

PLACE IDENTITY, THE PERMANENT CORE OF A MUTATED CITY.

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Abstract

It is in the context of contemporary cities that research proposes to look to place identity as an inspiration for refocusing architectural and urban practices, proposing them to rethink their final product – constructed space.

In an era where cities represent the largest home of humanity, absorbing almost two-thirds of the world's population and growing at a rate of one million births and/or immigrant's, two challenges rise: 1. The necessity of optimization of the occupation and land use for economic, ecological and environmental reasons; 2. The urgent response to the growing need of cities accommodations - related to the urban population growth - and new social-spatial demands ensuring the notion of sustainability.

In this context work focus in finding one possible answer based on urban "waste" – disable structures, sub-used areas and social-spatial disintegrated spaces – here call as dehumanized built landscapes in order to (re)discover their own potential to answering fast to new urban challenges by regenerating space, without is necessary formal extension, and by taking place identity as a key element to rethink contemporary city space. The weakening of place identity leads to its abandonment, therefore its comprehension and preservation can be a method for the intensification of its usage increasing, for that so, place sustainability.

Moving the focus from static to dynamic, from formal toward functional we propose (re)thinking space not only as an economic program and functional container but as a social morphology by using a methodological strategy - based on Bennett, Relph, and Seamon work – that aims to stimulate people space production participation. A social process of change through the empowerment of users, allowing them to take control over their environment and reshaping city based on their socio-spatial needs, practices and cultural identity.

Keywords: Place Identity, Built Dehumanized Landscapes, Social Morphology, Space (Re)programming.

1. INTRODUCTION OF GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

In his book "Being and Time" the philosopher Martin Heidegger speaks no longer about a dualistic vision between Human being and space but of a complex space understanding – being-in-the-world – merging environment and people in one single layer.

A need to explore the concept of space associated with its social dimension that in the beginning of the 1970s phenomenological geographers start to claim. In Tuan Yi-Fu work place is analyzed according to its everyday life, to individual or group experiences that gives place a more complex dimension enriching and expanding its concept. A holistic vision of space that research claimed inside the architectural and urban design practice in order to rethink new space design strategies and methodological approaches.

In this context, we will call this "more" profound way of thinking space as systematic. Here space is seen as a system, the social-spatial system. By system we designate a holistic view of experiencing and/or thinking space which cannot be reduced to unity (Bennett, 1966), shaped by three components divided into geographical, built environment and socio-cultural space qualities (Seamon, 2011), whose relation allow to amplify or to decrease the functioning of place socio-spatial system and, consequently, its identity (Bennett, 1976).

Inside this perspective we understand place identity not as an individual way of absorbing and understanding place through our perception but related with space qualities – here understood as the space permanent core. So, the identity of place refers to the result of the sum of the three different components constituting the socio-spatial system, where space and human beings are read as one: people-in-place (Seamon, 2011).

Also sharp as the spirit of place or *genius loci* (Rigby, 2003) referring to the unique atmosphere that defines each place - we assume across geographical qualities that place already contains a specific *genius loci* (Loukaki, 1997). A primary identity - that can be amplified or reduced by human beings actions - representing a permanent space quality (Relph, 2009), constituting a single and unique heritage of each place (ICOMOS, 2013; UNESCO, 2013) and this is why we advocate its relevance in space production. A uniqueness belonging to each and specific place, distinguished from the sense of place by the fact that irradiates from the physical environment to the human being and not as a sensibility that emanates from the human to place (Relph, 2009).

Thus, space becomes a "living organism" as Lefebvre claimed, designed and produced not only as an economic, programmatic and/or material container but also as a social morphology. Leading us to a more complex space reading where the notion of dialectic's between the moving and the real estate parts that constitute place, and its mutual influence, give rise to the concept of dehumanized built landscapes.

