treadmills, but moving on straightaway after just a few seconds. No one seriously trained. The same occurred in reference to the small horses for the children to ride: some boys and girls aged between two and five years occupied these only for brief moments, while their parents kept an intense watch over them. Furthermore, one afternoon while children playing the park facilities, some reporters took advantage of this place to work on their notes on had gone on in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo.

Because the bicycle station at the southeastern corner next to the exercise and playground area planters was utilized on average only by one or two bicycles (and a scooter) at a time and the repairing stall with tools close was utilized only very sporadically, we noticed that, despite its having been a planned “new” Square differentiated in design for various activities, some of the equipment remained underutilized. In particular, the apparatuses for exercising and those in the children’s playground were used only occasionally for a few moments as at a time, rather out of curiosity than for physical exercise.

However, in that the function of this place is for resting or as a meeting or waiting point, the pedestrian crossing is very noticeable at Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo (Fig. 84). Because of its central location located in the vicinity of the Zócalo, people came and went, using the Square as a pedestrian transit zone. The majority of the passers-by were tourists or employees, dressed accordingly. At the center of the Square, there is a free zone that allows crossing from the Zócalo esplanade to City Hall. However, if people transited in the opposite direction, as do the majority of user approaching from 20 de Noviembre Avenue, they talked between the pedestrian lines at the corner of the Square to reach the traffic lights, crossing to Plaza de la
Constitución (Constitution Square), the latter representing one of the largest tourist magnet in the country.

In this sense, the lack of the separation of the Square and the extensive traffic flow circulation (private cars, taxis and other public transportation medium) around the Zócalo is noteworthy, because its excessive proximity implies both prolonged exposure to noise and the inevitable inhalation of the combustion gases released by vehicles. The Turibús tended to pass by more often, as well. Furthermore, patrol cars with their sirens blaring circulated, making a great noise, blocking the perimeter road by circulating in the opposite direction, causing bikers, minibuses, and other vehicles to stop and get out of their way.

While the vehicular movement intensified around 6:00 p.m., the influx of people in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo was reflected by up to 25 persons who were sitting, three children in the exercise and playground area, and five people crossing, considering an average of twenty people occupying the space in the late afternoons. At the same time, also at 6:00 p.m., another highlight was the daily lowering of the flag in Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square), bringing together hundreds of people who stopped by to witness this at the Zócalo, and various persons observing the event from the Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park). As the day started gradually to darken, the lights in the buildings began to be turned on, buildings, providing the Square with yet another atmosphere. Nonetheless, around 7:00 p.m., visitors gradually left the Square.
Parque Bolsillo Zócalo

Figure 84: Objects, activities, movements.

**OBJECTS**
- Umbrellas
- Table
- Plants
- Pots
- Benches
- Brushes
- Ramp
- Tree
- Tool stele
- Bicycle stands
- Gym
- Children's playground

**ACTIVITIES**
- Eat
- Coexist
- Sit
- Observe
- Chat
- Transit
- Contemplate
- Rest
- Smoke
- Exercise
- Play
- Park (Bicycle)
- Recreate
- Repair

**MOVEMENT**
- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” (“l’espace vécu”). Interviews with users. Actors

The “lived space” (“l’espace vécu”) deals with the relation of subjects or users with space. To determine this relationship, a survey of 17 people was conducted, nine females, eight males, while the age range of the interviewed users was between 22 and 74 years, and 65% were from the Federal District, especially from Cuauhtémoc Delegation (24%), another 14% from the State of Mexico, and 12% of the respondents did not specify this (Fig. 85). Of this population sample, only 30% were professionals, including two sociologists, an advertiser, a marketer, and an electrical engineer, 35% were merchants or retailers (3), one was a ballerina, or the respondent engaged in a trade such that of as a “bolero” (shoe-shiner), and 35% worked, with four employees, two homemakers, and a stylist.

The principal activity that took place in the park was relaxing (49%), followed by working (11%), waiting (5%), coexisting (5%), using the Internet (5%), etc. Furthermore, the surveyed population said that they came to this park primarily because of its proximity to their workplaces (40%), and second, because it is on their way (18%), using Parque de Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo as a transition zone. Others passed through on going to shop in the City Center (12%) or chose the Square because of its central location (6%) and its historic context (6%). Six percent noted that that they came to the Square because of its tranquility (6%), its benches (6%, or just because they liked it (6%).

Forty-seven percent of this population said that they had experienced some way to relate with other persons, while the remaining 53% had not experienced this, because that was not their purpose or for security reasons. They pointed out that they observed that users primarily reached the place to rest (28%), talk (17%), take a seat (17%), or read (7%). Others approached the place as tourists (7%), while a lower percentage of the respondents (3% each) noticed people waiting for someone, spend time together, playing at the children’s games, drinking coffee or water, smoking or just texting with their cellular phones, and 3% had no comment. People also considered that the activities taking place in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo were in accordance with the place (76%).

Respondents felt, in leaving the Pocket Park, that it was mainly an experience of resting (27%), relaxing (5%), tranquility (16%), and on of pleasure (16%). People met people (5%). Some left the park tired (5%), angry (5%), or with a negative experience (5%). Others had different experiences after leaving the Square (5%), while 11% had no experiences. Seventy six percent of respondents would invite another person to visit this place, 18% no, and 6% maybe.
The frequency with which the respondents visited the park ranged between once a month (24%), occasionally (12%), up to six times a week (16%), remaining in the Square for an average time of between 15 and 20 minutes. Other people reported visiting Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo once (12%) or twice a week (6%), while the individual who visited the place three (12%) or five times, stayed for an average of 40–60 minutes because they worked nearby and used the Square to take a break. In general, 12% remained 15 minutes in the square, 35% 20 minutes, 6% 40 minutes, and 18%, 60 minutes. Those who stayed in the Square for two hours or more, i.e., 8, 9, or 12 hours, i.e., the whole day, accounted for 6% each, among these the person offering shoeshine services. Five percent mentioned spending “a while” in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. Likewise, 12% of the respondents had come for the first time.

People who came to visit the Pocket Park mostly did so individually (47%), others in a group (29%), and a few came with a partner (12%) or to meet someone (12%). Consequently, the Square is regarded by respondents as a transit place (53%) and not as a final destination (47%). With respect to security issues, the majority of the people surveyed considered that they felt safe (65%) and very safe (29%) when they were in the park, since it is well protected by public security officers as well as by surveillance cameras. However, this situation in turn led to a feeling of insecurity in a small segment of respondents (6%), who felt intimidated by the large police presence.

Eighty two percent of respondents said they liked the Pocket Park because it is a clean, well-cared-for, and convenient place along their way to somewhere else. Some also mentioned its well-developed concept. Nevertheless, a minority (18%) did not like the Square because they considered it too small, also claiming the presence of rather “noisy” people. However, in general, its atmosphere was perceived as quiet (64%), friendly (12%), and relaxed (6%), while some other respondents pointed out that, due to its location, it could be a boring (6%), noisy (6%), and tense spot (6%).

Among the features of the place that caused users to visit it, we include the urban furniture (17%), since that most sought after by respondents were the benches (17%), tables (6%) and umbrellas to shelter them from the sun (6%). Other came to be alone (6%) or because it is located close to the Zócalo. Forty two percent did not make any comment. Thus, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo was considered by 71% of respondents as a space that facilitates spending time together, while 24% said no, and 5% did not respond to this query. Although the concept and the characteristics of the place were rather pleasing, the surveyed population mentioned various needs for attention to be paid to in order to transform the area into one with a more satisfactory effect. Umbrellas were among the most requested of these to mitigate the sun (23%),
as well as more seats in order to meet their needs (9%). Others asked for the removal of the exercise machines (9%) or preferred more trees (4%), desired water fountains (4%), more playgrounds (4%), and trash cans (4%). People also wished to reduce the police presence (4%) or only to enlarge the site (4%). Another 4% would even change “everything”, 9% “nothing”, and 13% made no comment.

Worth mentioning is that 9% of the respondents would have liked fewer cars passing by the Square. In consequence, the inquiries showed that 58% were of the opinion that this place did not provide an acoustic well-being, 12% said “yes”, 6% “partly”, and 24% did not respond. Therefore, a majority considered it as not a place to rest from urban noise (71%), while 29% did not answer. Finally, the respondents proposed a reduction of cars in the area (30%) as a strategy for making Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo a nicer place in terms of sound. In order to make it acoustically more enjoyable, the respondents would plant new trees (6%) or build walls (6%), while 18% would do “nothing”, and 40% did not add any recommendation.
Figure 85: Results of the questionnaire applied at Parque Bolsillo Zócalo.

- **Age range:**
  - Men: 47% (22 - 74)
  - Women: 53%

- **Stay time (%):**
  - 5 Short time
  - 12 15 min
  - 35 20 min
  - 6 40 min
  - 18 60 min
  - 6 120 min
  - 6 8 hours
  - 6 9 hours
  - 6 12 hours

- **-like (%):**
  - Nice: 82%
  - Clean: 82%
  - On my way: 82%

- **-dislike (%):**
  - Small: 18%
  - Noisy: 18%
  - Boring: 18%

- **Frequency (%):**
  - 12 Once a week
  - 12 Sporadic
  - 16 Everyday
  - 24 Once a month
  - 12 2 or 3 times a week
  - 12 First time

- **Why did you choose to come here? (%):**
  - 40 Near my house / work
  - 18 It is on the way
  - 12 Shopping arround
  - 6 Like it
  - 6 The stalls
  - 6 It is quiet
  - 6 Historical context
  - 6 It is downtown

- **Activities (%):**
  - 49 Rest
  - 11 Work
  - 5 Wait
  - 5 Eat
  - 5 Coexist
  - 5 Train
  - 5 Cultural dance
  - 5 Take pictures
  - 5 Talk
  - 5 Wifi

- **Activities you see (%):**
  - Rest: 28
  - Talk: 17
  - Sit: 17
  - Read: 7
  - Tourism: 7
  - Wait: 3
  - Drink coffee: 3
  - Coexist: 3
  - Drink water: 3
  - Smoke: 3
  - Text: 3
  - Games for children: 3
  - NC: 3
Conclusions. Learning at Parque Bolsillo Zócalo

The study should imply a thorough review of the scope of this new type of square, representing an important urban initiative promoted recently by the City Government within the framework of proposals to recover public spaces in the Historic Center of Mexico City. By questioning its social actors, a positive assessment of the urban space was observed in general, as the main users, including tourists, employees, and shoppers, often stopped unexpectedly in between their visits to the City Center for a moment, especially when the seats were unoccupied. Then the Square eventually became a place for encounter for small groups, while the huge Mexican place for “ciudadanía” (citizenship) is in sight, the former probably the most disputed space in the country.

Learning from the other(s)
In that regard and because of the rather short stays of users, “learning from other(s)” is reduced to moments of the mostly spontaneous uses of the urban furniture and equipment provided, before people continue on their way. Thus, through observing the other(s), one acquires recognition of the Square’s function as a place for relaxation, contemplation, coexistence, and meeting. Individuals appropriate different types of recreation, such as reading, playing, or eating. Furthermore, they became familiar with the flows and movements on the street and with different kinds of public attitudes and behaviors. In addition, one learns from other(s) to use the exercise apparatus, as well.

Learning with the other(s)
Such “Learning with the other(s)” occurred mainly when cultural and social events took place at the adjacent Plaza de la Constitución, a phenomenon that occurs nearly daily, turning Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo into a meeting place. While observing the occurrences on the Zócalo, people initiated spontaneous conversations with strangers, acquiring communication skills and faculties and creating contacts. Thanks to meeting with the other, one might learn values such as empathy or solidarity. Through coexistence, people felt protected and therefore secure, generating self-confidence.

Learning from the place (“genius loci”)
Thus, notwithstanding the centrality of Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, it is not the place itself, which appeared implicit in the “genius loci”, i.e., the “spirit of the place”. Rather, it is the “genius loci” of the Zócalo that prevails, engaging in personal and collective memories because of its importance in the history of the country.
Furthermore, visitors learned from the place to recognize the best places to rest in the shade or the sun, depending on the period of the year or time of the day, as appropriate equipment is available for sitting as well for doing exercise. Moreover, one took note of the access to, the exit from, and the semiology of the space. The place is recognized as an “oasis” for resting in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the city, leading to a certain type of identification with the place, and the desire to take care of it.

In general, this appears to be a positive initiative for the recovery of lost or underutilized spaces, due to the huge visibility of the place in view of its proximity to the main Square of the city. Likewise, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo served the purpose of recreation and enjoyment for the community, improving the quality of life and the urban image. It also offered elements for sitting down and for protection from the sun, which are completely missing in the Zócalo. Even on such a small scale, visitors and residents of the adjacent neighborhoods experienced the generation of activities for promoting social harmony and the conformation of community life, improving their sensation of safety and welfare. However, its functionality should be analyzed because, for example, the exercise machines were used very little; thus, they should eventually be replaced with urban furniture that is more in demand, such as benches and umbrellas.

Although green and recreational areas are unquestionably a requirement for the improvement of public space, the need for people to have places of conviviality and socialization, with free and easy access, determines in some cases the intensive use of less appropriate spaces. Therefore, this “new” Square is relatively intensively utilized, even if its urban condition, embedded as a small islet surrounded by traffic and including a difficult accessibility, is critical. Additionally, it is not an open Square that promotes the formation of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), with strict regulations and omnipresent monitoring, and an excessive offer or affordance of activities, determining and therefore restraining its functionality.
Given to its central location in the city, the Pocket Park is in constant use.

The Parque Bolsillo Zócalo offers elements that do not exist in Constitution Square, such as vegetation and umbrellas for sun protection and seating accommodation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30 a.m.</td>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People came to have breakfast at the “eating” section. At the same time, cleaning workers arrived with tool carts and containers, keeping the Square and its gardens in good condition.</td>
<td>The military ceremony hoisting the National Flag was observed by persons in the Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo.</td>
<td>There was a great influx of people from the institutions and people who visited the Book Fair, which took place at the Zócalo, as well as a considerable amount of vehicles circulating around the Square.</td>
<td>Between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m., the tables had its highest occupancy. Since the Square is surrounded by shops and offices, at this time, the workers normally take a break to have lunch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Pocket Park served for short times as meeting point and resting place for these people, as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5:00 p.m.
On a sunny afternoon, the Pocket Park Zócalo served as meeting point and place for relaxation. The majority of the visitors were 30 years old and more, or children and youngsters up to 15 years.

3:00 p.m.
On the weekends, the office workers disappeared.

4:00 p.m.
People perceived the Square as an isolated “island”. Consequently, they felt safe using their electronic devices, such as iPads or cell phones.

4:00 p.m.
People were smiling, talking, and sometimes there was loud laughter, as well. Others, took advantage of the tables to have picnic.

5:00 p.m.
People came and went, using the Square as transition zone.

6:00 p.m.
The lowering of the flag in Plaza de la Constitución was witnessed daily by various people from the Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park), as well.

People enjoyed the view of the adjacent Zócalo and the activities that took place there, converting the Pocket Park into a practical place for resting and meeting.

