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Cities, Public Space and Citizenship. Some Contemporary Mediterranean Urban Social Movements

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An Introduction to
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Abstract

Cities, and mainly their central squares[1] have been very relevant in the explosion of the so called Arab spring, one spring that has very rapidly become a grey fall, when not a terrible winter, with too much blood, sweat and tears. But Cities, as the main stage of all kind of social movements, continue alive in a very resilient way under so many different conditions; they have always been connected to the birth and to the explanation of social conflicts and changes. Since the beginning of the 1970's has been created as a study object the concept of Urban social movements by the French sociologists, especially by the Spanish Manuel Castells (b. in 1942). Castells discussed with his former teacher Henry Lefébvre (1901-1991) the role of space on the social events and he has evolved to the analysis on the impact of the new technologies of communication in the origins of the new mobilizations (Castells, 1972, 1983, 2012; Harvey, 2012).

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[1]Square is a conflictive English word for Spanish plaza because the public space that indicates don't refers at all at any specific geometric form.

Introduction

The subject of the important relationship among these three concepts of Cities, Public spaces and Citizenship could be considered as too ambitious, because have had a great amount of different theoretical and empirical contributions from a wide range of disciplines. The traditional Geographical approaches combine the physical analysis of the form of the Cities with the social perspectives of Urban dynamics and conflicts. In this case, we try to understand the contemporaneity of a new model of Social Urban movements and their relation with the form of the City. In order to understand what is really new in these conflicts and their consequences on the restructuration of Cities, we combine the debate on the role of space into the French sociological school, with the analysis of some Mediterranean study cases, where social conflicts happens or not. The selection of cities arouse from the experience of the research team in different fieldworks and the objective is to define the political and geopolitical consequences in all the region.

In this direction this paper tries to reintroduce space as a significant variable in the analysis of the role of the City in general and of some parts of the cities in particular in order to explain the characteristics of the new social movements. While in Athens the economic and social protests were[2] concentrated in front of the political more representative buildings, on the Syntagma (Leontidou, 2012), in other Mediterranean cities the popular use of the Urban space has selected a very few places that became not only a stage, but even the real cradle of the new social movements (Morcuende, in press). We try to put some central public spaces on the research focus with the first objective to analyze the birth and evolution of these social movements in 2011. A second and more general objective is to study the role of the public spaces in the Mediterranean cities, from the Barcelona study case. In addition to the main analysis on the Barcelona's plaza de Catalonia example, the research team has had experiences also on the Madrid's Puerta del Sol, and other public spaces in Alexandria, Napoli and Sarajevo on the framework of the historical Mediterranean urbanism.

The main hypothesis is that urban alive public spaces are one of the most significant variable in the creation of the new urban social movements on the context of the global technical-scientific informational milieu, and on the formation of the popular period of history (Santos, 2000). A second one is that some Mediterranean Public spaces have a very special functional, cultural and morphological features that facilitate socialization in all his forms, even the social and political protest. Finally, it is possible to think about of some kind of geopolitical and cultural diffusion of the social movements in the Mediterranean (European Urban and Regional Studies, 2013, 20).

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[2]And unfortunately continues to be.

The Role of Public Spaces into the Cities

The Cities were born many millennia ago in the World Fertile Crescent as the concentrations of private residential spaces of peasants (Childe, 1951)or even before of hunters and gatherers (Jacobs, 1970). The public as an urban object appears as a formal representation of power relations in form of temples and castles and palaces and their surrounding streets and squares; power needs to be shown itself in front of the people in order to maintain its discipline. In fact, the City itself became the symbol of the political and economic power, evolving in a hard competition among cities.