2. CONTEMPORARY CITIES CONTEXT AND BUILT DEHUMANIZED LANDSCAPES.

According to the United Nations (UN, 2012) it is expected, in 2020, for the first time in human History the urban population exceeds, on a global scale, the rural population. In this context we can state that the world has become urbanized. Cities since 1950 have absorbed nearly two-thirds of the world's population (PIP, 2002) transforming them in the largest home of Humanity. A reality especially visible in the current Chinese context here 700 million of people live in urban areas. In 2035 it is expected that the percentage of the urbanized Chinese population has reached 70% more than a thousand million people. China will host in two decades the equivalent to the entire United

States of America population or more than half of the citizens of the European Union, at the speed of thirty million people per year (Interessante, 2013).

But Chinese metropolises are, currently, one of the examples of what is happening cities worldwide. In a short period of time they had to host thousands of people that for economic, political and social issues had to leave the fields or their countries funding home in cities. One of the effects of the increasing of the urban population is its contribution to speed cities built environment image sheltering the most diverse socio-spatial practices. The other effect of this phenomenon is its role in the bumping of the metropolis peripheral areas, growing wildly and consuming unnecessarily resources (Davis, 2007), contributing to the hyper occupation of the suburb areas and to the accentuation of the abandonment of the urban centers, increasing the number of deactivated spaces. The fast filling and draining of metropolises - like European cities since the beginning of the financial crises in 2008 – contributes to the weakening of place identity. As result socio-spatial system will start is degradation processes ending, in some cases, with the dead of places. If we take a look to the Portuguese case, Lisbon, itself, had in 2008 4.000 abandoned buildings, from a total of 55.000 (Relea, 2010) increasing every year. Together with urban voids, these latent spaces can answer to the increment of population needs through a process of space (re)programming and (re)activation.

Inside contemporary context urban and the architectural paradigm is no longer uncontrolled consummation of physical and social resources but their sustainable optimisation through thoughtful (re)programming. In that context, a building of space should be seen as a socially and contextually aware creation of its liveability and successful usage, without its necessary formal extension. Reprogramming based on the methodological set that would systematically assess space qualities - 1.Identity of place; 2.social actions found in it - can be an answer to the contemporary cities context that brings two major challenges: 1. the necessity for optimization of the occupation and land use, for economic, ecological and environmental reasons 2. The urgent response to the growing need of cities accommodations - related to the urban population growth - and to new social-spatial demands ensuring the notion of sustainability.

On the other hand, while some metropolises will fill others through social, economic and political reasons – as Buenos Aires, Argentina, after the economic decline and politic issues in the beginning of the 1990s - will be draining through emigration. Here, the challenge is to prevent that socio-spatial system degradation process occur, contributing to maintain the existing population in place and the spatial bases activated to ensure a more rapid and effective answer to future socio-spatial needs and people flows.

This new paradigm shifts requires cities to respond hurriedly, through new programs that would consider its spatial qualities/identity as a project foundation (Calthorpe, 2005), preventing spatial degradation and reflecting the need to rethink new methodological and space design approaches. In this context we propose looking to existent space focusing in disable and social-cultural and spatial disintegrated spaces – in order to (re)discover their own potential to (re)generate space. These structures, in general, not only have the ability to respond - by its pre-existence - in a faster way to contemporary cities shelter and new equipment needs, increased by the migration process, but they also contribute to the decrease of the occupied built area freeing the land to other functions including the agricultural. But these structures – by being traces of the built environment – also can act as urban remainders, a urban core of a local identity, reinforcing the sense of belonging by being linked to local history and collective memory, increasing, for that so, a sense of place. A heterotopical position that, as Michel Foucault claimed, allows discovering other spaces within the existing, through a process of space (re)programming and (re)activation, transforming them into assets

according to space qualities - geographical, built environment and socio-cultural qualities – seen as a priority to project development taking into consideration the necessity for project-sustainability by reinforcing the connection between people and the city. A holistic way of thinking space and its architectural/urban planning interventions that helps hindering the process of place abandonment and neglect.

4. PLACE IDENTITY. THE CORE OF A MUTATED CITY.

Generally composed by a set of quantitative data, between the functional organization and the needs list "...program is constituted as a step where it is tacitly assumed the exclusion of space qualities, listing only quantities" (Adrião, 2006), this way the separation between the act of elaborating program and the act of thinking and designing space, only as a physical entity, is evident. Giving rise to hermetic projects showing high levels of socio-spatial disintegration, contributing to mere pieces of built territory where the process of space appropriation and use are struggle, reducing the quality of the built environment through a degradation process.