7:00 p.m.
Visitors gradually left the Square.
4.2.4.3 Town Center “El Rosario”

(Abstract)
Town Center “El Rosario” is a shopping mall located very near El Rosario Subway Station in Delegation Azcapotzalco, north of Mexico City. This mall was inaugurated on June 28, 2012, and opened its doors to the general public, providing facilities and attractions with options for shopping, eating, entertainment, leisure time, and culture. Although the users’ perception of the commercial center is that of an easily accessible, comfortable and safe public space, its commercial success depends on the consistency between the space conceived by its private producers and the actual use made of it by its visitors. This is a clear example of the blurred limits between private and public space. In that regard, as long as there are no truly public spaces where society can meet, socialize, and learn from others, malls will be perceived as public spaces, even when in reality there are internal regulations that limit freedom of expression in the space. While functioning as a place for encounter for specific socioeconomic sectors, there is the motivation for different learnings from and with the other(s), even if otherness is not permitted in general and if intoxicated persons or “street people” are excluded. Likewise, it is not a place for “ciudadanía” (citizenship). Any kind of dispute is prohibited; thus, that certain types of communication and cooperative skills cannot develop. The “genius loci” of the place is completely overwhelmed; however, through observing others handling space and its inhered objects such as elevators, escalators, and other facilities and the urban furniture of this “new” Square, respective learnings of the place took place.
1st Stage: “Conceived space” ("l'espace conçu"). Analysis of the planning

Historical aspects
Town Center “El Rosario” shopping mall in the northwestern part of Mexico City is located in Delegation Azcapotzalco and is one of the 16 delegations of the city with one of the larger cultural heritages. Thus, there are archaeological evidences of human settlements from at least the formative Preclassic period on; therefore, the town has already been established in the pre-Hispanic era, being the seat of Tepanec dominion until the Aztec Triple Alliance conquered it. The name is derived from Nahuatl and literally means “in the place of the anthills”: as noted in the legend, Quetzalcoatl became a red ant in order to penetrate the underworld and extract the grains of corn necessary to maintain humanity.

From Colonial times, remains of the settlement of different religious orders may be found, such as of the Dominican Order in 1529 (Tinajero Morales 2015). In the history of Mexico, Azcapotzalco has been home to historic events related to the Mexican Independence movement, particularly at Hacienda “El Rosario” built in the seventeenth century, formerly called “Hacienda San Nicolás Careaga” (Urdapilleta Pérez/Solorzano Carvajal 2002). Thus, it became a rural farming area that joined the Mexico City Federal District in the mid-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the neighborhood was overwhelmed by urban sprawl, is now 100% urbanized, and represents an industrial center.

Currently in Azcapotzalco, we find the cohabitation of the traditional and the modern, and the urbanization process has followed no pre-established pattern. In this way, it is common to see industrial centers surrounded by large popular and middle-class housing areas, and one of the most important tasks for the public administration is to stop the deterioration of the cultural heritage of the original towns and neighborhoods of Azcapotzalco (Trejo Palacios 2012).

In this context, the huge mall was planned on the site of one of the most emblematic historic buildings in the Delegation, Hacienda “El Rosario” or “Hacienda San Nicolás Careaga”. Thus, in 2010, work to clean the plot started and, in a formal ceremony with the presence of the media, construction company representatives, and local and federal authorities, the cornerstone was set in place (Archundia 2010). Meanwhile it was announced that Town Center “El Rosario” would have 180,000 m² of construction, distributed among these shops and parking, with an investment of 1,200 million MXN and the creation of 1,500 temporary and 650 permanent jobs (ibid.). Consequently, on June 28, 2012, Town Center “El Rosario” was inaugurated, and the shopping mall opened its doors to the general public, providing facilities and attractions
with the option to buy a variety of products and offering services, gastronomy, entertainment, leisure, and cultural facilities.

**Urban aspects**

Town Center “El Rosario” is located about three km to the north-west of the historic City Center of Delegation Azcapotzalco, very near “El Rosario” Subway Station, between primary road Aquiles Serdán, El Rosario Avenue and Cultura Norte Street in the Colony “El Rosario” (Fig. 87). On Aquiles Serdán, about 200 m from the shopping mall, we may find Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades (CCH) (College of Sciences and Humanities), with a population of 5,000 students. Situated 500 m from the mall toward the west is located public Parque (Park) Tezozómoc, built in 1982, designed by well-known Mexican landscape architect Mario Schjetnan, providing an outdoor theater, playgrounds, and running and cycling lanes. In the Park’s center, there is a large pond with a “nature reserve” island. A scaled representation of the Valley of Mexico as it was in the Pre-Hispanic times has been created, employing berms and hills. Signs at the lake describe the features around historic Lake Texcoco, which dominated the valley basin at this time, when the Aztec city of Tenochtítlan was found on an island in Lake Texcoco.

The accessibility of the shopping mall is guaranteed through its proximity to “El Rosario” Metro Station, in the south of Unidad Habitacional (Housing Unit) “El Rosario”, the largest conglomerate of housing units in Mexico, composed of social-interest condominiums. The station known as Centros de Transferencia Modal (CETRAM) (Modal Transfer Center) received its name due to its location in Housing Unit “El Rosario”, which in turn was named after being built on the former Hacienda of the same name. The terminal serves as a station for both underground Lines 6 Tierra Colorada and Avenida El Rosario Colonia El Rosario and 7 Tierra Caliente y Avenida El Rosario Colonia Tierra Nueva, being simultaneously the western end station of the former, crossing the city in an east-west direction, and the north terminal of the latter. Furthermore, it functions as the meeting point for several bus lines that connect the north and the east of the city.

This terminal, like many others, is multimodal, i.e., it connects to other types of transport. Metro El Rosario connects with suburban buses that serve municipalities such as Cuautitlán Izcalli and Lechería, in the neighboring Estado de México (State of Mexico). The terminal also has links to Trolleybus Line “I”, which runs between El Rosario and Metro Chapultepec. Recently, this CETRAM was remodeled, adapting a relatively small shopping center to the former bus stops.
The area where this mall is located is primarily residential and is surrounded by the three-story apartment buildings of Housing Unit “El Rosario”, as well as other condominiums by the “Antorcha Campesina” Organization. To the south, along Avenue Aquiles Serdán, there is another enormous housing unit with five-story-high punctiform apartment buildings, provided to the workers of Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) (Mexican Petroleum), the Mexican state-owned petroleum company. South of El Rosario Avenue, we find mainly poor colonies, the so-called “colonias populares”, with houses built by means of auto-construction or rather, auto-organization.

However, according to Project of Government Program 2012-2015 for Azcapotzalco, there are some structural weaknesses in the Delegation. This document addresses topics such as population density, while the social development index is found to have an average score. The urban equipment exhibits shortfalls in green areas, cultural spaces, recreation, and activities for different sectors of society. There is a concentration of high traffic flow. The risk and vulnerability are mainly related to the facilities of Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) and the different industrial areas, all of which generate hazardous waste.

*Figure 87: Accessibility by public transport.*

**Architectural Aspects**

The project of the enormous shopping mall Town Center “El Rosario” was executed under the responsibility of the GDI Commercial Group, a leading company in the real estate development industry in Mexico founded in 1989. The GDI business line is directed toward the design, construction, marketing, operation, and management of hotels, residential condominiums, land sales, shopping malls, etc., and is focused on adding and achieving attractive returns with a controlled risk for its investors. The basis of its architectural proposal pretends to offer quality construction of its developments
with special emphasis on finishing details. For GDI in general, the development of its properties is aimed at providing a satisfying experience for visitors to the shopping mall. Locations of the commercial centers are carefully selected and consistency with the context is sought to ensure economic benefits to investors and to provide satisfaction to visitors and consumers. Therefore, the GDI group presents itself as a trendsetter in the development of shopping centers, one of its main strategies being to provide a service that exceeds the expectations of visitors, focusing on safety and comfort (GROUP GDI Commercial 2015).

In the case of Town Center “El Rosario”, we find a modern and functional work of six floors, including three commercial levels and three ground levels, with a closed metal façade, which entertains a slightly repellent effect. Other elements of spatial typology used in the shopping mall comprise the tarpaulin membranes in tensed structures located at the main entrance, which blocks the sun and creates a semi-covered space that offers a friendly, warm atmosphere.

The respective area covered by the tarpaulin roof at a height of 18 m, corresponding to the hull of the former Hacienda, which forms part of the architectural and historical heritage of Mexico. Thus, the process of restoration and rehabilitation was counseled and regulated by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) (National Institute of Anthropology and History). In this manner, the contemporary architectural intervention was combined with a restored building of thick walls, vanes with arcs, and wooden doors framed with original friezes and quarry columns, as well as a large number of different species of trees. Consequently, the zone denotes a contrast between the past and the present (Migdal arquitectos 2015).

Inside, a huge, all-floors-comprehensive bright atrium painted in white receives visitors and vertically links the different floors through large electronic ramps (Fig. 88). A glass elevator cuts through the enormous void. A prefabricated concrete column structure allows for covering 178,500 m² of construction, with “Omega”, “T”, and “Spancrete” slabs, with the architectural project developed by Migdal Architects in 2010.
The entrances to the mall are on Aquiles Serdán Avenue, Río Blanco Avenues and El Rosario Avenue. At all accesses to the mall, pedestrian crossings are well marked, while at its main pedestrian entrance at Aquiles Serdán Avenue, the two, very high advertising billboards flank the visitors as they arrive, while we find a rather small restored park of 10,000 m² with pavilions and a children’s playground, as well as a lake of 1,640 m² including pedal boats for resting, all of which invite to linger (Fig. 89).
**Functional aspects**

The “conceived space” refers to the space as it was initially planned with specific theoretical and physical objectives, pre-terminating functions. Therefore, it is the space is projected by technocrats, urban planners, architects, designers, and administrators. It is apparently the dominant space that aims toward the hegemony the “perceived” and “lived spaces” through discourse. This is the space where power appears as the organization of space (Delgado 2013). Then, the “El Rosario” Town Center shopping mall was planned, programmed, and designed as a place of power, a space of dominance where economic interests of land use and commercial interests of private initiative prevail. Without any doubt, this has exerted an impact on the function of the Square as a social learning place as well as on the environment of Delegation Azcapotzalco, with a building that concentrates various uses and activities and whose shape and intended functions impose the symbolic representation that society renders to spatial practice.

There are many functional elements in this commercial plaza (Fig. 90). While in the front building to the south parking places and storerooms are offered on various levels, in the core area of Town Center “El Rosario”, are mainly commercial premises, i.e., shops and anchor stores located around the central space or atrium, where which the most important flows of circulation develop. Furthermore, there are some restaurants,
cafés, and bars situated under the tent roof near the central entrance, housing the gourmet area, and these are found as well on the ground, first, and second floors. Thus, on the second or top level of the mall there is a food court with large open areas, and over 120 tables with four seats each for sitting down and eating. Asia Town, Chang Hing, McDonald’s, VIPs, WingStop, Burger King, Starbucks, Domino’s Pizza, Nutrisa, Subway, Chilim Balám, and Asadero Beef are some of the food providers in the plaza. In the remains of the Ex Hacienda of San Nicolás Careaga or El Rosario, we may find a small, supplementary museum on the history of Delegation Azcapotzalco.

Among the commercial anchor stores involved in this project are Walmart, Sam’s Club, Suburbia, Coppel, Promoda, DxGym, and the interior decoration and furniture shop Idea Interior, as well as Cinépolis and Recórcholis on the top floor. One can purchase music goods at Best Buy, Radio Shack, or anchors stores Sam’s Club and Walmart, while on the second ground floor, there is the Librería Gandhi, next to an central ice rink, which was recently replaced by a children’s playground area with admission fees. The number of places or “locales” is 112 in sum. However, what is striking here is the great number of outlet stores, which is presumably related due with the socioeconomic strata of the surrounding neighborhoods with popular colonies.
Furthermore, there is a sport hall and a fully fenced-in soccer court on the roof terrace, with the appearance of a cage, where seven small soccer tournaments are organized, with the predominant participation of inhabitants from the adjacent areas. However, the most popular attraction with a “public” character among the visitors is a fountain of dancing water on the ground floor, which, at certain intervals, begins a play of lighting and water spouts, creating various choreographies to the beat of music, which is greatly enjoyed by the people (Fig. 91). In addition, the surrounding, rectangular framing of the fountain is of an ideal height and adequate materials, inviting users to sit down, in the sense of “affordance”.

Figure 91: Dancing fountains.

There are many physical elements where the user can sit, mainly metal benches distributed in the exterior and the interior of the Square, such as 16 benches outside in the park and 40 inside, i.e., 16 seats on the first floor, 16 on the second, and 8 seats on the third. Their distribution is apparently irregular.
Therefore, the ability of objects to offer different options or usages is implicated, especially in the seating elements. However, there are other architectural elements in the outdoor landscape and in the modern interior design, offering the possibility of being utilized by the visitor in different ways from those originally planned. For example, the height and surface of the bridge over the lake invites users to occupy it as a large communal bench for more than 50 people, for resting, chatting, or flirting. And there are other elements that are unique in design, such as the red benches that follow the outline of some sections of the route in the outdoor park planters.

Emergency exits in Town Center “El Rosario” are divided into two types: those shared by the ground and basement floors, i.e., a staircase adjacent to the elevator placed out of sight but accessible at all times, and emergency exit routes in the ground and upper floors. Outside, the lake serves as a storm water regulator, while the pavilions in the surrounding park offer mostly ice cream and snacks. Here are found nine rectangular metal tables at which up to four people can sit on benches, fixed to the floor situated in the shade of the trees. Thus, while there is no vegetation inside the Square, there is a diversity of planted species in the park outside, such as plants and trees, including a variety of palms, ferns, and others types of plants, for instance, wild privet with the largest population. Only the gourmet-style Food Court on the ground floor has a covered garden, which is affected by the tarpaulin blocking the light, but it offers a rather pleasant atmosphere reflecting a garden for contemplation, recreation, and eating in a permanent, dim light. Moreover, a huge monitor was recently installed here, as well, for watching soccer to matches or movies in the company of others. However, the plant population arranged in boxes with colored sand and gravel is undergoing deterioration and requires frequent replacement.
2nd stage: “Perceived space” ("l'espace perçu"). Photographic documentary inventory (7/24) of activities

“Perceived space” is the result of practices, movement, and interaction that people generates in space. Therefore, users of Town Center “El Rosario” perceive this mall as a public space, because they can perform certain practices common to a collective space, such as the ease of access to all routes connecting with the remainder of the city and its nearby surroundings near (via Metro Aquiles Serdán and El Rosario), as well as the possibility to move through its paths and walkways, utilizing the urban furniture and landscape, the latter permitting interaction within and with the space and among the visitors.

Observational work was performed specifically between Monday November 5 and Friday November 7, 2014, as well as between Wednesday March 11 and Saturday March 14, 2015, elaborated together with under- as well as postgraduate students in Architecture as well as in Design and Urban Studies, UAM-Azcapotzalco, UEA “Cultura y Diseño I” (“Culture and Design I”) and “Seminario de Diseño II” (“Design Seminar II”). It is noteworthy that the periods analyzed resulted in being rather short. Because of that, no photographic camera could be installed, as permission was no granted even to take a picture in the interior of Town Center “El Rosario” in general. In the meantime, many other visits have been carried out since 2013.

The social actors perceived and used this space differently according to the possibilities of itineraries offered there, with a variety of sites to be seen and activities to be carried out. Therefore, the study of these activities can be divided according to their temporality: those conducted Mondays through Fridays, or those that took place on weekends or holidays. Visitors or customers walking through the shopping center perceived different spaces, transiting from or to “El Rosario” Metro Station or Aquiles Serdán Avenue, using a safe pedestrian corridor, sheltered from outside dangers.

Persons visiting the shopping mall recognized the space through the use of transition or flow zones, either vehicular or pedestrian, with accesses that are friendly to all types of visitors by means of ramps and designated areas for the disabled, lifts, escalators, and hallways, as well as visitor-friendly gardening. Both customers and pedestrians accessed and circulated the same roads and entrances, subsequently separating themselves at the different floors of the mall.

Distinguishing the temporality in the use and perception of this “new” Square, the latter was intensively used on weekends and had fewer visitors on weekdays. A gradually increasing use of the place was observed by the daily progress observed. The first activities at the Town Center “El Rosario” began at 6:00 a.m., especially that
of some employees and suppliers of the supermarkets located inside, which received their first customers from 7:00 a.m. on.

From Monday through Friday, the morning’s activities were concentrated in the outdoor park and on the first floors. Customers used the mall because they were familiar with the services offered, such as banks, pharmacies, and grocery stores, while other visitors employed the garden furniture to relax and perform other activities. However, at these morning times, only a small number of users was observed, with the availability of vacant seats, too. In the afternoons, the number of visitors increased in other areas of the plaza, such as the upper floors, featuring shops, the cinema, and the Fast Food area in the top floor. People were distributed by circulation areas and occupied the furniture to sit on. At night, the number of visitors on the upper floors again decreased, concentrating visitors on the first floor and at the access or exit to “El Rosario” Metro Station, where long lines of people passed by in a hurry, without stopping to rest or enjoy the place. Therefore, the use of the Square from Monday to Friday was primarily related to the flow of people to the Metro Station, representing a place for transition. Furthermore, shopping included the consumption of products and articles for daily use.

