

URBAN

LOUNGE

THE RECOVERY OF SOCIAL-SPATIAL COHESION

AR3A010 RESEARCH PLAN | STEPHANY KNIZE (5045320)



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PART ONE. INTRODUCTION

* MEANING | IDENTITY



I Prologue: Social reconnection and spatial transformation.

This research aims to address the interaction between social behaviour and urban architectural interventions, studying the notion of public spaces and how these are currently utilized in the historic city center or so called “Casco Viejo” (old town) of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia.

The Casco Viejo is the result of approximately four and a half centuries of rich history. Throughout this period and due to the rapid expansion of the city, the area went through substantial urban transformations which altered its streets and generated a variety of architectural styles, leaving an evolution record as a memory of the city. Thus nowadays, modern, eclectic, and colonial buildings – among other styles – coexist next to one another¹. The historic center is part of the living history preserved from the past, and it is through its monuments, squares, and streets that culture is transmitted. It is important to manage a special treatment in urban interventions, looking for ways of renewal while respecting and

maintaining the urban landscape in the most faithful way. This can be done either through a restitution to its original condition, or through a revitalization by reinterpreting and constituting new meanings for it.

Focusing on the renewal, regeneration, and reinvention of spaces, the objective of this study is to investigate – through the lens of the inhabitants themselves – the impact that these public spaces have on the formation of social unity and inclusiveness. Ideally, the urban environment should result as a space where multiple user perspectives and interests meet on equal ground, reinforcing, as Henri Lefebvre has stated, “the right to the city”². This raises questions concerning public activities, and their relations within the social and urban fabric described above. *What are the social fragmentations? Are there any spatial preconditions that establish social interaction?*

Moreover, moving beyond Lefebvre’s too structuralist notion and introducing Martina Löw’s³ inversed process within spatial sociology, *how do spatial relations shape society in return?*

¹ Limpías Ortiz, V. H. (2010). Plan Techint: Medio siglo de urbanismo moderno en Santa Cruz de la Sierra (1st ed.). Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Gobierno Municipal Autónomo.

² Lefebvre, H. (1968). Le droit a la ville: 2e ed. Anthropos.

³ Löw, M. (2009) Towards an anthropological theory of space and place. *Semiotica* 2009(175): 21–37.

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This research will be developed within a specific framework for collective public life that responds not just how people *use* public space, but also how and why they *need* public space to be restored.

It is important to understand that this study cannot be done in a linear way, therefore the research consists of a constant interchange from questions to results, and the other way around, creating a research cycle to ultimately lead toward a conscious, integrated, and restorative scheme that would enlighten existing patrimonial buildings, and celebrate the everyday life and the ordinary.

II Problematique: The loss of social-spatial cohesion.

The historic city center continues to be a monumental space for its citizens, but it is no longer a living element with value for use and social unity as it used to be. This raises the idealistic notion of a society coming together motivated by constructive architectural interventions that advocate social encounters and free appropriation of space, particularly for marginalized people. Therefore, the objective of this research is to decipher the prevailing decohesion between everyday social practices and the spatial qualities of existing public spaces in a dilapidated historic city center – mainly patrimonial buildings that are being ignored and left in oblivion.

This suggests that the adaptive reuse of colonial approaches to planning would imply to upgrade the fabric so that it accommodates newer forms of practices while distinguishing existing exterior and interior public spaces. This can only be studied through historical development: how things used to be, how things are now, what changed in terms of architectural composition and what changed in the level of social-spatial cohesion. Therefore, my research perspective is based on gentrification, which brings building practices and policies – changes of building typologies and urban structures – into place.

