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## Odology and virtual environments: Reflections on spatial-territorial reconfiguration in social isolation

Odología y entornos virtuales: Reflexiones sobre la reconfiguración espacio – territorial en el aislamiento social

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

Space,  
Territory,  
Virtuality,  
Imaginaries.

The article presents the reflections and results of the investigative exercise carried out during the year 2020 on Odology, the study of routes and flows from architecture and anatomy, referring to Hodos, a Greek notion alluding to the path and movement itself physically disrupted due to the compulsory social isolation experienced in our country and in the world in the year 2020, which led to the establishment of new forms of relationship based on the movement and journey of an environment that ostensibly accentuated its presence: the virtual space. The research team, made up of professionals from the field of Social Communication and Education, describe the methodology used in the development of the exercise, from a qualitative approach to Urban Imaginaries proposed by Armando Silva, taking two Case Studies (CA) from the corpus. formed, to conclude with the analysis derived from the illustrations and visual texts designed by the participants from the communicative content disseminated around the theme of the present investigation referred to describing the imaginaries of the university academic space of students assigned to the research chair in Armenian universities before and during the social isolation decreed by the national government of Colombia.

### RESUMEN

**Palabras clave:**

Espacio,  
Territorio,  
Virtualidad,  
Imaginarios.

El artículo presenta las reflexiones y resultados del ejercicio investigativo realizado durante el año 2020 sobre la Odología, el estudio de los recorridos y los flujos desde la arquitectura y la anatomía, en referencia al Hodos, noción griega aludida al camino y al movimiento mismo trastocado físicamente por el aislamiento social obligatorio vivido en nuestro país y en el mundo en el año 2020, lo que conllevó a establecer nuevas formas de relacionamiento a partir del movimiento y recorrido de un entorno que acentuó ostensiblemente su presencia: el espacio virtual. El equipo investigador, integrado por profesionales del campo de la Comunicación Social y la Educación, da cuenta de la metodología empleada en el desarrollo del ejercicio, desde un enfoque cualitativo de los Imaginarios Urbanos propuesto por Armando Silva, tomando dos Estudios de Caso (EC) del corpus conformado, para concluir con el análisis derivado de las ilustraciones y textos visuales diseñados por los participantes a partir del contenido comunicativo difundido en torno al tema de la presente investigación referido a describir los imaginarios del espacio académico universitario de estudiantes adscritos a la cátedra de investigación en universidades de Armenia antes y durante el aislamiento social decretado por el gobierno nacional de Colombia.

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## Introduction

The world faced the effects generated by COVID-19, a virus that unleashed a great impact to the point of establishing itself as a pandemic that, given its characteristics of prevention and care, permeated all spheres of society, generating changes in all processes, both political, scientific, economic, social and educational, thus showing that, for human beings, the act of change should not be an odyssey, it is something natural and inherent because in some way humanity has always had to face the positive consequences and negative aspects of the transition, but the fear of change could be generated, mainly, by the resistance to facing the unknown, leaving the comfortable zone or doing without security or stability; For this reason, in some way, the COVID-19 pandemic taught us that the best way to assume changes consists, to a large extent, in being resilient and adapting to new scientific and technological knowledge, to the virtualization of life. itself and the flexibility of many of our daily practices.

The academy is no stranger to this type of disruptive process faced after mandatory social isolation and it was clear that presence and the traditional educational model, in which physical attendance prevails, conflicted with a reality that sought the virtualization of processes, the interconnectivity and knowledge that transcends geographical borders, in one way or another promoted as a consequence of a pandemic that changed the way we see the world and everyday life.

The educational dynamics deployed in such a scenario, permeated by a growing virtualization and motivated by a global virus, undoubtedly gave rise to a series of phenomena, sensations and perceptions that needed to be analyzed, within the framework of a milestone event for humanity, which as beings historical events we had to live and face and which we consider relevant to leave a record and phenomenological memory.