According to the mainstream of urban planning historians the Hellenic *agora* has performed the first open public space as a sort of representation of the first democratic organization in the ancient Greek cities-states (Benevolo, 1975; Kostof, 1993). The Roman *forum* could be the logic heir of the agora, build in many other different forms in the subsequent civilizations, like the Castilian *plaza mayor* or the Portuguese *rossio*[3](Sica et al, 1977-1979). But the so obvious and long material impact of the urban forms don't allows to understand the evolution of Cities in a sort of an acritical continuity; on the contrary, urban forms are a consequence of the social, economic, cultural and political ruptures along history; they are socially produced. Their continuity lays on the materiality of urban plan and buildings, and both could be adapted to many different changes in their contents, destroyed or rebuild or renovated in their material structures. This permanence could constitute the nucleus of the famous urban resilience and forms the so called urban palimpsest (Soja, 2000). Social production in each period and social evolution are the key elements to explain the present complexity of the cities. For this reason it is impossible to find public spaces in their contemporary concept before the implementation of the bourgeois democracy, since the French Revolution at the end of XVIII Century, with the diffusion of the Capitalist system. In this sense the first association between social protest and public space must be situated probably on the place de la Bastille in July, the 14th, 1789 (Castells, 1983).

The large and artistic urban squares and gardens in the precapitalist times were always connected to the power of kings and emperors and they reached their biggest splendor in the old capital cities like London, Wien, Madrid, Saint Petersburg, Beijing, Torino or Naples. There was the power of monarchies and empires and churches, formally represented by castles and palaces and cathedrals and different public administration buildings and gardens. Celebrations and festivals, military demonstrations and executions[4] where the most frequent events developed in these spaces organized as real power performances in order to maintain the hierarchic order in front of the people.

One of the most important morphologic problems remains to decide what constitutes the defining element of the public spaces: the empty space or its

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[3]The public square is named *plaza* in Spanish, like de Portuguese *praça*, the Italian *piazza*, the French *place* or the Catalan *plaça*. The ethimologic origin is the classical Greek πλαττεια (in latin *platea*) that minds large street. In English *plaza* is related to commercial centers, like in Catalan where *plaça* minds also market.
[4]The Red square in the center of the old Moscow shows till today its famous scaffold.

surrounding buildings? The traditional round form of the space uses to be encircled by the more or less square limits of the surrounding buildings[5], with a very few exceptions, like saint Peter in Rome, Palace square in Saint Petersburg or Amalienborg palace square in Copenhagen.

The power of religion and monarchies has evidently diminished and the public administration buildings have become more representative, especially with the reversion of its traditional pyramidal structure. In the capitalist cities the power uses to be mainly economic, and the company buildings become their most visible symbols, especially with the construction of the corporate skyscrapers and the organization of the so called Central Business Districts (Gottmann, 1966; Murphy, 1971). On the democratic regime the different appropriations of certain symbolic public spaces could be thus interpreted as some kind of manifestation of the claiming for political power from popular classes.

Squares and Streets in the Urban Centrality

Urban centrality itself is a complex concept that goes beyond its geometric definition and is probably mainly related to the accessibility. The capacity of one place in the city to be reached for the majority of their inhabitants (and even also of visitors and tourists) becomes the key factor in the definition of the city center; center becomes the main meeting point. Public powers build some symbolic items (buildings, statues or decorations) in this kind of places in order to facilitate the legibility of their importance and significate by the majority of the citizens. Private urban landowners benefit of the high land prices of these central locations in order to raise big buildings with important functions (banks, company offices, department stores, hotels) and diffuse all around retail and recreation services. By the recognition of the central symbols and the use of private and public services and facilities citizens could do a lot of different forms of appropriation of these places in their everyday life. These processes of popular appropriation contribute largely to the bolstering of the centrality itself in a dynamic and virtuous cycle.

We are here mainly dealing with Mediterranean cities. This fact imposes from the academic point of view the need to find a sort of definition of a Mediterranean city typology. Sociology, History and Geography haven't never defined this typology, with general references only to their cultural trends or to their classical (Greek and Roman) origins of to the climatological characteristics in very partial approaches. In spite of the complexity of the question, it could be summarized for this article analysis in one special trend: high densities. High densities of population in a Mediterranean environment (with two seasons, like a sort of tropics in the temperate zone). High densities of settlement, both residential in the domestic sphere, and social in the public sphere. High functional densities also, with a less segregated structure, with mixed activities. High density also of urban planning forms (classical and

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[5]This is the case, for instance of the popular Washington Square, designed in 1850 in New York city

industrial planning together with, traditional and contemporary disorder). And high densities also of times, that implies their long history and their cultural complexity forming their contemporary urban palimpsest.

