

City's imaginary / imaginary for the city. The paradigm of the commercial image in the tourist city. Barcelona Case.

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Abstract

The majority of large commercial urban spaces are no longer perceived for the user as private spaces as it has become part of the urban network and the public space: what consequences and possibilities related to the development of a particular urban image involved in this arise?, also, which role plays in this the spatial configuration given by the particularities of the urban grid?

Urban promotion through tourism, seeks to experience the city on the basis of an imaginary that is created primarily by the physical characteristics linked to the social, thus creating two groups of visual perception: An imaginary of the city and imagery for the city.

The aim of this research is to show an approach to the method - in space syntax terms- to uncover the main spatial configuration factors of Barcelona urban grid that sustain its particular and iconic urban image which is exploded by the tourism attraction entities.

Keywords: Urban space; tourism image; space syntax; Barcelona

Introduction

Commercial trade and its consequent social and physical demands have characterized the urban space, which has been adapted, modified and created to accommodate the activity through the ages. Along with the industrial revolution, the supply and consumption of goods and trade therefore in the city have grown exponentially.

The concept of "shopping center" has developed a logic (flows of visitors between department stores) that is similar to certain themed tours that can be found in largely touristic cities, like Barcelona: sightseeing tours as paths using service nodes or characteristic landmarks of cultural interest, usually architectural ones, are connected through routes operated by different means of transport, these paths superimposed in the urban grid serve as food for local commerce (retail stores) which is attracted to and settle in its area to ensure their survival, forming an ecosystem which requires a balance in order to avoid that its commercial overexploitation image superimposed over any other that could generate and /or characterize the public space.

But what happens when commercial spaces are no longer private spaces and become part of the urban network, resulting in a merge with the public space?, and what consequences and possibilities involved in this make it possible to merge? Also, how does this impact the image of the city to the visitor?

Urban promotion through tourism, seeks to experience the city on the basis of an imaginary that is created primarily by the physical characteristics linked to the social, thus creating two groups of visual perception: An imaginary of the city and imagery for the city. The visual weight involves these two sides of the same coin. The existence of paths with varying visual weight to create different flows is the food of commerce.

Based in the equation:

Visibility + spread = landmark weight

(Distance + Speed) * landmark weight = visual weight

The images that make up the urban visual weight are related through a visual opening to adjacent spaces. The strength of these connections are those that encourage the movements that cause the flows within the various spaces and therefore the level of exposure and establishment of certain imaginary.

For a qualitative evaluation we establish an index associated with the history of the place that have led to a morphology or another in order to establish relationships and differences between the agents of trade and cultural promotion that define a base image for the "tourist attraction " .

While to evaluate flows quantitatively, we propose the use of theoretical and computational tools (space syntax, depthmap UCL) to determine the main visual and morphological factors of the urban layout that play a leading role in establishing the balance between the image of the city as a physical phenomena and the image create for it by the commercial and tourist diffusion.

Urban images

One of the consequences of the actual economic system is that the urbanism do not has a social interest; it looks at the habitant as a client, where the city is a product that has to be sell. If the publicity is capable to bring necessities and make desirable products, then, Can it do the same for the public urban spaces?, can this be of any help in the task to promote an urban experience which include a characteristic spatial configuration given by the urban layout which can lead us to a more integrated and optimized urban experience?

Is undeniable that the publicity media in different expressions are today more present than ever, this situation is largely sustain by an off place manner by the internet and social networks, informatics system that are mainly based on images. Now here we have another question; how is this media manifest in the creation and modification of urban spaces in cities like Barcelona where there exterior urban image is so important for its economy? Also, how this publicity or diffusion strategies can modify or "play" with the urban spatial ones; and finally, what can be the architect's role in this process?

To capture the point of view of each individual is the basic and main concern of the commercial and touristic diffusion process inside the city, in the public space. In consequence, the layer that covers the physical and geometric structure of the urban spaces is the main area of development of the different strategies that aim at being seen; in a sort of game that contemplates the user interact with a foreground and a background, where the background are the physical barriers compose mainly by the buildings and the foreground is the layer of images that cover it at different scales.

The game between this background and foreground duality is not only present between the skin and the architectonic structure, but also in a larger scale like in the urban layout and therefore in the way that the spaces are lived between the constructions: the main realm of public space. The so called background in the urban layout is given by the centralities which are those particularities in the urban grid that attract the movement, the circulation and the glance, as a whole form islands within a greater layout, while what conforms foreground unites in a unitary form call the city. An analogy between this logic system and a film could be done where the background is the script and the foreground is the actor: both must be coordinated and correctly play its roll at different scales.

The Centralities by their own characteristics tend to accumulate services that are interconnected through the foreground, this relation between “going towards” and “going trough” - a relation between time and space- is the one that contains the urban experience. The image of the skin or texture acquires greater or smaller importance according to factors like the distance, the time, the means of transport and in smaller degree the height of vision. This last one is because the urban landscape is plenty of functional own elements like the urban furniture that does not represent physical barriers necessarily (the steps can be saved and the benches can be jumped) but represents visual obstacles and/or of movement (it is possible to see over a low light wall, but by civic behavior few will jump it).