On the other hand, the tables in the outdoor park as well as in the Fast Food area on the top floor served throughout weekdays as classroom extensions, as well. Students, mostly between 16 and 20 years of age, from CCH Azcapotzalco, which is located opposite the shopping mall, did their homework in teams gathered around these tables, coming to agreements about and sharing among others what they had studied. In addition to continuing the learning begun in the classroom, the students converted the site into a place of coexistence for relaxation, through talking or flirting with their fellow students, as well as watching soccer games together on the monitors installed in the Food Court (Fig. 92).
Over the weekend, the students disappeared; nonetheless, rather intensive use of the Square was observed (Fig. 93). Besides some movements that were registered on weekdays in the park and lower floors, on the weekend more visitors used the upper floors, which had appeared half-empty during the week. Likewise, more groups of people visited Town Center “El Rosario”, such as families with children or couples, unlike other days when users entered and left alone.

A notable difference in the use and perception of the place during the week and the weekend is that on Saturdays and Sundays, people had time to enjoy the place, thus perceiving it differently. They noticed more sitting places, found stairways and aisles that they had not seen before, and used the balconies as well as the escalators themselves to watch the occurrences in the shopping mall. This, in general, the stays in the mall became more enjoyable for the people, who shared an afternoon with their families or friends, using the afforded furniture, taking pleasure in the food, water, shade, and all of the elements that could contribute to making this place attractive, while it had been conceived predominately only for commercial objectives.

Thus, both the exterior park and the interior floors were planned with a commercial intent that needed to meet certain requirements and standards for the customer and visitor with regard to their comfort, offering rather pleasant stays and a well-designed orientation for the visitors moving around in the place, with easy-to-read and easy-to-follow signs and indications. Because the perception of the user was positive, people who formerly used the scarce public parks in the neighborhood now prefers Town
Center “El Rosario” to meet with family or friends, while consuming or only spending an afternoon window shopping or utilized the services offered.

In consequence, the commercial success of Town Center “El Rosario” is based on the idea of finding an easily accessible space that is easily recognizable at different speeds and patterns, representing a comfortable, safe area, with opportunities to relax and consume and engage in, respectively, a variety of products and activities. The place is rather tranquil in its outdoor park and acquires the effect of a safe indoor area, protected by a series of cameras and security staff that guarantee a stay sheltered from the external natural and social environments. Therefore, there exists a consistency between the space conceived by its producers and the actual use made by its visitors, who consider shopping centers as public spaces where people can enter and leave with no apparent restriction.

However, there have not been political manifestations, informal traders, or street performers, for example. Taking photographs was not permitted, and in addition, access to inebriated individuals is denied. But as long as there are no truly public spaces where society can meet, socialize, and discuss matters, thus learning from and with the other(s), people will continue to perceive shopping malls like Town Center “El Rosario”, as well as other similar places, as public squares, even if in reality these are rather private or pseudo-public spaces where internal regulations delimit the citizens’ rights to express themselves and move freely.
Figure 93: Objects, activities, movements.

**OBJECTS**
- Ex-Hacienda
- Football pitch
- Membrane roof
- Shopping mall
- Food Court
- Restaurants
- Delivery ramp
- Bridge
- Parking lot
- Park
- Main entrance
- Advertising columns

**ACTIVITIES**
- Eat
- Drink
- Inform
- Stable
- Shop
- Play football
- Go to cinema
- Park
- Paddle
- Play
- Relax

**MOVEMENT**
- Pedestrians
- Vehicles
3rd stage: “Lived space” ("l’espace vécu"). Interviews with users. (Social) Actors

Because “lived space” concerns conscious or unconscious experiences between human beings and space, randomized interviews were conducted with 25 individuals who visited the square on different days and at different times, among other activities (Fig. 94). Seventeen of the respondents were women, and eight men, while their ages ranged from 16 to 73 years, i.e., ten person were under 21 years of age (40%), the majority (13 persons) were between 21 and 65 years old (52%), thus economically active, and two persons were over 65 years of age (8%). Their main occupations can be classified into three major groups: twelve respondents had been employees (48%), nine were students at the adjacent high schools (36%), and four were homemakers (16%).

Given the location of this commercial center, its affluence includes mainly areas of immediate proximity, i.e., from the colonies located in the four cardinal directions in regard to the Square, such as delegations and neighboring municipalities Azcapotzalco, Tlalnepantla, Atizapán, Gustavo A. Madero, and Miguel Hidalgo, or even localities further away, such as Cuautitlán Izcalli and Ecatepec, However, the diversification of places-of-origin corresponds to the connections that employees and students carry out in Azcapotzalco.

Of the 25 interviews, most agreed that they visited the shopping mall mainly due to the proximity of their homes, and because there is no other commercial center nearby that fulfills their needs. In 16 cases, the respondents assumed Town Center “El Rosario” to be a place of final destination (64%), while the remaining nine persons interviewed acknowledged that it serves as place of transition (36%), either with respect to work or school. The latter related to the important influx of students from Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades (CCH) (College of Sciences and Humanities) Azcapotzalco, located precisely opposite the commercial plaza and to which the majority of the respondents arrived by public transport. Although each of the respondents “lived” or experienced the shopping mall in different ways, the majority of the identified behavioral patterns that met with their necessities corresponded to the formal intentions of those who conceived this project, planning it as a place for consumption.

In this regard, the majority of the persons interviewed visited the shopping mall frequently. Ten respondents came once a week (40%), six daily (24%), four every two weeks (16%), two once a month (8%), and three occasionally (12%). They all agreed that the main activities conducted in the Square dealt with consuming products (21 votes, i.e., 84%), purchasing grocery items, clothing, other articles, snacks, and
desserts, and last, food consumption in the restaurants. Nine respondents mentioned the utilization of services (36%) and 13 responses included participation in the list of activities carried out in Town Center “El Rosario”, relaxation, and the process of socialization (52%).

Persons also recognized that in Town Center “El Rosario” shopping mall, one could also consume entertainment programs, attending attractions such as movie theaters and gaming centers, or spending time with partners, family, and friends in this “new” Square. Individuals even might contemplate the place itself by sitting, lingering or, according to the hour of the day, watching for free the daily dancing fountains’ shows. The interviews demonstrated that this type of entertainment was the favorite of the young students who visited the Square before or after classes in search of distractions.

It is noteworthy that in nearly one half of the cases, a special affinity for visiting the park belonging to the Square could be observed (44%), especially by those who came with their family. These respondents said that, despite its being undersized regarding the amount of weekend visitors, it would be an ideal place to relax and spend time, while children would use the playground. Later they would go for specific shopping on their visit to the mall.

In general, the majority of informants liked the square, describing it as a nice, friendly, and safe place; with a rather quiet family atmosphere, which fosters conviviality among groups of friends, families, or couples gathering there. Ten of the 25 respondents agreed that the shopping mall, and especially the park, appear to be extremely tranquil places that invite one to relax. Moreover, two informants mentioned (8%) that it could sometimes become boring and suggested more dynamic activities to attract young people in particular.

Questioned as to whether the commercial center seemed to be a place that promotes coexistence among people, the majority of respondents nodded affirmatively, but this would clearly only happen through meeting their partners, friends, or family. They did not relate to anyone else in the Square and, specifically there was no contact with strangers. Students especially explained spending their time there in the company of friends, while employees and homemakers visited the Square preferably in the company of family members.
Figure 94: Results of the questionnaire applied at the Town Center “El Rosario”.

- **Age range**: Men 32%, Women 68%
- **Use of the square**: 64% Final destination, 36% Transit
- **Frecuency**: 40% Once a week, 24% Daily, 16% Every 2 weeks, 8% Once a month, 12% Occasionally
- **Ocupation**: 48% Employees, 36% Students, 16% Housewives
- **Why did you choose to come here?**: 52% Relaxation and socialization, 36% Services, 84% Consume
Conclusions. Learning at Town Center “El Rosario”

Learning can take place by means of various symbols, actions, or behaviors according to time and space, but what and how does this occur in a place possessing private legal status. Thus, Town Center “El Rosario” comprises a private shopping mall that people employ as a public space. Many activities are able to be performed there due to the variety of options provided, in addition to the Center’s commercial and gastronomic offerings, similar to those at other malls (Fig. 97). Furthermore, Town Center “El Rosario” features an open space that looks like a public park. While the user transits, rests, consumes food, meets others, and develops activities as in other urban “public squares”, one might be aware of the fact that in reality, Town Center “El Rosario” is a private space due to the limitations imposed on visitors to the mall, restrictions that do not exist in a public space.

This private area has rules that are posted for the user, generating urban conditions which reproduce Mexico City’s predominant urban phenomena such as segregation and fragmentation, limiting possibilities of interaction, intervention and discovery. Therefore, among other activities, it is not permitted to take pictures, pets cannot enter, and no running is allowed inside. Other common activities performed in any public park and that are not allowed in Town Center “El Rosario”, include the carrying out of civic and social events, such as rallies and political demonstrations. No street vendors or intoxicated individuals can attend the place, which is open from 6:00 p.m. to midnight. Consequently, it is also not possible to spend the night inside the Center.

Notwithstanding this, while performing their daily activities in it, visitors use this shopping mall as if it were a public space. Likewise the criteria for functional open spaces according to William H. Whyte (1980), it comprises elements for enjoyment, such as places to sit, vegetation, water, food, exterior triangulation, light and shade, and, in a restrictive manner, because of its relation to access streets. Thanks to these elements, people might be attracted to this “new” Square, considering it appropriate to meet and spend time with others. Therefore, it represents a place for encounter, but not one that contributes to the formation of “ciudadanía” (citizenship).

Learning from the other(s)

This collective space, perceived as “public” through the usage of the people, allows for long visitor stays, which permitted the achievement of various kinds of learning. The adults learned from the other(s) social competences such as tolerance, even though this shopping mall was predominantly visited by the inhabitants of the surrounding
colonies with similar social strata. Furthermore, adult users who visited the park with children, taking them to the playground areas, learned from the other(s) by observing that they could take care of their children while sitting at a comfortable distance from the tables nearby.

The user of the Square who came in their own car learned from the other(s) to use the Automatic Teller Machine (ATM), whereby the parking fee was paid when using it for the first time. Through watching, one learned where to put in the parking ticket and where to introduce the coins, and even by asking others about the operation of these machines. Thus, it was common to see people aiding other, confused users with the operation of the machine, the majority of these elderly persons unused to carry out payments in this type of automatic device.

The user knew, through observing others, that running is not allowed in the halls and stairways of this shopping mall, thereby respecting its regulations. Young children acquired certain abilities from the older ones regarding the use of objects and the children’s furniture in the playground located in the outside park. They learned by observation from children with previous experiences on these devices. Visitors learned from the other(s), we all, how to dress. This means that even if there was no defined etiquette for access to this place, in that everyone was dressed rather casually and according to their taste, the shopping mall is undoubtedly also a place to recognize the fashion colors in vogue. Here people came to know whether they were up to date as far as fashion is concerned.

**Learning with other(s)**

Because the shopping mall is a favorable space for meeting(s), skills such as solidarity, respect, or friendship can be developed. Following others or accompanying them, one might recognize and learn the route to take to “El Rosario” Metro Subway Station, such as the shortcut from the exit located on the first basement that exists to Río Blanco Avenue.

Children accessing the skating rink located at Basement 3 of this “new” Square learned, together with other children, how to skate on this rink made of plastic material simulating ice. Young girls and boys, as well as some adults, developed together, with others, how to skate without falling down, while more advanced skaters learned to skate backward or in circles. In that it would be more difficult in isolation, children progressed in evolving skills in skating rather quickly and had more fun, too.

Furthermore, the tables in the outdoor park served as classroom extensions at certain hours Monday through Friday in the morning. Students from CCH Azcapotzalco, whose preparatory school is located opposite the shopping mall, did
their homework in teams seated at these tables. Thus, they came to agreements and shared among others what they had learned, continuing their learning that had already begun in their classrooms.

**Learning from the place ("genius loci")**

Because this type of edification does not seek to be inserted into a specific landscape and the large-scale architecture of Town Center “El Rosario” is not anchored in the realities of the place, a “genius loci” is not detectable. A related quality of “being inside” also does not exist. Recently conceived with no particular relationship with its surroundings, the accent of this commercial center is placed predominately on its physical form and its functionality, akin to the building model existing throughout the Mexican Republic and even worldwide. Regardless of the identity of the place, the architecture has overwhelmed any references to the particular urban memory of the people with regard to the site and its specifics and its landscape.

Moreover, the shopping mall and its surrounding areas operate under internal regulation, determining the movements, actions, and behaviors of its users. Thus, the children understood that they could only run and play within the enclosed area with its soft flooring in the playgrounds in the park. Outside this area, i.e., the area without soft pavement material, one cannot run or play because of the danger caused by harder materials.

From the experiences of others with space and objects, such as the elevator, escalator, bathrooms, and other Square facilities, with urban furniture designed for average human users and their measurements, different types of learning of the place were successful. Thus, users learned from the place to circulate around the different floors, because the disposition of the escalators forces the visitors to walk in circles around the atrium passing the entire sales areas of this commercial center. However, people who used the shopping mall for the first time were sometimes confused, attempting to the escalator while it was going down (Fig. 95). Consequently, one learned the operation of these elements that allowed for up-and-down circulation, determining the direction of the inside flow.
The population that visited the outdoor areas learned that it was possible to sit on the perimeter of the gardening areas located in the Food Court. People assumed that the architectural elements, such as the barriers or the containers for a small garden, do have a comfortable height for sitting (Fig. 96), and there were no signs indicating that it would be prohibited. Thus, visitors supposed that it was permitted. Likewise, these elements were painted a different color, highlighting their differences from the planters, inviting people to sit down due to the architectural form itself and its dimensions.
Outside in the park, people learned from the place the shape and sense of the circulation, as well. The paths marked among the gardening areas demonstrated to the users the ways along which they could move and the areas where people were not allowed to enter. Planters and trails delimited the zones that the user could or could not transit. Moreover, people who visited the outdoor park learned to utilize the two small walls that delimited the bridge over the pond, due to the bridge's adequate height and width for seating, although it was nearly certainly not designed for this purpose. Thus, people learned by watching others about the “affordances” of the bridge, such as resting on its architectonic objects, noting that they were not asked to move and were consequently tolerated by the security personnel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 a.m. The shopping mall opened its</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. Despite that all the food</td>
<td>6:00 a.m. The entering cars corresponded</td>
<td>9:00 a.m. Bookstores, banks and services</td>
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<td>doors to the public. Nevertheless, the</td>
<td>establishments were closed, 25-30% of the</td>
<td>mostly to persons working in the Square.</td>
<td>such as medical laboratories begun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shops kept closed, so that there were only</td>
<td>tables in the Food Court were occupied</td>
<td></td>
<td>opening, also Starbucks, Walmart and Vips.</td>
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<td>cleaning personnel and some students</td>
<td>by young people, who converted the mall</td>
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<td>searching for tables to have breakfast,</td>
<td>into a place of coexistence and relaxation,</td>
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<td>talk, or do homework.</td>
<td>resulting in an extension of their school.</td>
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<td>Some brought their own food, others red,</td>
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<td>made homework, and talked having fun from</td>
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<td>3:00 p.m. More than half of the visitors</td>
<td>2:00 p.m. 40% of the parking lot was</td>
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<td>were youngsters. The majority of them did</td>
<td>occupied, representing the maximum of a</td>
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<td>not consume.</td>
<td>normal weekday.</td>
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Town Center “El Rosario” is a clear example of vanished differencies between the private and the public.

| 1:00 p.m. The show of the dancing fountains | 8:00 p.m. Decreased the flows of people who | 11:00 p.m. The Food Court was rather        |
| started, so that people stopped to watch.  | entered and left.                          | unoccupied.                                |
| At the same time, a large number of persons|                                            | There were only some persons in the bar   |
| observed the show from the balconies.      |                                            | “Perros & Burros”.                         |
FRIDAY

8:00 a.m.
Very few automobiles already entered and almost no one exited.