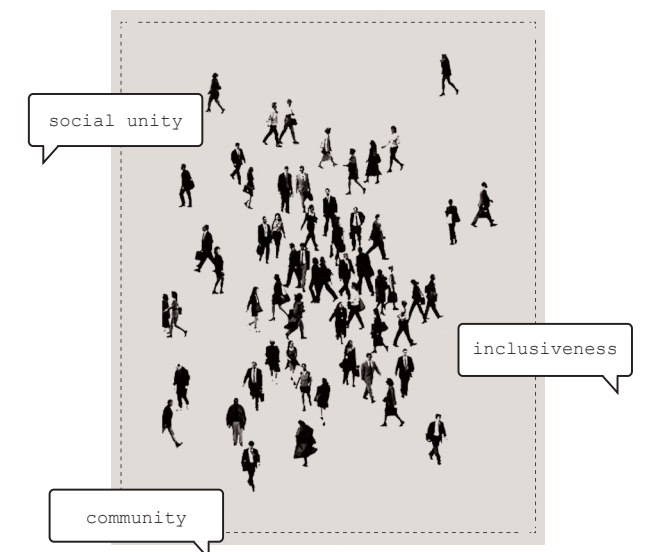
III Hypothesis: Space is a public tool.

My hypothesis incorporates the idea that “space is a public tool” which people employ constantly within spatial practices – such as protesting, selling goods, or performing on the streets. The act of converging and appropriating space further enhanced people’s sense of belonging, which reveals that democracy has a spatial quality, and that design plays an important role in generating a more democratic urban environment. These spaces are therefore not architectural but social mechanisms which can be directly observed. Therefore, my hypothesis becomes my research program as the study precisely relies on observations, discussions, and interpretations of public spaces.

IV Question: The recovery of a dilapidated and decaying historic city center.

Stimulated by social, cultural, and urban issues, this research will focus on redefining and rehabilitating transformative areas in the Casco Viejo to become inclusive public spaces. Therefore, the question I will attempt to answer throughout my research is,

How can patrimonial buildings and spaces in the Casco Viejo be redefined to bring back social-spatial cohesion, and in what ways could they be restored to become more inclusive without compromising traditional values and identities?



PART TWO. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

* DEVELOPMENT | REVIEW



I Public Space: Past and open debates.

To start addressing my question in an architectural and urban planning viewpoint, there is the need for a theoretical framework that affords both a top-down and bottom-up understanding of a democratic urban environment. To do this, I will raise different points of views for a logical argumentation involving various actors and reflections that have previously discussed matters related to public space.

The theoretical background of my research will start with understanding space production under the lens of French philosopher and sociologist of urban and rural life, Henri Lefebvre, who argues that space is never given but instead created by interpretation. In his book “The Production of Space”, Lefebvre argues that (social) space is a (social) product¹, which resembles my hypothesis positioning space as a social tool, reiterating that it is social mechanisms – such as chanting, performing, or protesting – what creates space.

Following the argument that space does not simply exist but instead it is shaped by action and further

shapes action, Martina Löw argues that “the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning”². Therefore, this research will attempt to understand how identified spaces in the city center are (or could be) generated through individual and collective practices, and further be experienced as meaningful and transformative encounters.

More contemporary architects, such as Carlos García Vázquez, have approached different questions related to social practices and public spaces through the perception of modern urbanism being utilized to rediscover traditional cities. To view issues of public spaces through a more progressive lens and to support the inclusive notion of differentiated and heterogenous publicness, I will study Vázquez position within urban sociology, which he addresses in his book *Theories and History of the Modern City* (“Teorías e Historia de la Ciudad Contemporánea”, 2016)³.

¹ Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space* (N. S. Donald, Translated). Blackwell Publishing, London.

² Vázquez, C. G. (2016). *Teorías e Historia de la Ciudad Contemporánea*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

³ Vázquez, C. G. (2016). *Teorías e historia de la ciudad contemporánea*. Editorial Gustavo Gili.

and narratives.

Santa Cruz is one of those cities that are always projecting themselves into the future and does not stop growing. But to understand the development of the historic city center, it is necessary to look back to its history and traditions. Bolivian historian, architect, and urbanist Victor Hugo Limpías’ literature will play a significant role during this section. In his book *Techint Plan, Half a Century of Modern Urbanism in Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (“Plan Techint, Medio Siglo de Urbanismo Moderno en Santa Cruz de la Sierra”, 2010)⁴ he points out the relevance of existing structures and typologies, and their role in defining and giving value to the public realm. There are two important tools to take into consideration while reviewing archival information: urban policy and existing conditions. Policy will determine the scale of the project, its requirements, and typology, whereas analysing existing conditions will help identify buildings that are currently abandoned or deteriorating, and in need for an intervention.

