

THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF ZACATECAS. TRANSFORMATION OF THE SURROUNDING BUFFER AREAS.

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ABSTRACT

The intention is to endeavor to approach the problem of the urban conservation of historical centers where the city of Zacatecas is taken as a case study starting from the period of its registration in UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1993. Over time, it has presented various changes caused by the redensification of the areas adjacent to the historic center, which has led to the gradual transformation of the urban landscape. These transformations are mainly due to the social, economic, and cultural effects that surround them, which addresses the international discourse of the historical urban landscape that acquires holistic approach methodologies around urban planning and management strategies. Under this vision, a new wager is made for a theoretical-methodological reflection of the urban landscape of the city, from a phenomenological vision, which may be applicable to other cases and other historical Mexican cities. This opens the possibility of identifying the problems that the transformation of the identity of the place entails, through a methodological approach for the detection of particularized landscapes that configure the place. It assists, in the first instance, in the recognition of the phenomenon and its characteristics, with the purpose of contributing to the historical understanding and stratigraphic development of the city. Finally, it translates into a work which must be directed through a process of constant reflection and the contribution of strategies for urban management and planning around the urban landscape, as a container of the values and attributes of the identity of a city.

INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1972, we have had the need to strengthen our credibility by constantly reviewing the universal value of the sites, especially in their entirety, in the sense of the growing response to what is seen and what is put at risk. The Mexican state, as part of the Convention, adopted these commitments, that from the perspective of the historic urban landscape, in as far as the management of the territory, the role played by its sites is recognized in the construction of the cultural dynamics of each city. For this reason, it is a priority to work on the consolidation of its permanence and, among other things, as a support for the development of alternatives for the promotion of the economy (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para los Asentamientos Humanos (ONU-Habitat), 2016, p. 173) of the cities, without underestimating the practical guidelines proposed by the Convention regarding management strategies.

At present, the idea that urban areas should be studied has been strengthened, not as static objects of contemplation, but as dynamic learning spaces. Under this approach, it is pertinent to take a step forward with the purpose of transcending the conceptual framework and the methodological approach, which has been addressed to the policy on landscapes under the guidance of international bodies. To achieve this purpose we will focus on the search for other benefits, under the exploration of new approaches and academic contributions to the place, through the implementation of ideas and methods around phenomenological observation, with the purpose of strengthening the conceptualization of the habitability, as an essential element in the construction of spaces for the inhabitation of individuals (*which*) leads us to the concept of space and place

(Espinoza López, Ana Elena & Gómez Azpeitia, Gabriel, 2010, p. 61), the reason being that it opens the focus on the notion of the territory and the investigation of the meaning of the landscape, which more than a concept, we visualize as a continent of human activity, for practical purposes.

The scope of the problem is placed on the attention to the process of the transformation of the landscape to deepen the understanding of how the forces of change impact the buffer area adjacent to the historic center (see *figure 1*). Therefore, it is intended to develop a methodology that starts from the focus on the historic urban landscape, which helps to identify, as a first step, which factors and constraints produce this change and how it impacts on the authenticity and integrity of the city. In parallel, it is intended to transcend the methodological approaches limited around the idea of the historical urban landscape from a critical challenge of the position developed around the approach, so it will be used as an idea of departure and holistic (presence, inclusion). The maturation of their approaches and integration of ideas will serve as a basis for the design of a theoretical-methodological evolution of the main objective, which lies in the approach of strategies around the urban conservation of world heritage cities in Mexico.