In this context it is possible to define two different typologies of central urban places, in the Mediterranean cities usually analyzed: squares and streets, it is punctual or lineal places. The Puerta del Sol in a really polycentric Madrid, has this central character, probably connected to its different symbolic items; for one hand, in front of the ancient National Security headquarters, was defined the 0 km, the virtual start of the all radial communication system of Spain; also the most traditional and popular celebration of the every end of the year, like the Times square in New York, is diffused by all audiovisual Spanish media. La Puerta del Sol has been also the epicenter of the 15M social movement, in March 2011, that started the dramatic recent political changes in the whole Spain.

Some months before, the Tahrir square in central Cairo has been the epicenter for one of the most active social protest against the Egyptian president Mubarak regime, on the way of the so called Arab springtime. Since then Tahrir has remained the place for the contradictory social protest that has trained the whole country to democratic elections and to a military coup d'état. In a relative similar way Taksim square in central Istanbul has been the stage for the antigovernment protest and its hard repression. Like more recently and in a very different context Maydan square, an enlarged central part of the symbolic Khreshiatik street in Kiev, has been at the beginning of the Ukrainian unrest against president Yanucovic, in 2014; the whole Ukraine has been involved in a terrible conflict both a civil war and an international conflict affecting the European Union and Russia. Other Arab springs have finished in open wars, like Libya or, especially Syria, renovating the war of Iraq with their cities as the main military objective of the parts involved.

Other Mediterranean cities don't have or don't use these symbolic central squares, and their centrality is located in some special streets. This is the case, for instance of Naples with the via Toledo[6], in the lower part of the city that clearly marks the border between the classical and the modern city, and the via Scarlati into the Vomero neighborhood, the high part of the city[7] (D'Alessandro, 2005). In the Egyptian Alexandria the central street is la Corniche, 14 km along the Mediterranean coast, where its Arab spring took place. And also in the Bosnian Sarajevo, the street that runs parallel to river Mijacka, from the ottoman nucleus (Basarcija), through the Austro-Hungarian Ferhadija, till the Socialist Marsala Tita, plays the central role in the economic, social and political life (Moreno, 2009).

In other cities, Mediterranean or not, it is possible to find these two typologies of centrality, in a more complex model, especially in the great

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[6]During the Italian fascist years the name was changed for via Roma, trying to centrally impose the State unity. Via Toledo starts and the splendid Plebiscito square, in front of the king's palace, and opens piazza Dante in the middle of the street.
[7]Both streets were connected at the beginning of the 20th Century by two funiculars that have been very famous through the famous Neapolitan song *Funiculí, funiculà*.

metropolis. It would be a very interesting forward study to analyze the possible specialization of the social appropriations of these different places.

The Evolution of Centrality in Barcelona

Barcelona has not been a political capital in the modern times and consequently has a traditional lack of public spaces in general. With the diffusion of the capitalist real estate market since the second half of XIX Century, a first economic center has been created close to the harbor, with the location of the siege of the Bank of Spain and other banks and textiles and transportation firms. Local and regional administration remained (and still remains) in the historical city, where has been the ancient Roman forum, totally disappeared during the medieval times and reopened at the same period after the first social unrests in 1835, that caused the burning of many Catholic churches and monasteries[8].

In 1859, with the military walls demolition and the beginning of the urban extension of the new city designed by the civil engineer Ildefons Cerda (1816-1876), in the central contact zone between the old and the new city a big new square has been originated. As the majority of border regions here there were the complex relationship that always exists between the separation of the frontier and the connections that cospaciality creates. This urban space has a long and complex history, from the Isabel II forum to present Catalonia square that is analyzed in the next section.