12:00 p.m.
There are children in the playground area of the park, while their mothers did observe them talking. Many persons used the flanking walls of the bridge to sit down and relax, and two boys entered a paddleboat in the small lake.

3:00 p.m.
Youngster bought snacks while studying, or watching a soccer game in one of the eight screens installed in the Food Court on the top floor.

SATURDAY

7:00 a.m.
Only little movements existed, VIPs already opened, Walmart and Sams too. Soon afterward, About 30 cars were in the public parking lot. Maintenance and cleaning personnel started working.

9:00 a.m.
Many pedestrians arrived through the main entrance at Rio Blanco Avenue, so that the first two floors started to fill, while most people on the top floor mainly were employees, guardians or cleaning and maintenance staff.

11:00 a.m.
Now, there were more clients, children and families, in the Food Court and at the electronic games in the third floor, next to the cinemas, as well, so that the workers were less visible.

3:00 p.m.
Finally, the park seemed to be fully exploited. No seats or tables were left. Couples and families widely enjoyed the park. The bridge over the pond was used as benches, while many activities were located at the food pavilions.

SUNDAY

8:00 a.m.
People ascended toward the gym, dressed in pants and tennis.

6:00 p.m.
The parking lots were used at their maximum with 90% of its capacity.

07:00 p.m.
While the entire shopping mall had its climax during the afternoon, now the activates decreased significantly.

Rules limit the free access and prohibit social or political events.
4.2.5 Results

Through the social production of space (Lefebvre 1974), collective spaces of socialization and exchange may emerge, interpreted also as places for encounter and for citizenship ("ciudadanía"), reflecting spaces “in transformation”. These common spaces have been, are, and will be of vital importance for the “good” social development of the human being, so that urban public spaces, and squares in particular, are converted processually through (spatial) appropriation into places for social learning, in which learning from the other(s), with other(s), and from the place exist. Therefore, the respective situations modify the participants, and we construct citizens as the understanding of the essence of a place can even condition the behavior: “First we shape the cities, and then our cities shape us.”1 Nevertheless, the urban structure might positively or negatively influence the conduct of its users, such as appropriation may possess diverging impacts.

Based on an interdisciplinary vision, theory should be confronted with the practical experience of observational work, paraphrasing the tradition of Jane Jacobs and putting out “eyes on the street” or squares2, in order to examine the role of urban public squares in Mexico City as learning places for social competences, interpreted as a places for encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship). Six cases studies were elaborated: Alameda Santa María la Ribera, a square based on a “traditional” idea of centrality not remodeled in its essence; Plaza Aguilita and Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution, two “revitalized” squares where further attractions were recently added in order to encourage their appropriation, as well as the “new” squares Bajo Puentes (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, and Town Center “El Rosario”, completely rehabilitated or constructed over the last ten or twenty years, representing contemporary conceptions (4.2.1 Methodology). The results obtained in the investigated squares regarding “learning from and with the other(s)”, i.e., intercultural learning and understanding and learning through social interaction, collaboration, and participation, as well as “learning from the place”, confronting the characteristics of the place ("genius loci") (3.2.2 Place for social learning), are summarized in the following (Fig. 98):

2 However, Jane Jacobs employed this phrase mainly as a general idea in order increase the social control in public spaces.
**Alameda Santa María la Ribera**

In this regard, the urban imaginary of Alameda Santa María la Ribera, a square with a “traditional” notion of centrality, interpreted as a rather unsafe neighborhood with an elevated criminal rate, hinders “learning with the other(s)”. Nevertheless, the square represents a place for peaceful encounter predominately for inhabitants of the Colonia themselves, in which communicative and cooperative competences are learned. Furthermore, “learning with the other(s)” occurred through coexistence, engaging in cultural and sports activates, such as attending artistic workshops, concerts, dancing, riding bicycles, and skateboarding, or simple walking with someone.

Alameda Santa María la Ribera is a constructor of the identity of the society where, recently, various artists and other collective groups support the emerging process that is converting the colony and Alameda Santa María la Ribera into a more familiar area. Urban architectural elements such as the Museum of Geography and Kiosco Morisco reflect the historic importance of the colony being one of the first planned districts in the city, creating a link to the essence of the location and to the spirit of the place (“genius loci”), i.e., motivating “learning from the place”. Other elements, such as the exposition panels or the recently installed public compost area that are raising the awareness of people with regard to the cycles of nature possess a merely educational function.

**Plaza Aguilita**

In Plaza Juan José Baz, the short periods of permanence of the passers-by in this place with the predominant character of transition unfortunately did not allow the observation of “learning with the other(s)”. Only the merchants of the area learn from their peers to accommodate their merchandise, ways of selling to and treating the customer, maintaining and cleaning their work areas, and behaving appropriately in public spaces. In addition, one learns from “Radio Aguilita” about issues related with coexistence.

Certain “learning with the other(s)” was observed between clients and pedestrians in relation to the time of their stay in the Square. Highlighting children and the elderly, the latter chatting while resting, they learned dance choreography and to play soccer or to ride a bicycle. Again, the socialization that occurs with greatest intensity took place among traders relying on groups and defending themselves from the dispositions by the City Government, which affect their interests. Also noticeable was a remarkable solidarity among neighbors.

At the same time, it appears important to take the sociocultural and architectural aspects of the place into account in order to integrate the use and the function of the space into the revitalization process from the appropriation of the subjects in the space.
and with this, the learning of the place. Therefore, people recognized places to rest because of the offering character (“affordance”) of the various architectural elements, such as fountains and low-lying walls and to identify the places indicated for throwing away their trash.

**Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution**

Republic Square represents a “revitalized” urban public square in the center of Mexico City, which was remodeled recently by the City Government, with the integration of new attractive elements such as the dry fountains at the esplanade or the glass elevator leading to an observation platform at the top of the monument, all serving as catalysts for a “new public life”. Thus, the Square is an outstanding example of a place for social learning in which the population meets and coexists with tourists and protesters, being that Republic Square a highly disputed public square for urban struggle, thus for the formation of “ciudadanía” (citizenship) and a suitable place to politicize the people.

Confronting different options and attitudes, handling strangeness while interacting with residents, visitors, tourists, protesters, street vendors, performers, and “street people”, among other actors, Republic Square represented urban scenery where people “learned from” and collaborated “with the other(s)”, including different types of civic or social attitudes, such as tolerance, solidarity, respect, or friendship. In coexisting and as well as in participating in discussions, individuals acquired contact and communication competences regarding conflict management, civic courage or social anticipation, and empathy.

Physical competences such as skating, playing, and juggling were acquired, making use of the architectural and urban characteristics of the site, for example the large slight slope toward the Monument to the Revolution, where people performed acrobatics, converting Republic Space into a varied social learning place. Notwithstanding this, perhaps the “revitalization” of the Square would have been even better served as a medium for providing identity on “learning from the place”, if the population had been more involved in the Square’s planning, because public participation in the conception and management of a place generates identification and identity.

**Bajo Puente Juan Escutia**

In the “new” Square Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, a hybrid between a public and a private space, mothers and/or parents who came with their children realized that the space allows them to rest, as there are playground facilities. Within the Square, there is an attempt to guarantee public security, so that children could maintain
some distance as they played and continued to be in full view of their parent(s). Another few parents frequented the place more often; therefore, their children obviously felt quite comfortable having fun in the playgrounds as well as in the outdoor fitness area.

“Learning from the other(s)”, couples discovered a clean and partially intimate space where they were not disturbed and where their intimacies came to be protected by the environmental noise despite the lack of isolated areas out of the sight of other users of the Square. The inhabitants, who usually passed by this place, found services located nearby, such as a module for paying their taxes and a site for Ecobicis, knowing that these might be of service to them in the future. Some inhabitants perceived the space as free of contamination, as “healthy”, and appreciated the exercising, as well, either by including the Square in part of their sports routine or by using the outdoor gym for their workout.

At first, one can notice that the passers-by are pleased to sit down and take a break in the Square, looking around and finding “learning with the other(s), a restaurant, recreational facilities, home delivery and parcel services, and watching the cyclists take or return their Ecobicis, which they might consider as future possibilities. In turn, these individuals realized that they might not only stay briefly in the Square; they might also coexist with others and spend a pleasant recreational moment.

Over time, the users left the Square, and on returning, they realized that other individuals do not remain for a long time in the Square, either. The environmental conditions do not allow for long stays, but by observing others with their rambling thoughts, listening to music, reading a book, or entering the restaurant, the users became aware that coexistence with the Square is possible and that its atmosphere may be enjoyed, if even for short while. There is a peace-and-tolerance relationship regarding the environmental noise; therefore, individuals and groups have learned to live with the exterior chaos and the tranquility and privacy of the place, which they observe through the other(s) using it.

In general, the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square openly exhibits areas for commerce, food, services, and physical recreation, as well as security and Ecobici parking stations. It does not require any guidance because the majority of the business sites are situated close by and within sight. Surveillance cameras and the inauguration of a cultural forum, open until late at night, as well as security officers and the services of parking lot, provide confidence and safety for the consumers of the place. Users of the Square might be pedestrians passing by at any time, drivers of automobiles leaving their vehicles overnight or for a few hours, individuals or groups of persons staying to rest for a while, families with children,
couples, people eating, workers, cyclists, and consumers of public or private services, as well as people interested in the nocturnal cultural events at the forum. It is noteworthy that these frequent consumers did not come frequent this place when it was in decay and neglected.

**Parque Bolsillo Zócalo**

Transients coming from Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square) or the Zócalo located near to the Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, situated at the southwestern corner of the Square, observed people crossing the street at this point in order to arrive at this place. Some took a break on the installed benches, approaching the areas designed for play and exercise or watching the pedestrians, who safely crossed the pedestrian zone or occupied a table to talk or eat some food, implying “learning from the other(s)”.

Furthermore, pedestrians learned “with the other(s)” to cross the street coming from September 20 Street or from the City Hall. Persons who were solely interested in getting to know this small Square coexisted with those who had already passed by. While some pedestrians take a rest while sitting on the benches or concrete blocks around the tables afforded, other apparently curious passers only lingered for a while in the exercise and playground areas. Parents took their children to have fun on the metal horses adapted to their size. Office workers and other employees from nearby used the food tables to spend their leisure time reading or having lunch. Some elderly people conversed with others or attempted to discuss, with adolescents and other adults, topics of interest or just to coexist with them for a while.

The park facilities permit few activities, such as resting, having fun, exercising, passing through safety, parking their bicycles, and meeting socially, as well as eating, while exercise areas allow nearby residents to rid themselves of their stress and train outdoors in a safe and open space. Children approached the horses, where they remained for short periods. In the meantime, their parents rested and watched. For cyclists, an area for parking and repairing their bicycles is reserved, where they can go by foot to the adjacent shops and buildings, returning afterward. At some times, the benches provide shade, but also allow passers-by to rest between their trips, and safe passage guarantees a comfortable and free displacement to and from the Square at times of pedestrian congestion. Workers in general, tourists, and passers-by occupied the food area, taking a break, sunbathing, or eating. At the same time, taking into consideration the “learning from the place” (“genius loci”), as a rather busy passage, many passers-by approached Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo because of the facilities offered, trying out the activities and examining the proposals. They did not stay
there for long before going on their way; nevertheless, they were aware that, at another time, they might utilize the Square as place to meet, relax, and read, or just for transit.

**Town Center “El Rosario”**

In Town Center “El Rosario” Shopping Mall, there exist exterior green area, containing a lake that used by visitors for recreation. Above the lake, there is a bridge, while by observing and “learning from the other(s)”, people realized on strolling around that they could sit on the little walls limiting the edges. The authorities did not prevent this function of the bridge, although there were other pieces of furniture to sit and rest on nearby. Families learned that parents can monitor their children in the playground facilities from tables in the vicinity. Children instinctively approached these areas on observing other children playing with equipment designed for them and learned to use the equipment from those who had already been occupying them.

Users located the incoming and outgoing flows of pedestrians, but also noted the entry and exit of cars to the parking lots located underground. Motorists arriving for the first time followed others who were taking routes from their cars to the staircases of the Square and saw how payment and use of the parking ticket worked or asked an employee or one of the other drivers. Due to its being a shopping mall, visitors observed the consumers coming in and out of various places of business and learned to follow their routes, ascending and descending floors and recognizing the most important locations, along with the hustle and bustle of the Square.

By crossing the entry and exit routes of the place, one may also follow the pedestrian flow in order to identify routes, directions, points of interest, and access to the Metro and the various areas for food, entertainment, clothing, the Walmart, services, etc. Therefore, there was a “learning with the other(s)”, referring also to short, linear passages or shortcuts.

Town Center “El Rosario” takes part in the globalizing offensive aiming to introduce to the society that consumption represents the only way to relate to other(s) and the private space is the only place for encounter (Rojas 2007: 28). Thus, children visited the video game premises and the skating rink. Together with other girls and boys, they learned to play video games that are in vogue or to skate with other children. Teenagers shared their recreational and leisure activities with their duties and academic work at the tables of the Food Court, taking over these areas to consume their own food and meeting to talk or do their homework during their free time.

The installations of the site predispose segmented activities for food, recreation, clothing, games, entertainment, and even exercise. Users of these spaces have adapted to these “learning from the place”, so that when they visited the square, they
normally already had an idea of what they needed or wanted to do. For example, the children’s areas employed soft materials for the floor so that parents could depend on that their children would not be hurt when they fall down at play. The food areas offer displays on their sides tables and chairs to sit and eat. The green areas have benches and trees for resting and relaxing, while watching the landscape and the artificial lake in particular, or while listening to music from the outside speakers located around the park. The lake provides boats for rent by couples wanting to enjoy a ride.

