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Cities' Vocabularies: The Influences and Formations

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Holistic Approaches to Recognizing City Identity

The concept of city identity has been at the center of discourse of researchers, politicians and practitioners from different disciplines. In light of the existence of different conceptualizations and definitions, the identity of a city does not only depend on spatial factors but its formation is also affected by cultural, social and economic factors. Over the years, different frameworks and approaches have developed based on recognized characteristics of the cities and local communities that make up their primary identities as well as the way in which the communities have learned to perceive and deal with those identities. In the latter, associations between memories or symbolic meanings and the urban setting are established.

In this sense, the identity of a city is associated with its characteristics as perceived by its residents or observers. In the third chapter of this part titled “[Identifying the Perceptual Image of Distinctive Places Through Storytelling](#)”, the authors carry out perceptual studies that include storytelling to analyze and measure the distinctiveness of one of the most important streets of Alexandria, Egypt. By identifying what forms a place’s distinctiveness, both, the tangible and intangible aspects of the perceptual image, they were able to examine its means of measurement using a Distinctiveness Referential Scale (DRS).

In the chapter titled “[Improving Urban Contexts’ Identity via Conducting a Smart Mechanism](#)”, the author uses culture, identity and design, digital technologies and parametric design in an attempt to identify, document, understand and communicate original morphologies of digital heritage and cultural landscapes. He uses a matrix, which plays a

significant role in the reconstruction and recovery processes, where components are matched with standards or preferences. Once relevant criteria are corresponded, a place is reinterpreted and brought into the cotemporary world in a new and distinct form.

Establishing an understanding of what makes a place unique, and the elements or contents used in the process, is crucial as it brings about an understanding of how an identity of a place can be affected. In other words, changes to a place may encompass a restructuring of its identity and that of residents who had made connections with the place. Physical and social interventions within a city can often be viewed as threats to its identity. In “[Dialogical Approach for the City Identity: Examination of Beirut Central District Contemporary Architecture](#)”, the author highlights the lack of dialogue between the past and present within newly reconstructed areas and structures. The chapter examines the Beirut Central District as a case study and focuses on its newly constructed zone after the end of the civil war. Through a checklist for an evaluation model of buildings, this chapter aims to prove that an improved city identity can be achieved by taking a dialogical approach between the historical identities and values of cities and new trends.

The first part of this book introduces the different approaches used in exploring, interpreting and maintaining cities identities. Analytical in nature, it provides a clear understanding of how identities are constructed as well as the factors or elements contributing to the formation of a city’s identity, from natural to geographical and those artificial.



How Can We Recover the Identity of the City? Workshops of “The City of Tomorrow/A Vila Do Mañá”

Sandra González Álvarez

Abstract

How can we recover the identity of the city? How art can inspire new generations to understand our cities? How can the city be a meeting or exchange place again? How can we feel safe again inside our homes, in the neighborhood, in the city? How can we make of the city is our place? What should we do so that the city stops being something associated with dirty, gray, monstrosity...? These are the issues that we deal with “*The City of Tomorrow/A Vila do Mañá*”. “*The City of Tomorrow/A Vila do Mañá*”.

Keywords

Identity • City • Town planning • Childhood • Innovation

1 Introduction

At one time we were afraid of the forest. It was the forest of the wolf, the ogre, the darkness. It was the place where we could lose ourselves. When our grandparents told us stories, the forest was our enemies favourite place. [...] At one time, we felt safe between the houses, in the city, with our neighbours. This was the place where we were looking for our friends, where we would meet them to play together. There was our place, the place where we hid, where we became fellows, where we pretend to be mummies and daddies, where we hid our treasures... [...] But in a few decades, everything has changed. There has been a tremendous, rapid, total transformation, as our society had never seen it before (at least according to documented history). [...] The forest has become beautiful, luminous, the goal of dreams and desires. The city, on the other hand, has become dirty, grey, monstrous. [...] In recent decades, and especially in the last fifty years, the city, born as a place of meeting and exchange, has discovered the commercial value of space and has altered all the concepts of balance, well-being and community, fulfilling just profits and interest. It has been sold, prostituted. [...] The city is now like the forest of our stories. (Tonucci 1997)

How can we recover the identity of the city?... how can we do so that our heritage is not lost?... how could the city be that place of meeting and exchange again?... how to return to make the city our place?... these are the issues that lead us to create the project of “The City of Tomorrow/A Vila do Mañá”.

