

The City of Murcia through the Analysis Proposed by the Geography of Perception and Behavior: A Dialectic between Rational and Emotional Space

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GOALS

The analysis and use of the inner space of the city is conditioned not only by economic and social factors, but also by the images or mental representations that people make of the places in which they live or know through the sources of information that exist. The mental images are influenced by the paths used in the displacements, the places frequented and the feelings of identification or rejection with the space object of daily use.

We present the results of a significant sample of surveys (M=215) and of the mental maps elaborated to know the perception of the city of Murcia by its inhabitants. Based on the results, proposals for improvement that contribute to the harmonious and sustainable growth of the city will be sought, correcting palpable deficiencies that may alter the quality of life in it.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed uses the three approaches or perspectives in the perception of space indicated by Zárte and Rubio (2011: 71-79): visual approach, carried out by observation and description; evaluative and preferential approach, in which the subject analyzes and evaluates; and a third approach, centered on the feelings a space awakens in individuals, which is known as the sense of place.

The visual approach has led to a selection of certain components or elements in which he considered that people structure and remember the urban landscape. The combination of these elements determines the greater or lesser readability of the city and its greater or lesser imagination, which is the property of the urban landscape of evoking more or less clear images in the majority of the observers. Therefore, the greater representation of a city allows the observer to remember it and evoke easily and can reproduce in the mind very plastic images of it.



RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the study reflect a level of average satisfaction of the respondents about the city, and although the efforts of the last decades in the improvement of their equipment are recognized, some elements can be deduced for the improvement and a necessary ordering of the city.

The respondents appreciate and value the urban center of the city, highlighting a perceived centrality in spaces such as the town hall, squares of Santo Domingo and Romea, Paseo de Alfonso X El Sabio, University / La Merced, which has been seen in this study. In this area there are no pockets of poverty or housing in poor condition, but houses a large number of shops, it is passable and here are the most visited and remembered by its inhabitants: the emblematic buildings already mentioned as landmarks: cathedral, City Hall, Casino, Romea Theater, Salzillo Museum, Víctor Villegas Auditorium or the bridges of the Virgin of the Dangers and Iron. To them are added the new spaces created in recent decades, such as the new avenues that connect the city with external access to the shopping centers of Juan de Borbón (Thader and Nueva Condomina) or Juan Carlos I with universities, Zairaiche, and C.C. El Tiro, spaces, which Serrano (2014) describes as the biggest change experienced in the city, are clearly perceived by its citizens.

A new avant-garde aesthetic has improved the image of the city with the Blue Towers (2012), in the Atalayas neighborhood, a private business building, the Moneo building (2005), with municipal offices in the Plaza de la Catedral, the bridge of the Hospital (1973) reformed by Santiago Calatrava (1999) and the footbridge of the Malecon of Javier Monterola (1997) are some of the exponents of the new architecture of the end of s. XX and s. XXI in the city.

In relation to transport infrastructures, many of them perceived as edges, rather than as paths, the arrival of the tram has been detected, but it is not considered sufficient to solve Murcia's traffic problems. It is necessary a new ordering of road traffic, the improvement of accessibility, still necessary despite the expansion of the bridges over the Segura river that connect the neighborhoods of the north and south of the city, and the incorporation of new equipment in various neighborhoods, with known issues although little minimized.

The location, around the large rounds of circulation of the city, of communication nodes such as the Carmen station in the south, bus station of San Andrés and a series of roundabouts around the Ronda Norte and Levante as they would be: Emilio Díaz de Revenga, Plaza Circular and Juan XXIII and the location of the great avenues: the Rounds, avenue of Fame, Intendente Jorge Palacios, Alejandro Seiquer and the Gran Vía del Escultor Salzillo; without forgetting the railway corridor, which opens a deep gap in the southern neighborhoods such as El Carmen and Infante D. Juan Manuel with the hamlet of Santiago el Mayor, San Pío or El Progreso, to the limit with the districts of the huerta of Murcia They denote an aspiration of citizens for many years: the burying of roads, which would mean an improvement in spatial cohesion, mobility and creation of new spatial developments, especially with the anticipated arrival of the AVE to Murcia from the year 2018.



It is necessary a policy of global improvement of some neighborhoods, which continue an unstoppable process of degradation and social exclusion, such as "La Paz" or the suburbs of the peripheral area, such as "Los Rosales" or "El Espíritu Santo" in the district of Espinardo. Other neighborhoods, such as La Flota or Juan Carlos I have reinforced urban appeal, reflecting this fact on internal mobility as they are considered by citizens as preferred spaces of residence. Special mention deserves the urbanizations created outside the city of Murcia that have spaces of great environmental quality, such as Altorreal or La Alcayna.

The enclave of Murcia in the fertile plain of the Segura river, supposes that one of its main "edges": orchard and river, still have much to improve, in spite of the actions carried out in the channeling of the river to minimize the periodic risk of flooding, and it is observed how citizens still have the feeling of a space without accessibility, which has repercussions on a negative image of a place that should have a great projection in the future of the city.

It insists on the necessary adequacy of the Segura riverbed as a space adapted for leisure and recreation, where except for the construction of the Hydraulic Museum and the new footbridge, the river has had little use as a sports and recreation space, which has fact be considered a limiting element between the central city and the southern neighborhoods, such as El Carmen and Infante Don Juan Manuel separating the large urban agglomeration in some way with the existence of garden spaces, where evidently a "neopaisaje" has been formed that has been erasing the almost idyllic image of the fields full of lemon trees and other fruit and vegetable crops, without forgetting the idiosyncrasy of the landscapes formed by the presence of water: ditches, adarves, and lifting wheels.

CONCLUSIONS

The studies related to the geography of perception show new lines of research that introduce a differentiated vision of the city, offering the citizen's participatory vision of a space that knows, enjoys or suffers and ultimately lives. The influence of the behavior of the same, in relation to how it perceives its living space, will serve as a basis for the detection of existing urban problems, as well as useful recommendations in the improvement of urban planning, the provision of equipment and the new contribution of services complementary both public and private.

The results of the mental maps and of the surveys made with the reality of the city have been contrasted, in this way the assessment made by the citizens of their city has been known, information that could be exploited in the near future of the same and that should invite reflection. Of the results obtained, both in relation to the visual approach, following Lynch's structuring, as well as to the evaluative and preferential one, we can affirm that the study reflects not only the degree of satisfaction about the city in which the respondents live, but that they are recognized the efforts made in recent decades to recover the city and improve its different facilities, and also, you can deduce some elements necessary for a new city planning, as it has been previously mentioned.

This work has provided us with an X-ray of the current city of Murcia with its strengths and weaknesses. The reflection on its results can guide us on the way forward in the improvement of



the city in the near future, citizen participation in the analysis processes and proposals for improvement in urban spaces should be taken into consideration by the authorities that have power to carry out the relevant actions that have an impact on the progress towards cities with better environmental conditions, mobility and sustainability.