But with the urban growth of the city, accelerated since this moment, the centrality also has been growing and constantly changing its internal structure with the changes of the economic system. The expansion has been very linear, along the main avenues of the city, passeig de Gràcia first, and Diagonal after in a western direction, transforming this last avenue in the first clear social border in Barcelona. From the original harbor initial area, till the present Maria Cristina square center there exists an axis of more than five km. The axis of Five Kilometers has been the conclusion of one of the studies on the retail concentration areas in Barcelona (Carreras, Domingo & Sauer, 1990). This axis, shortened from the Catalonia Square has been promoted as the *Barcelona shopping line* some years after by the Tourist board of the city. The functional dynamics of changes could be summarized by the succession of first leisure activities, the progressive bankerization and cinemaland formation, and the posterior touristification with a shopping predominance. This dynamic is detailed in the next section for the case of the Catalonia Square.

As a reaction in front of this centralization processes, local authorities developed different decentralizing policies, since the democratization of the municipalities in 1979. One first plan has been created from the exhaustive study of the 19th Century Eixample in 1984. The plan put in evidence the quality of its design for this large extension of the city, and oriented the rehabilitation of the main buildings and the opening to the public many of the

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[8]Behind these unrests that take place in different Spanish cities lays the attempts to build a liberal State against the conservative power of the Catholic Church.

inner spaces of the plots. In order to fight the centralization the plan also maintained the mixture of functional uses both residential and economic in order to diffuse in this big central area many of the Tertiary activities with a concentration tendency.

The second plan was more ambitious connected with the restructuration of the city on the occasion of the organization of the Summer Olympic Games in 1992. Approved in 1987 it designed ten new centrality's areas, four of them the Olympic ones, in order to organize six new polarities with a great offer of office's spaces. The collapse of the local productive economy has strongly reduced the effectiveness of the plan with some of these poles don't yet developed.

In the last years on 20th Century, one sectorial plan for retail has been applied exporting the idea of the shopping line to other parts of the city trying to reinforce the neighborhoods. Some commercial axes where defined which number has been increasing till the present 18 in 2015. These axes include very different situations with an irregular success. The total of areas reveal by itself the incapacity of the plan to really decentralize. The tourist success[9] of the city of Barcelona constitutes a real factor of centralization that puts a lot of difficulties to the implementation of any plan general or sectorial.

The Catalonia Square Study Case

In spite of these recent decentralization policies, the Catalonia square has successfully maintained its centrality during all years round. Probably not in a continuous evolutionary way, but with the cyclic rhythm of the city's life.

Irregularity could be the main characteristic of the square: a relative large space, especially in relation with the narrow streets and the lack of squares in the historical city, reinforcing its image of emptiness, with some bars and picnic areas, even a temporal cirque in the middle; it was a popular jock to compare the square with a desert. A new unplanned space in the middle of one of the first general urban planning of the World helps to explain its irregularity. One of the rural landowners builds a rent house unsuccessfully trying to prevent its expropriation and to block the public space (Galera, Roca, Tarragó, 1972).

The form and the role of the square has been defined not by the local urban planners, but by the progressive concentration of transport infrastructures; the biggest architect interventions were implemented in 1924 (gardens and statues) and in 1959 (construction of two twin fountains) [10]. Accessibility has become the main cause of its increasing centrality. Traditional pedestrian accessibility because the medieval gate of Portal de l'Àngel was the later closing of all the walls gates, at ten on the night. Modern accessibility also because there are concentrated a big part of the 20th Century railroad infrastructures. The main

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[9]According to the Barcelona's Tourist Board the city receives more than 7, 5 million tourists per year.
[10]The architect Salvador Tarrago said that the Catalonia square has a civic content greater than the architectonic one (Galera, Roca, Tarragó, 1972).

station of the train to Martorell in 1855, and very close, but not connected another one of the train to Sarria in 1860. Some years later, started the connection with other urban public transportation systems, like the tramway to Gracia in 1872, electrified in 1899; other tram lines and buses progressively have been connecting the different parts of the increasing urban space of the city with the square. The first metro line was inaugurated in 1926 (a second metro line in 1975). The private transport system has also progressively increased, with the landmark of some underground parking plots in 1964. This accessibility was clearly marked in the landscape of the square, but also in his underground with tunnels for trains, for connections, for parking, even for a commercial gallery presumptuously named Light Avenue[11].