It is important to remember that, as of March 12, 2020, the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia declared a National Health Emergency due to the arrival of COVID-19 in the country, declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. As a result of this health emergency, since March 16, 2020, our nation experienced mandatory social isolation that led us, as inhabitants, to assume confinement in each of our homes in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

From this date, the National Educational System at all its levels – Early childhood, basic primary, basic secondary, secondary, technical, technological and higher – both in the public and private spheres, saw the need to physically and at the same time withdraw. extend its actions in an accentuated manner virtually to guarantee and provide continuity to the training process given that the State approved the development of school and university dynamics under non-presence.

The conditions faced, which implied assuming home education, involved not only the deployment and implementation of plans and actions through virtual support strategies by children's homes, schools, technical education institutions and universities, with the consequent use of devices, platforms and circulation on the network, as well as the use of different tools to guarantee educational support through mechanisms specific to the distance modality for those families and students who did not have equipment and connectivity.

### *As Carlón (2020) pointed out at the time:*

The virus locked us in and the home became an unchosen space of confinement, a form of prison. The relationship between the public, the private and the intimate also changes. In multiple and changing scenarios according to the makeup of each home... And the relationships between leisure and work are reconfigured, once again. Social distancing, teleworking, home office. (párr., 2-4)

And of course, the academic dynamics and the ways of assuming education were reconfigured in themselves.

Hence, the results of the research exercise carried out in this context allowed, as a research team, to analyze the reflections and considerations assumed by undergraduate students regarding the reconfiguration of their academic dynamics in their respective homes. For everyone, the event constituted a drastic change, since many things in daily life changed structurally, such as going out to study or work, important and simple routines for our survival and personal growth that unexpectedly mutated.

Social isolation, the proclaimed quarantines and the closure of public spaces or those in which massive crowds occurred, led to the implementation of mechanisms to continue with the activities of the day, whether assuming virtual classes or working with the necessary isolation measures. to ensure that the virus does not continue to spread.

In Colombia, as of March 12, the moment in which the health emergency was decreed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, mandatory social isolation led to in-person education being seen as of March 16. suspended, leading the university environment, among others, to develop the teaching-learning processes with the help of the technological means available, to continue with the training process and achieve the objectives proposed for each study group.

## Materials and Methods

For the research exercise, documents related to the analysis of the proposal for attention to students in situations of school and social isolation proposed in Spain (Beltrán et al., 2020) were preliminarily explored, the objective of which was to promote an agile and committed to reducing the negative impact of school isolation on those most disadvantaged individuals or highly affected by the new situation

derived from confinement, creating alternative communication channels or scenarios that facilitated enriching learning experiences and generated emotional bonds beneficial for the well-being of each student.

Another document consulted corresponded to the Education 2020 report (2020), in which 19 proposals were presented for school education in times of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 in Chile.

The creation of the working group called “Education in times of crisis” generated a document that allowed for a thorough review of the financing system for schools in the medium and long term, seeking the elimination of subsidies based on attendance, guaranteeing the total and timely distribution of school textbooks and protecting different aspects of educational inclusion. This table considers, for example, a rights-based approach and also a gender perspective, as well as guidelines for the work of the PIE teams.

Additionally, through the article “Education in times of pandemic: Covid-19 and equity in learning in Mexico” (Villafuerte, 2020), informed decision making, creative problem solving, and adaptability processes are addressed. with the purpose of guaranteeing that these skills continue to be a priority for all students during social isolation, while resilience must also be integrated into educational systems.

Based on the information obtained from said reports, and for the training purposes of the research chair developed with university students who studied the first semester of 2020 at universities in Armenia, an inquiry exercise was proposed that made it possible to address the theoretical and the carrying out of a research work from its approach, execution, analysis and systematization of data obtained, based on a proposal oriented from the research question: what are the characteristics of the academic exercise of the students assigned to the research chair at

the first half of 2020, before and during the social isolation decreed by the national government of Colombia?