González-Álvarez (2017b): “The City of Tomorrow” is an educational and outreach project, whose goal is that from childhood and through play you become aware of all the scales of the common: tangible and intangible heritage, architecture, urbanism and landscape. At the same time that from the architectural discipline becomes aware of a new vision of the city, which is what those who will be the inhabitants of tomorrow contribute to us.

González-Álvarez (2017c): We believe that it is necessary that childhood and adolescence be actively present in the processes of construction of the common space (square, neighborhood, city...) providing them with the necessary tools to know the value of their environment and develop their creativity, from art and architecture. The objective is to

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provoke in them the awakening of a new look on the spaces in which they develop their life.

This project is being developed through different workshops in the City Councils of Galicia, it is carried out by the PØStarquitectos team, financed from the different councils, and receives the support of the ETSAC (Higher Technical School of Architecture, University of A Coruña), COAG (Official College of Architects of Galicia), and APA-TRIGAL (Association for Defense of the Galician Cultural Heritage). Last March, the project was put to the test, making the leap from the Galician villages to a large metropolis such as São Paulo, with the collaboration of the City, Gender and Early Childhood Research Group of the Mackenzie Presbyterian University.

2 Objectives

González-Álvarez (2019): In the times we live, where everything is a “click” away, where flying over Tokyo or New York is within reach, where I can visit the Parthenon from the screen... we have forgotten the place where I live. The new generations, the inhabitants of tomorrow, are totally unaware of the town or city they inhabit, they live in a “little box” they move into another smaller “box” and they arrive at a bigger “box” (call school, shopping center... or sports center), this is their relationship with your environment Fig. 14.1.

González-Álvarez (2017a): The reality of today is that the natural connection between children and their habitat, the place where they grow and develop, the city or the village in which they live, is diluted, is barely existent. We found children in their homes, watching TV, with their video games, playing in their fenced and guarded urbanizations, moving by car and discovering the city from their window, where the park or plaza has been replaced by the shopping center. The city is a hostile medium for them, they have lost their freedom, which is limited to certain enclosures considered safe and controlled by adults. We are transmitting the message of fear that is currently being felt in society, and consequently, the place where they live, the town or the city, is not safe for them.

González-Álvarez (2018): In front of this image of the public space of today, “The City of Tomorrow/A Vila do Mañá” starts from understanding the city as an educational tool, not neutral, to which we approach from the game.

We recover some of the ideas proposed by the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck (1918–1999), in which the child was given the opportunity to discover the city from his own movement, which has to be developed through his games because is his natural way to know the world. We are aware that, now, this generates a conflict in the streets and squares, which we want to provoke, highlight and show from the

workshops, even temporarily. What happens when the spaces of our cities are occupied by children playing? How do the children feel? How do adults react? How can the city be transformed? From this conflict, we want to transform the image of the city that children and adolescents have and, at the same time, make them visible in those spaces in the eyes of adults Fig. 14.2.

Another idea that bases our project of “The City of Tomorrow” arises from the right to the city, Lefebvre (1975, 2013): As defended by Lefebvre (1901–1991), by which the people who live in it have the right to its enjoyment, transformation and that reflects their way of understanding life in community. From this point of view, how not to include the right of boys and girls to the city? Therefore, we consider the public space as a common space of learning and collective construction in which childhood must also have a place.

We want to give voice to those who normally do not have it, children and adolescents, promoting their right to form their own judgment about the habitat in which they live and to be able to express it and make it manifest. We seek to stimulate a critical attitude to promote their development as an active citizenship, as they will be responsible for the city of the future. Forming, therefore, the foundations of a critical citizenship.

We want to work in public spaces to transform them into common spaces. As the geographer and social theorist Harvey affirms, it is necessary the appropriation of urban public spaces by citizens through political action to convert them into common spaces. The squares and streets, the landscape with its elements, the furniture, the voids... are common goods that we seek for children to recognize as their own from different points of view: from history, its uses, its evolution and its transformations.

Our main objective is that childhood and adolescence be actively present in the processes of construction of the common space, giving them the necessary tools to develop their creativity from art and architecture, in order to provoke in them the awakening of a new look and generate identity links with the spaces in which they live.