But accessibility is not only a communication phenomenon; activities of leisure, retail and tourism are important factors of attraction of local and foreign customers, becoming new elements of accessibility, or the reason of. Bars and restaurants, and dancing's were traditional, and since the beginning of the 20th Century was imported the Parisian cafe model with the famous Maison Dorée or La Lune. Hotels concentrated both restaurants and hosting functions; the hotel Colón, inaugurated in 1902 and enlarged in 1918 has been the most important, till 1936. During the Spanish Civil war, its building gained a great symbolic role with the location of the Catalan Communist party (PSUC) central siege. Retail was even very diffused all around the square, the most important the Vicens Ferrer first local department store.

Accessibility also in regard to some political movements. The military rebels from the barracks of western and northern part of the city converged to Catalonia square in order to take the power in July, the 18th, 1936. People and defenders of the legal government surrounded the rebels with a big fighting on the place the day after. And even with the fascist victory the first military catholic mess was held in the square in January, the 27th, 1939. Symbol of power was taking place into the collective mentality around the square (Miralles, 1987).

With the new fascist regime, the banks take the leading role in the reconstruction of the civic atmosphere, organizing a fist attempt of a local CBD. In 1947 the hotel Colón was rebuild as the Banco Español de Crédito, and in 1955 the regional siege of the Banco de España took the other side of the square, forwarded by other Spanish banks everywhere, and some companies headquarters (Telefónica, FECSA). The next decade started a new transformation, with the location of the first Catalan shop of the Spanish department store El Corte Inglés, in 1962. Some years later the company take all the northeastern façade of the square. Since the political transition in 1979[12] new department stores (Marks & Spencer, Sphera) and a French shopping center (El Triangle) were located together with many bars and restaurants and some hotels benefiting of the touristic success of Barcelona after 1992. It seems that the history was starting again in a more or less cyclic way (Carreras, 1999).

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[11]Today it is possible to see the remains of the gallery into the Sephora perfumery shop.
[12]In spite that the first democratic election in Spain took place in 1977, only two years later come the local elections for the first time.

During all this Century different popular appropriations take place also in the square. On their everyday life citizens and visitors use the public space, transportation facilities and shops and services in a very long days because the traditional Spanish timetable and the benignity of the Mediterranean climate. At the same time different social communities take some part of the square as their central meeting point all around the space. Canaletas for the football supporters, late in the evenings of matches; the Zurich bar, the main entrance to El Corte Inglés or the center of the star in the square pavement for many personal and groups meetings, both local and foreign, like the Filipino domestic maids in the 70's or the illegal African immigrants in the 90's. Even today very young people, especially Latinos, meet in front of the Apple store because of its free wi-fi service. But the most important appropriation, in order to explain the role of the space in the organization of social movements have been the different recent protests.

The social movements have been defined by the French Sociology in the years after the 1968 crisis, after the enlargement of the traditional working class protests (Castells, 1972). The classical trade unions battle was focused on labor and housing conditions into the production field. Its space used to be the factories or the political institutions. The new social movements enlarged this focus to the spaces of reproduction (neighborhoods, equipment, services) and to other social groups (women, LGBT, young, old people, ethnic minorities). Its spaces were the local centers and the local institutions. But in the last years appeared the newest social movements extending the protest to the change of the economic system (with contradictory strategies)[13] with not a clear class structuration (heterogeneous popular movements in the sense of Laclau (2005) and with a central role of the new technologies in order to organize and maintain and extend the protest (Castells, 2012; Harvey, 2012).

The negative consequences of the austerity policies started by the Zapatero government in 2010 were the breeding of the protests in Spain. Here the system was symbolized by the politicians ("they don't represent us" was the most popular slogan) and the image was the 99% against the 1%. On May the 15th, 2011, many demonstrations occupied the center of Madrid and Barcelona and many other Spanish cities[14]. Some days later first the Puerta del Sol, in Madrid, and after the Catalonia Square in Barcelona were permanently occupied, during almost 30 days (Hessel, 2010; Morcuende, in press).

