



## Public space and citizenship: Understanding from urban heterotopias

Espacio público y ciudadanía: Comprensión desde las heterotopías urbanas

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Heterotopias,  
public space,  
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This article shows a reflection on the urban environment, its influence on people's emotions and behavior, and on the configuration of public space from the perspective of herotopias, understood as juxtaposed places that, when analyzed, determine social relationships based on the configuration of space in an internal logic of power and resistance which have a content of reason. Heterotopia also configures city construction and requires an understanding of the environment from its green areas, paved roads, pedestrians and public services that contribute to the quality of life of citizens.

### RESUMEN

#### Palabras clave:

Heterotopías,  
espacio público,  
ciudadanía.

El presente artículo muestra una reflexión sobre el ambiente urbano, su influencia en las emociones y el comportamiento de las personas y en la configuración del espacio público desde la perspectiva de las herotopias, entendidas como lugares yuxtapuestos que al analizarse determinan las relaciones sociales a partir de la configuración del espacio en una lógica interna de poder y resistencia la cuales tienen un contenido de razón. La heterotopia también configura la construcción de ciudad y requiere de una comprensión del entorno desde sus zonas verdes, las vías pavimentadas, los peatones y los servicios públicos que contribuyen a calidad de vida de los ciudadanos.

## Introduction

In the research of urban phenomena, the interest of interdisciplinarity arises and with it the accumulation of its research methods that seek to privilege the study not only of the physical space of the city, but of the people who inhabit it. In this corpus of sciences, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and architecture take the lead as support for the emerging paradigm for the study of this phenomenon.

Urban problems can have as a methodological focus the heterotopias that according to Toro (2008) are:

Effective locations, utopias realized and materialized, but that are outside of all localizable places, do not belong to the set of other physical spaces and are unclassifiable because their configuration escapes spaces of power, hegemonic knowledge, organized discourses, are places that occur by themselves, using structured places. (p. 56)

The Heterotropics propose a phenomenological analysis of counter-spaces, which constitute a sensitivity capable of discovering ignored meanings. The epoch of space leaves the historical and temporal aspects in a second place to analyze the concept of Heterothopy, which gains explanatory power when

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defining the institutions of segregation or places where idealistic policies of territorial ordering are articulated and materially resisted.

Heterotopias are in essence juxtaposed places that, when analyzed, determine social relations based on the configuration of space in an internal logic of power and resistance, which have a content of reason, of location called by the French thinker as a discourse in a space subject to content, to topological and morphological knowledge of bodies, to ignored meanings.

Bachelard, (as quoted in Foucault, 1967) states

Phenomenologists' descriptions have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but, on the contrary, in a space that is loaded with qualities, a space that perhaps is also visited by ghosts; the space of our first perception, that of our dreams, that of our passions keep in themselves qualities that are as if they were intrinsic; it is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or else a dark, rocky, obstructed space: it is a space from above, it is a space from the summits, or it is on the contrary a space from below, a space from the mud, it is a space that can be running like living water, it is a space that can be fixed, stopped like stone or glass. (p. 2)

This work seeks to reflect on the phenomenological contributions to the problems that arise in the transformation of the territory, in this context addresses the Heterotopias, a concept that was raised by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in 1967 in two conferences being the discourse of contemporary space the reflection of the urban.

This interest has brought with it the development of qualitative methods that put the subject at the center, in the methodological perspectives of social cartography as a resource of analysis for the knowledge and understanding of the configuration of urban spaces. These techniques of analysis show the dynamism of urban space, inviting the researcher

to be part of the space, to inhabit it, to live it and to travel through it, thus participating in the life of cities in characteristics inherent to the everyday life of today's city.

What cartography finally does is confer visibility to these movements of territoriality, acting as an open map that is constantly mutating and that has the possibility of creating realities, connecting apparently irreconcilable fields, generating openings in bodies, capturing intensities, forces, resistances and powers. (Piedrahita, 2018, p. 127).

In another context we can refer to the fact that communities, through the experience of participation, assume the involvement of the public world, the exercise of citizenship in mechanisms of experience that assume the problems and from there, from participation, generate processes of political awareness and administrative transformation which consist of spaces of participation for the identification of the problems with the aim of improving their quality of life.

For this reason it is fundamental to problematize the model in the community intervention that responds to the material realities of the community, being the action and participation fundamental when describing the political and administrative processes in the territory being fundamental to articulate new geographies of the urban theory in the model of intervention.

Silva and Bernal (2019) state that a trained community does not need intermediaries to develop its actions, since it knows its objectives and proposed goals very well. As a result, it can plan and develop actions with a high leadership profile and identify critical points, as well as points of support, that is, "the possibilities that can be found in the municipalities, governorships and other public and private sector institutions with respect to resources to promote social investment projects". (p. 7)

## Public space

Public space has been a phenomenon that has interested social science researchers. Some studies that can be cited in this text refer to space from otherness (Carrión, 2007), its uses and meanings (Aramburu, 2008), urban segregation (Saraví, 2004), public space and culture (Feixa, Porzio, & Recio, 2006) and its uses and appropriations (Páramo & Burbano, 2014).

For his part, Segovia (2007) states that through these two aspects he wants to situate public space as a notion present in the theoretical debate that is linked to the notions of citizenship, “social construction, democracy, collective identity, among others; and to show initiatives that were conceived with the participation of the communities, and that along with their material results were proposed as exercises of collective citizenship”. (p. 9).