It is intended that they acquire a greater knowledge of the city in which they live; an appropriation of spaces that are vetoed daily; the movement with freedom in the squares; the spatial empowerment along with other children favoring their coexistence; assessment of the place where they live through a new look at their habitat; make them responsible for the environment; to know also the elements that make up the immaterial place and, above all, to demonstrate their transformative capacity Fig. 14.3.

With “The City of Tomorrow,” the city in which they live is not an abstract idea, nor is it a series of small partial images; It begins to be understood as a much more complex and comprehensive environment, which brings us closer to



Fig. 14.1 The vision of children about their city. Workshops: “The City of Tomorrow, Vilagarcía”

the notion of habitat: the space that transcends its physical location in a territory, in which we solve our needs by establishing relationships with other people and the environment, both natural as built; implying processes in which it is transformed but in which we are also transformed. The habitat also implies the memory and the symbolic of the community. In short, the habitat as a system of relations and processes that are generated between three elements: nature, society and the inhabitant.

We want children to learn to look at the place where they live, taking with them two powerful tools: art and architecture. They are two elements that help us to apprehend the world and, most importantly, also to transform it. To do this, tools from different disciplines are combined, since children are expected to manage knowledge of architecture, art, landscape, urban planning and sustainability.

The fundamental tool to reach childhood is the game, so the activities are based on it. The children play, have fun, and discover elements of their town/city unknown until now. Generate an identity with the space in which they live.

In “The City of Tomorrow” students from the ETSAC (High Technical School of Architecture of A Coruña) participate, looking for ways to outline the concepts of heritage, architecture, urbanism and landscape to transmit them to children; at the same time that they themselves learn from the little ones, they break with the regulated education forgetting the figures, the norms and the urbanistic techniques, and they learn to focus on the needs of the citizens of tomorrow.

3 Methodology

The workshops of “The City of Tomorrow” have a duration of 5 days, 5 days in which the city where we work becomes our game board, in our laboratory of experimentation, let’s learn by playing through art.

The activities carried out in the workshops: “The City of Tomorrow,” are structured through six fundamental concepts: Perception, Scale, Space, City, Landscape and



Fig. 14.2 Invasion of urban space. Workshops: “The City of Tomorrow, Cambados”

Sustainability and four necessary tools: the Point, the Line, the Plane and the Three-dimensional Element. To develop these six concepts, strategies of art and architecture are used.

4 Perception

The perception of the body itself, as well as the perception of the environment that surrounds us, are fundamental concepts in the workshops of “The City of Tomorrow”.

We work with perception in two very different ways. First of all we need to know how children see the city they inhabit, we need to answer the question: what is your city like? Debord (1959): For this, based on Guy Debord, we go out to the “drift” accompanied by a large golden frame, so that in our wanderings they can frame those elements of the city that are important to them Fig. 14.4.

Why a great golden frame? Like Lorraine O’Grady in her performances, she makes us question what is inside or outside. Traditionally this was delimited by the frame, now that line is broken, and what is outside the frame coexists with what is inside Fig. 14.5.

Continuing with the work of perception, we try to provoke in children/adolescents a new vision of their environment, seeking to break with the known and that they can perceive the same places with different eyes Fig. 14.6.

Todorov (1970): We base this experience on the concept of “defamiliarization,” a literary concept developed by Viktor Shklovski. According to his theory, daily life causes “freshness in our perception of objects to be lost,” making everything automated. The routine makes us sleep, it makes us blind, deaf, and oblivious to what happens in our environment. We no longer observe what surrounds us, we no longer look at the objects or the places we know, because they are everyday. Art presents objects from another perspective. It takes them away from their automated and everyday perception, gives them life in themselves, and in their reflection in art. Through this concept we begin to perceive our environment in another way, we are forced to do so by the “defamiliarization,” which presents us with reality as we have never seen it before. Using this concept we have made some significant actions such as turning a square into a large ocean... or even painting graffiti in the air Fig. 14.7.

5 Scale

In the workshops of “The City of Tomorrow” we introduce the concept of human scale and the city scale (Fig. 14.8). Starting from becoming aware of our own body dimensions, we can approach other dimensions such as the city and the



Fig. 14.3 Transforming the city. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Ferrol”

territory. It is a perceptual route that we place between the hand (Fig. 14.9), which represents what is close to our body, and the horizon (Fig. 14.10), how distant the view reaches.

6 Space

We seek work from the space of architecture and the city through experimentation with light, texture, color, sound... The instrument is the body, which travels, constructs and plays in spaces with all the senses displayed.