The 99%, people coming from everywhere on the city, neighborhoods and periphery was claiming for the recovery of the center of the city, from where they have been ejected by the gentrification processes. This central space was also the symbol of the centrality of the whole political system, because the 15M in Spain has been a clear political movement, like Syriza in Greece, with important advances in the European elections in 2014, and in the local elections in 2015. The Catalonia square has been organized as a symbolic space representing all the society and all the territories in an open, flexible and spontaneous organization. The centrality of the square climbed to a higher new

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[13] It has been very significant the short essay of the old French thinker Stéphane Hessel (1917-2013) that gave name to the Spanish movement: *indignados* (Hessel, 2010)

[14] For this reason the whole movement is known in Spain as the 15M.

step as a space of representation of the new powers. One square with no institutional evidences very different of the Greek Syntagma where the building of the Parliament presides the square. The police evicted the square on May, the 27th[15] but its symbolism remained there forever and people reoccupied the square for more than 15 days[16]. But the square remained as the real epicenter of many other demonstrations (students, health, trade unions) (Tortos, 2014; Morcuende, in press). Ada Colau closed his political campaign in the Catalonia square three days before to win the municipal elections and become the new major of Barcelona.

First Conclusions

The complexity of the relationship among cities and citizenship through the role of public spaces gives the possibility to formulate some conclusions at very different levels.

The first conclusion regards the necessity to reintroduce the space and place into the analysis and reinterpretation of the social movements surpassing the old debate between Castells and Lefébvre (Castells, 1972). In the transformation of the class structures during the late Capitalism the cities, the right to the city, plays a very important role. Public spaces, streets or squares recover their role of socialization of free citizens, of the new citizenship. People integrate the new technologies of information and communication, but these technologies are mainly used in short distances communication, reinvigorating the cities live. The space becomes a real challenge in front of the ephemerons effect of informational facts. Buildings and open spaces impose their symbolic formal power, as pointed out the French Geographer Jean Gottmann some years ago in the case of the skyscraper (Gottmann, 1966). In spite of the continuity of the iron rules of the real-estate market, a very new dialectics center-periphery arise changing the traditional approaches to the urban question and giving more place to the spatial dimensions.

A second conclusion regards to the necessity of reformulation of the concept of the city itself. In spite of the importance and signification of the urban form it appears the need to privilege the social content and his historical production of space and its forms. In front of the too linear (with continuities and ruptures) evolution of architectural and urbanistic forms it is necessary to reintroduce the role of the production process (Lefebvre, 1974) and of sociability and togetherness of cities (Jacobs, 1970; Soja,2000). It seem very possible today to analyze an emerging postgentrified city. From the first models of the Chicago school describing the centrifugal processes of cities during the 20th Century to the Neil Smith centripetal gentrification a cycle has

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[15]The Catalan government argued hygienic reason and the danger of the coincidence of the supporters of a British football team on occasion of one Champions match.
[16]On the occasion of a political protest against the austerity Budget in front of the parliament, at the Greek stile, they decided to maintain the political actions, but to empty the square. On Christmas the municipality erected an ice skating premise in order to reduce the public open space.

completed his evolution. With the beginning of the 21st Century a new cycle seems to start, according to the premonitory vision of the last work of Milton Santos, when popular classes claim their right to the Centre of the city from which they have been expropriated (Santos, 2000).

The third conclusion is even more general, enlarging the Geopolitical analysis. The so different social movements contemporary to the Spanish one analyzed suggests some kind of diffusion all around many different cities in the Mediterranean basin. The blooming of many political and social movements in many cities, mainly on the Mediterranean area, with a very significant differences and evolution, could probably be explained by the also different Geopolitical adscription of its components. Some are in an old colonial European inertia (in favor or against, like in the ISIS case), some others with big interferences of the old superpowers (USA and Russia) and others under new interferences (China mainly). The community of urban characteristics could facilitate the community of social movements in spite of their different, even contradictory trends and objectives.

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