Recognizing the natural exercise of citizenship among anonymous people in public space, Segovia (2007) affirms that the possibility of realizing the rights of citizenship depends, therefore, on the richness and availability of these resources; in other words, on the health, integrity and permeability of the urban fabric, since it is there that the spaces and cultural means necessary for the practice of citizenship are found (p. 19). This refers to the natural link between the right and citizenship in the context of social capital as an element of urban progress.

Without a doubt, referring to public space invites us to rethink the use of land. Segovia (2007) states that “the social capital of those who make the decision to attribute a public space to it influences the content of the use that will be given to it for recreational, sporting or communicational purposes” (p. 37). In this way, the urban dynamics of land uses respond to the systemic participation of the city and the space.

The interaction gives rise to the increase of social capital in a public geographic and communicational

space. Segovia (2007) states that “a public space can have great symbolic value and yet have become ineffective in satisfying needs for exchange and communication” (p. 38).

## Urban Heterotopias

Heterotopia is a concept that was raised by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in 1967 in two conferences, the discourse of contemporary space being the reflection of the urban that means against spaces, bodies in resistance. The areas of study in the present research are from philosophy, anthropology, sociology, architecture, psychology and social work as an epistemological break of the social sciences developing the emerging paradigm when applying the study at a subjective, constructive and holistic level.

Bachelard, (as quoted in Foucault, 1967) states that the descriptions of phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but, on the contrary, in a space that is loaded with qualities, a space that is perhaps also visited by ghosts; the space of our first perception, that of our dreams, that of our passions keep in themselves qualities that are as if intrinsic; it is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or a dark, rocky, obstructed space: it is a space from above, it is a space from the summits, or it is on the contrary a space from below, a space from the mud, it is a space that can be running like living water, it is a space that can be fixed, stopped like stone or glass (p. 2).

It does not seek a geometric knowledge, what it seeks is a morphological topographical knowledge of the bodies from images, life stories, language, symbols, rites, the aesthetics to the social nature of space being a product of social interaction of evident manifestations of power which cause rejection or resistance.

This ends up developing a reflection on the urban fabric in the context of space and social capital in its archaeology of knowledge. Foucault (1967)

states “We do not live in a diversely iridescent void, we live in a set of relationships that define sites that are irreducible to each other and that should not be superimposed” (p. 2). The idea of power is every human relationship is a power relationship, it is not only reduced to institutions or social structures, as a principle where there is power there is resistance. The idea of power is not an instance, a power that would be hidden or visible that would spread its influence in the social body.

Foucault (1967) points out that:

The problem of the site or the location is posed for men in terms of demography; and this last problem of human location does not simply pose the question of whether there will be enough room for man in the world, which is after all a rather important problem, but also the problem of what relations of proximity, what type of storage, circulation, identification, classification of human elements must be taken into account in this or that situation in order to arrive at this or that end. We are in an era in which space is given to us in the form of relationships of locations. (p. 2)

In this way, it is pertinent to mention the evolution of the concept of space, where Foucault makes his contributions from the perspective of the site, which has a central reading in the archaeology of knowledge.

It is important to mention the creative tendencies in Foucaultian thought of heterotopia. Foucault (1967) states that “the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation, since, after all, old age is a crisis, but equally a deviation, because in our society, where free time is opposed to work time, doing nothing is a kind of deviation” (p.4 ). From the sets of locations in the city in the context of temporality, western civilization is rethought in the analysis where Foucault expresses multiple phenomenological examples from the composition of place as in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, cemeteries, churches, libraries and geriatric hospitals.

From Foucaultian thought, five principles can be identified that give all the conceptual categories of complex phenomenological thought in heterotopia: as understanding and perception of life, of citizenship, which respond to a concept of bio politics and its disciplinary power in institutions, economic and social dynamics rethinking the historical configuration in the desire to analyze social relations from the configuration of public space in the urban context.

Foucault (1967) states:

As for the heterotopias themselves, how can they be described, what is their meaning? It could be assumed, I do not say a science, because it is a word too prostituted now, but a kind of systematic description that would have as its object, in a given society, the study, analysis, description, “reading”, as we like to say now, of these different spaces, these other places, something like a polemic at once mythical and real of the space in which we live; this description could be called heterotopology. First principle: there is probably not a single culture in the world that does not constitute heterotopias. It is a constant in every human group. But heterotopias obviously take on forms that are very varied, and perhaps no single form of heterotopia can be found that is absolutely universal. (p.3)

Heterotopology is the science that studies the Heterotopics that constitute themselves in a sensibility capable of discovering ignored meanings, the re existentialism as social conscience. The time of space leaves the historical and temporal aspects in a second place to analyze the concept of Heterotopy which gains explanatory power when defining the institutions of segregation or places where idealistic policies of territorial ordering are articulated that are materially resisted.

Likewise, it can be stated that heterotopia is against spaces, juxtaposed places that when analyzed determine social relations from the configuration of space in an internal logic of power and resistance

which has a content of reason, of discursive placement, of topological and morphological knowledge of bodies, of ignored meanings.

## Conclusions

Approaching the territory and approaching the urban has an ethnographic significance which nourishes every social structure in its systemic complexity. This characteristic conditions social needs, which in their complexity determine and guide behavior, and their very imagination feeds constant and decisive transformations in a social environment that contains a space and a discourse.

The public space is not only a material urban element, it has some subjective elements that are sometimes ignored and that define the community identity such as language, symbols, rites, customs, flavors and aesthetics that can be interpreted from heterotopia as a methodological possibility.

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