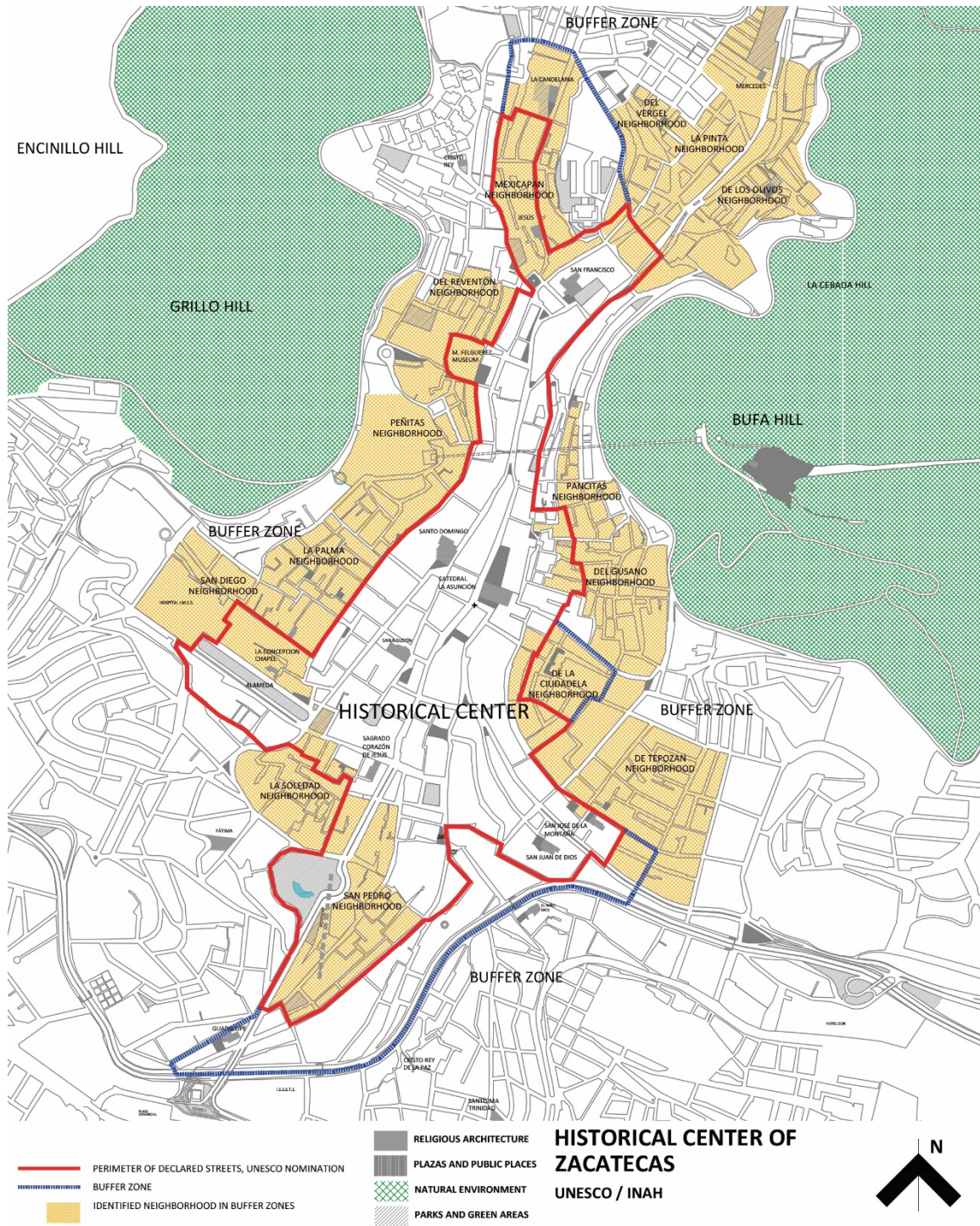


Figure 1. Plan of the historic center of the city of Zacatecas, 1993. Perimeter of enacted streets and buffer zones Indicated in the INAH-UNESCO Plan, Undated, signed by M. Arq. Elías Corrales García, Centro Regional INAH, Zacatecas. The information concerning the neighborhoods limited in the partial program of the historical center of Zacatecas, 2006-2012. Elaboration and reinterpretation of the territory by Pablo Vázquez Piombo, 2018.

THE STUDY OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE PRESENT.

As a physical limitation, we have the context of the historic city of Zacatecas which presents geographical conditions and acquires much of its identity from the rugged topography, where it is materialized in various connections and visual continuities of the city as a recipient of human activity and its hills as territorial limits. The continent that shapes the city is determined by the physical limitations that distinguish its urban and natural landscape, its context has configured the identity of the site, where it transcends its uneven urban layout, which is distinguished among others by topographic accidents and mining activities that developed over the territory. The historic city, organized by the economic boom produced by mining, led to the construction of various religious and civil groups that were surrounded by popular architecture, an expressive result of the Indian villages and traditional neighborhoods, dedicated among other activities, to mining. This was determined under a stratigraphic scheme of layer accumulation that was coined in the image of the historic city, which at the beginning of the 20th century established an identity as a result of its typology and morphology (see figure 2).



