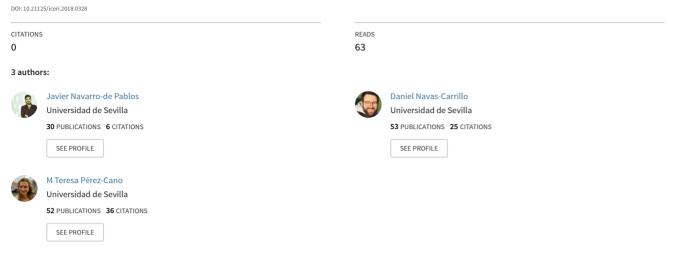
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# Teaching innovation through the occupation of public space: Urban Heritage and Planning at the University of Seville

#### Conference Paper · November 2018



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# SEVILLE (SPAIN) 12-14 NOVEMBER 2018



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## TEACHING INNOVATION THROUGH THE OCCUPATION OF PUBLIC SPACE: "URBAN HERITAGE AND PLANNING" AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SEVILLE

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#### Abstract

Public space is one of the ventricles of the city - the engine that drives the social relations among the citizens who inhabit it - being able to contract or expand the spatial sequence within the contemporary city. As an inherent part of society, it evolves at the rate that collective behaviour dictates, forming a relationship of vital dependency [1].

In this society-space symbiosis, the architect's task from a polyhedral point of view is to provide the city with a spatial network that not only fills the relationship between individuals, but also emphasizes the sense of belonging to the place and the collective. In many cases throughout history and from an international point of view, public space, specifically the square as the social agora, has been an escape route for social, political and cultural demands and manifestations. Despite its crucial importance in historiography and social evolution, the share of this concept in the current teaching plans of the Department of Urban Planning and Territorial Planning of the University of Seville is nil, barely treated from the formal point of view in the subject "Public Space in Planning Urbanization".

Objectives of the research:

It is intended to put into practice the occupation of public space from the subject of "Urban Heritage and Planning" during the next academic year 2018-2019, with the primary objective of highlighting how the different ways of occupying, positioning oneself, moving about and conquering public space are directly related to the intentions of the claims, the character of the group that calls for them and the socio-political governing system [2].

For this reason, ephemeral occupations of public space in the city of Seville will be proposed as practices associated with the core argument of the subject, based on experiences developed by the School of Architecture of the University of Valparaiso (Chile). Around these occupations, the gender conflict applied to the historic city will be discussed, explaining how the starting urban elements constitute favourable or unfavourable parameters in terms of security, belonging, identity and habitability.

Keywords: Protests, Occupation of Public Space, Empowerment, Teaching and innovation, University of Seville.

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Hanna Arendt is one of the fundamental figures when approaching any approach to public space and its social function: in her profuse texts, Arendt delves into the relationship between the polis and political action insofar as the latter arises from the civil encounter of "sharing words and actions". For the German author, the action of being together is the only one that constitutes the public space, the polis. In "The Human Condition" [3] the Greek polis is presented from the politically contemporary point of view of space: "all political action requires a space of appearance". It is in appearance that Arendt finds the mediation between collective action and power. The facade, the integral cell of the city, is the channel that marks the rhythm of these relations. Like the skin that protects the interior of spaces, the façade is a frontier. As such, its hardness or ductility is key in the qualification of public space. These premises, based on the theory of German philosophy, represent the beginning of an important current of thought with great influence on urbanism in the last third of the 20th century.

The vision from which one analyses and interacts with public space, considered as the vindictive heart of the city and, therefore, the collective patrimony of democracy, radically changes in May 1968 [4], enjoying eccentric processes from openness and integral colonisation to privatisation processes associated with capitalism. Being the meeting space of citizenship, it is a highly permeable element to

the social circumstances in which the different powers, whether public or private, develop important representations or stagings.

The stories represented by this great urban theatre are mostly of a political nature and, therefore, of biased logic. This has been proven in the analysis of large collective stagings in cities that have served as the setting for various conflicts [5]: as if it were a theatre, public space itself is a perceptive manipulation of matter. As such, its power of suggestion generates a multiplicity of sensations capable of altering emotions and thoughts insofar as an analogous world is designed and constructed to accommodate it.

The attainment of different architectures and languages thus construct an instrumental stage for hegemonic or revolutionary powers, turning the city into a figurative space of dispute. This condition has not historically been treated as a characteristic associated with the city nor as a crucial component for the understanding of the urban discipline; on the contrary, the theory of urban planning has deepened the public-private dichotomy [6], ignoring the capacity of public space to "disguise" or "dramatize" itself in order to change its condition. Making use of this emptiness, the different governing powers have intervened in the way of inhabiting space through urban models and architecture itself in a sort of operatic scenography project, appearing since the Renaissance an almost obsessive impulse to generate perspectives.

