



Public Space in Sao Paulo: Some Different Approaches

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Sao Paulo is one of the most interesting Latin American Cities nowadays. Several recent studies have focused on this city through distinguished approaches, such as its cultural diversity, multiple ethnicities, social and economical contrasts, as well as its different spatial arrangements. Globalization has also modified its importance in the international context, bringing a new light to World Cities' hierarchy (Koulioumba, 2002). In this sense, this article aims at discussing some of the contemporary approaches to the use of public space, particularly to some social and cultural exchanges that are happening mainly in Sao Paulo's central area, including, for example: streets, squares, parks or meeting points; open air markets; street shopping and shopping centers. Our main objective is to point out how recent urban transformations have contributed, on the one hand, to change some forms of social coexistence, destabilizing life in community, as suggested by Baumann (2008) as well as legitimizing individualism, as presented by Richard Sennett in many of his books. However, it has been noticed, on the other hand, that well established social networks stimulate sociability and public space use, especially in some places where historical, economical or cultural associations dominate, in spite of the advances of globalized Capitalism.

Therefore, as described by Jane Jacobs (2000), in her book entitled: 'The Death and Life in Great American Cities', originally written in 1961, diversified neighborhoods (in respect to their assorted land use, varied social and economical aspects of their inhabitants, as well as miscellaneous landscape and architectural characteristics), tend to be sites based on interactive social networks. Or as described by Certeau (2008), "the neighborhood is a place where the relationship with the other as a social component emerges. (...) It is always a relation between a person and its physical and social universe." Bom Retiro neighborhood', situated in Sao Paulo's central region, can be included in this context due to its multicultural ethnicities, that has been taking place in the area since the end of 19th Century, and its varied architecture. For this reason, some of this neighborhood's streets are being intensively utilized by inhabitants and foreigners, reinforcing communal sense. The same has been observed in relation to some nearby places, like Liberdade, a Japanese district, full of street shopping and typical restaurants. Other examples of intensive public use will be analyzed here, including Augusta Street, a diversified place near Paulista Avenue, thanks to different activities, that occur there night and day. However, we also intend to compare the public use of some neighborhoods mentioned above to highly gentrified places, such as some middle and high class shopping centers that have proliferated in the last decade in Sao Paulo, like Patio Higienopolis Shopping Center, where even dogs receive a VIP treatment to utilize artificially designed covered squares. Such places, as well as others, segregate people and tend to homogenize social relations, clearly contributing to decrease the quality of life in Sao Paulo. Consequently, we hope to leave here some contribution to the public space debate.

KEY WORDS: Sao Paulo; public space; gentrification; sociability; city centre; streets and open areas.