About the centralities John Gehl gives us some tracks that direct us to the same; Gehl exposes that if the activities and the people are grouped, it is possible that the individual events are stimulated mutually, in addition that indices as the ground occupation and building space do not conclude anything on how the human activities are concentrated, in addition also exposes the subject of the space in relation to the time when saying that a few trivial functions that they demand much space or a slightly excessive distance they are enough to turn an enriching experience into a deficient one.

Barcelona

With the purpose of avoiding the prejudice about the characteristic places that conform the image of a city so promoted as Barcelona, it will be tried to make the analysis the other way around: instead of considering those spaces, buildings and images already known, a first analysis by the tools given by space will be carried out to determine the study places as if it was a generic city, soon considered the other factors in game. This is one of the advantages that the possibility of taking an analysis of perceptive tendency to a computerized process represents.

Due to the characteristic opening generalized in the urban plot and configuration of Barcelona, we considered of much greater relevance to be centered in the study of the “emptinesses” between the constructions, this is the streets, strolls, seats that conform the preponderant image of Barcelona. While it exists great amount of buildings and particular constructions of great interest and importance for the image of the city as most of the work of Gaudí, they are not as important as the wealth of situations and imaginary that happen between the emptinesses of one and another construction.

Another characteristic of Barcelona is that their squares do not have as much relevance as their linear public spaces, the streets and “passeig” have a much greater visual weight. Thus we see that Catalonia square is visually important because its connects three linear public spaces of much greater relevance as they are “La Rambla”, “Passeig de Gracia”, and “Rambla Catalunya”. Each one of these spaces represents a characteristic face of the city.

The importance in a preponderant layout as “La Rambla” are only certain aspects of its immediate image since most of its individual images are disposable and the truly preponderant and what it remains through

time is its flow of elements as a whole and not like individual aspects. We could call to this phenomenon fixed landmarks in horizontal movement.

It is important to notice that the flows that are mixed in the urban plot not only are referred to different means of transport, is as well as within the pedestrians speeds are mixed: in this way a runner can pass through the same street that a person who goes to do some shopping and other that by any means arrive at the street looking for another direction, the three move at different speeds and its attention will be centered in elements quite different from a same pattern. The runner surely will notice the pavement and its variations as well as the general form of the street, the one of the shopping will probably not pay attention to any street detail more than the products, meanwhile the last person will give much more attention to info images.

How to measure the impact of the image in the urban layout

For the representation and analysis of these dualities on local scale we have to begin with a technical problem exposed by Venturi in the 70 decade; this is that the classic architectonic representational techniques are better adapted for big and wide objects in space, like the buildings, but not for thin and “intense” objects such as the labels or announcements that conform the local figure. But from this affirmation it has passed much water under the bridge, thus nowadays we dispose of many means but more important we have now a theoretical base applied to practical informatics tool that is space syntax and depth map which help us to analyze this kind of subjects. Space Syntax thus welcomes problematic present of the urban analysis in the contemporary city also the use of the spaces in local scale. Considering for it how they are crossed such and that space factors affect a type of movement and another one, of step also it contemplates altogether the vision which they give to the spaces and urban configurations from different points from he himself all expressed through graphs and tables of values that allow to make comparisons and to expose realities under an analytical eye. Hillier raises that the urban space is globally topologic or topogeometric (Hillier 2007) since when the distances are very extensive the metric distance is not what determines the movements but that is the topology, whereas for local scales the metric measures are the ones that has sense because they determine the choose of a route or another. In this respect, depthmap is a software developed by the University College of London that allows to work with the main tools that conform the theory of Space Syntax, with this software we can carry out the translation in images of the collected data.

In addition, the research in a near future stage is also pointing to include a micro scale represented by the duality that is also transported to the same image, on one hand the one that properly is generated by the changes and interventions through the years of the urban weave and the one that prevails on the basis of first with different aims. All of this is pointing to the goal of have a complete range of scales of intervention of the images generated and/or imposed to the city.

Approach to the method

Table 1. The basic indexes that will be take into account for the analysis.

Scale	Duality	Measure Type
Global	Urban layout-structural centralities	Topological
Local	Structure- texture or skin	Metrical
Micro	Evident image- Resulting image	Visual

Source: Felipe Lazo Mella

The measure indexes are adapted to the analysis possibilities that bring us depthmap. For it, topological measures on axial and segments maps are taking into account, considering these as the main factors of global integration and chose that will help us to determine the structure that unifies the urban network. To this it is added the stack of layers which are part of the urban transport network associated to the tourism promotion (what it also includes not only the tourist bus but the layouts proposed by different means by the tourism organizations) in order to evaluate which aspects coincide and which do not, thus also to determine which spaces and sectors of the city are potentially exposed to the different agents of particular images (commercial, turism, informative, historical or cultural related).

For the local scale, metric measures with metric radius that rescue the small centralities or local particularities of the network for which the measurement of number of nodes or stages are considered that conform a sector within a ratio that can be crossed on foot in a relatively reduced time.

Finally, for the micro scale, maps of visibility (VGA) with their respective analysis -as much in plans as in sections- added to specific depthmap agent analysis applied in reduced areas determined by the results of the analyses on the previous bigger scales that will give us the tracks of those textures that are exposed more in those places and that has the potential to characterize a part of the image of the city.

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