By doing this specific literature review, the objective will be to have a clear indication of what were the expectations for the city’s public spaces back when they were planned in the 1960s and compare those initial idealistic thoughts with the current urban conditions. This section will particularly focus on the impact of the process, whilst addressing the question: *can we open new doors to new aspirations while drawing on existing values?*

III Key Terms: Understanding conditions.

My research comprises a family of terms, each of with a certain historical and theoretical resonance, suggests different applications and perspectives. My goal here is to present both socially and spatially related terms, constantly connecting their interrelations and elaborating subjective definitions that will help further understand their position in relation to my research.

⁴ Limpías Ortiz, V. H. (2010). *Plan Techint: Medio siglo de urbanismo moderno en Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (1st ed.). Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Gobierno Municipal Autónomo.

As there are various definitions, and therefore various conceptual approaches to *social cohesion*, I will particularly refer to how cohesion enhances a sense of belonging, collaboration, and community bond⁵. It is about people sharing the same objective of achieving unity and inclusiveness. Fundamentally a cohesive society is one that provides social bond, which is measured by trust and social capital. *Social capital* will therefore be used following the definition provided by Putnam perspective on the public sphere and the communal good, which defines social capital based on civic engagement, norms and trust, and effective collective action⁶. Both social cohesion and social capital have the potential to serve as tools to open meaningful spaces that encourages dialogue and an integrated society. Therefore, my purpose of studying social cohesion and social capital is not precisely to consider them as societal phenomenon, but instead to explore how these concepts can provide a valuable perspective for the development of my research.

Additionally, throughout this research, *urban regeneration* will refer to the transformation or reinvention of dilapidated areas through an improved urban landscape. This resonates with the idea of re-establishing social to spatial relations by adding meaning, values, identity, and memory through architectural interventions. Under the idea of transforming a space, I have also categorized *urban resistance* as a space that can be reshaped, distorted, and accommodated to adapt to urban needs, while maintaining the same identity, structure, and functions. Therefore, the objective of urban regeneration (or revitalization) and urban resistance is to give meaning to the past in relation to the present, recover tradition through collective memory, and create a respectful and integrated development through pre-existing physical structures.

⁵ Rudiger, A., & Spencer, S. (2004). Meeting the challenge: Equality, diversity and cohesion in the European Union’, Paper presented to the Joint European Commission/OECD conference on the economic effects and social aspects of migration, Brussels. Retrieved from Manca A.R. (2014) *Social Cohesion*. In: Michalos A.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2739

⁶ Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65–78.

PART THREE. METHODS + METHODOLOGY

* COLLECTION | VISIT



I Observations: An ethnographical approach.

The challenge within my method studies will be to essentially translate my theoretical framework into a framework that calls for action. Since formal practices, which are established formal policies and plans, will be mainly discussed in an earlier section (Historical Analysis), my first method approach will bring informal practices into the research.

Informal practices are unwritten and unestablished, they are perceived as “ways of doing things” but are ultimately what formalises space. Therefore, this research method will consist of analysing

urban studies and social practices, both as individual and community level. This must be done from experiencing spaces at eye level, which is a perspective that seems to have lost importance over time. Field research will help me perceive spatial activities from a first-hand experience to collect data on current practices and appropriation of space.

This is a socially grounded more ethnographic research approach with the aim of achieving a deep and lengthy immersion in the culture and lives of the locals, while studying the notion of social space and observing different practices through different lenses.

II Discussions: A profound recollection of opinions.

This is a qualitative research method based on interaction through user perspective, and it is meant for citizens to participate and bring their voice into the research itself. I will subsequently collect opinions through interviews, and – through different viewpoints and filters – create a storyline based on relations and connections made by the inhabitants themselves.