Figure 2. City of Zacatecas, facing south from Cerro de la Bufa. Personal archive Pedro Martel Mangematin, image taken in 1920.

The city of Zacatecas entered the twentieth century through a process of lethargy and therefore of forced conservation of its urban landscape, as the economic activity and population density began a slowdown process from the events unleashed by the Mexican Revolution, where economic scarcity forced the population to gradually abandon the city (Flores Olague, de Vega, Kuntz Ficker, & del Alizal, 2011, pp. 166–167). This process of uncertainty directly affected the social and economic activity of its Indian towns and well-off neighborhoods around the first square, where the settlements were reconfigured. These social boundaries have transcended in time to a greater or lesser extent, at present they are still identifiable from their identity-shaping elements, although at present they could be considered part of the urban sprawl, they still maintain their neighborhood essence, where the growth of the city and the homogenization of the territory, together with a scarce social management, threatens to make them disappear.

We start with the concern to identify, in general, why the historic urban landscape of the city of Zacatecas has transformed so rapidly (see figure 3), and specifically, what has happened in the buffer areas, adjacent to the historic center inscribed on the World Heritage list. The difficulty of understanding and interpreting the change in scale of the object of study implies a work of

observation, discernment and interpretation of the phenomenon with emphasis on the actions and relationships between the individuals that occur in the place (Norberg-Schulz, 1979), so, it is intended to develop a specific theoretical-methodological approach capable of identifying the physical characteristics of the place at present. The need to respect continuity has often been underestimated or misunderstood (Bandarín & van Oers, 2012, pp. 117-119), so, it is essential to contribute in the development of specific proposals to facilitate the management of these transformations in fields such as architecture, infrastructures, public space and the use or reuse of existing built heritage.



Figure 3. City of Zacatecas, West view of the city. A residential area on the Cerro del Grillo, a settlement built above the panoramic promenade, which serves as a container for the urban growth of the city. Pablo Vázquez Piombo, 2018.

METHODOLOGY

To address this approach, we will integrate a qualitative vision that will start from a phenomenological reflection, as an inductive process of exploration of the place and the description and interpretation of the urban landscape. We will work on the generation of new theoretical contributions, for this, a wide selection of secondary sources at a global level is available, based mainly on the recent conceptual exploration of approach to landscape knowledge, related to the description, interpretation and proposal (M. Gómez Villarino & T. Gómez Villarino, 2018, p. 1). To complement the above, the city will be used as a historical and present document, which will be our primary source for obtaining information to understand the object of study.

The study of the conceptual elements that shape the urban space are a necessary ingredient to approach the understanding of the social construction of the historical space. This approach, from an interpretative perspective, will help us to identify landscapes as networks of places under a stratigraphic vision. This methodological construction is developed around the culturally constructed individuals, who inhabit places, use roads, get involved in the material world and constitute through these processes as material beings. To observe, discern, and interpret these phenomena from the point of view of the individual, the city and territory, is the most appropriate way to approach the understanding of the problem. Contributing to the theoretical-methodological advancement of urban conservation and strengthening the concept of the historical urban landscape, will help to

create a new social conscience which will promote an adequate understanding of the landscape and its possible conservation.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE LANDSCAPE

The term landscape refers to the experience of visualizing an open space, a place that is familiar because of the time we spend outside. In turn, it is difficult to comprehend it due to the large number of particularized landscapes to which we are exposed, as well as the circumstances and constraints that influence us to limit it. We cannot define a landscape in a synthetic way, its complexity and richness in phenomenological manifestations provide different ways of understanding and expressing it. For example, ask a group of people to define what elements make up the landscape, in short, there will be explanations or various points of reflection and interpretation of the place, so it is necessary to find windows to approach the phenomenon of study, which will help to compare the information, considering the place is in constant transformation.