Town Center “El Rosario” outlines the direction of flows for circulating and imposes rules for utilization of the Center and imposes restrictions. By ascending the floors of the commercial center, people understood that there is a circular flow for accessing one electric ramp to another. The route can only be cut short by using the glass elevator located on one side of the mall. Potential consumers observe the range of offers of products and services. In that they are aware as potential buyers, they move slowly to observe all of the suggestions presented. Customers could hardly ignore these suggestions, because the mall places them out front, showing them constantly along the mall’s passageways, advertising shops that are open as well as interesting. Regarding this “new” Square, many efforts have been put into it, investing in the offering of security, in order to ensure the integrity of its users. On the other hand, this management undoubtedly restrains the function of the mall as a place for social learning, as well, which should promote the encounter and the formation of “ciudadanía” (citizenship). In this regard and in addition to the limited accessibility, no demonstrations are possible, thus the control of free expression of ideas. To regain real public spaces, which do have free access and which are inclusive and diverse, we should begin to assess them by being aware of their importance for civil formation, demanding their maintenance (Rojas 2007: 28).
### Figure 98: Learning at the selected urban public squares. Field research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Learning from the other(s)</th>
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| Alameda Santa Maria Ribera            | - Due to the existing problem regarding public safety, meeting with the other(s) is limited and with it, the encounter with the different.  
- Instead, there is significant coexistence with a crowd of dogs (obviously offering a type of security, such as that of personal security guards).  
- The accumulation of many groups ofcollectives of artists ("graffiti") present in the square leads to a certain approach and openness toward an alternative culture. |
| **"Revitalized" squares**            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Plaza Agustina                        | The short periods during which the visitor remains in this place of transition did not allow observing learning from the other(s).  
- One learns from "Radio Agustina" issues related to coexistence in the public space.  
- The user who does business in the zone learns from his/her peers:  
- Ways to accommodate their merchandise  
- Manners for serving to and treating the customer  
- Maintenance of the work area  
- Behaviors in public space. |
| Republic Square with the Monument to the Revolution | There is a wide range of users, including residents, visitors, tourists, protesters, street vendors, performers, and "street people", among other actors, whose meeting and co-existence with others, some types of learning of civic or social character, including tolerance, solidarity, respect, or friendship succeed. |
| **"New" squares**                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Bajo Puente Juan Escutia              | The user learns to observe the environment by forming a relation of the functionality of the space and the necessities of occupants of this space.  
- People observe whether they can carry out different activities, such as eating,  
requesting a service at the kiosk, using an Ecobici, arguing that it increases the business increases if the more people use the square. |
| Parque Bolívar Zócalo                 | By observing the other, one learns that there is a place for relaxation, coexistence, and encounter.  
- They know the flows and movements on the street, the public attitudes, and the ways of recreation (read, play, and eat).  
- One learns from the other to use the objects for exercise. |
| Town Center "El Rosario"              | This collective space perceived as "public" by the users and allows for the long stays in it of the users who go to walk there, thanks to the diversity of the present activities, permitting the achievement of various kinds of learning.  
- One learns how to sit on the two small walls that delimit the bridge over the small lake, despite that the furniture was not designed for this purpose.  
- Adults learn that they can watch their children while sitting at the tables in front of this area.  
- The user of the Square who comes in his/her own car learns from the others to utilize the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) for the first time, where payment for parking must be performed, because most frequently, especially occurring with older people, these persons are not very familiar with making automatic payments.  
- The visitor knows that you cannot run by observing that no one runs through the halls and stairways of the shopping mall, respecting the rules of the place.  
- Young children learn from older ones how to use the furniture and objects for children in the playground located in the park outside.  
- The user learns from the others how to dress. There are no rules of etiquette rules in this regard to access the place, and everyone is dressed comfortably according to their own tastes. However, on the Square, we are able to observe the colors in fashion. |
PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY

Learning with the other(s) | Learning from the place ("genius loci")
--- | ---
| **Square with a "traditional" notion of centrality** | **- Through the relation between the Museum of Geology and the Kiosco Morisco, icon of Mexican evolution built in steel, you can become aware of the historic importance of the place.**
| **- The square serves as space for co-existence, so that communicative and cooperative skills are learned.** | **- The Block Fair, installed temporarily in tents, represents a good proposal to encourage people to read, while the Agriculture Fair brings the population in greater proximity - and urban agriculture offering leads to the elaborated of organic products.**
| **- Thus, meetings of the neighborhood that take place are held peacefully.** | **- In one of the gardens there is a public compost area, raising the consciousness of the people regarding the cycles of nature.**
| **- People exercise, ride bicycles, or simply walk in the company of others. Others meet to dance, and young people practice skateboarding among other activities.** | **- The various cultural offerings, including a photographic exhibition that shows a part of the heart of the Colony and its people. Concerts, workshops, and fairs entertain an educational character and create a sense of community, therefore identification and identity.**
| **- The socialization that occurs with greatest intensity succeeds once again among the businesses.** | **- In this regard, various collectives in the Colony are interested in carrying out activities to improve the environment for its inhabitants.**
| **- As groups, these support and defend the dispositions of the city government, which affect their interests.** | **- Solidarity among neighbors.**
| **- Solidarity among neighbors.** | **- Faculties for communication and social cooperative skills for cohesiveness.**
| **- Behaviors of discussion** | **- The professor, Mr. Mario, for example, learned in the square how the teachers from Cacaxtla live together and what they think about the government.**
| **- So, one learns to organize and protest, so that Republic Square seems an appropriate place to politicize people.** | **- Physical competence, such as skating, playing, and juggling.**
| **- The square invites to discovery, so that children and young people understand and feel the characteristics of the water playing in the fountain in the main, representative area, together with music (or in the square's fountain at the side).** | **- Protestors come to understand how to position themselves properly in the space, because they are only allowed to develop and expand physically on the western part of the Square.**
| **- Protests choose adequate places to sleep in the sunken, hidden parts of the Square.** | **- "Street people" choose adequate places to sleep in the sunken, hidden parts of the Square.**
| **- Skaters have learned in Republic Square to employ a small slope with the purpose of performing their acrobatics.** | **- Through the redesign and the revitalization of Republic Square, people begin to take care for the space, avoiding the accumulation of trash, for example, respecting the Square and its new architectural appearance.**
| **- The space configures a set of uses and functionalities that determine the interaction of the users within it.** | **- "El Huepulito" ("The Little Gap") Restaurant is one of the busiest places in the Square. Most of the diners there went in a group.**
| **- The user uses the availability of the equipment and shops.** | **- Thanks to meeting with the other, one also learns values such as solidarity:**
| **- Changes for use of the space** | **- The security and confidence of feeling protected among the users.**
| **- The cultural and social events that occur nearly daily take place in the Zócalo.** | **- The shopping mall is a favorable space for meeting and learning with the other:**
| **- From spontaneous conversations with strangers.** | **- Following what others do, one recognizes and learns the route that one may take to get to "El Rosario" Subway Station, such as a small, safe shortcut.**
| **- Children who entered the skate park located in Basement 3 of this Square from the skate park, and with other children who know the route made of plastic.** | **- The area of the tables outside in the park serves as a classroom extension at certain times (Monday to Friday, in the mornings). Students at CCH Acapulco, whose school is situated across from this shopping mall, do their homework and other tasks in groups gathered around these tables. Here, they attempt to establish agreements and share among themselves what they have learned, continuing the learning that began in the classroom.**
| **- The population learns to sit on the perimeter of the gardens, because the architectural elements, such as the barrier or the container for a small garden, are at a comfortable height and there are no signs indicating whether this is possible or whether it is forbidden. Thus, to the user, sitting appears to be permitted.** | **- The plaza operates under an internal regulation regarding the user, determining the latter's movements, actions, and behaviors inside the plaza.**
| **- One learns which the access to, exit from, and semiotics of the space.** | **- Children learn that they can only run and play in the enclosed area with soft materials on the ground of the playground in the park. Outside this area, without soft pavement material, one cannot run or play because of the danger caused by harder materials.**
| **- One learns to circulate around the floors, because the disposition of the escalators forces the visitors to walk around the void while passing the entire sales area of this shopping center.** | **- The population learns to sit on the perimeter of the gardens, because the architectural elements, such as the barrier or the container for a small garden, are at a comfortable height and there are no signs indicating whether this is possible or whether it is forbidden. Thus, to the user, sitting appears to be permitted.**
| **- One learns from the space by means of the shape and the directions of the circulation in the park outside. The pathways marked between the gardens of the park show users the ways in which they can move and the places through which you are not allowed to pass, with gardens and pathways delimiting the areas that the user can or cannot pass through.** | **- The plaza operates under an internal regulation regarding the user, determining the latter's movements, actions, and behaviors inside the plaza.**

305
As a result, the six squares studied allowed observing an interaction with the place and among the people, succeeding in obtaining social or civic learning such as tolerance, solidarity, respect, or friendship in engaging in various activities at these sites, such as resting, eating, and playing, or just crossing through them, even if the corresponding intensities were observed on different levels. The contrast among the six places was reflected in the use of space and its perception of the individuals, but especially in the learning that took place.

Learning within the squares occurred both individually and collectively. Individuals and groups analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of this type of space, which might meet their needs or, on the other hand, give rise to frustrations. The space indicates its possible usages, and – if the space became a success – there were the users themselves who provided acceptance and proposed activities, at the same time developing a sense of identity and belonging. Thus, in the “era” of spatiality, appropriation of a space, which seeks to transform and transfigure it, can be understood as its having a sense, or as identifying property.

The success or failure of these spaces depends on the difference between their past and their current image. Any change by urban actors may be beneficial, or at least a proposal worth initiating, always taking into account that the neighboring residents and the general public can participate together with government agencies and tenants. As an open space, one learns and adapts through the activities and needs of the consumer of the space, proposing and teaching the place to be consumed, transforming it into a direct-indirect relationship with the others.

The various architectural and spatial qualities of these squares determine their use and the relationship that the people have in these places, to the degree that, from the conception of the squares by their planners and even the equipment, spaces are created with different configurations and offer different levels of functionality, comfort, and safety, allowing the user to use these spaces in various ways, and at different frequencies, and during different temporalities. The field studies showed that a space that is easy to localize and access offers facilities for sitting and providing shade, where food can be consumed, and the space is animated by water and vegetation that offer elements (Whyte 1988) that enable people to stay longer and establish more profound usages, quite the opposite from a place that only functions as a crossing or passage point.

During the field investigation, in all of the places sited, people commonly occupied the benches and tables to sit and take a break. The seats themselves served as points of rest and relaxation for the majority of passers-by. Nearby residents who usually
crossed through the squares noticed a radical change, which encouraged them to change their own habits. The residents sometimes frequented the streets or became part of their habitat, as part of a living space and of security where they can carry out other activities and meet, eat, park a vehicle, etc.

While in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo there are not many services because of its dimensions, in Tower Center “El Rosario”, there is a variety of activities and possibilities for use of the space. However, these activities were more limited in the latter than in the former square, where usage is freer and less restrictive. In Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square, we find a hybrid of a recovered, revitalized, and refreshed space for incorporating activities such as recreation, rest, and recreation, the very activities that also take place in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. Nevertheless, in contrast to the latter square, Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia offers business premises, security, and services.

Learning from one person to another is the same when one takes into account the need for rest and relaxation. Individuals learn to coexist with the space by observing other persons, who have used the space for a short while within the permitted utilization of its facilities, as well as taking advantage of their morphological characteristics. This occurred in the case of the Town Center “El Rosario”, where some individuals used the bridge over the lake to sit or take a break and admire the lake, or others went upstairs to the Food Court to coexist in groups or to eat lunch. In the case of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, workers realize that you can relax and let your thoughts wander as individuals within the Square appear to enjoy the intimacy under the bridge and go unnoticed in the midst of the environmental noise. However, these are the same shapes and limiting conceptions in terms of that this learning differs from one space to another, since there is not the same usage of Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo as of Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia. This is because the former does not offer an intimate hidden space, but is rather for everybody to see.

It is Town Center “El Rosario” that, due to its large dimensions, provides semi-public and public spaces of pedestrian congestion; nevertheless, there are some intimate, constantly monitored spaces as well. The Town Center reveals the presence of all types of individuals, including students, workers, pedestrians, diners, families with children, people attracted by the commercial or entertainment venues, etc. These individuals often learn something new from other individuals, because the type of place provides many activities, even if some of these were probably not considered prior to its construction.
The passing pedestrian realizes that there are people sitting, eating food, listening to music, or relaxing within these spaces. People have noticed that it is possible to isolate themselves from the outside world, and even from the noise that usually disturbs their thoughts, perceiving a certain tranquility through the facilities of the squares and parks. However, the relationship among individuals of the same space is not always the same in all places. Therefore, the interaction of the people in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo can be more intensive because of its proximity to the furniture, unlike in the Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square, which exhibits a wider gap between furniture and facilities. However, in the case of the Tower Center, no average exists with respect to this interaction, because of its being a huge space with an outdoor section and another roofed section. There, it is common to have spaces nearby for the encounter of individuals or groups, and there are great distances between facilities that permit more privacy.

The ephemeral, fast-paced users of this space demonstrate the type of recreational activities or services that can be consumed in the Square. There are users who coexist with others, sharing the space and the activities; little by little, they come to realize that many things can be done and they begin taking advantage of the facilities, adapting them to their particular interests. For example, in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, it is common for passers-by to look round curiously on entering to the park and approaching some of the furniture, this inviting through its offered use the possibility of experimenting with them. Thus, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo is very successful in improving the coexistence between known and unknown users; thus, the place functions as a space for interaction and for the usage of individuals and groups.

This aspect does not occur in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo Square, where the surrounding residents place a positive value the Square and interact with other passers-by who are either crossing through or resting for a while. These passers-by make use at some point of its facilities and stand in line to purchase a product or recreate with facilities for exercise and play. These two spaces are very similar regarding to interaction and learning with the others, but these are more intensive in Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, although not as successful as in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. The same is highly debatable in Town Center “El Rosario”, which mixes different gatherings and learnings in the Square, because it never presents the same experience at each visit. This can be perceived by means of the modifications of route changes, distractions, weather conditions, and human needs such as hunger or fatigue, or even by the access paths.

Furthermore, one aspect that does not appear in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, neither exist in Town Center “El Rosario”, is that of the dissemination of culture.
On the contrary, Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia presents a forum of cultural expression, which comprised part of its initial planning and its objective-to-accomplish. This feature has caught the attention of the zone’s inhabitants and groups of artists in its ability to provide a space for expression and artistic and cultural distribution, with a parking lot, 24-hour security including overnight, and low access costs. The space also serves as a medium for diffusion and artistic expression.

One of the first impressions of the squares is orientated toward their environmental noise: auditory contamination prevents sensory enjoyment, causing stress during persons’ stay in the squares. However, people will eventually adapt to the high-frequency auditory contamination and begin to discriminate certain sounds in favor of a moment of relaxation and pleasure afforded by the internal conditions of the square. The spaces represent very high frequencies and air pollution, with Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia causing major stress on being located between avenues with congested traffic. Over time, the user adapts to this aural medium. Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo also features vehicular noises, albeit less frequently, because large and heavy traffic flows do not completely surround the place, while in Plaza Aguilita, we find the predominance of commercial noises in the soundscape. Thus, in Tower Center Square, there are also areas with high sound frequencies, including megaphones, horns, and the noise of the hubbub of clusters of people. However, the Square does possess silent spaces or areas that are distant from the sound sources, thus exhibiting aural contrasts.

The problem of unsafe accessibility, caused by the aggressive passage of pedestrians, prevents quick and convenient entry into and exit from Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square or transfer between its hemispheres. The inhabitants may consider it a small oasis surrounded by noisy and aggressive vehicular traffic. Likewise, Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo presents times with high pedestrian flows, which impede access to and enjoyment of the Square. These periods are similar to the conditions in terms of stress in Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia Square; therefore, individuals tend to avoid accessing these spaces and instead enjoy them at certain times. The Square becomes a hostile environment that demonstrates an “oasis” in the middle of the chaos of the traffic. In reference to the Town Center, the roads are wider and controlled, and users avoid the Center’s most problematic flows: they recurrently use the square, in contrast with those just passing through it in order to access to the Metro or exit to the avenue.

The interior of these spaces offer facilities according to different activities, which attract the attention of various passers-by, inviting them to come back and use their
services. Therefore, nearby residents return and consume the offers provided in these spaces.

On taking notice of security cameras and constant surveillance (dealing, then, with a more public than private space), people feel safer and thus learn to relax within spaces offering security. The users feel rather more safe in the Squares corresponding to Town Center “El Rosario” and Bajo Puente (Bridge Underpass) Juan Escutia, and less safe in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo, either through the safety implied by the surveillance cameras or the presence of security guards, or the limited borders with controlled accesses, none of which exist in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. The constant care and maintenance of these spaces allow the conservation of a positive image toward the society, which beforehand had considered them with displeasure due to their abandonment and deterioration. These spaces have changed the perception that the inhabitants and passers-by had in former times.

Thus, the studied squares allowed for the comparison of possible learning potentials determined through the activities experienced in them as indicators of appropriation, among such contrasting spaces as the relatively “traditional” Plaza Aguilita and Town Center “El Rosario” Shopping Mall. Various occurrences and uses happened in these places. However, the population’s need to have places of conviviality and socialization with free and easy access determined in some cases the intensive use of inappropriate spaces, such as, in some aspects, in Parque Bolsillo (Pocket Park) Zócalo. The different activities permitted the observation of various learnings occurring in the squares, indicating more learnings in places with an infrastructure suitable for use as a public space, with a variety of activities and offering greater user density, such as Town Center “El Rosario”. In contrast, Plaza Aguilita, a rather deficient urban space with respect to its equipment, served primarily as a pedestrian corridor.