To be able to provide a variety of different angles, the layering of collected data will need to allow for diversity and hence be more inclusive, rather than limiting to involve a specific group. This means that there will be different type of actors, including users of the spaces as well as experts working in the municipality and architects or urbanists with knowledge on the topic.

The goal is that through drawn interviews and discussions, across a variety of different positions, there can be an informed interpretation of the use and meaning of spaces as well as suggestions of different ways of *adding* meaning to spaces.



III Mapping: A socio-spatial practice.

Part of my research will be finding an adequate form of drawing or mapping my results and conclusions. This method will therefore be utilized to transpose the social praxeological information mentioned in the previous sections and portray them on a larger scale by drawing them together through mapping.

This will result as a psychogeography exploration, where social actions and spatial practices are represented by drawing them together and making connections.

Mapping is usually a top-down analysis, which relies on an objective or etic view. What I attempt to do instead is a type of mapping that results as an accurate ethnographic description from an internal or emic perspective - a perspective that is immersed in social practices and behaviours.



Mapping: A socio-spatial practice.



PART FOUR: PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

* GROWTH | FUTURE



I Preliminary Conclusions: The social responsibility of design.

There is a socially grounded responsibility within this research which implies giving citizens a space that they respect, feel identified by, and thus have a certain value for. Understanding the social and spatial *decohesion*, and how patrimonial structures and modernist urban policies are part of the dilemma, will positively lead me to answer questions related to social inclusiveness and the reproduction of public spaces in Santa Cruz's historic city center.

Issues related to inclusiveness will be managed by promoting social and cultural behaviours, and by celebrating the everyday life and the ordinary. Hence, what I attempt to reveal is a sort of memory scape that is much more fitting to the empathy that I am trying to achieve, which consist of designing *for* the people instead of designing *over* the people.

II Expected Results: A manifesto that reclaims social modalities.

Based on the results from my theoretical framework and methodologies, I intend to generate a manifesto

or documentary that would visibly define my research outcomes and collected data. This will be presented in a form of film which will reveal how people use the space, and depict a set of ideas, opinions, and views through specific lenses and filters.

My position while creating this cinematographic odyssey will be to reflect on the people, the ordinary, and their everyday activities; ultimately relocating my research on a larger framework to then evaluate the relationship that social practice and behaviour have with architectural and urban spaces.

III Choices and Design Strategies: The toolbox.

My objective would not only be to research ways to renovate or bring back good public spaces in the Casco Viejo, but to end with a document that sets out a plan of action for a practical architectural intervention. The result will consist of a design toolbox for a kind of renovation that respects time, celebrates local building culture, and responds to people's present (and future) needs.

This toolbox will be a set of principles – not only architectural guidelines but including as well policies, urban practices, experts' recommendations, frameworks, and so on – to be used for application on future interventions. The idea is that the toolbox could be implemented in different areas, and possibly in phases throughout the Casco Viejo. The objective then is not to create one specific design, but to compile a scheme that can be implemented in different scenarios at (probably) different times, or based on different situations.