We work with the horizontal plane, new materials are available, which make us discover new uses. By transforming the space with the new materials, when discovering new textures, new activities appear, they sit down, they lie down, they play, they take off their shoes... Fig. 14.11.

7 City

The city as our habitat, our game board to discover. To understand its structure, morphological conformation, its empty and full, its history, its traditions. Reflect on how we move from one place to another, the routes, the important points where the lives of children and the community unfolds.

“... for if a city, according to the opinion of philosophers be no more than a great house, and on the other hand the house be a little city ...” (Alberti 1975)

We want you to discover how your houses connect to the city, recovering the idea of Leon Battista Alberti from understanding the house as a big city and the city as a small house, which Aldo van Eyck also exhibits in his diagram of the tree and the leaf: “Tree is leaf and leaf is tree-house is



Fig. 14.4 What would you frame in your city? Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Rianxo”



Fig. 14.5 What would you frame in your city? Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Milladoiro”



Fig. 14.6 Playing with perception. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Vilagarcía de Arousa”



Fig. 14.7 Playing with perception. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Vilagarcía de Arousa”

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLACE !!!

THE CITY IS THE AMBIT IN WHICH WE CAN DISCOVER WHAT WE WANT TO MAKE THE REST OF OUR LIFE



THE SENSE OF HERE, of my body and ask the difference of all the places that surround me, aware of oneself, in parallel with the place.

PLAY WITH THE LAYER MORE DISTANT OF MY BODY = THE HORIZON, being the limit of perception of my body: the infinite, to realize that the place is infinite, that it is our planet, that it is ours, and so, take care of it, as we take care of ourselves.

Travel in perceptive stays between the closest and the most distant.
DEPTH, my body here and my body there, on the horizon.

HORIZON SHARED AND SO UNDERSTAND THE HABITAT of the territory, the city or the landscape.

ARCHITECTURE, AS AN ELEMENT WHERE IDEAS AND THINGS GIVE SENSE TO THE HORIZON.

Fig. 14.8 Summary on the importance of the place, of the hand to the horizon



Fig. 14.9 Working with the scale, of the hand... Workshop: "The City of Tomorrow, Verín"



Fig. 14.10 Working with the scale, ... to the horizon. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Cambados”



Fig. 14.11 Working with the space... to the horizon. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Riveira”

city and city is house—a tree is a tree but it is also a huge leaf—a leaf is a leaf but it is also a tiny tree—a city is not a city unless it is also a huge house—a house is a house only if it is also a tiny city” (van Eyck 2008a, b).

The instrument is the body, which travels and plays in space with all the senses deployed. The children/adolescents become in a few days in thinkers of the city, they appropriate the spaces, they make them their own. They devise and invent their own play spaces, modify the city, live it, enjoy it and generate an identity with him.

With what elements are we going to work? What elements of architecture will we use as tools to appropriate the spaces?

Point

In our perception, the point is the essential, unique bridge between word and silence... [...] The point is also, in its exteriority, simply the practical, utilitarian element that we have known since childhood. The external sign becomes habit and obscures the inner sound of the symbol... The sound of everyday silence is for the point so strident, that it imposes itself on all its other properties. (Kandinsky 1993)

We work with the Point as an elementary tool, based on Kandinsky, the point allows us to invade the spaces. We use balloons as a Point, which is an element that we are familiar with since we were children. With the balloons we do not invade only physically the space, the noise will also invade the space, when we put an end to the activity by exploiting all the balloons Fig. 14.12.

Line

The geometric line is an invisible entity, it is the trace that leaves the point when moving and is therefore its product, it arises from the movement when the total rest of the point is destroyed, we have made a leap from static to dynamic. [...] Such is the line, which in its tension constitutes the simplest form of the infinite possibility of movement. (Kandinsky 1993)

Another of the elementary tools that we use is the Line, colored threads or beacon tapes are used to generate new spaces. The children weave the street, fill the asphalt with color. It's their new play space, they have fun on “their street,” they generate an identity with it Fig. 14.13.