The construction of images in the present, based on concepts from the past, is a subject of considerable relevance, given the enormous difficulty of bringing the past to the present, accepting the burden of subjectivity (Cerdeira Farías, 2012, p. 332) that exists in these type of comparative exercises. This complexity is accentuated by the volatility of the term landscape and the difficulty of understanding that it has no physical limits that distinguish it, but it does contain an identifiable list of particularized belongings or conforming elements that converge in the territory as a scenario.

This is the basis of our holistic vision that predominates over the reading of the landscape that is based on the understanding of the various conforming elements, such as the "*typological and morphological elements, axis or visual continuities, perspective, public spaces, natural spaces, etc.*" that will help to recognize key wholes entities to be conserved for the strengthening of the technical tools needed for knowledge and planning. To reinforce the above, we recall that methodological holism (Harris, 2000, p. 51) is supported by three elementary propositions:

- The whole is more than the sum of its parts and cannot be reduced to them.
- The whole determines the nature of its parts.
- The parts cannot be understood if they are studied independently of the whole.

In these terms, the photographic and historical planimetric record can hardly help considering its landscape and urbanistic approach. Therefore, we believe that the study of the landscape cannot be addressed without the support of an interpretative framework of the past, since the transformation and disappearance of the landscapes of other eras has altered much of the evidence, to try to approach them and its meanings must be based on certain theoretical premises that facilitate establishing the parameters that will help us define and conceive them in this order:

1. The idea of landscape lies in who contemplates it.
2. The landscape is like a palimpsest.
3. Landscape is a holistic concept.

Our consumer culture has been shaped by values that have led to the "*materialization*" of the landscape. However, the landscape is not a thing or an object or a set of objects shaped and transformed by human action. The landscape is not nature either, not even the physical environment that surrounds us or on which we situate ourselves, it is a construction, a mental elaboration that people realize through the phenomena of culture. *The landscape, understood as a*

cultural phenomenon, is a convention that varies from one culture to another (Maderuelo, 2005, p. 17). This idea forces us to imagine how other cultures perceive the world, referring to other eras and other social media different from ours. Consequently, for the builders of the historical or founding city, the space (*landscape*) was an extension of the same humanity where one lived, where one believed and died. In its simplest and most abstract conceptualization, human or humanized landscapes consist of two elements: places and their properties and the paths or silences of movement between these places and their properties (Tilley, 2010). On the contrary, our society has turned space into an abstract category of analysis, where the landscape has been "dehumanized" almost completely, therefore, it has "reified" it in such a way that it is not possible to establish comparative frameworks of quantitative analysis between societies or times, as they are of different scales.

Considering archeology as an observational science that works with material traces of the past and geography as a spatial science, it is constituted as a component for the re-theorization of the urban phenomenon, so the main differences between a "scientific" space or abstract and a "humanized" or meaning-filled space (Tilley, 1994, pp. 7-8) (Cerdeira Farías, 2012, p. 335) can be debated under the following scheme after adapting it to our conditions of landscape and the period of defined study (see figure 4).