This question led to the general objective of characterizing the academic exercise of students of academic programs at universities in Armenia in the first semester of 2020 and that, from a specific objective *aimed at describing the imaginaries of the university academic space of students assigned to the chair of research in universities in Armenia before and during the social isolation decreed by the national government of Colombia*, presents the results and analysis that are shared in this article.

Methodologically, embracing the imaginary as a constructor of social reality, and based on Silva's (2006) methodological proposal around Urban Imaginaries, characterized by exploring processes of microperceptions that allow us to reveal the ways in which social imaginaries are “incarnated.” In physical environments, our research proposal, in order to disembodied imaginaries of the university academic space of young people, proposed the creation of manual visual resources – drawings – to explore the images projected by the participants.

Bocanegra (2017), in the research developed on educational imaginaries and architectural spaces, states that the projected image in terms of imaginaries refers to

That which is captured by the eye of the camera, and seen and narrated by the voice, desire and life; Thus, the imaginaries become an object of study because they allow us to place emphasis on the direct testimonies of “the others”, to from there investigate, in the case of the school object, how it is socially perceived, valued, resignified and used. (p. 107-108)

In this sense, the projected images that made up our corpus arose from the visual activity, in some cases cartographic and in others as an illustration, of the space graphed by nearly 60 participants of

the research chair, expanded through socializations carried out in four work sessions.

For the formative scope of the academic exercise and in light of the characteristics of qualitative research from the methodological component, on the one hand, the purpose of sample selection is considered sufficient as:

Whether it is small or large matters little if it provides new facts. It then follows from this objective that the sample size is rarely determined in advance, because everything depends on the evolution of the research and the research needs. (Deslauriers, 2004, p. 58)

On the other hand, and based on the data collected, it is relevant to extend what was stated by Galeano (2021) when he states:

Data, from a qualitative perspective, can be understood as groups of facts, observations, perceptions, evaluations, meanings, feelings and actions that allow the understanding of social reality. Data are marks, footprints, imprints, vestiges, physical stimuli, symbolic vehicles and mediations that account for the process of construction and reconstruction of reality made by social actors in interaction with the social, cultural and physical environment. (p. 159)

For this article, the case study (CS) is addressed in a special way, referring to the in-depth study of one or several individuals, which under a qualitative approach responds to how, since the research team did not analyze why the space is built. university academic in one way or another, but how it is constituted or reconfigured from its imaginaries; As an example, *the approach of the project entitled Images of the city, perception and cognition in children of Bogotá* is illustrative, in which, from the Case Study, no search was made for

In itself the formulation of a hypothesis or generalizations, these may eventually emerge as a



product of the research activity... the aim is not to find generalizations about a collective imaginary, but rather to account for the diverse images that different boys and girls produce in different ways. his city through his experiences as a construction of heterogeneous realities” (González, 2004, p. 2010)

Reflection applicable to our investigative exercise since, evoking Berger and Luckmann (2015) from *The social construction of reality*, as well as "Society, in fact, has objective facticity - also - society, in fact, is constructed by an activity that expresses subjective meaning" (p. 33).

## Results and Discussion

The renowned Brazilian sociologist Renato Ortiz, from the perspective of Latin American Cultural Studies, when talking about space and territoriality, pointed out the strong tradition that accompanies the social sciences in the face of the immediate relationship that space and territory establishes with the physical and its materiality, so the link between social phenomena and spatial media is accentuated towards the materialized direction; However, Ortiz (1998) also warned, like a social oracle, that

The advent of automation, data transmission, and telecommunications make ideas such as “elementary geographical unit” obsolete... The impact of technologies even affects cities. As services and homes become computerized, the urban fabric takes on a new meaning; is crossed by messages that deterritorialize people, homes, buildings. (p. 23-24)

In light of the above, the coming future of virtual reality, like Echeverría (2000), supposes a reconfiguration of the space-time coordinates that we live in today. From the neologism of Cyberculture, Levy (2011) has pointed out that this spreads from co-presence and interaction from any physical territory thanks to virtualization, understanding the virtual, in a philosophical sense, as “what exists only in potential and not in act... a very important dimension

of reality” (p. 33) and this is not exactly opposed to the real but to the actual, which is why actuality and virtuality would be understood as different ways of understanding reality.