In an attempt to consider “genius loci”, understood as an architectural conception that responds to the surrounding natural landscape, the traditional landscape of Mexico City and its metropolitan zone is characterized through three evident elements: a water basin; a belt of surrounding mountains, and a relatively intermediate sky interspersed by mountains. In the definition of conceptual landscapes according to Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980), the landscape of the Valley of Mexico could be most likely classified as “classic” (Fig. 11). However, with the Spanish Conquest, the architectural appearance of the city changed rather brutally; thus, the existing culture disappeared on order to evaluate the culture of the conquerors, destroying the old buildings and reconstructing new ones of the model imported from Spain above the ruins. Therefore,
with the destructions and reconstructions, reference to the specificity of the landscape became lost, hiding the “genius loci”.

Notwithstanding this, the squares in which “genius loci” could be experienced soonest were principally the places with a more “traditional” notion of centrality, which was related directly in the history and uncovering different levels in order to transmit urban memories. On the other hand, the places that did not exhibit a “genius loci” are influenced predominately by commerce. At these rather “pseudo” public urban squares, no connection to the natural landscape was left, no “genius loci” was legible. “But is there such a thing as truly public space today?” (Bourriaud, in: Rosa 2011: 17).

Without doubt, the growing inequality has divided Mexico City into different social sectors, reflecting a so-called “island urbanism” that limits the possibilities of usage and appropriation of the public space in general and converting these places in small, segregated, scarcely connected islands that cannot surpass their limits without outside help. Therefore, the appropriation of each “living environment” is considerably restricted now, since the appropriation of urban public squares is according to the social sectors, influencing the spaces’ manner-of-use. Problems regarding socio-spatial action within the urban context of cities such as Mexico City, in which a rupture between the physical and social space and extreme segregation of social residential groups exist, lead to the loss of necessary spaces for exchange and learning such as the public square. Phenomena such as segregation, concern for public security and its abundant monitoring systems, the increasing predominance of the visual culture influenced by the new technologies, and the communication media associated with consumption, affect the function of squares as spaces of integration between the society and the city. In the meanwhile, the idea of appropriation through transformation of spaces (“Spacing”) may represent a way to aid in linking the “islanded” spaces of the lifeworld (Deinet 2009).

Public space disappears increasingly in the process of the spatialization of social inequality. Thus, new typologies of public appearance, such as the commercial center or the shopping mall, emerge and replace the “traditional” square. In this manner, the decisive criterion of a social mixture as a measure of the quality of a city and of the public square, particularly at present, is accompanied by the privatization, the commercialization, and the control of the public squares. However, such an extensive control system that constantly monitors the passers-by may appear to be exaggerated, but above all, the indications exposed nothing casual about the vigilance (Fig. 99). Therefore, the excessive surveillance of urban public spaces is an example of the consequences of this growing division in cities, because public spaces reflect social disparities both spatially and visually.
The city integrates and marginalizes. Additionally, it educates for “ciudadanía” (citizenship) and also for exclusion (Borja 2009). Therefore, the debate on exclusion, or rather on the processes of segregation, do indeed shape the contemporary public square in Mexico City. This exhibits a discrepancy between the behavior of usage, as well as the limits and possibilities of appropriation in the current environment. The public square as a place of social learning, as the scenery for the meeting and for the formation of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), is limited in a city such as the Mexico City megalopolis, by means of the prevailing phenomena, such as segregation and fragmentation, because lack of diversity precludes any possibility of interaction.

Urban public spaces are announced as squares of demonstrative cultural consumption. The boundaries between public and private spaces are blurred and marked by the participating actors. For example, a shopping mall or commercial center comprises a collective space with an aspect of a public space. In this way, they speak within this context of the privatization of the public, as well.

Commercial centers are imitations of the public; the population perceives and uses them instead of “traditional” parks and plazas. Shopping malls reveal specific regulation with a series of restrictions for the user: it is not permitted to take pictures, you cannot enter with animals, you cannot run in the mall, enter in an inebriated state, or if you are a street vendor, among other prohibitions. If these activities that are so very commonly carried out in a public space are not allowed in a certain shopping mall, as is the case of Town Center “El Rosario”, one is much less able to imagine there the performance
social and civic events, such as rallies and political demonstrations. Thus, “the amusement park presents the jolly, regulated vision of pleasure as a substitute for the democratic place” (Sorkin 2004: 25).

This place has controlled and restricted access: it opens at 6:00 a.m. and closes at midnight, and it is not permitted to spend the night inside; thus, the concept of public space as a meeting place and for “ciudadania” (citizenship) is perceived in a limited manner, in that accessibility is restricted, and any type of social and political dispute with respect to “ciudadania”-spaces (Tamayo Flores-Alatorre 2013) is denied. The abandonment, the lack of social interaction, and exchange not only harms the public space, but also the cultural dimension of the city, including learning from the other(s), with the other(s) and also from the place. Nonetheless, because we do not only learn in traditional institutions such as in school or college, we should consider the existence of places of multiple learning and the urban public space in particular. We need urban public squares as learning places of social as well as esthetic and emotional competences for “ciudadania” (citizenship), expanding the sense of formation in general.

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3 Michael Sorkin (2004) mentions that in this sense, in “public spaces”, such as theme parks and shopping centers, public discourse is limited. Thus, there would not be protests at “Disneyland”, which restricts its role as a so-called democratic place.
5. CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF PLANNING
5.1. Call for “possibility spaces”

“Appropriation takes place in situations!” Thus, planners, i.e., architects and urban planners must create situations for appropriation or possibilities for appropriation. Thus, they provide opportunities for social learning. Through the increasing, and in Mexico City, rather extreme, division in poor and rich districts, places of the “marginalized as hardly connected islands of localized poverty” (Danschat, in: Frey 2004: 231) arise. Simultaneously, the decisive criterion of the social mixture of the public space disappears to a greater extent through the spatialization of social inequality, which also evidently did not frequently exist in the past as well. However, today this process is accompanied by the privatization, commercialization, and control of public squares. Therefore, the monitoring of urban public spaces is a consequence of this growing division of cities, because the public spaces of a fragmented and segregated city such as the Mexico City megalopolis also reflect social disparities, and also spatial-visually.

The exclusion-debate, or rather the segregation processes, shapes the contemporary public square in Mexico City, so that a discrepancy between appropriation behavior as well as its limits and possibilities in our environment of today is observable. But the public square is required as a place for social learning interpreted as a place for encounter and for “ciudadanía” (citizenship), i.e., as a place that enables learning from the other(s), with the other(s), and also learning from the place (“genius loci”).

Therefore, a place of social learning is a space of possibilities, actions, and experiences that encourages discoveries and interventions, motivates cooperation with other people, invites the testing of new skills, and so inspires acts and activities, which are aimed at the evolvement of the whole person. Within these so-called “fields of discovery”, knowledge is generated about social transactions, social learning processes are stimulated and promoted. Thus, the (temporary) spatial appropriation of public spaces represents an opportunity for the democratic community in the sense of this “ciudadanía” (citizenship).

As an urban scenario of coexistence, democratic places must also allow people to assemble collectively, encouraging the practice of the Right to the Public Space. Therefore, citizens of a participatory democracy may speak in public, as a public searching for democratic consensus. If this right is revoked and the principles of free assembly are opposed, then the citizens ought to be able to congregate through any necessary means necessary, i.e., act peaceably or struggle otherwise.
Maybe what is required now, as democracy is put up for tender, contacted-out and outsourced, is some type of new “citizens’ agora” (ibid.: 13), a so-called “shadow citizens’ agora”, where an unsteady public might constitute and conceptualize itself as a solid citizenry, as a Lefebvrian revolutionary citizenship (“ciudadanía”). “Yet the shadow citizens’ agora must be something more than the hijacked public spaces we have nowadays, those pops and branded plazas that have somehow branded us” (ibid.).

At present, there is a lack of spaces where people can become involved with one another on a human scale, communicate, and converse face-to-face. It is difficult to interchange with others in a place that is not about shopping or gaping and where there is not some digital screen above your head. It is also difficult to turn the sound down, to stop the music, to ignore the ads, and to talk, especially in Mexico City, where the noise level is in general very high. A certain impoverishment of action spaces is notable, and through this development, due to the dearth of available options for the conversion of existing arrangements, as expressed, for example, in the construction of excessive surveillance systems and the omnipresent process of privatization, public spaces are limited, transformed, devaluated, and functionalized.

Even if, according to Richard Rogers, public spaces comprise the physical realization of society’s values, we should also make them permeable, fulfilling the spaces and their surroundings with life. We need confidence in the potential for public space (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000), generating new clubs and societies, meeting halls and debating chambers, cafés and bars, social clubs and youth centers, street corners and university classrooms, fostering anyplace where General Assemblies might be forged and where people can congregate non-commercially, encountering other people actively (Merifield, in: Derive 2015: 13). Because the city and its public spaces in particular are the original and most direct forms of political and cultural manifestations or image, the recovery of spaces should allow for social encounter under a scheme of equity and democracy. But instead, cities have become trivialized: their differences have been erased; their public spaces have been eliminated, and their typological diversity has disappeared.

But we can do better. We need to invent another public realm, one not defined by the state, not even by tenure, such as that regarding the Parques Bolsillos (Pocket Parks), but by citizens affirming their general will, someplace where, at least in the short term, we can bring all our hopes and fears to the surface and work through them together.
Therefore, the urban planners and architects need to work carefully and penetrate the community. They must learn to listen well, because there are no quick solutions\(^1\), in that celebrations of meetings and popular festivals in the public spaces and other similar initiatives organized by community-based associations (neighborhood associations, etc.) are part of an emancipatory practice; a rethinking of urban space and its (social) opportunities on a local scale. Possible readings allow identifying a field of action for the (re-)codification of an existing urban space, because the sampling of projects (parallel to traditional, conventional, and official planning practices) represent another possible way to think about the city, in the sense of a re-evaluation of the civic culture (Rosa 2011: 17). In this respect, the idea of collective actions is proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud, in opposition to passive criticism, waiting for changes. Among planners and architects, the social claim of improving the relations of the inhabitants remains, creating favorable, encouraging urban spaces, and more civil participation close to the social necessities is required, especially in hierarchically entrenched, rather authoritarian, so-called neoliberal societies such as the Mexican one, while the architects could rather function as agents of civil processes.

The urban public space should be an enjoyable, integrative space for the people, promoting social cohesion and identity, i.e., the ability to offer a place in which the society can interact with the others and with the space, producing identity through symbolic constructions. Urban public spaces and squares understood as places for encounter and for “cuidadania” (citizenship), also open to public debates and conflicts, take into consideration the large variety of cultures that exist in Mexico and possibilities of expressions, for example, for political or ethical attitudes as well as for esthetic tendencies, resulting in its own auto-poetic forms.

In order to increase the possibilities for the interaction of different social classes, which characterize the enormous inner splitting of the current Mexican society, therefore for appropriation and learning, real democratic public spaces for integration have to be built, decreasing the gap of inequality, interpreting the urban public space as an integrative element of our societies. Social learning begins with encounter and dialogue.

Thus, today great hope is placed on the so-called “open” or “possibility” spaces, often urban brownfields, which suspend the economic recoverability and traditional significance for a short time and allow for experiments. For this time of experiments,

\(^1\) Quotation from the exhibition Weltstadt Mexico: Who creates the city? Who decides about its future?, Goethe-Institute Mexico/German Pavilion, Col. Roma, Mexico City, July 14 - September 11, 2016.
these “open” spaces convert into “spaces of possibilities”. Here something could, should, occur, but occasionally it could also result differently. Thus, such a “possibilities space” possesses no special properties. But in order to think specifically about brownfield areas, abandoned zones, or “non-places” (Augé 1994), we should think more generally in designing urban public spaces and squares with a notion of a city-playground, i.e., a collective space that is open to creation, action, and occupation. This reinterpretation of a built scenario to which new meaning can be added, becomes available for various types of interpretation, without predetermining particular functions or uses.

Therefore, areas are particularly appropriated in which the control of so-called “guardians of space” was perceived as not especially strong (Harms, et al. 1985: 164). More important would be adequate accesses and the playability of green areas, sidewalks, streets, courtyard entrances, garages, passageways, boundary walls; this means the overall design of the spatial and architectural outdoor areas. So, “opportunity spaces” do not deal necessarily with “empty” spaces, but rather with their internal (new) possibilities. “Developing a place means to recognize its peculiarities”. Therefore, areas are particularly appropriated in which the control of so-called “guardians of space” was perceived as not especially strong (Harms, et al. 1985: 164).

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Because, after the completion of a project activity, the “classical” architect does not matter anymore and there are the users who maintain the space alive, as well as the fact that history has proved that human actions are not predictable, should lead to a new attitude of planners and architects to turn away from the idea of finished plans toward a more open, flexible design principle (in terms of scales and times), instead proposing functionally hybrid spaces. “You get life in the city by not trying to plan for everything, by allowing things to happen organically as possible. Life comes when you give people a chance to contribute something. And it proves that people need such spaces to come and do that kind of thing”. Thus, planners can provide architectural or material suggestions, thus establishing “possibility spaces”, whereby the architect reinterprets himself as an arranger of opportunity structures in the sense of a “didactic of possibilities”, i.e., inviting people to appropriate spaces by offering a variety of uses, without restricting or trying to persuade them by force. A good example for this is the wide open esplanade toward the Monument of the Revolution on Republic Square, whose slope seems to be ideal to skateboard or ride bicycles, while others enjoy lying

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in the sun, or lingering at the laterals observing the hustle and bustle, or meeting, flirting, kissing, etc.

The competence of the architect involves the creation of opportunity structures that allow for spatial, architectonic situations in which social competences can be appropriated, establishing a framework facilitating life to take place. Therefore, "openness" appears to be the ideal setting, while, at the same time, architectonic "conciseness" is required (Janson/Wolfrum 2008). This means that the material structure, the thing, the haptics, and the atmosphere are not incidental, in that there exists an exuberance, inventiveness and appropriateness of so many of the design details (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000). Moreover, and in accordance with Dagobert Frey (1925/1992) as well as with the idea of space “in transformation”, we, i.e., the people, are fellow players in architecture, which unfolds on use. Only then does it acquire social and esthetic relevance, so that situation, use, process, and fellow players are the keys to a performative understanding of urban spaces.

Thus, this is not about great signature architecture, it is about a significate, meaningful architecture, i.e., urban spaces, which bring people together and network the urban society. Thus, neither it is not necessarily about density (Wolfrum 2013).

Furthermore, the concept of capacity of architecture (Wolfrum/Janson 2016) refers to its openness to unexpected uses, i.e., capacity means two things: not the close determination of a particular function, but the scope for a certain range of actions and uses. In the same regard, Richard Sennett associates ambiguity with openness, interpreting it with the "possibility of surprises" (Sennett 1994: 249), resuming the claims that are currently set for urban spaces.

Appropriation possibilities include, in the sense of an “experiential pedagogy”, and also didactically, enacted risks or "ventures" (Seggern 2004). Therefore, appropriation behavior implies, for example, skaters, spray painters, and other groups, who always also risk behavior. Experimental means, in the strict literally sense of the word, “risky venture”, so that at the same time the term always implies that, although something might function, it could also possibly fail. Thus, to take ventures belonging to the quasi appropriation process, only the social developments, especially in Mexico City, convert them too often into taking non-calculable risks, because of the problematic regarding public safety, for example.

So, the future lies in hybrid spaces with no predetermined uses: from the functionally separated to a mixed-use urban public space. The megalopolis of Mexico City with all of its urban agglomerations represents a “structural collage” (Krieger 2006b) whose parts should be linked by a network of public spaces, which together
CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF PLANNING

constitutes the whole. Thus, even the public squares would move back into the center of our community.

5.2 The actor as designer of the space. Redefinition of the role of the architect and the urban planner

While the planning bureaucracies are concerned with the application of the rules and the necessary routines for the organization and operation of effective urban environments, the cities appear to be taking an indefinite and imprecise course. The idea that the architect or urban planner could anticipate the development of a city, an understanding which goes back to how we teach architecture, accomplished this because cities are extraordinarily complex, so that, also, the idea of a “Master-Plan” seems absurd. This means that, despite the enormous efforts invested by planning experts and the production of detailed projections for the future, cities seem to emerge in environments of improvisation, innovation, creativity, informality, and flexibility, as if they had a life of their own. Similarly, numerous attempts were carried out to reduce human behavior to a predictable pattern, but it appears that the correct answer is still to be found. Therefore, we need further interdisciplinary approaches for planning issues, i.e., not planning for the people, but rather with or at least near the people, integrating them into the design processes. Nevertheless, despite the various “pseudoscientific efforts” (Correa 2013), it is impossible to know their progress in advance.