In the approach to the object of study of this text, we see how an interesting circumstance has been generated in the Mediterranean city: since the majority of its public spaces are governed by a vernacular logic, the theatrical component appears on the perimeter facades to the detriment of the very morphology of the void. In the remaining cases, those that have been intervened by successive powers, with special mention of the change of logic from the medieval to the Enlightenment urban plot, are recognizable examples of the use of the urbanism as an instrument of power and communication.

As a result of an empirical analysis at the University of Seville itself and after carrying out a study of the Study Plans and teaching projects of the main Schools of Architecture in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Pamplona and A Coruña) in the field of urban planning, an initial conclusion can be drawn consisting of the absence of a transversal training offer; the political vision of public space, gender equality or urban safety are subjects dealt with in a very specific way despite being fundamental challenges of contemporary urban society. This imbalance between socio-political reality and university aims to be alleviated with a pilot experience developed during the academic year 2018-2019 at the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Seville with fifth-year students enrolled in the subject "Urban Heritage and Planning".

### 2 METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 The occupation of space as a method for conceptual immersion: the case of the School of Valparaiso

Between 1960 and 1965, a group of professors and students from the University of Valparaíso (Chile) undertook a teaching project that proposed the realization of journeys based on "Amereida", a literary typology that mixes the discovery of America and the Latin epic of Aeneas written in the Eneida [7]; these journeys are journeys through the American continent in which a collective logbook is made that gathers daily experiences and the development of a project associated with territory and poetry. It is a very basic methodology based on three actions: the reading of pre-Columbian poetry and literature, the occupation of specific places (extending over several countries and landscapes) and the construction of ephemeral structures during that occupation. This triumvirate of actions ends up being formalized in a single project that lacks meaning without the previous pieces of the process.

In 1965 he finally makes the first crossing, opening the horizon of the canonical processes of education and university learning; in 1984 he incorporates into the curriculum of the Architecture students the realization of an "annual Crossing" within the scope of each Workshop [8]. For nearly a month, students and teachers carry out architectural works following a strategy of appropriation of a continental territory, initially unembraceable, and which after a hundred crossings is filled with red dots indicating milestones and threads describing divergent trajectories.

Two years after the Journey of 65, texts, annotations, poems, letters of the first American chroniclers, cuttings and drawings were collected, and the material was edited to give shape to the publication "Amereida", by a collective author, without numbered pages and without capital letters. The text explores around the concept of *being american* from the recognition of the appearance of America

seen as a discovery; from the first poem, the encounter with the unknown opens the possibility of rethinking a new world, of understanding it in the way Paul Valery described the creative process: "When I have understood something I end up believing that it is I who discovered it" [9]. It is about revealing more than creating; the pieces, the continents, were scattered throughout the world long before the verb create was created.

The need that the promoters of Amereida see in travelling the world with *the house in bed*, following this series of nomadic performances, is the reflection of the idea of developing teaching -or social-activity through an impulsive, almost obsessive experimentation, through poetry and architecture, complementary pencils both in the sketch of found dreams.

The final result of the cross-workshops, often ephemeral installations resulting from intense colloquiums on art and architecture, is usually placed in their place of creation - previously fixed by each Workshop - as a way of insertion into the natural landscape; in other cases, they are dismantled and transported to an enclosed space where many of the School's teachers live and experience self-construction. The Open City of Ritoque, which partly disappeared after the earthquake of 2011, becomes a full-scale laboratory, a Great Glass delimited and protected by a barrier of dunes [10].

This novel methodology manages to apply the practical part of the workshops in relation to the space, a determining circumstance in the teaching of Architecture. This summoned symbiosis between space and object represents an unprecedented educational challenge in the field of Architecture schools: the process of ideation and creation is intimately linked to the place where each of the projects is made and designed. Each of the ephemeral structures is marked by the logic of the environment, by the spatial context. This circumstance inspires the possibility of applying this methodology in the urban environment, transferring it from the American rural landscapes to the historic Mediterranean city. When it comes to developing the processes of occupying public space referred to in the introduction, the relationship between vindictive typology and space forms a single entity similar to the object-space relationship developed by the School of Valparaíso throughout the American continent.



Figure 1. Geolocalized and enumerated list of the crossings carried out in the Amereida project in zone B -South Patagonia. S. Gatica and S. Alfaro, "Las Travesías de Amereida, Experiencia de un Registro Documental", School of Architecture and Design of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, October 15, 2010. Retrieved from https://www.ead.pucv.cl/2010/las-travesias-de-amereida-experiencia-deun-registro-documental/

# 2.2 Methodological application in the analysis of the historic city: "Urban Heritage and Planning"

The subject "Urban Heritage and Planning", taught as an optional subject in the Architecture Degree at the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Seville, and of which the authors of this communication are teachers, is the only opportunity for students throughout the five courses to link the heritage value of public space and the drafting of legislative protection plans [11]. In spite of the fact that until the academic year 2017/2018 teaching has focused on the study of architectural objects of high historical value (declared Heritage of Cultural Interest according to Law 14/2007 of 26 November of Andalusian Historical Heritage [12]), the interest in implementing a project of teaching innovation itself to be a subject has led to a reformulation of the main object of study.