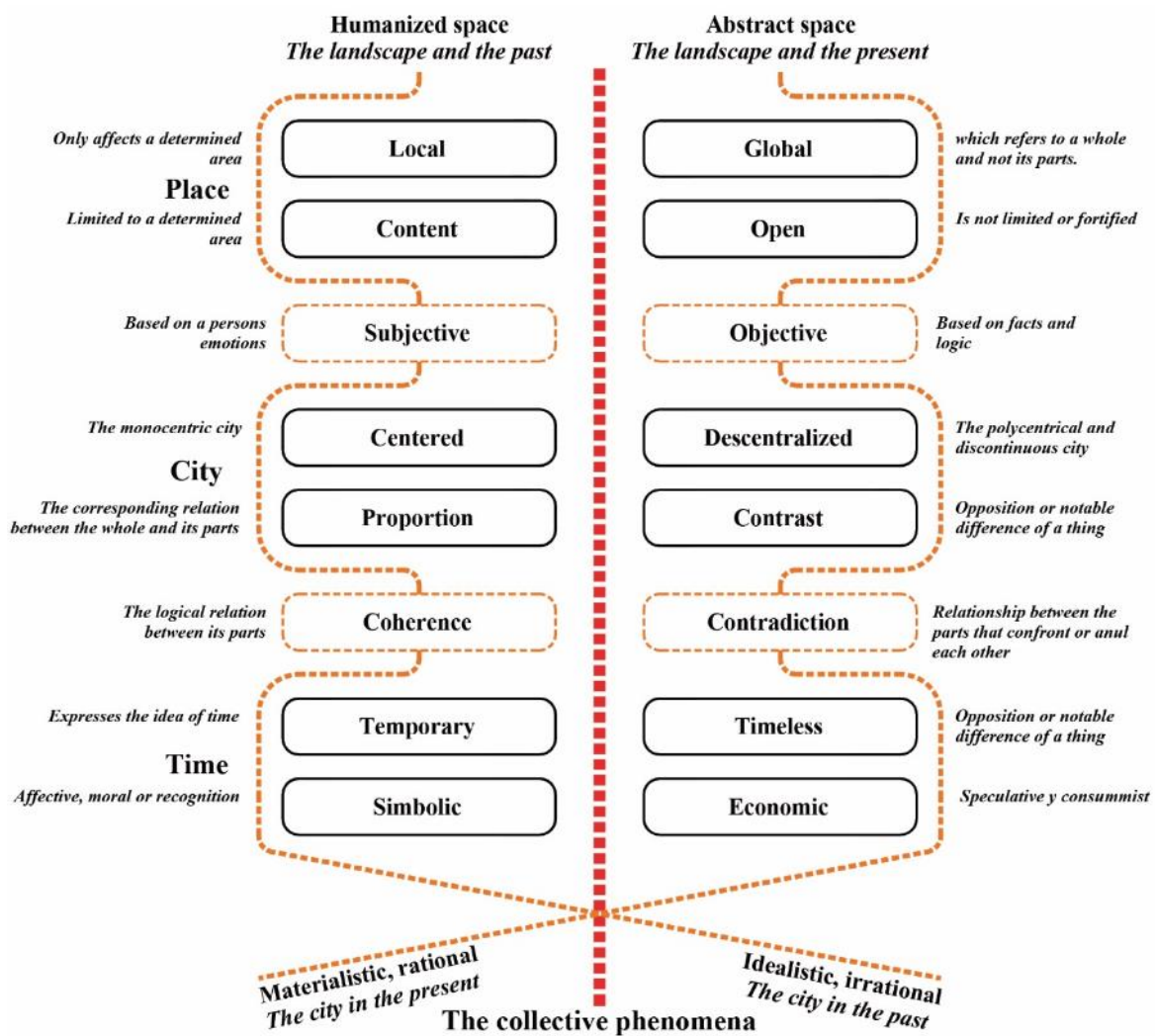


Figure 4. Visualization of the shaping factors of the humanized space and of the humanized abstract space in a short period of time. Pablo Vázquez Piombo, 2018.

The abstract space (*landscape*) is typical of our capitalist creed (Harari, 2013, pp. 336–366) and of our postmodern perspective, which inevitably attends to our academic formation, where the domain of the visual in Western culture has been relegated to the other senses when considering them of minor importance (Tilley, 2004, p. 15). Being aware of this aspect and trying to assimilate it is a solid step to approach the understanding of the landscape that prevailed and gave meaning to the settlement at the beginning of the 20th century. *Overcoming the functionalist, empiricist, modern and capitalist conception of space, as a territory of exploitation and economic-energy maximization* (Cerdeña Farías, 2012, p. 337), so to conceive them is, we believe, the challenge to define a theoretical orientation that help to study the landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

The result and materialization of this theoretical-methodological position will emphasize the material and dialectical relationships for field work, which will continue with the interpretation of that information from the experience, with the purpose of understanding the landscape in a holistic way. The basis of the interpretation of the landscape will be the approach to the place with the purpose of comparing it to others, through metaphorical or analogical reasoning. Through these qualitative metaphors we will learn regardless of how the people who built the city, created, molded, and transformed the landscape contained in the territory and turned it into a collective identity phenomenon.

The approach of the phenomenon, under this focus on the historic urban landscape implies a change and adjustment to the trends of current thinking about heritage. As a first step this leads us to analyze the scenario of events and the appropriate set of questions for the application of our ideas and methodological proposal, in response to our research questions. The identification of the critical aspects of transformation that occur in the city of Zacatecas will help us to apply the concepts and theoretical aspects explored.

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