People do not necessarily live in an environment of geometric relationships, i.e., a rather “boring” type of architectural uniformity, but one in a world of meanings or significances. Urban areas of self-construction, informal meeting places, illegal regeneration, and appropriations of public sites, clouds, “flash-mobs”, conceptual interventions, temporary and artistic events, urban art guerrillas, pop-ups, and non-conventional intrusions are re-encoding our notion of community and design. The world has changed and this change brings with it the awareness that the development of a city is not predictable. According to Jaime Correa⁴, urban planning is nearly dead, and even the “educated ignorant” should realize that, ultimately: “Una ciudad no es un reloj” (“A city is not a clock”) (ibid.: 2).

⁴ Architect and urban planner, professor at the University of Miami.
Therefore, new ways of making cities are also emerging as a result of the financial chaos, based on the idea of participative planning, as predictability, the mantra of the planning bureaucracies, is one of the main contributors to the lack of organization in contemporary cities (ibid.). While the promise of a rational world has not been confirmed, in that the limitations for top-down planning appear to be imminent, now is a favorable time for the production of professional disruptions from the bottom-up, taking into account the activities of non-specialized citizens in the development of the cities and in the design of their own space. Even if these activities seem unimportant, they are slowly redefining the signification and production of space. Now that the world has changed, we must change, too.

Thus, the new city is no longer a homogeneous “habitus”, but a place of sociopolitical confrontation with an infinite variety of shades and colors. Ordinary citizens must be prepared to resist the abuse of the planning bureaucracies, because these groups are challenging the bureaucracies of planning face-to-face. Now, and before it is too late, we must generate a civic awareness and begin to realize that the city planners have managed to undermine the autonomy and quality of urban public spaces. Even if the new method might be non-reductionist and anti-scientific, urbanism should become a collective and unitary discipline that gives rise to an intentional consciousness (“noesis”) of things that exists in the realm of the primarily invisible, creating operational awareness in a reproducible manner (Correa, 2013).

According to Henri Lefebvre, the absolute space cannot exist because each society and each mode of production generate its own spatial framework (Lefebvre 1974/1991). Urbanistic, architectural design proposes a particular form or shape, but we have learned that space is dynamic. Similarly, the conceptual artist Kaarina Kaikkonen signalizes, in her work, “site-specific” the esthetic, emotional, and sensual dimension of space within the development of the significations (Fig. 100). In her project, the idea not only of “taking space” but also “making space” is absolute and evident, so that a novel way to make space is born.
Therefore, the claim of a redefinition of the role of the architect and the urban planner is based on the new spatial concepts, integrating activities and actors in the production of space “in transformation”, understood as a stage or scenario of social life. Today, space is defined beyond the social aspect as a result of a corporal practice, since our bodies are part of the space. The space is continuously produced within as fold of a cultural event, in a situation of movement and concrete use.

It is obvious that in this context, the urban design profession should no longer focus on the production of specialized data or stereotyped urban public spaces. Urban design, in this context, must evolve into a kind of discipline that intends to produce significant places and sociocultural information. The new generation of designers must act anti-systematically or anti-establishment and anti-consumerist, turning away from the idea of the “great”, omnipresent architect who decides “everything”.

The idea of defining the actor as a designer of space relates to the recognition that planning beyond the that from top to bottom (“top-down”) is required, i.e., planning from the bottom up is required (“bottom-up”), envisioning the dissolutions of the limits and the construction of new interdisciplinary bridges, expanding traditional limits, and reclaiming a repositioning of the architect and urban planner.
Spatial appropriation could represent an opportunity for the democratic community in the sense of “ciudadanía” (citizenship), too. Thus, “small steps” or “tactical urbanism”, understood as a temporary appropriation of space, represents a new possibility for urban planning to form an emancipatory participative practice; a reassessment of the urban space of a city and its (social) opportunities centered on a local scale. Therefore, urban tactics are “practices to activate encounters, to encourage the utilization of public spaces and to redefine the vectors of social incidence (...)” (Nerivela 2015)⁵.

The “tactical” refers to the works of De Certeau (1984), where practices are configured as various activities presented that are politically neutral and friendly to the capitalistic discourse narrative, which reappropriates and temporarily reconfigures the life of a particular place, at once taking the space, ending the tactical, and legitimizing a strategy for the city. On terms of releasing this strategy, there even exists a large creative component that performs temporary, ephemeral interventions, which convert the tactical into a platform of urban management. Thus, the idea is that a small intervention can serve as a kind of Trojan horse – opening up for larger changes in the city by showing that a positive impact can be made.

Therefore, the attitude of macro planning is replaced by a smaller observation closer to the human being who lives in the city and participates within it. Regarding “tactical urbanism”, “city making” does not only mean to create physically, but also, that it is possible to change, departing from the collective promotion of initiatives for better living. The insertion of references generates new “articulations” and relationships that unfold in ways of using and producing space, modifying the urban “fields” of a city, referring tactics and actions to the duality between the produced and the lived space.

“Tactical urbanism” or “small steps urbanism” is not within the scope of the “educated ignorant”, but rather is an activity that involves the citizen who is not specialized in economic development and in the design of his own public space. Other terms employed in relation to this participative practice include “emancipation”, “self-realization”, “socialization”, “deceleration, “sharing” or “do-it-yourself”, denoting an urban development “from below”, conducted in micro-spaces. “Tactical urbanism”

⁵ Available from: http://www.es.eventhint.com; http://mumo.nerivela.org (Accessed November 1, 2015. Nerivela is a collective of conceptual artistic practices and a research platform. In 2015, the group developed MUMO, an artistic device in order to accompany processes of self-management and collaborative design of the environments by decoding, reinforcing, replicating, and making visible through experimental practices and providing alternative ways of understanding civic projects. Findings of the project were presented and discussed during Festival Vecinal (Neighborhood Festival) 2015, a festival on tactical urbanism open to encounter and dialogue, which was held in Mexico City on November 4 and 6 to 8, 2015.
CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF PLANNING

competes with short-term commitments in realistic expectations, aiming to stimulate a change in the long term, assuming less risk with the possibility of great rewards through the development of the social capital of the citizens. An illustrative example for such a “small steps urbanism” appeared to be Radio Aguilita, which pretended to function as a motor or catalyzer for the social transformation of the La Merced neighborhood. It is not only a booster that enhances urban processes, but rather, it produces space.

Thinking and developing on a small scale and on pedestrian level, “tactical urbanism” interprets the city as a space that is built in a dynamic, continuous manner, beyond an ordered, rational, and controlled system of streets and blocks, serving as motivation for small meetings, actions, and collisions among needs, interests, and desires. In this fashion, “tactical urbanism” can be interpreted as an instrument to remove barriers that prevent people from developing their skills, such as distrust among the political class, lack of civic participation, and the insurmountable environmental, economic, and social inequity experienced by the citizens.

This type of spatial design constitutes itself continually step-by-step, guiding citizenship (“ciudadanía) to the creation of novel urban spaces through active and often spontaneous participation, while public engagement in the organization of a place and in the conception and management of the spaces leads to identity and the identification of the inhabitants with their neighborhood. And it is through tactical urbanism that we understand the death of planning; it is through tactical urbanism that we have dedicated ourselves to the production of design alternatives; it is through tactical urbanism that new identities and significances are being fed and articulated, and it is through tactical urbanism that we are promulgating our desires for a public space within a gentle civilization (Correa, 2013).

Since space is designed and constructed procedurally and not in a pre-calculated manner (2.1.1 Space “in transformation”), spatial appropriation, synonymous for a specific social learning (ibid.) and considered as a process, can be updated and expanded through the significance of the active confrontation of the individual with the environment. In the case of applying it to the new special paradigms according to Ulrich Deinet and its original model in the field of the social pedagogy, research and development of the social-spatial practice “Spacing” (3.1.3 Appropriation through transformation of spaces (“Spacing”)), a scientific term related to the idea of creating spaces on their own, appropriation of the material as well as symbolic culture (Deinet 2009), may refer to the space with the idea of human action beyond the existing space, amplifying the users’ area-of-action.
Likewise, the basic idea of Martina Löw (2003), the “relational” model of space, is that individuals function as social actors; thus they produce spaces, but their actions depend on economic, legal, social, cultural, and, ultimately, spatial structures. Therefore, this integrates the approach of the theory of the “relational” space by Löw to the process of creating space activity, which takes place in the order of things and bodies.

Because the space cannot be fully anticipated by the traditional planning practice, it is understood as a space that is socially formed, a constructed and constituted space initiating from cultural and social practices based on subjective relationships (Rosa 2011: 19). This is defined as a space and place open to intervention that is influenced by current urban processes, in which cultural and social life can evolve instead (Fig. 101). The structure of the spaces, the actions, i.e., the spaces, can delimit the actions and, at the same time, can promote them, although they do not define these in a deterministic sense.

In accordance with the idea introduced by Rosa (2011), based on a theory of the relationship between actor and space and including the creative process of appropriation as an own activity in the sense of amplification of the area-of-action, these thoughts lead to an expansion of the boundaries of traditional planning and recognition of the importance of civic culture and civic perspectives. In particular, they involve the transformation and design of situations and existing arrangements, reconsidering a new role for and a repositioning of the architect and urban planner. Thus, referring to the definition of an artist as a manufacturer or maker by Helio Oiticica (2007), any active and purposeful person (actor) could generously occupy a proactive role in the environment that he inhabits (Oiticica 2007, in: Rosa 2011: 20), thus considering the actor as a designer of space. By this definition, the architect is understood as anyone active in a space and with that, the actor as a designer of space.

Interpreting the citizen as an intangible, immaterial producer of space (Hiernaux Nicolas 2008) implies that the citizens themselves could improve the livability of their environment, beginning with the creation of a civic awareness, preferably working collectively, and about collectiveness, through collaboration and collective intelligence. In this actor-network-theory, civil participation is then considered a key for defining and understanding the urban space, in which people sharing the city serve as a basis for rethinking social issues in urbanistic terms, designing urban public spaces and squares. The city is our potential and we are its creators. We are part of the social, and spatial, reality of the city. This means, as we are not simply observers, that we even
play with, participate, and move on the urban stage together with other players (Lynch 1960/1965: 10), we make the city, all of us.

*Figure 101: Production of space (through spatial appropriation).*

Therefore, we see that the culture of space is crucial for the culture of cities, which can include a culture of movement and “performative” aspects, leading to the interpretation of space as a scenic stage. Thus, it should be noted that a “performance” is a scenic demonstration, often with an important factor of improvisation, in which provocation or amazement, as well as the sense of esthetics, play a major role and which refers to the execution of an action that only has meaning within a determined situation. However,
the “performative” characterizes a situation that generates a certain reality, such as, for example, the act of the theatrical representation of a marriage ceremony.

Another idea that relates to the concept “performance” was provided by Ervin Goffman, on explaining the “order of interaction - interaction order”. Because human interaction does not always begin by being influenced by the environment (Goffman 1983, in: Dirksmeier/Helbrecht 2010), the performance will be significant in terms of the social environment, and there it is that the interaction may obtain its theatrical character. This take place over a period of time and has a group of observers, which also influences it, resulting in mundane interactions at a conscious and unconscious level (Goffman 1969, in: Dirksmeier/Helbrecht 2010).

While space and movement have been thought of together for a long time, such as perception and production of space, currently there exists a renewed wave of “performative” actions. These discourses on the “performative” generate a new opportunity to relate architecture and urbanism, even if urban studies have distanced themselves from the social sciences and the theory of the planning of space in modern times. In consequence, Christopher Dell interprets the “performative” context of form, the acting subject, perception, and the production of space, as an architectonic strategy, which he likes to calls “urbanistic turn” (Dell 2007: 136); therefore, so the “spatial turn” in the cultural sciences would follow an “urbanistic turn” in architecture.

To the extent that the “performative” is read as a very faithful representation of the needs and even the aspirations of citizens regarding the social production of space, specifically the public space is constrained within a great principle of transformation, the previously mentioned notion of the “tactical urbanism” appears, appealing to the logic of “learning by doing”, forming common and ordinary citizens as new urban agents (actors) of change in their neighborhoods. The resulting actions are characterized by being rather slight, fast, and economical. Thus, a group of neighbors could gather in the middle of a street in order to slow the traffic down, or to trace the trajectory of a bicycle path with paint and brushes; however, an example of the application of the model could also refer simply to the activity of walking, to the “Game of Steps” (Wolfrum 2013a). Walking the city, in the style of Guy Debord, is a provocation and a form of protest, but walking aimlessly, and with the sole interest of experiencing the city and the journey itself, is an act that also drives thinking.6

In this respect, urban public spaces or squares should be implicitly a place of social learning, a desire to walk, as “the act of walking is to the urban system as the

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expression (the act of speaking) would be to the language of or to a formulated statement made. (...) The steps weave the basic structure of the places. In this sense, the movement of the pedestrians becomes one of the real systems whose existence forms the heart of the city, but these do not materialize. They cannot be located because they themselves create the space” (Certeau 1988: 188,189) (Fig. 102). This means, as Michel de Certeau originally wrote in 1980, that no physical marks are necessarily left. Notwithstanding, by walking, strolling, or skating in the city, we not only have different experiences, depending on our individual perspective, but also, these “Game of Steps” that we play, create space and, as well as any other action, leave footprints in the memory of the people.

Figure 102: Pedestrians in the Corridor Francisco I. Madero.

Thus, the non-intentionality of wandering around, “ambulating”, is related to the concept of a space “in transformation”, and created continuously day by day through a process of usage and interaction carried out by the people. The current interest in wandering, in traveling, in the development of the corporal perception, in the “lived space”, in the social cultural production of space, culminate in the concept called “situational” or “performative urbanism”, aimed at understanding the space of the city, far beyond its properties, as a simple object or image. Therefore, the “Game of Steps” represents an example of everyday urbanism, unfolding through the daily processes of the inhabitants that, simultaneously with their understanding, might lead to a

August 1, 2017).
demystification of everyday life (Giglia 2010).

The need to incorporate the human-scale in urban planning can have different meanings. The basic principle could be defined as the need to turn the face toward the human experience, and to assume, as a significant reference, the implications generated in the lives of urban inhabitants in a departure from decision making with regard to their physical environment (Guevara 2007). Likewise, Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzøe have also underscored the importance of understanding human perception and the use of space (Gehl/Gemzøe 2000).

In conclusion, cities are not only built by planners and urbanists, but also by the people who are reconstructing them, creating in this manner other ways of living, imagining, and designing the city. The importance of this idea lies in contributing to the theoretical and practical discussion in order to recognize the role of city design and management in proximity to the vision of the inhabitants, i.e., the signification of the actors. Cities are products of people’s experiences, vital results of social activities and actors, their properties, skills, and behaviors that have evolved over generations, and their squares, part of their urban scenarios.

Even though large-scale efforts do have their importance, improvement efforts on a small scale are increasingly estimated as an opportunity for transformation. This approach allows local players to test concepts prior to making substantial political and financial commitments, encouraging others to commit themselves to urban action and to archive changes in space, alluding to the complex and bureaucratic traditional fashion of urban planning.

Today, these new modes of urban intervention on a micro-scale are denominated “micro-planning” as well. By functioning as an approach to promote changes that offers local solutions to local planning challenges, this task results in a specific logic for the production of space “in transformation” through the interaction, or actions, of the users themselves, taking movement and performativity into consideration. Its applications, parallel to traditional, conventional, and official planning practices, comprise another possible way to make city. Thus, the term “micro-planning” possesses a crucial aspect of development, implying a decentralized multi-level approach to the overall development of a city or even a country.