In this way, the spaces are welcomed in a different way, as is the sense of the territory. This, in full, was experienced in a forceful way in the world in general and in Colombia in particular, since March 16, 2020, the date on which, explicitly, schools and universities were closed, which led to a new way of assuming the educational experience and experience from our space-time coordinates.

One of the spaces traveled would correspond to the virtual space that entails a new territory to explore. In his study on *The Image of the City*, Lynch (2015) provides us with an interesting aspect that is related to the dynamics that emerge from the mental images that we build about the territory. Lynch calls imaginability as that

Quality of a physical object that gives it the ability to evoke, with a high degree of probability, a strong image in any observer; that shape, that color or that arrangement that facilitates the development of mental images of the environment that are graphically identified, powerfully structured and extremely useful. (p. 19)

This imaginability, from the perspective of the Colombian semiologist Armando Silva and his extensive work on *Urban Imaginaries*, would help to understand the displacement or mutation of the territory, as:

The concept of territory responds to both a traditional urban category and a new one, at the same time, which includes complex problems of new contemporary technologies. The city is no longer the territory in the sense of shared space, but that does not mean that we lack territory but rather that new and brilliant displaced territories appear. (Silva, 1996, p. 138)

One of these territories is the one that corresponds to the virtual.

Due to the above, the investigative exercise based on the imaginaries captured illustratively is relevant for the methodological approach to the phenomenon explored, since it allows us to know, intuitively, the sensorium that emerged during the pandemic in the face of the socio-spatial dimensions experienced.

As a Case Study (CS), image number one, for example, presents the experience collected among the students from the topos of the room, a private and intimate space that underwent a substantial mutation, as expressed by the student Andrea Vallejo, which implied the spatial hybridization of both study and work, assumed with public or external implications that erupted and, consequently, led to the modification of their experiences, links and ways of relating. Visually, as seen in Vallejo's graphic description, highly intimate, it allows us to appreciate and extend to the situations that we had to face when experiencing the intersection of the public and the private from our spatial-territorial conceptions and their consequent management implications. temporal and situational.



Figure 1. Housing Types

It was evident, according to the visual devices socialized during the sessions developed, that from

the sociocultural level, for example, the role that the web plays today:

It represents an experience of otherness, for young people it constitutes their alter ego... While young people merge with them, establishing a continuum between the offline and online world, adults face a battle of otherness against the "machines." (Winocur. 2009, p. 126)

And merging into them entails the use of new skills and competencies in terms of reading and writing, a factor enhanced by the prevailing need to configure their study habitus.

As can be seen in the sense of closure – physical room – opening – virtual space – that emerges from the sensorium felt by Vallejo and experienced by other young people in the course, we were able to appreciate an interesting analysis related to the routes, a kind, if you will, of odological reflection, in allusion to the Greek Hodos. In this regard, from a philosophical perspective, the Spanish author Gregorio Luri, in *Walking and Being*, reminded us that within the vocabulary of said discipline the excursion is latent since the Hellenic cradle “Hodos is <<way>>. From here come Met-hodos (method) or syn-hodos (synods)” (Luri, 2018, p. 141) and whose expression, from anatomy and architecture, denotes the path that is assimilated to the study of the ways, the routes, the flows that necessarily cause the space-time coordinates to be experienced in different ways, for example, when moving from the private - internal sphere to the public - external and vice versa; physical structures, in the sense of movement, are perceived differently; Therefore, when we find ourselves permanently in a single physical space, how was the outside experienced? How were the tours appreciated? What changes occurred in our perceptions?