In this way, in response to the absence of references to the ways of occupying public space in the Study Plans of the different schools of architecture, it is proposed to focus the urban objects susceptible of heritage protection on the squares of the Historic Complex of Seville, understanding how the morphology and logic of these spaces can mark the development, success or failure of the different claims called for in it. This decision seems timely given the context of the last decade, in which protests have taken place in the local sphere on the occasion of the economic crisis that began in 2008 [13]. The application of this methodology is inspired by the experiences described in the Amereida project, including a teaching project that will be applied throughout the second four-month period of the academic year 2018/2019. This includes a process of approaching the case study and a subsequent occupation of space, offering students the possibility of designing a protest project on their own, including ephemeral constructions, vindicative actions or spatial transformations that they consider appropriate to ensure that the claims have an echo in the public opinion.

In order to improve the understanding of the logics of superposition of powers and cultures that result in the urban palimpsest, it has been considered opportune to separate the cases of studies by their genetic root; that is to say, examples of public spaces that arise from different dynamics of urban metamorphosis have been chosen and classified, relating up to five roots: the conventual, the mercantile, the scenographic, the defensive and the sacramental. Emulating the trips of the Chilean case, groups of work in pair will be raised, that will develop the study, project and occupation of the object of study that they themselves choose. The trips or occupations will be carried out during school hours (4 hours per week), being able to extend the timetable depending on the interest of each group involved in the project. This practical part of the course will be accompanied by a theoretical base, dedicating the first 8 weeks of class to it.

> Cinco huellas, Diez espacios.

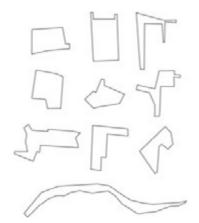


Figure 2. Presentation of the teaching project for the subject Urban Heritage and Planning of the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Seville, entitled "Cinco huellas, diez espacios" ("Five footprints, ten spaces"). Own source.

#### **3 EXPECTED RESULTS**

The intensity in the permanence of the different cultures that occupy Seville draws a characteristic urban ecleticism in which the scenarios are confused and the temporal, stylistic and cultural limits end up blurring. The plot of the *Sevillian-opera* has a thread of reuses and symbologies that are expressed, of course, through the facade, a mask that hides different personalities, scales and perspectives. This double circumstance makes the expected results highly permeable with the historical logic of a changing city, in which the theatricalisation of public space referred to in the contextualisation of this communication is a main conceptual argument in the understanding of the evolution of the city.

The voluptuousness of the collection of perishable architectures that have occupied Seville since the 17th century bases its logic on the façade, full of artistic resources and sacred references [14]. From the triumphal arches built to adorn the city at the entrance of the monarchs to the Corpus Christi processions, the way in which the public space is occupied has a direct relationship with the architectural epidermis, giving the protagonist witness to the action - the event - rather than to the static matter, presented as a backdrop, as a landscape addition.

This reason justifies the proposal to occupy Seville's public space: as a historical setting, it is proposed to provide a new experience of occupying the collective space in order to show students first-hand how the city is transformed through the construction of ephemeral architectures or mere occupations. The different logics that define each of the spaces will almost certainly determine different dynamics of occupation.

The aim is to obtain disparate results that are marked, in the first place, by the demands that the students consider appropriate as laudable and fair. This freedom of choice is based on the conviction that an open content model improves results in experimental teaching applications [15]. Secondly, the results will be marked by the limitations and opportunities offered by each of the chosen spaces: trying to balance the case studies both geographically, qualitatively and quantitatively, spaces of different morphology and surface have been selected, from the most representative square of the introduction of the hygienist logic of the Enlightenment (Plaza Nueva) [16] to one of the oldest spaces in the city, witness to the passage of the main cultures that inhabit it (Plaza de Santa María la Blanca) [17].



Figure 3. Panel-summary of the teaching project of the subject Urban Heritage and Planning, collecting the selected case studies that should be chosen as case studies by the different working groups. Each one of the places will be occupied in different ways, having to propose an integral project of vindication and spatial formalization. Own source.

The variability of occupation possibilities makes it impossible to describe defined results, and it is impossible to make a single project formal. On the contrary, the main objective of this methodological and teaching bet is precisely the construction of contextualized arguments, that is to say, of unique arguments at the time of reading the city and experiencing the act of learning. The relationship between teaching, city and learning can give exceptional results as long as the students get involved and accept the proposal positively.

As the last stage of the project, the aim is to prepare a logbook similar to the one written after the Amereida crossing experiences, in which the conclusions of the experience are gathered, putting in crisis the theoretical base developed during the first eight classes of the course. The aim is for students to experience first-hand the tensions that mark the reality of public space, introducing themes of gender, safety and accessibility.

In the event that the results obtained are satisfactory and coincide with those described, the aim is to create a network of experiences of space occupation together with the School of Valparaiso, with the capacity to create a transfer of knowledge and exchange of students.

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