In this context research stand for a holistic way of thinking space "...in order to design, it is necessary to conceive and think about architectural space surrounding us by decoding its nature and discovering messages in its built forms" (Durson, 2009). Decoding is nature, relates to people-place relationship (Seamon, 2011) here persons and the characteristics of the physical environment contribute to define place ambience and character. what Relph (2009) call the singular qualities of a particular environment that infuse it with a unique identity as a lived and permanent quality radiating from the physical environment, distinguished from sense of place, the synesthetic and unself-conscious of persons to feel and sense the uniqueness of place. As Relph (1976) claimed place identity it is a definition of diffuse contours although its main characteristics are visible "identity of something refers to a persistent sameness and unity which allows that thing to be differentiated from others" (Relph, 1976). Following this notion – of identity as a persistent sameness – we face place identity as the result of the sum of place primary qualities – geographical, built environment and socio-cultural qualities – a place core representing a permanent space quality, embodying, for that so, a more solid basis for place potential understanding.

The weakening of place identity leads to its abandonment, therefore its comprehension and preservation can be a method for the intensification of its usage and space qualities preservation. Ignore place identity it's to ignore that people have an innate sense for *genius loci* and, existentially, gravitate toward it (Seamon, 2011) amplifying the people-place relation - as example the threat of collective death from the Guarani-Kaiowá Indians after receiving the deportation order from their land Yvy Katu in Japorã, Brazil (Cacis-ufu, 2013). For being a place permanent core, place identity, helps to reinforce the bonds between people and place – becoming a substructure of the self - translated in a space permanent appropriation. A way of feeling space as our belonging and extension contributing to maintain life of and in places by promoting a "...sense of familiarity, a perception of environmental stability, and feelings of control and environmental safety. Consequently, people may describe themselves in terms of their belonging to specific places (...) belonging becomes a component of our personal identity..." (Vidal, 2012).

If we consider the space of our cities as highly unstable whose speed of social, economic and political changings made it deeply dynamic (Cannavò, 2006), we can say that this instability arises from quantitative data such as new languages, behaviour changing, media and fashion's influences viewed as quantitative requirements that the program must complete and not as the basis for thinking and/or (re)programming space, provided by permanent space qualities – space identity. Thus we

understand the city as a system here each space represents a pixel that when it goes bankrupt starts to weakening and to transforming that same system. Following this concept we look in to existent city space treating her from the micro to the macro scale (re)programming each weakened pixel, based on local identity and emergent socio-spatial needs, where the built dehumanized landscapes and local people participation act as algorithms representing a set of steps for the socio-spatial system (re)activation, essential for urban regeneration.

5. METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND METHODS:

Proposed methodological strategy will be divided in three major moments:

M1. Identification of built dehumanized landscapes and understand of their potential.

For the identification of the dehumanized built landscapes we suggest a participative method of space survey always working with local people emerge in its social, cultural and physical ambience. Built dehumanized landscape should be understood inside the local context. Working with people outside the local socio-spatial system will lead to a wrong space decoding and built dehumanized landscapes evaluation.

Methods: local people interview, cognitive maps, photograph record and survey – surveys must cover three main topics 1. What people understand for built dehumanized landscapes; 2. Local examples of dehumanized landscapes; 3. Suggestions for their rehabilitation and to prevent future built dehumanized landscapes – surveys can be done directly in place or in internet, like the “International Call: From the Dehumanization of the Built Landscape” (Nascimento, 2013). In this case the number of participants, dissemination and the period of time that project will be running must be strictly decided and participants provide with a Kit composed by a disposable camera and survey – exploring the above and other topics that may be relevant – and people asked to photograph in their spatial context what they consider as dehumanized built landscapes.

After the material’s reception and the critical analyses of data collected will be provide a local built dehumanize landscape overview helpful to understand their and place potential.

Methods: historical and literature review – to understand built dehumanized landscape causes – space potential evaluation, entropic maps, diagrammatic and accurate draw analysis, space syntax.