The previous questions allowed us to compare, According to Downs and Stea (1977, as cited in González, 2004), the modification and reconfiguration of our cognitive maps in situations

of stillness and confinement, taking into account that said cognitive map is developed in the being human as an adaptive response to spatial problems and varies in each individual according to their age, socioeconomic, cultural and family environment, in addition to their sensory capabilities, aptitudes and personal experiences.

Additionally, it is recognized that human beings constantly develop strategies to relate or link things and, with this, give meaning to the world in which they live, through the generation of cognitive maps and, according to González (2004), the use of three strategies that They contribute to solving spatial problems: a) the search for similarities between places, classifying and ordering the experience in accordance with shared characteristics; b) the organization of information taking into account that spatial relationships represent places in accordance with the “real world” and generate specific frames of reference, and c) the incorporation of both similarities and spatial relationships, a phenomenon that results from this process a set of stereotypes.

This was perceived by several of the participants in the exercise, among them, as a Case Study, the student Laura Pineda, who pertinently describes, in accordance with what was pointed out by Downs and Stea, the following visual form from its cartographic construction:

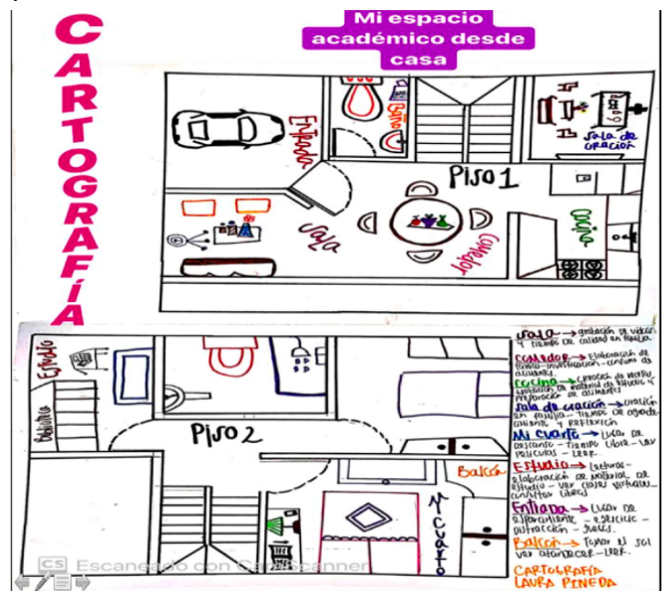


Figure 2. Cartographic Topos.

Faced with isolation, the closing event of the external route, which would oppose the apocryphal aphorism “Better the road than the inn” alluded to Cervantes and his Quitoese character, the private habitation, the dwelling or dwelling, resulted in new traces of the inhabited spaces. by the students, who, according to the example cited by Laura, interpolate scenarios of external practices and experiences in the spaces of the privacy of their home, in such a way that, as Perec points out (as cited in Delgado, 2007) leads us to point out that, despite thinking:

That there were stable, immobile, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, immutable, rooted places: places that were references, starting points, principles...Such places do not exist, and since they do not exist the space becomes a question, it stops being evidence, it stops If it is incorporated, it is no longer appropriate. Space is a doubt: I continually need to mark it, designate it; It is never mine, it is never given to me, I have to conquer it. (p. 27)

## Conclusions

From the study carried out, it was possible to appreciate, by the participants, the multiple ways

that reconfigured living and feeling the private space of their home, determined by everyday situations that before the pandemic were related to activities carried out in the external environment characterized mostly due to socialization and physical encounter.

In this sense, the isolation and confinement that the absence of the external and public entailed, accentuated the character and power of the internal and private, in some even intimacy itself, generating new forms of relationships with close people that, in many cases, were unknown despite the territorial proximity, which allowed us to infer that the importance of the relationships was not subject to physical presence but rather to the intensity of the encounter, in various cases, fostered by virtual networks.

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