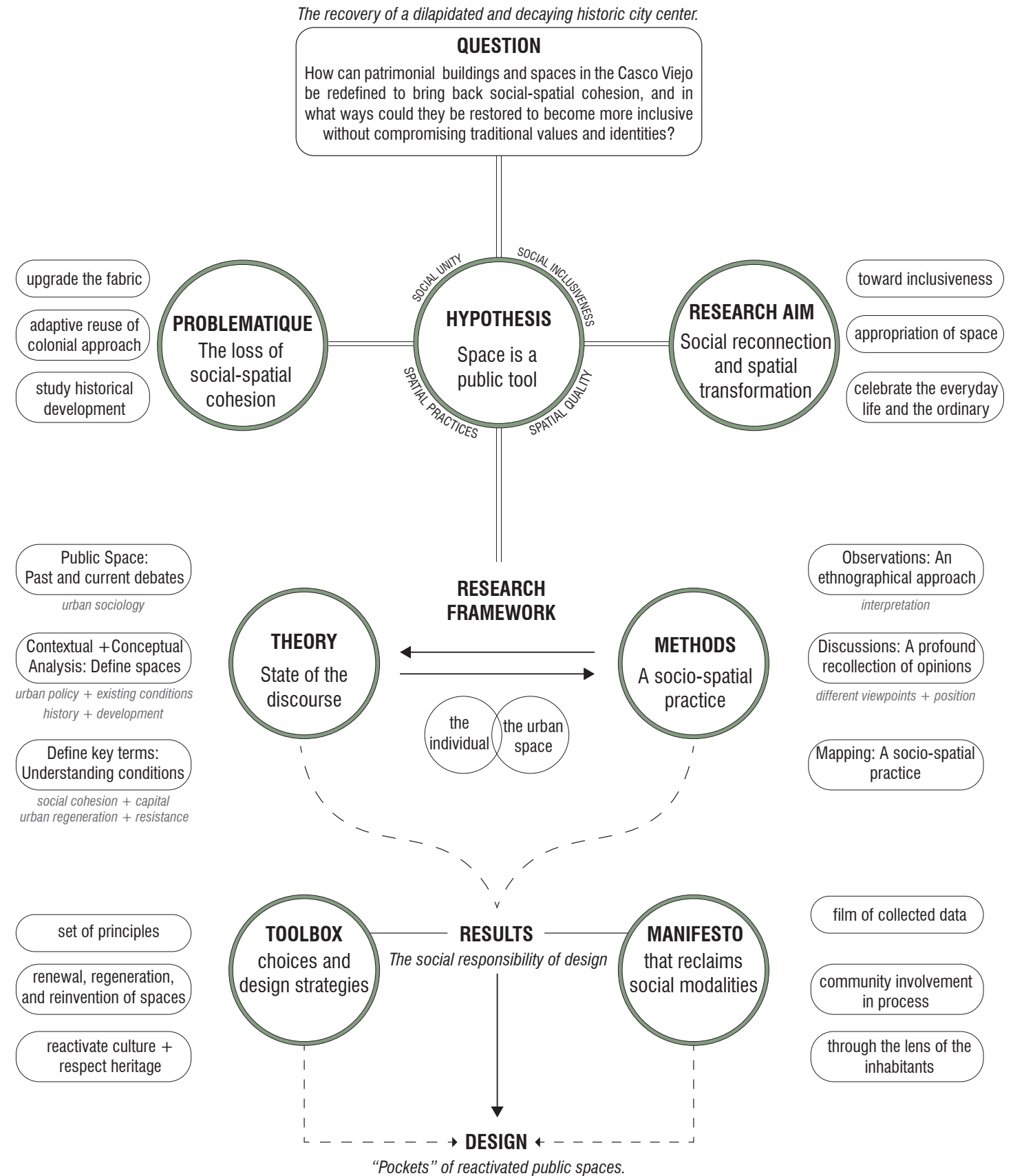
IV Design Proposal: "Pockets" of reactivated public spaces.

By establishing connections between public spaces and its inhabitants, the goal within the design phase will be that, through small-scale clustering interventions, there could be a larger focus on reactivating culture and promoting spaces of unity. This could be done through the redistribution of reactivated spaces, or establishing "pockets of urban spaces", that could result as a cultural hub consisting of different (yet nearby) areas in the Casco Viejo, connected (physically or symbolically) with existing landmarks.



In terms of program and going back to my hypothesis stating that "space is a public tool", using space as a tool often happens based on need. This means that there are people who utilize public space to generate profit. For instance, artisans, artists, musicians, and food carts settle in the streets sidewalks to sell their products. This is an indicator that there is an urgent need to provide a space that promotes open movement for both the sellers themselves and the consumers. For example, a musician can have a space to play, and spectators can have a space to enjoy music - all free access. This could be a way to create a space that accommodates to people's needs.

Furthermore, the intended reconstruction of public spaces will happen in the most inclusive manner and respond, based on research, to people's current needs and aspirations. The idea is that throughout the design phase there can be an active participation of citizens so that a whole community becomes part of the project. Thus, it will be people's own work and ideas what will guide the intervention design, and therefore become a local and contemporary landmark.



RESEARCH DIAGRAM



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