M2. Measure space qualities/space identity.

Geographical qualities will be measured and used as a recommendation for future definition of a program that would respect, in this way defined, qualities of physical scenography. The measurement of socio-cultural qualities will reinforce users’ participation in the process and ensure sustainability and dynamical liveability of a future program that after the analysis completion with built environment qualities will be proposed (M3).

Geographical qualities: refers to natural environmental space qualities. Topography, weather, flora, fauna, and natural landscape (Seamon, 2011).

Methods: literature review, natural observation, space syntax and space matrix analysis, Isovist, topographical survey, photographic and video recordings.

Socio-cultural qualities: relates to people-in-place, the human worlds unfolding in the geographical ensemble (Seamon, 2011). Actions, routines, events, atmosphere (Kurtuncu, 2008), memory, place story and soundscape.

Methods: diagrammatic drawings, photographic and video recordings, sensory-relations maps, historical and literature review, interview, soundscapes recording, actions citizen participation, natural observation, phenomenological methodology.

Built environment qualities: includes constructions and their spatial configurations. Scale, proportion, space context, light, structure, materials, architectonics, spatial articulation and syntax, colour pallet, background/figure, shape, buildings conditions, full/empty relation (Kurtuncu, 2008) and perceptual unity (Untaru, 2002).

Methods: natural observation, photographic, diagrammatic drawings and maps (Lacy, 1995; Harmon, 2010), entropic and sensory maps, studies of color/light (Pernão, 2013), survey, literature review, methodology of space syntax.

The critical analysis of data collected will give an expanded understanding of local socio-spatial system functioning and needs, leading directly to M3.

M3. Socio-spatial system (re)activation.

Here morphological flexibility and sustainability are the priority tools to think the program and place identity the basis for project development. Space (re)activation program does not necessarily relate to the act of (re)building or spend but to resources economics' and social participation. For example, in Kerstin Bergendal (2013) Tre Kronor Art Plan Project (2001-2013) artists were invited to display a performance and/or an art work on public space for a temporary period of time. These strategies, in association with social practices, repeated over time, ensured and increase new spaces activation and appropriation. A strategy of a continuous usage space discourse rarely include in traditional urban planning which also can be applied for space (re)activating.

Project is, also, a subjective moment, so we do not ask architects or urban planner quitting from the language and concepts that define their work, but always to be aware as a project strategy that 1. Space production also involves not building, urban planed voids, contemplation, leisure and decompression spaces are needed for the socio-spatial system to work and, sometimes, the only thing to its (re)activation; 2. Space is reprogrammable and for that so a regenerating source of itself. An accurate map of existing space will provided a range of disable spaces and structures that can represent the basis to design a new space program saving time, money and resources, contributing to the management of land use.

Methods: social and spatial needs list, space and place potential evaluation and surveys, project design, project implementation, social and artistic practices as a way of stimulating space usage.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE OUTCOMES:

By understanding the space as a living entity not only as a physical entity, research provides space expanded reflection for the practice and the theory in Urbanism and Architecture, reinforcing knowledge about a holistic reading of space including its quality program – space identity - as a key element for project development and program implementation. Ensuring projects more effective integration and sustainability within the inherent social-spatial system, respecting its physical stability and metabolism processes.

By reinforcing a holistic space observation and by the creation of a new methodological strategy, using space qualities as crucial elements for its own (re)programming and (re)activation research will offer a faster answer to economic, ecological and socio-spatial emerging needs. Hoping that result will represent a useful platform for reflection on the management and optimization of existing urban

resources. In this context proposed methodological strategy should be understood as a recommendation for future interventions not as a hermetic methodology to be literally followed. It rises from a very specific way of facing space production here it is seen as a mutated being, by all socio-spatial demands merge in it, with a permanent core – local identity.

By representing a constant space quality – place identity - and since people have an innate sense to feel it we advocate is relevance into space production, especially inside contemporary urban context whose instability can be a strong element of place degradation and abandonment. A phenomenon, especially visible inside Portuguese cities - like in many European metropolises - that methodological strategy aim to prevent.

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