Fig. 14.12 Transforming the city working with point. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Bueu”



Fig. 14.13 Transforming the city working with Line. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Vilagarcía de Arousa”

Plane

But the line hides among its other properties, and ultimately, the deeply hidden desire to engender a plane, thus becoming a denser, more closed entity in itself [...] when the line dies, and At what point does the plan arise? [...] The basic plan is the material surface called to receive the content of the work [...] The basic schematic plan is limited by 2 horizontal and 2 vertical lines and acquires thus, in relation to the environment that surrounds it, an independent entity. (Kandinsky 1993)

The third fundamental tool is the Plano, we work with the Plano to modify our spaces, to make them contain our works Fig. 14.14.

Three-dimensional element

To finish talking about the tools we use to invade the spaces of the city, and outside those defined by Kandinsky, Fröebel (1826): We work with the 3D Element, for this we will build on the “third gift” of Froebel. The German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) was the creator of Kindergarten for the teaching of six-year-old children. And the word Kindergarten itself, makes us mention a place where

children are going to be cared for as small plants, so that they develop completely.

In Architecture we have reference to Froebel, through Frank Lloyd Wright who was educated with this method. It is a system based on creativity and intuition of the child through direct experience with the game and nature. Froebel creates pedagogical resources based on “gifts” and “occupations”. The “gifts” are pedagogical materials that do not change but are transformed; “Occupations” are activities in which children play by transforming the objects they manipulate. The “gifts” are the precursors of the building blocks of today (Lego, Tente...).

We use cardboard boxes as the “third gift” of Froebel, a “gift” on a much larger scale, a “gift” with which we propose to appropriate the city. The space is modified, it becomes a great fort, small cabins, a big wall... the space is full of life Fig. 14.15.

8 Landscape

Interaction between the built landscape, the most natural landscape and the intermediate territories. Understand how the people construct the landscape and how the landscape in turn builds us.



Fig. 14.14 Transforming the city working with Plane. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Arteixo”

9 Sustainability

We want to reflect on the way in which we relate to the planet. Make us aware that what sustainable consists in a balance between what allows us to develop our life and what commits us to the survival of future generations.

We work with the inclusion of green in the cities, for this we will use the system of “seed bombs” of Masanobu Fukuoka Fig. 14.16.

10 Conclusions

I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the facade of the cathedral, where it roams over the mouldings and contours, sensing the size of recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me. (Pallasmaa 2005)

Paraphrasing the Finnish architect Pallasmaa, inhabit the city and let the city inhabit me. It is an idea that we try to transmit to the children of the workshops through the

different activities and actions. From the self, from the being in the world, from the body, recognizing the habitat that surrounds us with all our senses, understanding it, making it our own; with the ultimate goal of knowing that you can modify it, for better or for worse. For this, our instrument has been the game, the natural way in which children learn and express themselves. We have played with the concepts of art learned in the academy, we have taken them to the street, we have transformed the cities through artistic strategies. The city as a big board that they discover from the action, from their own movements and transform it from the art.

“The City of Tomorrow” has worked so far with 3200 children aged between 3 and 15 years, has been made in 14 cities/towns: Rianxo, Milladoiro, Bertamiráns, Verín, Mondoñedo, A Pobra do Caramiñal, Riveira, Bueu, Arteixo, Carballo, Vilagarcía de Arousa, Cambados, Ferrol and São Paulo, and 80 students of the last courses of the ETSAC and FAU-Mackenzie, throughout the development of the project we have observed two aspects of relevant importance:

1. When we started the workshop, the vision of children about their city is diffuse, disconnected Fig. 14.17.



Fig. 14.15 Transforming the city working with 3d Elements. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, Vilagarcía de Arousa”



Fig. 14.16 Transforming the city working with Natural Elements. Workshop: “The City of Tomorrow, São Paulo”



Fig. 14.17 The vision of children about their city. Workshops: “The City of Tomorrow, Bertamiráns”

The perception of the city and of the habitat in which the children live has changed after carrying out “the City of Tomorrow” workshops, the urban space has become a part of them, they have internalized it, They have made theirs. They have generated links with the place where they live. In addition, children have learned to express themselves through art.

2. The perception of the city and the habitat for future architects and for those who already are, has also been modified, learning by working with children, has made us consider on aspects of the city that we usually leave out of urban planning manuals. New questions arise: How can we recover the identity of the city?... How could the city be that place of meeting and exchange again?... how can we feel safe again between the houses, in the city?... how can we make the city our place?... what can we do to stop the city from being something dirty, grey, monstrous?... which are what motivate us to continue evolving the workshops of “The City of Tomorrow”.

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