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7 The term micro-planning is used in many different ways and in widely differing contexts. In fact, the concept remains rather vague unless it is defined the current level of planning. Currently, the term "zoning" is more fashionable and is often used as a synonym for micro-planning (Rosa,
5.3 Toward an idea of a “pedagogy of place”

Leaving behind the experiences of designers and planners and opening a theoretical discussion in favor of the public space as an element of social cohesion leads to the management of public spaces and squares through the strengthening of the citizens’ culture but, above all, to the idea of a “pedagogy of place” as a theoretical-analytical concept. Paraphrasing Borja (1998b), interpreting the city as a place of learning implies the administration by the users themselves, resulting in a theoretical discussion tending toward the idea of constructing a concept of a “pedagogy of place”. However, to do this, we would have to explain and deconstruct the ideas of urbanism, architecture, pedagogy, and public space.

In that it is not only necessary to problematize the different technical approaches to urban planning (construction, economy, regional development zones), any discussion of the “urban” requires, in addition, the discovery of the concrete particularism of spatial practices by observing and listening to what people do and say as they are immersed in the urban structures, which allows a different access to the meanings of urban life. Thus, according to Giglia (2010: 338) we need “to analyze what the inhabitants of the metropolis do, understanding the dimension of their daily lives in specific spatial and social contexts. This means focusing on the study of specific cases, without losing sight of those macro-social factors that make up what we call the relevant context.”

Similarly, cities are built with plans, signs, houses, buildings, parks, etc., but also through multiple and diverse ways of living in them. In this regard, the inhabitants build by inhabiting, being, moving along their routes, appropriating their public spaces, and recreating and constructing an image of streets or neighborhoods. The linkage of these factors with the manner of the edified, as well as the symbolic, city is produced, leads to a new type of urbanism, a more civic one (Silva 2001).

Thus, and recovering the initial idea, we consider that cities are not only constructed by planners and urbanists, but also by their inhabitants, who are reconstructing it, creating other forms of inhabiting, imagining, and designing the city. The importance of this vision is to contribute to the theoretical and practical discussion of recognizing the role of design and management of the city together with the vision of the inhabitants (Castro/Göbel 2012).

The key to the construction of squares with a participatory and esthetic vision,
resulting in social learning places, lies in the spatial appropriation. Appropriation serves as a source for stimulation, reflection, emotion, and curiosity, whereby urban interventions could be employed as a method for investigating sustainability, such as installations and other ephemeral urban art projects. Therefore, public art could serve as a medium to generate a significant reference for people, marking tracks in their memories, instead of having an effect of filling space only in the form of abstract objects, i.e., producing a self-relationship. In terms of the idea of a “pedagogy of place”, an architecture is required that accommodates the appropriation opportunities for use by the social actors. This implies that a determination of the spatial shape or an architectonic “conciseness” is necessary in order for new challenges to enrich the architectural work (Janson/Wolfrum 2008).

To think of the city and the public space beyond their physical characteristics, considering symbolic terms in the constructing and meaning of space, based on the new spatial paradigms and beyond than the formal limitation of the urban element “square”, the idea of urban public place as a teaching and learning scenario could be developed further in other research steps toward a “pedagogy of place”. Likewise, the categorization of Mark Francis (2010) that the public space fulfills a pedagogical function of teaching, the idea of a “pedagogy of place” suggests the recognition of the importance of civil perspectives, therefore of citizenship (“ciudadanía”), in which the respective image of the popular culture and the use of a space exert an influence on the appropriation and appreciation of a place (Quezada 2006). Urban public squares are the responsibility of the people, applying their Right to the City through civic participation, deciding together for the common good. Public involvement in the organization of place and of the conception and management of public spaces represents a symbol of identity in the sense of an emotional appropriation, which is understood as exemplary as places for encounter and for citizenship (“ciudadanía”), thus as social learning places.

Citizen participation is, then, a way of linking citizens with their spaces, involving them in the decision-making, generating identity and a sense of pertinence, while the emotional relationship as a first step toward the appropriation linking of space and place leads simultaneously toward the identification and identity of a square. Therefore, public spaces function as “constructors” of identity for the society, while reinforcing the idea of a collective memory and also of care and respect for places. Taking the spirit of the place (“genius loci”) into account, the idea of a “pedagogy of place” supports aspirations for the conserving and preserving of tangible and intangible heritage, as well.
It is important to know how the public space can not only meet an urbanistic function, but also may help to develop citizenship skills among the users. Therefore, the tracing of argumentative lines regarding the conceptualization of a “pedagogy of place” would be an important next step.

In the construction and questioning of the concept of a “pedagogy of place”, it is necessary to think that the latter is nourished within a city by at least four basic elements that are connected with each other and that give meaning to the idea of “pedagogy of place”: public space; distinction between the “traditional” concept of architecture and civic culture, pedagogy, and appropriation of the public space (Castro/Göbel 2012).

a) Public space
In the appropriation, there are clues for the construction of public spaces with a participatory and esthetic vision. According to Borja (1998a) or Correa (2013), functional urbanism has had to pay the price of its limitations and also of the perverse uses that have been made of it. Residential groups rapidly degraded because of their poor quality, lack of urban integration, their social cultural anomie, and the poverty of the equipment, leading to the vicious circle of physical and social marginalization. Congested and spatialized central areas lose their integrative role, benefiting administrative and economic functions.

b) Architecture and pedagogy of “the other” (recognizing the importance of the vision of the citizen)
Beginning by distinguishing between the pedagogy of place and the construction of educational spaces through urban planning and architecture, the work becomes less educative and pedagogic on not including specific pedagogical concepts in the architectural program. This means that pedagogy is in contained the spatial structure itself, in the forms or shapes, in the functional arrangement, in the light and the shadow, in relations with the natural and urban environment, as well as in the empowered actions.

Traditionally, urbanistic modernism is based on a systematic knowledge of urban societies and the application of new technologies in the construction and operation of cities, in other words, on the expertise in facing a major project or design led by the State or by properties or real estate group. Thus, a traditional, rigid paradigm dominates in urban planning, where the city is often observed as a purely physical setting, in which its actors simply inhabit and live. This way of seeing the city is called by Ramírez (1998), the structural perspective or geometric paradigm of urbanism.
URBAN PUBLIC SQUARES IN MEXICO CITY AS PLACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

However, there are other emerging readings. Ramírez confirms that the city can also be conceived of as complex of the human activities of the local society, with one activity among others being of extremely importance, that is, constructing the urban scenery, in which this same active human life develops.

According to Guevara (2007) “The necessity to incorporate the human scale in urban planning can have different meanings. The basic principle could be defined as the requirement to turn toward the face of human experience, and assume as significant reference the implications generated in the lives of people, starting from decisions made up to their physical environment.” The ruling forms restrict the resolution to this need of civil and advisory committees (of little or no efficiency), however, rather than emphasizing decentralization regulations, it would be better to emphasize the need to incorporate a new way of thinking in the (technical and political) decision makers, driving a new understanding of the importance of incorporating the human scale in urban planning.

c) Citizenship and pedagogy (civic culture)

The democratic city and its urban public space must consider all of the people that integrate it. Civic participation in the organization of the territory and in the design and management of public spaces represents a sign of identity in this model, interpreting the city as well as its urban public spaces or squares as places for encounter and for citizenship (“ciudadania”). Thus, the rescue of space through civic participation includes community spirit or civic-mindedness.8

Similarly, and in the sense of Borja (1998), the city is the most complex cultural product that has been realized and that we build and destroy altogether day by day. This complexity is not afforded by the concentration of population, nor by the size of its economic activity, but rather through its possibilities of interchange. So, the city is represented not only by the physical space (“urbs”), but also through the conjunction of people who live in community (“civitas”). Thus, the city is that which should optimize opportunities for contact, being committed to diversity and functional and social mixture, multiplying its meeting spaces. This means that the city is the initiatory adventure in which all people have rights. Therefore, it has been said many times that politics is pedagogy and the city is politics. So it would seem logical to consider the pedagogic dimension of urbanism, i.e., urban strategy as a great educational project.

Therefore, urban projects must form part of a global project for the city,

8 Andaluciainformación. Available from: http://andaluciainformacion.es/nota/350440/izquierda-
concertizing socially, led democratically, and validated culturally. The urban architectural, physical configuration is not the city. Making city is, above all, recognizing the Right to the City for the people, i.e., for everyone, claiming city values that opt for an urbanism of integration and non-exclusion or an inclusiveness that optimizes urban freedoms.

Then, it is an imperative for a “pedagogy of place” to maintain or establish the conditions necessary for the development of public spheres within neighborhoods. We must refer to “critical” pedagogy within the context of urban life, in that it plays a crucial role in the production of counter-publics or the sense of counter-public spaces in the practices of political and cultural construction, organizing human experiences that allow individuals to interpret the social reality in liberating ways. However, a “pedagogy of place” should be understood in terms of establishing pedagogical conditions that permit city dwellers to interpret critically how the dominant definitions and uses of urban space regulate and control the way of organizing their identity with regard to their territory, and the consequences of this for the configuration of their urban project.

Benefits
As a result, the advantages of such a “pedagogy of place” could be summarized as follows:

1. Emotional link of the space and the place. As such, an emotional bond represents a first approach toward appropriation.
2. Identification and identity of the place, reinforcing the idea of a collective memory with the site.
3. Care and respect for the places, i.e., parks, monuments, roads, streets, and public spaces in general.
4. Preservation and conservation of the tangible and intangible heritage, recognizing the spirit of the place (“genius loci”).
5. Citizen participation in the construction of the city and the neighborhood environment as a minimum unit.
6. A civil task useful for other sectors of the public and the democratic life of the

9 Therefore, one must resort to the tradition of “critical pedagogy” of Henry Giroux, who argues that in relation the production of (public) spheres. There exists by the other a counter-sphere. “Critical” pedagogy must be seen as “having an important role in the struggle of oppressed groups to recover the ideological and material conditions for the organization of their own experiences” (Giroux 1983: 237).
inhabitants.

Thus, participation of the people is crucial for a “pedagogy of place”, revealing the mobilization and the commitment of persons to earn their Right to the City. Various indicators suggest that this opportunity exerts a great influence on improving lifestyle, as citizens give meaning to their city. The proposal concludes with a citation from the already multiquoted Borja (1999) concerning the new rights to the recent challenges of the territory. “The right to public space and to beauty, the right to collective identity, the right to mobility, the right to access and to the use of technologies for information and communication, the right to local justice and security, the right to protection against institutions and service companies, the right to employment and civil salaries, the right to environmental quality, the right of all residents to a city having the same political and legal status of the citizen...; new and less new rights to be developed and legitimized requiring a huge movement of mobilization and civil involvement and a considerable political audacity. The right to the city and the political duty of making city toward a city of all of the inhabitants, needs to modify the idea of a pedagogy based on the city, developing the idea of the city as pedagogy. This is the real objective and the challenge, nothing easy, the Educational Project of a City”, as well as the urban public space and square.
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Bajo Puente Juan Escutia


March 31, 2016).

Parque Bolsillo Zócalo


Town Center “El Rosario”

2015).


Appendix: Example of a questionnaire applied at Republic Square

Cuestionario (investigación cualitativa mediante entrevistas con los usuarios)

- espacio vivido ('l'espace vécu')/relación inconsciente entre el ser humano y el espacio, es decir la relación subjetivo, personal de los habitantes con el lugar

Datos básicos

- Nombre y apellido

- Edad ¿Cuántos años tiene?

- Profesión ¿A que se dedica?

- Dirección ¿De dónde viene? ¿Donde vive? Vive cerca del monumento?

Plaza pública

- Actividades

¿Qué tipo de actividades realiza en esta plaza?

- ¿Por qué eligió venir aquí y no a otro lugar?

- ¿Ha tenido alguna experiencia en donde haya tenido la posibilidad de relacionarse con otra persona?

- ¿Qué actividades hay que se desarrollan en esta plaza?

- ¿Cree que las actividades que aquí se desarrollan están en concordancia con el lugar?

- ¿Qué experiencia se va usted de la plaza cada vez que viene?

- ¿Le gustaría a otras personas visitar este lugar y por qué?
- Movimientos, flujos

¿Con qué frecuencia viene aquí? (antes después revitalización)

¿Viene solo, en grupo, pareja o para encontrarse con alguien?

¿La plaza es para usted un lugar de transición o destino final?

¿Cuánto tiempo pasa usted en esta plaza? (un rato, varios horas, todo el día)

¿Qué tan seguro se siente aquí?

- Características físicas/mobiliario urbano ("affordance")

¿Le gusta la plaza y por qué?

¿Cómo percibe el ambiente en este lugar? (enfrentándome normal)

¿Cuáles son las características del lugar que le permiten realizar la razón por la que viene?

¿Cree que este es un lugar que facilita la convivencia?

¿Qué le cambiaría para cumplir sus necesidades?

más píxelado hacia el monumento mismo, y que este en contra que se quine aquí o se divierran
Abstract

Where there are cities, there are also central places where people come together and make city, i.e., socialize and exchange economically, culturally, and affectively. With the changes of urban form and urban structure, the public space, with its character and the use and the appropriation of squares, has been transformed as well. The interest of this work centers on the presentation and discussion of the crisis of “city” and “urbanity”, as manifested in public space in particular.

In that in the city center of Mexico City the concept of the public square as a free space between buildings is being “revitalized”, it becomes significantly less important in large parts of the periphery. Instead, the new socialization spaces emerge that reinforce urban segregation processes and give rise to the legitimacy of repressive responses to the construction and maintenance of these socialization models. The public dimension is shifting toward a system of collective spaces in which the new typologies are based on consumer behavior and are determined by the desire for public security.

This development leads to a reconsideration of the role of public spaces as learning places for civic skills, including concepts such as space, architecture, and “ciudadanía”, in order to discuss the appropriation of public space as a synonym for a specific social learning process.

“Learning from the Place” (confrontation with the peculiarities of the place, “genius loci”), “Learning from Others” (intercultural learning and understanding), and “Learning by Common Actions” (social interaction, collaborative and participative learning) convert the public square into a place for social learning, a meeting place, and a place for citizenship (“ciudadanía”), a place for confrontation among social actors, thus a place for learning social conditions and relationships, which promotes a democratic culture of learning and, consequently, a place for democracy.

According to Michel de Certeau (1988), places become spaces by appropriation and concrete uses. In the sense of Henri Lefebvre’s ideas in reference to the social production of space (1974), space is no longer defined as a passive unit, but as a dynamic process between physical environment and social and discursive practice. Architecture should not be observed only as a material framework, but also as a situation that acquires its social relevance through its use. The term “ciudadanía” (citizenship) represents for a polyvalent concept and refers to a political movement, actor, or demand, depending on the context. Primarily, “ciudadanía” comprises urban
practices and, in the forms of urban socialization, the work of the civic society is (re-) territorialized (Tamayo 2013: 203-223).

The appropriation theory of human development of Soviet Developmental Psychologist Aleksei N. Leontiev (1903–1979) states that the “real world, which most determines human life, is a world that has been transformed by human activity. As a world of social objects that embody the human skills formed in the course of sociohistorical practice, it is not immediately provided to the individual; in these properties, it reveals every human to be a task” (Leontjew 1980: 281). Because urban areas are not natural, but instead elaborated, designed, modified, and structured by people, people must appropriate these spaces and the meanings contained in them, such as objects and tools (Deinet 2009). The term appropriation is updated here in reference to the new spatial paradigms and extended beyond the importance of the active engagement of the individual with her/his environment, so that according to the actual transformation of space, appropriation signifies the individual’s own active creation of spaces (“Spacing”).

The aim of this research is based on analysis of the questions of whether urban public spaces interpreted as a places for social learning are threatened in Mexico City within the perspective of the current spatial and social realities of a highly segregated and fragmented megalopolis, and in the other question on which tools and instruments are available for city planners in order to stimulate architectural and material suggestions or proposals, establishing so-called “possibility spaces”, creating opportunities for appropriation, therefore for learning.
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